Haggai

Overview and Summary

Author:

- ⇒ Little is known about Haggai as the author of this letter. His name is mentioned 11 times throughout the Old Testament narrative. Even in these 11 mentions, little can be added to Haggai's biography
    - Haggai is mentioned nine times in the book bearing his name (1:1, 3, 12, 13; 2:1, 10, 13, 14, 20)
    - Haggai is mentioned two times in the book of Ezra (5:1; 6:4).
- ⇒ Richard Taylor suggests that the lack of Haggai's familial information leads the reader to further conclude that this message to Judah had a divine origin.
- ⇒ The Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT), Syriac, and Latin translation of the Old Testament attribute a number of psalms to Haggai and Zechariah. This cannot be confirmed, since the Hebrew translation makes no mention of them as authors, but it remains possible.
    - Septuagint – Psalm 144, 145, 146, & 147
    - Syriac – Psalm 125, 126, 145, 146, 147, & 148
    - Latin Vulgate – Psalm 112 & 146
- ⇒ Some believe Haggai's mention of the previous Solomonic Temple suggests he lived to see it in its former glory before Babylon destroyed it in 586BC. This would indicate that Haggai would have been in his 70's at the time of this writing.
- ⇒ The name Haggai is also disputed, with some suggesting it means "festal" or "festival of God."

Date:

- ⇒ The Jews were given permission to return back to their native land under the reign of King Cyrus in 538BC. While some Jews returned, many chose to stay in their exiled land.
    - For those Jews who traveled back to Israel, instruction was given to them to begin to rebuild the temple of God. However, over time, their energy and focus waned as their eyes turned to more pressing matters.
- ⇒ Haggai dates his writing as having occurred in the second year of the reign of Darius, King of Persia.
    - Darius reigned over Persia from 522-486BC, making Haggai's writing in 520BC.

- Darius would be known for many of the improvements to the Persian government, which included: development of roads, improved military organization, revision of the tax system, infrastructure, and more.

⇒ Like the two Persian kings before him, Darius sought to earn his subjects' trust by granting them significant religious freedom.

- On this matter, Richard Taylor writes, "Such policies adopted by Persian kings toward their non-Persian subjects were particularly evident in two areas. In matters pertaining to local law, considerable latitude was granted to the wishes of indigenous populations, and in matters pertaining to religious practice, government funding was made available for building temples of regional interest."

⇒ Not only do we have an exact year in which Haggai wrote this prophecy, but he also lists the day and month. The four messages comprising Haggai were composed on the following dates:

- Message #1 (1:1-15) August 29, 520BC
- Message #2 (2:1-9) October 17, 520BC
- Message #3 (2:10-19) December 18, 520BC
- Message #4 (2:20-23) December 18, 520BC

<u>Context:</u>

⇒ Written to the Jewish people who had returned from exile back to Israel.

- In 538 BC, when Cyrus declared that the exiled people could return to their native home, the first of three waves of people returned to Israel.
- Sheshbazzar led the first wave, which included 42,360 Israelites and 7,337 slaves. We know this from Ezra 2:64-65.

⇒ Not only were the Jewish people allowed to return home; Cyrus also encouraged them to rebuild the destroyed temple. To further encourage them, Cyrus gave the people the necessary funds (Ezra 1:1-4, 9).

- The foundation and altar were completed after the second year of their return (approx. 536BC) but work soon stopped as other priorities and outside hindrances emerged. The foundation then lay bare for 16 years before Haggai came onto the scene with this prophecy.

⇒ Zerubbabel was the governor of Jerusalem at this time, and Joshua was the high priest

⇒ Haggai writes to these returned people, spurring them on to continue to rebuild the temple into a place where the one true living God may be worshiped.

Structure & Content:

⇒ Haggai is structured by the dating of its four messages:
- 1:1-15 – Message #1 – Stop building your own houses and build my own.
  - 1:12-15 – The People Respond to Haggai's message
- 2:1-9 – Message #2 – Do not fear, for I am with you.
- 2:10-19 – Message #3 – Pursue the Lord, and you will be blessed.
- 2:20-23 – Message #4 – The coming judgment and signet ring.

Message:

⇒ 1:1-15 – Message #1: The people of God had come back to Jerusalem, and the foundation of the temple had been completed, yet progress had stopped. Through the prophet Haggai, the Lord recognizes that work on his "house" has stopped, and the people have become more concerned with building their own houses. God calls on His people to stop the work on their own homes and consider their ways. While they work hard for their own good, they "harvest little." Only when they refocus their efforts on God will He bless their ways and provide them with an abundance. Verse nine summarizes this, "You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? Declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. Haggai is encouraging the people to refocus their efforts to God's abode instead of their own.
- In verses 12- 15, we read that after Zerubbabel and Joshua spoke these words, the people obeyed. God's word shook the people out of their spiritual slumber and refocused their attention on God.

⇒ 2:1-9 – Message #2 – Almost two months later, the word of God once again comes to Zerubbabel and Joshua through the prophet Haggai. As work began on the temple, many complained that this second temple was nothing compared to the glory of the first, but this was not to dissuade these men from continuing to build. Verses 4-5 proclaim, "Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not." There was a lot to distract and dissuade the people, but above all they were to remember that God had covenanted Himself to them, not based on the construction of the temple but because He chose them out of His love.
- In verses 6-9, Haggai's message takes a turn to the future. Looking to a time in the future, Haggai prophesies that God will shake the earth, and all that is valuable will come in and fill the house of God. The power and wealth of the nations will be given over to the Lord, and from His temple His glory will shine forth. There are some who see this as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but a

dispensational view sees this as being fulfilled in a literal temple built in the millennial kingdom

⇒ 2:10-19 – Message #3 – Another two months later, Haggai receives a third message from the Lord, but this time his message is not just to Zerubbabel and Joshua, but also to the people of Israel directly. His message begins with two questions. First, if something touches holy meat, does it become holy? The Levites listening answer, "No." This is then followed by the question: If an unclean person touches something, does it become unclean? To which the Levites answer, "Yes, it does become unclean." The message to the Israelites is simple: while they may be building a holy temple to the Lord, if their hearts are full of iniquity and injustice, the building will not be useful. God reminds the people that he ultimately desires their hearts, not simply their obedience.

⇒ 2:20-23 – Message #4 – On the same day as the third message, Haggai delivers his fourth and final message, and this time it is directed only to the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel. In this prophecy, Haggai looks to a future time when God promises to shake the nations and reduce them to rubble. Their weapons of war and symbols of strength will be shaken from them, and God will reign over them. Some suggest that this is referring to Armageddon, the final battle where God will completely dismantle the opposing nations of the world and set up His kingdom. On that day, God will make Zerubbabel his chosen signet ring. Several implications are at play when God tells Zerubbabel he will be a signet ring. First, this fulfillment is not near, but will be fulfilled at the same time as the previous prophecy concerning the nations. Second, Zerubbabel will serve as the signet ring of God's kingship over his people. Third, as the signet ring, Zerubbabel signifies the continuing link of the Davidic Covenant, ultimately tracing its fulfillment to Jesus.