

Kings and Prophets 17-08-24

This is Thursday, the 24th of August 2017. We continue our study of kings and prophets. We're going to be dividing our time tonight between the first part of the book of Ezra and the prophet Haggai, or Haggai, if you pronounce it the way they did when I was in Sunday school.

Got to looking at that, there's not an extra I in there, so it's not Haggai, it's just Haggai. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our concentration, and focus our attention, and then we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for this opportunity to spend time together in fellowship in the study of your word.

We thank you for the blessings that you convey to us through our contact with one another, the spiritual gifts that minister and encourage and strengthen each one of us. We thank you for each one who is participating with us tonight, either near or far, either now or in the future. We pray your blessings on each one, that as we spend this time looking at your word, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart in a way that is up-building and edifying, and will provide us the tools that we need, the information that we require, the voice that the Holy Spirit will use to lead us and to guide us so that we can accomplish your purposes and reflect your glory in these times of challenge and opportunity that you bring to us.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Well, once again, in our long study now, spanning some five years of the kings and prophets, we have seen the united monarchy with Solomon, the divided monarchy following that, the disappearance of the northern kingdom in 721 at the hands of the Assyrians, the captivity of Judah with Nebuchadnezzar, and three waves of judgment, 605, 597, and 586, where in the first Daniel and his three friends are taken, in the second Ezekiel is taken, and in 586 the temple is destroyed. The people of God from that time, 586, all the way down to the decree of Cyrus, beginning in about 538, lays the foundation, almost literally, for the return of the people of Judah to their homeland.

And the 70-year clock could be figured from 605, which would mean that 535 would be one of the first waves of return, and that turns out to be just about the case. There is a group that returns in the first wave. Just as there were three waves of destruction, there are going to be three waves of return, and the first one comes 70 years after the first wave of destruction.

And this is, as we've seen in the book of Ezra, with Zerubbabel. Remember, Zerub is from the Semitic root that Hebrew gets Sira from, T-S-E-R-A, and its derivatives in cognates, which basically means seed. Babel is, of course, harking all the way back to the plain of Shinar, and the original confusion of language down to Babylon.

And so Zerubbabel is literally the seed of Babylon. He was born there, and that's his name. He leads this first group back, and we did the math of the groups that are enumerated and the extensive portions of Ezra and Nehemiah that are devoted to that list last time.

And we saw the care that was taken, some of the differences in the two lists, what that means.

So tonight we resume looking at these people who return. Why are they returning? What is their mission? What is their purpose? I was involved in a Bible study last night, and the first thing the guy did was walk up to the chalkboard.

He was on a video, but he had a much nicer chalkboard than anything we would have. But he went up to the chalkboard, and he wrote, Why did Jesus come into the world? He put a big underline underneath it, and then he proceeded to ask people to try to answer that question based on their scriptural knowledge and so on. And it's always a useful question to ask, What is the purpose of whatever episode in Scripture we're looking at? So what was the purpose? Was it a divinely ordained and commissioned and commanded purpose? Was it something that was dreamed up by people? What exactly happened? Well, we saw that in the beginning of the book of Ezra, because Cyrus, who we know from Isaiah and other places is God's instrument, tells us that he has received the word from God that he is to send these people back to rebuild the temple.

That's what he said in Ezra chapter 1. Thus says Cyrus king of Persia verse 2, All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me, he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. And it goes on from there. And we're going to see that this is not the only indication that this is in fact a divine purpose.

So, in these first six chapters of Ezra, we have the story of this group of exiles who return. They are given authority. They are given provision.

They have a mandate. They have a purpose. They've got guidance.

They have everything they need to go and do this. So, for one thing, by the time you reach the end of chapter 6, and quite a few years have gone by, this purpose has not really been fulfilled in two ways. First of all, the physical establishment of the temple has not been completed.

And we'll see this when we look at the second return that is detailed in the book of Ezra, beginning in chapter 7. Because why does Ezra come back in chapter 7? Well, when we begin to read that, I'll give you a preview of coming attractions. He's got to bring a whole bunch more stuff to crank up temple worship. It's not going well and it's not going right.

And he's got to go try to get it going. So, these six chapters with all of their lists and all of their details don't seem to get the job done. Well, I would submit as a first point tonight, what is God's purpose in our lives? A pastor I used to listen to when I was growing up on tape would often say, if you're still alive, God still has a purpose for your life.

If you didn't have a purpose for your life, you wouldn't be alive. It's almost a given, right? So, again, we could ask ourselves the question, well, what is the purpose of my life? Or, as I have often quoted to you, and it always comes to my mind in this context, when I went to one of the first forestall lectures at Annapolis, which has become an annual series of lectures, but one of the first ones happened while I was a midshipman. And they brought a former Vietnam POW to

speak to us.

