

The Prophet Haggai  
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It is interesting to note that every major concordant body of Freemasonry references or chronicles the destruction of Jerusalem and the sacking of the Temple by the Chaldeans in the year 586 B.C.

Historically, we discover that under the direction of King Nebuchadnezzar, the Hebrew nation was defeated; its citizens were taken into captivity, and the plundered spoils of war, consisting of the Jewish treasures, Sacred Vessels and Holy Furniture of the Temple were carried off to Babylon. As a climax to this saga, we learn of the eventual freedom of the exiles, and the efforts of Zerubbabel, a Prince of the House of Judah, along with his band of companions who successfully rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem 516 B.C.

Against this historical backdrop the ceremonies, rituals and lessons of the Royal Arch Chapter, the Cryptic Council, the Chivalric Order of the Red Cross, the Knight Masons of the U.S.A, and the 15th & 16th Degrees of the Princes of Jerusalem of the Scottish Rite, (just to name a few!) are portrayed at length and transmitted to candidates who seek additional enlightenment in our venerable Order.

The infrastructure and platform of Royal Arch Masonry is set in the ruins of the first Temple, with Jeshua (Ezra 3:2) (or Joshua), Zerubbabel, and Haggai taking major portions as the principal characters of this noteworthy period. Our Royal Arch tradition, fancies these individuals comprising the first Grand Council, however I can not locate any Scriptural or written accounts to base this assertion,

The purpose of this discourse is to add to our base of knowledge concerning the Prophet Haggai. He is one of the central characters named above. It is intriguing to contemplate why the designers of our ritual deemed Haggai reasonably important to include him in our ceremonies.

It is without dispute that Haggai's name is articulated at the ritualistic opening ceremony of every convocation, but few Companions (if any) are fluent in the history and background concerning this oracle. Who is Haggai? What is his role during this era? How did he accomplish his task?

In pursuing our objective we will attempt to interpret and explore the scriptural passages of the Book of Haggai contained in the Old Testament of the Holy Bible. Through this analysis we hope to gain knowledge concerning the events and the society of his era thus providing an even deeper appreciation and understanding of this important Masonic setting. The Book of Haggai is named after the Prophet, Haggai, whose name means "festive" or "festival." Many believe the name was given because Haggai was born on or near a festival day. It is also the second shortest book in the Old Testament.

Haggai is also the most precisely dated book of the Bible, with the dates of each sermon given to the exact day. The accuracy with which he records these dates suggests that he might have kept a journal. The beginning of Darius' reign is well established at 522 B.C. Each of his four messages took place in the second year of his reign which would be 520 B.C. His writings also suggest that he had seen the glory of King Solomon's Temple which would make him at least 70 years of age when he wrote his prophecy. Haggai most likely returned to Jerusalem from Babylon with Zerubbabel 18 years earlier in 538 B.C.

As a result of the proclamation of King Cyrus, Israel was allowed to return from Babylon to her

homeland under the civil leadership of Zerubbabel and the spiritual guidance of Joshua the High Priest. About 50,000 Jews returned. In 536 B.C., they began to rebuild the Temple but opposition from the neighbors and indifference by the Jews caused the work to be abandoned.

Sixteen years later Haggai was commissioned by the Lord to stir up the people not only to rebuild the Temple, but also to reorder their "spiritual priorities". As a result, the Temple was completed four years later. (516 B.C.)

The primary theme is the rebuilding of God's Temple, which had been lying in ruins since its destruction in 586 B.C. By means of five messages from the Lord, Haggai exhorted the people to renew their efforts to build the house of the Lord. He motivated them by noting that the drought and crop failures were caused by misplaced spiritual priorities.

But to Haggai, the rebuilding of the Temple was not an end to itself. The Temple represented God's dwelling place, His presence with His chosen people. The destruction of the Temple by the Chaldeans followed the departure of God's dwelling glory.

