

Spiritual Priorities in Haggai and Zechariah

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes in our lives, even after we have received something we had been praying and hoping for, not everything becomes easy or free of pain and struggles. Life often has a way of presenting us with new challenges even after a previous challenge has been overcome or ended. The people of Israel knew about this. For seventy long years, they had been exiles in Babylon, longing to go back to rebuild Jerusalem. Well, that finally happened, but new spiritual and physical challenges arose. So, God raised up a couple of prophets named Haggai and Zechariah to help the people navigate these trials. Today on *Groundwork*, we will look at these two prophetic books; so, stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is episode five now in a six-part series we are doing here on *Groundwork* on the Old Testament minor prophets—minor only in the sense that they are shorter than the major prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. So far, we have looked at quite a few: Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah. Today, we will pick up Haggai and Zechariah; and then the final program will be Malachi. That is nine out of the twelve, but we have done series...or we will do series...on the other three on *Groundwork*.

So, here in this first part of this program, Darrell, Haggai is only two chapters long, so we are going to look at that one just in this first part of the program. Zechariah is fourteen chapters, so that will take up the second and third parts of this program.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if you have been listening to these episodes on the minor prophets series, then you would see some major recurring themes of God's character, namely his holiness or his righteousness or his justice is on one side of the coin; and the other side of the coin would be hope, peace, restoration, and kindness and mercy. So, we see that again in these two books showing up. Even though Haggai is a short book and Zephaniah is a longer book, these themes still find their way in these books.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, many of the minor prophets came before first Israel at the hands of the Assyrians and then Judah at the hands of the Babylonians got conquered. So, a lot of the minor prophets say: Hey, Israel; hey, Judah: You are in trouble. You are going to get wiped out, and here is why: You have broken covenant with God. Both Haggai and Zechariah, though, are on the other side of the exile. They worked around 520 BC, so this is around the time *after* the Persians, who had conquered Israel's conqueror, Babylon. The Persians allow the Israelites to return home after nearly seventy years of exile. So, that makes Haggai and Zechariah contemporaries probably of Ezra and Nehemiah and the time of the rebuilding of the ruined city of Jerusalem, and the rebuilding of the temple of God. Other key leaders who come up in these books...there is a high priest named Joshua, and the king, the person in the line of David, is a man named Zerubbabel.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know, we know the fall of the southern kingdom is 587 BC, but it is interesting to me that Daniel in his book prophesied a lot of the changes that we are seeing here, that you just talked about; and it is really interesting...sometimes I wish the Bible was chronological when it was written, the way they arranged the books...I wish they were chronological so I could say: Oh, this follows this and this follows this...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But, because they are not that way, it is really important to locate where we are in history; and Haggai being a short book, it is something that is happening during the contemporary time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and I would like to begin with Chapter 1.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. ²This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.'" ³Then the word came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house (my house) remains a ruin?" ⁵Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." ⁷This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the Lord.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, the prophet is saying that they live in these paneled houses, and the Lord's house is in a ruin. So, that sounds like a priority issue...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

They are focused on what they can do in their self and their home and their location, but they are not concerned about God's. That is a priority problem.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is all about the temple in Haggai. Haggai appears to cover in its short, two chapters about a four-month stretch of time; and what is interesting is sometimes, Darrell, in the prophets, their messages fall on deaf ears. Haggai's don't. Haggai's message falls on open ears. The people actually do it. By the second month, after Haggai said to them: Get going on the temple, they did. But by the third month, some discouragement had set in.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says in Chapter 2, beginning at verse 3: "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? ⁴But now be strong, Zerubbabel," declares the Lord. "Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land," declares the Lord, "and work. For I am with you," declares the Lord Almighty. ⁵This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the temple Solomon built four or five centuries earlier had been quite the splendid edifice, but now people are realizing that their current efforts aren't even coming close. This new temple, such as it is, is a shadow of its former self...kind of shabby and ramshackle...and those who are older, and they had to be well over 80 or so, if they could remember back seventy years...those who could remember what Solomon built, looked at this and could but weep. It was like: this is pathetic; it is just pathetic! But God comes now through Haggai to kind of speak a comforting word and says: it is really not the physical reality that is important; it is my presence among you; and if you are faithful to me, I will be with you, even in this ramshackle temple; and that is the most important thing. Don't worry about how it looks; worry about whether I am in your hearts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Historically speaking, the people of God kind of hung their spiritual hat on: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord; and they kind of got some worth from that; they got their value from that; they got a lot of status from that; but the Lord is saying to them: It isn't about the condition of the temple, it is about the condition of your hearts; and in the New Testament we know that the temple of the Holy Spirit is the body. This is where God lives now, and he wants to address how we live as well; but in this case, where here in Haggai it is talking about the actual physical building, he is trying to let them know...the Lord is...that the presence is important.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is going to be ultimately the Messiah, right? So, the Gospel of John in particular in the New Testament says: Who is the new temple? Well, it is not Herod's temple there in Jesus' day; it is Jesus himself; and Haggai looks forward to that, because Jesus will be a descendent of David, and thus a descendent of Zerubbabel, who was in the line of David.

