



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

---

**Volume 20 Issue 12**

**March 21, 2021**

## **A Word of Encouragement**

Haggai 2:20-23

The Bible speaks enough about God blessing His people that each of us in some way expects that, in our lives as Christians, God will bless us! Listen to some of the passages. Following the giving of the Ten Commandments, God gave this promise to the people of God:

Exodus 20:24, "...in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you."

Malachi 3:10, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My

house, and test Me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.'"

In fact, last week in our study of this book, we noted that the section ended with an incredible promise...

Haggai 2:19b, "...Yet from this day on I will bless *you*."

With this, it is so important that you and I see that God's blessings don't come as we might want them to. We are *EARTHLY* and *TEMPORAL*; as such, we tend to look for *EARTHLY* and *TEMPORAL* blessings from the Lord:

- Health.
- Wealth.
- Power.
- Prestige.
- Position.
- Standing.
- Ease of Days.
- A Long Life.

Yet we must see that in and through all things God has a specific goal for His people. There is an "End Game" to God's purpose and plan for us; and that "end game" is our communion/relationship with God in eternity future. We have seen this in the prophecy before us.

Haggai 2:6-9, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and in this place I shall give peace,' declares the Lord of hosts."

As you know, the fulfillment of this promise began December 18, 520 BC! And yet, God did NOT stop with this. He went on to address the Covenant Head of His people, Zerubbabel, lest he become overwhelmed by the work and disappointment which lay before him!<sup>1</sup>

Haggai 2:20-21a, "Then the word of the Lord came a second time to<sup>2</sup> Haggai on the twenty-fourth *day* of the month saying, 'Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying...'"

Zerubbabel was in the line of David as he was the grandson of Jehoiachin (the King of Judah) — who was taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC.

Sixty years later, in 538 BC, when Cyrus issued the decree for God's people to return to Palestine and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1-2), Zerubbabel was the one appointed to oversee the return as well as the restoration of the temple! In other words, he was the man in charge-politically! That means, the responsibility for the rebuilding of the temple ultimately rested with him! If there were problems, conflict, or neglect, he ultimately would have been the one accountable! Now recall, because of the initial opposition that God's people encountered at the hands of the Samaritans, all efforts at rebuilding the temple were suspended for seventeen years (cf. Ezra 5:3-17! But then in 520 BC, God gave a series of oracles to His people through the prophet Haggai by which the Lord brought revival and reformation amongst God's people, including Zerubbabel!

That is the context of the passage before us! There is no question that this text was given to this repentant leader to encourage him and so address what no doubt would have been a guilty conscience!

- *"God sent me here and I did nothing! Lord, will you ever forgive me?"*
- NOT ONLY had God forgiven him (think of the previous oracles in this prophecy), BUT the Lord gave him three words of encouragement which no doubt is what enabled this man to complete the work of the rebuilding of the temple in just four years (recall, Solomon's temple took seven and one-half years [1 Kings 6:37, 38])!

And yet, because that which "...was written in earlier times was written for our instruction..." (Romans 15:4), we can take this exhortation and apply it to any and all of God's servants in leadership positions, like these:

- Preachers, elders, deacons...
- Husbands, parents, those doing the work of evangelism or discipleship...
- Pretty much all engaged in the ministry of God's Kingdom!

With that, consider with me the word of encouragement God gave to this Servant of the Lord! The first word of encourage is that our work as servants of Christ is eternal.

Haggai 2:21, "Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah saying, 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth.'"

This promise is a repeat of Haggai 2:6 which you will recall did NOT happen in total in Zerubbabel's day NOR the succeeding generations! In fact, it would NOT be visibly seen until Christ hung on the cross and gave up His Spirit. At that moment, heaven and earth literally quaked (Matthew 27:51) as God reached down from heaven and tore the temple curtain in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51)!

Now get this: That work of "shaking the world" began with Zerubbabel NOT ONLY because he was in the line of Christ (which is huge), BUT because the work he and his brethren were doing, according to Ephesians 2:20<sup>3</sup>, served a "foundational" role in establishing the Messianic Kingdom of Christ! Listen to Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:19-20, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*.”

Let me ask you an important question: in what way is the church built upon “the foundation of the... prophets”? You say, it was their teaching! Yet was it? Was it NOT more than this? Was it NOT God’s people responding to their teaching — as did Zerubbabel and the people here?

Doctrine/teaching is of little use unless it is appropriated. Did you know the PCUSA still subscribes to the Westminster Confession of Faith — basically the same statement of faith as what you and I profess to be true, yet they are a false church because they do not live-in light of it! Truly, the foundation of the kingdom of God is NOT the prophetic word encased in a book and put in a museum. RATHER, it is the working out of the words of the Prophets — which is what Zerubbabel and the people of God actively were doing in 520 BC!

