

## Haggai

1. Introduction – In two short chapters, Haggai rebukes and stirs the returned exiles to build the temple and then encourages them about the glory of the temple in spite of its humble beginnings.
2. Author, date, historical setting – Haggai is traditionally regarded as the author of the book. In this view, the third-person perspective is understood to be a device that communicates objectivity and historicity to the reader. Others have taken the third-person perspective as an indicator that the book was written by a later disciple who, under divine inspiration, took Haggai's prophetic statements and set them into a narrative context. Similarities to Chronicles have been used by some to argue for a somewhat later date, after Chronicles was written. However, a better explanation of this similarity is that the Chronicler was influenced by Haggai and not the other way around. Very little is known about Haggai outside his book. He is mentioned by Ezra (5:1, 6:14) as a prophet along with Zechariah.

Cyrus the Persian had issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild their temple. However, most of the exiles were either old or had been born in exile and did not consider Judah their home; only 50,000 exiles returned (Ezra 2:64; Neh. 7:66). When they arrived, they encountered a number of challenges. Land and buildings were in disrepair, conflicts occurred with those who had remained behind, and opposition arose from nearby peoples and officials. The people had fallen into the temptation to look to their own interests instead of to the Lord and the temple project.

3. Structure:
  - a. Haggai rebukes the people for neglecting the building of the temple (1:1-11).
  - b. The people respond with action and are assured of God's presence (1:12-15).
  - c. Haggai warns the people that holiness is not contagious, but work on the temple will be rewarded by God's blessing (2:1-19).
  - d. Haggai points the people to the future realities prefigured by their leader and assures them of his love and his judgments on their behalf (2:20-23).
4. Themes:
  - a. God speaks to a people whose relationship with him was only moderately important to them. This is unacceptable and worthy of God's discipline. The people were enjoying a degree of luxury while the house of God stood in ruins. Christians can get caught up in their own pursuits while neglecting to pursue their relationship with Christ and failing to build up his people.
  - b. The people in Haggai's day encourage us with their wholehearted, immediate action in the face of a divine rebuke.
  - c. Labors done with the Lord's presence are eternally significant. God gives the people two very powerful assurances: 1) "*Work, for I am with you*, declares the Lord of hosts."; 2) Their present effort would lay the foundation for the future glory of the house of God.
  - d. The promised glory of the temple taught that the temple under construction was a provisional fulfillment that would find its highest meaning in Christ himself and his new covenant people (Matt. 12:6, John 2:19-21, 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Pet. 2:5).
  - e. Independent attempts to find significance will be of no value, but God can take even our feeble, weak obedience and establish it as significant before him.

### Reference:

*An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.