

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

# Take COURAGE

A STUDY OF HAGGAI

JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD

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COURAGE

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JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Take Courage: A Study of Haggai* is Jennifer's seventh video-based Bible study with Lifeway. It follows her popular Bible studies, *Psalm 23: The Shepherd With Me*, *Hosea: Unfailing Love Changes Everything*, and *Me, Myself, and Lies: A Thought-Closet Makeover*.

Jennifer became blind when she was fifteen years old and has experienced firsthand how God gives us courage through His presence, His people, and His Word. Now, more than thirty years later as an author and speaker, she boldly and compassionately teaches women how they can take courage, too.

Known for her substance, signature wit, and down-to-earth style, Jennifer weaves together relatable stories with biblical truths to help women know and live for Christ. She has shared her practical and inspiring messages to audiences across the country and through media outlets including: *The Dr. Phil Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Life Today*, and *The Billy Graham Television Special*.

She is the featured teacher and founder of “Fresh Grounded Faith Conferences,” host of the *4:13 Podcast*, and publisher of the popular online resource for women in ministry called [WomensMinistry.net](http://WomensMinistry.net).

Jennifer and her husband, whom she calls her “very own Dr. Phil,” live in Missouri, and have two sons, Connor and Clayton, and a lovely daughter-in-law, Caroline. She's also GiGi to her two grandsons, and that's her favorite name of all!

Besides walking—or being walked by—her little dog Lucy, Jennifer enjoys riding a bicycle built for two with her husband. She is also an avid listener of audiobooks, a C. S. Lewis junkie, and loves dark chocolate and robust coffee—especially when shared with a friend.

Connect with Jennifer at [jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage](http://jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage).

# INTRODUCTION

Hey, sister!

I'm typing this with a bulky, uncomfortable cast on my left arm. Just as I finished writing this study, I tripped over my open dishwasher door and landed on my wrist. Ouch.

Girl, it's been painful and a pain! Managing the trappings of a broken wrist has been hard but trying to pull myself out of the trap of discouragement I landed in when I fell on my kitchen floor has been even harder.

Healing has been slow. Blindness has made being one-handed even more complicated. And courage, well, it ran out about the time I ran out of my first bottle of Tylenol\*!

Discouragement is real. But so is God's presence. And because He is with us, we can take courage—to be who He calls us to be and do what He calls us to do.

That's why I'm so glad you're here! You've got stuff in your life that makes you want to throw in the towel too. It's often the daily drip, drip, drip of defeat or frustration that discourages us. But sister, that's when we can take courage. And our guy, Haggai, will show us how.

So here's how this will go. During the week you'll do daily study. It's OK if you don't finish a day of study or fill in every blank. This is a guilt-free Bible study! Yet, the more you do, the more you'll gain. Then, if you're doing this with a group, you'll gather with your Bible study buddies seven times. You'll pray, watch me teach on video, and discuss what you've discovered in your personal study. Also, if you're the courageous woman leading this group, you'll find helps in the back of this book.

Plus at [jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage](http://jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage), you'll find two more things to complement your study. First, I've created a *Haggai* playlist for you to listen to as you do this study. Secondly, you can sign up to get the weekly video teaching summaries. That way, if you missed a word, or a whole video, you can easily catch up.

Sister, I've had you in mind and on my heart as I studied Haggai because I want this to bless you, grow you, and change you just like it has me. So I'm raising my good wrist and cheering you on! Let's take courage together as we take God at His Word.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

# Group Session 1

Rather than a formal leader guide in the back, we've provided what we hope is a simple and functional group plan on these pages with an additional word to leaders in the back. Each week will begin with a two-page group guide like this. I suggest you divide your group time into three parts: 1. Welcome and prayer; 2. Watch the video; 3. Group discussion of the personal study for the past week and the video you just watched.

