**Old Testament Survey**

**Book of** **Haggai**

In order to understand the work of the last three prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), we must review Jewish history. In 536, Ezra took about 50,000 Jews and returned to the Holy Land. They rebuilt the altar and started the sacrifices again, and in 535 the foundation was laid for the temple. But there was considerable opposition and the work stopped. It was not until 520 that the people took up the work again; and in 515 the temple was finally completed. It was the work of four godly men that finally brought the task to completion: Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; and Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets. See Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.

The purpose of Haggai’s ministry was to awaken the lazy people and encourage them in finishing God’s temple. It was easy to get the work started when they first arrived in the Holy Land because everyone was dedicated and enthusiastic. But after months of trial and opposition, the work lagged and finally stopped. In this little book we have four sermons from Haggai, and each one of them has a specific date. In each message, Haggai points out a particular sin that will keep us from accomplishing God’s will and finishing His work.

**Putting Self Ahead of the Lord (1:1–15)**

1. It was on September 1, 520, that Haggai delivered this message. Sixteen years had passed since the laying of the foundation, and the temple lay unfinished. This message was delivered to the two leaders of the nation, Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil ruler and the religious leader.
2. Haggai gets right to the point of his message: “The people are making excuses and neglecting God’s house. But it is time to get to work and finish the house of God.”
3. He points out their selfishness: they had built their own houses, but they said it was not time to build God’s house. In other words, they were putting self ahead of the Lord.
4. Haggai warns us that we really lose out when we put ourselves ahead of God. In 1:6 he tells us that our earnings vanish away and our possessions fail to last when God is left out. God held back the rain (v. 10), and for this reason the crops failed (v. 11).
5. The message was received with real conviction (vv. 12–15), and the leaders became stirred to do God’s will. “I am with you,” promised the Lord. “I will be glorified.” God’s people rose up and put the Lord first in their lives.

**Looking Back Instead of Looking Ahead (2:1–9)**

1. The people had been working about seven weeks when Haggai preached his second sermon on October 21, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34). It was supposed to be a great day of joy and praise, but instead it was a day of discouragement and complaining. Why? Because the people were looking back instead of looking ahead. When they had laid the foundation sixteen years before, the older men had wept because they remembered the glory of Solomon’s temple (Ezra 3:12); and now some of the people were discouraged because the new temple lacked splendor and glory.

**Failing to Confess Our Sins (2:10–19)**

1. The people expected material blessings the very day they began to work on the temple, but here it was December 24 and things were still difficult.
2. Haggai explained why God had not yet blessed them: they were still unclean; they had not confessed their sins. “You cannot give someone your holiness or health,” he explained, “but you can give someone your uncleanness and sickness.” And because the people were unclean, their work was unclean (v. 14).
3. Zechariah had preached his message in the eighth month of the same year (Zech. 1:1), just one month before Hag. 2:10–19. God was able to cleanse the people of their sins, if only they would repent.
4. Once the nation had been cleansed, God promised to bless them (v. 19). It is not enough to do God’s work; we must do it with clean hands and a pure heart. Unconfessed sin is one of the greatest obstacles to accomplishing the Lord’s work.

**Unbelief (2:20–23)**

1. This final message, preached the same day as the third message, was directed to the governor personally. No doubt Zerubbabel needed special encouragement as he directed the work of the Lord.
2. Satan always attacks spiritual leaders, and it is our duty to pray for them and work with them. But God encouraged the governor’s faith.
3. Unbelief always robs us of God’s blessings. “I will shake the heavens and the earth,” God said. “Don’t be afraid of these kingdoms. I will overthrow them and destroy them. As for you, Zerubbabel, you are a very precious jewel to Me. I have chosen you—don’t give up.” How this message must have encouraged the governor and strengthened his faith.

**Book of Zechariah**

Zechariah ministered with Haggai during the difficult days when 50,000 Jews had returned to Palestine to reestablish their city and their temple worship. The remnant went back in 536 B.C. and laid the foundations for the temple in 535, but opposition arose and the work stopped. In 530, the Lord raised up Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the leaders and the people, and in 525 they finished the work. Zechariah was both a prophet and a priest (see Neh. 12:4, 16), and from Zech. 2:4 we discover that he was a young man. His name means “Jehovah remembers.” His father’s name means “Jehovah blesses,” and his grandfather’s name means “His time.” Put them together and you have “Jehovah remembers to bless in His time.”

