

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Lesson 2, Chapter 1

Open your Bibles to Haggai chapter 1. This is a short chapter, that is straight to the point, and so we'll be able to complete it in this one lesson. That said, there are some technical details, and some ambiguous words that we will attempt to deal with, hopefully to gain some clarity and better understanding.

READ HAGGAI CHAPTER 1 all

Immediately we get the pragmatic, unemotional approach Haggai was taking in recording his prophecy: it would revolve around a chronologically and historically based structure. To get us oriented, he says that it was during the 6th month of the 2nd year of the reign of King Darius that what he's about to report, happened. Why would he choose this way to explain the timeframe? Because there was no such thing as a universally applied calendar in those days.

When we read today of an event happening on such and such B.C., for example, that is merely a modern way of employing a modern chronology to an ancient time to help us get a handle on it. But, obviously, no society had a pre-Christ calendar system. Rather, different kinds of calendars were employed for different uses based on different things. Here in Haggai, the type of calendar system is called Regnal. It is based on the time a certain king reigned, and it is never compared to a calendar that is more general. Thus, the way such a date is stated is in total relation to the period of time a certain king served. The day when the king to replace another king was enthroned, the calendar was reset, and it would say day 1 of year 1 of the reign of so and so. So, every nation would have a calendar system based on the reign of their own king, and no two systems would line up with one another.

In our case, the words do not mean to say that it was 6 months into the 2nd year of Darius's reign. Rather it means that in the 2nd year of Darius's reign, it was the 6th month of the Hebrew civic calendar that Yehoveh spoke through Haggai. The 6th month is Elul, about our month of September. Since this was the northern hemisphere, then this was late summer/early fall in the agricultural cycle. Harvesting was underway in Yehud, but the winter fallow season wasn't far off.

Darius is the English-ized version of his Persian name, Daryavesh. Darius followed Cambyses, who followed Cyrus as kings of Persia. So, this address of God to Haggai would correspond to 520 B.C. in our modern way of reckoning it. One of my favorite Old Testament scholars, Charles L. Feinberg, points out that because Haggai is dating his reception of God's oracle according to a gentile, and not a Hebrew, king, then this surely means that the "times or the age of the gentiles" that we read of in Luke's Gospel account was already underway.

CJB Luke 21:22-24 ***22 For these are the days of vengeance, when everything that has been written in the Tanakh will come true. 23 What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! For there will be great distress in the Land and judgment on the people. 24 Some will fall by the edge of the sword, others will be carried into all the countries of the Goyim, and Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim until the age of the Goyim has run its course.***

What this means is that the age of the gentiles is much older than it is typically spoken as. It also means that in Yeshua's time on earth, He, too, was living in the age of the gentiles. As it stands, very likely we are still living in it. There is some hint in the Bible that when Jerusalem is no longer trampled on by gentiles that it will signal that the age of the gentiles has come to a close. While it is true that Jerusalem was taken away from the Arab world by Israel in 1967, the reality is that the Temple Mount is still considered Muslim jurisdiction, and that East Jerusalem is also somewhat separate from the rest of Jerusalem. So, my conclusion is, we're not quite there yet.

Verse 1 explains that what came to Haggai was something called "the word of Yehoveh". The root Hebrew word is **dabar**, and here it means "to speak". When the words **dabar** and Yehoveh are coupled in Holy Scripture, it forms a compound term that means a prophetic revelation. I want to alert you that nearly all Bibles will obscure this meaning by saying instead, "the word of the Lord". I've explained in the past that this is an intentional mistranslation by Christian Bible translators of very simple, much used Hebrew words. The Hebrew word for lord is **adonai**. That is not what is present here. Rather the word is in Hebrew spelled **yud-heh-vav-heh**... Yehoveh...God's formal name. So why translate it incorrectly? Because in the New Testament, the most common reference to Jesus is Lord.