The session guide for this first meeting is for us to get to know each other. Then we'll each go do our personal study. (It will be fun, I promise!) Each day, plan to spend a few minutes with that day's study. Don't worry if some days you don't get it all. This isn't a race, and you can come back later. When we meet next group session, we'll have this week's study to discuss. Now let's get to know each other, and I'll join you by way of video.

## BEFORE THE VIDEO

### *Welcome and Prayer*

## VIDEO NOTES

Haggai 2:4 is an \_\_\_\_\_ from God—not just an imperative command.

Taking courage comes from taking God at His \_\_\_\_\_ and trusting His \_\_\_\_\_.

We need to take the courage that God \_\_\_\_\_ us so that we can be the women He has \_\_\_\_\_ us to be and do what He has \_\_\_\_\_ us to do.

Haggai prophesied at the same time as the prophet \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>1</sup>

Haggai lived during the same historical period as \_\_\_\_\_, the Chinese philosopher.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the Jews did not follow \_\_\_\_\_.

The Book of Haggai contains four \_\_\_\_\_ that Haggai preached in four months.

The Jews are now under \_\_\_\_\_ rule.

- King Solomon \_\_\_\_\_ a temple.
- King Nebuchadnezzar \_\_\_\_\_ a temple.
- King Cyrus said, “\_\_\_\_\_ that temple.”
- King Jesus said, “I \_\_\_\_\_ the temple.”

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

### *Video 1 and Getting to Know Each Other*

What is one thing you want this group to know about you?

What drew you to this study of Haggai?

What do you hope to gain from this study?

Would you like to read my written summary of this video teaching? Just go to [jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage](http://jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage)





SESSION 1

*The ABCs  
of Haggai*

#TAKECOURAGESTUDY

# Haggai Highlights

586 BC

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the second deportation of Jews to Babylon took place (2 Kings 25:8-21; Jer. 39:8-10; 40:7; 52:12-34).

598 BC

King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and the first deportation of Jews to Babylon took place (2 Kings 24:10-16).

538 BC

- King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians.
- First group of Jews, including Zerubbabel and Joshua, returned to Jerusalem and began to rebuild the temple, completing the foundation (Ezra 3:8-11).
- Opposition arose, and the temple rebuilding was stopped (Ezra 4:1-5,24).

520 BC

- Haggai appeared on the scene, urging Jews to get back to work on the temple.
- First day, sixth month (August 29), Haggai's first sermon (Hag. 1-11)
- Twenty-fourth day, sixth month (September 21), temple reconstruction began again (Hag. 1:14-15).
- Twenty-first day, seventh month (October 17), Haggai's second sermon (Hag. 2:1-9)
- Twenty-fourth day, ninth month (December 18), Haggai's third and fourth sermons (Hag. 2:10-23)

515 BC

Temple was finished (Ezra 6:15).

Approximate dates are from *The New American Commentary—Volume 21a, Haggai & Malachi* and from the *Holman Old Testament Commentary*.

## Day 1

### IT'S SHORT, BUT IT'S NOT SHALLOW

Hey, my friend! I'm so grateful you're choosing to take courage right along with me. You're going to love our guy Haggai! Which, by the way, in case you aren't sure how to pronounce his name—just rhyme it with “guy” like “our guy Haggai,” and you're good to go.

If you're not familiar with Haggai, don't worry. Neither was I. One day, while reading the Book of Haggai, I thought, *I feel like those people he's preaching to!* In other words, discouraged. It wasn't full blown throw-in-the-towel kind of discouragement; I was just “weary in well doing,” to quote the King James Version (Gal. 6:9). I felt like I had about as much courage as that scaredy-cat lion in the *Wizard of Oz!* Nothing was really wrong; life was good.

But sometimes, real life brings real discouragement, doesn't it? You've felt it. You may be feeling it right now. When the mundane of life piles up, when the happy ending of our story feels a million miles away, when the joy-squashers and courage-killers won't leave us alone, we can find ourselves wanting to quit.

