

The Book of Haggai

Haggai 1:1-2:23

Introduction

The short two chapter book of Haggai is incredibly important to the chronology and history of the Old Testament because it records an actual date with each part of its story. When these dates are correlated with accepted dates in world history, the whole chronology of the Old Testament begins to fit in time and order.

Who is Haggai the Prophet?

Very little is known about this prophet except what can be gleaned from the books of Ezra and Haggai. He is prophesying along with Zechariah and his ministry seems to have begun in recorded history 16 years after the return from the Babylonian Exile. He is not listed with those who returned from Babylon and since we do not know the name of his father, we cannot determine his lineage or his residence during the Babylonian experience. The Lord's recorded interaction with Haggai occurs between August 29 and December 18 of 520 BC, the second year of Darius' reign as king of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Who is Darius?

Darius the Great was the fourth ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire which overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 536 BC.¹ At that time, Cyrus the Great ruled the Medo-Persian Empire and Darius the Mede was one of his military leaders. We should not confuse Darius the Mede with Darius the Great, the King of Persia. It was this Darius the Mede who invaded Babylon the night that Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall for Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and co-ruler with his father. Belshazzar's mother was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. His father ruled mainly as a place holder in the royal line until Belshazzar could come of age. While Belshazzar's parents were on a trip to Arabia, he threw a youthful and expensive party.² That night Darius the Mede ripped the kingdom from their hands and handed it to Cyrus who ruled six years until his death in 530 BC. His son, Cambyses, ruled until his death in 522 BC. At that time, another man claimed the throne and began to rule for nine months. Darius the Great, with the support of the people, took over the throne and reigned for 36 years until his death in 486 BC. Darius was born in 550 BC making him only 14 years old when Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonian Empire for Cyrus; he was 28 years old when he conquered the imposter. He was not the biological successor to the throne; he took it by force. Historians record that both his mother and father were still alive when he began to rule. His son, Xerxes, followed him, serving for 21 years until his death in 465 BC.

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¹ Some historians place the date at 538 BC.

² Daniel 5:28-30

Who is Zerubbabel?

Zerubbabel and his father, Shealtiel were ancestors in both Joseph's and Mary's lineage going back to David. How can this be?³ According to Matthew, Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel who later fathered Zerubbabel. All were descendants of David through Solomon and rightful heirs to the throne. With the deportation of the Jews into exile which began in 606 BC, Shealtiel did not have the opportunity to be king, but with the return from Babylon in 536 BC, Zerubbabel had the rightful opportunity to reign as governor.⁴

Mary's line descended from David through his son, Nathan. Shealtiel was placed in her lineage because he acted as a kinsman redeemer for Neri, who died without a son. Shealtiel and Neri's wife had a son, Zerubbabel. Both Joseph's and Mary's lines, descended through Zerubbabel. His son, Abihad, continued Joseph's line and his son, Rhesa, continued Mary's line. Because of His genealogy, Jesus had every right to be king.

Haggai's message to restart the construction of the temple was directed to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC, but Cyrus' decree allowed for the work of rebuilding the temple to begin in 536 BC.⁵ The work was constantly delayed and thwarted by complaints from the Samaritans which included the letters to the king of the empire.⁶

Ezra records one letter written to Cambyses by the Samaritans which was ignored by the king.⁷ In 522 BC, Cambyses died and an imposter ascended to the throne. A second letter was sent to the imposter who stopped the building of the temple.⁸ The imposter used several names including Smerdis, Guamata, Artaxerxes and Ahasurus. Ahasurus is the Persian name for ruler just as Pharaoh is used in Egypt and King is used in Israel. After nine months, Darius the Great overthrew Smerdis and began his reign in 522 BC.

A third letter was written to Darius in 520 BC, his second year as ruler.⁹ The Samaritan's complaint was that Judah and Benjamin had restarted the work without Persian approval. Darius searched the records and discovered that Cyrus intended to pay for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple out of the Persian treasury. Darius sent word to let the building continue and to fund it with Persian funds. Solomon's temple was 60 cubits by 20 cubits, or 90 feet by 30 feet. The new temple was to be 90 feet by 90 feet. When it was built, many of those who saw Solomon's temple before it was destroyed lamented that the new temple was too boxy.¹⁰

What had caused the tribes to restart the work on the temple?

