

Anchored by Messianic Promises (Lesson 7)

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Words to Anchor Your Soul

“In that day there will be a fountain opened up for the dynasty of David and the people of Jerusalem for sin and impurity.”

[Zechariah 13:1](#) (NET)

Introduction

A “do-over”! Sometimes we get to go back and try again without being penalized in a game when we play with gracious people, but life doesn’t afford us “do-overs.” How we long to be able to go into the past and fix our mistakes! Instead of going back and redoing life, God does provide for our mistakes. He totally forgives our sins and uses even the worst of our mistakes and circumstances for good ([Rom. 8:28-29](#)).

Despite the sins of the Jews, which resulted in their exile from the land, God gave them hope and the chance to learn and begin again. He reminded them that His promises to David given long, long before would last forever because they depended upon God’s faithfulness rather than the faithfulness of His people. He promised that One would come whom He had anointed to rule the house of David in glory, whom we now know was Jesus. He promised a future day when justice would prevail and all wrongs would be made right.

Background of the Post-Exilic Prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

We have covered selected studies in the prophets in a somewhat chronological fashion. We spent five weeks reading in the pre-exilic prophets, who spoke before the final exile and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Last week we read Lamentations, which detailed the terrible things that occurred when the Babylonians besieged and then destroyed the city.

Ezekiel and Daniel experienced the exile and wrote during that time while in a foreign land. We will not read from their prophecies in this study because of their lengths; hopefully, you can study them in the future.

The Israelites began returning to their land after King Cyrus of Persia decreed that they could go back in 538 B.C.²⁸ The initial group returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel; the second group came with Ezra, the priest, in 458 B.C.; and Nehemiah led the third return in 444 B.C.

This week we will read portions of the three Minor Prophets who prophesied in Jerusalem after the Jews returned to the land: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The first of the three is Haggai, whose prophecies date to 520 B.C. (Compare with the dates above.) His is a message of priorities. Days Two and Three will be spent reading selected sections of Zechariah; on Day Four

you will turn to Malachi. I have included extra stories this week because they were all so good! I hope you take the time to read them all and complete all of your work because I know that it will richly bless your life.

Day One Study

As background for the message of Haggai, we need to read excerpts from the book of Ezra. The first six chapters of Ezra relate what had already occurred in Jerusalem in the eighty years before Ezra arrived there.

Read [Ezra 1:1-4](#).

1. Write down the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of this story, or write a “newspaper article” about it.

Diamonds in the Word: Read [Ezra 1](#)--6, noting the events and the dates given.

Read [Ezra 3:1-8](#). Note that v. 1-6 occurred during the first year that the first group of returnees was back in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. Then, there was a two-year break before they began building the temple.

[Ezra 4:1-16](#) tells us that the enemies of the Jews did not want them to finish rebuilding the city and its temple. They used tactics of discouragement and accusation.

Finally, the people stopped work on the temple entirely in 535 B.C. Fifteen years later, in 520 B.C., God spoke to His people in Jerusalem through His prophet Haggai.

Read [Haggai 1:1-15](#).

2. What was wrong with the priorities of the people, and how had God responded to those misplaced priorities?

Before we move on today with Haggai and his message, read these two stories about women who learned that prioritizing God and His kingdom brings blessing!

Kay S's Story

In the early spring of 1991, my husband, Terry, came to me and said he believed the Lord was leading us to move to Russia with Campus Crusade for Christ. For the previous two years, he had been traveling in and out of the Soviet Union working with the underground church. Politically, things were rapidly changing and it became apparent that soon Christians would be able to live and work openly.

The week after Terry's announcement, I spent concentrated time with the Lord. He graciously confirmed to me that moving to Moscow was indeed His will for our family.

The six months before we moved were incredibly busy. We sold most of our furniture, our cars and even some of our clothes. As our home slowly emptied out, I began to panic. We had an eight-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son. Not only were Terry and I giving up the comforts of the U.S., but so were our children.

