

# Haggai

## 1

**Summary:** *Haggai 1 records the first prophetic oracle of the post-exilic period, dated precisely to the second year of Darius I of Persia (520 BCE). The returned exiles have rebuilt their own homes but left the LORD's temple in ruins. Through Haggai, God confronts this misplaced priority: they plant much but harvest little, earn wages that vanish like coins dropped into a bag full of holes. The people respond with rare obedience — Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest lead the community to resume building. God's brief assurance closes the chapter: 'I am with you.'*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Haggai is one of the most precisely dated books in the Hebrew Bible, with four oracles anchored to specific days. The rhetorical question in verse 4 — 'Is it time for you to live in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?' — uses the Hebrew saphan ('paneled'), the same word describing Solomon's original temple paneling in 1 Kings 6:9. The implication is devastating: the people have given their own homes the luxury that belongs to God's house. The economic futility described in verses 6 and 9-11 echoes the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:38-40 — they are experiencing the consequences of covenant neglect. Uniquely among the prophets, the people actually obey immediately (v. 12), making Haggai one of the few prophetic success stories.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase tseror naquv ('a bag with holes,' v. 6) is vivid Hebrew idiom — we preserved it as 'a bag full of holes' rather than abstracting it to 'wasted effort.' The verb charvah ('to be dry/desolate') in verse 11 creates a wordplay with chorev ('ruins/desolation') in verse 4 — both describing dryness, one of the temple and one of the land, linking the temple's condition to the agricultural crisis. We rendered ne'um YHWH consistently as 'declares the LORD' throughout the post-exilic prophets.*

**Connections:** *The call to 'go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house' (v. 8) echoes the original tabernacle construction in Exodus 25-31 where God commands the gathering of materials. The promise 'I am with you' (v. 13) reprises the fundamental covenant assurance found in Genesis 26:3, Exodus 3:12, Joshua 1:5, and Isaiah 41:10. The dating formula 'in the second year of Darius the king' connects to the narrative framework of Ezra 4-6, which records the political circumstances surrounding the temple rebuilding.*

<sup>1</sup>In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: <sup>2</sup>This is what the LORD of Armies says: This people says, 'The time has not come — the time for the house of the LORD to be

