



August 31, 2014  
Haggai 1:1-15; 2:15-23  
Pastor Larry Adams

## Haggai - The Importance of God's Priorities

Hello, my name is Larry Adams, and I want to take a moment to personally thank you for tuning into this week's podcast where you downloaded or are streaming this week's Bible message. I hope it will be a great encouragement to you, and it's our prayer that God will use it to strengthen your faith.

I just want to be sure to tell you too that we in no way intend for this message to be a replacement for your weekly involvement in a good local church. We hope that you are involved in a church in your community to worship, grow, and serve and to sit under the authority of pastors and teachers who can speak into your lives. We also realize that around the world there are places where there is no local church, so we're hoping that these messages each week will be a great encouragement to you and anyone else you may be gathering with to pray with, encourage, and to share with in this message. Thank you again for downloading this message, and we hope it will be a great blessing in your life.

If you have your Bibles today, I'd like you to turn with me if you would to the Old Testament to the book of Haggai. We're continuing on in our series "The Prophetable Church: Major Lessons From the Minor Prophets." The church is to be nonprofit in a financial sense, but we are never to be non-prophet in declaring God's word. You and I, believers in Jesus who make up the church, are to be a prophetable church. We are to be always living, obeying, and proclaiming the word of the Lord. We are following in a great tradition of men and women who come before us who have been faithful in their generation such as the minor prophets of the Old Testament.

Today, we're gonna be looking at Haggai. Haggai was the first of the post-exilic prophets, the first to begin preaching after the return from Babylon after the judgment of captivity. Haggai is calling the people back to living by God's priorities because they were neglecting the very work that God had called them to do and because of that missing out on the blessing of God. Haggai is a book about calling us to experience God's blessings by living out the priorities he's called us to do. Here's the way Haggai recorded it in Chapter 1 verse 1:

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:

<sup>2</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: **"These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house.'"**

<sup>3</sup>Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup>**"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"**

<sup>5</sup>Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: **"Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup>You 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."**

<sup>7</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: **“Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go 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. <sup>9</sup> **“You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?”** declares the LORD Almighty. **“Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. <sup>11</sup> I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”**

<sup>12</sup> Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: **“I am with you,”** declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup> So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, <sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

Chapter 2 verse 15:

**“Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. <sup>16</sup> When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. <sup>17</sup> I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,”** declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> **“From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: <sup>19</sup> Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.**

**“From this day on I will bless you.”**

<sup>20</sup> The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: <sup>21</sup> **“Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. <sup>22</sup> I 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, each by the sword of his brother.**

<sup>23</sup> **“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.

Let’s pray together.

*Lord, these words are powerful and as relevant today as they’ve ever been. A whole generation of people came back to the land under your mighty hand and fell into complacency that kept them from doing the very work you sent them to do. You raised up Haggai to stir their hearts to call them back to a place of faithfulness. Thank you, God, for the work you are still doing in your*

*people today and for messages like this one that can stir us up continually with the importance of God's priorities and we'll thank you for all that you'll show us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Over time, our true priorities cannot remain hidden. They will show by the way we live. I was reading about a man who everyone knew his highest priority was playing golf. His boss knew it; his family knew it. He always worked his schedule to make sure he had time to play golf.

One day he was standing on the tee getting ready to shoot when a funeral procession was going by. To the surprise of his friends he stopped, took off his hat, put it over his heart, bowed his head, and stood reverently as the hearse went by. When it passed, his friends said to him, "Wow, we had no idea you were so devoted or reverent about the dearly departed."

The man said, "Well, we were married for 34 years."

When I read what I hope is an apocryphal story, I thought it illustrates so well the point that Haggai's trying to make. Whatever it is, over time our true priorities will come out by the way we live. Whatever our true priorities are, they will show. We can give lip service to what we say we truly value, but our actions eventually reveal what our top priorities are. That's especially true when it comes to revealing the real priority in people's lives of where God fits and where the things of God fit. We can say that God is first, but the reality is it will show whether that's true or not by the way we live. That's what the prophet Haggai was preaching at a time when God and the work of God was not the priority of God's people.

Haggai, as I mentioned, was the first of the post-exilic prophets. You remember, the people of Israel, the people of Jerusalem, had been carried off 70 years earlier into Babylon as a judgment of God. Up to this time, all the prophets we'd been studying were preaching to the people about how to prepare and avoid that judgment, but that judgment fell. In fact, in 586 B.C., the Babylonians completed their conquest of Judah, carried the people off to captivity, and destroyed the city and Solomon's temple.

