

God's Twelve Voices that Shaped His People: Haggai **Adult Bible Class**

prepared by Bob Young

Introduction

Living messages of the OT prophets

Background of text, social setting, and prophet provides parallels in our day

Points of interest

The first of three post-exilic prophets. (Who are the other two?)

Haggai means "joyous" or "festive" one. Conjecture: he was perhaps born on a festival day?

Other OT references to Haggai are in Ezra 5:1; 6:14. Ezra provides the background of Haggai and will be helpful in the study of this book.

Historical setting

Haggai is a contemporary of Zechariah.

Haggai's work can be dated 520 B.C. His writing ministry extends over 4 months of this year; 16 years after the exile had come to an end.

Haggai has only one theme: the temple must be completed.

As the departure from Jerusalem took place in stages, the return occurred also in stages. We can easily identify three:

- (1) 536 B.C. when Sheshbazzar led about 50000 back to Jerusalem (Ezra 2);
- (2) 457 B.C., 79 years later, Ezra led back a group (Ezra 8:1-34);
- (3) 445 B.C., Nehemiah returned with a third group (Nehemiah 2).

The Persian period continued until the time of Alexander the Great. Persia fell in 331 B.C.

Textual considerations

Absence of denunciations of immorality, idolatry, and social injustice.

No mention of moral conduct or principles.

Only two chapters, 38 verses, four oracles.

Structure/Outline

Oracle One (chapter 1)

August 29/September 1, 520 B.C. Call to rebuild God's temple. Memorable for no prophet had spoken since Ezekiel or Daniel.

Oracles Two (2:1-9)

Feast of Tabernacles, October 520 B.C. Theme is the surpassing glory of new temple. This is an oracle of encouragement for those who tended to compare the second temple with the first.

Now 66 years have passed since the destruction of the first temple, a time period that suggests some of those present had seen the first temple.

Oracle Three (2:10-19)

December 24, 520 B.C. To those who think that God's blessings are too slow in coming, Haggai reminds that the once-cursed people are now blessed.

Oracles Four (2:20-23)

Spoken on same day as Oracle Three. Special promise of divine protection to Zerubbabel.

Influence/Results of Haggai

The temple was completed by 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

A clear NT reference to Haggai is in Heb. 12:26-28 (see Hag. 2:6) where the writer refers to the shaking of the heavens in contrast to the kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Contemporary lessons

An age revolting against institutionalism, and seeking “spiritual worship” must not diminish the importance of Haggai’s message. The temple is a significant part of the history of God’s people with continuing implications for the NT.

Questions

What situations in the church today parallel those of Haggai’s time? Where are there similar concepts, challenges, or attitudes?

In what condition did the returned exiles find Jerusalem and the temple? Why was it so important that the temple be rebuilt? What are the NT parallels?

What does Haggai say about the providence of God? Is providence ever dependent on us?

What verses in Haggai are most challenging? Most memorable?

What conclusions should be drawn from Haggai’s discussion of evil (2:10-19)?

Should one attribute a Messianic application to OT passages every time such is possible? Why or why not?