



PT Butler

Bible Study Notebooks

Study of HAGGAI

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HAGGAI

Introduction

We are going to reproduce Clinton Gill's "Introduction" to Haggai, (pronounced Hagg-ee-yi) from his book, *Minor Prophets*, 1971, pub. College Press---it is the best we've found and teachers need all the history Mr. Gill puts into it.

The purpose of Haggai 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 497 he captured Jerusalem. In 486 the city of Jerusalem was demolished and the temple pulled down. Jerusalem looked, as the earlier prophets (Jeremiah) had said, like a plowed field. In 605 B.C., following his defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to Jerusalem (Dan. 1:1). He carried off the royal treasures and a few select young men, including Daniel, to serve in his court (Dan. 1:3-7). In 497 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. (See 2 Kings 24:10-20; 2 Chron. 36:8-10; Ezek. 33:21). In 586, 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 (2 Kings 25:11-12; Jer. 40:6).

The 70 years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 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 536 B.C. Isaiah had predicted the coming of Cyrus (Isa. 44:28; 45:1ff). 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 Ecbatana. Cyrus's lust for power brought an end to his alliance with Babylon and Babylon now turned to Egypt and Lydia (Asia Minor--today, Turkey) 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 to their homelands. 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. In 536 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's political finesse. His treatment of the Jews was not unexpected. The Lord's prophets (Isaiah, etal.) 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 (see Jer. 29:1-14). The synagogue had come into being, replacing the temple as the center of worship. Their property, coupled with a widespread apathy toward spiritual things caused most of them to stay in Persia (what was once Babylon). Those who did return were the spiritually concerned. Idolatry would never again rear its ugly head among God's people until the 4th century A.D. These were the remnant, a handful of faithful people returning to a strip of land no more than 25 miles in length--all that remained of the once proud kingdom of David and Solomon.

Before the captivity there were 24 orders of priests. Only a small number, representative of only 4 of the orders returned--a total of 4,289. The first call to return to the homeland was totally unheeded by the Levites (1 Chron. 24:3; Ezra 2:40). In all, about 50,000 were the total remnant that returned, 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 Jewry is concerned enough, or willing to give up the material security in other lands (especially the U.S.A.) 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 (537 B.C., 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). The Samaritans were a "cur-race," a mixture of some of the Jews who had been left behind in 721 B.C. when Assyria took the ten northern tribes captive, and the Mesopotamians which the Assyrians had emigrated into the territory known as Israel who had intermarried with the Jews left behind. They had their own temple, their own priesthood, their own civil structure (of sorts)--and they were part-Jewish. The Samaritans would be inveterate enemies of the Jews for centuries--even into the days of Jesus Christ. The Samaritans plotted 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 aspirations, 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 525 B.C., but was thwarted in attempting to conquer Carthage and Nubia in North Africa. 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 the Jews had no official authority to do so. The Jews appealed to Cyrus's decree which was 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 began reconstruction after they had returned to the Holy Land only when God had sent Haggai and Zechariah to persuade them to do so. As a result of the preaching of these two prophets, the second temple was finally completed in 516 B.C. 20 years after the first increment of Jews had returned to the Holy Land.

Haggai means in the Hebrew language, Festival. He is the only person in the OT with that name. We do not know where he was born or lived before he came to Judah with the returning captives. He is mentioned in Ezra 5:1 and 6:4 and referred to in Zechariah 8:9. He is named twice in the Jewish apocryphal writings I Esdras and Sirach 49:11. Jewish tradition says that all three post-exilic prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) died in the same month--all passing in the same month the temple was completed (which is unlikely). In addition to the book which bears his name, Haggai is traditionally the author of several ceremonial regulations. The Latin 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 145, 146, 147, and 148.

