

Minor Prophets: Haggai

Introduction

Haggai begins a new era in the minor prophets called the post-exilic era, after the exile. The people have returned to the land and begun working on rebuilding the temple, but outside opposition and apathy from within have halted the work. Only the foundations have been laid, so Haggai preaches four messages of encouragement to finish the temple. His message is that God will bless personal and professional endeavors when the house of God is our first priority. It also preaches a message of dogged determination for the Lord in spite of outer circumstances and opposition.

About Haggai the Prophet

We know very little about Haggai except from these two chapters he wrote and also the mention of Ezra of him in Ezra 5:1. Internal evidence may suggest he was an old man at the time of the rebuilding of Zerubbabel's temple (Hag 2:3). Apparently, from this text, he may have seen the first temple built by Solomon because he speaks of the former glory of Solomon's temple.

His name, Haggai, means "feast, festival." We know from Ezra's account in Ezra 6:14-15 that Haggai stayed in contact and involvement with the temple until it was finished four years later, although his writing covers only four months in the beginning of the second initiative. The book does not talk about the finishing of the temple but focuses on his initiation and encouragement of finishing the temple. He was a contemporary of Zechariah who also focused on finishing the temple in his prophetic writings.

Haggai in History

Rough Historical Timeline of Exile and Post-Exilic Period

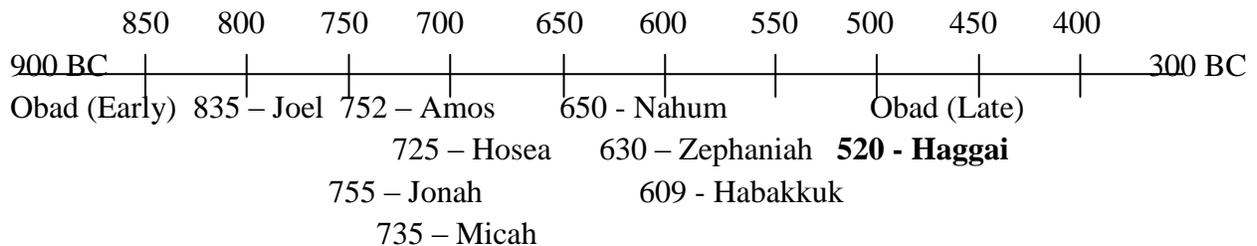
- 608 BC – 70 years from here line up with Cyrus' decree
- 605 BC – Babylonians take a king from Judah in the first of three waves of exile.
- 586 BC – Last wave of Babylonian exile for Judah.
- 539 BC – Cyrus the Great defeats Babylonians.
- 538 BC – Cyrus edict for 50,000 to return and build temple. Foundations laid for temple.
- 536 BC – 7th month – Jews build altar and offer sacrifices.
- 523-520 BC – 15 years of no building.
- 520-516 BC – Temple finished in 4 years.
- 446-444 BC – about 70 years later, Jerusalem wall with Nehemiah and Malachi's prophetic ministry.

After Cyrus defeated Babylon in 539 BC, in the next year he sent out a decree reversing the exiles of other nations by the Babylonians, allowing 50,000 Jews to return to the area of Palestine and being to rebuild their temple and city. Only the most religious returned to Judah and Israel because many had developed good businesses where they were in exile and decided to stay. However, for those who returned, one of the top priorities was to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. With fervor they began the work, but then were stopped by outside hindrances.

A leader named Zerubbabel led the people back and began the work on the temple before it ceased. An amazing 15 years of self-absorbed building of personal comfort went by without anything beyond a foundation laid and an alter for sacrifices completed! During that time Cyrus died and another king's reign occurred, followed by Darius I (521-486 BC). Under his reign, temple building began again and was finished in four years from 520-516 BC. This happened because of the prophetic preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. Zerubbabel remained a governor throughout the temple's rebuilding and was in the line of King David, as well as Joshua the high priest of the temple in this time after the exile.

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Haggai

- I. Haggai brings the initiative to rebuild the temple immediately (1:1-15).
 - A. The people should put the building of the temple first if they wish to see prosperity (1:1-11).
 - B. The people respond by initiating the building of the temple (1:12-15).
- II. Haggai encourages the people by linking Zerubbabel and a promise from God to fill the Temple (2:1-9).
- III. Haggai reminds the people through images and examples that they must prioritize God's house over their own affairs (2:10-19).
- IV. Haggai prophesies that the Messiah will come through the line of David and Zerubbabel (2:20-23).

The Prophetic Message of Haggai

Chapter 1

1:1 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai's hand, the prophet, to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah and to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, to speak.

Unlike most of the prophets, this work is not only easy to provide historical background on, but we will find Haggai an astute observer of time and a deliverer of exact moments in time. No more will we wonder what is being referred to in prophecy for Haggai. Like someone working with a clock-in and clock-out stamp, he dates everything that is said and happens in his prophecies. So we have exact dates for these happenings.

He starts by giving us the date of the book and the authority from which he writes and speaks his prophecies. Prophecies were first spoken and then usually penned and that is how we have them today. However, only the prophecies listed and written in Scripture as it stands now are inspired by God. There is a practice of writing down words from the Lord, and there is nothing wrong with that practice as long as it is not understood to be inerrant and infallible like the Word of God through these prophets recorded in Scripture.

So we start our tale in Darius' second year as reigning king, 520 BC. Half way through that year in the sixth month on that first day. That is when this prophecy is given by Haggai. After doing the compatibility work between the Hebrew calendar and the Persian and Roman calendars, the exact day of this first prophecy is August 29, 520 BC. Haggai interestingly reports that this prophecy could have been written first, because the prophecy comes by his hand, not his mouth, although he may have simply been recording what he has already spoken.

Now we meet the people in charge of the return of the remnant to Judah and Jerusalem. The governor is listed much like the kings were listed in other prophets' writings to give times to us. Zerubbabel is favorable because he is a direct descendant of King David, so his father's name is given to show us that he goes back to David, so the Davidic line is intact. Joshua is the high priest for the temple. His father is also given to us, although we don't have too many records of his father. But we know that he is from the proper tribe for priests. This is important because it shows that in the remnant the kingly line and priestly line have not been lost.

