

Haggai 1:1-15

The Last Old testament Prophets

The prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) each spoke to those Jews who returned from the 70-year exile.

In 538 B.C. Cyrus King of Persia allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem after 70 years in captivity. Two years later (536 B.C.) construction on the temple began, led by Zerubbabel. The work stopped after two years (534 B.C.). That's where we left the story in **Ezra 4**.

The work stopped because the "people of the land" surrounding them had complained to the new Persian king, Cambyses, warning that the Jews might rebel as they had in the past. So Cambyses ordered a halt to the rebuilding of the Temple, and cut off supplies and support.

This was a situation like in Egypt, when "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." (**Exodus 1:8**)

There were other roadblocks and hardships. The land itself was desolate for the most part. The Jews didn't have enough manpower or funds, and the work was hard. Then they were hit with crop failures and drought. And the Samaritan population was still actively harassing them.

The situation, they thought, was actually easier for them back in Babylon. This recalls the Children of Israel during the Exodus, longing for the leeks and onions of Egypt (**Numbers 11:5**).

After work on the Temple has stopped, God speaks through Haggai. The foundation to the temple had been laid and the altar was rebuilt but the temple wasn't yet rebuilt.

The next chapter of Ezra sets the stage:

Ezra 5:1 - "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them."

These prophets played an essential role in getting the Jews to restart the rebuilding of the Temple. What did they say?

Haggai

The name Haggai is probably an abbreviated form of the phrase, "Festival of Yahweh." Little is related about his life. Haggai may have been an old man, and had seen the previous Temple before its destruction due to what he says about the former glory of the Temple in **Haggai 2:3**.

Haggai 1:1-2 - "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built."

The Jews were confronted with a direct order from Cambyses to stop. The surrounding "people of the land" opposed them. It's easy to understand how they would think, "Maybe the time isn't right. Maybe we should wait."

After Cambyses died, the whole situation changed. But they had not taken advantage of it. In fact, nothing had been done for two years after Darius became king. Meanwhile, the prophets were exhorting the Jews to continue work on the Temple.

Haggai 1:3-4 - "Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?"

They had been improving their houses, panelling them and renovating, while the Temple was still surrounded by rubble.

The Targum says, "you panel your walls with boards of cedar."

The point was that they were indulging themselves in luxury, ease, and sloth. The Temple foundation that had been paid was a continuing symbol of their lack of faith, of zeal. The whole reason they were there was to rebuild the Temple.

As King David had said, "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." (**2 Samuel 7:2**)

It became his passion and focus:

- **Psalm 132:3-5** - "I will not enter my house or get into my bed, I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

One of the great things Ole did was exhort us in just this same way. We were young adults with new jobs, some of us had young children we were trying to raise, without much money and with good excuses to concentrate on our own things, and to treat church as an add on, or a hobby.

He would read this verse to us a lot - "Rebuilding the Temple" we understood meant building a community, which took time and commitment. Some important things had to take a back seat to what God was doing. Some of Ole's zeal rubbed off on us, and we became a community. We spent a lot of time together in Bible study and just hanging out. We began to share our lives and pour ourselves out for each other, and then for homeless and needy people around us.

If we ever lose that vision of our purpose, we'll be left with an organization that is spiritually empty. "Rebuilding the Temple" never stops.

Haggai 1:5-6 - "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes."

Pursuing their own interests had gotten them nothing. What we acquire slips through our fingers and daily life doesn't satisfy without a spiritual basis. Unless our lives are invested in something eternal, life lacks significance and meaning.

Haggai 1:7-8 - "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD."

"I will be glorified" = "I will show myself glorious," meaning He would cause His Shekinah Glory to dwell there. But the rabbis note that a letter is missing from the word, which numerically signifies "five"; from that they infer that five things were lacking in the second temple - the Ark of the Covenant, the Urim and Thummim, the fire from heaven, the Shechinah or the divine Majesty, and the Holy Spirit. (Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 22b)

Reading these verses in the past, we have understood it to mean we must take the wood from the Asherah groves where we formerly worshipped idols, and incorporate it into the Temple. Our high place identity becomes transformed into our ministry in the Temple of God as we take our place in the Body of Christ.

Haggai 1:9-11 - "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands."

Most of your troubles, Haggai says, are caused by God, not the devil, because of your neglect of God's house. The people shouldn't have been surprised. This was prophesied in Moses' day (**Deuteronomy 11:16-17**).

Remember, he's telling this to the cream of the crop, the most zealous Jews who had volunteered for this mission. They had initially sacrificed much toward the rebuilding of the Temple. God, through Haggai, is asking, "Why are you still waiting around?"

