

# **Sermon on Give to the Church in order to stop your financial problems**

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**Text:**

**Haggai 1:2-9** <sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'" <sup>3</sup> Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" <sup>5</sup> Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." <sup>7</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.

## **1 Introduction**

Giving to a deity is common in all religions and it shows your concrete belief in that deity. Idol worshippers make sacrifices to their gods in order to get a good harvest or stop a plague. Yahweh worshippers were no different and through the teachings of Leviticus they came to understand that their healthy relationship with Yahweh was dependent also on the offerings they gave to Yahweh for sinning, to thank him, and to incur his favor. Obviously the Bible stresses that such offering has to be on top of Godly behavior. But granted that you are living a Godly life giving is important to show your faith and to avoid God's wrath and to incur God's favor.

Our passage deals with giving to God to fulfill what he expects of you, in accordance with his covenant, in order to avoid problems. If you give to God then it incurs his favor and he puts his protection on you and your resources. If you fail to give then you have broken his covenant and so he lifts his protection and hence you and your resources are open to attack by the enemy. Knowing this then, you must give to remain under his covenantal protection so as to

avoid any problems. You must give to stop your problems. You must give to eliminate the drain on your finances. You must give to get out of your financial problems. You must give to get out of your poverty.

## **2 The returned exiles failed to rebuild the temple for 15 years**

In the book of Ezra, we find that about 559BC during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of King Cyrus he permitted the Jewish exiles including Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Zechariah, and Haggai to return to Jerusalem to rebuild “the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:3). When they returned they began the rebuilding amid opposition from their enemies but they did not finish it during King Cyrus reign. Fifteen years after the rebuilding effort started, during the second year of the reign of King Darius, they had still not finished the temple rebuilding. God spoke through the Prophet Haggai as recorded in our passage to chastise the returned exiles for abandoning the temple rebuilding project.

*What happened in those fifteen years to drastically slow down the rebuilding effort?*

## **3 The returned exiles got poorer as they spent their money building mansions instead of the temple**

When the exiles first set out to return to Jerusalem all the exiles, including those remaining in Babylon or returning to Jerusalem, gave offerings for use in rebuilding the temple. Somewhere along the line when the money ran out the returned exiles stopped contributing their money and resources to the rebuilding effort. Each had started rebuilding his house. They spent their money and resources on renovating their houses and making it magnificent. To support their own houses they planted large farms. But when harvest time came they harvested little and so decided to spend the little on their own houses first leaving nothing for the temple. Then they planted a larger farm and got an even smaller harvest, which they spent on their own house while neglecting the temple rebuilding effort.

Out of the little money they got they incurred all kinds of unnecessary expenses. Then, there was a draught that affected their business even some more. As they worked harder their income became smaller and their expenses increased. And so they gave nothing to the temple

rebuilding. This became a vicious cycle of impoverishment – work harder, get smaller income, give nothing to the Lord, incur bigger expenses, and work even harder.

### **3.1 Ghanaian Christian immigrants who spend all their money building mansions in Ghana and fail to give to the church get poorer**

As I reflected on the vicious cycle of impoverishment of the returned exiles it sounded all too similar to Christians who do not give when they come to the USA. Many Christians are serious about their faith when they are in their home country and they are obedient to the Word including giving faithfully. Things go well for them as a result and sometimes even it is in response to their faithfulness to God that God opens the door for them to come to the USA. But once they arrive their mind turns to building a life for themselves. As a result they forget the church. Even when they go to church they don't give because they have to pay their bills, send money to their family in Ghana, and send money to Ghana for the mansion they are building. Soon they find that they can't make ends meet and must work two jobs. They give the extra money they get for the mansion at home. Then the expenses start – unnecessary expenses – a speeding ticket here, a broken car there, money for a sick relative at home, and so on. They work harder to meet these needs while continuing to ignore their giving obligation to God. Then their expenses increase and then they are laid off. This is a vicious cycle of impoverishment caused by lack of giving to God.

