

# THE PROPHECY OF HAGGAI REBUILDING THE CHURCH

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## Introduction

The prophecy of Haggai, though little known, is a book of enormous value, not only as a record of God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament, but also as a reminder of God's regard for and faithful care of his church in the New Testament. The book of Haggai is a book about the church, about the calling that every member of the church has within the church, and about God's faithfulness to his church. It is, therefore, a book that very much needs to be read and understood in times such as these, times in which the church is despised and neglected and fallen into spiritual ruin.

The prophecy is concerned with the rebuilding of the temple in the days after Judah's return from captivity in Babylon. Though that might seem to have little bearing on our life and calling in the New Testament, it is in fact, a vivid and unforgettable reminder of the truth of the Reformation slogan concerning the true church of Christ, that it is "reformed and always reforming." The calling that Judah had to rebuild God's house, is ours also - a calling that continues until the Desire of all nations comes again as he has promised.

## The Author

Haggai is the first of the three prophets of the return. He began his prophecies about two months before Zechariah and the two of them prophesied about thirty years before Malachi. There can be no doubt that he is the author of these prophecies, since he is named nine times in the book and twice in Ezra. His position and work as a prophet in Judah who brought the word of God concerning the rebuilding of the temple are confirmed in Ezra 5:1, 2, where we read:

Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua (also called Joshua) the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Haggai and his work are also mentioned in Ezra 6:14:

And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Some suggest that although Haggai is the author of the prophecies, this does not necessarily mean that he actually wrote the book, since he is referred to in the third person throughout. Three times, however, we read literally that the Word of the Lord came "by the hand of Haggai" (1:1, 3; 2:1; cf. also Acts 7:35; Gal. 3:19) which would indicate that he is the one who wrote the prophecies down, so that the book, and the prophecies are contemporary. We see in this the way that many of the books of Scripture have come to us, first spoken to the church under the inspiration of the Spirit and then under the inspiration of the same Spirit, infallibly written. In this book, too, God used a man to preserve his Word in writing for all ages, while insuring that what was written remained "the Word of the Lord," infallible and perfect.

We know nothing about Haggai himself, except that he prophesied in years after the return from Babylon, as a contemporary of the prophet Zechariah, when Zerubbabel was governor of Judah and Darius king of the Persians. He is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture and neither his prophecy nor the book of Ezra give us any information about him. There is not even any clear evidence that his name has any significance. In fact, as far as we know, he delivered only four prophecies, each of which is marked in the book of Haggai by a date. Those four prophecies were given over a period of just under four months (15 weeks). Whether Haggai's career as a prophet lasted longer, and whether there were other prophecies besides these four we do not know.

All this is of some significance. That we know so little of Haggai, is a needed reminder that what he says is the Word of God. The man himself matters very little in light of that important fact. That this is the Word of God is important, for the message is a message that must be heard by God's people in every age. It is a word of God the relevance of which has not changed though many hundreds of years have passed and though the circumstances of the church are ever so different.

That Haggai himself apparently prophesied for only a very short time speaks of the Lord's sovereignty in his dealings with Judah. The men he uses to bring his word or in other ways are merely instruments of his sovereignty and grace. He is the one who saves, directs, corrects and glorifies his church.

#### The Date

The book dates itself to the second year of Darius, king of Persia. This is confirmed in Ezra 4:24:

Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

This Darius is not the same man as Darius the Mede, the conqueror of Babylon, mentioned in Daniel 5:28. He had died 18 years earlier and had been followed by Cyrus the Great, who sent the Jews back to Judah, and by several other kings. The Darius of Haggai's days is almost certainly Darius I Hystaspes also known as Darius the Great who ruled Persia from 521-486 B.C. Haggai, then, prophesied around 520 B.C., approximately 22 years after the return from captivity. This Darius is also very likely the same man as the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:1-21 and of Nehemiah 2:1, 5:14 and 13:6, and the Ahasuerus who married Esther and is referred to in that book.

In secular history he is, therefore, the Persian king who first tried to conquer Greece and whose armies were defeated at the battle of Marathon. It is striking that great king though he was, none of his exploits are mentioned in Scripture, except very briefly in the book of Esther (1:1) where he is remembered as the king who ruled from India to Ethiopia. Scripture's bare mention of him is a reminder that God judges greatness by a different standard than men do. Those who are great in the world are usually of little account in the kingdom of God, and those who are unnoticed and who die unremembered in the world are often of great account in that kingdom.

In the book of Haggai Darius is important only insofar as the rebuilding of the temple is dated to his reign. The important event on God's calendar in those days, that which in his eyes was worthy of note and one of the great events of history, was the rebuilding of the temple, not the accession and power of this great king.

#### The History

In the context of that history the book of Haggai shows that the rebuilding of God's house was the main reason for the return from captivity. God was most of all concerned with his house

and the glory of his own name in that house. Even the return of his people from captivity and their reestablishment in the promised land is only a means to that end. The Jews should have been and we should be equally concerned for the house of God.

That the rebuilding of the temple takes place many years after the return is the reason why Haggai had to bring the Word of God to God's people in Judah. It was 18 years after the return and the temple was not yet completed. The work on the temple had started almost as soon as the Jews had first returned to Judah. Seven months after the decree of Cyrus they were back and the next year they were already busy with the rebuilding of the temple and had laid its foundations (Ezra 3:8-13).

In the years that followed, however, very little more was done, so that at the time of Haggai's prophecies, twenty years later the temple was still unfinished. Originally the work had stopped because of the interference of Judah's enemies. These enemies, especially the Samaritans, had themselves interfered with the work and had hired counsellors (something on the order of lawyers) to do all they could to stop the work (Ezra 4:4, 5). Those efforts had been unsuccessful while Cyrus and his successor Ahasuerus (not the husband of Esther but a man known in to secular history as Cambyses) were still living, but when a man identified in Scripture as Artaxerxes (known in history as Pseudo-smerdis) became king, they were able to have the work stopped (Ezra 4:7-24). Artaxerxes listened to the charges of these enemies that the rebuilding of the temple would be an occasion for rebellion and ordered the work stopped.

Nevertheless, as God pointed out through Haggai, the interference of enemies was not the only reason the temple remained unbuilt. The work God had given Judah to do had been neglected and it is that neglect that God admonishes through Haggai's prophecies, urging the Jews to finish their work on the temple and promising them His blessings when they obeyed.

The Jews did obey and the work on the temple was finished five years later in the last month of the sixth year of the reign of Darius (Ezra 6:15). We do not know if Haggai was still living or prophesying when the work was finished. He says nothing of it. His concern was getting the work underway and encouraging the people to continue. Once that was accomplished, as it was in less than four months, he fades from the scene of biblical history. God Word through him, however, remains and continues to be of value to the church.

### The Divisions

These prophecies of Haggai are four, each identified by the date on which it was brought, all of them in the second year of Darius. The first is dated to the first day of the sixth month and is found in Haggai 1:1-15. The second came less than a month later on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the seventh month and is found in Haggai 2:1-9. The third and fourth were about two months later again on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month and include Haggai 2:11-19 and 2:20-23.

Most scholars agree that these dates can be determined with quite a degree of accuracy from Babylonian records as follows:

Reference	Darius' Year	Month	Day	Calendar Date
1:1	2	6	1	29 August 520 B.C.
1:15	2	6	24	21 September 520 B.C.
(This is the date when the people began to obey God's Word through Haggai).				
2:1	2	7	21	17 October 520 B.C.
2:10	2	9	24	18 December 520 B.C. <sup>1</sup>

(This is the date of the last two prophecies of Haggai).

The first prophecy is a call to be busy with the work of building the temple accompanied by a warning against further neglect of the work. In that warning God points out the sins of his people and shows them how he was punishing them for those sins. Though they did not recognize the fact, many of the troubles they were suffering in Judah were God's chastisement.

Attached to that first prophecy is an historical notice of the people's obedience to God's Word through Haggai and a word of encouragement to them in their work of rebuilding the temple. Haggai does not tell that part of the story, but the Jews obtained a decree from the king allowing them to build and providing them with the necessities for building and for the worship of God in the temple, to the consternation of their enemies (Ezra 5:3-6:13).

The second prophecy, found in chapter 2:1-9, is the most important of them all. In it God's addresses the discouragement of the people, who could see, now that the work was progressing, that the temple they were building was not much in comparison with Solomon's temple. God not only encourages them with the promise that he would live in the temple as in old times, but also points them forward to the coming of Christ, to the building of the true temple, and to its glory, which would be far greater than the glory of Solomon's temple. This second prophecy concerns the future history of the temple and carries us all the way to the end of the world, when all things would be shaken to pieces and destroyed and only the true temple remain.

The third prophecy is a reminder to the people, through an example taken from the law of Moses, that because the work was God's work, they must be holy and work with holy hands. That warning is reinforced in chapter 2:13-19, with a reminder of God's former judgments and a promise of future blessing.

The fourth of these prophecies speaks again of the coming of Christ as the one in whom all the promises of God concerning the temple would be fulfilled. Christ is spoken of in the figure of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and under that figure God not only promises his people complete deliverance from their enemies, but also speaks of His great and eternal love for them as the motive for all his dealings with them.

These prophecies, then, take us into the New Testament and have to do not only with Old Testament events, but with those things that are even now taking place between Christ's coming as the Desire of all nations and his return to shake all things. The book of Haggai is only quoted once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 12:26, but is very much a book for New Testament believers, a book that may not be neglected and forgotten, a book that concerns the church of Jesus Christ in the world and the calling of believers in relation to the church.

#### The First Prophecy: Haggai 1:1-15

*1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying,*

This first mention of Darius is a reminder that the Jews, at the time of Haggai's prophecy, were no longer an independent nation, but under the dominion of foreign and heathen kings. They even dated events now by the reigns of these strange kings who ruled from far-off Persia. The fact that this king is not the same king who sent them back to Judah is a reminder that many years had passed and the work of the temple was not yet finished. It was Cyrus who had sent them back, and now another king named Darius was on the throne of Persia. It was also a reminder that

circumstances had changed once again and that they could no longer use the hostility of former kings as an excuse for their neglect of God's house, for neglect it was, as Haggai points out in verse two.

There is some controversy about whether the sixth month is the sixth month of the reign of Darius or the sixth month of the Jewish year, but the questions seems of little significance. The main reasons for carefully dating each of the prophecies are three-fold: (1) to show how long the people had been remiss in their calling; (2) to show their quick obedience to God's command when rebuked for their sloth and indifference; and (3) to show God's faithfulness in encouraging them and helping them in the work. He is quick to encourage their willingness to work and quick to see their troubles and discouragements and to assist them.

This first verse, then, reminds us that the word that Haggai brings, whether a word of rebuke or of encouragement, is God's word, literally "the word of Jehovah," Israel's covenant God and the one whose covenant faithfulness never fails. The phrase, "saith the Lord," is found over and over again, sometimes three times in the same verse (2:4, 23). Judah had to know that their calling to rebuild the temple did not depend on the whims of earthly kings, however great they might be, but came from the King of kings himself. Nothing and no one might stand in the way of their obedience. God, not Cyrus or Darius, had commanded the building of his house.

That reminder is very important today. As we shall see, the calling to rebuild God's house is for us the calling to labor faithfully in and for the church. That we will do, as Judah did, only when we are certain that the calling comes to us from God himself and concerns his house. If we do not understand that the calling is of God we will be as neglectful and indifferent as Israel was before the word of God came to them through Haggai

A quick glance at the book of Haggai will show that God most often identifies himself in the book by the name Jehovah and that Jehovah is used many times in this very short book. It is used 34 times in 38 verses and very often appears as "the Lord of hosts" or more literally, "Jehovah of hosts." In comparison, the only other name used is the name "God," and that only three times.

God uses this name to remind us of the fact that the temple, called here his house, is a part of his covenant with his people. It is in that house that he chooses to dwell with his people, to reveal himself as their God, and to take them as his people. That is what his covenant with his people is all about and so he uses his covenant name time and time again.

This first word of God is addressed especially to Zerubbabel the governor, also called Sheshbazzar in Ezra 1:11; 5:14, 16) and Joshua the high priest (also referred to as Jeshua). That does not mean that God is not speaking to the rest of the people. He addresses them all through these their leaders. Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David, the grandson of Jehoiachin, the next to last king of Judah, and would have been king himself if Judah had been an independent nation and if the throne of David had not fallen from its former glory. He is mentioned also in I Chronicles (3:19), Ezra, Nehemiah, Matthew (1:12) and Luke (3:27). In Matthew and Luke he is identified as one of the ancestors of Jesus. Joshua was descendant of Aaron and is mentioned also in the prophecy of Zechariah (3:1-9; 6:11).

The mention of these two men is evidence of God's faithfulness to Judah, a faithfulness that makes their unfaithfulness all the more inexcusable. God had preserved both the line of David and of Aaron through the awful years that led to and followed the Babylonian captivity. He had preserved those lines not because there was any merit in the house of David or of Aaron, but that his promises, especially the promise to live with his people and be their God, might not fail.

More importantly, however, these men in their offices of priest and governor represent Christ himself. It is really through him and from him that this word of God concerning the temple comes,

and it is by his grace that the word of God through Haggai bears the good fruit of obedience in the hearts and lives of God's people. Even in the Old Testament he was the great temple builder and nothing could or would be done without him

Christ is the governor or king through by whom the true temple of God is built. It is as King that he describes the building the true temple in John: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). He is also the great high priest in the house of God (Heb. 3:1-3; 8:1,2), through whom and in whom God is worshipped in his temple and the worshippers themselves sanctified. Through Zerubbabel and Joshua, then, as figures of Christ, this word of God comes to God's people to insure their obedience.

It is possible, as some suggest that this prophecy was made in the temple area, since the first of the month was a Jewish feast or holiday (Num. 28:11-15). This would have meant that Haggai had a large audience and could point to the unfinished temple itself as evidence of the people's failure to honor and obey God.

