

# newDAY

## “Redirected Priorities”

Haggai 1-2

**Idea:** Redirect your focus from your poverty to His priorities.

**Intro:** The subject of money in a Baptist church is a most unwelcome one. I heard about a church in the Deep South whose preacher was moving toward the end of his sermon, and with growing crescendo said, “This church, like the crippled man, has got to get up and walk.” And the congregation responded, “That’s right, preacher, let it walk.” And he added, “This church, like Elijah on Mount Carmel, has got to run.” “Run, let it run, preacher. Let it run!” “This church has got to mount up on wings like eagles and fly.” “Oh preacher, let it fly. Let it fly.” Then he added, “Now if this church is gonna fly, it’s gonna take money.” “Let it walk, preacher. Let it walk. Just let it walk.”

In preparation for our renovation and construction project, we have spent the last two Sunday mornings looking at the incredible stories of the two greatest building projects in the Bible – the construction of the Tabernacle in Exodus and of the Temple in 1 Chronicles. Over \$60,000,000 in today’s market went into the construction of the Tabernacle. Moses oversaw that project in Israel. The Temple, which was conceived in the mind of King David, was erected during the reign of David’s son, King Solomon. It was the greatest building project in the Bible and the most beautiful structure in the world. It sat on top of Mount Zion for nearly four hundred years.

Last week we looked at how it was financed. David gave from his personal treasure 225,000 pounds of gold, which today would be valued at over \$4.3 billion. From across Israel, the leaders and the people gave generously toward this project. In his prayer in 1 Chronicles 29, acknowledging the success of the stewardship campaign to raise the resources for the Temple, David prayed: *“O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own”* (29:16).

**Inquiry:** So the Temple was constructed, and people came from around the world to worship there and to gaze in wonder and admiration at this beautiful house of the Lord.

During the ensuing centuries, however, the nation of Israel declined spiritually and morally, which led to a corresponding decline in their national strength and solidarity. As a result, they fell victim to the pressures of rising empires in the east. Eventually, because of their sin and disobedience, they were brutally conquered by the Babylonian Empire. All of Jerusalem was pummeled and plundered, and the incomparable Temple of Solomon was torched and burnt to the ground. The scream of the Jewish people echoed to heaven and hell. Most of Israel perished, and the survivors were largely deported and dispersed by the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar in 586B.C. It was the most tragic even in the Old Testament, and for two generations the surviving Jews remained traumatized and paralyzed.

Seventy years passed. Then, as predicted by the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord began to stir the hearts of the surviving Jews. According to the book of Ezra, God placed within their hearts a desire to send a remnant back to Jerusalem to clear away the rubble, to rebuild the Temple, and to restore worship.

Again, we're presented with a question that has been raised in each of the other two stories we've looked at these past two Sundays: "How did they have the resources to fund the project?" Remember that this was a tattered, traumatized, and scattered people living in exile. How could a people in this kind of situation gather the needed resources? How was this rebuilding project going to be financed?

Surprisingly, the Lord offered no new fundraising ideas. Just as in our previous examples, He didn't provide the money through spectacular miracles. Instead, He provided it through the pockets and purses of His people. The book of Ezra begins with these words: Read Ezra 1:1-6.

Does that sound familiar? Let the people provide silver and gold, goods and livestock. Anyone whose heart God moves, let them give valuable gifts and freewill offerings.

This is the same strategy God used to raise the funds for the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus and for the Temple in 1 Chronicles. We have a further word in Ezra 2:68-69.

*"According to their ability..."* This has always been and always will be the Lord's method of financing those building programs that stem from His heart. And so the people started. Clearing away the rubble, they began rebuilding this building, which had been the most beautiful and meaningful edifice on earth.

How many of you know that when God is doing a work in and through His people, the Enemy always stands in opposition to it? Satan was opposed to this building project, and he did everything he could to derail it. He used division, distraction, and demoralization. Anytime we attempt something great for the Lord, we will encounter the devil's opposition. He seeks to discourage us. Discouragement is one of his most lethal weapons. But remember: All discouragement is from the devil.