**Theme**

1. This book ranks next to Daniel as an OT unveiling of God’s plan for the Jews. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned over forty times in Zechariah.
2. In Zech. 1:14–17 you have the key verses of the book: God is jealous for Jerusalem; He will punish the heathen for what they did to His city; and He will one day restore the city in glory and peace. The fact that God has chosen Jerusalem in His grace is often mentioned in this book (1:17; 2:12; 3:2). He will have mercy on the city (1:12) and will one day dwell in the city (8:3, 8).

**Interpretation**

1. As with most OT prophecy, we must distinguish between the near and the distant meanings of what Zechariah says. In one verse he will be describing the fall of Jerusalem under the Romans, and in the next verse he will picture the coming of Messiah to reign. Zechariah’s favorite name for God is “Lord of Hosts”—the Lord of the armies. He sees the Lord coming to defeat Israel’s enemies and establish Jerusalem in peace and glory.

**The Book**

1. The book is divided into three parts. In chapters 1–6, the prophet describes eight visions, all of which summarize the message of the book: Jerusalem shall be delivered, cleansed, and reestablished in peace and prosperity. The section closes with the crowning of Joshua as king-priest, certainly a picture of Jesus Christ.
2. Chapters 7–8 are the record of a visit from some Jews to ask about their fasts in commemoration of the fall of Jerusalem. This fast was in the fifth month (2 Kings 25:8; Jer. 52:12). There is a question. If Jerusalem is going to be rebuilt, why continue the fast? Zechariah replies that their fasting ought to be from the heart and not from the calendar, and he promises that in the glorified city, their fasts will be turned into feasts.
3. The final section (9–14) is a description of Jerusalem and God’s victory over the Gentile nations. In 9–11 we have the first “burden,” and in 12–14 the second.  Zechariah deals with the invasion of Alexander the Great, the time of the Maccabees (Jewish patriots who delivered Israel from bondage for a brief time), and even the fall of Jerusalem under the Romans. Zechariah also leaps to the “latter days” to show us the Battle of Armageddon, the return of Christ to earth, and the establishing of the kingdom.

**Christ**

1. Zechariah shows us Jesus Christ in many aspects of His ministry: the King (9:9; Matt. 21:4–5); the Stone (3:9; 10:4; Rom. 9:31–33); the Slave sold for thirty pieces of silver (11:12; Matt. 27:3–10); the smitten Shepherd (13:7; Matt. 26:31); the Branch (3:8, 6:12; see Isa. 4:2, 11:1; Jer. 23:5, 33:15); the glorious Ruler (14:1–4, 9, 16–17).
2. The nation of Israel will look upon the Pierced One (12:10; John 19:37; Rev. 1:7) and will repent of her sins and mourn. God will open His gracious fountain and cleanse them of their sins. Note the specific groups of people who will repent (12:12–14): David (royalty), Nathan (the prophets), Levi (the priests). Throughout Israel’s history, it has been the prophets, priests, and kings who often led the people astray.
3. The glorious temple will be established by the Branch (6:12–13), and Christ the King-Priest shall reign in majesty and peace. “Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited” (14:11) for the first time in history. The glorious living waters will flow out to heal the land (14:8 and Ezek. 47:1). The Gentile nations will worship at Jerusalem (14:16), and holiness will characterize the city that Zeph. 3:1 calls “filthy.” The cleansing of Zech. 3 will be a reality, and there will be peace in the world. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6). For when Jerusalem has peace, there will be peace among all nations.

**Book of Malachi**

We know very little about this OT prophet. He ministered to the restored Jewish nation about 400 years before Christ. The sins described in this book are found in Neh. 13:10–30. Malachi directs his first message to the priests, and then he turns to the people. As the prophet delivers God’s Word, the people respond by arguing. Note the repeated “Wherein?” (1:2, 6–7; 2:17; 3:7–8, 13). It is a dangerous thing when people argue with God and try to defend their sinful ways. Malachi points out the terrible sins of the people and the priests.

