

## CHAPTER 22: Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi

The three post-exilic prophets we'll be looking at next reveal that God has big plans for His people moving forward no matter where they might be living. Please take notice of how often God's sovereignty is emphasized by all three of these prophets with the phrase, "the Lord who rules over all." It is used a lot.

### HAGGAI

Haggai is mentioned in Ezra 5 along with Zechariah as one of the prophets who encouraged the newly returning Israelites to get back to the work of rebuilding the temple. If you will recall, the temple sat unfinished for 15 years. During that time the people finished their own houses. They were not just sitting around doing nothing but they were not working on the temple. The prophet Haggai opens with a message to God's people about their misplaced priorities.

**So the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai as follows: "Is it right for you to live in richly paneled houses while My temple is in ruins? Here then is what the Lord who rules over all says: 'Think carefully about what you are doing. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but are never filled. You drink, but are still thirsty. You put on clothes, but are not warm...'"** (Haggai 1:3-6)

Several times in this book God says, "Think carefully." What the people do or, in this case do NOT do, matters to God. It all goes back to those blessings and curses from Deuteronomy. God's people are reminded that their faithfulness to God will produce blessings such as a large harvest with plenty to eat. On the other hand, disregarding God's commands, being disobedient will produce curses like drought and hunger.

Haggai's message is favorably received. It prompts the Israelite community to complete the task at hand of rebuilding the temple. But despite their best efforts it is obvious that this new temple is going to fall well short of the glory of Solomon's temple. Back in Ezra 3 we observed the older men weeping as they realized this. So Haggai addresses the low morale and the shattered expectations of the people: **"Take heart, Zerubbabel,' says the Lord. 'Take heart Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you citizens of the land,' says the Lord, 'and begin work. For I am with you,' says the Lord who rules over all."** (Haggai 2:4)

Haggai then reminds the people of all the wonderful promises about God's future kingdom. They are all tied directly to the Jerusalem temple. **“The future splendor of this temple will be greater than that of former times,’ the Lord who rules over all declares, ‘and in this place I will give peace.’”** (Haggai 2:9) And so it is that Haggai gives God's people much-needed encouragement.

One day Haggai is engaging some of the priests in a discussion about ritual purity. This goes back to God's instructions thru Moses in Leviticus. Haggai asks them, “If someone goes and touches a dead body and becomes ritually unclean, then they go and touch some clean food, will that food then become unclean?” The priests, who know the law, answer, “Yes, it will be unclean.” **Then Haggai responded, “The people of this nation are unclean in My sight,’ says the Lord. ‘And so is all their effort; everything they offer is also unclean.’”** (Haggai 2:14)

So what's Haggai's point? Simply this: God demands a clean heart, one that has been changed from the inside out. That comes about only through repentance. An impure heart with merely a façade of righteousness is a heart that is not right with God.

Recall David's prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 following his sin with Bathsheba. **Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your loyal love! Because of Your great compassion, wipe away my rebellious acts! Wash away my wrongdoing! Cleanse me of my sin!** (Psalm 51:1-2) David acknowledged his wrongdoing and he asked God for mercy and forgiveness. But then he added this: **Create in me a pure heart, O God! Renew a resolute spirit within me!** (Psalm 51:10) This is something that only GOD can do. If God's people are going to enjoy the blessings that God wants for them, then they must obey Him. They must do things God's way – be top line. They will need to have a pure heart.

The book of Haggai closes with a message from God to Zerubbabel. Not only is he the civil leader of the people at this time but he also represents King David's royal line. Then the Lord spoke again to Haggai... **“Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah: ‘I am ready to shake the sky and the earth. I will overthrow royal thrones and shatter the might of earthly kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and those who ride them, and horses and their riders will fall as people kill one another.’”** (Haggai 2:20-22) Haggai's message seems to indicate that all of these end time events spoken about by the prophets will be happening fairly soon. Then Haggai adds this...

