

PostExilicProphets 21-05-06a

Good evening, this is Thursday, the 6th of May, 2021. We continue our study in the post-exilic prophets. We're looking at Haggai.

We are in chapter one and moving in the direction of chapter two. Very fascinating look at the end, ending period, the last revelation that God sends to his people at the close of the previous dispensation. And since we feel like we're rapidly approaching the close of our dispensation, these words resonate with meaning and application for us.

So we're going to pick up this morning and we're going to look at chapter two of Haggai and this effort to rebuild the temple, which was God's command. That's the reason he sent Haggai and Zechariah was to fire the people up. We're going to see a little bit of background on that.

And the title of our study tonight is doing right wrong, doing right wrong. So it appeals to me, it's succinct and almost grammatically incorrect, doing right wrong. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study and we'll get started.

Father, we're so grateful that you have woven us into the fabric of your plan and purpose. You have, through grace, given us the supply, the standing, the position, the opportunity and the power to serve and to reflect your glory now and in the future. We know that understanding your word, learning from it and putting it into practice in our lives is a key part of that preparation for future service and future function.

And we pray that as we look at this portion of your word this evening, that your Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts in such a way that it accomplishes that goal, enables and empowers us for love toward one another, to express our love to you and to be prepared for every good work. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. As we approach our passage this evening, you remember the general flow of events here.

The people have returned from the Babylonian captivity, which began in Babylon, but it sort of ends up in the days of the Medes and Persians because Nebuchadnezzar scrolls off the map. His successor, for whom he was the predecessor, Belshazzar gets defeated. You have the incursion of the Medes and the Persians represented in Daniel's vision by the bear with one high shoulder and ribs in its teeth, or the shoulders and chest of brass that the king himself saw, that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision.

So we're in those days now, the 70 years that Jeremiah prophesied have been completed, the people have returned and they've been back in the land now for a while. And yet they did not begin the reconstruction. Actually they began, they didn't finish the reconstruction that they started when they came back.

Just to read ourselves into the picture, we have not really dipped back into the book of Ezra as of yet, but this would be a good time to do so. So you can put something in the page there,

Haggai is not always easy to find, although my Bible is getting well creased there. And turn back to Ezra chapter three.

Ezra chapter three. Ezra of course details the, if you flip back to chapter one, my new King James starts at one one with the end of the Babylonian captivity. Corresponding to second Chronicles 36, 22 and 23, first year of Cyrus.

And then in chapter two, you have a list of all the ones who return. And that's a long list. You've got the sons of Barzillai who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai, the Gileadite in verse 61.

The Urim and Thummim are in verse 63 of chapter two there of Ezra. And of note is that there is a lot of wealth that comes back beginning in verse 65, besides the male and female servants of whom there were 7,337, they had 200 men and women singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6,720 donkeys.

The people are not coming back in poverty and in rags. These were signs of affluence. They're coming back with wherewithal, they're coming back with plenty of wealth.

Notice in verse 68, some of the heads of the father's houses, when they came to the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem, and what are they coming back to? It is utterly destroyed. It has been lying in ruins for the better part of 70 years, right? So when they see that, they offered freely for the house of God to erect it in its place. So according to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas in any age at any time.

This is a lot of money. This is a lot of capital. 61,000 gold drachmas, 5,000 minas of silver, 100 priestly garments.

So the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the Nethanim dwelt in their cities and all Israel in their cities. So early on now, when the seventh month had come, this is chapter three of Ezra, children of Israel are in the cities. People gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

Joshua, Yeshua, the son of Josedach and his brethren, the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and his brethren. Remember, these are the addressees of our Haggai prophecy, but this is earlier. This is years before Haggai.

They came, arose, and built the altar of the God of Israel. Now, think about your temple geography. You know what the temple is.

You know where the temple was. Kind of a square thing, right? Like the tabernacle. Where is the altar? Is it in the temple? No, it is not.

It sits out in front of the temple. Remember the great bronze altar of sacrifice. Then you have the bronze sea, the laver.

Then you have the door to the holy place. Then you go through to the Holy of Holies, if you're

the high priest, and in where the Ark of the Covenant had been. So the site for the altar is not in or on the temple or its foundation.

It's in front. So it's nearby, but there still is no temple. They built the altar, and they started making offerings on it, burnt offerings, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

Verse three, this is Ezra 3.3. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases. They offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening burnt offerings. They kept the Feast of Tabernacles, offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.