The Soviet Union was still intact when we moved to Moscow in October of 1991. We lived in a cramped, drab Russian apartment. There were days we had no electricity and no hot water. Sometimes we had no water at all. We stood in line in snow and ice to buy bread. Occasionally, we would get close to the front of the line only to have the store close because it had run out of bread. We had no car and for almost a year were completely dependent on public transportation. Our first several months in Moscow I struggled with all we lacked and had given up. We had no car, no conveniences, and sometimes limited food choices. Not only had I had given up most of the things I was so accustomed to, but I also found I had lost most of my personality because I could not communicate. I mostly came across to my Russian neighbors as a mute American woman who could only stare blankly at them as they spoke to me. I felt like the Lord had led me into a material and personal wasteland.

What was the result? Christ blessed our family with four of the most wonderful years we have ever had. We grew closer to each other in ways that would not have been possible in the U.S. As a family, we saw the Lord's hand of blessing and provision over and over again. As time went on, we all slowly learned Russian and became accustomed to life in Moscow. Terry and I were blessed with a fulfilling ministry working alongside godly men and women.

I realized that all the things I had given up by moving to Russia were more than replaced by the Lord. They weren't necessarily replaced by other material things but by spiritual and relational blessings far more valuable.

Dixie's Story

My favorite thing to do is "nest." Fixing up my home and making it warm and inviting brings me great joy. In 26 years of marriage, we have lived in 8 cities. Moving meant new decorating! Let the fun begin!

With each move, I would become consumed with getting the house "done." I would wake up thinking about it, and after getting the kids off to school the car seemed to go straight to the shops. Yes, I had quiet times, attended Bible study, and went to church on Wednesday nights, and Sundays, but the thing that brought me the greatest satisfaction was decorating.

In 1990, we made a move from Nashville to Baltimore. This was one move I did not want to make, but God put it on my heart to trust Him, and to move, looking for ways to serve Him in Baltimore.

Shortly after moving in, the phone rang. The wife of the president of my husband's company explained that God had put it on her heart to gather a group of women together weekly in her home for prayer and study, and to seek the Lord about starting a city-wide Bible study class for women and their children in Baltimore. I said I'd come, but with hesitation. I had a house to fix up, and kids to get settled, new neighbors to meet.

About ten of us met for several months in prayer. The Lord raised up small group leaders, a teacher, and a church. No one was stepping up to be the Children's Director. It was surely not to be me because I had three children, ages three, six and nine. I had things to do. But of course, God kept urging me, telling me this was my ministry to women. This was the way I was going to serve Him in this new town.

My three-year-old was in Mother's Day Out Tuesdays and Thursdays, the only time to "run errands." Those times were spent, instead, preparing for the upcoming Bible study. The summer was then spent recruiting teachers and gathering supplies for the nursery and preschool children's classes, putting together arts and crafts projects, and planning little teaching sessions for the older kids. I even attended a leaders' retreat to learn my role as the children's director, using my "decorating money" to pay for a baby sitter.

A great number of women and children had signed up for the class, which would start in September. In late August I was getting weary and selfish, tired of planning and preparing. One day I was driving from the host church, after having dropped off a carload of supplies, and I started complaining. "Lord, I don't want to be doing this! Why did I sign up for this? Two days every week for the next nine months will be consumed with this. I will have to get there early and stay late! Poor, pitiful me!" And very clearly and silently, the Lord impressed on my heart, "My child, on what better thing could you be spending your time?"

And I knew then that I would choose God over things. I knew there was not one single thing that would be better than serving these little children, teaching them about Jesus, singing praise songs with them, presiding over their selfless teachers, serving them crackers and juice, and letting their mothers have precious needed time in Bible study and fellowship with other women.