Here is Haggai 2:20: The word of the Lord came to Haggai... ²¹“Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²²I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall... ²³“On that day,” declares the Lord Almighty, “I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,” declares the Lord, “And I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the Lord Almighty.

So, God is still working through the line of David, represented by Zerubbabel, and he says: You are going to be like a signet ring. I am going to, you know, keep things moving forward with you; and then, we know, as I said a minute ago, that ultimately leads to the Messiah, who is the final true temple, and who enables all of us to then become temples of the Holy Spirit, and so forth. So, that is the message of Haggai. Next up, Zechariah; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are going to turn now, Darrell, from the book of Haggai to the book of Zechariah. It has way more in it than we could cram into a single program here, much less just the two segments we have left on this particular program. Most of Zechariah's first eight chapters are a series on often frankly bizarre dream visions. I mean, Zechariah sees flying scrolls; four horsemen riding across the earth to bring God's justice; a woman in a basket being lifted up and flown away in the basket by other women who sprout wings on their backs like storks...strange stuff; but in reality, all of those dreams are in service of one main thing: A call to not be like the people of old; don't be like your ancestors who sinned so bad, Babylon came in and wrecked the whole place. Keep covenant.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, these visions are typical of prophetic visions...apocalyptic visions...and we have seen them in Ezekiel, we have seen them in different books of the Bible...we have seen them in Revelation; and so, we know that prophets often get these stark visions in their words from the Lord, but also, there is an interpretation that goes deeper than the actual symbols. So, we see that here in the book of Zechariah; and actually, we see visions like this in the book of Zechariah that are similar to the ones that are in the prophetic and apocalyptic visions.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And here is how it begins. Zechariah 1:2: The Lord was very angry with your ancestors. ³Therefore, tell the people: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Return to me," declares the Lord Almighty, "and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. ⁴Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices. But they would not listen or pay attention to me," declares the Lord. ⁵"Where are your ancestors now? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶But did not my words and my decrees, which I commanded my servants the prophets, overtake your ancestors?" Then they repented and said, "The Lord Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as he determined to do."

So again, just like other prophets, including from the major prophetic books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, the message is pretty simple: Obey God, fulfill the covenant; keep the law; pursue justice for the vulnerable and the marginalized; and if you do, blessings are going to cascade down upon you.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the opposite has often been true as well. If you disobey God, then these other things are going to happen to you as a consequence. The actual standard of what this is, is called the law of divine retribution: You obey God, you get the blessing; you disobey God, you get the curses. This happened in the Old Testament quite a bit before the gospel came through and Jesus Christ atoned for all sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In fact, we mentioned just a minute ago, there were eight visions. Here is the third one; this one has some hope in it. So, this is the third vision of Zechariah: ^{2:1}Then I looked up and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand. ²I asked, "Where are you going?" He answered me, "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is." ³While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him ⁴and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. ⁵And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'

(So) ¹⁰"Shout and be glad, Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. ¹¹"Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day, and they will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you."

So, here is a man who is going to measure Jerusalem, and Zechariah says: Stop; it is going to become unmeasurable; it is going to be so full of people and God's glory. Don't measure it; it is going to finally be unmeasurable because it is going to be so eternal and huge.

