

Main Idea: If we want to experience hope for the future, we must do two things, according to Haggai 2:20-23.

An Overview of the Book—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. To experience hope, 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. To experience hope, 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.

Scripture Reading: 2 Peter 3:1-13

Many people are filled with fear these days. They’re wondering what’s going to happen to this world, to their country, to their families, to their own lives.

But we, the people who belong to the Redeeming God, have reason to be encouraged. Our Sovereign Lord has a plan for the future and He has revealed it in His Word. 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 what was going to happen, and in some cases, what *is* yet to happen.

God wants us to know what He’s going to do in the future. So He had His servants write it down. No, He didn’t give us every detail for sure, but enough detail to fill our hearts with hope and a desire to live for His kingdom.

Haggai was a prophet of God in the sixth century BC. 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 BC, God revealed four messages to Haggai, which 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 previous three messages.

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, the prophet said this to his people...

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

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ Adapted from a series preached at WBC in 2001.

He said this because they hadn't been. The problem at hand had to do with God's temple. After God brought a remnant of His people back from the Babylonian captivity to the promised land, 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. Ironically, 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."²

Put God *first* in your priorities. That's what Haggai told his people.

And by the grace of God, 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*, for 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, the solution is the same for you as it was for Haggai's people. Just do what God is calling 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."

Then, two months later on December 18, Haggai delivered his third message, recorded in Haggai 2:10-19. In it he addressed the subject of how a nation and the people in that nation get right with God *after* they've blown it.

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

To make the point 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.

Why that question? To teach that holiness isn't "caught." You can catch another person's cold, but you can't catch their 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 for holiness, which He calls *atonement*.

² *Our Daily Bread.*

You sins must be covered by the sacrifice of one that is holy. Then it was an unblemished lamb. Today it's the spotless Lamb of God.

Holiness must be received *from* God, not earned by doing something *for* God.

"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. Are you right with God? Would you like to be? Then repent today, and reflect on your need for the atonement that God provided through His Son, His death and resurrection. But don't just reflect. Put your total trust in God and what He has done for you.

Now we're ready for Haggai's fourth and final message.

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

What do I mean by hope?

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."³

That's not the kind of hope that God offers. He says that if we are right with Him, there *is* hope for the future, a certain hope. And God wants us to know what it is.

That's why Haggai delivered his fourth and final message. If we want to experience hope for the future, we must do two things, according to Haggai 2:20-23.

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.

Zerubbabel was the leader. The Lord finishes by giving the leader a personal message. There are unique challenges that leaders face, and the Lord knows how to meet them.

The Lord refers to Zerubbabel 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).

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?

³ Bernard M. Baruch.

The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the first temple. What's going to prevent another ruler from doing the same to this temple? After all, we don't even have a wall around the city. And even if we somehow survive another enemy attack, are we doomed to live forever in this second rate condition as the pawn of pagans?

To address this fear, God sent Haggai to Zerubbabel with a message of hope. The Lord made a series of predictions in verses 21-23. 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, and Haggai gives 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 BC. Israel had been mistreated and oppressed by foreign nations for much of her long history. Think of Egypt and how they forced the Jews to be slaves. Think of Philistia, and Syria. Think of Assyria which devastated and deported the ten northern tribes. Think of Babylon that hauled away the southern kingdom in chains. Think of Persia and the wicked Haman, who devised a plot to exterminate every single Jew from the kingdom, just six decades or so after Haggai.

And then 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.

I just listened to *Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide*, a memoir by Michael B. Oren. In it Oren speaks of his time as Israel's ambassador to the United States from 2009 to 2013. Oren was born in America in 1955, but later immigrated to Israel and fought in the Israeli army. Still later he renounced his American citizenship,

even though he loves America, so he could serve as Israel's ambassador to the United States. If there's anything that Oren's book revealed to me, it's that the many of the world's rulers and nations still have no room for Israel.

But 25 centuries ago God announced that the day is coming when He will turn the tables. He said that He will overturn the rival nations of the world. And 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.

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."

Fifty or so years before Haggai, 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. Just ten years before Haggai, Daniel completed his book, speaking of this coming battle (Daniel 7:25-27). Isaiah talked about it (Isa 60:12). So did Zephaniah (Zeph 3:8).

The Lord Jesus Himself 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. Just like a king would never let go of his signet ring, I will never let go of you, says the Lord to Zerubbabel.

A wonderful series of promises, for sure.

But wait. Did the things Haggai predicted in his fourth message occur in Zerubbabel's lifetime? The answer is *not all of them*.