Even in the worst situations in our lives, there is always a remnant of hope and God's salvation. He does not completely leave us with no way to get back to His plan when we get off track or experience tribulation. Sometimes we need to look around and see the good things instead of the bad things. As the prophet begins his ministry, he notices that God has not neglected King David's line and that the priest is still there. The foundations might still be intact. Be careful not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. If the foundations of your life are still present, you can start anew through any trial!

The First Message About the Temple: “Consider Your Ways!” (1:2-10)

1:2 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, saying, “These people say that the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord’s house.

Lord of Hosts is a common name for God. It speaks to His control of all the celestial creation and the whole of the universe. It tells us that He is commander in chief of all military armies. He is the Lord of the hosts of heaven and Lord of the hosts of the earthly armies. He commands armies of angels and armies of men. Even an earthly army can be used by the Lord of Hosts.

The beginning of the first prophetic message comes from the Lord of Hosts who knows the time for things and how to get things done. Thus says the Lord is an opening authoritative statement reminding the listeners and readers that God’s authority rests behind the speech of the prophet. The Lord introduces our section by stating the feeling or the saying of the people who have returned about the temple.

The remnant of Israel that returned to Judah have said with their mouths and with their actions that they don’t believe the temple is a priority. At the moment of Haggai’s prophetic message, the rebuilding of the temple had already been stopped for some 15 years! The people did not see fit to start the rebuilding up again at this time. What then was their priority? We will find this out in the next couple of verses. But God’s priority is not the same as theirs. He wants His house rebuilt. He even sent a prophet to get it started again!

There is a peh here to break from the moment and the situation and then deliver the Lord’s response to the apathy of the people. Perhaps we don’t always show our lethargic intentions and priorities through our speech. Sometimes it is our action that betrays our true priorities. Is the place where we meet God our top priority? Are there any other priorities that are more weighty or heavier in importance? When we ask ourselves these questions, we must not only look at what we say but what we do!

1:3 Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet.

The Lord does not just sit idly by and allow the people to continue in their wrong priorities. He sends a prophet to accomplish His will and to have the temple put in the forefront and at the very center of the priorities of the remnant. The Lord has a word for the people who have the wrong priorities. God is so awesome in our walk with Him that He will even let us know when our priorities are not His own!

He sends the prophet to speak to the priorities of the people. Prophets get a lot of talk and credit for being used in predictive prophecy where God calls His future shots through them. But the original and weightier intent of the prophetic ministry was to speak to the issues of the culture around it. The Lord used prophets to speak to the ethical and practical dilemmas of the day. He was just as concerned about the priorities of this remnant. They must start off on the

right foot. They must rebuild the Lord's house first. It is an ancient lesson that Solomon learned the hard way. His house took twice as long to build when he attempted to build it at the same time and with the same fervor as the Lord's Temple.

The Lord is not just jealous of His people against the other nations, but He is also jealous for our time and our priority, for our relationship. Just as a spouse seeks the priority and the time and the moments together and to do things together, so also the Lord seeks these same things in relationship with us. He does not want us to concentrate on other things that do not have anywhere near the importance as Him. It would be like walking into a room full of precious metals and gems and taking the crickety wooden stand that the jewels laid upon rather than the jewels themselves. That's how the Lord feels when we do not give Him more attention and priority than anything else in our lives.

1:4 Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house is in ruins?

The Lord begins with a challenging question to these people of the remnant. He starts by asking if it is instead a time for their own houses. If it is not at time for His house, perhaps their houses and security are more important to them. But it is not just the basic necessities of their houses that the Lord here refers to. How long will they way to build His house? Will it be until they only have shelter, or will it be until they have nice paneled houses?

The word for paneled here has the idea of a covering or a roof. It is ironic that the people build in vain and trial and struggle their own houses for their existence, complete with a covering and a roof or a covering of wooden panels over the walls while the Lord's house has only a foundation, no walls to speak of and certainly no roof. Wooden panels were also a luxury in Israel, for wood was scarce and usually brought in by trade from more wooded areas like Lebanon. So the Lord is making as much a case for His house being more of a priority than their houses and the luxuries they have come to enjoy.

The first strike of the Lord's words is against the people thinking that His house and existence are dependent upon them first having their own necessities taken care of and their own lives in order. They've got it backwards! Without Him, they have no existence. It is the apostle Paul who quotes a secular poet when he says, "In Him we live and move and have our being," but the point is very true. Without God to sustain us, we would have nothing. The priority then is not our own wellbeing, but God's place first, then our wellbeing will follow.

Also noted in the tone and speech of the Lord is the anger against prioritizing not only our needs and necessities, but also our luxuries over His house. The paneling for the houses was a luxury. It was unnecessary. What things in our lives do we prize over worship of our God? What things of luxury do we not even need and yet place in priority over Him? Worship is not an act of selfishness. Worship starts when we realize that God is our sustenance and our necessity. Will we continue to enjoy luxuries over the substance of a relationship with Him? Our priorities are indeed backward!

1:5 And now, thus says the Lord of Hosts, “Consider your ways!”

The Lord calls the people to consider their ways, the paths they are taking. Haggai refers to the Lord very much so far as the Lord of Hosts. This is usually a title used when people are about to be judged through war and conquest. I believe that he uses it here to show that the Lord has no quams about removing the people again especially if they start out afresh and anew with the wrong motives and priorirites. The whole point of the exile was that the people had lost correct priorities.

The phrase that becomes the battlecry of this first message from the prophet literally means, “Let your heart set down your ways.” The Lord commands the people to evaluate their priorities, their actions, their words and their thoughts. Consider means to set down something in their hearts. The heart for a Hebrew was the center not only of emotions but of thinking and reasoning. They combined feelings and reason in this one word for heart.

The Lord demands of them that with their thoughts and their considerations, their emotional connection as well, to carefully evaluate their ways, the roads that they are deciding to take as they are freshly in the land again as a remnant. He will start this out right. But the people must decide if it will be with them, or with someone else. If they choose their own selfish priorities over His priorities, then the Lord of Hosts they will meet on the battlefield.