We all need encouragement. Encouragement is oxygen for the discouraged soul. Girl, I had no idea how much encouragement was tucked into Haggai's thirty-eight verses. So, let's do this! You are about to step into one of the shortest books of the Bible but watch your step because short does not mean shallow. The Book of Haggai is deeper than you think!

Turn to the Old Testament Book of Haggai. We are going to read all of it but don't panic. It's only two chapters long!

Before you read Haggai, review the following questions. Then, as you read, jot down some notes:

**What phrases do I read more than once?**

#### GO DEEPER

Check out page 182 in the back of the book to find a list of resources for studying the Bible, including some of my online favorites.

What emotions do I experience?

What passages are confusing?

What seems challenging in the book?

What words or verses sound hopeful?

Take a minute and review what you wrote. Pause and pray over each area where you jotted notes. Ask God to give you clarity over the next few weeks about what confuses you. Ask Him for courage to face what challenges you. Thank God for the hope you found and praise Him for the ways His faithfulness is reflected in these verses.

Once you've said "Amen," let's start at the beginning again. Literally. I'm pausing to pour my coffee now, so pause and pour yourself some, too! Or, of course, tea, Coke®, or whatever you like will be just fine with Haggai and me.

Look at Haggai 1:1 and jot down the name of the author.

I know, it's obvious, but what is obvious is often overlooked. Let's pause for a minute to see what is hidden in the author's name. Look in your favorite online Bible resource and find the meaning behind Haggai's name. (Hint: You can just Google "Hebrew meaning of Haggai.")

What does Haggai's name mean?

It seems everyone agrees that Haggai’s name means “festive” or “festival”—but they don’t all agree on the reason. Some scholars believe it’s because Haggai was born on a feast day, so he was named accordingly. Kind of like if you were born on a warm July day, and your mama named you Summer. But others believe that “festive” points to the joyous nature of Haggai’s prediction; his prophecy is encouraging!<sup>3</sup>

Since the Book of Haggai only has two chapters, go back and read it once more. This time through, record the joyous predictions and/or encouraging promises you find in the reference listed below.

PROMISE	REFERENCE
	Haggai 1:13; 2:4
	Haggai 2:5
	Haggai 2:7
	Haggai 2:8
	Haggai 2:9
	Haggai 2:22
	Haggai 2:23

God promised His presence and His Spirit would be among His people. He promised He would shake the nations, and the latter glory would be greater than the former. He promised He would fill His house with glory, and He would make Zerubbabel like His signet ring. (If that one makes no sense right now, don’t worry; it will.) Finally, God also promised His peace. Worth partying over, right?



I’m sharing my personal *Haggai* playlist with you! As you’re getting to know Haggai this week, listen to the Session One songs of my *Haggai* playlist at [jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage](http://jenniferrothschild.com/takecourage).

Those predictions and promises were encouraging to the people of Haggai's day. And you'll soon discover how encouraging they will be to you, too. In fact, my prayer is that you will find courage and encouragement as you study these verses along with me.

Well, my mug is empty, so we'll pick this up tomorrow. I'm praying for you and cheering you on. See you tomorrow!

## Day 2

# OUR GUY HAGGAI

On Day One, we started with the basics of Haggai. Let's continue that simple approach and look at the ABCs of Haggai over the next three days. We'll start with A, the author.

If Haggai had a profile on LinkedIn®, it might look something like this:

- I was born in Judah before 586 BC.<sup>4</sup>
- I'm the only person in the Old Testament with the name Haggai.<sup>5</sup>
- I began prophetic ministry in Jerusalem in 520 BC.<sup>6</sup>
- I'm the first of the prophets to minister to Israel following her return from Babylonian captivity.
- I successfully exhorted the people to complete the task of rebuilding the temple.

Nice profile, huh?

Haggai was a man whom God raised up at a specific time for a specific mission. Some scholars believe he was older when called to serve.<sup>7</sup> If this is true, try picturing Haggai in a contemporary setting: a card-carrying AARP-er, drinking his discount coffee from McDonald's®. I love that! It reminds me that no matter how young or old we are, we can also be raised up for a specific time and a specific mission.

