

April 13, 2025 (Lesson 7)

GOD PROMISES BLESSINGS

1. **Healing and Rest** (Hosea 14:1-9)
2. **Peace and Restoration** (Zephaniah 3:9-20)
3. **A More Glorious Temple** (Haggai 1:13—2:9)

Central Truth: Astonishing blessings await the people of God.

Focus: Reflect on and anticipate divine blessings.

Evangelism Emphasis: Everyone who turns to God will be eternally blessed.

Golden Text: “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former . . . and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts” (Haggai 2:9).

Hope is an essential element of the Christian life. The Apostle Peter wrote to the early Christians, “Your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21 NKJV). But what is “hope”? People today often use the word *hope* as equivalent to the word *wish*. For example, “I hope it doesn’t rain,” or “I hope I don’t get stuck in traffic.” The Biblical meaning of *hope* is much more than “wishing.” *Hope* is expectancy based on faith. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for” (11:1 NASB).

Faith and hope work together to give us confidence in the promises of God. Without hope, we become discouraged and despondent. Paul encourages us to “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). Without hope, we cannot persevere. Without hope, we lose heart when faced with difficulties. Without hope, we cannot recover from failures. Without hope, we give in to temptation. Without hope, the future becomes bleak.

We are sustained by the hope of Jesus’ soon return. We are “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Hope gives us joy as we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). Our hope in the return of Jesus also gives us strength to live in holiness: “All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3 NIV).

The theme of hope pervades the Old Testament prophets. The prophecies of Hosea,

Zephaniah, and Haggai were written both to challenge God's people and to give them hope. As we reflect on the promises of God found in this week's lesson, we will be encouraged to live faithfully until Jesus Christ comes again.

1. HEALING AND REST

A. Bring Petitions to God (Hosea 14:1-3)

¹ O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. ² Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. ³ Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

After devoting the bulk of his preaching to condemnation and judgment, the prophet Hosea brings his message to a close with a word of opportunity and promise. Despite Israel's stubbornness and backsliding, they can find redemption if they will repent. Hosea invites them to pick up themselves from where they have "fallen" and "return to the Lord." In the Hebrew, the phrase "return to" is stronger here than in other scriptures (McComiskey, *Hosea*). The wording suggests genuine repentance (a complete return) and could be translated, "Return all the way back to the Lord."

Hosea supplies to Israel the necessary wording for their prayers of repentance. The Israelites should ask the Lord to "take away all iniquity," which signifies the removal of guilt. They also should plead for the Lord to "receive" them "graciously," an act that would transform them into faithful children of God. Next, they should say, "so will we render the calves of our lips." This vow seems strange to us, but it makes sense when we remember calves were offered as sacrifices and lips signify our words. Therefore, they are urged to "render" (which means "pay") to God sacrificial words (sacrifices of praise) (see Jer. 17:26; Heb. 13:15).

Furthermore, Israel must renounce their trust in Asshur (Assyria). God alone is worthy of their

trust. Assyria will not save them; “horses” will not save them; and the false gods they have been serving will not save them (Hos. 14:3). They must cast aside allegiances with other nations, not depend on their own military strength, and forsake idols. Instead, they must seek for the “mercy” of God. Israel can trust in the Lord because He cares for the weak. The “fatherless” have no resources, no family, and no support; but the Lord pours out His compassion on them. Just as the Lord cares for the orphan, He will care for His people when they are in a position of weakness.

The Bridge

To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Unless you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge.—Frederick Buechner

B. Receive Healing and Restoration (Hosea 14:4-9)

⁴ I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. ⁵ I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. ⁶ His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. ⁷ They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. ⁸ Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. ⁹ Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

The prophet verbalized Israel's prayer of repentance, and the Lord answered with three promises. First, the Lord would “heal their backsliding” (v. 4). Notably, the Lord did not speak of Israel's salvation in terms of forgiveness, but in terms of healing. This suggests the effects of sin go deeper than we may realize. Yes, sin creates guilt, and guilt must be pardoned (what Paul calls “justification”). However, sin is also a poison that produces a spiritual sickness which needs healing. Healing is accomplished through God's works of regeneration and sanctification. Freedom from

guilt without healing the soul is equivalent to a person with cancer whose tumor is not removed but who takes pain medication to ease their suffering. The pain may be relieved, but the illness remains; and the illness will manifest itself eventually.

