

Notes on
Haggai
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Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

The title of this prophetic book is also the name of its writer.

Haggai referred to himself as simply "the prophet Haggai" (1:1; et al.) We know nothing about Haggai's parents, ancestors, or tribal origin. His name apparently means "festal" or possibly "feast of Yahweh."¹ It is a form of the Hebrew word *hag*, meaning "feast." This has led some students of the book to speculate that Haggai's birth may have occurred on one of Israel's feasts. Ezra mentioned that through the prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah the returned Jewish exiles resumed and completed the restoration of their temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14; cf. Zech. 8:9; 1 Esdras 6:1; 7:3; 2 Esdras 1:40; Ecclesiasticus 49:11). Haggai's reference to the former glory of the temple before the Babylonians destroyed it (2:2) may or may not imply that he saw that temple. If he did, he would have been an old man when he delivered the messages that this book contains. In this case he may have been over 70 years old when he prophesied. However it is not at all certain that the reference in 2:2 implies that he saw the former temple.

Some editions of the Greek Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate versions of the Book of Psalms attribute authorship of some of the Psalms to Haggai and or Zechariah (i.e., Ps. 111-112, 125-126, 137-138, and 145-149). There is no other evidence that either prophet wrote any of these psalms. The reason for the connection appears to have been the close association that these prophets had with the temple where these psalms were sung.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including Solomon's temple, in 586 B.C. and took most of the Jews captive to Babylon. There the Israelites could not practice their formal worship (religious cult) as the Mosaic Law prescribed because they lacked an authorized altar and temple. They prayed toward Jerusalem privately (cf. Dan. 6:10) and probably publicly, and they established synagogues where they assembled to hear their Law read and to worship God informally. King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their land in 538 B.C. At least three waves of returnees took advantage of this opportunity. The first of these was the group of almost 50,000 Jews that returned under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, and

¹This is appropriate since much of what Haggai prophesied deals with millennial blessings.

Zerubbabel who replaced him, in 537 B.C. (Ezra 1:2-4).² Haggai and Zechariah appear to have been two of these returnees, as was Joshua the high priest, though Haggai's name does not appear in the lists of returnees in the opening chapters of Ezra. During the year that followed, these returnees rebuilt the brazen altar in Jerusalem, resumed offering sacrifices on it, celebrated the feast of Tabernacles, and laid the foundation for the reconstruction of the (second) temple. Opposition to the rebuilding of the temple resulted in the postponement of construction for 16 years. During this long period apathy toward temple reconstruction set in among the residents of Judah and Jerusalem. Then in 520 B.C., as a result of changes in the Persian government and the preaching of Haggai, the people resumed rebuilding the temple.³ They finished the project about five years later in 515 B.C. (cf. Ezra 1—6).⁴ Haggai first sounded the call to resume construction, and Zechariah soon joined him. Zechariah's ministry lasted longer than Haggai's.

DATE

Haggai delivered four messages to the restoration community, and he dated all of them in the second year of King Darius I (Hystaspes) of Persia (i.e., 520 B.C.). His ministry, as this book records it, spanned less than four months, from the first day of the sixth month (1:1) to the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (2:20). In the modern calendar this would have been between August 29 and December 18, 520 B.C. This means that Haggai was the first prophet to address the returned Israelites since Zechariah began prophesying to the returnees in the eighth month of that same year (Zech. 1:1). Haggai was the most precise of the prophets in dating his messages.

The precision in dating prophecies that marks Haggai and Zechariah reflects the annalistic style of history writing that distinguished Neo-Babylonian and Persian times.⁵ Ezekiel, an older contemporary of these prophets, was the third most precise in dating his prophecies, and Daniel, another contemporary, also was precise but not as detailed. Likewise Ezra and Nehemiah, who wrote after Haggai and Zechariah, showed the same interest in chronological precision.

PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Haggai obviously preached and wrote in Jerusalem as is clear from his references to the temple in both chapters. Confirming this location is his reference to the nearby mountains (1:8, 11). There were no real mountains in Babylonia.

²Ezra led the second wave of 1,700 men plus women and children (perhaps about 5,000 individuals) back to Jerusalem in 458 B.C., and Nehemiah led the third wave of 42,000 Israelites back in 444 B.C.

³For details concerning changes in the Persian government, see Robert L. Alden, "Haggai," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 569-71; or Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, pp. 5-9.

⁴One way to calculate the 70-year captivity is from the first deportation to Babylon in 605 B.C. to the year temple reconstruction began, 536 B.C. Another way is to count from the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. to the completion of temple restoration in 515 B.C.

