

HAGGAI

The Name and Personal Information:

The name Haggai is probably a short form of Haggiah, which means "Festival of Yahweh." Little is known about the prophet, except that he was a contemporary of Zechariah and that he prophesied after the return of the Babylonian Captivity. Ezra mentions the two prophets in connection with the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, which had been interrupted because of political and military pressure from Israel's enemies. We read: "Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them."¹ According to an ancient Jewish tradition, Haggai was a member of the Great Synagogue. If his question: "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory?"² is an indication that he personally remembered Solomon's temple, as some suggest, he must have been an old man when he prophesied. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, the first temple was destroyed in 586 BC, and Haggai's prophecy can be dated as 520 BC.

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary states: "Tradition represents him as returning with the first exiles from Babylon his birthplace, under Zerubbabel 536 B.C., when Cyrus, ... actuated by Isaiah's prophecies concerning himself (44:28; Isa 45:1), decreed the Jews' restoration and the rebuilding of the temple, for which he furnished all necessaries. ... In spite of Samaritan opposition the temple building went on under Cyrus and Cambyses (Ahasuerus Ezra 4:6); but under the Magian usurper Smerdis (Artaxerxes Ezra 4:7-23) the Samaritans procured a royal decree suspending the work. Hence, the Jews became so indifferent about it that when Darius came to the throne (521 B.C.), whose accession virtually nullified the usurper's prohibition, they pretended that as the prophecy of the 70 years applied to the temple as well as to the captivity in Babylon (Hag 1:2), they were only in the 68th year, and that, the time not yet having come, they might build splendid ceiled mansions for themselves. Haggai first, and Zechariah two months later, were commissioned by Jehovah (Hag 1:1) in Darius' (Hystaspes) second year, 520 B.C., to rouse them from their selfishness to resume the work which had been suspended for 14 years."

General Introduction:

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Hitherto the prophets have dated the time of the exercise of their office from the reigns of the legitimate Hebrew monarchs; it shows a new slate of things when they place at the head of their oracles the name of a foreign and a heathen potentate. The Jews had, indeed, now no king of their own, 'the tabernacle of David had fallen' (Amos 9:11), and they were living on sufferance under an alien power. They had returned from exile by permission of Cyrus in the first year of his occupancy of the throne of Babylon sixteen years before this time, and had commenced to build the temple soon after; but the opposition of neighbors, contradictory orders from the Persian court, and their own lukewarmness had contributed to hinder the work, and it soon wholly ceased, and remained suspended to the moment when Haggai, as the seventy years of desolation drew to an end, was commissioned to arouse them from their apathy, and to urge them to use the opportunity which was afforded by the accession of the new monarch and the withdrawal of the vexatious interdict that had checked their operations in the previous reign."

The same *Commentary*, in its General Introduction to the book states: "From the time when Zephaniah prophesied of judgment to come to the day when Haggai lifted up his voice, some hundred years or more had elapsed. In this interval God had not left himself without witness; the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel had carried on the torch of prophecy, and had not suffered the light of inspiration to be extinguished. Meanwhile startling events had happened. That which earlier seers had foretold had come to pass; warnings unheeded had ripened bitter fruit. Israel had long ago been carried into captivity; Judah had suffered a similar fate. For seventy years she had sat weeping by the waters of Babylon, earning a hard lesson and profiting thereby. But the period of punishment came to an end at the appointed moment. God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Elam, to allow and to urge the return of the Hebrews to their own land and the rebuilding of their temple. Not that Cyrus was a monotheist, who believed in one supreme God. This idea, which has long obtained, is proved to be erroneous by the inscriptions which have been discovered.... From these it is clear that he was a worshipper of Bel-Merodach, the patron god of Babylon, and that, as it was his first care on the capture of that city to reinstate its deities in their shrines, so his edict respecting the

¹ Ezra 5:1. See also 6:14

² ch. 2:3

rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem was a result of his usual policy to adopt the gods of conquered countries, and to win their favor by supporting their worship. That God used him as his instrument for the restoration of the Hebrews proves nothing concerning his personal religion. Unworthy agents often perform most important service. Obeying the king's edict, many of the Jews, assisted by donations and bearing with them the rifled treasures of the temple, B.C. 536, prepared to return to their native land under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a prince of the house of David, and Joshua the high priest. They were, indeed, but a small body, amounting, according to the enumeration of Ezra (2:64,65), to 42,360, exclusive of menservants and maidservants reckoned at 7337. But they set to work with vigor on their arrival at Jerusalem, and in the second year of Cyrus, B.C. 534, erected the great altar in its old place, and established regular worship according to the Mosaic ritual. They then proceeded to lay the foundations of a new temple in the second year after their arrival. The prosecution of this undertaking met with unexpected obstacles. The mixed population which had been settled by the Assyrian conquerors in Central Palestine claimed, on the score of brotherhood, to take part in this sacred work. Such a claim could not be entertained. These Samaritans, as they are named, were not of the holy seed, did not worship Jehovah with pure worship, mixed idolatrous rites with their devotions to the true God. It would have been an abandonment of their unique position, treason to their Lord, for the Israelites to have admitted such syncretists to a participation in the erection of the temple. Zerubbabel, therefore, rightly declined their offered assistance. This rejection was bitterly resented. By representations made at court, they endeavored to hinder the work, and were so successful in their opposition that the building was stopped during the remainder of the life of Cyrus, and during the reign of his successors, Cambyses and Pseudo-Smerdis (Artaxerxes I.). Other causes combined to bring about the suspension of operations. The zeal with which the labor was begun grew cold. The exiles had returned with high hope of happiness and prosperity; they had expected to enter into possession of a home prepared and ready for their reception; in their fervid imagination peace and plenty awaited them, and the blessings promised to obedience in their old Law were to be theirs with little labor or delay. A very different state of things awaited them. Cities ruined and desolate, a land sterilized by want of cultivation, neighbors unfriendly or openly hostile, scantiness of bread, danger, toil, — these were the objects which they had to contemplate. And though the spirit that animated their first enterprise, and the enthusiasm that accompanied a great national movement, excited them to commence the work with earnestness and ardor, their hearts were not sufficiently engaged in its prosecution to enable them to rise superior to inward distraction and outward opposition; and so they grew less interested in the completion of the undertaking, and they acquiesced with stolid complacency in its enforced cessation. They learned to look on the ruins of their holy house with a certain desponding equanimity, and turned to the furtherance of their own personal concerns, contentedly leaving the restoration of the temple to other times and stronger hands than theirs. But a happier condition of affairs arrived under the rule of Darius, the son of Hystaspes, who succeeded to the throne of Persia B.C. 521. The interdict which had stopped the building of the temple was removed, the original decree of Cyrus was discovered and reenacted, and every assistance was given to the Jews to carry out their original design. Nothing but the will was now wanting. It was the design of Haggai's prophecy to inspire this will, to shame the people into a display of energy and self-denial, and to encourage them to continue their efforts till the whole work was satisfactorily completed."

