



# Haggai

## Transcript

### Introduction

00:00-01:26

The book of the prophet Haggai. It's one of the smaller prophetic books, but crucially important in the overall story of the Hebrew Bible. So for centuries, the Hebrew prophets had been accusing Israel of breaking their covenant with God through idolatry and injustice, and they warned that God would send the great empire of Babylon to take out Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and haul off the people into exile. And it all happened in the year 587 B.C. But that wasn't the end of the story. The prophets also believed that there was still hope and that God would one day bring back a transformed remnant of his people Israel to live in a new Jerusalem, where God's presence would live in their midst.

Now when we turn to Haggai, the year is 520 B.C., nearly 70 years after the exile, and the Babylonian empire has recently collapsed, and the world is now ruled by the Persians. Now, they allowed the return of any exiled Israelites who wanted to go back to Jerusalem, which still lay in ruins. And so under the leadership of a high priest named Joshua and Zerubbabel, an heir from the line of David, and a group of exiles, they all returned and began to rebuild the city and their lives. Remember the story from the book of Ezra chapters 1-6.

So our hopes are high, and the future seems very bright, but it's not actually, at least from Haggai's point of view. The book consists of four sections that summarize Haggai's message given to the people of Jerusalem over the course of four months.

### Chapter 1

01:27-02:17

He opens by accusing the people of misplaced priorities. And so, yes, they have come back to Jerusalem, but they're spending all of their time and resources

rebuilding their own fancy houses while the temple still lay in ruins from its destruction from 70 years ago! So Haggai asks, "Are your own houses really more important than your allegiance to God?" This neglect, Haggai says, is tantamount to the covenant rebellion of their ancestors, which is why the land is still unproductive, why they've been struck with famine and drought. And here, Haggai's quoting from the list of covenant curses in the book of Deuteronomy.

And so Haggai's challenging words are followed by a story of the people's response. Remember also the story in Ezra chapter 5. We're told that Zerubbabel, Joshua, the remnant of the people were provoked by Haggai's message, and they were motivated. They started rebuilding the temple.

## Chapter 2

02:18-04:46

So in the next section, Haggai follows up one month later, and he addresses some problems of shattered expectations among the people. So the temple that they're rebuilding is really pretty unimpressive. It's nothing compared to the glory of the temple Solomon built here some 500 years earlier, and so morale was really low for finishing the project. And so Haggai reminds the people of the great prophetic promises of the future Kingdom of God and about this temple. He draws from the earlier prophets, especially Isaiah and Micah, about the new Jerusalem, and that it would be the place from which God would redeem the whole world and where all nations would come and participate in God's Kingdom, resulting in an era of peace. And so the temple, it 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.

In the third section, Haggai follows up two months later with a call to covenant faithfulness, and he engages some priests in a conversation about ritual purity. Remember all the key ideas from the book of Leviticus. So he says, "If someone goes and touches a dead body and becomes ritually impure or marked by death, and then they go and touch some food, is that food impure too?" And the priests, knowing the book of Leviticus, say, "Yes, it's impure." And then Haggai turns this into a parable. He says, "This is how it is with the people of Israel and what they're putting their hands to in rebuilding the temple." If the current generation doesn't humble themselves, if they don't turn from injustice and apathy, then, Haggai says, whatever they build with their hands, including this new temple, will be impure too.

Haggai's challenge is that it's only by true repentance and covenant faithfulness that their building efforts will result in God bringing his Kingdom and blessing. And so in a sense, Israel's future lay in their hands. God's waiting for his people to be faithful. And so the choice that Haggai is laying before the exile generation, it's very similar to the challenge Moses gave the wilderness generation before entering the

land. Their obedience will lead to blessing and success, while faithlessness will lead to ruin.

The book concludes with Haggai's summary of the future hope of God's Kingdom. He's going to make the new Jerusalem the center of his glorious international Kingdom, and from there, he will confront and defeat evil among the nations. He reminds people of the defeat of Pharaoh's army in the exodus story. God will fulfill here his promise to David and establish the king from his line, and in Haggai's day, that was represented by Zerubbabel.

## **Conclusion**

**04:46-05:36**

And so the book ends with the choice of a bright future just hanging there. So the question is: Will Haggai's generation be faithful to God? Will they experience the fulfillment of all these promises? And Zerubbabel, will he be faithful? Will he turn out to be the messianic king? And you have to just keep reading into the final two books of the prophets, Zechariah and Malachi, to find out.

But you can see how this little book contains a great challenge to every generation of God's people, that our choices really matter, and that the faithfulness and obedience of God's people is part of how God has chosen to work out his purposes in the world. And so this surprising truth should motivate humility and action in God's people as they look forward to God's coming Kingdom. And that is the message of the book of Haggai.