Haggai preached this message in 520 BC. The Jews finished the temple about four years later, in 516 BC. But the nations of the earth did not collapse. Zerubbabel did not become a world ruler. Israel did not become a powerhouse.

In fact, history tells us that the temple Zerubbabel rebuilt and King Herod later modified was *totally destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD*. And there hasn't been another Jewish temple since.

Furthermore, Governor Zerubbabel passed from the scene just a few years after Haggai preached this message, not in notoriety but in relative obscurity.

So was Haggai wrong? Did he misunderstand God?

No. Zerubbabel *was* God's signet ring, and God never let go of him, just as He promised. But God did not shake the heavens and earth and shatter foreign kingdoms in Zerubbabel's day. That part of the promise would be fulfilled, not by Zerubbabel, but by one of his descendants.

We might say that this promise pertained to Zerubbabel's position, and not just his person. He was a descendant of David, and therefore, in the messianic line.

And that's the point.

On a small scale, Zerubbabel *did* lead his people out of bondage. And he *did* build a temple. He *did* give his people hope. And in so doing he presented the world with a prototype of what one of his descendants would do, on a *cosmic scale*.

Look at Matthew 1:12-16 (ESV), “And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of **Zerubbabel**,¹³ and **Zerubbabel** the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom **Jesus** was born, who is called **Christ**.”⁴

There’s the ultimate fulfillment. 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 Signet Ring did come, and He died as a sacrificial lamb to provide an atonement for guilty sinners. Then He conquered death and returned to heaven.

Before He left, He made this announcement in Matthew 24:27-30. “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

That’s when the rest of the promise will come true, just as God declared through Haggai.

My friend, if we want to experience hope for the future, here’s the first step. We need to *know God’s promises*. He wants us to know them. That’s why He recorded them in His Word.

The promise of forgiveness, 1 John 1:9

The promise of provision, Matthew 6:33

The promise of answered prayer, Matthew 7:7

The promise of God’s peace, Philippians 4:4-6

The promise of joy, John 16:20

The promise of eternal life, John 10:27

And the promises of God go on and on. But to benefit from them, you must know them. And to know them, you must dig into the Bible like you would dig into a mine looking for gold.

To experience hope, we must know what God has promised. Then, according to Haggai, comes a second responsibility...

II. We need to believe God.

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 *believe God*.

Look again at today’s text. We have just learned four important things about God from Haggai.

A. God is sovereign. “I will, I will, I will, I will, I will,” says the Lord in this passage. I can’t say that, nor can you. How can God? Because He is *sovereign*.

⁴ Robert Alden says, “Zerubbabel was no more the Messiah than Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, or Isaiah. But Zerubbabel was in the genealogy of Christ (cf. Matt 1:12-13).” Robert Alden, *Haggai*, p. 591.

He is in absolute control over everything that's happening in this world, and in your family, and in your life. Things don't just happen. God is orchestrating His plan to rescue a people who will enjoy Him forever.

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? On the day of the LORD.

1. *Right now man is having his day.* He 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 better education, or a better government, or a better economy, or better health, or whatever."

But they refuse to see the 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.

If you want to make sense of the world situation, you need to know that right now man is having his day. Part of God's sovereign plan involves letting man have his day. And so there are terrorists, and broken wedding vows, and drug babies, as God allows man to go his own way.

But know this...

2. *In due time God will have His day.* Several years ago, then Vice President, George H. W. Bush represented the United States 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.⁵

Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God."

God *will* have the final word.

C. God is going to exalt His chosen Servant. That's what He told Haggai.

That's not the message of the world, for sure.

1. *Some say there are many ways to God.*

God is whoever you want him (or her) to be. And you can reach him (or her) any way you choose. All roads are acceptable. All roads lead to God.

⁵ Gary Thomas, in *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1994, p. 26.

2. *God says there is only one Messiah.* More than five hundred years before Jesus came to earth, God said this 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 is a right way and a whole bunch of wrong ways to get to Seattle, and who looks to the objective map to take me there.

Beloved, God has given us a map, and the map says there’s only one way to Him. Through His Son, who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).”

As far as Haggai’s message goes, it boils down to this.

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

This is the truth about God. He is sovereign, will have the final word, is going to exalt His chosen servant, and has revealed what He will do in the future so we’ll get right with Him in the present. The appropriate response is to put our weight into His *promises*, and *believe Him*. For when we know His promises and put our trust in Him, we have *hope for the future*.