

# Haggai Explained & Applied 37

Ger de Koning





# **The Book of Haggai**



# The Book of Haggai

The Temple

Ger de Koning

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# Contents

<b>Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible</b>	<b>7</b>
Old Testament	7
New Testament	8
<b>Explanation of General Format</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Book of Haggai</b>	<b>10</b>
Introduction	10
<b>Haggai 1</b>	<b>13</b>
Hag 1:1   Dating and Addressees	13
Hag 1:2   No Time to Rebuild God's House	14
Hag 1:3-4   Is It Time?	15
Hag 1:5   Consider Your Ways!	16
Hag 1:6   Much Labor, Disappointing Result	16
Hag 1:7   Again: Consider Your Ways!	18
Hag 1:8   What the LORD Wants Them to Do	18
Hag 1:9   Egoism Blocks Blessing	19
Hag 1:10-11   No dew, No Produce	20
Hag 1:12   The People Show Reverence for the LORD	20
Hag 1:13   I Am With You	21
Hag 1:14-15   The Work on God's House Is Resumed	22
<b>Haggai 2</b>	<b>23</b>
Hag 2:1-2   A New Message	23
Hag 2:3   The Glory of the House	23
Hag 2:4   Take Courage	24
Hag 2:5   Word and Spirit	25
Hag 2:6   Once More in a Little While	26
Hag 2:7   The Wealth of All Nations	26
Hag 2:8   Everything Belongs to the LORD	27
Hag 2:9   The Latter Glory of the House of God	28
Hag 2:10-11   The Message for the Priests	28
Hag 2:12-13   When Holy and When Unclean	29

*Contents*

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Hag 2:14   Everything Is Unclean	31
Hag 2:15-17   A Look Back	32
Hag 2:18-19   The Blessing Is Promised	32
Hag 2:20-22   A Word for Zerubbabel	33
Hag 2:23   A Word to Zerubbabel	34
<b>Other Publications</b>	<b>36</b>



## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

**New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of General Format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS** [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS** < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** \* are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

# The Book of Haggai

## Introduction

The name Haggai is said to mean 'the festive' or 'festival of *Yahweh*'. He is still mentioned in Ezra (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Haggai is not mentioned in the lists of the returnees in the first chapters of the book of Ezra. We know nothing of his ancestry, to which tribe he belongs or where his grandparents lived. Nor is there any information about his profession, except that he acts as a prophet.

He performs his service after a remnant has returned from the Babylonian exile to the promised land. The period in which he pronounced the described prophecy is four months. The reason for his service is the resignation of the work on the rebuilding of the temple. The excuse for stopping the rebuilding is the opposition to it (Ezra 4:17-24). But the real reason lies deeper and is presented to the people by the prophet.

Opposition cannot be a real hindrance to God's work. The real hindrance is a declining interest in the things of God. If what is the main thing with God is no longer the main thing for us, the cause is that our own interests have come to play a greater role. Haggai encourages the people to go back to work (Ezra 5:1). A prophet speaks to the conscience of God's people when they have departed from Him and start pursuing their own interests. If the conscience is not active, the people will quickly explain the circumstances in a manner that best fits their own vision.

The words of the LORD "go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified, says the LORD" (Hag 1:8), indicate the core of the book. Everything in this short book is about this command: Build the house of God!

This command echoes through a great part of Israel's history. We see it in the days of the tabernacle. Moses is commanded to build a sanctuary for the LORD in which He can dwell (Exo 25:8-9). We see it in the wish of David and in the command he gives his son Solomon to build a house for the LORD (1Chr 17:1-15; 28:6,10). To the exiles who are allowed to return to

the land under Cyrus, the same is said with regard to the temple that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1:3).

The short report of the service of Haggai shows him as a man of conviction. He has the unique place among the prophets of someone God's people really listen to and to whose words they are obedient. The people do what he preaches, with the result that in only four years the building of the temple is completed.

Another unique feature of Haggai is the precision with which he dates his prophecies. A few specific days are mentioned in his book. This shows that the duration of his service has been less than four months.

1. His first preaching is "in the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month" (Hag 1:1). This sermon is addressed to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest (Hag 1:1).
2. The second date is "the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king" (Hag 1:15). The message on that day is for Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the people (Hag 1:14).
3. The third date is "the twenty-first of the seventh month (Hag 2:1). This message is also for Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the rest of the people (Hag 2:2).
4. The fourth date is "the twenty-fourth of the ninth [month]" (Hag 2:10). That day there is a word for the priests (Hag 2:11).
5. The fifth date is "the twenty-fourth [day] of the month" (Hag 2:20), which is the same month as mentioned in the previous point, the ninth (Hag 2:10). Then there is a word only for Zerubbabel (Hag 2:21).

The place where Haggai served as a prophet is apparently Jerusalem. The two chapters of his book contain references to the house of God, the temple in Jerusalem.

A verse from Haggai 2 is quoted in Hebrews 12 (Hag 2:6; Heb 12:26). This underscores the Divine inspiration and thus the Divine authority of this book.

