

INTRODUCTION TO 37TH BIBLEBOOK

HAGGAI (520 B.C.)(15th)

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A. THE WRITER, RECIPIENTS AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

Haggai is the tenth of the twelve Minor Prophets. We do not know more about the prophet. The prophet Haggai was a contemporary of the prophet Zechariah and both prophets are mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14. They prophesied during the days of the governor Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua¹. Zerubbabel was a descendant of king David² and he was appointed governor of the Jews who had returned from Babel. Joshua was a descendant of the high priestly family through Jehozadak, who was deported to Babylon, and he was the first high priest after the exile³.

The emperor Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. According to Ezra 1:1, in the year 538 B.C, king Cyrus gave an order that the Jews might return from exile back to Judea and also that they might rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. In 537 B.C, the first group of Jews returned to Judea under the leadership of the governor Zerubbabel, also called Sheshbazzar, and the priest Joshua and they took the temple articles with them. Cyrus was succeeded by Cambyses (529-522 B.C.) and Darius Hystaspes (521-486 B.C.). There were internal rebellions to quench and only in about 520 B.C. peace returned to the Medo-Persian Empire. The prophet Haggai prophesied all four his prophesies in the second year of king Darius, that is in **520 B.C.** (1:1; 2:1,10,20).

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

The book of Haggai may be given the title, “**Exhortation to rebuild the Lord’s house.**”

It has four parts:

1. Haggai 1:1-15. Condemnation and repentant action.

- God’s condemnation of Israel’s sinful neglect to rebuild the temple (1:2-11).
- Israel’s faithful remnant began to rebuild the second temple (1:12-15).

2. Haggai 2:1-9. Prophecy concerning the shaking of the heavens and the earth and the greater glory of the second temple.

3. Haggai 2:10-19. Exhortation to consider how things were before and the blessing from this day on.

4. Haggai 2:20-23. Prophecy concerning the overthrow of all earthly kingdoms and a special promise to Zerubbabel.

C. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

1. An exhortation to the leaders and people to continue rebuilding the temple.

The Jews built the first temple during the time of king Solomon, from 968- 961 B.C.⁴. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. The Jews were taken into exile until the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. They returned from exile in 537 B.C. After the return from exile, the Jews began to rebuild the temple on the same place. In about 536 B.C., they set up the altar of burnt offering, restored the daily sacrifices and laid the foundation of the temple⁵.

However, the work came to a standstill due to the opposition of the Samaritans⁶ and possibly due to the fact that Cyrus discontinued to finance the project. After a recess of about 15 years, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhorted the governor Zerubbabel and the priest Joshua as well as the people to continue to rebuild the temple. He challenged them to consider their present situation. They planted much, but harvested little. They ate, but never had enough. They earned wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. They expected much, but it turned out to be little. What they brought home, God blew away. Why? God said, because “while each of you is busy with his own house, my house remains a ruin” (1:5-9). Their present poverty and crop failures were the result of their sinful neglect to rebuild the temple. The people listened and resumed the rebuilding of the temple (1:15). Ezra 6:15 says that the rebuilding of the temple was completed in 516 B.C.

2. A prophecy concerning the future shaking of the heavens and the earth and the glory of the second temple.

There were people who deplored the insignificance of the second temple in comparison with the first temple of king Solomon (2:3). The prophet speaks of two shakings of the earth.

¹ Ezra 3:1 and 4:6

² 1 Chronicles 3:17-19

³ 1 Chronicles 6:15

⁴ 1 Kings 6:1,38

⁵ Ezra 3:1-6,10

⁶ Ezra 4:5

The first shaking of nations occurred during the fall of the Babylonian Empire of Nebuchadnezzar and the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire of Cyrus. This event caused a great movement of nations including the return of the Jewish nation from exile. But this first shaking of the nations did not issue into the expected Messianic Age!

Therefore, the prophet prophesied that once more there would be a shaking of both the heavens and the earth and the precious things ('desire or object of delight') of the nations would fill the second temple. This is saying that the external glory of the second temple would be greater than the external glory of the first temple. While all the earthly powers and their greatness collapsed, Jerusalem's temple would receive glory.

At this time the future period of salvation or the Messianic Age (the New Testament period) would begin. And in that temple (that is the Body of Christ) God would give 'peace' to the people, that is, his complete wholeness, well-being and salvation in the fullest meaning of the word⁷.

