

Haggai 1:1-12

I would venture to say, that most of you have never heard a message from Haggai, and very few of you have ever read Haggai. It is an obscure book, but it is like a treasure hidden in a large field. It is a book about preparing for the presence of God.

How desperately we need the presence of God.

You can have all of your doctrine right and still not have the presence of God. Leonard Ravenhill.

"I want the presence of God Himself, or I don't want anything at all to do with religion. You would never get me interested in the old maids' social club with a little bit of Christianity thrown in to give it respectability. I want all that God has, or I don't want any." Tozer

I. The Context

The story really begins more than 50 years earlier when Nebuchadnezzar's forces attack the city of Jerusalem and destroy the temple. Nebuchadnezzar takes the temple priests hostage and many of them are executed.

Daniel 1:1-8

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came into Judah and besieged it wrecking havoc

A. He took the capital city v1

1. Jerusalem was a fortified city that was difficult to take
2. Jeremiah 52:12-14 *Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He burned the house of the LORD and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around.*

B. He took the temple and its elements v2

1. Jeremiah 52:13a *He burned the house of the LORD*
2. Jeremiah 52:17-20 *The bronze pillars that were in the house of the LORD, and the carts and the bronze Sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried all their bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, the shovels, the trimmers, the bowls, the spoons, and all the bronze utensils with which the priests ministered. The basins, the firepans, the bowls, the pots, the lampstands, the spoons, and the cups, whatever was solid gold and whatever was solid silver, the captain of the guard took away. The two pillars, one Sea, the twelve bronze bulls which were under it, and the carts, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD--the bronze of all these articles was beyond measure.*
3. Into the treasure house of his own god he took the vessels of the temple.
4. This would really be a blow to the Hebrews, because in essence what this said was that the Chaldean god defeated YHWH God.
5. God wasn't even defending Judah anymore.
6. God's own temple could be robbed and God didn't put up a fuss.

C. He took their children v3-4

1. Isaiah prophesied this to King Hezekiah in 2 Kings.
2. II Kings 20:17-18 *'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'* "
3. They came in and took the best of the best.
 - a. They took those who were physically superior v4a
 - b. Mentally superior v4b
 - c. Socially superior v4c

D. He took their culture

1. Literature v4a
2. Language v4b
3. Food v5
4. Names v6-7
 - a. Daniel--God is my Judge / Beltshazzar--Bel protect the King
 - b. Hannaniah--YHWH is Gracious / Shadrach--Command of Aku
 - c. Mishael--Who is like YHWH / Meshach--Who is like Aku
 - d. Azariah--The Lord is my helper / Abednego--Servant of Nebo

About 50 years later Cyrus sits on the throne. God stirs his heart to send the exiles back to their homeland to build a temple for their God...just as had been prophesied.

1. Isaiah 44:28 *who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'*
2. He issues an edict permitting those Jews who wished to do so to return to their homeland and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.
3. 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 *Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'"*
 - a. Many Jews returned to the land and shortly thereafter some progress was made on restoring the temple in Jerusalem.
 - b. Can you imagine the excitement among the people of Israel? They are returning to Jerusalem and they are given permission and resources to rebuild the temple of God.
 - c. The temple is the dwelling place of God. It is where the ark of the covenant resides. It is, for Judah, **the presence of God.**
 - d. They are going to prepare for the presence of God!

II. The Characters

A. Zerubbabel

- Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoichin, one of the final kings of Judah.
- He was a descendant of King David and he was in the genealogy of Jesus.
- Zerubbabel's name meant seed of Babylon which suggests that he was born in the captivity.
- As governor of Judah, Zerubbabel was in charge of a very small area of the empire.

B. Joshua

- Joshua, who could be traced all the way back to Aaron, was the highest ranking priest.
- His grandfather had been chief priest in Jerusalem at the time of its fall to Nebuchadnezzar and was executed with some of the other leaders.
- This is the Joshua referred to in Zechariah 3.

Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem laid the foundation of the temple. But progress soon ceased and the people turned inward. For 16 years, the temple had been in ruins until Haggai comes on the scene in 520 B.C.

C. Haggai

- We don't know much about him.
- He only preached 4 or 5 sermons that we know of and his ministry only lasted 3 and a half months
- In that time Haggai called the people to prepare themselves for the presence of God and revival broke out.
- Within 4 years of his preaching, the temple was complete.

III. The Excuses

Verse 1:

1. Haggai's first message was delivered on the first day of the month, which was when the New Moon festival was held.
2. Normally a large crowd would gather at the temple for the holiday in order to hear a prophet.
3. Today, there was no temple, but there was a prophet and it is here that we deliver his first message.

Verse 2:

1. The message does not start out very encouraging.
2. Notice how the people are addressed: not as my people, but as these people or this people
3. The word "these" signals at the outset of this message that it might not be a very positive one.

The Lord, through Haggai, immediately addresses the guilty party.

1. These people say
2. The verb for "say" suggests that this is an excuse that had been set forth repeatedly
3. It was one that God had heard repeatedly from them.
4. We really want this temple. We really need this temple. It is just not the right time.
5. This has nothing to do with our spirituality or our love for God; it is a matter of timing!

What were their excuses? Some of their reasons were likely...

1. **Their Enthusiasm had waned**

- a. The foundation was laid in [Ezra 3:8-13](#) with a shout of joy
- b. But look what happened in verses 12-13.
- c. In their excitement over what God was doing, cold water was dumped on them.
- d. The older generation wasn't excited, they were broken hearted! This temple can't compare with the temple of our generation!
- e. And their fires were just snuffed out. They had lost motivation and enthusiasm.

2. **Their Enemies had attacked**

- a. In Ezra 4 we learn that some of the enemies of Judah came and asked to help build the temple.
- b. They claimed that they worshipped YHWH and sacrificed to him too.
- c. But Zerubbabel refused to allow them to assist and from then on, the enemies of Judah tried to discourage and trouble the building project.
- d. Now, not only has their fire been put out, but they are meeting opposition as well.
- e. Too much is against us

3. **The Economy had Suffered**

- a. Times were difficult, and they were unable to provide even the bare necessities of life required by their families.
- b. The building program would have to wait until a better economy.

The children of Israel would say, look at all of this God! It just is not the right time.

Let's just say that the Lord did not accept their excuses.

1. Instead he rebukes them through Haggai
2. And thankfully, they repent and obey the command of God
3. And that is really where we need to start this morning if we want the presence of God.

IV. How to Prepare for the Presence of God

1. Priority
2. Perseverance
3. Purity
4. Promise