⁵For example, see D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (625-556 B.C.) in the British Museum*.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Haggai was as specific about his audience as he was about when he prophesied. The first oracle was for Zerubbabel and Joshua, the Jewish governor of Judah and its high priest (1:1). The prophet delivered the second one to those men and the remnant of the people (2:1). The third oracle was for the priests (2:11), and the fourth one was for Zerubbabel (2:21). Obviously these oracles had a larger audience as well, namely, the entire restoration community and eventually the general population of the world.

Haggai's purpose was simple and clear. It was to motivate the Jews to build the temple. To do this he also fulfilled a secondary purpose: he confronted the people with their misplaced priorities. They were building their own houses but had neglected God's house. It was important to finish building the temple because only then could the people fully resume Levitical worship as the Lord had specified. They had gone into captivity for covenant unfaithfulness. Thus they needed to return to full obedience to the Mosaic Covenant. Furthermore, in the ancient Near East the glory of a nation's temple(s) reflected the glory of the people's god(s). So to finish the temple meant to glorify Yahweh.

" . . . he also wrote to give the people hope by announcing that God's program of blessing would come 'in a little while' (Hag. 2:6) when God would again 'shake the heavens and the earth' (2:6, 21)."⁶

THEOLOGICAL EMPHASES

Central to Haggai's emphasis is the temple as God's dwelling place on earth, as a center for worship, and as a symbol of Yahweh's greatness. For him the temple was more important than the palace, and the priests were more important than the princes. (There was no king of the Jews after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) Another theological emphasis was the relative importance of glorifying God compared to living luxuriously.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Haggai is the second shortest book of the Old Testament, after Obadiah. The writer's literary style is simple and direct. The book is a mixture of prose and poetry, the introductory sections being prose and the oracles poetry. The book contains four short messages that Haggai preached to the returned Jews during one year, 520 B.C. Haggai was clearly aware that the messages he preached to the Israelites were from God. He affirmed their divine authority 25 times. In contrast to almost all the writing prophets, Haggai was successful in that the people to whom he preached listened to him and obeyed his exhortations.⁷

⁶Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 815.

⁷There are only a few textual problems in the book (1:2, 9; 2:2, 5, 7, 9, 14, 16). In addition to these, the Septuagint made some additions to the Hebrew text (2:9, 14).

"The truth is that few prophets have succeeded in packing into such brief compass so much spiritual common sense as Haggai did."⁸

"Interestingly, Haggai's message has none of the elements so characteristic of the other biblical prophets. For instance, he wrote no diatribe against idolatry. He said nothing of social ills and abuses of the legal system, nor did he preach against adultery or syncretism. His one theme was rebuilding God's temple."⁹

UNITY AND CANONICITY

Critics have not seriously challenged either the unity or the canonicity of Haggai. Its place in the canon is chronological, leading the postexilic prophetic books and following the pre-exilic and exilic ones.

MESSAGE¹⁰

Haggai is the first in the last group of prophetic Old Testament books. Along with Zechariah and Malachi, these books reveal life in the restoration community. The historical book of Ezra deals with the same time period and the same group of people. A remnant of the Israelites were back in the land following the Babylonian Captivity. The returnees remembered stories of the past glories of their nation, before the Captivity. But they also felt great shame since they returned to a land controlled by the Gentiles. They lived in difficult and discouraging times. Their hopes were very shadowy and uncertain in the short range.

Haggai had a single burden from the Lord. His passion was to motivate the returnees to rebuild their temple. Zechariah helped him in this mission. Malachi lived some 90 years later and uttered the final warning from Yahweh to His people in the Old Testament.

About 18 years before Haggai ministered, in 538 B.C., about 40,000 Jews had returned from captivity under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. A year later they began to rebuild the temple. They had finished repairing the foundation and were starting on the superstructure when opposition from the native people of the land, the Samaritans, made them stop working. For about 17 years they did no work on the temple. Then the Lord led Haggai to challenge the people to resume temple reconstruction. He delivered four short messages in 520 B.C. that got the people working again. The people went to work after hearing his first message, but then a difficulty arose and they stopped working. He delivered a second message, and the people got back to work. After a while, another difficulty arose and the people stopped working again. Haggai then delivered two messages on the same day, which moved the Jews to resume and finish their project.

⁸Frank E. Gaebelin, *Four Minor Prophets [Obadiah, Jonah, Habakkuk, and Haggai]: Their Message for Today*, p. 199.