Also the prophet Isaiah prophesied of this shaking in Isaiah 24:19-23 and the prophet Joel in Joel 2:10-11 and 3:16. But the prophet Haggai did not speak directly of the coming Messiah, but of the glory of the second temple.

3. Concerning the fulfilment of this prophecy..

The shaking of the earth and its nations.

The preliminary fulfilment began when the nations of the Medo-Persian Empire had to make place for the Greek Empire and the Greek Empire had to make place for the Roman Empire, and all these shakings of the nations refer to the future rise and fall of other earthly empires.

The treasures of all nations.

The preliminary fulfilment was when the emperor Darius decreed that the expenses for rebuilding the temple as well as for its sacrifices be paid out of the royal treasury⁸, when the emperor Artaxerxes and his advisors gave gifts of silver and gold for the temple in Jerusalem⁹ and when king Herod renewed the temple¹⁰.

But in final analysis this prophecy views the glory of the temple, not in terms of its external beauty, but in terms of its revealing the kingdom of God. That is why the external glory of the temple pointed to a new chapter in the history of God's kingdom in which especially the spiritual significance and glory of the temple would be greater than that of the first temple. This began to happen when greater numbers of Gentiles joined the faith of God's Old Testament people as proselytes¹¹.

The greatest glory of the second temple.

The greatest glory of the second temple was that during its existence, the first coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, took place! Jesus Christ revealed himself and preached his messages in this temple. And according to John 2:19-21, by breaking down the real temple of God, which is the crucifying of the body of Christ, the Jews also condemned their earthly second temple to destruction. When Jesus Christ was crucified, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom as a sign of the end of the second temple's function¹²! And by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, also a new spiritual temple came into existence, namely the Church or Body of Christ. Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-10 clearly teach that the spiritual temple consists of all the believers in Christ from all the nations in the world, including the nation of Israel.

The shaking of the heavens and the earth.

Haggai 2:6 says, "In a little while, once more" God will shake the heavens and the earth. The prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament spoke of the divine patience and delay of the Final Judgement Day. Habakkuk 2:3 says, "The revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and not wait." And 2 Peter 3:8-9 says, "Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

According to Hebrews 12:26-28, the final great shaking of the heavens and the earth will take place at the Second Coming of Christ! The words 'once more' indicate the shaking (transforming) of what can be shaken - that is, all the created things - so that what cannot be shaken (the Kingdom of God and its citizens) may remain. And Christians are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken!

⁷ Micah 4:1-2

⁸ Ezra 6:8-10

⁹ Ezra 7:13-20

¹⁰ John 2:20; Mark 13:1

¹¹ Isaiah 56:1-8. "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations".

¹² Matthew 27:51

According to Haggai 2:21-22, in that shaking of the heavens and the earth, God will overturn all other thrones of kings on earth and he will shatter the power of all the kingdoms in the world¹³. And according Daniel 2:44, “the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people” than the people of God. “The Kingdom of God will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it self will endure forever.” Thus the shaking of the heavens and the earth indicate that a new period of the world will come, namely, the new heavens and the new earth.

4. A special promise to Zerubbabel.

Haggai 2:23 says that God would make his servant Zerubbabel like his signet ring, because he had chosen him. To be called a servant of God means that Zerubbabel stood in a special relationship to God and was entrusted with a special task, namely, to rebuild the temple¹⁴. To be chosen by God and to be like a signet ring on God’s finger means that Zerubbabel, and the house of Judah with him, stood in a special relationship of love and intimacy with God. Zerubbabel was highly appreciated by God and stood under the direct protection of God in the fulfilment of his task¹⁵. However, these designations did not make Zerubbabel a type of the Coming Messiah and the shaking of the heavens and the earth did not find their fulfilment in him. It only showed that Zerubbabel had a share in carrying the promise of future salvation further.

In a time when the nations were shaken, Zerubbabel was appointed governor over the returning Jews in the Persian Empire. He was the leader who led the Jews out of exile back to the land of Israel.

At a later time when the nations would be shaken, *the most important descendant of Zerubbabel, namely Jesus Christ*, would come. Zerubbabel himself was a descendant of king David and according to Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27 he was the direct ancestor of both Joseph and Mary, who became the legal father and mother of Jesus Christ as to his human nature.

¹³ Ezekiel 38-39; Zechariah 1:21

¹⁴ Isaiah 41:8

¹⁵ Jeremiah 22:24