

XII. Chosen Community

26-Feb-06 Haggai 2:10-23

Theme: God purifies His people and equips them for the task of building for His glory.

Key Verses: Haggai 2:11-13 ¹¹Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Now, ask the priests concerning the law, saying, ¹²“If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?”’ Then the priests answered and said, “No.” ¹³And Haggai said, “If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean?” So the priests answered and said, “It shall be unclean.”

Review

Last week we studied Haggai’s second sermon (2:1-9). Haggai addresses a word of encouragement to the remnant, who have become discouraged by the hard work and by the seemingly slow progress. Furthermore, it has become apparent that the Temple they are working on will be far inferior to the Temple of Solomon, both in size but especially in glory. So Haggai comes during the Feast of Tabernacles to give them a message of encouragement, to remind them that *God’s glory* is not bound up in man-made buildings, but in the people who inhabit His kingdom.

Haggai encourages the remnant to “be strong” and to “work” because God is with them. The promise of God’s presence in the midst of His people is the heart of the covenant and the Immanuel Principle – “God with us.” The command to “be strong” would remind the people of Joshua and how God was with him in the conquest of the Land. God reminds them of His powerful presence during the Exodus as He promises to send His spirit to give the remnant *spiritual strength* for the work ahead. These promises based on God’s actions in the past are one aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is to remember what God has done.

But another aspect of the Feast of Tabernacles is to look forward to see how God will gather the nations into His Church. *Greater glory* lies still ahead, as God promises to shake the nations and bring in the wealth of the nations and the nations themselves into His Temple. Ultimately, the *true Temple* is Jesus Christ and the nations He brings into the kingdom of God.

Introduction

In Haggai chapter 1, the message is an exhortation *to build*. Haggai’s second message in 2:1-9 is an encouragement to build for *God’s glory*. As we come to Haggai’s third message in 2:10-19, we can see that it is an encouragement for God’s builders, who need to become a *purified people*. We will also consider Haggai’s fourth message in 2:20-23 to Zerubbabel, God’s *special servant*. Together, the *purified people* and the *special servant* comprise God’s *chosen community*.

Exposition

A. Purified People (2:10-19)

Haggai’s third message is given **on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius** (v. 10a). This prophecy comes just over two months after the previous message (*cp.* 2:1). This date corresponds roughly to mid-to-late December in 520 BC. You will notice from verse 18 that this date is **the day that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid**. However, we know that the foundation had already been laid sixteen years previously. What this

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apparently means is “the date that the Lord’s Temple actually began to be built.” The work had started exactly three months previously (*cp.* 1:15), but apparently it had consisted mostly of clearing debris, collecting construction materials, and preparing for the actual work of construction. It was on the date that the actual building up of the Temple began that Haggai again speaks prophetically.

Previously, I have mentioned that Haggai’s name means “my festival” and that all of his messages are delivered on significant dates related to feast days or holy days. The first message in 1:1 occurred on the first day of the sixth month, which was a New Moon celebration. The second message occurred on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. So what is the feast associated with the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month? That’s a bit of a trick question, because at the time Haggai is writing, there is no feast in the ninth month. Rather, it anticipates a feast that is established over 350 years in the future: The Festival of Lights, or Hanukah.

The origins of Hanukah have to do with the oppression of the Jews by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC. Antiochus brutally suppressed Jewish customs and forced pagan Greek practices on the Jews. He defiled the Temple (the one we are building here in Haggai!) and filled it with vile statues, pagan altars, and unclean practices. In 167 BC, a small group of Jews revolted against Antiochus. They were led by Judas Maccabeus and his brothers. Eventually, in 165 BC, the Maccabees were able to defeat the superior Syrian forces and recapture the Temple, which they proceeded to purify over an eight day period. The apocryphal books of 1 & 2 Maccabees describe this Temple purification:

⁵²Early in the morning on the *twenty-fifth day of the ninth month*, which is the month of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-eighth year, ⁵³they rose and offered sacrifice, as the law directs, on the new altar of burnt offering that they had built. ⁵⁴At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. ⁵⁵All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. ⁵⁶So they celebrated the dedication of the altar for eight days, and joyfully offered burnt offerings; they offered a sacrifice of well-being and a thanksgiving offering. ⁵⁷They decorated the front of the temple with golden crowns and small shields; they restored the gates and the chambers for the priests, and fitted them with doors. ⁵⁸There was very great joy among the people, and the disgrace brought by the Gentiles was removed. ⁵⁹Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel *determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev* (1 Maccabees 4:52-59).