⁹Alden, p. 573.

¹⁰Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:302-15.

The reason God preserved this book for all time and for all humanity is its permanent value, which is twofold. The Book of Haggai, first, is a revelation of the perils that often accompany a period of adversity. Second, it reveals the duty of people of faith in such a period and God's resources. In other words, Haggai exposes the perils that accompany times when there are discouraging circumstances and hope burns dim. And it helps us see what the duty of God's people should be in such times and how God will help us.

Each of Haggai's four messages deals with one of these perils. The four perils are misplaced priority, incorrect perspective, unrealistic expectation, and unnecessary fear.

The first peril was a problem of misplaced priority. The people did not think the time was right to proceed with the rebuilding of the temple (1:2). They seem to have been waiting for some indication from God that they should resume building, but they were busy building their own houses and had forgotten God's previous commands to rebuild the temple. They were very practical when it came to building homes for themselves. They saw the need and proceeded to do something about it. But when it came to building a house that would honor Yahweh, enable them to worship Him as He had commanded, and exalt His reputation in their land, they were waiting. Seventeen years had passed. It was time to finish the unfinished temple structure, but the people put it on hold while they gave priority to what was more important to them.

The second peril was a problem of incorrect perspective. When the workers began rebuilding again, some of the people started comparing the structure they were working on to the previous temple that the Babylonians had destroyed. They were saying that the present temple was nothing in comparison to Solomon's temple (2:3). Some of the older people, who had seen the former temple, could not help weeping when they compared the two structures. It looked as though all their work would amount to nothing significant, and so they became discouraged and stopped working.

The third peril was a problem of unrealistic expectation. The people thought that because they had taken on the project of rebuilding the temple, God would begin to bless them greatly. They looked at their external obedience as what God should bless (2:12). Haggai reminded them that it was wholehearted devotion to God that was necessary to obtain His blessing, not just piling stone upon stone.

The fourth peril was a problem of unnecessary fear. The people looked at the strength of the Gentile nations around them and concluded that their small community would never amount to anything. Haggai had to remind them that God would judge the Gentile nations one day. They needed to look beyond the immediate future and believe God's promises concerning Israel's ultimate restoration and exaltation over the nations (2:21-22).

God led Haggai to meet each one of these problems by reminding the people of their duty and their dynamic. They had a responsibility to do something different in each case, and then God would provide the enabling grace for them to succeed, the spiritual dynamic.

In regard to their problem of misplaced priorities, the people's duty was to get back to rebuilding the temple (1:8). They needed to give priority to what God said they should do rather than to what they wanted to do. The dynamic that God would provide was His enabling presence with them. He would be with them (1:13).

With regard to their problem of incorrect perspective, their duty was to be strong and work. They should not compare the work God had given them to do with the work He had given their ancestors to do. They should simply give themselves to carrying out the will of God for them. The dynamic God promised to provide was again His own presence with them (2:4). He would help them do what He had called them to do.

Regarding their problem of unrealistic expectation, their duty was to learn from their priests, who would get the Lord's will from Torah, that blessing would come in response to genuine obedience. It was not enough to simply rebuild the temple. That was only part of God's will for His people, and not really the most important part. More important was that they should genuinely seek to exalt the Lord in their lives by following Him faithfully. The dynamic Yahweh promised for such heartfelt obedience was blessing on their lives (2:19). From the day the returnees turned their hearts to obey the Lord, He would bless them. But they should not expect much blessing if their obedience was only external.

Fourth, in regard to their problem of unnecessary fear, the people's duty was to be patient. They might not see a reversal of conditions in the immediate future, but eventually God would restore His people, as He promised. The dynamic God promised them was His own acting in time to reverse their fortunes (2:22-23). The Gentiles would not lord it over them forever. Their present leader, Zerubbabel, was only a foreview of a greater leader whom God would provide for them in the future. We know that the times of the Gentiles will come to an end when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to reign.

We are now in a position to point out the living message of this book. It is that whenever God's people face problems involving fulfilling His will, we should do our duty as the Word of God reveals it with the assurance that when we do God Himself will provide all that we need to succeed.

We often get our priorities out of order. We wait for direction from God to act when He has already told us what He wants us to do. While we wait, we get involved in matters that occupy our energy and resources that are self-directed. What we should be doing is reading the Word, learning what God wants us to do, and then putting first things first. We need to make His agenda our agenda. When we do this, He will be with us and will provide all we need to carry out His will successfully (cf. Matt. 6:33).

