

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

HAGGAI

THEME

Author and Title

The book of Haggai contains messages delivered by the prophet Haggai, and thus it is reasonable to consider Haggai its author. The name Haggai, which means “festal,” promotes the conjecture that his birth occurred during a festival of Israel, or perhaps links his name with his message, anticipating the restoration of Israel’s great feasts within a restored temple. Nothing is known of his genealogy.

Date

The word of the Lord comes to Haggai between late August and mid-December of 520 B.C. There is widespread scholarly consensus on these dates, though this does not preclude the possibility of editorial activity. If such editing did take place, it likely occurred before 515 B.C., when the temple was completed. The dates given are significant for their places in both the liturgical and agricultural calendars of Judah (see notes on [1:1](#); [1:15b–2:1](#); [2:10](#)).

Dates of the Oracles in Haggai (All in 520 B.C.)

Oracle	Reference	Date
First	1:1	1st day of 6th month (Aug. 29)
Second	1:15	24th day of 6th month (Sept. 21)
Third	2:1	21st day of 7th month (Oct. 17)
Fourth	2:10	24th day of 9th month (Dec. 18)
Fifth	2:20	24th day of 9th month (Dec. 18)

Theme

The restoration of the Lord’s house by the people of God will mediate God’s presence.

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Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Haggai motivates the leaders (Zerubbabel and Joshua) and the people of God to consider their current economic and spiritual circumstances and to renew their efforts to complete the work of temple restoration.

The historical setting of the book is in the sixth century B.C. among the returned exiles from the Babylonian captivity. The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great (559–530 B.C.) captured Babylon in 539. His edict in 538 B.C. permitted the return of Jews to Jerusalem so that they might rebuild the temple ([Ezra 1–2](#)). Initial work stalled, however, when opposition arose ([Ezra 3:1–4:5](#)).

The events within the book of Haggai take place during the reign of Darius I (522–486 B.C.), a general who rose to power following the death of Cyrus's son Cambyses (530–522). The specific mention of the “second year of Darius” ([Hag. 1:1](#)) places the book firmly in the year 520 B.C. Darius's support was vital for the completion of the temple ([Ezra 5–6](#)).

Key Themes

1. *The restoration of God's house.* Temple restoration highlights the Lord's desire to renew a covenant relationship with his people, characterized by his presence ([1:13](#); [2:4–5](#)). A decaying temple signifies a decaying relationship and brings defilement rather than holiness to the people ([2:14](#)).

2. *The prophetic word is the divine Word.* The divine message comes “by the hand of Haggai” ([1:1, 3](#); [2:1, 10](#)), is characterized by “thus says the LORD” ([1:2, 5, 7](#); [2:6, 11](#)), is a message “to Haggai” ([2:20](#)), is characterized by “declares the LORD” ([1:9, 13](#); [2:4 \[3x\], 8, 9, 14, 17, 23 \[3x\]](#)), is the “voice of the LORD their God” ([1:12](#)), and is the “LORD's message” ([1:13](#)).

3. *The Lord is sovereign.* The phrase “LORD of hosts” occurs 14 times in these 38 verses (see [1:2](#)). The Lord gives the divine word, controls the fortunes of his people ([1:9](#); [2:17, 19](#)) and nations ([2:6–8](#)), directs nature ([1:10](#)), motivates his people to action ([1:14](#); [2:4](#)), and establishes and deposes kingdoms ([2:20–23](#)).

4. *The people must work.* A restored house will bring pleasure and glory to the Lord ([1:8](#)) and convey blessing to the people ([2:19](#)), but there is work to be done. Physical labor ([1:14](#)) is urged in the form of numerous imperatives ([1:7–8](#); [2:4–5](#)). But there is also “heart” work to be done, as evidenced by the call to consider past experience in light of the present inaction ([1:5–7](#); [2:15–19](#)).

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5. *The restoration of David's house.* Undoubtedly Zerubbabel, the heir of David (see note on [1:1](#)), is promised an elevated status ([2:23](#)). The Lord, who had taken off the “ring” of the Davidic house ([Jer. 22:24–27](#)), now promises to wear it once again. As in the OT ([2 Samuel 7](#); [Ps. 2:6](#)), the NT understanding inextricably unites king and temple. It is only as the temple is rebuilt ([Matt. 26:61; 27:40; John 2:18–22](#)) that Christ Jesus, the Davidic heir, is installed as the messianic King ([Rom. 1:1–4](#)), thus fulfilling the promises to Zerubbabel ([Matt. 1:1, 12–13; Luke 3:27](#)).

3

History of Salvation Summary

After the exile, the Lord is renewing his promises to his people and calls on them to finish rebuilding the temple so that he might be with them and fulfill his promises to bless the whole world through them ([2:9](#)), particularly through the Messiah from the house of David ([2:23](#)). (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the [Overview of the Bible](#). See also [History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

