

Introduction to Haggai

Author and Date

The book of [Haggai](#) contains messages delivered by the prophet Haggai, and thus it is reasonable to consider Haggai its author. Little is known about Haggai's personal background. The specific mention of the "second year of Darius" ([1:1](#)) places the book in the year 520 BC. Haggai ministered among the Jews who had returned to Judea after some 70 years of exile in Babylon. The Persian ruler Cyrus the Great captured Babylon in 539 BC, and in 538 he permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple ([Ezra 1-2](#)). The work of rebuilding stalled, however, when opposition arose ([Ezra 3:1-4:5](#)). Haggai encouraged the people to renew the work of restoration.

The Gospel in Haggai

With its focus on rebuilding the house of the Lord, the book of [Haggai](#) would be easy to apply moralistically, especially in the midst of a church building program. The key to applying the book in a gospel-centered way is to see that the temple, like the tabernacle before it, was the visible symbol of God dwelling in the midst of his people, and therefore it foreshadows Christ, the one in whom the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" in our midst (see [John 1:14](#)).

Christ himself is the new temple in the New Testament ([John 2:19](#)). As his body, the church is also the new temple ([Eph. 2:16-22](#)). The message of this book for Christians is thus not primarily about restoring a building in Jerusalem, or about constructing a contemporary building: Haggai is all about the ongoing work of building up the people of God, a work that is primarily God's ([Matt. 16:18](#)), but a work in which he, by his Spirit, invites us to participate ([1 Cor. 3:10-17](#)).

The other prominent link to the gospel is through Zerubbabel, the faithful descendant of David who leads the people in restoring the temple. Though Zerubbabel's grandfather, Jehoiachin (also known as Coniah), was earlier discarded by the Lord like an unwanted signet ring, in Zerubbabel the chosen status of the Davidic line was restored ([Hag. 2:19-23](#)). Zerubbabel was one of the ancestors of Christ ([Matt. 1:12](#)) and foreshadowed his faithful zeal to build God's house ([John 2:17](#)).

Haggai Outline

- Introduction: Reluctant Rebuilders ([1:1-2](#))
- Consider Your Ways: Fruitless Prosperity ([1:3-12](#))
- Promise and Progress ([1:13-15a](#))
- The Former and Latter Glory of This House ([1:15b-2:9](#))
- Consider Your Ways: Holiness and Defilement; Repentance and Blessing ([2:10-19](#))
- Zerubbabel: The Signet Ring ([2:20-23](#))

Introduction to Zechariah

Author and Date

Zechariah was a prophet and a priest. He began his ministry in 520 BC, shortly after Haggai had begun his prophetic work. Nearly 20 years after returning from the Babylonian exile in the time of Cyrus (538 BC), God's people were discouraged. The foundation of the temple had been laid shortly after the initial return, in 536 BC, but powerful opposition had prevented further progress on rebuilding it.

The Gospel in Zechariah

Zechariah's prophecy begins with a cycle of vivid and complex visions, and it would be easy to get lost trying to explain all of the intricate details. Yet we are not left alone to try to understand these visions: the Lord sent an interpreting angel to Zechariah (and to us), and we can find the meaning of the visions explained in the angel's comments. He repeatedly points us to the coming of "the Branch" ([3:8](#); [6:12](#)), the messianic offspring of David promised in [Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15](#), who combines in himself the offices of king and priest ([Zech. 6:13](#)). This Branch will purify his people and remove their sin in one day ([3:9](#)).

Writing to people who were discouraged by living, after the exile, in a "day of small things" ([4:10](#)), when there seemed to be little progress toward the glorious future promised in the earlier prophets, Zechariah encouraged them to look forward to the day when the Lord would act once again. The righteous King was coming to bring salvation and to bring an end to war and suffering ([9:9-17](#)).

That coming would, strikingly, result in the piercing of God himself, which would be the means by which a cleansing fountain would be opened for sin ([12:10-13:1](#)). The Good Shepherd would be struck for his sheep, who would continue to endure great suffering until the time of the end ([13:7-14:5](#)). Yet the outcome of that time of suffering and pain would be the final victory of God and the vindication of his people ([14:9](#)). Given all of these messianic themes, it is not surprising that the book of [Zechariah](#) is one of the Old Testament books most frequently quoted in the New Testament.

