

Haggai 1:1

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The prophet Haggai receives the word of the LORD during the second year of King Darius of Persia. His prophecy is directed to Judah's top civil and religious leaders.

The book of Haggai begins with a title verse providing the reader with information concerning the date, authorship, and source of the prophecy. It states that the prophecy occurred *in the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month* (vs. 1). The biblical text dates the prophecy as the *second year* of the Persian king *Darius*. This is unlike the historical books of 1 Samuel—2 Kings, which typically date time based on the reign of kings of the kingdoms of Israel or Judah. But after the defeat and exile of Judah by Babylon, there were no more national kings in Judah (Zechariah 1:1; Daniel 2).

The man *Darius* was the fourth king who ruled Persia, the nation that defeated Babylonia in 539 BC. The first Persian king was Cyrus II, who ruled Persia from 559 BC to 530 BC. Cyrus was the agent the LORD used to restore the nation of Judah from exile (2 Chronicles 36:22–23). The next Persian king was Cambyses II. He took the throne in 530 BC when his father, Cyrus II, died. He remained there until he allegedly committed suicide in 522 BC.

The successor of Cambyses was Gautama. He ruled for a short time. Since many people did not like him, they arranged a plot to remove him from the throne. The leader of this coup was *Darius* Hystaspes, who, with six collaborators, assassinated Gautama and ruled in his place. King *Darius* secured the throne of Persia in 522 BC and remained there until 486 BC. Assuming these dates are accurate, that means that the prophecy of Haggai took place in 520 BC.

Haggai further stated that the prophecy took place *on the first day*. The *first day* refers to the first day of the month. That means that it occurred on the *day* of the new moon in the lunar calendar. In ancient times, the people of Israel and Judah observed *the first day* of each month as a holy day of worship, as evidenced in Ezekiel 46:3. During that time, they would “present a burnt offering to the LORD” their God (Numbers 28:11).

According to the Jewish calendar, *the sixth month* would have been the month of “Elul” corresponding to “August” in the Gregorian calendar (Nehemiah 6:15). During that month, the Israelites usually harvested grapes, figs, and pomegranates.

The prophet tells us that *on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of Darius, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai* (vs 1).

The phrase *word of the LORD* refers to Yahweh's revelation (1 Kings 6:11; 16:1). In biblical times, God often revealed His will to some individuals who, in turn, were to relay the divine message to others. For instance, God spoke to Hosea, the son of Beerai (Hosea 1:1) and Joel, the son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1). He spoke to Micah of Moresheth (Micah 1:1), Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1), etc. These individuals were the spokesmen of God, so the Bible calls them each a *prophet*.

The term *prophet* (“nābî” in Hebrew) means “proclaimer” or “forth-teller.” It describes someone who received a call from God to be God’s spokesman. A *prophet* was a messenger of God. That means that he did not speak from his authority but was empowered to speak on behalf of God. The frequent prophetic formula “Thus says the LORD” (Jeremiah 11:3; Jeremiah 33:2; Isaiah 48:17) confirms this truth. It makes clear that the *prophet* spoke what he received from the LORD.

Although the Hebrew term “nābî” can apply to true and false prophets alike (Jeremiah 6:13; 26:7–8; 27:9; 28:1; Zechariah 13:2), *Haggai* was a true *prophet* because *the word of the LORD came by him*. The prepositional phrase translated as *by the prophet Haggai* is literally “by the hand of the prophet Haggai,” suggesting that he was God’s instrument.

The English name *Haggai* is pronounced as “Chaggai” in Hebrew and means “festal.” It is derived from the Hebrew term “chag” meaning “festival,” suggesting that the *prophet* was born on the Feast of the Passover or some other major feast.

We are not told anything about the *prophet*’s family or his background. Not even the name of his father has survived. Nevertheless, the content of his prophecy helps us to determine when he lived. The *prophet Haggai* ministered to the Jews who returned to Judah after about 70 years of captivity in Babylonia (Jeremiah 29:1–12). He delivered four messages within six months in 520 BC *in the second year* of Darius Hystaspes of Persia (522 BC to 486 BC). Each message begins with the date of the prophecy, followed by an iteration of the divine prophetic formula (“Thus says the LORD of hosts”).

The first message was directed to *Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest* (vs 1). The man *Zerubbabel* was a descendant of King David and a grandson of King Jehoiachin (1 Chronicles 3:17–19; 2 Kings 24). He served as governor of Judah under King *Darius* of Persia. He led a group of exiles back to Judah (Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 7:7).

Zerubbabel means “born in Babel.” Babylon and Babel are different translations of the same Hebrew word. This might indicate that the political leader represents a generation of Israelites that were born in Babylon, but who chose to move back to their spiritual homeland, despite the difficulties.

Joshua means “Yahweh is salvation.” It is the Hebrew name translated into English as “Jesus.” It might represent the religious leader as the one pointing Israel back to its covenant God, Yahweh, who is their only hope of deliverance.

As for *Joshua*, his father *Jehozadak* was the *high priest* who went to Babylonia “when the LORD carried Judah and Jerusalem away into exile by Nebuchadnezzar” (1 Chronicles 6:15). These two men—*Zerubbabel and Joshua*—were the force behind the rebuilding of the “house of God” in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:2).

Zerubbabel represented the leader of Judah's civil government and *Joshua* the priest represented the head of Judah's religious leadership. Good leadership makes an enormous difference, and these men provided courageous leadership to Judah.

Biblical Text

¹In 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.