HAGGAI 1:1---2:23

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 70 year captivity would not really end for two years, so the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. They had, after all, erected an altar and in so doing had recognized their allegiance to God. That was enough! Harvest failures plagued them (Haggai 1:6,9,10,11; 2:15,19) also and this, too, added to their pre-occupation with themselves. The repeated criss-crossing of their land by Persian armies, which, though not attacking them, interfered with their peace and prosperity. Then, they had the Samaritans falsely charging them with rebellion against Persia. Finally, there was internal dissension among the Jews themselves (Zech. 8:10). It was a critical moment in the history of the Jewish nation. That is why God sent two strong prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to speak his word to the people. The temple, the shrine within which was kept inviolate the faith of the Old Testament, was symbolic of the Messianic remnant's continuation as the reason for the existence of the Jews. These Jews felt there had not been sufficient time since their return from exile to rebuild the temple. They had built an altar and that should be enough until they get settled in. We have had too many distractions and interruptions, they said. With so much uncertainty about food to eat, a drought, the international situation with Persia tramping through our land--it has all had a terrible effect on the national economy--it is a poor time to be working on the temple. What it all amounts to, whether in Haggai's day or our own is simply that God's people are too often more concerned with their own interests than building God's house. Whereas Haggai is concerned with building a temple of wood and stone, we are concerned with building the real temple of God, the church (Eph. 2:11-22), not constructed of materials but of people! To neglect evangelism and teaching the congregation directly from the word of God is to neglect the most important work in the world! Jesus admonished his followers to seek first the kingdom of God (building the church) and take no thought saying, What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or what shall we wear? After all these things do the Gentiles seek (Luke 12:29). **THERE IS NO BETTER TIME THAN RIGHT NOW TO BUILD THE CHURCH OF THE LORD.** We must not wait for a more opportune time to take the gospel to the lost. As the apostle Paul told the Corinthians, Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:1-2). We must not put our own interests **AHEAD** of the Lord's interests! **BUILDING THE BODY OF CHRIST MUST TAKE PRECEDENCE AND PRIORITY IN OUR LIVES!**

Stop and think! This was the Lord's response through the prophet Haggai. None of you seem able to make ends meet. Consider your ways--look how things are--you expected much, but it has come to little! You were able to bring in crops and work for wages--but it never seems enough and you never have enough to eat and can't keep any of the wages you are earning, says the Lord. Had these Jews not wondered why things were as bad as they were? **IT WAS BECAUSE THE LORD HIMSELF BLEW IT AWAY!** This was the way the Lord chastened his people in the Old Testament (see Joel chs. 1-2; Amos 2:4-15). **IT IS STILL THE WAY THE LORD CHASTENS HIS**

PEOPLE TODAY WHEN THEY PUT THEIR OWN NECESSITIES AS PRIORITIES-- AND NOT THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH! If you don't believe it, read the epistles and the book of Revelation (the letters to the 7 churches). One of the multi-millionaire, industrial barons was asked in the early 20th century, "How much is enough?" And the reply came, "Just a little more!" These Jews had houses (even paneled houses in which to live, crops from which to eat, jobs from which to earn wages--but they wanted a little more! So they discontinued working on the Lord's house and devoted all their energies and resources to working for THEMSELVES! The Lord was not pleased with this! NOR, IS HE PLEASED WITH MEMBERS OF HIS NEW COVENANT (THE CHURCH OF CHRIST) WHEN THEY THINK JUST THE STATUS QUO IS ENOUGH--WE MUST SPEND THIS TIME RIGHT NOW, DEVOTE ALL OUR ENERGIES AND RESOURCES, TO OURSELVES! Not a good idea, dear church of the Lord! And remember, it is not the building today that is the church--it is people! STOP, AND THINK, CHRISTIAN--ARE YOU GIVING PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE TO BUILDING THE CHURCH?

The people obeyed the Lord because of the Lord's message to them through the prophets! Had there been no prophet there to preach to them, they would have gone on in their self-centered way, taking care of themselves first! The prophet Zechariah reminded them of their days before in the captivities. They were still close enough to the exile to know God was not playing games! Their forefathers had refused to hear Isaiah, Amos and Micah and the rest of the prophets. They and their forefathers had grown up in exile as a consequence of their materialistic, self-centered, worship of themselves! God stirred up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, along with Zerubbabel and Joshua (leaders of the returned Jews), and the message of God came across to the people and they put God's things first in their lives. THAT WAS WHAT GOD WANTED! They feared the Lord--there's no better motivation than the fear of the Lord! God is the same God today! When God's people (the church) both leaders and the led, fear the Lord, heed and obey his word--HIS HOUSE IS BUILT! We need to fear the Lord even in this sophisticated age when a misunderstanding of God's love often causes us to be overly familiar and without fear. We need to obey him as he tells us through his word when it is preached and taught in its purity in the church. When that is done, God's Spirit will move in us to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think! (Eph. 3:20-21).

