

Pleasant Springs Church

Discipleship School — The Twelve Minor Prophets

Haggai

Author & Audience — with The Bible Project's framing

Septuagint (LXX) & ESV side-by-side · 520 B.C.E. · Book 10 of The Twelve

THE BIG IDEA

Our choices matter, and God has chosen to work out his purposes through the faithfulness and obedience of his people. This reality invites reflection and humility, and prompts action rooted in the hope of God's coming Kingdom.

WHERE HAGGAI SITS IN THE STORY

One important aspect of the ancient TaNaK order of the Hebrew Bible is that the twelve prophetic works from Hosea through Malachi — sometimes called the Minor Prophets — were designed as a single scroll called **The Twelve** (Greek: Δωδεκαπροφήτων, *Dōdekaphēton*). Haggai is the **tenth book of The Twelve**, sitting between Zephaniah and Zechariah.

Though Haggai is among the smallest prophetic books in the Bible, it is crucially important in the overall story of the Hebrew Bible. For centuries the prophets had been accusing Israel of breaking covenant with God through idolatry and injustice, warning that God would send Babylon to dismantle Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and carry the people into exile. That is exactly what happened in **587 B.C.E.** (2 Kings 24–25). But it was not the end of the story. The prophets carried a deep conviction that God would bring back a transformed remnant of Israel to live in a renewed Jerusalem, where his Presence would once again dwell in their midst.

THE AUTHOR — HAGGAI THE PROPHET

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Almost everything we know about the prophet himself comes from his own book and a brief mention in **Ezra 5:1–2; 6:14**. His Hebrew name חַגַּי (*Haggai*) — rendered Ἀγγαῖος (*Haggaios*) in the Septuagint — means “festal” or “born on a feast day,” perhaps suggesting a birth during one of Israel's pilgrimage festivals.

Haggai prophesies in the **second year of King Darius I of Persia (520 B.C.E.)**, delivering four messages over the course of roughly three and a half months. In Haggai 2:3 he asks, “Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory?” — a question that only makes sense if Haggai himself is an old man who, as a child, saw Solomon's temple before its destruction sixty-six years earlier. He likely returned with the first wave of exiles under Zerubbabel and Joshua in 538 B.C.E., having spent most of his life in Babylon.

Working alongside the slightly younger prophet **Zechariah** (Ezra 5:1), Haggai's ministry is short but decisive. Within weeks of his first oracle, the temple rebuilding project that had stalled for sixteen years is back underway.

THE AUDIENCE — A DISCOURAGED REMNANT IN 520 B.C.E.

When we turn to Haggai, the date is **520 B.C.E.**, nearly seventy years after the exile began. Babylon's empire has recently collapsed, and the world is now ruled by the **Persians**, who allowed the return of any exiled Israelites who wanted to go back to Jerusalem. Under the leadership of a high priest named **Joshua** (Hebrew: Yeshua / Jeshua) and **Zerubbabel**, an heir from the line of David, a group of exiles returned and began to rebuild the city and their lives (Ezra 1–6).

You can imagine that the people's hopes are high and the future seems bright. But not from Haggai's point of view. The temple foundation had been laid back in 536 B.C.E., but Samaritan opposition (Ezra 4) and economic hardship caused the work to grind to a halt. **For sixteen years** the foundation sat exposed while the people focused their attention on building their own homes and businesses.

Haggai is sent specifically to:

- **Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel** — Persian-appointed governor of Judah, descended from King David through Jehoiachin (Matt. 1:12).
- **Joshua son of Jehozadak** — the high priest, restoring the priestly line in the new temple.
- **The remnant of the people** — Judeans who had returned from exile and settled around Jerusalem.

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ORACLE ONE

Haggai 1:1–15 — Exhortation to Rebuild the Temple

First day of the sixth month, second year of Darius the king

Haggai opens chapter 1 by accusing the people of **misplaced priorities**. Sure, they've come back to Jerusalem, but they're spending all their time and resources rebuilding their own fancy houses while the temple still lies in ruins from its destruction nearly seventy years ago. Haggai asks, in effect, "Are your own houses really more important than your allegiance to God?" (Hag. 1:4).

This neglect is tantamount to the covenant rebellion of their ancestors. This is why the land is unproductive and they are struck with famine and drought — they are repeating the folly of their forefathers, which is why Haggai echoes the list of covenant curses from **Deuteronomy 28:22–40**. His words are followed by a story about the people's response, similar to Ezra 5:1–2: Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of Israel were provoked by Haggai's message and were motivated to start rebuilding the temple.

Haggai 1:2–6 · The Question of Priorities

Septuagint (LXX)

²Τάδε λέγει Κύριος παντοκράτωρ λέγων· ο λαὸς οὗτος λέγουσιν· οὐχ ἦκει ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ οἰκοδομῆσαι τὸν οἶκον Κυρίου.

⁴εἰ καιρὸς ὑμῖν μὲν ἐστὶ τοῦ οἰκεῖν ἐν οἴκοις ὑμῶν κοιλοστάθμοις, ὁ δὲ οἶκος οὗτος ἐξηρήμωται;

⁵καὶ νῦν τάδε λέγει Κύριος παντοκράτωρ· τάξατε δὴ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὰς ὁδοὺς ὑμῶν.

