

Reading Guide for Haggai

Haggai prophesied in Jerusalem alongside Zechariah to encourage the people to complete the temple (Ezra 5:1, 6:14). The oracles in the book of Haggai are given within a four-month period in 520 B.C., the second year of Darius.

The exiles had returned from Babylon after Cyrus' decree in 538 B.C. and, upon their return, immediately rebuilt the altar and laid the temple foundation (Ezra 3).

Soon after, the community ceased construction on the temple when they met opposition from the nations around them. Haggai's oracles serve both as a rebuke to the community for their complacency and disobedience, but also an encouragement to the leaders, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, to complete the temple.

The Call to Rebuild the Temple Answered (1:1-15)

The oracle begins with a disputation. The people claimed that it was not the right time to build. The Lord responds with a counterclaim, rebuking the people for building and beautifying their own houses and neglecting to build His house. The following oracles make it clear that the community has not been prospering because their disobedience has brought covenant curses upon them.

The community responds to Haggai's oracles with fear and reverence. The Lord assures them that He is with them as they begin work on the temple.

I. The Call to Rebuild the Temple (1:1-11)

Message-reception Formula (with Date and Audience) (1:1)

Disputation Oracle (1:1-4)

The People's False Claim: The Time Has Not Come to Build the Temple (v. 2)

The Lord's Counterclaim: Why Then is It Time to Dwell in Paneled Houses? (vv. 3-4)

Oracle: The Consequences of Disobedience (1:5-6)

Quotation Formula (v. 5a)

Exhortation to Consider (v. 5b)

The Community is in Need Because of Their Disobedience (v. 6)

Oracle: The Consequences of Disobedience (1:7-11)

Quotation Formula (v. 7a)

Exhortation to Consider (v. 7b)

Command to Build the Temple (v. 8)

The Land is Experiencing Drought Because of Disobedience (vv. 9-11)

II. The People Respond with Obedience (1:12-15)

The People Obey the Lord (v. 12)

The Lord Offers Assurance as a Response to Obedience (v. 13)

The Community Resumes Work on the Temple (v. 14-15)

Finding Encouragement in the Future Glory of the Temple (2:1-9)

Haggai again brings a message to the community, addressing those who were alive to see the glory of the first temple and were disappointed in the current construction. This attitude was a discouragement to the rest of the community and the leadership. The Lord assures the people that He plans to make the glory of the second temple exceed the glory of the first.

Message-reception Formula (with Date) (2:1)

Command to Speak to Zerubbabel (2:2)

Oracle: Encouragement to the Community and Their Leaders (2:3-5)

Oracle: The Lord will Glorify His House (2:6-9)

The Defiled People Will Be Purified and Blessed (2:10-19)

Haggai begins by asking the priests two questions regarding ritual purity. First, he asks if ritual cleanness is contagious, which receives a negative answer, and second, if uncleanness is contagious, which they affirm. The point of these questions is to show the community that the guilt and uncleanness they have incurred through their disobedience has defiled their offerings as well, making them unacceptable. However, now that the people have resolved to rebuild the temple and seek the Lord first, the people can be clean before the Lord and receive a blessing.

Message-reception Formula (with Date) (2:10)

Oracle: The Defiled People will be Purified (2:11-14)

Questions to the Priests Regarding Ritual Cleanness (vv. 11-13)

The Community is Unclean So Their Offerings are Unclean (v. 14)

Oracle: The People Under Curse will be Blessed (2:15-19)

The People Have Suffered Under a Curse Thus Far (v. 15-17)

The Lord will Now Bless the People (vv. 18-19)

Zerubbabel Chosen as the Lord's Signet Ring (2:20-23)

Haggai's final recorded oracle promises that Zerubbabel will be exalted, and that the nations' strength will be destroyed. Zerubbabel represented the hope of a renewed Davidic monarchy—a hope that the Lord Himself affirms. Although the post-exilic community did not immediately see a fulfillment of this promise, it was indeed fulfilled through the birth of Jesus, who is the everlasting King of the nations.

Message-reception Formula (with Date) (2:20)

Command to Speak to Zerubbabel (2:21a)

Oracle: The Lord will Overthrow the Nations and Exalt Zerubbabel (2:21b-23)

The Lord will Judge the Nations (vv. 21b-22)

The Lord will Exalt Zerubbabel (vv. 23)