The people began rebuilding the temple. It would be the second temple--Solomon's was the first. As they built, the Lord spoke through Haggai to the people and asked, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Indeed, when the people saw it being built, those who had seen Solomon's temple wept (Ezra 3:10-13) because the second temple was going to be nothing compared to the first temple built by Solomon! (a) the Ark of the Covenant was gone; (b) the Shekinah glory was not there; (c) the sacred fire, kindled by God upon the altar had been extinguished and was no longer there; (d) the Urim and Thummim were also gone. The first temple had been built by Solomon, the wise ruler of a wealthy nation, in collaboration with building experts. The second temple was built by a vassal state, with no king and no real wealth. THEY BECAME DISCOURAGED AND WANTED TO QUIT WHAT THEY HAD JUST STARTED--THEY HAD ONLY LAID THE FOUNDATION TO THE SECOND TEMPLE

AND WERE READY TO GIVE UP! They thought that the ultimate relationship to the Lord was to be found in things (temples, animal sacrifices, ornate priests and rituals, Sabbaths, feast-days). They seemed unable to understand what Isaiah had said 250 years earlier that the dwelling place of the Lord is not in a temple made with hands, but in humble and contrite hearts (Isa. 66:1-2). This was a serious problem even with Jewish Christians of the first century. It called forth the Epistle to the Hebrews by the apostle Paul to reveal to them that all the Old Testament ritualism had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his church (people)--not in a temple made with hands and animal sacrifices, etc. Through the prophet Haggai, the Lord was trying to reveal to the people that in the Messianic times, it would not matter how much less the second Jewish temple was from the first one. The Lord told Haggai to preach, Take courage...all you people of the land; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit abides among you; fear not. (2:4-5). This is the very essence of the message of all the prophets. This is the reason the remnant had been delivered from captivity. This is the reason the temple must go on being built. BECAUSE OF THE PROMISE (THE MESSIANIC PROMISE). The Lord's promise to bless all the nations of the earth in the seed of Abraham (seed singular, see Gal. 3:15-18, i.e., the Messiah) is to come to pass through this faithful remnant. In their focus on the material and their pride in being Jews, they were about to forget that their purpose for existence was that through them all the nations of the earth could be blessed. This is the real purpose of the preaching of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi for in the restoration of the Jews to Judea and the reconstruction of the temple was the symbolic re-affirmation of the Messianic covenant made with Abraham.

The Messiah would come through the restored remnant. Never again would Baal be worshiped among his people. However, they would forget the covenant purpose of their nation. Their religion would become a hollow form (Matt. 15:1-9), but through it all, the faithful few would remain true and the Messiah would come in fulfillment of the covenant promise (Matt. 1:1; Lk. 1:33,55,72,73). When the Messiah came, just as the power of the Lord had shaken Sinai (Heb. 12:26), so again the Lord would demonstrate his power in the shaking down (defeat) the very worst that all the world could do to thwart his redemptive program! Paul wrote that at the vicarious death of Christ God canceled the bond which stood against us (the world) with its legal demands; this (God's law of the ministration of death, 2 Cor. 3) he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him (in Christ) (Col. 2:14-15). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (the apostle Paul) sees the fulfillment of Haggai 2:6-9 in the coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant! There can be no doubt about that (tie Heb. 12:18-29 to Matt. 24:29-31). The coming of the church, the new temple (Heb. 8:1ff) and ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal. 3:29) put an end to the devil-inspired power of the heathen (and impenitent Jewish system) trying to stop God from providing redemption for his creation! The Hebrew word *chemedah* in 2:7 is properly translated, desired or delighted--the RSV translation, treasures is incorrect. It can refer to none other than the Christ--the Messiah, the desired of all nations. Haggai is comforting the people by turning their minds from their ambitions of national grandeur to the glorious spiritual hope of covenant fulfillment.. Haggai's statement, that the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former (2:9) is fully expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews! It is obvious that Haggai cannot be saying

that when the second temple is complete it will be more splendid than the first. Historically this was never true, even with Herod's embellishments during the Roman era. Haggai is looking to something far more meaningful than stone and mortar. Lump Solomon's temple, Zerubbabel's temple, and Herod's temple all together and their glory cannot surpass that of the real temple, the church of Jesus Christ! It was a grave error for the Jewish people to continue to identify the material temple with their ambitions for national glory but it did not alter the spiritual facts (Dan. 2:36-45; 4:19;27; Ezek. chs. 40-48; Zech. 2:3-13; 6:9-15; 8:13,18,23; 9:9-10; 14:16-21; Psalm 145:6-21).. Ultimately it brought about their rejection of the Messiah.

