

# **Rebuild God's Temple**

A study in the prophecy of Haggai

Andrew Swango

## Prophecy of Haggai - Introduction

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### AUTHOR

Haggai was a prophet when Zerubbabel, the descendant of King David, was the Persian governor of Judah and Jeshua (called Joshua in Haggai) was the high priest. Haggai was the prophet that spurred the people to start rebuilding the temple after they returned from captivity. He prophesied before and during the time when Zechariah prophesied.

### DATE

The person who compiled Haggai was extremely specific on when Haggai prophesied.

Hag 1:1-14a occurred in the second year of King Darius I, in the first Hebrew month, Nisan. This would be in February or March 520 BC. 1 Esdras says that this was the same year and month that Zerubbabel spoke to Darius and was appointed governor of Judah.

Hag 1:14b-15, when the Jews started to build the temple, occurred the following sixth month, Elul. This would be in May or June 520 BC.

Hag 2:1-9 occurred in the seventh month (Tishrei). This would be March or April 520 BC.

-Since the foundation was already laid by Hag 2:18, Hag 2:1-9 occurred in the seventh month (Tishrei). This would be August or September 519 BC.

Hag 2:10-23 occurred in second year of Darius I, in the ninth month (Kislev). This would be October or September 520 BC. This is when the temple's foundation was laid (Hag 2:10, 2:18).

### AUDIENCE

Zerubbabel the governor, Jeshua (Joshua) the high priest, and the priests. The audience are the highest leaders of the nation.

### STYLE

Throughout the whole prophecy, God is calling His people to action. But this is not without promises to bless the people and make them prosperous.

### THIS CLASS

#### Style

The style of this class will focus on two things: a call to action (no reason to procrastinate!) and how God rewards those who following His commands.

## Prophecy of Haggai - Outline

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[The Jews return to Jerusalem and Judah (Ezra 2).]

**1:1-11** Command to rebuild the temple.

1:1-2 God speaks through Haggai to Zerubbabel and Jeshua ("Joshua" in Haggai).

1:3-11 God commands the temple be built by contrasting it to the people's luxury.

1:12-15 Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and all the people begin obeying God.

[The altar is completed (Ezra 3:1-7).]

**2:1-9** Encouragement to build and a prophecy of a future Temple of God.

2:1-5 Haggai encourages Zerubbabel and Jeshua.

2:6-9 Haggai prophesies a Temple of God greater than the first (and second).

**2:10-19** Their poverty is turned into prosperity.

2:10-18 God reminds them of their poverty.

2:19 God now promises prosperity.

**2:20-23** God encourages Zerubbabel.

[The foundation completed (Ezra 3:8-13).]

For a more detailed chronology of Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, see the chronology in *The Jews Under Persia*.

## **Prophecy of Haggai - Suggested 3-Week Schedule**

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<b><u>Week</u></b>	<b><u>Scriptures</u></b>
1	1:1-15
2	2:1-9
3	2:10-23

## Prophecy of Haggai - Commentary

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The theme of Haggai's prophecy is the call to rebuild God's temple (Haggai 1:14). "The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, the spirit of Jeshua (Joshua), son of Jehozadak, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. They began work on the house of Yahweh of Hosts, their God." It also includes a mention of the coming of the Messiah, the most glorious Temple of God (Hag 2:6-9) and how God will turn their poverty into prosperity (Hag 2:19).

The style of Haggai's prophecy is filled with calls to action and promises that God will bring prosperity.

The translation I mostly use is the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

### **1:1-2 God speaks through Haggai to Zerubbabel and Jeshua ("Joshua" in Haggai).**

Second year of King Darius, sixth month. The years in this commentary follow Darius while the months follow the Hebrew calendar. The month is Elul. This occurred in August or September 520 BC.

Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is Persia's governor over Judah, appointed by Darius I. He is a descendant of David and an ancestor of Jesus (Matt 1:12-13, Luke 3:27). (For more information on Zerubbabel, see notes on Ezra 1:11 and 2:2.)

Joshua. Ezra and Nehemiah call him Jeshua while Haggai and Zechariah call him Joshua. Based on the Hebrew, Jeshua is closer to the original. In the Septuagint, his Greek name is Iesous, which is Jesus in English.

Lord of Hosts. Throughout this whole prophecy, the Hebrew (Masoretic Text) has Lord of Hosts (or Armies) while the Greek (Septuagint) has Lord Almighty.

These people say. (1) God is repeating the consensus among the people: no one desires to build God's temple. In other words, the people are mindful of the temple ruins, but everyone agrees that it could be done some other day. (2) According to Ezra 3:1, this is about the time that all the people have finished settling into their towns and homes. God has given them 6 months to travel to Judah and resettle in their towns. Now that they are situated, Haggai brings God's message that it's time to situate God's "home." When it comes to having homes in the Promised Land, God has let the people go first for enough time. Now He wants the people to know that it is His turn. There is good reason to keep working on rebuilding houses, but this time, on God's house.

