

Haggai 2.20-23 / FBC / 11.22.20

Introduction

- † **[1: Title]** If you search the internet for how to pronounce “Haggai,” you find several supposed Hebrew experts suggesting Hag-GEE-eye. That’s pathetically wrong in two languages. In Hebrew, the prophet’s name is [חַגַּי], meaning “feast” or “born on the feast day.” We soften the first consonant to an H, because we don’t like clearing our throat while we talk. In English, if you look at the spelling of the prophet’s name – H-A-G-G-A-I – wherever you put the emphasis, that has to be Hag-GEYE or Hag-GAY, it certainly cannot be Hag-GEE-eye. Oh well, we butcher all names we bring into English, so it probably doesn’t matter how badly we do it.
- However you say his name, we have one prophecy left in Haggai, starting at 2.20; you can open your Bible there. We only have four verses, but you might want the handout, so you can fill in the blanks and improve your ability to remember the main points, since this is a deep one.
- † Before we begin, let’s remind ourselves of what is going on.
- When the Persians conquered the Babylonians, they allowed some of the Jews who were in exile in Babylon to return to the Jerusalem area and start rebuilding the temple.
 - The Persians appointed Zerubbabel to be the political overseer of the area. Zerubbabel was the grandson of the Judean king named Jehoiachin, who had surrendered Jerusalem to the Babylonians. [This will be important today.] At this time, Zerubbabel was the rightful king of Israel in God’s eyes. He was descended from David and he would become an ancestor to Jesus. [This also will be important today.]
 - Haggai began to prophesy to this community in 520BC, about eighteen years after the exiles returned to Jerusalem. On December 18 of that year, Haggai delivered the prophecy we will study today, his last one as far as we know. God has hidden treasure for us to find in this passage; I don’t mean there is anything mystical, but some deep study will pay rewards.
- † **[2: 2.20-23]** **Haggai 2.20-23 NET: Then the LORD [Yahweh, the true God] spoke to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month [December 18, by our calendar]: “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah: ‘I am ready to shake the sky and the earth. I will overthrow royal thrones and shatter the might of earthly kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and those who ride them, and horses and their riders will fall as people kill one another. On that day,’ says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.”**
- I don’t remember the first time I read this, but I am sure I did not understand any of it. To understand this prophecy, we need to discuss why God called Zerubbabel his servant, what it means to be like a signet ring for God, what exactly God was promising here, and what encouragement we can take from a 2500 year old prophecy. This will be a studious sermon today, but I think it will be rewarding! Let’s pray and then we will begin...