To the Prophet Haggai, the rebuilding of the Temple invited the return of God's presence to their midst. Using the historical situation as a springboard, Haggai puts across the idea of the glorious messianic temple yet to come, and encourages them with the promise of even greater peace, prosperity, divine sovereignty and national blessing during the millennium.

I invite you to follow along with our review of "The Book of Haggai". We will incorporate appropriate commentary and interpretations as necessary as we look forward to obtaining the answers to the queries previously put forward.

## *The Book of Haggai*

### *Chapter 1*

*1 In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, 2 "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."*

Verse 1: King Darius 1 became King of Persia in 521 B.C. and ascended to the throne after the death of Cambyses. He was an officer of Cambyses and the great grandson of Cyrus the Great's brother. He reigned until his death in 486 B.C.

Zerubbabel was the grandson of Jehoiachin and thus was in the Davidic line. He was the civil leader and overseer of the Temple rebuilding project. He reestablished the Davidic throne, even though it will not be again occupied until the time of the Messiah.

Joshua (also spelled "Jeshua" in other writings) was the High Priest and a descendant of Zadok and the religious leader of the exiled community that returned to Jerusalem. He re-established the High Priest line of Aaron through Eleazar. Jehozadak was one of Nebuchadnezzar's captives.

Verse 2: Haggai begins his message by quoting the popular point of view of the people, saying that it was not yet time to rebuild the Temple. These sentiments were fueled by the hostile opposition of their neighbors and the lack of economic prosperity in the region. The roots of their reluctance ultimately lay in their selfish indifference to the Lord.

God's displeasure and distance is noted in His reference to them as "This people" and not "My People" They wanted wealth for themselves, not a Temple!

*3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying,*

*4 "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?"*

Verse 4: Speaks of the people's self-indulgence. The Prophet's rhetorical question demonstrated their hypocrisy and misplaced priorities. Walls and ceilings overlaid with cedar were common in wealthy residences and had to be imported from Lebanon at great expense.

*5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways!"*

6 "You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." 7 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

Verse 6: By using five pairs of poetic contrasts, each question results in the same conclusion. Haggai paints a vivid picture of their economic and social distress. Their selfish lack of concern for God's house had only cost them more hardship.

With a biting query, the Lord reminded them that it was not right for them to live in expensive paneled houses while the Temple lay in ruins and urged them to carefully consider the consequences of their indifference.

8 Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the Lord.

Verse 8: Three imperatives give the remedy for their trouble Go up! Bring wood! Build! The long captivity of 70 years had let the forest grow so there was an ample supply of wood. They were to use it to rebuild the House of the Lord, and therein He would be glorified.

By putting God first, He would then be honored in their worship and they would be blessed in the secondary matters of life.

9 "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house.

Verse 9: The people ran to their own house, because they were zealous to pursue their own interest, the prophet drew a contrast between the one who eagerly ran to care for "his own house" while disregarding God's house.

10 Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. 11 For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."

Verse 10, 11: An economic catastrophe resulted from God's withholding of the summer dew. That was the price for their disobedience. Grain, wine, and oil were the primary crops of the land. Cattle also languished because of the absence of spiritual health.

12 Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared the presence of the Lord. 13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the Lord."

Verse 12-15: Haggai's second message came twenty-three days after the first one around September 21, 520 B.C. The Lord's call to "Consider your ways" caused the people to respond in repentance and obedience.

Verse 13: This new message of "I am with you" further stirred the Jews to action. Oppressed by hostilities from without and famine from within, the Lord responded to their genuine repentance and obedience assuring them of His presence with them.