### **1:3-11 God commands the temple be built by contrasting it to the people's luxury.**

Paneled houses. The Scriptures give examples of paneling a house with cedar like with Solomon's house (1King 7:7) and Jehoiakim's palace (Jer 22:14). Paneling in a house is not necessary for the house to fully function like a house. In other words, paneling is a decorative luxury. The people have not only rebuilt their houses and made them livable but they have had enough time to make them look very nice. God's point is that they have gone beyond the necessary and into the luxury while at the same time, God's house does not even have walls.

Planted much... a bag with a hole in it. Here, God tells them that they have not truly prospered nor felt fulfilled. This might be an "a-ha" moment for the leaders of Judah. If God knows why they have not prospered like they would like, then maybe God has a solution to this problem.

Bring lumber and build the house. The first thing God does is tell them what they need to do. This is the solution to their problem of not prospering.

I ruined it. And here is the surprise in God's speech. It is not that the land is not fruitful or the workers are lazy; it is that God Himself is causing the people not to prosper. Thus the surprise: God has been punishing them! No wonder God then asks, "Why?" because that would be their very first question.

While each of you is busy with his own house. God lays it out straight. Haggai is not an obscure prophet like Isaiah or Ezekiel. God through Haggai is giving it to them straight. At this point, the leaders of Judah ought to be cut to the heart.

On your account. God continues telling them how He has been punishing them. And it is their fault. As God said earlier about paneled houses, they have moved past their necessities and moved on to their luxuries while at the same time everyone says that building God's house can wait. No wonder God is angry with them. God had warned the Israelites that He would do these things if they sinned against Him (Deut 11:13-17). What is their sin here? Refusing to build God's house, worship Him, and sacrifice to Him when they are able and have the opportunity to do so. Many have called this type of sin the sin of omission.

[Church in Laodicea]. This whole passage, especially verse 6, is very, very similar to what the church in Laodicea was going through (Rev 3:14-19). They believed they had it made and need nothing. Instead,

Jesus told them that they were really wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus called them to buy true prosperity from Him. God is giving the same condemnation to the leaders of Judah here. Just as the Jews were doing nothing for God, neither were the Christians in Laodicea doing anything for God.

### **1:12-15 Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and all the people begin obeying God.**

Obedied the voice of God. The people responded in full force to God's prophecy against them. God was plain enough for them to understand their problem and what they needed to do. They had just received so much from God, and they realized that they had given absolutely nothing back. They were cut to the heart! Not only did they obey God, but as Ezra 3 explains, they didn't waste any time building the altar (they will finish it in a week (Ezra 3:6)), later resuming the sacrifices, and finishing the foundation.

Feared the Lord. This was the one, important thing they were missing. They were probably busy thanking God for restoring their nation, their towns, and their houses. But they were neglecting their worship to God as He wanted it. In short, now they feared God, a desire to be devoted to worshipping God.

I am with you. God did not rebuke the people then sit back with gladness as they did what they were supposed to do. As soon as the people repented and began the work of God, God gave them a message of encouragement. It is a very simple, short message, but it also carries so much meaning and power: "I am with you." Are there any other statements that we would want God to say to us that that?

Stirred up the spirit. (1) Not only did the people take the first step in repenting, God wanted to be their catalyst. In other words, the people repented, but God added gas to their fire by further stirring the spirit of their highest leaders as well as all the people. God saw their repentance and gave them the drive to do it. (2) What God is doing here is reminiscent of what Paul said in [Php 2:12-13](#). What God did for them, He also does for us!

Twenty-fourth day. From the time Haggai first started preaching God's message to the people, it only took 24 days for all the people to change their minds and believe that the time HAS come for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.

[Application]. (Develop a big application here about Christians pursuing luxury and pursuing meeting other people's needs.)

### **2:1-5 Haggai encourages Zerubbabel and Jeshua.**

[Ezra 3:1-7]. Read Ezra 3:1-7 because it chronologically falls between Haggai 1 and 2.

Twenty-first day of seventh month. According to Ezra 3, this is three weeks after the altar is built and the sacrifices have resumed, it is one week after the Festival of Booths begins, and it is at the end of the week-long Festival of Booths. The foundation is not complete yet (Ezra 3:8-10). The month is Tishrei. This occurred in September or October 520 BC.

Who is left who saw. The captivity began about 80 years ago. It is a little surprising that there are people who may remember the previous temple. These people would have to be older than 90 years. But God is speaking to them and knows what they are thinking.

