

**Message #1****Various Texts**

If we were to ask most people, what book of the Bible had the most immediate impact on the people of God, I doubt too many would say Haggai. But in not saying Haggai, they would be wrong. Haggai is one book in the Old Testament that is an immediate success story and there aren't many of those in the Bible.

The shortest book of the Bible in the Old Testament is Obadiah. The second shortest book is Haggai. But don't let its size fool you. Haggai is informative, inspired and impacting. This little book is potent. This book did prompt a nation and individuals to get things done for God, when they hadn't been doing a whole lot.

Duane Lindsey quoted Frank Gaebelin and said, "The truth is that few prophets have succeeded in packing into such a brief compass so much spiritual common sense as Haggai did" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary Haggai*, p. 1537).

In the next several studies we would like to take you through this little book known as Haggai.

**QUESTION #1** – Why study Haggai?

We give seven reasons here:

**Reason #1** - Haggai is an inspired book from God and there are only 66 of them in existence.

In these two short chapters that total 38 verses, it is stated at least 25 times that this is the word of God. God's authorship and authority of this book is repeatedly stated over and over again (1:2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 13; 2:1, 4, 4, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 23, 23). Time and time again we read "this is what the LORD says"; "this is what the LORD declares."

What cannot be denied from this book is that this book says it is the word of God in about 70% of its verses. The fact that Haggai belongs in the Bible "has never been questioned." The ancient Jewish teachers regarded Haggai as one of the twelve Minor Prophets in what they called "the Book of the Twelve." Haggai is listed as one of these books.

The title of the book comes from the name of the prophet. In Hebrew the name is Haggai ('gh). In Greek the name is Aggios. In the Latin Vulgate the name is Aggaeus.

The first major collection of Hebrew manuscripts was made by Benjamin Kennicott (AD 1776-1780). He listed 615 manuscripts of the Old Testament. The main modern discovery of Hebrew manuscripts are the Cairo synagogue manuscripts that totaled about 10,000. The Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts that totaled about 600. "Moshe Goshen-Gottstein estimates that the total number of Old Testament Hebrew manuscript fragments throughout the world runs into the tens of thousands" (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 357-358).

The most important Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. Many of these Hebrew manuscripts contain Haggai - The Codex Cairensis (AD 895); Aleppo Codex AD 930; Codex Leningradensis AD 1000; Babylonian Codex AD 916. They all contain Haggai.

In Qumran Cave #4, in the Dead Sea scrolls, all of the Minor Prophet books were found including Haggai. In 1952 in caves SE of Bethlehem a scroll was found in a cave that contained Haggai.

Haggai is specifically quoted one time in the New Testament. Haggai 2:6 and 2:21 is quoted in the New Testament in Hebrews 12:26. In the Hebrews quotation it is clearly stated that this is God speaking and these are God's promises (Hebrews 12:25-26).

When these scrolls have been studied and compared, there is a word for word identity, indicating Haggai was very carefully copied and preserved and protected as an inspired book of God.

**Reason #2** - Haggai is a book that teaches that God wants His people to be people of careful thought (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18, 18).

God does not want His people to be airheads. He does not want them to be irrational or overly emotional. God wants His people to be thinking people. He wants His people to give careful thought to what they are doing and what they are not doing. He wants them to be people who give careful thought to God and His word and His will.

**Reason #3** - Haggai is a book that stresses the importance of maintaining spirituality and worship when things are going well.

When things are sailing along in a good direction, it is easy to become lax in one's spiritual condition and commitment. As Moses said it is easy to become fat and undisciplined (Deut. 32:15). God's people don't ever want to do that. They want to stay focused in their relationship with God. They want to stay focused on getting things done for God.

What was happening here is that God's people were enjoying their freedom and enjoying their lives. They were spending their time on their own homes and families and working their own fields and building their own careers and they were spending less time on worshipping God and focusing on God and His word. This is a formula for disaster.

Now there is not a thing wrong with taking care of your family, home and business, but God must always be kept as a priority. If God's people lose sight of this, they will eventually lose the blessings of God.

When God blesses His people, He expects that He will not be put on the back burner somewhere.

