

## ENCOURAGING THE TEMPLE BUILDERS.

SEPT. 10. – HAG. 2:1-9.

"Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you."

HAGGAI'S prophecy dates from a period fifteen years after the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity. In our last lesson we saw the corner-stone of the Temple laid with much rejoicing and hope, but it would appear that the builders soon became discouraged, and practically gave up the work. We are to remember that the work of reconstructing their homes, gardens, etc., would be considerable, and would keep them very busy for years. Besides, a new ruler of the Medo-Persian empire had succeeded Cyrus, viz., Cambyses, and he with his hordes of soldiery had passed through Palestine en route for Egypt, which he conquered, and doubtless both going and returning the large number of poorly disciplined soldiers did considerable looting, and thus discouraged the hopes of those who so confidently looked for a return of national prosperity.

But apparently a considerable portion of the difficulty lay in a lukewarmness toward religion. The people, it would seem, had provided themselves with comfortable houses, gardens, etc., while the Temple, the Lord's house, lay desolate. This is implied in the Prophet's words. (Haggai 1:4-6.) Haggai not only came as a reprover of the people's neglect, but also as an encourager to a reformation in this matter. He pointed out to them that their crops were small, and prosperity was lacking, because they had neglected to honor the Lord with their substance. We remember that this was the Lord's covenant with Israel as a nation – that they should have temporal prosperities as a reward for faithfulness to the Lord, and temporal adversities as a punishment for neglect of their religious obligations. Hence the Prophet's words would be recognized by the people as in full accord with the Lord's predictions through Moses. (Deut. 28:1-42.) And the

appeal seems to have had the desired effect. The people began to realize that in neglecting the Lord's cause, and merely caring for their own temporalities, they had not only dishonored God, but had also justly hindered their own temporal prosperity. In consequence, a revival of religious interest followed, and the Temple reconstruction began again.

Many have failed to note the distinct difference between God's covenant with fleshly Israel and his covenant with Spiritual Israel, and therefore are inclined to apply the above reasoning to Christian people of the present time, and to say that if anyone is not prosperous financially and socially it is an indication of his lack of religion and of divine disfavor. But the very reverse of this is frequently true now. If we see an individual, or a company of individuals, very prosperous in temporal things, experience would lead **[R2520 : page 220]** us to question whether or not the prosperous ones were living as near to God as when they were less prosperous, and whether or not their prosperity might imply extra danger from "the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches." – Mark 4:19.

True, riches do not in every case indicate worldliness. Apparently the Lord occasionally finds some earnest and faithful children to whom he can entrust a stewardship of riches for the furtherance of his cause, without injury; but observation shows that such instances are rare, and that as a rule not many great, not many rich, not many wise, not many learned, hath God chosen, but the poor of this world, rich in faith, to be heirs of the Kingdom. – 1 Cor. 1:27.

If it be inquired, then, Wherein is the parallelism which we should expect to find between God's dealings with fleshly Israel under the Law Covenant, and his dealings with Spiritual Israel under the New Covenant? we answer, The parallelism is there, but on a higher plane. The Spiritual Israelite who is faithful to God will grow rich spiritually in deed and in truth, but if unfaithful to God he will grow poor spiritually in deed and in truth. And those who are poor in

temporal things may be rich in spiritual things, but in any case will find that "godliness with contentment is great *gain*" – true riches.

The date of Haggai's prophecy is given as the second year of the reign of Darius (1:1), but this Darius was not the one who succeeded Belshazzar, but Hystaspes, who succeeded Cambyses.

Haggai's message, as presented in the first chapter, had evidently aroused an interest in religion, as intended; and so we find that the second chapter, of which our lesson is a part, is in the nature of an exhortation and encouragement to "the people of the land." And by the way, this expression, which fifteen years before was considered applicable to the foreigners residing in Palestine, is now applied to the returned exiles; they were henceforth *the* people of *the* land, – God's people in the Land of Promise. The encouragement, extended to the governor, the chief priest, and the people in general, was an exhortation to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might; and the basis of the encouragement was in the declaration, "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."

It is a mistake to suppose that God's people always need a berating. It is well to remember the weaknesses and discouragements with which all contend, and to administer the oil and wine of consolation and encouragement. We are to remember that when the Lord's people are weak in confidence in themselves is the most hopeful time to cultivate in themselves and each other a spirit of reliance upon the Lord and confidence in him. Fain would we say to the Lord's spiritual children these words of the Prophet, "Be strong, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you."

It is when the Lord's people begin to feel that the Lord is afar off, and that they are depending on themselves or on each other, and when they realize their weaknesses, that discouragement is apt to creep in – especially upon those who, having returned from mystic Babylon, are seeking to build again the spiritual Temple, the Church, the Temple of the living God. There are many temptations to these to attend to

earthly affairs, to build their own reputations and earthly prosperity, and to neglect the great work for which ostensibly they came out of Babylon. Let all such take courage from the Word of the Lord, through Haggai, "I am with you; be strong and *work*." To those who have no interest in the *work* the message respecting the Lord's presence will be undesirable; but it encourages and strengthens the truly devoted who are merely discouraged by the fightings without and within.

