



haggai

AFFIRMING OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD'S UNCHANGING CALL

Haggai spoke to a group of people who lacked commitment in their lives. They chose the path of convenience and comfort rather than obedience to God. God did not bless that behavior in the ancient world and He will not bless it today. When God said, "Consider your ways" (Haggai 1:5), God was speaking not only a warning to those in the ancient world, but one that challenges us in the present to re-focus our lives from "creature comforts" to lives that demonstrate God's power and presence. God doesn't want to be *part* of our lives; He wants to be *preeminent* in our lives!

Have you ever had a defining moment in your life? I think I can answer that question for you. Yes! You have had at least one defining moment in the fact that you were born. That is a defining moment, right? A defining moment can happen on a wedding day; the birth of a child; the choice of a school, college or career; a move or change to a different path; and certainly when we face the death of a loved one.

All of these are defining moments between the life that was *before* and the life *afterwards*.

It is always our prayer that baptism represents a public, defining moment for the person who says, "Who I was, I am no longer. I am a new person in Christ and my life is now being lived in identification as a follower of Jesus Christ. I am a part of His church and I want to

live out my faith in a way that will honor the Lord Jesus Christ."

Becoming a part of a church can be a defining moment—not just sitting on the sidelines or being on the margins of a church, but choosing involvement into the life of a church. One of the sweetest things I hear on a regular basis is how God uses the ministry of Life Groups to help form spiritual families for people in our church.

Defining moments change life forever!

Defining moments happen on a personal level, but they also happen nationally. For example, I'm old enough to remember when Elvis appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show." That was a defining moment in American television. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus, that was a

defining moment in our nation. Then there was the huge impact on the culture with "Saturday Night Live." Other defining moments include the use of the iPhone, certainly 9/11 and the mission of Apollo 11 to see the first man walk on the moon.

In the Old Testament book of 2 Chronicles, we find a significant, defining moment concerning the nation of Israel.

Background

For hundreds of years, the people of Israel saw God move and work among them. God took them out of Egypt and placed them in a land of their own. He blessed the land and gave them kings. He provided for them in safety and security. They built a walled city, and at the heart of it was the temple of God.

Jerusalem, the holy city, was the location of this glorious temple, built by King Solomon. Solomon put an enormous amount of riches and wealth into the building of the temple, and the temple was one of the most amazing sites in the ancient world. People traveled long distances to see the temple and worship God.

Yet, because of moral and spiritual decline, there came a day when the people had rebellious hearts.

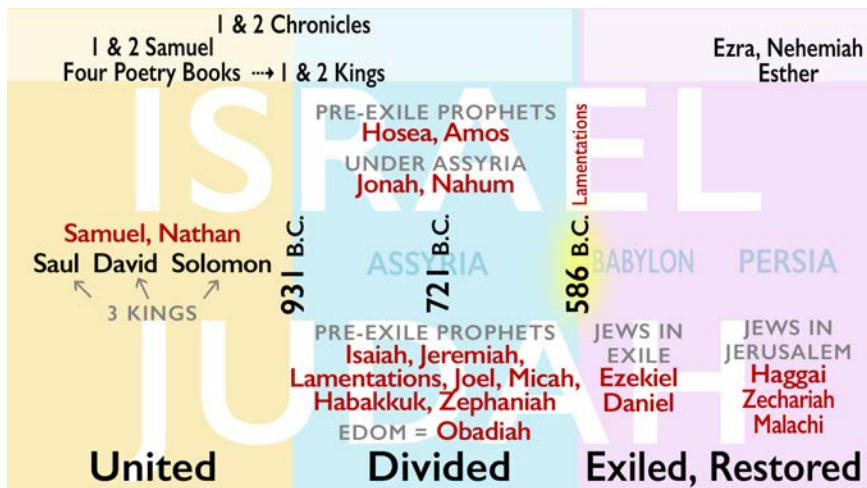
"The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people

and on His dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, until there was no remedy... And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he [king of the Chaldeans] brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years (2 Chronicles 36:15-16, 18-21 ESV).

The Babylonians came on a very specific date. Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. (a defining date on the Jewish calendar).

Let's review some key words and dates:

United Kingdom. During the United Kingdom, Israel had three consecutive kings who established the people in the land of Israel: King Saul, King David, and King Solomon.