**Reason #4** - Haggai is a book that stresses the importance of not focusing on taking better care of our own house in the secular world more than taking care of God's house in His sacred world. **1:2, 4**

When we live in this world, we may easily be tempted to put our own prosperity above God. We may be tempted to put our own house above God's house. We must make a decisive decision to put God's word, God's will and God's house first and if we do that His blessings will flow to us.

There is certainly nothing wrong with seeing to it that your house is kept nice; but God expects His people to also take good care of His house.

When I used to travel to different churches to speak, I would usually be taken to someone's home for dinner before the evening service. Often I would be taken into a really nice home and sometimes the church was run down and certainly it was not nearly as nice as the home.

It is not right for God's people to have beautiful homes and God's place of worship is some run down dilapidated shack. God will never bless this. That point is clearly brought out in Haggai.

**Reason #5** - Haggai is a book that clearly develops the positive blessings that come from obedience.

Haggai specifically develops the idea that God can cause great blessings to come to those who keep Him first in life (**Haggai 2:7-8**). God will bless people who honor Him, worship Him, reverence Him and keep Him as a priority (**2:19**). God can actually say, "from this day on I will bless you." A key to God making this kind of declaration is staying focused on keeping our focus on Him and by obeying Him specifically in a context of a great place of worship.

**Reason #6** - Haggai is a book that clearly develops the negative consequences that can come from disobedience. **1:6, 11; 2:16-17**

God can make it so people just exist and survive but don't flourish. He can see to it that His people don't thrive. God can cause negative things to hit His people when they forget about Him and leave Him out of their lives as a priority.

**Reason #7** - Haggai is a book that clearly teaches that one does not have to stay in the present condition in their relationship with God.

It is possible to regroup and get going again in a right relationship with God. There may be a multiple year gap of time that has transpired from when one was last seriously committed to the word and will of God. Haggai invites God's people to get back on track and get going again. The relationship may be renewed and the relationship may be blessed.

**QUESTION #2 – Who is Haggai?**

The actual name Haggai means festal or festival. He may have been born on some major feast day, but that is uncertain. Jerome claimed he was of priestly descent, but that too is uncertain. **What we do know is that Haggai was a prophet of God.** He is identified as a prophet of God in Haggai three times - 1:1; 2:1, 10 and also by Ezra two times - 5:1; 6:14. He lived and prophesied at the same time as Zechariah.

**Haggai was a prophet which means he received direct revelatory messages from God.** He does reveal prophecy (Haggai 2:22). He was singled out by God and gifted by God to communicate God's word to His people. He received revelatory messages from God and he communicated those messages to the people. There are no prophets today and the gift of prophecy has ceased (I Cor. 13:8). But Haggai was a true prophet of God who actually did receive direct revelatory messages from God.

As we mentioned, he lived at the same time as the prophet Zechariah and also at the same time as the Chinese philosopher and politician Confucius (551 BC-479 BC).

Nothing much is known about his parents or his genealogy. We do learn from Haggai 2:3 that apparently he was one who had seen the Temple of Solomon before it had been destroyed in 586 BC. He apparently had actually seen the Temple in all of its glory. He was also one who had come back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel 50 years later in 536 BC.

The Babylonians destroyed the Temple in 586 BC, but in 539 BC the Babylonians were conquered by Cyrus the Persian king. God stirred Cyrus' heart to permit any Jew who wanted to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4; II Chron. 36:22-23) and he also signed a decree that permitted Israel to not only return to her land but also rebuild the Temple (II Chron. 36:21-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5).

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel (the governor), about 50,000 people decided to return (Ezra 2:64-65). **Haggai was probably one who returned with the people and began his prophetic ministry to them.**

**Now Zechariah began his prophetic work in the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the second year of Darius (Zech. 1:1), and Haggai began his prophetic work in the 6<sup>th</sup> month of the second year of Darius (Haggai 1:1). So what this means is that Haggai was the first prophet to communicate prophetic messages from God to the people after they got back to Jerusalem.** In fact, he was the first prophet after the Babylonian captivity to appeal to the people of God to make sure they rebuilt the Temple.

As we mentioned, it would appear from Haggai 2:3 that he actually saw Solomon's Temple before it was destroyed by the Babylonians. We may conclude from this that he was one who was exiled to Babylon and then approximately 70 years later came back to Jerusalem. So at the time he writes, he is an old man. **Many believe Haggai was in his 80's when he gave these prophecies.**

There are some older versions of the Old Testament that say Haggai and Zechariah wrote some Psalms. In fact, the Septuagint says that Psalm 146-148 was written by Haggai and Zechariah.