And he was later the vice presidential choice for Ross Perot. And he had the chance to do the vice presidential debate. And so when they turned the camera on him and he got to make his opening remark, he said, who am I and why am I here? And I thought, those are really excellent questions.

Who am I and why am I here? What is the purpose of my life? Well, as we look at this purpose that God has given these exiles, it will illuminate the answer to that question for us. So, we have the decree in chapter 1. And we need to keep track of some dates here. And I apologize for the math.

You know me as an English major. Math is not my favorite thing. But tracking the time here is important.

How do I know it's important? Because the times are given over and over again in this book. And in another book we're going to be looking at. So the times are important.

So, 1.1 of Ezra. First year of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, this is not his first year as the king of Persia.

It's his first year as the sovereign of Babylon. Right? The Jews look at him, okay, you're the new king. So, it's his first year of having control of them.

That's how they're counting it in Babylon. He's got more years if you're a Persian than if you're a Babylonian exile. But in the first year that he has control of Babylon, he wastes no time.

He says, you Jewish exiles need to return to your land and build your God's temple. I got this straight from your God's mouth himself. In a nutshell.

This is, we're going to say, 538 B.C. The decree of Cyrus. Not to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, but to restore and rebuild the temple. Okay, 538.

Now, in the second year and the second month, turn over to Ezra 3, verse 8. We saw last time the story of Zerubbabel getting all the stuff, the donations, the authorization, the travel, all the people that came, who got counted, who was on the rolls, who was registered as a priestly line, and so on. We've covered all of that. We did that in the first two chapters.

So, they're going to restore worship in Jerusalem in chapter 3. So, they've got to kind of get there and move in first. You know how this is. You've got to have a place to live and you've got to kind of get your economy set up before you can really start to work.

You can't live on the job site, so to speak. So, the first part of chapter 3 is occupied with these people coming back to the land and sort of setting up. They move into their cities.

They gather as one man to Jerusalem. Jeshua, the son of Jehozadak, and his brethren, the

priests, Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, arose and built an altar to God. This is a great start, kind of like the history of mankind.

One of the first forms of worship we see of God is the building of an altar and sacrifice thereon. This is Genesis chapter 4, right? Cain and Abel built an altar, sacrifice. Fear had come upon them because of the people of the countries.

They set this altar on its basis. They offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, morning and evening burnt offerings. They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, offered the daily burnt offerings, number required by ordinance for each day.

Afterward, they offered the regular burnt offering and those for the new moons and all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, those of everyone willingly offered a freewill offering to the Lord. Verse 6, from the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, although the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. They gave money to the masons and carpenters, food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs via sea to Joppa according to permission they had from Cyrus, king of Persia.

Now we come to verse 8, Ezra 3 verse 8. Okay, what is their purpose? Why are they commissioned to go? Build the temple. In the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, of course there is no house there, but coming to where the house needs to be, Zerubbabel the son of Sheltiel, Jeshua the son of Josedach, and the rest of their brethren, the priests, and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. So they have started.

So what year would this be? Five. They kind of hit in the cracks. It's 538-537 along in there, right? We say the decree was 539-538.

I just picked 538. So they begin 538-537. Joshua with his sons and his brothers, the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee the work in the house of God.

Now, this is important. Second month of the second year. Make a note.

Second month of the second year. So they've started the work, and you figure, okay, this isn't going to be something you can just throw up overnight like an Amish barn or something. You're going to have to take some time.

There's stone. You're waiting on these logs to come from Lebanon and different places, supplies coming through Joppa, and these people from Tyre and Sidon. But they're underway, right? So you would expect that this thing would start in the second month of the second year and gain momentum as it goes, right? You start small.

As supplies come in, you get more and more people going. You get it organized. People figure

out what they're doing.

It begins to run like a sewing machine. You start to really get this thing underway. Here's the thing.

It almost immediately bogged down. Now, you don't get that in Ezra. What you get in Ezra is, verse 10, When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in the apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals to praise the Lord.

According to the ordinance of David, king of Israel, they sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever toward Israel. All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. This is kind of like the first spade.

They have the golden shovel. Everybody lines up, and they turn over. The governor comes, or the president of the company, or whatever.

The foundation is not finished. This is the day they started the foundation. Trumpets, singing, special music, shouting.

Everybody is just on a big adrenaline rush over the inception of this. It's long awaited. You think about all of the potential, and the dreams, and the hopes, and the aspirations, and the oldest ones of them remembering what the temple of Solomon looked like, and they say, you know, it's coming back.

It's going to be back. Do you remember the prophet Daniel? When we were looking at him some weeks back, and he began to pray about this return, about the 70 years that Jeremiah had talked about, and Daniel prepared himself and went into an extensive prayer mode, and then he was taken aback by God's response, because God said, this isn't going to be what you're hoping for. We're not returning to the glory days of David and Solomon.