How often do we evaluate our ways, our actions and our principles, the philosophy of life we enact? Do we consider the steps we take, the actions we make, the means and methods of our lives? Are they God-honoring? Are they godly? Would God be pleased? Do we even use that question as a filter for what we do and say and think? We must be a people who are deeply moved and immovable based on the priorities of God. That means we have to be a people who know God’s will through knowing Him and hearing His voice. If we are to live in a God-pleasing way, we must know His priorities and make them our own. The rest falls into place afterward.

1:6 You have sown much, and harvested and brought little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but not to your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And the one who is hired is hired with a bag of holes.

The people had put their own wellbeing before worship of the Lord. When they returned to the Land, they planted crops and sowed in the fields. They expected a great harvest in their own land again. They were counting on it not just for survival but to thrive. Despite their joyous and abundant sowing in their fields, they only received a small portion for harvest. The fields did not yield for them as they had thought they would.

Even when they eat, they are not satisfied or filled. They drink, but they don’t fill up on their drink. Life seems colorless and the vibrancy that should be there is not there. It seems they are making the movements of life, but they have no life in their movements. They are just getting

by and they struggle through life instead of enjoying it to its full. Even though they are fully clothed and prepared, still they have no warmth. Everyone knows what it's like to underdress for the winter or to overdress for the summer. That seems to be happening here.

More than all of this, when a person finally finds a good job, it seems the money leaves before it is even given. Many of us see this happening in our own accounts with bills and taxes. It seems we have already spent the money before pay day. The image here is of a money bag having holes through which the money is dropped and lost as one walks from the employer who just gave it. Another picture shows the separation between the people's ways and their concerns and the lack of life as the Lord will once again in the next verse tell them to consider their ways.

When we prioritize other things above God's priorities, and above God Himself, we lessen the quality and quantity of our success in the other things. If we want to have full and satisfying, vibrant lives, to enjoy life to its full, we must first worship and adore and serve the Creator of life. All other things pale in comparison to Him and when we place them first, He is sure to make our way hard and rough.

We don't worship Him in highest priority just to get these other things and to enjoy them, but they follow after this highest and most heavy imperative to worship God alone first. Jesus put it this way: Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you. Our priorities must be straightened out before we can enjoy any part of life.

1:7 Thus says the Lord God, "Consider your ways!"

A new subsection opens with the same command as earlier to consider our ways. We must evaluate in our heart and in our mind the actions that we take, the presuppositions and the priorities we maintain. Do they line up with God's ways? If not, then we are going down the wrong path. How do we know that God is our first and foremost priority? What are some ways we can gauge and evaluate our priorities and whether or not He is in the center?

The prophet starts again with another statement of God's authority in "Thus says the Lord of Hosts. Once again he employs that militaristic title for God's authority. He is the Sovereign who can call to His desire any army against people who do not heed His words of counsel. Once again the phrase "Consider your ways" is given to the people. When the Lord says something once, we are called to obedience and must do as He says. When the Lord must say something twice, it is for the emphasis and the extreme importance of His point. Another method for God's repetition is not only the serious nature of the command, but also the imploring that He wishes to give us, the encouragement to obedience.

The people are hard against the work of the temple. The Lord knows this by their action. All it took was a little bit of adversity. The labor was hard and the people around them, their enemies and neighbors, were not in favor of it. That's all it took for them to stop! So it is from the Lord that twice the command to consider their ways, to take to heart their priorities, comes. May we hear Him the first time and not have to hear it a second time! This suggests that perhaps

we can even deceive ourselves as we evaluate our priorities, think that we have amended them to agree with God's priorities when they truly have not changed. We must not take lightly this time of introspection and adjustment to His ways.

1:8 Ascend to the mountain and bring wood and build the house that I may take pleasure in it and I may be glorified, says the Lord.

Followed by the imploring of the people a second time to consider their ways is the Lord's will in this one verse for their time. Instead of working on their own luxurious houses or receiving little for all their hard work in the fields, and going hungry despite the amount of food they eat and always being thirsty for more drink, they should go up and ascend to the temple mount. The temple is built upon a mountain, which is referred to throughout Scripture as Mount Zion. It is the place where God's house sits and His glory dwells.

The Lord calls the people to become productive and to build His house with wood. Bringing the wood would probably mean going to Lebanon, because that is the place where wood was brought for Solomon's Temple, although they may have gone somewhere else for it. The Lord's pleasure is bound up not in the house, but in their obedience to His priority and desire. It is of the utmost importance that God be glorified because He deserves the glory.

The Lord is indeed concerned with us making His priorities ours. He is pleased in what we do when it is godly and glorifying Him. But He is also pleased in our obedience and in our great care and priorities that line up with His. When the Lord commands us to do something, that becomes our priority. It lines up with His will and it is also a way to glorify Him. It is a win-win situation for us. But we must first hear from Him and then obey to see His priorities become ours.

1:9 You looked for much, but behold, it was only a little. When you brought it home, I blew it away. "Why?" declares the Lord of Hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins while each of you runs to his own house."

The Lord reminds them of their misfortune and small harvest. He tells them that He is the cause of such small crops! We have seen other prophets claim that God was the one to stop good harvests. This should not surprise us too much. Some would ask, "Would a good and loving God take away blessing and even necessary sustenance to His people?" The answer is "Yes, when they don't act like His people or keep His commands."

The Lord is the one who blew away the harvest even as it was coming in on the wagons and in their loads. As they paid so much attention to their crops, the Lord got their attention in making their efforts futile. Unless the Lord is pleased with us, every effort that we put forth will also be futile! When we enjoy our own luxuries without giving God the glory and honor and worship due His name, we will find that nothing in life has any worth or joy in it.

All will be futile until God is first. The writer of Ecclesiastes expresses this in the vanity of vanities passages until he discovers that to glorify God first brings meaning to everything else in life. Is there anything in your life that seems empty or not quite what you thought it should be? I would first ask as a pastor, “How’s your prayer and devotional life going? How’s your worship of God going?” I almost always hear the answer, “Well, I’m not really doing that as much as I should be.” I’m not surprised that life is not going the way you think it should then.

Now this is not to say that when you have God first in your priorities that you will get lots of stuff or life will be perfect. Far from it. But it will indeed be satisfying and full and vibrant. That much we can indeed promise. The joys of life will be all the more greater when we go to God first in our trials and pains. When we put God and the things of God first, we will see fruit in the other areas of our lives.