### **Division of the book**

- I. Call to build the house of God (Haggai 1:1-11)

1. Introduction (Haggai 1:1-3)
2. Ranking of priorities (Haggai 1:4-11)
- II. The positive reaction (Haggai 1:12-15)
- III. The promised glory of the rebuilt house (Haggai 2:1-9)
  1. Encouragement for Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:1-5)
  2. The glory of the rebuilt house (Haggai 2:6-9)
- IV. Blessing for an unclean people (Haggai 2:10-19)
  1. The former uncleanness (Haggai 2:10-14)
  2. The future blessing (Haggai 2:15-19)
- V. Zerubbabel, the signet ring of the LORD (Haggai 2:20-23)

# Haggai 1

## **Hag 1:1 | Dating and Addressees**

*1 In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,*

The prophecy begins with the dating “the second year of Darius the king”. This dating is also found in Ezra 4. There we read that until that year the people stop working at the house of God (Ezra 4:24). Darius comes to government in 521 BC. So his “second year” is the year 520 BC. Dating the prophecy according to the reign of rulers of the nations shows that God sees His people as “Lo-Ammi”, not My people (Hos 1:9), and that the times of the Gentiles have come (Lk 21:24). Those times began when Nebuchadnezzar led the people of Judah into exile. Then Judah loses his sovereignty. This time lasts until the coming of the Messiah in glory.

Furthermore, the dating is said to be “on the first day of the sixth month”. Each new month begins with new moon. This means that the moon is completely invisible. The point of deepest darkness has been reached. Then the moon goes on its way again to the moment when it becomes full and shines abundantly. The first day of the month is a day of hope for restoration. The Israelites usually celebrate new moon with festivities (Num 28:11-15; Isa 1:14; Hos 2:11). It is not inconceivable that for Haggai – after all, his name is said to mean ‘the festive’ or ‘festival of *Yahweh*’ – this is an excellent opportunity to make his message heard to a large audience.

Against the backdrop of heathen domination and the hope of restoration, the word of the LORD comes to the leaders of the people. The prophecy is addressed to Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the religious leader. The word of the prophecy is first addressed to those who are responsible among the people.

Zerubbabel means ‘born in Babel’. He is also called Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8; 5:14,16). He is a descendant of David and is therefore entitled to the throne

(Mt 1:12). But he has been appointed by the occupying power as governor of Judah, which is a Persian province. Joshua is the son of Jehozadak, who is high priest during the exile (1Chr 6:15). He is the first high priest after (a remnant of) the people have returned to the land.

“The word of the LORD” comes to them. Together with the expressions “declares the LORD” and “says the LORD”, no less than twenty-six times in this short prophecy the statements of the LORD are emphasized. This makes it clear that the messages Haggai passes on are not his words, but those of the LORD.

The LORD passes on the words which He wants His people to hear “by the prophet Haggai”. “By” is literally “by the hand of” which emphasizes that Haggai is an instrument by whom God speaks. Haggai is one of the prophets the writer of the letter to the Hebrews means when he says that “God spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways” (Heb 1:1). It is therefore advisable to listen carefully to him and to take his words into our hearts, because they come from God.

## Hag 1:2 | No Time to Rebuild God’s House

2 *“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘This people says, ‘The time has not come, [even] the time for the house of the LORD to be rebuilt.’”*

In his first message on behalf of the LORD, Haggai presents Him as “the LORD of hosts”. He Who speaks stands at the head of all heavenly and earthly hosts. He is the Supreme Ruler and Supreme Governor. He oversees everything and everything is at His disposal. Who will not bow down in awe before His majesty if He makes Himself known in this way?

That exalted Majesty speaks to His people. The first word He speaks is an admonition. He speaks *to* the leaders, but not *about* them. He speaks about the indifference of the people, which He calls “this people” and not “My people”. He does so because “this people” do not recognize Him through their actions, and thus He cannot recognize them.

He knows exactly what the people say, how they think and act. He dismantles the excuse not to rebuild. It is a pious excuse to camouflage one’s own laxity. They lack faith. In their excuse they do not talk about their



unwillingness, but about an inappropriate time, ignoring the fact that the work has been at a standstill for fifteen years.

After their good start in rebuilding the altar and laying the foundation of the temple (Ezra 3:1-13), the first fire was extinguished. They are no longer warm to the things of the LORD, but to their own things. It is (unfortunately) not uncommon to start with something in the Spirit, but to end in the flesh (Gal 3:3).

They do not say that they are reluctant to rebuild the temple, but that it is not convenient for them now. It is a matter of postponement. Not now. But everything shows that they are not pursuing God's interests, but those of their own (Phil 2:21; cf. Mt 6:33). The indictment does not concern their weakness or inability, but their obvious lack of interest. They are delaying the rebuilding of the temple in order to have more time and money for their own affairs.

### **Hag 1:3-4 | Is It Time?**

*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 while this house [lies] desolate?"*

After the general indication of evil in verse 2, which is given time to sink in, the word of the LORD by Haggai comes again to the people in verse 3. There is strength in this renewed indication, which makes the contrast with what the people say even sharper. The people say this, the LORD says that. It indicates how much we have to test our own words against the Word of God. The Word of God must go above all else.

In answer to what the people say in verse 2, God asks a question (verse 4). That question is meant to touch their conscience and expose the search of their own interest. They think that it is time to build their own houses, while the work on the temple, the house of God, has been stopped and "this house" is still "desolate". The desolated state in which the house of God is contrasts sharply with their houses. They have turned their own houses into kingly houses (cf. Jer 22:14; 1Kgs 6:9). Isaiah pronounces the 'woe' over such an attitude (Isa 5:8). David shows a very different attitude (2Sam 7:1-2).