This rather lengthy introduction gives an accurate picture of the background against which Haggai spoke. Before we enter into the study of the actual text, there is one more quote that reveals the general policy to which King Cyrus adhered in the administration of his conquered territories. *The Pulpit Commentary* made mention of the fact that Cyrus was not a monotheist and that inscriptions were found to support this. One such inscription refers to the king's conquest of Babel; it reads: "When I peacefully entered Babel, their great lord Marduc made the generous heart of the Babylonians favorably inclined toward me, and I made it a point to revere him on a daily basis."³

In spite of the fact that Cyrus, obviously, manipulated the religious feelings of the people he had conquered for his own political reasons, the Bible speaks favorably about him. Isaiah prophesied about him and mentioned him by name some 150 years before the king appeared on the scene of world history. Isaiah proclaimed the Word of the Lord as saying of Cyrus: "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.' This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give you

³ Quoted from the Dutch *Bijbels Handboek*, Vol. II, Page 116

the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it.”⁴

According to Josephus, Cyrus became familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy, which made him decide to honor YHWH. This statement can, however, not be proved. Even if Cyrus acknowledged the supremacy of YHWH, this, obviously, did not deter him from honoring Marduc at the same time.

According to Ezra, the Holy Spirit moved the heart of Cyrus to issue the order for the return of the Jews to their homeland and for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. We read in Ezra: “In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing.”⁵ The fact that the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus does not necessarily mean that Cyrus experienced a renewal of heart, similar to what the New Testament calls: “the new birth.” The Holy Spirit worked in the heart of the king for the accomplishment of a specific project, the rebuilding of the temple. Sometimes the stirring of the Spirit brings about a change of heart, sometimes it leaves the person involved untouched in his innermost being. Such was, evidently, the case with Cyrus. It also seems to have been the condition of many of the Jews who prepared themselves to return to their homeland: they obeyed the order but their vision of God’s purpose of restoring the place of His revelation on earth was lacking.

The rebuilding of the temple was God’s project. The eternal God, Creator of heaven and earth, wanted to reveal Himself to man, who was made in His image and likeness. God’s love and care for man was the motivation to restore the broken line of revelation. “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.”⁶ Without this revelation, there would be no clear distinction between Israel and all other nations. Without this revelation there is no essential difference between man and beast. This makes the rebuilding of the temple such an urgent matter. The restoration of the place of God’s revelation on earth would also restore to Israel its dignity and its unique place in the world. It would mean renewed hope for the world.

The rebuilding of the temple makes us realize how utterly dark and desperate the period of the Babylonian Captivity must have been. There was no longer a place where God lived on earth, a place where man could find forgiveness for his sins. The faithful who had retained the hope could only pray in the direction of the place where the temple and the altar had stood. A pile of rubble was the only visible reminder of the fact that there was a living God in heaven. We can hardly exaggerate the depth of this tragedy. Even when we consider the fact that the temple was only a shadow of the real or perfect revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the principle of revelation remained the same and the matter was one of the greatest urgency. The destruction of the temple was like the stopping of the heartbeat in a human body; it meant death. The rebuilding of the temple, therefore, was an image of the resurrection. The repetition of the words: “the LORD stirred up the spirit” is significant in this context.⁷

The destruction of the temple had been the direct result of the broken fellowship between God and the people of Israel. It was a result of sin and a punishment for sin. What happened to the temple is a clear image of the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ in His suffering, dying, and resurrection.

We must take a closer look at the historical background of Haggai’s ministry, as it is given in the Book of Ezra. As a matter of fact, a complete study of Ezra would be very enlightening for the understanding of both Haggai and Zechariah’s prophecies. Ezra describes the result of the publication of the proclamation by the King of Persia for the cessation of the rebuilding: “As soon as the copy of the letter of King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately

⁴ See Isa. 44:24-45:8

⁵ Ezra 1:1

⁶ Prov. 29:18

⁷ Hag. 1:14; Ezra 1:1 (NKJV)

to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop. Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.”⁸

There seems to be a chronological problem concerning the way the dates are presented in Ezra. Some commentators believe that the actual cessation of the building of the temple was no longer than approximately 2 years and that the 15 years mentioned cover interruption of both the reconstruction and the city walls.

Ezra states clearly that the work on the temple that had been stopped on order of King Artaxerxes was resumed, not because of another royal decree annulling the first one, but by the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. The work began at God’s command, not because of a royal edict.

Outline of the Book:

The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary gives the following outline of the Book of Haggai:

I.	The Completion of the Latter Temple	1
	A. The Temple Is Not Complete	1:1-6
	B. The Temple Must Be Completed	1:7-15
II.	The Glory of the Latter Temple	2:1-9
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III.	The Blessings of Obedience	2:10-19
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IV.	The Future Blessings through Promise	2:20-23
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	B. The Future Recognition of Zerubbabel	2:23

The Text:

I.	The Completion of the Latter Temple	1
A.	The Temple Is Not Complete	1:1-6

1 In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest:

2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, `The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

3 Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:

4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.

6 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."

The rebuilding of the temple had ceased by order of King Artaxerxes. The edict had been enforced upon the Jews with the power of weapons. It seems, therefore, rather unreasonable that Haggai, or rather, God would reproach the people that the temple had not been rebuilt. After all, it was not their fault!