Doesn't it seem like nothing. All they have done at this point is rebuild the altar and resumed the sacrifices. They haven't laid the foundation yet, so of course it looks like nothing! God is sympathizing with the people. They see that the temple is nothing and all the intense work ahead of them. God plans to encourage them.

Be strong. God specifically calls out the two highest leaders: Zerubbabel and Jeshua. He also calls out the people. God tells each of them: "Be strong!" They have completed the altar... there is no reason to slow down or stop now!

Work, for I am with you. Again, God tells them that they are not alone. God said He was with them before they built the altar and resumed the sacrifices, and God said He will be with them when they bring the temple to completion.

Promise from Egypt. What is God referring to? When Moses asked God for reassurance that he can lead the people to the Promised Land, God said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex 33:12-14). God is being clear that his promise to Zerubbabel and Jeshua is the same.

My Spirit is present. They have done good work so far, God tells them something new: His Spirit is with them.

As they rebuild more and more of the temple, God's presence among them becomes stronger and stronger.

Do not be afraid. How often has God told the Jews this? God made this clear in Joshua right before the Jews entered the Promised Land (Josh 1:9). David said it to Solomon to encourage him to build the first temple (1Chr 28:20)! God and the people have not forgotten that they have enemies all around them. What are the enemies going to think now that the Jews have resumed their sacrifices which is opposed to the religion of Persia? The treat is real—but there is no reason to be afraid because God is with them ([Rom 8:31](#))! God has said it before and there is no reason to shrink back now!

### **2:6-9 Haggai prophesies a Temple of God greater than the first (and second).**

Shake the heavens... shake the nations. This kind of talk is usually given when God is going to do something major such as throwing down a kingdom or empire. Unlike everything God has spoken through Haggai so far, this section is very allegorical.

I will fill this house with glory. God has just spoken about the ruins of the temple. Here, He says his glory will fill this house. This happened with the tabernacle and with Solomon's temple, when God's presence, a cloud, came and filled it (Ex 40:34-35, [1King 8:10-13](#)). However, looking back at the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, nothing like this ever happened with the second temple. What could God be talking about?

Glory of this house will be greater than the first. God says that this house will be more glorious than the first. However, the opposite seems to be true. When Zerubbabel finishes the foundation of the second temple, the older people who had seen the first wept loudly (Ezra 3:11-12). Were they weeping out of joy? Possibly, but none of the major commentators believed they did. They were weeping because the second temple was far inferior to the first temple. So what could God be talking about???

I will provide peace in this place. With the exception of the time of the Maccabees, there was never really a time when Judah experienced peace. What is God talking about in these three verses? Well, there was a time that all of these things came true: God did fill the house with glory, that glory was greater than the first temple, and it was a provision of peace. All these prophecies were, indeed, fulfilled. God's glory did enter the second temple in [Luke 2:21-35](#). The treasures of the nations to come [to see Jesus] in [John 12:20-28](#), A second time God's glory, which was seen by the people, did enter the temple in [Matt 21:15-16](#), The temple of Jesus Himself did have a glory greater than the first temple ([Matt 12:3-6](#)), He will be the Peace ([Luke 2:13-14](#), [John 14:27](#), [John 16:33](#)), and Jesus Himself is the House that Haggai is talking about ([John 2:19-21](#)). So the heavens and the nations did shake: Jesus brought the eternal Kingdom of God!

[Verse 9]. In the Septuagint, there is an additional phrase here which says, "...even peace of soul for a possession to everyone that builds, to raise up this temple." Since the best way to explain verses 6-9 is as a prophecy about Jesus, this additional phrase does not seem to fit—in my opinion.

## **2:10-18 God reminds them of their poverty.**

[Zech 1:1-6]. Chronologically, this passage occurs between verse 9 and verse 10. So the rest of Haggai is delivered while Zechariah is prophesying along side him.

Twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius. The rest of the chapter occurred two months after the first half of this chapter. The month is Kislev. This occurred in November or December 520 BC. In total, Haggai prophesied for four months at the most. The foundation will be completely finished in about a half-year.

Priests. Up to this point, Haggai has directed his prophecy to Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Now, he addresses the priests. As the sacrifices to God have resumed but the temple itself still without a foundation, Haggai will deliver a warning to the priests.

Consecrated meat. That is, meat sacrificed to God. This kind of meat is holy.

Bread, stew, wine, oil. The reason why Haggai chooses these foods is unknown. But the meaning of these foods is apparent in Haggai's illustration. These foods are neutral in their holiness, that is, they are neither holy nor unholy.

Become holy. In other words, if holy meat touches these foods, do these foods become holy? That is, can holy meat transfer holiness to neutral foods?