Afterward, they had the regular burnt offering for new moons and all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated. Notice these consecrated new moons and feasts. This is month by month and year by year because time is passing and the temple is not being rebuilt.

So new moons, that's every new month. New moon means a new month. That's a lunar calendar in Israel.

And the appointed feasts of the Lord, these are the annual feasts that are coming and going, calendar flipping off the wall there. Those are everyone willing to offer a freewill offering to the Lord. From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord.

Although, verse six, the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. They're back, they're offering offerings, but there's no house. They gave money to the masons and the carpenters, food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea to Joppa according to the permission they had from Cyrus, King of Persia.

Second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the brethren and priests, all those had come out of the captivity, began work and appointed the Levites from 20 years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Joshua with his sons, Cadmiel arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God. More guys.

Verse 10, the builders laid the foundation of the temple. The priest stood in their apparel with trumpets, cymbals, praise the Lord. So they got trumpets, they've got tambourines, they've got cymbals, they've got music, they've got big noise and celebration here as they begin to lay the foundation.

And this is Joshua and Zerubbabel. These are the same guys that we are gonna see far in the future being addressed by Haggai. They sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord.

My point here is when you look at the beginning of this effort that has languished for somewhere 17 to 20 years by the time of Haggai, this is 17 years earlier when they laid this foundation. All of these gifts were given, all of these horns were blown, all of these cymbals

were crashing, all of these singers were singing, all of the priests were overseeing and there was a great noise of celebration and a bustle of activity. We're gonna get this thing built and it died on the vine and it was opposed by a lot of the people who were living in the land in the meantime.

I've told you before what happens when you split up a group of people and then reunite them later. This happened to the Cherokee Nation and some of the other civilized tribes that were on the Trail of Tears. Some of them left early, came out here to what would become Indian Territory and ultimately the state of Oklahoma and others resisted and tried to hang on to their land and they were separated by many years in their arrival here.

Well, the old settlers that came first resented and resisted the new ones coming with the actual chief of the Cherokee Nation, John Ross. They said, well, we've already got a tribal government, we've got our own stuff set up here and now there's two different systems and two different groups and the oldies don't like the newbies and so on. And even in the military, even at service academies and such, people wanna call other people boot and newbie and you're beneath me because you haven't been here as long and there's just a thing in human nature that wants to find a reason to feel superior to others and it manifests itself.

Well, the people that never did leave in the captivity and stayed and some of them, many of them intermarried with other people that stayed behind and nobody was keeping track of who was descended from whom and you end up with what will become the Samaritans who are a mixed blood, part Jewish and part Canaanite. Well, those people are in the land and then the Jews that have been suffering in captivity start coming back and saying, we're gonna build the temple. Well, there's resistance to this, there's opposition to it and that's what's detailed in the next part of chapter three.

Now, when they lay this foundation, there's a great shout, they praise the Lord, this is verse 11 of chapter three of Ezra, Ezra 3.11. The people shouted with a great shout, they praise the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. Next verse, but many of the priests and Levites and heads of the father's houses, old men who had seen the first temple. Remember now, this is nearly 20 years before Haggai and Zechariah and so guys that might be 60 and 70 may not be around in the later days when they finally finished this project, but there was a lot of old people who could remember what the old Solomon's temple looked like and they wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes.

Many shouted loud for joy, but there's a mixed reaction. Some of them say, oh, this is tacky, tacky, tacky compared to the glory in the days of Solomon. It's never gonna match, it's never gonna be as good and they wept.

Some are joyful, some are sad and the people couldn't discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping and lamentation because the people shouted with a loud shout and the sound was heard afar off. Then in chapter four, adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel.

They came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the father's houses and said to them, well, let us build with you for we seek your God as you do.

We have sacrificed to him ever since the days of Esau, Haddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here. Remember the Northern kingdom, Assyria and the 10 Northern tribes. And so these people say, we want to join back with you, but guess what? There is racism, there's bigotry, there's discrimination.

And they say, Zerubbabel, verse three, just Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the heads of the father's houses of Israel said to them, you may do nothing with us to build a house for our God. We alone will build to the Lord God of Israel as king Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us. So the people of the land got hot under the collar about this.