Servant

- † **[3: servant]** We begin with Zerubbabel being God’s “servant.” That might not sound like a compliment, right? We would rather hire servants than be servants; I think life would be much more tolerable if I could afford a few good servants. If I say you must be my servant, you might balk in disgust. But to be God’s servant is a wonderful thing. God is the pure and all powerful authority in the universe, and it is better to be aligned with him, even as a servant, than to find him against you. Paul was proud to identify himself as a servant, even slave, of Christ as he wrote to the Philippians. In fact, all believers today are supposed to grow in their servanthood to God through Christ. In the Old Testament scripture, being called God’s servant was a special designation.
- In that Old Testament scripture, God refers to several people as his servant, including Job, Abraham, Moses, Caleb, the nation of Israel, King David, and the Messiah whom God promised would come from the line of David to be God’s chosen king. In the context of an end times prophecy, I would say being God’s servant must make us think of David’s descendant, the Messiah. But the context of Haggai itself shows us this. Let’s explore that a bit.
 - **[4: command]** We previously have discussed two of Haggai’s major prophecies which had an emphasis on command: God asked the people to live as his faithful remnant. He called on them to be more devoted to him, to be clean and obedient for him, to be more dependent on him, and to be more faithful and trusting in him. All of that would result in them rebuilding God’s temple. This would fulfill earlier prophecies about the temple in God’s plans, and allow the people to have access to God and to offer proper sacrifices to God.
 - **[5: promise]** We also looked at the other major prophecy of Haggai, which had an emphasis on promise: the people were concerned that the less glorious temple they were planning might indicate they were not the faithful remnant for God as described in earlier prophecy, so God assured them the new temple would be more glorious than previously and the center of God’s peace. To bring that about, God promised that a new exodus-like deliverance was coming, in which God would shake up the heavens and the earth, the Gentile nations would pay tribute to God, and there would be freedom and peace for Jerusalem. We know from earlier prophecy that all this points to the second coming of Christ, the Messiah, to sit as Israel’s king, to judge and conquer the nations, and to establish his millennial kingdom over the earth.
 - **[6: today’s promise]** In today’s passage, we have an echo of that promise: God would shake up the heavens and the earth, he would overthrow the governments and militaries of the Gentile nations, and Zerubbabel – who was the seed of David, the ancestor of Jesus, and God’s servant in Haggai’s community – would be God’s chosen one. Zerubbabel is in a sense a stand in here: he represents both his ancestor David, to whom God made a big promise, and his descendent Jesus, to whom God promised to give the kingdom. Let’s explore that a little more.
- † **[7: 2 Samuel 7.8-11]** The promise to David is called the Davidic Covenant; it is found in **2 Samuel 7.8-17 NET**. Go ahead and turn there if you have your Bible open. This is an important passage for understanding that Jesus will return as Israel’s king: *[WAIT for them]*
- [God told the prophet Nathan] **“So now, say this to my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies has said: I took you from the pasture and from your work as a shepherd to make you leader of my people Israel. I was with you wherever you went, and I defeated all your enemies before you. Now I will make you as famous as the great men of the earth. I will establish a place for my people Israel and settle them there; they will live there and not be**

disturbed anymore. Violent men will not oppress them again, as they did in the beginning and during the time when I appointed judges to lead my people Israel. Instead, I will give you relief from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you.

- **[8: 2 Samuel 7.12-17]** When the time comes for you to die, I will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom [Solomon]. He will build a house for my name [the first temple], and I will make his dynasty permanent. I will become his father and he will become my son [God's ultimate representative on Earth]. When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings. But my loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. **Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.**" Nathan told David all these words that were revealed to him.
- God promised David that his dynasty, through Solomon, would be permanent. Prophets between the time of Nathan and the time of Haggai made clear that one descendent of David would be the promised Messiah, who would reign forever as God's chosen ultimate representative. This Messiah also became known as the "Son of Man" in Daniel's prophecy and both the "Prince of Peace" and "Suffering Servant" in Isaiah's prophecy.

† **[9: Isaiah 9.7]** Let's read a little of that prophecy, starting in **Isaiah 9.7 NET**: [talking about the Prince of Peace, Isaiah wrote] **His dominion will be vast, and he will bring immeasurable prosperity. He will rule on David's throne and over David's kingdom, establishing it and strengthening it by promoting justice and fairness, from this time forward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will accomplish this.**

- The Prince of Peace, the Messiah, is God's chosen eternal king from the line of David. Note that Jesus will rule on David's throne, from Israel.

† **[10: Daniel]** Now look at **Daniel 7.13-14 ESV**: **I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days [that would be God the Father] and was presented before him. And to him [the son of man] was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**

- The Messiah, here called the Son of Man, will reign forever for God as king, and all other nations and peoples will serve him.

† **[11: Matthew 21.9]** When the crowds chanted in **Matthew 21.9 NET**, **"Hosanna to the Son of David!"** as Jesus entered Jerusalem the last time before his death, they were quoting from Psalm 118.25-26, thereby in effect acknowledging Jesus as the descendent of David who was the promised Messiah-king from Yahweh. Hosanna means "Please Lord, save us."