The first year of this study God provided for every need. I don't think I ever missed a day. If one of my own children got sick, I don't remember, they must have been taken care of somehow. I made a multitude of new friends in the faith. I served on a leadership team of older wiser women who impacted my life forever, as I observed their Christ-centered lives. I soaked up Truth as we met as a leaders group. These were some of the benefits to me from choosing God over things.

Young mothers got to be refreshed while being with other women, sharing God's Word, and hopefully having transformed lives. Perhaps these women, who were served, are serving others today. Perhaps these little children are now shining examples of Christ-centered youth. I will never know the full impact of making this one decision to put God before things. God showed me that life is not about me, but about Him.

Years have come and gone since then and we have moved a few times more. God has continued to provide our family with a perfectly satisfactory nest in which to "fluff up," and live and share with others. These days, however, my favorite words are becoming "down-size, de-clutter, clean out and throw away!"

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

3. *Sharing question:* Consider your priorities. How do you measure them—in time, in effort, in money? How do misplaced priorities keep you from anchoring your soul in God? Is God showing you that any of yours are out of order through the prophet Haggai?

Read [Haggai 2:1-9](#).

4. What promises did God give those who built the new temple? Why would these promises have been an encouragement to them?

5. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer or poem committing to God as first in your life. If He showed you today that you need to confess any wrong priorities, do so, knowing that God forgives but asks you to repent. Once you confess, it is time to act. What do you need to do? Do you need to write a check for God's work, go next door and spend time with your neighbor, take your place in ministry, streamline your life, or commit to get up early for time with God?

Day Two Study

Today we will turn our attention to the prophecies of Zechariah, the second of the three post-exilic prophets in Israel. According to [Zech. 1:1](#), God first spoke to the prophet two months after Haggai gave his first prophecy. [Ezra 5:1](#) tells us that it was the words of Haggai and Zechariah that resulted in the resumption of work on the temple!

Dr. Eugene Merrill says this about the message of Zechariah:

“The prophet is concerned to comfort his discouraged and pessimistic compatriots, who are in the process of rebuilding their Temple and restructuring their community but who view their efforts as making little difference in the present and offering no hope for the future He challenges members of the restored remnant to go to work with the full understanding that what they do, feeble as it appears, will be crowned with success when YHWH, true to His covenant word, will bring to pass the fulfillment of His ancient promises to the fathers.”²⁹

Diamonds in the Word: Spend time today and tomorrow reading and charting the book of Zechariah as best you can in a limited time.

Read [Zechariah 1:1-11](#).

6. How did Zechariah rebuke those who returned to the land?

Read [Zechariah 7:1-14](#). This is dated 22 months after the previous visions.

The people asked the priests whether they should continue fasting during the fifth month (7:2-3). This yearly fast was a reminder of and time of lament over the destruction of the temple on August 14, 586 B.C.³⁰ The fast in the seventh month (7:5) “apparently refers to the anniversary of the assassination of Gedaliah, governor of Judah ([Jer. 40:13-14; 41:1](#)) in approximately 581 B. C.”³¹

7. What do these verses teach you about fasting that is done truly for God?

Read [Zechariah 8:1-23](#).

8. *How do these verses relate to the original question in 7:2-3?*

9. *Sharing question:* Share your experiences with fasting. What did you do and how did it affect you?

10. *Responding to God:* God's rebuke of the people over their fasting is another example of wrong priorities. They followed religious ritual but ignored issues of the heart. Spend time listening to God. Write down what He tells you about your religious ritual—yes, even in an evangelical church! What do you need to do about it?

Day Three Study

Read [Zechariah 12:1-14](#). The promises concerning Jerusalem have not yet been fulfilled in this way; yet, God is faithful; He anchors His promises in His own faithful character.

11. Compare [Zechariah 12:10-14](#) with [John 19:35-37](#) (note the context) and [Rev. 1:7](#). What do you learn about these prophecies in Zechariah?

We understand some of these verses to be yet future. The day has not come when God has fulfilled all of these promises.

Read [Zechariah 13:1](#), our memory verse.

