

EXPOSITIONAL STUDY OF HAGGAI

Introduction

In his four brief prophecies, Haggai provided revelation, illumination, direction, and hope, to the post-exilic community in Jerusalem, particularly about God's desire for them to make construction of the temple their priority, the fallacy of trying to rely on themselves instead of God, the certainty of their fortunes being tied to God's covenant with them, and the intention of God to work things to his glory.

In this paper, I will explain the pertinent historical background, provide a thematic summary of the message, outline the flow of the scriptures, and then explain each verse. This expositional study focuses on the message of the book of Haggai, thus omitting many details not essential to the understanding of the message [though perhaps interesting for other reasons], which are included in full commentaries.

Background

After being warned of what was about to happen by God's prophets [such as Jeremiah], the residents of Jerusalem and Judea witnessed the Babylonian army destroy the Temple and most of Jerusalem in 586BC.¹ At that time, most of the residents of Jerusalem and of much of Judea either suffered exile to Babylon or drifted to Egypt. About 539BC,² in a move orchestrated by God,³ Persia, which had conquered Babylon, allowed about 50,000⁴ Jews to return to Jerusalem.⁵ These people were faithful and united in purpose, willing to give up what is thought to have become a comfortable existence in Babylon to return to their devastated land in Judea.⁶

¹ I noted this date from the following sources: Donald A. Leggett, *Loving God and Disturbing Men: Preaching from the Prophets* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 1990), 132; and Duane F. Lindsey, "Haggai," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004), 1537.

² I noted this date from the following sources: Leggett, 132; and Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 300. An alternative date of 538BC has been proposed by Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 13.

³ Merrill, 11 [citing Isaiah 44:24-45:7].

⁴ I noted this figure from the following sources [citing Ezra 2:64-65]: Lindsey, "Haggai," 1537; Smith, 300; Merrill, 14; and C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 302. However, only about 20,000 people occupied Judah in 522BC, including those who had remained behind in the exile, according to Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 29.

⁵ Archaeologists have discovered the decree allowing many exiled people in Babylon to return to their countries, as noted in the following: Smith, 300; Merrill, 12.

⁶ Leggett, 133.

The Temple had been central to their worship before exile, as an external sign of the covenant with God,⁷ so rebuilding it was an integral aspect of the resettlement of Jerusalem. The returning exiles quickly had a functioning altar for sacrifices and within two years they had the foundation for the temple completed. However, Samaritan resistance, Persian pressure, and internal issues conspired to halt work for the next sixteen years.⁸

While all words from God are important, the ones Haggai delivered were distinctive for a few reasons. First, Haggai's initial two messages were the first direct words from God which we know were spoken to the postexilic community.⁹ Second, Haggai's message was tightly focused and highly successful: he told the people of God's desire that they make as their priority attending to the construction of the temple; and they did.¹⁰ Third, Haggai's message was notably timely to turn around the post-exilic community's relationship with God and get the temple built.¹¹ The books of Zechariah and Ezra pertain to this time period also.

Message¹²

God merits and demands to be our priority. There is no excuse for neglecting our relationship with God or his will for us. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the people could expect great blessings from God when they were keeping their part of the covenant, but – as this post-exilic community knew quite well – the covenant also included curses for disobedience which God would not hesitate to implement. Haggai communicated for God the warnings, “consider your ways” and “do consider from this day onward” six times combined in the first three short messages, and informed the people that their recent struggles had been due to their neglect of doing God's will.

God also merits and demands our dependence. He is the Almighty, not only able to meet all provisional, protective, and empowerment needs presently, but also completely sovereign over future world events, which he will manipulate to bring about his will for Messianic judgment and rule. Believing in his promises and trusting in his faithfulness, we can have hope and encouragement to carry on despite whatever challenges exist in our lives. Haggai communicated God's name as the “Lord of Hosts” [or “Almighty”] twelve times in these four short messages,

⁷ Leggett, 132-133.

⁸ The number of years was either explicitly stated or implied in the following: Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1537; Merrill, 25; and Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 451. Alternative figures of fifteen [Smith, 300], fourteen [Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 470], and nineteen [Leggett, 133] appear in commentaries.

⁹ Verhoef, 45; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1537.

¹⁰ Merrill, 20: “Haggai's distinctiveness lies in his single-mindedness. No other prophecy is so fixed on a specific objective, nor is it likely that any other was so successful in its accomplishment (1:12, 14; cf. Ezra 5:1-2).”

¹¹ Verhoef, 8: “In a time of deep decline and discouragement, his single-minded and ardent preaching again gave the people of God new perspectives on their relationship with God and on the promised blessings. In encouraging the people to rebuild the temple, Haggai gave them a new spiritual center, without which they would have perished as the people of God in the vortex of history.”

¹² This summary is my own, based on the scriptures. The views of my extra-biblical sources are documented below as I discuss the meaning of each verse.

and informed the people that their attempts at self-reliance in recent years had been futile and sinful.

Outline¹³

1:1-11: First Message

- 1:1-5: It was a mistake for the people to have attended to their own houses and concerns, while neglecting to honor God by attending to the construction of the temple.
- 1:6-7: Though the people have worked hard, they have struggled, which they can infer was because of their bad priorities.
- 1:8: They are to build the temple now.
- 1:9-11: Because they have not built the temple while they tended to their own houses and concerns, they have faced God's covenant curses.
- 1:12-15:¹⁴ [The people responded with obedience and reverence.] They can be assured of God's presence. [God stirred them into action.]

2:1-9: Second Message

- 2:1-5: Despite discouragement from comparison of the current temple site with the communal memories of past glory, they are to take courage and work, for God is with them in presence and in covenant relationship.
- 2:6-8: In the future, God will shake the nations, which will come to bring their wealth to the temple, for it is all God's.
- 2:9: The future temple will have more glory than previously, and there will be peace.

