

Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 June 2026

Preacher: David Court

[0 : 0 0] Let's read God's word together. This is Haggai chapter 2, verses 20 to 23. The word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month.

Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I'm about to shake the heavens and the earth and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I'm about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations and overthrow the chariots and their riders.

And the horses and the riders shall go down, and everyone by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord.

I will make you like a signet ring, for I've chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts. And then in Matthew chapter 1, verses 1 to 17, the genealogy of Jesus. The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nashon, and Nashon the father of Sammon, and Sammon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.

[1 : 2 6] And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah, and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Sheolteal, and Sheolteal the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eliasir, and Eliasir the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob.

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations.

Well, we turn this evening to the final portion of the book of the prophet Haggai, chapter 2, verses 20 to 23. Many years ago now, a friend, colleague, had a somewhat disconcerting experience after preaching in a particular church. After the service, he was confronted by a man who demanded to know who had told him about what was happening in his life. A friend was somewhat taken aback by this. He explained that he didn't know what the man was talking about. And as their dialogue continued, it became clear that the sermon had spoken so directly into this man's personal situation that he was convinced that my friend had received inside information and had been preaching only to him. Now, of course, sometimes in preaching, it can be a temptation for a minister to compose a sermon with a particular individual, maybe a particular individual in mind. A sermon is constructed with one person in the crosshairs, as it were. That is never, this is the voice of experience here, never really a good idea. Because if a preacher decides to do that, there's one thing that is almost guaranteed. That particular individual will not be present at that particular service.

And here in the final words of this short book, you'll notice that Haggai's closing message has a very particular focus. Unlike the previous messages addressed really to both leaders and the

people, this address is directed towards one particular individual, this man, Zerubbabel. Now, Zerubbabel, his name means something like child of offspring of Babylon. And he's been mentioned numerous times in the book already, chapter 1, verse 1, and verse 12, chapter 2, verse 2, and 4. And he is the governor of Judah. It's likely that he was someone born in Babylon while the Jews were in captivity there.

[5 : 26] And when the Jews returned, Zerubbabel came home, and he was appointed governor under the rule of the Persians. His was the pivotal leadership role in the life of the community. And as we've already seen, things had not gone too well for the people since their return. Indeed, such was their faithlessness.

There was a real question about their future. Haggai's previous sermon preached earlier this same day had ended, however, on a resounding note of hope, as God had pledged Himself to bless His people from that day forward. Things may have been bleak, but God was going to turn things around. He was going to pour out His blessing. And so, on the afternoon, we know the 18th of December, 520 B.C., yet another message is preached by the prophet Haggai, his fourth final recorded sermon. The Word of the Lord came a second time to Haggai on the 24th day of the month. And God determines to speak to this individual, Zerubbabel, and to encourage him in the task of leading the people of God. He wants to, God wants to underscore this great truth that despite the way sometimes things appear, there is a future and a hope for God's people. And that may be something that we ourselves need to hear again and again and be reminded of. Certainly in our Western European world, the church is no longer an institution of power and prestige as it once was. The Christian consensus that has existed for so many years appears to be disappearing. And in its wake, there are these huge social and ethical problems. The ideological foundations of Western civilization are crumbling. In its place, a new kind of society is emerging, one that is often hostile to biblical faith and values. And for those of my generation and those who are older, we've witnessed the decline of Christian influence in our land. There is today a much more acute sense of the church's weakness, vulnerability, than there was perhaps even a generation ago. The kind of questions that some are asking today are, can the church survive? Does it have a future? And those were the kind of questions that people were asking in Haggai's day.

But notice this, that the burden of Haggai's final message here is not one of exhortation and command. Rather, it is a sermon, really, that is full of the promises of God. Here is the Lord telling Zerubbabel of those things that He will accomplish. The Lord is not telling Zerubbabel about what the governor and the people must do for Him. He's telling Zerubbabel what He will do. In these few verses, God says to Zerubbabel, not you will, but I will. In other words, this final sermon is all about God.

