

HAGGAI

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BACKGROUND

The first group of Jews returned from Babylonian exile in 538 B.C. ([Ezra 1](#)), and in 536 began rebuilding the Temple ([Ezra 3:8-13](#)). In about 535, however, deeply discouraged and under intense opposition, their work had ground to a halt ([Ezra 4:24](#)). 15 years later, in 520, God raised up Haggai and Zechariah to encourage them in the rebuilding and in personal holiness.

AUTHOR

Both Haggai and Zechariah are named by Ezra ([Ezra 5:1](#); [Ezra 6:14](#)). Like Nehemiah, who would come to Jerusalem much later to rebuild its walls, Haggai was a man of action: After the Temple had sat unfinished for 15 years, it took Haggai just 23 days to inspire the people to resume the work. (The work would finally be completed in about 515—see [Ezra 6:15](#).)

DATE

[1:1](#) dates Haggai's ministry in "the second year of King Darius's reign," or 520 B.C. (compare [Ezra 4:24](#)). The book can be divided into three separate prophecies, each given on a specified day of that year:

- First prophecy ([Haggai 1](#)): first day of sixth month, Elul (August-September) ([Haggai 1:1](#))
- Second prophecy ([Haggai 2:1-9](#)): 21st day of seventh month, Tishri (September-October) ([Haggai 2:1](#))
- Third prophecy ([Haggai 2:10-23](#)): 24th day of ninth month, Chislev (November-December) ([Haggai 2:10](#), [20](#))

Haggai probably recorded his prophecies soon after giving them.

RECIPIENTS

The Jews who had returned from exile in 538 B.C.

PURPOSE

- To encourage the rebuilding of the Temple.

- To give instruction in holiness.
- To show God's faithfulness.

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Haggai's writings, like Ezekiel's, are very precisely dated (see [Date](#)).
- Haggai is notable for his frequent use of the phrase "this is what the LORD Almighty says" and similar phrases (some 25 occurrences), emphasizing the seriousness of his message and the fact that God was still speaking to his people in the postexilic era.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Ezekiel:

- Both speak of the millennial Temple ([Haggai 2:9](#); [Ezekiel 40-42](#)).
- Both speak of a "shaking" of the land of Israel ([Haggai 2:6](#); [Ezekiel 38:19](#)).
- Both have special names for the Messiah:
 - in Ezekiel, "David" ([Ezekiel 37:24](#); though this could be a reference to a literally resurrected King David)
 - in Haggai, "Zerubbabel" ([Haggai 2:23](#))

Jeremiah:

- Both include significant prophecies involving a signet ring, the symbol of royal authority:
 - Jeremiah spoke of King Jehoiachin as a signet ring that God would cast away ([Jeremiah 22:24](#)), symbolizing the end of the Davidic kings.
 - In Haggai, the signet ring was taken up again and put back on the Lord's hand, signifying that the Messiah ("Zerubbabel") will be the last and greatest Davidic king ([Haggai 2:23](#)).

OUTLINE

I. HIS WORD IN AUGUST: PERFORM ([Haggai 1](#))

1. The call ([Haggai 1:1-11](#))
2. The response ([Haggai 1:12-15](#))

II.HIS WORD IN OCTOBER: BE PATIENT ([Haggai 2:1-9](#))

III.HIS WORD IN DECEMBER: PONDER ([Haggai 2:10-23](#))

- A. Judah's contamination ([Haggai 2:10-14](#))
- B. God's determination ([Haggai 2:15-19](#))
- C. The Great Tribulation ([Haggai 2:20-22](#))

D. Zerubbabel's elevation ([Haggai 2:23](#))

TIMELINE

538 B.C.:	Exiles return with Zerubbabel
535 B.C.:	Temple rebuilding stops
520 B.C.:	Work resumes, through ministries of Haggai, Zechariah
516 B.C.:	Temple finished
473 B.C.:	Esther saves Jews still in Persia
457 B.C.:	More exiles return with Ezra
445 B.C.:	Nehemiah rebuilds wall

[Haggai 1:1-4](#) *"The right time for ours, the wrong time for his!"* In August of 520 B.C. (see [Date](#)), God spoke to Haggai, expressing concern that the returned exiles were delaying the Temple's rebuilding ([Haggai 1:1-2](#)). Haggai relayed God's concern to the people, rebuking them for having built luxurious homes for themselves while the Temple lay in ruins ([Haggai 1:3-4](#)).

[Haggai 1:5-11](#) *"The more you get, the less you have. Why is that?"* Haggai challenged the people to take stock of their situation: They had worked hard with comparatively little result ([Haggai 1:5-6, 9-10](#)) because they had left God out of their lives ([Haggai 1:9](#)). The current drought was God's way of getting their attention ([Haggai 1:11](#)). These Jews had not learned a secret Christ would teach: that God's richest blessings come to those who seek first his kingdom (see [Matthew 6:33](#)). They did not realize that blessings from God depend on obedience to God. No Temple, no blessing.