Initially, the royal command to cease the work must have seemed incomprehensible to the people in the light of God’s guidance and omnipotence. They were forced to accept the harsh reality of the fact and ultimately they rested in God’s will, concluding that God’s time for rebuilding had not yet come; their zeal had been premature.

It is not difficult to find parallels for this kind of situation, both in Scripture as in the lives of all God’s children. It is much easier to obey God’s call for action than to accept the fact that doing the work of the Lord has become an impossibility. Yet, waiting for the Lord is a keyword in spiritual life. David said in

⁸ Ezra 4:23,24

the Psalms: “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”⁹ Evidently, just as much strength and courage is need for waiting as for acting.

What does acceptance mean? In some cases it can mean a negative response to the will of God by being passive. This is backed up by the suggestion that one actually wanted things to be different but one finds himself unable to oppose “force majeure.” A Dutch atheist author of the nineteenth century mocked the obituaries in the newspaper that would state: “We rest in the Lord’s will.” He countered that he had never seen an advertisement in which the bereaved said that they were not accepting the matter. Accepting that which cannot be helped has no spiritual value in itself. That kind of acceptance can actually be in total opposition to a positive acceptance of the will of God. According to the Epistle to the Hebrews, the maxim of Jesus’ life was: “Here I am... I have come to do your will, O God.”¹⁰ Facing the mystery of divine election, He reacted with: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.”¹¹ And when the agony of death faced Him, He says: “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.”¹² “Resting in God’s will” can be a cover-up for resistance to the will of God.

One could say that, when the order of Artaxerxes was put into effect to stop the work, there was as little outward as inner resistance to the edict. As is often the case, the enemy could be seen inside the spiritual armor that the believer is supposed to wear. Because immediately after the work on the temple was halted, the people began to do that which was actually their heart’s desire, the building of their own houses.

Haggai describes those houses as “paneled.” The Hebrew word used is *caphan*, which literally means: “to put on a roof.” The same word is used in connection to the building of Solomon’s temple. We read: “So he built the temple and completed it, roofing it with beams and cedar planks.” It wasn’t merely a matter of putting up shelters in which one could find cover; the houses that were constructed by these poor immigrants were lofty mansions.

Barnes’ Notes quotes Jerome, who wrote: “Will ye dwell in houses artificially adorned, not so much for use as for delight, and shall My dwelling-place, wherein was the Holy of holies, and the cherubim, and the table of showbread, be bestreamed with rains, desolated in solitude, scorched by the sun?” The same *Commentary* adds a note by Dionysius: “With these words carnal Christians are reprov’d, who have no glow of zeal for God, but are full of self-love, and so make no effort to repair, build, or strengthen the material temples of Christ, and houses assigned to His worship, when aged, ruinous, decaying or destroyed, but build for themselves curious, voluptuous, superfluous dwellings. In these the love of Christ gloweth not; these Isaiah threateneth, (Isa 5:8,12.) ‘Woe to you who join house to house and field to field, and regard not the work of the Lord!’ ” The common building material in Israel was stone. To add inside paneling and ceiling required extra time and effort, which must be considered an extreme luxury under the circumstances in which the returned captives lived. What was done far surpassed the elementary needs of the moment. The people’s priority was, obviously, no longer the rebuilding of the temple but the construction of their own villas. We see the same human tendency in King Solomon’s life, who built the temple in seven years but devoted thirteen years to the construction of his own palace.¹³

The first and greatest commandment in the Bible is “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”¹⁴ At the unset of all sin is a chilling of this love that demands our all. Ceding the central place in our life to anybody or anything else but to God opens the door to corruption of the heart. Haggai’s prophecy is proof of the fact that this is the danger that particularly

⁹ Ps. 27:14

¹⁰ Heb. 10:7

¹¹ Matt. 11:25

¹² John 12:27

¹³ See I Kings 6:37,38; 7:1

¹⁴ Deut. 6:5

threatens those who have the name of serving the Lord. The text speaks about people who had returned from captivity for the sole purpose of rebuilding the temple, people “whose heart God had moved.”¹⁵

What the people were saying: “The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built” was nothing but a pious pretext. It can be a crushing and humbling experience to realize that we have covered up our lack of love for God, and our excess of self-love with pious words.

Haggai contrasts what the people called “the Lord’s time” with “a time for yourselves.” It is, of course, true that God has reserved certain times to put the council of His will into effect. Paul says that God sent His Son into the world to be born “when the time had fully come.”¹⁶ And, as we saw above, waiting for the Lord’s time can be one of the most important exercises in our spiritual life. It is often one of the most blessed experiences also. Haggai’s reproach to the people was not that they waited for the time of the Lord, but that they had not waited for Him. Theirs was not an attitude of longingly waiting for the moment to arrive at which the Lord would give the signal. They had made up their minds that God’s time had to coincide with their time. Their time, actually, stood in opposition to God’s time. They had no time for God when it was God’s time, because they were too busy with the building of their houses. When they said: “The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built,” they did not mean to say that God had determined a time and that that time had not yet arrived, but simply: “We have no time for God.”

If we have no time to do that for which we have come into this world, we are in a precarious condition. We note the irony in the words: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘These people say...’ ” God does not say “My people,” but “these people.”

The message of healing the Lord sends to them is: “Give careful thought to your ways.” The Hebrew says literally: “Set your heart upon your ways.” We find the expression in verses 5 and 7. The same words are used in ch. 2:16, 19. Jesus captures the meaning of the text when He says, in The Sermon on the Mount, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”¹⁷ The irony again is found in the fact that they had been setting their heart on their ways, but literally on *their* ways, not on God’s way. They believed that the only way to enrich themselves was to work as hard as they could to achieve their goal. It had never penetrated their minds that their toil had been in vain. There are some very important factors in the human life over which we have no control. The length of life, our health (partially), and the fruit of our labor are things over which we have very little power. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus formulates the problem as follows: “A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”¹⁸

They had experienced poor harvests, there was a lack of warm clothing, and, as a modern equivalent for the words: “You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it” we could use the term “inflation.”

It is a healthy phenomenon when one realizes that his calculation have been wrong. The truth still stands: “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.”¹⁹ The foundation of our life ought to be the fact that we “love the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] strength.”²⁰ The foundation of the temple is also the foundation of our own life. After this foundation has been laid, we have to learn to trust the Lord for the needs of our daily life.

