

## Major Messages from the Minor Prophets A Study of Haggai

**Intro:** In our study of the prophets we have followed the story of the children of Israel from kingdom to captivity. At every key event God's prophets were present with a "thus says the Lord" to make known His message for His people. The last three prophets of the OT belong to the final period of Israel's history. They are sometimes called the "post-exilic prophets".

### The Historical Background (Ezra 1-4)

*As you know, both divisions of the kingdom of Israel were taken into captivity by foreign nations because of their sin, Israel by Assyria (722 BC), then Judah by Babylonia (606 BC).*

*After a seventy-year captivity, Cyrus II of Persia decreed that the Israelites could return home to rebuild their temple and cities (539 BC). Led by Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel), 42,000 Israelites returned to Jerusalem in 536 BC. They began the efforts to clean up the rubble and rebuild their temple. They erected the altar of sacrifice and began offering sacrifices to the Lord. However as they laid the foundation of the temple, Israel's enemies in the land began to interfere and persuaded King Artaxerxes to order a halt to the work that had been started.*

*For the next sixteen years the Israelites apparently made no effort to follow through on their commitment to build the temple. Instead they focused on their own affairs and neglected the Lord's work. It was a time when the people of Israel needed a fresh word from God. God raised up two prophets to help stir the Israelites to action, Haggai and Zechariah (Cf. Ezra 5:1-2). Let's consider the message of one of those prophets, Haggai, who arose to prophecy around 520 BC. His work had a single focus--to restore the worship of Jehovah by the rebuilding of the temple and encouraging the people to devotion in serving the Lord.*

**The Message of Haggai was given on four occasions.**

#### *A Message to Rebuke & Stir (1:1-11, 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month)*

The Israelites had neglected the work of God.

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'This people says, 'The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.''' Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?" Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, "Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:2-5)*

Because they had neglected God's work out of material concerns, God had withheld material blessings from them.

*"You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes." (Haggai 1:6)*

Thus God challenged them to devote themselves to His work and He would reverse the conditions they were experiencing (v. 7-11). Haggai records a marvelous response. Three weeks later, the people out of reverence for God began work on the temple again and God gave them through Haggai the assurance that He was with them in their efforts (1:12-13).

***A Message to Encourage & Support (2:1-9; 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month)***

Almost a month passes and the Israelites become discouraged. Everyone could see that this temple was not anything as impressive as Solomon's! It was the same feeling that some of the older men felt when the effort had been started years ago!

*Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away. (Ezra 3:12-13)*

Yet God wanted them to know that their efforts were not in vain and that He did not want them to be discouraged. Instead He promised that His house would one day be filled with people of all nations who would bring their wealth and glory into it.

*"For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. 'And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and in this place I shall give peace,' declares the Lord of hosts." (Haggai 2:6-9)*

***A Message to Correct & Confirm (2:10-19; 24<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> month)***

God through Haggai poses two questions to the priests about defilement, the point of which being that Israel because of their sins and their contact with the heathen were unholy and in need of cleansing.

*Then Haggai answered and said, "So is this people. And so is this nation before Me," declares the Lord, "and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean." (Haggai 2:14)*

But now God indicates that their uncleanness has been removed and that He will bless them again.

*Yet from this day on I will bless you. (Haggai 2:19)*

By God's grace this unholy people would be made holy again so that God in His holiness could bless them!

***A Message to Assure & Inspire (2:20-23; 24<sup>th</sup> of the 9<sup>th</sup> month)***

That day God gave a second message, this one to Zerubbabel, Israel's leader.

*Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying, "I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. And I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another. On that day," declares the Lord of hosts, "I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant," declares the Lord, "and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:21-23)*

The message is that in the day that God "shook the heavens and the earth", when the nations would be overthrown, that Zerubbabel would be like a signet ring to God. God's salvation would come through Him.

It is interesting that Zerubbabel was a descendant of Israel's kings and an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's choice of Zerubbabel through whom to bring His salvation is seen in the genealogy of Jesus himself.

*And after the deportation to Babylon, to Jeconiah was born Shealtiel; and to Shealtiel, Zerubbabel; ...and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (Matthew 1:12-16)*

God's promise to bless the nations in the seed of Abraham would be fulfilled through him.

### **An Application of Haggai's Message in Modern Times**

***God has a job for us—to devote ourselves to Him and build His house!***

We need to make this the first priority of lives, before material things.

God will bless our efforts because He will be with us. Cf. Mt. 28:18-20

***When we get discouraged, we need to see what God can do through small but faithful efforts.***

Our efforts may at times seem unsuccessful and futile.

We never know what can come out of the little efforts we put forth.

We need to take courage and work!

***By remaining faithful to God, we are a part of the only thing that will last.***

The Hebrew writer found in Haggai a timely message for his own day.

*See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.*

*And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."*

*And this expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25-29)*

So it is with us. God is still in charge and His day of judgment will come in which all the nations will be judged. What may appear in this world to be permanent and immovable will move at the command of God; and the only thing that will remain unshaken is His kingdom. If we are a part of it, we too will stand!

**Conclusion: Haggai's message should encourage us to commit to God's work and remain faithful so that we can endure the mother of all earthquakes, that last day when the whole universe shall be rocked by the voice of God. The question for you and me is, "Will we be a part of the kingdom when that day comes?"**