Look at what human history is going to unfold, and the people of God are going to be grist in the mill as these great wheels of other empires turn and churn and grind. And it made Daniel sick, literally. And it made him weak, and he had to be propped up and encouraged when he saw that the people of God were no longer going to be at center stage.

They were no longer the pivot around which the axis of the world would turn. If that were the case, the Greenwich Mean Time would be Jerusalem Mean Time. Coordinated Universal Time wouldn't be based on London like it is today and has been forever.

It would be based on Jerusalem Time. Everything would go back to Jerusalem, but long ago, God's people forfeited that role and that privilege. Well, it's similar here.

There is a great expectation, and it starts well. When did we start now? What's the time? Second year, second month. Golden shovel turned to spade.

Singing, shouting, big dreams, big hopes. Everybody's high as a kite, right? Okay. Stick a piece of paper or something in Ezra chapter 3 and turn with me toward the end of the Old Testament to the book of Haggai.

Third book from the end of the Old Testament. Third book back from Matthew. Haggai.

How does this book begin? Haggai 1.1. In the second year of King Darius, Haggai is going to get the word of the Lord to who? Who's Haggai got a message to? The same guy, Babelseed. It's a rubber bell. And to Joshua, the son of Jehoshadak, the high priest.

The same two guys. Now, from Cyrus, who as the king and lord of Babylon is going to have eight or nine years of rule before he kicks off. Then there's going to be Cambyses I or somebody.

Then Darius comes along. This is going to be about 25 or 26 years later. Let me see if I have my math right here.

Until Darius, it's going to be 18 years. Because we started in 538 and the second year of Darius, Darius begins ruling in 522. So, this is going to be 520.

So, the word of the Lord by Haggai to Zerubbabel and Joshua is coming 18 years later. 18 years later. And what does he say? Thus says the Lord of hosts in verse 2. This people is saying the time has not come to build the Lord's house.

So, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses and this temple to lie in ruins. So, 18 years later, after all of that big glorious start, all of those trumpets, all of that blowing and everything else, it's still in ruins. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts.

And then we go on to that message, which we're going to see in a minute. What happened in those intervening 18 years? Well, in Ezra chapter 4, we see the problem. And you can read the rest of chapter 3. The people shouted with a great shout.

People were weeping. You remember the whole thing about some people were weeping when they saw the second temple? The occasion of that weeping, I always thought it was when they saw the finished thing. I was wrong.

I didn't read my Bible closely. It's when they saw the first spade of earth turned over. Because you can see it at the end of chapter 3, verse 12.

Many of the priests and Levites, heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid, when the work on the foundation started. They wept and cried. But others shouted aloud for joy, so that people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people.

For the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. So, you always talk

about something being a big noise. Well, the inception of this project was a big noise.

But look at chapter 4. When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel. Now, the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard. They came to Zerubbabel, verse 2, and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said, Let us build with you, for we seek your God like you do.

And we have sacrificed to him since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here. So, these people are the current occupants of the land, right? If you're familiar at all with Cherokee history, and I'll just use them as an example. Other tribes suffered a similar fate.

But they largely occupied what is now the state of Georgia in the United States. And as European settlers came in, they began to, of course, encroach more and more on that land. Well, the Cherokee Nation didn't like their people being slaughtered and their farms and houses being taken over and so on.

And so, in the 1830s, Chief John Ross took a delegation and went to see President Jackson and said, This ought not to be. They went first to the governor of the state of Georgia. Well, the governor of the state of Georgia was in cahoots with all the settlers, and he wanted nothing more than for all the white people to come in and run all these people out so that they could prosper, take advantage of the great resources.

It was complicated by the fact that a guy found gold in a creek in Georgia, and so there was sort of a mini gold rush. And everybody was calling all over the area, and they were just killing the natives right and left. Long story short, the beginning of the end for the Cherokee people in Georgia started around that time in the early 1830s.

They went all the way to the Supreme Court and got a court decision that said the land is theirs, there are treaties that guarantee their ownership, and when that decision from the Supreme Court hit the desk of Andrew Jackson, he said, Well, the court made the decision. Now let them enforce it. In other words, the head of the executive branch refused to enforce the law that had been upheld by the Supreme Court.

And so a lot of the Cherokees at that time saw the handwriting on the wall, and they left, and they went west. John Ross, principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, and a contingent of people with him, Elijah Boudinot and several others, they continued, and the ones who remained said, Wait, we've got the law on our side, and they fought and fought and fought and fought. Well, it was a losing battle, but it took decades.

So here's what happened. The first ones that left and saw the white man is not going to honor his promise, you know, we have the land as long as the grass grows and the river flows. Forget about that.

We're going to go someplace where he won't take our land. And so they left early and came out to Arkansas and Oklahoma and Missouri and this area and settled. Well, they're a great

distance from the nation, and so they set up their own government, made their own laws, set up their own institutions, set up their own economy.