Divided Kingdom. In 931 B.C., there was a division in Israel. The descendants of Solomon split and splintered over how they would worship and what they would do. As a result, ten of the twelve tribes inhabited the northern region (Israel) and two of the tribes inhabited the southern region (Judah and Jerusalem).

This division continued for a period of time until the mighty and powerful Assyrians descended upon the Northern Kingdom. In 721 B.C., the ten northern tribes were removed from the land and scattered to the ends of the earth. To this day, the ten tribes have not re-established themselves in the land of Israel.

The two tribes in the Southern Kingdom—the nucleus—embraced the covenant and looked forward to the coming of Messiah.

Exiled. As time passed, the two southern tribes also fell prey to worshipping other gods and idols, and they neglected the things of God.

In 586 B.C., the Southern Kingdom was assaulted by the Babylonians and under the leadership of King Nebuchadnezzar, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. The people were exiled to Babylon (Iraq today) and held captive there. The Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, provide us with insight concerning this long period of exile.

Then in 538 B.C., Cyrus, the king of Persia, gave the exiles the privilege and opportunity to return back to their homeland, but it had been almost 50 years since they were exiled from Judah and Jerusalem.

To get some perspective about this time frame, in the 1950s, Fidel Castro led a revolution in Cuba and seized the property of many

Cubans. These property owners fled Cuba, came to America, and established their lives and families on American soil. Only in recent years have we seen an opening that allows some travel and trade to occur between our two countries. Now more than 50 years later, not every one is trying to find their way back to Cuba since America is their adopted home, and the life they know is here.

In much the same way, after 50 years of being in Babylon, many of the Jews did not go back to Judah and Jerusalem. However, some returned to reestablish their lives in the land of promise.

“Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and the prophets of God were with them, supporting them” (Ezra 5:1-2 ESV).

Here we meet post-exilic prophets (prophets after the exile), beginning with Haggai and Zachariah. These prophets began the process of leading the Jews back to Jerusalem to reclaim the land and rebuild the house of God.

The land had been desolate for all these years, and the people struggled between trying to reestablish life in the land and rebuild the temple.

The people realized that although they wanted to rebuild the glorious temple Solomon built, they did not have the same resources that were available to Solomon. They wondered if they needed to rebuild the temple, and as a result, the effort to rebuild ceased and the people began focusing on the settlement of their lives in the land.

With all this as background, let's look at the opening verses in the book of Haggai:

“In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.’ Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord” (Haggai 1:2-5 ESV).

The people understood the big picture about going back to Judah and re-inhabiting the land, but once there, their emphasis quickly shifted from establishing their lives and living for the glory of God to simply surviving in the land—being in the right place, but not necessarily doing the right thing.

1. The People Excused Personal Obedience for Practical Convenience

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord” (Haggai 1:2 ESV).

God had called them and provided miraculously for the Jews to go back and reoccupy the land. However, when they got back, they did not keep the things of God first in their hearts. They focused on making a good life for themselves in Jerusalem.

Have you ever made excuses for something you knew you should do? Have you ever chosen a pathway of convenience rather than a higher pathway of commitment?

As an adult, I have had prolonged periods of time to develop disciplines and patterns of study in my life, and I really care about those things now. But I must confess that in my younger years, I was never a person who enjoyed studying or going to school.

I went to a high school where I had to make an 86 to receive a B—not

80, but 86! Frankly, if I made an 86, I thought that was good enough. In fact, I was happy to make Cs—at least, I was passing.

Later I realized what really mattered was the character of my life. Once I sensed a greater commitment to God—His call to study His Word and to lead others—I had to right the wrong of a “sloppy student attitude.”

I make this confession to illustrate that God never honors partial commitment. Do you give God your best or are you more likely to make a partial commitment?

“... the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD” (Haggai 1:2 ESV).

To paraphrase, the people were saying, *“We have a lot of things to do and someday we’ll get to the temple-building project. Right now, though, is not the time.”*

Yet, God sent Haggai on the scene to say,

“... thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes” (Haggai 1:5-6 ESV).

The people kept eating and drinking, but they never had enough. They kept building, but

they were never happy with what they built. They gained wages, but they had holes in their pockets.