1:10 Therefore, the heavens above you restrained the dew and the earth restrains its produce.

Because the people did not have the same priority and goals as the Lord in the rebuilding of the temple, the Lord put a stop to the success of any other project that was before His house. He shut up the heavens so that the rain would not fall on the crops. He choked them to death. He kept the earth from producing the crops that they needed to survive. The action started in the heavens and was completed on the earth, and the Lord would reset their priorities through pushing them to successful projects. If they couldn’t rely on crops or any other industry, the building of the temple would be their only rewarding task.

Is the Lord redirecting you? He closes doors that only He can open and He opens doors that only He can close. But if we choose to violate His will and not take the opportunities that He brings and follow the priorities that agree with Him, then we will find that the door that only God can open will be shut. He will teach us how to prioritize His will and His goals. May we not be so hard-headed to see it when He does redirect us. Let us consider our ways and His ways.

1:11 So I called for a drought on the land and on the mountains and on the grain and on the new wine and on the oil and on whatever the ground brings forth and on human and on beast and on all their toil.

The Lord put a solid stop to everything that the Israelites would have attempted to do above working on His house. He called for a drought, starting in heaven and its affects were known on the earth. Nothing grew and no new production of any kind of crop was able to happen. The Lord put this drought on everything from the highest heights of the mountains to the valleys of fields. Everything they put their hands to failed.

There was no grain to eat, no wine to drink, no oil for cooking and nothing else that grew naturally in the ground. God’s drought and its effects then were put on humanity itself and on the beasts of the field and the soil was not only cursed from the Fall in Genesis, but extra cursed

because God made it dry up before them. He was determined for them to see the point and turn to His house. There is a samek here that shows us a change in subject and in time.

1:12 Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet just as the Lord their God had sent him. So the people were afraid before the Lord.

This next section details the response of the people to the word of the Lord brought through the prophet Haggai. The governor, Zerubbabel, and the high priest, Joshua, and everyone else of the remnant of the people obeyed God's voice. The word in Hebrew for obey is the word for hearing and listening. The implication is that if you hear, then you obey. The prophet does his job and warns the people based on the word of the Lord, and the people are in awe of the Lord. The word for afraid here means to have the awe-inspired fear of the Lord. The people obeyed because they respected and revered the Lord. His word is law.

Are we so quick to respond with obedience to the Lord when He speaks to us? Many times we have trouble even hearing His voice amongst the din of the rest of the voices in our world, let alone immediate obedience based on a reverence and fear for the Lord. We must check ourselves to see if we would be so obedient as this leadership and remnant. How long does it take you to obey the Lord? Are there other steps between hearing and obeying for you in your life? We are all challenged by such obedience.

1:13 Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, spoke with the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I am with you," declares the Lord.

The people reacted with fear to the message of the Lord through Haggai because they had not done as the Lord had commanded. If there is anything that they learned through the exile, it is to obey the Lord and serve Him alone. While they weren't physically making idols as their ancestors did in the land, they were making unseen idols of their own desires and their own agendas. But the Lord sends a smaller message to the people through the prophet. He tells them simply that He is with them.

When the people react to the Lord with humility and reverence, and they fear the Lord, He then gives them the power of His presence. The task will not be easy, that is why they stopped in beforehand. When things get tough, we usually do not wish to complete them. So the people would need the Lord's presence to invigorate them and encourage them as they went to the hard labor of doing what should have been done first. The Lord's judgment will not come to them as long as they are obedient to His word through His prophet.

We even as believers tend to need constantly reminded that our God is with us, that His presence never leaves us. We are so used to others leaving or even being there physically but not being present, that we don't realize that God does not leave His people. If He promises His

presence, He will be with us. But another point of application reminds us that we don't need to make physical idols to have idols in our lives. We can have idols such as money, time, entertainment, and other such things. Anything that comes before the Lord in our allegiance, our hearts, and our lives is an idol. They must be eradicated so that only the Lord is God of our lives. Give no quarter to any idol in your life, and the Lord will be with you. Always be reverent and soft and open toward the Lord in obedience.

1:14 Then the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah and the spirit of Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people and they came and did work on the house of the Lord of Hosts, their God.

It is at the moment of realization that God is with His people that the leaders become emboldened to carry out the command of the Lord and restart work on the temple. The Lord is the one to stir up the spirits of the leaders by His word from Haggai. It flows directly from the leaders to the people until the whole people of God have a zeal for fulfilling the Lord's word and restarting work on the temple. We have seen this stirring before when the tabernacle was made in Moses' time. The people were zealous for the Lord and brought all the emblems and implements and materials needed to make the tabernacle. Here, the people are stirred up to do something great for God rather than themselves. A peh here shows us the end of this reaction of the people and the next part is one verse dating the event from verses 12-14.

Today we need the Lord to stir the pot of our souls once again. The Church is stagnant and needs a fresh wind and fire for God. We need another Pentecost event! We are lethargic like these people and apathetic. We need for the Lord to stir up our spirits and stir us to revival. The word revival refers to something once alive now dead. Are you alive for God? Or are you dead to the moving of His Spirit? We need to be stirred again. The Lord does the stirring often through His Word and Spirit. May He come and stir us afresh and anew today!

1:15 on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth *month*, in the second year of Darius the king.

The work on the temple is the object of this timestamp. We are given the exact day in which the people once again took up the daunting task of finishing the House of the Lord, the Temple. It took place according to this calendar and its transition to the Roman calendar we use on an exact day, September 21, 520 BC. So barely a month has gone by since the Lord challenged through the message of Haggai that the people should consider their ways, and they have begun to work on the temple because He has encouraged them with a favorable word of His presence with them in the daunting task, and the stirring up of their spirits unto zeal. The Lord uses all of these resources to help the people obey Him despite the difficulty of the task.

Chapter 2

Message Two: Prepare for Glory!

2:1 In the seventh month of the twenty-first day of the month, it happened that the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying,

The second message of the book comes to Haggai again after work has been restarted. This message is a message to encourage the people as they do the work. The first message was a call to restart building the temple and to finish it. The second message is an encouragement that their labors are not in vain, that the house will be as glorious as the former house. So the Lord sends another message right when it is needed by the people as they are hard at work on this new temple for the Lord.