rebuilt.' <sup>3</sup>Then the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet: <sup>4</sup>Is it time for you — you yourselves — to live in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins? <sup>5</sup>So now, this is what the LORD of Armies says: Set your hearts on your ways. <sup>6</sup>You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink but are never satisfied. You put on clothes but no one is warm. And whoever earns wages earns them only to put them in a bag full of holes. <sup>7</sup>This is what the LORD of Armies says: Set your hearts on your ways. <sup>8</sup>Go up into the hills and bring back timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified, says the LORD. <sup>9</sup>You expected much, but look — it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of Armies. Because my house lies in ruins while each of you runs to his own house. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, because of you, the heavens have withheld their dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. <sup>11</sup>I summoned a drought on the land and on the hills, on the grain and the new wine and the olive oil, on everything the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands. <sup>12</sup>Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, along with the entire 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 feared the LORD. <sup>13</sup>Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke the LORD's message to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup>And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the entire remnant of the people. They came and began work on the house of the LORD of Armies, their God, <sup>15</sup>on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date corresponds to August 29, 520 BCE. The Hebrew beyad ('by the hand of') indicates Haggai as the instrument through whom God's word was delivered — rendered as 'through' for natural English. The dual address to both the civil governor (Zerubbabel) and the religious leader (Joshua) establishes the post-exilic leadership structure where political and priestly authority are shared rather than united in a king.
1. Zerubbabel's name means 'seed of Babylon' — he was born in exile. His grandfather was King Jehoiachin (1 Chronicles 3:17-19), making him a Davidic heir. The title pechat ('governor') is a Persian administrative term, not a royal title — the monarchy is over.
2. YHWH Tsevaot ('LORD of Armies') is the dominant divine title in the post-exilic prophets, appearing 14 times in Haggai's 38 verses alone. The title emphasizes God's sovereign command over heavenly and earthly forces — critical when Israel has no army of its own. The phrase ha'am hazzeh ('this people') rather than 'my people' creates deliberate distance — God does not claim them with the covenant possessive while they neglect his house.
3. The repeated prophetic reception formula (cf. v. 1) signals a new unit of divine speech. The Hebrew beyad ('by the hand of') is again rendered 'through' for consistency.
4. The emphatic pronoun attem ('you yourselves') is forceful — God is singling out their self-interest. The word sephunim ('paneled') is the same term used for the cedar paneling of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 6:9 — the people have appropriated temple-grade luxury for their own homes. The word charev ('in ruins') will create a wordplay with the drought (chorev) in verse 11. The rhetorical question is devastating: they claim it is not time to build God's house (v. 2) while making time to furnish their own.
5. The phrase simu levavkhem al-darkheikhem (literally 'set your hearts upon your ways') is more forceful than 'consider your ways.' The Hebrew levav ('heart') is the seat of will and decision, not emotion — this is a command to examine their priorities and choices with deliberate attention. This phrase is repeated in verse 7 as a literary bracket around the economic catalog of verses 6.
6. This verse is structured as a devastating five-part catalog of futility, each clause following the same pattern: effort followed by lack. The structure mirrors the covenant-curse pattern of Deuteronomy 28:38-40 — the people are experiencing the consequences of covenant neglect without recognizing the cause. The final image — tseror naquv ('a pierced bag') — is vivid Hebrew idiom for economic loss that defies explanation. We preserved the concrete image rather than abstracting it.
7. Identical to verse 5. The repetition creates a literary frame around the futility catalog of verse 6, functioning as an inclusio — the command to reflect brackets the evidence that should prompt reflection.
8. The three imperatives — go up, bring, build — are direct and urgent. The verb 'ekavedah ('I will be glorified') is from the root k-v-d, the same root as kavod ('glory'). God's glory is tied to the physical presence of his house — not because he needs a building, but because the temple represents his willingness to dwell among his people. The cohortative form 'ertseh-vo ('that I may take pleasure in it') expresses God's desire, not mere tolerance.
9. The verb naphachti ('I blew upon it') is startling — God himself is the cause of their economic loss. The wordplay between beiti ('my house') and leveto ('his house') at the end of the verse is the theological key to the entire chapter: the contrast between God's house (neglected) and their houses (prioritized). The verb ratsim ('running') implies eager, hurried attention — they rush to care for their own homes while God's house sits desolate.
10. The verb kala' ('to withhold, restrain') personifies both the heavens and the earth as agents who refuse to give — as if creation itself participates in the covenant lawsuit against the people. The language echoes Deuteronomy 28:23-24, where disobedience results in bronze skies and iron ground.

11. The Hebrew chorev ('drought') creates a deliberate wordplay with charev ('ruins') from verse 4 — the same consonants ch-r-v link the desolation of the temple to the desolation of the land. God's summoning of drought (va'eqra chorev) uses the same verb for 'calling' that one would use to summon a person — drought comes as an obedient servant of God's judgment. The comprehensive list (land, hills, grain, wine, oil, ground, people, cattle, labor) emphasizes that nothing escapes the covenant consequences.
12. This is a remarkable moment in prophetic literature — the people actually obey. The word she'erit ('remnant') is theologically loaded: these are not the whole nation but the surviving fragment that returned from Babylon. The verb shama' here means 'obeyed' rather than merely 'heard' — the covenantal sense. The phrase vayyir'u ha'am ('the people feared') uses yir'ah in its reverent sense — not terror but awe-filled respect that produces obedience.
13. Haggai is called mal'akh YHWH ('messenger of the LORD') — the same term used for angels. This is the only place in the prophetic books where a prophet receives this exact title, emphasizing that Haggai functions as God's authorized envoy. The divine assurance 'ani ittekhem ('I am with you') is the covenant presence formula — the most compact expression of the covenant relationship. It echoes the promise to Jacob (Genesis 28:15), to Moses (Exodus 3:12), and to Joshua (Joshua 1:5).
14. The verb ya'ar ('stirred up') describes divine activation of human motivation — the same verb used for God stirring up Cyrus's spirit to issue the decree permitting the return (Ezra 1:1). God's response to their obedience (v. 12) is to energize their will. The threefold 'spirit of' (ruach) — Zerubbabel, Joshua, all the remnant — shows the divine stirring touches every level of the community. The word melakhah ('work') is the same term used for the tabernacle construction work in Exodus 36:1-7.
15. This date — September 21, 520 BCE — falls twenty-three days after the oracle in verse 1. The precision documents the speed of the response: within three and a half weeks, the community has mobilized and begun construction. Some scholars attach this date to the beginning of chapter 2; in the Masoretic text it closes chapter 1, marking the date work actually commenced.