B. The Temple Must Be Completed

1:7-15

7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways.

8 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.

¹⁵ Ezra 1:5

¹⁶ Gal. 4:4

¹⁷ Matt. 6:21

¹⁸ Luke 12:15

¹⁹ Ps. 127:1

²⁰ Deut. 6:5

9 "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.

10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops.

11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands"

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

13 Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD.

14 So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God,

15 on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

The exhortation is repeated in vs. 7, with the addition: "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house." Those words address the will of man. These were people "whose heart God had moved."²¹ Obviously, their spirit had been willing, but the flesh was weak. There had been a basic willingness to go and work but they had become bogged down in their cares of daily life. Their human egoism had found a rich soil in that situation. The Lord asked them to do for Him as much as they were doing for themselves: "Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house." Loving God more than anything else begins with loving God as oneself.

We see in the Book of Job that the great controversy between God and Satan is whether a human being can love God because of who He is, or that this love is conditional upon the blessings He bestows upon us and the health we may enjoy. "Does Job fear God for nothing?"²² Job's trial proved that, even when he lost all his possession, his family, and his health, there still remained a spark in the depth of his soul that drew him close to God. The question remains, is there really love for God in the heart of man? Maybe we can say that, on this issue, God looks at us with the same intensity as Satan does. We know, of course, that God is omniscient. But there are also indications, as in vs. 8, that God looks at our willingness and our acts for Him with a keen interest. He reacts to every one of our acts of surrender and service with a demonstration of His pleasure. When Jesus surrendered to the Father's will by submitting to the rite of baptism, we read: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'²³ The fact that our surrender is glorifying to God means that God somehow links His glory to our conduct. By surrendering, we prove that He is right and thus we contribute to His glory. The opposite of this is that, if we sin we diminish His glory. In the words of the apostle Paul: "As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'²⁴

Verses 9-11 are a repetition of what was already said more concisely in vs. 6. They had counted on much but they had not counted on God. In a way for which there was no human explanation, all their initiatives had floundered. All the factors that were beyond human control had worked against them. There was a drought at the time when it should have rained and, consequently, everything that had been planted withered. In the New Testament, Paul uses a similar image on a spiritual level when he speaks about Christ being the foundation upon which we build with either perishable or imperishable material. We read: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each

²¹ Ezra 1:5

²² Job 1:9

²³ Matt. 3:17

²⁴ Rom. 2:24

man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."²⁵

The foundation of the temple had been laid. It has been suggested that most of the foundation of Solomon's temple was still there. It is possible that when King Nebuchadnezzar gave the order for the destruction of the temple, only the walls were torn down. Ezra, however, specifically states that the people who had returned from captivity first built an altar, even before the foundation of the temple was laid.²⁶ It could be that stones that were left over from the foundation of the first temple could be used for the groundwork of the new building. We see a similar situation in the present; if ever the Jews wanted to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem now, they would not have to lay a new foundation. The old one is still there. They only obstacle is the presence of that magnificent mosque, the Dome of the Rock.

The spiritual lesson we can draw from this is that the same principle remains for all who are building in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whether we build our own spiritual lives, the church of Jesus Christ, our worldwide missionary endeavors, we must be on the right foundation and not build on sand. We must use lasting material. We still see that the house of the Lord "remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house."

The Hebrew word rendered "busy" is *ruwts*, which means: "to run" or "to rush." The NKJV remains closer to the Hebrew with: "every one of you runs to his own house." In a sarcastic manner, God compares the people to an ant hill where feverish activity is visible. Everyone is rushing somewhere to do something, but no one looks as the ruins of the temple. Initially, the rebuilding of the temple had brought the people together; because every individual had been building on the same house they had melted together as one man, harmoniously organized into one body. Rushing everyone to his own house broke up this unity into thousands of little isolated universes that stumbled over each other. The word *ruwts* expresses the inefficiency of their efforts. Outside the Kingdom of God there is no efficiency.

Haggai's word evokes faith in the hearts of those who had been responsible for the rebuilding. Their egoism had made them blind to the spiritual reality. All of a sudden they realized that the Word of God was more important than the threats of the government.

Haggai's message has remained up to date throughout the ages. "Give careful thought to your ways ... Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house" still applies to the problems of our day. Jesus has formulated this eternal principle as: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."²⁷ This is the sole solution to all of man's problems. The problems of Haggai's day appeared to be poor harvests, a deficient economy, and inflation. But when God put His finger on it, it shows that it is nothing else than human egoism and a lack of acknowledgment of God's priority. It has been stated that today's world problems are overpopulation, pollution, hunger, and more recently, terrorism. The real problem, however, is that man seeks himself instead of God. In some countries, the problem seems to be hunger. But when grain is imported from abroad, local authorities often hinder the efforts to have it transported inland where the people are perishing. This kind of egoism is widely criticized because it is so obvious. But in every instance where survival is at stake, egoism will raise its ugly head. Only when the Holy Spirit is at work, a person will say: "I don't need that field. I will sell it and give the money to the poor." We read in the Book of Acts: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need."²⁸ This was one of the lessons Israel learned during the desert journey: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed."²⁹ One of the greatest lesson we must all learn that "man does not live on bread alone."³⁰

²⁵ I Cor. 3:11-15

²⁶ See Ezra 3:6,10

²⁷ Matt. 6:33

²⁸ Acts 4:32-36

²⁹ Ex. 16:18

Our planet is not even half populated. Pollution means that one part of mankind does not care whether his refusal bothers the other part or not. In one of my children's *Science Book*, I saw, years ago, a chapter about "survival." It dealt with various forms of organization in nature as a beehive, a society of chickens, etc. One form of "organization for survival" mentioned was that of the bears, who marked certain territories for themselves, using the odor of their urine, and who defended their terrain with their lives against intruders. The authors of the book did, of course, not use the illustration as an example for man to follow, but I asked myself the question: "Why not?" If man does not base his life on the foundation of God, why not fight for survival to the point of death, as the Nazis in Germany did? Outside God, there is no answer to this question. A person who does not believe in God and who speaks about respect for life and about kindness to his fellowmen handles values that do not belong to him; or rather, they do belong to him, but he contradicts himself by denying the basis for them; yet he uses them.