Once again, the dates are exactly laid out for us by Haggai the prophet. This second message comes in the seventh month and the twenty-first day. When we do the calculations and compatibility, we find that this second message is given on October 17, 520 BC, close to a month from the restarting of temple building. So they had been working about a month when encouragement was needed and the Lord spoke through the prophet. He speaks through his mouth to the people, but the prophet himself was the one to pen the accounts in the book we have today.

2:2 “Surely speak to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people, saying,

The Lord commands the prophet to speak to the leaders and to the people. Many times throughout our tiny book we are well introduced to the governor from the line of David, Zerubbabel, and the high priest in the line of Aaron, Joshua. The Lord starts by intensifying the command to speak, adding a little article in the original language that is something like, "Please do this now," or "Surely you must now speak."

Not only are the leaders to receive this word of encouragement, but also all of the people. The leaders bear responsibility for the work being accomplished, so they certainly need to hear this message from the Lord. But the Lord also wants all the people to hear the word as well, so He addresses it to the whole nation. Leaders are those who must give an account to the Lord of all that they oversee. They need encouragement as much as anyone else, but the Lord does not neglect the people. Everyone is "in the know" about what the Lord has said. We should always share a word from the Lord with those to whom it applies!

2:3 'Who among you is left who saw this house in its former glory, and how do you see it ? Is it not like nothing in your eyes?

The Lord starts with what is most likely a rhetorical question. He asks how many of the people of the remnant can even remember the former temple, the one built with splendor by Solomon. The word for being left is in a different form, but it is the same word for remnant in verbal form. This message is to the people who were taken away from the land and spent 70 years in foreign lands like Babylon.

Seventy years in biblical calculation is more than one generation. So the remnant that returns is at the very least the children of the Exiles who saw Solomon's Temple. They may not have ever seen the temple before it was destroyed, but they surely had heard descriptions from their parents of its grandeur and splendor, most likely through tear-filled eyes and shaky voices as the parents remembered what used to be before exile.

The former glory of the temple would still have been known to these children, although they most likely did not see it for themselves. Most scholars will make the suggestion that Haggai was much older and had seen the former temple. But that cannot be confirmed by this verse alone. The suggestion that this house is like nothing in their eyes might suggest that Haggai was old enough to have seen the other temple. There may have been others who had seen it, but most if not all would have heard of its former glory.

The word for glory is a word that carries two connotations. The first is that of weightiness or heaviness. The secondary meaning speaks to a brilliance of light. Weighty in importance and brighter than all things, all of glory speaks to the preeminence of whatever has glory. It is that of the very priority that the prophet had stressed earlier. Here, the word glory in its context refers to the splendor or majesty of the house. The people were working on the house, but they felt that this temple could not compare to Solomon's. They had less resources and less workers to complete it. It was like they weren't accomplishing anything and this house didn't even rank with the splendor of the former house.

When we work for the Lord, we have previous experiences of awesome and glorious things in the past. But we cannot get stuck on those former things. God wants to do something great now in each of us. If we can't get our minds off of the past, we cannot be effective for His glory today. But we need encouragement to get there! Maybe what we think of our current ministry place is nothing like a ministry place we once enjoyed. But ministry is still glorious to the Lord. We need to keep on working for the Lord, even when we don't feel like we're making any headway. The Lord is what makes the work as glorious as before!

2:4 'Yet now, be strong Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord. 'And be strong Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And be strong, all you people of the earth,' declares the Lord, 'and work, because I am with you,' declares the Lord of Hosts,

Many years ago, a young commander of the military had stood on the precipice of a new world, a new land, and it had to be conquered with sword and with faith. An angel of the Lord, a celestial messenger was sent to him to guide him into that land through military conquest to obey

the Lord. Joshua was told the same message that this new generation of exiles returning to the land was now given. Be strong!

Despite the warring neighbors that tried to stop God's people from rebuilding the temple and despite the people disgusted with the current glory of the temple, the people were encouraged to continue the work and the leadership was given the command to be strong. Three times in this verse the words, "Be strong" are used. First they are used for the man who must combat those outside voices of the neighbors and the inner voices of the people calling for greater glory. The governor of Judah needed to hear this word!

Joshua, the high priest, also needed to hear that strength was needed. We are called by God to be people of strength and fortitude. When the going gets tough, God's people need to hear "Be strong!" Joshua was the high priest of a lesser glory according to some. These would be seeds of doubt for him and for the people. But the Lord calls everyone to be strong, to fortify themselves against such fears and dissention.

Finally, the leadership needed to hear this message for sure, but the people also needed to hear from the Lord the message to be strong. They needed to quit evaluating and analyzing the unfinished work of God's house and simply get to work on it. They were called to do the work by a divine command. That should be enough. But they were given more, a promise that is near and dear to the whole word of God, the promise of His presence. God tells them He will be with them. That is all they need. Notice that not only is the command to be strong given three times, but three times it is a declaration from the Lord, with His authority stamped on the commands for strength and work.

We would love to wallow in self pity when something we are doing now has less glory than before, but we forget that we are using our own understanding and system for measuring glory. I hear it all the time as a pastor who has visited different churches. "Oh, pastor, you should have seen this place in the 70s when God was here and filling this place." Well, did God leave? Because He didn't leave the exiles and He has promised to never leave any of us!

Sometimes we need to hear that precious promise again and again until we realize that anything that has God's presence has the greatest glory it could possess! We need to be strong enough to stop complaining about measurements of glory and do the work of God in our day. Perhaps when we learn to quit worrying and begin working, God will show us glory that will be off of our scales in the here and now!

2:5 'according to the word I cut with you when you came out of Egypt and My Spirit stands in your midst. Fear not!

It is my suggestion that the antecedent of this verse, the according to the word, is meant to modify how the people should work. They should work according to God's word that was cut with them when they came out of Egypt. This is a reference to the covenant, but also to God's rules for making the temple. The first tabernacle must not have been as amazing as Solomon's temple to the common Israelite, and yet God was willing to fill it with His presence.