**On that day, I will take you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant,’ says the Lord, ‘and I will make you a signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ says the Lord who rules over all.”** (Haggai 2:23)

So the two questions we are left hanging with as the end draws near are...

(1) Will Zerubbabel turn out to be the Messianic king? (2) Will this generation of Israelites experience all the prophetic promises that they have been looking forward to all these years? It sure sounds like that is what Haggai is saying.

However, having already heard what occurs in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah earlier in our story and knowing it all happens long after Haggai's day, we can safely answer both these questions with a resounding NO! Zerubbabel will die and fade from the scene without ever having been acknowledged as Israel's Messiah. And by the end of the book of Nehemiah (which takes place some 90 years after the book of Haggai ends) God's kingdom and His Messiah are yet to appear. This makes the prophecy at the end of Haggai a bit mysterious. We will talk more about this later.

## ZECHARIAH

The priest and prophet Zechariah is a contemporary of Haggai. His father was one of the priests who returned from exile with Zerubbabel in Ezra 2. Zechariah's words are messages of hope and encouragement to God's covenant people 20 years after their return to the land. For this reason Zechariah is called "the Prophet of Hope." What sets Zechariah apart from some of the other prophets is his frequent use of visions as a means of getting his point across.

The people are still waiting for the fulfillment of the many prophetic promises. They have willingly returned home to the Promised Land. They have rebuilt their temple. They continue to keep all the required religious rituals. On the surface they appear to be doing alright spiritually. In many ways this generation is better than the previous generations. They certainly have been more receptive to their prophets' messages. But still, none of the prophecies that they thought would happen after the exile has happened. Zechariah encourages the people of his generation to remain faithful as they continue to wait.

Despite the people's improved spiritual condition, they are far from perfect. Thus the book of Zechariah begins with a call to repentance. **The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. Therefore say to the people: The Lord who rules over all says, "Turn to Me," says the Lord who rules over all, "and I will turn to you," says the Lord who rules over all. "Do not be like your ancestors..."** (Zechariah 1:2-4)

Unlike the people of Jeremiah's day, this group actually DOES repent. Like I said they are better than previous generations! **Then they paid attention and confessed, "The Lord who rules over all has indeed done what He said He would do to us, because of our sinful ways."** (Zechariah 1:6) So give these people some credit. They recognize that they are sinners and they confess their sins to God.

Zechariah starts right in with his visions. He has a series of eight night visions. These occur during the period that the temple is being rebuilt (Ezra 6). An angelic messenger explains each vision to Zechariah as he sees them. In the first night vision some horses and their riders have just returned from patrolling the entire world. They report, **“Now everything is at rest and quiet.”** (Zechariah 1:11) **The angel of the Lord then asked, “Lord who rules over all, how long before You have compassion on Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah which You have been so angry with for these seventy years?”** (Zechariah 1:12)

God is moved with compassion for Jerusalem and His people. **“Therefore,” says the Lord, “I have become compassionate toward Jerusalem and will rebuild my temple in it,”** says the Lord who rules over all. **“Once more a surveyor’s measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem.”** Speak up again with the message of the Lord who rules over all: **“My cities will once more overflow with prosperity, and once more the Lord will comfort Zion and validate His choice of Jerusalem.”** (Zechariah 1:16-17) We know from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that this does in fact take place as God says within a couple of decades of Zechariah recording these words. The temple is rebuilt and Jerusalem again prospers.

The second night vision is that of four horns and four craftsmen. **Once again I looked and this time I saw four horns. So I asked the angelic messenger who spoke with me, “What are these?” He replied, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem.”** (Zechariah 1:18-19) The four horns represent the four nations that at Zechariah’s time had attacked and scattered God’s people. These would be Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and the Medo-Persians. As each horn emerges, four craftsmen appear. They terrify and cut off these horns. The message here is that those nations who had oppressed and scattered God’s people will soon face God’s judgment.