Living in such houses shows that they love prosperity and comfortable living conditions. We also see this attitude in carnal Christians. They show no zeal or commitment for God's work and home, but are full of love for themselves and their own comforts. What occupies God's heart does not count for them.

### **Hag 1:5 | Consider Your Ways!**

| *5 Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways!*

The admonition of the LORD to the Israelites in their sin is that they consider their ways, or, as it literally says, that they set their hearts on their ways (verse 7; Hag 2:18-19). It is a call to self-judgment. Just think, examine your heart, what is it all about? It is a call to evaluation.

It is not about a fleeting and transient look into the heart, but about thorough self-examination. It is the kind of attention of which God speaks to Satan about Job: "Have you considered My servant Job?" (Job 1:8). Satan also looks with intense attention to a God-fearing believer, with the aim of making him unfaithful. Conversely, the people must pay full attention to their own sinful ways, with the aim of returning and becoming faithful to the LORD again.

### **Hag 1:6 | Much Labor, Disappointing Result**

| *6 You have sown much, but harvest little; [you] eat, but [there is] not [enough] to be satisfied; [you] drink, but [there is] not [enough] to become drunk; [you] put on clothing, but no one is warm [enough]; and he who earns, earns wages [to put] into a purse with holes."*

In order to help them in their self-examination, the LORD points out their activities and what they yield. They are called upon to look at the results of their work and to judge their actions on that basis. If they do so honestly, they will have to conclude that all their expectations disappoint. Their efforts bring loss rather than gain. The poverty that they have believed they can prevent by committing themselves to their own homes is precisely what troubles them right now. This should make them think and repent.

The LORD mentions some activities and what they yield:

1. They have sown much. Undoubtedly they did so because they wanted a large harvest. But the yield is disappointing (Lev 26:26; Hos 4:10; Mic 6:14). For example, there may be a lot of spiritual activity, but if it is not done from a living relationship with the Lord, there is no spiritual fruit.

2. They eat, but the feeling of hunger remains. For example, a person can read and listen a lot to God's Word, but if it is only a matter of the intellect and God's Word is not taken to heart, it does not give satisfaction to the heart.

3. They do drink wine, but it does not make them happy. Wine is a picture of joy in earthly things. For example, there is no satisfaction in family life if life consists only of it and the Lord Jesus is not given the central place in it.

4. The clothes they wear do not give warmth. There may be a lot of knowledge about the position in Christ, but if it has no practical effect, the result is a cold or legal mind. The Galatians have put on the Lord Jesus Christ, but by reintroducing the law, the warmth of love has disappeared (Gal 3:27; 5:14-15).

5. He who receives wages for his work cannot buy anything from it, because it disappears in no time. This is how it goes with wages that people expect from people. He who works to get wages from people, gets them too, but such wages bring nothing for heaven, it evaporates (Mt 6:3,5,16).

The general lesson for us is that we can have knowledge of God's Word without our heart being involved and without it controlling our life in all its facets. The life of a Christian who does not seek the things of God is a lean, empty and poor life. Always bitter disappointment is the part of those who live for themselves instead of trusting in God.

How often is Christian fellowship given up, the privilege of proclaiming the Lord's death, supporting the preaching and building up the church to earn a few euros more each month? People move somewhere else to earn more, without wondering what it will bring spiritually. Then it should come as no surprise that both the social and the spiritual aspect will be disappointing.

Also in the children will be seen what the parents have pursued. If they never see father or mother reading in the Bible or praying, neither will the

children. Is there criticism on servants of God in the presence of the children? Then do not be surprised if they speak with contempt about who is doing a work for the Lord. How do we talk about the meetings? If we hardly pray and barely visit Bible studies, neither will the children.

### **Hag 1:7 | Again: Consider Your Ways!**

| 7 Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Consider your ways!

Once more “the LORD of hosts” makes the call to look carefully at their ways (cf. verse 5). Instead of sending them back into exile because of their infidelity, the people are exhorted to think about the way they are going, what happened to them. It should lead them to put the first things first. If God does not get His place, that is to say, the first place, our work will not have a lasting result.

### **Hag 1:8 | What the LORD Wants Them to Do**

| 8 Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the LORD.

Here they are told how they can fulfill the will of God and expect blessing again. With this the prophet says as it were: ‘Give God the first place in your lives.’ The house of God cannot be rebuilt without material and material cannot be obtained without labor. The LORD tells them where to go to get the material for God’s house. They have to go up to the mountains. There is wood to be used. With that wood they can rebuild God’s house, “the temple”.

The wood is a picture of Christ as “the fruit of the earth” (Isa 4:2). From a spiritual point of view, it is also true that all spiritual labor must have the glory of God’s house, His church, in view. It is about Christ. It is not easy, but what could be more beautiful than to be allowed to work for something in which God is pleased and through which He is glorified? His house, the church, consists of all believers. A local church is allowed to show in practice what the church is as God’s dwelling place. The Holy Spirit dwells in the church (1Cor 3:16) and in the body of the believer (1Cor 6:19).