The temple in Solomon's time was probably the most luxurious and beautiful temple that God had ever inhabited, and yet if His presence is in this next temple, then it will be glorious enough for Him to inhabit as well. The common denominator is not the luxury of the place that is built, but that it is built according to the Lord's commands set down in the Law on how to build it. That's the deciding glory factor, not the luxury or outer beauty of the place itself. Any place that God is willing to inhabit is a glorious structure! And now it is our bodies that He inhabits. So we must ask one another, "Does your temple confirm to God's standards of holiness so that He can dwell in you and fill you with His glory?"

Because God's Spirit stands in their very midst, the people need not fear a thing. It is as Paul says in Romans, "If God is for us, who can stand against us?" We need not fear when God's presence and His Spirit are with us! There is nothing harmful that can happen to us that He will allow. We must trust His Spirit!

The Lord hasn't given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. We are His people clothed with His Spirit. We need not fear anything! There is a samek here to split the first half of the message and the second half. The first half contains an encouragement to continue on in God's presence despite the lack of what we perceive as glory and splendor. The second half is a promise that the glory of this house will be greater than the previous house.

2:6 For thus says the Lord of Hosts, "Still once more in a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, even the sea and the dry land!"

The second part of the message starts out with that same authority right from the Lord of Hosts. We see this used often in the book of Haggai, but it is a title of the Lord's protection and power to control armies. This is surely a helpful and encouraging title to the defenseless Israelite exiles. The Lord begins His promise by saying that He is about to shake all of creation! The timing is unsure, because he uses subjective terms like, in a little while, or still once more. But the Lord has promised it and He will do it for them!

The Lord will shake all of creation from top to bottom. We see often in Hebrew poetry the imagery of heavens and earth, seas and dry land. The heavens are the highest part and the earth is the lowest part, so from the highest of heights to the lowest of depths, the Lord will shake everything. The word for shake speaks of causing to leap or quake. This is not a tremor. It is an earthquake! The Lord does not do things halfway.

Next, even the seas, the deepest and most foundational part of the oceans will not escape God's shaking. They will be caused to leap and dance and the dry land and its rock hard foundations will be like the sea. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken. And the Lord is the one doing the shaking. This shaking though is not for judgment in its punitive sense as much as it is the way things are will be shaken into a new formation, and the house of the Lord will be prioritized in the new shaking.

We tend to get a little comfortable in our lives and in our walk with God. We start enjoying the former ways and blessings and we miss the blessings He pours out presently in our

lives. We get too comfortable and the Lord will shake us up. He likes His people shaken, not just stirred. When we are shaken, we must find our true foundation so that we don't fall. Instead of putting our foundation on the things we think we understand about God, or the ways we think He works, we must seek Him to be our foundation instead of our understanding of Him.

I love it when God does something we did not plan on Him doing, when He gets dangerous and out of our boxes! Is God shaking you today? If you're comfy, He's on His way to shake you up so that you can be useful to Him. You're the salt, and He's shaking you out of your shaker to be flavorful in our world!

2:7 And I will shake all nations, so that the precious things of the nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of Hosts,

Not only will God shake the earth to its very foundations and core, but He will also shake all of the nations. God decides which nations are on top and which ones are on the bottom. He decides who is a premier nation and who is under judgment. So He promises to shake the nations and make sure that they don't get too comfortable either. America has been comfortable in its role for quite some time. Perhaps the Lord is beginning to shake us up! While the shaking will be unsettling, He shakes for greater glory, so the end result of His shaking will take us to higher heights and deeper depths.

The house of the Lord did not look so glorious to the people as they worked on it, but His promise is that He will shake the nations so that their treasures will be brought to His temple. Everything that is precious will then belong to the Lord in His house. They need not be concerned with its current glory because its future glory will be much more grand! Once the treasures and precious things of the nations begin filtering into Israel and into His temple, He will fill the temple with His glory. Once again, the title "Lord of Hosts" is used to show them that by armies, He can fulfill His promise.

2:8 "The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine," declares the Lord of Hosts.

Then the people, as we also need so often, are reminded that the Lord owns everything in every nation. Their wealth is actual His. Their precious things actually belong to Him. The Lord owns all things in all of creation. He can shake the nations and take what is rightfully His. It has never not been His. He can change who is entrusted with His resources with a shake. Silver was often used for currency and gold has always been a precious metal throughout human history. The very precious things and economies of this world belong to the Lord alone. In the original, the word mine is before the silver and the gold. This is done for emphasis, as much as the title is used again!

Scripture has always been clear that we don't own a thing in this world. Not even our own bodies. Everything belongs to the Lord. And He does with all of it as He wills, and He has every right to do so! But we create for ourselves this false sense of permanence and wealth and

ownership. That is not how the world works. God entrusts His possessions to us for us to manage, but we never own them. At any moment He can demand them back or change who is entrusted with them. Even if he wanted our very lives, they are His. The question is if we will fight Him on matters of ownership or if we will submit ourselves to Him and manage wisely what we are given. What does your management report card look like? What could you manage better?

2:9 "Greater will be the glory of this latter house than the former," says the Lord of Hosts, "And in this place, I will give peace," declares the Lord of Hosts.

Finally the main point of the message is proclaimed to the people who needed the encouragement. The Lord will make this current temple greater than the previous temple. It will happen in time. It will not happen right away. In fact, it is much later when right in Jesus' time, King Herod actually adds on to the Temple, using Roman resources to do so to make the Jews happy. God fulfills His word that He will shake the nations and use other nations' resources on His stuff.

The glory isn't because of things, but because of the Lord's presence. The Lord does not just promise a greater glory, but a peace that will be given by His hand. His peace will be given to His people. Now they are being barraged on every side by belligerent neighbors, but His peace will be theirs. Peace is not just the cessation of hostilities, though. It is a wellness, a completeness, that everything is right with us and with our world, a fulfilling of destiny unhindered.

These are the promises the Lord gives to His people in their depression and feelings of inadequacy, and He still ministers this peace and glory to us even today! A peh here in Hebrew shows us the conclusion of the second message. Next we will see the third message given to the people about the Temple.

Third Message: Consider the Life of Holiness!