14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest,

Verse 14: The Lord energized the leaders and the people through his Word to carry on the work of rebuilding the Temple. Just as God had moved in the heart of Cyrus 16 years earlier, the people's response of repentance and obedience allowed God's Spirit to energize them for the task.

and the spirit of all the remnant of the people;

Verse 14: Refers to the exiles that returned from Babylon and took the message to heart. Realizing that the words of the prophet were from the Lord, they "obeyed" and "feared" knowing that God was present.

and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth

day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

## Haggai Chapter 2

1 In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying:

Verse 1: This day in the month of Tishri corresponds to October 17, 520 B.C. This was the final day of the Feast of the Tabernacle. This feast celebrated God's provision for Israel during her 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. It gives thanks for a bountiful harvest. On this occasion the Lord gave Haggai the third message.

2 "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying:

Verse 2: The first message was directed to the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua. Here the prophet includes the remainder of the exiles who returned from Babylon.

3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?

Verse 3: Some of the people including Haggai had seen the magnificent Temple of Solomon before its destruction. With three figurative questions, the Lord through Haggai draws attention to the fact that this Temple was inferior to Solomon's Temple which caused many to be dispirited by its lack of splendor.

4 Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the Lord of hosts.

Verse 4: To counteract the disenchantment the Lord repeated the command to "be strong" and to "work" assuring them of God's presence. This was the second reminder from the Lord "I am with you".

5 According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!

Verse 5: Spoken at the close of the feast commemorating God's provision during the wandering in the wilderness, His covenant commitment and promise that His Spirit would be with them as "when you came out of Egypt" would be most reassuring.

6 "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the Lord of hosts.

Verse 6-7: The shaking of the cosmic bodies and the nations goes far beyond the historical removal of kingdoms and the establishment of others, such as the defeat of Persia by Greece. Rather, the text looks into the cataclysm in the universe described in Rev: 6-19, the subjugation of the nations by the Messiah, and the setting up of His kingdom which will never be destroyed.

Verse 7: *the desire of all nations...is* a reference to the Messiah, the Deliverer for whom all the nations ultimately long.

Verse 7: *I will fill this Temple with glory...* There is no Scripture to indicate that God's Glory ever did come to Zerubbabel's Temple. According to the Babylonian Talmud the Temple of Zerubbabel was quite comparable to the Temple of Solomon except for five items that it did not have: (1) The Ark of the Covenant; (2) The Sacred Fire; (3) The Shekinah; (4) The Holy Spirit; and (5) The Urim and Thummin. This would indicate that the House itself was not greatly inferior to the one it supplanted.

8 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the Lord of hosts.

Verse 8: Economically destitute, the people were reassured that He is the possessor of all things.

9 The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the Lord of hosts."

Verse 1-9: With building operations in full swing, the Lord gave a strong message of

encouragement, especially to the elderly among them who had seen Solomon's Temple. The Lord urged the people to be courageous, assuring them of his presence. His faithfulness to His covenant promises a greater more glorious Temple in the future.

Verse 9: *this latter temple...*The Jews viewed the Temple in Jerusalem as one Temple existing in different forms at different times. The rebuilt Temple was considered a continuation of Solomon's Temple. However, the glory of the millennial Temple, the latter Temple will far surpass even the grandeur of Solomon's Temple. (The former Temple)

Verse 9: *I will give thee peace...*This peace is not limited to that peace which He gives to believers, but looks ahead to that ultimate peace when He returns to rule as the Prince of Peace upon the Throne of David in Jerusalem.

10 *On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying,*

Verse 10-19: The fourth message of Haggai occurred 2 months after the third on the 24th day of the month of Chislev, corresponding to December 18, 520 B.C. This message sought to demonstrate that while their disobedience caused God's Blessings to be withheld, their obedience would reward them with His blessings.

11 *"Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, 12 If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?' "Then the priests answered and said, "No." 13 And Haggai said, "If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?" So the priests answered and said, "It shall be unclean." 14 Then Haggai answered and said, " 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the Lord, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.*

Verse 11-14: This passage provides an analogy or object lesson for the people, two questions were asked of the priests relative to ceremonial law. The first question was intended to show that ceremonial cleanliness cannot be transferred. Haggai then applies the lesson. Even though the people had been bringing their offerings while neglecting the rebuilding of the Temple; their offerings had not been acceptable. Their sin had caused their sacrifices to be contaminated and ineffectual. And their good works, their offerings, could not transmit cleanliness. In other words sin is contagious, righteousness is not!

