

For the last few weeks, we've been in a study in the book of Haggai, and we're going to finish that study tonight. I hope that this has been a redemptive time for you, that this has been a good study in a book that most of us may not be too familiar with. I hope that you see the hand of God and what He has for His people 2,600 years ago and what He has for us here today in 2011. So let's do a brief recap, and then we'll finish this thing out. In 586 B.C., the nation of Israel is led into captivity at the hand of the Babylonians. Israel had engaged in idolatry, and God had promised, "If you forsake Me and run after idols, I will allow you to be enslaved." And sure enough, that happens. The Babylonians come in, ransack the city, decimate the temple of Solomon in all its glory and the nation is hauled off 900 miles away from Jerusalem into Babylon. There they would stay for the next 50 years. So all the hopes and dreams of Israel are now up in the air. God eventually lifts His wrath from them and allows the Persians to come in and drive out the Babylonians. The Persians take over control of Israel, and they are more tolerant. They let them go home. They say, "Go back to your home land. Feel free to rebuild your city. We're still going to rule over you, but you've got free reign to go build that city back up." So 50,000 Jews take them up on the offer and head back on the 900 mile journey back home. You can read about the rest who stayed in the book of Esther. But those who went back home, went into the city under the command of God to do three things: rebuild the city, rebuild the people and first and foremost rebuild the temple of God which had been destroyed. So they go in and begin rebuilding, but no sooner than they began, the Samaritans start hurling accusations and threats against them and persecuting them. The nation chickens out and says, "It's too hard right now. It must not be God's will for us to do this work. So it must be God's will for us to actually go and take care of ourselves right now. So let's tend to that." So for the next fifteen years, they neglect the work of the temple, and they pour into their own lives by rebuilding their own homes, their own name and their own comforts. Just imagine that scene by the way. You're looking at the city of Jerusalem and all of a sudden homes just start popping up and civilization just starts taking off. Fifteen years go by, and in the very middle of that city, the temple of God is just laying in ruins and hasn't been touched for fifteen years. Something is just not right with that. So God sends in Haggai to come challenge the people and go, "Listen, God did not redeem you from captivity so that you would come back here and focus on your own life for the next fifteen years or more. God saved you so that you would be a part of His work now. He saved you so that you would go and rebuild the temple and the glory of God would once again dwell here among the people and that His name would be magnified among the nations. So get back to work. God's for this thing. He has big plans for this thing. So quit paying attention to your own lives and get focused on His kingdom." And sure enough God stirs up the hearts of the people and they move in repentance, starting with their hearts first and then with their hands. They get back to work, and the whole nation is now stirred up and excited.

But a couple months set in, and sure enough discouragement starts bleeding throughout the nation. Because the older generation who had been around before captivity, who remember what Solomon's temple looked like, look at the new temple as the foundation is going up and they go, "Wait a minute. This thing looks like a shack. This thing doesn't look anything like what Solomon's temple looked like. So what are we doing here? We're pouring into something that's worthless. This thing will never be as good as it was back in our day." So that kind of attitude then seeps into the nation, begins discouraging the younger guys who didn't know any different, who were excited about what God was doing, and before long the whole nation quit working again. So God sends Haggai in a second time. He says, "Listen, you guys are seeing this by sight, and in your own mind's eye, yeah this look like nothing to you compared to what you have known. But you don't know God the way you should. Because He sees something that man can't see, and there is something coming through this work of yours that you can't even fathom. Years down the road, Solomon's temple won't be able to

hold a candle to this one. So quit operating by sight and operate by faith and holding fast to the promises of God who promises that He's with you in this and that He's building something that you can't even fathom, something far more magnificent." Because as we know, what's coming through this ultimately is the Messiah, who will come and redeem God's people in salvation through His grace, which continues unto this day and will one day culminate when the Messiah returns once again and sets up His authority on earth forever. So sure enough, the Spirit of the Lord stirs up the people again and they get back to work.

