

OUTLINE OF HAGGAI

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CHAPTER XXIII

PREFACE TO HAGGAI

The purpose of this prophet was to motivate those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple. His problem was to overcome their discouragement and indifference.

The often foretold destruction of Jerusalem had finally come in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne of Babylon in 605 B.C. after the victorious battle of Carchemish. In 597 he captured Jerusalem. In 586 the city was demolished and the temple pulled down.

In 605, following his defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to Jerusalem. (*Daniel 1:1*) He carried off the royal treasures and a few select young men including Daniel to serve in his court. (*Daniel 1:3-7*)

In 597 Nebuchadnezzar again laid siege to Jerusalem. This time he carried away all the ruling class and leaders of Jewish society, among them the prophet Ezekiel. Remarkably, he did not destroy Jerusalem at that time. (Read *II Kings 24:10-20* and *II Chronicles 36:8-10* and *Ezekiel 33:21*)

In 586 B.C. all those who remained in Judah, with the exception of Jeremiah and a few of the very poorest people, were carried away to Babylon and Jerusalem, with the temple, was destroyed. (Read *II Kings 25:11-12*, *Jeremiah 40:6*)

The seventy years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 29:10-14*) date from the first transport of prisoners to Babylon in 605 B.C. to the decree of Cyrus that the Jews be released in 538 B.C.

Isaiah had predicted the coming of Cyrus (*Isaiah 44:28*, *45:1*). Cyrus had become king of Persia, the vassal state of the Medes in 559 B.C. To gain freedom from and finally dominance over the Medes, Cyrus allied himself with Nabonidus, king of Babylon.

With this added strength, Cyrus rebelled against Media in 550 B.C. capturing the capital city of Ecbatona.

PREFACE TO HAGGAI

Cyrus's lust for power brought an end to his alliance with Babylon and Babylon now turned to Egypt and Lydia for aid against the rising power of Persia. Lydia was defeated by Cyrus in 546 B.C. and Babylon surrendered without a struggle in 539 B.C.

A significant policy of Cyrus was the return of all images held captive by Babylon to their rightful owners. Since the Jews had no such images, they received rather the sacred vessels from the temple which had been part of the loot taken by Nebuchadnezzar.

In keeping with the practice of restoring fallen gods, Cyrus also returned captured people. The province of Syria, of which Palestine was part, came under the dominance of the Persian monarch in 539 B.C. with the fall of Babylon. The following year in 538 B.C., Cyrus issued the now famous first decree permitting the Jews to return to their homeland.

In this Cyrus was not motivated entirely by humanitarian sentiments. Palestine is a natural buffer zone between Persia and Egypt. Having it populated by friendly, even grateful Jews is symptomatic of Cyrus' political finesse.

His treatment of the Jews was not unexpected. Jehovah's prophets had predicted it before the beginning of the captivity!

The captivity had been such that, when the decree of freedom finally came, not many Jews responded to it. In exile they had been allowed to enter business, marry, raise crops, and establish homes. The synagogue had come into being, replacing the temple as the center of worship. Their property, coupled with a widespread apathy toward spiritual things detained most of them in Babylon.

Those who did return were the spiritually concerned. Idolatry would never again rear its ugly head among God's people until the fourth century A.D. These were the remnant, a handful of faithful people returning to a strip of land no more than twenty-five miles in length . . . all that remained of the once proud kingdom of David and Solomon.

Before the captivity there were twenty-four orders of priests. Only a small number, representative of only four of the orders returned . . . a total of 4,289.

The first call to return to the homeland was totally unheeded by the Levites. (cf. *I Chronicles 24:3, Ezra 2:40*) Only seventy-four Levites finally returned.

In all, about 50,000 were the total remnant, and these were largely from the servant classes. The response was similar to the present day migration of Jews to Israel. A very small minority of world Jewery

is concerned enough, or willing to give up the material security in other lands, to help rebuild the Jewish homeland. It is much easier to send money to plant trees!

When this small remnant returned, their first act was to re-erect the altar and re-institute the ancient feasts. (*Ezra 3:23*) Workmen and materials were gathered for the reconstruction of the temple in the second year. (*Ezra 2:68, 69, 3:7-13*)

The surrounding nations, quite naturally, opposed the re-entry of the Jews into Judea. The Samaritans, who now inhabited the old northern kingdom territory, offered help at first, but when they were rebuffed, they mounted a strong opposition to the Jews. (*Ezra 4:1-5*) Thus began an enmity between Jew and Samaritan which carried over into New Testament times, and is still alive today, although few Samaritans remain.

