

Haggai 2:20-23

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The prophet Haggai receives the fourth message from the LORD during the second year of King Darius of Persia. He predicts the overthrow of the Gentile nations and the exaltation of the Davidic line through Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is a Messianic figure that foreshadows Christ's triumphant return to earth.

The previous section highlighted that Judah's neglect of God's temple caused a negative impact on their crops and economic welfare. Haggai said that God had caused the work of their hands to falter, like someone who becomes unclean by touching a corpse, and then defile whatever else they touch. Now that the people had resumed their work, and were following the first and greatest command to put the LORD first (Deuteronomy 6:5), He would reverse their fortunes and cause great blessing to come upon them. This is in accordance with the provision of God's covenant with Israel that promises blessings if they will follow in His ways.

In the present message (vv 20-23), Haggai comforts and strengthens the Judeans, telling them the LORD will destroy the Gentile nations and elevate Zerubbabel to a position of prominence. This section forms the fourth message of the book of Haggai.

Like the previous three messages, this one begins by identifying the nature of the revelation, the human messenger bearing it, and the date he received it. The message is called *the word of the LORD* (vs. 20), a phrase occurring several times in the book of Haggai (e.g. Haggai 1:1, 3; 2:1, 10). It always refers to Yahweh's revelation (1 Kings 6:11; 16:1). When used in a biblical text, it clarifies the divine origin of the message. Simply put, it tells the reader that the Suzerain God is the primary author of the message. He chose to speak to some individuals, giving them a message to relay to others. In this book, the individual was *Haggai*.

The divine revelation *came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month* (vs. 20). In the Jewish calendar, the ninth month is Kislev. The equivalent date is on or about December 18, 520 BC, the same date mentioned earlier in verse 10. Thus, *the word of the LORD came to Haggai* twice on that day.

The first time, the message was for the priests, the law specialists. They were to make the appropriate rulings on some legal and ritual matters (Haggai 2:10–14). These matters would serve as an illustration to the people. The second time, however, the revelation was for *Zerubbabel*, the *governor of Judah* in *Haggai's* day and the last descendant of the Davidic dynasty. *Zerubbabel* means "born in Babel."

Jewish tradition holds that *Zerubbabel*, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, foreshadow the Messiah (Zechariah 3:8). The Messiah will build Ezekiel's temple in the messianic era (Ezekiel 40-47:12). Within Jewish tradition, the return of the exiles from Babylon is considered a foreshadowing of a future return from exile among the nations.

Revelation says that there will be a gathering of his people out of a mystery Babylon (Revelation 17:5, 18:1-4). This might represent a spiritual gathering of Jews from among the nations of the world at the end of the age; they will be returning to the worship of their covenant God.

This would seem to fit, since one Messianic figure is the priest Joshua, or “Yeshua” which is “Jesus” in English, and the other figure (Zerubbabel) who was a descendant of David, born in Babylon, but returned to Israel. The name Zerubbabel might picture Jesus as coming to earth as a human. It also fits because Jesus will be both the religious leader as well as the political leader in His kingdom (Hebrews 4:14; Isaiah 9:6; Revelation 19:6).

Here, the LORD commanded Haggai to *speak to Zerubbabel* and provided him with the message in the first person. The fact that Haggai only addresses *Zerubbabel*, the civil/political leader, would indicate that the following message will have national implication.

The use of the first person throughout this message emphasizes God as the author, making it clear that Haggai was simply a messenger. The revelation is twofold: (1) it proclaims the destruction of the Gentile nations; and (2) it elevates Zerubbabel to a position of prominence.

In the first part of the message, the LORD said, *I am going to shake the heavens and the earth* (vs. 21). The term *shake* is used with great frequency in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes, it is used literally to refer to an earthquake (Amos 1:1). Other times, it is used figuratively to portray devastation (Psalm 60:2). Here in Haggai, the verb *shake* is used figuratively to depict divine judgment. It is a participle in the Hebrew text, suggesting that several events would take place until God restores His creation. God would *shake* the world and reverse the created order.