¹³ This outline is my own. Verhoef, 39, had a one level outline which agrees with mine in verse allocation except for splitting v.1:15 between the first and second messages; Merrill, 20, allocated verses to the messages as I have, but his outline went three levels deep and differed from mine in second level categorization; Leggett, 131, saw the first chapter as about false contentment and the second as about false discontentment, and also did his categories topically, mixing verses from the second and fourth messages for one category; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1538, had an outline which agreed with my verse allocation on the first level, but differed at the second level; Bullock, 309, had an outline using different headings and breaking out the verses differently at the second level; Smith, 304, had an outline which was not sorted by message, but by topical "priority," though the only difference in verse allocation at the first level was to group the first two messages under the heading of "The Priority of Building the Temple"; Chisholm, 451-455, had an outline of only one level, agreeing with mine on verse allocation; Kenneth Barker, gen. ed. *NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 1327, had an outline which agreed with mine on first level verse allocation, except for separating the first message from the response of the people, but differed at the second level; Archer, 469, had an outline of one level, which agreed with mine in verse allocation.

¹⁴ These four verses are a challenge for one making an outline: v.12 is narrative [thus in brackets]; v.13 contains a mini-message from God for encouragement; vv.14-15 are back to narrative.

2:10-19: Third Message

2:10-14: The people are unclean because of sin, and their work and sacrifices are thus also unclean.

2:15-19: While God brought covenant curses on them for their disobedient neglect, he will now begin blessing them for tending to construction of the temple.

2:20-23: Fourth Message

2:20-23: God will overthrow and defeat the nations, raising up his Messiah and Davidic King.

Argument¹⁵

In the messages God delivered to the post-exilic community through Haggai, there were two main themes, each with two parts. The first theme was that God wanted total devotion from his people, to be the priority in their lives. This was manifested in building the temple and in being obedient to the Mosaic Covenant. The second theme was that God wanted total dependence from his people. This was manifested in dependence for blessings on the harvest and economy as part of the Mosaic Covenant and in trusting God's sovereignty through his working of world events to bring about his glory.

In vv.1:1-15, God used Haggai to emphasize the devotion theme, that the priority of the people should be devotion to God, manifested especially in construction of the temple. In vv.1:2-5, God questioned why the people had seen fit to construct their own houses while neglecting construction of the temple, and he concluded by suggesting to them, "Consider your ways!" In vv.1:6-7, God pointed out to them that they had not thrived despite their best efforts, and concluded again with, "Consider your ways!" So first he asked them to consider the rightness of their behavior, and then he asked them to consider the ramifications of their behavior. The inference for the people was that God had disrupted their prosperity because of his displeasure at their inattentiveness to constructing the temple, and the knowledgeable among them would have tied this displeasure and how it was exemplified to the covenant curses of the Mosaic Covenant.

In vv.1:8-11, God made this more explicit. First, he made clear his will for the moment: they should build the temple! Then, he followed this with a clear statement of what they could have inferred earlier in the message: their lack of devotion to building the temple had led God to bring upon them hardship in keeping with the Mosaic Covenant, in an effort to rekindle their devotion and dependence on him. This also is the first hint of the flip side of God's demand: not only did he demand their devotion, but also their dependence, and here he let them know that he was in control of their welfare. In vv.1:12-15, both themes continued, as God revealed that the people had responded with reverence and obedience to his communication through Haggai, that God had provided them with reassurance of his presence among them, and that God had actively stimulated them to continue the work.

¹⁵ The articulation of the argument of Haggai is my own, after doing my research. The comments herein are based only on my notes from the Bible reading, but some of the ideas might have come to me initially from my research. I have documented my research very carefully in the appendix, and I hope that will suffice.

In vv.2:1-9, the main theme was of dependence: the people should trust in God, for not only would he help them build the temple, but he would control world events to exalt his name, for the sake of his glory. In vv.2:1-5, God stressed that he was with them, particularly that the Holy Spirit was with them, which indicated covenant promises, and that he would help them build the temple. In vv.2:6-9, God stressed that he was in control of both world events and the glory that would come to the temple. This entire message should have provided hope to the listeners, if they trusted him, knowing that God was in control and that things would work out to his desires.

For the third message given through Haggai, God began, in vv.2:10-14, by emphasizing the devotion theme, emphasizing the need for obedience as an integral aspect of their covenant relationship. Then, in vv.2:15-19, he switched to the dependence theme, reminding them again of the covenant curses they had been suffering and announcing that because of their obedience he would now begin blessing them.

In vv.2:20-23, the last message spoken through Haggai which is recorded in scripture, God emphasized the dependence theme, focusing on his control of world events – disruption of human affairs, the demise of rebellious nations and their armies, and imposition of his Davidic King – to bring about his glory. As always, this dependence theme should have elicited hope in the listeners who trusted God.

Conclusion

The discussion herein has shown that Haggai effectively delivered four related concepts to the post-exilic community: that God insisted on their total devotion, on being their priority, and presently that was manifested by construction of the temple [1:1-15]; that – as part of the need to make God their priority – their fortunes were tied to their adherence to the Mosaic Covenant [1:9-11; 2:15-19]; that God insisted on their total dependence to go with this total devotion [1:6-7, 12-15; 2:1-5, 10-19]; and that this dependence was feasible because God was in control of everything, with the intention of working things out for his own glory [2:1-9, 20-23].

There is no record of further prophetic work by Haggai. Even if these four short messages represent all the prophetic work by him, Haggai still was important in the history of the Jewish people, as he was the first to speak to the post-exilic community and his prophecies illuminated God's will for the people, directed them in how to be blessed instead of cursed, encouraged them in multiple ways, and resulted in the commencement of construction of the temple.

