

Future belongs to God

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[0 : 00] So, it's Haggai chapter 2, beginning at verse 20. Now hear God's Word.

The Word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month. I speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I'm about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I'm 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.

On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shittil, declares the Lord. And make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts.

Well, that is the ending of Haggai, and we'll come back to that together after we sing this next song, Be Still.

[1 : 25] The heart of all of Haggai's messages is this. Seek God first. Seek his kingdom first. Put him first. And here's the issue.

Easy to understand. Very easy. But it seems to be increasingly difficult to do for these people. And even in the church, it is something that we can forget to do.

The first bit. In other words, not many of us have trouble seeking the kingdom. The difficulty comes with seeking the kingdom first.

It's a bit like the Lord's Day, and I've said this before. Why is the Lord's Day set apart and so special? And why is it to be set apart and special by us?

Aren't all days special? Yes. But the difference is when God puts a time frame in it. In the same way he does with the kingdom, to seek first the kingdom.

[2 : 22] Now, if God said, seek the kingdom, well, when and where and how can it be at the bottom of the list? Can I do other things before it?

But the moment you introduce first, all of those other things disappear. In the same way with the Lord's Day. The reason the Lord's Day is to be set apart, it is because it's to be set apart from all the other days.

That's what causes the believers trouble. It's not that we don't set the day apart. It's not that we don't put the kingdom first. But rather the trouble comes with whether or not we do it first.

The people in Haggai's day don't seem to be doing it first. So, Haggai motivates these people with the word of the Lord by telling them that they should have hope in what God is about to do.

What is God about to do? Well, here's the fourth message, verse 21. God is about to shake the heavens and the earth. Verse 22. God is about to overthrow the kingdoms and destroy the strength of the kingdoms and nations.

[3 : 35] God is also, verse 23, going to make Zerubbabel a servant of God like a signet ring. Which is similar of saying that Zerubbabel is going to have a position of authority.

That Zerubbabel is going to be the person who will represent God on earth. And Zerubbabel will do this, it appears, after all these other things have happened. What's the problem?

The problem is, if you've read the end of the Old Testament, none of these things happened to Zerubbabel. In fact, Zerubbabel disappears with almost no explanation.

Which raises a very important question. Did God tell a lie? Did he promise something that he wouldn't fulfill? Did he say something knowing that they would have believed it at the time?

But it never came to pass. Now the trouble is, is that if you read it one-dimensional, that's the conclusion that you have to come to. Because Zerubbabel was never given that position.

[4 : 46] Here's the issue. That when you read scripture, you have to read it in different ways. So I'm going to explain a different way of you of reading this. When it mentions here that something will be

done to Zerubbabel, it doesn't necessarily mean that something will be done to Zerubbabel.

In other words, it can mean something other than what it says. Confused? Well, it's almost as confusing when the New Testament addresses the church as brothers.

And he includes women in that. Now you know that when he says brothers, he's speaking of the women as well. You have no difficulty in understanding that the sisters are also brothers in that context, even though they're not.

They're sisters in the Lord, and there are brothers in the Lord. But you know that when he says brothers, he's including both male and female. You understand you can hold those two things together.

And like if you were to write English correctly, to use the masculine rather than the feminine is what you would call proper use of English.

[5 : 52] Even though there are some Bibles today that want to use both male and female terms. We already understood what brothers meant. There's no need to say brothers and sisters.

We knew what it meant. So when it says here about Zerubbabel, it's speaking about the line of Zerubbabel that he finds himself in. And that line is David.

Now why is that important? Well, because on the surface it looks like this promise is being made to Zerubbabel directly. But what you'll actually find as you read on, it cannot be because he doesn't occupy any of these positions.

So I'm going to explain it in a slightly different way now from another Old Testament passage. In 2 Samuel 7, the prophet Nathan is being asked to go to speak to David.

And the words that he is to speak to David are the very words that God is going to speak to him.

And I'm going to pick it up in verse 12. Here are the words. When your days are fulfilled, this is what Nathan has to say to David on behalf of the Lord.

[6 : 56] When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you. He shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Right? Who's the son? Now on the surface, it looks like Solomon.

Solomon is the offspring of David. Solomon becomes God's king on earth or the king who will represent God on earth. God will also establish the kingdom of Solomon.

Solomon is the son of David who will also build the house of God. He is the one who builds the temple. David asked to build it and God said, no, your son will do it.

On the surface, it looks like that God cannot be speaking about anyone else apart from Solomon.

The giveaway, however, is, is it true of Solomon? Does his kingdom last forever?

[7 : 58] And the answer is no. So on the surface, it looks like God is speaking about Solomon. Solomon, and in one dimension, it is true because Solomon does become king.

He does build the temple, but it doesn't last forever. Rather, Solomon, like David, like Zerubbabel, are all in the line of David and God is promising something in the future that will be filled through them.

Why? Because God's people always have a habit of thinking that when God says he's going to do something, the people think they're going to see it in their own lifetime. How many of you have been Christians for long enough and have heard the preaching on the second coming and have convinced yourself that it will happen in your lifetime?