**How does the way you feel about your age impact how you view your purpose or usefulness?**



You can embrace any season of life with purpose! Learn how on my podcast. Go to [413podcast.com/22](https://413podcast.com/22) to listen.

Sometimes, when we're young, we get discouraged because we feel we need a ton more experience before we are usable. On the other hand, when we're in the sunset years, we can get downright down because we feel our usefulness has diminished right along with our energy (or natural hair color).



Pause here for a second and find the following verses of Scripture. Jot down what they suggest about your age and usefulness.

Isaiah 46:4

Psalms 71:18

Psalms 92:12-15

Acts 2:17

1 Timothy 4:12



I'd love to hear your personal mission! Share it on Twitter® or Instagram® and be sure to tag me (@JennRothschild) and use the #TakeCourageStudy hashtag.

These verses show us that no matter how young or old you may be, you are in the game, sister! You may be at the starting line, somewhere on the sidelines trying to catch your breath, or close to the finish line, but you are still in it to win it! You are part of what God is doing and wants to do in our world. Be encouraged that you are never too young or too old for kingdom work. In Christ, there are no has-beens and no wannabes!

As you study the Book of Haggai, ask God to make you aware of why He has raised you up for this specific time and how He wants to use you.

Do you know your current mission assignment? Take a moment to think and pray about this. Jot down what God may have raised you up for. Write out what you think your personal mission is for this season of your life. (Remember, there are no small missions!)

You can relate to Haggai in lots of ways.

Think about it. Every season of life represents the end of an era and the start of something new. Perhaps young Haggai had been in a season of captivity in Babylon. Old Haggai went back home and had to start all over again in a brand-new season. When we're younger, we may be at the end of a bad relationship or at the beginning of a new career. When we're older, we may be stuck in a season of compromised health or finding our way with an empty nest. In between those seasons, we may just be coming out of a difficult divorce or moving to a new city.

Like Haggai, we all have seasons when we feel stuck, held captive, or longing to be free. We all also face seasons of new beginnings that often hold more questions than answers. Where are you in that cycle?

I've been held captive by . . .

I've had to start all over again or want to start all over again when it comes to . . .

I'm in a new season of . . .

Sister, you can relate to Haggai, right? Some scholars think he may have been one of the exiles in Babylon.<sup>8</sup> If that's the case, he would have had to navigate that transition from slavery to freedom, old patterns to new beginnings, familiar bondage to uncertain optimism.

And you and I have the same opportunities, don't we? I hope you're starting to see yourself in this little Book of Haggai. Your life can be found in his story, too. We'll get to know Haggai (and ourselves) a lot better as we move through this study, but that's enough for today.

Oh wait! I should pause with a major P.S. here. The human author of Haggai is our friend Haggai, but the ultimate author of the Book of Haggai is God Himself (2 Tim. 3:16-17). I figured you knew that, but, girl, I didn't want that foundational, life-changing, history-altering fact to slip past you. That means that God's Word, including the Book of Haggai, is alive and God-breathed. In turn, it can give you life and breathe life into your story. OK?

OK! Tomorrow, we are moving to the letter *B*. See you then!

## Day 3

# THE BACKSTORY AND YOUR STORY

Well, hey there! So glad you're working through all the ABCs of Haggai with me. Getting familiar with these facts and context will help your heart grasp the deep message as we move through all thirty-eight verses.

Today, we're covering the *B*, the backstory. Let's turn the biblical calendar back a few decades to see what the Jews experienced so we can better understand how they must have felt. It all started in 2 Kings 25. Go there and answer the following questions:

Who attacked whom (vv.1-2)?

List some of the awful things the Jews endured because of Babylon's attack (vv. 3-16 or 2 Chron. 36:17-20).