And so there was an autonomous Cherokee Nation, if you will, here in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, by the middle of the 1800s. The Cherokees who had the law on their side, but not the morality of the white man, eventually lost, and you remember the Trail of Tears story. So those people came out much later.

Well, you've already got people occupying the land. Now you begin to see the point of contact with our story in Ezra. There are people already living in the land, and now here comes a fresh group who says, well, the government has told us this is now our land.

Hey, we're already here. And you say you're the chief. We've already got a chief.

You say you've got a tribal court. We've got a tribal court. You say you've got land deeds and you've got an economy that you're going to foist on us.

We've already had one. We got here first. We set it up.

And depending on who you listen to when you read the history, either the ones that came first should have stayed back there and helped, and maybe the center of gravity would have been sufficient for them to hold on to Georgia. But because they left, these others didn't have enough numbers to give them a fighting chance. Or if you listen to these guys, we came out and carved out a new nation, and you need to come out and be subordinate to us.

So there's arguments on both sides. Do you see my point? Same thing here. There are people who have been living in the land of Judah and have been living in Jerusalem.

And now here's 40,000 people coming back with Zerubbabel saying, we've got the law on our side from Cyrus's decree, and we're bringing in money, and we're going to build, and we're going to do this, that, and the other. And the people say they resent it. We were here first.

We've been here ever since Esau had. So who are you to come in as Johnny-come-latelys and reorganize the landscape? And you can see that people could feel justified on either side of that. Look, you people lost your land.

You lost a war fair and square. We moved in here. We own it.

My family and my family before that, my generations before that, remember the Middle East? Israel takes land. Hey, wait a minute. My family's been here ever since the early 1900s when we swarmed in here and just kind of claimed it by presence.

And so you've got your Palestinian claims and you've got your Israeli claims. And there's right in the eyes of people who look at it from their point of view. Well, this is as old as biblical times, and this is your example here.

So what's going to happen? These who are the occupants of the land, when the former occupants come back and say, well, this used to be my great-granddad's, and this used to be my granddad's, well, the people who have been living there for the past 70, 80, 90 years say, well, tough. We're here now. And so they realize that because the government has officially sanctioned this return, they can't fight them outright.

So what are they going to do? They're going to do guerrilla warfare. They're going to do it by subterfuge. They're going to appear to go along, to get along, but they're going to sabotage and undermine and create division and strife and prevent these guys from getting anything done.

That's what you have in Ezra chapter 4. Let us build. We seek the Lord as you do. We've sacrificed to him forever.

Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the heads of the father's houses said, you may do nothing with us to build a house for our God. We alone will build as King Cyrus has commanded us. So the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah.

They troubled them in building and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose. And this is not just counselors. This is more like agents.

This is buying people off, bribing officials, waylaying shipments, just generally monkey wrench in the works. All the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, King of Persia. That's how the thing got frustrated for these 18 or so years.

Now, let me ask you a question. If you're Zerubbabel and you're Joshua and you're these other people who the Spirit of the Lord moved to come and do this work, and you're trying to do the work, and this frustration doesn't just get attempted, it succeeds. What are we to think? Was this just of the Lord that they not succeed? Or is the success of these efforts, these counselors, these agents, an indication that there's something wrong with the group that returned? What would you think? Let me ask you this.

When Solomon set up to build the temple, were there any agents that succeeded in stopping him? God honored David's wish to build him a house. He said, you can't build it, but your son will. David makes the plans.

Solomon has a super abundance of materials. When Moses was going to build the tabernacle, according to God's command, did he have any trouble getting materials? Remember how people were donating so much of the loot that they got from Egypt that Moses had to tell them to stop? He said, we've got too much as it is. Stop giving.

You're melting down your mirrors and donating your jewelry. We've got too much. You can stop now.

We're melting this stuff down for footings. We're using silver so that we can put poles in the

ground. We've got enough.

So in the building of the tabernacle, in the building of the first temple, when God says build and they build, no amount of opposition succeeds, right? Here, the opposition is successful for the better part of two decades. So my suspicion, just from the pattern, is something's wrong in the group. But I couldn't prove it unless I were to turn over to Haggai.

Let's turn over to Haggai because he's now down into the reign of Darius. Remember, we're at the second year. What does God say to these people? These same people led by the same two guys, the civil leader and the religious leader, Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Verse 4, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet saying, is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses and this temple in ruins? Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. He doesn't say consider the ways of your enemies. Consider the wily stratagems and schemes of your opposition.

What's the problem? You need to examine your ways. You need to consider what you yourself are doing. Now, suggested point of application.

Many times when we feel like we have a legitimate purpose, it's a godly purpose, it's biblical, it's sound, there's no real question. If you're providing for your family, that's something you're supposed to do. If you're looking out for your kids, if you're looking out for one another, if you're trying to practice the law of love, love your neighbor as yourself, putting others ahead of yourself, looking out for their interests, and so on, and your purpose seems to be getting frustrated, and we say, well, it's because of this, it's because of that, it's because of the other, and we start blaming circumstances, this might be a helpful example for us to look at and examine ourselves and make sure that we are in the faith.

