

Introduction to Haggai

Setting: After 70 years' captivity in Babylon (605-536 BC), Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem to restore the community life in the promised land. Upon arrival, they built an altar and offered sacrifices, then began to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3), which had been burned down in 586 by Nebuchadnezzar. They no sooner had begun the work, and laid the foundation than opposition from local Samaritans (Ezra 4:1-5) and an edict from "Artaxerxes" (thought, perhaps to be Cambyses—529-522). In 520, Haggai and Zechariah arose to exhort the Jews to complete the work (Ezra 5:1). Though the local Samaritans opposed this, and wrote to Darius to put a stop to it, Darius found the original edict of Cyrus, and authorized the Jews to complete their work. The Jews resumed the work and completed the temple in 3 ½ years (March, 516 BC). Haggai's ministry took place in 520 BC, after which we hear nothing more about him.

Contemporary with Zechariah, encouraged the Jews to complete the temple. The book is comprised of four short prophetic messages, all within a four-month period.

Chronology:

- 536 Return of first wave of 50,000 exiles under Zerubbabel, build altar in seventh month
- 535 Work on temple halted in second month
- 520
 - Haggai's first call to resume temple construction, in sixth month (Hag.1)
 - Work begins three weeks later
 - Haggai's second message, in seventh month (Hag.2:1-9)
 - Zechariah's opening prophecy, in eighth month (Zech.1)
 - Haggai's third and fourth messages in ninth month (Hag.2:10-23)
 - Zechariah's eight visions in eleventh month (Zech. 1-6)
- 518 Zechariah's answer to question about fasting , in ninth month (Zech.7-8)
- 516 Temple completed in twelfth month
- 515 Celebratory Passover, in first month
- 457 Ezra comes to Jerusalem
- 444 Nehemiah builds the wall
- 444f Probable time of Malachi's ministry

Message #1 (1:1-11): The Lord is displeased with the apathy being displayed in the neglect of building His house. This explains the drought and generally depressed economic state of the nation. They must resume the work.

Message #2 (2:1-9): This temple may seem discouragingly tawdry compared to Solomon's magnificent structure that once stood on this site. However, the glory of this temple will exceed that of the former one.

Message #3 (2:10-19): As ceremonial defilement is spread by contact (whereas ceremonial cleanness is not), so also you defile whatever you touch. Nonetheless, you have suffered enough, and the Lord is now going to bless your future.

Message #4 (2:20-23): A promise to Zerubbabel—though nations rise and fall, you are securely in God's hand, like His signet ring.