¹Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; ²they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. ³They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice.... ⁵It happened that on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, *on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislev.* ⁶*They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals* (2 Maccabees 10:1-3a, 5-6).

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You will notice that the purification of the Temple began on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month and lasted eight days, “in the manner of the festival of booths” (or tabernacles). This is our connection to the book of Haggai. The Feast of Hanukkah was originally instituted to celebrate the purification and rededication of God’s house for worship. That is the theme of the book of Haggai. Haggai’s third message, which comes on the eve of Hanukkah, has to do with purification and rededication—not just of the Temple that is being rebuilt—but of the people themselves. It takes a *purified people* to build for God’s glory. Also notice the connection between Hanukkah and the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the central feast of emphasis in Haggai’s previous message. Finally, note that the Feast of Hanukkah “comes over into Christianity as Christmas, which celebrates the birth of the Temple of God” (Jordan).

1. Contaminated Congregation (2:10-14)

In the previous two messages, Haggai addressed Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and all the remnant of the people. However, this time, the message is more narrowly focused. Haggai is commanded by God to address a pair of specific questions to the **priests**. The priests were charged with discernment in spiritual matters, and making judgments on the subject of clean and unclean things. For example, the priest was called in to judge whether a leper, or a contaminated garment, or a contaminated house was clean or unclean (*cp.* Lev. 13-14).

In the Old Testament, the categories of “clean” and “unclean” were very specific. In order to be holy, sacred, or set apart for God’s service, you had to be “clean.” However, that status was hard to maintain. Contact with any type of corruption that symbolized sin and the curse —blood, bodily fluids, mold, disease, death—made you “unclean.” If you were ceremonially unclean, it meant that you were forbidden to enter into the worship of God until you were ritually cleansed. Becoming unclean was easy; staying clean was much more difficult. Those who were perpetually unclean—for example, lepers—were driven out of society lest they contaminate anyone by casual contact.

So Haggai comes to the priests, the authorities of “clean” and “unclean,” and asks them two softball questions. The purpose is not to find out if the priests know their stuff; rather it is to apply the principles of “clean” and “unclean” to the people of God.

The first question had to do with the spread of holiness by contact: **“If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches bread or stew, wine or oil, or any food, will it become holy?”** (v. 12a). The priests quickly and correctly answer the question. The answer is **“No.”** The background of the question comes from Leviticus 6:

²⁵Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘This is the law of the sin offering: In the place where the burnt offering is killed, the sin offering shall be killed before the LORD. It is most holy. ²⁶The priest who offers it for sin shall eat it. In a holy place it shall be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of meeting. ²⁷Everyone who touches its flesh must be holy. And when its blood is sprinkled on any garment, you shall wash that on which it was sprinkled, in a holy place’ (Lev. 6:25-27).

The “holy meat” is the part of the burnt offering reserved for the priests and their families to eat. According to Leviticus 6:27, the robe of a priest’s garment used to carry the holy meat would be holy. But that holiness is not transmitted further. “Although the garment was made holy by the offering it contained, it had no power to transmit that sacredness any further” (Bentley). Jordan points out that holiness only passes through first-degree contact. The holy meat makes the

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garment holy, but that holiness cannot be passed on through second-degree contact with another person or object.

On the other hand, contamination is contagious. That is the point of Haggai's second question: **"If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it become unclean?"** (v. 13a). The priests were not fooled by this question either and correctly answered, **"It shall be unclean"** (v. 13b). Again, the background for this ruling can be found in the book of Leviticus (22:4-7), but the simplest expression of this principle in the law is in the book of Numbers:

²²Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches it shall be unclean until evening (Num. 19:22).