God had decreed that this captivity would last for 70 years. In that amount of time, Babylon was eventually conquered by the Persians. Under the Persian King Cyrus, captive peoples were sent back to their homes, such as Jerusalem, and in this case sent back with the orders to rebuild the temple and reestablish the worship in Jerusalem of Jehovah God. So, in 538 B.C., some Jews returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel their governor, Joshua their high priest, and Ezra their scribe. In fact, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther give a lot closer look at the details of what was going on in Persia at that time as well as back in Jerusalem.

The first returnees laid out the temple foundation, but that's as far as it went then the work stopped. They had a lot of excuses: Samaritan opposition from the north, some saying because it was a lack of resources, but the real issue was complacency. Many of these people had never lived in Jerusalem. Remember, their ancestors were taken captive, and for 70 years they had been there. Many these people were born in Babylon. That's all they had ever known. Their homes were there. Their jobs were there. Their lives were there, and now they're caught up in a movement of returnees going back to what their ancestors said was their homeland. But they had never lived in Jerusalem before, many of them.

Building a temple was a lot of work, and there were so many other priorities that needed to be addressed like building their own homes, repairing the city, planting crops, and restarting commerce. The temple foundation was laid, but for 18 years the construction was abandoned. The temple sat there in ruins, so God raised up Haggai to stir the people up and get them back to living by God's priorities not their own.

Haggai's messages consist of four oracles, or proclamations, that began on the 29th of August in 520 B.C. and continued for four months up until the 18<sup>th</sup> of December of that same year. These messages were directed to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people who

returned. But the last oracle #4 is powerful, and it was given to Zerubbabel himself. Haggai apparently had seen Solomon's temple before the captivity as a young boy. He had spent those years in Babylon as a captive. Now, returning as a man he would be at least in his late 70s or in his 80s if not older. He's calling the people back to fulfilling God's priority, and the people obeyed. The work began on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December in 520 B.C., and four years later in 516 the temple was finished, 70 years after it had been destroyed just as God said through Jeremiah it would.

We learn a lot of things from this short book, the chief of which is that living by God's priorities is the key to his continued blessing. What were God's priorities that Haggai had to call the people to remember? That God's interests must come before our interests, and that our obedience must come before our displays of worship. Living by God's priorities means that God's interests must come before our interests. Haggai put it like this in Chapter 1 verse 1:

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:

<sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: **“These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’”**

<sup>3</sup> Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> **“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”**

<sup>5</sup> Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: **“Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You 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.”**

<sup>7</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: **“Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go 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. <sup>9</sup> **“You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?”** declares the LORD Almighty. **“Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. <sup>11</sup> I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”**

Karla and I have lived those wrong priorities. In 1983, we were living in Oregon. I had finished up my master's work, and I wanted to stay there and be a youth pastor in a church I really liked in an area I really liked. But we got a call to come down and consider the possibility of planting a church here in the Antioch area, and I didn't want to do it. So when I came down to meet with the people, I fully came with the idea of telling them, “No.” I had my agenda. I knew where I wanted to live, what I wanted to do, what I wanted to do to serve. So we came down and told them, “No.”

When I went back home to Oregon, nothing was going right. I was miserable. You see, I was telling God, “This is the ministry I want to do. This is the house I want to live in. This is the land I want to buy. This is the ministry I want to carry out, and I'm gonna do this for you, God.” You see, I was more interested in what I wanted than what God wanted. So when we got a second call to come back and consider planting a church in the Antioch area, I told Karla, “We gotta go down there and put this thing to rest.”

The night before I was supposed to speak to a group of people that were asking me to consider this, was one of the most miserable nights I've ever had. I remember Karla saying to me, "Larry, I think one of the reasons you are so miserable is God wants you to come here to serve him, but you're not willing." She was right. If you've heard the longer version of the story, you know I had a long wrestling with God that night.

I came back in and I said, "Hon, we gotta come here because God wants us to come here, and I can't tell him 'No' any longer." When I think back what would've been different over the last 30 years, the hundreds and hundreds of people whose lives may not have been touched, and the course of disobedience I would've set my life on with that decision makes me shudder at the prospect that I would have any inclination to tell God "No" ever again.

That's the way the people were living in Haggai's day. It wasn't that they were bad people. They just wanted what they wanted more than they wanted what God wanted. So they who came back to build the temple of God, which is the primary reason God sent them back, they built a foundation and stopped. Haggai reminded the people that they were putting their interests ahead of God's interests, and that's why things were so difficult. Haggai reminded them in Chapter 1 verse 3:

The word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> **"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"**

The people kept saying, "Well, the time isn't right. We don't have the time. We don't have the money. We have so many things against us. We just don't have time to work on the temple."