We also frequently lose the proper perspective on what God has called us to do. We look at our part of the enterprise of fulfilling the Great Commission, and we think to ourselves, "How insignificant this is. If only I was living when Hudson Taylor lived, maybe then I could really change the world. Better yet, if only I lived in the days of the apostles." It is easy for many Christians to get so distracted by looking at the great things other

Christians have done in the past that we conclude that our little contribution is so insignificant that it is not worth the time and effort. If that is our problem, we need to remind ourselves that the same God who enabled saints of old to succeed has promised to be with us and to enable us to succeed in our calling. We may live in days of apostasy rather than in the glory days when Christ was more greatly honored in the world. Nevertheless our task in the will of God is just as important now as the task of other believers in days gone by was then. Focus on what God has given you to do, not on what others did.

We struggle with unrealistic expectations, too, as the postexilic community did. Why isn't our church growing faster? Why aren't we seeing more fruit from our ministry? Why don't we see more spiritual power in our lives? Ultimately all these blessings come by the will of a sovereign God who chooses to bless whom and how He will. We tend to underrate the importance of personal holiness and to emphasize activity, just like the returned exiles did. Perhaps God is not blessing more because our commitment is superficial and shallow. If we expect His blessing simply because we are doing His work, we need to look deeper into ourselves and into His Word. God will bless if we follow Him wholeheartedly. We may not see the blessing this side of the grave, but since He has promised to bless those who follow Him sincerely, we can count on His blessing eventually. In the meantime our duty is to get real.

Finally, we also struggle with unnecessary fear from time to time. The enemy looks so strong. We look so weak. Things have not changed much for a long time. But our duty is to be patient, to remember and to believe the promises that the Lord will return and balance the scales of justice one day (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-13). He will establish His kingdom on the earth. Our duty now is to be strong and to work.

OUTLINE

- I. A call to build the temple ch. 1
 - A. Haggai's first challenge 1:1-6
 - B. Haggai's second challenge 1:7-11
 - C. The Israelites' response 1:12-15
- II. A promise of future glory for the temple 2:1-9
- III. A promise of future blessing for the people 2:10-19
- IV. A prophecy concerning Zerubbabel 2:20-23

Exposition

I. A CALL TO BUILD THE TEMPLE CH. 1

A. HAGGAI'S FIRST CHALLENGE 1:1-6

1:1 Yahweh sent a message to Zerubbabel and Joshua through the prophet Haggai, though it went to all the Israelites too (vv. 2, 4). Zerubbabel was the political governor (overseer) of the Persian province of Judah who had led the returnees back to the land (Ezra 2:2; et al.). He was the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; et al) and the grandson of King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), one of the descendants of King David (cf. 1 Chron. 3:17-19; Matt. 1:12).¹¹ Joshua was the high priest of the restoration community and a descendant of Aaron. He was the son of Jehozadak, who had gone into Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C. (1 Chron. 6:15; cf. Ezra 3:2, 8; 12:1, 8).

The Lord gave Haggai this message on the first day of the sixth month in the second year that Darius I (Hystaspes) ruled as king over Persia. This was Elul 1 (August 29), 502 B.C.¹² Each new month began with a new moon, and the Israelites commonly celebrated the occasion with a new moon festival (cf. Isa. 1:14; Hos. 2:11). This first prophetic revelation that God gave in the Promised Land following the return from exile came on a day when most of the Israelites would have been in Jerusalem. The meaning of Haggai's name (festal, or festal one) was appropriate in view of when the Lord gave this first prophecy through him.

In the historical books of the Old Testament, the writers usually dated the events in reference to a king of Judah or Israel, but the Jews had no king now. They were under the control of a Gentile ruler, in "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24; cf. Dan. 2; Zech. 1:1).¹³

1:2 Haggai announced that his message came from Yahweh of armies, Almighty Yahweh.¹⁴ The Lord told Zerubbabel and Joshua that the

¹¹Zerubbabel apparently had two fathers (1 Chron. 3:17-19). Perhaps his other father, Pedaiah, was his uncle. If this was a levirate marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10), Pedaiah would have married a woman and then died. Shealtiel, Pedaiah's brother, would then have married the widow who gave birth to Zerubbabel by Shealtiel, Zerubbabel's physical father. Another possibility is that Shealtiel adopted Zerubbabel after Pedaiah died.

¹²When the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon, they continued to follow the Babylonian calendar and began their years in the spring rather than in the fall (cf. Exod. 23:16; 34:22). R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 75*, p. 30, established the equivalent modern (Julian) dates.

