

Wisely Respond in Obedience

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Haggai 1:12-15 (Matthew 1:18-25)

Open our eyes, heavenly Father, that we may see wonderful things in Your law this morning. By Your Holy Spirit, turn our hearts toward Your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Grant us a thirst for Your word as a deer pants for streams of water. May we desire it more than a baby craves nourishing milk and more than precious gold. May we desire to obey Your commands for Your glory through Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ in Whom we pray. AMEN. (Psalm 119:18, 32; 42:1-2; 1 Peter 2:2; John 4:34; 12:27)

In the first eleven verses, we met Haggai who was a prophetic contemporary of Zechariah. After 16 years of leaving God's temple unbuilt, God, through Haggai, called His People to rebuild it. God also revealed that He produced a drought to interfere with His People's improper priorities and self-centered preoccupations. The LORD exhorted this returned remnant to "Give Careful thought to Their Ways." We were left with the question of "how" to respond to God's Word after "Giving Careful thought to Our Ways" in considering our own priorities. Where is God in your list of "To-Dos"? What is your life centered around?

When confronted with a word from God in our Bibles, such as God's recorded word through His prophet Haggai, we must listen carefully and consider our ways. God's Word is given to us for our good, and, if God says that doing His work must come before our working for food, clothing, wages and decorating our own homes, then we must re-prioritize our lives to put God and His work above all else; because, rightly ordering our life around and under God is, ultimately, for our own good. Do you believe this? If so, how have you responded to God's Word when He rebukes you for your idolatrous priorities and

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exhorts you to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness? Do you trust that all other necessary things will be freely given to you, or do you worry about tomorrow? How did these Jews whose circumstances were more distressful than ours, respond to God's first word to them through their prophet? Let's have a look.

1. The People Obeyed the Voice of the LORD (READ Verse 12a)

a. God's Voice, not Haggai's

i. Haggai is sent by God, and God's Word is delivered through His servant.

1. This is the same for Bible preachers and teachers today. God's Word must be heard; not my opinions.

ii. We considered the ambiguous family lineage of Haggai, but we confirmed that he was indeed a prophetic contemporary of Zechariah. We also can see how Haggai, like Obadiah and teachers/preachers of God's Word in the Bible today, are mere servants of God sent on His Behalf. But, Haggai is also, as *Verse 13* states, is "the LORD's messenger."

1. In the Old Testament, this phrase in the Hebrew is often used to refer to "the angel of the LORD". While the Hebrew for 'messenger' is common for human messengers who speak on behalf of their masters, it is rarely used to refer to prophets as human messengers speaking for God (Faithlife NIV Study Bible). This simply lends itself to the enigmatic nature of Haggai.

2. The People Feared the LORD (READ Verse 12b)

a. If God can sovereignly intervene in our improper priorities to bring us to a point of considering our ways in relation to Him, then it is simply wise to fear such a God Who is a "Transcendental Interferer".

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- b. And let us never forget that the beginning of wisdom is a proper fear of the LORD. Wisdom, like our work, must begin with God and remain focused on His will; His priorities; then, He will properly direct our ways and lead us in all understanding in the same way He will provide; not just for our material needs, but for whatever we need to faithfully and obediently accomplish His will.

We, like the Jews confronted with God's Word to give careful thought to their priorities and to put His work above their own, must **Wisely Respond in Obedience**. How did this response come about? Was it that God's People simply saw God's reasoning? The answer to this question is very Good News for us who have heard God's Word but may have failed to respond to it in a manner that honors God and that is good for us.

READ Verses 13-14 God's presence enables the desire and willingness to obediently respond to His Word and to do the work He commands. Even though the temple, which was the sign of God's presence among His People, remained unbuilt because of the People's indifference, God was "with them." This is an amazing and comforting statement. God, by His presence, gives us hearts with the desire to be obedient to Him; therefore, we want Him to be our God and we want to be His faithful People. This is a great divine promise of God in the Bible realized among His faithful, remnant, People after they returned from the Babylonian Exile. (Remember: The Exile was the covenant cursing of Judah for their unfaithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant in the first place). **READ Deuteronomy 30:1-10**. This is very relevant to the present situation of these recently returned Exiles. Note something:

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What God fulfills in Deuteronomy 30:6 (**Re-READ**) is what He initially commanded of His People (**READ Deuteronomy 10:12-17**). Do you see? God commands us to have a heart that desires to obey Him, but how do we create such a desire ourselves? We can't! Therefore, God does for us what He commands but that we cannot do for ourselves. God, Who is with us, stirs our spirits (our desires, our willingness) so that we may wisely obey His commands as His People for our good. God gives us a heart that desires to wisely respond to His Word in obedience. It is this circumcision of heart that defines God's New Covenant People. It is what Paul spoke of in **Romans 2:28-29 (READ)**. God does this for us by His merciful abiding presence, and that is very Good News.

God is indeed fully with us in Christ by His Spirit. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promised presence to Jacob in Genesis 28:15; to Joshua in Joshua 1:5-9; and to Israel in Isaiah 41:10 and 43:5. This is what our Gospel reading from Matthew today reveals (**Matthew 1:18-25**). Jesus is "Immanuel" – "God with us". God is with us even in our own End-time temple building project that will eventually encompass the entire world. **READ Matthew 28:19-20**. It is not our performance that will accomplish God's will. Rather, it is God's presence in us by His own Spirit Who gives us both the desire and the ability to serve Him in wise obedience.

What if I don't have this desire? What if I don't even have the desire to hear God's Word or read the Bible? What if my response to God's Word fully revealed in Jesus is not that of repentance and wise obedience out of a genuine desire and love for God? Whether you're a Christian or an unbeliever, succumbing to a lack of desire to listen to God's Word makes it impossible to wisely respond in obedience, and,

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apart from God's Word and Spirit, no one would desire to do God's will for His glory. But, we must not despair when we experience such dryness and dullness; because, God is present. He is accessible despite His apparent absence. Therefore, we can pray for Him to stir our spirits and fill us with a desire to hear Him and to wisely respond in obedience.

After all, Jesus died so we may have these desires, and these desires come through the circumcision of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. By the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, Who gives us a new heart of flesh through His death and resurrection, we may do the Father's will for our good and His glory. Just as recently as preparing for this message, I was struck with a lack of desire to come to my Bible to read and study God's Word. We all encounter family stresses and burdens that drain us to the point of exhaustion, but, when we lack a desire to hear God speak and to wisely respond in obedience, we certainly do not look to ourselves. No. We turn away from ourselves and we look to Christ Who wholly inclined His heart to obey His Father's will so that we may pray in His Name for His very own loving desire to stir us and lead us by His Spirit. We pray for this desire to hear God's Word and, then, give careful thought to our ways so that we may, ultimately, wisely respond in obedience. This all is on account of Christ's faithful obedience FOR us; a perfectly wise obedience out of Jesus' own loving desire to do His Father's will. That's Good News.

AMEN