*2. Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.*

To understand the book of Haggai and its relevance to the New Testament church, we must see that the Old Testament temple, called here the "Lord's house," prefigures the institute church or what is sometimes called the visible church. The institute church is the church on earth as we find it in different congregations and denominations. It is the church organized according to the rules of God's Word with its pastors, elders, deacons and members - the church busy with the work of the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments and church discipline, worshipping God and living together in fellowship.

That this church is identical to the Old Testament - the spiritual reality of which that temple was a figure or type is clear from the witness of the New Testament. It is clear from the passage we just quoted in John 2, where Jesus says that the true temple is His own body (Jn. 2:22), which body further identified as his church in Ephesians 1:22, 23. Even clearer proof is found in I Timothy 3:15, where the institute church, the church in the world, is given the *same name* as it is here in Haggai:

But if I tarry long, that though mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the *house of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

We know that Paul is speaking of the institute church in I Timothy 3:15 because he recommends proper behavior in the church, in this case the church or congregation of Ephesus where Timothy was minister. That church, not the building, but the members and officers organized according to the rules of God's Word, like the temple in the Old Testament, is the house of God. Of that church Haggai speaks prophetically.

The Old Testament temple and the New Testament church are called the house of God because they are the place of God's covenant, the house where God and his people live together under one roof and as one family - where he is their Father and Jesus is their elder brother through the communion of the Holy Spirit.

God had promised that the temple would be that kind of a house in the Old Testament:

And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God.

That promise was first fulfilled when God in the cloud of glory came to the tabernacle in the wilderness.

For the same reason the church is called the house of God in the New Testament. It is the place above all others where God lives with his people in blessed and close covenant fellowship. It is the place where the family of God meets together, eats together the bread of life, and does the work of God's kingdom and covenant.

If the temple is not the church prefigured and typified, then the book of Haggai has nothing to say to us as New Testament Christians. Even if it is true, as the Dispensationalists believe, that the Old Testament temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem during a thousand year period preceding the end of the world, that temple and the book of Haggai are still of no significance for us. The temple and sacrifices were for the Jews and will still be exclusively for them if the temple is ever rebuilt. In that case our interest in book of Haggai can only be that of idle curiosity.

If the temple is the same as the church in the New Testament, then the calling to rebuild the temple is our calling - our calling to be always busy building and rebuilding the church. Of that calling we will speak more fully as we go on, but that calling is carried out in the New Testament in all the work of the church, as well as in the way of church reformation. It is the constant calling of every believer, something the great Protestant Reformation recognized in its description of the true church as "reformed and always reforming." That calling includes even the daily lives of God's people when they are working for the cause and kingdom of God.

In Haggai 1:2 God points out that the one reason for the unfinished work on the temple was not the interference of enemies or even the decree of the king, but that the people had given up because of the difficulties which faced them. The decree of Artaxerxes and the efforts of the Samaritans to halt the work had been taken by the Jews as a sign that God did not really mean them to be rebuilding the temple at that particular time. They had not entirely forgotten God's command, but were suggesting that the work should be left to some future and more propitious time.

They had done what so many do today, taken what they thought was sign from God and used that as an excuse to neglect God's explicit command. So it is always. Christians even today are quick to find signs in everything which then allow them to live in disobedience to God's explicit commands in the Scriptures. If their evil deeds are pointed out, then they excuse themselves by saying, "But God showed me that this is what I must do." Further inquiry will usually show that God's showing them what to do is nothing more than their taking some event or circumstance in their lives as a sign from God.

We must remember that God's Word is our only guide and rule for faith and life. Nothing from God will ever contradict his Word or allow us to live in disobedience to his Word. That is not to say that God does not guide us through circumstances, but we must be very careful that we do not misinterpret circumstances and providences, something we most certainly are doing if our understanding of those circumstances leads us into disobedience to God's commands and revealed will in the Scriptures.

A young person who is considering marriage, might think on the basis of circumstances that God is showing him or her whom to marry by the fact that he brought their lives together and gave them similar interests. If, however, one of them is not a believer, the command of God in I Corinthians 7:39 stands: "Only in the Lord;" and not circumstances may be interpreted to allow the believer to disobey that command.

Perhaps the clearest way that God guides through circumstances is when he makes something impossible or does not give us what we have asked of him. Even that, however, is open

to misinterpretation, as the example of these Jews showed. Especially the decree of Artaxerxes suggested that it was impossible to build the temple at that time, but they had the command of God and at no time may circumstances come in conflict with such a command.

A young person who is considering marriage might think on the basis of circumstances that God is showing them whom to marry by the fact that he has brought another person into their lives to whom they are attracted and who has come to depend on them and be their friend, but if that other person is an unbeliever, the command of God in I Corinthians 7:39 stands: "Only in the Lord" and no circumstances may be interpreted to allow anyone to disobey that command.

That God calls himself here the Lord of hosts is a reminder that he controlled King Artaxerxes and all their enemies and that the difficulties they faced in the work were really from him. That name, Lord of hosts, used so often in this book (twelve times), refers to the fact that all creatures in heaven and on earth, men, angels and devils, righteous and wicked, even inanimate things, are God's army through which and by which he brings to pass his own sovereign and unchangeable will.

Here God is reminding the people of Israel that the difficulties they faced were not outside of His control and most certainly must not, therefore, allow them to think that could disobey his command to rebuild the temple. That he refers to them through Haggai as "this people," not "my people," is an evidence of his displeasure with their disobedience and failure to bring their difficulties to him.

What the Jews were saying to excuse their disobedience, then, was nothing more than pious sounding hypocrisy, and is not much different from what many do and say today. No one will argue that the church today very much needs rebuilding. Its worship is often profane and conducted with no thought for the glory of God, its members are wayward and scattered if not completely worldly, its witness weak and faltering, and its work misdirected. Yet many, instead of working point to the times in which we live, which are very evil and use that as an excuse for forsaking the church and its work altogether, or for sitting back and waiting for someone else to fight the battles and do the work that needs to be done.

Many of them do not even realize that every Christian is called to that work, as all the Jews were in this verse. Not only the leaders, but people are rebuked for sloth and indifference. In that respect, too, things are not very different today. The people cannot lay all the blame on the ministers, elders and deacons of the church for the sad condition of the church, when they themselves are not willing to take up the work that needs doing.

*3. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying.*

*4. Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cield houses, and this house lie waste?*

The Jews had pleaded the difficulties that they faced as an excuse for their failure to carry out God's command to rebuild the temple. They plead their poverty, the hostility of the Samaritans, and the decree of Artaxerxes as proof that the time had not come to build God's house. God rebuked them for that, but he also points out in Haggai 1:3, 4 that the real reason for their failure was a gross materialism that revealed itself in a greater concern for their own houses than for God's house. And, what is worse, their lack of concern for God's house was really a lack of regard for God himself and for the covenant he had established with them.

When they first arrived back in Judah they had immediately begun the work of rebuilding the temple and had shown a greater concern for it than for their own homes and farms, which were also

ruined and infested with weeds and wild beasts. That had changed in the face of many trials and though they were now living in homes of their own, God's house was still waste. God is saying in effect, "You have a place to live and I don't."

That must not be misunderstood. That God lived in the temple in the Old Testament does not mean that he was confined to it. Solomon had confessed at the dedication of the temple:

Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (I Kings 8:27).

That God lived in the temple meant only that there especially he revealed his glory as the God of his people, spoke to them and kept his covenant with them. Nevertheless, even that meant that until the temple was finished there was no place for God to reveal himself to Judah. Judah's lack of concern reflected, therefore, on their attitude toward God and his covenant.

This verse makes it clear that the temple was far from finished at this time. God speaks of it as lying waste. That fact alone shows that there was much more to all of this than just the difficulties which they were using as an excuse. The decree of the king had only been passed about 5 years earlier, but about twenty years had passed since the return and little had been done beyond the laying of the foundations. They just did not care anymore about God's house and had spent their time working on their own homes.

When God speaks of their ceiled houses, the idea is not just that their houses were finished and could now be lived in, but that they had even had time to decorate and furnish their houses. The word used is the same as that used to describe Solomon's work on the inside of the temple and of his own palace (I Kings 6:9; 7:3, 7). God describes their houses as ceiled to show how little concern for his house which was in ruins. It was not just that they needed roofs over their heads and places to live, but that their only interest was in their own homes.

God puts them in their place and reminds them who they are by the double "you" of verse 4. He is reminding them that he is God and they but men, men whom he brought out of Babylon and took safely back to the land of Canaan. The words, therefore, express a certain incredulousness that they, who owe so much to God, who is after all the Lord of Hosts, should have so little care for his house and so such selfish regard for their own.

That is very much characteristic of the attitude of many Christians toward the church, the New Testament temple. All too often God's people seem to be concerned only for their own homes and families in their finances, in the use of their time, in their goals and in their efforts. They have time for everything but the work of the church, so much so sometimes that it is difficult to find men to serve in the offices of the church and to take the lead in building up the church. They can afford everything but the church budget. Recreation and holidays take priority over worship. Work and other responsibilities keep members from the Bible studies and other meetings of the church. Membership is considered of very little importance and even where Christians are members of a church, their membership involves very little commitment to God, to his Word or to the work of the church. We, too, live in ceiled houses while God's house lies waste.

T.V. Moore puts it well:

Men are always prone to put religion off with scraps and leavings, and serve God with what costs them nothing. In the outward things of religion they are much more disposed to work for themselves than for God; and if they have time that cannot be otherwise used, or funds that are not very current, to give them to the treasury of the lord, and if any larger expenditure of either is urged, to plead that "the time has not come" to do this work. In the inward things of religion the same spirit is shown.

The young, the middle aged and the old, all alike procrastinate the great work, on the plea that “the time has not come,” the convenient season that, like the horizon, recedes as we advance.<sup>2</sup>

The result is that the church institute is broken down and ruined as the temple was in Haggai’s times. Preaching, sacraments and discipline are all but vanished. Worship is seldom carried on in obedience to God’s Word. The members instead of being built up have their faith undermined and broken down. The church in the end is hardly recognizable as the church which instituted by Christ but resembles more an entertainment facility of some sort, a club, or a social services agency.

The lament of Psalm 74 is as true today as in the Old Testament:

Remember Thy inheritance, Thy church redeemed by grace;

Remember Zion’s mount profaned, Thy ancient dwelling place.

In ruin long Thy temple lies; Arise, O God of grace,

And see the ruin foes have wrought within Thy holy place.

Amid thy courts are lifted high the standards of the foe,

And impious hands with axe and fire have laid Thy temple low.

They have profaned the holy place where Thou hast set Thy Name,

The sanctuaries of our God are given to the flame.

We see no signs of power divine, no prophet speaks for Thee,

And none can tell, and none can know, how long these woes shall be.

All this does not mean we should have no concern for our own houses, whether the building or the lives that are lived there, but God insists that his house is more important than ours and that we can be blessed in ours only when our first concern is for his. That may appear to be very selfish of God and show a lack of love for us, but it really is not so. God’s own glory and honor are the most important things and ought to be most important to us, not the least because we cannot be blessed apart from him. Knowing his own glory and our need for him he insists that his house must be built and rebuilt always.

*5. Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.*

*6. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*

Having pointed out and rebuked the sins of Judah God now calls them to self-examination and repentance. He wishes them to see that their ways are sinful and displeasing to him and to do that by way of acknowledging their sin and turning from it. It should be clear that though God does not explicitly call for repentance, that is what he has in mind. There is no value in considering our ways if that does not lead us to turn to ways that are pleasing to God. It is much the same with God as with an earthly father who says to his child, “Look what you’ve done.” He means, “Do you not see that you have done wrong and that you must acknowledge and turn from your wrong-doing?”

We should note, too, that dealing with our sins always involves a consideration of our ways and a turning from the old ways of sin into the ways of life and peace. The person who only says he is sorry for sin and does not consider his ways, but goes on in them, has not truly repented of his sins. This becomes abundantly clear from verses 6 and 7 where God does call Judah to new ways of obedience.

But this call for repentance and conversion is addressed not only to Judah but to us. If we have neglected the house of God, the church or have shown the same lack of care for the church as the place of God's covenant, we, too, must consider our ways and turn from whatever evil we have done. We must consider our ways also so that we see that Judah's sins are ours and that God is speaking to us as well as to them. If we do not we are as blind and ignorant as they were before this Word of God came to them.

God enforces that call to self-examination and repentance by telling Judah that he had been punishing them for their sins, though they had not aware of it. Among the troubles they had suffered were famine, crop-failure, bad weather, drought and disease (cf. also 1:10, 11 and 2:17). These troubles had come from God as chastisement for their sin. Not all their problems, therefore, could be blamed on their enemies or on the decree of Artaxerxes and God is making sure that they know that these judgments, rather than being an excuse for not continuing with the work of rebuilding, were in fact punishment for their failure.

God speaks of the fact that their crops had been small, so that no one had enough to eat and drink or even sufficient for clothing. All these things had been threatened in Deuteronomy as punishment for disobedience, poor crops in Deuteronomy 28:38, lack of food in Deuteronomy 8:10 and insufficient clothing in Deuteronomy 10:18. Under these judgments it had been as though everything they earned was lost just as if they had been keeping it in a bag full of holes. And so it is always. Those who will not obey God cannot be and are not blessed and do not prosper.

All this raises the question, however, concerning the relationship between obedience and material prosperity. Especially in the New Testament, is it true that those who live in obedience to God can expect material prosperity or receive it when it comes as a sign of God's favor and blessing?

We believe that in the Old Testament this was far more true than in the New Testament. God made it clear to Israel that prosperity in the land of Canaan were evidences of his good-pleasure, and that drought and enemies were signs of his displeasure. Even in the Old Testament, however, this was not true absolutely. The book of Job is a lengthy lesson otherwise. In the Old Testament, therefore, prosperity was a sign of God's blessing nationally, but not individually, nor in times of prosperity did that prosperity mean that everyone in the nation was blessed by God. There were even times when God sent enemies and other troubles for reasons of his own and not because the nation as a whole was living wickedly. The people of God, therefore, needed the prophets and the Word of God to interpret their circumstances and to tell them that God was pleased or displeased with them.