**They Doubted His Love (1:1–5)**

1. “I have loved you,” God says to His people. “Oh?” they respond. “Wherein have You loved us? Prove it.” Doubting God’s love is the beginning of unbelief and disobedience.
2. God proves His love to His people in two ways: (1) He graciously chose Jacob, their father, (2) He judged the Edomites (Esau’s descendants) and gave to Israel the best of the lands.
3. He promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, but, alas, their sins polluted the land. Even then, he graciously restored them to their land and delivered them from captivity.

**They Despised His Name (1:6–14)**

1. Now God turns to the priests, who should have been the spiritual leaders of the land. The priests were not giving honor to God’s name; they were taking the best for themselves. They did not value the spiritual privileges God gave them: serving at the altar, burning the incense, and eating the dedicated showbread.
2. And they did not bring their best for the sacrifices: they brought the poorest of the animals (Deut. 15:21). God gave them His very best, and He asked for their best in return, but they would not obey Him.
3. Verse 10 the Lord asks: “Who is there spiritual enough to shut the temple doors and put an end to this hypocrisy?” God would rather see the temple closed than to have the people and the priests “playing at religion” and keeping the best for themselves.
4. The priests would not even accept a sacrifice until they had first gotten their share. It was this kind of sin that brought defeat to Israel back in Eli’s day (1 Sam. 2:12–17 and 4:1–18).
5. Verse 11 states that the “heathen Gentiles” were offering better sacrifices to the Lord than were His own people. It is too bad when unsaved people sacrifice more for their religion than do those of us who truly know the Lord.
6. We are priests through Christ, and we too are to bring “spiritual sacrifices” to Him (1 Peter 2:5). What are these sacrifices? Our bodies (Rom. 12:1–2); our offerings (Phil. 4:14–18); praise (Heb. 13:15); good works (Heb. 13:16); souls we have won to Christ (Rom. 15:16). Are we bringing Him our best—or only what is convenient for us?

**They Defiled His Covenant (2:1–17)**

1. It was no light thing to be a priest, for this was a gracious gift of God through His covenant with Levi.
2. Verses 5–7 describe the ideal priest: he fears the Lord and obeys Him; he receives the Word and teaches it; he lives what he teaches; he seeks to turn others from sin. But the priests in Malachi’s day actually led people astray (2:8) and defiled the holy covenant.
3. What would God do to them? “I will curse your blessings.” This ties in with 3:9 and the lack of tithes and offerings. God cursed the crops; the people were poor; they did not bring the offerings to the priests; therefore the priests went hungry.
4. In sinning against God’s covenant they were only hurting themselves. But vv. 10–16 point out another terrible sin of the priests: they divorced their Jewish wives and married heathen women. They dealt treacherously against the women and their families; see Ex. 34:10–17, Ezra 9:1–4, Neh. 13:23–31. All their weeping at the altar (2:13) could not change things; they had to put away their sins.

**They Disobeyed His Word (3:1–15)**

1. In 2:17 the people had scornfully asked, “Will God punish us for our sins? Does He really care?” God answers them by promising to send His messenger (John the Baptist) who would announce the Messenger of the covenant (Jesus Christ).
2. Jesus did come into the temple and expose its sins and purify its courts. In His ministry He revealed the sins of the religious leaders, so much so that they finally crucified Him.
3. Malachi closes his message with some wonderful promises to the faithful (3:16–4:6). There was that faithful remnant who did not forsake God’s house, but who met together for mutual blessing (3:16–18; see Heb. 10:25).
4. Christ is pictured as the Sun of Righteousness. To the church, He is the “Bright and Morning Star” (Rev. 22:16; 2:28), for He will appear when the hour is darkest to take His church home.

But to Israel, He is the Sun, bringing the “Day of the Lord,” a day that will mean burning to the lost, but healing to saved Jews and Gentiles. “Elijah” in 4:5–6 refers to John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13). The last word in our English OT is “curse.” At the end of the NT we read, “And there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3). The difference? Jesus Christ.