

Haggai:



Get Your Priorities Right... The Rest Will Follow

Consider It

Comprehend It

Connect It

**A 3 C's Contemplative Study™
By Dr. Jack M. Jacob**

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All quotations throughout this study are taken from the *New American Standard Bible (1995 Revision)* published by the Lockman Foundation of La Habra, CA.

Introduction to the Book of Haggai

Author: Haggai is perhaps one of the most unique Minor Prophets we encounter in the Old Testament. His name means “my feast”. This would be a strange name considering his book describes the terrible famines and blights on the agricultural scene of his day. In addition to the enigmatic nature of his name, there is also the fact that no one seems to know from whence Haggai came. There is speculation that he had lived in Jerusalem prior to the destruction of the temple, went into exile with the people, and then returned with them. There are a number of problems with this view including: this would have made him 80 years old at the time of his prophecy, he was not listed as returning, and the only people left in Jerusalem during the 70 years of exile prophesied by Daniel were the poor people and Haggai seems to have had quite an education to be able to write in such a suspenseful and artful manner.

Maybe some more information will help us to understand a little bit about the man, Haggai. He is identified in his book as a prophet of God 1:1, 1:13, 2:1, 2:10. He is identified as a messenger of the Lord in 1:13. He is listed as just Haggai in 2:20. In Ezra 5:1 and 6:14, Haggai is named as a prophet contemporary with Zechariah. We also know that he was not a priest because God tells him to inquire of the priests in 2:11. If he had been a priest, there would be no need for such an inquiry.

The only other things we know about Haggai are, other than Ezekiel, he showed the most zeal for the temple. Also, he is the only one of the minor prophets, up to this point, that saw the people obey his message! Putting all of that together, we have a man who was directed by God to first correct the people and then encourage them, and he does both with the same zeal and effectiveness.

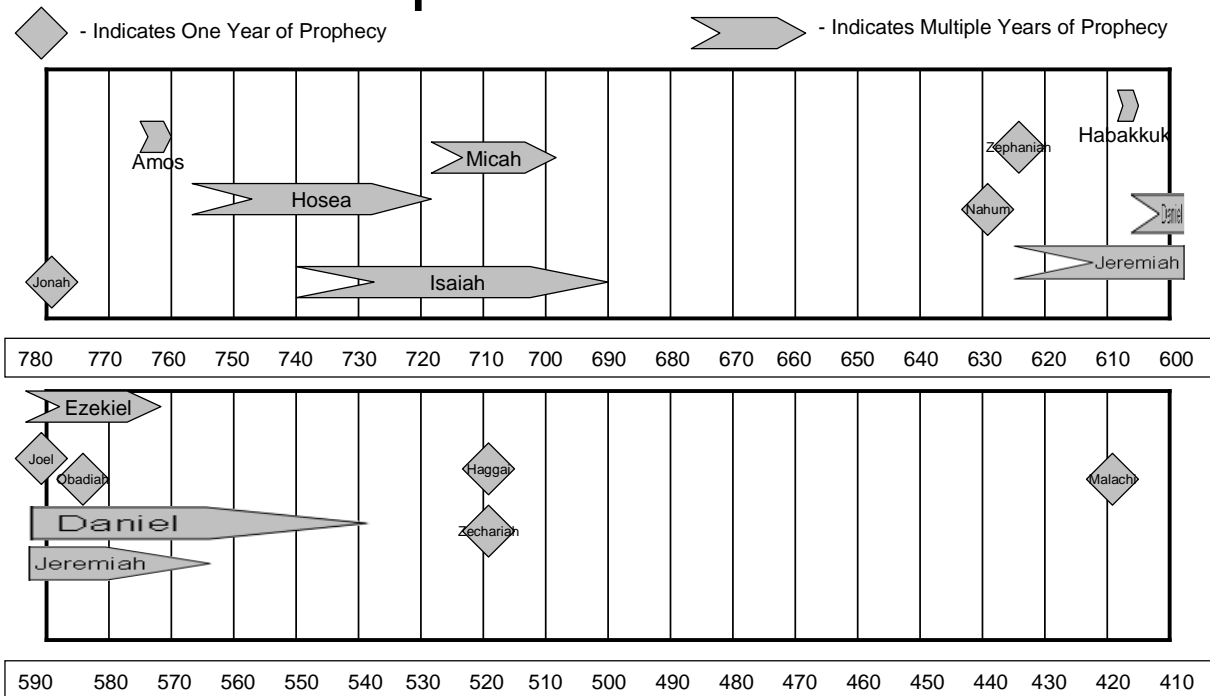
Date: There is very little serious doubt about the time in which Haggai prophesied. He provides chronological clues all throughout his book! Consider the following verses:

