



Haggai - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

The opening establishes the characters and context of the book. The Lord, prophet, king, priest, and people figure prominently as the major problem is presented, which is that the Lord's house is in ruins and the people are doing nothing about it.

In the second word to Haggai, the Lord asks his hearers to consider whether their prosperity, such as it is, brings about the intended satisfaction, and he exhorts them to supply materials for 'my house' (vv.3-11). A general response follows and rebuilding the temple recommences.

a. Haggai 1:1-15a - The Command to Rebuild the Temple

On the date of this oracle the people can reflect on the disappointing harvest season. They struggle mightily for personal gain at the neglect of the Lord's house. God evaporates their gain in order to teach them that the rebuilding of his temple will bring him glory and must be their priority.

¹ In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.

Haggai 1:1-2

The first day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius is 27th August 520 BC. As the first of the month, it is the day of a new moon festival, and thus a day of public worship: *<<and whenever burnt-offerings are offered to the Lord on sabbaths, new moons, and appointed festivals, according to the number*



Relief of Darius I in Persepolis

required of them, regularly before the Lord>> (1 Chronicles 23:31); it is also three weeks after the anniversary of the destruction of the first temple: *<<In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month – which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem>>* (2 Kings 25:8), and: *<<In the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month – which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon – Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard who served the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem>>* (Jeremiah 52:12). At this point most of the harvesting is finished, with only dates and summer figs left to be harvested. Darius was the Persian king who reigned between 522-486 BC.

The dating of this prophecy makes Haggai the first among the post-exilic Minor Prophets. Of the twelve Minor Prophets, the first nine spoke before Judah was carried away captive, exiled to Babylon.

The last three Minor Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, each spoke to those who returned from the 70-year exile.

In 538 BC King Cyrus of Persia allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem after 70 years in captivity. Two years later, in 536 BC, construction on the temple began, led by Zerubbabel. The work stopped after two years in 534 BC. After 14 years of neglect, work on the temple resumed in 520 BC and was finished four years later in 516 BC.

Came by the prophet Haggai, or by the hand of Haggai, is a phrase unique to Haggai among the writing prophets, although it is common in the books of Moses. In the difficult years of the return from exile God spoke to his people through the prophet Haggai. Haggai is also mentioned twice in the Book of Ezra, the priest who oversaw the work of rebuilding the temple: *<<Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the*

house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them>> (Ezra 5:1-2), and: <<So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia>> (Ezra 6:14).

Zerubbabel was a grandson of Jehoiachin, heir to the Davidic throne, and governor of Judah. He is therefore listed in the genealogy of Jesus: <<*And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel*>> (Matthew 1:12). He is probably the same man as: <<*King Cyrus of Persia had them released into the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah*>> (Ezra 1:8), and: <<*Moreover, the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem and had brought into the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor*>> (Ezra 5:14). Sheshbazzar would have been his Assyrian or Persian name and Zerubbabel his Hebrew name.

Renaming Hebrews with local names was common practice, for example: <<*The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego*>> (Daniel 1:7), and: <<*Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his cousin, for she had neither father nor mother; the girl was fair and beautiful, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter*>> (Esther 2:7).

Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, whose line is traced through Zadok to Aaron: <<*Azariah became the father of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Shallum, Shallum of Hilkiyah, Hilkiyah of Azariah, Azariah of Seraiah, Seraiah of Jehozadak; and Jehozadak went into exile when the Lord sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar*>> (1 Chronicles 6:11-15), <<*Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch*>> (Zechariah 3:8), and: <<*Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak*>> (Zechariah 6:11).

The Lord of hosts highlights the Lord as the leader of heavenly or earthly armies. Approximately one-third of all biblical occurrences of the phrase are found in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; it emphasises the Lord's universal rule.

Hosts, Hebrew *tseba'ot*, is probably the plural of an abstract noun meaning something like 'plentifulness' or 'numberlessness.' Hence, it refers to numerous entities such as heavenly bodies (Isaiah 40:26), angelic beings, i.e. <<*the army of the Lord*>> (Joshua 5:14), <<*the armies of Israel*>> (1 Samuel

17:45), or all creatures (Genesis 2:1). The title may originally have been particularly connected with worship at the Shiloh sanctuary (1 Samuel 4:4), in which case 'hosts' would probably have referred to angelic beings, portrayed as God's 'armies.' There is a chart showing the usage of the phrase 'The Lord of Hosts' in the OT in the About section on the website.

These people. Only on one other occasion does God refer to them as these people instead of 'my people': <<*The Lord said: Because these people draw near with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote; so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden*>> (Isaiah 29:13-14). On this occasion he may have said it because he saw their excuses and poor priorities and noticed that they were not living like his people. It should be remembered that these were not 'bad people'; they were the remnant that had returned from Babylon. Hundreds of thousands of people went into the Babylonian captivity and only about 50,000 returned. Those who did were the most committed to the Lord and to the restoration of Jerusalem.

