

Haggai – An Introduction

Session 1

Introduction

- The book of Haggai is one of the shortest books in the Bible, having only 38 verses across two short chapters – yet, it has much to say! Yet, together with Zechariah and Malachi, it is included in that part of Scripture that it deals with that period following the return of the Jewish people from the Babylonian exile, what is referred to as the “post-exilic period.”
- To understand and properly interpret any of the prophetic books of the Bible it is necessary to understand:
 - the role of the prophet, and
 - the history of the Jewish people in which these prophets spoke or wrote and the redemptive and historical context within which these prophesies occurred.
- These two items will be the focus of this introduction.

Who was Haggai?

- We know very little about the man Haggai.
- What we are told in the Bible, however, is important for it places the words of Haggai into a very specific redemptive and historical setting and place. There are four things to note:
 - Firstly, we know what Haggai was. We are introduced to him as “*Haggai the prophet*” (1:1, 3, 12; 2:1, 10) and as “*Haggai, the messenger of the Lord*” (1:13). He is therefore speaking the word of the Lord to his audience.
 - Secondly, we know where Haggai was. Haggai was physically present in Jerusalem among those exiles who had returned from Babylon. This is important for it places Haggai and his prophecies in a specific geographical setting and context.
 - Thirdly, we know when Haggai spoke. In Haggai a very specific sequence of dates for his prophecies is given, down to the specific month and date – between the first day of the sixth month and the twenty-fourth date of the ninth month in the second year of the reign of Darius the king. This therefore places the prophecies of Haggai in a specific historical time and context.
 - Fourthly, we know who Haggai spoke (prophesied) to. The primary audience for Haggai’s prophecies were the civic ruler in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the governor, and their religious leader, Joshua the high priest, together with those Jewish people who had left the exile in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus in 538BC. That is, it identifies the specific audience to whom the word of the Lord was directed.

What is the place of the book of Haggai amongst the other prophetic writings?

- Two principal groups (or types) of prophet:
 - the “non written prophets”
 - the “written” prophets.

- The written prophets in the Bible may in turn be divided into four groups associated with the history of Israel and Judah:
 - Prophets of Israel (Northern Kingdom) – Jonah, Amos, and Hosea
 - Prophets of Judah (Southern Kingdom) – Joel (?), Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk
 - Exilic Prophets – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah (?)
 - Post-exilic Prophets – Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
- The chronological sequence of these writing prophets is summarised in the following table:

Prophet	Date	King	Kingdom
Early “non written” prophets			
Samuel	1050-1000	Saul, David	United
Elijah	870-852	Ahab, Ahaziah	Israel
Elisha	852-795	Jehoram Jehoash	Israel
Micaiah	853	Ahab	Israel
Written prophets of monarchy period			
Joel*	810-750 (?)	Joash - Uzziah	Judah
Amos	760	Jeroboam II	Israel
Jonah	760	Jeroboam II	Israel
Hosea	760-722	Jeroboam II - Hoshea	Israel
Isaiah	740-700	Uzziah - Hezekiah	Judah
Micah	740-687	Jotham - Hezekiah	Judah
Zephaniah	640-610	Josiah	Judah
Nahum	630-612	Josiah – the exile	Judah
Jeremiah	626-587	Josiah-Jehoahaz Jehoiakim-Jehoachin Zedekiah	Judah
Habakkuk	600	Jehoiakim	Judah
Written prophets from period of the Babylonian exile			
Daniel	604-535	-	Judah
Ezekiel	582-570	-	Judah
Obadiah	c.587	-	Judah
Post-exilic period			
Haggai	520	Zerubbabel (Governor)	Judah
Zechariah	520	Zerubbabel (Governor)	Judah
Malachi	c.450		Judah

* There is some uncertainty regarding the timing of Joel. There is some suggestion that Joel was one of the earlier writing prophets, whose prophesies were given in the eighth or ninth century BC. An alternative view is that the prophesies of Joel were given in the Exilic or Post-exilic period, at a date more proximate to that of Haggai. The former is considered to be the stronger and better position.

The role of the prophet and prophecy

- The prophetic gift – The divine qualification/appointment – Who the prophets were/What is a prophet
 - One who speaks with authority to speak for another.
 - More specifically – being appointed and authorised by God to speak on his behalf.
- The prophetic office – The mode of exercising the gift – What the prophets did
 - The nature of the prophetic office needs to be understood in relation to redemptive history – prophecy co-exists with history.
 - Three forms of prophetic office:

Redemptive Period	Prophetic Office	Means of Revelation	Form of Revelation
Patriarchal	Theophanies	Immediate	Appearances
Mosaic	Theopneustic	Mediate	Men
Christian	Theologic	Permanent	Writing

- Tone, content, and purpose of each prophecy is determined by his historical situation.