The third night vision is that of the surveyor. A man with a measuring line is laying out the walls for the new city of Jerusalem. But he is told that what he is doing is not necessary because the new city will need no walls. God is the only defense they will need. **“But I (the Lord says) will be a wall of fire surrounding Jerusalem and the source of glory in her midst.”** (Zechariah 2:5) In the future Jerusalem will become a place of peace and safety where God Himself dwells.

In the fourth night vision the issue of sin is addressed. It is a vision of a man named Joshua who is Israel’s high priest. The prophet Haggai talked about him. He ministers before God dressed in dirty clothes, representative of sin. Satan accuses the high priest, but God rebukes Satan. **And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him [Joshua] he said “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure**

**vestments.**” (Zechariah 3:4) So Joshua’s sins are forgiven. This is represented by the fact that he is given clean clothes to wear.

God then tells Joshua the high priest some very exciting news: **“Behold, I will bring My servant the Branch ... and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.”** (Zechariah 3:8-9) This describes the coming of the Messianic King. Recall that both Isaiah and Jeremiah used these same terms “My servant” and “Branch” for the Messiah in their prophecies. So he is telling Joshua the good news about the coming Messiah.

In the fifth night vision Zechariah sees a golden lampstand with seven lamps. Two olive trees supply the lamps with oil. This indicates God’s provision for rebuilding the temple. Remember it was Haggai and Zechariah who encouraged the Israelites to resume work and to complete the temple project (Ezra 5). God gives Zechariah a word of exhortation for Israel’s leader, Zerubbabel. **“These signify the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord who rules over all.”** (Zechariah 4:6). Well, we know from back in Ezra 6 that God comes through. The people of Israel do in fact complete the temple building rebuilding despite several obstacles they had to overcome.

In the sixth night vision, Zechariah sees a flying scroll. **Someone asked me, “What do you see?” I replied, “I see a flying scroll thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.” The speaker went on to say, “This is a curse traveling across the whole earth...”** (Zechariah 5:2-3) God’s divine standard is being ignored and so the curse of His judgment is coming upon the guilty. There will be a purging of “thieves” and “liars” from the land. The ability of this scroll to fly underscores the idea that escaping divine judgment will be impossible.

In the seventh night vision we see a basket. **I asked, “What is it?” And [the angelic messenger] replied, “It is a basket for measuring grain that is moving away from here...” Then a round lead cover was raised up, revealing a woman sitting inside the basket. He then said, “This woman represents wickedness,” and he pushed her down into the basket and placed the lead cover on top.** (Zechariah 5:6-8) The basket is then flown away to Babylon. This indicates that all of the sinful systems of the world – those that oppose God – will be removed from Israel before God’s kingdom will come.

The eighth and final night vision describes four horse-drawn chariots emerging from between mountains of bronze. **Then I asked the angelic messenger who was speaking with me, “What are these, sir?” The messenger replied, “These are the four spirits of heaven that have been presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth...”** (Zechariah 6:4-5) These four spirits which are likely angelic beings

represent judgment. The Lord charges them to **“Go! Walk about over the earth!”** (Zechariah 6:7) The idea here is that there will be a future worldwide unleashing of God’s judgment upon the earth.

God then commands Zechariah to go to Joshua the high priest and place a crown on his head. He is to say this to Joshua: **“Look – here is the man whose name is Branch, who will sprout up from his place and build the temple of the Lord. Indeed, he will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed in splendor, sitting as king on his throne. Moreover, there will be a priest with him on his throne and they will see eye to eye on everything.”** (Zechariah 6:12-13)

Zechariah uses this same term “Branch” from earlier when he spoke about the coming Messiah King. So then, Joshua, by wearing this crown on his head, is picturing the future Ruler, the Messiah, who will reign as both King and Priest. This is very exciting! This explains the mysterious Zerubbabel reference with the signet ring that we saw at the end of the book of Haggai. Apparently Zerubbabel, like Joshua here, was presenting God’s people a picture of their coming Messiah King.