Awful, isn't it? In 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar left Jerusalem a wasteland—the people starving, the temple destroyed, the walls torn down, and all the houses burned.<sup>9</sup> Most of the Jews were taken captive. Only a remnant of poor people was left behind to farm the land (2 Kings 25:12). Simply put, it was devastating.

Before we move on, I want us to walk a few steps in the Jews' shoes and imagine the state of their hearts. How do you think they must have felt?

List a few adjectives below that describe the emotions the Jews may have experienced.

*Hopeless. Afraid. Discouraged. Dejected. Forgotten. Despondent.*

Those words describe how I think I would feel if I had been in the Jews' place.

## GO DEEPER

Why Psalm 137? Some believe that this psalm was penned by Jeremiah when the people of God were captives in Babylon, likely toward the latter end of their captivity.<sup>10</sup>

Read Psalm 137 to get a glimpse of their experience.

They wept. They longed for home. I can just see them by the river, heads hung low, demoralized, and despondent.

Have you ever felt that discouraged? If so, name the time and the reason.

If you can't think of an exact time, what kinds of experiences bring out those feelings of discouragement for you?

My experience hit me hard several years ago and showed up out of the blue. Girl, my maiden name is Jolly, and it fits me—I've got the happy going on! But when blindness met menopause, they didn't play nice. The result was depression. I'd love to say it was a onetime event that I no longer deal with. But sometimes it creeps back in when I least expect it. It is so discouraging.

Most of us have stories similar to the Jews' backstory—times when our hopes were exiled, our relationships were laid to waste, and discouragement and disappointment lay like rubble around us. Maybe you're in one of those seasons now. Just remember: God promises us hope, just like He did for the Jews.

But perhaps hope doesn't look like we expect it to. Hmmm . . .

Hope for the Jews came in the form of another conquering king. Fast forward a few decades, when Babylon got a bitter taste of her own medicine. Cyrus of Persia was now in charge.

Read 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.

What did Cyrus do for the Jews with his newfound power?

Yes! The Jews were allowed to go home. They could finally leave the captivity of Babylon. About fifty thousand Jews returned. And perhaps our buddy Haggai was one of them.

**I bet they showed up fired up! That's usually how we feel with a new beginning, right? So the Jews went home and got busy rebuilding the temple. But then . . . read Ezra 4:24 and jot down what happened next.**

After the Jews got home, the same people who had run for their hammers and nails to rebuild the temple ran out of steam and stopped their rebuilding project.

And, with that my dear, we are caught up with the backstory. As we study this book, we'll get an understanding of why the Jews quit rebuilding. Believe me, we can learn a lot from them.

But think about this before we move on: in captivity, the Jews felt discouragement, right? And rightly so. I can't think of a situation much more discouraging than being dragged from your homeland and being stuck in a foreign land. But when the Jews returned home and started to rebuild, they became discouraged and quit.

**What does that fact teach you about the source of discouragement?**

We often assume that when all is going well—when we are free and moving forward—there should be no discouragement. But, sister, discouragement ultimately never comes from an outside source; discouragement is an inside job!

Sure, many discouraging situations are filled with joy-killers, hope-squashers, and naysayers. (We'll meet some of them from Haggai's day next week.) But discouragement rises from within us. We can learn from Haggai how to take courage no matter where

### **DON'T LET EZRA 4 CONFUSE YOU**

If you read Ezra 4:23-24 in order, it looks like the Jews were forced to stop building the temple because of King Artaxerxes' decree. But those two verses don't sync up chronologically. Verse 23 is actually referring to events that happened several years later than what is described in verse 24. Verse 24 is the chronological end of Ezra 4:1-5, and is referring to opposition the Jews encountered when constructing the temple. Ezra 4:6-23 describes opposition the Jews faced when they were building the walls of the city, not the temple. As stated, the construction of the walls took place several years after the construction of the temple. Verses 6-23 were inserted parenthetically by Ezra to show the persistent opposition the Jews faced. <sup>11</sup>

we find ourselves. Even when everything around us is discouraging, we can remain encouraged and motivated.