Historical context of Haggai

- Biblical references:
 - 2 Kings 24-25
 - 2 Chronicles 36
 - Ezra (especially chapters 1 – 6)
 - Nehemiah (especially chapters 1 – 6)
- The historical context of Haggai was the “post-exilic period” being the time when the remnant of Jews returned to Jerusalem following the decree of Cyrus in 538BC. This is sometimes referred to as the period of the “Restoration” and the “Reformation” when Jerusalem was re-established as the centre of Judaism. The focus of Haggai is associated with the important task of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem following the first wave of people returning to Judah from their exile in Babylon.
- A summary of the history of Israel generally and the Babylonian exile in particular:

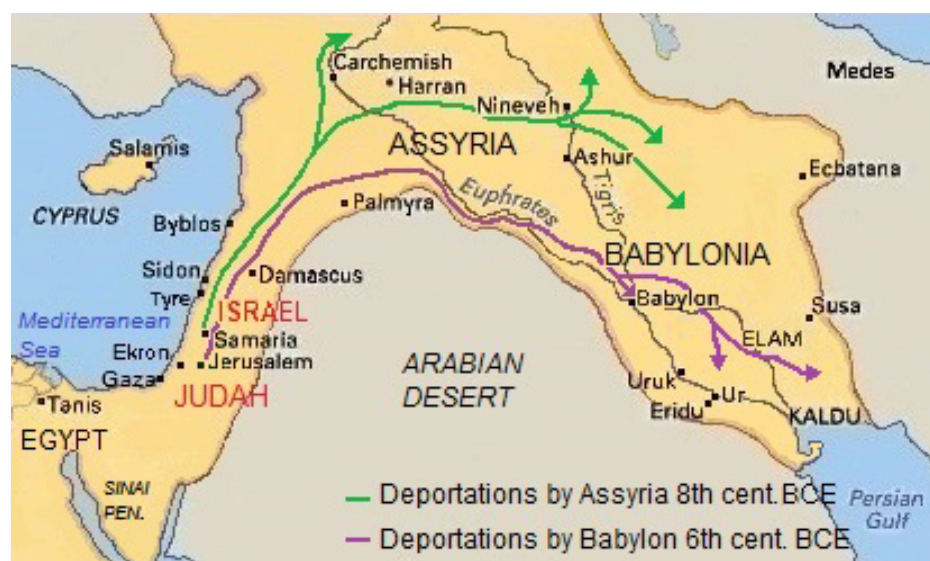
General timeline of the history of Kingdom of Israel

Date	Event
1012 – 931	Period of the Monarchy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1012-931 – United Kingdom - 931-587 – Divided Kingdom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 931-721 – Northern Kingdom - 931-587 – Southern Kingdom
734-612	Assyrian Period (Northern Kingdom) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 721 onwards – Assyrian Captivity (did not return)
605-539	Babylonian Period (Southern Kingdom) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 587-539 – Babylonian Captivity
539-332	Persian Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 539 onwards – Post-exilic period and return to Jerusalem

Timeline of the history of the Babylonian exile and Restoration

Date	Event
957	Completion of the First Temple (Solomon)
612	Babylonians and Medes conquer Assyria.
609	Death of King Josiah (Judah).
605	Nebuchadnezzar becomes king of Babylon. Babylon invades Judah; Jehoiakim appointed vassal king. First deportation to Babylon.
597	Babylon capture Jerusalem (following Jehoiakim's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar). Zedekiah installed as vassal king. Second deportation to Babylon.
589	Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar; siege of Jerusalem.
587	Jerusalem falls. Destruction of Solomon's Temple. Jerusalem's walls and gates burned. Judah becomes a Babylonian province; end of the independent kingdom of Judah and the Judah monarchy. Third deportation to Babylon. Babylonian exile begins.
539	Persia – under King Cyrus II (559-530) - conquers Babylon. Start of the Persian period (539-332).
538	Decree of Cyrus – allowing Jews to return to Judah.
537	First group to return to Judah/Jerusalem.
536	Work begins on the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem; but work stalls.
525	Second group of exiles returned to Judah; under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua.
520	Prophecy of Haggai.
520	Work on the construction of the Temple resumes.
516	Construction of the Second Temple completed.
458	Third group of exiles return to Judah under Ezra.
445	Fourth group of exiles return to Judah under Nehemiah. Work of restoring the walls of Jerusalem completed.

Map of the Babylonian exile



- The historic features of the Exile and Post-exilic Periods
 - The Exile – 605 - 538BC
 - The reasons for the Babylonian captivity and exile
 - Key leaders –
 - Nebuchadnezzar – King of Babylon
 - Cyrus II and Darius – Kings of Persia
 - The Restoration - the first return – 538BC onwards
 - The rebuilding of the Temple
 - Key leaders – Zerubbabel and Joshua
 - Haggai and Zechariah
 - The Reformation - the return of Ezra – 458BC onwards
 - The completion of the Wall of Jerusalem
 - Key leaders – Ezra and Nehemiah
 - Malachi

An outline of Haggai

The timeline of Haggai

- In Haggai there is a very specific, clear, and short (three months) timeline.
 - 1:1 Day 1, Sixth Month
 - 1:15 Day 24, Sixth Month
 - 2:1 Day 21, Seventh Month
 - 2:10 Day 24, Ninth Month
 - 2:20 Day 24, Ninth Month
- These dates effectively establish an outline for the book.

An outline of Haggai – The four prophecies

- 1:1-11 First Prophecy – The Call to Rebuild the Lord's House
- 1:12-15 The Response of the people to the Call
- 2:1-9 Second Prophecy – The Encouragement to Labour – The Glory that is to Come
- 2:10-19 Third Prophecy – Curse to be Replaced with Blessing
- 2:20-23 Fourth Prophecy – Restoration of the Kingship over the People of God

Key themes in Haggai

- Covenant fidelity
 - Of the Lord – Deliverance of his people
 - Of the people – Faithful obedience to the Lord
- Obedience and repentance
- Covenant curses and blessing
- Presence of the Lord among his people
- Covenant hope – the final restoration

Attachment 1