- (1) 1:1 – “In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month...”
- (2) 2:1 – “On the twenty-first of the seventh month...”
- (3) 2:10 – “On the twenty-fourth of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius...”
- (4) 2:20 – “Then the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying...”

With these references and the fact that a number of archaeological records show Darius coming to the throne of Babylon in 522 BC, there really is no logical way around dating Haggai’s prophecy as any time other than 520 BC.

Contemporary Prophets: In order to see the contemporaries of Haggai, refer to the following chart. You should see, from this chart that Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries and spoke to the same situation: the need to rebuild the temple. This is further verified by Ezra in 5:1 and 6:14.

Prophetic Timeline



Permission Granted to Duplicate

Historical Situation: Because we have a definitive date for Haggai’s prophecy, we also have a lot of data describing the situation into which he prophesied. Below is a brief history leading up to his prophecy:

Year	Historical Event(s)
586 BC	Jerusalem fell to Babylon and the people were taken into captivity again.
539 BC	Cyrus II conquered Babylon without much of a fight.
539 BC	Cyrus II issued a decree that allowed all of the peoples captured by Babylon to return to their lands and to rebuild their sacred buildings and begin their worship practices again.
539 BC	Sheshbazzar led a group of less than 50,000 back to Jerusalem. Many stayed in Babylon.

536 BC	Tattenai, the governor of the province, began to harass the builders of the temple because they would not allow foreigners to help. Work stopped on the temple.
520 BC	Darius Hystaspes stops in Syrio-Palestine (Israel) on his way through to fight against Egypt and to increase his empire. While there, Tattenai appeals to him and they find Cyrus' decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Darius makes Tattenai help finance the project.
520 BC	Haggai prophesied.
515 BC	The temple is completed.

It should be noted that many of the Jews remained in Babylon because of the comfort they enjoyed there. It should also be noted that those who returned to Jerusalem were quick to give up anything that was too difficult for them. This shows in their quitting work on the temple because of Tattenai and the Samaritans.

Another issue of note: during their Babylonians captivity, the Israelites began speaking Aramaic instead of Hebrew. Haggai wrote in Hebrew and not in Aramaic, so it would seem he was either educated or had not gone into captivity. Neither possible reason completely overwhelms the other as both seem reasonable.

Why had the work on the temple not been completed? First, because of intimidation by Tattenai and the Samaritans. Many of the Samaritans had intermarried with the poor Israelites left in Judah. They were not allowed to help work on the temple and sought to stop its work altogether. Second, because of the conflict described in Ezra 3:12-13 in which many of the people were conflicted over how grand the new temple would be compared to the last temple. Lastly, the people had become discouraged from the work because it was hard. It was into this situation that Haggai prophesied.

Main Focus of the Book: The main focus of the book of Haggai is simple: things are going bad because your priorities are out of line. Get your priorities right and you won't have to keep going through the things God is using to get your attention. Lastly, when you have turned and trusted God, don't get discouraged if things don't go your way right away.