Uncleanness spreads. Defilement spreads. Decay spreads. Pollution spreads. Sin spreads. The first example considered holy meat. This example considers "unholy meat" – a corpse (Jordan). Whoever comes in contact with a dead body becomes unclean. That's the first-degree contact. But then, anything that person touches also becomes unclean – second-degree contact. And presumably anyone who touches that unclean object or person becomes unclean, and so on and so on, to the nth-degree. Holiness is not contagious. But contamination is. The spiritual principle is that sin is contagious; it spreads and ruins everything it touches.

After establishing the principles of "clean" and "unclean", Haggai drops the hammer:

¹⁴Then Haggai answered and said, "'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me,' says the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean'" (Hag. 2:14).

What a surprise! Sure, the people had procrastinated on the Temple project for years, but once they heard Haggai's first message, they jumped to attention and began the work in obedience to God's command (1:12). Sure, they have become discouraged in the work, but Haggai has encouraged them about God's presence and power in the previous message (2:1-9). He had told them to "be strong" and to "work," for God was with them. And now, only a few months into the work, God is telling them that they are unclean, that their work is polluted, and that they are unacceptable in His sight. They are a *contaminated congregation*.

They had gone from being called "this people" in 1:2 to the "remnant of the people" in 1:12 and 2:1, back to **this people** and **this nation**. Is God being fickle? Is He changing His mind regarding His relationship to His people? Of course not. But this language is pointing out the difference between obedience and disobedience. "This people" are disobedient; the "remnant" is obedient. So how are **this people** and **this nation** now being disobedient?

Bentley suggests that it is in their attitude. They were presuming upon God's goodness to them. They presumed that since they were offering sacrifices upon the rebuilt altar for the past seventeen years that they were holy and secure in God's sight. They assumed that since they were working on the holy Temple, that they would be holy too.

Why were the people unclean? Their lethargic attitude had made them unclean. Their love, their loyalty, their enthusiasm for God's work had all begun to diminish. They thought that their good work in offering sacrifices upon the altar would make up for their lack of zeal for God's house. They thought their devout actions would make them acceptable in God's eyes.

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Baldwin & Jordan suggest a slightly different reason. Each of these commentators links the people's uncleanness in their failure to rebuild the Temple. Baldwin says: "The ruined Temple, a witness to sins of negligence, stood like a corpse in the midst. How could the defilement be purged away if every offering was itself defiled?" Jordan expands on this subject:

The idea is that somewhere in the nation there is a corpse, and the people have been in contact with this corpse. So, what is the corpse? The only answer that seems to make any sense is that the corpse is the Temple. It is sitting there in ruins. The Temple is considered a living being since God dwells there. The Temple also represents a living person – Jesus. Because the Temple is not built, it is considered a defiled corpse. Everyone who comes into contact with it has become defiled. That defilement is spreading throughout the land. What do they need to do? Remove the defilement and make it clean. Then that cleanness will spread at least to the first degree. It will spread to the people who come to the Temple. [Haggai's message] is an elaborate way of saying that your culture is defiled because your worship is defiled.

2. *Belated Blessing (2:15-19)*

How can this *contaminated congregation* become a *purified people*? Only through the power of God. So far, Haggai's message has been a rebuke of the people's sin, but now he turns his attention toward bestowing a *belated blessing* upon the remnant.

¹⁵And now, carefully consider from this day forward: from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the LORD—¹⁶since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. ¹⁷I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands; yet you did not turn to Me,' says the LORD. ¹⁸Consider now from this day forward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid—consider it: ¹⁹Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. But from this day I will bless you' (Hag. 2:15-19).

In this promise of future blessing, Haggai borrows heavily from the language he used in chapter 1. Twice he tells the people to **consider**, the same language he used in 1:5&7. In verse 15, he is telling the people to "consider" what has happened to them up to this point. That is, it is a backward reflection into the past. Once again, they are to review the frustration and disappointment they have felt in their endeavors. In their own strength, they produced much less than they had expected. They struggled with **blight** and **mildew** and **hail**. All these things were caused by the sovereignty of God (*cp.* 1:9-11). Once again, God is reminding the people that their poor harvest and the unnatural weather were sent by Him for a purpose: '**Yet you did not turn to Me' says the LORD** (v. 17b).