How can we build the church? The church is built up by teaching from God's Word through the gifts the Lord Jesus gave to His church (Eph 4:11-13). It is therefore important that everyone who has been given as a gift to the church performs his service faithfully and does not slacken in it. The believer is built up by absorbing this teaching. Then he builds himself up in his most holy faith (Jude 1:17-20). In this God rejoices and through this He is glorified.

### **Hag 1:9 | Egoism Blocks Blessing**

9 *"[You] look for much, but behold, [it comes] to little; when you bring [it] home, I blow it [away]. Why?" declares the LORD of hosts, "Because of My house which [lies] desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.*

In what God says here, you can hear how much it touches Him that His people ignore Him. He does not talk about their weak condition or the poor temple compared to that of Solomon. He talks about their indifference, their lack of interest in Him and His house.

The disappointing results are a disciplinary action of God for failing to rebuild His house. The importance of God's house has been supplanted by the importance of their own houses. Instead of making an effort for God's house that lies "desolate", they are devoting themselves to their own homes. When it comes to God's house, they are not engaged in any activity. But as soon as it concerns their own house, they are full of action, they run for it.

The word 'run' expresses the zeal with which they pursue their own interests. It is remarkable how much energy is put into realizing one's own plans that serve to increase laziness, while there are complaints that there is so little time for the Lord's things. Lack of zeal and love for the house of God, that is the church of the living God, often goes hand in hand with a lot of dedication and care for our own convenience.

There is time and there are resources in abundance for things that have no lasting use. In comparison, we see how difficult it is sometimes to make time for meetings and how little is sometimes contributed financially or in other ways to the work of the Lord. Once the conscience is addressed, that changes.

There is a great contrast between “My house” and “each ... his own house”. In the ‘own house’ we can see religious groups that are arranged according to their own ideas. People want to be able to recognize themselves in it and feel at home there. Whether or not God feels ‘at home’ plays no role. We hear the expression ‘his own house’ also when a pastor speaks about ‘my church’. There is only one Person who has the right to speak about ‘My church’ (Mt 16:18). That is He to Whom the church belongs, because He bought her with the price of His blood (Acts 20:28).

### **Hag 1:10-11 | No dew, No Produce**

*10 Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce. 11 I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.”*

Heaven does not give dew on the land because the people despise God’s house and thus Him Himself. If they would have thought of Him, they would have thought of rebuilding His house. That there is drought should not be attributed to natural causes, but to ignoring the interests of the LORD. When they do so, the LORD neglects their interests. If they do not serve Him, He serves them not with dew, but rather, He serves them in another way. His service in discipline must lead them to consider why there is no produce and Who sends the drought.

That He called for a drought on the land and on the mountains (verse 11) is a sign of the judgment resulting from the infidelity of the people (1Kgs 17:1). That drought affects them throughout the entire produce of the land, all “what the land produces”. “The grain”, “the new wine” and “the oil” summarize the blessings of the land (Deu 11:14; 18:4).

Not only the people, but also the cattle suffer as a result of the infidelity of the people. All creation suffers because of the sin of man (Rom 8:22). There is harmony in creation, between the animals, between man and animals, and between humans, only if creation has been restored by Christ in the right relationship to God – as it was in the original creation.

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## Hag 1:12 | The People Show Reverence for the LORD

*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 showed reverence for the LORD.*

After Haggai pronounced his first message on behalf of the LORD, the leaders and the people “obeyed the voice of the LORD their God”. The words of the prophet fall into good ground and all obey. They hear “the voice of the LORD their God” in “the words of Haggai the prophet”. This must be so with everyone who brings God’s Word. Haggai did not come of his own accord. He was sent to them by the LORD their God. He comes in His Name.

The coming and speaking of Haggai does not create dissension or division, but unity and acknowledgment. That shows a good mind. Everyone acknowledges the truth of what has been said. The people show reverence, the words make an impression. Reverence is the first fruit of hearing. The second fruit is that they resume the neglected work on the temple (verse 14).

## Hag 1:13 | I Am With You

*13 Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people saying, “I am with you,” declares the LORD.”*

“Then” indicates that what follows is a reaction to what preceded it. The good mind of the people is answered by the LORD with an encouraging promise. Haggai, who is now emphatically called “the messenger of the LORD”, comes to them with an extremely short but rich message from the LORD. When the LORD sees a mind in someone to obey, He makes the promise: “I am with you.” What more does a man need? This promise implies that their conversion is real.

With the presence of Lord the guarantee for help, protection, strength and blessing is present. He who has Him has everything. There is no greater encouragement to fulfill a commission, especially if it is a day of weakness, than the words of the Lord Jesus: “And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20; Psa 23:4; 91:15; Isa 43:2). Even in the best

days there is nothing better. It is the only word spoken to the fearful people, but it means everything.

Haggai is given the honor of being called “the messenger of the LORD” as the only prophet in the Bible, although this is true of all true prophets. You can be a messenger of the LORD, but still not bring a message from the LORD. With Haggai it is both true.

### **Hag 1:14-15 | The Work on God’s House Is Resumed**

*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, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; 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 Darius the king.*

When the right mind is present, the LORD can awaken the spirit of the leaders and of the remnant to go to work. He works “both to will and to work” in them (Phil 2:13). He encourages them inwardly and makes them willing and powerful to go to work. They begin, without waiting for the king’s permission. The word of the LORD is above that of a king.

