

Haggai (December 21)

Reading Haggai

A ruler lays his headdress and outer garments in his servant's hands and lifts a gold necklace over his head. He kicks his sandals off his feet and steps to the edge of the basin to wash in the water the servant will pour. On his right hand remains a broad ring with his name, title, and the symbol of his family – a lion – etched in its oval face. The gold and garments he can lay aside, but the ring can never leave him; by it he dispatches orders and exercises his authority.

When the prophet Haggai began to prophesy, the Judean exiles needed a man of authority. They needed a governor and high priest to rally them away from self-interest and to unite them for rebuilding the ruined walls of the temple. Over the course of three months in 520 BC, the Lord opened the mouth of Haggai 27 times to rebuke and encourage the leaders and the people of Judah, his chosen ones.

Author and Date

Haggai was a prophet who, along with Zechariah, encouraged the returned exiles to rebuild the temple. "Haggai" means "festal," which may indicate that the prophet was born during one of the three pilgrimage feasts (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost or Weeks, and Tabernacles). Haggai may have witnessed the destruction of Solomon's temple. If so, he must have been in his early 70s during his ministry.

The messages of Haggai were given during a four-month period in 520 BC, the second year of King Darius. The first message was delivered on the first day of the sixth month (August 29) and the last on the 24th day of the ninth month (December 18).

Themes and Teaching

Next to Obadiah, Haggai is the shortest book in the Old Testament, but its teachings are none the less significant. Haggai clearly shows the consequences of disobedience and obedience. When the people give priority to God and his house, they are blessed rather than cursed. Obedience brings the encouragement and strength of the Spirit of God.

chapter 2 speaks of the coming of the Messiah, called the "desired of all nations" in verse 7. His coming would fill the rebuilt temple with glory. The Lord made Zerubbabel his "signet ring" as a guarantee that the Messiah would come. These passages are linked with the judgment of the nations at Christ's second coming, when the nations will be shaken and kingdoms overthrown.

Literary Features

Like Malachi, Haggai uses a number of questions to highlight key issues. He also makes effective use of repetition: "Give careful thought," "I am with you," and "I will shake the heavens and the earth." The major sections of the book are marked off by the date on which the word of the Lord came to (or through) Haggai. Several times the prophet appears to echo other Scriptures.

Blessings for Readers

Haggai illustrates for us the problem of focusing on self-serving priorities to the neglect of God's priorities. It also shows how God rallied this community of faith to accomplish an important work, which united them in hearing God's word. (The prophet states 27 times that the word of the Lord came to him.) These are blessings that God's people certainly need today as they consider how to prioritize their life and work together. Also, do not miss how the word to Zerubbabel anticipates the coming of Christ's kingdom.