As you finish up today's study, think about that place or thing in your life that you feel most discouraged about. Just linger here with your Father God and be honest with Him.

**Where in your life do you fight defeat? Record it here with a prayer of faith asking God to give you courage and teach you how you can apply the lessons of Haggai to your discouragement.**

**Dear God,**

**Amen.**

Girl, I promise you that grace and glory are in your story no matter what discouragement or defeat you feel or face.

How God called you to Him, the pits you've fallen in, the small victories and the big blunders, the junk from your past that He's forgiven—all that is your backstory, your testimony. God can use it—and you—to encourage someone. Don't be ashamed of your story. You never know who needs to take courage, and you may be the one who gives it!

God's got us, and I'm so glad you're hanging out with me and our new friend, Haggai. See you tomorrow!

## Day 4

# Z AND THE BIG THREE

It's a sunny day here, and I just poured my coffee. I'm drinking from a mug emblazoned with the words: *She believed she could so she did*. That nifty little phrase inspired my prayer for you today as you study. I prayed you would believe God can accomplish in you what feels bigger than you. I pray that as you read God's Word today, you feel His presence.

Pause and ask Him to be your Teacher as we get to know the characters in Haggai. May God use them to help us know ourselves. Amen!

Remember where we left off yesterday? We sped through the background of the Babylonian captivity, and now the Jews are home. They started rebuilding the temple, but somewhere along the way, they got discouraged and stopped. Haggai stepped into the story here. God called him to speak correction and encouragement to the discouraged and distracted Jews. But he wasn't in it alone.

Today, let's look at C, other characters in Haggai I want you to meet.

Turn to Ezra 3:2.

Write down the names in the verse:

Yep, Zerubbabel and Joshua (called "Jeshua" in Ezra) partnered with Haggai in the rebuilding process. Haggai wasn't alone, and you aren't alone either, sister. Many of us are characters playing a part in your story, too.

Tomorrow, we'll get to know Joshua. Today, let's settle in with Zerubbabel. First of all, why is his name so hard to say and spell?! Can we just call him Z, please?

Z is an important part of the Book of Haggai and the bigger gospel story. Let's find out who he was—even if we can hardly spell or pronounce his name!

Do a word search in the Old Testament for Zerubbabel's name. Then, based on the verses you find, describe who he was—most importantly, who he was to the Jews—and what he did. I found a few to start with.

1 Chronicles 3:17-19 • Nehemiah 7:5-7 • Haggai 1:1; 2:21 • Matthew 1:12



Zerubbabel was . . .

Zerubbabel's role was . . .

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah, put in charge by King Darius. His main job was to oversee the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the temple services. Let's discover three amazingly significant things about him that set him apart and put Zerubbabel smack dab in the middle of the gospel story, our story.

### 1. Zerubbabel the Son

Review 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 and Matthew 1:12.

What can you deduce from these verses about Zerubbabel, his family, and his lineage?

Zerubbabel was a descendant of Shealtiel and the grandson of Judah's King Jehoiachin. If you climb all the branches of that family tree, you'll discover that means he was a descendant of David; he was of royal blood. Zerubbabel was not only in the Davidic line, but he also reestablished the Davidic throne.

That's a big deal because God promised David his family would always be on the throne.

Read Isaiah 11:1-5,10 and Revelation 22:16.

Based on those verses, who is also in the line of David?

Jesus, our Messiah, is in the lineage of David. That means Z was in the line of Jesus.

## 2. Zerubbabel the Servant

Read Haggai 2:20-23.

In these verses, Zerubbabel is also called “my servant.” This title was often a Messianic reference in the Old Testament.

Check out the following passages of Scripture to see what I mean.

2 Samuel 3:18

1 Kings 11:34

Isaiah 42:1-9

Ezekiel 34:23

How is the phrase *servant* compatible with *Messiah*?