It's all about what He is going to do. Here is God telling Zerubbabel about Himself and His great purposes for His people. And it's a message, I think, that like Zerubbabel of old, we would do well to hear and heed. And I want to highlight just three things that emerge from the text, three things about the God we worship and serve that are underscored, I think, in these verses. And the first thing that we dare not forget about the living God is this, that He is a God of sovereign power. And we have that in verses 21 and 22. Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I'm about to shake the heavens and the earth, to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I'm about to destroy the strength of kingdoms of the nations, overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders shall go down, everyone by the sword of His brother. And so, the language that Haggai uses here employs, reverberates with the sounds and the experience of God's redeeming power. His words echo that found in different parts of the Old Testament. In the days of Moses, for example, we know that God stretched forth His mighty hand, delivered His people from their Egyptian oppressors a dramatic display of power and authority over the idols and the false gods of Egypt. He defeated Pharaoh. He brought His people out. And in Exodus 15, we're told of how Moses and the Israelites sang, I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

[10 : 49] That's a picture of God casting down His enemies. And that same language of being overthrown is used in different parts of Scripture. We find it in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, for example.

Deuteronomy 29, 23, the whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger. Same word. Isaiah prophesies about Babylon,

similar terms.

Babylon, the jewel of the kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God, like Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaiah 13, 19. And then the reference here to falling by the sword of His brothers, taken from Judges chapter 7, verse 22, part of the story of Gideon and the Midianites. 300 trumpets sounded the Lord, caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. So, it's a picture again, you see, of God saving and rescuing His people against all the odds. So, here is God reminding Zerubbabel, I will shake the heavens and the earth. This is the language of power. Our God will shake the heavens and the earth, and the so-called powerful kingdoms of men will crumble and fall. Here are words of great encouragement to a small nation, a people of no reputation, weak and powerless, dwarfed on every side by the great empires of this world. And God comes to them in their weakness and says, look at what I will do. I'm going to shake things up.

These great superpowers will be overthrown. These earthly kingdoms will fall in ruined pieces. Because only the kingdom that God is building will last forever. Hebrews 12, the writer tells his readers, remember they're receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. It's actually very similar to the message that was given to Daniel in Babylon, when he was tempted to despair, tremble before the might and the magnificent of that great empire. And God came to him and spoke of a kingdom that would last forever. He reminded Daniel that all the great empires of this world were ultimately fragile, unstable, containing within them the seeds of their own demise and destruction. And God, in a similar way, is doing something like that with Zerubbabel. Yes, it looked as if the mighty Persian empire was in control. But no, nothing could be further from the truth. Because the kingdoms and empires of this world will inevitably crumble and decay. They are going nowhere. They have no lasting future. They rise, and then they fall. Remember Isaiah's words, Isaiah 40, surely the nations are like a drop in the bucket. Before him all the nations are as nothing. He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth.

[14:14] His people are like grasshoppers. He brings princes to naught, reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them, and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

I think that's a message that sometimes we need to hear. Believers, perhaps, in countries under the power of Islam need to hear. We need to hear, even in our own Western culture, often hostile to biblical faith, where the church appears marginal and fringe.

In these days of stress, we need to remember that God is able to shake the kingdom, kingdoms and ideologies, such that we are given to ask, where are they now? Where have they gone? Hitler's acclaimed Third Reich, boasted to reign for a thousand years. Didn't last thirteen. We think of communism in Eastern Europe, seventy years. Kingdoms come and go, and so we need not be afraid, because our lives are in the hands of a God of sovereign power. He's King of kings. He's Lord of lords. His arm is not short to save and save and save. Yes, the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever. He's the God of sovereign power who will overthrow the kingdoms of this world. So, that's the first thing that I think we're reminded of here. And then secondly, not just the God of sovereign power, but also the God of steadfast promise. Verse 23, on that day, declares the Lord of hosts,

I will take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the Lord of hosts. So, this final verse, really, of the book is an intensely personal word to Zerubbabel. I will take you, I will make you, I have chosen you.

What's going on here? Now, notice how he is referred to here as my servant. That's a title often used in the Old Testament of King David, and that's significant, because Zerubbabel is believed to have been the grandson of Jehoiakim, the last official king of Judah, who was carted off to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem. And so, the reference here, I think, is to that promise given to King David 500 years before, where God spoke to David through the prophet Nathan, 2 Samuel 7, 12, and 13, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And we sang some of those words from Psalm 89. You have said, I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I have sworn to David, my servant.