The Lord, through the Prophet, called the attention of the Israelites to the fact that he had made a covenant with them after they had come out of Egypt, assuring them of his willingness to perform it; and that his spirit, his power, his energy, was in their midst to guide, to overrule and to bless, and on this account they should not fear nor be discouraged. And if that Law Covenant, given at the hands of Moses, and ratified with the blood of bulls and of goats, was a cause of encouragement to fleshly Israel, much more should Spiritual Israel remember the New Covenant, and its new Mediator, who ever liveth to make intercession for us, and to regard our welfare at the throne of the heavenly grace; and the precious blood by which this New Covenant was ratified. Spiritual Israel may well say, I will not fear; for if God so loved us while we were yet sinners, much more now that we are accepted in the beloved are we the special objects of divine care and grace.

The message of vss. 6-9 was doubtless considerable of a riddle to the Israelites who heard it. It seemed an extravagant statement; indeed, it was so, if applied to the house which they were seeking to reconstruct. But the holy spirit, through the Apostle, shows us that this prophecy did not relate wholly nor even specially to the literal Temple at Jerusalem, but to the symbolic Temple, the Temple of God, "which temple are ye" – the Church of the living God, whose names are written in heaven. This Gospel Church is the "latter house" or Temple, Spiritual Israel, as the former house was natural Israel, represented in the natural Jerusalem and its Temple. Ours is the New

Jerusalem and our Temple is being built by the new **[R2520 : page 221]** Master-builder himself, as it is written, "Ye are his workmanship." (Eph. 2:10.) The Apostle shows us that Christ Jesus himself is the great Corner-Stone of this house of sons, and that all of the faithful followers of Christ are being shaped, fitted, polished, prepared, as "living stones," for places in this antitypical Temple, whose builder and maker is God. – 1 Pet. 2:7; Heb. 11:10.

It is only when we get a glimpse through the New Testament of the glory, honor and immortality which shall attach to the great spiritual Temple now under construction, and realize by faith the "glory that shall be revealed in us," in God's due time, that we can realize even slightly the significance of the words of the Prophet, "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."

The peace and joy and blessing which the world needs and craves cannot come, will not come, until this latter house of the Lord's building shall be completed and filled with his glory – until the elect Church, whose Head is Christ Jesus, shall be given the Kingdom, the dominion of earth – then a King shall reign in righteousness and princes shall execute judgment, the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth, and none shall need to say to his neighbor, Know thou the Lord, and great shall be the peace of that Millennial day, when the Prince of Peace shall reign. – Luke 12:32; Rev. 5:10; Isa. 11:9; 32:1; 54:13. **[R2521 : page 221]**

This prophecy respecting the shaking of the heavens and the earth is quoted in Heb. 12:26, and we there have an inspired comment upon it, showing that it will be fulfilled in the end of this Gospel age, and that it is a symbolic shaking and signifies the removal of everything that is unstable, transitory, imperfect, – in the great time of trouble with which this age will end and the Millennial age be ushered in. The Apostle assures us that the expression, "Yet once more," signifies a finality; that there will never more be requirement

for shaking, for revolution, for changes, because with this great shaking, this great change, will be ushered in that perfection of the new order of things which cannot be shaken – the Kingdom of God conditions.

The shaking of all nations is here, as everywhere, associated with the glory of the Temple: in other words, the Scriptures show that the time of great trouble upon the world, in which all the Kingdoms of this world and its various institutions, religious, political, social, shall fall, will be the very time when God's Kingdom, God's Church, shall be "*set up*" in power and great glory; to be his agency in blessing the world. And not only here but elsewhere we are assured that when this shall take place the Desire of all nations shall come.

All peoples have been looking with more or less earnestness and sincerity for a just and good government, however blindly they may have sought it, because the prince of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not through the weakness of their judgment and the selfishness of their hearts. But when the vail shall be taken away, and the blind shall see out of their obscurity, and God's Kingdom shall have come and established peace and good will amongst men, and when the knowledge of the Lord shall have been caused to fill the earth, and when the evil-doers shall have been cut off from life, in the Second Death, verily then the Desire of all nations will have come, and the desire of the Creator will have come too, – for God's will shall yet be done on earth as it is done in heaven, as prophesied in our Lord's prayer. – Matt. 6:10.

Silver and gold, in the restoration of the Temple, seem to have been lacking; hence the Lord's declaration that all the gold and all the silver are his. In the antitypical Temple construction, it at times appears as tho the silver of divine truth were lacking, and the gold of the divine character insufficient, but all who have confidence in the Lord may rely upon his assurance that he has all things needful for the accomplishment of his purposes – "the Lord knoweth them that

are his," therefore, in the language of the text, let us all be strong, and work, for God is with us; we are merely co-workers together with him. He will surely accomplish the great work he has promised; the spiritual Temple shall be built: but our individual blessing in connection with it will be in proportion as we have been strong in the Lord and full of faith and full of zeal, co-workers together with him. "I am with you,...***work!***"

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