

Book of Haggai Explained

Title: The prophecy bears the name of its author. Because his name means “festal one”, it is suggested that Haggai was born on a feast day. Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament (Obadiah is shorter), and is quoted by the New Testament once (compare Heb. 12:26).

Author – Date: The author of the prophecy is identified simply as “Haggai the prophet” or “the prophet Haggai” (1:1; 2:1, 10). The meaning and etymology of the name are somewhat uncertain, as some render it “Festival” or “Festive” or “Festal One,” and have inferred that the prophet was born on a feast day. Others consider his name to be a form of feast of the Lord, and see in the name an indication of the joyous character of the predictions he delivered. Nothing is known of his personal history, though he is mentioned (in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14).

Once again God has obscured the origin of His prophet. God’s message was all-important. Some have inferred (from 2:3), that Haggai was born in Judah (before 586 B.C.), and was one of a small company who had seen the former temple in its glory. If this is true, he must have been an old man when he prophesied. This supposition agrees with the brevity of his public ministry. Although his personal history is scarcely known, he was extremely practical in his ministry. He was a man whom God raised up at specific time for a specific mission.

Haggai began his ministry (in 520 B.C.), to exhort the people to complete the task of rebuilding the temple. The resumption of the work aroused further opposition, and a letter was sent to Darius (which he did not receive until 519/518 B.C.). Haggai’s ministry was short, lasting only four months. His prophecy was sufficient motivation to get the people started again. The work that he began was carried on by Zechariah and Malachi. The prophecy takes place in Jerusalem, the site of the rebuilt temple.

The lists of refugees in Ezra mention nothing of Haggai; there are no indications of his parentage or tribal ancestry. Nor does history provide any record of his occupation. He is the only person in the Old Testament with the name, although similar names occur (Gen. 46:16; Num. 26:15; 2 Sam. 3:4; 1 Chron. 6:30). Furthermore (Hag. 2:3), may suggest that he too had seen the glory of Solomon’s temple before it was destroyed, making him at least 70 years of age when writing his prophecy.

Background – Setting: Next to Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, containing but two chapters comprised of a total of 38 verses. It is the only book of the English Bible to contain two chapters. Haggai delivered his prophecy using simple prose. The prophecy consists of four messages from God delivered to the nation after the rebuilding of the temple had ceased for about 10 years. The straightforward style of the book is enhanced by the use of questions, recurring expressions, and commands.

(In 538 B.C.), as a result of the proclamation of Cyrus the Persian (Ezra 1-4), Israel was allowed to return from Babylon to her homeland under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel and the spiritual guidance of Joshua the High-Priest (Ezra 3:2). About 45,000 to 50,000 Jews returned. (In 536 B.C.), they began to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:1 – 4:5), but opposition from neighbors and

indifference by the Jews caused the work to be abandoned (Ezra 4:1-24). Sixteen years later Haggai and Zechariah were commissioned by the Lord to stir up the people to:

- (1) Not only rebuild the temple, but also to;
- (2) Reorder their spiritual priorities (Ezra 5:1-6:22).

As a result, the temple was completed 4 years later (ca 516 B.C.; Ezra 6:15).

Historical - Theological Themes: The immediate purpose of the book is to encourage the people to resume the building of the temple, which had been incomplete for about 10 years. It was imperative that the people build the temple, for blessing from God depends on obedience.

The primary theme is the rebuilding of God's temple, which had been lying in ruins since its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar (in 586 B.C.). By means of messages from the Lord, Haggai exhorted the people to renew their efforts to build the house of the Lord. He motivated them by noting that the drought and crop failures were caused by misplaced spiritual priorities (1:9-11).

But to Haggai, the rebuilding of the temple was not an end in itself. The temple represented God's dwelling place, His manifest presence with His chosen people. The destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar followed the departure of God's dwelling glory (Ezek. Chapters 8 - 11). To the prophet, the rebuilding of the temple invited the return of God's presence to their midst. Using the historical situation as a springboard, Haggai reveled in the supreme glory of the ultimate messianic temple yet to come (2:7). Encouraging them with the promise of even greater peace (2:9), prosperity (2:19), divine rulership (2:21-22), and national blessing (2:23), during the Millennium.

Historical Background: Haggai was the first of the prophets to minister to Israel following the return from the Babylonian captivity. The period of Israel's history into which he fits is recorded in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. His personal background is recorded in Ezra (chapters 5 and 6).

Haggai dates his prophecy according to the year of the reigning Persian monarch "Darius the king" (Darius I, son of Darius Hystaspis, who was also known as Darius the Great; 1:1). Darius began his reign (in 521 B.C.). During his first two years as king, Darius I defeated nine kings in 19 different battles. He became interested in law and permitted the Jews to rebuild Solomon's temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (in 586 B.C.).