On the one hand they are obedient to the message of Haggai. On the other hand, God’s Spirit works in them the willingness to resume the rebuilding of God’s house. Both aspects are necessary for the result to be to God’s glory. Nothing comes about that is to the glory of God when a work comes from man and he is busy in his own strength.

Paul has been thoroughly aware of this. We hear this when he says: “I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1Cor 15:10b). It must also penetrate us deeply that the Lord Jesus says: “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5b).

The day that they begin their work is of such great value to the LORD, that the date is accurately indicated (verse 15).



## Haggai 2

### **Hag 2:1-2 | A New Message**

*1 On the twenty-first of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet saying, 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,*

The third date notation marks the beginning of the second message. This second message comes within a month after work has started. Hearts that are willing to work for the Lord receive new encouragements again and again. Once the wheels roll, God provides the oil.

The seventh month is the month of the Feast of Booth, the last harvest feast (Lev 23:39-44). It is celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the month. On the twenty-first there will have been many people in Jerusalem. On that day the word of the LORD comes again to the leaders and the people. The word comes to them through the service of Haggai the prophet. He is the instrument the LORD uses to make His will known to them.

### **Hag 2:3 | The Glory of the House**

*3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?*

This verse consists of three questions. The first question can only be answered by the old people who can remember the temple of Solomon they saw as a child. All others have only heard about that temple. The second question is in fact also meant for the old people, because only they can make the comparison between what they see "now" and how it used to be. They too will have to say that what they see now, is nothing compared to what they saw in the past. The building cannot match the glorious temple of yesteryear (Ezra 3:8-13).

Moved by the fear of God, the people listen to the words of His messenger. But now there is yet another difficulty that stands in the way of faith and that is the painful realization that all the luster and glory of the former

temple is lacking. The remnant cannot change that. They cannot retrieve the first glory.

But how remarkable it is that God speaks of “this temple in its former glory”. The appearance of the house may have changed, but the house itself has not changed. For God there is only one house. So it is with the church, His house in our time. When we read in the book of Acts about the origin of the church, we see the glory of God’s house. There is not much of that glory to be seen today because of all the divisions and erroneous teachings. Yet for God it remains the same house.

The questions asked are also important to us. They make us realize that there is no room for any self-satisfied thought. It is good not to have high pretensions. We are allowed to build God’s house, while we realize that the manifestation of that house is nothing to boast about. At the same time, we may leave room for God’s grace and power. We feel how far the church has deviated from its original state, but we do not need to become discouraged.

### **Hag 2:4 | Take Courage**

*4 But now take courage, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD, ‘take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work; for I am with you,’ declares the LORD of hosts.*

The comparison of verse 3 is not meant to discourage them, but to make them trust their God all the more. The task they face may seem impractical when they compare their work with the former glory of God’s house. They have nothing to embellish the temple with. That is why the call to take courage and to continue with the work is so important. In doing so, the LORD lets them know once more that they are not alone and that they do not have to do it in their own strength, because He is with them (Hag 1:13). If the LORD had only said “continue with the work”, without the necessary promise of His support, the motivation would not have been sufficiently stimulated.

The call to take courage or to be courageous has sounded before, such as to the Israelites and Joshua (Deu 31:6,7,23; Jos 1:6-18) and to Solomon (1Chr

22:13; 28:10,20). This call was also made on other occasions (2Chr 19:11; Dan 10:19). He is the same faithful God for the remnant in the days of Haggai as in the days of Joshua and Solomon.

The same goes for us. Paul says to Timothy, and to us: “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 2:1). To the Ephesians, and to us, he says: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (Eph 6:10). The encouragement to be strong always sounds in situations of resistance, where the important thing is to continue, no matter what the hindrances and no matter how great the opposition. The Lord’s strength is needed to counter inner discouragement and overcome outer resistance.

The mess in the midst of which we live is huge. There are many divisions and confusion is increasing. Nevertheless, it is possible to respond to God’s desires for a place to dwell for Him, where we may be with Him in the midst. That is so, if as a local church we acknowledge the authority of His Word and the guidance of His Spirit. We see this presented in the following verse.

### **Hag 2:5 | Word and Spirit**

*5 ‘As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!’*

The possible thought that the LORD is no longer with them, is here declared unfounded by Haggai. He refers to “the promise”, which is the word of the covenant which the LORD made with them when they left Egypt. Their deliverance from Egypt, and the covenant which the LORD made with them on that occasion, is the guarantee that he remains faithful to his people, for he remains faithful to His Word, to what He promised. What He then intended for Himself – that is, to give His people possession of the land – still remains His goal. His Spirit has given them the assurance of this by being in their midst. That is why the encouragement now sounds: “Do not fear!”

The Word of God and the Spirit of God are always in harmony with each other and both are necessary to know and do God’s will. The Word of God cannot be understood without the Spirit and the Spirit always acts in accordance with the Word and will never stimulate to do something that goes

against it. Anyone who is dealing with the Word alone, without being guided by the Spirit, becomes a rationalist. He who wants to be led by the Spirit alone without consulting God's Word becomes an uncorrectable fanatic.