2:10 On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius, it happened that the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying,

The third message begins after that peh between verses nine and ten, and we are now transported through almost another month, as the next message from the Lord through Haggai comes on December 18, 520 BC. Once again Darius is mentioned, which suggests the Persian calendar is being followed. It is within the same year that they had been sent back to the land. As the work continued steadily, the prophet once again receives a message for the people. So Haggai must speak yet again to his culture and people from the Lord.

2:11 Thus says the Lord of Hosts, "Surely ask the priests about the Law, saying,

This third message comes by way of an illustration from the Law. Haggai goes to the priests and begins a conversation about holiness. He starts by inquiring of the priests, who know God's law, how holiness is conveyed. Once again we see the particle for please or surely connected in the original language to the command to ask the priests. The priests were those who not only deeply studied the Torah, the law of God, but also taught it. They knew every nuance. So the priest was essentially asking the experts about the law.

2:12 “If a person carries holy meat in the wing of his garment and touches with his wing the bread or cooked food or the wine or the oil or any of the food, does It become holy?” Then the priests answered and said, "No."

Haggai then presents a scenario to the priests. He asks them about a person who is carrying holy emblems of a sort, sacred or holy meat that was most likely part of a sacrifice. What if the person who is carrying it in the wing of the garment, by the corner of that long, flowing garment, would touch something with the holy meat or food. What would happen? What if the holy meat came in contact with common bread or wine or food that is cooked or oil, or really any object of food? Would the holiness of the meat be transferred to the things it touched?

The priests replied about this matter of legality that the holy meat would not transform the unholy or common elements around it by touching them. If that were so, people would worship things instead of the Lord. The prophet has an ulterior motive in asking about these legal matters. He is about to make a point about the people and the way that they live before the Lord, temple or no temple.

2:13 Then Haggai said, "If an unclean soul touches any of these, is it unclean?" Then the priests answered and said, "It becomes unclean."

So the priest had said that the holy thing would not make unholy things holy by touch. Then the prophet continues in his quest for knowledge and completes the image with this next question. He then asks the priests if someone who is unclean would touch the food or the wine or whatever else was before them. Would that make those things unclean? This time the priests answer that an unholy thing touching things would make them unholy! So a holy item would not transfer holiness to a neutral object, and yet an unclean thing is contagiously unclean!

Most likely the thing in the prophet's example is an unclean thing that has touched a dead thing. There are several ways that something will be declared unclean in the law of God. But the prophet here is raising an interesting point that uncleanness can spread while holiness is not so easily conveyed. Holiness is harder to occur, because it comes from God. We cannot be holy of ourselves. It is God's blessing for us to be considered holy. We must be holy through obedience. We can't merely be touched by some relic or thing.

2:14 Then answered and said, "It is thus with this with this before Me," declares the Lord, "and thus with all the works of their what they offer there is unclean."

Now comes the point of the prophet's inquiries. He then says that the examples already given, the image from the law, is also true of God's people. The people of Israel are not holy just because they work on the temple stones and are rebuilding the temple. It takes more than just contact with the holy things of God to be holy. The nation also is not holy automatically. Perhaps the people believed that just because they were involved with the temple they were holy.

But that is not the case at all. In fact, it is the opposite. If the people who are working on the Lord's temple are unclean in their practices and lives, they actually make the holy temple unclean! The sacrifices they offer are unclean and improper, no matter how much they follow the exact requirements of the law. Their hearts and lives must be holy for their offering to be holy. Rebuilding the temple is not some superstitious way of being holy. They must live holy lives.

We must not be unholy in our worship to God. Worship is a lifestyle. We must live out holiness to see the blessing of God. Just showing up to church and being in a church building will not make you holy. Surrounding yourself with crucifixes and chanting prayers will not make you holy or right before God. It is not a matter of superstition but a matter of your heart and life before the Lord, of Him making you holy and you obediently living out that holiness and applying the principles of holiness to everything you think and say and do. You don't get bonus points or holiness points just for coming to church.

2:15 And now, surely consider from this day and beyond, and before stone was set upon stone in the temple of the Lord.

The prophet calls the people to consider these points as they begin to build the holy house of God. Building the holy temple so that they can offer holy sacrifices is all a moot point if the people who built the temple were not holy unto the Lord. There is a principle of living holy here, and out of holy living comes the structures of holiness in our lives. They must consider this.

To consider is literally in Hebrew, "Set your hearts on it." Before the temple is continued, it must be continued in holiness. The people must be holy before the Lord. There is a method of consecrating the workers of the temple and tabernacle in the Old Testament law, and they would need not only to go through these ceremonies, but also in their hearts be set on holiness.

2:16 How was it for you when one came to a granary of twenty measures, there were ten, When one to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were twenty,

Now the prophet applies the word of holiness to them by asking them what it was like before they were holy and working on the temple again. We know from the earlier passages in chapter one that the Lord kept them from blessing and happiness because their priorities were not

straight. Now their actions are not holy. So we go back to the same place before, the indications of the Lord's anger with them through holding back blessing in the things they do every day.

Haggai reminds the people of the times before they would rebuild the temple when the Lord attempted to get their attention through giving them less than a blessing, when they were barely making ends meet and their lands were not fruitful. The reason for all of these problems in their lives was that the Lord was speaking to them, but they would not hear Him until the prophet made the connection for them.

Now the people are experiencing the same types of problems in their work in the fields. They would go to a granary and look for grain, except a place that could have twenty measures would have half that amount. Not only were they not living in blessing, they were living half under what they needed. Things were not overflowing; they were underflowing! They would go to the vats to get wine, and there would be under half of what they needed!

The subtle message the Lord is sending is that when our priorities and our lives are not holy unto Him, the blessing will not flow in our lives and in the things that we do. It is not always the case that when we are not experiencing abundant blessings the Lord is angry, but it is never the case that when we are experiencing less than blessing the Lord is happy. Seeing less of our needs fulfilled by the Great Provider can be an indicator that we must reevaluate our holiness and priorities with Him.

Sometimes, it is part of the Lord's will to go through a time of want. The Lord might be teaching us, as He taught Paul, to be content in every situation. But when you are suffering what seems like God purposefully limiting not only blessing, but every source of provision, it is likely you should listen closely to His word for you and check your life for issues of holiness and priority.

2:17 I struck with scorching heat and mildew and with hail all the works of your hands, yet it was not in you to turn to Me, declares the Lord.