After telling Haggai He would *shake* the heavens and the earth, the LORD stated, *I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations* (vs. 22). That means that the LORD would bring down the high and powerful kingdoms of the earth. He would disrupt the world order. Moreover, He declared, *I will overthrow the chariots and their riders*, which would refer to the military forces of the *kingdoms of the nations* (vs. 22).

The horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another (vs. 22). This indicates that the LORD would cause panic and confusion among the Gentile nations. They would kill each other in battle.

Thus the LORD predicted the election and exaltation of the Davidic dynasty through *Zerubbabel*. The prophet began with the phrase *On that day* (vs. 23) to speak of a distant time when God would accomplish the promise. After the temporal phrase, Haggai added the prophetic formula *declares the LORD of hosts* (vs. 23) to add weight and emphasis to his message.

The Hebrew term translated as *LORD* is Yahweh, the self-existent and eternal God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The term *hosts* translates the Hebrew term “*sabaoth*,” meaning “armies.” This term refers to the angelic armies of heaven (1 Samuel 1:3). Thus, the phrase *the LORD of hosts* demonstrates His power and dominion over all human affairs. This is directly applicable to the topic at hand, which is a claim that God would *overthrow the thrones* (seats of authority) *and kingdoms of the nations*.

The phrase *kingdoms of the nations* would apply to all nations other than Israel. So this is quite the claim, given that Israel is such a small nation compared to all the nations of the world. However, the *LORD of hosts* is far larger and more powerful than all the nations of the earth. Jesus is the King of kings, and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:6). This prophecy will be fulfilled in the future (as of this writing) when Jesus returns to earth, from His “exile” from earth, being now in heaven (Acts 1:9-10). Like *Zerubbabel* returned to Israel, Jesus will return to earth.

And like Joshua (Yeshua) the priest came back to Israel, Jesus (Yeshua) the High Priest will return to earth. And like Joshua the successor to Moses crossed the Jordan River to conquer the land, so Jesus will return to Israel to clear the land of the nations of the earth. As the Assyrians entered the land to overthrow it during the time of the Kings, so will the antichrist enter the land, and assault Jerusalem. And just as God repelled Assyria from conquering Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah, so will Jesus repel the nations gathered at Armageddon from conquering Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35; Revelation 16:16, 19:11-21; Joshua 3:9-17; Micah 5:5)

God alone can disrupt the entire world order (vv. 21–22). He can do as He pleases. Thus, He declared, *I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant, and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you.* This would indicate that *Zerubbabel* is a Messianic symbol that will be fulfilled in Jesus, who is the Son of David, and God’s servant. The kingdom of Israel will be fully restored to someone like *Zerubbabel*, who is “born in Babylon” like Jesus was born a human in a sinful earth.

Scripture uses Babel/Babylon as an image for the exploitative world system that has dominated the earth since Adam’s fall (Genesis 11:5-8; Revelation 17:5, 19:1-3). Jesus was born into that system, served God and others, and was abused and killed by that system as His reward. But He will return and overthrow the kingdoms of the world, and replace it with His kingdom (Daniel 2:44-45).

The verb *take* means that God would lay hold of *Zerubbabel*. The term *servant* is a title often applied to King David (2 Samuel 7:5, 8; 1 Kings 11:32; Ezekiel 37:24; Psalm 132:10). Here in Haggai, it is attributed to *Zerubbabel*, suggesting that he was willing to follow the divine commands faithfully. *Zerubbabel* is the political leader of Israel, of the lineage of David. But here he likely represents Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Isaiah:

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”
(Isaiah 42:1)

This prophecy in Isaiah 42 is quoted in Matthew 12:18 as having been fulfilled by Jesus, who was God’s ultimate Servant.