These people say. God's people, the citizens of Jerusalem, told themselves that it was not time to resume work on the temple. There were some good reasons why they might say this, and why the work of rebuilding the temple was hard:

- The land was still desolate after 70 years of neglect.
- The work was hard.
- They did not have a lot of money or manpower.
- They suffered crop failures and drought.
- Hostile enemies resisted the work (Ezra 4:1-5).
- They remembered easier times in Babylon.

The time has not yet come. The people claim that the time for temple restoration has not yet arrived: they want to postpone the work until sometime later. The people made their excuse sound spiritual. They could not speak against the idea of building the temple, so they spoke against its timing, in effect saying, "It is not God's timing to rebuild the temple."

Because of the great obstacles against the work, God's people began to rationalise and decided that it was not time to rebuild after all. "If it is so hard, evidently, God does not want us to do it, at least not at this time." They may have said 'the time has not come' because they thought that the 70 years of captivity mentioned in Jeremiah 25:11-13 and 29:10 had not yet been fulfilled. According to Usher's chronology of these events, they were in the 69th year since the last siege of Jerusalem. Even in this, the people of God lacked faith. There were three 'waves' of captivity, 605 BC, 597 BC, and 587 BC. In his prayer in Daniel Chapter 9, Daniel was bold enough to ask God to take the earliest starting point to determine the 70 years, and God did. Unbelief made

these returned captives think that God's mercy might not come to Israel until 18 years later.

Haggai gave this first word in late August 520 BC. At that time the exiles had been back in Jerusalem for 18 years, but the work of rebuilding the temple had lain idle for the last 14 years. The work started well enough: *<<When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever towards Israel.' And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid>> (Ezra 3:10-11). Despite the solid start, after two years the work stopped, mired in discouragement and derailed by a lack of focus. When Haggai prophesied, the foundation to the temple was laid and the altar was rebuilt but the temple was not yet rebuilt.*

³ Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: ⁴ Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins?

Haggai 1:3-4

Then the word of the Lord came. God saw and heard their excuses and poor priorities, and he had something to say to them through the prophet Haggai.

Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins? The inattentive people focus on comfortable personal dwellings (v.9) while the Lord remains homeless: *<<the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent'>> (2 Samuel 7:2).* The problem was simply wrongly ordered priorities, which can still bring condemnation: *<<Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, 'I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms', and who cuts out windows for it, panelling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him>> (Jeremiah 22:13-15).* They were content to let the cause of the Lord suffer at the expense of their own comfort. Instead, they should have felt no rest until the work of God was as prosperous as their personal lives, and been as willing to sacrifice for the work of God as they were for their personal comfort and luxury.

⁵ Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared.

Haggai 1:5

Consider how you have fared is an instruction for them to ponder their actions and the resulting experiences, as Jeremiah also called their ancestors to do: <<**Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord**>> (Lamentations 3:40). The Hebrew figure of speech for this phrase is literally ‘put your heart on your roads.’ Haggai asks God’s people to consider what direction their life is headed, and if they really want it to continue that way: <<**Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it**>> (Matthew 7:13-14).

⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes.

Haggai 1:6

You have sown much, and harvested little. This describes the hard work the people have done, and the frustrating yield. God has not blessed their crops because of their preference for personal comfort over the rebuilding of the temple: <<**But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**>> (Matthew 6:33).

You eat, drink, yourselves clothe, earns wages. Their efforts to care for themselves and their families lead only to frustration, so the Lord wants them to ‘consider their ways’ (v.5).

You drink, but you never have your fill. This is similar to the warnings of Amos: <<**so two or three towns wandered to one town to drink water, and were not satisfied; yet you did not return to me, says the Lord**>> (Amos 4:8).

These judgements are a fulfilment of promises God made hundreds of years before in the time of Moses: <<**Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshipping them, for then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly from the good land that the Lord is giving you**>> (Deuteronomy 11:16-17). The people of Israel were being judged and they did not even know it; they probably wrote it all off as bad luck or tough economic times, but God was trying to tell them something.

⁷ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. ⁸ Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the Lord.

Haggai 1:7-8

Go up, bring, build. The people are commanded to bring wood to build a proper house. Just as the Lord takes pleasure in acceptable sacrifice: <<*then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt-offerings and whole burnt-offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar*>> (Psalm 51:19), the sacrifice required to rebuild the temple will result in his pleasure and glory: <<*Is it any pleasure to the Almighty if you are righteous, or is it gain to him if you make your ways blameless?*>> (Job 22:3). God calls them to work. Sometimes God's cause needs work, work that is supported by prayer, not work that is neglected because of artificial 'spiritual' service.

It was work to be embraced by individuals without thinking, "Someone else will do it." When David Livingstone applied to a missionary society in Scotland because he wanted to bring Jesus to Africa they told him, "Young man, when God sees fit to evangelise Africa he will do it without your help." This is not the case at all, God will do it, and he wants and often will wait for the participation of his people.

⁹ You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses.