God reminds them through Haggai, **"Well, you know what? You've had plenty of time to fix up your houses. In fact, they're not only built, you're paneling them out. You got great landscaping, and you keep making them bigger and better, but you still don't have time to deal with my house. You've planted your crops. You've rebuilt your commerce, and you've had money to do all those things, but you keep telling me you don't have the resources to do my work. Your priorities are selfish, and they are backwards,"** so God told them, **"That's why you work so hard and you have so little to show for it. Your priorities are all wrong and I can't bless it."** Chapter 1 verse 5:

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: **"Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You 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."**

**"Haven't you noticed you're working harder and harder and harder, you have less and less and less, and you're less and less satisfied? Haven't you noticed?"**

**"Give careful thought to your ways."**

It's a Hebrew expression saying, "Be careful what you've set your heart on."

**"You have your heart set on yourself and on your houses and on your ways and on your business, and all these things, but you do not have a heart set on my priorities."** So repeatedly he says:

**"Give careful thought to your ways."**

**"Your heart is not invested in my work. You're using my resources first for you, and I get the leftovers."** Haggai 1 verse 7:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: **“Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go 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. <sup>9</sup>**“You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?”** declares the LORD Almighty. **“Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.”**

You see, the people made the mistake of accepting God's blessings but using all of those blessings first for themselves and not for God. That still largely happens today. People take care of their homes, their needs, their wants first, and God gets the leftovers. There is no kingdom priority to the use of their time or talent or treasure. The work of God is often left undone, and God can't bless the work of their hands. There is a reason why so many people can get more and more and more and still not be satisfied. It has always been God's priority that we would live kingdom first, putting God's interests ahead of our own.

Do you remember in Matthew 6 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is talking to the crowds and to the disciples. They lived in days of great need. The needs were real just like they are today. People are always worrying about, Where am I gonna get food? Where am I gonna get clothes? Where am I gonna get shelter? The basic needs of life. Jesus asked them a question that must have shocked them: **“Why are you worried about those things?”**

Well, their thought was, “Well, if I don't do this, who is gonna provide for me?” Yes, you have to go to work. Yes, you have to do your part, but remember, it's God who provides. That's why he said in Matthew Chapter 6 verse 31:

**So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

Is it possible, if we're not careful, that Christians can be running around chasing after things out of their worry that we gotta have this and this and this, and if I don't do this, this, and this we're not gonna have this? That's what the pagans do because they don't have a God in their life that provides for them. But Jesus said, **“If you're one of my followers, you don't have to do that. Yes, you go to work. Yes, you have responsibilities. You have bills to pay, and all those things. But remember this: You're not supplying that for you, I am. You may not live in a mansion. You may not drive a brand new car, and you may not have copious amounts of money in the bank. You may not have a beautifully outfitted lawn. You may not even own your house. You may drive a borrowed car, but you need to understand when it comes to what you will eat, what you will wear, and where you will live I will take care of that for you.”** So, he said, **“Seek me and my kingdom first, otherwise your priorities will get out of whack and you will misuse most of what I put in your hands. You'll have more and more, but never be satisfied. You'll be always worrying about how to hold onto what you have, and you'll forget it's not yours, it's mine.”**

This is what was happening with the people in Haggai's day, so he brought them a powerful life lesson, a reminder of the importance of keeping God's interests ahead of their own. I've fallen prey to this too many times, and I want it gone from my life. I don't get it right all the time, but I want to. So I think it's good ask the question from time to time of ourselves, Could you say -- could I say -- today that in the use of my time, my talent, and my treasure that we are putting God's interests ahead of our own, or is it the other way around? Honestly. I've had to face it, and I had to admit that I had my interest ahead of God's.

Could we say that in all of our praying, giving, and serving that God's interests and God's kingdom priorities are really first? Perhaps one of the reasons our lives are such a struggle is that we aren't experiencing the fullness of God's blessings because our priorities are more about us than about God.

Not only God's interests before our own, but living by God's priorities means that our obedience must come before our displays of worship. Haggai said in Chapter 1 verse 12:

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

They respected him. They revered him.