In verse 18, he is telling them to "consider" what will happen from this point forward. This point in time is again **the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month**. Furthermore, it is the date that the construction on the temple has begun. This date is significant, because it represents a change in fortune for the people of God. On the eve of Hanukah, the people will become purified instead of defiled. No longer will they be unclean. God promises to cleanse them and bless them in the future. Why? Because at long last they have actually begun the work of building the Temple and restoring the worship of God to the center of their lives. Better a *belated blessing* than no blessing at all!

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The blessing that God promises must be received in faith by the remnant. It is the middle of winter. They have just brought in a poor harvest, the latest in a series of poor harvests. There is no earthly reason to believe that the next harvest will be any more fruitful. The crop trees and plants are dormant for winter. There was no visible way to see the blessing that God had promised.

And yet, by faith, these builders were encouraged. They now knew that God had pronounced them clean, and that they would remain holy as long as they remained in contact with the Temple that they were now building, “resurrecting from the dead,” as it were. God had clearly demonstrated His priority to them: they were to order their lives and society around the organized worship of God in the Temple.

Three different pictures by Haggai had been given of this fundamental truth. In Haggai 1:1-11, we have the picture of the ornate houses of men arranged around the abandoned house of God. In Haggai 2:1-9, we have the picture of the Feast of Tabernacles, with the tents of men arranged around the Tent or Tabernacle of God. And here in Haggai 2:10-19, we have the picture of the dead corpse of the Temple in the midst of the people, polluting and defiling them. Jordan says this is a picture of Jesus:

Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19-21). When Jesus is brought back to life, everyone around Him is also brought back to life. Those who are gathered around the true Temple, Jesus Christ, become His people and are organized as a worshipping community around His throne.

If you are a Christian, then you are a member of God’s *chosen community*. Like the remnant of Haggai’s day, you have been called out of the world to a sacred task of building for God’s glory. In order to be effective in that work, in order not to be frustrated or disappointed, we need to be transformed from a *contaminated congregation* into a *purified people*. The sin that is in us and contaminates all that we touch must be daily removed. More and more, day by day we must become conformed to the image of Christ through personal sanctification:

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you *present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*, which is your reasonable service. ²And *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1-2).

B. Special Servant (2:20-23)

The final message of Haggai at first seems slightly out of place. Although it is given on the same date as the previous message, **the twenty-fourth day of the month** (v. 20b), it is addressed only to **Zerubbabel, governor of Judah** (v. 21a). It seems as if it is just added on as an appendix to the other three messages, which all have the same theme: build the Temple. How does this private message to Zerubbabel, God’s *special servant*, fit in with the rest of the book? Jordan answers that question:

The answer is that this is really talking about the Messiah. When Messiah comes, He will be of the house of David, and just as Solomon, the son of David, built the first Temple and just as Zerubbabel, a son of David, will build the second Temple, so the greater Son of David to come, the Messiah, will build the Temple. It is always pointing to Immanuel, God in their midst. So it makes sense that after talking about building the Temple, the book would close with a Messianic prophecy about the one who would build the Temple.

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Only He would build it once and for all. Because the kingdom was not established yet on the earth once and for all, the Temple was built and destroyed several times. But when Christ comes, He builds the Temple once and for all and it will not be torn down again. The final Immanuel must come and build it and sustain it forever.

1. Stay Strong (2:20-22)

The message to Zerubbabel, the scion of the Davidic line, comes in two parts. The first part is an exhortation to *stay strong*.

²¹Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying: ‘I will shake heaven and earth. ²²I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms; I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and those who ride in them; the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother (Hag. 2:21-22).

God reminds Zerubbabel once again that God will be doing the shaking of heaven and earth and the kingdoms of men (*cp.* 2:6-7). Perhaps Zerubbabel had worried about how his little group of people, the remnant of God, would be able to stand in a great big world filled with evil men and pagan empires. They had no way to defend themselves, they had no army, they didn’t even have any city walls! But God reminds Zerubbabel that he doesn’t need any of those things, as long as he has the LORD of hosts, the LORD of armies, the almighty and all-powerful God on his side. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31b).