Explanation of Each Verse

1:1 On Aug. 29, 520BC,¹⁶ God brought to Haggai a message for the political and religious leaders of Judah. Haggai stressed the divine origin of his messages twenty-five times in these thirty-eight verses,¹⁷ and, as Verhoef said, “the objective quality of

¹⁶ Verhoef, 5; Merrill, 9; Barker, 1328; Chisholm, 451; and F. Duane Lindsey, “Zechariah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor; 2004), 1546.

¹⁷ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1537.

this word was demonstrated by the fact that its occurrence could be dated.”¹⁸ This was possibly a holy festival day since there was a new moon, providing a ready audience in front of the people.¹⁹ Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah and heir apparent to the throne of David as grandson of King Jehoiachin,²⁰ though his name – meaning “descendent of Babylon” – clearly attests to his birth in exile.²¹ Joshua, the High Priest, was son of Jehozadak, the High Priest who was deported to Babylon.²² Merrill noted, “Thus the Davidic royal descent as well as that of the Aaronic priests meet in the postexilic age as common recipients of God’s word of hope and promise through Haggai and Zechariah.”²³

1:2 Haggai often called God the “Lord of hosts” or “Lord Almighty” [twelve times], a term also used by fellow postexilic prophets Zechariah [fifty-three times] and Malachi [twenty-four times], as they encouraged an insecure and defenseless people to depend on God.²⁴ This title emphasized that God had all the power of heaven and earth at his disposal,²⁵ and offered a counterbalance to the political pressures the people faced in being a conquered nation in a vulnerable position.²⁶ God recognized that the people were delaying the construction of the temple. Note God called them “this people,” not “my people,” implying rebuke²⁷ or the people’s alienation from the Lord and holy things.²⁸

1:3-4 God questioned why the people saw fit to construct their own houses while neglecting to build the temple. Reference to the houses being “paneled” could indicate they were nicely finished²⁹ or just completed.³⁰ In any case, God’s point was one of contrasting levels of zeal.³¹ This was an issue of the people’s priorities.³²

¹⁸ Verhoef, 45.

¹⁹ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1538; Smith, 305. Note, Verhoef, 57, thought vv.1-2 were one message to the leaders only and vv.3ff were another, related, message to all the people, probably on the same day. I think it is reasonable to assume that Haggai had an opportunity to address them together.

²⁰ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1539.

²¹ Merrill, 23.

²² Merrill, 24; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1539.

²³ Merrill, 24.

²⁴ Merrill, 27.

²⁵ Verhoef, 52.

²⁶ Verhoef, 53.

²⁷ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1539; Barker, 1328.

²⁸ Merrill, 25.

²⁹ Merrill, 25: “luxurious”; Chisholm, 451: “nice homes.”

The people probably were distracted by the struggles of survival and of rebuilding lives since moving back to the devastated area; the timing was “inconvenient” to the people;³³ perhaps with times so tough, they even reasoned they could not expend what was necessary in resources and effort to rebuild the temple.³⁴ However, God would not accept the cares of their lives to take priority over his will.³⁵ This provides a lesson for today from Leggett: “We must not give God the leftovers of our energies and efforts in commitment, service and worship.”³⁶ People today need to examine their priorities as they try to earn a living, enjoy life, and serve God.³⁷ God also had not been the focus of the people’s dreams and hopes,³⁸ rather they were intent on building their own lives in their own power. This was not just a community issue, but one of each individual who was running to his own house [v.9].³⁹

Other issues might have influenced the people. They faced opposition about building the temple from other local peoples, but this obviously was not an excuse for disobedience.⁴⁰ It is plausible the people thought God would miraculously provide the new temple [based on a misinterpretation of Ezekiel], and so thought building would be disobedient, or that they were waiting for Daniel’s seventy years to be up in 517BC,⁴¹ but if these were their issues, they likely would not have worked on the foundation earlier. It is possible that part of their discouragement was due to uncertainty about the continuation of the covenant with God,⁴² they having lost their autonomy, endured exile, and lately resided in the devastated land without direct word from God, but this also is no excuse for disobedience, and it is clear from the

³⁰ Verhoef, 44: “well-built”; again, on 59: “roofed”; Merrill, 25-26: “completion of construction”; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1539: “roofed.”

³¹ Verhoef, 58.

³² Verhoef, 58; Chisholm, 451.

³³ Verhoef, 55.

³⁴ Verhoef, 56.

³⁵ Verhoef, 58; Leggett, 134.

³⁶ Leggett, 144.

³⁷ Smith, 299-300.

³⁸ Merrill, 7.

³⁹ Merrill, 30.

⁴⁰ Leggett, 134.

⁴¹ Verhoef, 56.

⁴² Merrill, 11.

words that God spoke through Haggai that the driving issue was one of priorities, a heart issue.

- 1:5 “Consider your ways!” said God. Literally, “Set your heart upon your ways,” Merrill explains that this is “an injunction calling for the utmost degree of reflection and attention;”⁴³ it is a call for the people to reexamine their priorities.⁴⁴ God’s people must not put their own wishes ahead of God’s will.⁴⁵ As Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, we must live for God and make the kingdom of God our primary concern.⁴⁶ In Luke 10:42, Jesus taught Martha that while many things were important in life, only one was vital.⁴⁷ Here, God commanded the people to consider how they had messed up their priorities, while in v.7 he would repeat the language to ask them to consider how their mistake had led to their ruin, poetic use of the same phrase to stress both cause and effect.⁴⁸
- 1:6 The people had struggled and not been overly blessed in provision or activity. God’s words here described covenant curses that resulted from bad behavior in the covenant relationship.⁴⁹ God’s covenant demand was that the people put God first, be obedient, and trust that he would take care of them. Instead, they had been trying to take care of themselves and ignoring their priority to rebuild the temple, which brought curses down from God. A good meditation for today is that the promise of provision in Matthew 6:33 is conditional: put God first, then trust him to provide. In the present dispensation, we do not have the same type of covenant as the people in Haggai’s day, but when we do not live God’s way and do not make him our priority, then we remove ourselves from blessing in many ways.
- 1:7 “Consider your ways!” said God. In v.5, God commanded they consider what they had done; here he asked them to consider the ramifications, so they would understand the connection between their negligence of the temple construction and the struggles in life they were enduring.⁵⁰ Quite often, when people struggle, they look to blame others, their culture, or even God, but God said they should consider their own ways

⁴³ Merrill, 26.