God never asks us to do easy things (Rom 14:23). The work of the Kingdom is described in the Bible as a battle. Sometimes it is described as tilling the field, planting the seed, and tending the harvest. It is hard, hot, tough work, and our enemy seeks every opportunity to discourage us. In the case of this remnant, he was successful for a while. Look at Ezra 4:4: *"Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build..."*

They bribed people to speak against the work. They even sent a letter full of false accusations to King Artaxerxes, slandering the Jews and the work.

*Then the work on the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped, and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia. – Ezra 4:24*

When you study this passage, you learn that the project was idle for at least sixteen years. The people lacked the resources. They didn't have enough money or timber. And they didn't have the courage to go on in the work.

Chapter four ends with a cloud hanging over the project. Chapter five begins with a "but God" moment. God sent two preachers to rouse the people from their lethargy. Read Ezra 5:1-2.

These two preachers were among the most effective motivational speakers in history. Inspired by their messages, the people once again opened their pockets and purses. They picked up their tools and trowels. The work resumed. The resources were gathered. The Temple was rebuilt, and the city of Jerusalem was restored.

That must have been some powerful preaching done by Haggai and Zechariah! Wouldn't you have liked to been there? Wouldn't you like to have the contents of their sermons? Now, we don't have them on a podcast, but they are recorded in something much better, the Bible. Toward the end of the Old Testament we find the collected sermons of Haggai and Zechariah.

We don't have time today, of course, to thoroughly study these two books, but I would like to show you a few verses from Haggai. This prophet called the Jews to redirect their priorities. And this morning, I want to speak to the subject of "Redirected Priorities." Like the Jews in Haggai's day, we too can become discouraged, disillusioned, and distracted. Our priorities can become displaced. It is here that Haggai has a word for us today.

### **1. Consider your ways. (1:3-9)**

The Lord told this remnant that they were suffering personal financial hardship because they were escalating their own lifestyles while neglecting to provide for the work of the Kingdom. Due to the hardships that came against them, they had lost the heart to rebuild. They had moved on from the project of God and were striving to rebuild their lives. They were more interested in paneling their own houses than in purchasing timber for God's Temple. As a result, their finances were not under the umbrella of God's blessing, and they never seemed to have enough (vs. 9).

Have you ever heard someone say, "You can't out-give God?" Well, the people here were not even trying. They were infected with a bad case of *we-can't-do-this-itus*, and as a result, their morale was low. Their giving was pathetic. And they were comforting themselves by paneling their own houses. They were failing in their stewardship responsibilities, and Haggai told them to snap out of it.

Are you discouraged? Is your morale low today? Are you advancing your own lifestyle while failing in your stewardship obligations? Well, Haggai is telling you to snap out of it. He's telling you to consider your ways and to get your priorities rearranged once again before the Lord. That may involve some sacrifice. Sometimes we must sacrifice a paneled home in order to provide timber for God's house, but in the process we bring our own finances back under the umbrella of God's blessing and rediscover the truth of that aforementioned phrase: "You can't out-give God."

You may say, "Paneled house nothing – I'm broke! I'm in financial trouble. I don't have much to give." Remember, that is the same thing the Jews had been saying for years. God wants to and will provide you and me with the wherewithal for His Kingdom work. We just have to give Him first place in our hearts and budgets. We need to redirect our focus from our poverty to His priorities. He will give us the very resources we need to return as gifts to Him. Just as David said in our passage last week, "*of your own have we given you*" (1 Chron 29:14).

Does that mean all of us can give a large amount? Yes. Now it may not seem like a large amount in our eyes or in the eyes of others, but if we give willingly, sacrificially, and

enthusiastically, it is a large amount in God's eyes. There are no small gifts as far as God is concerned, when those gifts are given sacrificially for His glory.

