



Session

7



HAGGAI, PROPHET TO RETURNED EXILES

Haggai

Cyrus became king of Persia in 539 BC. Shortly after attaining the throne, Cyrus freed the exiles living in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. The temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, who took away all of the items used for worship. Cyrus returned the items and many people to Jerusalem. Those who returned rebuilt the foundations of the temple, but stopped with that. Hindered by opposition and other diversions, the Jews stopped rebuilding the temple for more than 20 years.

God sent Haggai, the prophet, to remind the people of their task and to refocus their attention to rebuilding the temple. The Book of Haggai has one of the most detailed chronologies in all of Scripture. Haggai actually recorded months and days of activities which can be easily calendared to show the impact of Haggai's preaching. Haggai actually has the distinction of being the first prophet to whom the people actually listened. Had earlier generations of Israelites listened when warned, perhaps Haggai's message never would have come as the people would never have ended up in captivity and the temple would still be standing.

Haggai's prophecy is a two-fold prophecy, split into four speeches. Israel had allowed outside influences to distract them from their task. The first part of Haggai's message encouraged the people to renew their commitment to rebuild the temple. But the people were more worried about their own houses than the house of the Lord. Crops had not prospered and Haggai knew why. Once the people heard Haggai's message, they responded immediately and went back to rebuilding the temple.

The second part of Haggai's message declared promises from God. God promised to inhabit the newly constructed temple and to dwell once again with His people. While this new structure paled in comparison to Solomon's temple, God introduced hope for the future by promising one day to make a temple far greater than the one Solomon built.