## **4 God told the returned exiles that their impoverishment was due to lack of giving to the temple rebuilding**

### **4.1 God explained through Haggai that he had abandoned them for failing to give to his house**

As this vicious cycle of impoverishment was happening to the exiles, Haggai waited upon the Lord. God spoke to him to explain to the returned exiles the reason for their increasingly greater impoverishment. In verse 2 of our passage, God said, “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’” The use of the term “these people” by God indicates how alienated they had become from him. He did not refer to them as “my children” because their disobedience in refusing to give to the rebuilding effort had alienated them from

God. Then God continued and chastised them for saying that this is not the time to rebuild the temple while they were building or had built mansions for themselves. I remember someone who used to be a churchgoer in Ghana saying “we didn’t come to the USA to go to church, we came to make money!” Perhaps, your coming to church is just to satisfy your guilty conscience and so you do not give any money to the church. If you are such a person God is challenging your attitude today.

#### **4.2 God explained that they are getting poorer because they had failed to give to his house**

Then God being the patient and compassionate God goes on to explain to them why they keep getting poor. He said in verse 9 that it is “because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.” In other words, since they had been disobedient in ignoring God’s house, he had also lifted his hand of covenant protection and provision and now they were suffering the curse of Deuteronomy 28:38 which says, “You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it.”

If you are working hard and finding it harder to make ends meet then you may need to listen carefully to the reason God gave the returned exiles for their financial hardship. Martin Luther once said, “I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God's hands I still possess.” So, give to God to get even more from God. Give to God to retain what you have and more.

“Captain Levy, a believer from Philadelphia, was once asked how he could give so much to the Lord's work and still possess great wealth. The Captain replied, ‘Oh, as I shovel it out, He shovels it in, and the Lord has a bigger shovel.’” (*Today in the Word*, July, 1990, p. 28) So, give to the Lord with the size of a wheelbarrow and God will return it to you in a tanker. Give to stop your financial bleeding.

#### **4.3 God chastised the returned exiles to examine their unfaithfulness in giving**

Money affects your health, your sanity, your marriage, your children, your safety, your comfort, and every aspect of your life. There is, therefore, an adverse effect on all these aspects of your life when your financial situation deteriorates. I don’t know your financial situation. But if you have a poor financial situation God is speaking to you today just as he spoke to the

returned exiles in verse 7, saying, “Give careful thought to your ways.” The RSV translation says “Consider how you have fared.” The NLT translation says, “Consider how things are going for you!” In other words, examine your giving to the church. Are you faithful in your tithes payment of ten percent? Are you faithful in regularly paying tithes? Are you faithful in giving an offering beyond the tithes? Are you generous in giving your offering or are you a one-dollar man or one-dollar woman? Give careful thought to your ways. Consider how you have fared. Consider how things are going for you! Now do the right thing, do the wise thing, do the reasonable thing, do the best thing: Give to the church to stop your financial problems. Give and give and give to get more and more and more!

#### **4.4 God exhorted them to give to his house in order to break their impoverishment**

God gave the returned exiles a situation analysis and then he told them what they must do to break the cycle of impoverishment when he said in verse 8 of our passage, “Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.” In other words, to break the cycle of impoverishment they must give to the temple rebuilding project.

To get out of your financial hardship you must give to the church. The more you give out of the little you have the faster you are going to recover from your financial distress. To give when you have bills staring at you is hard. J.D. Rockefeller said, “I never would have been able to tithe the first million dollars I ever made if I had not tithed my first salary, which was \$1.50 per week.” So, giving in your poverty is the bitter spiritual pill that you must take to get out of your financial problems. There is a saying, “no pain, no gain.” You must dig yourself out of the financial stress by giving to God. Give to liberate yourself financially. Give to liberate your career. Give to liberate your marriage. Give to liberate your children. Give to get your health. Give to get your security. Give to get your provision.

## **5 Conclusion**

The returned exiles failed to rebuild the temple for 15 years. They got poorer as they spent their money building mansions instead of the temple. So also, Ghanaian Christian immigrants who spend all their money building mansions in Ghana and fail to give to the church

get poorer. God told the returned exiles that their impoverishment was due to lack of giving to the temple rebuilding. He explained through Haggai that he had abandoned them for failing to give to his house. God explained that they are getting poorer because they had failed to give to his house. He chastised them to examine their unfaithfulness in giving. God exhorted them to give to his house in order to break their impoverishment.