Thus, when we read “The Lord” in the Old Testament, the intent is for our minds to think of God the Son rather than God the Father, because the Constantinian Church has from its inception attempted to phase out God the Father as but the God of Jews, while God the Son is the God of the Christians.

We’re going to segue from verse 1 for just a few moments in order for me to explain the backdrop of how the Hebrews viewed the entire concept of prophetic revelation, which contains an important element that we typically don’t know anything about, and which both Jewish and Christian scholars have chosen to dance around because it causes some doctrinal conflicts within both of those faiths when it is acknowledged.

The entire concept of “the word of Yehoveh” comes from the realm and language of ancient royal courts. This is a typical word formula for a discussion or decree of a king to his royal council, upon which the royal council would validate the message as authentic, and then deliver it to the people. In other words, from the ancient Hebrew mindset, when God announced an oracle, it first was presented to His Heavenly Divine Council, and then from the Council it was delivered to its earthly recipients. This is something I have spoken about in others of my lessons on the Minor Prophets at greater depth than I will today. But, the bottom line is that the Holy Scriptures are clear that there is a Divine Council in Heaven consisting of the highest caste of divine beings who are called in Hebrew **elohim**. Despite what is standard lingo within Christianity, **elohim** does NOT mean “God”. Generically it means something like “divine beings”. So, biblically speaking, God is portrayed as the highest of the **elohim**, who sits above the Divine Council of **elohim**. But, since the Divine Council **elohim** are created beings, yet God is self-existent, then it is not meant to say that God is a super-**elohim** any more than God is a super-human being. Rather it is that since **elohim** is the name of the office of the ruling administrative caste of Heaven, and Yehoveh sits as the ultimate ruler over that Divine Council, then He can be thought of as The Highest Elohim even though He is of a different and higher type and substance than the other **elohim**. And, in fact, we run across the term for God as The Highest Elohim on several occasions in the Bible.

Thus, Israelite thought, and their literature sees, God as the great judge or king who proclaims His oracles to, and in consultation with, the Divine Council. I’m not

going to debate exactly how this process works, because we're not told. However, the reality is that the acknowledgement and effect of the existence and operation of the Divine Council in concert with God is deeply embedded in biblical prophecy, is simply taken as a given by the Prophets themselves, as well as the Israelites who heard or read those prophecies. This is how we need to understand what is being said, challenging as that might be.

What is interesting is that this scenario I've just described is brought to life quite vividly in Zechariah chapter 3. And so, when I finish Haggai, and then we move quickly on to Zechariah, I'll spend more time with it when we get to Zechariah 3. OK. Back to verse 1.

The oracle from Heaven was through Haggai, but it was to Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zerubbabel was a common Babylonian name that meant "seed of Babylon". Therefore, to further identify him we learn that his father's name was Shaltiel. It appears that this Zerubbabel, governor of Yehud, was actually a descendant of King David, and the grandson of the exiled King Jehoiachin. So, although he was appointed by the King of Persia, the Judeans accepted him as legitimate because he was of the proper lineage. It is similar for the other named Jewish official, Johsua, who was the High Priest. He, too, was appointed by the King of Persia, but because he he was of the proper High Priest lineage, so the Judeans were fully onboard with him being the High Priest. Clearly, the Persian monarchy wanted to do what was right and acceptable from the perspective of the Judean exiles... a magnanimous and enlightened gesture to be sure.

Nearly always in the past, a Prophet was assigned to a king. So, the Prophet would bring God's message to a particular king. Haggai was not brining God's message to a king, but rather to a governor and an appointed High Priest. This demonstrates that while Zerubbabel and Joshua had a measure of authority over the residents of Yehud, they were in no way the ultimate authority as a king represents. The people were fully aware of this.

It is common among Bible expositors to say that Zerubbabel is just another name for Sheshbazzar (Sheshbazzar was the appointed governor of Yehud during the first wave of Jewish immigration back to Yehud). This is not correct. Sheshbazzar is either the uncle or the brother of Zerubbabel... 2 different people.