What was true individually in the Old Testament continues to be true in the New. Prosperity or the lack of it cannot be interpreted as signs of God's favorable or unfavorable attitude. God can, as Psalm 73 so clearly teaches, send prosperity as a curse, or send evil things for our good, so that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). There is no common grace or favor or mercy of God in things and those who think so have no explanation for the fact that God gives prosperity and earthly gifts to the ungodly whom he will send to hell in the end, nor any explanation for the fact that he sends cancer and other ills to those he loves.

It should be added, however, that we certainly *feel* that God is displeased with us when we are not living in obedience to God and when he, in those circumstances send trouble and grief into our lives. Even then, however, we should understand, that if, walking in sinful ways, we have all we want it may very well be that God is setting us in slippery places (Ps. 73:18) or filling our mouths while he sends leanness in our souls (Ps. 106:15).

As far as the nation is concerned, the only nation of God that now exists is a spiritual nation, the church. No earthly nation, not the USA, not Scotland, not the Netherlands can claim to stand in the favored position that Israel had in the Old Testament, and even Israel in its favored position was a type and foreshadowing of the church, as we have seen. That the church is that favored nation is taught in I Peter 2:9:

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The prosperity that God gives his church when she is faithful and obedient is not crops and good weather and freedom from hunger and disease, but spiritual prosperity. The wealthiest church is not necessarily the church that is being blessed by God, but the church in which the members are enjoying all the riches of God's grace and salvation. When the church is not prospering spiritually, when the people of God go spiritually hungry and thirsty and when they are like the church of Laodicea, spiritually poor and blind and naked, then they may certainly conclude that there is something desperately wrong and that they must consider their ways.

Let us then, as members of the church be busy always considering our ways in the light or the spiritual condition of the church and not be blind to the fact that God may very well be sending his judgments on the church for her unfaithfulness. Certainly we must not think that because the members of the church are prosperous in material things and because the church has many members and enough in offerings to pay for all sorts of programs, that these things are necessarily evidence of God's blessing. That is proved when the members of the church are clothed in the spotless robes of Christ's righteousness and when they have the bread of life as the food of their souls and the water of life as their refreshment.

*7. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.*

*8. Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.*

Again the Lord admonishes his people and calls them to self-examination and repentance with the words, "Consider your ways." All too often because we are so sluggish the Word of God must come repeatedly before we are roused from our sloth and begin to do what God requires. In this also we are no different from Judah. That God does continue to send his Word and its admonitions is itself an evidence of his faithfulness and mercy. Instead of saying, "Enough is enough," he continues to call.

In this second call we see another side of repentance and conversion, that it is not only a turning from sin, but a returning to God's ways and to God himself. God shows this here by calling the people back to the work of building his house and by promising that he will bless them if they do turn.

We may never think, though, that God's call, this or any other, implies that we have in ourselves the ability or power to do what God says. There are those who draw that conclusion, but the Biblical doctrine of total depravity, that we can of ourselves do no good, and the words of Scripture in Galatians 6:17 prove that it is not so, not even with Christians. Of ourselves we can do nothing.

The power to obey is in the command and it is there because the command comes from Almighty God. Augustine showed he understood that when he said that the command was the grace. That is an important truth for us all. It is important for the preacher and elders, lest they begin to

think that the power of their preaching and admonitions lies in themselves, or the power to obey in the hearers. Then they will begin to preach unsound doctrine, use unbiblical practices, and think themselves more than they are. It is important for those who hear these command, so that they look for the grace and help they need from God.

Here God calls Judah both to make the necessary preparation for their work by going into the mountains to gather timber, and to do the work of building his temple. For us, however, that house is not made of timber and stones, but a spiritual house. The work and the tools, therefore, that belong to the building of that spiritual house are also spiritual. Nevertheless, to think of the church as a building, helps us to understand how it is that we fulfil our calling to build.

When Scripture describes that spiritual house, the church, it tells us that the foundation is sound doctrine, the doctrine of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20-22). The cornerstone is Jesus Christ himself. Believers are the living stones out of which the house is built (I Pet. 2:4-8) and the love of the brethren the cement which binds the stones of that house together (Col. 3:14).

Building that spiritual house means, therefore, that we insure that the foundation is well laid in relation to Christ the chief cornerstone. That foundation is laid through the preaching of the gospel, through prayer for the ministry of the gospel, through our hearing, receiving and submitting to the truth of the gospel, and through reading and studying the Word of God both publicly and privately. In that way every member has a firm foundation for his faith and for his relationship to the other members.

That is, however, only the beginning of the work of building. Also through the gospel, as well as by worship, prayer, Christian fellowship, by admonition, the sacraments and church discipline every member of the church is cut and shaped like timber and stone and himself built up in faith and holiness, and all the members built up in relationship to one another. To this work belong both the instruction of the church's children and the work of evangelism including both the gathering and teaching of new converts. It is not at all difficult to see that these are essential to the work of building the church. Through them the church has the assurance that she is not only well-built for the present but will continue to well-built in the future.

To the building up and rebuilding of the church belongs also the work of the elders and deacons, each in their offices. When properly carried out their work of ruling the church and of caring for the needs of the widows, the orphans and the poor, builds up the congregation in which they perform their labors and becomes another means by which each member grows and all grow together, so that the church is strong, faithful and stands like a fortress against the assaults of Satan.

Ultimately, even the work that is done by godly parents in the home fulfils the calling that God lays on his people here in Haggai 1, as Paul so eloquently shows in the last chapters of Ephesians. In that book's great description of the church as the body of Christ, the closing chapters which have to do with marriage and family life, as well as with our daily work and walk in the world are not unconnected to the rest, but part of what the Spirit has to say about the church. The man who fears Jehovah and walks in his ways will not only experience family blessedness and happiness, but will see the good of Jerusalem, the church, (Heb. 12:22, 23; Rev. 21:9, 10) all the days of his life and peace on Israel (Ps. 128:5, 6).

When the church has fallen into ruin and when its foundations are crumbling, then the church needs to rebuilt in the way of church reformation, whether that comes through purifying a church or through leaving an apostate church for one that is faithful. That happened in the sixteenth century through the work of Luther, Calvin and many others. It has happened on a smaller scale at other times. It is a constant need. It is very much needed today.

The word “edification,” used so often in connection with the preaching and teaching of the church, means “building up” and refers to the strengthening and blessing of each individual believer so that through him the whole church is built up, strengthened and blessed. Every thing that is done in the church must be for “edification” (Rom. 15:2; I Cor. 10:23; I Thess. 5:11).

That calling in all its different facets belongs to every believer. Even the preaching of the gospel and church discipline are the responsibility of everyone, not just of the leaders. All are to be builders in the house of God. None may leave the work to others or be too busy with his own affairs to have no time for God’s house.

This call God urges upon Judah and upon us, upon Judah in its Old Testament typical form, and upon us in its New Testament reality, with the promise that he will take pleasure in the house and be glorified in it. For Judah that was the promise that he would reveal himself in the temple they were building as he had done in the days of Moses and in the days of Solomon - that he would be present in all of his power and grace and goodness as the Savior of his people.

For us that promise is the promise that the church will be the place of God’s covenant, where he is the God of his people and is worshipped and glorified as God - the promise that the church will serve the purpose for which God chose her and saved her, the glory of His own great name. It is also the promise that he will rejoice in his people and they in him, thus fulfilling the promise to be their God and Father.

Such encouragement we always need. By such encouragement God himself draws us into and along the way of obedience, not as dumb beasts, but as those who have learned to know him and love him.

*9. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the Lord of hosts? Because of mine house that is waste and ye run every man to his own house.*

*10. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.*

*11. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.*

In this closing section of the first prophecy, God elaborates on what he had told the Jews in verses 4-6. He reminds them once again of their sin, only now describes it as a running of every man to his own house. That is really no different than their living in ceiled house, only it emphasizes Israel’s complete abandonment of the work God had give them to do. That they had forsaken for their own materialistic endeavors to establish for themselves a place in Canaan and to become prosperous. A similar expression is found in Proverbs 1:16 and in Psalm 119:32 In the Hebrew, however, the verb “running” is in the present tense indicating that at the time God spoke they still had not turned from their sins. They were still running every man to his own house.

Certainly we may learn from this how difficult it is for us to see our sins. By nature we are blind especially to our own sins, and can see them only when they are repeatedly pointed out by God. That is the result of our natural depravity, and ought to be remembered whenever our sins are brought to our attention, whether it be by others or by God himself through his Word.

In the same way God speaks in more detail of the troubles they had suffered for their sins. It is here that he explains their lack of material prosperity by telling them that the drought they had

suffered was from him. Later one he speaks of other judgments (2:17), but apparently it was a drought which was the chief cause of poverty and starvation among them. The word drought is a play on words not evident in English. The word translated “drought” is the same word used to describe the ruined condition of God’s house in verse 9. In effect God says: “my house lies *waste* and therefore I have called for *waste* upon the land,” thus connecting the punishment with the sin and showing how the one fits the other.

God even suggests in a figure of speech that the heavens and earth agree with him concerning Judah’s sin. Literally verse 10 says: “the heavens over you refrained from dew and the earth refrained from its fruit,” as if the creation itself understood Judah’s sin and willingly held back its gifts from ungrateful and unrepentant nation. It was as if the creation had more regard for God than did his own people. May we not be so spiritually insensitive to the admonitions of the gospel that even the creation becomes a witness against us by its desire to glory God where we have no such desire.

What is more important, however, is that God shows them that this drought was his judgment for their sins. Not only are all things from God, who by his providence controls and directs even the forces of nature, but in this case he had specifically called for a drought upon them and upon their land that they might learn to obey and to see that only through obedience could they enjoy the blessing of God. This drought had been so severe that all the produce and work of their hands had been affected by it. How long it had lasted we do not know, but it had affected the cattle as well as the crops, and even the work of those who did not live as farmers and herders.

Haggai expressly mentions the fact that this drought was a result of God’s call. The call he speaks of is not the call of the gospel, but what is known in theology as the *vocatio realis*, the call of God through the things that are made. That call of God in the creation is one of the ways in which he makes himself known even today. Paul is speaking of that call in Romans 1 when he says:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (verse 18, 19).

As we learn from these verses and in the word of God through Haggai, that call and witness of God in the creation is only a witness against the wickedness of men, and has no saving power. Apart from God’s grace and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that call only leaves men without excuse. Here, then, that his people might obey and turn from their wickedness, that call of God through the creation is accompanied by the call of the gospel which comes first of all in the words, “Consider your ways.”

For us in the New Testament church the drought spoken of is not a lack of dew and of the fruits of the ground, but a spiritual drought and famine, such as the word of God describes in Psalm 106:15 and in Amos 8:11:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

This kind of famine and drought comes not only on the New Testament church but came on the church of the Old Testament in the period between Haggai, Zechariah, and the coming of Christ. For four hundred years the Word of God was not heard in Israel.

Such famine is common in the church. There was a long spiritual famine in the years before the Reformation. There have been periods of famine in more modern times as in the nineteenth

century when apostasy and liberalism held sway in the churches. It is not uncommon today, for the Word of God, read, sung, and preached is hardly to be heard in some places. Sermons, even where they are not heresy or the words of men, are no longer exegetical. The Bible is little read and less studied and its fountains of living water little desired. So dull are we and unspiritual that few even realize that the days of famine prophesied by Amos have come. Certainly we do not see that it is the judgment of God for disobedience and neglect of his house.

All this is summed up in the opening words of verse 9: “Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it.” How true that is in these last days. There is not a Christian anywhere who does not expect much, but how little profit and blessing there really is. How little peace and happiness, how little knowledge of God, how little enjoyment of the riches of grace and salvation! How little godliness and piety, how little blessing in family life and in marriage! All the result of God blowing upon what we reap.

Insofar as the Word of God is still heard and read and prayer offered, little comes of it because for the most part the church is disobedient to God and almost completely disinterested in seeing his house built up. God will not allow us to enjoy the blessings we do have and the spiritual privileges that still remain if we neglect his house and the glory of his name in that house.

*12. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the Lord.*

This historical notice, the first of two in the book of Haggai, is the occasion for the second prophecy, the shortest of the five. The obedience of the people to Word of God through Haggai is recorded in this verse and is the reason for the four words of encouragement (two words in Hebrew) that follow.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are mentioned first because they took the lead in obeying the God's word. This Ezra indicates in Ezra 5:2 when he does not even mention the people but these two men only. Their leadership, however, is not only an example of what every leader in the church, minister, elder or deacon ought to do, and how he ought to lead the people in obedience to God, but is also a reminder of the fact that ultimately it is Christ himself who leads us in obedience to God, not only by his own example, but by giving us the grace of obedience. These men, in their offices, are pictures of Christ as the king and priest of God's people, who atones for all their disobedience and sends them his Spirit that they may be led by the Spirit in the way of obedience.

We should note that the name Joshua is really the same name as Jesus, Joshua being the Hebrew version of the name, and Jesus the Greek version. Not only in his name but also in his office as high priest he is a type of Christ. Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David and an ancestor of our Lord. As governor of God's people he foreshadows him who governs the church in perfect righteousness.

The people are referred to now as the remnant, not as “this people.” In that way God shows that he still cared for them as he had when he brought them back from Babylon. For us, however, that name “remnant” not only reminds us of their small numbers - less than 50,000 had returned from Babylon - but to show us that the church is always but a remnant among men, and that her size and insignificance, does not in any way excuse her from her calling to be built up a spiritual temple and a dwelling place of God. It reminds us, too, that the word of encouragement which God sends through Haggai was necessary because of their small numbers and other discouragements.

That God speaks to the people as well as to the leaders is a striking reminder of the calling that every believer has towards the church. Very often the attitude of the members is that the work of the church is solely the responsibility of the leaders, and the members are content merely to fill the pews and go along with whatever the leaders decide, or to blame them when things go wrong. Especially in the New Testament, and because we are all priests and kings (Rev. 1:6), we are all equally responsible for the life and work of the church.

