

# Route 66

## *Haggai: First Things First*

Part 37 – May 16, 2010

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are the last three prophets/books of the OT; they all ministered *after* the Jews returned home. Haggai is the first voice to be recorded after the exile. Let's back up and look at what leads up to it:



Artist, Francesco Hayez, 1867

Fifty years after the destruction of the temple *and* Jerusalem, a Persian leader named Cyrus the Great triumphantly enters Babylon (October 29, 539<sup>BC</sup>) and declares himself king. And the Persian Empire is born!



Cyrus the Great



The Cyrus Cylinder circa 539 BC

Cyrus then garners much devotion and loyalty by freeing Babylon's displaced political prisoners (as recorded on this cylinder). He returns the temple artifacts and even offers to fund the restoration project (an act foretold 200 years earlier by Isaiah, even calling *Cyrus* by name). (*Isaiah 44:28 – 45:4*)

[We covered all of this in detail in the message on the book of Ezra.]

Well, 50,000 Jews take Cyrus up on his offer (mostly priests and Levites and the poor). Though many, like Daniel (who's been serving in Babylonian for 70+/- years), choose to remain behind. But, among the homebound remnant is old Haggai, who evidently remembers the temple's glory (2:3) and longs to see it rebuilt.

And once back in Jerusalem, the people quickly and eagerly reconstruct the altar, and the priests begin making sacrifices. (*Ezra 3:1-3*) And then, within two short years (536<sup>BC</sup>), they lay the temple's foundation and celebrate! (*Ezra 3:8*)

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. - *Ezra 3:11b NIV*

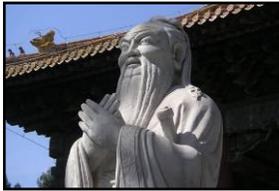
But then, as Ezra reports, their neighbors fear the possible revival of a Jewish state and discourage the workers with threats of violence, and frustrate their plans for *six* years. And then Cyrus is killed in battle (530<sup>BC</sup>), and his son Cambyses II<sup>1</sup> [kam-BIGH-seez] takes the throne. And Judah's enemies fire off a letter to the new king (it's recorded in *Ezra 4:9-16*) falsely accusing the Jews of rebuilding the "walls" in order to rebel. And Cambyses orders them to cease and desist! And so they do. Another eight years pass as they establish their homes and farms and businesses and the basic necessities of life.

<sup>1</sup> In Ezra, Cambyses II is referred to "Xerxes" and "Artaxerxes"; both are Persian equivalents to the Egyptian term, "Pharaoh".



King Darius I, circa 522 BC

SIDEBAR: Also during this time Cambyses murders his brother, Smerdis, keeps the death a secret, and takes his army to conquer Egypt. But, while he's away, the palace custodian puts a Smerdis impersonator on the throne. And then Cambyses dies of mysterious causes. This lasts for seven months (the impersonation, not the death).



Statue of Confucius

And then, Darius I [duh-RIGH-uhs] (3rd cousin of the *real* Smerdis) assassinates the imposter and is crowned as king. And two *more* years pass. Confucius is flourishing in China, and the world moves on, and there sits the foundation. No more fanfare; no more inclination to build on it.

And at this moment in world history, God speaks through Haggai, four short messages (between August 29th and December 18th).

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai ... This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" - *Haggai 1:1-2 NIV condensed*

They weren't telling God "no", just "not now". They put God on hold. And so, He asks them a question about their priorities.

Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? - *Haggai 1:4 NIV*

Their houses were made of stone. Wood paneling was a *luxury*. They've well met their necessities and are now putting all their energy into their own fortunes and their own *personal upgrades*. Haggai is a motivator with a simple message: "BUILD THE TEMPLE!" Unlike the other prophets, Haggai doesn't rebuke them for "doing the *wrong* thing"; but, for "*not doing* the *right* thing". They're not so much guilty of sins of *commission*, but sins of *omission*.