Haggai's use of language is more intense than a superficial glance would reveal. For instance, vs. 11 reads: "I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands." More is meant here than a lack of rain during the usual wet season. If that were the meaning, Haggai would only have mentioned the fields and the mountains. Grain, new wine, and oil speak of the needs of daily life. A drought on the life of man refers to the quality of life. The drought was not merely a physical one, but most of all, a spiritual dryness.

Vs. 12 indicates that there was a breakthrough from the deadlock in which Israel had been. "Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD." They recognized the voice of God in Haggai's message and they paid attention to its content. As we saw earlier, these were people "whose heart God had moved" while they were still in captivity. For such people it ought to have been natural to listen to the voice of God, but it turned out that this was not the case. It is still true that the percentage of Christians who really recognize God's voice and listen to His Word is relatively small. I am not thinking of a subjective acknowledgment that the Bible is the Word of God, as does, for instance Carl Barth. I mean that one approaches the Bible with the intent to obey.

The result of the hearing and obeying of the people to Haggai's message is fear. Not fear in the human sense of angst but the biblical concept of clearly distinguishing the reality of God and seeing man's relationship with Him in the right light. That fear differs from angst in that man becomes aware of his relationship as creature with his Creator, in spite of the awesomeness of God's presence. It is the respect of a child for a father that calls for obedience.

Israel's condition, as it was described in the previous verses, can be summarized as a lack of sense of reality. The people had simply forgotten about God.

God's answer to the change in attitude of the people is twofold: Haggai, first of all, assures the leaders and the people that God is with them. Secondly, there is a repetition of the spiritual renewal, which makes the people resume their labor. "So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people." We do not read that God spoke directly to the people. It was Haggai who addressed them with a word of encouragement. He took the right to do this from the fact that he was God's messenger and that the message was "the message of the LORD."

These last words cover both Haggai's first message as well as the whole of God's speaking. Understanding God's speaking to man and man's understanding of it are not mechanical phenomena. Some people can hear God speak without knowing what He says; others discern God's intent. The German pastor Johan Blumhardt, who was instrumental in the revival in Möttlingen in the nineteenth century, tells about a certain status he obtained before God by which it was not necessary for him to go to prayer as if he was asking for an audience. He could look up to heaven in the spirit and know what was the will of God concerning the things he was praying for. This section shows us, more than any of the others, what Haggai's status was before the Lord. His was a fellowship of confidence and intimacy by which he knew the will of God, without God having to put it into words.

As far as the external factors were concerned, Haggai could have based himself upon two: the omnipresence of God and the obedience of the people. The words "I am with you" express more than the fact of God's omnipresence. God's omnipresence is an objective reality. Our subjective experience of God's

³⁰ Deut. 8:3

presence is the result of this, but it can only become real for us under certain conditions. Some of the requirements for this are: confession, repentance, complete surrender, and absolute obedience. On God's side, the promise of His presence is often linked to specific commissions He gives to man. In this instance it was the rebuilding of the temple. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus links it to the great commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."³¹ A negative example, that is the subjective experience that God is not present, was as Jesus hang on the cross and cried out: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"³²

The experience of God's presence was the immediate result of the fact that the people "feared the Lord." The Hebrew text reads literally "the people feared before the Lord." God will always give a confirmation to an act of sincere surrender by man.

The promise of God's presence was also only right basis for the resumption of the work. Solomon sang: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."³³ There is also an inner confirmation of God's presence.

The miracle that marked the beginning of the work also marks the resumption of it. There is, at both points, a revival of the human spirit. We ought not to use Scripture portions like these to prove that there must be "a Second Blessing." It does show, however, that a first experience with the Lord is not sufficient for the rest of one's life. Man is made in such a way that he reacts to impulses; our lives are never static. The constant rhythm of our lives is made up of a change between highs and lows. We see in the early chapters of Acts, that the apostles were, at least twice, filled with the Holy Spirit.³⁴ There is no reason to suppose that the experience was never repeated afterwards. Whenever man reacts in faith to the Word of God and to His promise "I am with you," and an inner revival takes place, the work to be done will be accomplished.

Ezra reports what happened. The work had been stopped by order King Xerxes because of a formal complaint filed by the local population. These were people who had migrated to Israel while Israel was in captivity.³⁵ It seems as if history is going to repeat itself when the work is resumed. Again a formal complaint is filed with the king, who is now King Darius. The difference between the first and the second instance, however, is that the second time "the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews."³⁶

I remember a sermon by one of the teacher of the Brussels Bible Institute, when I was a student there. The topic was I Samuel chapter 4 and 7: "Victory at the place of defeat." This title could be place above the events that took place here. As in the war of Israel with the Philistines, here also an act of complete surrender to the will of God had preceded the battle. This was the reason the Almighty God sided with them against the opposition. If God is for us, royal edicts to the contrary will have very little effect.

II. The Glory of the Latter Temple 2:1-9
A. The Latter Temple Is Not as Glorious as the First 2:1-3

1 On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai:

2 "Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them,

3 'Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?

³¹ Matt. 28:19,20

³² Matt. 27:46

³³ Ps. 127:1

³⁴ Acts 2:4; 4:31

³⁵ See Ezra 4:6-23

³⁶ Ezra 5:5

This Word of God comes to the people by mouth of Haggai approximately one month after the resumption of the work. We don't know exactly how much had been done when the work was stopped. Ezra tells us that the foundation had been laid,³⁷ but as we saw earlier, it is possible that much of the foundation of the old temple was still there. That would mean that all that had to be done was cleaning up the rubble. It is obvious that, if the new temple was built on the foundation of the old one, only part of the old foundation was used, because the new temple was much smaller than the old one. The Book of I Kings gives us the measurements of the first temple: "The temple that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high."³⁸ According to Ezra, King Cyrus' instructions stipulated as "its height sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits."³⁹ We don't know if the units of measuring had remained the same over the centuries. It could be that a lack of material forced the Jews to make the temple smaller than King Cyrus had ordered. It seems, however, that the length and width were the same, but that the inferiority was determined by other factors. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "The Jews note five points of inferiority: The absence from the second temple of (1) the sacred fire; (2) the Shekinah, or cloud of glory representing the presence of God in the sanctuary; (3) the ark and cherubim; (4) the Urim and Thummim; (5) the spirit of prophecy. The connection of it with Messiah more than counterbalanced all these, because He is the antitype to all five (Hag 2:9)."