A good example is church discipline. Long before sins come to the attention of the elders and through them to the attention of the whole congregation it is the responsibility of every member to be busy admonishing his fellow believers and to be heeding their admonitions. Even when a particular sin comes under the formal discipline of the church it is the responsibility of every member to be praying for the errant brother and admonishing him to turn from his sin and repent. If that is not done, discipline is incomplete, even if the elders fulfil their responsibility and the sinner is excommunicated. Indeed, if it is not done, there is little chance that the elders will continue to do their work in admonishing, censuring and excommunicating the wayward.

The fact that all the people are commanded to be busy with this work of building is striking because in the Old Testament, generally speaking, the ordinary people of God were far less responsible than we are. For the most part the work of the Old Testament church belonged to the kings, priests and prophets that God gave them and the people were largely passive spectators in worship, prayer, sacrificing, and serving God.

God emphasizes the fact that the command was his and the duty owed to him, not only by telling us that it was his voice the people obeyed, but by reminding us that Haggai, through whom God's voice was heard, was himself sent by God. That remains true today. Those whom God chooses to use to bring his word must be sent. Romans 10:15 asks; "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" Unless they are commissioned and sent by God Himself, they have no right to expect that the people will listen to and obey the word of God through them.

In the New Testament that commissioning is not direct, as it was in the Old Testament, but is through the church. Paul and his fellow laborers did not begin their works as missionaries until they were sent by the church in Antioch, and by the Spirit through the church. Those who are not so sent have no commission from God.

That the people feared before the Lord means that they understood that God was speaking through Haggai and that they must obey him or perish. This fear is not the terror that the ungodly experience when they come face to face with God's wrathful judgments, but an awe and reverence of God, mixed with the love of God, that recognizes one's own sin and creatureliness and the great glory and holiness of God, and trembles before him.

Obedience to God is rooted in the fear of God. The reason why obedience is such a rare virtue in the church has to do with the fact that God in all his glory is not known, nor his judgments understood. He is viewed for the most part, if known at all, as one like us, who can be spoken of as we speak of our fellows and who can be met and talked to as one meets a casual acquaintance in the street and speaks to him as an equal. Only when the fear of God is born again in the hearts of God's people will obedience to God follow.

This fear of God has his approval and blessing. He proves here what he says in Isaiah 66:2:

To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

It is pleasing to him because it is always the fruit of his own grace. He cannot and never does despise his own work in his people.

That obedience and fear are produced by the Word of God. Just as the word “then” suggests this in English, so the “and” in Hebrew does the same. The Word of God has that power because it comes from God. Its power is the same as the power of God’s creative Word by which he called the things that were not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). That is always a reason why the whole Word of God must be preached. It is its own power and produces that which it requires.

*13. Then spake Haggai the Lord’s messenger in the Lord’s message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.*

The word of encouragement that Haggai brings to the people who were not obeying, is simple and short, but contains all that people needed to hear. It is for Judah the promise that the temple, though far less glorious than Solomon’s would be the house of God himself, who would live among his people there, bless them from that place, and keep covenant with them.

That God speaks in the present tense (the word “am” is not in the Hebrew, but that is certainly the idea here, as the KJV suggests) and says, “I am with you,” does not only mean that now that they had obeyed and begun working, he would prosper their work and bless them according to all the promises, but it is also a reminder that their obedience itself was the result of his presence and grace. In no other way could they possibly have obeyed or been stirred up out of their sloth.

That Word of God is throughout Scripture the formula for the covenant. In that covenant, the relationship between God and his people, the covenant is always described in those terms, that God is the God of His people and is with them, and that he takes them as his people. That promise is, of course, realized fully in the new heavens and earth (Rev 21:3), but even now it is realized in the church as the body of Christ and the house of God.

The Lord fulfilled that promise as well. Ezra tells us that the eye of the Lord was on them to protect them from their enemies and to turn the heart of the king to favor their cause, so that the things they needed for the work were provided by his decree. God’s words of encouragement are not empty as ours are, but are the powerful, helping, saving words of the Almighty. These words are like the words of blessing with which some many New Testament books begin. Like them, these words actually bring God’s richest blessing to his people.

The words that Haggai brought are the heart of every word of encouragement God gives us. He does not tell us what is ahead, he never tries to reassure us by minimizing future difficulties or by promising that there would be none. All he ever really says is this, “I am with you.” We must remember that in all our work and not judge the value and profit by visible results, by the lack of difficulties, or by our own perceptions of the work.

This encouragement is given especially for the church and its result, as the Belgic Confession says then when it states:

*This church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof... [and] is preserved or supported by God, against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing (Art. 27).*

Let us notice, too, however, that this encouragement is given immediately upon evidence of repentance. God does not put his people on probation when they repent of their sins, but blesses them without delay, a great encouragement to repentance.

Haggai is called here the Lord’s messenger and his word of encouragement the Lord’s “message.” The word “messenger” or “message” is, in the Old Testament, the same word that is often translated “angel” (Gen. 16:7; 19:1; etc.). It can, therefore, be used as a general term for any

messenger or for those special messengers who live in the presence of God in heaven. That it is used here for Haggai is somewhat surprising, because he is always elsewhere referred to as a prophet. It must be used here to underline the fact that the encouragement given by Haggai comes from heaven, and is of the same order as the gracious messages of angels so often recorded in Scripture.

*14. And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God,*

*15. In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

The date recorded is not merely a matter of historical record, but proof that the obedience of Judah was without delay, as all obedience to God and to men ought to be. Within a month's time the people were once again busy with God's work after a lapse of about 20 years. Nevertheless, that does not reflect on them. Their previous disobedience and sloth had proved them unwilling and unable to obey in and of themselves. The credit must all be given to the grace of God, given through his prophetic Word, and worked by His Spirit in the hearts of his people. Haggai's contemporary, Zechariah, speaks of that in chapter 4 of his prophecy: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (verse 6).

We must not miss the fact, either, that the people began the work before the decree of Artaxerxes was repealed. Tatnai, the governor of the territory in which Judah was found, investigated the news that they were building again and wrote the king, suggesting that it would be in his best interest to have the work stopped. He also reported the words of the people who had said that Cyrus had sent them to rebuild the temple. When investigation was made in Babylon it was discovered that the Jews had spoken the truth. Cyrus had decreed the rebuilding of the temple and sent them to Judah to do it, and so Darius not only forbade the governor from interfering, but commanded him to give the people everything they needed for the work and for sacrifices. In that way God showed that he was with them. But the people did not wait for the matter to be investigated or for the decree of king Darius, but began and continued the work in obedience to God.

That is the nature of true obedience always. It does not wait for men, not even for kings and rulers, nor does it fear them and their decrees, but insists that God has spoken and that what he has said must be done, no matter what the consequences.

Such obedience is the fruit of God's own grace. That is evident from the testimony of these verses. The people and their leaders obeyed because God stirred up their spirits. He did that by his Word through Haggai and by the internal work of the Holy Spirit. His Word is always quick and powerful, the way in which he gives his grace to us, not only at the beginning of our Christian life but daily. May he so stir up the spirits of his people today to obey and to come and work in the house of the Lord their God, that is, in the church which is also the pillar and ground of the truth.

We should note that a stirred up spirit is characterized by the fear of the Lord. Such fear is not the slavish terror of those who hate God and who come under his judgments, but a fear that trembles in awe and reverence before the presence of his majesty. Such fear is sadly lacking among Christians today and is the result of a lack of knowledge of God and his glory. Such fear is necessary if ever we are to understand the importance of his house and the urgency of our calling to work in his house.

Having such fear according to Isaiah 8:13 means that we “sanctify the Lord” and Peter adds that we do this in our hearts (I Pet. 3:15). To sanctify something is to make it separate and holy and we sanctify God when we know in our hearts the glory of his holiness and esteem him separate from all others in glory and power. We hold him holy in our hearts when we are governed by a deep awareness of his holiness in everything we say and do.

Judah showed that fear of God when they once again put his glory and his house first and set it above their earthly concerns. They showed the fear of God when they turned to God in repentance and conversion, remembering the Lord’s holiness and turning from sin.

A stirred up spirit is also characterized by quick and ready obedience. That was so in the case of the people of Judah. It is the case also now. A stirred up spirit does not make excuses, does not procrastinate, does not continue idle, indifferent and careless, but immediately does what God requires. Such stirred up spirits are a great necessity in the church of Jesus Christ, for without them, the people of God will continue to run to their own houses.

Such stirred up spirits are the work and gift of the Holy Spirit and are given when the Holy Spirit applies Christ and his work to God’s people. The Spirit, in other words, does not stir up their spirits by some secret and hidden operation but by showing them the loveliness of Christ and of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. God does that here by the promise, “I am with you,” a promise that is really the promise of Immanuel.

Finally, let us note that for the first time in the prophecy God identifies himself as the God of His people, “their God,” not because his favor and relationship to them depend on their obedience, but because it is only in the way of obedience that his people know and can believe that he is “their God.”

#### The Second Prophecy: Haggai 2:1-9

*1. In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying,*

*2. Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,*

The second prophecy comes nearly a month, that is, 27 days, after the people had begun working again on the house of the Lord, and nearly two months after the first prophecy. It comes, as will be seen, in response to their discouragement with the work, and the fact that it comes so quickly is a wonderful testimony to God’s watchful care for his people and to his mercy. He no longer chides them for their previous sins, or because of those sins keeps them on probation, but immediately comes with a necessary word of encouragement through Haggai.

The encouragement God gives has two parts. In the first part God speaks of the temple in past times and compares the temple they were building to the older temple of Solomon. In the second part he speaks of the temple in the future and of its future glory. In both parts God is reassuring them that the temple they were working on was necessary in the history of his house.

That this prophecy is addressed not only to Zerubbabel and Joshua but to the people is the case because it was they who were doing the actual work and who faced many discouragements in that work. God wishes them, therefore, to hear his gracious words directly and not just through the mouths of their leaders.

Zerubbabel and Joshua are also named, however, because this prophecy concerns Christ as the one through whom the temple of God would be filled with glory greater than the glory of Solomon's temple, and these men in their offices were the representatives and pictures of Christ to the people. God not only speaks to them and to the people about Christ, therefore, but holds them up as prefiguring Christ. Their glory, though very dim in those days, was still part of the glory that God had given in Solomon's days and a hint of the glory that would follow when a greater than Solomon appeared.

This prophecy would have been delivered on the last day of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:34-42). This is of more than passing interest in view of the fact that the feast celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, to which God himself makes reference in the verses that follow. That deliverance would have been on the minds of the people, therefore, and must have made them wonder whether God was really with them as he had been in the days when they came out of Egypt. Then they were a great host, now they were but a remnant. Then they had been on their way to a land flowing with milk and honey, now they were having difficulty even subsisting in the land.

*3. Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

There are those who think these words to be proof that Haggai was among those who had seen and still remembered the temple of Solomon (Ezra 3:12, 13), but that cannot be proved either from this verse or from other passages. Nor is it the point of this verse. Haggai is not speaking of himself, but of the people and their discouragement in the work of rebuilding the temple. That they were discouraged is clear from the exhortation to "fear not" (vs. 5).

Haggai's words show that the people, have begun the work of rebuilding were reminded of and could see that this temple would neither be a beautiful nor as glorious as Solomon's. It may have been larger than Solomon's (the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 6:3, 4 stipulated a temple of 60 by 60 cubits as compared to the 60 by 20 cubits recorded of Solomon's temple in I Kings 6:2), but it had not of the richness of Solomon's temple.

Solomon's temple had been covered with gold and silver on inside and much of the furniture and many of the vessels had also been of precious metal. This was impossible in Zerubbabel's temple because of the poverty of the people. God himself alludes to this lack of ornament in Haggai 2:8. But even that was not the chief cause of the people's discouragement, but rather the fact that some important things from Solomon's temple were missing in this, and most important of all, the ark of the covenant was not there.

The Jews traditionally listed five things lacking in the second temple: (1) the ark with its mercy seat; (2) the holy fire which burned perpetually in the candlesticks and on the altar (Lev. 6:8-13; 24:2); (3) the cloud of glory (I Kings 8:10, 11); (4) the spirit of prophecy; and (5) the Urim and Thummim (Ezra 2:63). Certainly we can agree that four of these five were indeed lacking (the spirit of prophecy did not depart until after Malachi's work was finished). That this temple was lacking in glory in comparison to Solomon's was evident already when the foundation were laid. Then the older people who had seen and remembered Solomon's temple wept bitterly (Ezra 3:12, 13).

We know that the ark was not in the second temple because it is not listed in Ezra 1:7-11 among the items that the Jews took back with them to Jerusalem. All they took back were some smaller dishes and other items. Nor is the ark ever mentioned again in Scripture, and Jewish tradition confirms that after the captivity the only thing that stood in the holy of holies was a large rock. Probably they did not dare rebuild the ark without an express command from God.

The ark was so important because it symbolized the presence of God in the house and among his people in the way of blood atonement, for it was there that the blood was sprinkled on the great day of atonement. The people must have feared, therefore, that they were building the house in vain - that God would not be there and dwell with them there. That this is not speculation is clear from the verses which follow in which God reassures them on exactly that point.

The other ways in which this temple lacked beauty, were not unimportant, however. The beauty and glory of Solomon's temple and the gold and silver which adorned it were ordered by God Himself for the purpose of reflecting his own glory and showing that he who promised to live in the temple was the sovereign Lord and Owner of all, the King of kings and Lord of Lord's. This temple lack all that. The temple they were building has been described by one commentator as "drab and utilitarian."<sup>3</sup> The people's fears and discouragement were well-founded, therefore. Nor did the fact that Ezekiel had prophesied of a more glorious temple help.

God, instead of glossing over these things, himself reminds the people of them through the words of Haggai, all but rubbing their noses in the fact. In that way he shows that he knows their hearts and the fears that were troubling them. He also shows by these words, though, that this matter is important to him. As he tells the people more plainly in the verses that follow, it is his will that the glory of his house be less than in former times.