### **Hag 2:6 | Once More in a Little While**

*6 For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.*

After the promise of His support in the previous verses, God is going to give this weak remnant even more encouragements. Although He cannot reveal Himself personally in their midst because of their dilapidated state and the changed situation, a time will come when He will intervene on His own authority.

This verse and the following four verses are clearly Messianic. They are meant as an extra encouragement to do the work of rebuilding. He Whom it is about and Who is with them is the One Who will soon fill everything with His glory. The reign of Christ does not only concern the earth, but the universe, including the heavens and all that is in them (Eph 1:10).

The quotation of this verse in the New Testament – the only verse quoted there from Haggai – makes it clear that this verse is still in the future. It is quoted in a somewhat different way than Haggai says. The writer quotes from the Septuagint: "And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This [expression], "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb 12:26-27).

The shaking of the earth 'then' happened at Sinai, when God gave the law to Moses (Exo 19:16). The second shaking will happen at the end of time, at the return of Christ, when He comes to judge the earth. Then comes an unshakeable kingdom, namely the millennial realm of peace under the blessed reign of Christ.

### **Hag 2:7 | The Wealth of All Nations**

*7 I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.*

To shake the nations means that God will throw down the nations, which will be accompanied by great turmoil. As a result, they will submit to Him and come to Jerusalem, which will be the center of their worship. There the Lord Jesus will reign and there will be the temple of God.

After 'all the nations' have submitted themselves to God, they will come "with the wealth of all nations", to bring it to the new built temple, wherein the LORD or Christ, dwells and where they will worship Him. "With the wealth of all nations" can also be translated with "the desire of all nations will come" which is Christ (cf. Isa 11:10). This longing for Christ and His house, the appreciation and understanding of Him, has been worked through Him in their hearts.

Christ will fill "this house", the temple, in the realm of peace "with glory", His glory. A shadow of this can be seen in the days of Solomon, who is a type of the Prince of peace (1Kgs 8:10-11; 2Chr 5:13-14).

### **Hag 2:8 | Everything Belongs to the LORD**

| 8 *'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts.*

God does not take from them the wealth with which the nations come, their riches, for it is all His. No one will be able to do anything against this, for this "declares the LORD of hosts". The remnant may be too poor to decorate the temple, nor may it be a large, willing people who bring gold and silver as they did at the building of the tabernacle and the temple, but that is not a limitation for God.

Here the prophet says as it were that they do not have to worry where the gold and silver for the temple should come from, because it is everything from God and He can and will provide for it (Psa 50:12b). Nothing can hinder the revelation of His glory.

The silver and gold represent the believers today who are the house of God. We see this in the materials used in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple. Silver represents the price of salvation and gold the glory of God. The believer is redeemed by the blood of Christ and clothed in Christ with the glory of God. Thus all believers together form "a dwelling of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22).

## Hag 2:9 | The Latter Glory of the House of God

9 *'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts.'*

It concerns, as noted in verse 3, always the same house, but in different circumstances. God only knows one house. No other house will be built, but the original house will be rebuilt. "The latter glory" is described in Ezekiel 40-48.

The promise that the latter glory will be "greater" than what they see now is a great encouragement to those who have rebuilt the temple. The rebuilt temple contrasts sharply with the one the Babylonians destroyed. Here God promises that the future glory will be even greater "than the former", which is the glory of the temple of Solomon.

The second promise is that "in this place", which is in the city of Jerusalem, the LORD will give "peace". This will happen when the Lord Jesus will reign as the Prince of peace (Isa 9:5-6). Here peace is not primarily the spiritual peace, in the heart, but the outer peace, which in its full effect also includes the spiritual peace (cf. Mic 5:4; Joel 3:17; Isa 60:18). Now the remnant is still surrounded by enemies and plagued by discouragement. The thought of future peace, both externally and internally, gives courage. This is underlined again by pointing out that "the LORD of hosts" declares this. What He declares, happens.

## Hag 2:10-11 | The Message for the Priests

10 *On the twenty-fourth of the ninth [month], in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, 11 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests [for] a ruling:*

Almost two months after the previous message and three months after the first one, now the third message comes from the LORD to Haggai. This time he has to go to the priests and ask them some questions to hear from them what the law says about this. The priests are the teachers of the people. They explain the law to the people (Deu 33:10a; Mal 2:6-7), while prophets apply it to the heart and conscience of the people.

## Hag 2:12-13 | When Holy and When Unclean

*12 If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any [other] food, will it become holy?" And the priests answered, "No." 13 Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will [the latter] become unclean?" And the priests answered, "It will become unclean."*

In order to make the people aware that the crop failures they have had so far are the result of God's punishment because of their attitude towards Him and His house, the prophet asks the priests two questions. He applies the answer in verse 14 to the spiritual state of the people.

The first question (verse 12) is about whether holiness can be transmitted. Haggai uses the example of someone who carries "holy meat in the fold of his garment". "holy meat" is the meat of animals slaughtered to be sacrificed to the LORD (Num 6:20). The priests may also have a part of it (Lev 6:26,29; 7:6; 7:15-16,31-34).

