

Introduction to Haggai

Where is it in the Bible?

Haggai is the thirty-seventh book in the Christian Old Testament and is found between Zephaniah and Zechariah. It is the tenth book of the Minor Prophets; the term “minor” refers to the length of the books, not to their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets follow Ezekiel at the end of the Prophets section and are grouped together in the Book of the Twelve in the same order as found in Christian Bibles.

Who wrote it?

This book contains the words of the prophet Haggai who lived during the time of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after the exiles returned from Babylon. We do not know if he was one of the exiles or if he remained in Judah during that time. Haggai is mentioned twice in the book of Ezra (5:1 and 6:14) in connection with the rebuilding of the temple. It is not clear who compiled the written form of the book.

When was it written?

Unlike most biblical books, Haggai can be dated very precisely. According to the book itself, Haggai’s prophecies began in the sixth month of the second year of King Darius (1:1) and the last ones were on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the same year (2:10, 20). This places them between August 29 and December 18 of 520 B.C. It is not clear exactly when they were written down, although scholars have suggested that it was probably not long after that.

What is it about?

The prophet urges those who have returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple. He warns that until the temple is completed, life will not return to normal. “In Haggai we see a vision of God and God’s temple in the center of the new community of God’s people. Faithful people of all generations are encouraged to consider what it means to put God in the center of all life.”¹

How is it structured?

- I. Call to Rebuild the Temple (1:1-11)
- I. The People Respond (1:12-15)
- II. A Glorious Second Temple (2:1-9)
- III. Promise of Blessing (2:10-19)
- IV. Promise to Zerubbabel (2:20-23)

¹ Steed Vernyl Davidson, “Haggai” in *Lutheran Study Bible* (Minneapolis: AugsburgFortress, 2009) 1570.

What are some things to look for?

- **Importance of the Temple:** Haggai emphasizes the importance of the temple to Jewish life and faith. Although the people have returned from exile, planted crops, and built homes for themselves, the temple is still in ruins. The temple is necessary to restore their identity as a community.
- **Making a Deal with God?** “Haggai promises that rebuilding the temple will usher in an era of prosperity for the people. This should not be seen as proposing a bargain with God that will ensure immediate divine favor, since that is explicitly rejected by biblical theology (Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalm 50:12-15). A rebuilt temple will be the place of God's presence, and God's presence brings the fullness of God's promises. The promise of prosperity rejoices in God's good gifts in the present, but also looks to the future ("On that day"--2:23) in which finally all things will be transformed into what God intends them to be. The greater splendor of the new temple and the overthrow of all competing nations are poetic visions of God's perfect rule to come. The assurance of that promise brings hope and life in the present, despite the real difficulties experienced by the returning exiles.”²

² Kathryn Schifferdecker at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=55>