¹³"The times of the Gentiles" are the times during which Israel lives under Gentile control. These times began when Judah lost her sovereignty to Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., and they will continue until Messiah's second coming when He will restore sovereignty to Israel.

¹⁴This title appears 14 times in Haggai.

Israelites were saying that the time was not right to rebuild the temple. By referring to them as "these people" rather than "my people," the Lord was distancing Himself from them. Construction on the temple had begun 16 years earlier but had ceased due to opposition from the Israelites' neighbors who were mostly Samaritans (Ezra 3:8-13; 4:1-5, 24). When the Jews considered resuming construction, most of them said it was not yet the right time. Their decision may have rested on the continuing threat from their neighbors. Or perhaps they felt that to finish the temple then would violate Jeremiah's prediction of a 70-year captivity (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). Another possibility is that they thought God Himself would finish it (Ezek. 40—48).¹⁵ Today many Christians do not do God's will because they feel the time is not precisely right.

1:3-4 Haggai then spoke to the people for the Lord, not just their leaders (v. 2). He rhetorically asked if it was proper for them to build their own houses but not rebuild His. They should have put the glory of their God ahead of their own comfort. Their priorities were upside down. "Paneled houses" apparently describes quite luxurious homes, though the Hebrew word *sapan* ("paneled") can mean simply houses with roofs. Wooden paneling or plaster that covered the walls and possibly the ceilings seems to be in view.

"Many Christians are like those ancient Hebrews, somehow convincing themselves that economy in constructing church buildings [or financing God's work] is all-important while at the same time sparing no expense in acquiring their personal luxuries."¹⁶

1:5-6 The Lord called "the people" to evaluate what they were doing in the light of their present situation (cf. v. 7; 2:15, 18 [twice]). They were not experiencing God's blessings very greatly. They sowed much seed but harvested only modest crops (cf. vv. 10-11; 2:15-17, 19). The food and drink that they grew only met their minimal needs. They had so little fiber from which to make clothing that their clothes were very thin and did not keep them warm. Their purses seemed to have holes in them in the sense that the money they put in them disappeared before they could pay all their bills. This was divine chastening for disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:18-20; Deut. 28:41). They should have put the Lord first.

B. HAGGAI'S SECOND CHALLENGE 1:7-11

1:7-8 Again the Lord called the people to reflect thoughtfully on what they were doing (cf. v. 5). He urged them to go to the mountains where trees grew

¹⁵See R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, "The Temple and the Origins of Jewish Apocalyptic," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1976):12.

¹⁶Alden, p. 581.

abundantly, to cut them down, and to continue rebuilding the temple (cf. Ezra 3:7). The completed temple would please and glorify Him.

- 1:9 The Israelites had looked for much blessing from the Lord, but they had found very little. When they brought their grain home, the Lord blew it away. Apparently their grain was so light and small that much of it blew away with the chaff when they threshed it. The reason was clear. They had neglected the temple and had given all their time and energy to providing for themselves by building their own houses.
- 1:10-11 The hot weather and poor harvests that the returned exiles were enduring were due to their selfish behavior (cf. Lev. 26:19-20; Deut. 28:22-24). Dew was the only form of moisture that plants enjoyed during the hot summer months, beside artificial irrigation, but even that was unavailable. The Lord had decreed drought that affected all their essential products and all aspects of their lives.

"Those who plan to give to God 'once they have enough for themselves' will never have enough for themselves!"¹⁷

C. THE ISRAELITES' RESPONSE 1:12-15

- 1:12 Haggai's preaching moved Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of Israelites who had returned from captivity to obey the Lord. This demonstrated reverence for Him.

"Haggai referred to the people as a **remnant** (here and also in v. 14 and in 2:2), not merely because they were survivors of the Babylonian Exile but also because they were becoming what the remnant of God's people should always be—those who are obedient within their covenant relationship to the Lord (cf. Isa. 10:21)."¹⁸

- 1:13 The people's obedient response resulted in the Lord sending another message to Haggai, His messenger. He reported that Yahweh was with them (cf. 2:4). This assurance of His divine enablement guaranteed their success as they continued obeying by rebuilding the temple. It is God's presence with us more than anything else that guarantees our success as we carry out His will (cf. Josh. 1:1-9). Our loving obedience results in Him drawing close, but our disobedience leads Him to withdraw His presence.
- 1:14-15 The Lord stirred up the two leaders and the people to resume work on the temple (cf. Ezra 1:5). Work began again on the twenty-fourth day of that

¹⁷Dyer, p. 816.

