

Books of The Bible

A Survey of Haggai

Introduction

Although Haggai is one of the smallest books in the scriptures, yet its importance bears no relationship to its size.

The Man

His name, outside of his book of Haggai, is directly mentioned twice on two other occasions (Ezra 5:1; 6:14) and possibly indirectly in Zech. 8:9.

- a) His name indicates “Feast” or “festal”, and possibly was related to one of the feasts of Jehovah (Lev. 23).
- b) According to the Septuagint the following Psalms are also attributed to Haggai and Zechariah (Psa. 138, 146, 147, 148). Some of the Palmists also attribute Psalm 111 and 112 to these two prophets.
- c) He states something which is said about no other prophet, he was “the LORD’s messenger in the LORD’s message” (Hag. 1:13) which indicates that the man lived in the solemnity and truth of that which he spoke. It was not just the giving of a “wee word”, it was his very life.
- d) From the dates given, his ministry lasted for four months (compare the dates he gives in ch. 1:1; 2:1, 20) but what a mighty ministry it was.
- e) He came on to the scene on the second year of Darius Hystaspes, sixteen years (as far as we can compute) after Cyrus gave the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.
- f) His ministry was for a work to be done now, but also with hope for the future.
- g) As far as his background is concerned we know nothing, he just appears, and any conjecturing of his parents, tribal or occupation is without biblical foundation.

The Messages In The Book

There are seven messages in Haggai:

- a) A message of rebuke (ch. 1:1-12) Because:
 - i) Of their lethargy in the things of God (ch. 1:2)
 - ii) Activity in the things of life (ch. 1:4)
 - iii) Spiritual dearth (ch. 1:6)
- b) A message of remonstrance:
 - i) Consider your ways (ch. 1:7)
 - ii) Go up to the mountain (ch. 1:8)
- c) A message of explanation:
 - i) God states, “I did blow upon it” because of your sins (ch. 1:9)
- d) A message of comfort (ch. 1:13-15)
- e) A message of encouragement (ch. 2:1-9), which was needed because of:
 - i) Discouragements from others (ch. 2:3)
 - ii) Disappointment from the work (ch. 2:3)
 - iii) My spirit is among you (ch. 2:5)
 - iv) Be strong in hope (ch. 2:4) for God is not finished yet (ch. 2:6-9)
- f) A message of instruction (ch. 2:10-19)
 - i) Activity for God must be done in holiness
- g) A message of promise (ch. 2:20-23)
 - i) There is coming a day when all the strength of the heathen will be destroyed (ch. 2:22)
 - ii) A word of encouragement to Zerubbabel (ch. 2:23)

The Times

The minor prophets (Hosea through Malachi) were separated into two groups by the Babylonish captivity. The first nine (Hosea through to Zephaniah) dealt with the pre-Babylonish captivity and the last three (Haggai through Malachi) after it. In that period between the two groups of minor prophets there had been written some of the Psalms, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

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The Chronological Historical Background of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah

When reading these four book separately it is rather confusing as to where things fit together, but a careful reading will indicate the following.

1) The Chronology of Events

- a) The 70 years of Babylonish captivity and the returns from Babylon.
 - i) When Babylon fell on the night of Belshazzar's feast, Darius the Median began the rule of the Medo-Persian government over Babylon (Dan. 5:31). That man, Darius the Median, was Astyages who had a son called Cyrus. According to the Lydian Line, the Behistun Rock, the Herodotus, and the Cylinder of Cyrus:
 1. This Astyages was the husband of Esther
 2. Their son was Cyrus the Persian (Isa. 45:1; Ezra 6:14)
 - (a) who had a son called Cambyses II
 - (b) a grandson called Hystaspes
 - (c) and a great grandson called Darius Hystaspes (Ezra 7:1).

- ii) The following is my understanding of the three returns to Jerusalem. Since this paper is a consideration of Haggai, I am only considering the first returning which was in two parts (Ezra chs. 1-6; Haggai chs. 1-2).

iii) Part 1

1. In the first year of Cyrus the proclamation was given for those who desired to go to Jerusalem and build the house of the LORD (Ezra. 1:2, 5). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel. At that time a congregation of 42,360 people went back (Ezra. 2:64).
 2. They accomplished four major works:
 - (a) The brazen altar was rebuilt (Ezra 3:2-3)
 - (b) The Feast of tabernacles was restarted (Ezra 3:4)
 - (c) The foundation for the temple was laid (Ezra 3:8-13).
 - (d) From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer the burnt offerings (Ezra 3:6). They did this before the foundation of the temple was laid (Ezra. 3:6).
 3. Of course there was opposition from those who sought an alliance (Ezra 4:2) by hiring counsellors to discourage (Ezra 4:5); and false accusations to the king which caused the work to stop (Ezra 4:7-22).
- iv) The first returning, not so much a returning physically but spiritually, being an exhortation of re-encouragement, recommencement, and rebuilding (Ezra 5-6; Hag. 1-2)

Part 2

1. The purpose of this returning was to complete the building of the House of God (Ezra 5:2). The leaders in this returning were Haggai, Zerubbabel and Jeshu (Ezra 5:1-2). Unlike the first returning (Ezra. 2:64-87), we are not told how many returned this time. There were four major works completed:
 - (a) The house of the LORD was completed (Ezra 6:15)
 - (b) The priests and Levites were set in their courses (Ezra 6:18)
 - (c) The passover was kept (Ezra 6:19)
 - (d) The feast of unleavened bread was kept (Ezra 6:21-22).
2. Again there were difficulties by lethargy (Hag. 1:1-2); neglect of the house of the LORD (Hag. 1:4); and discouragement (Hag. 2:1-9).