DARRELL DELANEY

And you can see this theme all over scripture, Scott, that God wants to be the peoples' God. He wants to be among them; he wants to be with them; he wants to be in relationship and proximity with them; and because of their sin, he is not able to do that. So, he has to atone for the sin or he has to judge the sin, because he is holy; but he always longs to be close to them...longs to be with them; and to have him and them have a relationship that is restorative. He has been looking for that for a long time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; here is from Zechariah 7: ⁸The word of the Lord came again to Zechariah. ⁹This is what the Lord Almighty said: "Administer true justice, show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰Do not oppress the

widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.”

Of course, the people of old wouldn’t pay attention, but now Zechariah is saying: You have to do that. Obey, and it is going to be good.

This introduces something we might be wondering about, because by the time we get to the New Testament, it is clear we are not actually saved by our deeds. We are not saved by keeping the law...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are saved by grace alone; and yet, the prophets like Zechariah go on and on and on about: You gotta obey; you gotta live right; and it almost makes it sound like: Until you do, the Messiah won’t come. So, it almost seems like we have to earn the coming of the Messiah, which is not what the New Testament tells us. So, how do we square these things?

DARRELL DELANEY

It is clear that God is always going to have a holy standard of how he wants his people to live. He always lets them know what he requires; but at the same time, we know that we cannot earn our righteousness alone by our own deeds. Many of us have tried and it hasn’t worked at all...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what we need to understand is that Christ gives us the ability to live a new life once he has paid the price; and we take his righteousness, and out of gratitude, we live out what God has done for us, and that is how we live into what he has called us to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; God ultimately is going to come in Jesus and say: You know, I kept my end of the covenant bargain all along, but it is not working on your end, so guess what? I am going to send my Son, and do your part for you. That is, then, Darrell, where we get salvation by grace alone; because, I mean, as you just said, if we could...if we actually could do what Zechariah is telling the people to do here, and if we could do it perfectly...well, obviously, maybe we never would have sinned. We wouldn’t need a savior, but we know we cannot. So, that is kind of how you square all this talk about obey and get rewarded, and then the talk of salvation by grace alone. It is not an either/or in the Bible, right? It is not like God changed his mind or something. It is all on kind of the same trajectory, actually.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, thanks to the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we have been called to this new life, and he actually gives us the power to live that new life. What I love about that, Scott, is that we don’t do good deeds to earn this favor with God. Jesus has already earned that favor. But now that he has done that, and cleared the way that the sin used to block, we now have a way that we can live out of gratitude for him, and we are grateful to do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everything Zechariah says here about keeping covenant and not oppressing the poor or showing favor to... Oh, it still applies to us, but it is as you just said, Darrell: Gratitude. You know, in the Reformed tradition, in sort of the classic Reformed confession, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the first section is called Misery; it is our sin. Here is why you need a savior; you are in trouble. The whole second section is Deliverance: Jesus came and delivered us. The whole third section is called Gratitude...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or it used to be called the three S's: Sin, salvation, service...

DARRELL DELANEY

Guilt, grace, gratitude.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, guilt, grace, gratitude. You know, Jesus did it all for you, so now we live in those ways as a way to say thank you to God. So, Zechariah still applies to us in his calls for obedience, but not to gain salvation, but as a result of it. Well, in just a moment, let's look at the conclusion of Zechariah, and then we will step back to look at what both Haggai and Zechariah have to teach us as disciples of Jesus yet today. So, you will want to stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. We have been looking at Haggai and Zechariah in this fifth of six programs here on *Groundwork*, on the minor prophets; and before we kind of step back and see lessons we learned from both Haggai and Zechariah, we want to move to the more hope-filled conclusion of Zechariah, Darrell. We have said all along that the ultimate news of the minor prophets for all their judgment and doom and gloom, is the ultimate restoration of Israel, of Jerusalem, and of the temple; but we have also been saying, Darrell, that came ultimately...not literally...not a literal city...not a literal temple...but spiritually in Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah.

