

Haggai 2:20-23 "Hope for the Future"*

Main Idea: According to Haggai 2:20-23, to experience hope for the future we must fulfill two responsibilities.

An Overview of the Book of Haggai—Haggai's Four Messages...

- #1 Put God first in your priorities (1:1-15).
- #2 If you're stuck in the rut of the past, there's hope (2:1-9)!
- #3 Getting right with God involves repentance and reflection (2:10-19).
- #4 If you belong to God, there's hope for the future (2:20-23).

I. We need to know God's promises.

A. God will shake the universe (21).

1. This speaks of judgment.

2. This speaks of a massive overhaul of creation.

B. God will overturn rival kings and kingdoms (22a).

C. God will overthrow rival armies (22b).

D. God will make Zerubbabel a royal authority (23).

1. He is God's servant.

2. He is like a signet ring.

3. He is God's chosen one.

II. We need to believe God.

A. God is sovereign.

B. God will have the final word.

1. Right now man is having his day.

2. In due time God will have *His* day.

C. God is going to exalt His chosen Servant.

1. Some say there are many ways to God.

2. God says there is only one Messiah.

D. God revealed what He's going to do in the future so we'll get right with Him in the present.

Are you interested in learning about the future? Would you like to know what to expect as we journey down the road? A lot of people are filled with fear these days. They're wondering what's going to happen to this world, to their families, to their own lives.

Be encouraged. The Bible has a lot to say about the future. God has a plan for the future. In fact, an entire section of the Old Testament Scriptures is called "The Prophets," written by men of old through whom the Holy Spirit revealed future events.

God wants us to know what He's going to do in the future. So He told us in His Word.

Haggai was a prophet of God in the sixth century B.C. We've been learning from the book that bears his name for the past month in a series we'll conclude this morning.

In the Fall of 520 B.C. God revealed four messages to Haggai, messages Haggai then delivered to his people. We'll be looking at the fourth message momentarily, but first I'd like to take a quick trip through the whole book.

[An Overview of the Book of Haggai—Haggai's Four Messages...](#)

The first message came, as the first verse of the book indicates, "in the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month"—that's August 29, 520 B.C. To sum up Haggai's first message, here's what the prophet said to his people...

#1 Put God first in your priorities (1:1-15).

The problem at hand, as we've seen, had to do with God's temple. After God brought a remnant of His people back from captivity to their homeland, they were supposed to rebuild God's House which had been destroyed. And though they started the job, they got distracted.

Verse 2, "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" They didn't have time to build God's house. Of course, they had plenty of time to fix up their own houses, as Haggai pointed out in verse 4. For nearly sixteen years the people ignored God's house and slighted God in their priorities. And God wasn't pleased.

Nor is He when we allow the things of our lives—even good things—to take precedence over seeking His kingdom first.

William Carey, pioneer missionary to India, became deeply concerned about the attitude of his son Felix. The young man, a professing Christian, had promised to become a missionary. But he broke his vow when he was appointed ambassador to Burma.

Carey requested prayer for him, saying, "Pray for Felix. He has degenerated into an ambassador of the British government when he should be serving the King of kings."

Put God *first* in your priorities. That's what Haggai told his people. And they responded. Haggai 1:15 says the people started work on the house of God on September 21. In less than a month, they changed their mixed up priorities.

About four weeks later, on October 17, Haggai preached his second sermon as recorded in Haggai 2:1-9. In essence here's what he said...

#2 If you're stuck in the rut of the past, there's hope (2:1-9)!

He said that because after starting to rebuild the temple, his people got discouraged. Why? Not because the job was so big, but primarily because the temple they were building paled in comparison with the glorious temple that used to sit on this spot. Solomon's temple had been filled with gold. How could this one ever compare?

To which Haggai said, "Just build it. This is what the LORD Almighty says—verse 7—I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory."

Dear friend, if you are stuck in the rut of the past, here's the solution. Just do what God has asked you to do in the present, and leave the results up to Him. To the Jews He said (9), "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house."

Haggai delivered his third message, recorded in Haggai 2:10-19, two months later on December 18. In it he addressed the subject of how a nation gets right with God *after* it's blown it. The answer?

#3 Getting right with God involves repentance and reflection (2:10-19).

Haggai asked the priests a question in verse 12, "If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil, or other food, does it become

consecrated." Their answer was no.

Haggai's point? Holiness isn't "caught." You can catch a cold, but you can't catch health. A person doesn't become holy merely by doing holy things—like rebuilding a temple, or going to church, or giving money to the needy. No, in order to become holy, a person must repent of his sin and accept God's provision of atonement. Holiness is received, not earned.