⁴⁴ Leggett, 132.

⁴⁵ Smith, 308.

⁴⁶ Merrill, 7; Verhoef, 33.

⁴⁷ Leggett, 145.

⁴⁸ Verhoef, 60, suggested the command in v.5 referred to both what they had done and the lack of achievement that resulted, and, on 64, that it was repeated in v.7 to stress the appeal for repentance; on the same page, he also discussed another solution, that v.5 referred to past experiences and v.7 to the cause and effect, which suggested they would need to mend their ways in the future.

⁴⁹ Verhoef, 63; see Deuteronomy 28:22-24; 38-40; Leviticus 26:14-20, 26.

⁵⁰ Merrill, 26.

first: most often people dig their own holes. The people's attempts to build their own wealth [or at least welfare] had not worked. As Leggett said, "Little wonder that their efforts toward becoming prosperous are not successful, because prosperity in the Old Testament is not something to be sought directly; it is a by-product of God-centered living."⁵¹ Their neglect of the Temple had resulted in God allowing hard economic times.⁵² Prosperity was a gift from the Lord, coming from pursuing God, not by making prosperity the goal.⁵³ Today, we need to ask ourselves, has the world set our agenda or has God? Are our priorities in line with God's or motivated by selfish interests?⁵⁴ As Leggett said, "There is need for the godly process of examining our lives in light of Scripture. Are we missing out in our Christian life by not walking each day closely with the Lord Jesus?"⁵⁵ As mentioned previously, the people possibly viewed their struggles as a reason to not build the temple yet, but God said it was the reason they should.⁵⁶

1:8 God wanted them to build the temple to please and glorify him. This was to be their priority.⁵⁷ As Lindsey said, "Having rebuked them for what they had *not* done and having shown the fruitlessness of what they *had* done, the Lord challenged them concerning what they *should* do – rebuild the temple to the glory of God."⁵⁸ This was a return to correct priorities: pursuit of a life that exalted God and was obedient to his will. However, just rebuilding was not the whole issue: God wanted their hearts to be right, for them to genuinely restore worship and service.⁵⁹ As Verhoef said, "The priorities in God's relationship with his people are not the temple and temple worship as such, but God himself and his covenant, and only in this context of a living faith and genuine obedience to the word of God can the temple again become the veritable house of the Lord, the place of God's divine and gracious presence. Haggai's message concerning the rebuilding of the temple must be viewed in this light."⁶⁰ God mentioned bringing only wood most likely because there was ample stone lying

⁵¹ Leggett, 135.

⁵² Chisholm, 451.

⁵³ Leggett, 135.

⁵⁴ Both questions from Leggett, 135.

⁵⁵ Leggett, 147.

⁵⁶ Smith, 305.

⁵⁷ Verhoef, 64; Smith, 306.

⁵⁸ Lindsey, 1539; italics in original.

⁵⁹ Merrill, 27; though two pages later he said the temple would glorify God in part because it would allow his glory to inhabit it.

⁶⁰ Verhoef, 35-36.

- around from the ruins of the previous temple construction.⁶¹ God's pleasure signified the opposite of an attitude of punishing sins.⁶²
- 1:9 There is a chiasmic pattern in vv.9-11: judgment, cause for judgment, and judgment, a poetic amplification of God's message.⁶³ Their lack of provision was due to God's intervention, because he was not happy that they had neglected the temple while continuing to work on their own houses.⁶⁴ The phrase rendered "blew upon" spoke of destruction and judgment.⁶⁵
- 1:10-11 Because of their sin, God brought the drought and famine, covenant curses. Covenant obedience was required by God.⁶⁶ God even used a little word play here, as explained by Chisholm: "Ironically, the Hebrew word translated "drought" (v.11, khorab) sounds like the word used to describe the ruined condition of the temple (...khareb)."⁶⁷
- 1:12 The leaders and people responded with reverence [a change of heart] and obedience [a change of behavior],⁶⁸ in contrast to many of the pre-exilic responses to prophetic teaching.⁶⁹ God used Haggai to prompt the beginning of construction. People don't always respond well to prophetic rebuke, but these people, with the memory of exile still present within them, had a desire to please the Lord. Probably their intentions were good, since they were the remnant who returned to the desolate land, so they were willing to see their error and correct it. Haggai was the first prophet through whom God spoke to the post-exilic Judean community,⁷⁰ but before Haggai brought his third and fourth recorded message from God, Zechariah had begun his ministry to the same community,⁷¹ and continued until the temple was dedicated about four and a

⁶¹ Verhoef, 66.

⁶² Verhoef, 66.

⁶³ Merrill, 30; alluded to also in Verhoef, 18.

⁶⁴ Verhoef, 69, said that vv.9-11 were an extended parallel to the earlier part of the prophecy, but, on 72, worried about the implication that people were still building so many years after returning from exile, concluding the people who had already built were now fussing with decoration and expansion. Alternatively, this could be a phrase for tending to their own cares.

⁶⁵ Merrill, 30; cf. Ezekiel 22:20-21.

⁶⁶ Merrill, 30.

