

POST-EXILIC PROPHETS

HAGGAI

The Reconstruction Prophet

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Historical Context. Post-exilic prophecy begins with Haggai who receives the word of the Lord during the reign of the Persian King, Darius (520BC). King Darius has allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland. Upon arrival, the exiles set about the task of rebuilding their homes and the Temple. The Samaritans had succeeded in blocking the rebuilding of the Temple, but after Darius ascends the throne, permission is once again given to resume the work. But the rebuilding project is also delayed because the people have given priority to rebuilding their own lives. This is when Haggai arrives on the scene. God uses him to jumpstart the Temple project. Haggai seeks to light a fire under his fellow Jews.

Division of chapters. The two chapters can be divided into five oracles:

- Exhortation to rebuild the Temple (Ch. 1)
- Future glory of the new Temple (2:1-9)
- Rejection of the offerings of the unclean (2:10-14)
- Promise of immediate blessings (2:15-19)
- Pledge to Zerubbabel (2:20-23)

COMMENTARY

CHAPTER 1: Rebuilding God's house

"Is it time for you to dwell in your own paneled houses while God's house lies in ruins?" (v.4)

"Then the Lord stirred up the spirit of the governor of Judah, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and the spirit of the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, so that they came and set to work on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month." (vv 14-15)

The reasons for the delay in rebuilding the Temple all make sense, whether in ancient or modern times. The returned exiles are poverty-stricken; in addition, they are suffering under drought and crop failure. It is obvious that they need houses for shelter, and God does not. Haggai attributes their difficult situation not so much to their failure to get the Temple project going, but to their persistence in building their own homes first.

There is wisdom in the prophet's exhortation to rebuild the Temple. The morale of the community will also be built up by working on a common project, especially one that will focus the people's attention on God. Recall the experience of the poor European immigrant communities in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They built impressive churches and schools at great sacrifice to themselves. Their value to these communities was enormous, not just economically, but as a sign of their faith in God and what they could accomplish by working together.

CHAPTER 2: Reaction to the finished Temple

"Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes? But now take courage, Zerubbabel, says the Lord, 'and take courage, Joshua, high priest....'" (vv3-4)

"...I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts." (v.7)

The people have come in from the countryside to Jerusalem for a religious feast day. Even though the reconstruction project has only gone on for a month, it seems people are disappointed. Unfortunately, the restoration work is compared to Solomon's magnificent Temple. Haggai steps in and exhorts Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all present to "take courage." In time, God's glory will come and once again fill the Temple (v.7).

Verses 10-14 are questions and answers on what is ritually clean and unclean.

Verses 20-23. In the final oracle, Haggai addresses Zerubbabel, telling him that God, in his own time, will shake the heavens and the earth and make him his special servant, symbolized by the signet ring (a sign of divine authority).

Resources

- Collegeville Bible Commentary
- Collegeville Bible Handbook
- The Daily Study Bible Series – The Twelve Prophets