The language used in this description of God’s shaking of the nations is reminiscent of the Exodus, when God overthrew the horses and riders of the Egyptian chariots in the Red Sea:

¹Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: “I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! *The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!*” (Ex. 15:1).

Zerubbabel must have been familiar with the prophecy of Daniel. In fact, Zerubbabel probably knew Daniel personally in Babylon before the Restoration. And so, God’s words to Zerubbabel here would also confirm what had been revealed to Daniel a few years previously: that God was in sovereign control of the rise and fall of human empires and that one day all human kingdoms would be replaced by an everlasting kingdom ruled by God Himself (*cp.* Dan. 2:31-45; 4:34-35; 7:13-14; etc.).

So, the first part of the message to Zerubbabel is simple: even though the work is hard, even though you seem small, even though your enemies seem overwhelming, *stay strong*. The power of God is more than adequate to equip you for your God-given task and to see you through any adversity. This is a great message for any Christian leader and really for any Christian at all.

2. Servant Signet (2:23)

The second part of the message to Zerubbabel identifies him as a *servant signet* ring:

²³‘In that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,’ says the LORD, ‘and will make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you,’ says the LORD of hosts (Hag. 2:23).

Let us carefully consider the various parts of this promise. First, we have the phrase **in that day**. As we have seen in our study of Micah, phrases like “in the latter days” and “in that day” often refer to the period of time beginning with the first advent of Jesus Christ. Thus, we already have

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a hint here that the promise to Zerubbabel is bigger than just himself. In fact, this promise takes on Messianic proportions.

Next, notice that Zerubbabel's title has changed. He has been referred to four previous times in this short book as the **governor of Judah** (1:1; 1:14; 2:1; 2:21). But now, in this final verse, he is called **Zerubbabel My servant**. The title of "servant" has special connotations in Scripture. Far from being a lowly and demeaning description, God's servant is a highly exalted position. Many of the most gifted and talented men of God in Scripture are given the title of "servant:" e.g., Moses (Num. 12:7); David (Ez. 34:23-24); Daniel (Dan. 6:20); and Jesus Christ (Lk. 22:27).

The title "Servant" has a special Messianic connotation in the Old Testament. The title "David my servant" in Ezekiel clearly points forward to the Messiah. And Isaiah uses the title frequently in chapters 40-55 in his "Servant songs" to describe the work of the Messiah.

²⁴*David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them (Ez. 37:24).*

¹Here is *my servant*, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations (Is. 42:1).

⁶It is too small a thing for you to be *my servant* to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6).

¹¹After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge *my righteous servant* will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (Is. 53:11-12).

Now Zerubbabel is being given the same title of "servant." As a descendent of David and as an ancestor of Jesus Christ, it is likely that this title is meant to draw our attention to the ministry and work of the Messiah as God's "righteous servant."

God says that He will take His servant Zerubbabel and make him **like a signet ring**. What does that mean? Well, first we must understand the role and significance of a signet ring. In ancient times, a signet ring represented the individual. It was used to impress an image into clay tablets or wax as a seal of authenticity and authority. It is similar today to our signatures, and yet it was much more valuable. If it were loaned out or stolen, it could be used with the same authority as the original owner. In order to protect the signet, it was kept on one's own person, either as a ring worn on the finger or on a cord around one's neck. There are many examples of the signet in Scripture:

¹⁸He said, "What pledge should I give you?" "*Your seal and its cord*, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him (Gen. 38:18).

⁴¹So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt."

⁴²Then *Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger*. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. ⁴³He had him

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ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and men shouted before him, “Make way!” Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt (Gen. 41:41-43).

¹⁰So *the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews....* ¹⁰Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, *sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring*, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king (Esther 3:10; 8:10).

²⁴“As surely as I live,” declares the LORD, “even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, *were a signet ring on my right hand*, I would still pull you off. ²⁵I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear—to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians” (Jer. 22:24-25).