Anyhow, the laying down of the foundation and the rebuilding of the temple was accompanied by an outburst of mixed emotions. In the eyes of those who remembered Solomon's temple the new building was inferior. Both Ezra and Haggai mention people who had seen the old temple. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "It is quite possible that there should be some old people present who had seen Solomon's temple. Many have thought that Haggai himself was of the number. It was sixty-eight years ago that the temple was destroyed, and we can well believe that its remarkable features were deeply impressed on the minds of those who as boys or youths had loved and admired it. Ezra tells us (Ezra 3:12) that 'many of the priests and Levites' [when the foundation first was laid] and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house... wept with a loud voice.' ... The prophet identifies the present with Solomon's temple, as being adapted for the same purposes, to fill the same place in the national life, built on the same hallowed spot, and partly with the same materials. In the Jews' eyes there was one only temple, whatever might be the date of its erection or the comparative worth of its decorations and materials."

The greatest difference between the old temple and the new one was the absence of the ark. The Bible does not reveal what happened with the ark. If the ark had been among the object that Nebuchadnezzar had stolen, it would certainly have been mentioned. We may, therefore, assume that the ark was no longer there when the new temple was built. The cover of the ark had been the throne of God, the place of God's presence on earth. God had said to Moses: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."⁴⁰ The ark may have been destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple. The prophet Ezekiel had seen in a vision how the glory of the Lord withdrew from the ark, from the temple, and the city.⁴¹ What remained inside the temple when the Babylonians tore down the building was nothing but an empty hull. God no longer resided above the cover of the ark. The ark was no longer the throne of God; it was merely a wooden structure, laid over with gold. Israel was so used to see the ark as a symbol of God's presence that they had identified the two. Was not this the bitterest part of the captivity that the throne of God had been destroyed? It was as if God no longer existed because the ark was no longer there. The people might have known better. In his inaugural prayer, Solomon had said: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"⁴²

³⁷ Ezra 3:10,11

³⁸ I Kings 6:2

³⁹ Ezra 6:3 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Ex. 25:22

⁴¹ See Ezek. 9:3; 10:4,5,18,19; 11:23

⁴² I Kings 8:27

Part of the sadness was due to the knowledge that things would never be the same again. It was as in a marriage when the discovery is made that one of the partners has been unfaithful. Even if there is reconciliation, the relationship will never be again what it was before. Something was destroyed that could not be healed. Maybe the people thought of the time when Moses had pled with God because God wanted to send an angel to accompany the people through the desert. Moses had said to God: "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."⁴³ The people of Haggai's time felt that they were in "the dispensation of the angel." Too much had happened between God and His people. There was a feeling of shame among the best of the nation.

This corresponds to a stage in the spiritual experience of all of God's children. We probably all come to a point where we feel that God is no longer there. The first joy of redemption has past and sin has raised its head again in our lives. We feel ashamed and we believe that, maybe, God's efforts for us had been in vain. How could we know that this stage is part of God's plan to greater glory? God could have let the Jews build a new ark, but He wanted to prepare them for the day when He would reveal His glory, not above a wooden crate with a gold cover but in the body and life of Jesus Christ. That truth is the topic of Stephen's defense before the Sanhedrin.⁴⁴

B. The Latter Temple Will Be More Glorious than the First 2:4-9

4 But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty.

5 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

6 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

7 I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.

8 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty.

9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

The words with which Haggai encourages his contemporaries are more marvelous than one would expect. The Lord Himself draws a parallel between the rebuilding of the temple and His presence among the Israelites during their journey through the desert. We read: "This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear." At the time of the desert crossing God promised to be present. The rebuilding of the temple is also part of the same promise. The fulfillment of the covenant is in our Lord Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."⁴⁵ The Greek word rendered "made his dwelling" is *skenoō*, which means, "to tent or encamp," Strong's Concordance adds to its definition the word *skenoō*: "as God did in the Tabernacle of old." Jesus spoke about this fulfillment when He said to the Jews: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." We read: "The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said."⁴⁶

The exhortation: "Be strong" is also used in the Psalms in connection with waiting for the Lord. David says: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."⁴⁷ The author of Hebrews expresses the same thought in connection with perseverance. "You need to persevere so that when you have

⁴³ Ex. 33:15

⁴⁴ See Acts 7

⁴⁵ John 1:14

⁴⁶ John 2:19-22

⁴⁷ Ps. 27:14

done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”⁴⁸ That is the strength Haggai refers to in this chapter. It means resolve to continue on the way God has traced, in spite of the darkness and the deceiving appearance that all may be in vain.

Verses 6-9 contain the actual message and form the highlight of this book. The Lord places the promise in the near future, as if the fulfillment would come in a moment, “in a little while.” Yet, the people who rebuilt the temple never saw it, or did they? An earthquake would accompany the fulfillment. “The heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land” would be shaken. Would this be the same kind of earthquake as in the days of King Uzziah, the one Amos and Zechariah mention?⁴⁹ That would mean that the promise refers to the Day of the LORD, which means that the prophecy still has not been fulfilled. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: “At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’”⁵⁰ The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ will complete the fulfillment of this prophecy, just as His first coming began it.

The temple that Zerubabel built was an image of the heavenly reality, as was Solomon’s temple. The real temple is in heaven.⁵¹ Even gold and precious stones are only shadows of the real heavenly glory. Zerubabel and Joshua did see this; actually they are seeing it right now! The writer to the Hebrews uses the same imagery in connection with the life story of Abraham. We read: “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”⁵² And Jesus said about Abraham: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”⁵³

This does not mean a spiritualization of reality; it means to understand the real meaning of what we call reality, that is a representation of an invisible heavenly actuality. God did not promise the Israelites unreal things that never came to pass; He led them into values and realities that were greater than a temple made of stone and a golden ark. God wants our lives to be dominated by the expectation of “the city with foundations.”