"Give careful thought," Haggai admonished his people three times in verses 15-19. Getting right with God involves repentance and reflection.

Haddon Robinson points out that one old recipe for rabbit started out with this injunction: "First catch the rabbit." Says Robinson: "The writer knew how to put first things first. That's what we do when we establish priorities -- we put the things that should be in first place in their proper order."

That's what Haggai did. He told his people in clear terms what they needed to do to get right with God. Then came message #4...

#4 If you belong to God, there's hope for the future (2:20-23).

The story is told of a man sentenced to death who obtained a reprieve by assuring the king he would teach his majesty's horse to fly within the year--on the condition that if he didn't succeed, he would be put to death at the end of the year. "Within a year," the man explained later, "the king may die, or I may die, or the horse may die. Furthermore, in a year, who knows? Maybe the horse will learn to fly."

Beloved, apart from God there is no true hope for tomorrow, only a whimsical "hope-so." But if you are right with God, there *is* hope for the future, a certain hope. And God wants you to know what it is.

That's why Haggai delivered his fourth and final message. Knowing future events can affect our perspective on living in the present. How so? According to Haggai 2:20-23, to experience hope for the future we must fulfill two responsibilities.

I. We need to know God's promises.

Take a look at verse 20, "The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah..."

Stop there and notice a couple of things. First of all, notice that Haggai delivered the fourth message on the same day as the third, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month—again, that's December 18. God gave Haggai two messages that day. Please realize that a prophet didn't invent his message. When God spoke, he spoke.

To whom was Haggai to deliver message #4? God said, "Tell Zerubbabel." The other messages were for the people as a whole, but this one, though it certainly held implications for the people, was intended for Zerubbabel.

Who was Zerubbabel? The Lord refers to him as the "governor." Remember, Israel didn't have a king at this time. They were under pagan rule, under the dictatorship of the Persian, Darius. All they had was a *governor*, Zerubbabel, a son of Shealtiel (1:1).

You see, a question that must have plagued the people, especially governor Zerubbabel was this one: What good will it do to rebuild this temple if we're still living under pagan rule? The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the first temple. What's going to prevent another ruler from doing the same to this temple? And even if they don't destroy it, are we doomed to live forever in this second rate condition

under pagan oppression?

To address that fear, God sent Haggai to Zerubbabel with a message of hope. God made a series of predictions in verses 21-23, five to be specific. Five times He said, "I will" do something.

To experience hope for the future, here's our first responsibility. We need to know God's promises. Here are five...

A. God will shake the universe (21). "The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: ²¹ "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth."

That's the same prediction God made back in verse 6, "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land." The imagery communicates two ideas.

1. *This speaks of judgment. What's more...*

2. *This speaks of a massive overhaul of creation.* Adam's sin brought the curse of God upon creation. Romans 8:22 says that creation "groans" as an expectant mother in the pains of childbirth. But the day is coming when God will *shake* it. He will shake the heavens and the earth, and release it from its bondage. In Romans 8 terminology again, "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (21)."

There's God's first promise. *I will shake the heavens and the earth.* This world will not continue on indefinitely as we know it. The second promise...

B. God will overturn rival kings and kingdoms (22a). "I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms."

Never forget that God places kings on their thrones. And removes them. If there were no governments in the world, there would be total anarchy. Even a bad government is better than none. According to Romans 13:4, rulers are God's "servants" (or "ministers") for justice.

God is so good. He gives nations rulers to lead them. And He even allows pagan rulers who mock Him to remain in office. Why? Is it because He can't get rid of them? No. It's because even a godless ruler maintains some sense of order in his country.

But know this. One day God will overthrow all rulers and kingdoms. On that day God will reclaim what is rightfully His, and His kingdom will prevail.

Think of what that meant to Zerubbabel in 520 B.C. Israel had been mistreated and oppressed by foreign nations for much of her long history—by Egypt, Philistia, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Later the Jews would suffer at the hands of the Greeks and Romans, and still later by the Soviets under Stalin and the Germans under Hitler. And to this day a host of hostile nations would like nothing more than to push Israel right out of her homeland to drown in the Mediterranean Sea.

But God says one day He will turn the tables. He Himself will overturn the rival nations of the world. That's not all.

C. God will overthrow rival armies (22b). Listen to His words, "I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother."