But just three weeks later, God has to send Haggai in a third time. Because somehow in the process of serving God and His mission, the people became convinced that, just because they were engaged in religious activity, they would stand holy before God and God was obligated to pour out His blessing upon them. So God has to send Haggai in this third time to correct their errant theology. Just because you do something of religious activity and engage your hands in a holy work doesn't mean that that holy thing that you touch makes you holy. It doesn't work that way. In fact, you're an unclean vessel, a sinner. So anything you touch isn't going to make you holy; it's going to make that which you touch unclean. What you're in need of is a heart transformation. What you need is a cleansing from the inside out. So your holy, religious activity doesn't make you more holy before God. What makes you holy before God is His grace. So what God wants, the sacrifices God was after 2,600 years ago and the sacrifices God is after tonight is not religious activity, but it is as David says in Psalm 51 "a broken and contrite heart." That's what God is after. That's the kind of heart that He can use. So He promised that, from a heart change that day forward, His blessing would come, not because they earned it, but because His grace poured it out on them. So that's where we left of last week.

We now have four verses left in this book. There is one last message that's going to take place over four verses in Haggai 2. This fourth message comes on the same day that the last message came. So Haggai finished up that message about purity and religious activity, and then a few hours later he comes back and has one more message to give. There's a difference in this one than what we've seen in the previous three. The previous three were geared toward the entire nation. They were words of God for the entire nation. This last message is given to one man. So follow along with me here in verse 20. "The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah. . . ." This message is geared toward Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah. So he was the political leader who was going to take the people back and get them jump started here in the rebuilding process. Many feel that, of all that has transpired in these fifteen plus years of Israel being back and rebuilding and discouragement, there is probably nobody who was more discouraged in this whole process than Zerubbabel himself. First of all, we saw from week 1 that Zerubbabel was a part of a greater promise that had occurred 500 years before he was born. 500 years earlier, God met with king David and made a promise to him called the Davidic Covenant in which He promised that it was through his line there would be many kings that would come in the days ahead, but eventually through that line there would be a King who would come who would establish the throne forever. There would be a messianic King who would come, deliver the people from their sins, erect His throne and dominion over all the earth, who would put down all authority and all powers and that King was yet to come. Jesus was the prophetic fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. And in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, you'll find Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was a part of that Davidic Covenant. He was to be king over Israel, and it's through that line that eventually ten generations after Zerubbabel, Jesus would come. And so Jesus would be the fulfillment of that. But what had discouraged Zerubbabel no doubt was, "Would that promise get fulfilled?" Because in 586, the Babylonians came in when Zerubbabel was just a tiny boy and when his grandfather Jehoiachin was the king of Judah. So when the Babylonians came in and drove them out, they locked Jehoiachin up for about 36 years of that 50 in imprisonment. So the line was over. So Jehoiachin's son Shealtiel wouldn't become king, and his son Zerubbabel wouldn't become king. In fact, Zerubbabel's name means "offspring of Babylon." His destiny was that he was going to be reared by a foreign nation. He wasn't going to get the chance to be king over Israel. So here's Zerubbabel watching the demise of his family line, watching his nation being taken off into captivity and then, even as they're led back in the rebuilding, he

can't be king because Persia is ruling over them. The best he can be is a local governor of Jerusalem. So he's probably wondering in this whole thing as they're building this temple up, "Where's the hope? Where's the promise in this thing? What's going to become of me if I'm never going to be king?"

So God sends in Haggai in this final message to give a message of hope to an individual who was heavily discouraged. Of the four messages given in this book, the first and third messages are rebukes and the second and fourth are encouragements. So this book is going to end by lifting the sights of Zerubbabel. In fact, Haggai is going to come in and go, "Zerubbabel, let me take you to a place that you just can't see right now. Let me take you into an event down the road to where you and your line are going to be used mightily. And let me show you that this little, insignificant thing that you're pouring into has tremendous significance." So look at verse 21. "Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, . . ." This is the same message that was given in verse 7 of Haggai 2 to the entire nation. "I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother." So here's this prophecy again that we saw two weeks ago about some futuristic event, some cataclysmic, apocalyptic event in which there's going to be this massive battle with all these armies of the earth coming together and in that moment God will destroy them all. He'll rid the world of evil once and for all. He'll purge the nations, and they'll all go down. And His kingdom will be set up to endure forever. Now when you hear of a battle like that when all nations are defeated in one battle, have we seen that take place yet? Not that I know of. What battle are we talking about here biblically? Armageddon would be the closest thing we see in Scripture to what this might be.