Haggai makes it sound as if all nations will come and decorate this temple with silver and gold. If we take this literally, we must admit that the prophecy was never fulfilled. This temple didn’t even exist any longer when Jesus was born. It would also have been strange if the building had been finished first and then be covered with gold.

We ask ourselves what God meant with this promise. If the temple in heaven is the main thing, why then is it so important to build a house on earth? This building must have had some importance, otherwise the reproach that the Lord’s house remained a ruin, “while each of you is busy with his own house” would be unfounded. It may be true that the temple, as well as the tabernacle and the ark, were meant to be symbols, as a symbol the temple did have its value. The tabernacle was so strongly wired to the glory of God that touching it caused death. This temple had passed that stage.

We see in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the one hand, a holy respect for the temple as a building, and, on the other hand, the conviction that of that temple “not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”⁵⁴ At the same time we read that Jesus purified the temple. John reports: “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ Then the Jews demanded of him, ‘What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three

⁴⁸ Heb. 10:36

⁴⁹ See Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5

⁵⁰ Heb. 12:26

⁵¹ See Rev. 11:19

⁵² Heb. 11:10

⁵³ John 8:56

⁵⁴ Matt. 24:2

days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body."⁵⁵ Jesus called the building "my Father's house," but at the same time, He declared that the actual temple was His body. As a twelve-year-old boy He felt the urge to be in His Father's house.⁵⁶ In Matthew's Gospel, as well as in Ezekiel's prophecy that foretold the event, we see that Jesus leaves the temple to go to the Mount of Olives, leaving the house desolate.⁵⁷

These verses show us what the worth of the temple was and what it was not. The temple was, in the first place, a testimony; it was a testimony to God's heavenly glory. Secondly, it was a witness to the nations of the earth. We read in Mark's Gospel that Jesus said: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"⁵⁸ This statement is a combination of a prophecy by Isaiah and Jeremiah. Isaiah said: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,"⁵⁹ and in Jeremiah's prophecy we read: "Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD."⁶⁰ Thirdly, the destruction and rebuilding of the temple were a shadow of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although there was no ark of the covenant in the temple, Jesus taught that God indwelt the temple. He said in Matthew's Gospel: "He who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it."⁶¹ But in the same breath, Jesus mentioned heaven and the throne on which God is seated.

God pointed, in Haggai's message, to the importance of the work the people were doing, and at the same time, He declared that there were things that were more important. He wanted them to be occupied with the work they did for Him and He wanted also that this work would not completely absorb them. We could paraphrase Paul's words that they ought to be building and not be possessed by it.⁶²

The true importance of the temple is found in vs. 9: " 'In this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty." It is impossible to separate the heavenly reality from what happens on earth. It is not only true that the image has no value without the invisible reality, but spiritual things are also influenced by natural incidents. Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit, for instance, caused a tremendous upheaval in the heavenly places. And the restoration of the heavenly order cannot be separated from the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Golgotha. The peace God granted was linked to the temple.

III.	The Blessings of Obedience	2:10-19
A.	The Disobedience of the Remnant	2:10-14

10 On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai:

11 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Ask the priests what the law says:

12 If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?'" The priests answered, "No."

13 Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?" "Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."

14 Then Haggai said, "'So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the LORD. 'Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.'

⁵⁵ John 2:13-21

⁵⁶ See Luke 2:49

⁵⁷ See Matt. 23:37-24:2; Ezek. 11:23

⁵⁸ Mark 11:17

⁵⁹ Isa. 56:7

⁶⁰ Jer. 7:11

⁶¹ Matt. 23:21

⁶² See I Cor. 7:29,30

This section emphasizes the necessity of holy living. Haggai elaborates on the principle of distinguishing between pure and impure, and in the following section, he shows how this is put in practice.

The “kosher principle” indicates that sin is contagious but holiness is not. The examples given are borrowed from the temple rituals. The issue, however, is not ritual purity or impurity but moral purity. It is, of course, not so that sin is by nature more contagious than holiness. It appears to us to be that way because sin has already found a foothold in each of our lives. On the sinful level of fallen humanity, sin is extremely contagious. But the Lord Jesus was never contaminated, although He lived in the same world as we. Mankind is susceptible to evil because it has chosen for evil. The fact that, even as a child of God, we become polluted, proves that our will has only been superficially touched by God’s grace. Behind every act of surrender there always remains a great deal of resistance that reacts immediately when it comes under the influence of impurity. That is why James warns: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”⁶³ The fact that, in spite of our susceptibility to evil, God does not leave us to ourselves is an indication that there is still hope for mankind. A day will come on which our sinful nature is eradicated in and through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the meantime we do well to guard against infection. No one will let a sickly child die without medical help because it will be infected again at a later date. On the basis of the same kind of love, God will always want to keep our soul from all kinds of infections.

Verses 14-17 apply “the kosher principle” to everyday life. “ ‘So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.’ ”

B. The Solution: The Obedience of the Remnant

2:15-19

15 "Now give careful thought to this from this day on-consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple.

16 When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty.

17 I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me,' declares the LORD.

18 `From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid. Give careful thought:

19 Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

""From this day on I will bless you.""

The text does not specifically state how the people were defiled. It could be that their sacrifices were defiled because they themselves were ritually impure. But this would obscure the meaning of the following verses about a heap of twenty measures that turned out to be ten and a wine vat of fifty measures that only contained twenty. TLB paraphrases this by using modern measurements: “Before, when you expected a twenty-bushel crop, there were only ten. When you came to draw fifty gallons from the olive press, there were only twenty.” The majority of commentators interpret these words as a disappointment of harvest, which makes the following verse an explanation of the cause, namely that blight and mildew were responsible for the lack of yield. Another possibility, which I have not seen taken into consideration by anyone, is that an amount of wheat, which was said to be twenty measures, was sold. But after payment was made, the buyer discovered that there were only ten. The issue then was not ritual but moral impurity by deceit. The Lord wanted His people to think back to their moral condition before they undertook the rebuilding of the temple. Dishonesty and temple building are irreconcilable. On the other hand, the fact that one is busy building the house of the Lord is, in itself, no guarantee for honesty either.