¹⁸F. Duane Lindsey, "Haggai," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1540.

very month. Perhaps it took three weeks for the people to make their decision and make preparations, including cutting wood (cf. v. 8). There was also a harvest of figs, grapes, and pomegranates in the month of Elul, which may also have delayed them.¹⁹

II. A PROMISE OF FUTURE GLORY FOR THE TEMPLE 2:1-9

- 2:1 The Lord revealed another message to Haggai almost one month later, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month (Tishri, modern October 17) of the same year, 520 B.C. This was the last day of the feast of Tabernacles (Booths). Tishri was a month of feasts for the Israelites. On the first of this month they celebrated the feast of Trumpets, and on the tenth, the day of Atonement. The feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days, and the following day was a day of rest (Lev. 23:33-44).
- 2:2 The audience was the same as received the first message: Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the returnees, a remnant of the Israelites.
- 2:3 The Lord asked if the older members of the restoration community who had seen Solomon's temple, which perished 66 years earlier, did not think the present temple was nothing in comparison (cf. Zech. 4:10). The Lord's three questions forced the people to admit that the present temple was not as grand as the former one had been.²⁰ The dedication of Solomon's temple took place 440 years earlier at the feast of Tabernacles (1 Kings 8:2), so that was probably the reason the Lord gave it to Haggai on this day.
- 2:4 The Lord again encouraged Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people to work, and He promised again to be with them (cf. 1:13). David had given the same charge and promise to Solomon regarding the first temple (1 Chron. 28:10, 20). Comparisons can be discouraging when doing the Lord's work, so people involved in it need to remind themselves that He is with them (cf. Matt. 28:20).
- 2:5 The Lord reiterated the promise He had made to the Israelites when they left Egypt in the Exodus. His Spirit would stay in their midst so they did not need to fear (cf. Exod. 19:4-6; 33:14). The returnees could identify with their forefathers who departed from Egypt because they had recently departed from another captivity in Babylon.

"There must have been those who were theologically naive and doubted that God could be with them if the temple and the ark in particular were not intact.

¹⁹P. A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, p. 88.

²⁰The older returnees had made a similar negative comparison when the foundation of the temple was laid 16 years earlier in 536 B.C (cf. Ezra 3:8-13).

"Undoubtedly fear gripped many of the returnees—fear that God had written an eternal 'Ichabod' over Jerusalem, fear that no amount of praying or piety would induce him to bless them again, fear that the whole endeavor was in vain, fear that the political enemies would in fact win, fear that all was lost."²¹

2:6 The basis of their confidence and lack of fear was a promise from Almighty Yahweh. He would do again in the future what He had done at the Exodus and at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:16; Ps. 68:8; 77:16-18). Shaking the heavens and the earth describes an earthquake, which was an evidence of the Lord's supernatural intervention (cf. Isa. 2:12-21; 13:13; Ezek. 38:20; Amos 8:8). This will occur when Christ returns to the earth (Joel 3:16; Matt. 24:29-30).

The writer of Hebrews quoted this verse in Hebrews 12:26. He then added that we who are in Christ have an unshakable kingdom that will endure the coming cosmic earthquake (Heb. 12:28-29). Haggai's prophecy still awaits fulfillment.

2:7 At the same time, Almighty Yahweh would shake all the nations; His return will upset the political and governmental structures in the world (cf. Zech. 14:1-4). The nations would bring their wealth to the Israelites, like the Egyptians gave their treasures to the departing Hebrews at the Exodus (cf. Exod. 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36).

Some English translations have "the desire of all nations will come." This "desire" could be an impersonal reference to the wealth that the nations desire (cf. Isa. 60:5; Zech. 14:14),²² or it could be a personal reference. In this case it could be a messianic prophecy, which is why some translations capitalize "Desire." The Hebrew does not solve the problem, which is interpretive. Perhaps the Lord was deliberately ambiguous and had both things in mind.²³

The Lord also promised to fill the temple with glory. The temple in view must be the millennial temple rather than the second (restoration) temple in view of the context. This glory could be the wealth that the nations will bring to it (cf. Isa. 60:7, 13). Or the glory in view may be the glory of God's own presence (cf. Exod. 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 43:1-12). Simeon referred to the infant Jesus as "the glory of your people Israel"

²¹Alden, p. 585.