Imagine it happens that someone with the fold of his garment which contains that holy meat, touches food. Haggai mentions a few examples of the food it could be. He also indicates that they are only examples, because it applies to "any [other] food". Then he asks whether that food becomes holy when it is touched by the fold of his garment in which the holy meat is.

Apparently, without having to think about it, the priests answered with an emphatic "no". It is true that the fold of the garment itself becomes holy through the holy meat (Lev 6:27), but it cannot pass on this holiness.

Then Haggai asks a second question (verse 13). That question is the opposite of the previous question. This is not about someone carrying something of food, but about someone himself, a *person*. It is about someone who has become unclean by the touch of "a corpse". If that unclean person "touches any of these" [i.e. the things mentioned in the previous verse], Haggai asks, "will [the latter] become unclean?"

The answer of the priests here is more emphatic than the answer to the previous question. There it is a short 'no'. Here the answer is not a short 'yes', but a clearly defined "it will become unclean". Also the second question is

answered correctly by the priests. Someone who is unclean by the touch of a dead person makes everything he touches unclean (Num 19:22).

This is the lesson: Holiness cannot be transmitted, but uncleanness can. A healthy man cannot transmit his health, but a sick man with a contagious disease can transmit his disease (cf. 1Cor 15:33). What is unclean does infect the environment, but what is holy does not have that power.

This is also how it works in daily life, as the Preacher discovered that as “dead flies” spoil a supply of “oil” that has been carefully composed, so a little foolishness causes so much harm, that all “wisdom [and] honor” are powerless in the face of that (Ecc 10:1). The meaning is that it only takes a small thing to render unusable or even destroy a large quantity of valuable goods. Foolishness has much more influence than wisdom. That is exactly such a statement. One weak link makes the chain break.

We can apply this to many things in everyday life. When we listen to unclean music, it does not leave us untouched, it radiates something that makes us unclean ourselves. Unclean images – it only has to be a flash of something unclean or sadistic that we see on television or on the internet – sometimes linger for days, we become infected by them. We think we can go anywhere, read all kinds of literature, watch all kinds of movies without it affecting us. But we are very much mistaken, because it has an effect that makes us totally dirty.

Haggai presents the people their wrong way of thinking. They thought in Babel: ‘As long as we are in Jerusalem, that is after all the city of God. As long as we are in touch with what is holy, with the holy city, that gives us the best chance to enjoy the promised blessing. Haggai goes razor-sharp against that with this priestly teaching from the law.

He says: ‘Outward touch with the holy does not process anything, but outward touch with the unclean has disastrous consequences! We may not be aware of it, but touch with the unclean affects us to the bottom of our hearts. And let us not think that touch with the holy undoes the touch with the unclean.

We say: ‘You should always be open to everyone.’ The Bible does not speak like that. The Bible says that we must break the bond if someone in our circle of friends, for example, openly mocks the holy. An outward touch



with what is unclean through what we hear and see makes us unclean. We should not think that the outer touch with the holy outweighs that. A ritual reading of the Bible after dinner, or once in a while visiting a meeting without our heart being there, is an outward touch of the holy, which has no effect at all. The holy does not have the power of an automatic radiation.

In summary we can say that all Haggai's prophecies are directed against the nonchalance of the superficial touch in two ways:

1. The superficial touch of the holy, of which we think that it gives us something extra, gives us nothing extra.
2. The superficial touch with the unclean, of which we think we can handle, makes us unclean.

### **Hag 2:14 | Everything Is Unclean**

*14 Then Haggai said, " 'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.*

In this verse Haggai gives the meaning of his questions in the previous two verses. Because of their lax attitude with regard to the work at the house of the LORD, their offering is not pleasant to the LORD. He does not accept their offerings, a fact clearly evidenced by the withholding of dew and rain and the blessing of the fruit of the land. The holy meat of the offering cannot transfer its holiness to the offeror if he is only pursuing his own interests. On the contrary, by his unholy attitude he transmits his uncleanness to everything he does, including his offerings. There has to be personal cleanness before someone can act or offer properly.

Also in this verse there is mention of "this people" (cf. Hag 1:2). In their place before the LORD, the people look on the one hand like a man who carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and on the other hand like a man who has become unclean by the touch of death. Israel has a sanctuary in the land. Because of this also the land becomes holy. But the people who live in the land do not automatically become holy because of this, nor does everything they build or cultivate there become holy. Israel has become unclean through the failure to rebuild God's house. As a result, everything

the people touch, anything they plant or build or sacrifice on the altar, also becomes unclean.

Haggai is closely involved with a people who have let themselves to be touched only externally, but who do not give the LORD, that is the Lord Jesus, the first place. It is a people who do not seek the kingdom of God first (Mt 6:33), rebuild the temple first and only then rebuild their own house.

### **Hag 2:15-17 | A Look Back**

*15 But now, do consider from this day onward: before one stone was placed on another in the temple of the LORD, 16 from that time [when] one came to a [grain] heap of twenty [measures], there would be only ten; and [when] one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there would be [only] twenty. 17 I smote you [and] every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you [did] not [come back] to Me,' declares the LORD.*

The prophet calls on the people to look back to find out what they were doing when they stopped working on the temple and what consequences they experienced (verse 15). This should lead them to work “from this day onward” on the rebuilding of God’s house.

