

## Haggai – First Things First in 2022

Haggai was written by the prophet Haggai under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The book consists of four sermons he preached. The introductions to all four sermons show that Haggai was the speaker, the messenger from God, and His prophet. Haggai (along with Zechariah) spoke to the Jewish people living in Jerusalem (see Ezra 4-5). Haggai is referenced in the third person and God speaks in the first person. This is a customary practice in prophetic books. It seems very probable that these sermons were faithfully recorded shortly after they were delivered.

These messages addressed Zerubbabel (governor of the people), Joshua (High Priest), and the common people living in Jerusalem. The issues discussed were directly applicable to this group, making the setting of Jerusalem clear.

All four messages of the prophet Haggai are connected to specific days, months, and a year. It was the second year of the Persian king Darius, thus 520 B.C. This period fits with Ezra's dating. The time is postexilic, after Nebuchadnezzar's siege (started 605 B.C.) and the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple (587-586 B.C.). The date is eighteen years after Cyrus's original decree that allowed the Jewish people in the Babylonian exile to return to Judah and rebuild their temple (Ezra 1). The sixth-century B.C. was an incredible historical time, replete with much philosophical and religious thinkers such as Confucius, Zoroaster, Buddha, and several Greek philosophers. The book of Haggai stands in great contrast to these patterns of thought.

After Cyrus was killed, his son Cambyses took over the kingdom. The historian Herodotus wrote that he "was completely out of his mind." At some point a coup arose and Gaumata (a magician) seized the Medo-Persian throne in 522 B.C., in the name of Cambyses's dead brother, Smerdis. What a mess! In September 522 B.C., Darius overthrew Gaumata. Darius was a great military technician, but a greater politician and administrator. All these historical events had a significant impact on the Jewish people. It was not until 520 B.C. that Darius was able to restore law and order to the kingdom.

God is sovereign. If the Israelites had started building the temple earlier than 520 B.C., the Persians would have considered their action to be part of the rebellion against Darius. The time was tough. The governor Zerubbabel was a weak leader, controlled by the Persians. The socioeconomic setting was difficult because God sent a drought and poor harvest. There was an overwhelming sense of hopelessness about rebuilding the temple.

Yet God changed all this when He sent his prophet Haggai to challenge the people to rebuild the temple. Shortly thereafter, God also inspired the prophet Zechariah to share eight visions that supported and supplemented the words of Haggai. God always provides!

As one ponders the theological emphasis of Haggai, think three “C” words. Confronted, Challenged, and Chosen. Haggai confronted the theological belief of the people that it was impossible to build a temple where they could worship God. He challenged the people to change their thinking to make glorifying God their top priority. He reminded them that they were chosen and that they should persevere, believe, be resolute, and live holy lives. In addition, leadership was chosen and were to be faithful servants, supported by God.

Questions to ponder about this book include: “What should be the most important priority in the life of God’s people?” “What guiding theological principle should govern all of a person’s choices?” “What was the purpose for the presence of God’s people in Jerusalem?” We will attempt to answer these questions and more in our study.

Practically, let us consider “First Things First.” This phrase is spoken when one thing needs to be prioritized over other things. It also shows that important matters should be addressed before anything else occurs. So, what are we, as Christians, to do in 2022?

Think “Priorities.” Think “Obedience.” “Motivation,” “Holiness,” and “Belief.” We will be challenged to trust God to provide, to be strong, and to depend on Him. We are to confess our sins and repent. We cannot assume that religious activities will automatically make us acceptable in the eyes of God.

As we think of the New Year upon us, consider Haggai and the idea of repentance for the New Year, with these thoughts in mind:

**Have Mercy on Me** – David wrote in Ps. 51:1, “*Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to Your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*”

**Have a Broken and Humbled Spirit** – David wrote in Ps. 51:16-17, “*You do not want a sacrifice, or I would give it; You are not pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. God, You will not despise a broken and humbled heart.*”

**Seek Joy and Restoration** – David wrote in Ps. 51:12, “*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.*”

**Work in Me, Then Others** – David then wrote in Ps. 51:13, “*Then I will teach the rebellious Your ways, and sinners will return to You.*”

Let us resolve repentance this year as we see God at work in Haggai. Take it all to the Lord this year! And see what He will do!