It is at that point that the word of God through Haggai touches a sensitive nerve in every member of the church who loves God's house in the New Testament. Everyone who is spiritually sensitive can see that what was true in Haggai's day is also true today. The house of God, the church in the world, is much less glorious today also than it was in former days. Compared to the church in the days of the apostles or in the days of the great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century the church today is nothing.

We see the church splintered and divided. We see the glory of her worship waning as the emphasis in worship is less and less on God and more and more on the worshippers. We see worship changed to entertainment and socializing. We see the preaching and sacraments despised and misused and discipline non-existent. Even the glory of the members, those living stones of which God's house is built appears as nothing, for their glory is the glory of holiness and that, too, is departed in these last days. That helps us understand the feeling of these Jews and their need for encouragement. But their need is also ours.

Lest we be discouraged, God himself tells us that he is aware of these things and addresses both to Judah and to us words of encouragement that keep us busy with the work of building his house, even when, humanly speaking, their seems so little point to it. Those words of encouragement are found in verse 4-9 and consist in a number of distinct though connected promises.

God first encourages them, however, by speaking of the fact that this temple was really a continuation of Solomon's temple. Though less glorious, it was nevertheless the same house. Both are referred to as "this house." In that way God tells the people that whatever may be lacking in this rebuilt temple, it is still his house, the same that he commanded to be built in the days of David and Solomon.

God promises first that he will be with his people and dwell among them as in former days (vss. 4, 5). He promises a greater glory for his house than that of the house that Solomon had built. And he promises that he will give his people peace and deliverance from their enemies in that house, when its glory finally transcends the glory of Solomon's temple. Included in these promises are the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promise of Christ's coming both in Bethlehem and at

the end of all things, the promise of a new heavens and earth, and the promise of the salvation and glorification of his church.

Why was it, though, that God was satisfied with a house that was only a poor shadow of the house Solomon had built? You would think that God would want the most beautiful temple possible, and that he would have supplied the Jews with gold, silver, precious stones and woods, so that his house be more beautiful than any kingly palace. Why did he remind the Jews of the poverty of this house and do nothing to change that?

The answer to these questions is that Christ was coming and the people had to start looking away from the earthly types and shadows to Christ himself. It would be only a little while before the Desire of all nations would come, and they had to be ready. Haggai 2:9 is a promise of the coming of Christ. He is the true temple of God because he is Immanuel, God with us, the fulfilment of all God's promises to dwell with his people.

His coming was only a little while away, less than 500 years away. To help these Old Testament believers look for his coming God began to take away the pictures and types in some cases by removing them altogether, as with the ark, and in other cases by taking away their glory and beauty, as with the temple building. That was necessary because the pictures and types were very beautiful and the Jews sometimes became enamored of them. At the time of Jesus' death, for example, they were so enamored of the types and shadows that they could not eat the passover lamb the night before Jesus was crucified and never recognize him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. They continued to bring their sacrifices without seeing that they pointed to the sacrifice of Christ. They continued to worship in the temple without seeing that he was the true temple.

Perhaps God is doing the same today, Perhaps he is taking away whatever external glory the New Testament church once had, making her smaller and more insignificant in the world in order to prepare us for the second coming of Christ. That would not be at all surprising in light of the fact that this prophecy speaks of the lesser glory of God's house in the latter days. It would seem on the basis of this prophecy that we have no reason to expect that in the last days the church will become the dominant force in human society, controlling politics, education and the other areas of human life. Before Christ comes again the New Testament church will be reduced to nothing. Jesus himself prophesies that when he asks:

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

The wonderful thing is, though, that when the glory of the church is reduced to nothing, as it shall be in the latter days that are coming, then we have every reason to hope that Christ will soon appear. As Jesus says:

When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads;  
for your redemption draweth nigh (Lk. 21:28).

The lesser glory of God's house in these latter days, though no excuse for sloth and indifference is a sign that our final redemption is near.

*4. Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts:*

*5. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.*

In these verses God is promising his people that he will reveal his presence and glory in the temple they were building, even though the building itself did not compare to the temple of Solomon. That promise is bound up in the words, "I am with you," words which are at the heart of God's covenant with his people, the covenant that was symbolized and typically realized in the Old Testament temple.

God's covenant is above all a relationship between God and his people that flows from and is part of the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. That relationship is consistently summarized in Scripture by the promise, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people," words that become a kind of formula for the covenant in Scripture. That promise comes in various forms, among them the promise of God to be with his people or to dwell among them.

That relationship between God and his people was symbolized by the temple as the house of God. It was in that house, through the ministry of the priests as mediators that God lived with and was with his people, revealing himself as their father and taking them under his fatherly care and counting them as his children.

That God's has this covenant in mind is clear from the triple use of the name Jehovah in verse 4. That name is pre-eminently his covenant name for it speaks of his unchangeable faithfulness to his people. It was also the name which he first revealed when he brought them out of Egypt, and event referred to here and an event which proved that he was their God and they his people. That he in one case calls himself the Lord of hosts does not change this, but simply reminds them, that as always, he rules all things - they are his hosts - for their sakes.

The reference to God's covenant is further confirmed by the fact that God's says literally here that he "cut" his word with his people when they came out of Egypt, language that is ordinarily used of the covenant in Scripture. The Hebrew for making a covenant is almost always literally "cutting" a covenant in reference to the solemn ceremony of cutting animals in pieces as part of covenant making.

God, in fact, speaks of his covenant in verse 5, when he describes the promise of Exodus 29:45, 46 as word he had "covenanted" with them. That promise reads:

And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God.

Not only does that promise include all the elements of the covenant, God promising to be the God of his people and to dwell among them, but it was given in connection with the setting up of the tabernacle and the promise of God that he would meet with the children of Israel there and speak with them (Ex. 29:42-44). That promise was all the people of Judah needed as an answer to their discouragement. They had to understand, and did understand if they were at all spiritually minded, that the size and glory of the building they were working on were of little account. What mattered was God's presence.

That promise, even today remains the hope and blessedness of the church. If God is not present in the church, then nothing else matters, not the number of members, not the many programs and ministries that are carried on in the church, not the approval of the membership, not the fact that the church is growing. If God is not present, then the worship of the church is a sham, its preaching in vain, membership in it of no more account than membership in any other worldly organization. Nothing matters so much as the presence of God, the covenant God of his people.

That presence of God is proved in the New Testament church by the pure preaching of the gospel, Biblical worship and sacraments, and the carrying out of Christian discipline, what are

sometimes called the marks of the true church. Really, though, they are not marks of the church, but of God's presence in the church through Jesus Christ. That is the reason, too, why membership in the visible church is so important. It is a matter not just of loyalty to one or another group of Christians, but a matter of seeking God and finding God himself and of following Christ.

That promise is not only the promise of Christ, of which we have much more to say in connection with the following verses, but is also a promise of the Spirit. Just as it is only through Christ that God is the God of His people and dwells with them, so it only by the Holy Spirit that the promise is realized. When God, therefore, speaks of his Spirit in verse 5, he is speaking of the Holy Spirit as the one through whom and by whom he dwells in his church and of the coming of the Spirit to the New Testament church at the time of Christ's ascension into heaven.

That does not mean, of course, that the Spirit was not present in the church of the Old Testament. God makes it clear here that his Spirit always was and always would be among them. He would "remain" among them. Nevertheless, it is only in the New Testament, through the outpouring of the Spirit as the Spirit of the risen Christ, the one who testifies of Christ crucified and risen, that the promise is fully realized.

The promise of the Spirit here brings us closer to the New Testament, however, for in the New Testament it is through the Spirit and not through types and shadows that God dwells among his people. The Word of God reminds us of this in Ephesians 2:22 where the church is described as an habitation of God through the Spirit. Now in Haggai's time, after the return, the types and shadows through God was present with his people begin to vanish and he promises to dwell among them by his Spirit, just as in the New Testament.

That promise of the Spirit parallels the promise of Jesus at the last passover. The presence of the Spirit was so important, he said then, that it was expedient for him to go away so that the Spirit might come (Jn. 16:7). The Spirit, after all, is the one who works in our hearts, giving us what Christ earned for us on the cross and applying to us the words that he speaks to us. It is by the Spirit that our hearts are stirred up and we fear God. It is by the Spirit that we obey God's commands, and by the same Spirit that we labor in God's house as builders.

So God tells Judah not to fear enemies or other discouragements, but rather to be strong - strong in faith - and to continue with the work he had given them to do. We must understand, though, that God does not just say so, but by this word gives them the hope and faith and strength they needed. His word is always his own power unto salvation and gives what it requires. His word is for us also.

*6. For thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;*

*7. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*

This passage is the key to the whole prophecy, not only because it speaks of Christ, but because it reveals the future history of God's house all the way to the end of the world, and of the fact that through Christ that house will become ever more glorious until its glory entirely eclipses the glory of Solomon's temple in the new heavens and earth. There are two main parts to the passage, the prophecy concerning the shaking of all things, which is quoted in Hebrews 12:25-29, and the prophecy concerning the coming of the Desire of all nations. These two are related, the coming of the Desire of all nations being the cause of the shaking of all things, and the shaking of

all things not only accompanying the coming of the Desire of all nations, but being the means by which God's house receives its greater glory in the latter days.

This shaking includes not only earthquakes including the great earthquake that will destroy this present creation, but also political and social disturbances that God uses to shake the nations and the hearts of men. The destruction of Gog in Ezekiel 38:14-23 is described as a shaking as is the destruction of Egypt in Ps, 68:7ff. Isaiah, too, describes the overthrown of Babylon and the return of Israel to Canaan as a shaking (Is. 13:1-22).

Once again God speaks as the Lord of hosts, his principle name in the books of Haggai and Zechariah. The word "hosts" in this name refers to all created things (Dan. 4:35) in heaven and on earth, and to the fact that they are all God's great army which serves him willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, and through which he accomplishes his own sovereign purpose. In this case those "hosts" includes the heavens, the earth, the sea the dry land and the nations, as well as the wealth of the creation.

The shaking to which the passage refers takes place in "once, a little while," which Hebrews 12:26, 27 interprets to mean "yet once more." The first shaking was at Mount Sinai when God's voice shook the earth only. This shaking would take place once more and in a little while in the overthrow and destruction of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great, but the yet once more refers especially to the shaking takes place the New Testament in connection with the coming of Christ and throughout the New Testament and will be a shaking of all things in earth and heaven, temporal and spiritual.

Hebrews 12:27, however, clearly indicates that this shaking takes place at the end of the world, for when it happens, Hebrews says, the things that are made shall be removed and only those things which cannot be shaken shall remain. However, It is clear from Haggai, that this shaking also takes place in connection with the incarnation of Christ, for the coming of the Desire of all nations is first fulfilled then. It was that shaking especially that the Jews looked for in Haggai's days.

How can that be? We should understand that the coming of Christ in Scripture is always viewed as one event that includes his incarnation, his coming through the Spirit (Jn. 14:16-18), and his coming at the end of the world. They are principally one because through the coming of Christ God accomplishes his one purpose in the salvation of his church and the judgment of the world. It was from this perspective that the Old Testament prophets did not even see that there are different events that are part of the coming of Christ. Joel, when he spoke of blood and fire and smoke and darkness (Joel 2:30, 31) did not realize that he was prophesying both of the coming of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-21) and of the end of the world (Rev. 6:12-14).

One must, in reading the prophets think of the whole New Testament as one day on God's time clock, the one day in which he finishes his work and cuts it short in righteousness (Rom. 9:28). It is difficult for us to grasp that for whom over 2000 years of New Testament history have passed, but we must remember that the passage of time means nothing to God. One day with him is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day (II Pet. 3:8).

There is, then, a progressive fulfilment of this prophecy as there is of most prophecy. That is not often seen, but should be evident, since to say that prophecy has only a single fulfillment at one point in history is really to say that the prophecy is of no significance for the people of God living at other times. A progressive fulfilment of prophecy means that prophecy is always relevant and always applies to the times in which we live. We live, therefore, in the middle of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Haggai concerning this shaking.

The “yet once more,” therefore, is the whole New Testament and is fulfilled again and again in the events of the New Testament until finally the word of God in Hebrews 12:27 is fulfilled and the things that are made are shaken to pieces and removed. It is fulfilled in the shaking of Herod’s heart at the time of Christ’s birth, in the shaking of the nations that brought the wise men to Bethlehem, in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles when hearts and minds are shaken by the truth concerning Christ. It is fulfilled in the shaking of the earth at the crucifixion, in the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, in every earthquake that shakes this present world, and in the great earthquake at the end of the ages (Is. 24:19, 20; Rev. 6:12).

This shaking as Hebrews 12 teaches us is a shaking of all things that destroys everything but that which cannot be shaken (verse 27). It shakes this present creation and all the works of man to pieces that only God’s work may remain. It does that in the judgments and destruction that come upon and destroy the ungodly and their world and that leave only God’s work of grace in the hearts of his people unshaken. But even in them, that which is made is removed and only God’s work remains, when they are translated by means of this shaking into the everlasting kingdom of Christ (Heb. 12:28).

We must not set our hearts on those things that can be and shall be shaken and removed or labor for them. We must seek those things that cannot be shaken, the things of the everlasting and enduring kingdom of Christ, the kingdom that cannot be moved, that kingdom that is centrally the church and which is found always in the institute of the church. Even that shall be shaken, however, and much that does not really belong to that kingdom of Christ shall fall away and be destroyed, both those who are hypocrites, as well as the sin of God’s people, as well as those things that belong now to the life of the church in the world, but shall not be necessary in the life to come.

Of this shaking every earthquake is a sign. Each is a beginning tremor of that great earthquake that shall shake not only the dry land, but the sea, not only the earth but the heavens. Even the nations are and shall be shaken by this earthquake. And all but God’s work through Jesus Christ shall be shaken to pieces and destroyed. What a thing it is to experience an earthquake understanding this prophecy of Haggai! An earthquake is a frightening experience in any case, when the ground beneath our feet becomes unstable and unsafe. How much more frightening when it is seen as the beginning of that greatest of all quakes.