- Speaking to Mary about her son still in the womb, the angel Gabriel said of Jesus in **Luke 1.32-33 NET**: **"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High [God], and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father [ancestor] David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."**

- Speaking about the Messiah as his suffering servant, God said in **Isaiah 42.1 NIV: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations.**
- In Haggai's day, by calling Zerubbabel his servant, his chosen one, God assured Zerubbabel that – even though Israel presently was a conquered nation and Zerubbabel merely an employee of the Persian government – the promise of the Davidic Covenant was still valid, that David's throne would be an eternal dynasty as promised long ago, that the Messiah was still coming someday to restore Israel as God's covenant representative people under God's servant king.
- For Zerubbabel and the people in his community, this must have been tremendously encouraging. God had made that promise to David about 500 years earlier; think how long ago that was! Our country's entire history is less than half that. Since that promise, 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. Now God was promising the returned exiles that his promises would still come true.

Signet ring

- † **[12: signet]** When I was in middle school, a parking lot attendant at Busch Gardens advised my father that his signature on the receipt must match the signature on his credit card. My father, mixing humor with belligerence, told him that might be a problem, since he never signed his name the same way twice. I feel the same belligerence sometimes. I mean, I can go online and buy a \$2000 computer without a signature, but then a restaurant asks me to sign for a \$20 check; and they ask me to do so with my finger on a screen, with the result that the signature means nothing. On the other hand, I do sign my letters, as a way to show they are from me; I know people who have a signature or other graphic for their email, as a way of certifying it is from them.
- 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. If "signet ring" were a metaphor for a king ruling in God's name, that king would be God's ultimate representative on Earth.
 - **[13: 3 circles]** Under the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants God had with Israel, Israel as a nation was to be God's representative people: they were to reflect God's character, represent God, reproduce the image of God, and eventually rule the nations. The king was the head of the Israel, and thus the king was the top representative for God. The king ruled in God's name over Israel, and Israel with the king represented God to the world. So Israel's king was like God's signet ring, he was God's ultimate representative on Earth! As we read earlier, God promised David that his descendants would always have this role.
 - Now, through Haggai, God said that on the day when he would interrupt the affairs of mankind, 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, the Son of God who came from Heaven to be God's king on Earth, who will rule the whole Earth forever from Jerusalem.
 - This reassurance of the promise to David would have encouraged Zerubbabel and the other people who returned from exile. They could look forward to freedom from Gentile oppression,

they could look forward to being a nation again, they could look forward to having the monarchy restored, and they could look forward to being God's representative people again.

- † **[14: Jeremiah 22]** This assurance also was significant to these people because it represented a reversal of the curse God had placed on Zerubbabel's grandfather, King Jehoiachin.
- Let's look at that in **Jeremiah 22.24-23:1 NIV**. You can turn there in your Bible if you want *[WAIT]: "As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. I will deliver you into the hands of those who want to kill you, those you fear-- Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the Babylonians. I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die. You will never come back to the land you long to return to."* You can see it is not pleasant to face God's wrath!
 - **[15: continued]** [Jeremiah continued] **Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring [his children] will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."**
 - **[16: condensed]** God did allow the Babylonians to conquer the promised land, forcing Jehoiachin and his family to surrender and go into exile. Jehoiachin 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.
 - Jehoiachin, as the Davidic king, was God's ultimate representative, like his signet ring, but he had failed to walk by faith and obedience, so God abandoned him and let him be destroyed. Through Jeremiah, God told Jehoiachin this was coming, that if he were God's signet ring – the symbol of representation, of authority in God's name – in that case, God would pull him off.
 - **[17: signet]** The returning remnant knew about this prophecy, and they had lived in exile before returning eighteen years earlier. This prophecy was a great source of concern, because it looked like God was saying he was ending the Davidic covenant, that he would not fulfill the promise he made to David about a perpetual kingdom. Now Haggai was in a sense reversing the curse, assuring Zerubbabel that divine authority had indeed passed to him, and that he carried the seed of the coming Messiah.
 - Zerubbabel was God's chosen in the line of David, and from him would come the representative seed of the woman promised way back in Genesis 3, the Messiah who would be the savior from evil and from foreign domination, who would be prophet, priest, judge, and God's chosen king, the ultimate representative of God on Earth.
 - 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 would be 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.