<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: **"I am with you,"** declares the LORD. <sup>14</sup> So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, <sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

In Chapter 2 verse 10, this interesting question to the priests:

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: <sup>11</sup> "This is what the LORD Almighty says: **'Ask the priests what the law says: <sup>12</sup> If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?'**"

The priests answered, "No."

<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?"

"Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."

<sup>14</sup> Then Haggai said, **"So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,"** declares the LORD. **'Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.'**"

I was reading about an evangelist who was preaching with a great deal of zeal on the passage, "Thou shalt not steal." He was impressing upon his listeners the necessity of absolute integrity in everything. The next morning he boarded a bus and gave the driver a dollar for his fare, and the driver gave him back a little change, but in counting the change he found that he had received an extra quarter. Without hesitation, he approached the driver and he said, "You accidentally gave me too much change."

The driver said, "It wasn't an accident. I did it on purpose to see what you would do. Last night I was in your meeting where you talked about the need for absolute integrity in everything. When I saw you coming, I determined I was gonna put extra change in your hand. If you saw it and returned it, I would know I could return tonight and believe that what you're giving me is truly the word of the Lord."

You know it's one thing to be seen or known publicly as a worshiper of God. It is another thing entirely to actually be one in everything. We can't be refusing to obey God in one area of our life and then expect that God will accept our worship or our ministry. We must be willing to obey God before we can truly be worshipers of him, and that's what the people in Haggai's day had to learn. Haggai told the people that God doesn't accept your worship because it isn't accompanied by obedience. In Chapter 2 verse 10 it says:

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: <sup>11</sup>“This is what the LORD Almighty says: **‘Ask the priests what the law says: <sup>12</sup> If someone carries consecrated meat (meat that has been set apart for sacrifice and holy to the Lord) in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’**” (Does it make it holy?)

The priests answered, “No.”

**“The groceries aren’t made holy because it touched the fold of a garment that held consecrated meat. That isn’t how it works.”**

<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai said, **“If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?”**

“Yes,” the priests replied, “it becomes defiled.”

“The law declares if you’ve touched a dead body and then willfully go and touch the consecrated things, you make them defiled. It’s clear.”

<sup>14</sup> Then Haggai said, **“‘So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.’”**

You see, even though the temple was still in ruins 18 years later, a testimony to their prolonged disobedience, the people were still bringing sacrifices to the site as an act of worship. God was asking them, **“Do you think that because you come to this temple site that your offerings are consecrated and made holy?”** Then he asked them, **“Do your garments become consecrated because they touch meat that has been offered or set apart for God? No, they don’t. Neither are your sacrifices acceptable worship simply because you come and lay them on the temple’s foundation. Your offerings are defiled because of your disobedience.”** Haggai reminded them that it was obedience that would make their worship acceptable. In Chapter 1 verse 12:

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: **“I am with you,”** declares the LORD.

So many people think that they can live in sin and disobedience and then come to church and sing songs and give an offering, and teach in Sunday school, or serve in some way, and God will be pleased with their worship. He won't. People, there is a great provision made by God to forgive us. All of us blow it. None of us live it right. I come and confess my sins all the time, but

there's a difference between that and people who are willfully disobeying God and refusing to do what he asked them to do.

Worship is a declaration of worth. God is to have ultimate worth in our lives and that is to be demonstrated by how we obey God during the week, by the choices we make, by learning his word, knowing his will and being willing to carry it out. When we choose to obey God in these little things and in these big things, we are demonstrating worth. We are demonstrating worship so that when we come together on Sunday like this, and we give and we pray and we serve and do all these things, God's pleased with that because it's flowing out of a life of obedience as an act of worship. But if we want to do things our own way and just do our own thing and then come and think God's gonna accept that as worship from us, we're wrong. It doesn't matter who you are.

You remember in the days of the judges when Israel had no king? It was summed up like this: "Everyone did that which was right in their own eyes." What was interesting was they all said, "We're doing this for God." But they were doing their own thing, so God raised up judges like Sampson and Jephthah and Barak and Deborah and Samuel. The people asked for a king. That was not the problem. God had already said he was gonna give them a king because it was through the kingly line of David that Messiah would come. The people asking for a king was not the problem. The people were asking for a king because they didn't want God as their king, so God gave them a king with Saul.

