

Author - STEVEN R. DOUGLAS 2017

THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

OLD TESTAMENT

BOOK 37

HAGGAI



The Prophet Haggai by Giovanni Pisano

SUMMARY

The author of the Book of Haggai was the Prophet Haggai. The Book of Haggai was written in approximately 520 B.C.

Haggai sought to challenge the people of God concerning their priorities. He called them to reverence and glorify God by building the Temple in spite of local and official opposition.

Haggai called them not to be discouraged because this Temple would not be quite as richly decorated as Solomon's. He exhorted them to turn from the uncleanness of their ways and to trust in God's sovereign power.

The Book of Haggai is a reminder of the problems the people of God faced at this time, how the people courageously trusted in God and how God provided for their needs.

Will the people of God reconsider their priorities, take courage, and act on the basis of God's promises? God sought to warn the people to heed His words. Not only did God warn them, but He also offered promises through His servant Haggai to motivate them to follow Him.

Because the people of God reversed their priorities and failed to put God in first place in their lives, Judah was sent into Babylonian exile. In response to Daniel's prayer and in fulfillment of God's promises, God directed Cyrus the Persian king to allow the Jews in exile to go back to Jerusalem.

A group of Jews returned to their land with great joy, put God first in their lives, worshiped Him and began to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem without the aid of the local people who lived in Israel. Their courageous faith was met with opposition from the local people as well as the Persian government for approximately 15 years.

As with most of the books of the minor prophets, Haggai ends with promises of restoration and blessing. In the last verse, Haggai 2:23, God uses a distinctly messianic title in reference to Zerubbabel, "My Servant".

Through Haggai, God promises to make him like a signet ring, which was a symbol of honor, authority, and power, somewhat like a king's scepter used to seal letters and decrees. Zerubbabel, as God's signet ring, represents the house of David and the resumption of the messianic line interrupted by the Exile.

Zerubbabel reestablished the Davidic line of kings which would culminate in the millennial reign of Christ. Zerubbabel appears in the line of Christ on both Joseph's side and Mary's side.

The Book of Haggai draws attention to common problems most people face even today. Haggai asks us:

- (1) to examine our priorities to see if we are more interested in our own pleasures than doing the work of God.
- (2) to reject a defeatist attitude when we run into opposition or discouraging circumstances.

SUMMARY Continued

(3) to confess our failures and seek to live pure lives before God.

(4) to act courageously for God because we have the assurance that He is with us always and is in full control of our circumstances.

(5) to rest secure in God's hands knowing that He will abundantly bless us as we faithfully serve Him.

Chapter 1: In the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord comes via Haggai to Zerubbabel (governor of Jerusalem) and Joshua (the high priest). The Lord complains that the people say it is not time for the temple to be finished.

The Lord criticizes the procrastination and lack of progress. The houses of individuals are in working order, but the house of the Lord is not. Go up to the mountains and bring wood. The people act on God's words via Haggai.

Chapter 2: The Lord confronts the anxiety that the current temple is far less impressive than Solomon's. Be strong. Haggai questions the priests. Will food touched by a garment that carries holy meat be made likewise holy? No.

If a dead body touches any of these, will it render them impure? Yes. Holiness is not contagious, but impurity is. In the same way, living in the holy land and offering sacrifices does not make one holy, so long as they are unclean through neglect of the Lord.

A recent drought is seen as a consequence of the people's refusal to build the temple. God sees their change of heart and promises a harvest of blessing to come. The Lord speaks to Zerubbabel via Haggai – the gentile nations will be overcome. Zerubbabel will be made the Lord's signet ring.

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 2:5** *According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!*
- 2:17** *I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me, says the Lord.*
- 2:23** *In that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts.*

BIBLE TIMELINE

520 BC

The Word of the LORD by Haggai

Haggai 1, 2

CHARACTER Definitions

HAGGAI - The prophet Haggai recorded his four messages to the Jewish people of Jerusalem in 520 BC, eighteen years after their return from exile in Babylon (538 BC).

Haggai 2:3 seems to indicate that the prophet had seen Jerusalem before the destruction of the temple and the exile in 586 BC, meaning he was more than seventy years old by the time he delivered his prophecies. From these facts, the picture of Haggai begins to come into focus.

He was an older man looking back on the glories of his nation, a prophet imbued with a passionate desire to see his people rise up from the ashes of exile and reclaim their rightful place as God's light to the nations.