The LORD also said to *Zerubbabel*, *I will make you like a signet ring.* The term *signet* refers to a stamp seal embedded in a *ring*. It was a sign of authority, identification, and ownership. “Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand and clothed him in

garments of fine linen and put the gold necklace around his neck” (Genesis 41:42; see also Esther 3:10). Here in Haggai, the LORD stated He would make *Zerubbabel like a signet ring*.

This prophecy is that God would give authority to *Zerubbabel* to rule. This was fulfilled when Jesus was given all authority in heaven and on earth after He fulfilled His Father’s will (Matthew 28:18). Jesus’s authority will be fully implemented when Satan is dispatched into the bottomless pit and Jesus ascends to the throne of His kingdom (Revelation 19:15-16, 20:1-3).

Zerubbabel is a descendant (grandson) of King Jechoniah. Jechoniah’s lineage was cursed; God asserted that no descendant of his would sit on the throne of Israel.

- God ended his dynasty by saying, “‘As I live,’ declares the LORD, ‘even though Coniah [a shortened form of Jechoniah] the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off’” (Jeremiah 22:24).
- Also in Jeremiah 22:30, God asserts of Jechoniah, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper Sitting on the throne of David Or ruling again in Judah.’”

So the question arises as to how *Zerubbabel* the descendant of Jechoniah can foreshadow the Messiah. Further, the question arises how Jesus can be the Messiah since he descends from Jechoniah (Matthew 1:12) and Jeremiah says none of Jechoniah’s descendants would sit on the throne of David.

It could be viewed that God reverses the curse in Haggai 2:23 by calling *Zerubbabel* a chosen signet ring, making that line valid for a Messiah. But it is more likely that the answer lies in the fact that Jesus’s kingly lineage that includes Jechoniah comes through Joseph, who was Jesus’s earthly father, but not the source of His seed. Jesus was born of a virgin, the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:3:15; Galatians 3:16). Jesus’s mother Mary was of the line of David, but not through Jechoniah, if we take Jesus’s lineage as set forth in Luke 3:23-38 as being the genealogy of Jesus through Mary. Mary is related to David through his son Nathan rather than Solomon.

The prophet Haggai closed his fourth oracle with the formula *declares the LORD of hosts* to remind his audience of the divine source of the message. Even though some of these predictions seem farfetched from a human perspective, they are not, because they are spoken by He who created the heavens and the earth, and all that is within them.

The book of Haggai served to encourage the returning exiles of Judah to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem. The LORD rebuked the people for building paneled homes for themselves while leaving His temple desolate. They had been ordered by men to cease building and they complied, failing to obey God’s desire that they build. Therefore, God was greatly displeased.

The people responded positively to the message of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1) and resumed work on the temple. As a result, God poured out His blessing upon them. When they began to resume the work, and made an articulate legal appeal, the ruling authorities reversed course and gave their blessing to continue the work on the temple.

The LORD addressed the complaints of some Judean elders who had seen the splendor of the former temple, and compared the new temple which was inferior to the former. But God told them to have courage and hope, because there would in the future be a much greater temple than that of Solomon's, likely the one prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-45:9).

God emphasized the necessity of following His commands, explaining that the people's disobedience to His direction had rendered their work futile and their worship ineffective. Their lack of zeal to follow God's ways had resulted in their lack of blessing. The LORD promised to destroy the Gentile nations and exalt the Davidic line through His servant Zerubbabel, who is an image and likeness of Jesus, the Son of David and Servant of the Most High.

Although this message was for the returning exiles of Judah, it can be useful for believers today. In the advanced information age in which we live, we can easily misplace our priorities. We can focus on acquiring material possessions on this earth and neglect our spiritual lives. But Jesus reminds us to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). May all who read this book remember its message to remain faithful to the Lord until He comes!

Biblical Text

²⁰ Then the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth *day* of the month, saying, ²¹ "Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.'²³ 'On that day,' declares the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,' declares the Lord, 'and I will make you like a signet *ring*, for I have chosen you,'" declares the LORD of hosts.