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Haggai: The Strait Talker
Ezra 5:1-2 and Haggai 1:1 to 2:9

Haggai the strait talker DIG: Why did the Jews stop building the Temple in the first place? How did that gradually grow into complacency over time? God does not dwell in any physical structure, so why was He angry the people had not rebuilt His house? What were the larger issues involved? How did ADONAI get His message across to His people? What circumstances did He use? What people did He use? How does He do similar things today? What does it mean to be strong? What does it mean to not fear? How are these things done voluntarily? Why were the Jews distressed when they saw their new Temple?

REFLECT: What are some comparisons people make when it comes to a home, a car, or success? What traps do people fall into when they compare their situation to the situation of others? What exactly is complacency? What causes it and what are its results? How can you guard against it? What does it mean to set your heart on your ways? How is this done, in practical terms? Why is it so important for you to do? Why do people lose sight of the Lord's priorities in the midst of their busy lives? How do the demands of daily life crowd out concern about the things of God? How can you guard against this? What priorities and perspectives do you share with Ha'Shem? Which priorities or perspectives are more like those of the world? What will you do this week to renew your mind?



All we know about **Haggai**, the man, is recorded for us in the prophecy that bears his name. This little book of a minor prophet covers the span of four months, from August 29 to December 18, **520 BC**. **He** most likely had returned to **Jerusalem** from Babylon with **Zerubbabel** eighteen years earlier in 538 BC. The name **Haggai** means *festival*. At first glance, this name may seem very ironic, given the stark nature of **his** message from **Ha'Shem**. However, **God** had sent **His people** to **Yerushalayim** specifically to reinstate true worship and to rebuild **His Temple**, which *should have been* a *festive* occasion. If there was any loss of festive nature, it was because **the people** had lost **His** perspective.

Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Isra'el. Here, **the prophets** functioned as catalysts to finish the rebuilding with **their** encouraging message **(Ezra 6:14). Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the House of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them supporting them (Ezra 5:1-2).** Those workers were not on their own, **God was over them.**

A Call to Build the House of ADONAI

In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of ADONAI came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak (Ezra 3:2), kohen gadol: "Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot: 'This people say the time has not come – the time for the House of ADONAI to be rebuilt.' (Haggai 1:1-2)." The people of **God** had been procrastinating, saying that the time for building **the Temple** was not right for **them**. **They** were

unwilling to build; **they** were waiting for the right moment when such work could be done. **They** had been excusing **their** inactivity. For sixteen years **they** had convinced **themselves** of this.

Then the word of ADONAI came through Haggai the prophet. He was not a man to mince **his** words. **His** message was to stop making excuses, to make **God's** priorities **their** priorities, and resume the work of rebuilding **the Temple**. **"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this House lies in ruins?** Walls and ceilings overlaid with cedar were common in wealthy homes. **The Jews** had made **their** own comfort a high priority, while ignoring **the LORD's house**. **They** were building luxury homes, while **the Temple** was in ruins.[85]

But now," thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Haggai 1:3-4):

"Set your heart on your ways!
You sowed much but bring in little.
You eat but are never satisfied.
You drink but not enough to get filled.
You put on clothes but no one is warm.
And whoever earns wages works for a bag full of holes." Haggai rebuked **the people** for **their** selfish indifference and negligence. **Thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot: "Set your heart on your ways (Haggai 1:5-7)!** This was the central message of **Haggai's** prophecy. **He** called on **God's people** to examine **their** lives, make sure **they** were living in obedience to **God's** word, and make sure our priorities are **His** priorities.

Paul warned his readers that this process is we are to understand **ADONAI's** will for our lives.

I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice – holy, acceptable to God – which is your spiritual service. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2). As believers in **Yeshua,** we cannot hope to understand **Ha'Shem's** perfect will unless we are constantly renewing our minds by the Word of **God**. If we forget to **set our heart on** our **ways**, we will end up **conformed to the world.**[86]

Go up to the hills, bring wood and build the House. Three relatively simple steps outline what **YHVH** required of **His people**. **They** were to go to the forest (which had regrown during the exile), bring lumber and start building. By putting **the LORD** first, **they** would honor **Him** in **their** worship, and **they** would be blessed in all the other areas of **their** lives. There was mystery surrounding **His** will, and **the people** didn't lack understanding of what **He** wanted . . . what **they** lacked was simple obedience. **Then I will delight in it and I will be glorified," says ADONAI (Haggai 1:8). His delight** would not come from the building itself. In fact, **the Temple** was to be a pitiful structure compared to the magnificent **Temple** that **Solomon** built **(Second Chronicles Chapters 2-5)**. Rather, **ADONAI** would take pleasure in seeing **His chosen people** worshiping **Him** in the way **He** had prescribed, and as a result, **His** name would **be glorified** when **He** would see **them** doing so.[87]

But instead, **the Jews** were busy running "here and there," looking after **their** own interests, while **the House of the LORD lay in ruins**. **"You have looked for much, but indeed, there is little. What you have brought home, I have blown away. Why is this?" – it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva'ot – because My House lies in ruins, while you are running, each to his own house (Haggai 1:9). ADONAI** snorted with contempt when **He** saw **His people's** priorities as **they** strove after things of this world that would not last. **Yeshua** faced the same problem when **He** said: **Therefore, do now worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the pagans eagerly pursue all these. But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:31-33).**

The price of **the people's** disobedience came in the form of an economic catastrophe. **Therefore, because of you, the sky has withheld dew and the earth has withheld its yield. For I have called for a drought on the land, the hills and the grain, on the new wine, the oil –** the primary crops of **the Land** – **on what the ground brings forth, on mankind and beast, as well as all labor of hands** because of **their** disobedience **(Haggai 1:10-11). The people** had stopped working on **the Temple** to save riches for themselves, yet **ADONAI** was disciplining them by sending drought and famine.