Outline of Haggai

- I. First Message from God (1:1-15)
 - a. Your priorities are wrong (1:1-5)
 - b. You are getting nowhere (1:6-7)
 - c. Get your priorities right and your fortunes will follow (1:8-11)
 - d. The response (1:12-15)
 - i. The leaders respond (1:12a)
 - ii. The people respond (1:12b)
 - iii. God responds (1:13-15)
- II. Second Message from God (2:1-9)
 - a. Looking Back (2:1-4)
 - b. God promises His permanence (2:5)
 - c. God promises His provision (2:6-8)
 - d. God promises His presence (2:9a)
 - e. God promises His peace (2:9b)
- III. Third Message from God (2:10-19)
 - a. Looking at their position (2:10-14)
 - b. God reminds people of their past (2:15-17)
 - c. God reminds people of His promises (2:18-19)
- IV. Fourth Message from God (2:20-23)
 - a. Looking forward: God reveals His plans for the future (2:20-22)
 - b. God reveals His provision (2:23)

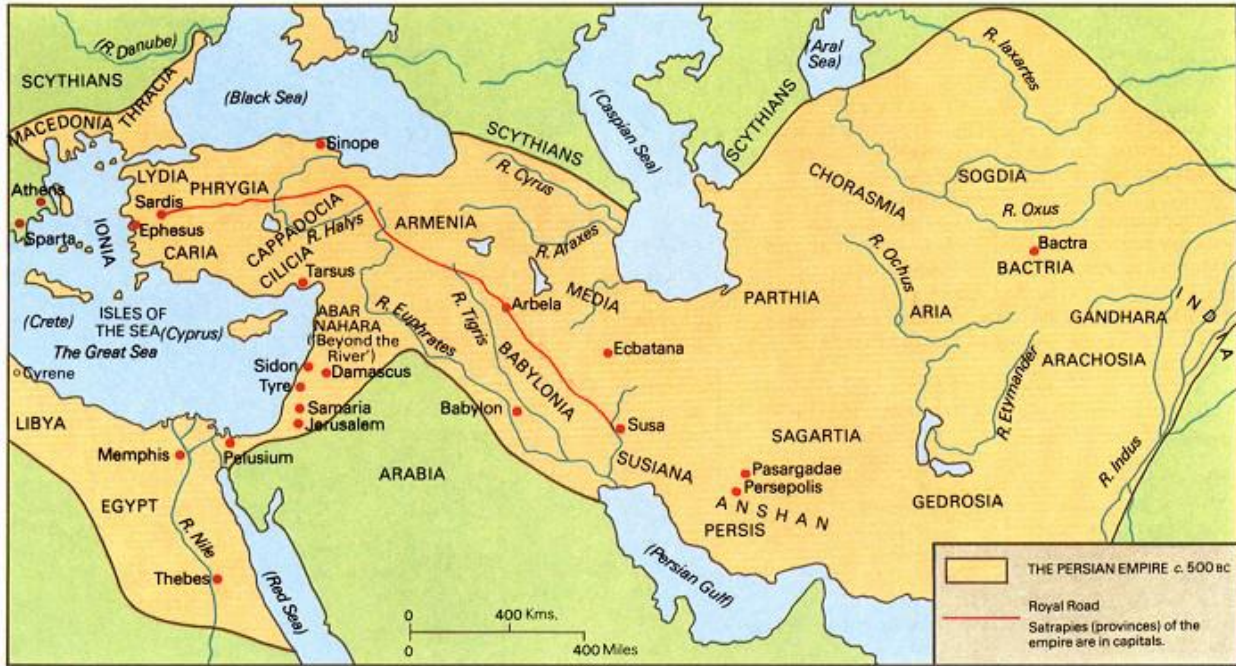
Personal Word: If you have been studying these lessons throughout the Minor Prophets, you are in for a treat! If you just picked up this lesson, you are still in for a treat. Haggai is unique in that the people actually listened to his prophecy and did what he told them God wanted them to do and God blessed them.