Haggai 1:9

You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little. When God was neglected, nothing worked right. They were able to accomplish some things like building their own houses, but it did not bring the satisfaction that it should have. This was not a new warning to the people: <<*You shall carry much seed into the field but shall gather little in, for the locust shall consume it*>> (Deuteronomy 28:38), and: <<*For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah*>> (Isaiah 5:10).

When you brought it home, I blew it away. This is similar to the concept of the lost wages in v.6, and echoes: <<*for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more*>> (Psalm 103:16), and: <<*I will gather you and blow upon you with the fire of my wrath, and you shall be melted within it*>> (Ezekiel 22:21)

The word 'house' is used three times with three different meanings: home, a place to store goods; my house, referring to the Lord's temple: <<*So I remonstrated with the officials and said, 'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their stations*>> (Nehemiah 13:11); and your own houses, the personal dwellings of the people.

You hurry off to your own houses, literally means 'is running for'. As compared with the implicit critique of v.4, the misplaced priorities of the people are now made explicit.

¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labours.

Haggai 1:10-11

Therefore. There is a causal link between the ruin, Hebrew *khareb*, of the Lord's house (v.4 and v.9), and the drought, Hebrew *khoreb*. It can be imagined that the people of God were depressed and discouraged because of the drought. They thought it was all an attack by Satan, and they prayed fervently against 'Satan's plot.' All the while it was not Satan's doing at all, but it was the Lord who called for a drought on the land. The problem was not Satan, but their wrong priorities. Many Christians face the same problem.

It was due to drought and famine that the Israelites moved to Egypt, where they could grow as a nation without external influence. It was the cause of Elimelech and Naomi taking their family to Moab (Ruth 1:1), which resulted in the line of David being established. There were other examples of God-ordained droughts that served a specific purpose for Israel, such as: <<Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, 'As the Lord the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word'>> (1 Kings 17:1), and: <<I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it>> (Isaiah 5:6).

On the grain, the new wine, the oil. Because they neglected the Lord, he neglected to bless their three basic crops, as well as on the people, their effort and their livestock. The reference to the drought on the animals was not to cause them harm but to make them less productive.

¹² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua 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 the prophet Haggai, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the Lord.

Haggai 1:12

The people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of the prophet Haggai. To the admonition of vv.3-11, people render a general response of hearing and alarm. Obedience had to begin with the leadership. This was not a sermon just for the people, but also for the highest leaders among God's people.

The remnant (v.14 and 2:2) is the same as the people addressed in v.2, 2:4, and 2:14.

The Lord their God, and the words of the prophet Haggai. In pointing out both, Haggai is distinguishing between the author of the doctrine (God), and its minister (Haggai). The people's respect for Haggai was based on his office as prophet and his commission, i.e. God had sent him.

The people feared the Lord. Their fear of God prompted obedience. This was more than basic respect; it was recognition that God is a judge who deals with his people righteously. Fear of the Lord does not mean fear of final judgement but is a common theme referring either to fear as godly awe, reverence, and devotion, as in Acts 2:43, 10:2 and 13:26, or fear of God's displeasure and fatherly discipline: *<<Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness>>* (Hebrews 12:7-10).

¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, saying, I am with you, says the Lord.

Haggai 1:13

The messenger of the Lord. This was a term used to describe prophets: *<<The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place>>* (2 Chronicles 36:15). This was also used in relation to John the Baptist: *<<See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts>>* (Malachi 1:1). Jesus confirmed this as being written of John: *<<What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you”>>* (Luke 7:26-27), despite John's own denial of this: *<<This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, ‘I am not the Messiah.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’ He said, ‘I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord”’, as the prophet Isaiah said>>* (John 1:19-23).

I am with you. This is the great promise of covenantal assurance, as confirmed by: <<*Only, do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they are no more than bread for us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them*>> (Numbers 14:9), <<*So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the Lord said*>> (Joshua 14:12), <<*The Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron*>> (Judges 1:19), <<*Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you*>> (Isaiah 43:5), <<*and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:20), <<*So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it*>> (Mark 16:19-20), and: <<*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*>> (Romans 8:31). God was there to encourage them, and to strengthen them for the work. He always empowers and encourages his people to do what he commands them. Therefore, the task before them will be undertaken with the promise of God's aid.

¹⁴ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua 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, ^{15a} on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month.

Haggai 1:14-15a

And the Lord stirred up the spirit. In this fine example of divine prompting and human response, the Spirit of the Lord moves in the people and the people take action. God awakens in the people an intense desire to work on repairing his house. Progress on the house arises only by means of the enabling power of the sovereign God: <<*And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments*>> (Exodus 35:21).

They came and worked on the house of the Lord. The stirring of spirit did not come and go just as a spiritual experience. The stirring of spirit flourished into a stirring of the work.

Their God is the companion statement of covenantal assurance: <<*I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart*>> (Jeremiah 24:7), and: <<*I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God*>> (Ezekiel 11:19-20).

On the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month is 19th September 520 BC, again calculated according to the known dates of the reign of King Darius.

The source of the date conversions is taken from www.cgsf.org.