

Haggai 2.20-23 Reflections

by Will Groben

Day 1

Learn: Read Haggai 1.1-2.23. Two of Haggai's prophecies were forthtelling, emphasizing command: the people were to live as God's faithful remnant: devoted to God, clean and obedient for God, dependent on God, and faithful and trusting toward God. As the faithful remnant, they would build the temple, which would fulfill earlier prophecies and allow the people access to God and the opportunity to offer proper sacrifices. The prophecy in Haggai 2.1-9 was foretelling, emphasizing promise: God assured the people that the new temple would be more glorious than expected, because he was going to bring about a new exodus-like deliverance, in which he would shake up the heavens and the earth, make the Gentile nations pay tribute to him, and bring peace and freedom to Jerusalem. Earlier prophecies make clear this refers to the second coming of Christ, the Messiah, as Israel's king. Haggai 2.20-23 echoes this promise: God will shake the heavens and the earth and overthrow the governments and militaries of the Gentile nations, so he can establish Zerubbabel as his chosen one. As we will see, Zerubbabel represents here his ancestor David, to whom God had promised an eternal dynasty; and Zerubbabel represents here his descendent Jesus, whom already God had promised would be his eternal Davidic King.

Reflect: Think of how the book of Haggai is constructed: two prophecies about being God's faithful people; two about God's promise to restore Israel as his people under a Davidic king; and a few other associated encouragements. In what way are the foretelling prophecies of promise and the forthtelling prophecies of command related? In your life, is there a relationship between God's commands and promises for you? Do you think of God more as fearsome commander, more as loving promiser, or do you have a healthy balance?

Day 2

Learn: Read Haggai 2.20-23; 2 Samuel 7.8-17. Through the prophet Nathan, God promised David that his dynasty, through his son Solomon, would be permanent. Prophets between the time of Nathan and the time of Haggai made clear that one descendent of David and Solomon would be the promised Messiah, who would reign forever as God's ultimate chosen representative. Read Isaiah 9.6-7; Daniel 7.13-14. Though they called him the Son of Man or the Prince of Peace, these prophets foretold the Messiah reigning over Israel as God's chosen king from the line of David, with all the other nations and peoples serving him. Read Matthew 21.1-9; Luke 1.30-33; Isaiah 42.1. Jesus is this Messiah, both the savior God sent and God's chosen king.

When, in the context of an end-times prophecy, God called Zerubbabel his servant, his chosen one, God was assuring Zerubbabel that the promise to his ancestor David was still valid, that the dynasty of David, through Solomon, through Zerubbabel, would continue in the Messiah-king, who would be born as a descendent of Zerubbabel. This Messiah king would come to restore Israel as God's representative people. God had made that promise to David about 500 years earlier. Since then, the nation had split into two, had experienced great upheaval, sinful leadership, and widespread idolatry, and then piece by piece had been conquered and exiled by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Things might have seemed bleak – being a conquered nation under Gentile rule, with no temple yet, and the historical curse on Zerubbabel's grandfather – but God promised the returned exiles that his promises would still come true.

Reflect: Do you think it was hard for the people in Haggai's day – few in number, controlled by the Gentile Persians, struggling just to build the temple – to believe in God's glorious promises? Do you struggle to believe in God's promises for you? Are some easier to count on than others? Which?

Day 3

Learn: Read Haggai 2.20-23. A signet ring was a seal that represented a person. Instead of signing important documents, you pressed your seal or inked your seal onto them to make them official. So if God had a signet ring, it would be the ultimate symbol of his authority on Earth. Under the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants which God had with Israel, Israel as a nation was to be God's representative people. The king was the head of the nation, and thus the king was the top representative for God, so Israel's king was like God's signet ring. God promised David his descendants would always have this role. Now, through Haggai, God said he would take Zerubbabel and make him like a signet ring, his authorized representative, for God had chosen him. This is a promise to keep God's earlier promises of the Davidic Covenant. The line of David, through Solomon, through Zerubbabel, would forever represent God, because their descendant Jesus would be the true Messiah, God's king, who would rule the whole Earth forever from Jerusalem.

Reflect: What does it mean to you that Jesus will return as God's king? In the church age, Christians are God's representative people, but God's plan is for Christ to return as the King of Israel, and to rule the world from Jerusalem. How does that affect your thinking about Jesus, Israel, Jews today? The signet ring today would be the head of the church: who is that? Read Ephesians 1.22-23; Colossians 1.18-20.

Day 4

Learn: Read Haggai 2.23; Jeremiah 22.24-23.1. Notice the signet ring language in both passages? God's assurance to Zerubbabel represented the reversal of the curse God had placed on Zerubbabel's grandfather, Jehoiachin. God allowed the Babylonians to conquer the promised land, forcing Jehoiachin and his family to surrender and go into exile. He never did return to Israel, and neither did his children, and his children did not sit on the throne of David or rule in Judah. God stripped Jehoiachin of his representation for God, but this did not invalidate God's promise to David. Through Zerubbabel's descendants would come the Messiah, to reestablish representation for God. Zerubbabel was not himself the Messiah, but that does not lessen the importance of this prophecy. God restated his confidence in the line of David through Zerubbabel. The messianic hope would be carried in his line, until all the prophecies were fulfilled. We now know that Jesus is the fulfillment, he is the Messiah, the chosen king, and he will bring this vision to reality when he returns.

Reflect: The Gentile nations always conquered by might, they conquered even Israel. In this prophecy, God promised to historically overthrow the symbols of their might, just as he had the chariots and army of Egypt in the exodus. It was not important that the postexilic community was small, weak, and ruled by the Gentile Persians, for God was the one who would do all this. God wanted the people to walk by faith and obedience to his revelation, trusting that he would accomplish what he had promised. How can what you have learned about God in this historical situation encourage you in life and in your relationship with God?

Day 5

Learn: Read Matthew 25.31; 28.18. What was Jesus saying about himself? Read Philippians 2.8-11. Who exalted Jesus, and who will bow before him in the end? Read Titus 3.4-7. What is the image of Jesus you get in this passage? All of scripture comes together in Christ, in the theme of God bringing himself glory by establishing for himself a representative people here on Earth, who will reflect his character, represent him, reproduce his image, and rule in his name. To overcome sin and evil and their consequences, Christ has come and will come again.

Reflect: If someone asks you who Jesus is or who Christ is, what would you say? How do you reconcile the image of fearsome king and judge with the image of gracious and loving savior? What would you tell someone who doubts the value of studying Old Testament prophecy?