Saul started out pretty good as the first king of Israel, but he got off track. He stopped listening to God, and he didn't obey him. He started taking things into his own hands and making up his own rules for worship. God sent Saul on a mission to destroy the Amalekites. They had oppressed Israel for years. God was gonna bring judgment. He said, **"I want you to go and wipe them all out, their sheep, their cattle, everything. I want you to put it into my hands. Irrevocably give them to me. I will be responsible for their judgment. You do what I tell you."** So Samuel went out. He attacked the Amalekites. He wiped most of them out. He kept Agag the king, and he kept the best of the sheep and the cattle and the other plunder for himself. Then he went to Carmel and built a monument to his name. It tells us in 1 Samuel 15 verse 13:

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions."

<sup>14</sup> But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"

<sup>15</sup> Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."

You see it? "Well, we didn't exactly do everything but it was still obedience because what we got out of this we're gonna use for God."

"Lord, I don't want to go to Antioch. I want to stay in Oregon, and I'm doing that to serve you."

Isn't it amazing how we can put a veneer of serving God on our disobedience when we're trying to cover our disobedience? "I'm doing this for God." 1 Samuel 15:16:

<sup>16</sup> "Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul replied.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel said, **“Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. <sup>18</sup> And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ <sup>19</sup> Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”**

<sup>20</sup> “But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. <sup>21</sup> The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

“I did it for God. I disobeyed to honor God, so that’s obedience.”

<sup>22</sup> But Samuel replied:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD?

To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

<sup>23</sup> For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft),  
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry (self-worship).

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has rejected you as king.”

Howard Hendricks used to remind us pastors, “Remember, partial obedience is total disobedience.” We cannot knowingly disobey God and come and think he will accept our worship, yet far too many Christians do that today. They think they can serve themselves, deny God, withhold their offerings, hold back their service, sleep around, get drunk, lie, cheat, steal.

“God won’t care. I’ll just come and I’ll offer God my worship and everything will be okay. We’ll just go to church, give our offerings, render our service, sing our worship. No one will know and God won’t care.” Wrong. God cares a lot. There’s a tremendous provision made for our forgiveness, but willful disobedience is something God won’t tolerate in worship.

Haggai called the people to obey. Within 23 days, they had reordered their priorities and resumed the work of God. On that day, God said, **“Now, I am with you.”** What a message. **“Now, I’m with you.”** And the people revered God. They actually worshipped him.

They began the work on the 24th day of the sixth month. That would be the 18th of our December. On that same day, God spoke again through Haggai, Chapter 2, verse 15:

**“Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. <sup>16</sup> When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. <sup>17</sup> I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,”** declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> **“From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month,**

**“From the 18<sup>th</sup> of December when you began the work”**

**give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: <sup>19</sup> Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.**

**“From this day on I will bless you.”**

God said, **“You started the work today, and I want you to notice something. When you went to the temple site or anywhere else to get your grain, you expected a certain amount but it was always a lot less. You went to get your wine and you expected a certain amount. It was always a lot less, but I want you to notice something. Is there seed in your barn right now? No, there isn’t. But from this day forward there’s going to be. You watch how your obedience in worship is related to the blessing I’m now gonna pour out to you because now you’re using what I give you for my purposes. I want you to always remember this day, and I want you to see the difference that obedience makes.”** That’s why in Chapter 2, verse 17, he said:

**I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,”** declares the LORD.

**“When the blessing comes, I want you to know it’s come from me.”** It makes us ask, What blessings are we missing because we have not yet been willing to obey God completely? Remember, he always makes provision for our failure, and we do it a lot. But willful disobedience is different. Obedience is the key to the life God can bless into a genuine worship that will delight God and honor him. God can bless the person who lives by his priorities.

I don't know if you know the name Ken Wales. I'll bet you've seen some of his work. Ken Wales is an award-winning TV and film producer who started his Hollywood career as an actor. But early in his career, Wales chose to turn down a significant role because it conflicted with his faith in Christ. While he was under contract with MGM, he was cast for a film starring Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and Shirley McClain. At one point in the script, his character enticed a young woman to get drunk so he could take advantage of her. Wales described his decision to decline the role like this:

I had been speaking to a lot of church groups and conventions around the country on the subject of making right choices. So when I read the script, I had to meet with the director Vincente Minnelli to tell him I couldn't do it. He told me, “You'll do it or you'll be out of your contract. You'll go on suspension. You'll have no salary for a year, and I'll see to it that you never work in this town again. I told him he'd have to find someone else, and he literally threw me out of his office.

I was put on suspension. When the film came out the following year, I was speaking at a youth convention in Denver to about 600 kids. We took a break at dinnertime, and everybody piled out of the hall to see a movie and to get a pizza. As we started to walk across the street there was a huge marquee with a sign for the very movie I had turned down. I thought, How interesting is that? What if I had done that film and any of these kids went to see it, and they saw me seducing that woman after I just talked to them about the importance of making right decisions as a Christian?