Do you remember the poor widow in Mark 12? She only had two copper coins, but she gave them both in devotion to God. As the people came that day to the Temple for worship, the Lord Jesus sat across from the offering box and watched what people gave. He gloried in her seemingly small gift.

*43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

Illust: One of the most famous stories in fund-raising history comes from the year of 1912. Dr. Russell H. Conwell, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia, had a little girl in Sunday school named Hattie May Wiatt. The Sunday school was very crowded, and one day Dr. Conwell told her that he would love to have buildings large enough to allow everyone to attend who wanted to attend.

Later, Hattie May became ill and died. Dr. Conwell was asked to preach the funeral, and the girl's mother told him that Hattie May had been saving her money to help build a bigger church. The mother gave him the girl's purse. In it was the fifty-seven cents she had saved. That was big time money for a poor little girl in those days. Dr. Conwell took those coins to the bank and exchanged them for fifty-seven pennies, which he put on display and sold. With the proceeds, a nearby house was purchased and the property was converted into a children's wing for the church. Inspired by Hattie's story, more and more money poured into the church. Eventually, her deep sacrifice provided the resources to construct the buildings of Temple Baptist Church, Temple University, and Good Samaritan Hospital.

"Little is much when God is in it." The amount of your gift isn't as important as the nature of it. Are you giving willingly, heartily, and sacrificially? Whether we give out of our abundance or out of our poverty, if we give willingly, heartily, and sacrificially, it is a large gift in God's eyes and one He will use beyond our expectations. So consider your ways.

## **2. Fear the Lord. (1:12-13)**

The Jews heeded Haggai's message and feared the Lord. They renewed their awe and reverence for God, which resulted in God's promise of His presence. "*I am with you.*"

What a promise! As we devote ourselves to God, His projects, His work, and His Kingdom, He promises to be with us. And just to make sure we don't miss the significance of the promise, God repeats it in 2:4-5.

Today, we must be strong and work, for God is with us. His Spirit remains among us. We're facing a great task and a huge challenge, but do not be discouraged for God is with us. And He intends to use this project for His glory in ways we cannot even imagine (Hab 1:5). This leads to a final point from Haggai.

## **3. Believe God for more. (2:6-9)**

Surely, this project must have seemed overwhelming to the Jews, and yet when compared to the former Temple it may have seemed small and futile. It wasn't going to be nearly as extravagant as Solomon's Temple. Regardless, God promised to provide the silver and gold. The wealth of the nations would flow through the people of Judah and provide all the resources for the reconstruction.

The result would be a new Temple more glorious and greater than the former. The new Temple would be a house prepared for the Son of God. It would be the place where Jesus would one day stand and preach, pray, and present Himself to the world. When that day comes, Haggai says, "This house will be a million times more glorious than Solomon's Temple because you are building something for the Messiah."

Appl: Our project may seem overwhelming to you. Perhaps, it may even seem to you as something that breaks from our past because it is different and modern. Regardless of the design, could it be that God will do something in and through us that is greater and more than we have ever imagined because we are redirecting our priorities from ourselves to God and others? Church, let's believe God for more.

**Conclusion:** We are facing a great challenge in these days, but with the challenge comes a great opportunity. We desire nothing for ourselves, nor do we desire to make our name great. God will not share His glory with another. We are building something for Jesus. Just as Haggai, Zechariah, and the remnant were doing, we are building something for Jesus.

Who cares if our houses are paneled? Who cares if we must sacrifice? Who cares if we have to do without for a while? The God who owns it all is with us. He will fill this project with His glory. He will use this project for His purposes. He will touch this project with His blessings, and in our lives He will grant peace (2:9).

He will use us in ways greater than we can ever imagine, and in this place He will give peace to multitudes of people. That is what it's really all about. Buildings are nothing more than tools in our hands to carry out the work of the gospel, making disciples of nations.

Let us provide the timber, and see what God will do!