[17 : 47] I will establish your offspring forever and build your throne for all generations. And so, Haggai is reminding Zerubbabel that he has been chosen. I have chosen you.

Similar language to use of Abraham in Joshua 24, 3, I took, I chose your father Abraham from the land beyond the river. What we're being told here is that God has set His eye upon Zerubbabel and selected him to fulfill His covenant purpose. The Lord is going to take him and make him into something very special. I will make you like a signet ring, he says. Now, the signet ring, many of you know, was a symbol of the king's authority, a great symbol of the king's power and majesty, normally engraved with the king's seal. It was used to endorse official documents. And so precious was it, it was worn on the king's person at all times, either on a finger or perhaps on a chain around the neck. It was effectively the king's signature. It was his authorized means of identification. It was immensely precious and valuable. So, what does God mean when He says to Zerubbabel, I will make you like a signet ring?

What is God promising to His servant? Is He promising to make him great? Well, no, I don't think that is it. Because one of the strange things, of course, is that we know more of Zerubbabel than the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures. And to understand what's going on here, again, we need to go back before the exile to words spoken in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 24, verse 24, As surely as I live, declares the Lord, even if you, Jehoiakim, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, wear a signet ring on my right hand, I would pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and to the Babylonians. And then a few verses later on, the same chapter, verse 30, record this man as childless, a man who will not prosper in his own lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper. None will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah. So, in the days of Jeremiah, the covenant lay in tatters, in pieces broken and destroyed by the unfaithfulness of the king and the people.

God cursed Jehoiakim and his line, and the people went off into exile. And to all intents and purposes, it appeared as if the promise of a Davidic kingdom had absolutely failed. God's promise had failed. It all came to nothing. The exile appeared to have signaled the end for God's people and the end for God's promise. But now you see things have changed. God has restored His people to the land of promise. And so, what we see in this verse of Haggai really is a reversal of the judgment and the curse of Jeremiah 24. The signet ring that had been torn off was now going to be put back on. Through Zerubbabel, God was going to lift that curse and bring blessing to His people and indeed to all the nations. He was going to restore His people, raise up His servant to the throne, and accomplish His mighty purposes. The Davidic line was going to be restored. The signet ring once again would be put back, and the blessings of the covenant would once more be poured out on the Lord's people.

The great promises of God would come to pass. God says to Zerubbabel, you are going to be my signature in history. You're the guarantee that my promises to David will be fulfilled. Because God doesn't allow His promises to fail. Yes, human history and human life may be littered with broken promises. But God is utterly faithful to His promises. Just when it looks like everything is all over for God's people, that His promises have failed, we see here God displaying His faithfulness in that He revives and restores and renews. He is stubbornly, He is defiantly determined to fulfill His promise, come what may.

[22 : 22] Nothing can keep Him from doing that. Amid this broken world, He is a rock of security. He is the one who will never abandon His promise.

And of course, in the New Testament, Jesus expresses the very same thought when He says, I will build my church, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Nothing can thwart His purposes for His people, not our sins, not our failures, not our enemies, not even our foolishness and stupidity. He will build His church and nothing will stop Him.

And despite opposition being organized at the very gates of hell, it cannot drown out the church-creating cry of Jesus Christ, who has promised to build His church, come what may.

J.C. Ryle writes, The mystical body of Christ shall never perish or decay. Though often persecuted, afflicted, distressed, distressed, and brought low, it shall never come to an end. Visible churches like Ephesus may come to nothing, but the true church never dies. Like the bush that Moses saw, it may burn, but shall not be consumed. No matter what people may do, no matter what the dark powers of this world may organize, no matter what schemes are devised against it, nothing can thwart that great vision of Jesus Christ to build His church. He is the author of eternal salvation, and He's begun by grace for many of us here to write that work of salvation into our lives. And He is

Himself the one who will complete every single page.

[24 : 28] Remember Paul's words to the Christians in Philippi, He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Think of Jesus' words in John 6, All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. John 10, My sheep hear my voice, I know them, they follow me, I give them eternal life, they will never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Here's the one that we can trust God in a world where so little can be trusted. The God of sovereign power, the God of steadfast promise.