In our world of hectic, frantic pace, we need the reminder Haggai provides. We must put God in his rightful place as first in our lives and homes. When we do this, we will be able to see Him working like never before. Just like in Haggai, He does not promise to take away everything that causes us concern, but He does both promise to be with us and to provide us a bright hope for the future. As you study this lesson, look for the encouragement God intended because it applies just as much today.

May God richly bless you as you study His Word.

Dr. Jack M. Jacob

Geography in Haggai's Day



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¹ J. J. Bimson, J. P. Kane, *The New Bible Atlas*, Intervarsity Press, Leicester, England, 1985.

Timetable of Jewish Captivity

Jerusalem Conquered by Nebuchadnezzar
586 BC

Babylon Conquered by Cyrus II of Persia
539 BC

Cyrus II Decree to Return All Captured Peoples to Native Lands
538 BC

Sheshbazzar Leads First Group of Exiles Back to Jerusalem
538 BC (Ezra 1-2)

Darius Hystaspes Becomes King of Persia
522 BC

Haggai/Zechariah
520 BC

Xerxes Becomes King of Persia
486 BC

Artaxerxes I Becomes King of Persia
464 BC

Ezra Leads Second Group of Exiles Back to Jerusalem
458 BC (Ezra 7)

Nehemiah Leads Third Group of Exiles Back to Jerusalem
44 BC (Nehemiah 1-2)

Malachi Writes Last Words from God
420 BC

Silence from God
419 BC to 4 BC(?)

Jewish and Babylonian Calendar
Compared to Modern Calendar

# of Month	Hebrew Name	Babylonian	Current Calendar
1	Nisan	Nisannu	March-April
2	Iyyar	Ayaru	April-May
3	Sivan	Simanu	May-June
4	Tammuz	Du'uzu	June-July
5	Av	Abu	July-August
6	Elul	Ululu	August-September
7	Tishri	Tashretu	September-October
8	Marsheshv	Arakshamna	October November
9	Kislev	Kislimu	November-
10	Tevet	Tabetu	December-January
11	Shevat	Shabatu	January-February
12	Adar	Addaru	February-March

Reading Record for Haggai

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Record Observations Below:



Lesson One: Get Your Priorities Right! Haggai 1:1-15

Have you ever found that following directions can be very important? I sure have! For instance, one day, I decided to repair my weed-eater. I had pulled on the starter string a little too hard and it came out of the housing. (Sounds technical doesn't it?) I decided, being college educated, I should be able to disassemble the housing, rewind the string and get on with the yard work.

I began my repairs by carefully taking the housing apart. I noted exactly how each part came off so that I would be able to reassemble it when the time came. I took one side of the housing off without a problem. I took the spindle out, around which the string was to be wound. I rewound the string around the spindle. I went to put the spindle into the housing and b-r-r-ing! The spring, that was supposed to cause the reflex winding of the string when starting, sprung itself free and unraveled all over the porch.

I tried several times to rewind the spring, but it would leap free each time. Finally, in a fit of desperation, I decided to read the directions only to find that the housing was not meant to be disassembled as it might cause the spring to unravel. The directions gave a simple means of rewinding the string. If only I had read the directions and followed the steps in the right order!

Much of life is like that. When we get steps out of order, chaos ensues. When we get our priorities out of line, we end up in a fight, the hospital, the lawyer's office, jail, or the grave. In this lesson, God tells Haggai and the leaders of the fledgling nation just having returned from exile...**GET YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT!** Or, in other words...**GET YOUR EYES BACK ON ME!**

Describe a time when following directions would have made a job easier, quicker or less expensive:

When did you discover this truth?