So flip over to Hebrews 12. I want to show you just a snapshot of the description of what this kind of apocalyptic event looks like here. Starting in verse 25, the author of Hebrews here is giving a warning and an admonition to the believers here in Christ, encouraging them to persevere and not give up, because the Lord's about to do something amazing. Verse 25, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking." That "him" is God. "Don't refuse God. As God is laying before you that there is this time coming in which all nations will be put down by the sword and God will establish His throne, see to it that you don't reject that. See to it that you don't refuse what God is promising is going to happen one day." And what he does at the end of verse 25 is he's going to use the example of the Exodus, of the Egyptians and how they turned their nose up at God and got judged for it. He says, "For if [the Egyptians] did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, . . ." Moses came in and said to the Egyptians and said, "Listen, you need to let my people go, according to God." Pharaoh said, "No." "All right, if you don't let them go, judgment is coming. You're going to incur multiple plagues, and it's not going to be well with you. Let them go." Sure enough, plague after plague begins to come. Each one gets worse and worse, but Pharaoh and the Egyptians will not relent and they will not let God's people go. So the final plague comes when the angel of the Lord comes in and kills the firstborn male of every household. Only those with the blood of the lamb on the doorpost were saved. This finally brings Pharaoh to his breaking point where he says, "All right, you can go. Get out of here." So they take off and no sooner than they get a head start, Pharaoh changes his mind and gets the Egyptian army to go after them. So judgment comes and eventually Israel passes through the Red Sea, and as the Egyptian army comes through, it caves in on them and kills the entire army. So the author of Hebrews says, "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." He's saying, "Don't turn your nose up at God and think this whole thing is a joke, that He's not coming back, that He's not going to wage war against His enemies, that He's not going to put them down and that He's not going to establish His throne forever. Don't turn your nose up to that and think it's a joke. That's what the Egyptians thought, and they went down. Much more will we face judgment if God is telling this from heaven right now and we turn our nose to it." And he says in verse 26, "At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." The author of Hebrews quoted God's promise in Haggai 2. This is what I love about the Bible. If you wonder

what that means, he interprets it for you in verse 27. "This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain." He's saying, "Back in Egyptian days, those things that they thought were impenetrable, God took them out and the one thing that stood was God's promise and the nation of Israel. In the same way, in the final days, all those things that we're going to worship that are going to have such meaning will be destroyed. All those nations will be laid down, and the one thing that will remain is the promise of God, namely His Messiah who will set up His dominion on earth and that will remain." So even in Hebrews there's this indication that this day is coming and he quotes Haggai 2.

Flip over now to Revelation 16. Let me give you just a little bit more description of what this actual event looks like, at least at the outset. Revelation 16 finds itself in the midst of God's outpouring of wrath in what some would call the Tribulation period. It's a time when God is purging the earth, slowly bringing folks for one last shot at repentance and gathering His elect unto Himself. And now we're at the end of those final days of wrath before the Messiah will return. Let's pick it up in verse 12. "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty." So these three personalities are walking the earth. These are three rulers who are on the earth at that time, and he says there are unclean things coming out of their mouths like a frog. And then he tells you what it is. It's a demonic spirit. There are these three rulers who are going around gathering up support from other nations and they're going, "You need to come to battle and wage war against God." And these three rulers are demonically influenced. They are gathering kings from the east and the west, and they're coming in to meet for this great day of battle. Let's keep reading in verse 15. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") He's saying, "Don't get caught with your pants down on this one. I'm coming back. You know it's close. Don't fall asleep on Me. Stay in this thing. The battle is about to happen, kings are gathering, but I'm coming and I'm going to put an end to this." So in verse 16 it picks up, "And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Last year, on a trip to Israel I was teaching over there. The teachers had multiple sites, and I got picked to teach at Megeddo, which was a very surreal moment. Standing on this mound that 27 different civilizations have built on. It over looks this plain. In this plain are major trade routes that come and intersect. It is in this plain of Megeddo that the nations will gather together and the warriors will then head into Jerusalem for battle. It's a very surreal moment as you're standing there reading this text. And then verse 17, "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Have you heard those words before? As Jesus is on the cross, right before He is about to die, resurrect and take away the sins of the world, He says, "It is finished." And right before He returns and sets up His dominion forever on earth, "It is done!" Verse 18, "And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake." You have to go back to creation when God spoke into the emptiness and said, "Let there be" and it was. That's the last time anybody has seen anything like what we're about to see. "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath." And this is when it gets bad. Verse 20, "And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe." This is another thing that has always interested me too. They cursed God. How hardened does your heart have to be that you don't recognize that there's something wrong when hundred pound hailstones come falling on you from the sky and you won't repent? So here are these descriptions of this cataclysmic event. And Revelation goes on to describe it in more detail. The Lord is coming out of the clouds and incinerating everything.