Anytime we trade taking responsibility for assigning blame, if we find ourselves assigning blame instead of looking for where we can take responsibility, that's a red flag. That's what was not happening here. So, clear down in the second year of King Darius in the sixth month.

Second year of Darius, the sixth month. So this is down in 520 or so. They've had 18 years to get this thing done.

And God says, you're sitting in your paneled homes. You're not just in a home, notice, you're in a paneled home. What happened to some of that wood that was earmarked for the temple? The foundation's not even done.

There's no place to put the wood that got shipped in from Tyre and Sidon. So they said, well, there's no point in just sitting here turning gray and going to waste. We'll just use this wood, and once the foundation's finished, we'll order more wood.

Where do you think this paneling came from? It's not like Israel has ever been a great grove of trees. Even when Solomon built, he had to go to Lebanon to get the cedars, remember? Hiram,

king of Tyre and all of that. So, where's this wood coming from? I'll tell you where it's coming from.

It was originally earmarked for the temple, and they haven't even got the foundation laid. So God sends them a note via Haggai. Is it time for you to dwell in your paneled houses, your sumptuously furnished wood-appointed houses? And this temple is in ruins.

And the word temple there is the very same word as your houses. This house. This house.

What house? God's house. And by way of your interpretive triangle here, spiritual priorities are not being observed. God doesn't need a house.

Remember what he told David? Do you think you're going to build me a house? I've got the heavens here. But I appreciate your idea that there will be a place where my glory can be reflected. But this is a spiritual priority that has been neglected.

So, God says, consider your ways. You have had some clues here. You have sown much and bring in little.

You eat but do not have enough. You drink but you are not filled with drink. You clothe yourselves but no one is warm.

He who earns wages earns wages to put in a bag with holes. Have you noticed that your way is not prospering? You've managed to panel your homes but have you noticed that you're not receiving the blessing that is promised to the faithful and the obedient? Right? God has sent previous clues and they didn't read them. So now he's sending a vocal prophet to spell it out for them.

Verse 7, Thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. Stop and reflect. Take some time to ponder, to think.

I used to use the word meditate a lot and I realized it probably sounded kind of transcendental. But in the biblical sense, in that law does he meditate day and night, Psalm 1? Consider your ways. Reflect.

Take some time. Set aside some time. Maybe early in the morning before the day really starts.

Maybe in the evening before you get too tired to succeed. Go to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified, says the Lord. Why do they have to go to the mountains and bring wood? He's talking about the mountains up north.

There is no wood in what mountains? Mount Zion is the mountain in that area. It's not like there's a bigger mountain range that's deeply forested. Go back to where the first wood came from that you used on yourselves and do this thing right.

That I may take pleasure in it and be glorified, says the Lord. Now what should have been their

clue? Haggai should never have had to deliver this prophecy. What should be the clue for us? You looked for much, but indeed it came to little.

And when you brought it home, I blew it away. I have given you some warning discipline here. I have frustrated your purposes.

Now some of these people were actually looking for the completion of the foundation of the temple. Remember the frustration back in Ezra? The agents frustrated their efforts for lo these many years? God says there's a reason for that. Why do you think those frustration efforts were allowed to succeed? Not just in God's purpose, but in every other.

You say, well Lord, we'd have finished if you hadn't let these people frustrate our efforts. No, their heart is not right. Remember when Balaam was going to go at the behest of Balak and say something over Israel? And God stopped him in the way? God told him to go, but then God stopped him.

Remember when Moses was heading back after Sinai to go to Egypt and let the people go? And God stopped him? What was the problem with Balaam that God had to stop him, with the talking donkey and the angel with the sword? What was his problem? He was doing the right thing, but his heart wasn't right. What was the problem with Moses that he got stopped at the border and his wife ends up saying, you're a bridegroom of blood? He was going, but his heart wasn't right. He hadn't observed the law of God in his own family, the right of circumcision that went all the way back to Abraham.

He hasn't been to Sinai yet, but this is God's law back to Abraham. And Moses had not observed it in his own family. It's like it says in the New Testament, if a man cannot rule well his own house, he has no business being a pastor or an elder or serving in a larger capacity in a group of believers.

He hasn't got his own house in order. That's the problem here. These people have been commissioned and they've got all the enthusiasm.

They're shouting shouts and singing songs and all the rest of it, but their heart is not right before the Lord to do this task. And so He has stopped them. And He's frustrated their original purpose and He's frustrated their personal purposes.

Everything they try to bring home is in a bag with holes. Therefore, verse 10, the heavens above you withhold the dew and the earth withholds its fruit. Notice that God will wake us up with an interruption of provision.