Zechariah Outline

Oracles and Visions ([1:1-8:23](#))

- Introduction: return to me and I will return to you ([1:1-6](#))
- Eight night visions and a sign-act ([1:7-6:15](#))
- From fasts to feasts ([7:1-8:23](#))

The Return of the King ([9:1-14:21](#))

- The first oracle: leaders and their people ([9:1-11:17](#))
- The second oracle: the people and their leaders ([12:1-14:21](#))

Introduction to Joel

Author and Date

Little is known about Joel, a prophet from Judah (perhaps Jerusalem). Most scholars date the book of [Joel](#) after the exile to Babylon (586 BC).

The Gospel in Zechariah

In typical prophetic form, Joel gives his readers both the bad news of God's judgment and the good news of his promised deliverance. The book contains a description of a dramatic judgment on God's people through a devastating plague of locusts. This serves as a warning of the great "day of the Lord" at the end of time. Joel also includes one of the Old Testament's most significant promises regarding the future coming of the Holy Spirit.

Both the judgment and the promise remind us of our desperate need for God's help. The judgment that our sins deserve is far worse than a plague of locusts. The promise of the Spirit reminds us that the help we need is nothing less than supernatural. Through the ministry of Jesus Christ, the requirements of judgment and of supernatural provision have both been met. Jesus took upon himself the plague of judgment for our sins ([2 Cor. 5:21](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#)) and then promised ([John 14:16](#)) and provided ([Acts 2](#)) the gift of the Holy Spirit. Preaching at Pentecost, the apostle Peter explains that in Jesus the "day of the Lord" prophesied by Joel has taken place—not at the end of history but in the middle of history ([Acts 2:16-21](#)).

For believers, the end-time judgment has been carried out already—at the cross of Christ. The Spirit not only enables us to believe and receive this free gift but also empowers us to live a new, gospel-shaped life ([Rom. 8:11](#)).

Joel Outline

The Judgment against Judah and the Day of the Lord ([1:1-2:17](#))

- Locust invasion: forerunner of the day of the Lord ([1:1-20](#))
- Army invasion: the arrival of the day of the Lord ([2:1-17](#))

The Mercy of the Lord and Judgment against the Nations ([2:18-3:21](#))

- Mercy: the Lord responds by restoring his people ([2:18-32](#))
- Judgment: the Lord's judgment against the nations and his dwelling with his people ([3:1-21](#))

Introduction to Malachi

Author and Date

The prophet Malachi (whose name means “my messenger”) probably lived at the same time as Ezra and Nehemiah, around 460 BC.

The Gospel in Malachi

The book of [Malachi](#) contains six oracles (or disputations) that each begin with a saying of the people, to which the Lord responds through his prophet. Most of these oracles are searching rebukes. It is striking, however, that before the Lord rebukes the people, he begins by affirming his electing love for them, which is the reason they continue to exist after the judgment of the exile ([1:2](#)). He didn’t choose their forefather Jacob to be the ancestor of his people because of his good works but in spite of his sin. So too, their sin cannot make God cease loving them. The non-elect, however, will be judged for their sin without hope, as the fate of the descendants of Esau (Edom) makes clear.

We too were chosen to belong to God, not based on our works but simply out of God’s electing grace in Christ ([Eph. 1:4-6](#)). We therefore cannot sin our way out of God’s love. Yet at the same time, we were chosen to be holy and blameless ([Eph. 1:4](#)), not only positionally but also practically. So God rebukes our sin through his Word, and calls us to repent sincerely and turn to him for forgiveness.

And yet the ultimate remedy for our sin is not our repentant obedience, but the Lord’s coming to his temple ([Mal. 3:1](#)). Our own righteousness cannot stand the exposure that that day will bring any more than dross could survive the refiner’s fire or dirt could endure the launderer’s soap ([3:2](#)). We need the righteousness of another, if we are going to stand on that day—which is precisely what God gives us in the gospel. As a result, the day of the Lord’s coming for believers is not a fiery, destructive furnace that we need to fear but rather a warming sun of righteousness that rises on us for our healing ([4:1-2](#)). For in Jesus, God does come to his temple—not the temple building, but the temple of Christ’s own body—which we are. There, humans can once more meet with God.

Malachi Outline

- Title ([1:1](#))
- Disputation 1 ([1:2-5](#))
- Disputation 2 ([1:6-2:9](#))
- Disputation 3 ([2:10-16](#))
- Disputation 4 ([2:17-3:5](#))
- Disputation 5 ([3:6-12](#))
- Disputation 6 ([3:13-4:3](#))
- Summary ([4:4-6](#))