⁶⁷ Chisholm, 451; also mentioned in Verhoef, 18, 68.

⁶⁸ Distinction by Lindsey, "Haggai," 1540.

⁶⁹ Bullock, 306.

⁷⁰ Verhoef, 45; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1537.

⁷¹ Lindsey, "Zechariah," 1546.

half years later.⁷² That the people were called “the remnant” was not just that they were the few who had returned from exile, but that they were now acting like the remnant of faithful who always followed God.⁷³

1:13 Sometime within three weeks of the first message,⁷⁴ God declared to be with the people, providing encouragement. Having rebuked their sinfulness and motivated their future obedience, God now provided reassurance.⁷⁵ This should have been the greatest encouragement imaginable,⁷⁶ more important than any worldly or inner assurance. This encouragement helped the people get past their fear, to remember God’s mercy and guidance.⁷⁷

1:14-15 God stirred in their hearts so they would work on the temple. Here we see another reason for the positive response of the people: God was at work within them.⁷⁸ However, as observed by Chisholm, the pattern of divine challenge, human response of obedience, and then divine response of assurance and empowerment portrayed in these verses indicates this is not God acting alone, but rather God acting as “a sovereign king who rewards obedience by giving it a boost.”⁷⁹ Today, God might prompt our hearts with conviction, and when we respond with repentant obedience, he might then strengthen our resolve and empower us to change. The delay from Haggai’s delivery of the first message to the start of construction could have been due to the harvest of figs, grapes, and pomegranates⁸⁰ or because of time needed for planning and gathering resources.⁸¹

⁷² Lindsey, “Zechariah,” 1546; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1538.

⁷³ Verhoef, 81; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1540; or at least God anticipated that they would, as per Merrill, 32.

⁷⁴ Verhoef, 5; Chisholm, 451.

⁷⁵ Leggett, 137.

⁷⁶ Leggett, 138.

⁷⁷ Verhoef, 84-85; Merrill, 33, believed this would have alleviated fear regarding both God’s anger and the intimidation of the task; Barker, 1328, believed this encouragement indicated future success of the enterprise; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1540, also indicated this should have removed apprehensions about completing the task; Chisholm, 452, identified this as assurance of a protective presence, and Bullock, 306, argued along those lines too, but Verhoef, 85, denied there was a biblical basis for this interpretation.

⁷⁸ Leggett, 138; Chisholm, 452.

⁷⁹ Chisholm, 452.

⁸⁰ Verhoef, 88; Merrill, 34; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1540.

⁸¹ Verhoef, 88; Merrill, 32; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1540.

- 2:1-2 About three weeks after work began,⁸² God brought another message through Haggai, to the political and religious leaders and the people. This message was delivered on the last ordinary day of the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles,⁸³ the same time of year as the dedication of Solomon’s temple.⁸⁴ The use of the term “this temple” suggests Haggai delivered it while on the temple site.⁸⁵
- 2:3 God sensed some discouragement among the people, in some way connected to the fact that the temple site seemed like nothing compared to the temple in its former glory. This discouragement most likely was due to recognition of the extensive effort needed to complete the work or the lack of progress made so far due to compulsory holidays.⁸⁶ It is possible that they were discouraged because – despite prophecies from Isaiah and Ezekiel about the new temple surpassing the former glory and beauty of the previous one⁸⁷ – they thought it could not because they lacked suitable materials, sacred objects, and skilled craftsmen.⁸⁸ Some believe that their plans were not to completely recapture the glory of Solomon’s temple,⁸⁹ citing Ezra 3:12, in which those who had seen the Solomonic Temple wept when they saw the foundation of the new temple laid, possibly indicating that even from the foundation they could foresee it would not be as grand as before.⁹⁰ However, as the planned new temple was to exceed the old one in size,⁹¹ and the temple these people might remember would have been largely stripped of material glory prior to the exile,⁹² it seems more likely that they were suffering intimidation about the task ahead.
- 2:4 God told the people to take courage, for he was with them, and to get to work. They were to bravely press on with the work while trusting God to deliver success.⁹³ As God’s people, they were not to allow their concerns to be more influential than God’s

⁸² Verhoef, 5; Merrill, 9; Lindsey, “Zechariah,” 1546; Barker, 1328; Chisholm, 451.

⁸³ Verhoef, 93; Merrill, 37; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1541; Bullock, 306.

⁸⁴ Verhoef, 94; Merrill, 37; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1541; see 1 Kings 8:2.

⁸⁵ Verhoef, 94.

⁸⁶ Verhoef, 92.

⁸⁷ Bullock, 306.

⁸⁸ Verhoef, 97.

⁸⁹ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1541; Chisholm, 452.

⁹⁰ Merrill, 38; Leggett, 139-140; Bullock, 306; Smith, 306 [without reference to Ezra].

⁹¹ Verhoef, 97.

⁹² Verhoef, 96.

⁹³ Verhoef, 97.

plans.⁹⁴ A lesson for today is that success is not about accomplishment, it is about obedience, and we can be successfully obedient if we submit to God's will.⁹⁵ Even if they did have questions about how glorious the new construction would be compared to the old, what was important was that God was with them, not whether the temple rose up to some standard.⁹⁶

2:5 As promised during the Exodus, the Holy Spirit was in their midst, so they were not to fear. This assurance was timely in three ways, for not only was it apparently needed by the people, it also came at the end of the feast which was in remembrance of God's provision during the Exodus, and which was also to celebrate the successful realization of the covenant promises through the harvest, which we know had been poor that year.⁹⁷ Thus, this was both encouragement and reiteration of the covenantal promise.⁹⁸ God referred to himself in Spirit here, perhaps because the Holy Spirit was the stimulus to obedience and accomplishment, as Zechariah would remind these same people in encouraging them to complete the temple: "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" [Zechariah 4:6 NASB].⁹⁹

2:6-7 God made clear that there would come a time when God would disrupt everything, and the nations would bring their wealth to fill the temple with glory. This was a vision for the end-times stated in apocalyptic terms.¹⁰⁰ God provided clarification later [vv.21-22], that he planned to disrupt the affairs of men.¹⁰¹ Hebrews 12:26 quoted this verse,¹⁰² and vv.12:26-27 related this time to the judgment of the nations at the second coming of Christ.¹⁰³ Here, God began to tell of how the temple in the future would be more glorious than in the past.