And then thirdly and finally and quickly as time disappears, the God of saving purpose. We encounter Zerubbabel's name in the Scriptures, just a few pages on from this in our Bibles, not of course in the Old Testament, but in that opening chapter of the New Testament that Chris read for us, the beginning of Matthew's gospel, in the genealogy of Jesus.

[25 : 54] After the exile, Matthew 1 verse 12, After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud.

And in that chapter, Matthew is announcing good news for the world. He's writing a gospel that centers on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David and the son of Abraham.

And he's telling us how the chosen one of God, the great servant of the Lord, the promised Savior, how he has come into this world to save, to rescue his people from their sins. And he has done so, you'll notice, in the line of Zerubbabel. Here is Jesus the Messiah coming to fulfill all the promises of God and to sit upon the throne of David and to establish his eternal kingdom. And therefore, this man Zerubbabel is a key link in that great genealogical chain that will eventually lead to the coming of the promised Messiah and King. Here, way back in the days of Haggai the prophet, God is working out his saving purpose for the world, preparing the way of the Lord. Zerubbabel is a messianic figure pointing us to Jesus Christ. Because Jesus, of course, is the chosen one of God. He is great David's greater son. He is the true servant of the Lord. He is the Lord's signet ring and precious in his sight.

But of course, for those great purposes of God to be accomplished, this precious servant of God was called to suffering and humiliation. And it's in Jesus that the curse of the fall is utterly reversed. And it's only through him that covenant breakers like us, exiled in the far country of sin and disobedience, can be brought back into a relationship with the living God.

Because Jesus was the Lord's Son of God. He was the precious Son of God, and yet forsaken on the cross, cursed that we might be blessed, rejected that we might be accepted, enduring wrath that we might enjoy love and the very favor of God. And yet Jesus' cursing and death were no defeat, because he was raised up from the dead in conquering power. His victory proclaimed now among the nations. A day hastening on when we will see this Jesus lifted up, all of human history moving towards this great end.

[28 : 59] Towards the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and towards that new heavens and earth in which righteousness shall dwell. Christ will be exalted to the highest place. He has given the name above every other name. His enemies a footstool before His throne, and His kingdom will come one day in all its fullness and power and glory. Many years ago, when I was a student, that is many years ago, in the early 1980s, I was in Glasgow, and there was a lot of renovation work being done at that time in many of the kind of Victorian tenement blocks in the city. And near to where I lived, there was a block to pass it almost every day. It was obscured. It was covered in scaffolding. And it seemed to be covered in the scaffolding for such a long time. The scaffolding almost appeared to be a permanent figure on the city landscape. Until eventually one day, the scaffolding was dismantled and taken down.

And behind was revealed these gloriously renewed, renovated sandstone buildings. Friends, one day the entire scaffolding of human history will be taken down and be dismantled.

And when that happens, what will be revealed is the glory of a new creation in which the kingdoms of this world will have become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And here is our bright hope for tomorrow. It's not to be found in us, in our works. It's to be found only in the living God, whose kingdom will outlast the years. The God of sovereign power, the God of steadfast promise, the God of saving purpose. At the close of 1 Thessalonians, Paul pronounces this benediction.

Chapter 5, verses 23 and 24. May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In these words, the one who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

[31 : 49] Stop and think this evening, friends. He will do it. Not I will do it. Not you will do it. Not they will do it. He will do it. Do you believe that? Friends, we're called to live in the light of that great reality.

All the ideologies and kingdoms of this world will one day fall, and above them shall be exalted the one whom the Lord calls my servant and my son, and whom by grace we call my Lord and my Savior.

He will do it. Let's pray. God, our Father, in all our weakness and frailty and unbelief, we look away from ourselves.

To you, the living and eternal God, we look to Jesus Christ, our great Savior and King, and we thank you for Him. Lord, help us to rest in Him, to trust in Him, and to live in Him.

Help us to cast away and cast aside those feelings that we can do it. Lord, we have the energy, we have the resources.

[33 : 09] Lord, help us to turn to you, and to know in our hearts, you will do it. Lord, we bow the knee before the one who is King of kings and Lord of lords, our great Savior, Jesus Christ.

And pray these things in His name. Amen. Amen.