⁶ἐσπεύρατε πολλὰ καὶ εἰσηνέγκατε ὀλίγα, ἐφάγετε καὶ οὐκ εἰς πλησμονήν, ἐπίετε καὶ οὐκ εἰς μέθην, περιβάλεσθε καὶ οὐκ ἐθερμάνθητε ἐν αὐτοῖς.

English Standard Version

²"Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord."

⁴"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?"

⁵Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.

⁶You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

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Haggai 1:13–14 · “I Am With You”

Septuagint (LXX)

¹³καὶ εἶπεν Ἀγγαῖος ὁ ἄγγελος Κυρίου τῷ λαῷ·
ἐγὼ εἰμι μεθ' ὑμῶν, λέγει Κύριος.

¹⁴καὶ ἐξήγειρε Κύριος τὸ πνεῦμα Ζοροβάβελ καὶ
τὸ πνεῦμα Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Ἰωσεδὲκ τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ
μεγάλου, καὶ εἰσήλθον καὶ ἐποίουν ἔργα ἐν τῷ
οἴκῳ Κυρίου.

English Standard Version

¹³Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, "I am with you, declares the Lord."

¹⁴And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God.

NOTE FROM THE TWELVE

The covenant curses Haggai echoes — sowing much but harvesting little, eating without satisfaction, wages drained into “a bag with holes” — are pulled directly from Deuteronomy 28. The diagnosis is not bad weather or bad luck. It is a covenant people building everything *except* the place where God's presence is meant to dwell.

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ORACLE TWO

Haggai 2:1–9 — Vision and Hope for the Rebuilt Temple

Twenty-first day of the seventh month — about a month into the rebuilding

In the second section, Haggai follows up one month later and addresses a problem of **shattered expectations** among the people. The temple they are rebuilding is unimpressive. It is nothing compared to the glory of the temple Solomon built some 500 years earlier (compare Ezra 3:12, where the older returnees wept aloud at the sight of the new foundation).

Haggai responds by reminding the people of the great prophetic promises of the future Kingdom of God and his temple. Here he draws from earlier prophets, especially **Isaiah and Micah**, saying that the new Jerusalem will be the place from which God will redeem the world and that all nations will come and participate in God's Kingdom, resulting in peace for all (Isa. 9; Isa. 60–62; Mic. 4–5). So the temple plays a key role in God's plans for the future, and Haggai calls on the people to **work in hope, despite the disappointing circumstances**.

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Haggai 2:4–9 · Be Strong, My Spirit Remains

Septuagint (LXX)

⁴καὶ νῦν κατίσχυε, Ζοροβάβελ, λέγει Κύριος, καὶ κατίσχυε, Ἰησοῦ ὁ τοῦ Ἰωσεδὲκ ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ μέγας, καὶ κατισχυέτω πᾶς ὁ λαὸς τῆς γῆς, διότι μεθ' ὑμῶν ἐγὼ εἰμι.

⁵καὶ τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐφέστηκεν ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν· θαρσεῖτε.

⁶ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σεισῶ τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηράν.

⁷καὶ συσσεισῶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, καὶ ἤξει τὰ ἐκλεκτὰ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν, καὶ πλήσω τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον δόξης.

⁹διότι μεγάλη ἔσται ἡ δόξα τοῦ οἴκου τούτου, ἢ ἐσχάτη ὑπὲρ τὴν πρώτην, καὶ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τούτῳ δώσω εἰρήνην.

English Standard Version

⁴Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts,

⁵according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.

⁶For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.

⁷And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.

⁹The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.

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ORACLE THREE

Haggai 2:10–19 — A Call to Covenant Faithfulness

Twenty-fourth day of the ninth month

In the third section, Haggai follows up two months later with a **call to covenant faithfulness**. Calling back to the key ideas from Leviticus, he engages some priests in a conversation about ritual purity. If someone touches a dead body and becomes ritually impure or marked by death, and then goes to touch some food, does the food become impure too? The priests say, “Yes.”

Then Haggai turns this scenario into a parable. It is the same with the people of Israel and what they are putting their hands to as they rebuild the temple. **If the current generation does not humble themselves and turn from injustice and apathy, then whatever they build with their hands — including the new temple itself — will be impure.** Going through the religious motions does not sanctify a life that is otherwise out of step with God; rebellion contaminates the very work it tries to consecrate.

And yet the oracle does not end in diagnosis. The same God who exposed their impurity also pledges, **“From this day on I will bless you.”** Repentance opens the door to renewed blessing.

Haggai 2:18–19 · From This Day On I Will Bless You

Septuagint (LXX)

¹⁸ ὑποτάξατε διὴ τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης καὶ ἐπέκεινα, ἀπὸ τῆς τετράδος καὶ εἰκάδος τοῦ ἐνάτου μηνός.