### ZERUBBABEL'S DAD

In 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 Zerubbabel's father is listed as Pedaiah, the brother of Shealtiel. Apparently Salathiel (AKA Shealtiel, the same guy) died without a son, and his brother Pedaiah married Shealtiel's widow who gave birth to Zerubbabel. The purpose of such a marriage was to maintain the dead husband's line, so that means Zerubbabel was legally Salathiel's (Shealtiel's) son—even though, technically to us, he was Shealtiel's nephew. Whew! Now you know!<sup>12</sup>

The Messiah was not only expected to be a conquering king, but the prophets made it pretty clear He would also be a servant—a Suffering Servant.

Can you think of any New Testament examples of how Jesus fulfilled this prediction? If you're not sure, read John 13 and Philipians 2.

Jesus washed feet; He served; He was not waited on. Z was a servant, too. He served the people in newly established Jerusalem.

OK, hold that thought and consider number three.

### 3. Zerubbabel the Signet Ring

Read Haggai 2:23.

How was Zerubbabel described in this verse?

Son? Check. Servant? Check. Those two we have heard before. But signet ring? Hmmm . . . Let's learn about the significance of a signet ring.

Use your favorite search engine or Bible website to find the word *signet* in the Old Testament. Take some notes on people who wore signet rings or places signet rings were used. Then determine what a signet ring represented. I've included what I call "Scripture Starters" to help you get started.

Scripture Starters

Genesis 41:41-43 • 1 Kings 21:8 • Esther 8:8 • Daniel 6:17

Signet rings affirmed authority, honor, or ownership. Every signet ring had an emblem that was unique to the king who wore it. A dollop of soft wax was dripped on the seal of an official document and then impressed with the king's signet, which was usually kept on a ring on his finger. A signet was sort of like the seal of a notary public; it certified the document was genuine.

Read Jeremiah 22:24.

Describe how God pictured King Jehoiachin (Coniah):

When King Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon along with the Jews, he lost his throne. God described it like a signet ring being removed from His own finger.

Now, in Haggai 2:23, God called Zerubbabel the signet ring on His finger, but this time the ring wouldn't be removed. As God's signet ring, Zerubbabel was given a place of honor and authority. As a son in the line of David, God was reinstating the Davidic line. As God's servant, God was dropping a clue through Zerubbabel, giving a nod to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Zerubbabel was clearly a man chosen by God for a purpose—son, servant, and signet ring is like a trifecta! The big three description isn't given to anyone else in Scripture. What an honor and encouragement for Zerubbabel! They show how significant Zerubbabel was in the rebuilding process, and his presence made it clear God was not absent. Even though the temple wasn't complete, God's plan was still working. Zerubbabel was a reminder that God was in control. His presence was encouraging.

But as significant as Z was, he pointed to the One who would be the ultimate Son, Servant, and Signet Ring, Jesus Christ.

You may be in a new season of life. Or there may be a place in your life that needs repair. You may be in the process of building or rebuilding, or it may feel like your life is in shambles. But, sister, God's plan isn't uncertain or incomplete just because your future or project is. Zerubbabel is on the scene. Not the Z of Haggai's day, but the ultimate Zerubbabel: Jesus, the Son, the Servant, God's Signet Ring. He has authority over your project in every season, so don't get discouraged by the process.

Take courage, my sister. Jesus is with you!

## Day 5

# THE PROPHET, THE POLITICIAN, AND THE PRIEST

Joshua is in the house! So make room for him at your table or wherever you are studying today.

We're back in reoccupied Jerusalem again. We've got our prophet. We've got our governor. So who are we missing? The third character of the Book of Haggai. His name was Joshua. (Not the one who hung out with Moses and Caleb. Different guy.)

Find Ezra 3:2 in your Bible and write down what this verse reveals about Joshua. (Remember, Jeshua is just a different spelling for Joshua in this verse.) Who was his dad and what did he and his brothers do?