We all believe that it's going to happen in our lifetime. Why? I don't know. But it seems to be the case that whenever God's people are told something about the future, that they all think it's going to happen in their lifetime.

The trouble is, many Christians have lived the Christian life thinking those things, and it hasn't happened. Hence, here we are. And we all could be thinking that Christ is going to come in our lifetime, and lo and behold, Christians two or three thousand years from now will think, what were they thinking?

[9 : 17] Right? We all find ourselves in this position. God has a way of confusing us, although it's not confusing when you read the Bible as a whole, that God writes multifacetedly, multilayered, multidimensional.

It's never just a straight-line story. It has depths. It has peaks. It has troughs. It has wonders that will amaze you that you will never get to the bottom of. And so these promises of God here, just like the one to David about the son who will build a kingdom, or have a kingdom which will last forever, was

never speaking about Solomon, though in part it was.

It was rather indicating the need for Jesus to come. The same also is true of Zerubbabel. That yes, in part, like Haggai as a prophet, they represent God in a certain kind of way, but he will never be the type of man who will have complete ownership.

When God's kingdom comes, when this happens, it never happens all of a sudden. It happens over a great period of time.

That's why the early disciples were so confused about the kingdom of God coming. That's why in Acts chapter 1, they say, is it now that you'll restore the kingdom to Israel? Well, what are they doing?

[10:41] They're misunderstanding that God takes his time over everything. This is what Jesus says, that the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour till it was leavened.

That takes a lot of time. And that's how the kingdom comes. In other words, the kingdom doesn't come like a parachute regiment jumping out of a plane, and all of a sudden, it's here.

No, the kingdom comes gradually over time, like waiting for a cake to rise in the oven. It's slow. It's gradual. But it's always happening.

And that's how God unfolds his plan throughout the Old Testament, and indeed, the New Testament. It doesn't happen all of a sudden. And yet, as believers, we all think it'll happen very quickly indeed.

The early church had to be taught and taught again that Christ wasn't actually coming back as quick as they thought he was. Okay, most of the New Testament letters that address this issue are telling believers to be ready because no one will know when, but at the same time telling them to get on with everyday life and to build the church and to go ahead and evangelize the world because it's not quite likely that Christ is coming back.

[11:57] You've got a lot to do before Christ returns. You've got a lot of life to live before Christ returns.

There will come a day when the new heavens and the new earth will be fulfilled, where there will be blessing on earth without the ruin of sin or everything that sin ruins.

But this fourth message of Haggai is very similar to the others, and that is, think about the future.

Seek first the kingdom. Have your spirits lifted by taking your mind off the present and looking what God has got in store for you in the future.

It may not be the immediate future. It might, but it's more likely to be a future further down the line. Whichever is the case, you get to enjoy it because it's there for you.

So rejoice and have hope in the future that God is promising you. That's the essence of everything almost Haggai is saying.

[13:06] Think further ahead, much further ahead, and then plan every day in light of that future.

You know, the reason why I think Christians should have high hopes, great desires, and big dreams is because the future is coming that is glorious and godly and perfect.

We should all be trying to establish things on earth that will make it through the fire. We should all be trying to, hymn writers should write hymns that will make it through the fire. Builders should build buildings that will make it through the fire.

People should build in their minds and hearts companies and so forth that will make it through the fire. We think, well, that's not, it's all coming to an end. We won't bother with anything. Oh, Jesus is coming back soon.

We won't bother about building a school for children who don't have education. We won't bother about building a Christian school. Yeah, Jesus is coming. That type of attitude only leads to the church being defeatist.

I'll just let it go. Jesus is coming back soon. And nothing gets done in the meantime. Rather, understand the future that's coming. It's one where God will populate the world and remove all the evil from it.

[14:28] The future that God is promising is not one where he throws away this world. It's where he takes that which is bad in this world and throws that away.

Go read Matthew 13. So have hope in the future that God is promising. And go about doing things now that will make it to that future.

So then, the one who is to come will be like a signet ring. And it ain't going to be Zerubbabel.

And when it speaks of a signet ring here, it speaks of one who has authority, one who will represent God. More importantly, it speaks of one who will have total ownership. Now, when God says he'll shake the heavens and the earth, of course he can.

He can do whatever he likes with his world. He can shake it left, right, up and down, however he chooses. In other words, it's God's world to shake up. It's God's world to shape and take into the future.

[15 : 34] And when God's people forget that, we end up thinking that we live in somebody else's world. That's run by someone else and can only come to ruin. But the very future that God promises here to Haggai is the very opposite.

That God destroys other kingdoms. He destroys other nations. He gets rid of them. Why? So that God's people would flourish. For the Christian, we know that there has been a decisive change. For the Christian, we know that Christ, at this very moment, is sat at the right hand of the Father. For the Christian, we know that we've just gone through a political campaign where people thought they were going to win and didn't win, and people thought they were going to lose, and they did. And you begin to realize that they're not the real political leaders. That the world is not controlled by politicians and their policies. Rather, it's controlled by the one who sits on the right hand of the Father, reigning and ruling until all of his enemies are made his footstool.

