



## An Introduction to the Book of Haggai

### Author and Title

The Book of Haggai contains messages delivered by the prophet Haggai, and thus it is reasonable to consider Haggai its author. The name Haggai, which means 'festal', promotes the conjecture that his birth occurred during a festival of Israel, or perhaps links his name with his message, anticipating the restoration of Israel's great festivals within a restored temple. Nothing is known of his genealogy.

### Date

The word of the Lord came to Haggai between late August and mid-December of 520BC. There is widespread scholarly consensus on these dates, although this does not preclude the possibility of editorial activity. If such editing did take place, it likely occurred before 515BC when the temple was completed. The dates given are significant for their places in both the liturgical and agricultural calendars of Judah.

### Dates of the Oracles in Haggai

Oracle	Reference	Date
First	1:1	1 <sup>st</sup> day of 6 <sup>th</sup> month (29 <sup>th</sup> August 520BC)
Second	1:15	24 <sup>th</sup> day of 6 <sup>th</sup> month (21 <sup>st</sup> September 520BC)
Third	2:1	21 <sup>st</sup> day of 7 <sup>th</sup> month (17 <sup>th</sup> October 520BC)
Fourth	2:10	24 <sup>th</sup> day of 9 <sup>th</sup> month (18 <sup>th</sup> December 520BC)
Fifth	2:20	24 <sup>th</sup> day of 9 <sup>th</sup> month (18 <sup>th</sup> December 520BC)

## Theme

The restoration of the Lord's house by the people of God will mediate God's presence.

## Purpose

Haggai motivates the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua and the people of God to consider their current economic and spiritual circumstances, and to renew their efforts to complete the work of temple restoration.

The historical setting of the book is in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC among the returned exiles from the Babylonian captivity. The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great (559-530BC) captured Babylon in 539BC. His edict in 538BC permitted the return of Jews to Jerusalem so that they might rebuild the temple (Ezra Chapters 1-2). Initial work stalled, however, when opposition arose (Ezra 3:1-4:5).

The events within the Book of Haggai take place during the reign of Darius I (522-486BC), a general who rose to power following the death of Cyrus' son Cambyses (530-522BC). The specific mention of the 'second year of Darius' (1:1) places the book firmly in the year 520BC. Darius's support was vital for the completion of the temple (Ezra Chapters 5-6).