15 *'And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord-- 16 since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty.*

Verse 16: Ephahs and baths convert to four to six gallons respectfully.

17 *I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the Lord.*

Verse 15-18: The Lord called the people to again consider their situation prior to the resumption of the Temple building. In those days, the farmer found less than expected. Between 50 to 60 percent of the expected harvest had been lost.

18 *'Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid--consider it:*

19 *Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you.' "*

20 *And again the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,*

21 *"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: 'I will shake heaven and earth.*

22 *I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots And those who ride in them; The horses and their riders shall come down, Every one by the sword of his brother.*

23 *'In that day,' says the Lord of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of*

*Shealtiel,' says the Lord,*

Verse 23: Refers to the day of Messiah's triumph, "My servant" is a distinctly Davidic and messianic title,

*'and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,' says the Lord of hosts."*

Verse 23: The signet ring was a symbol of honor, authority and power. It corresponded to a king's scepter which was used to seal letters and decrees. Zerubbabel as God's signet ring stands as the official representative of the Davidic dynasty and represents the resumption of the messianic line interrupted by the Exile.

Just as Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet ring and made him second in the kingdom so God will do for the Davidic line of kings, the pre-Exilic signet of Jehoiachin was removed by God and renewed here by his grandson, Zerubbabel, who reestablished the Davidic line of Kings which would culminate in the millennium reign of Christ.

Zerubbabel appears in the line of Christ on both Joseph's side and Mary's side thus bypassing God's curse on the lines of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin.

Verse 20-23: The fifth message to Zerubbabel came on the same day as the fourth, and He returned to the theme of the millennial reign of the Messiah. Once again, it depicted the overthrow of the kingdom of the world and the establishment of the messianic kingdom. As the events predicted did not transpire historically, the promise pertains to the royal line through which the Messiah would come. It looked to the ultimate day when the Messiah reigns on the earth.

### Summary and Conclusion

Although the biblical scholars categorize Haggai a minor prophet, we as Royal Arch Masons and claimants to the title of "Sons of Light" can draw many life lessons from his divinely inspired words. His principles are as relevant in today's society as they were during his age.

- (1) Haggai admonished the people for having misplaced their priorities. He pointed out the errors of their ways chasing after the luxuries of life while ignoring God's plan.
- (2) The people responded to God's message by resuming the work on the Temple. Their new found obedience reconciled them back to God.
- (3) The people's courage and motivation came from the promise of God's presence and His peace. This is the peace of mind that comes from knowing that God is in control.
- (4) Haggai also dealt with the issues of living clean and godly lives so they would not defile their work and sacrifices. He also urged them to depend on God for life.
- (5) And finally, Haggai ultimately gave them hope for the future by revealing that God was going to destroy their enemies and establish His kingdom for His chosen people.

Haggai's exertions ultimately resulted in a series of events that led to the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple. Its completion was a momentous occasion for it marked the start of a new religious life for the Jewish people. The common people were given an understanding of the Law of Jehovah and this led to a more spiritual concept of religion. Without the Temple, the Jewish faith could not possibly have blossomed forth into the mature and beneficent religion we recognize today.

As one of the principal characters of the Royal Arch Masonry ritual, the Prophet Haggai is beyond a doubt, worthy of our admiration and respect. His role was substantial and he accomplished the task God set before him. He is a true role model for all Royal Arch Companions.

### References and Resource Materials for this paper

New King James Bible  
The Temples in Jerusalem by Eversull

The Mac Arthur Study Bible by Mac Arthur

The Old Past Master's Masonic Almanac 6004 A.L., by ME Jan L. Beaderstadt, KYCH