The Response

Haggai 1:12 - "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD."

"Obeyed the voice of the LORD" - Obeyed = *Shema* - to hear and obey; to hear "under" or in submission.

The people didn't get offended by Haggai's words, or try to justify themselves, and pity their sad situation, etc. They immediately obeyed.

Reciting the Shema is an important ritual for Jews. Twice a day they read a series of verses: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41. It's called the Shema because that is the first word in the reading: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

To "*shema*" implies listening with intent, paying close attention, and then taking action.

Seeing their response, God through Haggai, delivers a forgiving and comforting word:

Haggai 1:13 - "Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD."

Whatever their previous fear and discouragement, this word of acceptance from God had a miraculous effect.

Haggai 1:14-15 - "And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

Darius Makes a Decree

When Darius became king of Persia, he reversed most of Cambyses' policies.

Josephus has an apocryphal version of what happened, possibly after this exhortation by Haggai...

<https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-11.html>

Zerubbabel had been a friend of Darius in his youth. After Darius gained the throne, Zerubbabel traveled back to Babylon to congratulate him. During a seven-day feast, Darius appointed Zerubbabel and two other friends as his honorary body guards. One night as he talked with his three friends, he proposed a contest. To the winner "he would grant it as a reward of his victory, to put on a purple garment; and to drink in cups of gold; and to sleep upon gold; and to have a chariot with bridles of gold; and an head

turban of fine linen; and a chain of gold about his neck; and to sit next to my self; on account of his wisdom. And, says he, he shall be called my cousin."

They were to choose which was the strongest - wine, the king, women or truth - and explain why.

The next day, one friend made an oration about the strength of wine. The other argued for the strength of the king. Zerubbabel chose to compare the strength of women with that of truth.

"Wine is strong; as is the King also, whom all men obey: but women are superior to them in power. For it was a woman that brought the King into the world: and for those that plant the vines, and make the wine, they are women who bear them, and bring them up. ... and when we have gotten a great deal of gold, and silver, and any other thing that is of great value, and deserving regard, and see a beautiful woman, we leave all these things; and with open mouth fix our eyes upon her countenance; and are willing to forsake what we have, that we may enjoy her beauty, and procure it to our selves. ... I once saw the King, who is Lord of so many people, smitten on the face by Apame, the daughter of Rabsases Themasius, his concubine; and his diadem taken away from him, and put upon her own head; while he bore it patiently: and when she smiled he smiled: and when she was angry he was sad.

"I have already demonstrated how powerful women are. But both these women themselves, and the King himself are weaker than truth. For although the earth be large, and the heaven high, and the course of the sun swift, yet are all these moved according to the will of God, who is true and righteous. For which cause we also ought to esteem truth to be the strongest of all things; and that what is unrighteous is of no force against it. Moreover all things else that have any strength are mortal, and short lived, but truth is a thing that is immortal, and eternal. It affords us not indeed such a beauty as will wither away by time, nor such riches as may be taken away by fortune; but righteous rules and laws. It distinguishes them from injustice, and puts what is unrighteous to rebuke."

Darius was delighted with Zerubbabel's oration and declared him the winner.

When he had said this, Zorobabel put him in mind of a vow he had made years before, in case he should ever have the Kingdom. Now this vow was, "To rebuild Jerusalem; and to build therein the temple of God: as also to restore the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had pillaged, and carried to Babylon." And this, said Zerubbael, is that request which thou now permittest me to make, on account that I have been judged to be wise, and understanding.

So, like Cyrus before him, Darius ordered his administrators to supply another caravan to Jerusalem laden with cedars from Lebanon and any remaining vessels that had been taken from the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar.

He also enjoined the Idumeans and Samaritans, and the inhabitants of Celesyria, to restore those villages which they had taken from the Jews: and that, besides all this,

fifty talents should be given them for the building of the temple. He also permitted them to offer their appointed sacrifices, and that whatsoever the High Priest and the priests wanted, and those sacred garments wherein they used to worship God, should be made at his own charges: and that the musical instruments which the Levites used in singing hymns to God should be given them. Moreover he charged them, that portions of land should be given to those that guarded the city, and the temple; as also a determinate sum of money every year, for their maintenance. And withal he sent the vessels. And all that Cyrus intended to do before him, relating to the restoration of Jerusalem, Darius also ordained should be done accordingly.

So another contingent of Jews left with Zerubbabel for Jerusalem to join the previous returnees, armed with a new decree.