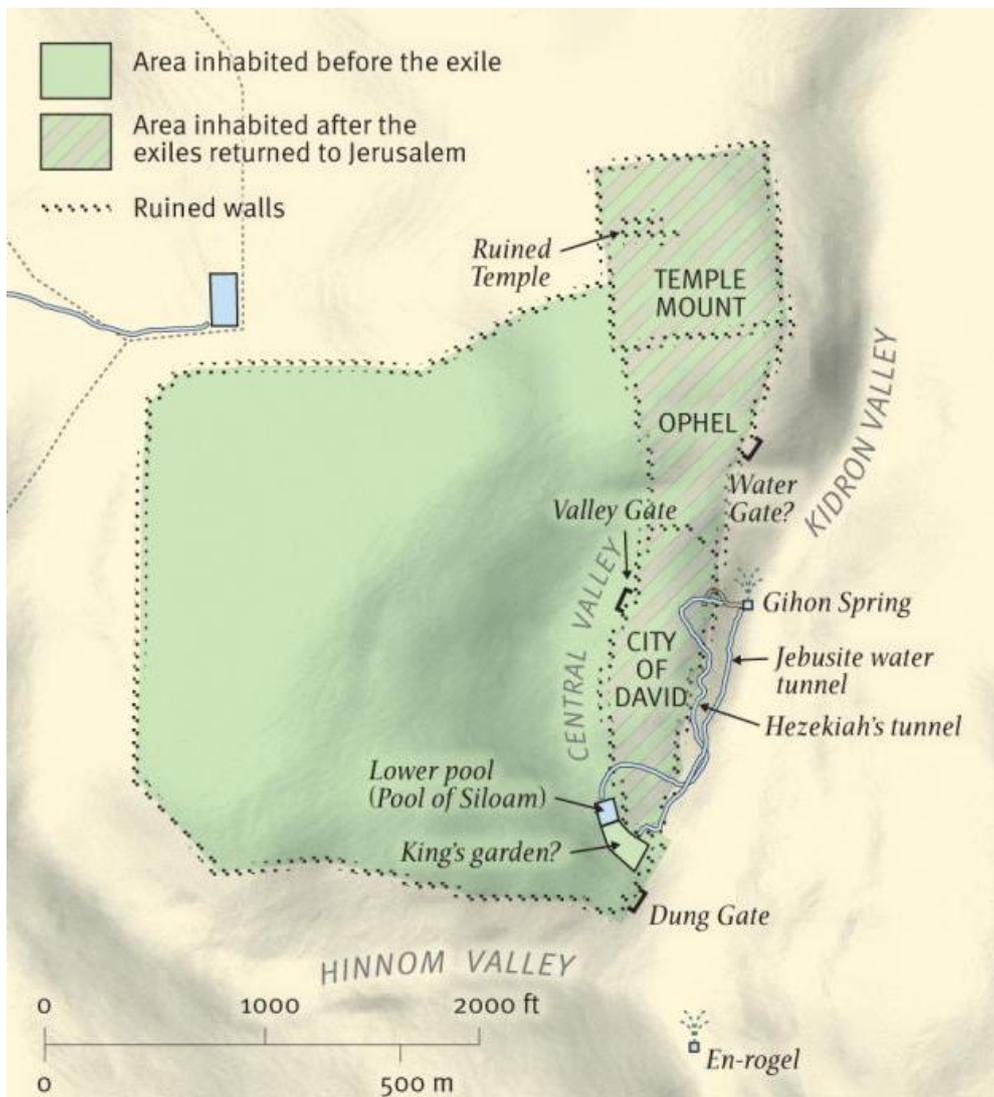
## Key Themes

1. *The restoration of God's house.* Temple restoration highlights the Lord's desire to renew a covenant relationship with his people, characterised by his presence (1:13 and 2:4-5). A decaying temple signifies a decaying relationship and brings defilement rather than holiness to the people (2:14).
2. *The prophetic word is the divine Word.* The divine message comes 'by the hand of Haggai', is characterised by 'thus says the Lord', is a message 'to Haggai', is characterised by 'declares the Lord', is the 'voice of the Lord their God', and is the 'Lord's message'.
3. *The Lord is sovereign.* The phrase 'Lord of hosts' occurs 14 times in these 38 verses. The Lord gives the divine word, controls the fortunes of his people and nations, directs nature, motivates his people to action, and establishes and deposes kingdoms.
4. *The people must work.* A restored house will bring pleasure and glory to the Lord and convey blessing to the people, but there is work to be done. Physical labour is urged in the form of numerous imperatives. However, there is also 'heart' work to be done, as evidenced by the call to consider past experience in light of the present inaction.
5. *The restoration of David's house.* Undoubtedly Zerubbabel, the heir of David, is promised an elevated status. The Lord, who had taken off the 'ring' of the

Davidic house (Jeremiah 22:24-27), now promises to wear it once again. As in the OT (2 Samuel Chapter 7 and Psalm 2:6), the NT understanding inextricably unites king and temple. It is only as the temple is rebuilt (Matthew 26:61, 27:40 and John 2:18-22) that Christ Jesus, the Davidic heir, is installed as the messianic King (Romans 1:1-4), thus fulfilling the promises to Zerubbabel (Matthew 1:1, 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27).

### Jerusalem at the Time of Haggai (circa 520BC)

Haggai prophesied to the people of Jerusalem after they had returned from Babylon in 538BC and before they had rebuilt the temple in 515BC. The city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, the walls and the temple having been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586BC. Within a year after returning from Babylon, the people had laid the foundation for the new temple, but by Haggai's time they had still not completed it. Haggai, together with Zechariah, called upon the people to stop focusing on their own economic well-being and complete the temple.



**Regional Map**

## History of Salvation Summary

After the exile, the Lord is renewing his promises to his people and calls on them to finish rebuilding the temple so that he might be with them and fulfil his promises to bless the whole world through them, particularly through the Messiah from the house of David.

## Literary Features

Although the Book of Haggai falls within the general category of prophecy, it is not a typical prophetic book. It is written in prose instead of the customary poetry. Although there are predictions of promised blessing, there are no oracles of judgement in the usual sense. Instead, God simply calls the nation's attention to its low ebb, as though judgement had already occurred. There are also intermittent golden-age visions, as well as a narrative episode (1:12-15). By means of a specific instance, i.e. the rebuilding of the temple, the Book of Haggai is a relevant and timeless book on the need to put God's work first in one's life. For the prophet's society, rebuilding the temple would be the visible sign of the people's determination to put God first.

## Outline

- a. The Command to Rebuild the Temple (1:1-15a)
- b. The Future Glory of the Temple (1:15b-2:9)
- c. A Rebuke and a Promise (2:10-19)
- d. God's Promise to Zerubbabel (2:20-23)