This shaking, then, takes place as a revelation of God’s righteous judgments on the world in which we live and on those who live in it. The things that are made are removed. Through that judgment comes salvation, however (Is. 1:27; I Pet. 4:17, 18), for those things which cannot be shaken remain, the glorified church in the new heavens and earth (Heb. 12:28).

Though Hebrews interprets Haggai’s words to mean “yet once more,” the “yet a little while” of Haggai is also true. Always, beginning with the coming of Christ in Bethlehem, it is but a little while and this shaking is felt again. From Bethlehem to the cross is but a little while; from the cross to Pentecost, from Pentecost to the gathering of the Gentiles, from the ingathering of the Gentiles to the coming of Christ, each is but a little while. Even the whole period from the first to the second coming of Christ is but a “little while,” one day, the day of the Lord, in Biblical terms.

This shaking accompanies and is caused by the coming of the Desire of all nations. We take this, like Handel’s *Messiah*, as a reference to the coming of Christ, first in his humiliation and then in his glory as the judge of the living and the dead. The grammar, however, is quite difficult, and has caused much controversy and led to very different interpretations of the passage. The RSV translates, “The treasures of all nations shall come in,” the NKJV, “They (the nations) shall come

to the Desire of all nations,” and the NIV, “The desired of all nations shall come,” a few samples of the many differences in translation that are the result of the grammatical difficulties.

The difficulties are two. The word translated in the KJV as “desire” is feminine and plural, so that literally the phrase would read: “The desires of all nations shall come.” This is the reason why some version and commentators do not find in it a reference to Christ but to the precious things, the gifts, that the Gentiles bring when they come into the kingdom of Christ (cf. Is. 60:6). The other difficulty is that the verb “shall come” is singular and masculine and does not seem to fit with the word desire. That second difficulty is not solved, however, by making the noun subject refer to the Gentiles and their gifts instead of to Christ.

Without going into a detailed explanation of the grammar, we believe that the word “desire does refer to Christ and the prophecy is similar, therefore, to II Samuel 23:5. That the word is plural can only be then because it refers not only to Christ but to all the riches of his glory and grace. The masculine singular verb, we believe, confirms the fact that the passage is a reference to him alone. It is difficult to see how the passage could refer to anything or anyone else, since the glory of the temple, which is the main subject here, is not in its members but in him.

That he is called the Desire of all nations is a reference to the fact that in his saving grace and power he is lovely to the people of God. They say of him: “He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song 5:16). They say this, of course, only by grace, for without grace he is not lovely, but despised and rejected. He is called the Desire of the nations especially, however, because he is the fulfillment of everything the temple represented, the covenant and fellowship with God as members of his family under one roof.

That he is literally the “Desires” of the nations, because all pleasant and desirable riches are found in him. One of the early church fathers, Ignatius says of him:

Hungerest thou and desirest food? Long for Jesus! He is the bread and refreshment of Angels! He is manna, containing in Him all sweetness and pleasurable delight. Thirstest thou? Long for Jesus! He is the well of living water, refreshing, so that thou shouldest thirst no more. Art thou sick? God to Jesus. He is the Saviour, the physician, nay, salvation itself. Art thou dying? Sigh for Jesus! He is the resurrection and the life. Art thou perplexed? Come to Jesus! He is the Angel of the great counsel. Art thou ignorant and erring? Ask Jesus; He is the way, the truth and the life. Art thou a sinner? Call on Jesus! For He shall save His people from their sins. To this end He came into the world: This is all His fruit, to take away sin. Art thou tempted by pride, gluttony, lust, sloth? Call on Jesus! He is humility, soberness, chastity, love, fervor: He bare our infirmities, and carried, yea still beareth and carrieth, our griefs. Seekest thou beauty? He is fairer than the children of men. Seekest thou wealth? In him are all treasures, yea in Him the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth. Art thou ambitious of honors? Glory and riches are in His house. He is the King of glory. Seekest thou a friend? He hath the greatest love for thee, Who for the love of thee came down from heaven, toiled, endured the Sweat of Blood, the Cross and Death; He prayed for thee by name in the garden, and poured forth teats of Blood! Seekest thou wisdom? He is the Eternal and Uncreated Wisdom of the Father! Wishest thou for consolation and joy? He is the sweetness of souls, the joy and jubilee of Angels. Wishest thou for righteousness and holiness? He is the Holy of holies; He is everlasting Righteousness, justifying and sanctifying all who believe and hope in Him. Wishest thou for a blissful life?

He is life eternal, the bliss of the saints. Long them for Him, love Him, sigh for Him!  
In Him thou wilt find all good; out of Him, all evil, all misery.<sup>4</sup>

Because the temple in the Old Testament was the place of God's covenant it was sometimes referred to as the desire of God's people. Thus Ezekiel 24:21:

Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth.

And Psalm 84 says the same though in different terms:

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.... For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness (vss. 1, 2, 10).

Of that temple and house of God Christ is the reality to which the pictures pointed, the true temple of which the Old Testament temple was but a shadow. That he is that true temple is clear from John 2:21. There the Word of God adds to Jesus words concerning the destruction and rebuilding of the temple this explanation: "But he spake of the temple of his body." He is that true temple because in Him God dwells with his people and is their God. As Paul says in Colossians 2:9, 10: "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him...."

He is the Desire of the nations as the one described in Psalm 45:2:

Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips;  
therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.

He is desirable as the one in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3, as the one who is the only-begotten Son of God come in the flesh, as the Savior of sinners, whose blood is more precious than gold or silver. He is Desirable in his person, in his works, and in his gifts - as the one in whom we are chosen of God, as Redeemer, Deliverer, Intercessor and Judge. There is nothing undesirable about him and the fact that so many do not desire him is not a reflection on his glory but a testimony to their blindness.

That body of Christ which is the true temple of God is not only his own flesh and blood, assumed through the incarnation, but also his church. We are, Paul says in Ephesians 5:30 "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." That is, as Paul also admits in Ephesians 5 (vs. 32) a very great mystery, but it is the mystery of Christ and the church. The prophecy of Haggai 2:7, therefore, is a prophecy of the rebuilding of the temple, not as a house made with hands, but in its true spiritual reality. It is a prophecy of Christ as Immanuel, God with us. It is a prophecy of the realization of God's covenant in Christ.

In that way God's house is filled with glory, glory that far transcends the splendor of Solomon's temple. The glory of that true temple is the glory of the living God himself revealed in Jesus Christ as the God of his people. The Lord of hosts himself guarantees it. As Lord of hosts he uses even Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Jews and the Gentiles in their rebellion against him and his Son to insure that house is built on everlasting foundations and each stone of which that house is built chosen and precious in relation to the chief cornerstone.

That he is the desire of all nations means that the true house of God, that spiritual temple called the church would be the place of God's covenant not for one nation, the Jews, but for all the nations of the world, that is, for god's elect out of every nation. In that way, too, God would add to the glory of his house in the latter days until its glory would outshine the glory of Solomon's temple

as the light of the sun outshines a little flickering candle. God prophecies through Haggai the gathering of the Gentiles and the building of that house in which the Gentiles would be no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and on Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone, an habitation of God through the Spirit.

*8. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.*

Having spoken of the future glory of his house, God reminds the Jews and us that the glory of his house is not in externals but in Christ. When he says that the gold and silver are all his, he refers to all the gold and silver the world contains and asserts his sovereign ownership of them as Creator. He does that by way of telling Judah that if he had wanted this earthly they were building to be gloriously decorated with gold and silver, he could very well have seen to that. That fact that he had not given them gold and silver as he had to Solomon was proof that he did not want this house to be externally glorious. Solomon had used 600 talents of gold just in the holy of holies in the first temple. This temple was plain and unadorned

Yet God did provide for them. Ezra tells us that when the Jews began again to build, they were confronted by the provincial governor, Tatnai asked what they were doing. Instead of ceasing the work they continued and when a formal inquiry was made by Darius they answered him by letter and told the story of how Cyrus had sent them back for the express purpose of rebuilding the temple. That letter initiated a search through the records of Babylon that confirmed what the Jews had written, and Darius, instead of ordering the work stopped, commanded Tatnai to let the work alone and to provide the people with money for the building and with animals and other commodities for the sacrifices.

God did not provide enough gold and silver to make this temple as glorious as Solomon's but he did prove in these events that he was able to do so if he wanted to. That he did not was something the people had to learn.

There is a lesson in that also for us as members of the New Testament church. Even now the glory of the church is not to be determined by the number of her members, though the elect will be in glory a multitude that no man can number, nor in pomp and circumstance and elaborate liturgies. It is not in a multitude of programs and ministries, not in earthly wealth and power, not in expensive buildings, but solely in the fact that the church is the body of Christ, joined in him to God himself, and beloved of God.

*9. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.*

This latter house is not the building which the Jews were erecting, but the true temple, called in verse 7, the Desire of all nations. The earthly house built in Jerusalem in the days of Haggai never had any earthly glory. It remained an empty shell, without ark or holy fire or cloud of glory. Some suggest that the building was made glorious when Christ actually walked in it, but that was really a different temple, usually referred to as Herod's temple, and even Christ's presence in it could not make it anything more than it was, an earthly building which was little used for the true worship of God and often used as a den of merchandise.

God, therefore, is teaching his people to look for the coming of Christ by taking away the external and earthly splendor of the temple. Because it was a little while until the coming of the Desire of all nations, the earthly house, which had been Israel's desire through all its history had to begin to decrease that he might increase. The necessity of that is seen in the attitude of the Jews who

lived at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. They were so enamored of the building that they did not recognize or want him who was the true temple of God. They rejected and crucified him, though he was the fulfilment of everything their beloved temple pictured, and so, in the end, God took even that away from them.

The glory of the true temple would be the promised peace of which God speaks through Haggai. For the Jews that peace was due to God's protection from their enemies the Samaritans, whom God forced to provide the things necessary for the temple and its worship. That peace, however, would not last forever, and indeed soon departed from them. We see then that God had a better peace in mind, the blessed peace that he gives us through Jesus Christ when he delivers us from our great spiritual enemies, the devil, the flesh and the world. Indeed, he not only delivers us from their power, but uses them also to provide what is necessary for the building of his house. It is by their hands that the stone, rejected and despised becomes the head of the corner. The glory of the true temple for us is the peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That God reduced the external glory of his house in the days of the return, so that the people might look for the coming of Christ, is true today also. In these last days of the New Testament, just as in the last days of the Old, the church is reduced to a remnant, and is poor and despised, retaining none of her former glory as in the days of the apostles or of the Reformation. But God has his purpose in that as he did with Judah. We, too, seeing the lesser glory of God's house must not be discouraged and despair and cease our work, but continue in the confidence that the Desire of all nations shall soon come and through his coming the house of God receive all the glory that God has promised, for through his coming the tabernacle of God will come from heaven and God will dwell with us and be our God and we shall be his people (Rev. 21:2-4).

The lesser glory of God's house in the latter days is not a reason for discouragement, then, but a reason for hope, for it is the proof, for us also, that him who we desire above all will soon come again. Nor may we as we witness the beginning of the shaking of all things that shall accompany his coming cease our labors and simply wait for him, but "receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved" we must serve God with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28).

### The Third Prophecy: Haggai 2:10-19

*10. In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying,*

This third prophecy comes a little over two months (63 days) after the previous, at a time when the people were busy at work on the temple. They would not be finished with the work for nearly four years, so this prophecy comes very shortly after they had begun and long before they were finished. It is, though couched in the form of two questions about the law, really an admonition to the people to keep themselves holy in the work they were doing and concludes with a promise of blessing should they do so.

As with the previous prophecies God identifies himself as Jehovah, the covenant God of his people. He does that because they were at work on his house, the Old Testament place of his covenant and of the covenant fellowship that he enjoyed with them. The name amounts, therefore, in this passage to a reassurance that he would dwell in the house as he had promised and continue his covenant with them (1:8; 2:2:4, 5).

*11. Thus saith the Lord of hosts; ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,*

Haggai is commanded to go the priests with a question concerning several points of law, the law of Moses. He asks the priests these questions because they were the official interpreters and teachers of the law. This is especially clear from Malachi 2:6, 7. There we read:

The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

This particular question is not specifically answered in the law of Moses. There is, in other words, no specific verse or verses in which the questions of Haggai are dealt with, but the answer could easily be deduced from the teaching of the law regarding cleanness and uncleanness, especially in personal matters, and the priests to whom Haggai brought his questions apparently had no difficulty finding answers.

They answer these questions, however, not only as a matter of personal interest for Haggai, or even for themselves, though the matter certainly concerned them also, but for the benefit of the people who were doing the work. That is clear from verse 14, where the lesson from the law is applied to the people in the form of a rather sharp word of God, the concerns the personal holiness of the people in the work they were doing.

That Haggai addresses this matter of holiness does not mean that people had turned away from God once again and were living very sinfully. Of that there is no evidence in the text or in the other accounts of the work. In fact, the blessing which God promises in verses 15-19 is proof that God was pleased with them and with the work they were doing. Nevertheless, the matter of their holiness was so important that it had to be addressed at the very beginning of the work.

*12. If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine of oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.*

The two questions are very similar. The first concerns the meat of the sacrifices, especially of the sin offerings (Lev. 6:25, 26) that were offered in the temple. That meat is called "holy flesh" by Haggai. That meat was apparently carried at times by the priests in the skirts of their robes, perhaps to the altar to be burned there, or from the altar to be eaten by the priests of the people. In instances where they were carrying the meat, Haggai asks if contact with the robe in which they carried the meat would make other things holy. He mentions other food especially. In other words, if the robe brushed against other food, would the holiness of the sacrificial meat be transferred to the items that were touched by it or by the robe in which it was carried?

The priests were able to answer that question correctly with the simple answer, "No." Leviticus 6:27 indicates that the garment itself or any other vessel in which the meat was carried would be holy. The rest of the priests' answer is not specifically given in the law, that the holiness would not be transferred from garment or vessel to other things. They must have deduced their answer from those passages in the law that indicated that the people, who often ate the meat of the sacrifices, were not themselves necessarily made holy by the holy food they ate. It was possible for them to eat and to remain unholy.

