

Book of the Twelve: Haggai (“Festive/Festival of YHWH”)

1. **Historical Setting:** Haggai is known as one of the post-exilic prophets (after the Babylonian exile). At the time of Haggai, the Medo-Persian Empire has conquered Babylon and freed many of their slaves and exiles. Unlike many of the prophets, we have a very specific context for Haggai’s message. In 538 BC, Cyrus had allowed the captive Judeans to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. In 536 B.C. the first wave of exiles begin to return to Jerusalem, and laid temple foundations. Shortly after they give up. It is now 520 BC (the second year of Darius), and the temple has still not been rebuilt. Haggai’s task is to encourage the people to rebuild the temple. The temple is finally completed in 515 B.C. Additional historical background for this setting/context can be found in Ezra and Nehemiah, specifically Ezra 5:1-2, and the second temple dedication in 516 B.C. in Ezra 6:13-18.
2. **Date:** c. 520 B.C.
3. **Author:** Haggai the prophet as mentioned in 1:1 and in Ezra 5:1.
4. **Summary/Primary Theme:** God’s promise of the coming Messiah whose presence will fill the temple.
5. **Christ in the Book of Haggai:** In Haggai, the Lord overthrows his enemies and brings greater glory in his abiding presence.
6. **Theological Themes:**
 - a. YHWH as the Lord of Hosts (YHWH of Armies) 1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14, and throughout the book.
 - b. Temple as God’s place of appearance and presence in his glory (1:8)
 - c. God’s blessing of his people through his presence in the temple (2:19)
 - d. Dawn of a new age of peace after God’s upheaval of the world and the nations (2:6-9, 20-22).
 - e. YHWH repeats his promise of David to Zerubbabel of a coming Messianic King (2:20-22)
7. **Purpose(s):**
 - a. To encourage the rebuilding of the temple, so that God could bless his people by his presence with them.
8. **Outline/Structure:**
 - a. The command to rebuild YHWH’s temple (1:1-11)
 - b. The people listen and obey (1:12-15)
 - c. The glory of this temple will surpass Solomon’s (1:16-2:9)
 - d. A faithful response to YHWH will remove the people’s defilement (2:10-19)
 - e. Zerubbabel is YHWH’s chosen leader (2:20-23)
9. **New Testament References:**
 - a. Haggai 2:6 is quoted in Hebrews 12:26.
 - b. Not direct quotations, but allusions to the glory of the temple and God’s promise of a greater glory to come are found in John’s reference to Jesus in John 1:14, in Jesus statements about the temple being destroyed and raised up again in 3 days (John 2:18-21), and in Revelation in the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven adorned as a bride.
10. **Liturgical Use:** None



Haggai 2:9, “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former...”

The people have begun to rebuild the temple and many of them lament over its seeming lack of glory...it is “as nothing in [their] eyes” (2:3). This must have been especially discouraging since they thought that this would be it....It certainly must have seemed that the return from exile at the decree of Cyrus was the beginning of the fulfillment of all of YHWH’s promises about His end-time people....the new heavens and earth of Isaiah etc.....and perhaps this new temple would be the one that Ezekiel had seen in his visions....the immaculate temple to end all temples, in which YHWH would dwell with His people and they with Him.....

And yet, things weren’t going that way.....the return was not complete, the restoration was not full of glory and power that caused the nations to know YHWH as God, and the temple was smaller and worse even than the one they had before...there must have been a strong inclination to despair. “Is this it? Is this

what our people have been waiting for? Is this the promised restoration?" And yet into this disappointment, the Lord affirms His continued presence with His people: "Work, for I am with you...according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not." (2:4-5).

The Lord's ways are not our ways....His plans are not our plans....His means and methods are not ours....and His imagination is infinitely more beautiful than our own.....the people of Israel had anticipated a glorious return to their land....but YHWH intended rather to come into their midst Himself, in the True Temple of the incarnate Christ...to come and dwell with them, and to reveal His glory not in an obscuring cloud of light, but in the concrete form of a life of love, a death of servanthood and obedience and sacrifice, and a resurrection to victory beyond all expectation or hope.....Yes, the latter glory of this house would indeed be greater than the former.....

And this is always true....the latter glory will always be greater than the former....God is always drawing His people up into greater and greater apprehension of His glory, always drawing them into deeper and deeper experience of His excellence, always giving more, always having better in store..Ah, yes....this is—this must be—true. And yet, He does it in ways we would not expect. We expect this temple to be glorious, to be better than the last.....and yet, it is not.....we expect this ministry to flourish, this relationship to be restored, this situation to be resolved, this sickness to be healed.....and perhaps the ministry crumbles, the relationship remains strained, the situation only becomes more intractable, the sickness spreads and worsens.....does that mean He has abandoned us? Does that mean He is not with us? Does that mean that good is not coming? No! The latter glory, the latter joy, the latter beauty, the latter gladness will always exceed the former.....Why? Because in this cruciform and Christocentric reality, the deaths of God's people (of which all disappointment is a species) will always be answered by resurrection.

And the latter glory of the temple in question certainly did exceed the former. Yes, because YHWH Himself, in the flesh, would enter these very precincts....and more than that, because YHWH Himself would replace this temple of stone and mortar with one of bone and flesh and blood....the incarnate Son (John 2:19-21).....and then, to this True Temple, He would weave—by His Spirit—people from all tribes and languages and peoples and nations (Ephesians 2:22) so that Ezekiel's vision of a perfect dwelling place of God with His people would be fulfilled beyond any possible expectation (Revelation 21:3, 22)....Hallowed be His Name.

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