Some translations say "The Desire will come," and believe it could refer to Christ, noting the Hebrew term can refer to an individual.¹⁰⁴ However, this is not the best

⁹⁴ Smith, 308.

⁹⁵ Leggett, 140.

⁹⁶ Leggett, 140.

⁹⁷ Verhoef, 94.

⁹⁸ Verhoef, 23; Chisholm, 452; Merrill, 38, stated this was just assurance of triumph and God's presence; Leggett, 140-141, said this promise reminded the people of the covenantal promise of salvation.

⁹⁹ Leggett, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Verhoef, 102-103; Merrill, 40.

¹⁰¹ Leggett, 142.

¹⁰² Lindsey, "Haggai," 1542.

¹⁰³ Barker, 1329.

¹⁰⁴ Barker, 1329.

interpretation since the verb “will come” is plural in Hebrew, suggesting the subject should be plural also,¹⁰⁵ and this translation is based on the Vulgate.¹⁰⁶ It seems clear from the context of the following verse, that the glory speaks to some material aspect, most likely spoils from the holy war.¹⁰⁷

There is a question of why this did not happen “in a little while,” not in post-exilic times, nor in New Testament times, nor even yet for the next two thousand years.¹⁰⁸ It is possible we are interpreting “in a little while” incorrectly, as the Hebrew words literally mean, “Still one, a little it is,” a construction that is not repeated elsewhere in the Bible, leading some to propose leaving out one word and translating it as “Yet once for all,” removing the sense of immediacy.¹⁰⁹ Another theory, expressed by Chisholm, is that the immediacy was conditional, and the post-exilic community’s failure to meet those conditions “pushed the fulfillment into the more distant future and transformed literal realities into archetypes.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps God’s sense of timing is not the same as ours. Many of Jesus’ messages about the future seemed to imply the same immediacy.

2:8 God said all the wealth was his. This explained the meaning of glory in the previous verse.¹¹¹ This statement also might have served as a reminder that God had provided the material glory for Solomon’s temple construction too.¹¹²

2:9 This would result in greater glory [material glory¹¹³] than even before, and there would be peace then. This mention of peace suggested the presence of the Messiah, with ultimate fulfillment in the millennial temple.¹¹⁴ The messianic motif was also

¹⁰⁵ Merrill, 43; Chisholm, 452.

¹⁰⁶ Verhoef, 103-104.

¹⁰⁷ Verhoef, 103-104; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1542, said that this could refer to Christ’s first advent, when he was in the temple these people were about to construct [after its modification by Herod], could refer to the millennial temple, or could refer to material glory; see discussion on v.9 below.

¹⁰⁸ Chisholm, 453.

¹⁰⁹ Chisholm, 453.

¹¹⁰ Chisholm, 453.

¹¹¹ Verhoef, 105; he viewed this not as speaking to ownership by God, but to spoils of war.

¹¹² Barker, 1329.

¹¹³ Verhoef, 105; Archer, 469, believing God was discussing his presence instead of material glory, said God was saying the temple would be more glorious despite being less pretentious; yet the temple would become even more pretentious after Herod’s modifications.

¹¹⁴ Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1542.

implied by the nations coming to temple.¹¹⁵ Peace was expected in the messianic age,¹¹⁶ assurances of the coming of which were provided by the post-exilic prophets Zechariah and Malachi, as well as by Ezekiel and Daniel during the exile.¹¹⁷ As Merrill said, “With his feet firmly planted in the world of the sixth century, B.C., Haggai lifted up his eyes and those of his people to the eschaton as well – to the day when the Lord would fill His house with His glory and peace.”¹¹⁸ Peace was part of the renewal of the covenant relationship, and included all the blessings of the messianic period, with a prerequisite of faith that led to submission and thus obedience.¹¹⁹

It is interesting to know now that this temple would be defiled and destroyed not long after Christ’s ascension. However, as Chisholm explained, “...it is important to note that verse three... appears to view the Solomonic temple and the second temple as one, not as distinct structures. In the same way, a future temple could be regarded as a later phase of this historic temple.”¹²⁰ Fulfillment of this prophecy came in stages. The people completed the temple in about four years, with the return by Persian decree of some of the precious things which the Babylonians had removed, and with taxes being raised on the surrounding area to help pay for the construction.¹²¹ The temple was expanded with added splendor by Herod, and then visited by Christ. In Christ, the essence and purpose of the temple was fulfilled,¹²² Christ referred to his body as the temple,¹²³ and through him the church became the temple of God.¹²⁴ Thus, Christ’s advent seems to fulfill the promise of this verse, as noted by Verhoef: “In Christ, the very essence and purpose of the OT temple were fulfilled...”¹²⁵ However, the prophecy would not be fully realized until when Christ returned, when the messianic-apocalyptic aspect would come true, though later revelation has

¹¹⁵ Verhoef, 107.

¹¹⁶ Leggett, 144.

¹¹⁷ Leggett, 142-143.

¹¹⁸ Merrill, 20.

¹¹⁹ Verhoef, 107.

¹²⁰ Chisholm, 453; Verhoef, 96, also spoke to this.

¹²¹ Smith, 307; Ezra 6:5-9.