In ancient warfare the chariot was an intimidating piece of military equipment. Speaking today Haggai might

refer to F-16's and scud missiles. Such weaponry may threaten us. It may create fear in us. But it doesn't phase the omnipotent God.

"I will overthrow chariots and riders," He says. And when God says something, it's as good as done.

Would you notice what God will utilize to bring about the collapse of the kingdoms? They're going to fall "each by the sword of his brother." What does that indicate? God's overthrow of rival armies will involve confusion and panic—they're going to kill each other.

Does that sound familiar? I'm reminded of what God did to the Midianites in Gideon's day. Judges 7:22 states, "When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords." And so God eliminated an army too large to count by causing them to turn on each other.

"Do any of the other prophets talk about this coming battle?" you ask. Indeed they do. Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, had this to say (Zechariah 14:13-14):

"On that day men will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. *Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other.* ¹⁴ Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected—great quantities of gold and silver and clothing."

Several years earlier Ezekiel described the prophetic scene (Ezekiel 38:19-23):

"In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. ²⁰ The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. ²¹ I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. *Every man's sword will be against his brother.* ²² I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. ²³ And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

And that's not all. Daniel spoke of this coming battle (Daniel 7:25-27), as did Isaiah (Isa 60:12) and Zephaniah (Zeph 3:8). Jesus had this to say in Matthew 24:7, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." And in the final book of the Bible, John recorded the prophetic announcement he heard (Revelation 11:15):

"The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Yes, God says that one day He will get rid of all pagan rulers, establish His kingdom, and display His glory in vivid fashion. But that's not all. There's one final prediction.

D. God will make Zerubbabel a royal authority (23). "On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty."

What did God reveal about Zerubbabel here? Three things...

1. *He is God's servant.* He doesn't call him "governor" here, as before, but "My servant." That's a messianic title that appears frequently in Isaiah's book.

2. *He is like a signet ring.* The king's signet ring was engraved with the king's seal. It was used to endorse all official documents. It was so precious that a king usually wore his signet ring so no one would steal it. It represented his authority. If you had the ring, you had the authority to make life-and-death decisions.

The word could also be translated "seal," because a person's seal often functioned as a signature. In the case of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:18), a seal served as a pledge or guarantee of future payment. God told Zerubbabel, "I will make you like my signet ring." That's interesting because Jeremiah 22:24 says that God plucked the signet away from the wicked King Jehoiachin, Zerubbabel's grandfather, and gave it to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. But now, God reverses the sentence, and returns the signet to Zerubbabel.

3. *He is God's chosen one.* "I have chosen you," God told Zerubbabel. This again is a messianic description.

A great promise, for sure, but wait. Did the things Haggai predicted in his fourth message occur in his lifetime? The answer is *no*. He preached this message in 520 B.C. The Jews finished the temple about four years later, in 516 B.C. The nations of the earth did not collapse. Zerubbabel did not become a world ruler. Israel did not become a powerhouse.

In fact, history verifies that though the temple rebuilt in Zerubbabel's day was later modified by King Herod, it was totally destroyed in 70 A.D. It hasn't been rebuilt since. Furthermore, Governor Zerubbabel passed from the scene just a few years after Haggai preached this message, not in notoriety but in relative obscurity.

Was Haggai wrong? Did he misunderstand God? The answer is absolutely not.

No, Zerubbabel was not the Messiah, that's clear. But this prophecy pertained to Zerubbabel's position, not his person. He was in the messianic line. And that's the point.

He did lead his people out of bondage. And he did build a temple. He did give his people hope. And in so doing he exemplified the Messiah.

Robert Alden is right in his observation, "Zerubbabel was no more the Messiah than Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, or Isaiah. But Zerubbabel as in the genealogy of Christ (cf. Matt 1:12-13)."

That's the significance. When Israel rebelled against the Lord, He sent the Jews into captivity, and the messianic line was interrupted—there was no son of David reigning in Israel. But with this promise to Zerubbabel God is saying, "My promise still holds. The hope of the coming Messiah is still in tact."

And five hundred years later the Messiah—a descendant of Zerubbabel—did come. His name is Jesus Christ. And He will come again, just as promised. When He does He'll finish the work predicted in Haggai's prophecy.

My friend, do you want to experience hope for the future? Here's the first step. We need to *know God's promises*. That's why God told us His intentions ahead of time. He wants us to know. But we have a second responsibility...

II. We need to believe God.

The fact of the matter is this. There are two types of people in the world. There are people who believe God, and there are people who *don't* believe God. The promises we've learned today will do us no good unless we do what? *Believe God*. Knowing what God says is vital. But so is this. We must chose today to *believe Him!*

To sum it up, we've learned four important things about God from Haggai's message.

