

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Haggai the Prophet

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 16

IN BRIEF

Saint Haggai the Prophet

Tenth of the twelve minor prophets of the Bible, who urged the rebuilding of the Temple of Jerusalem.

Feast day	December 16
Era	6th century BC

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Haggai for New Beginnings

Novena to Saint Haggai

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Haggai the Prophet

Saint Haggai is the tenth of the twelve "minor prophets" of the Bible. Back from the exile in Babylon, he preached in Jerusalem in 520 BC and urged a discouraged people to rebuild the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians. His book, only two chapters long, is one of the few prophetic texts dated precisely, down to the day. The Church remembers him on December 16, in the heart of Advent.

Who was Saint Haggai?

His Hebrew name, *Haggai*, means "festive," perhaps because he was born on a feast day. The book gives neither his family nor his age. We know only that he belonged to the generation of the return. According to tradition, he came back from Babylon with Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, a descendant of King David.

The Book of Ezra mentions him twice, together with the prophet Zechariah, as one of those who supported the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 5:1 and 6:14). Jewish tradition also attributes to him several religious rulings reported in the Talmud. He is the first of the three prophets who spoke after the exile, with Zechariah and Malachi.



The prophet Haggai, 18th-century Russian icon.

Key dates of Haggai's time

- **587 BC**: Nebuchadnezzar destroys the Temple of Jerusalem and the people are taken into exile in Babylon.
- **538 BC**: The Persian king Cyrus allows the exiles to return; work on the Temple begins, then stops.
- **520 BC**: In the second year of King Darius I, Haggai delivers his oracles, between the end of summer and the end of autumn.
- **515 BC**: Dedication of the Second Temple.

"Consider your ways"

Eighteen years after the return, the Temple was still an abandoned building site. The returned exiles had rebuilt their own houses, but they said that "the time has not yet come" to rebuild the house of God. Haggai shook them: you

live in paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins!

He pointed out that their efforts bore no fruit. They sowed much and harvested little; they ate without being satisfied; they earned wages only to put them "into a bag with holes." Twice he repeated: "Consider your ways" (Haggai 1:5 and 1:7). For the prophet, the failure of their harvests was a sign: a people that puts God last ends up empty-handed.

The message was heard. Less than a month later, Zerubbabel, the high priest Joshua and all the people went back to work. To this new start God answered through Haggai with a simple word: "I am with you." The book is one of the rare biblical accounts in which a prophet is listened to at once.

A glory greater than the first

The elders, who had known Solomon's Temple, wept at how modest the new building was. Haggai encouraged them: "Take courage, all you people of the land! Work, for I am with you" (Haggai 2:4). He announced that the glory of this new house would be greater than that of the first, and that in this place God would give peace.

The prophet also reminded the people that a building is not enough to make a people holy. Without a conversion of their actions, even their offerings remained unclean. The Temple was to be the sign of a renewed relationship with God, not a substitute for it.

His book closes with a promise addressed to Zerubbabel: God will make him like a signet ring, a sign of the faithfulness of God to the line of David. Christian tradition has read these promises in the light of Christ, the Son of David, who would himself come to teach in this Second Temple. The Latin Vulgate speaks of the "Desired of all nations" who is to come (Haggai 2:8 in the Vulgate numbering), an expression that became dear to the Advent liturgy and that gives its full meaning to the date of his feast.

Why is Saint Haggai honored?

Haggai has no particular patronage. He is honored as one of the prophets of the Old Testament, whose words prepared the coming of Christ. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on December 16, and the Eastern Churches also keep his memory on the same day. His place in the middle of Advent is no accident: like the Church in those weeks, he invites believers to prepare a dwelling for God.

What his holiness teaches us

Haggai is the prophet of new beginnings. He speaks to tired believers who have seen what they loved fall to ruin and no longer find the strength to rebuild. He does not promise them a return to the past, but the presence of God at the heart of a modest building site.

His questions remain direct: what do I put first? Do I always find that "the time has not yet come" for God? He can be prayed to for parishes and communities that must rise again, for those rebuilding a church or a life, and for all who hesitate to take up an abandoned project.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Haggai in art

- **A scroll**, often bearing his name or a verse of his book, as for the other prophets.
- **The appearance of an old, bearded man**, especially in Byzantine and Russian icons.
- **A place among the twelve minor prophets**, in series of icons, stained glass windows and sculpted portals.



The Second Temple of Jerusalem, model at the Israel Museum.

Where to pray to Saint Haggai

No relic of the prophet is known. On the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, an ancient burial cave is traditionally called the Tomb of the Prophets and associated with Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The simplest way to pray with him is to read his short book, which takes only a few minutes, especially around December 16. Many Catholics also meet his words in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the weekday Mass readings.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Haggai and the novena to Saint Haggai, from December 7 to 15.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Haggai for New Beginnings

The prophet Haggai left no prayer of his own, but his short book is full of words that still speak to anyone who has to start again. Below you will find two verses from his book to meditate on, followed by an original prayer to Saint Haggai for all who must rebuild: a parish, a family, a vocation or a life.

