
BOOK OF HAGGAI

Approximate date: 520 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 520-400s B.C.E. (Left)

Time period: construction of the Second Temple

Author(s): Haggai (Right, some conservative-moderate); Haggai and/or anonymous other(s) (some conservative moderate, some Left); anonymous (some Left)

Location of prophet/author(s): somewhere in Judah (Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Target audience and their location: Jewish exiles having returned from Babylon

People:

Haggai, Zerubbabel (son of Shealtiel), Joshua (son of Jehozadak)

People mentioned:

King Darius

Places:

Judah

Places mentioned:

Egypt

Key Themes and Events:

Haggai declares that the people will experience drought because they have failed to finish the House of the Lord / after Haggai's declaration, the people agree to finish building God's House / Haggai asks the people if any of them remember the glory of the First Temple / God says He will fill the new House with His glory / God tells Haggai that the people are to remember their previous blight / God says that He will bless the people / Haggai is told by the Lord to tell Zerubbabel of His mighty power over human governments

Key Scriptures: Haggai 1:2-4, 9, 13-14; 2:3, 6, 14-16 / **The call to rebuild the Temple** (1:1-15); **Encouragement to complete the Temple** (2:1-23)

Theological Summary: Haggai was a post-exilic prophet who was used by God to encourage the returned Jewish exiles to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14). The name *Chaggai* (חָגַי) means “festal,” “which would suggest that the prophet was born on some feast day” (*IDB*),¹ probably with an intended connection to one of the three major pilgrimage feasts (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). We do not know very much about Haggai’s background. Some have speculated (cf. 2:3) that Haggai was present when the First Temple was destroyed, making him very old by the time his prophecies were delivered. Others, however, doubt this and believe that Haggai was probably a child when he arrived in Judea,² having been born in the exile. Neither view should significantly alter our interpretation of the text. Haggai began to prophesy at the time after Cyrus the Great of Persia allowed around 50,000 Jewish exiles to return home to the Land of Israel (Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66), forming the Persian province of Yehud.³ Haggai is the second shortest book in the Tanach, after Obadiah.

Haggai’s messages are some of the most precisely dated in the whole of the Tanach, given in a four month period in 520 B.C.E.⁴ The two main dates are likely August 29 (first day of the sixth month) and December 18 (twenty-fourth day of the ninth month) as seen in 1:1; 2:1, 10. While these dates can be important to consider, there is a danger of placing an over-emphasis on them, when Haggai’s prophetic ministry surely lasted more than four months.⁵

When we consider the actual composition of the Book of Haggai, was Haggai a writing prophet, or did he have someone else write down his messages? This is unknown, but since the text is written in the third person, some suggest that a close associate of Haggai’s actually wrote the text.⁶ Notably, as the messages are precisely dated, if Haggai did not write this book certainly he knew of its being written and oversaw some part of it. Jewish tradition ascribes ultimate authorship to the members of the Great Assembly (*b.Bava Batra* 15a).⁷

A number of psalms (Psalms 138; 146-149) are attributed to Haggai as seen in the textual traditions of the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, and Aramaic Peshitta.⁸ They are probably indicative of the Temple worship that Haggai was responsible for helping restore.

Liberal examiners will actually concede some strong degree of reliability to the composition of Haggai, due to the specific dates mentioned in the text,⁹ placing it sometime during the Persian period.

It is debated whether or not the Hebrew MT of Haggai is in relatively good condition, with some favoring it¹⁰ and others not favoring it.¹¹ There are some significant additions as

¹ W. Neil, “Haggai,” in *IDB*, 2:509; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 944; H. Wolf, “Haggai,” in *ISBE*, 2:594; Robert L. Alden, “Haggai,” in *EXP*, 7:571-572.

² Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 945.

³ Ehud ben Zvi, “Haggai,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1243.

⁴ Carol Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, “Haggai, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:20-21.

⁵ John W. Rogerson, “Haggai,” in *ECB*, 718.

⁶ Dillard and Longman, 423.