So Haggai comes along and points to this event in the future of when the Messiah will come and defeat all the nations, all evil in one swooping battle and it's done. And we will never know another kingdom on this earth except God's and His alone. He shares this with Zerubbabel. Can you imagine Zerubbabel sitting there going, "Man, this sounds pretty amazing. What does it have to do with me? Here I am, governor of this little remnant nation coming back together. What does that have to do with me?" And the last verse in this whole book God says, "On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts." Now this becomes interesting, because he basically says, "Here's how it's going to play out. That event I'm talking about, I'm going to use you in that event. I'm going to use you, Zerubbabel. O Zerubbabel, you who thinks that there's nothing left in life for you, who thinks that there's no promise yet to be fulfilled, there is a day coming when all the earth will shake, all heavens will shake and the Messiah will set up shop. On that day, I will use you in a powerful way." Now the question here becomes, "Has that battle happened yet?" I think most of us would agree that it hasn't. Have we seen a time between 520 B.C. and 2011 when all nations have been overthrown? Have we seen hundred pound hailstones fall? So if that battle hasn't happened yet, if it's still in the future, then how is God going to use Zerubbabel? There's two ways that can happen. One is He's literally going to use him, which means Zerubbabel is 2600 years old and still walking the earth somewhere. But I don't think Zerubbabel is still around. We know that Zerubbabel is dead. Ezra records in his account that, from the time Haggai ends here, the temple would be finished in three years. After the temple is finished, there is a rededication of the temple. Ezra lists for us every single person who was present at the dedication of the temple, and guess whose name is not there. Zerubbabel. Many scholars feel that Zerubbabel lived until the completion of the temple but did not live until the dedication. He died somewhere in between. So how does he become used? The answer is there in verse 23. "You will be like a signet ring. I won't literally use you. You'll be like a signet ring." What is a signet ring? Think back to some stories of kings and monarchies where you've got somebody ruling who has a sign of authority. Sometimes they wear it as a ring on their finger or a necklace around their neck, and it had an emblem on it that represented the official seal of the king. If they had official documents or letters, they would fold them up, put them in an envelope, put hot wax on the seal and then they would press it with the sign. And wherever they delivered it, it would be an official sign of authority from the king. If somebody delivered it, they went on the authority of that king. So in a sense, God I saying, "On that day, I'm going to use you as a sign of My authority." And the reason is because of the Davidic Covenant, that though the line of David would come the Messiah, who would be the one who does that returning and wipes out the nations and sets up His throne forever.

Here's why Zerubbabel is probably discouraged. In Jeremiah 22, a curse was made on Zerubbabel's grandfather because of his wickedness. Verse 24 of Jeremiah 22, "As I live, declares the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans." This curse is given to Zerubbabel's grandfather that says, "I'm so sick of your wickedness, your reign is over. And even if you were a signet ring on My hand, I'd pull it off." And God did and He allowed the Babylonians to come in, capture the nation and take them off into captivity. Now we come back and Zerubbabel is wondering, "Will that signet ring ever get put back on? Will the line continue?" And in the midst of deep discouragement, Haggai comes along with a message from God going, "Listen, some day this amazing event is going to take place, and in that day, I'm going to use you like a signet ring through the Messiah. Yes, I'm putting the ring back on. And down the road, just ten generations later, One will come to Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling clothes and He will be a Savior for the whole world. In a future day, He will come back and make all things new. He will put away evil and do right. And Zerubbabel, that's through you. So take courage. Your labor is not in vain. You're building into something bigger than you can see." And the book ends right there.

So what do we take away from this whole book? We have four messages given over a six-month period of time to the nation of Israel. One is a message of kingdom priority, another one is a message of kingdom perspective, the third is a message of kingdom purity and the final one is a message of kingdom promise. Each one of these was to teach the nation the importance of what God was doing with them. In other words, God had redeemed them from captivity. They were slaves. They could have been under Babylon forever, but God redeemed them, He ransomed them, He brought them out, He delivered them and salvation had come and they came back. But the problem was the temptation to focus on self and not the kingdom. God comes along and says, "Listen, I didn't save you to focus on yourself. I saved you to build into something bigger than you." So they do. And then discouragement sets in because what they see in front of them doesn't look as good as what they see in the rear view mirror. And God says, "No, I need you to be a forward thinking people. Move forward, not based on sight but based on upon the promises I have put before you. And then thirdly, as you enter into this work, as you move forward into this mission, understand that it's not the work that makes you holy; it's the heart from within that must be cleansed by God Himself. So don't deceive yourself into thinking that doing religious activity makes God pleased with you. What he's pleased with is a broken and contrite heart. So get back to work." And then finally, to the one who felt most discouraged of all, as he led the nation into this mission, there is the promise of hope that God was not done with that kingly line yet and that there was One who would still come to rule and reign over all.