A provision which is a promise. You remember that whole thing, I've never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread? He doesn't say I've never seen a child of God go hungry or his seed beg bread. Who is it that doesn't go hungry and his seed doesn't beg? The righteous.

The obedient. If we are disobedient, if we are apathetic, if we are distracted, if we are misled, if we are waylaid, if we get frustrated by one thing or another and we go astray, God may withhold provision. How many times did God send a drought to Israel to wake them up? Think about the days of Elijah.

I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands. All the labor of your hands. Our first, primary, fundamental, foremost purpose is just like what Jesus said about himself.

I have come to do thy will, O God. If it is your will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done.

So Haggai, 18 years after they get started, brings this message, and there is a great response. Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, 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 them. The people feared the presence of the Lord.

Haggai spoke the message to the people, saying, I am with you, says the Lord. So 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 the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the Lord their God on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of King Darius.

Twenty-fourth day of the sixth month. Now, when did the message from Haggai come? Second year in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, right? So, three weeks later, they were all hammer and tongs. They were after it, right? It takes time in a pre-technology day to get the word out, get everybody's spirit stirred up by the message.

So they had this period of time. So now, you say, alright, this thing is going to really get after it now. They had a lapse, but they've learned their lesson.

Everything is going to be great, right? Look at Haggai chapter 2. In the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet. So how long is this after the first word of the Lord that came by Haggai the prophet? About a month, right? A little over a month. He started at the beginning of the month, and they kind of got with it in the latter part of the month.

So, they've had a month to show that their zeal is of a sustainable character, right? But just a month later, the word of the Lord by Haggai comes saying, Speaking out of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua the son of Jehoiach the high priest, to the remnant of the people, saying, Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? How do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Now, why would God say this? Well, without going into great detail, if you go back and look at how long it took

Solomon to build the first temple, and how long it's taken these guys just to get the foundation laid, there's a great contrast. I think Solomon was a building, and I'm doing this from memory, I believe it was about six years. I think he got it done in about six years, start to finish.

These guys have had three times that long, and he says, Okay, those of you that remember the first temple, and you've been working on this one for 18 years, how do you think these two compare? Three times as long, it ought to be three times as great, something like that. And this is a month that, why would God send them anything, if they're really making progress, why would God send them another word and say, Look at how this looks? They've been working on it a month. Who is left among you who saw it? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel, be strong, Joshua, all you people of the land, and work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts.

Now look at the next verse. This is the key, this is the highlight verse of the evening. Can you see why? Look at verse five.

Haggai 2. According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remains among you. Do not fear. My spirit remains.

How many times have we talked about the fact that the shortcomings and the shortfall in the Old Testament was because they didn't have the ubiquitous ministry of the spirit such as we have. But God says, My spirit is with you. I've given you the word, I've given you the provision, and I've given you my spirit.

Remember Bezalel and Aholiab who were the workmen on the tabernacle, and God put his spirit in their midst so that they could do this supernaturally great work of building the tabernacle. God enabled and empowered the guys that worked on Solomon's temple to surpass themselves, weaving the curtains and putting the ornate decorations and the beauty and the place where God's glory would be reflected. When they finished the tabernacle, God's glory filled it.

When they finished Solomon's temple, God's glory filled it. And God says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Once more, it is a little while, I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations.

They shall all come to the desire of all nations. I will fill this temple with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts.

The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts. There's a lot of authority in this.

You notice how many times he gives Zerubbabel's title and he gives Joshua's title and he gives his own title. I am the Lord of hosts. Now, does the glory of God fill this second temple? No, it does not.

Does God shake the nations and make Jerusalem the place of peace? Yes, for everybody.

Yerushalayim, city of peace. Does it live up to its name? The thing has been contested from that day to this, right? How can God say this and make this promise to faithful Zerubbabel and faithful Joshua and it doesn't happen? Is Haggai not inspired Scripture? What did I say is the highlight verse of the evening? Verse 5. According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt.

According to the word I covenant. What is the covenant that God made when they came out of Egypt? Which one is it? The one where he said I will take you to a land flowing with milk and honey? Do we have milk and honey in view here? What is the word that God covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt that is pertinent and applies right here? Keep your finger here and turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 7. This is where the people are going to go. You know this already and we are going to see it.

Don't make marriages. See verse 3. Don't make marriages with these people. Don't give your daughter to their son.

Don't take their daughter for your son. They will turn your sons away from serving me. This is where Ezra and Nehemiah are both going to come and say this is the word of the Lord about coming into the land.

This must be what Haggai is talking about. What is the covenant that God is talking about? God tells Moses in ahead of time in Deuteronomy He will be with them if they are obedient. Right before the blessings and cursings You are a holy people to the Lord.

This is Deuteronomy 7.6 The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord didn't set His love on you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any other people. For you were the least of all peoples.

But because the Lord loves you, because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore know that the Lord your God He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments. He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them.