A. God is sovereign. He is in absolute control over current events. Things don't just happen. God is fulfilling His plan.

Corrie Ten Boom, survivor of a Nazi concentration camp and devout believer in Christ, once said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." You can trust God today—you can *believe* God—because *He is sovereign*.

B. God will have the final word. When? Notice verse 23 again, "On *that day*, declares the LORD Almighty." On what day? *That day*.

1. *Right now man is having his day*. In fact, man has been having "his" day on planet earth since Adam and Eve rejected God's Word and authority. We are living in the *Day of Man*.

The world is full of people who blindly think they can fix this world of its ills. They say, "If we just give people more education, that'll fix the world." Or more money. Or better health care. Or whatever.

But they refuse to see the fundamental problem for what it is. The problem is not *around* us. It's *within* us. We have sinful hearts. Until you can change the heart of man, you'll never change the world.

Only Jesus Christ can do that, my friend. Jesus died on a cruel Roman cross and then rose from the dead to provide salvation for all who will repent and call upon Him. When Jesus saves a person, He changes him or her inside out.

Don't miss this. If you want to make sense of the world situation around us, know this. Right now man is having his day. Part of God's sovereign plan involves letting man have "his day." And so terrorists do unthinkable things, inhumane acts towards their fellow mankind. Man is having his day. But know this...

2. *In due time God will have His day*. Several years ago, then Vice President, George Bush—father of our current president—represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest.

There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.

Know this. God *will* have the final word.

C. God is going to exalt His chosen Servant. That's what He told Haggai. Yet think for a moment of what we're hearing in our day.

1. *Some say there are many ways to God*. In recent days we've seen a resurgence of interest in spiritual things. The change is much needed. People are starting to realize there's more to life than accumulating wealth and personal fame. And that's good. We are spiritual beings. We need God.

But there's a great fuzziness when it comes to the definition of spirituality, indeed, the definition of God. Underneath the expressed need for spirituality these days is the belief in pluralism.

Pluralism says there are many ways to God, and all are legitimate. Indeed, no one definition of God is correct. God is whoever we want Him to be. And the path to God is whatever path we choose to take. All roads are acceptable. All roads lead to God.

The only unacceptable "road" is the one with the street sign that says, "This Is the Only Right Road. All Other Roads Are Dead Ends."

Such an assertion is anathema to the pluralist. "How dare you claim to have absolute truth! You are narrow-minded, mean-spirited, and bigoted! Your way isn't the only right way. There is no one way to God!"

And so we're told that all roads lead to God as long as you're sincere, as long as you have *faith*. Have you noticed the recent prayer services? On the platform you'll see leaders from a variety of "faiths" in their various clerical garments calling upon God. The assumption is clear. There is one God, yet there are many ways to Him. All faiths are legitimate. The only illegitimate faith is the one that says the other faiths are not true. Such is the message of our pluralistic society.

Now listen to the words of Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6)."

Jesus doesn't sound very pluralistic, does He? *I am the way*. Not only option amongst many, but *the way* to God.

The world says there are many ways to God, but the Bible doesn't teach that. What does God's Word say?

2. *God says there is only one Messiah*. More than five hundred years before Jesus came to earth, God revealed this message through Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel: "I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you."

God chose the Messianic line. And God chose the One who would be the Messiah, the King who would conquer and rule the world forever.

If I'm going to fly on an airplane, I don't want a pluralist in the pilot's seat. "Ladies and gentlemen, our destination is Seattle, but we're using new methods to get there today. I won't be using a map, because all routes will take us to Seattle eventually, anyway. And I won't be using navigational equipment because as long as we're sincere in our efforts, we'll make it. And I've disconnected my radio equipment because I don't to receive any messages from outside sources that might create confusion along the way. We all know that we have all it takes to get to Seattle if we'll just look deep within ourselves and listen to our hearts."

No! I don't want a pilot who looks within himself for answers. I want a pilot who admits there's a right way and a whole bunch of wrong ways to get to Seattle, and who looks to the map to take me there.

Beloved, God has given us a map—it's His Word. And the map says there's only one way to heaven. It's through Jesus. The question is, will we believe God or not?

D. God revealed what He's going to do in the future so we'll get right with Him in the present.

Let there be no doubt. There is hope for the future. But to experience that hope we must take some steps in the present. We must get to know God's promises. And we must believe God. Let's do so today.