Literary Features

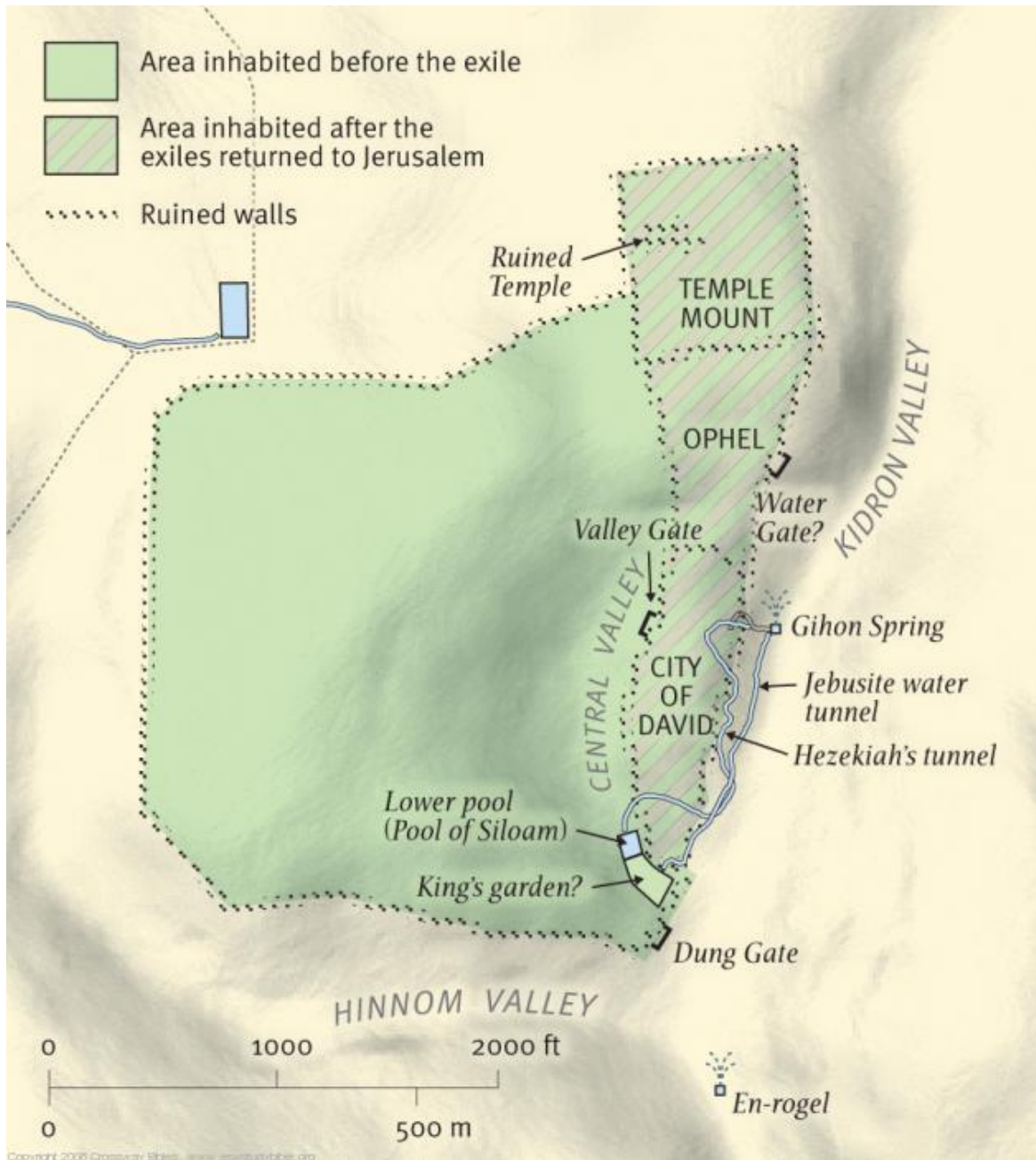
Although the book of Haggai falls within the general category of prophecy, it is not a typical prophetic book. It is written in prose instead of the customary poetry. Although there are predictions of promised blessing, there are no oracles of judgment in the usual sense. Instead, God simply calls the nation's attention to its low ebb, as though judgment had already occurred. There are also intermittent golden-age visions, as well as a narrative episode ([1:12–15](#)). By means of a specific instance (the rebuilding of the temple), the book of Haggai is a relevant and timeless book on the need to put God's work first in one's life. For the prophet's society, rebuilding the temple would be the visible sign of the people's determination to put God first.

Jerusalem at the Time of Haggai

c. 520 B.C.

Haggai prophesied to the people of Jerusalem after they had returned from Babylon in 538 B.C. and before they had rebuilt the temple in 515. The city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, the walls and the temple having been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Within a year after returning from Babylon, the people had laid the foundation for the new temple, but by Haggai's time they had still not completed it. Haggai, together with Zechariah, called upon the people to stop focusing on their own economic well-being and complete the temple.

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Outline

- I. Introduction: Reluctant Rebuilders ([1:1-2](#))
 - A. Characters ([1:1](#))
 - B. Context ([1:2](#))
- II. Consider Your Ways: Fruitless Prosperity ([1:3-12](#))
 - A. Work without satisfaction ([1:3-11](#))

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- B. General response: obedience and fear ([1:12](#))
- III. Promise and Progress ([1:13–15a](#))
 - A. God's promise ([1:13](#))
 - B. Specific response: work begins ([1:14–15a](#))
- IV. The Former and Latter Glory of This House ([1:15b–2:9](#))
 - A. Comparing past and present ([1:15b–2:3](#))
 - B. Acting based on the past ([2:4–5](#))
 - C. An image of God's house restored ([2:6–9](#))
- V. Consider Your Ways: Holiness and Defilement; Repentance and Blessing ([2:10–19](#))
 - A. Analogy: holiness and defilement ([2:10–14](#))
 - B. Consider life before restoration began: you did not turn ([2:15–17](#))
 - C. Consider life since restoration began: I will bless ([2:18–19](#))
- VI. Zerubbabel: The Signet Ring ([2:20–23](#))
 - A. Destruction upon kingdoms ([2:20–22](#))
 - B. An image of David's house restored ([2:23](#))¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 1741-1743). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.