One of the reasons for this discrepancy is because in the 1Chronicles chapter 3 lineage of King David, we don't find a Sheshbazzar listed, but we do find a Shenazzar. There is little doubt that this is simply a copyist's misspelling, and Shenazzar is actually Sheshbazzar.

The English name Joshua is spelled two different ways in Hebrew. Pronouncing it phonetically, one way is **Yehoshua**, and the other way is **Yeshua**. You heard that correctly. If one wanted to more properly say Our Savior Yeshua's name in English, it would be Joshua and not Jesus. Translated it means "Yehoveh saves". Haven't heard it that way? Think about the ramifications if this were to be acknowledged by the Church, and that will help you in understanding why only rarely is Christ's name explained in terms of its meaning, and then it is usually said to mean "God saves". Since Yehoveh is the name that at Mt. Sinai God said was His formal name, and since Yehoveh and Yeshua are clearly two different entities, spoken about separately in the Bible, then it says that Christ's name means that God the Father saves. Now, to be intellectually honest, a person's name usually meant to put forward a hoped-for attribute of that person, but it didn't mean that literally that person (possessing whatever name) actually fully exhibited the characteristics that the name implies.

So as to complete that thought about Yeshua and the meaning of His name as "Yehoveh saves", the best way I've learned to explain exactly what it is that Yeshua represents in His role in the Godhead, is by defining Him as "God's saving will". That is, as the Holy Spirit can be said to represent the teaching and comforting will of God, so Yeshua can be said to represent God's desire and vehicle to save humanity.

Verse 2 begins with the same mistranslation used by nearly all Bible versions saying "Lord of hosts" rather than the literal "Yehoveh of hosts". So, this is still referring the oracle giver as The Father, or as the Hebrews of that day would have mentally pictured it, God as the supreme head of the Heavenly Divine Council.

The crux of verse 2 is as a rebuke of those returned Jewish exiles for their indifference towards rebuilding God's House. As a rationalization for their lack of concern, they said that it just wasn't time, yet, to restart the project. What would

have made it the right time from their viewpoint isn't stated. It is true that when that first wave of returning Jews arrived, they faced a largely disagreeable and unwelcoming bunch of relatively new residents, many of which were Samaritans...that is, a hybrid Hebrew/gentile people that migrated to Judah from the former Northern Kingdom of Ephraim/Israel. And, those disagreeable residents kept finding ways to subvert the efforts to rebuild the Temple, leading to the Judeans abandoning it. The reality is that despite all the lofty religious talk they made to one another up in Babylon, of wanting to return to their homeland primarily to rebuild the Temple and start the services again in order to restore fellowship with God, it was really far more about their personal interests, no doubt reclaiming family farms, vineyards and orchards as the priority. Had they exercised faith might God have dealt with the Samaritans, and provided enough funding, to complete the project? There's no way to know for certain. However, clearly, God was most displeased with His people for having little interest in getting back to work on His House now that conditions had changed for the better.

It is rather telling that God says "**this** people is saying" rather than "**My** people are saying". It isn't that God has disowned them as much as it is expressing His disgust at them. By now the job of rebuilding the Temple had been stopped for 15 years!

In His oracle to Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people, God asks what can probably be labeled a rhetorical question tinged in sarcasm. It is essentially this: you say it isn't the right time for you to rebuild My House that lay in ruins, but I notice you found it time for you to rebuild your own houses using fine and expensive materials like wood paneling. The contrast isn't really about the nice materials the people used to build their homes with. Rather, it is between that which is finished, and that which isn't. The people's houses are finished and they are settled in them, but God's house is unfinished.