Second, the Lord promised to “love them freely” because He was no longer angry with them. The Book of Hosea teaches that God never stops loving His people, although sometimes His love is accompanied by sorrow or anger because of their sin.

Third, the Lord promised to “be as the dew unto Israel,” which meant He would provide whatever was necessary for their prosperity. The dew represents God’s blessings on His people—blessings that would cause them to “grow as the lily” and spread out their “roots as Lebanon” (v. 5). Lebanon was famous for its giant cedar trees. Israel’s future prosperity is described further in terms of spreading branches, beauty “as the olive tree,” and a fragrance like Lebanon’s cedar (v. 6). Moreover, Israel’s healing will cause them to return and dwell in the Lord’s protection, “under his shadow” (v. 7); and they will grow like abundant crops. Amazingly, Ephraim, the worst of the idol worshipers, will abandon his idols; and he will confess the Lord is his source of fruitfulness (v. 8).

Hosea concludes his prophecies with a summary statement that emphasizes God’s righteousness. Everyone who is wise will know the Lord is “right” in His judgments and in His mercies. Therefore, if we desire to be “just,” we must walk in accord with the character of God as described in the Book of Hosea.

—How should we follow the example of Ephraim?

2. PEACE AND RESTORATION

A. Purified Lips (Zephaniah 3:9-13)

⁹ For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. ¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. ¹¹ In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for

then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. ¹² I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. ¹³ The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

We learned in lesson 4 of this unit that Zephaniah preached a message of severe judgment during the early years of King Josiah, about forty-five years before the Babylonians invaded and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Zephaniah's message supported Josiah's religious reforms that he instituted after he read the Book of the Law that had been discovered in the temple (2 Kings 22:3—23:25).

Like Hosea, Zephaniah began his prophecy with scathing rebuke but concluded with a word of hope. On the one hand, the first words of the prophecy are shocking: "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord" (1:2). On the other hand, the final section of Zephaniah's prophecy speaks about God's mercy and restoration of Judah. If Judah will turn to the Lord and "wait" on Him (3:8), they will see the nations judged while a remnant of Judah is restored.

Zephaniah turns his attention toward the Jews who had been scattered and "dispersed" among the nations (v. 10). God will cleanse their lips, restoring them to holiness; and they will call on the name of the Lord and serve Him once again (v. 9). Even as far away as Ethiopia, the dispersed Jews will bring offerings in worship to God. In that day, the Jews will no longer suffer shame because of their idolatry. They will humble themselves before the Lord (v. 11) and "trust" in His name (v. 12). There will be a remnant who are holy—they will no longer do wrong "nor speak lies." Therefore, they will live in peace (v. 13).

—How can God help us to overcome sinful speech, as seen in verses 9 and 13?

B. Joyful Songs (Zephaniah 3:14-20)

¹⁴ Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ The

Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. ¹⁶ In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. ¹⁷ The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

²⁰ At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

The conclusion of Zephaniah's prophecy is astonishing. After the prophet reveals the good news that a remnant will escape, he declares, "Sing . . . shout . . . be glad and rejoice" (v. 14). The phrase "daughter of Zion" refers to all of the people who are faithful to the Lord, and it is essentially the same as "Israel." The joy of the Lord is restored, and the people should rejoice with all their heart.

Verse 15 gives four reasons for rejoicing: (1) The Lord has removed His punishments. (2) The Lord has expelled the enemy. (3) The Lord is King over Israel and is dwelling in their midst. (4) They will not experience disaster anymore (the word *evil* refers to the disastrous effects of sin).

Because of God's work of restoration, Jerusalem will no longer have any reason to fear. The name *Zion* is another name for Jerusalem. They should not let their hands "be slack" (v. 16), which means "they should not be discouraged."