Wales went on to say that declining that role is what propelled him into his current role as a film and TV producer. Since that day, he said, he has produced award-winning TV series and film series including *Christie*, *East of Eden*, and the highly acclaimed movie *Amazing Grace*. God can bless a man who lives like that, who will live according to God's priorities by putting God's interest ahead of his own interest no matter what, and who will obey God as an act of worship before any displays of worship.

Haggai was such a man, and God used him to lead a nation back to being a people God could bless. How important was this obedience? This fourth oracle in Chapter 2 verse 20 is to Zerubbabel himself, the governor of the people.

<sup>20</sup> The word of the LORD came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month:

The very day they began the work, the 18<sup>th</sup> of December.

<sup>21</sup> **“Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. <sup>22</sup> I 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, each by the sword of his brother.**

<sup>23</sup> **“On that day,”**

**“The day when all of this happens. When kings and authorities are destroyed and my king is established.”**

<sup>23</sup> **“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.

A signet ring was a sign of royalty. God said, **“Zerubbabel, I have chosen you to be my signet ring.”** Seventy years before, King Jehoiachin, also known as Coniah or Jeconiah, was the rightful Davidic king sitting on the throne of Israel. God had promised that through the line of David, Messiah would eventually come. Jeconiah, the rightful king in the line of David, was on the throne in Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion. Jehoiachin was taken captive as a young man, carted off to Babylon where he was thrown in prison to die.

If you're reading the story line of the Bible and you read that, you should be shocked because you now realize this Jeconiah who at this time apparently has no heir is now taken captive, hauled off to Babylon, thrown into prison to die, and the line of David is over. How is God gonna bring Messiah through the line of David when the last descendant's rotting in a Babylonian prison? Second Kings, Chapter 25, verse 27:

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Awel-Marduk (*Nebuchadnezzar's* son) became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. He did this on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. <sup>28</sup> He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. <sup>29</sup> So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. <sup>30</sup> Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived.

King Jehoiachin did not die in that jail. Thirty-seven years later, Nebuchadnezzar's descendent let him out, treated him royally, took care of him. Jehoiachin went on to have a little boy named Shealtiel. Shealtiel in Babylon had a son named Zerubbabel who, when he grew up, under the Persian rule of King Cyrus was ordered to come back to Jerusalem to build the very temple that his ancestor Jesus would be ministering in and at on his time on earth.

Zerubbabel was in the line of David, and God said, **“I've chosen you through this obedience to continue that line through you, Zerubbabel. You will be my royalty, my signet ring, and I will overthrow kingdoms and establish my King. The line of David will continue through you.”** That temple was rebuilt. Jesus ministered in the courtyard of that temple. In 70 A.D. that temple was destroyed by Roman General Titus. That temple is gonna be rebuilt again because this Jesus is gonna return to the earth to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords to overthrow all kingdoms and establish his own.

Zerubbabel could've had no idea how important his obedience and living by God's priorities could be and that God was gonna use him to fulfill a promise that will be eternally fulfilled for you and me.

People, how important is it living by God's priorities? You and I and the individual choices we now make are living for this God who chooses through us to carry on and carry out his work every time we choose to put his interest ahead of our interest. Every time we choose to obey as an act of worship, God uses us in the unfolding eternal plan that will usher in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of his kingdom forever. How important is it that you and I follow God's priorities every day? Ask Zerubbabel how important it is. You and I are given a tremendous privilege, and that's why it goes on in the book of Matthew Chapter 1 to tell how in verse 12:

After the exile to Babylon:  
Jecooniah was the father of Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

And on it goes right down to:

<sup>16</sup> Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup> Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

God is working in our generation and is one day gonna shake the earth again. That's why it says in Hebrews 12:25-29, quoting from Haggai 2 verse 6 and following, that God's gonna one day shake the earth just like he said he would. He's gonna shake out every other power and every other kingdom. What's gonna be left is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, a kingdom that is eternal, the kingdom of Jesus Christ himself. You and I have a hand right now in ushering in that kingdom by living according to God's priorities.

*God, thank you for this word. It challenges me every day to see the significance of my life, every Christian's life, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. God, help us to be a people who put your interest ahead of our interest, who puts obedience before any display of worship, and trust that you are using our lives today to usher in the very kingdom that will be forever. Give us an understanding of the importance of God's priorities and we'll thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*