Accordingly, the work of Zerubbabel most certainly was part of God’s shaking of the world because — unlike his grandfathers who received the prophetic word BUT did NOT obey — he acted upon it! And that is what is going on in the text before us. As God viewed the labors of this man, He looked through them to Christ and the ultimate destruction of this world as well as the creation of the New Heavens and Earth! Speaking of God’s people before Mount Sinai,

Hebrews 12:26-28a, “And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised [and this is a quotation of the text before us, Haggai 2:21. Notice how it was applied...], saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’ And this *expression*, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. [And what is it that cannot be shaken? The text tells us...] Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken...”

Again, this is a direct quotation of the promise made in Haggai 2:21 *WHICH*, beginning with the “*foundational*” labors of Zerubbabel, the Lord ultimately would destroy the earth and remake it into a paradise. How incredible! All that Zerubbabel saw and experienced up to this time was defeat! Yet little did he know that through his fidelity (think of the message of the previous oracle), God was in the process of moving the world!!! From this we must see that ours is NOT to know *HOW* our seemingly insignificant work fits into the greater plan of God. RATHER, ours is to know that it *DOES!!!*- which is the message given to Zerubbabel here! “*Zerubbabel the work you are doing is significant. For ultimately through it I am going to shake the world.*”

From this I want you to see that the work we do as ministers has eternity as its ultimate end (as God uses us to bring about His purpose)! Talk about an encouraging word at this time in Zerubbabel’s life! When I think of all the struggles God’s people had at this time, I wonder:

- How many times did Zerubbabel as the leader of God’s people lay his head down at

night in frustration and despair?

- How often did he withdraw to his private room, fall on his face, and mouth those inspired words given to any and every servant of the Lord...

Isaiah 49:4a, “But I said, ‘I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity’...”

Yet listen to how this verse ends...

Isaiah 49:4b, “But I said, ‘I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely the justice *due* to Me is with the Lord, and My reward with My God.”

In other words, what I am doing today is NOT to be judged by its fruit. RATHER, what is most important is God’s assessment and the reward that He is preparing for me in eternity! No doubt that is why Paul gave this exhortation:

1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.”

That is the first word of encouragement given to Zerubbabel as it pertained to his service. It was to assure him that through his efforts God was in the process of shaking the world — which means his work, in contrast to the world, was Eternal!

That brings us to a second word of encouragement; earthly power and glory is empty and temporal.

Haggai 2:22, “And I will overthrow<sup>4</sup> the thrones<sup>5</sup> of kingdoms<sup>6</sup> and destroy<sup>7</sup> the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow<sup>8</sup> the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.”

This passage carries with it strong overtones of the destruction of Pharaoh’s army at the time of the Exodus, “I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down...” Review the history with me:

Exodus 15:1, “Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and said, ‘I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.’”

Recall, Egypt at this time was the most powerful nations in the world. Nothing compared! It had just entered into what we now call the “New Kingdom Era” in which it boasted of incredible wealth, power, and influence over the known world. Yet God single handedly conquered it by conquering its gods (Exodus 12:12) of which Pharaoh was the chief.

As the chief god, Pharaoh was unwilling to relinquish God’s people. And so, the most powerful army in the world led by an incarnate deity went after Israel! Yet what did God do?

- He detained Pharaoh's army with a pillar of fire as God's people travelled through the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 14:19-20).
- And then at the right moment, God took away the pillar of fire such that Pharaoh's army rushed into the parted Red Sea (Exodus 14:23) whereupon God then allowed the waves to come crashing down, destroying the pursuing army (Exodus 14:24-28)!

Do you understand what God did? Again, this was THE most powerful nation and king at the time, and yet God single handedly gave it/him a massive defeat and in the process delivered His people!

Isaiah 40:15a, "...the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales..."

Proverbs 21:1, "The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes."

Jeremiah 10:10b, "...the nations cannot endure [God's] indignation."

Joyce Baldwin wrote of our text:

The fact that Judah is small and defenseless makes no difference when God says *I will overthrow*. He will act, and Judah will not need to fight. (Baldwin, 1972, p. 58)

All of that and more is proclaimed in the message God gave to Zerubbabel in this text. This leader needed to know that those nations, peoples, and events which had and could ally themselves against him were nothing!

- The Samaritans who at this moment in Israel's history were opposing, threatening, and then attacking God's people (cf. Ezra 5:3-5).
- The letter of Tattenai which would have mentioned Zerubbabel by name to the Persian King Darius (Ezra 5:6-17) and could very well have brought a Person force to Palestine to take him out.
- The current shortage of grain and wine- staple foods at the time (Haggai 1:6; 2:17).

