



Introduction

Background

Name & Author: Haggai. Very little is known of this prophet. His name is briefly mentioned in the book of Ezra (Ezra 5:1, 6:14).

Date: In the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia, or 520 BC.

Audience: Those Jews who have returned from exile in Babylon..

Historical Background

The Jews had been exiled throughout the Babylonian and Persian empires for 70 years, when in 538 BC, the King of Persia issued a proclamation allowing them to return to their homeland. The first returning exiles only numbered 42,360 (Ezra 2:64). Nonetheless, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, the grandson of King Jehoiachin, the people established a settlement in Jerusalem and began rebuilding the temple of Yahweh.

However, while the Jews were in exile, their conquerors had encouraged the settlement of Palestine by relocating peoples into the land. These immigrants, many of whom had intermarried with the few Jews who remained in the land, felt threatened by the returning Jews. They took every effort to squelch the establishment of the Jewish settlement and the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:4-5).

The Jews became discouraged, and while they remained in their homes, they forsake the rebuilding of the temple. So, the temple remained with only its foundation completed for 15 years before a prophet named Haggai came onto the scene.

Structure

The book of Haggai consists of four messages from the Lord.

Rebuild the Temple	The Glory of the New Temple	Consequences of Disobedience	Restoration of Zerubabbel
1:1 1:15	2:1 2:9	2:10 2:19	2:20 2:23

Purpose

To encourage the exiles to complete the building of the temple to Yahweh..

Theme

Haggai speaks to the consequences of disobedience. These consequences can be immediate, and can also be long lasting. However, obedience also has consequences: blessings and restoration.

The First Word of the LORD (1:1-15)

Date: (1:1)

Haggai's first word from God came on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius of Persia. According to Baldwin, this would be August 29 on our modern calendar. This was the beginning of the harvest season for the Jews (a fact that is significant in light of the circumstances described below).

Circumstances (1:2-6)

Neglect of the Temple (1:2-4)

It had been 15 years since work had taken place on the temple. The people, by now, were well settled in the land. The people felt that establishing their homes and establishing themselves was more important than completing the temple (1:2).

Famine in the Land (1:5-6)

At this time, the people were also experiencing a poor harvest. The poor harvest was not due to the people's lack of effort. Rather, the land was just not producing as it should.

“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, NASB95)

The people were struggling with making ends meet no matter how hard they tried.

God's Message (1:7-11)

In the midst of these circumstances God speaks through Haggai to the people in a very rational tone. In verse 5 God says, “Give careful thought to your ways.” He is saying think about it. Why do you expect me to provide a bountiful harvest for you when you have been neglecting me and my house?¹ The reason you are struggling in your harvest is because you are more caught up in building you own home than mine. This reveals selfishness in the heart of the people. God withholds his blessing from the people to show them of their selfishness.

The People's Response (1:12-15)

The people, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest, respond to the word of the LORD and begin work three weeks later.

Application

The people were putting their own needs and desires above those of God. It is not that they did not think rebuilding the temple was not important. Rather, that this was the wrong time in light of the needs they had. But God desires the first of our efforts.

The application today is the same. When managing the resources God has given us (money, time, talents), are we seeking God's kingdom first? Do I give Him the best of what I have, knowing that if I do so, He will provide all our needs. Jesus promises us this in the Sermon on the Mount when he says “seek first the kingdom of God and it's righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”

¹Ray C. Stedman, “Haggai: Some Words To Discouraged Carpenters,” *Adventuring Through the Bible*, from the Ray C. Stedman Reference Library on the World Wide Web, <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/adventure/0237.html>.

(Matthew 6:21). Conversely, as born out by this situation, when we put ourselves first, God frustrates our efforts in order to bring us back to Him.

The Second Word of the LORD (2:1-9)

Date (2:1)

One month after work begins on the temple, the 21st day of the 7th month.

Circumstances (2:2-3)

Work had been going on for a month, when a new problem developed. Those who had seen Solomon's temple were saddened by the small size of this new temple. Solomon's temple was not just large, though. It also was filled with gold and silver and built out of the beautiful cedars of Lebanon. This temple would have not gold or silver, for the returning exiles were not wealthy. The wood for this temple was not imported, but only taken from the nearby mountains (1:8). This discouragement was frustrating the work on the temple and was taking away from the focus of God's work.