The admonition: “Give careful thought” is of quite a different character than the one that was given in the same words in the first chapter. In chapter one it was a warning to people who had not given priority to God in their lives. Here it is the astounding discovery of those who have turned to the Lord, that a process of moral rejuvenation has taken place in their lives. The time of blight and mildew was past. I remember, while

⁶³

James 1:13-15

working in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, a man from Java, Pak Nyoto, who had accepted the Lord and confessed that, to his own amazement, he had no longer any outbursts of anger.

Day twenty-four of the ninth month marks the beginning of a new era. It is a spiritual milestone, the first day of the Lord's New Year. It is New Year's Day on the spiritual calendar. What happened? It is not so that up to that day the Israelites had been dishonest and suddenly had become honest people. It was rather the realization that they had begun to walk a new path and they paused to confirm to themselves that they wanted to continue walking on it. Their spiritual balance was being made up.

It is important to pause from time to time and ask oneself the question: "Have I really made any progress?" It was not the Jews who looked at the balance but God. The Lord placed their experiences of the last three months in their right perspective and He says: "See how things have changed since you began rebuilding." Zerubbabel must have written that day in his diary: "God has done great things for us. We began rebuilding and no one has been able to stop us. As we were building on the temple, we built up ourselves. As the house became stronger, we grew in strength ourselves. What God has begun to for us, He will certainly continue."

IV. The Future Blessings through Promise 2:20-23
A. The Future Destruction of the Nations 2:20-22

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

21 "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth.

22 I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

The same day, on which this great encouragement was given to the people, a message arrived for Zerubbabel. As in vs. 7 here also, there is mention of a universal quake. Looked at from an earthly perspective, this kind of prophecy makes no sense. Imagine someone in a gathering of the United Nation making such a statement! This prophecy was never fulfilled in an earthly setting. King Darius, Alexander the Great, or the Roman emperors have never known that there was a man by the name of Zerubbabel. This governor was never more than a little civil servant in a small department. If it were true that life ends at death, that there is no connection between what happens here and on the other side of the grave, then this prophecy is nothing but a lie.

It happens sometimes that earthly kingdoms are confronted by the Kingdom of Heaven, as in the meeting between Jesus and Pilate, at which occasion Jesus "made the good confession," to use Paul's expression.⁶⁴ Haggai's prophecy demonstrates the relationship between life here on earth and life hereafter, because Zerubbabel is given to play a role which, apparently, he never played on earth. Or did he?

The Lord announces three things in this prophecy:

- a. He will shake heaven and earth.
- b. He will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms.
- c. Zerubbabel will become a signet ring.

As we saw earlier in connection with a statement by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the shaking of heaven and earth refers to the Day of the Lord.⁶⁵ Heaven and earth will be shaken. The two world wars that were fought in the twentieth century were a reflection of the actual battle that takes places in the heavenly places. Daniel's prophecy testifies to this. We read that the angel who appeared to Daniel said: "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."⁶⁶ And John writes in Revelation: "And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the

⁶⁴ See I Tim. 6:13

⁶⁵ See Heb. 12:26,27

⁶⁶ Daniel 10:12-14

earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.'⁶⁷

This issue is not merely the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. As we have seen already, this temple is an image of the real sanctuary. The struggle, the opposition, and the perseverance mentioned here are the ultimate issues. The NIV renders the Hebrew word *ki'ce'* with "thrones," but the word is singular, "the throne." The NKJV is closer to the original with: "I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms." The meaning is that there is for every kingdom and power on earth a central point of authority in the heavenly places. Behind every power that resists God stands the person of the great adversary, Satan. The fact that kings are dethroned, and presidents are assassinated on earth, and that there are revolutions and wars is due to the fact that Satan's power in the heavenly places is taken away from him. John describes this for us in Revelation: "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."⁶⁸ When the central point of authority has disappeared, the rest will collapse by itself. Then there will no longer be any power of resistance on earth. Military power will no longer be able to function and organized armies will fall in disarray. Because of discord will section will finish off the other. Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea,⁶⁹ the army of the Midianites in the day of Gideon,⁷⁰ and the attack on Judah by Moab and Midian⁷¹ are all packed into one great scene here.

B. The Future Recognition of Zerubbabel 2:23

"On that day,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the LORD, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the LORD Almighty."

The fact that Zerubbabel is called "my signet ring" indicates, in the first place, that he is an image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The announcement of Zerubbabel's future glory is very impressive. God calls Himself in this verse *Yahweh tsabaa'owt*, the LORD of Hosts, the King of the universe. The name Zerubbabel means "seed of Babylon." The meaning is probably: "child of Babylon," or "child of captivity." It refers both to the captivity and to God's promise that there would be survivors. The addition "son of Shealtiel" confirms Zerubbabel's descent from King David and his right to the throne of Israel's theocracy. But the highest title given to him is "My servant." This refers to Zerubbabel's complete surrender to the will of God. The highest compliment that can be given to man is: "There came a man who was sent from God."⁷² Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself was given this title: "Servant of the Lord."

This man who came back from being lost in captivity, this child of God's promise, who had given himself unconditionally to God, God took and made him a signet ring, one who confirms God's edicts. Jesus

⁶⁷ Rev.12:7-12

⁶⁸ Rev. 20:1-3,10

⁶⁹ See Ex. 14:23-28

⁷⁰ See Judg. 7:22

⁷¹ II Chr. 20:22,23

⁷² John 1:6

calls Himself the One on whom: “God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”⁷³ Thus Zerubbabel became the token of God’s authority. What he bound would be bound. The Father bestowed His honor upon this man. This makes us exclaim: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”⁷⁴

This prophecy also indicates that God does not place the work above the worker. The person of Zerubbabel is as important to Him as the temple. This reminds us of what Paul wrote to Timothy: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”⁷⁵

In conclusion we observe that, although the resumption of the work on the temple in Jerusalem instigated Haggai’s prophecy, the subject of his message goes well beyond and is much richer than the building of stone the people erected. We see an ascending line from this building and from the people who built it going into eternity. Haggai did here what Jesus would do unfailingly while on earth at every important moment of His life. He drew a line from His place on earth to heaven to reveal the right perspective and to place every incident in time and space in the light of eternity.

Toccoa Falls, GA, 10/8/03

⁷³ John 6:27

⁷⁴ Ps. 8:4

⁷⁵ I Tim. 4:16