The effect of **his** sermon was dramatic. **The people** immediately obeyed, turning away from the past and focusing with renewed zeal and dedication to the work at hand. **Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak,**

Kohen Gadol, and all the remnant of the people heeded the voice of ADONAI their God and the words of Haggai the prophet, since ADONAI their God had sent him. So the people revered ADONAI, knowing that **God** was present **(1:12). They** renewed **their** commitment to **Him** and to seeking **His** presence. **The people's** repentance came less than two weeks after **Haggai** began preaching.[88]

Then, as soon as **the people** repented and embraced **God's** priorities, **ADONAI** relented **His** hand of discipline and began pouring out **His** blessings once again. **Haggai, the messenger of Adonai, spoke to the people with the message of ADONAI, "I am with you!" – it is a declaration of ADONAI (1:13).**

God was with **them** in a new way, and there seemed to be a unity among **them** that hadn't been seen since the days **they** had first arrived back in **Yerushalayim**.[89] **Then ADONAI** energized the leaders and **the people** through **His** word to carry on the work of rebuilding **the Temple**. **He stirred the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, Cohen Gadol, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and did work on the House of ADONAI-Tzva'ot their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius (Haggai 1:14-15).**

The Promised Glory of this Latter House

The people had once again experienced some opposition and discouragement, and **ADONAI** sent another prophecy through **Haggai**, this time concerning events in **the far eschatological future**, when **YHVH** would build **His** most glorious **Temple**.

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of ADONAI came through Haggai the prophet (Haggai 2:1). According to **Leviticus 23:39-44**, this would be the final day of the feast of **Shukkot**, in which **the people** celebrated **God's** provision for **the Israelites** during **their** forty years of wilderness wanderings and gave thanks for a bountiful harvest. On this occasion, **God** gave **Haggai** another message to give to **the people**.

Ha'Shem said: **Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, kohen gadol, and to the remnant of the people** and ask **them** three questions that would expose **their** unfavorable

comparison of Solomon's **Temple** to the one **they** had refused to finish. **"Who remains among you who saw this House in its former glory? So how do you see it now? Does it not seem as nothing in comparison in your eyes (Haggai 2:2-3)?** The older **Jews** would have remembered the magnificence and splendor of Solomon's **Temple**, but the rebuilt one must have seemed like a shack compared to the original one. Yet **ADONAI** was not discouraged and **He** didn't want **His people** to be discouraged. **He** had a far more glorious **Temple** in mind**.** The future Millennial **Temple will** be filled **with His Sh'khinah glory** because **He** will rule and reign from the Most Holy Place (see the commentary on **Isaiah Db – The Nine Missing Articles in the Messiah's Coming Temple**).

But now, Zerubbabel, chazak!" – it is a declaration of ADONAI – "and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, Cohen Gadol, and all the people of the land, chazak!"- it is a declaration of ADONAI – "and work! For I am with you!" – it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Haggai 2:4). The LORD encouraged **the leaders** and **the people** to take **strong** action since **the Ruach** was **with them**. **Strength** is normally something that you cannot choose – a person is either physically **strong** or not, according to heredity. However, **strength** in **ADONAI** *is* a matter of choice: the choice to **set one's heart** on steadfast obedience regardless of the cost.[90]

"According to the word I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. My Ruach is standing in your midst. Do not fear" (Haggai 2:5)! Closely related to the previous **declaration** is the command **not to fear**. The point of the motivation was to call **the LORD's** people to work with the motivation of what lay ahead – the unseen rather than what could be seen – much as Paul seemed to be doing when he said: **We look not at what can be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal (Second Corinthians 4:18)**.

For thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot: "In just a little while I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all the nations. The treasures of all the nations will come, and I will fill this House with His Sh'khinah glory," says ADONAI-Tzva'ot. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine!" God's inexhaustible natural resources will be available for constructing a future Millennial Temple **– it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva'ot (Haggai 2:6-8).** The **shaking** of the cosmic bodies that **Haggai** referred to here looks to the upheaval in the universe described in **Revelation Chapters 6-19**, the subjugation of the nations by **the Messiah**, and the setting up of **His Kingdom**

that will never be destroyed (see the commentary on **Hebrews Dc – The Earthly Sinai and the Heavenly Tziyon**).

“The glory of this latter House will be greater than the former,” says ADONAI-Tzva’ot. Messianic **Temple**, **the latter House,** will vastly surpass anything **Zerubbabel** and **the returnees** could build. Then the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom are summed up in one word – **shalom**. **“In this place, [Yerushalayim], I will grant shalom” – it is a declaration of ADONAI-Tzva’ot (Haggai 2:9).** The thousand years of **shalom** will result only from the presence of **the Prince of Peace** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ck – He Will Be Called the Prince of Peace**).[91]

We find ourselves in a similar place as the Jews in **Haggai’s** day. The gospel has been proclaimed, and there are believers around the world. Nevertheless, the world is dominated by wars and rumors of wars. Injustice is the norm, and hunger and poverty are rampant. Yet we, too, can be encouraged by the promise of **God** that **Messiah** is going to return to earth and fulfill every one of **His** promises. We know that **He** will establish **His** glorious **Kingdom** on earth and from that **Temple, ADONAI** will return **shalom** and order to the world.[92]