Consider It

1. When did Haggai receive the word of the Lord? (1:1-5)
2. To whom was Haggai's prophecy to be delivered? (1:1-5)
3. What excuse were the people using for not working on the temple? (1:1-5)
4. How were the people using their time instead? (1:1-5)
5. What warning did God give the people? (1:1-5)
6. About what had the people been complaining? (1:6-7)
7. How did God respond to their complaints? (1:6-7)
8. What instructions did God give the people to deal with their complaints? (1:8-11)
9. Why did God say they were struggling? (1:8-11)
10. How did the people respond to Haggai's prophecy? (1:12-15)

11. What promise did God give the people **after they decided to obey**? (1:12-15)

12. What caused the people to move forward with working on the temple? (1:12-15)

13. When did the people begin working on the temple? (1:12-15)

Comprehend It

1. Why did God send this prophecy to the leaders instead of directly to the people?

2. Who holds the following positions on our day?
 - a. Governor of Judah

 - b. High Priest

 - c. Prophet

3. What had caused the people to put off building the temple? (See Ezra and Nehemiah)

4. What does it mean that people lived in **paneled** houses?

5. What had been the priority of those returning from exile?
6. What **should** their priorities have been?
7. What were the conditions in Judah for those who returned?
8. Did the Israelites return to an empty land? If not, who was there?
9. How would those people have reacted to the return of the exiles?
10. What did God mean by telling the people twice, “Consider your ways”?
11. What is the key verse to this chapter?
12. Why is that the key verse?
13. How had God been reacting to the efforts of the exiles?
14. What had caused God to act this way?

15. What had caused the people to go into exile in the first place?
16. Which was more important in verse 12: that the people obeyed God or that they had reverence for Him? Why?
17. How long did it take for the people to get the message? (See 1:1 and 1:15)
18. From the calendar on pages 4 and 5, when did the people begin to work on the temple?
19. What else would have been happening then?
20. How does that show a change in priorities?

Connect It

1. From your knowledge of the rest of the Old Testament, what led to the problems the Israelites had experienced?
2. How can this be seen as an issue of priorities?
3. What took the place of God in the priorities of the returning exiles?

4. Do you ever struggle with keeping God your first priority? If so, what tends to take His place?
5. How has God captured your attention in the past, when your priorities have skewed?
6. Have you ever felt like you were “spinning your wheels” and not getting anywhere?
7. From this passage, what might have been the problem?
8. Do you identify with any of God’s description of the people in verse 6? If so, which one(s)?
9. Can you identify any priorities that might be causing this?
10. What response has God been asking of you?
11. In verse 12, Haggai states that the real reason behind their problem of priorities is their lack of reverence for God. Is this true for the areas with which you struggle? Why or why not?
12. Would you say you love God? Read 1 John 5:3 and answer this question again.

13. God did not promise to reverse the conditions of the people, but promised to be with them. Does this seem fair? Why or why not?

14. From the length of time it took the people to respond to Haggai, would you consider the people slow to obey? Why or why not?

15. When was the last time God convicted you about something? How long did it take you to respond?

16. What needs to change in your priorities right now?

17. What will you do to change your priorities?



Lesson Two: With Me, You Can Do It! Haggai 2:1-23

Sometimes we just need some help. Isn't that true? Whether it is studying a new subject, learning to change a tire, or lifting something that weighs more than we do, sometimes, a little help is, well...helpful!

One television show that fascinates me is a cable show, "How It Is Made". I think this program captures my attention because it shows how everyday items are made. I realize this is not everyone's cup of tea, but I like to understand how things are made. I was watching this program, a few weeks back, and they were showing how they made barbeque grills. I love to grill, so I was interested.

The grills begin as round sheets of aluminum. Each sheet is run through a soapy solution and then a huge press applies over 1000 pounds of pressure to make the bowl of the lower part of the grill. After a few more steps, the grill comes out looking just as it would on the shelf at Wal-Mart.

As I watched this program, I thought, "1000 pounds of pressure"?! How many people would have to bring their total strength and weight to bear on this metal to apply that kind of pressure. That got me thinking about all of the other gadgets we have for help for everything from staying organized to staying connected to loved ones. The bottom line I came up with is this: without help, we really can't do much!