Judah and Jerusalem will have much to rejoice about. They will have many reasons to offer up praises to God. The Lord promises to be in the midst of His people, and that promise provides deep assurance about the future. There is no question the Lord "is mighty," and He guarantees to Judah that "he will save" (v. 17).

Not only will Judah and Jerusalem rejoice, but God himself will rejoice. "For the Lord takes delight in his people" (Ps. 149:1 NIV). For God to "rest in his love" (Zeph. 3:17) means His attitude of love toward us is settled forever. God will "rejoice" over His people "with joy," and He will even sing! The Hebrew word translated *singing* means "loud singing." The heart of God will be so full that

He will exult over us with loud singing!

Verses 18 and 19 portray the Lord as our Shepherd. He will reach out and gather everyone who is “sorrowful” or who has suffered “reproach.” He will deal with all enemies. He will heal the lame, and He will bring back those who are “driven out.” His hand will extend to “every land” where His people have been put to shame.

When the Lord gathers His people, He will give them “a name” (v. 20), which signifies “reputation” or “honor.” God’s people will have renown and praise in all the earth. The Lord declares to Judah, “I [will] turn back your captivity,” which means more than just a return to the land of Israel. It means He will bring them back and restore their prosperity, and they will see it with their own eyes!

God Delivers

Online buying is unlike the experience at a physical store, where the shopper can see a product, touch it, examine it, and sometimes even test it. Online shopping requires faith and trust in the seller’s promises. The shopper sends their payment to the seller in hope that their purchase will arrive on time. Unfortunately, a seller might be dishonest or make a mistake, and the customer is disappointed. Thankfully, God is not dishonest and He never errs; therefore, we will never be disappointed in His promises!

3. A MORE GLORIOUS TEMPLE

A. Rebuilding the Temple (Haggai 1:13—2:3)

1:13 Then spake Haggai the Lord’s messenger in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord. ¹⁴ And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

In Haggai 1:1, Haggai is called a “prophet,” but in verse 13, he is referred to as the “messenger” of the Lord. The expression *messenger of the Lord* is not applied to any other prophet, although the name of the prophet *Malachi* means “my messenger.” However, the role of messenger is a key element of the prophetic calling. It focuses on the idea that the prophet serves as an emissary, ambassador, or envoy for the Lord. The primary function of a messenger is to deliver the message, and that is exactly what Haggai did here—he spoke the Lord’s message to the people.

Like Hosea and Zephaniah, Haggai began with criticism of the people of Jerusalem who had returned from Babylon after the Exile. They had started to rebuild the temple but had become discouraged by the lack of resources. The Lord commanded Judah: “Consider your ways” (Hag. 1:5, 7).

When God saw the attitude of the people had changed and they had begun to collect building materials as He commanded (v. 8), Haggai’s second message was very different from his first one, and it was very powerful. The Lord said, “I am with you” (v. 13). The word *you* is in the plural, meaning “you all.” This word of encouragement would infuse new energy and excitement among the people. It would have reminded them of the times in the past when the Lord had spoken the same word to people who needed strength for the task: Jacob (Gen. 28:15), Moses (Ex. 3:12), Joshua (1:5), Gideon (Judg. 6:16), and Jeremiah (1:8).

With this guarantee of His presence, the Lord “stirred up the spirit” of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all of the remnant of the people (Hag. 1:14). The Hebrew word for *stirred* means their spirits were awakened, excited. They were revived and motivated to do the work of God (cf. Jer. 51:1; Ezra 1:5).

When they learned God was with them, they were eager and enthusiastic about proceeding with the rebuilding of the temple. They “came and worked on the house of the Lord, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month” (Hag. 1:14-15 NKJV), three weeks after the first prophecy, which

had called into question their loyalty and dedication to God. This date would have been in early autumn, during the time of harvest. It must have been very difficult to complete the harvest and begin the building program at the same time. This demonstrates there is never a convenient season to begin God's work. We must start now, when the Lord speaks to us.