Words from the Book of Haggai to meditate on

> *"Consider your ways."*

Source: Book of Haggai 1:5 and 1:7. A short call, repeated twice, to look honestly at what we put first.

> *"Take courage, all you people of the land! Work, for I am with you."*

Source: Book of Haggai 2:4 (Saintspedia translation), the word of encouragement given to the people when they wept over the modest new Temple.



The prophet Haggai, Russian icon.

Prayer to Saint Haggai for new beginnings

Saint Haggai, prophet of the return, you who spoke to a tired people standing before ruins, look on all who no longer find the strength to rebuild.

You who asked, "Consider your ways," help me to see clearly what I put first. When I say that the time has not yet come for God, wake me up gently and give me back the desire to make room for him.

You who encouraged the builders of the Temple, pray for parishes that are struggling, for communities that must rise again, for families that need to be rebuilt and for every heart that has seen its hopes fall.

Obtain for me the courage to take up again the work I have abandoned, and the trust that God is with me even when what I build seems small. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

And as we wait for the coming of the Lord, help me to prepare in my life a house where he can dwell and give his peace. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

The Church commemorates the prophet Haggai on December 16, during Advent, when the liturgy calls us to prepare a dwelling for the Lord. You can also pray with him:

- when your parish begins building or restoring a church;
- when you must start again after a failure, a loss or a separation;
- when you keep putting off what you know God is asking of you;
- for Christian communities that are few in number and discouraged.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Haggai, and read the life of Saint Haggai.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Haggai

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Book of Haggai. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his commemoration, December 16, begin on December 7: you will then pray it in the heart of Advent, as the Church prepares to welcome Christ. You can also pray it at any time of year, especially when you have to rebuild something in your life.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the few verses of Haggai it refers to. Then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your life. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: The word of the Lord came

The Book of Haggai begins with a date: the first day of the sixth month of the second year of King Darius. God speaks at a precise moment, in real history, to real people. He also speaks to us today, in the circumstances of our own lives.

Prayer: Lord, open my ears to your word today, in the place where I am. Saint Haggai, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Read the first chapter of the Book of Haggai slowly.

Day 2: "The time has not yet come"

The people said it was not yet time to rebuild the house of God. There is always a good reason to wait. Haggai unmasks this excuse: what we keep putting off often shows what we really love.

Prayer: Lord, free me from my excuses and from my endless delays. Help me to answer you now. Amen.

Today: Do something for God that you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 3: Consider your ways

"Consider your ways," the prophet repeats. This is not a reproach meant to crush, but an invitation to look at our life honestly, in the light of God.

Prayer: Lord, give me the grace of a true examination of conscience, without fear and without excuses. Amen.

Today: Take ten minutes in the evening to review your day before God.

Day 4: A bag with holes

The people earned wages only to put them into a bag with holes. When God is not at the center, our efforts slip away and leave us unsatisfied. When he comes first, everything else finds its place.

Prayer: Lord, be the first in my life, so that my work and my days bear fruit. Amen.

Today: Begin your day with a moment of prayer before anything else.

Day 5: Getting back to work

Less than a month after hearing the prophet, Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people went back to work. Conversion is not only a feeling: it becomes concrete action.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to move from good intentions to action. Saint Haggai, pray for me. Amen.

Today: Take up again a good project you had abandoned, even in a small way.



The Second Temple of Jerusalem, model at the Israel Museum.

Day 6: "I am with you"

To a people that had started working again, God answered through Haggai with a simple word: "I am with you." This is the heart of the whole book, and of the whole Bible. We never rebuild alone.

Prayer: Lord, let me hear today that you are with me, in my work and in my struggles. Amen.

Today: Encourage someone who is going through a hard time.

Day 7: Not despising small beginnings

The elders wept because the new Temple was so modest compared with Solomon's. Haggai told them to take courage. God does not measure the value of what we build by its size.

Prayer: Lord, free me from nostalgia and comparison. Teach me to love the small things you entrust to me today. Amen.

Today: Thank God for a small blessing you usually overlook.

Day 8: A holy people

Haggai reminds the people that a building is not enough: without conversion of their actions, even their offerings remain unclean. God wants living stones, a people whose life matches its worship.

Prayer: Lord, make my life consistent with my prayer. May my actions honor you as much as my words. Amen.

Today: Prepare to receive the sacrament of reconciliation before Christmas.

Day 9: In this place I will give peace

The prophet announced that the glory of the new house would be greater than that of the first, and that God would give peace there. Christians have seen in this promise the coming of Christ, the "Desired of all nations," who would come to his Temple and give the peace the world cannot give.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, come and dwell in me and give me your peace. Through the intercession of Saint Haggai, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Amen.

Today: Make peace with someone, or pray for a person you are in conflict with.

Closing prayer

Saint Haggai, prophet of new beginnings, at the end of these nine days I entrust to you the intention I have brought before God. Pray for all who must rebuild, for parishes and communities that are struggling, and for my own

heart. Help me to put God first, to take up my work with courage and to prepare a dwelling for the Lord who comes. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Haggai and the prayer to Saint Haggai.

CREDITS

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