12. Compare this verse with [Hebrews 10:10-18](#). Write down your insights.

13. *Sharing question:* What does it mean to you that your sins are totally washed away?

Read also [Zechariah 14:2-9](#).

14. Let's compare Zechariah's words with some other verses. Write down any parallels with [Zech. 12:1-14; 14:2-8](#):

a. [Revelation 19:11-16](#), 20-21

b. [Revelation 20:7-9](#)

15. *Responding to God:* Spend time drawing a picture of the coming King in all of His glory. Meditate upon that day and all that it means. Express before God how much you long to see Jesus.

Day Four Study

Today we will read from the book of Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets. Although his book is difficult to date, Malachi likely prophesied between 480-470 B.C.³² Dr. Boice says, “The book of Malachi is located at a point of transition, too. It comes at the end of the Old Testament, but it anticipates the New Testament.”³³

Read [Malachi 1:6-14](#).

16. What religious hypocrisy and wrong priorities did Malachi rebuke?

17. *Sharing question:* Malachi seems to be rehashing problems that we have seen over and over throughout the prophets’ messages. What sins do you fall into over and over? Where are your weaknesses? Use your small group to make yourself accountable to others. What one thing can you implement in your life to help prevent this recurring sin?

Diamonds in the Word: Read the book of Malachi today and tomorrow, noting God’s comments to the priests, the questions they give in reply, and God’s answers.

Dr. Merrill says that for the people to whom Malachi spoke

“theirs was not the problem of rebuilding the Temple and holy city, for that had long been done by Malachi’s day; rather, it was the issue of holy living and holy service in the aftermath of all the external accomplishments. Malachi, though dead, yet speaks to the modern world about the need to bring performance into line with profession. His message, therefore, is current, especially in light of the coming of the One of whom the prophet so eloquently spoke.”³⁴

Read [Malachi 2:13-3:5](#).

18. Why did God refuse to honor the offerings of the people and why had He grown tired of their words? How did their profession not line up with their performance?

Two of my friends have shared the difficult stories of their divorces. I so appreciate their willingness to relive that hard part of their lives so that we can see real life examples of why God hates divorce and why He wants us to marry strong believers. God in His grace has brought blessing despite poor choices.

Doris’ Story

I married young – against my parents’ wishes. Without seeking God’s will. It was all me. It was what I wanted.

For 13 years my husband and I did not miss a Sunday in church. I served in various ministries and participated in all the activities. We were faithful in our giving. By all outside appearances we were a “lovely family.” A precious little girl and then God gave us a darling little boy. We were perfect. All was complete, but, Satan was working, gleeful and deceitful. Little by little the years of hurt and pretense began to erode our false façade. My husband became even more controlling and abusive, both physically and emotionally, to me and to the children. I feared for

our safety. Finally, I knew that I could not stand by one more day and let anything else happen to the children; after much counseling I filed for divorce.

It was unbelievably hard and during the process I began to turn my anger toward God. After all, if He truly loved me after I had been so faithful to Him how could He let this happen—never mind the fact that I had made a rebellious choice when I married in the first place, not honoring my parents and not honoring God’s presence in my life. For a full year I was so angry with God that I would deliberately take a different street so I wouldn’t drive by my church. It was all His fault, I reasoned—He had let me down. It was all about me. I didn’t go to church and I didn’t teach my children about God.

And then one day God lifted the veil from my eyes and from my heart—praise the Lord. I was watching my children play and like a bolt of lightning, I realized how I was depriving them of loving the Lord—the same Lord who had guided me from the cradle in my precious Christian home and family. A flood of emotion followed and I asked our precious Father for His forgiveness and restoration. And, He has blessed me beyond measure since that day. He has allowed me to see my children accept Him as their Lord and Savior. Praise!

Our Lord God has given us all the tools and He has made us to fit those tools. It’s so simple—all we have to do is acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior and love Him back the way He loves us. I almost deprived my children of their inheritance from their Heavenly Father and I praise the Lord every day that He had a different plan for them and for me.