## 2

**Summary:** *Haggai 2 contains three distinct oracles delivered on two dates. The first (vv. 1-9) encourages the builders who remember Solomon's glorious temple and find the new construction pitiful by comparison — God promises that the glory of this latter house will surpass the former. The second (vv. 10-19) uses a priestly ruling about ritual purity to illustrate how the people's neglect has contaminated everything they touch, then promises blessing 'from this day forward.' The third (vv. 20-23) addresses Zerubbabel personally as God's chosen signet ring — a reversal of the curse on his grandfather Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 22:24) and a reassertion of the Davidic promise.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The promise that the glory of 'this latter house will be greater than the former' (v. 9) is one of the most audacious declarations in prophetic literature — the second temple was architecturally inferior to Solomon's, yet the prophet insists its kavod will surpass it. Jewish and Christian traditions have interpreted this in radically different ways. The signet ring oracle (v. 23) directly reverses Jeremiah 22:24, where God declared he would tear Jehoiachin (Zerubbabel's grandfather) off like a signet ring from his hand. What was removed is now restored. The phrase 'the desire of all nations will come' (v. 7) is one of the most debated translation questions in the Hebrew prophets — chemdah kol-haggoyim may mean 'desired things' (treasures) or 'the desired one' (a messianic figure).*

**Translation Friction:** *The word chemdah in verse 7 is the most significant translation challenge. The Hebrew noun is singular but the verb uva'u ('they will come') is plural, creating a grammatical tension. If chemdah is singular ('the desired one'), the plural verb is anomalous. If it means 'desired things' (treasures), the plural verb agrees. We rendered it as 'the treasures desired by all nations' following the grammatical evidence, while noting the messianic reading in the translator notes. The priestly torah ruling in verses 11-13 requires understanding Levitical purity law — holiness does not transfer by secondary contact, but uncleanness does. We preserved the catechetical question-and-answer format of the Hebrew.*

**Connections:** *The 'shaking of heavens and earth' (v. 6) is cited in Hebrews 12:26-27 as referring to a final cosmic transformation. The signet ring image (v. 23) reverses Jeremiah 22:24 and connects forward to the messianic genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. The priestly ruling on clean and unclean (vv. 11-13) applies the Levitical principles of Numbers 19:11-22 and Leviticus 6:27. The promise of peace (shalom) in verse 9 connects to the messianic peace prophecies of Isaiah 9:6-7 and Micah 5:5.*

<sup>1</sup>In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came through Haggai the prophet: <sup>2</sup>Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying: <sup>3</sup>Who among you is left who saw this house in its former glory? And how does it look to you now? Does it not seem like nothing in your eyes? <sup>4</sup>But now, be strong, Zerubbabel — declares the LORD — and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work! For I am with you, declares the LORD of Armies. <sup>5</sup>The promise that I made with you when you came out of Egypt stands, and my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear. <sup>6</sup>For this is what the LORD of Armies says: In just a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. <sup>7</sup>I will shake all the nations, and the treasures desired by all nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of Armies. <sup>8</sup>The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of Armies. <sup>9</sup>The glory of this latter house will be greater than the former, says the LORD of Armies. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of Armies. <sup>10</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet: <sup>11</sup>This is what the LORD of Armies says: Ask the priests for a ruling on the law: <sup>12</sup>If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and the fold touches bread or stew or wine or oil or any food, does that food become holy? The priests answered, "No." <sup>13</sup>Then Haggai asked, "If someone who is defiled by contact with a corpse touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered, "It becomes unclean." <sup>14</sup>Then Haggai answered and said, "So it is with this people, and so it is with this nation before me, declares the LORD. And so it is with every work of their hands — what they offer there is unclean." <sup>15</sup>Now then, set your hearts to consider — from this day and back, before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD: <sup>16</sup>In those days, when someone came to a grain heap expecting twenty measures, there were only ten. When someone came to the wine vat to draw out fifty measures, there were only twenty. <sup>17</sup>I struck you with blight and mildew and hail — everything your hands produced. Yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup>Set your hearts to consider — from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, set your hearts on it: <sup>19</sup>Is the seed still in the storehouse? Have the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree not yet produced? From this day on, I will bless you. <sup>20</sup>The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: <sup>21</sup>Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah: I am about to shake the heavens and the earth. <sup>22</sup>I will overturn the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the strength of the nations' kingdoms. I will overturn chariots and their riders, and horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother. <sup>23</sup>On that day — declares the LORD of Armies — 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 Armies.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date is October 17, 520 BCE — less than a month after construction began (1:15). The twenty-first of the seventh month would be the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), when Israel celebrated the autumn harvest and remembered God's provision in the wilderness. This timing is deliberate — the festival celebrated God's dwelling presence in the tabernacle.
2. The particle *na'* ('now, please') adds urgency to the command. The same three audiences are addressed — governor, priest, remnant — establishing the consistent leadership structure of post-exilic Judah.
3. The question assumes that some elderly returnees remembered Solomon's temple before its destruction in 586 BCE — sixty-six years earlier. The comparison is crushing: the former *kavod* ('glory') against what now appears *ke'ayin* ('like nothing'). This demoralization threatened to halt the rebuilding project entirely. Ezra 3:12 records that the old men wept when they saw the new foundation.
4. The threefold *chazaq* ('be strong') addressed to each leadership tier echoes Joshua 1:6-9, where God commanded Joshua to 'be strong and courageous' for the original conquest. The builders are cast as a new generation of conquest — not of land, but of rebuilding. The phrase *ne'um YHWH* ('declares the LORD') appears three times in a single verse, an unusual concentration that emphasizes divine authority behind every exhortation. The imperative *wa'asu* ('and work!') is terse and direct.
5. The Hebrew *karati* ('I cut') is covenant-making language — literally 'cut' a covenant, referring to the ancient practice of cutting sacrificial animals (Genesis 15:10, 17-18). The word 'promise' represents *davar* ('word, matter, thing') in context of the covenant commitment. The assurance that God's *ruach* ('Spirit') 'stands' (*omedet*) among them connects the post-exilic community to the Exodus generation — the same Spirit that led Israel through the wilderness is present now.