No. The priests give the correct answer: holy food cannot transfer holiness to neutral foods.

Someone defiled by a corpse. This question would be easier to answer because it was explicitly addressed in the Law of Moses ([Num 5:1-3](#)). This was also true of animal corpses (Lev 11:24-40).

It becomes defiled. (1) The priests, again, give the correct answer. (2) Up to this point, what should the priest understand? Holy food cannot transfer holiness to other food, and defilement can transfer defilement to food. Defilement can be transferred but holiness cannot. (3) An illustration from me: it is like trees and a forest fire. Trees cannot transfer growth to other trees, but trees can transfer a wild fire to other trees.

So is this people and nation. God is about to explain the specifics of this, but the summary is that the holiness of where they were living (the previous kingdom of Judah, now Persian province of Judah) was not making them holy and the defiled way they were living—living to themselves—was making their work defiled.

Blight, mildew, hail. These were the same punishments that God brought to the sinful kingdoms of Judah and Israel which he had prophesied before they entered the Promised Land (Deut 28:22, [1King 8:35-40](#), Amos 4:6-9).

Reflect back from this day. The people have finished the altar, resumed sacrifices, and are working on the foundation. They have gone from being completely self-focused to now being concerned about God's house and worship to Him.

[Verse 16-17]. This is very similar to how God described their situation one chapter (and three months) earlier (Hag 1:5-11).

This day forward. God is about to change things!

Twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. This is the same day as Haggai is giving this prophecy (Hag 2:10). This is “this day” forward.

Day the foundation was laid. According to Ezra 3:8-10, the foundation will be laid in about a half-year from now. But Haggai speaks as if the foundation of the temple has been laid. Either Hag 2:15-23 was written long after the bulk of Haggai—which is unlike the exactness of time that Haggai has given us so far and because this day continues into Hag 2:10--, or Haggai is talking about a different foundation. The later seems to be the case. The same kind of idea of a laid foundation but that foundation not being complete is found in Ezra 5:14-16. (As stated in my notes at Ezra 1:11, I believe Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel were different persons.) In that passage, Tattenai says that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple BUT it is still under construction and not yet complete. The foundation Haggai is talking about is probably Sheshbazzar’s foundation. He must have started it when they arrived under Cyrus, but never finished because of the local opposition that they had. In short, God is saying that from the time of their arrival under Cyrus and the foundation was left uncompleted until this moment (when they are continuing the work and about complete the foundation), God has been punishing them.

### **2:19 God now promises prosperity.**

Is there seed in the granary. Is there? We do not know. I believe the answer would be “no.” God is saying that they have no food in storage and it is a long way until harvest.

I will bless you. This is the turning point of Haggai’s prophecy. It is the climax. From this point on, things will be different: the people will be building God’s house with determination and God will turn their many years of punishment into prosperity. Throughout this whole prophecy, God has described some horrible harvests in the land, but no more! There is a great teaching of truth that when people focus on God, God will bless. As Paul said, “All things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). This is true for Christians, and we can see how this was specifically true for the Jews under Persia. (2) God gives the same promise again later under Zechariah ([Zech 8:9-13](#)).

### **2:20-23 God encourages Zerubbabel.**

The word came a second time. This is a different time the Lord spoke to Haggai on the same day (see Hag 2:10).

Zerubbabel. The very last mention of Zerubbabel is at the completion of the foundation in about a half-year. Shake heavens.. horses and their riders will fall. This is apocalyptic language from Haggai, very much unlike the rest of his prophecy except in Hag 2:6-9 which is about the Messiah where God uses some of the same phrases. Like 2:6-9, this passage is probably about future events in Zerubbabel’s life. A very, very similar prophecy is given in Ezk 38:17-23 about Gog, an enemy of God’s people. The point of God’s message is that God will cause Zerubbabel and God’s people to triumph over their enemies to the point where their enemies will be destroyed before them. This is a prophecy and promise of protection on Zerubbabel and should be very comforting to him.

Signet ring. A signet ring was significant during that time. Kings used it to prove that documents were truly from them and gave those documents authority. For example, look at the power Artaxerxes I (Esther’s husband and king) had ([Esther 8:7-8](#)). This should be specifically significant to Zerubbabel, now the Persian governor of Judah, because God removed his signet ring from Jehoiachin, one of the last kings over Judah before God gave them over to the Babylonians ([Jer 22:24-25](#)). Zerubbabel feels very special. Even though he is the governor of a Persian province, his relationship with Darius is not strong enough for Darius to allow Zerubbabel to use his signet ring. But God, the King of kings, shares a very special relationship with Zerubbabel and says that he is God’s signet ring. God had taken from the kings of Judah their heavenly authority as kings over God’s people. Now, with Zerubbabel, God is giving it back!