The Lord contacted Haggai, the prophet who delivered the message to Zerubbabel in 520 BC.¹¹ The work was completed in 515 BC, 21 years after returning from Exile. In 37 BC, Herod the Great began his plan to renovate and expand this second temple. His work continued until AD 66. Four years later, on Sunday, August 4, AD 70, Titus destroyed this second temple.

³ Joseph's line: Matthew 1: 1-17. Mary's line: Luke 3:23-37

⁴ Cyrus called him the Prince of Judah. His Babylonian name was Sheshbazzar.

⁵ 2 Chron. 36: 22-33; Ezra 1: 1-4

⁶ Ezra 4

⁷ Ezra 4:6

⁸ Ezra 4:11-16

⁹ Ezra 5:6-17

¹⁰ Ezra 3:10-15

¹¹ Ezra 5

Haggai received his first word from the Lord on August 29, 520 BC. He most likely delivered the message to Zerubbabel and Joshua that day.

Not Time to Build – August 29, 520 BC

Haggai 1:¹ In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,² "Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'This people says, "The time has not come, *even* the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.'""

Work on the temple had been suspended for almost two years and the Jewish tribes were afraid of the wrath of the Persian king. They knew that the Samaritans could stir up Persia's anger with just a single letter to the king. "Time has not come to continue the work" was their reply to Zerubbabel and Joshua when they tried to restart the project.

Consider Your Way – Sown Much with Little Harvest

Haggai 1:³ Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying,⁴ "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house *lies* desolate?"⁵ Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways!⁶ "You have sown much, but harvest little; *you* eat, but *there is* not *enough* to be satisfied; *you* drink, but *there is* not *enough* to become drunk; *you* put on clothing, but no one is warm *enough*; and he who earns, earns wages *to put* into a purse with holes."

As long as work continued on the temple, the Lord blessed His people. During the two years that the temple was incomplete, the people were dissatisfied and unhappy. "Consider your ways," the Lord said to the people. He did not bless them because He was dissatisfied and unhappy. As long as the work on the temple was delayed, they would have no personal gains or happiness. The Jews might have lived in paneled homes built during the last 14 years; but their homes did not bring happiness.

Consider Your Way – Rebuild the Temple

Haggai 1:⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways!⁸ "Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified," says the Lord.

The Lord was direct. He wanted the temple finished and He didn't need the approval of the Persian king. He had spoken.

It is interesting that the Lord did not tell the people to bring wood and stone to rebuild the temple. He mentioned only wood. Most likely, only the roofs, doors and windows were incomplete. The stones were probably in place already. We must remember that the temple was to be built in complete silence.¹² All the cutting, hammering and chiseling were to be completed far enough away that nothing could be heard on the temple mount.

I Will Blow it Away

¹² 1 Kings 6:7

Haggai 1:⁹ "You look for much, but behold, *it comes* to little; when you bring *it* home, I blow it *away*. Why?" declares the Lord of hosts, "Because of My house which *lies* desolate, while each of you runs to his own house. ¹⁰ "Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ "I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands."

The Lord had punished His people because they stopped building His temple more than two years before. His punishment was tied to their actions. The Lord had withheld the rain that was necessary to sustain the entire economic system of life in Jerusalem and the blame for His decision was placed squarely on the people. Try as they may, they would not improve their circumstances until they completed their task.

Work Begins on the Temple – September 21st, 520 BC

Haggai 1:¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him. And the people showed reverence for the Lord. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke by the commission of the Lord to the people saying, " 'I am with you,' declares the Lord." ¹⁴ So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king.