In response to His own largely rhetorical question, God continues His upbraiding of His people. The CJB says that God tells the Judeans to "think about your lives". Most other English translations counter with "Consider your ways". What it says literally is: "Set your heart to your ways". Since biblically "heart" means "mind" in such a context, then the instruction is for the Judeans to think about their

conduct, with the inherent meaning to realize what they have been doing by ignoring rebuilding the Temple is selfish and not even as beneficial to their own best interests as they'd like to believe. I like the way that J.H. Michaelis puts it: the people should ponder "your designs and actions, and their consequences". Indeed, verse 6 goes on to spell out the consequences for the people's neglect to rebuild God's House. They've sown plenty of seed, but the crop yield is small. They ought to have enough food, but they have to ration what they have... they just don't have enough food to fully satisfy their appetites. They have *some* wine to drink, but not enough to get joyously tipsy. They have clothing, but not enough to keep them properly comfortable and warm. And, there is work to be had in order to have an income, but that money doesn't ever seem to go far enough to properly care for their families. In other words, instead of abundance and gain the returned exiles are facing lack in most areas of their lives. The people are not faring well at all; and it is a direct result of their lack of enthusiasm for rebuilding God's Temple.

Although this isn't a lesson on tithing and giving, the Bible tells us that the results of giving, or not giving, are rather ironic in outcome. Giving to God's ministry and towards helping others brings tangible rewards. One might feel that giving will simply deplete what we have to spend on our own needs, such that by not giving it allows us to have more for the things we want. I cannot say that in some instances that might be so. But often as not, the results are the opposite. For reasons hard to fathom, giving tends to actually benefit the giver in tangible ways. It could be as simple as our money somehow going farther. Our material possessions somehow lasting longer. Our labors somehow producing more. Or, it might be a matter of having a greater sense of well-being or having actually better well-being. Yes, since tithing is a commandment of God, then it is an obligation and not an option. Of course, God doesn't stand over us to collect.

I'm certainly not one to preach the Prosperity Doctrine because I think it is nonsense at best, and hypocritical at worst. The Prosperity Doctrine would have us give for nothing but selfish motives. But, we are also shown throughout God's Word that giving in the right attitude and motivation can, and usually does, result in personal benefit. The story here in Haggai is about God's people deciding not to give and God is saying, so look at the result of your disobedience and lack of faithfulness.

In verse 8, God says to get to work! Go get the wood necessary for the Temple. In this He will be glorified. We've already discussed why, on a practical level, a Temple is a necessary and ongoing symbol of the covenant people's agreement to be in covenant with Yehoveh. And that the Temple is where God intends on having fellowship with His people. So, while God being properly glorified by having the Temple rebuilt, and having a closer level of fellowship with His people, are paramount... at the same time He is prescribing how the people can move from their present state of insufficiency to plenty. It is all tied together. Yet, let's not overlook some simple words that also impact why God wants His Temple to be rebuilt.

It is towards the end of this verse where God says He wants the Temple so that He will be glorified. The RSV translates this more literally and it comes out this way:

^{RSV} **Haggai 1:8** *Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may appear in my glory,*

Here's the thing; what does it mean for God to appear in His glory? We typically take this to mean "in His splendor" or some such approach. I don't think that's correct. We have to go back to the days when this oracle was given, and the concepts in the Hebrews' and in the other nations' minds about gods and temples. The idea was that the glory of God was but another manifestation of God in the same way that Christians think of His Son or of the Holy Spirit as other manifestations of God. That is, we need to capitalize the word Glory because it is a proper noun... it is a name of a divine entity. God's Glory in the Temple was that manifestation of Him that indicated His power, His presence, and His pleasure in being there. A fine example of this is when we read about a cloud filling up the sanctuary in Solomon's Temple on the day it was inaugurated into service. That cloud was God's visible Glory. So... the idea is that God WANTS to be present in the Temple in the form of His Glory, but that obviously can't happen until the Temple is rebuilt. And right now, there is nothing but a foundation that has been left abandoned for 15 years.