Now, is it justified that Joshua and Zerubbabel resist these people? Separate question. I'm only pointing out that there is this huge, as they say in Britain, controversy. There's a great, great conflict here.

The people of the land want to be a part of it and the people actually engaged in the work say no. Now, why do the people want to be a part of it? Good question. But they say that they've been worshiping God the whole time.

Is it true? Is it not? The Bible does not say. Interestingly, the Bible does not come down on the side of Joshua and Zerubbabel or on the side of the people of the land. People of the land claim they are God worshipers and they want to come and help and contribute.

And Joshua and Zerubbabel say absolutely no, not only no, but sheol no and shoo them away. And so the people get angry and they say, well, if we can't join you, we're going to beat you. And so they go into active opposition.

So the people of the land tried to discourage. Discourage doesn't mean psychologically demotivate. That means they began to actively resist and cause problems.

And if you've ever seen someone resist a building project, this amounts to theft, vandalism, sabotage, threats to workers and so on. And they also, they troubled them in building and they hired counselors against them. They sent lobbyists to Cyrus, King of Persia and Darius, the King of Persia to undermine the political empowerment that had been given to these people.

So just think for a moment, and we've been through Ezra and Nehemiah in more detail than this. I only want to point out that the contrast between the days of the tabernacle that Moses built in the wilderness, where the people also wealthy from the spoils of Egypt contributed so much that Moses had to tell them to quit. Please stop, you're giving too much.

We can't use it. Keep your treasure. You know, what nonprofit, what church ever gets up in the pulpit and says, please don't put anything else in the offering plate.

It's too much. We have to stop giving, it's too much. But that was the case in the days of Solomon because of the victories of David and the spoils of war and the blessing of God upon Solomon because of his initially humble heart and desire to please God and to rule the people well.

He had largess beyond anyone's wildest dreams. Can we pull a cord here? I feel like I'm in jail. With these bars.

So look at the contrast between the days of Moses and the days that we see in Joshua and Zerubbabel. Now, if I just duck, that's good, thank you. I still have glory on my forehead, but I don't think there's much we can do about that.

So think of the contrast. What is different? What is different in these days? Now, the people in the wilderness are eventually all going to drop. You can roll this thing up and just shove it in that.

I wish we could turn the camera around here to see the, not that one, next one down left. Okay, that's pretty good. We'll go with that.

Thank you. What is the difference? The people in the wilderness have their problems, golden calf, complaining, quail, earth opening and swallowing, offering strange fire. They are far from perfect, but in the days when the tabernacle is going to be built, it's one of their high points.

They do have moments of faith. They trust God and cross the Red Sea. They trust God for victory against the Amalekites.

Remember Moses with his raised arms and so on. They do have their moments. And one of their moments of success is when they contribute to the building of the tabernacle.

And Solomon is going to have his days of failure, especially in his latter years, but he shines at the beginning and he is a man of faith and obedience. Now, hear me closely. There is a way to do a right thing in a wrong way.

There's a way to do a right thing in a wrong way. And boy, she must be thirsty. No, she'll finish eventually.

I hope. I can't think at the moment. All right.

There is a difference in the heart of the people that have returned. And this is an important message for us. Really important.

Important to focus on, important to remember, important to get to. Everyone makes a mistake. Everyone can arrive at the point where we need correction from God, discipline from God, even judgment from God.

The post-exilic times where we have our post-exilic prophets prophesying. What just preceded

it? What is it post of? The exile, which was discipline, punishment, judgment from God for what? Disobedience and faithlessness. What is the purpose of that judgment? What is the purpose of that discipline? Whom the Lord loves, He chastens.

He scourges every son whom He receives. No chastening is fun at the moment to paraphrase, but it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness when it works. The word of God is profitable for doctrine, reproof and correction and instruction in righteousness.

So what should the people of God coming out of the captivity here, coming out of the judgment, what should they have learned? They should have learned from the mistakes of their fathers. This is a new generation. The generation that went into the land with Joshua learned from the mistakes of their fathers and they were not faithless and disobedient.

They didn't grumble and complain. They didn't pull back when Joshua led them forward into battle. Soon as they got across the Jordan, they were circumcised and they waited three days before they proceeded on to Jericho and Ai and the battles where hail and fire are falling from heaven.

