

Dickson Old Testament Commentary

HAGGAI

WRITER

The prophet Haggai was the writer of this book. We know nothing of him other than what is written in the book and what is stated in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. The name Haggai means “festive” or “festival.” At the time of the writing of the book, we know that he was a former exile in Babylonian captivity who had recently returned to Palestine. When the Medo-Persians, under the kingship of King Cyrus, released the captives in 536 B.C., Haggai was among the initial captives who returned to the land. Zechariah was a contemporary prophet at the time of Haggai’s ministry.

DATE

Haggai dated the book between August and December according to our calendar today. According to the dating of the book, it is assumed that Haggai’s prophecy took place in 520 B.C.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

God spoke through Haggai eighteen years after the first captives returned to the land of Palestine. The temple in Jerusalem was still lying in ruins. The local leaders of the people were discouraged. They were discouraged because of the great opposition that they faced when they initially returned to the land. The Samaritan race had developed in the land, and thus did not want the Jews to reestablish their identity. There was thus a lethargy among the leaders of the returned Jews (See comments Er and Ne).

At the time of Haggai’s ministry, Darius Hystaspes was the king of Persia. A decree had formerly gone out from the Persian throne to stop the rebuilding of the temple. But Darius was interested in the development of local religious beliefs, and thus reversed the decree. Through the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah, God commanded the Jews to rebuild the temple.

Call For Action

(1:1-15)

Outline: (1) The cause of delay (1:1-6),
(2) Time for action (1:7-15)

Chapter 1

THE CAUSE OF DELAY

1:1,2 The word of the Lord came to Haggai during the reign of Darius in 520 B.C. The message came during one of the Jewish feasts, and thus the people were gathered together (See 2 Kg 4:23; Am 8:5), giving Haggai the opportune time to deliver his encouragement that the people begin the work of rebuilding the temple. **Zerubbabel:** He is called the son of Pedaiah in 1 Chronicles 3:19. Though he was the son of Pedaiah, through a levirate marriage he was also the legal son of Shealtiel. Since his grandfather was King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), he was a descendant of the Davidic kings. Zerubbabel did not assume the role of a king, for God had terminated the kings of Israel. However, God did use him to illustrate King Jesus who would come in the future of the restored remnant (See 2:20-23) **Joshua:** Joshua was the first high priest after the exile. His father was the high priest who was taken into captivity (1 Ch 6:15). His grandfather, Seraiah, was killed by Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. (2 Kg 25:18-21). **The time has not come:** Since the Samaritans had fought against the reestablishment of the Jews in the land, the Jews may have concluded that their opposition was a sign from God that they not rebuild the temple. Some have assumed that they

believed that the seventy years of exile had not actually been completed, and thus they felt that it was not yet time to rebuild the temple (See Jr 25:11).

1:3-6 While the people were carrying on with their efforts to reestablish themselves in the land, they neglected the task of rebuilding the temple. It thus took this direct word from the Lord in order to stimulate them to do the work of rebuilding the temple. Sometime after their initial arrival in the land, they became discouraged. We are not told how long it had been since they terminated their efforts to rebuild. But it was long enough for God to call a prophet in order to tell the people that they need to resume the work. **Consider your ways:** It seems that they were more concerned over the material things of life than the reinstatement of the things that pertained to the reestablishment of the symbol that represented God among the returnees. As a result of their neglect, God was not prospering their labors in the land. They may have thought that they would prosper themselves before they gave their labors to rebuild the temple. They were seeking their own kingdoms first, rather than the kingdom of God (See comments Mt 6:25-34).

TIME FOR ACTION

1:7-11 *And I will take pleasure in it:* God called them out of their state of indifference in order that they focus on those things that pertained to Him. The cut stones of the destroyed temple of Solomon would still remain. God urged them to go to the mountains in order to

acquire wood for the construction. The promises that God had made through the prophets concerning the rebuilding of the temple had not been completed (See Is 40–60). God thus reminded them that their labors in their fields was not bringing forth fruit because they had neglected laboring for Him in rebuilding the temple. While they had built paneled houses for themselves, they had neglected those things that manifested their interests in the things of God. As in their days before the captivity, God brought drought on the land in order to stimulate a response. Before the captivity, the droughts came in order to restore them to God. In this historical context, the drought was brought on the land in order to stir them into action.

1:12-15 *Obedied the voice of the Lord:* Those captives who came as a remnant from Babylon were encouraged to build because they trusted the word of the Lord that came through Haggai and Zechariah. Because they feared the Lord, they set their hands to the work. ***I am with you:*** See Gn 28:15; Ex 3:12; Ja 1:5. ***They came and worked:*** When people fear the Lord, they will work. When people become indifferent to the things of God, they will waste their lives away in things that pertain to this world.