The Samaritans intrigued against the Jews. Both were vassal to Cyrus and the Samaritans accused the Jews of planning revolt. The reconstruction of the temple, connected as it was to Messianic aspiration, supplied them with ample fuel for such rumors.

With this pressure against them, and spiritual indifference mounting, the Jews soon left off the reconstruction and the temple stood less than half-finished.

In 529 B.C., upon the death of Cyrus, Cambyses ascended the Persian throne. He conquered Egypt in 625 B.C., but was thwarted in attempting to conquer Carthage and Nubia. This military campaigning brought Persian armies through Judea with increasing frequency with demoralizing effects upon the Jews.

Cambyses died in 522 B.C. and his death was followed by a brief period of anarchy in the Persian Empire under his weakling successor Smerdis.

Smerdis was assassinated by Darius in 521 B.C. This triggered a number of revolts among Persia's vassal states. These left a mark on Palestine as Darius criss-crossed the land for two years before finally restoring order.

In Darius's second year, the Jews resumed construction of the temple in 520 B.C. Tattenai, the Persian governor of the province, objected that they had no official authority to do so. They appealed to Cyrus' decree which was thereupon discovered in the royal archives (*Ezra 5:1-17*) and Darius ordered Tattenai to allow the reconstruction.

Even with the encouragement of Darius, the Jews waited another year to resume the building. They did this only when God had sent Haggai and Zechariah to persuade them to do so.

PREFACE TO HAGGAI

As a result of the prophecies of these two, the second temple was finally completed in 516 B.C.

HAGGAI THE PROPHET

Haggai, as a person, remains obscure. No one else in the Old Testament shares the name, the literal meaning of which is "festival." He is mentioned in *Ezra* 5:1 and 6:4 and referred to in *Zechariah* 8:9. He is named two times in the apocraphal *I Esdras* and in *Sirach* 49:11.

Jewish tradition says that all three post-exilic prophets died in the same month. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all passing in the same month the temple was completed.

In addition to the book which bears his name, Haggai is traditionally the author of several ceremonial regulations. The Vulgate credits him as author of Psalm 111. The Peshitta text credits him with Psalms 125 and 126. The Septuagint attributes Psalm 137 to his authorship, and all three credit him as author of Psalms 146, 147, 148, and 145.

HAGGAI'S MESSAGE

Haggai's burden is the spiritual indifference of God's people. The discontinuation of the rebuilding of the temple gave an opportunity for the people to become pre-occupied with their own interests and the erection of their own homes. Some even argued that the seventy year captivity would not really end for two years, so the time had not yet come to re-build the temple. They had, after all, erected an altar and in so doing had recognized their allegiance to God. It was enough!

Harvest failures plagued them also and so added to their pre-occupation. (*Haggai* 1:6, 9-11, 2:15, 19) The repeated criss-crossing of their land by armies which, though not attacking them, interfered along with Samaritan interference too, gave them pause as did internal dissensions. (*Zechariah* 8:10)

It was a critical moment. The remnant must be revived or God's covenant would yet fail. The temple, "the shrine within which was kept inviolate the faith of the Old Testament," was symbolic of the remnant's continuation as the reason for the existence of the Jews. Without it, the prophetic symbolism of the sacrificial system could not be resumed.

With this covenant hope in mind, Haggai prods their consciences with Messianic promises. Finally, with Zechariah, he succeeded in persuading the returned exiles to set aside their private interests and get to work.

Chapter XXIII—Questions

Preface to Haggai

1. What was the purpose of Haggai's prophecy?
2. Trace the three incidents from 605 B.C. to 586 B.C. in which increasing numbers of Jews were led to Babylon.
3. _____ had predicted that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years.
4. _____ had predicted the coming of Cyrus who issued the decree which ended the Babylonian captivity.
5. How do you account for Cyrus' return to the Jews of the sacred vessels from the temple?
6. What moved Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to their homeland?
7. Most of the Jews did or did not return to Palestine? Why?
8. What was the first act of the remnant upon returning?
9. What was Samaria's reaction to the return of the Jews? Trace the consequences of the Jew's response.
10. What three prophets encouraged the Jews to rebuild the temple?
11. In addition to the Book of Haggai the prophet is credited with what other writing?
12. The burden of Haggai is _____.
13. How do you account for the Jews' indifference to the task of re-building the temple?
14. Why was this reconstruction critical?

CHAPTER XXIV

EXPOSITION OF HAGGAI

THE FIRST MESSAGE . . . Haggai 1:1-15

RV . . . In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehoozadak, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh Jehovah of hosts, saying, This people say, It is not the time for us to come, the time for Jehovah's house to be built. Then came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste? Now