As believers we're prone to omission and neglect: *not* seeking and embracing His presence as a central purpose of why we're alive; and *not* expressing gratitude and praise on a daily basis. We tend to put second things first and first things second.

So many things in life are *important* but they're not *urgent* (they don't have a deadline), and *that's* what trips us up. The tyranny of the urgent is the enemy of the important. Remember: Busyness is a choice and a decision. And the bitter fruit of misplaced priorities is discontentment. So, the Haggai cautions them to really examine their ways.

Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." - *Haggai 1:5-6 NIV*

If you devote yourself to sowing, eating, drinking, clothing, and earning to the neglect of God you'll *never* be satisfied. Every pleasure will leave a sour aftertaste of emptiness.

They had an altar; they had the basics. They were doing their duty; they were sacrificing. Why is the temple such a big deal? In the Garden of Eden God dwelled among His children until sin severed their relationship.



After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. - *Genesis 3:24a NLT*

Interesting. Did you know God sent them out to the “east”?  
Did you know that the temple had to be built facing east?<sup>2</sup>

God stationed the “cherubim” (angels) for Adam and Eve’s welfare. And, did you know that cherubim aren’t mentioned again until it comes to the construction of the Tabernacle (and the Temple)? According to 2 Chronicles 3:14, cherubim were worked into the curtain that separated the holy of holies, where God’s glory resided. When the Lord first proposed the idea to Moses, He said:

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. - *Exodus 25:8 NIV*

The altar signified religion, but the sanctuary signified relationship. This is a far cry from Eden, but a big first step! He’s only dwelling with Israel, but His sights are set on China! The temple was at once both a symbol and a means to restoring the intimacy that He and we (and the world) lost in the garden. The reason the curtained entrance to His presence faced east, was because He was waiting for his children to come home.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. - *Mark 15:37-38 NIV*

The cherubim were no longer needed! The gates of the garden have been thrown wide open. We’ve been forgiven and welcomed back in. And now He dwells inside of *you!*

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? - *1 Corinthians 3:16 NIV*

From the beginning, His plan was and *still is* to reveal His presence and His power and His purpose through His temple. Don’t settle for a foundation; don’t settle for second-rate secular pursuits. Don’t *defraud* yourself. BUILD THE TEMPLE! Appreciate His presence and prioritize your praise.

Haggai has something that few other prophets had: success! He tells us that his people responded with enthusiasm!

---

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 47:1

They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius. - *Haggai 1:14-15 NIV*

He spoke on August 29, they got to work on September 21 ... *and* they were discouraged by October 17!

Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? - *Haggai 2:3 NIV*

Turns out 50,000 dirt-poor Jews couldn't compete with Solomon's tons of gold and silver, and two-and-a-half *million* subjects! We tend to compare our temple to other temples; and our temple can seem so ... under-budgeted. And you think, "Who am I kidding?" And you just want to throw in the towel sometimes and watch TV. But, Haggai encouraged his people to press on:

"Be strong, all you people of the land," declares the Lord, "and work. For I am with you" ... - *Haggai 2:4b NIV*

When you get discouraged with slow progress or a poor outcome, keep in mind that God is in you and with you and working away. He's echoing the words King David said to his son, when Solomon was given the lofty task of building the *first* temple.

David also said to Solomon his son, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. - 1 *Chronicles 28:20a NIV*

Haggai goes on to say:

"I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord Almighty. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the Lord Almighty. "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty. - *Haggai 2:7-9a NIV*

In other words: You build more than you're aware of. The Lord seems to delight in taking imperfect, impoverished temples and filling them with His glory. But, you gotta BUILD THE TEMPLE! It's *His* kingdom over mine. They finished the temple just 4.5 years after they began. I love how Luke 12:33-34 reads in the New Living Translation:

... the purses of heaven never get old or develop holes. Your treasure will be safe; no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. - *Luke 12:33-34 NLT*

Our heart's true desire is reflected in our priorities. The problem isn't the volume of demands or lack of time; it's failing to identify the worthy, and putting first things first.