He has blessed me with a wonderful godly husband of 22 years and each and every day I thank Him for remembering me when I ignored Him. Praise the Lord!

Sammy’s story

Right after college graduation, I married my high school sweetheart. It was wonderful. We were madly in love and convinced that only “death would us part.” He was the football hero and voted most handsome and most likely to succeed. I was the senior class president and a majorette for the band. We were the perfect couple. We were both believers and went to church every week. After a few months of marriage, we both began graduate school. I taught school and went to school at night. My husband went to school full time.

Somewhere along the line we began living separate lives. We never argued or had unkind words. We simply never talked about anything except what to get at the grocery store and what clothes needed to go to the dry cleaners. I became resentful but never expressed my feelings. My husband worked hard at making wonderful grades, and soon both of us graduated.

He was offered a job a long way from home and we excitedly packed up and moved. I found a job and soon we were both working and making new friends. We both became homesick for family, so after a year we moved back home. Again, both of us got jobs and appeared to be the perfect couple. We never shared our deepest feelings and/or fears. We just rocked along. Then, I broke the marriage vows and started having an affair. Right away I told my husband what I was doing. He divorced me practically on the spot. We didn’t go to marriage counseling; we didn’t

discuss why I was doing what I was doing. The marriage was over. Within three months of our divorce, my ex had remarried and they are still married today.

God is gracious, and within five years I was planning another marriage. During this time, I had done a lot of soul searching and Christian counseling. I learned that I was a baby Christian and that God hated divorce. I began growing spiritually and started attending a Bible-based church. I had such guilt and wished I could talk with my ex and apologize for the pain I had caused both of us.

Today I am happily married with children. I have been forgiven much, but my divorce still haunts me. I wish I didn't have to explain that part of my life to our children. I pray they will not go through divorce. I am a different person now. I understand a lot better now that what I did years ago was a symptom of a bigger problem, but divorce does carry life-long consequences. I wouldn't recommend it.

19. *Sharing question:* These two women experienced the terrible ordeal of divorce, as a consequence of their own choices. Although the children of Israel experienced the ordeal of captivity and of returning to a land that they no longer ruled because of their choice to ignore God, He continued to give them hope for the future because of His loyal love and faithfulness to His promises of old. How does that encourage you today?

Read [Malachi 3:6-15](#).

20. What do you learn about the character of God in 3:6 that gives you hope and anchors you when you find yourself far from God?

21. Describe the attitudes of the people. How are they similar to those you see in people today?

Read [Malachi 3:16-4:6](#). Malachi's words did impact some of the people.

22. *Responding to God:* Ask God to use His word to continue to speak to you, just as He used it in Malachi's day.

Day Five Study

It may be hard to believe, but today is your last day of study! I pray that God has used His Word to anchor your soul more firmly in Him. You may face mighty storms but your anchor will hold you tightly and keep you close to the One who loves you more than you can even imagine!

Read [Psalm 50](#).

23. Compare the message in this psalm with what you read in these three prophets this week.

24. *Sharing question:* What line of this psalm speaks to you today? Why?

25. *Sharing question:* How have the words of the various prophets that we have studied for the past seven weeks impacted you?

26. *Sharing question:* You have read the stories of women throughout this study. Think of what God has done for you while you have studied with your small group this semester. Write out your own story of God's work in your life during this time period. Write it in detail and be ready to read it to your group. If you would, send it to me so that I have it to share with future groups of women as well! (Your name can be totally confidential. Only I will know who you really are. I often change the names of women who give me these stories. Some of the names in this study are not the real names, but the stories are!)

27. *Responding to God:* Write a prayer thanking God for all He has taught you this semester, for your small group, and for the coming King!

I hope that you have been blessed by the study of these prophets and psalms. May you continue to hunger and thirst for the things of God!