Haggai's first burden was to preach against false contentment--false priorities. His second burden was to preach against false discontentment--discouragement. Now, his third burden is to preach against false motives--false self-righteousness. Haggai puts his third burden in the form of a riddle--a favorite literary vehicle of the Bible. He tells the people to ask the priests, essentially, two questions: (a) Can the holy make the unholy?; (b) Can the unholy make holy unholy? The priests's answers are accurate. To the first they answer, No. To the second they answer, Yes. This is a basic principle of God's word. The influence of holiness is not as far reaching as the influence of unholiness. A rotten apple will corrupt a barrel of good apples, but a good apple will not make a barrel of bad ones good! The majority of the Jews of Haggi's day were indifferent toward rebuilding God's house and interested in primarily in their physical plight. Haggi is calling them "a barrel of bad apples." Furthermore, the construction of a holy temple will not automatically sanctify the land or its people any more than the flesh of a sacrifice will make holy a garment in which it is carried. When the first temple stood, the people could not believe God would allow evil to come upon them (see Jer. 7:4-16; Micah 3:11). They made a fetish of the building. It must not happen again by assuming the work of re-building the temple can sanctify an unclean people. Haggai challenged his people to consider what had happened since they returned from exile, prior to the beginning of the reconstruction of the temple. Conditions had not changes since they began to build. Prosperity did not immediately result from their work on the temple. The reason was the far-reaching result of past neglect and present discouragement. It could not be erased by three months of building a temple made of wood and stone! **IT WAS A MATTER OF THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS!** Haggai indicates in 2:17 that they still had not surrendered their minds to the real purpose for their return from exile--to fulfill the Messianic destiny! Herein is a warning to today's Christian who assumes he is alright with God because he is merely associated with an active church, regardless of his personal commitment and service to God and trust in Jesus's vicarious sacrifice.

Haggai's fourth burden is focused on the time of fulfillment of the promises made in 2:6-9. The shaking of the heavens and earth (see Heb. 12:22-29). The shaking of the heavens and earth (2:6,21) cannot mean the chaos which threatened the Persian empire during and just prior to the accession of Darius in 521 B.C. Haggai's message was delivered in 520 B.C. when this threat had been largely abated by the decisive action of Darius. Haggai is not predicting the end of the world or some alleged great tribulation before some alleged millennial reign of Christ on earth. God's promise to Zerubbabel has to do with the reversal of materialism over spirituality in his kingdom. This promise to Zerubbabel was ultimately fulfilled, according to the writer of the

Epistle to the Hebrews, with the establishment of the church (Heb. 12:22-29). Haggai 2:22 is a parallel to Ezekiel 38:19-21. Zechariah confirms that this promise made to Zerubbabel is Messianic (Zech 4:13). There is every reason to interpret Haggai identifying Zerubbabel as a type of the Messiah. Zerubbabel led the exiles out of the Babylonian bondage, just as Christ would lead his people from the bondage of sin. Zerubbabel built a temple to God--just as Jesus is building the church (Eph. 2:11-22; 4:1-16). Haggai's burdens must be interpreted in the light of all the other prophets of the OT (especially Isaiah and Daniel). The OT prophets said nothing about the second coming of Christ--they were occupied with and focused totally on the first coming of the Messiah. The prophets often had to put this message of the first coming of the Messiah in apocalyptic style language and that is why some of it sounds like the end of the world. IF YOU HAD BEEN A JEW WHEN JESUS CAME, AND HE TOLD YOU THAT YOUR TEMPLE, WORSHIP, AND CULTURE WOULD NO LONGER BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD AS A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP, WOULDN'T YOU THINK IT WAS "THE END OF YOUR WORLD?!" But the new heavens and earth, i.e., the Messianic kingdom (see Isa. 66:1-24) would be so much more glorious people from all over the earth would come to it and become citizens.

Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

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