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2) The Return

- a) As in any emancipation, there is great initial rejoicing and then the hard reality for rebuilding begins. It can even go well until there is opposition and then the people get discouraged. This is the historical background for Ezra, Nehemiah, Zechariah, and Haggai.
 - i) In the second month of the second year of their arrival in Jerusalem they began to build the house of the LORD (Ezra 3:8).
 - ii) When the temple was laid and the priests were clothed in their clothing there was a great celebration however, it was mixed with some rejoicing and others weeping (Ezra. 3:11-12; Neh. 7:73-8:18).
 - iii) Due to opposition and depression the building was stopped (Ezra 4:21) and only began again some years later under the teaching of Haggai (Ezra 6:14; Hag. 2:3).
 - iv) It is easy to visualize the foundations after the years, as with any building left for years without maintenance, filthy with dirt and overgrown with weeds. Depression mixed with looking after their own houses and trying to eek out a living meant the temple was left an unfinished relic of long gone dreams.

To Whom He Prophesied

That which comes to the fore is the apathetic attitude of the people due to distorted priorities. He begins with God's revelation of their lack of zeal with the probing question, "Is it time for you, O ye that dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4)

- a) The rebuilding of the temple had begun with the return of many from Babylon but due to the threatenings of the enemy, it had stopped and never started again. Some fifteen years now passed, and although they knew what ought to be done, they just were not interested enough to do it.

The sharp contrasts:

- a) There is the contrast of Persons between God and the people.
 - i) Note how pointed the Lord is in His message of conviction when He uses the pronoun "you" followed by "Ye". It is in such a form of speech that it is better said, "Is it time for you, even you".
- b) There is a contrast of attitudes. God was marked by zeal for His house, the people with lackadaisicalness.
- c) There was the contrast of houses. Theirs were beautifully finished, His lay in ruins.

Keys

Key words and clauses:

- a) Consider:
 - i) (in a phrase) "Consider your ways" - remonstrance (ch. 1: 5); "Consider your ways" - exhortation (ch. 1:7); explanation (ch. 1:9-11); compliance (ch. 1:12); admiration (ch. 1:12).
 - ii) "I will shake the heavens" (ch. 2:6, 21).
 - iii) "I will" (ch. 1:8; 2:6, 9, 19, 21, 22, 23)

Features of Haggai

- 1) In reading Haggai it quickly becomes apparent that not only does he have key words and phrases, but he also repeats the same, or almost the same, twice over. For instance:
 - a) "The people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God" (ch. 1:12) and "the people did fear before the LORD" (ch. 1:12).
 - b) "The people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God" (ch. 1:12) and "Haggai . . . the LORD their God had sent him" (ch. 1:12).

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- c) “Consider from this day and upward” (ch. 2:15) and “Consider now from this day and upward” (ch. 2:18)

What Is The Thought Flow

Haggai was written to encourage the people of God for God recognized they had been the victims of Satanic zeal in disheartening them. Many years previous the house of God had been started after the return from Babylon under Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubbabel. However, time had passed and that had been taken over by deadening apathy and taking further advantage of the situation, Satan had them focus all their attention on the things of their own. They had time to build beautiful houses but the house of God lay unfinished. God raised up Haggai to rekindle their dreams of the temple, and now that they had started it, a new depression came, this is not as good as the first one. To answer this perplexity, God through Haggai speaks and tells them of days yet to come when this house will have the glory of God in it.

Aspects of Divine Persons

1) God

- a) His sovereignty over creation (ch. 2:6, 7)
- b) “The LORD of Hosts” (ch. 1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14; 2:4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 23)
- c) “LORD their God” (ch. 1:12) and the fact that the clause is not only repeated, but in the same verse, thus showing an emphaticalness. This was very important for the people were weak but the LORD was the LORD of Hosts, that is, all ability and resources were under His command.

2) Christ

- a) “Desire of all nations” (ch. 2:7). The Hebrew word translated “desire” is also translated “goodly” (2 Chron. 36:10); “precious” (Ezra 8:27); “beloved” (Dan. 10:11). Sometimes it is used in a bad sense (Hab. 2:5). Saul was the desire of all Israel (1 Sam. 9:20) but the Lord is the “Desire of all nations”. This is an expression which needs clarification for it is evident that the ungodly of the nations do not have any desire for the Lord, and yet we cannot change the meaning of the word “nations” within the context. Christ will be the desire of all nations but for two different reasons. The shaking of earth, seas, sky, etc., can only be fulfilled when the seals are opened, the trumpets blow, and vials poured out, and the days after the tribulation (Rev. 6:12-19; Matt. 24:29). With the earth in complete chaos the unsaved will again look for a man to give a solution to the economical, environmental, financial, social, national, nutritional, international, and religious needs of a world of disappointment, of the utopia promised by the Beast. Israel will look for help from God for the desperate plight they are in when surrounded by the armies of the world and in real danger of being made extinct. Then Christ will appear. The obstinate He will destroy along with their armies and bring in millennial blessing in every way in which it was deficient under the beast, and Israel will be given all the promised land and the Lord will fight for them and rule over them.

3) The Holy Spirit

- a) “My Spirit remaineth among you” (ch. 2:5)

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The Dates Mentioned

Date	Reference
01 06 02 of Darius	ch. 1:1
24 06 02	ch. 1:15
21 07 02	ch. 2:1
24 09 02	ch. 2:10
24 09 02	ch. 2:18
24 09 02	ch. 2:20

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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