What a message! And I think 2,600 years later, as we're looking at the church that Christ has built, in the same way we have been ransomed from our captivity, ransomed from our sin. He has delivered us. He has freed us. He has broken the chains so that we're reconciled once again to our heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ. But as we move out of that salvation experience into the life that He now has for us, there's an understanding that we need to be careful. Because there is a world around us that would love to deceive us into thinking that the reason we got saved is so that we can pour into our own kingdom. And that's not what God has done. He has liberated us so that we would be free to serve Him, so our hearts and affections would go to the true object, which is Jesus Christ Himself. So yes, while God has given us this time on earth to enjoy, the end for us as believers is not simply that we would get married, have a few kids, land that great job and build up that 401k. As good as those things can be, that's not the end. The end is His kingdom. We're waiting for Him to come. And until then, He has given us work to do, to go serve Him, to go out into the communities around us and to the ends of the earth proclaiming the gospel of salvation to all who would hear. That's why a believer is on this earth. If you're sitting in this room today, that is why you're here. There is a reason why we didn't hold you under at your baptism and just leave you there and send you on home. There is still work to do, and it's a work for His kingdom. That's why we're here. And we have to recognize now that we need to be stewards of that priority. I don't know if you recognize it or not, but we're not going to be on this earth forever, in this body anyways. There is a day coming for all of us when the last thing we will see is the lights of the hospital room up above us and we will breathe no more. That day is coming. The time that we have left was meant to be spent serving His kingdom, His purposes. It's why Paul says in Ephesians 5, "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." In other words, Paul is saying, "Listen, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, don't act like a fool walking around for the rest of your days acting like you don't know how this is going to play out." You know. You know you're going to die at one point. You know He's coming back. You know He's going to reign. So live like you know that. And discern the will of the Lord and move out in obedience. That should saturate every area of decision making in your life. It reframes everything. It reframes how I'm going to live with my family, how I'm going to lead my family. It reframes my decisions on how I'm going to spend my time and money, of what kind of investments I'm going to make. And there is a cost of every one of those, but it's for the greater gain. So there is kingdom priority at hand. But understand, as we enter into this mission, there is a temptation to discouragement. Because there are days when it just doesn't seem like much fruit is coming, and you're serving and laboring for His kingdom. And you feel like Jeremiah because you're preaching and nobody's coming to faith. You're taking things you could have spent on yourself and you're pouring into the kingdom, and you look in that rear view

mirror and feel the temptation to just want to go back. And God would come alongside and say, "No, you are building into something that you cannot see. Stay in it. Hold to the promise of God." And as we continue in that work, there's that temptation for us to feel like, just because we go to church, just because we go to small group, just because we crack open a Bible, just because we say a prayer before a meal, that makes me perfectly justified and holy before God. No, God wants purity in the midst of the mission, but He wants it from a clean heart that comes cleansed by faith in Jesus Christ, not by trusting in your own good behavior to somehow pull you through this. So fight that, hold to the promises of God and put before Him a clean heart knowing finally that that day is coming, the day that the Bible promises will be no more tears, no more pain, no more hurt, no more evil, no more tragedy. There will be a day when His authority will rule forever and we will sit before the throne saying, "Holy, holy, holy is our Lord." That's Haggai.

Let's pray. "Father, thank You for the promise in Your Scripture, the promise that You are not done yet. You have saved us not only from Your wrath and the judgment that is to come, but You have also saved us into a body, into a mission. And not only have you saved us into something, You have saved us for something, a day that's coming when the whole earth will shake and will know that You are God. We are reminded in the book of Haggai that our labor is not in vain. We're not crazy for giving up temporal things that we can never keep anyways. So Father, would You stir us up as Your church? Would You stir our hearts that we might move forward in obedience, trusting You with a cleansed heart that we might see Your kingdom come? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

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