All would be taken care of by God! Accordingly, Zerubbabel did NOT need to fear or spend one night in sleepless turmoil! He could be as his nineteenth great grandfather, King David, as he faced a threatening crisis which caused great distress (Psalm 4:1-2). Listen to that which brought him most comfort:

Psalm 4:8, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety."

Brothers and sisters, come to understand that earthly power and glory is empty and temporal!

What little it can do to us is little indeed! For truly, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”  
God gave this promise to Joshua:

Joshua 1:5, “No man will *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you...”

God gave this promise, to the generation that would go into exile:

Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

In fact, this is such an important truth, God gives it to each of us as we approach old age:

Isaiah 46:4, “Even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I shall carry *you*; and I shall bear *you*, and I shall deliver *you*.”

Brothers and sisters, bank on this! As the nations are “like a drip from a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15), we need never fear! For truly- in the words of the Hebrew writer:

Hebrews 13:6b, “...The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?”

With that, God gave Zerubbabel a third and final word of encouragement; he was (and we are) of inestimable value to God.

Haggai 2:23, ““On that day<sup>9</sup>,’ declares the Lord of hosts, ‘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 hosts.”

The key to this promise is housed in the reference of God making Zerubbabel “like a signet ring.” What is this? And what is this referring to? To answer that we need to be aware of some history. Toward the end of the Theocratic nation of Judah, a series of really bad kings sat on the throne. It began with Jehoahaz, then Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin (who we talked about earlier), and lastly Zedekiah. By far the worst was Jehoiakim who spent his short regency (ten years) focusing on himself and his own prosperity (*who cares about the nation?*). In fact, at the height of the crises he would have with Babylon, Jehoiakim was busy remodeling his palace! In defiance of God’s word given through Jeremiah NOT to resist Babylon (Jeremiah 38:17), Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar which incurred the wrath of the full army of the Babylonians.

Yet before the Babylonian army arrived, he died leaving his son, Jehoiachin, to deal with the Babylonians. You may recall what happened next. When the Babylonian army arrived in 597 BC, Jehoiachin was taken into exile along with his family including his mother. This is the prophecy God gave through the prophet Jeremiah at this time.

Jeremiah 22:24-26, “‘As I live,’ declares the Lord, ‘even though Coniah [another name for Jehoiachin the grandfather of Zerubbabel] the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off and I shall give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. I shall hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die.”

At this moment in time, a curse was leveled against Jehoiachin and his line! And yet, seventy-seven years later, God gave this promise to Jehoiachin’s grandson, Zerubbabel, “I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring...” (Haggai 2:23)!

Do you understand the significance of this promise? According to the text before us, the curse which was upon Zerubbabel’s grandfather was here removed! Unlike with his grandfather, God’s richest blessings now rested upon Zerubbabel! And what specifically was that blessing? The answer is housed in the connotation of the “signet ring” as referenced here.

The “signet ring” was a stone-carved ring, set in gold or silver, which bore the symbol of the person in power. It served as a means of authentication as the imprint of the ring was pressed into the wax seal of a scroll or the clay tablet containing an order from the king.

Now this is key — this signet ring — was a precious/valuable object in that day! To own it was to wield incredible power! As such, it was kept on the ruler’s finger or on a chain around his neck next to his heart!<sup>10</sup> As such, the “signet ring” was used as a metaphor in Bible times something which was at the same time of high value and yet incredibly precious!

And that is the connotation here! “God’s signet ring” was a term of endearment saying to Zerubbabel, “*You are of utmost value to God and so incredibly precious in His sight. So much so, He has placed you next to His heart for safe keeping!*”<sup>11</sup> And lest you think we are reading too much into this statement, notice that in this verse God used multiple terms of endearment — which indicates the clear theme of this final promise:

- Notice the statement, “I will take you.” The word here is used as in Exodus 6:7; Joshua 24:3; 2 Samuel 7:8 of a special selection! Zerubbabel just wasn’t any ol’ ruler! He was of special significance to God!
- Then there is the expression, “My servant” which was a title used of David (Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24) and prominent in Isaiah 40-55. To be “God’s servant” was to be the apple of His eye!<sup>12</sup>
- Finally, the promise here ends with, “I have chosen you” which speaks NOT of a blind selectin, BUT of a selection which comes on account of love!

There is no question: Zerubbabel may be odious to the Gentile people in Palestine, Persia,



perhaps even amongst some of God's people resenting his authority, BUT in Christ Zerubbabel was most precious to God! And the call here was for him to live like that! James Boice wrote of this verse:

The signet was a precious object. So, it was kept on the ruler's finger or on a cord around his neck. It was guarded with his person. God was telling Zerubbabel that he was going to be like that to God. God was going to place the governor on his finger or hang him around his neck so that, though the nations and even heaven and earth should be shaken, Zerubbabel would remain safe. He would be kept secure until God had done all the things spoken about in this prophecy. (Boice, 2006, pp. 480-481)

Was Zerubbabel important to God? You better believe it! And by application, so are you!