You remember that? These were people of faith. God gave them victory and gave them possession in the land because they learned the lessons exemplified in their fathers, the preceding generation. So the challenge for this generation in the days of Haggai, Ezra, Nehemiah, Zachariah is to learn the lessons that caused the captivity, that caused God to require his Sabbaths back from the people.

That's why in Haggai chapter one, the exhortation from God is what? Consider your ways. We saw this last time, consider your ways. Now, what did he not say in light of the exhortation and the observation that you're dwelling in paneled houses and the house of God lies in ruins? He didn't say consider the work.

He didn't say consider the temple. He didn't say consider the opinion of other people. Or consider the opinion of nations that surround the land.

What did he say to consider? What did God tell these people to think about? Consider your ways. Your ways. This is what you do based on the thoughts and intents of your heart, right? Your ways.

What are your priorities? What are your goals? What are your values? Because if you don't fix those, the work, even if it gets done, isn't going to be pleasing in God's sight. This is the point. Is it right or wrong to build the temple? It is right.

God said, look, my house is lying in ruins. It needs to be built. Is it possible to do a right thing in a wrong way? Can you do the right thing for the wrong reasons? Well, you know, obviously, of course, this is true.

We have copious examples of this inscription. We're going to look at a few of them when we

come back from the break. But here's the point.

You're still in Ezra. Take a look at chapter four. These adversaries are trying to dismantle, discourage, undermine, sabotage, both actively, physically, politically, and in every other way, the work of rebuilding the temple.

So verse six of Ezra four, in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Artaxerxes also. These guys wrote to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. They wrote in Aramaic, translated into the Aramaic language.

And they give you this long letter. And let it be known to the king, verse 12, the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem. They came from you to us who were already here.

See that? They're building a rebellious and evil city and they are finishing its walls and repairing its foundations. Let it now be known to the king that if this city is built and the walls completed, they will not pay tax, tribute, or custom, and the king's treasury will be diminished. Can you say false narrative? Can you say we're making up a story to accomplish our objectives that isn't in any way true? So because we received support from the palace, it was not proper for us to see the king's dishonor.

Therefore we have said, this is all for your good, O king, when it isn't. So the king sent an answer in verse 17, peace and so forth. I love that.

In verse 17, peace and so forth. The letter which you sent has been read. I gave the command, search has been made.

It was found in former times that this city has revolted against kings. Rebellion and sedition have been fostered in it. There also have been mighty kings over Jerusalem who ruled over all the region beyond the river.

Tax, tribute, and custom were paid to them. Give the command to make these men cease that the city may not be built until the command is given by me. So the plot succeeds and the policy for building up the house of God, the city of God for the people of God is halted.

Victory for the bad guys. Chalk up one for the bad guys. So verse 24, the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

When the government said stop, they stopped and years go by, years and years and years all the way down to the reign of Darius the second year. That's where our book picked up, Haggai. And notice at chapter five of Ezra, then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah, the son of Ido, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them.

So Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel and Joshua, the son of Josedach rose up and began to build the house of God, which is in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them. The same time, Tat and I, the governor of the region beyond the river, the region beyond the Euphrates river is Israel at this point.

Shethar, Boaz and I, their companions came and said, who has commanded you to build this temple and finish this wall? You're breaking the decree that was issued years ago to stop. So their names are reported, but the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews in verse five. So they could not make them cease until a report could go to Darius.

Written answer was returned concerning the matter and the letter is sent. And long story short, Darius issues a decree in chapter six and says, verse three of chapter six, let the house be rebuilt. The place where they offered sacrifices, let the foundations of it be firmly laid.

Notice the previous decree stopped the walls, reconstruction of any kind of fortifications or a palace or anything that looked like the city would be self-sufficient and able to resist an invasion. But they finally got around to saying, we're just building a temple for our God, building of the temple. So Darius finds the decree of Cyrus.

Therefore, verse six, Tad and I, Shef, Boaz and I, your Persians and so on. Verse seven, let the work of this house of God alone. Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site.

I issue a decree as to what you shall do for the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God. Let the cost be paid at the King's expense from taxes on the region beyond the river that is to be given immediately to these men so that they are not hindered. How was the tabernacle financed? Free will gifts.

How was Solomon's temple financed? Spoils of war provided through victories that God gave to David. That wealth was accumulated, given to David by God through military victory. At no time was the tabernacle or the temple of Solomon financed by government taxes.