DARRELL DELANEY

Jesus is the Messiah that everyone is pointing toward. It is the most important point in history, that everyone is looking toward Jesus' acts; even after he is gone, we look back to what Jesus has done, because that is the most important time in history. So, in Zechariah 9, you see that this well-known passage that we often read on Palm Sunday comes into play, where it actually prophesies his coming. It says: ⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So, we see Jesus is named as the king who is coming on a donkey.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and if his entry into the holy city was lowly, and not resembling the thunderous entry on a white stallion, such as Caesar would do in Jesus' time, what came next was even more lowly: the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. So, yes; that interesting passage you just read, Darrell, from Zechariah 9, at least a couple of the evangelists quote it, saying: Look, what happens on what we call Palm Sunday...Passion Sunday...that is what Zechariah was talking about in Chapter 9; and indeed, we see the ultimate fulfillment here in Jesus.

Then, the last chapter, a beautiful vision here, Darrell, from Zechariah 14:

⁹The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

¹⁰The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up high from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate... ¹¹It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure. (And then these great words, starting at Zechariah 14:20): On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. ²¹Every pot in Jerusalem

and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord Almighty.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have seen...like I said, there has been a theme in the minor prophets where you see God's holy justice; you see his wrath; you see his anger; you see him dealing with sin; but you also turn it over on the other side and see that he is using that to restore the people, bring them back to hope, and this is a hope-filled message right here, where he is letting them know that he is going to inscribe his name on everything...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he is going to be a blessing to them, and bring them back to this place, where they are in fellowship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a great image. Basically, he is kind of saying there is not even going to be any difference between the secular and the spiritual, because nothing will be neutral; everything is going to belong to the Lord. So, yes; your Farberware cooking pot in your kitchen...it is going to be holy to the Lord, right? Everything...you make a spaghetti dinner, it is holy to the Lord, right? Everything is going to be devoted to the Lord, and the Lord will be in all things.

So, that is our look, Darrell, at the books of Haggai and Zechariah. Both prophets focused on rebuilding...rebuilding the temple for Haggai, rebuilding the larger city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel itself for Zechariah; and what is very evident here is that what human beings manage to build is nothing compared to what God and God alone will finally build.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it is beautiful to see, too, that God, in his heart, desires total devotion from everything that he has made; and it is really powerful for us to see that he actually is setting into motion that redemptive plan even now through the words of the prophet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, we mentioned when we were looking at Haggai in the first part of this program, and the closing image, you know, about Zerubbabel being like a signet ring on the hand of God; again, God is the one who will rebuild Jerusalem; God is the one who will rebuild the temple; and ultimately, God is going to rebuild the whole creation, to what we just said: Every cowbell, every horse bell, every pot and pan in your kitchen, will be sacred to the Lord.

Darrell, I think these are words of hope for us also, including when we look at the state of the Church today.

DARRELL DELANEY

If we are honest, Scott, we know that the Church is not always living up to the holy standard in which God called it to. We see division and we see brokenness in fellowship and we see political disagreements; even in the Church, we see these things. We see racial divides and we see systemic problems, and even in the Church, there are situations that make pastors leave; but we are seeing here also, too, that even though you can weep over these things, God is not done and he is not defeated, and he has a plan to restore. It is already set in motion.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; yes, I like the image there. So, we saw in the first part from Haggai, when the people who could remember what Solomon's temple looked like, saw the kind of pathetic temple they were managing to rebuild, they just wept, it was just so sorry looking; and as you just said, sometimes we feel that way about the Church. We know what the Bride of Christ is supposed to look like...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We know what the Church is supposed to look like; and yet, there is a disconnect there, very often, through our disagreements, our partisan divides, all the things that happened in many churches during the pandemic of COVID. It is enough to make you weep.

So, is there hope? Yes; Haggai and Zechariah both say there is hope. Ultimately, I think we see that. The ultimate visions of Haggai and Zechariah climax in scripture in what John of Patmos saw in his grand vision that became, you know, basically the end of the book of Revelation.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ^{21:5} He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty, I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Rev 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

And Darrell, that is the ultimate trajectory traced out by Zechariah and Haggai.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is a beautiful vision, and it gives us hope; and so, we need to understand that God is in the process of not only doing restorative justice, but mercy. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we conclude our study of the Bible’s minor prophets with the prophetic book of Malachi. Connect with us now at our website: groundworkonline.com, where you can share what *Groundwork* means to you, and even make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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