After the people had worked for about a month on the rebuilding of the temple, the Lord gave a new revelation to the prophet Haggai. The purpose of this message was to encourage the people in their work. The Lord began His message by asking three questions: (1) Did any of you see the previous temple "in its former glory"? (2) "How do you see it now?" (3) Isn't this structure "nothing" compared to the former one? (2:3 NKJV). These questions imply some of the older people would have remembered Solomon's temple. After a month, the temple did not appear to be glorious. Instead, it looked quite insignificant and plain in comparison to the one Solomon had built with cedar, gold, silver, marble, and ivory. The Lord knew this kind of comparison was going on in the people's minds, and they were probably talking about it around the dinner table and as they worked. After only a month of work, the new temple would seem like nothing; therefore, the Lord did not want the people to get discouraged and stop working.

Stir Up the Gifts

Some are waiting passively for God to use them, but God is waiting for them to stir up the gifts that are within them. . . . Stir up what God has already given.—*Enduringword.com*

B. Filling His Temple With Glory (Haggai 2:4-9)

⁴ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: ⁵ According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. ⁶ For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; ⁷ And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith

the Lord of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. ⁹ The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

Verse 4 changes from questions to commands. Three times the Lord said to “be strong.” Then He repeated His earlier word of assurance: “because I am with you.” However, a new aspect of God’s commitment was revealed when He said, “According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!” (v. 5 NKJV). The Lord remembered His covenant and His promise to His people. The Hebrew word translated as “remaineth” means “stand,” so the phrase should read, “My Spirit stands in the midst of you. Do not fear!” The presence of the Holy Spirit brings hope and power to God’s people as they do His work.

At this point, the Lord began to speak about a future time, “a little while,” when He would “shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land” (v. 6). Since “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8), it is impossible to determine the length of “a little while.” The shaking is probably a symbolic reference to the dramatic and world-changing upheavals that would result from the coming of the Messiah. All the nations would shake, and the “desire of all nations” would come (Hag. 2:7). On the natural level, the “desire” refers to treasures such as silver and gold. On the spiritual level, it refers to Jesus.

On the natural level, the temple would be enhanced and glorified by the additions made by King Herod in the years just preceding the birth of Christ. Herod enlarged the temple and decorated it with precious metals. He also crafted new furnishings, such as the golden lampstand, and made them more elaborate than they had ever been. Many resources were required to accomplish such a splendid task, but obtaining resources is not a problem for God, who said, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine” (2:8).

On the spiritual level, when God says, “I will fill this house with glory,” He meant the temple would take on new meaning in the messianic age, after the Savior was born. In the physical and the spiritual sense, the glory of the new temple would “be greater than” the glory of Solomon’s temple. Furthermore, the new temple would stand for five hundred years, whereas Solomon’s temple stood less than four hundred years.

The future glory of the temple was capped off with the promise of peace: “And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts” (2:9). The promise of peace was a promise of wholeness, prosperity, and blessedness. This promise was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

—*What should the Lord’s statement in verse 8 encourage us?*

A DAY OF HOPE

Do we have hope in God’s promises for the future? Do we understand how important it is to look expectantly for the coming of the Lord? Paul said the “day of Christ is near” (2 Thess. 2:2; Rom. 13:12; Phil. 4:5). Peter agreed, saying, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray” (1 Peter 4:7 NIV). The Lord will return very soon; therefore, we must watch and pray. The Day of the Lord will be a day of judgment for those who do not know the Lord; but for God’s children, it is a day of hope. Therefore, believers should “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18).

Daily Devotions

- M. Blessings for the Obedient (Deuteronomy 11:8-15)
- T. Blessings for the Reverent (Psalm 128:1-6)
- W. Prayer for Restoration (Lamentations 5:1-3, 15-22)
- T. Unexpected Blessings Pronounced (Matthew 5:1-12)
- F. Resurrected Bodies (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)
- S. The Lamb’s Marriage Supper (Revelation 19:1-10)