6. The phrase *od achat me'at* ('yet once, a little') indicates a singular, decisive divine intervention. The fourfold shaking — heavens, earth, sea, dry land — encompasses the entire created order. The author of Hebrews (12:26-27) interprets this as eschatological: the shaking removes what is temporary so that what cannot be shaken remains. The verb *mar'ish* ('shaking') suggests seismic upheaval — cosmic restructuring, not gentle correction.
7. The key translation decision: *chemdat kol-haggoyim*. The noun *chemdah* is singular ('desire, precious thing') but the verb *uva'u* is third-person masculine plural ('they will come'). This grammatical mismatch strongly favors reading *chemdah* as a collective noun — 'the desirable things of all nations,' meaning their wealth and treasures. The alternative messianic reading ('the Desired One of all nations') requires treating the plural verb as anomalous. We follow the grammar while noting both readings. The promise that *kavod* will fill the house connects to the Shekinah glory that filled Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) and the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35).
8. This brief, emphatic declaration answers the implicit objection that the second temple cannot match Solomon's because the returnees lack resources. God owns all silver and gold — the lack of human wealth is irrelevant to divine purpose. The fronted possessive *li* ('mine') is emphatic in Hebrew, and the parallelism (silver/gold) is preserved.
9. This is the theological climax of Haggai's message. The comparative *gadol...* *min* ('greater than') is unambiguous — the latter house's *kavod* will surpass the former's. How this is fulfilled has been debated: Herod's later expansion of the second temple gave it architectural grandeur, the Christian tradition sees the incarnation of Christ (who taught in this temple) as the ultimate fulfillment of *kavod*, and Jewish tradition connects it to the messianic age. The promise of *shalom* 'in this place' (*bammaqom hazzeh*) echoes Jeremiah 7:7 and the Deuteronomic theology of the chosen place.
10. The date is December 18, 520 BCE — exactly two months after the previous oracle (2:1). This third oracle introduces a new theme: ritual purity as a metaphor for the people's spiritual condition. The shift from 'through' (*beyad*, 1:1, 3; 2:1) to 'to' (*el*) may indicate this oracle came directly to Haggai rather than through him to others, though the distinction is subtle.
11. The word *torah* here means 'instruction, ruling, directive' in its original priestly sense — not the Torah as a written document but a specific priestly ruling on a point of ritual law. This is one of the few places in the prophets where the priests' teaching function is affirmed rather than criticized. The imperative *she'al-na* ('ask, please') is courteous but carries divine authority.
12. The question tests the principle of secondary holiness transfer. According to Leviticus 6:27, whatever touches consecrated flesh becomes holy — but the question here is about secondary contact: the garment touches the holy meat, then the garment touches other food. The priests correctly rule that holiness does not transfer through an intermediary. The five foods listed (bread, stew, wine, oil, any food) represent the full range of daily sustenance.
13. The second question reverses the principle: uncleanness, unlike holiness, does transfer by contact. A person defiled by a corpse (*teme-nephesh*, literally 'unclean of soul/life') contaminates everything they touch (Numbers 19:11-22). The asymmetry is the point Haggai will exploit: contamination spreads more easily than sanctification. This is a profound observation about the nature of sin and purity — defilement is contagious, but holiness requires deliberate consecration.
14. Haggai applies the priestly ruling: the people are like the corpse-defiled person, not the holy meat. Their spiritual condition contaminates everything they produce and offer. The double designation 'this people... this nation' (*ha'am hazzeh... haggoy hazzeh*) is unusually harsh — *goy* ('nation') is typically used for foreign peoples, not Israel. The word *sham* ('there') likely refers to the altar where they have been offering sacrifices even without a completed temple — their offerings are rendered unclean by their misplaced priorities.