A delegation from the Israelite city of Bethel goes to the temple in Jerusalem to “seek the Lord’s favor.” They ask the priests if they should continue to fast and weep. This has been a religious practice they have followed for years. God’s response to them comes in the form of a rebuke. Speaking through Zechariah... **“The Lord who rules over all said, ‘Exercise true judgment and show brotherhood [mercy] and compassion to each other. You must not oppress the widow, the orphan, the foreigner, or the poor, nor should anyone secretly plot evil against his fellow human being.’”** (Zechariah 7:9-10) God is telling His people that what is more important to Him than any sort of religious activity is how they treat each other.

God reveals His heart for His covenant people Israel. **“The Lord who rules over all says, ‘I am very much concerned for Zion; indeed, I am so concerned for her that My rage will fall on those who hurt her.’ The Lord says, ‘I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem. Now Jerusalem will be called “truthful city,” “mountain of the Lord who rules over all,” “holy mountain.””** (Zechariah 8:2-3) God longs for the relationship He once had with Israel to be restored. His plan is to one day re-gather all His people back to the Promised Land where they will live in peace and prosperity. Nations of the world will come to Jerusalem to worship God there. This is the same message of hope that many of the prophets have delivered before.

The last part of the book of Zechariah, from Chapters 9 through 14, focuses on the future restoration of Israel and the coming of God’s kingdom. These have been recurring themes throughout the prophets. But Zechariah will add several new details. Like we noted in the book of Daniel, some Bible scholars view these visions of the

future as having a “near” fulfillment, as happening closer to Zechariah’s day. Others see them as having a “far” fulfillment, to be fulfilled well into the future. Both views are reasonable because God divinely orchestrates all the events of history. Zechariah announces that judgment on the nations is coming. Once again this is similar to what we have heard many of the other prophets predict. But he adds something new...

The righteous King, the Messiah will arrive on the scene. When he does, there will be shouts of joy among the people. This king will come in power and will bring peace. But then Zechariah says this... **“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your king is coming to you: he is legitimate and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey – on a young donkey, the foal of a female donkey.”** (Zechariah 9:9) What an unusual picture is presented here of the arrival of Israel’s king! No other prophet has mentioned this before.

Shortly after his arrival there will be a battle between the Lord God and the enemies of Israel. God, the divine warrior will crush all of His enemies and save Israel! **On that day the Lord their God will deliver them as the flock of His people, for they are the precious stones of a crown sparkling over His land.** (Zechariah 9:16)

So, while God is certainly angry at the foreign nations who oppose Him, He’s also not very happy with the spiritual leaders of His own people. These so-called “shepherds of Israel” have failed to properly shepherd the flock. They have NOT protected God’s people from the dangers in the land such as false teachings and evil practices. The result is that the people are like lost sheep without a shepherd – confused and scattered. God will hold the shepherds of Israel accountable for this.

God intervenes on behalf of His people. **For the Lord who rules over all has brought blessing to His flock, the house of Judah, and will transform them into His majestic warhorse. From Him will come the cornerstone...** (Zechariah 10:3-4) God radically transforms their spiritual condition from that of lost sheep to valiant horses – warhorses. He then raises up One who will lead His people. The “cornerstone” mentioned here is a direct reference to the Messianic King of Isaiah 28.

Because of His compassion for Israel, God says that He will re-gather them. God says... **“Though I scattered them among the nations, they will remember in far-off places – they and their children will sprout forth and return. Thus I will strengthen them by My power, and they will walk about in My name,” says the Lord.** (Zechariah 10:9 and 12)

The end of the book of Zechariah offers a detailed look at what many of the other prophets refer to as “the day of the Lord.” This is the terrible time of God’s final judgment. First, God will deliver Jerusalem which has come under attack by the nations. This will be a time of spiritual revival among God’s people. They will mourn. They will

repent of the sins of rejecting God and His shepherd, His Messiah. But God will forgive and cleanse them. Zechariah alludes to the kingship and dynasty of David. Again, this is a reference to the Messianic King.