This was true of the Israelites of Haggai's day. They were building the temple, but had no food. They were focusing on God again, but had no rain. They listened to God's correction, but were not seeing any results. Into this situation, God sent them word to help them to continue without becoming disheartened. You and I need the same reminders God sent to the people of Haggai's day...you can do it, if you trust in Me and keep your eyes on Me.

Look around your house and list all of many helpful devices you can see from where you are sitting at the time.

d.

8. When did God say He would do these things? (2:5-9)
9. When did the third message come? (2:10-14)
10. Who did God tell Haggai to consult? (2:10-14)
11. What was Haggai to ask? (2:10-14)
12. What did God declare about the work they were doing on the temple?
(2:10-14)
13. What did God remind the people of as they worked? (2:15-19)
14. When was God talking to the people? (2:15-19)
15. What promise did God make? (2:15-19)
16. When did the fourth message come? (2:20-23)

17. For whom was this message intended? (2:20-23)
18. What did God say He was going to do outside Jerusalem? (2:20-23)
19. What did God say He was going to do inside Jerusalem? (2:20-23)

Comprehend It

1. Why did God give separate messages for separate groups of people?
2. From God's response to the people's objections in 2:3, what were they saying in their complaints about the new temple?
3. What was God's point in His response in verses 4 & 5?
4. What did God mean by saying He would shake the Heavens and Earth, sea and dry land?
5. Do we read of this happening in Haggai's day? If not, towards what might God have been pointing?
6. In 1 Kings 8, God's glory filled the temple in a cloud. God promised Haggai He would fill the temple. Do you read of this happening in Ezra or Nehemiah? What does this mean?

7. Did the temple ever get back to the glory that it had seen under Solomon? If so, when? If not, what might that mean?
8. Was the temple, even in the time of Jesus, ever a place of peace? If so, when? If not, why is it significant?
9. What was the overall meaning of the second message?
10. How many days elapsed from the second message to the third message?
11. What agricultural event would people be preparing for at this time?
12. What was God's point in His questions to the priests?
13. What questions might the people have as this time approached?
14. How did God answer these questions?
15. What was the difference between then and before?
16. How many days elapsed between the third message and the fourth message?

17. God told Zerubbabel He was going to destroy the nations of the world and only leave Israel. Did God do this in Zerubbabel's lifetime? If so, when? If not, what might this mean?

18. What was the overall meaning of the last message?

Connect It

1. Have you ever prayed and waited on God to do something? If so, what was it like to wait? What thoughts went through your heart? How long did you wait?

2. What would it have been like to wait 70 years for the temple to be rebuilt only to have it wait for another 16 years?

3. Describe a time when you looked forward to something, with great anticipation, only to find out it was not at all as great as you thought it would be?

4. How did you react when you realized it was not as you thought?

5. Have you ever had that experience in your walk with Christ? If so, explain.

6. How might that apply to people who have been hurt by churches?

7. How can we apply God's promise to be with Haggai to those situations above?
8. How might we apply God's encouragement "once more in a little while..." in 2:6, to the disappointments and hurts we face in life?
9. Is this a magic phrase that makes everything go away? Why or why not?
10. If not, why is it important?
11. How does 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 apply to this?
12. In James 1:5, we are told, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives liberally and without reproach." How does that apply to the concerns of the people in Haggai 2:10-19?
13. Is there any circumstance of life with which you struggle right now? Can you ask God for wisdom? Have you? Why or why not?
14. What was God's point to the Israelites about the unclean making the clean defiled?
15. How does this apply to Ephesians 2:8-9?

16. How is it that we are ever able to accomplish anything for God's Kingdom?
17. What should this mean about how you react?
18. Twice in this chapter, God tells Haggai, and Haggai relays the message, of eschatological or end times events. Summarize what has been said.
19. How should a believer in Jesus Christ react to these messages?
20. What are you struggling to accomplish for God right now?
21. How does this chapter apply to that situation?
22. What will you do differently since studying this book?

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