He will not be slack with him who hates Him. And you know this is the Biblical concept of hate. This isn't I hate God in an emotional sense.

This is hate in the Jacob and Esau sense. Not prioritizing. Not putting first.

Therefore, verse 11 You shall keep the commandments, the statutes and the judgments which I command you today to observe them. Verse 12 Then it shall come to pass because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, multiply you.

He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain, your new wine, your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock in the land which He swore to your fathers to give you. You'll be blessed above all peoples. There will not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock.

The Lord will take away from you all sickness, will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt, etc. Now what does this stand in stark contrast to? What did Haggai just tell them? Have you noticed that those covenant promises are not coming to pass? Since you've come back to the land? Everything is in a bag of holes? There's a drought? You go and what you're expecting is not there? What is he saying in Haggai when he says according to the word I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt? It is conditioned on obedience from the heart. That's what it means when it says love the Lord your God.

This is obedience from the heart. What's the first and greatest commandment? According to Jesus. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength.

Right? Without that, according to the covenant, God is not going to bless. So Haggai reminds them if they know the word of God, if they're paying any attention to the covenant that God made with them, according to the word I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, my spirit remains among you. And do not fear.

Well, what happens if they don't? That's also the word he covenanted with them. This is why their enemies and opponents have succeeded for 18 years. This is why although they're trying to dwell in panel houses, there is a shortfall and there is a drought.

So that is the key. Carefully consider your ways. Verse 15.

Chapter 2. Haggai. Now, carefully consider. He told them in the beginning, carefully consider your ways.

Verse 5 of chapter 1. He said in verse 7 of chapter 1 of Haggai, consider your ways. Well, what's the problem? Look in verse 10 of Haggai chapter 2. This is what we'll close with. On the 24th day of the 9th month, 2nd year of Darius.

So when did we start out? We started out in the 2nd month. Then we came back in the 6th month. I'm sorry, 2nd year of King Darius in the 6th month.

We started out there. Then we came back in the 7th month in chapter 2. Now we're in the 9th month. So now, from the message that they got in the 6th month, and the message that they got in the 7th month, consider your ways, consider your ways.

Now it's the 9th month. 2nd year of Darius. The word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Ask the priests about the law.

If you carry holy meat in the fold of your garment, and with the edge you touch bread or stew,

wine, or oil, or any food, will it become holy? The priest answered, No. Haggai says, If one who is unclean because of a dead body touches any of these, will it be unclean? They said, Yes, it would be unclean. What does this mean? Taking a holy thing and touching an unholy thing doesn't sanctify it, unless you're Jesus.

Right? Jesus could touch a leper, and the leper became clean. Jesus could touch the dead, and the dead became alive. But outside of the Lord Jesus Himself, contact with defilement by a holy thing, defilement flows, not righteousness.

Right? Haggai in verse 14 says, So is this people and so is this nation before me, says the Lord, and so is every work of their hands. And what they offer is unclean. They started with the altar and sacrifices and observing the feasts, and they laid a few stones at the foundation, but they have not sanctified themselves.

Their heart is not right. And when they touch a thing, they defile it. Coming back and associating with the temple doesn't make them holy.

Being the ones who pulled up stakes and came in and began this glorious work, that does not sanctify them. Being led by Zerubbabel and Joshua, who by all accounts are good guys, that doesn't make all of the people and their efforts sanctified. Their hearts are wrong.

And month after month, this continues. So he says in verse 15, carefully consider from this day forward, from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord, since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there's only ten. Have you noticed that you're not prospering, even though you're allegedly doing the work of the Lord? You're losing ground.

It's a story of loss. You go to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths, there's only twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail and all your labors of your hands, yet you did not turn to me.

Corrective discipline has not, isn't this the story from before the exile? They've not learned the lesson of their parents and their grandparents who lost the land because their hearts weren't right. And when their hearts weren't right, eventually their works weren't right either. Well just fixing your works isn't going to change your heart.

It doesn't go from the outside in. Touching stones that are going to be part of the temple doesn't sanctify you. Your work is not going to be sanctified unless you are sanctified.

Right? Consider now from this day forward, this is the fourth time now he said consider, consider, consider. From the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. That's the fifth time.

Five times now Haggai has said pay attention, reflect on this. Is the seed still in the barn? As yet the vine, the fig, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded fruit. Notice that there's italics there and he says but from this day I will bless you.

That's not what it says at all. That's why you have so many words in italics. As yet the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have not yielded.

I will bless you when those things start yielding. When the fig tree starts bearing figs. What kind of tree was it that Jesus cursed because it didn't have figs? Fig tree.

Who's buried in Grant's tomb? I will bless you when you start bearing fruit. Bear fruit. What's the message of John the Baptist when they come to him and say what shall we do? What's the first words out of his mouth when they say what should we do? Bear fruit in keeping with change of mind.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. That's when God will bless. Times of refreshing will come.