⁷ “The Men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and the scroll of Esther” (*b.Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

⁸ Neil, “Haggai,” in *IDB*, 2:509; Wolf, “Haggai,” in *ISBE*, 2:594; Alden, in *EXP*, 7:571.

⁹ ben Zvi, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1243; Rogerson, in *ECB*, 718.

¹⁰ Wolf, “Haggai,” in *ISBE*, 2:595.

seen in the Greek LXX,¹² leading some to conclude that the Hebrew Vorlage behind the LXX may have been different in some places.¹³

The background behind the events of Haggai largely concern how the Temple reconstruction had ceased after completion of its foundation, with a period of about eighteen years having passed. The construction work had been delayed due to drought, a bad economy, and the self-interests of the people (1:6-11). Little interest was given to the Temple, as people were trying to rebuild their own lives and reclaim former holdings and property prior to the exile.¹⁴ “The book contains reports of theologically based exhortations to undertake the work of reconstruction and discusses the central role of the Temple in the life of the community” (*Jewish Study Bible*).¹⁵ Haggai tried to arouse the Jewish returnees to continue the work they were committed to.¹⁶ It is important to consider that the returned exiles were likely those who had not fared well in Babylon, deciding to stay because of business ventures, and were from the poorer classes.¹⁷

The text of the Book of Haggai can be divided into two major parts: (1) the restoration of the Temple (1:1-15), and (2) oracles of encouragement (2:1-23). Themes seen in Haggai include the consequences of disobedience (1:6, 11; 2:16-17) and obedience (2:7-9, 19). When people take God and His House seriously, He will bless them and surround them with His Spirit (2:4-5). The major focus of ch. 2 is for the workers and laborers reconstructing the Temple to be encouraged to continue the work that they have committed themselves to, as a new era was emerging for God’s people.¹⁸

Some, often liberals, radically interpret the text as meaning that Haggai was a Messianic zealot who sought to cast off the foreign rulership of the Persians and install Zerubbabel as king,¹⁹ but this is reading a great deal into his message. History largely demonstrates that the Persians were somewhat generous to the Jews,²⁰ wanting a stable empire. It is possible, though, that some instability in the Persian Empire led the Jews to ask questions about independence, formulating some Messianic ideas.²¹ Haggai’s message is contemporary to Zechariah,²² and the reign of Persia’s Darius I.

In the Jewish theological tradition, Haggai, along with Zechariah and Malachi, are the last of the Prophets, and the forerunners of the Sanhedrin.²³

Haggai 2:9a, “The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,” is often viewed as having distinct Messianic significance, with the expectation of a Coming One whose

¹¹ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 948.

¹² Alden, in *EXP*, 7:575.

¹³ Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 948.

¹⁴ Dillard and Longman, 422.

¹⁵ ben Zvi, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1243.

¹⁶ Wolf, “Haggai,” in *ISBE*, 2:594.

¹⁷ Neil, “Haggai,” in *IDB*, 2:510.

¹⁸ Meyers and Meyers, “Haggai, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:21.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:22-23.

²⁰ Arthur B. Fowler, “Haggai,” in *NIDB*, 410; Alden, in *EXP*, 7:570-571.

²¹ Dillard and Longman, 423.

²² Meyers and Meyers, “Haggai, Book of,” in *ABD*, 3:21.

²³ ben Zvi, in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1244.

glory would fill the Second Temple. This occurred as the Second Temple was the scene of some of Yeshua's ministry.²⁴

There has presently been no significant Messianic engagement with the Book of Haggai. Haggai does have a profound message as it may relate to the current condition of the Messianic community, and as we consider the specifics of our mission and goals for the future. We do need encouragement to take on the challenges that God has presented before us. We have the responsibility as Messianics to build God's House (1:8), as it were, meaning something that can last and bring glory to Him.

Bibliography

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON HAGGAI:

1. What critical role was the Prophet Haggai called to play among the Southern Kingdom exiles having returned?

2. Do you believe today's Messianic community takes the message and themes of Haggai seriously? Why or why not?

REFLECTION ON HAGGAI'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Book of Haggai:

²⁴ Alden, in *EXP*, 7:575.