[Haggai 1:12-15](#) *With three mighty men, the building begins.* After a delay of 15 years (see [Background](#)), it took just 23 days ([Haggai 1:15](#)) for Haggai, with the help of Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, to restart the Temple reconstruction. God had "sparked the enthusiasm" of these three men ([Haggai 1:14](#)), and the people followed their lead. Great things can be accomplished when God's people are in obedience to and in fellowship with him ([Haggai 1:12](#)).

Ezra's account of the rebuilding suggests that, besides encouraging the builders on God's behalf (see [Ezra 5:1, Ezra 6:14](#)), both Haggai and Zechariah actually helped with the manual labor (see [Ezra 5:2](#)). (Joshua is called "Jeshua" in Ezra's account.)

[Haggai 2:1-9](#) *Smaller, yes, but far more glorious!* In the months following the resumption of reconstruction, the Lord gave Haggai messages of encouragement for the builders. Perhaps recalling the discouragement that had helped end the earlier efforts (see [Ezra 3:12](#)), Haggai acknowledged that this second Temple would lack the grandeur of Solomon's Temple ([Haggai 2:3](#)) but gave assurance that God was with them ([Haggai 2:4-5](#)) and that he had great plans for this new Temple ([Haggai 2:6-9](#)). The description of the new Temple is generally seen as a foreshadowing of the millennial Temple as well (see [Ezekiel 40-42](#)).

Nearly 70 years had passed since the destruction of Solomon's Temple; though only the oldest would have remembered it, they would surely have described it often to their children while in exile.

[Haggai 2:10-14](#) *Sin is highly contagious.* Two months later, Haggai spoke of the need for holiness. With rhetorical questions, he showed that a ceremonially holy object cannot transfer its holiness to another object ([Haggai 2:12](#)), but an *unclean* object contaminates everything it touches ([Haggai 2:13](#);

see [Leviticus 22:4-6](#); [Numbers 19:11](#)). The people should be very concerned about the effects of their personal sins on the nation ([Haggai 2:14](#)). Common sense teaches the same lesson: A healthy person cannot communicate his or her health to a dying person, but a dying person can spread contagion to the healthy.

[Haggai 2:15-19](#) *As the Temple goes up, the blessings come down.* In the past, because of their sin, Israel had experienced hardship ([Haggai 2:15-17](#)). Yet God was determined to bless them, and now that they had obeyed him and begun rebuilding his Temple, the blessings would come ([Haggai 2:18-19](#)).

[Haggai 2:20-23](#) *"Tell the governor great honor awaits him!"* Haggai's final word of encouragement was to Zerubbabel, political leader of the returned exiles. To Zerubbabel went the honor of comparison to Israel's Messiah: After the Great Tribulation at the end of history ([Haggai 2:21-22](#); see [Haggai 2:6](#); [Isaiah: Background](#); exposition on [Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#)), the Messiah—here called Zerubbabel—will be given the honor and authority embodied in the signet ring (see [Comparison with Other Bible Books](#)).

HAGGAI

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM HAGGAI)

Key Facts: Prophet, helped lead Israel in rebuilding the Temple ([Haggai 1:1-8](#); [Ezra 5:1](#))

Total Bible References: 11

Key References: [Haggai 1-2](#); [Ezra 5:1](#); [Ezra 6:14](#)

Haggai Speaks

One fact is clear: My little book has indeed been inspired by God, as I tried to note as often as possible. Hopefully, future priests and Levites will recognize this as they ponder and proclaim its truths. Maybe they'll call it, "Haggai's Tale of Three Temples," for so it is. The people came up with such miserable excuses for not getting started right away in rebuilding the Temple: "It isn't time yet," they said! Obviously, however, the real reasons for their inaction were unconcern, laziness, and greed! Well, I quickly reminded them that the crop failures, droughts, and hardships we had all experienced were simply God's way of punishing such wickedness. ([Haggai 1:1-6](#), [9-11](#))

Of course the Lord then called us to action, instructing us to go to the mountains and gather materials to rebuild his house. And that's exactly what we did! Now, after that inexcusable delay of 15 years, our people have once again begun the rebuilding. ([Haggai 1:8](#), [12-14](#))

To be sure, this Temple will be far smaller than Solomon's. I recall the keen disappointment of our people as this "second Temple" began to take shape. But how thrilling it was to reveal to them God's plans for a massive and magnificent third Temple, to be built by Messiah himself, which will far exceed the beauty and size of the first two Temples combined! All the nations of the earth will come to this Temple, and he will fill it with his glory! ([Haggai 2:3-4](#), [7-9](#); [Ezra 3:12](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Haggai

- We should seek to build God's kingdom rather than our own ([Haggai 1:2-8](#); see [Matthew 6:25-34](#)).

- As Christians, we should never long for the good old days, for the best days are yet to come ([Haggai 2:3-9](#))!

Key Verse

"I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will come to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the LORD Almighty" ([Haggai 2:7](#)).