God's Message (2:4-9)

Again, God's response is well reasoned. He encourages Zerubbabel and Joshua to be strong and trust God. He reminds them of his faithfulness to his covenant. Even though His glory was not present with them, His Spirit was still among them (refer to the discussion in Ezekiel). Then in verse 8 he reminds the people that, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine." That is, if I want gold and silver in My temple, I will provide it. But more important than silver and gold is the glory of God. This temple, it is predicted, will have greater glory than Solomon's.

In light of our discussion in Ezekiel, the question must be asked; "when did Zerubbabel's temple receive God's glory, and receive it greater than Solomon's?" History does not show us a time when the Glory of the LORD descended on the temple as it did in Solomon's day or as it did in the Exodus? Most scholars agree that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. Although remodeled by Herod in 20 BC, this was the very same temple which Jesus saw in his lifetime. Jesus, we are told in John 1:14, is the fullness of God's glory.

Application

The elder Jews were discouraged at the size and scope of the new temple. They felt they had nothing to offer to make the temple what it should be. God responds that it is His glory that makes the temple what it should be, not silver and gold.

God does not ask us for our gifts because He needs them. Haggai states that God has all the silver and gold. Psalm 50 states that God owns "the cattle on a thousand hills," and that our sacrifices are for our benefit. They are to bring us to a state of humility. What makes God's work valuable is not anything we bring, but is what God brings to it.

The Third Word of the LORD (2:10-19)

Date (2:10)

Two months later, on the 24th day of the 9th month. This is December 18, 520 BC, the beginning of winter, three months after the temple construction had resumed.

Circumstances (2:11-19)

The people had been obedient. Yet, the famine described in chapter 1 was still affecting them in the winter. If the reason the land did not produce for us was because the temple was not being built, then they people were wondering why three months into it, why they were still struggling.

God's Message (2:11-19)

God directs Haggai to ask the priests a point of the law. The simple question of cleanliness is answered correctly by the priests (2:11-13). If something is considered clean, its cleanliness does not "rub off" on unclean things. However if something is considered unclean, its uncleanness does "rub off" on clean things. This principle applies not just in the Mosaic Law. It is a general principle of sin and righteousness. God is telling the people that three months of righteousness does not "rub off" on their 15 years of sin. It will take time for the consequences of their behavior to be eliminated (2:14). God again asks the people to reason with him. Three times in verses 15-19 he asks the people to give careful thought to their plight. Then He gives the promise: "From this day on I will bless you."

Application

The Jews in Jerusalem are so like us today. We demand instant results. We are unwilling to be patient for the blessing. We make God out to be a thing to manipulate. If we do this, he has to do that, and it has to happen right away. However, God is a process oriented God. He takes His time to effect consequences, change our life, and provide blessing. Our call is to be faithful to do what is right and trust that God will be faithful to His promises.

The Fourth Word of the LORD (2:20-23)

Date (2:20)

This message is given on the same day as the 3rd Word of the LORD.

Circumstances (2:21)

Jerusalem was still a conquered city under the dominion of Persia. Zerubbabel was a governor under the authority of the King of Persia. Just as the people were impatient to have the famine over, they were also impatient to be rid of foreign domination. But, just as the sin of indifference to the temple resulted in consequences that would take time to eliminate, the sin of idolatry that put Judah under foreign domination would take time to be eliminated.

God's Message (2:21-23)

Yet, God promises that indeed Israel would indeed shed its foreign oppressors. God will shake the earth (2:21) and show His authority over the kings and nations of the earth. In that day, Zerubbabel's offspring will take the throne and rule Israel. Zerubbabel was of the son of Jehoiachin and part of the kingly line. This was the line of David from which the Messiah would someday come. It is this Messiah who one day will rule Israel.

Bibliography

¹Ray C. Stedman, "Haggai: Some Words To Discouraged Carpenters," *Adventuring Through the Bible*, from the Ray C. Stedman Reference Library on the World Wide Web, <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/adventure/0237.html>.

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