Verse 9, then, is actually pronouncing a double curse on these returned exiles as the consequence of their sin of not putting God first and building His Temple. God says that you had high expectations for your incomes of produce and labor, but instead you got little. And, what little you did get you took it home and (like chaff in a wind) God blew it away. Curse 1, little results of the fruits of their labors. Curse 2, what little they did get didn't stretch as far as it should have. And, so that the people are very clear as to why this is happening, the final words of this verse reiterate it.

CJB Haggai 1:9 ...*Why?*' asks ADONAI-Tzva'ot. *'Because my house lies in ruins, while every one of you runs to take care of his own house*

Carol and Eric Meyers offer an alternative reading of verse 9 that I think has much merit. When I first began to look at this chapter in earnest, I was struck by the words that spoke of God blowing something away. I can't recall anything anywhere else in the Bible that phrases God's thoughts or words in such a way. And when that happens, we need to look closer at how the Hebrew is being translated because either there has been a copyist error handed down in the Hebrew, or the translation is off the mark probably due to not understanding the ancient context.

Where, in the middle of verse 9, virtually every Bible translation reads, "...when you brought it home, I blew it away", the Meyers' say it ought to read, "...what you have brought to the House, I have blown away". In other words, it is not referring to someone's home, but rather it is referring to what the people brought to the Altar as their sacrifices, and the context is probably speaking of their firstfruits sacrifices, which God has refused to accept. That is, we need to realize that the Altar was in operation even if the Temple building itself had not yet been rebuilt. The High Priest, Joshua, as well as the other priests and the people assumed that they could sacrifice using the Altar (which would have been rather cheap and easy to reconstruct), without the existence of the Temple sanctuary. When we read in the Torah of God accepting the sacrifices of His people it sometimes speaks of God figuratively inhaling the smoke of the sacrifice and the sweet smell being pleasing to Him. This means that He is accepting the sacrifices that He commanded be performed because the people were being obedient in doing them, and in doing the sacrifices properly. Here, God doesn't inhale the

smoke and declare it sweet, instead He blows the smoke away from Himself as a sign of His non-acceptance. I must admit, in addition to this alternative reading being grammatically possible, it makes more sense. The assumption has always been that of an analogy to a wind that blows chaff away, but that's all it has ever been... an assumption...because there is nothing in this verse that explicitly makes that connection. While I have my preferential reading as it being about sacrifices that God refuses to accept, by no means am I am certain of it, even if the context allows for that understanding better than the more traditional interpretation.

Further, if this alternative reading is correct, then this means that the 2nd of the 2 curses is not about food not stretching sufficiently for the people, but rather it is that God won't accept their sacrifices. And, that is really serious because it means God's people have been deceiving themselves into thinking they can use the Altar without putting the Temple back into operation.

Verses 10 and 11 continue with God explaining the "why" of Israel's continuing lack of basic necessities that have haunted and confounded the people. The problem is that the land isn't producing as it should, and this is primarily because not enough rain is falling or at the right times. I remind you that this prophetic oracle is being given during the late summer/early fall harvest time. Obviously, the harvest is coming in most disappointing, something I'm sure the farmers already knew was going to happen as they watched their crops not thrive. God cursed the land with a drought, whether on the plains or the hills. Nowhere in Yehud was their enough rain. Thus, every manner of produce from grain to olive oil to wine has been negatively affected. Humans were affected as well as animals. This means that even drinking water had become scarce. What is emphasized is that God did this as punishment; it was not coincidence and it was not merely some random weather cycle.

Then there is this: the bulk of the Jews who returned to their homeland had been born in captivity. They knew nothing of the land and climate conditions that their parents had been sent away from, nor how farming was accomplished there. Up in Babylon, agriculture that used irrigation techniques relied less on rainfall and so their annual yields were more even and predictable. Without doubt those who returned seriously overestimated the crop yields they could expect, and were so

very concerned to see their fields, orchards, and vineyards withering up, having no remedy for it. What God said through Haggai likely would have had much impact on them as the following verses tell us it did.