Haggai's prophecy came at a time when the people of Judah were extremely vulnerable. They had been humbled by their exile to Babylon, hopeful in their return to their Promised Land, and then so discouraged by opposition in their rebuilding of the temple that they had quit.

Now, sixteen years later, with Haggai blaming their lack of food, clothing, and shelter on their failure to rebuild the temple, the Jews were receptive to his message of rebuilding the Lord's house.

Unlike most of the other prophets, Haggai explicitly dated his prophecies, down to the day. He gave four separate messages, the first on August 29, 520 BC; the second on October 17, 520 BC; and the final two on December 18, 520 BC. These messages encouraged the people of Judah to finish building the temple and to have hope in God for the promise of blessings in the future.

After thousands of years, the book of Haggai remains largely unique among the books of Old Testament prophets for one key reason: the people of Judah listened! Haggai's message to rebuild the temple was passionate, simple, and straightforward.

No one could mistake whether or not his direction had been followed—the results would be evident for all the people to see. Through the physical act of rebuilding the temple, the people began to indicate a shift in their spiritual lives: from devotion to self toward devotion to God.

Haggai had an important message for the Jews who had recently returned from exile. They had forgotten their God, choosing instead to focus on their own interests, so it was time for them to consider [their] ways.

Nothing was more important for the Jews than to show that the Lord was at the center of their thoughts and actions, so Haggai directed them to finish rebuilding God's temple.

However, rather than leaving them alone with the task of rebuilding, Haggai continued to preach to the Jews, encouraging them with the hope of future glory in the temple and a victory to come over the enemies of God's people.

According to Haggai's message, if the people would place God at the center of their lives, they would realize the future blessings that God had in store for His people.

CHARACTERS Continued

The Jews who emigrated from Babylon to their original homeland of Judah faced intense opposition, both external and internal. Ezra 4:1–5 records the external resistance to the project of rebuilding the temple.

The enemies of Judah first attempted to infiltrate the ranks of the builders, and when that didn't work, they resorted to scare tactics. Haggai, on the other hand, focused on the internal opposition they faced, namely from their own sin.

The Jews had thoughtlessly placed their own interests before the Lord's interests, looking after their own safety and security without giving consideration to the status of the Lord's house.

Haggai's encouragement to rebuild the temple in the face of the Jews' neglect brings to mind the apostle Paul's exhortation to Christians to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Are you building a life that reflects your status as a temple of the Holy Spirit, leaving a legacy that will stand the test of time? Find encouragement for that construction project in the four passionate sermons from this Old Testament prophet.

KING CYRUS – Cyrus is a king mentioned more than 30 times in the Bible and is identified as Cyrus the Great (also Cyrus II or Cyrus the Elder) who reigned over Persia between 539—530 BC. This pagan king is important in Jewish history because it was under his rule that Jews were first allowed to return to Israel after 70 years of captivity.

In one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible, Isaiah predicts Cyrus' decree to free the Jews. One hundred fifty years before Cyrus lived, the prophet calls him by name and gives details of Cyrus' benevolence to the Jews:

This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him. I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge. Evincing His sovereignty over all nations, God says of Cyrus, He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please.

King Cyrus actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem under Ezra and Zerubbabel. Cyrus restored the temple treasures to Jerusalem and allowed building expenses to be paid from the royal treasury.

Cyrus's beneficence helped to restart the temple worship practices that had languished during the 70 years of the Jews' captivity. Some commentators point to Cyrus's decree to rebuild Jerusalem as the official beginning of Judaism.

Among the Jews deported from Judah and later placed under the rule of Cyrus include the prophet Daniel. In fact, we are told Daniel served until at least the third year of King Cyrus, approximately 536 BC.

That being the case, Daniel likely had some personal involvement in the decree that was made in support of the Jews. The historian Josephus says that Cyrus was informed of the biblical prophecies written about him. The natural person to have shown Cyrus the scrolls was Daniel, a high-ranking official in Persia.

CHARACTERS Continued

Besides his dealings with the Jews, Cyrus is known for his advancement of human rights, his brilliant military strategy, and his bridging of Eastern and Western cultures.

He was a king of tremendous influence and a person God used to help fulfill an important Old Testament prophecy. God's use of Cyrus as a shepherd for His people illustrates the truth of Proverbs 21:1, The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

MAP REFERENCES