But Zechariah adds some alarming details regarding this final period of judgment. **“It will happen in all the land,” says the Lord, “that two-thirds of the people in it [Israel] will be cut off and die, but one-third will be left in it. Then I will bring the remaining third into the fire; I will refine them like silver is refined and will test them like gold is tested. They will call My name and I will answer; I will say, ‘These are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”** (Zechariah 13:8-9)

A final battle is waged against the nations that oppose God. **Then the Lord will go into battle and fight against those nations, just as He fought battles in ancient days. On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which lies to the east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, leaving a great valley. Half the mountain will move northward and the other half southward.** (Zechariah 14:3-4)

What happens next is remarkable...

**Moreover, on that day living waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea [Dead Sea] and half of them to the western sea [Mediterranean Sea]; it will happen both in summer and in winter.** (Zechariah 14:8) The living waters we see here are those waters from the river flowing out of the new temple that we saw in Ezekiel 47. With the Mount of Olives split in half the valley formed in between will allow this water coming to flow eastward and into the Dead Sea. This is something that cannot do now. Today the Mount of Olives physically blocks any possibility of water from Jerusalem flowing eastward the Dead Sea. But when the Mount of Olives splits, the water from the temple in Jerusalem WILL be able to flow east.

In the end God prevails. All of His enemies will be utterly wiped out. **The Lord will then be King over all the earth. In that day the Lord will be seen as One with a single name.** (Zechariah 14:9) There will be no other religions – just one.

**And people will settle there, and there will no longer be the threat of divine extermination – Jerusalem will dwell in security.** (Zechariah 14:11) The nations will stream to Jerusalem to worship Him. The book of Zechariah ends with this great hope for the future and the Lord who rules over all physically ruling over all.

From the vantage point of the Israelites in Zechariah’s day, what are they to make of all these visions of the future? There is so much to absorb here! Zechariah not only reinforces many of the previous prophecies about the Messiah King and God’s kingdom, but he is giving some more details.



So while they (and we as the readers) may still have many of our questions left unanswered, we can cling to the hope of what we DO know at this point. God has revealed His heart to us. He plans to redeem sinful mankind and renew His good creation. This will be accomplished through His chosen nation (Genesis 12). God has shown His people the importance of dealing with their sins through blood sacrifices (Leviticus 4). He has told His people to be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 19). The people know the promises God made to Abraham (Genesis 15) and to David (2 Samuel 7). They wait for the serpent-crushing victor who will defeat the evil one (Genesis 3). They wait for a prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18) and a king like David (Jeremiah 23). They wait for God's chosen servant to bring justice and righteousness (Isaiah 42). They wait for their Messiah to bring salvation (Isaiah 53). They wait for a righteous and humble king (Zechariah 9). They wait for God's glorious kingdom that all these prophets talked about.

For now God's people continue to wait eagerly and expectantly. They live day to day by faith trusting that God WILL keep His word and that all of these wonderful promises for their future WILL be fulfilled.

## MALACHI

The ministry of the prophet Malachi takes place about 100 years after the Israelites returned from their exile. This makes Malachi a contemporary of Nehemiah's. By the time Malachi writes the words in this book the new temple has been completed and the walls of the city of Jerusalem have been rebuilt. But as a whole new generation comes along, the people find themselves in a bit of a spiritual decline. So God calls Malachi to go to the people and motivate them toward revival. His is a call to covenant renewal. The book begins with a conversation between God and His people...

**"I have shown love to you," says the Lord.** (Malachi 1:2a) God's words are met with skepticism by His people: **"but you say, "How have You shown love to us?"** (Malachi 1:2b). God reminds them of Jacob and Esau and He points out that it was the younger Jacob who was the child of promise. **"Esau was Jacob's brother," the Lord explains, "yet I chose Jacob and rejected Esau. I turned Esau's mountains into a deserted wasteland and gave his territory to the wild jackals."** (Malachi 1:2c-3)

Jacob's descendants became the Israelites who are now living in the land God that gave them. On the other hand, Esau's descendants became the Edomites who were eventually destroyed. The prophet Obadiah talked about this. There is no reason at all for the Israelite people of Malachi's day to be questioning God's love for them. But still they do.