Now, Zerubbabel and Joshua are good guys. They are leading a failed effort because the people are not with them. And you think well, that's tough luck for them.

No it isn't. Look at the end of Haggai. Again the word of the Lord came to Haggai on the 24th day of the month.

This is the same day. But it's a separate message. There's one message for the people.

There's another message for Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying I will shake heaven and earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. Doesn't this sound familiar? Didn't he say this back in chapter 2? Verse 6 Thus says the Lord of hosts, once more it is a little while I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and the dry land.

I will shake all nations. They will come to the desire of nations. I will fill this temple with glory.

It could have been this temple. But these people are not ready. In the same way that the kingdom could have come in when Jesus offered it to his generation.

It doesn't mean that it's not going to happen. It doesn't mean that the prophecies of his kingship and his rulership and his taking the throne of his father David are not going to come true. It's just not now.

This is the encouragement. This is the word of hope and promise to Zerubbabel, a faithful guy. He's done everything right.

But the people are not with him. He can't carry them on his shoulders. Contact with him doesn't make them righteous.

So what does God say to him personally? This is a prophet sent to one guy with a personal message. God says, I will shake heaven and earth. I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms.

I will destroy the strength of Gentile kingdoms. Think back to Daniel. Think back to Ezekiel.

I will overthrow chariots and those who ride them, the horses and their riders shall come down

everyone by the sword of his brother. In that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Sheltiel, says the Lord, I will make you like a signet ring for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts. The reward for your faithfulness and your diligence even though your effort is a failure here, this temple isn't what it should be and it isn't going to get finished under your watch and it's never going to be the fulfillment of my original promise but you are coming back and you're going to see my glory after the nations are shaken, after the chariots are emptied, after the Gentiles are overthrown.

You, Zerubbabel, son of Sheltiel, your physical self is going to see this and you're going to serve as a signet ring. This is a promise of resurrection and reward and opportunity in the millennial kingdom for a faithful man who did not see his efforts bear fruit in his earthly life. We are never ultimately shortchanged.

We are never ultimately at a loss if we are faithful and obedient. If we are in the midst of a people of unclean lips, if we are in the midst of a people who are going the wrong way, who will not catch the fire of God's word, who don't see the opportunity, if we are lone rangers and when we call nobody comes, when we want to go forward no one will join us, take heart. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love and your reward is secure.

Your blessing is as certain as every other unfailing decree of God. Don't be fooled by circumstances, don't be fooled or discouraged by short-term outcomes. John the Baptist didn't have much of a short-term outcome, did he? Imprisoned and beheaded.

The Apostle Paul never saw what the gospel was going to do worldwide in his lifetime. He had a lot of discouragement, he had a lot of disappointment, he had a lot of suffering. He also got beheaded, he was also imprisoned.

But, what do you think is in store for those two men when the Lord Jesus returns? Man born of woman, Jesus said, none greater than John. And the man who called himself the chief of sinners is going to have a gate named for him in the New Jerusalem. We look at this and realize that there are generations where people just will not heed the call.

You remember it was over in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 8, I've quoted that several times. It isn't the tall spirit that counts, it's the enduring spirit, the long spirit. It isn't how loud you shout and how loudly you sing at the beginning of a thing.

It is he who endures to the end who will be saved. You have need of patience so that after you've suffered a while, you inherit the promises. You see that here.

Haggai comes to this people and challenges them. The people never do get it. Zerubbabel and Joshua get it.

And Zechariah is going to talk. You see the promise to Zerubbabel here. We're going to see what happens with Joshua in Zechariah next time.

But the encouragement for us is don't let the crowd bog you down. Don't let the generation discourage you. God is in his heaven and his books are detailed and accurate.

And God honors those who honor him. Man looks on the outward appearance, judges things by the outcomes, the Lord looks on the heart. If we are faithful, if we are obedient, if we consider our ways, examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, God in heaven will never suffer the righteous to be moved.

It's one of those sort of hidden lessons in the book of Ezra. We're going to look next time at the second wave with Ezra himself when he comes back and the third wave with Nehemiah and we're going to look at Zechariah and the message in that great prophet specifically as it regards Joshua the high priest. But we'll close here tonight in word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the encouragement that we receive from your word and wherever we look, if we look in the Old Testament, we find wonderful truths that rebuke and correct and instruct us and inspire and encourage us. We thank you most of all for the example of the Lord Jesus who put our interests ahead of his own, who came to do your will, who accomplished it at great cost to himself, but because of that he is highly exalted, he is seated at your right hand where he continues to express his love for us by interceding for us, by representing us and one day in the not too distant future he will return and take us to himself and bring us before your throne. We thank you for that wonderful hope and promise.

We pray that we can be worthy of it and that it will motivate and encourage each one of us to live a life that is pleasing in your sight and reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus as we ask these things in his name. Amen.