Call For Courage, Patience and Faith (2:1-23)

Outline: (1) Call for courage (2:1-9), (2) Call for patience (2:10-19), (3) Call for faith (2:20-23)

Chapter 2

CALL FOR COURAGE

2:1-5 About a month later, this second message came to Haggai for the people. It seems that the people had become discouraged in their work of rebuilding the temple. ***Who is left among you who saw this house:*** There were a few among them who had seen the grandeur of Solomon's temple before it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Haggai himself may have been one of these people. In making a comparison between what Solomon had built and what they were about to do, they must not be discouraged. This small community of poor Jews could not rebuild the temple to the grandeur of the temple that Solomon built. Therefore, they must not be discouraged because of their inabilities. They must worry about that which they could do. The point in rebuilding the temple was not in what they would accomplish. God was not concerned about the physical structure of the temple (See comments Jn 4:20-24; At 17:24). His concern was in the fact that they identify themselves again as the people of God in the land. In order to do this, they had to reinstitute all that they had forsaken in their apostasy. ***Be strong ... and work:*** The Samaritans had discouraged the people, and thus they earlier stopped their work on the rebuilding (See comments Er & Ne). God thus reassured them that He was with them. Their work, therefore, was of the Lord. ***My Spirit remains among you:*** God reassured them that the Holy Spirit was among them in order that they accomplish the goal of

completing the work on the temple. As He had been with their forefathers when they came out of Egyptian captivity, He was with them in the rebuilding of the temple.

2:6-9 *I will shake the heavens and the earth:* As God shook Mount Sinai when He established a covenant with Israel and gave them the law, He would shake the nations in giving a new covenant in the future (See comments Jr 31:31-34). There would be turmoil throughout the nations until the coming of the Messiah (See comments in intro. to Dn). However, at the end of this shaking of the nations, God would again reveal Himself to man through His Son. This Son would ascend to the right hand of God and reign over all nations of this world (See comments Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Ph 2:5-11). Though the Jews to whom Haggai spoke would have understood none of these prophecies, they at least were given hope that their efforts were part of God's eternal plan for the ages. God was working through the restored remnant in order to lay the foundation for the coming of the Messiah. Their work of rebuilding the temple, therefore, involved more than laying stones to build a house. God had in mind the spiritual house that was yet in their future.

CALL FOR PATIENCE

2:10-14 Haggai asked two questions for the priests to answer. The first was if a garment that was bearing holy meat would make holy that which it touched. The answer to the question was that it would not. The second question was if

that which is made unclean by touching a dead body could defile that which it touched. The priests' answer was that the defiled, or unclean, would make unclean that which it touched. The point of the two questions was that it was easier to become defiled than it was to become clean. That which was ceremonially holy could not make holy that which it touched. That which was unclean, however, would make unclean the person who touched it, and whoever the person touched (See Nm 19:11-22). *So is this people:* These were the Jews whom Haggai addressed. *That which they offer:* The Jews had erected an altar. The error of the people was that they thought that their past sin of indifference in reference to the rebuilding of the temple would be forgiven if they ceremonially performed offerings on the altar. The point was that their inactivity had defiled them to the point that God would not accept their sacrifices on the altar. He had brought drought upon the land as punishment for their indifference.

2:15-19 The lesson from the questions to the priests was that it was easy to become defiled, but not easy to be cleansed. Therefore, one must not think that a simple change of direction would immediately produce results. They had to live with the consequences of their own sin. In this case, Haggai wanted them to be patient for the blessings that would result from their repentance. They would have to labor against many difficulties that were created by their sins. They had labored greatly in order to please their own selves in building their houses and

cultivating their land. Since they had now changed to labor in building the temple, they would have to be patient until God brought forth fruit from their labors. They had been idle for years since the time they had terminated their efforts to rebuild the temple, during which time of idleness God had stricken their crops (See Dt 28:22). From the time they began to lay the foundation of the temple, there would be no immediate signs that God was blessing them for beginning the work on the temple. They must be patient for the blessings. But from the 24th day of the month Kislev (December), the day the foundation was laid, God would from that time start to bless them in giving increase to their crops. God made this promise to bless their crops because they took the initiative to rebuild the temple. They had to take action before God would take action to bless them. God has never changed in this principle of how He works in the lives of His people. God does not work in the lives of those who do not express their faith by their works (See comments Js 2:14-26). God opens doors when men step out on faith. In the historical context of what happened in the rebuilding of the temple and walls was that God went to work for the people when they went to work to accomplish what He wanted them to do.

CALL FOR FAITH

2:20-23 This final message of the book was addressed to Zerubbabel. This was a repetition of the prophecy 2:6. God would shake the nations in order to bring about His purposes of bringing the Messiah into the world. Zerubbabel is here used as the type of the King Jesus that would come. **Signet:** This was a ring with the sign of the owner engraved on it. It was used as a signature of authority when the engraved sign was pressed on a document. The significance here was that Zerubbabel was made the leadership symbol of the nation in anticipation of the Messiah whom Zerubbabel would symbolize. As Zerubbabel was the initial leader of the exiles when they returned from captivity, so King Jesus, of the Davidic kings, would be the Deliverer for all those who would seek to escape the captivity of sin. Jesus would lead out of the captivity of sin those who would seek freedom. As Zerubbabel led an initial remnant of captives out of captivity, Jesus would lead a remnant of captives who would be the new Jerusalem of God's people. The kingdom of the Messiah would be established above the kingdoms of this world (See comments Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). Jesus would reign as king from heaven over all things (Ep 1:20-23). He would call all men to walk by faith in obedience to His leadership (Rm 10:17).