²²Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 421. See Ezra 6:8-12; 7:12-26, 2 Macc. 3:3; and Matt. 2:1-11 for other past instances of wealth coming to Israel from the nations.

²³Herbert Wolf, *Haggai and Malachi*, pp. 34-37.

(Luke 2:32). However, Jesus' presence in Herod's temple only prefigured the glory that will be present in the millennial temple.

- 2:8 This verse seems to support the view that impersonal wealth is in view in verse 7. The Lord reminded the people that He controlled all the silver and gold in the world, so He could cause the nations to bring it to the temple in the future.²⁴ This reminder would have encouraged Haggai's contemporaries as they rebuilt the temple as well. God could bring more financial resources to them so they could glorify their presently modest temple.
- 2:9 Even though the present temple was less glorious than Solomon's temple, the Lord promised that the final glory of the temple would be greater than its former glory. The Lord also promised to bring peace to the site of the temple, Jerusalem. Neither of these things has happened yet, so the fulfillment must be future (millennial). Lasting peace will only come when Messiah returns to rule and reign (cf. Isa. 2:4; 9:6; Zech. 9:9-10). Jesus Christ's adornment of the second temple, as renovated by Herod the Great, with His presence hardly seems to fulfill the exalted promises in this prophecy.²⁵

The Lord used the occasion of the feast of Tabernacles to encourage the builders of the temple in Haggai's day. This feast looked back to the Exodus, reminded the Israelites of their wilderness wanderings, and anticipated settlement in the Promised Land. This message also looked back to the Exodus, referred to the present temple construction, and anticipated the glory of the future temple.

III. A PROMISE OF FUTURE BLESSING FOR THE PEOPLE 2:10-19

- 2:10 Another prophecy came from the Lord on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of 520 B.C. (Kislev 24, December 18). During the two months between this prophecy and the former one (vv. 1-9), Zechariah began his ministry in Jerusalem (Zech. 1:1).
- 2:11 Almighty Yahweh instructed Haggai to request a ruling from the priests. The priests were the official interpreters of the Mosaic Law, and what follows deals with matters of ceremonial defilement.
- 2:12 The question was, if someone carries consecrated food in his garment and touches other food of any kind with the garment, will that food become holy? Holy meat was meat set apart for a particular sacrificial purpose (cf. Lev. 6:25; Num. 6:20). The answer was, no it would not become holy. The meat carried in the garment would make the garment holy, but the holiness

²⁴Merrill, p. 41, suggested that "the point may well be that because all such things are His and are therefore not of value to Him, His own glory is what is central."

²⁵Chisholm, p. 421.

would not be communicated beyond the garment to anything else (cf. Exod. 29:37; Lev. 6:27; Ezek. 44:19; Matt. 23:19). The people were apparently thinking that since they were working on the holy temple all that they contacted and did became holy.²⁶

- 2:13 A second question was, if someone who has become unclean, for example by touching a corpse, touches food of any kind, will the food become unclean (cf. Lev. 22:4-6; Num. 19:11-16)? The answer was, yes it would become unclean.
- 2:14 Haggai then made an application of this principle to the people for the Lord. Their sacrifices were unacceptable to God because they were unclean. They should not think that contact with something holy, such as the temple they were working to complete, made them acceptable to God. They had previously been unclean, so their present sacrifices were unacceptable to God.
- 2:15-16 The people needed to give careful consideration to something again (cf. 1:5, 7). They needed to remember that before they began to obey the Lord by rebuilding the temple (1:12) they had been disobedient to the Mosaic Covenant (cf. 1:5-11). The Lord's punishment for their covenant unfaithfulness had been greatly reduced harvests. Their grains had decreased by 50 percent and their grapes by 60 percent.
- 2:17 The Lord had used hot winds, mildew, and hail to smite the people and what they had planted, but they still did not repent (cf. Amos 4:9).
- 2:18-19 The people were to notice something on the day this prophecy reached their ears, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. They were to notice that from the day they started to rebuild the temple, their hardships had continued (cf. 1:14-15). They still suffered shortages of staples such as seed, grapes, and olives, and luxuries such as figs and pomegranates. However, the Lord revealed that He would now bless them, beginning that very day, the twenty-fourth of the ninth month.

This oracle explained why agricultural blessing had not begun immediately after the people resumed reconstruction on the temple. Their present dedication and obedience did not wipe out their previous covenant unfaithfulness and its punishments. That punishment had to run its course, but now, as of the day of this prophecy, God would begin to bless the people with better harvests.

