

Haggai 1:12-15

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The people of Judah respond positively to Haggai's exhortation to rebuild the temple. Then, the LORD stirs up their spirit, giving them a boost to complete the project.

The LORD, through Haggai, exhorted the people of Judah to rebuild the temple, which they had neglected for sixteen years while building paneled houses for themselves. During those years, the people experienced all sorts of calamities. They worked hard to cultivate the land but reaped little at harvest time. Then what they harvested did not last (Haggai 1:9–11).

The LORD confronted them with their neglect and misplaced priorities, explaining the reason for their crop failure. *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* (vs 12).

The man *Zerubbabel* was a descendant of 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).

As for *Joshua*, his father *Jehozadak* was the *high priest* who went to Babylonia when the Suzerain (Ruler) God sent the Judeans into exile (1 Chronicles 6:15). These two men—*Zerubbabel and Joshua*—were the positive leadership force behind the rebuilding of the “house of God” in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:2).

Zerubbabel and Joshua encouraged *all the remnant of the people*—all the Judean exiles who had returned to their homeland in Jerusalem—to rebuild the temple. The people responded positively to *the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him*. The people *obeyed the voice of the LORD* (vs 12) as spoken through *Haggai*.

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, like an ambassador is to a president in our societies today. A *prophet* was a messenger of God. That means he did not speak from his authority but was empowered to speak God’s truth to others.

The people of Judah recognized *the words of Haggai* as God’s revelation. They listened carefully to the message and *showed reverence for the LORD* (vs 12). The verb translated *show reverence* is literally “to fear” in Hebrew. To fear God or *show reverence* for Him is to display an attitude of respect and awe. It is also to care most what He thinks and says, and whether He approves of our behavior (Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:2, 13; 10:12).

In other words, to *show reverence for the LORD* is to speak and act in a way that pleases Him. This is the essence of keeping God’s covenant with Israel. It is this attitude and action that God promised to bless. The returning exiles of Judah learned to trust in God through difficulty. They

repaired the temple, and faced down their opponents. Although there was some opposition, the Judeans resumed the building project, as *the LORD their God* had commanded.

Roughly sixteen years earlier, the “work on the house of God in Jerusalem ceased” by the order of the Persian king Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:23-24). Now, by God’s command, the people of Judah defied the order, and began to rebuild (Ezra 5:1-2). This will lead to a legal appeal, and a resulting reinstatement of Cyrus’s original decree.

The LORD took pleasure in the people’s positive response and gave a message to *Haggai*. Then, *Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the commission of the LORD to the people* (vs 13). Earlier, the text described *Haggai* as a *prophet*, God’s envoy (v. 12). Here, it gives him an additional title: *the messenger of the LORD* because *Haggai*’s message originated from *the LORD*. He was an agent entrusted with a word of revelation from God (Isaiah 6:8).

As *Haggai* addressed the people, he *spoke by the commission of the LORD*. He was not self-appointed. He was commissioned by God. That means he reported to them what *the LORD* told him to say. In this verse, *the LORD* told him to tell the people: *I am with you* (vs 13).

The Suzerain (Ruler) God assured His covenant people of His protective presence. Such a promise served to encourage the people to resume the building project and complete it. They did not have to be afraid of their enemies because the LORD their God is the all-powerful LORD of armies (hosts), and would stand by them when they followed His way. His presence would bring the project to fruition. After the affirmation of God’s presence among His people, the prophet *Haggai* added the formula *declares the LORD* to provide more weight to the message.

After the LORD reassured the people of His presence, He *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* (vs 14).

The verb *stir up* means “to rouse” or “to awaken.” It is the same verb used in 2 Chronicles to describe how the LORD moved the heart of King Cyrus of Persia several years previous to issue a decree allowing the Judean exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild the temple (2 Chronicles 36:22–23).

God rewarded the obedience of the returning exiles. The exiles are called *the remnant of the people* because there were so few who returned compared to the number slain during the Babylonian invasion, or perhaps those who remained in exile. Once the people responded, God intervened supernaturally and moved their hearts further. So *they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God* (vs 14).

God gave Judah a good boost, enabling them to accomplish the task of rebuilding the temple (vs 14). But He did so after they had obeyed His voice and trusted Him. Thus, the returning exiles resumed work *on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of Darius the king* (vs 15). The date here is about September 21, 520 BC., three and one-half weeks after *Haggai* gave the first prophecy. It seems there was some hesitation, but the people did respond. And when they did, God blessed them with additional zeal.

The construction was noticed by Judah's enemies, who warned them to cease, and questioned their authorization (Ezra 5:3-17). They sent a letter to Darius, who searched the archives and found the original authorization from Cyrus, and allowed the temple construction to continue (Ezra 6:1-7). This overturned the cease-and-desist order from King Artaxerxes. It is interesting to note that God first stirred the heart of the people to act, then cleared the legal path for them to continue. This was a tangible manifestation of God's promise to Judah that *I am with you* (vs 13).

Biblical Text

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.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.”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.