¹²² See Colossians 1:19-20.

¹²³ See John 2:21.

¹²⁴ See 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22; entire thought process from Leggett, 148.

¹²⁵ Verhoef, 37; though he said this was not about the first advent; Archer, 470, also spoke to this.

- revealed that the temple itself will disappear¹²⁶ and the essence of the promise will have to hold true for the New Jerusalem,¹²⁷ with Christ as the temple.¹²⁸
- 2:10 About two months later,¹²⁹ God brought another message through Haggai. During these two months, Zechariah had begun his ministry.¹³⁰
- 2:11-12 God asked the people [through the priests] whether other food items become holy by touching the fold of cloth holding holy meat, and the priests answered no. Consecrated meat would make the garment holy [Lev.6:27], but the garment could not pass on that holiness.¹³¹
- 2:13 God asked if those other food items become unclean by touching someone who is unclean from touching a corpse, and the priests answered yes [Num. 19:22]. Uncleanliness was transmitted more easily,¹³² like a disease.¹³³
- 2:14 God said, so is this people unclean, and this nation, and the work of their hands. Just being back in the holy land did not make them clean; they needed to be obedient.¹³⁴ Their disobedience rendered even their sacrificial worship unacceptable.¹³⁵ Simple association with the temple did not make them clean, while sin did make them unclean.¹³⁶ A lesson for today comes from Smith: God's people cannot "allow good religious activity to replace true holiness."¹³⁷ Verhoef elaborates: "Salvation and

¹²⁶ See Revelation 21:22.

¹²⁷ Verhoef, 109.

¹²⁸ Verhoef, 106.

¹²⁹ Verhoef, 5, 115; Merrill, 9, 46; Barker, 1329; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1542; Lindsey "Zechariah," 1546; Chisholm, 451.

¹³⁰ Verhoef, 115; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1542; Lindsey "Zechariah," 1546.

¹³¹ Barker, 1329; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1543; Chisholm, 454, Bullock, 307; Verhoef, 118, believed this conflicted with Ezekiel 44:19.

¹³² Barker, 1329.

¹³³ Lindsey, "Haggai," 1543; Bullock, 307: "contagious."

¹³⁴ Barker, 1329.

¹³⁵ Verhoef, 111, 114, 120; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1543; Chisholm, 454.

¹³⁶ Smith, 307; Bullock 307; Merrill, 46, added association with unclean things, which, on 48, he said might include acceptance of assistance by pagan neighbors.

¹³⁷ Smith, 308.

blessings can only be expected when the Lord receives and retains the place of honor in the midst of the people.”¹³⁸

2:15-17 God said to consider that before they started work on the temple, they had struggled because God had smote them and their work, yet they had not turned back to him. This referred again to covenant curses because of what Merrill terms their “egoistic self-serving,”¹³⁹ in not offering appropriate gifts [temple construction effort] to God. Their failure to obey in the face of covenant curses is reminiscent of pre-exilic failures. As Verhoef says, “The people are reminded of what they have experienced in the past because of their uncleanness,”¹⁴⁰ which fits in with the theme of contrasting the past disobedience and cursed results with the expected future obedience and blessed results.¹⁴¹ In v. 17, blight would be from a dry easterly wind, mildew from a wet westerly wind, and hail from a cold northerly wind, suggesting calamity was coming from all directions.¹⁴²

2:18-19 God said he now would bless them, as they began the new temple.¹⁴³ The blessing would begin that day, as the prophet spoke.¹⁴⁴ Previously, God had given hope of eschatological blessing, and now he brought hope for the present and near future, that he would bless them because they were operating in his will.¹⁴⁵ They would continue to suffer because of the weak harvest that resulted from disobedience, but things would improve.¹⁴⁶ Material blessings were proof of the restored relationship with

¹³⁸Verhoef, 120; Verhoef, 115, considered the people to have continued in unrepentance right up to this day, despite their construction efforts, but I think it was just that this was when the foundation was complete [v.18], a day on which the Lord decided to mark with a change of direction in the relationship; but then Verhoef, 115, had a point in citing Zechariah’s preaching of repentance during this time period.

¹³⁹ Merrill, 49; on 50, he argued that the people did not need to “return” to God at this point, just get their priorities straight.

¹⁴⁰ Verhoef, 24.

¹⁴¹ Verhoef, 125; The Hebrew syntax of v.15 is confusing; Verhoef, 121-124, discussed options, and concluded the people were encouraged to consider the new things to come from this day onward, with vv.16-17 as parenthetical.

¹⁴² Verhoef, 127.

¹⁴³ Verhoef, 131; he discussed the confusing Hebrew syntax of v.19, but concluded it was clear that the point was that God would now start blessing the people; Barker, 1330, stated the term “founded” in v.18 referred to when the foundation was completed in 536BC, a warning to not fail again; Lindsey, “Haggai,” 1543, thought it referred to three months earlier when they started work, with which Merrill, 51, agreed; I agree with Verhoef, 129-130, that this could refer to finishing the foundation work or commencement of construction, but that it refers to the day of the prophecy in any case.

¹⁴⁴ Verhoef, 129; Bullock, 307.

¹⁴⁵ Verhoef, 135; Merrill, 47.

¹⁴⁶ Merrill, 53.

God.¹⁴⁷ A few decades later, Malachi would speak of economic suffering again, suggesting the people were once more disobedient.¹⁴⁸

2:20 God spoke through Haggai again the same day.