That's the type of world that we live in. Our hope should not be in politicians. It should not be in the latest trend. It should be in the Christ who reigns. The one who truly has defeated all other kingdoms.

[16 : 48] The one who truly has brought an end to all other nations. The one who promises this future and a future that we will inherit.

So come again to the message of Haggai as we conclude. And come again and realize that it has important lessons for us. The first lesson is this. Seek God first.

Seek his kingdom. Seek him. Look to the future. But look to the future as God explains it. Not as you see it. The second lesson is don't make divisions where no divisions can be made.

It never ends well for the Christian church or the individual believer. Don't try and divide something that cannot be divided. All of life is sacred. All of life belongs to God.

God owns it all. Don't try and divide your life up and say this is my portion and God can have the rest. Or this, the church can have so much and the rest belongs to me.

[17 : 52] Don't do that. It doesn't end well for you spiritually. It doesn't end well for you sort of emotionally or mentally. It wears you down. Rather understand all of life belongs to God.

God, the spiritual and the material, all of worship, all of life, the sacred and what we call the secular. Never seek to do your will over his will.

That's what the people in Haggai's day did. Yeah, they proclaimed that they believed God. Yeah, they listened to God. But at the end of the day, they were still doing what they wanted to do.

And there was no blessing. And they continued to do it because they couldn't work out why there was no blessing. And so Haggai had a point out to them that what they were doing in their private life was a reason why they were not being blessed by God, despite the fact that they started to do the work of God.

They failed to make the connections. And the same is true in the New Testament church. God treats us according to the way we treat him in many ways. The husband, who doesn't have his prayers answered, as I said, should ask first whether or not he's treating his wife correctly.

[19 : 07] The person who's not getting healed should ask first whether or not they have confessed their sins. James chapter 5. These issues are New Testament issues as well.

Not that they make a difference to our salvation, but they certainly make a difference to our life before God. So even when the people in Haggai's day get all of this sorted out, it's all sorted out, the temptation is to go back to their old ways.

So Haggai brings a fourth message. Look further ahead. Look at what God is about to do. Gordon Taylor used to say to me, you know, perception is one of those things that you really can't judge all too well because people see things differently.

And he used to tell this story. It was a fable, not a true story. But at least it got the point across. That two men looked through prison bars and one saw mud and the other saw stars.

All depends on where you're looking. And that's kind of Haggai's message. Christians can be in the same condition before God. And yet one can see a future.

[20 : 23] And all the other can see is the pit that they're in. Why do you think the psalmist speaks of being taken out of the pit by God? Do you know why depression is described as a pit in the psalms?

For this very simple reason. That when you're in a pit, you can't see any further forward. You lose your horizon. It disappears.

And what people need is a hope and a future. They need to be able to see that tomorrow's worth living. They need to be able to see that next year is worth getting into. They need to be able to see that the next ten years, it's worth living in this particular way for God.

But the moment you're in a pit, all of that forward-looking disappears. And all you get to see is that wherever you look, it all looks the same.

The psalmist, they didn't have a clinical degree in psychology. But they understood. They understood. They understood the nature of the human heart. They understood what depression really was.

[21 : 29] And they also understood the cure. Lord, take me out of this pit. Why? Basically, so that I can see forward. And to put another spin on it, there is only one way that you can look in a pit and see something different.

Up. So here's the exhortation. When God calls you to look to the future, don't just look to your own future, but look to the future that he has promised.

When God asks you or calls you to pray the Lord's Prayer, as he does, and in that prayer, you are told to pray, Lord, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Do you think that God has given you something to pray that he isn't going to fulfill? Rather, he gives you that prayer because that is what's going to happen. The kingdom is going to come, and God's will on earth will be done as it is in heaven.

That's a hope. That is a future. And I'm not a politician. The future is certain. Absolutely certain.

[22 : 39] Because the one who speaks the future and promises the future and proclaims the future is the one who is sat at the right hand with all power and all authority.

He is the one who is like the signet ring. He owns everything and controls everything. Listen to his sermon. And in his sermon, he asks us to be kingdom people.

And in his sermon, he describes what blessed people are like. Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are a whole load of others.

Blessed people, indeed, who do the will and the work of God. So here's the final thought. As a Christian, beware of the danger of defining your own kind of Christianity.

Let me say that again. As a Christian, be aware of defining your own kind of Christianity. He's not asking you to live it in your own way and neither is he interested in your version or interpretation.

[23 : 46] God is very clear on how to live the Christian life and abundantly clear on the future. No cause of blame can be laid at the feet of God for not being clear when it comes to what he expects from those who love him and for those who follow him.

Rather, lift your head and see what God has spoken. And as Haggai says here, all I'm bringing, or I'm putting words into his mouth, but it's clear that all Haggai brings is the word of the Lord.

How do you address people who are not following the word of the Lord? You address them with the word of the Lord. Blessed are those then that hear the word, not just hear, but blessed are those who hear and do the word.

Amen.