Tamar used Judah’s signet (seal and cord) as evidence against Judah in Genesis 38. Pharaoh elevates Joseph to second in the land of Egypt and gives him the king’s signet ring as a symbol of his new authority. Both Haman and Mordecai receive King Xerxes signet ring; Haman to plot to destroy the Jews; and Mordecai to issue a decree to save them.

Perhaps the most interesting reference to a signet ring is the one in Jeremiah 22. Jehoiachin was Zerubbabel’s grandfather. He was taken into Babylonian captivity in 597 BC, where he spent out his days under house arrest (2 Ki. 25:27-30). The kings of David’s line had been God’s regal representatives on earth. They reigned under the approval of God and with His authority. They were in essence, “signet rings” of God, granted with His authority to rule on earth. However, Jehoiachin is removed as God’s signet ring. He is rejected as God’s human representative. Clearly, a better representative is needed. Enter Zerubbabel.

Although his grandfather was rejected, Zerubbabel is now reinstated as God’s signet ring, as God’s representative leader. He has been **chosen** by God, just as David and his line were chosen by God. Zerubbabel has been chosen by God and equipped for the task of building the Temple for God’s glory. Zerubbabel was not chosen because he was worthy; for he was not. As governor of Judah, he was ultimately responsible for the failure to rebuild the Temple in a timely fashion. Rather, Zerubbabel is chosen because God elected to choose Him. It was all purely because of grace.

Once chosen, God equipped Zerubbabel for his task:

⁶So he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty. ⁷What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’” ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹“The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you” (Zech. 4:6-9).

Zerubbabel is chiefly remembered for his role in getting the second Temple built. He was a faithful servant of God and had his name recorded in the New Testament as an ancestor of Jesus Christ (*cp.* Mt. 1:12-13; Lk. 3:27). Even non-canonical writings hold Zerubbabel in high esteem:

¹¹*How shall we magnify Zerubbabel? He was like a signet ring on the right hand,* ¹²and so was Joshua son of Jehozadak; in their days they built the house and raised a temple holy to the Lord (Ecclesiasticus or Sirach 49:11-12).

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But this image of a signet ring carries further significance than just Zerubbabel being ordained by God for leadership in ministry. It also points to his significance as a type of Christ who will ultimately build the final and everlasting Temple (Church) of God. Jordan explains:

What is on the signet ring? A symbol or name of the king. When you use the signet, it reproduces its form in the wax. In Greek, the word for that is *typos*, from which we get the word “typology.” “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” Heaven is a model and it is pushing itself down on the earth and the earth will reproduce that model. Now Zerubbabel is like the ring, pushing into the wax and reproducing his image. What is the wax? Well, it is all the people around him. Just as the Temple reproduces its image in the houses, just as the Tabernacle reproduces its image in the Feast of Booths, so the greater Zerubbabel will be pressed onto His people and reproduce His image in them. That is salvation – for us to be in Christ and have His image pressed on us so that we reproduce His life. Thus, the final image in the book of Haggai is the imprint of the righteous Messiah upon His people.

Conclusion

On a surface level, the book of Haggai is about a construction project—the rebuilding of the Temple of God. On a more fundamental level, it is about who the people of God are and what are they called to do. It is about subtle idolatry, about getting our priorities straight, about obeying God and worshiping Him.

We are called to build for God’s glory. God is faithful; He will not call us to a task that we cannot do. Therefore, He promises to purify His chosen people and equip them for kingdom work. He does this by giving us His Spirit, by encouraging us with His presence, by protecting us from our enemies, and by blessing us even when we don’t deserve it.

The Temple we are building is the Church of Jesus Christ. Christ is the chief cornerstone and the head of the Church. Each one of us is a stone being laid upon that foundation. God will continue to build His Church, shaking the nations and bringing in the wealth of the nations. We must remain faithful, live obedient and righteous lives, preach the gospel faithfully, and worship God as He commands. We are His *chosen community*. Let us build our lives around Christ in obedience to the message of Haggai.

Next week: end of winter quarter – 2 new spring classes begin!

Close in prayer.