God will bless His people for their obedience, but sometimes He will not erase the punishment that previous sins have made necessary. Sin always brings death (Rom. 6:23). Sometimes that punishment must run its course before blessing can begin.

²⁶Another view is that the Lord sought to discourage His people from taking gifts from pagan rulers and using them to build the temple (cf. Ezra 6:8-10). See *ibid.*, pp. 45-46, 49.

IV. A PROPHECY CONCERNING ZERUBBABEL 2:20-23

- 2:20 The Lord gave Haggai a second message on the same day as the previous message (v. 10), the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Kislev 24, December 18).
- 2:21 Haggai was to tell Zerubbabel that Yahweh was going to shake the heavens and the earth. Again a divine judgment is in view (cf. v. 6).
- 2:22 The Lord announced that He was going to overthrow the rulers of the nations of the earth (cf. Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45). He would defeat their armies by turning them against each other (cf. Zech. 12:2-9; 14:1-5; Rev. 16:16-18; 19:11-21).
- 2:23 When He did that, the Lord promised to make Zerubbabel His servant. The title "my servant" is often messianic in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Sam. 3:18; 1 Kings 11:34; Isa. 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13—53:12; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25).²⁷ He would make him like a signet ring because He had chosen him for a special purpose. A signet ring was what kings used to designate royal authority and personal ownership (cf. 1 Kings 21:8; Dan. 6:17; Esth. 8:8). God had chosen Zerubbabel to designate royal authority and personal ownership, namely, the coming Messiah. God had revealed through Jeremiah that if Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel's grandfather, was His signet ring, He would take it off and give it to Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer. 22:24-25). Thus it is clear that this figure of a signet ring views Zerubbabel as the descendant of David and Jehoiachin through whom God would provide the victory promised in verses 21 and 22.²⁸ He will do that not through Zerubbabel personally but through one of his descendants, namely, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 1:21). Zerubbabel represents or typifies the Messiah here (cf. Joshua's similar role in Zech. 6:9-15).²⁹ The certainty of this promise is clear from the threefold repetition of "Yahweh," twice as "Yahweh of hosts."

"By calling Zerubbabel His 'servant' and 'chosen' one God gave him the same status David had enjoyed (cf. 2 Sam. 3:18; 6:21; 7:5, 8, 26; 1 Kings 8:16). The comparison to a 'signet ring' indicates a position of authority and reverses the judgment pronounced on Zerubbabel's grandfather Jehoiachin (cf. Jer. 22:24-30).

²⁷Zechariah, Haggai's contemporary, used another messianic title to refer to Zerubbabel: the branch (Zech. 3:8; 6:12; cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-16).

²⁸The curse on Jehoiachin that none of his descendants would sit on David's throne or rule in Judah (Jer. 22:30) may have referred to his immediate descendants (i.e., children).

²⁹His name becomes a code name (atbash) for the promised Messiah. See Herbert Wolf, "The Desire of All Nations in Haggai 2:7: Messianic or Not?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976):101-2.

"The words of Haggai 2:21-23, though spoken directly to Zerubbabel, were not fulfilled in his day. How is one to explain this apparent failure of Haggai's prophecy? Zerubbabel, a descendant of David and governor of Judah, was the official representative of the Davidic dynasty in the postexilic community at that time. As such the prophecy of the future exaltation of the Davidic throne was attached to his person. As with the Temple (cf. Hag. 2:6-9), Haggai related an eschatological reality to a tangible historical entity to assure his contemporaries that God had great plans for His people. Zerubbabel was, as it were, the visible guarantee of a glorious future for the house of David. In Haggai's day some may have actually entertained messianic hopes for Zerubbabel. However, in the progress of revelation and history Jesus Christ fulfills Haggai's prophecy."³⁰

This final oracle promises a future overthrow of the Gentile nations that were, in Haggai's day, exercising sovereignty over Israel. A descendant of King Jehoiachin, and before him David, would be God's agent in that day. He would come from Zerubbabel's descendants and would be similar to Zerubbabel in that He would be the political ruler of God's people. Such a message would have encouraged and motivated the returned exiles to complete the temple since there was still a glorious future for their nation in God's plans.

"Haggai's sermons alternated between accusation and encouragement. (This is true of most of the prophets and in a sense should characterize all ministry.) The first sermon was basically negative. The second one aimed to encourage. [The third] . . . one is again essentially chiding and accusation. And . . . the last one is positive and uplifting."³¹

³⁰Chisholm, p. 422.

³¹Alden, p. 588.

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