This is one of the many glorious implications of the gospel! Through it, God not only delivers us from our sin, BUT gives us a standing in His Kingdom which makes the best that this world has to offer, pig's scrap! What is that standing?

Galatians 4:6-7, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

Do you understand how precious you are to God? The Lord no longer views you as a slave or servant, BUT a member of His household... one of His very own children! It was based on this that Paul no doubt wrote this:

Romans 8:31-32, "What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

Christian, how important it is that we understand and accept this for it makes all the difference when it comes to how we process the things of this life — the difficult things — the trials, disappointments, and failures.

- Yes, we may be scorned, shamefully treated, and disdainfully set at naught!
- Yes, of all people we may be most to be pitied!
- In the words of Paul, we may even be viewed as "the scum of the world" (1 Corinthians 4:13).

Yet the God of this universe valued you so much that He gave up His Son that you might be redeemed! That makes you- from the perspective of God and His Kingdom — the most important person in the world!

## References

- Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai Zechariah Malachi (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)*. Downers Grove: Tyndale.
- Boice, J. M. (2006). *The Minor Prophets, Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Hill, A. E. (2012). *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 28)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.
- Richard A. Taylor, E. R. (2004). *Haggai & Malachi: New American Commentary [NAC]*. Nashville: B & H Books.
- Verhoef, P. A. (1987). *The Books of Haggai and Malachi (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

## End Note(s)

- <sup>1</sup> “The work had not been going well. The people were discouraged. The building of the city walls had not even begun. Anyone could invade the city. Zerubbabel could be killed.” (Boice, 2006, p. 480)
- <sup>2</sup> “As in 2:10, the Lord’s word is said to come ‘to’ (’el) Haggai rather than ‘by the hand of’ (bēyad) Haggai (cf. 1:3; 2:1). As noted earlier, the difference in meaning between the two expressions is slight. The preposition ’el portrays Haggai as a passive recipient of divine revelation, while bēyad shifts attention to the prophet as an active agent in the communication of that message. But the important thing is that it is the Lord’s message. Haggai is simply a chosen messenger.” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, p. 192)
- <sup>3</sup> Their work was the fruit of the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zephaniah! Truly, the “foundational” role in which the prophets served in the Old Testament not only was the revelation which God gave through them, but the fruit of their work! In the tapestry of grace, their work was essential!
- <sup>4</sup> “The verb overturn is used generally of divine judgment (e.g. Amos 4:11) and is specifically associated with God’s judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:21, 25, 29). The term also has connections with the exodus, referencing the miraculous events surrounding the Hebrew deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 7:17, 20; Psalms 66:6; 78:44).” (Hill, 2012, p. 95)
- <sup>5</sup> “The singular ‘throne’ may also be construed as a plural, given its grammatical relationship with the following plural noun (e.g. ‘thrones of kingdoms’, NJB). Motyer notes that the word thrones ‘signifies the world without reference to God.’” (Hill, 2012, pp. 95-96)
- <sup>6</sup> The plural could be a reference to the Persian dynasty which had rulers who constituted numerous political entities.
- <sup>7</sup> “The verb shatter often refers generally to God’s prerogative and power to destroy those who transgress his decrees, whether Hebrew or non-Hebrew (Deuteronomy 4:3; Psalm 37:38; Proverbs 14:11). More specifically, the word is associated with God’s command (including his divine enablement) to Israel to destroy the Canaanite people groups occupying the land of the covenant promise, lest they ensnare the Israelites in their web of idolatry (Deuteronomy 7:23–24; Joshua 9:24; 24:8).” (Hill, 2012, p. 96)
- <sup>8</sup> The repetition of the word *overthrow* and the series of four verbs depicting the destructive power of God (*shake, overturn, shatter, overthrow*) underscore his supremacy as true king over the nations.
- <sup>9</sup> The phrase *on that day* is typical prophetic language for some indefinite future time, that is, eschatological time (e.g. Hosea 2:18; Amos 9:11; Zechariah 12:3; 13:2).
- <sup>10</sup> The Biblical references for this statement are Genesis 38:18 for the ring being worn around the neck and Jeremiah 22:24 for the ring worn on the finger.
- <sup>11</sup> “A signet ring was so precious that, to guard it against theft or misuse by an unauthorized person, it was usually worn on a chain around the neck, or as a ring on the right hand. In Canticles 8:6 the bride beseeches her lover to set her ‘as a seal [signet ring] upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.’” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 147)
- <sup>12</sup> “The figure of the ‘servant’ presupposes the idea of the favorite confidant of the king, one who remains in the vicinity of the king, who knows the mind and wishes of the king, and who executes the confidential assignments of his master.” (Verhoef, 1987, p. 146)