**QUESTION #3** – What is the historical background of Haggai?

The Babylonians captured Jerusalem and Judah and began deporting Jews in 605 BC. Then a few years later they destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In 539 BC the Babylonians were defeated by Cyrus and the Persians, and **Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple**. This would have been some 66 years after the first deportation.

Things at that time became exciting and people of God were hopeful and optimistic. Haggai and Zechariah were two of the men of God who were elated. But after having gone back to Jerusalem, they discovered things weren't so positive.

In 538 BC, about 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem along with the High Priest and also Zechariah and Haggai (Ezra 1:2-4). Once the people got back to Jerusalem, the work of rebuilding the Temple began in about 536 B.C.

The altar of burnt offering was reconstructed and worship was semi-restored with sacrifices (Ezra 3:3). Within two years the foundation of the Temple was laid and the people rejoiced (Ezra 3:8-10). But at that time some Samaritans and some other of their neighbors started opposing the work. They saw the Jews and their place of worship as a real threat so they threatened God's people and they stopped building.

The people of God became lethargic and discouraged and instead of working to rebuild the Temple house of the Lord, they spent more time working on their own homes.

**The building of the Temple came to a stop for the next 14-15 years until Darius came to office in 521 BC.**

In 529 BC, Cyrus died and was replaced by his son, Cambyses, who committed suicide in 522 BC. He was replaced by Darius Hystaspes in 521 BC. Darius was for rebuilding the Temple.

Darius was a political leader who was very interested in the Jews and their religion. He fully supported the Jews and he fully supported the idea of them rebuilding their Temple.

**In the second year of Darius' reign (520 BC), God raised up His prophet Haggai to tell the people it was time to get back to work and rebuild that Temple. Both Haggai and Zechariah surfaced to proclaim this message (Ezra 5:1-2). Haggai was the first. Haggai's specific job was to communicate God's revelatory message to His people that they needed to get out of their spiritual apathy and get back to work on the Temple of God.**

C. Hassell Bullock said, "Outside of Ezekiel, there was no prophet more zealous for the Temple than Haggai" (*An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, p. 301).

There are times when God's people need to hear that let's get going for God again. Let's get it done. That was the case here.

**QUESTION #4** – When was Haggai written?

There is no question that we can pinpoint with great accuracy the time Haggai prophesied. In fact, Gleason Archer said, "Of all the books of the Old Testament, this one enjoys the unusual status of being uncontested by all critics of every persuasion" (*A Survey of the Old Testament*, p. 430).

There are six specific stated dates given in the book that pinpoint it exactly. The problem is our calendar isn't identical to the Babylonian calendar or the Jewish calendar. **What we can say is that all of the dates come from 520 BC:**

- 1) 1:1 - 1st day of sixth month
- 2) 1:15 - 24<sup>th</sup> day of sixth month
- 3) 2:1 - 21<sup>st</sup> day of seventh month
- 4) 2:10 - 24<sup>th</sup> day of ninth month
- 5) 2:18 - 24<sup>th</sup> day of ninth month
- 6) 2:20 - 24<sup>th</sup> day of ninth month

**So from this we may conclude that in 520 BC, in a period less than 4 months, all of these prophecies were given by Haggai.**

What these precise dates teach us is that these were factual events that took place at real pinpointed specific time moments.

**QUESTION #5** – What is the theme of the book?

**The theme of the book is clearly stated in Haggai 1:8: "Rebuild the Temple that I may be pleased with it and be glorified."**

**If God's people will put God's word, God's will and God's property first in their lives, He will be pleased with them and bless them.** If God's people will put God first in their lives and put Him first in His house and first in His worship and first in His program, He will turn present poverty and failure into present blessings and prosperity.

Regardless of the dispensation, God blesses people who put Him first. When we are serving God, we need to stay at it and not be discouraged and quit.

**QUESTION #6** – What was the impact of Haggai?

Haggai is only two short chapters but his prophecies had a major impact because he is one prophet to whom the people listened.

There are those moments when the word of God truly does move in the minds and hearts of those who have been negligent. This is one of those times.