As is often the case in the prophets, the Lord takes the blame for the weather patterns that destroyed crops and blessing. He purposefully kept from them these things so that they would learn to look to Him. The word "struck" is an intensive hiphil to show the Lord's drastic measures. The scorching heat of the sun and the mildew through blight of dew and too much rain are opposites that would wreak havoc on a field of produce.

He even sent hail from heaven, frozen water to violate the produce of the land, so that all the works of their hands, all the things they spent so much work and time perfecting, would not grow despite their care toward them. The people were missing something in that time. They were unable to see that the Lord was the one causing their misfortune. They did not consider that He would be the one sending them a message.

Sometimes in our lives, we turn to the Lord last when we should turn to Him first. The people did not see that the Lord was crying out to them through every venue of their lives. But we need to be people who clearly hear the Lord when He speaks through our circumstances.

They are one of the ways we can hear from God. When you are sick, do you call on Jesus or your doctor first? When you are having financial hardship, do you turn to your accountant or to the Lord first? Our priority must be to commune with the Lord first, and to do whatever He says. These other methods are not evil, but they must not be first.

2:18 Surely consider from this day and beyond, from the twenty-fourth day in the ninth month, since the day upon which the Lord's temple was established, consider!

Once again the very common particle is added to intensify the command to consider or to set in their hearts these matters of holiness. Holiness itself is a priority of the believer. Those who do not consider holiness a priority have not learned what pleases the Lord. The prophet calls the people to remember from now on, from this day forward, and then if they don't realize which day, he renames the day of the word from the Lord about holiness, December 18th.

This seems much like a commitment speech or a vow as he records the exact day forward. He then starts the whole way back fifteen some years ago when the Lord's temple was restarted and the foundations were laid. The temple must remain holy before the Lord, but the people must be holy or they would corrupt the holy temple.

Now it is an extra step for us because the New Testament tells us that every believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So we must apply this message to our hearts. God will not live within us when we are unholy and unclean in our thoughts and our actions and our words. If we want God's presence in our lives, we must become holy and obediently and consistently remain in that holiness. When the Lord speaks to an issue in our lives that is unclean, much like He spoke through prophets to unclean issues in their society and culture, so also we must hear and obey!

2:19 Is the seed still in the grain pit? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate and the oil tree have yielded nothing. From this day, I will bless you!

Because the people did not prioritize the Lord or live holy lives, He could not bless them, but He promises here in this final verse of the third message from the prophet that He will bless them when they begin to live holy lives and prioritize Him. Nothing that they had planted or gained was blessed while they lived in sin. But now that they understand the Lord and are living holy lives, He will pour out blessing upon every aspect of their lives, every tree and plant, everything that they put their hands to. A samek completes this third message and we will now turn to the final message from the prophet concerning the matter of the priority of God's Temple and holy living.

Fourth Message: The Lord's Servant

2:20 Then it happened that the word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,

The final message from the Lord is a personal message to Zerubbabel about how God will use him in the future. It happened on the same day that the third message was delivered to the people of the land of Judah. So the Lord once again calls the prophet to give a personal prophecy over the leadership of the governor that day on December 18th.

The Lord does use personal prophecies even today. Sometimes He has a special word for a certain individual. This personal prophecy makes sense because it is to the governor, a high-ranking leader whom the Lord has chosen. Sometimes we need to hear the Lord's blessing and encouragement when we are faced with difficult times ahead. The promise helps, but a personal word reassures us. Not everyone will receive a personal prophecy from the Lord. I would issue a caution about personal and public prophecies. Consider them as part of God's revelation, and not the whole.

2:21 Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, “I am about to shake the heavens and the earth

The Lord commands Haggai to speak to Zerubbabel and tell him that he is directly connected to the former prophecy, and that when the Lord does shake the heavens and the earth, he will be part of what's going to happen. We saw earlier that the Lord will shake the heavens and the earth, and the nations as well. How exciting it would have been to be part of God's work, to be an instrument in His hands!

Well, we can be in that situation, where He uses us as His instruments. We all are already instruments of the Lord's salvation, for it is through us that the message of the gospel is proclaimed in word and deed! God calls us to be involved in what He is doing. We are involved with the shaking of the nations even today. Some believers are placed in high places and special places so that they can carry out their mission for God.

2:22 and overthrow the throne of kingdoms, Then I will exterminate the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. So i will overthrow chariots and their riders will go down with the horses, every man by his brother's sword.

The Lord continues in being more exact about how He's going to shake the nations from earlier. Sometimes leaders are more privy to God's methods than the rest of the people. This may come through a word of knowledge or wisdom, or through specific prophecies. God delivers His messages to those whom He can trust to do His will in that situation. He will overthrow those who are rulers, the ones sitting on thrones in their kingdoms.

He will destroy or frustrate the power of nations, their strength and their resources. He will defeat their armies, their symbols of power and their strength. He will eliminate them through their brothers and allies. The Lord has been doing this since the very beginning of time, and He continues to do what He wills with the nations. All that He does is just. We must come to

grips with that because we are used to power corrupting the powerful, but God is not corrupt in His power. He is merciful and righteous!

2:23 On that day, declares the Lord of Hosts, I will seize you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant, declares the Lord, and I will appoint you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of Hosts.

When the Lord has done the overthrowing and shaking that He desires among the nations, He will then turn to Zerubbabel and will place him in a place of honor among the nations. He will seize him as His divine servant, sent to fulfill His will. Zerubbabel cannot question this because it is a divine and authoritative declaration from the Lord Himself.

The Lord will set him up as an authority. The word for "set" or "appoint" is the word that God uses when He does something by His will. It cannot be changed by humans. The signet ring is the ring on a king's finger that would carry the official seal of the king. It would be pressed against the hot wax sealing a letter and bearing the king's authority. The Lord will use Zerubbabel as His servant empowered to do His will on His earth.

The Lord chose him for servanthood in an authority fashion. Many church leaders are chosen by God to lead His church. They operate under His authority, but have been entrusted with authority to do His will. He has chosen and called them into service. When you are a church leader, you are first a servant, but you serve in the function and capacity of leading others. So also the Lord declared this for Zerubbabel and for those who have served Him in this capacity ever since.