2:21 To the political leader, Zerubbabel, God said he was going to shake the heavens and earth. Some see this as encouragement to Zerubbabel in his leadership of this seemingly insignificant group,¹⁴⁹ to not let his doubts be more influential than God's will for him,¹⁵⁰ and to base his identity on his function in God's eyes, as God's chosen and approved servant.¹⁵¹ As the message is "unmistakably apocalyptic,"¹⁵² perhaps the point was to couple the restoration of the temple to the restoration of the Davidic dynasty.¹⁵³ As with many other prophecies about the end times, the events in this one are presented as seemingly imminent.¹⁵⁴

2:22 God would direct the demise of the nations and their armies. All of this would be by the Lord, so it was unimportant that Judah was small and defenseless when they had God to do the work,¹⁵⁵ which promised he would do in order to establish the rule of his own representative.¹⁵⁶

2:23 The book ends on a chiasm to emphasize the object of God's choice: Zerubbabel.¹⁵⁷ God called Zerubbabel his servant, a term with salvific and messianic nuances,¹⁵⁸ used especially with reference to David, thus implying the promise of the Davidic dynasty was still valid.¹⁵⁹ God said that on that day of his interruption of the affairs of

¹⁴⁷ Verhoef, 136.

¹⁴⁸ Verhoef, 137.

¹⁴⁹ Lindsey, "Haggai," 1543.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, 308-309.

¹⁵¹ Smith, 308.

¹⁵² Merrill, 55; Verhoef, 143, agrees.

¹⁵³ Bullock, 307.

¹⁵⁴ Verhoef, 143.

¹⁵⁵ Verhoef, 145.

¹⁵⁶ Verhoef, 143.

¹⁵⁷ Verhoef, 25, 140.

¹⁵⁸ Merrill, 56.

¹⁵⁹ Verhoef, 146-147.

men, he would take Zerubbabel and make him like a signet ring, his authorized representative,¹⁶⁰ for God had chosen him.

This represented a reversal of the curse placed on Jehoiachin,¹⁶¹ for God had told Jehoiachin that if he were God's signet ring, God would pull him off and give him over to Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁶² As Merrill said, "The despair following Jehoiachin's rejection is turned to hope in the proclamation of Zerubbabel as the chosen signature of YHWH Himself."¹⁶³ This also was a guarantee that someday the Messiah would come from the line of David,¹⁶⁴ or that Zerubbabel was the chosen channel of the Davidic line for the coming Messiah.¹⁶⁵ Some believe this verse indicates Zerubbabel will have delegated authority with David during the future millennial reign of Christ.¹⁶⁶ More likely this is a promise made to him "in his office as a lineal descendant of the last Davidic ruler," finding fulfillment in Christ.¹⁶⁷ Zerubbabel is listed in the lineages for Jesus, in Matthew 1:12 and Luke, 3:27.

There is no information about Zerubbabel after 520BC, and it appears Judah was run under the authority of a succession of high priests until the time of Nehemiah.¹⁶⁸ Some, thinking this prophecy specifically pointed to reestablishing the Davidic dynasty in Zerubbabel, believe it was a contingent promise, but failure of post-exilic community to live up to God's conditions led God to postpone the event.¹⁶⁹ Others, such as Verhoef, argue that Haggai and Zechariah were wrong about Zerubbabel being the anointed one, since the throne of David was not reestablished.¹⁷⁰ Some say Zerubbabel must be a prototype of Christ,¹⁷¹ while Verhoef argues that this prophecy "does not justify typological exegesis, according to which Zerubbabel is interpreted

¹⁶⁰ Verhoef, 145-146; Merrill, 57-58; Chisholm, 455.

¹⁶¹ Verhoef, 147; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1544; Barker, 1330; Chisholm, 455.

¹⁶² Lindsey, "Haggai," 1544.

¹⁶³ Merrill, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Verhoef, 148: "Thereby he has legitimized the promise of the prophecy in 2 Sam. 7 concerning 'the house of David,' in a time when the idea of a Davidic king seemed to have been disregarded"; mentioned also by Barker, 1330.

¹⁶⁵ Merrill, 57; Lindsey, "Haggai," 1544; Chisholm, 455.

¹⁶⁶ Lindsey, "Haggai," 1544.

¹⁶⁷ Leggett, 142.

¹⁶⁸ Verhoef, 31.

¹⁶⁹ Chisholm, 455.

¹⁷⁰ Verhoef, 37; on 141: "Zerubbabel is projected on the screen as a representative of the coming Messiah, perhaps as being the Messiah."

¹⁷¹ Merrill, 57-58, Chisholm, 455.

as a foreshadowing of Jesus of Nazareth,”¹⁷² saying instead that this is an “actualization of the promise that the Messiah would be a descendant from the house of David...”¹⁷³ Though Verhoef said the prophecy was in error in picking Zerubbabel, he later said that the fact that the prophecy had not come true did not necessarily mean it was in error, because fulfillment of prophecy is complex and in stages: “...the messianic hopes were transferred via his [Zerubbabel’s] descendents, until they were fulfilled centrally in the first and will be fulfilled finally in the second coming of Christ.”¹⁷⁴ Verhoef further argued that prophecy projects to the end times, but the history of fulfillment has “a salvation-historical dimension, which can only be ascertained in the light of Christ’s vicarious work on the cross.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Verhoef, 38.

¹⁷³ Verhoef, 38, 149.

¹⁷⁴ Verhoef, 141.

¹⁷⁵ Verhoef, 149.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Archer, Gleason L. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.
- Barker, Kenneth, gen. ed. *NASB Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.
- Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.
- Chisholm Jr., Robert B. *Handbook on the Prophets*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Leggett, Donald A. *Loving God and Disturbing Men: Preaching from the Prophets*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 1990.
- Lindsey, F. Duane. "Haggai." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 1537-1544. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004.
- Lindsey, F. Duane. "Zechariah." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, 1545-1572. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004.
- Merrill, Eugene H. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*. Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003.
- Smith, Gary V. *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994.
- Verhoef, Pieter A. *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.