15. The phrase *min-hayyom hazzeh vama'lah* can mean either 'from this day forward' or 'from this day and back' (looking backward). Context here favors the retrospective sense — God is asking them to recall the period before construction began. The term *hekhal* ('temple, palace') is used rather than *bayit* ('house'), elevating the language. The phrase 'stone upon stone' evokes the physical reality of construction — each stone laid is an act of covenant renewal.
16. The specificity of the numbers — twenty becomes ten, fifty becomes twenty — documents a consistent pattern of receiving roughly half of what was expected. This is not natural agricultural fluctuation but systematic divine diminishment. The word *purah* ('wine vat measure') refers to the amount expected from a single pressing. The economic shortfall exactly mirrors the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:38-40.
17. The three agricultural disasters — *shiddaphon* ('blight,' scorching east wind), *yerakon* ('mildew,' fungal crop disease), and *barad* ('hail') — are drawn directly from the covenant curse list of Deuteronomy 28:22. God is explicit: these were not natural misfortunes but targeted covenant discipline. The final clause *ve'ein etkhem elai* ('yet not you to me') is terse and pained — despite repeated warnings through economic suffering, the people did not return. This echoes the refrain of Amos 4:6-11: 'yet you did not return to me.'
18. Now the direction shifts from retrospective (v. 15) to prospective — 'from this day forward.' The repetition of *simu levavkhem* ('set your hearts') at beginning and end creates an *inclusio* framing the pivotal moment. The laying of the temple foundation marks the turning point between the era of covenant curse and the era of covenant blessing.
19. The rhetorical question acknowledges present reality: it is December, seed is still stored, the trees have not yet fruited. God's promise of blessing comes before any visible evidence of change — it is a pure act of faith. The four trees named — vine, fig, pomegranate, olive — represent the full agricultural wealth of the land of Israel. The declaration *avarekh* ('I will bless') is the covenant turning point of the entire book: from this moment, the curse is replaced by blessing.
20. Same date as verse 10 — December 18, 520 BCE. The word *shenit* ('a second time') marks this as a separate oracle delivered on the same day. This final oracle shifts focus from the community to Zerubbabel personally.

- 21.** The cosmic shaking language reprises verse 6 but now is directed specifically toward Zerubbabel. The participial form mar'ish ('shaking, about to shake') expresses imminent action — God is on the verge of cosmic intervention, and Zerubbabel stands at the center of it.
- 22.** The repeated verb haphakhti ('I will overturn') echoes the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:25), where the same verb is used. The image of enemies destroying each other — 'each by the sword of his brother' — recalls Judges 7:22 (the Midianite rout) and anticipates Ezekiel 38:21 (the Gog oracle). God's method of toppling empires is often to turn them against themselves. The language envisions the collapse of Persian imperial power, though the fulfillment extends beyond any single historical event.
- 23.** This is one of the most theologically charged verses in the post-exilic prophets. The title 'my servant' (avdi) echoes the Davidic promise in 2 Samuel 7:5, where David is called 'my servant.' The term chotam ('signet ring') directly reverses Jeremiah 22:24, where God stripped the signet from Jehoiachin — Zerubbabel's own grandfather. The threefold ne'um YHWH ('declares the LORD') in a single verse gives it extraordinary weight. The verb bacharti ('I have chosen') is the election verb used for Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6), David (1 Samuel 16:8-12), and Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:13). Zerubbabel stands as the living proof that the Davidic promise survives exile.