If they look back, they will have to conclude that the land has only produced part of the expected harvest (verse 16). They thought the harvest would give a certain yield, but that was disappointing. The cause of the disappointing yield of the threshing floor and wine vat is not due to changed weather conditions. The LORD Himself is the Cause of it (verse 17).

He said through Moses that he would give plagues like “blasting wind” and “mildew”, plagues affecting various types of grain, if the people were unfaithful (Deu 28:22). Haggai adds “hail”, which particularly affects the vintage and fig harvest (Psa 78:47). In spite of all this, the people have not turned to God.

### **Hag 2:18-19 | The Blessing Is Promised**

*18 'Do consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth [month]; from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded, consider: 19 Is the seed still in the barn? Even including the vine, the fig tree, the pome-*

*granate and the olive tree, it has not borne [fruit]. Yet from this day on I will bless [you].”*

The prophet does not tire of calling for consideration of the events they have experienced (verse 18). When they look at the proceeds of the land, they must come to the conclusion that God has not blessed them and that this is because of their disobedience (verse 19). But now that they have become obedient, He will bless them again from this moment on.

“From this day”, that is, “from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth [month]”, fruitful times will come again. Fields and trees will start to bear fruit again. This is a promise for all those who judge what is evil and want to walk in the truth.

### **Hag 2:20-22 | A Word for Zerubbabel**

*20 Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth [day] of the month, saying, 21 “Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, ‘I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. 22 I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.’*

On the day of the prediction of blessing the word of the LORD comes for the second time to Haggai (verse 20). It is his fourth and final message. He must personally tell Zerubbabel what the LORD will do. Zerubbabel is the rightful heir to the throne in the line of David. There is nothing to be seen of it here yet. Here he is the governor of Judah in the service of the Medes and Persians to whom Judah is subject (verse 21).

But Haggai has an encouraging message for him. The land may be subject to foreign domination, but the LORD will change that situation. He does so with the power He has to shake heaven and earth. These words point back to the verses that also speak of the shaking of heaven and earth (verses 6-7).

The LORD will change the situation of His people by overthrowing the throne of the kingdoms. The throne is the symbol of kingship or dominion (Dan 7:27). He will break their reign, so that they no longer have any strength to rise themselves up against His people. The means by which

they have shown their strength, such as “the chariots and their riders”, and “the horses and their riders”, will be overthrown and will go down.

The LORD will do this by letting them exterminate one another, “everyone by the sword of another” that is, of his brother in the evil that they have done to God’s people. One hostile realm will destroy the other (Zec 14:13; cf. Eze 38:21). This paves the way for the introduction of the King to God’s heart, the Messiah, of Whom Zerubbabel is a picture. We see this in the next and last verse of this book.

### **Hag 2:23 | A Word to Zerubbabel**

*23 ‘On that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet [ring], for I have chosen you,’” declares the LORD of hosts.*

“On that day” is the day when all enmity is extinguished, as described in the preceding verse. Immediately after that follows: “Declares the LORD of hosts.” This is repeated at the end of the verse. In the middle of the verse it also says: “Declares the LORD.” Three times it says in this verse that the LORD speaks, twice of which is pointed out His dominion over all hosts, wherever they may be and whatever they may be.

What He says, happens, because He has all the power to carry it out. Any doubt about His words is therefore excluded. This is further emphasized by the double mention of the LORD what He will do – “I will” and “I will” – and also of His election – “I will make you ...”; “I have chosen you”. All emphasis here is on the LORD, on Who He is and what He will do and has done.

This confirmation is needed by this descendant of David and the rightful claimant to the throne of David. It is also a great encouragement for the small and weak remnant over which Zerubbabel is governor.

The LORD speaks to “Zerubbabel, son of Sealthiel, My servant”. It is a word for him personally. The fact that the LORD speaks to him so emphatically as “My servant,” underlines the thought that via Zerubbabel it is ultimately about the Messiah (Isa 41:8; 42:1; 49:5-6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).

The LORD does not *give* Zerubbabel a signet ring, but *makes* him a signet ring. A signet ring is a sign of honor and authority (Song 8:6; Jer 22:24). The bearer thus marks letters or documents, which then represent him (Gen 38:18; 1Kgs 21:8; Dan 6:18; Est 8:8). As already mentioned, Zerubbabel is a type of Christ. God's goal is to use Christ as His signet ring and to put the imprint, the mark, of Christ on all things created.

This is not yet the case. The nations do not take Him into account, they are not impressed by Him. But anyone who accepts the gospel among the nations will be impressed and become an imprint of Him.

The signet ring belongs inextricably to the wearer. God will give Zerubbabel a position in which he will be and remain inseparably connected to the LORD. He will not throw him away, but keep him as His valuable property. The promise does not apply to him personally, but to the official position he occupies. This is evident from the fact that what is prophesied will only come when all kingdoms will be overthrown (Dan 2:44a). It looks forward to Christ whose kingdom will not come to an end (Dan 2:44b; Lk 1:32-33).

Thus ends the book Haggai, which began so discouragingly and depressingly, in an uplifting and promising way. The first message of Haggai is an indictment. In his last message he speaks about a great and blessed future for the people of God. As we now know that future was much further away than both Haggai and Zerubbabel thought. But in the thoughts of God it is as close and sure as the sun rising in the morning.

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