God said to His people (paraphrased), *"Listen to Me. Neglect My glory and you will never know My blessing of contentment in your life. You spend too much time distracted by your life, your things and what you want. Although you live in a world that is broken and surrounded by debris, at the end of the day, I want to work in your life. I want you to care about My glory."*

Ultimately, these people lacked commitment in their lives, choosing convenience and comfort rather than obedience to God. God did not bless that behavior in the ancient world and He will not bless it today.

"If you spend your time and energy seeking comfort and security from the world, and do not spend yourself for the glory of God, every pleasure will leave its sour aftertaste of depression and guilt and frustration." —John Piper

How many times have we watched people strive to better their lives, build their own "kingdoms," indulge in the blessings of their labor, only to find they are empty inside? And how many believers do this? We keep looking to "feather our nest" in order to have creature comforts. Does this make for a life that will be full and meaningful? We often give God blessing, but in reality, we are only

giving a partial sense of devotion to God rather surrendering our lives totally to Him. What is missing? The pursuit of the glory of God.

God doesn't want to be *part* of our lives; He wants to be *preeminent* in our lives!

That is why Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

Are you worrying about what you will wear, what you can eat, what you are going to have and how you are going to live? Jesus said that these are the things Gentiles (pagans) seek. But you must seek first the kingdom of God and seek His glory above everything else, and all these things will be added to you.

We have known a good life, especially in America. But at the end of the day, our hope is not in the *things* of this world; it is in *living* for the glory of God! As the people of God, we are called to live for His glory.

Thankfully, look what happened:

"Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, **obeyed** the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the

people feared the LORD" (Haggai 1:12 ESV).

What a great, defining moment! It came not because they were in the right place at the right time; it came because they purposed in their hearts to do the will of God. And God began to work and move in the lives of His people!

2. The Lord Affirmed Forward Progress Through His Powerful Presence

"Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, 'I am with you, declares the Lord'" (Haggai 1:13 ESV).

God affirmed His presence with the people.

"And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king" (Haggai 1:14-15 ESV).

The people worked and refocused their lives. God not only spoke a cutting word of prophecy through Haggai to change the course of their lives, but God also spoke a word of comfort, confidence and promise: "I am with you."

"Now, go to work to do what I have told you to do. Do what is needed for My glory."

God's purposes and work for His people (both ancient and present) are not hindered by conditions or circumstances. If the Lord is with His people, then His presence is their path forward.

Our path forward in this nation and culture is found when we begin to purpose the glory of God in our lives above everything else. God has called us as His people to go forward, to press onward, to consider our ways, and ultimately, to consider the word of the Lord.

In the book of Haggai, the prophet preached four distinct messages to the people:

1. Message of Rebuke (Haggai 1:3...)
2. Message of Encouragement (Haggai 2:2...)
3. Message of Promise (Haggai 2:10...)
4. Message of Hope (Haggai 2:20...)

As Haggai spoke these messages, he repeated these words over and over again, "... the word of the LORD...."

We should always be thinking, *"What does the word of God say about who we are, where we are, and what we are to do with our lives?"*

As believers, "We don't
live our lives based
on explanations,
but on promises."
—Warren W. Wiersbe

There are things we can't explain, things that unfold in ways we don't understand. Being a Christian does not mean we have the answers to how all things work together in this world. However, as a believer, you have the Word of God. Whatever God promises in His Word, God promises to His people.

God called the people back to Judah. God sent them. God gave them a task bigger than they could do. In fact, one of the most interesting passages is this:

"Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you declares the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:3-4 ESV).

Some of the people who returned to Jerusalem remembered how glorious, how spectacular, how amazing the temple of Solomon had been. But now, standing amid debris, they probably thought, *"What difference does it make? If all we are going to do is build some little, shameful temple,*

why would we even do this? We just don't have the ability. We are surrounded by so much opposition, so much debris and so many distractions. We cannot do what was once done, so why don't we just quit?"

Have you ever had something you loved be devastated in your life? ... something you knew that no matter how you fixed it, it would never be the same again?

That is exactly where they were. Yet the Lord said (paraphrased), *"Listen to Me. I'm not looking for what kind of an external temple you can build. What is going on in your heart? If you purpose in your heart to build a temple for My glory, it is My glory that will make a difference in your lives and not the quality of the temple you build."*

What does that say to us? We may feel what we are doing doesn't matter. The world around us is so big, so chaotic, so confused, so broken, and what we accomplish as we come together is so small, so insignificant. Does it measure up to what it could be or could have been given other circumstances?