Haggai is talking about ceremonial holiness, the "holiness" of things that were set apart and kept separate for the worship of God. That ceremonial holiness, however, is a picture of true

spiritual holiness, for true holiness also means to be set apart for and dedicated to the service and worship of God. Haggai, then, is pointing out through this question and its answer that holiness is not transferred by mere external contact with holy things.

The Jews often fell into that way of thinking. They thought that because they had the temple and the sacrifices and the worship of God there, and because they attended faithfully on those things, that they were different and better than the nations around them. Nor were the Jews unlike Christians today.

That is also a very important principle in the New Testament. It is a principle which applies to the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and to the water of baptism. It also applies, however, to any circumstances in which we have external contact with holy things, worship, the reading and study of the Scriptures, prayer, church membership, the hearing of the preaching. In all of these circumstances we come into very close contact with holy things, but the holiness of those things, which is the holiness of God Himself is not transferred by mere contact.

We must think of the holy flesh in terms of the blood of Christ which alone redeems and sanctifies, of the Spirit of the living God, and of his own divine saving power. These things are carried to us in the preaching of the gospel, the sacraments, prayer, church membership, and all of the other means which God uses to give his saving grace to his people, just as the holy flesh was carried in the priest's garments. The holy things are God are wrapped in these things and we come into contact with them only through these "wrappings."

The holiness of the things of God, their separateness, lends a certain holiness and separateness to the external forms in which they are wrapped, but the holiness is not further transferred by mere contact with those forms and wrappings. Hearing the preaching, attending on the worship of God, being a member of the church, does not make someone holy. This first question and its answer, therefore, add up to a warning against formalism and dead orthodoxy in worship and church membership first of all.

The principle that is illustrated by the this first question and answer applies in other everyday circumstances and relationships of life. In marriage between a believer and unbeliever, for example, the believer may have no expectation that his own holiness will be transferred to the unbeliever simply by virtue of the fact that they marry. Those who sin by marrying unbelievers often justify what they do on the ground that their marrying the unbeliever will have a good influence on the unbeliever, but that is a vain hope in light of this Word of God. Holiness is not transferred in that way.

We learn that same principle in the rearing of our children. Our own personal holiness and the holiness of godly and pious family life is not automatically transferred to every child who is born in a covenant home. Holiness does not come in that way, no more than it did in the case that Haggai cites to the priests.

Holiness comes only as a gift of God purchased by the blood of Christ and given through the Holy Spirit. The Lord hints at that in verse 14 when he points out that the people of Judah were in themselves and in all the works of their hands unholy. Even their sacrifices were not holy, not without the work of God's Spirit and the blood of Jesus which was symbolized by those sacrifices. Church membership, faithfully hearing the preaching, being baptized, praying, do not in themselves make anyone holy.

*13. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.*

The second question Haggai asks of the priests is really the opposite of the first. He asks concerning ceremonial uncleanness. There were many ways in which a Jew could become ceremonially unclean, all of which made it impossible for him to enter the temple or present his sacrifices. One way a person could become unclean was through contact with a dead body (Lev. 22:4). In that case a person had to wash himself and was unclean for the rest of the day (Lev. 22:6, 7).

Haggai's question concerns contact with someone or something that had become unclean. Would the uncleanness be further transferred by contact with something or someone who had become unclean? The answer of the priests, the opposite of the previous answer, taken from Leviticus 22:4, 5, was that the uncleanness would be transferred. The person who had become unclean would make everything he touched unclean, even the food he ate.

To understand the point of the answer, we must see that the ceremonial uncleanness of which the law spoke was a picture of the defilement of sin. Those laws certainly were used by God to protect the physical health of his people, but the main reason for them was to teach spiritual truths, in this case to teach them about the pollution of sin. Contact with death made a person unclean because death is the punishment of sin.

The point of the question and its answer, then, is that while holiness is not transferred by external contact with holy things, there is the real danger that the pollution and defilement of sin is so transferred. To use a similar example, one drop of filth will pollute much water, but many added drops of clean water will not container of filthy water clean.

The application of this is best seen in the commands in Scripture to God's people to keep themselves separate from the ungodly (II Cor. 6:14-18). The danger is always that they become polluted and unholy. They must, therefore, maintain what is sometimes called the antithesis, their spiritual separation from the ungodly and from their ways.

This separation means they may not marry the ungodly (I Cor. 7:39), may not be joined to them in any equal union (II Cor. 6:14), ought not have fellowship with them (Eph. 5:7-12). They need not go out of the world altogether as Rome teaches (I Cor. 5:10), but there must be a clear separation between them, and that especially of a spiritual character. If that separation is not maintained, it is not the unholy which will be made holy, but the holy that will be profaned and made unclean.

*14. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.*

God now comes to the point of this lesson from the law. The people, in spite of the fact that they often thought otherwise, were not holy by virtue of their contact with the ordinances and types in which the holy things of God were wrapped up, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the worship of God in the temple, even the temple itself.

God is especially concerned, however, with the "work of their hands." That work includes their agricultural labors. It also includes their religious labors, especially the work they were doing in the temple. Unholy themselves, they would certainly pollute everything they touched. The people had to learn that they were not acceptable to God by virtue of anything in them or by their own works.

There is an important principle here. Without holiness of heart and life, even our ordinary labors are polluted and defiled and unacceptable to God. That is the other side of the Biblical

principle that all things must be done for His glory. How much more, then, the efforts we put forth in religious and spiritual matters. Holiness is not optional. It is essential, and a lack of holiness among Christians is without doubt the reason why the work of the church so often does not prosper, but fails.

That leaves the question, however, how they could be holy. That question is not directly answered by Haggai, but only implied. Holiness was necessary, for unless they were made holy, their polluted and unclean hands would defile and make unholy everything they touched, including the house of God they were building and the sacrifices which would be offered in that house.

How might they be holy? The answer is implied in what God says about their sacrifices. Those sacrifices had no value in themselves and could not make the worshippers holy (Heb. 10:1, 2). Nevertheless, God had commanded them and required them because they pointed to the one sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, a sacrifice, a sacrifice which not only justifies (provides forgiveness), but also sanctifies (Heb. 10:10). Only by that sacrifice is the work of our hands holy and acceptable to God, and that includes the work we do in his house as builders.

The answer is further implied in the last verse of this prophecy to which we will come in due course. There God promises his blessing and it is by that blessing alone that we have anything at all, including holiness. That blessing comes, though, through the sacrifice of Christ, offered once for all. It is the payment for sin and the purchase price of every blessing of salvation including holiness. That we need that holiness is evident, for without it no man can even see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

*15. And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord:*

God tells the Jews to look back to the time four months before when they were still neglecting the house of God and work of building the house, to the time before one stone had been laid on another in the temple, when only the foundations had been laid and nothing more done. He is telling them, not only to think back but literally to “lay it to heart.” He is going to remind them once more of the judgments they had experienced and suffered through drought and crop failure, and is going to give them these things once again as signs of his blessing.

He wants them to know that disobedience brings wrath and that his favor and blessing come only in the way of obedience. That is a perennial problem with God’s people, who think they can have it both ways. They think they can enjoy the blessing and favor of God while continuing in ways that are displeasing to God. They think that their salvation and status as people of God guarantee them uninterrupted enjoyment of God’s goodness.

It is not so. Salvation itself cannot be lost, but the enjoyment of it can and is lost when we disobediently and hard-heartedly go our own way and refuse to hear the warnings of God’s Word. The lack of true happiness and peace that are the lot of so many Christians today, the terrors of conscience they suffer, their troubled lives, mental anguish and coldness are more often than not the result of the fact that they do not lay to heart what God says here.

That he says it again is due to our forgetfulness and constant inclination to go backslide and return to our old ways. Never does it happen that God’s people are without the need for the admonitions and warnings of God’s Word. By those admonitions he draws them on in the way of obedience and does not let them fall back into neglect, carelessness and sin.

*16. Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty.*

*17. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord.*

God speaks here more fully of the judgments that he had sent Judah, making it clear that they had not only suffered drought, but inclement weather and various diseases of their crops that had left them unable to maintain themselves in the land. Harvests that were half or less than half of the expected amounts would have made it nearly impossible for them to live. God speaks especially of the grain and the wine, the two staples on which they subsisted, and of the fact that even these harvests had failed.

He speaks in more detail because the Jews now recognized that the drought, the mildew and the hail had all come from him as judgments. He reminds them of those judgments, first of all to warn them against backsliding, but also by way of contrast to the blessing which would follow. He would give them an abundance, that in contrast to their previous poverty and struggle would very obviously and clearly represent his blessing and prove to them beyond doubt that their obedience was the way of blessing.

God reminds them, too, of their former blindness and insensibility under his judgements, not because they were again guilty of these sins, but because there was always the danger that they lapse again into them. That this is always the tendency of God's people the long and sad history of the New Testament church abundantly proves. Yet, by the grace of God they had learned their lessons and God who is merciful, does not hold their former sins against them, but promises those things that they needed.

We learn these same lessons, not so much when God sends drought and crop failure as when he sends spiritual drought and a dwindling harvest of souls, and storms of trouble in the church and in our own lives. The nation here is the church, and the blessings of God are no longer represented by national prosperity, but by spiritual prosperity and wealth.

*18. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it.*

*19. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.*

The twenty-fourth day of the ninth month was the date of this prophecy, at the beginning of the work that was being done on the temple. The day that the foundation of the temple was laid was the time, many years previous, when the work on the temple had first begun. God mentions these dates through Haggai to remind the people that the building of his house was the most important work they had to do, work that had been long neglected.

He reminds them of this also to show that the sufferings they had endured in the land were all due to their failure to build the temple - that he could not bless them as long as they did not finish that work. The temple, after all, was his house, the place where he revealed himself among them as their covenant God and Savior. And, though God does not dwell in temples made with hands, yet in the Old Testament, because the true temple had not yet been built in Christ and in his death and

resurrection, this earthly house was the symbol of his presence so much so that without it, he would not and could dwell with them.

He speaks to them at a time when the harvest had not yet been gathered. The question about seed is a rhetorical question through which God reminds them that the seed was not yet gathered in. Nor was the produce of the vines and the fig trees gathered. Yet God promises to bless them, and to bless them from the day that they had begun to work in his house. This prophecy would have been delivered in December, just after the early rains and the sowing had taken place, so there would have been no evidence as yet of God's blessing on the fields, and in the light of previous year's experience, little hope for a good crop.

He would not let them forget the close relationship between his house and their blessedness. Nor may we. Though the church of God is nothing like she was in former days, and is often despised and forsaken by her own members, she is still the place of God's covenant, the place where our great God reveals himself as the God and Savior of his people. No more, then, than the Jews can we be blessed when the house of God lies in ruins. Then we do not have the preaching of the gospel as the food of our souls, nor the shelter of his gracious presence from the storms that threaten to destroy our spiritual prosperity, or the spiritual diseases that corrupt the means that God has provided to cover care for our needs.

We need not expect that the church will ever again be as glorious as she was in the days of the Reformation or in the days of the Apostles, though we may certainly pray that she will be. The book of Haggai emphasizes the lesser glory of God's house in the latter days, as does the prophecy of Zechariah (4:10). Yet our calling to labor in building and rebuilding does not cease until Christ comes and builds his everlasting and glorious kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. To neglect that calling is to neglect the command of God, and to show that we care little for his gracious presence among us.

Let us, then, labor faithfully and diligently, each in the place God has given, in prayer, in the preaching of the gospel, in the reading and studying of God's Word, in the instruction of our children, in missions, and in all the others ways in which God's spiritual house is built, its stones gathered and shaped and fitted into place, and it built up as an habitation of God through the Spirit. We have the promise of God's blessing to encourage us and to show that he is pleased with the labors of our hands. We have that blessing in the outpouring of the Spirit, who comes as rain upon dry ground, to refresh our souls, we have in the great harvest of the blessings of salvation, in the fields white for harvest, in shelter from the winds of change that blow in church and state, and in protection from the enemies of the church.

What an encouragement! Well may we sing the words of Psalm 126 as we wait for the harvest God has promised us:

Although with bitter tears the sower bears his seed,

When harvest time appears he shall be glad indeed;

For they that in the sowing weep shall yet in joy and gladness reap.

And so, even when that harvest seems to be delayed.

When we see no proof of, while we are still laboring with many disappointments and tears, the promise remains of rich harvest that will be there in the end. That is all the encouragement we need to continue our work, especially when we remember how the gathering of that harvest will contribute to the final glory of the house of God.

## The Fourth Prophecy: Haggai 2:20-23

*20. And again the word of the Lord came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying,*

This fourth and last prophecy of Haggai comes on the same day as the previous Word of God, and nearly four months after Haggai began his work. It is addressed to and about Zerubbabel, the local civil ruler of the returned captives, and is a word of promise that concerns especially the coming of Christ as the king of God's people and the great temple builder.

That this prophecy comes on the same day as the last has to do with the fact that it also is a promise of blessing. By this final promise God shows how he will preserve and increase the blessings promised in the previous prophecy and looks ahead to even greater blessings that would come through Christ as king.

Motyer very beautifully gives an overall view of this final prophecy. He says:

The final verses of his book reveal Haggai as the literary equivalent of an impressionist painter—he gives general tone and effect without elaborate detail. His colors are the thunderstorm and the earthquake (2:21), revolution (2:22a), clashing armies (2:22b-c), and civil conflict (2:22d). As in a carefully composed picture, where every stroke is designed to lead the eye to what is central, so here too the focus is like a shaft of sunlight illuminating one item—a ring shining on a finger (2:23).<sup>5</sup>

*21. Speak to Zerubbabal, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth;*

There is some question about Zerubbabel's father. He is usually identified as Shealtiel, but there is one passage in the genealogy of I Chronicles in which he is identified as the son of Pedaiah (I Chron. 3:17-19). There are different possibilities suggested with regard to this difficulty, perhaps the most likely, that Pedaiah was Zerubbabel's actual father, but that after he died, his widow married Salathiel or that Zerubbabel went to live with Salathiel who would have been his uncle. That God continually identifies him as the son of Shealtiel is a reminder of the his descent from David.