It is not just the people God has a problem with. He also has a problem with the priests. God asks the priests... **“If I am your Father, where is My honor? If I am your Master, where is My respect? The Lord who rules over all asks you this, you priests who make light of My name! But you reply, ‘How have we made light of Your name?’ You are offering improper sacrifices on My altar...”** (Malachi 1:6-7) The improper sacrifices God is referring to here include blind, lame and sick animals. This was strictly forbidden in the Law (Leviticus 22 and Deuteronomy 15). So the priests are willfully dishonoring God by doing what they want to do rather than what the Law says.

God has yet another indictment of the priests. He says... **“You, however, have turned from the way. You have caused many to violate the law; you have corrupted the covenant with Levi,” says the Lord who rules over all.** (Malachi 2:8) As a result, God will send judgment upon them. He will turn their blessings into curses. This refers back to the covenant conditions of Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Worship has become so corrupt that God wishes they would just **“shut the temple doors!”** (Malachi 1:10)

God now exposes some practices in the Israelite community that are a violation of His covenant with Israel. Some men are marrying non-Israelite women who do not follow God. Instead, these women worship idols and bring these false gods into their homes. In addition, the men are being unfaithful to their wives or divorcing their wives for no good cause. **“I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel, “and the one who is guilty of violence,” says the Lord who rules over all. “Pay attention to your conscience, and do not be unfaithful.”** (Malachi 2:16)

**“You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied Him?” Because you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the Lord’s opinion, and He delights in them,” or “Where is the God of justice?”** (Malachi 2:17) Basically the people have the attitude that God doesn’t care. God responds by promising to send His messenger who will prepare the way for the day of the Lord. In other words, justice IS coming! One of the focal points of God’s judgment will be against the rampant social injustice in Israel – the mistreatment of widows, orphans and foreigners – those who are very near and dear to God’s heart.

God points out another major area of neglect by His people which is the with-holding of their tithes. The word “tithes” means one-tenth. The Law requires the people to give one-tenth of their income to support the temple and priests (Deuteronomy 26). So God calls for them to repent and to tithe faithfully.

**“From the days of your ancestors you have ignored My commandments and have not kept them! Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord who**

rules over all. **“But you say, ‘How should we return?’ Can a person rob God? You indeed are robbing Me, but you say, ‘How are we robbing You?’ In tithes and contributions! You are bound for judgment because the whole nation is robbing Me – this whole nation is guilty. Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in My temple. Test Me in this matter to see if I will not open up for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until there is no room for it all.”** (Malachi 3:7-10) So now you see the context of this familiar passage.

**“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God. How have we been helped by keeping His requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord who rules over all? So now we consider the arrogant to be happy; indeed those who practice evil are successful. In fact, those who challenge God escape!’”** (Malachi 3:14-15) The people here sound a lot like the prophet Jonah. They have adopted an “I don’t care” attitude toward God. God’s response is that in the end there WILL be a huge difference between those who care and obey Him and those that do not. Evildoers WILL be consumed in fiery judgment. The faithful WILL be delivered. In other words, you better care! So you think all the evil people are going to get away with it. They won’t!

The final words of the book of Malachi bring the words of the prophets to a close. Malachi tells his less than faithful audience the same thing that Zechariah told his audience: wait expectantly and remain obedient to your covenant with God. **“Look, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrives. He will encourage fathers and their children to return to Me, so that I will not come and strike the earth with judgment.”** (Malachi 4:5-6)

And so, like many of the other prophets that we heard from before, Malachi leaves the people with words of hope.

“Behold, He comes!” Every prophet we heard from sees a future day when God will send His servant, a new prophet, a new Elijah, to prepare the way for God to restore His people and to heal their hard hearts. And so it is, as Malachi and the Old Testament conclude, we see God’s people waiting with hopeful anticipation for their Messiah and His kingdom to come.

420 years pass...

The prophets are silent...

And the people wait... and they wait... and they wait.