Please hear me. God has not said to backup, shut down, or quit. The same command Jesus gave in a defining moment in Matthew 28 is still in our lives and our hearts today—Go there!

In the New Testament, we read about a little boy who had just five loaves and two fish, and gave them

to Jesus. Jesus took the food, blessed it, and fed 5000 people that day.

You may not see yourself as being able to do something significant or amazing for God, but God uses small things in big ways when they are done for His glory. The question is not, "What can you do for God?" Instead, "What can and will God do for you if you live for His glory?"

"Now then, consider from this day **onward**" (Haggai 2:15 ESV).

"Let this be a defining day for you from this day onward. You need to go forward, understanding I want you to work because I am with you."

And it is repeated again:

"Consider from this day **onward**" (Haggai 2:18 ESV).

Don't quit. Don't backup. Don't shutdown. Don't make excuses. God is looking for people who will take Him at His Word and listen to His Word. God is at work, and so "from this day onward," go forward with God!

3. The Church Has Been Chosen and Sent to Declare the Glorious Gospel of Christ and His Coming Kingdom

"The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month,

'Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for **I have chosen you**, declares the LORD of hosts'" (Haggai 2:20-23 ESV).

"I have chosen you."

Here is an incredible statement. God was going to shake the nations and change the world. How would it happen?

Zerubbabel took the Lord at His Word. The people reoccupied the land and rebuilt the temple, although the temple was nothing like the grandeur of the previous temple. But in the years that followed, Herod would rebuild the temple in what would effectively become the "third" temple. The retaining wall (the "Wailing Wall") of Herod's temple remains strong in Jerusalem even to this day.

The temple was rebuilt and prepared for the time when the Lord Jesus Christ would ultimately come and make his arrival there according to the word of the prophets.

Jesus said, "Tear down this temple [the temple of Herod] and three days I will raise it up again [speaking of His body]."

It was in the temple area that Jesus Christ was falsely accused. It was outside the walls where He was taken and crucified.

God's plan was not and has never been for His glory to reside in a building; His glory resides in His people!

It was prophesied the Messiah would come through the line of King David (the Davidic line). Zerubbabel was part of the Davidic line and as a result, the Messiah came through the line of Zerubbabel too.

The Messiah accomplished His work, and the glory of God impacts nations through the resurrection and ultimately, the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When God said to Zerubbabel, "I have chosen you," it was only the forerunner of when Jesus would say to us as His people, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give it to you" (John 15:16 ESV).

God—through His gracious choice and elective purpose—is the strength and the security of our lives.

In John 17, Jesus prayed and said,

"I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:15-18 ESV).

One of the greatest, defining moments in your life is when you realize you are here not for yourself, but for His purpose, His kingdom, His glory, His work and His service. That defining moment begins when you respond to the "Go there" command that has come to every one of us. "Go" includes your church, community and the world.

What is the attitude of your heart today? ... the action of your heart as the people of God? How will you respond to His promise and His presence within you? Will you surrender and give your life—risk your life—for the glory of God? Is it about you or is it about Him?

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, **according to the power at work within us**, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21 ESV).

God doesn't need a temple today; His people are His temple. God wants to so inhabit your life and

rule your heart that who you are, how you live and what you do will demonstrate His power and His presence.

Trust Him. Try Him. Prove Him. Let God work in your life.

The ancient people of Israel were not building, investing, serving, giving, supporting or aligning themselves with God's purpose, and they needed a spiritual reformation. "Consider your ways."

God is saying to us as He said to them, "Work, for I am with you" (Haggai 2:4b ESV).

God is calling us to go and do what He has called us to do. Live for His glory!

*Facing a task unfinished,
that drives us to our knees,
a need that, undiminished,
rebukes our slothful ease.*

*We who rejoice to know Thee,
renew before Thy throne
the solemn pledge we owe Thee,
to go and make Thee known.*

—Frank Houghton

English missionary, China Inland Mission



*Lord, how I pray that we will hear
Your word by Your spirit speaking
to us today, "Consider your ways."
Then Lord, I pray we would say
going forward, "By Your power, by
Your presence, by Your promise
may it be for Your glory." In Jesus
name I pray, Amen.*

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