That is the important thing. Zerubbabel was of the royal line of David, through Jeconiah (I Chron. 3:16) more familiarly known in Scripture as Jehoiachin (Matt. 1:11, 12). This king, himself a wicked man, was the grandson of king Josiah of Judah, and only ruled for three months before he was taken away to Babylon and imprisoned there. It was through him, though, that the royal line of David was continued. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, a brother of Jehoiachin was blinded and has his sons all killed when Jerusalem was taken and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Of him we hear no more in Scripture, but Jehoiachin was released from prison by the Babylonian king, Evil-merodach, and given a position of authority in Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). It was then and there that he must have married and had children, thus preserving the royal seed of David as God promised. Zerubbabel was his grandson, born in Babylon.

Zerubbabel as a descendant of David and heir to the throne of David is addressed here. There is a recognition of his royal prerogative in his identification as governor of Judah, and the promise that God makes him is really a promise to restore the throne and power of the line of David. In doing this, God says, he will overthrow all earthly thrones, particularly those that had taken captive and oppressed David's descendants.

Indeed, Zerubbabel functions in this prophecy as a type of Christ, in his office and as seed of David, he foreshadows the great Ruler of God's people, and the Seed of David *par excellence*. Christ is the servant of Jehovah, who is addressed here through Zerubbabel, and it is Christ more than Zerubbabel who will be made like a signet on the hand of God. It is he who is chosen by Jehovah of hosts to defeat those who have made war against God's people and whose throne will be over all.

God's first word to Zerubbabel connects this prophecy with the second, for once again God speaks of the great earthquake which will destroy this present world, the earthquake that would accompany the coming of the Desire of all nations. That earthquake would begin at the first coming of Christ and the shaking that accompanied it, and would culminate in the complete destruction of all things.

That shaking, as we have seen, has as its purpose the removal of temporal things, that only those things which are God's work may remain. Here that shaking will be the occasion for raising the throne of David from the low condition into which it had fallen and making glorious above all other thrones and kingdoms.

It is that shaking, as interpreted in Hebrews 12-25-29 that makes it clear that this prophecy is about Zerubbabel only as a type of Christ, for in the lifetime of Zerubbabel the throne of David was never restored to its former glory. He was only governor, and is so identified in the prophecy. Though that was a fairly high position in the Persian empire, he was nevertheless under the rule of the Persian kings and his position was of little account in comparison to that of David, his illustrious ancestor.

Before Christ came the throne of David would lose even the little glory that it had in the days of Zerubbabel and be reduced to nothing. By the time Jesus was born, the line of David had been reduced to one woman (Lk. 1:34), and the descendants of David had no authority or power any longer. Some of the Jews, the Herodians (Matt. 22:16; Mk. 3:6; 12:13), had given up on the line of David and become supporters of bloody and cruel Herod and his family as the God-appointed rulers of Israel and the continuation of God's promises to David.

*22. And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots and them that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.*

Here God shows that the shaking prophesied would be the judgment and destruction of the nations. They and their thrones would, by this shaking, be removed, that only the throne of Christ, which cannot be shaken, might remain. God is speaking here of all earthly kingdoms, as is clear from the description of them as the kingdoms of the heathen. There are no other kind of kingdoms that belong to this present world. They would all be destroyed.

The reference to horses and chariots is a reminder of the temporal might of these kingdoms. Such indications of earthly power were forbidden to the Jews (Deut. 17:16; Ps. 20:7). There trust and strength was Jehovah himself, who here foretells the ruin and fall of all the kingdoms of this present world and all their might.

That began by at the first coming of Christ. Even Herod recognized the threat that Christ posed to the kingdoms of this world, as did Pilate. It was fulfilled principally at the cross, which is the judgment of this world, and it is finished in the destruction of all things and the judgment of the nations which takes place at the end of the world when Christ returns.

God accomplishes this throughout history by keeping the nations at war with one another. Persia was the ruin of Babylon and Greece of Persia, and Rome of them all. Even the kingdom of Antichrist, which God will use to bring down all other power and authority shall be destroyed in this way. Those kings and kingdoms that give their power to the Beast will in the end turn against the Beast and the whore and make them desolate and naked (Rev. 17:16-18).

This warfare among the nations, through which the kingdoms and their power come down, every one by the sword of his brother, is not only the means by which God controls and directs these kingdoms and prevents their premature development, but is the way in which he brings his judgment on the nations also, culminating in the great battle that will immediately precede the coming of Christ (Rev. 16:14; 20:8).

That shaking of the nations would be, God tells Zerubbabel, the way in which he would once again exalt the throne and power of David and bring all nations under the sway of David's scepter. Only, of course, God is speaking not of David personally, or of David's descendant, Zerubbabel, but of Christ in whom all the prophecies of David and his throne have their fulfilment:

He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall given unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:32, 33).

Christ is the king who rules forever on that throne. His kingdom alone is everlasting. He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

*23. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.*

In this last verse of the prophecy of Haggai, Zerubbabel, the political leader of the Jews is both the person addressed and the subject of the prophecy. Insofar as this promise applies to Zerubbabel himself, it is a promise that Zerubbabel will be God's representative, the representative of his own divine rule among the people, and that God will use him in the work of rebuilding.

If the day referred to, the day of the shaking of all things, is indeed the great day of the Lord, the day that begins with Christ's coming in the flesh and ends with his return for judgment, then the reference here is not so much to Zerubbabel as to Christ. Indeed, it must be so, for this is a promise of the restoration of the kingdom and of the royal rules of David's descendants, something that did not happen during the days of Zerubbabel, but only happened when Christ came, born of the seed of David to rule forever on the throne of David.

The signet of which God speaks is a royal ring, used to seal documents, both to make them tamper-proof and to indicate that they contained the decrees and statutes of the king. It is in that reference to a signet, then, that we find the evidence that God is indeed speaking of the royal line and throne of David. That Zerubbabel is described as a signet is due to the fact that the royal power he represented, is really the power of God himself. He, and all David's descendants were nothing more than that - signets on the hand of the King of kings, evidences of the power of him who had given the throne to David in the first place, the one to whom the throne and all its power belonged.

This promises reverses a previous threat made to Zerubbabel's grandfather, Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah or Coniah:

As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence (Jer. 22:24).

There we see not only that this signet is on the hand of God, whose power and authority the kings of Judah represented like a signet ring, but we see also God's faithfulness to David. To pluck the ring from his hand would be to take the kingdom away from David, and though he removed from David all the trappings and power of the kingdom, he never abandoned his promise, but fulfilled it, and that in a way unlooked for, in Christ.

Insofar as this promise applies to Zerubbabel himself, it is a promise that Zerubbabel will be God's representative, the representative of his own divine rule among the people, and that God will use him in the work of rebuilding.

That God promises the coming of Christ as king under the figure of Zerubbabel is clear from the prophecy. Not only is Zerubbabel referred to as a signet but as the servant of Jehovah and as his chosen. Both of these are important names for Christ, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah to which Haggai very obviously has reference (Is. 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2). That these names refer to Christ in the book of Isaiah becomes clear when we realize that the servant passages all climax and come to their conclusion in Isaiah 53 which describe the chosen servant of the Lord in his sufferings.

There is a passage in the New Testament that comes very close to describing Christ in the same terms as he is here described. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Christ as the express image of the person of God. Those words, "express image" literally describe the stamp or impression left by a signet ring. That is what Christ is as God's Son come in the flesh, as the bodily representative of God himself.

God speaks of Zerubbabel and through of him of Christ as king, to show how completely he would provide for his people and fulfil the promises that he had made to them. Not only would Christ be the true temple, the Desire of all nations, but he would also be the great temple builder. That was the role of Solomon and of every king of Judah, to rebuild and keep in repair the house of God. Solomon fulfilled that task by building the first temple. Men such as Jehoshaphat and Asa kept the temple open and in repair, and later kings such Hezekiah and Josiah restored it when it had fallen into disrepair.

That God has Zerubbabel in mind as the builder of the temple is especially clear from Zechariah 4:7-10:

Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundations of this house: his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you.

Now God assures his people not only that the temple would be built and that its glory would be complete, but that he would himself take the responsibility for seeing to it that the work was finished, not only in this earthly house that they were working on, but in the true temple, the body of Christ, the church. We have then in this closing prophecy of Haggai God's Word to the church of all ages that he will build his church, through us to be sure and through our obedience to the calling we have in his house, but that the responsibility for that work would always be his.

That work he does through the sending of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the death and resurrection of Christ he lays the cornerstone, through the Spirit of Christ he gathers the living stones of which that house is built. He preserves his church in the world and brings her to perfection in glory, where his house is built unmoveable and everlasting and in that house he dwells with his people as one family, taking them as his people and revealing himself as their God and giving them the blessed vision of his own face in the face of his beloved Son.

That promise is the encouragement of every true temple builder from now until the house of God is finished. It is the guarantee that our labors are not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58). Let us not be slothful, then, in these latter days, but build as we have been commanded - build in the assurance that the true temple, the Desire of all nations will come soon, that God will build his church with a view to that coming day of Christ, when the church shall be, as the body of Christ, part of that true temple, and in the hope that the true temple of God shall remain when heaven and earth and all things in them are shaken and removed.

That God is speaking to and about Christ under the figure of Zerubbabel is also clear from the prophecy. Not only is Zerubbabel referred to as a signet, but as the servant of Jehovah and as his chosen. Both of these are important names for Christ, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah to which Haggai very obviously has reference (Is. 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2). That these names refer to Christ in the book of Isaiah becomes clear when we realize that the servant passages all climax and come to their conclusion in Isaiah 53 which describe this chosen servant of the Lord in his sufferings.

A passage which very obviously refers to Christ as the chosen servant of the Lord is Isaiah 42:1-3 which is quoted in reference to Christ in Matthew 12:18-21;

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

Such passages prove beyond any doubt that it is not finally Zerubbabel but Christ of whom the prophet was speaking.

That Christ is spoken of as a signet ring on the hand of God, refers first of all to the fact that he is the representative of the kingly majesty and power of God. He is that in a way Zerubbabel could never be, for Zerubbabel was but a man, and Christ is the one in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).

There is a passage in the New Testament that comes very close to describing Christ in the same terms used here. Hebrews 1:3 speaks of Christ as the express image of the person of God. Those words, "express image" literally describe the stamp or impression left by a signet ring. That is what Christ is as God's Son come in the flesh, as the bodily representative of God himself.

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That Christ is both temple and builder is somewhat difficult to understand, but is true because all the Old Testament pointed to him. He is both the temple and priest, both priest and sacrifice, both sacrifice and altar. There really is no other name but his. That he is both temple and builder is clear from John 2:19, 21;

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...but he spake of the temple of his body.

He builds the temple in all of his work. In his death and resurrection he lays the cornerstone, through his Spirit he gathers the living stones of which that house is built. He preserves his church in the world and brings her to perfection in glory, where his house is built unmoveable and everlasting and in that house he is the one in whom and through whom God dwells with his people as one family, taking them as his people and revealing himself as their God and giving them the blessed vision of his own face in the face of his beloved Son.

The promise of Christ under the figure of Zerubbabel is the encouragement of every true temple builder from now until the house of God is finished. It is the guarantee that our labors are not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58). It is the assurance that we too are chosen and precious in God's sight, and that we will receive from him every blessing necessary for the work he has given us to do. It is the assurance that God's promises are not failing even when it looks so to us- when all appears hopeless and the cause of God is very small in world, left like a hut in garden of cucumbers and like a besieged city (Is. 1:8).

We must remember that in Zerubbabel the Jews could not longer see anything of the former splendor and power of the throne of David. Zerubbabel was nothing more than a minor official under a foreign king. And because he had none of the power of David there was in him no assurance that the temple would be built, and when built, be preserved. It is little different in these last days, now that Christ has gone away for a while and his church is left alone in the world, small and despised. No wonder that so many have abandoned and given up on the church and forsaken her to run to their own homes. They have, however, forgotten that nothing depends on us, that God has promised to build his church through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that therefore and in him our labors are not in vain.

God promises to raise up the throne of David once again, not in Zerubbabel, but in him who is to come, to make him the visible representative of the power and dominion of God himself, and thus to insure the building and preservation of his house. That promise we have as we take up yet again in the New Testament, in the work of the church and in the work of church reformation, the building and rebuilding of the house of God.

Let us not be slothful, then, in these latter days, but build as we have been commanded - build in the assurance that the true temple, the Desire of all nations will come soon, that God will build his church with a view to that coming day of Christ, when the church shall be, as the body of Christ, part of that true temple, and in the hope that the true temple of God shall remain when heaven and earth and all things in them are shaken and removed.

May our prayer be that of Calvin as we consider what Haggai, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, has written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come:

Grant, Almighty God, that...as thou hast favoured us with so great an honour as to make us the framers and builders of thy spiritual temple, may every one of us present and consecrate himself wholly to thee: and inasmuch as each of us has received some peculiar gift, may we strive to employ it in building this temple, so that thou mayest be worshipped among us perpetually; and especially, may each of us offer himself wholly as a spiritual sacrifice to thee, until we shall at length be renewed in thing image, and be received into a full participation of that glory, which has been attained for us by the blood of thy only-begotten Son. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Cf. J. Alec Motyer, *Haggai*; in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1992), vol. III, p. 967.

2. Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), pp. 65, 66.

3. Motyer, *Haggai*, vol. III, p. 987.

4. Quoted from E. B. Pusey, *The Minor Prophets: A Commentary Explanatory and Practical*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1977), vol. II, pp. 312, 313.

5. Motyer, *Haggai*, vol. III, p. 1000.

6. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. Rev. John Owen, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, n.d.), vol. IV, p. 326.