Verse 12 says that as a result of what was happening to their food supply, and what Haggai said about their lack being directly connected to not rebuilding the Temple, the Jewish leadership and the people of Yehud finally paid attention to what God said and changed their ways. But, as is the human way, they didn't change until they had exhausted all human means of trying to solve a problem on their own. Until conditions became dire enough, their ears and hearts were closed. People of faith, we don't have to be this way. We don't have to despair or suffer until we come to the end of ourselves before we sincerely seek God, open to what He shows us. Yet, always... it will involve our obedience. Not obedience to some subjective, intangible thoughts that we are sure is coming from God, but rather obedience to God's written code of conduct and morality that He set down 3300 years ago. If our walk with God teaches us one thing, it is that by living righteously in His eyes, then the rest will take care of itself. However, in the midst of continuing disobedience, we will not seek God or we will attempt to operate outside of His covenant provisions, which means nothing will change for the better.

It is interesting that verse 12 says that the people were filled with the fear of God when they finally listened to Haggai. I'd like to talk on this matter for a long time, but I'll restrain myself and come right to the point. Fearing God carries a double meaning in the Bible. It's means to have allegiance to Him, and it also means to have a healthy trepidation about going against Him or being disobedient to Him. The modern Church has overturned this biblical reality and said that with Jesus, we no longer need to fear God. That is a false doctrine. God has absolute power over us, and over everything. He will react against us if He deems we deserve it, whether we believe in Christ as Savior or not. If that doesn't bring about a healthy fear then you don't believe what the Holy Scriptures tell us about God. And that, dear friends, is very dangerous.

CJB Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of ADONAI is the beginning of wisdom...*

Haggai is a messenger. God's will is communicated to His people through His Prophets, and here God is making it clear that Haggai is God's authorized messenger. Since the end of the Prophetic era, because we now have God's communicated word to us in writing, then to be a Prophet and a messenger means to teach people God's written Word. Therefore, for Israel to ignore the Prophets' messages to them, is the same as us ignoring God's written Word.

At the end of verse 13 when God says "I am with you", it is not a nicety meant to give the people some intangible comfort or emotional support. Rather, invariably in the Bible it has to do with Israel being tangibly protected from sickness or from an enemy, or it is about having the provision of sufficient water and food. So, when God says to Israel (or to some other group) I will **not** be with you, it means the opposite.

Verse 14 is straightforward enough in its essence: the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua, along with the common folks, became invigorated about rebuilding the Temple. The verse literally says Haggai's message "roused the spirit" of the leaders and the people. It means an arousal to action. The Lord filled the returnees with energy and enthusiasm to, together, do a task that up to now had been neglected. So, as we read in verse 15, work began anew on the Temple precisely on the 24th day of the 6th month, the month of Elul. It had been only 23 days since Haggai confronted the people with God's message. We learn that when God moves in our hearts, it is nearly impossible for us to sit still; we simply must act.

No doubt, during those 3 weeks much discussion within the government, and with certain representatives of the people, took place. Then, preparations had to be made to get construction underway. It is really quite remarkable for such a huge decision to be made and put into action in but 23 days, but such is the power of the Prophetic Word. Some years ago, I spoke about the power of the Prophetic Word. The reality is that God's will to do something existed long before it was brought to action. What brought it to action? The Prophetic Word. Once God's Prophetic Word is spoken, the action phase begins and it is unchangeable and unstoppable.

This applies to the End Times Prophetic Word as well. All that we read of the various Prophets' words about the End Times have set the wheels of its reality into motion. Let me be clear: the pronouncement of the Prophetic Word is the power and the moment that God's will is set into motion. Humanity may not have noticed it, nor in some cases noticed the long and slow process of it heading towards fulfillment; but rest assured it *is* happening.

Next time we'll open up the somewhat longer chapter 2 of the Book of Haggai.