This house is begun with free will offerings. Remember when the foundation was laid, the offerings we saw that were used and people donated their labor and donated the material and brought cedars from Lebanon and such. Then the work was halted.

When it is resumed, they get government permission, but it is with government money. What happens when government money gets involved in anything? The government now has a say in when and how it is used, whether it's education, whether it is facilities, whatever it may be. Do you see the connection between that time and this? Do you see the reason that we have problems making independent decisions? Let's say, and not to be controversy aerial, but healthcare, if government money is involved in healthcare, now the government can tell people what to do about healthcare, healthcare decisions.

Because when the government has its money in there, the government says who does and

does not get it, who will and will not be cared for because they're paying the bills. Same thing in education. If the government is paying, then the government can exert leverage and control over what is and is not taught, whether or not various programs favorable to the government and its agenda are supported, taught, justified, vindicated, propagandized in the education systems, high and low.

The Bible says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Well, government money is at the root of all kinds of evil when it crosses over into the realm of private life and most importantly, spiritual life. It's in the word of God.

All of the problems that we've seen, and you remember the difficulties. This is going to go on to pushing wives and children out of households. It's going to get so ugly by the time of the end of the days of Nehemiah.

It's tragic. It's horrific. It is an abuse and an affront and a misconstruing and a misinterpretation and a misapplication of the word of God to the detriment and at the expense of thousands of God's people.

And it starts right here. It starts with allowing government money to finance the undertaking of a fulfillment of God's command. And this is where it begins to go wrong.

You can do a right thing in a wrong way. There should never be taxes to support a church. Would you want a tax supported church? Government money coming into the church.

Now can the government say what is and is not taught or said or allowed in that church? Look at everything else the government supports. What do you think this is? It's one of the most overlooked things in the whole word of God that the decree from Darius says support the building of the temple with tax money. Does it seem like any surprise that the temple that is standing in the days of the Lord Jesus is called what? Is it called God's temple? It's called Herod's temple because Herod started with this building and continued to furbish it.

And everyone said, isn't this great? This is how you get the Pharisees. This is how you get the Sadducees. This is how you get the corrupt priesthood and the corrupt scribes and the corrupt Sanhedrin that is going to crucify the Lord, murder James and go on to persecute the apostles throughout the first decades of the church age, ultimately resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD from the legions of Titus at the behest of God himself.

Jesus said, there's not going to be one stone of this temple left on top of another because Israel did not recognize and correct their ways. Consider your ways. Government's got a thing called the Ways and Means Committee.

Does that not sound evil? Ways and means. You just figure everybody's in there rubbing their hands together. Ways and means.

Well, we need to consider our ways. And as to pick and choose the parts of the law that they're

going to emphasize and find a part that says, oh, no foreigner is supposed to be here and there and ignore the parts of the other parts of the law that say there are exceptions to that. That's the tragic end of Ezra and Nehemiah that we've seen before.

But just remember, as we go to our break now, just because you are doing a right thing, you can't shut off considering ways. What is the way it is being done? He doesn't say consider the work. It's a worthy goal.

It's a command from God to rebuild his house. Consider the way it is being done, the ways it is being done. And where is the righteous indignation that says, I'm not going to build an altar for the Lord or a place for the Lord from that which costs me nothing.

Remember King David, the threshing floor of Arona, so significant, I will not build when it doesn't cost me. We'll tax these other people. We're going to tax the people who are opposing us in sending these letters.

Ha ha, isn't that ironic? And isn't that poetic justice that these people that are opposing their tax money is going to build God's house. That may be humanly satisfying, but it is divinely abhorrent. God doesn't want or need contributions from his enemies to build his house.

And that's exactly what's going on here. This is the root of all of the problems that follow. You can trace it back to this point right here.

Actually, you can trace it back to the point that they stopped the work. Why did it take them 17 plus years to get the paperwork straightened out and resume the work? It wasn't until God sent prophets and lit a fire under them. They knew about the decree of Cyrus.

It was much fresher in their minds 17 years earlier. Why didn't they get the decree then? This same Zerubbabel and this same Joshua were presiding when they stopped the work. If they were as on fire for the Lord as people like to believe, this work would have never stopped.

They wouldn't have let themselves be stopped. Well, I've got an excuse. Anyway, we'll see more about this doing right, wrong, when we come back from our break.