Zerubbabel and Joshua took the Lord's message to heart. The governor and priest gathered all the people together and Haggai spoke to them. They were inspired. They were encouraged. They were motivated to complete God's ordained task. On September 21st, 520 BC, they resumed the work on the temple mount. According to Ezra, the Samaritans were appalled and wrote to King Darius who replied with his hearty approval and instructed the Samaritans to provide the funds for its completion from the Persian treasury.¹³

Do Any Remember? – October 17th, 520 BC

Haggai 2:¹ On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, ² "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying, ³ 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

One month later on October 17th, 520 BC, the Lord spoke through Haggai again. "Who remembers the former temple?" was the Lord's question. Sixty-six years had passed since Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it and the Lord was addressing the oldest Jews who had seen the original. In a way, He was asking how this second temple compared to the first. Once again, Ezra fills in the answer. The older people wept because this second temple was so boxy and plain. For those who never saw the first temple, this new temple was marvelous, and they shouted with joy. Ezra says the noise was so loud that no one could tell if the people were rejoicing or weeping. ¹⁴

¹³ Ezra 6

¹⁴ Ezra 3:12-13

Take Courage – I Am Still with You

Haggai 2:⁴'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the Lord of hosts. ⁵'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

With a month of building completed, the Lord blessed them with a renewal of His original promise. He was still with them. When they came out of Egypt, the Lord was visibly with them in the cloud or fire on Mt. Sinai. When the tabernacle was completed, the Lord's presence rested on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Just before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in 586 BC, the Lord departed from the Mercy Seat and left the temple. The Maccabean history says that the Ark along with the Tent of Meeting and the Altar of Incense were hidden in a cave on Mt. Nebo by Jeremiah. They have never been found, but the Lord did not leave them without hope. ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit was among them, guiding their work and protecting them. Today, the Holy Spirit lives within the believers to guide them instead of just among them as He did in the Old Testament times. That change occurred on the Day of Pentecost in 30 AD.

Once More I will Shake the Heavens and the Earth

Haggai 2:⁶"For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. ⁷'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. ⁸'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts. ⁹'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the Lord of hosts."

A promise was given to the Jewish builders about the temple. It may have been boxy and simple compared to Solomon's temple and its construction may have been completed in the most humbling of circumstances, but its last days will be magnificent. One day, the Lord will shake the universe and come to dwell in the temple for 1,000 years as the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and the sole Ruler of the world.

From this Day I will Bless You – December 18, 520 BC

Haggai 2:¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth of the ninth *month*, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to Haggai the prophet, saying, ¹¹"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Ask now the priests *for* a ruling: ¹²'If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any *other* food, will it become holy?'" And the priests answered, "No." ¹³ Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will *the latter* become unclean?" And the priests answered, "It will become unclean." ¹⁴ Then Haggai said, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean. ¹⁵'But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the Lord, ¹⁶ from that time *when* one came to a *grain* heap of twenty *measures*, there

¹⁵ 2 Maccabees 2:4-5

would be only ten; and *when* one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be *only* twenty. ¹⁷ 'I smote you *and* every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you *did* not *come back* to Me,' declares the Lord. ¹⁸ 'Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth *month*; from the day when the temple of the Lord was founded, consider: ¹⁹ 'Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree, it has not borne *fruit*. Yet from this day on I will bless *you*.'"

Two months later on December 18, 520 BC, the Lord removed His punishment from His people because they had shown their faithfulness. For the past two years their economy had struggled because of the lack of rain. From December 18 on, everything was different. From that day on the Jews were blessed by the Lord.

Zerubbabel Chosen – December 18, 520 BC

Haggai 2:²⁰ Then the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth *day* of the month, saying, ²¹ "Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² 'I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.' ²³ 'On that day,' declares the Lord of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,' declares the Lord, 'and I will make you like a signet *ring*, for I have chosen you,'" declares the Lord of hosts.

Later in the day, the Lord promised Zerubbabel that he would be like a signet ring. What was a signet ring? When a letter, document or law was printed on paper, several drops of wax were dropped next to the king's signature and the signet ring was used to stamp the royal seal in it to signify the official status of the order. It stood out on the page and was necessary for the document to be considered legal and enforceable. The signet ring was that special tool that made a document legal.

Zerubbabel is that signet ring in the Lord's ancestry chosen by Him to notify everyone that the Lord has every right to be the King. One day He will descend from the lineage of Zerubbabel's two sons and rightfully begin to rule the world. On that day, the day of the Lord which includes Armageddon, He will shake the universe and become its undisputed King. Zerubbabel was the one chosen to continue the heritage so that everything could happen exactly as the Lord planned.