Promises

- † **[18: promises]** Now that we understand God's terminology, let's discuss what God was promising.

- In Haggai's earlier foretelling prophecy, God spoke of seizing the wealth of the nations, and we discussed Isaiah's prophecy that the nations would either submit to Israel and bring their wealth to Jerusalem or they would perish. In this prophecy, God says he will destroy their political and military power. God will shake up both nature and nations, as he has done before, to bring about peace for Israel and submission from the Gentiles [including our country].
 - As a result, God's representative, his Messiah-king, will take control. The anticipation of Israel's ultimate restoration is connected in prophecy with the ascendance to power of God's Davidic King and ultimate representative. This Messiah-king sets Israel free, rules all Israel to fulfill the promise to David, and through Israel rules the world.
- † The Gentile nations always conquered by might, they conquered even Israel. Here, 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.
 - God would take care of everything, all they had to do was what he asked of them. Do as God commands, trust him with the results and everything else.
 - God has a glorious plan for Israel, including keeping his promises to the nation and David, and fulfilling his prophecies about the Messiah.

Conclusion

- † **[19: Messiah]** At Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and at Easter, when we celebrate the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus, we focus on grace and love, we emphasize that God the Father sent Christ the Son of God to come be born as one of us, and then allowed his sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, so we could join him in resurrection to new life and intimacy with God. The truth in these holidays emphasizes God's grace and love.
- But God also is pure and righteous, he brings justice, which includes death sentences – physical death and spiritual death – for our sin. The Son of God is not just the savior and the high priest advocating for us in Heaven, he also is God the Father's anointed judge whom every person will face, and he is God the Father's anointed king to whom every person will bow.
 - In Psalms 2 and 110, we learn that God the Father plans to overthrow the nations and establish the Messiah – the Son of God – whom we call Christ, as his eternal king over the whole earth.
 - Jesus acknowledged, that with his crucifixion and resurrection, he now was anointed as God the Father's king and representative. **Matthew 28.18 NET: Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given [by God the Father] to me."**
 - He also said in **Matthew 25.31 NET: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him [his second coming], then he will sit on his glorious throne."**
 - This is an important aspect of understanding Jesus. Jesus is God the Father's anointed judge and king, so those of us who believe in him seek to follow him, to be his disciples, to represent him as our king, so that we can be the image bearers of God we were created and saved to be.

- Paul wrote of Jesus in **Philippians 2.8-11 NET: He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross! As a result God [the Father] highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow— in heaven and on earth and under the earth— and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.**
 - Like Narnia’s Aslan, “Jesus is good, but not safe.” We need to understand that. And we need to understand that Jesus is servant to God the Father, not us. To us, he is king.
- † **[20: cross]** Having emphasized that Jesus has all authority and power and thus is somewhat of a frightening figure, it still is he who offers us reconciliation with the triune God. Our only part in that reconciling, that salvation, is to trust in God’s gospel promise: first, that Jesus is the divine Son of God and the human Messiah-savior we call Christ; and second, that he accomplished salvation for us in his crucifixion and resurrection. We are saved by God’s grace gift when we believe in Christ.
- **Ephesians 2.8-9 NET: For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.**
 - **Titus 3.4-7 NIV: But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified [declared righteous] by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.**
 - As a preacher, I like to rotate the areas of the Bible we study together. We mix in some of the Bible’s Old Testament history, some of the wisdom writings, some from the prophets; we go verse by verse through a gospel and study in the epistles. 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. Do you believe? Do you live like it? Let’s pray. . .