¹⁹ εἰ ἔτι ἐπιγνωσθήσεται ἐπὶ τῆς ἄλω, καὶ εἰ ἔτι ἡ ἄμπελος καὶ ἡ συκὴ καὶ ἡ ρόα καὶ τὰ ξύλα τῆς ἐλαίας τὰ μὴ φέροντα καρπὸν· ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης εὐλογήσω.

English Standard Version

¹⁸ Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider:

¹⁹ Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you.

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ORACLE FOUR

Haggai 2:20–23 — Future Hope and a Choice to Be Faithful

Same day — a private word to Zerubbabel

The book concludes with Haggai's summary of the future hope in God's Kingdom. **God will make the new Jerusalem the center of his glorious international Kingdom.** Just as he defeated Pharaoh long ago, God will again confront and defeat evil among the nations and fulfill his promise to David by establishing a king from his line, who, in Haggai's day, was represented by Zerubbabel.

The signet-ring image is loaded with covenant memory. Two generations earlier, God had pronounced judgment on Zerubbabel's grandfather Jeconiah by saying that even if he were a signet ring on God's right hand, he would be torn off (**Jeremiah 22:24**). Now, in Zerubbabel, that signet is restored — the Davidic line publicly reaffirmed as the channel of God's coming kingdom.

And then the book ends with the choice of a bright future just hanging there. **Will Haggai's generation be faithful to God and experience the fulfillment of the promises? Will Zerubbabel be faithful and turn out to be the messianic king?** To find out, you have to keep reading into the last two books of the prophets, Zechariah and Malachi.

Zerubbabel himself never becomes king — he remains a Persian-appointed governor and quietly disappears from the record — so the signet-ring oracle becomes a messianic placeholder. A future descendant of Zerubbabel will fulfill what this small post-exilic governor only hinted at. Both Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27 trace Jesus' lineage through Zerubbabel.

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Haggai 2:21–23 · The Signet Ring

Septuagint (LXX)

²¹ εἶπὸν πρὸς Ζοροβάβελ τὸν τοῦ Σαλαθιήλ ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰούδα λέγων· ἐγὼ σείω τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηρὰν.

²² καὶ καταστρέψω θρόνους βασιλέων καὶ ὀλοθρεύσω δύναμιν βασιλέων τῶν ἐθνῶν.

²³ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, λέγει Κύριος παντοκράτωρ, λήψομαί σε, Ζοροβάβελ τὸν τοῦ Σαλαθιήλ, τὸν δούλόν μου, καὶ θήσομαί σε ὡς σφραγίδα, διότι σὲ ἠρέτισα.

English Standard Version

²¹ “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth,

²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations.

²³ “On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.”

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THE NEW TESTAMENT ECHO — HEBREWS 12 QUOTES HAGGAI 2

The author of Hebrews picks up Haggai's "shaking" language and applies it directly to the work of Christ. The cosmic shaking Haggai promised is not just about an empire shift in the sixth century B.C.E. — it is about everything created being shaken so that what cannot be shaken (God's kingdom) remains.

Hebrews 12:26–29 · Quoting Haggai 2:6

Greek New Testament

²⁶νῦν δὲ ἐπήγγελλται λέγων· ἔτι ἅπαξ ἐγὼ σεισω οὐ μόνον τὴν γῆν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν οὐρανόν.

²⁸διὸ βασιλείαν ἀσάλευτον παραλαμβάνοντες ἔχωμεν χάριν.

²⁹καὶ γὰρ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκων.

English Standard Version

²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens."

²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.

SO WHAT?

Haggai's small book carries an outsized promise. The shaking he announces is still rolling forward in history, dismantling everything we are tempted to build in place of God's kingdom — including paneled houses, family empires, and self-protective comforts. Whatever survives the shaking is the only thing that was ever real to begin with.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

1. Haggai accuses the returned exiles of building "paneled houses" while God's house lay in ruins. Where in your own life are you tempted to finish your private projects before tending to God's priorities?
2. Re-read Haggai 1:6. Have you ever experienced the "bag with holes" pattern — lots of effort, little satisfaction? What would it look like to "consider your ways" in that area?

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3. God's short answer to a discouraged remnant is "I am with you" (1:13; 2:4). Why is divine presence the foundation of obedience rather than its reward?
4. Hebrews 12 says we are receiving "a kingdom that cannot be shaken." What in your life right now is being shaken, and what does Haggai 2:6–9 invite you to trust in the middle of it?
5. Zerubbabel becomes a signet ring — the seal of God's authority — even though he never sees the full promise fulfilled in his lifetime. What does faithful obedience look like when you may not live to see the fruit?

A PRAYER IN RESPONSE

Lord of Hosts, our God, you have promised, "I am with you." Forgive us for the paneled houses we build while your house lies neglected in our hearts. Stir up our spirits as you stirred up Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of Israel. Shake whatever in us cannot stand, and root us in the kingdom that cannot be shaken. Fill this house — your people — with a glory greater than the former, through Jesus the true and final Signet Ring of David. Amen.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

- The literary framing of Haggai used throughout this lesson follows the overview by **BibleProject** (bibleproject.com/explore/video/haggai).
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