The bottom line is Joshua was the high priest, and he was a descendant of Zadok (1 Chron. 6:1-15). He had been hauled away into captivity and now served as the religious leader of the community that returned to Jerusalem. Joshua reestablished the high priestly line of Aaron through Eleazar.

Now you've got a prophet, a priest, and a politician. And a complicated etymology and history lesson. Sorry. But think about it: a prophet, a priest, and a politician. Wow, what a combo! As you study Haggai, you'll notice that Haggai preached to the people. But he also directed his messages to the politician and the priest, the civil and the religious leaders of the people. It is as if Haggai recruited Joshua and Z to be his associates in pulling off God's plan. Priest, prophet, and ruler are all part of the way God spoke to and guided His people in Haggai. Is that still true today?

On the surface, it seems perfectly reasonable that God would guide and instruct His people through those who proclaim His Word, like the prophet and priest. But, usually, you don't throw a politician in that mix, right? Well, God used the political leader in Haggai's day, and He can use political leaders today, too.

Zerubbabel, the governor, was on board with God's plan. He was the signet ring after all. But not all political leaders are like Z. Can God use a political leader who doesn't seem to follow God's way?

Let's bring this home to our backyard. If you look back at America's history, you probably have opinions on who was a good president and who was not so good.

Can God use the not-so-good as part of His perfect plan? Read Daniel 4:17 and answer the following questions:

Who is sovereign over all kingdoms?

Who gives the kingdoms to anyone He wishes?

Who sets the "lowliest of people" in authority (CSB)?

No matter how high the office, no man is higher than the Most High. Think of it like this: America doesn't just elect a new commander-in-chief every four years to be president. God, the Commander of the universe, allows a person to be president. The Most High, our God, has got this! God is sovereign and in ultimate control, even over what seems totally crazy and out-of-control. God is ultimately in charge of those who are in charge—prophets, priests and, yes, even politicians (Rom. 13:1).

This is nothing new. It's been that way throughout history. Good kings, bad kings—all were under the rule of the King of kings.

One king who was part of Haggai's story proves this point: King Nebuchadnezzar. Everyone thought of King Nebuchadnezzar as the biggest, baddest king of his generation. And, in his mind, King Nebie thought of himself that way, too.

Read Jeremiah 27:1-6.

Describe what God called the vain king:

God called him "My servant." Sister, he sure wasn't God's servant in the way Jeremiah was, or in the way King David was, or in the way you and I want to be. He was pagan, pompous, and prideful.

## So why do you think God called Nebuchadnezzar His servant?

The Hebrew term for *servant* that we see in Haggai 2:23 is common in the Old Testament. It's often used to describe people the Lord calls or uses for special service, whether they are followers of God or pagans.<sup>13</sup> It's a tough truth to swallow, but Nebie served as a tool of God's judgment of His people. In other words, God's perfect plan was pulled off by a bad king. Even a bad king was under the rule of the King of kings.

God has ultimate influence over the hearts of leaders who influence the future of nations.

When we realize that God has priests, prophets, and leaders—every one of them—in His hands, we can stop wringing our own. We don't have to be discouraged, no matter how bleak the national news gets or how dysfunctional the government is. Instead, we can take courage and march on “For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:28).

There's a lot of wisdom in the way God instructed Haggai to address the people, isn't there? God wisely guides, corrects, instructs, and protects us today in the same ways. So trust His process.

Let's wind up this day of study with prayer.

Find in your Bible 1 Timothy 2:1-4 and use it to guide your prayer. In your prayer, include, as the verses instruct, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving for your leaders, both spiritual and political.

Dear God,

Amen.

Well, Session One is a wrap! Way to go, sister! You just won't believe how much we're about to learn together. Seriously, Haggai may be two little chapters, but it will be one big blessing in your life. Buckle up, sister, it's gonna get even better!

Love,



# *Notes*

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