Haggai - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Minor Prophets, Haggai1:1-15: the Need of Revival

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Haggai 1

The heart of Lydia, in other days, was opened by the Lord, as well as the lips of Paul that spoke to her. He spoke to her and she attended to him; and both of these things were of God. How simple, and yet how needful! The Lord lets us know the need of each of those operations in His great discourse in John 6, teaching us that if the Father gave not to the Son, if He draw not, if He teach not, the ministry will be lost upon the soul, and the bread of life, the true manna of the desert, will be spread in vain.

Now, this was a revival, and reviving of God's work in the midst of the years became the neccessary way because of the tendency to decline which is found to be in us. The sinner's utter ruin, and full incompetency to restore himself, is the ground of needed sovereignty at the first (Isa. 1:9); the saint's or the church's tendency to slacken, to grow cold and dull, becomes the like ground of renewed, repeated revivals afterward. A fresh putting forth of reviving virtue has been ever the way of maintaining a dispensation in any condition worthy of itself. And this day of Haggai was one of those revival seasons.

The subject of this prophetic word by Haggai might lead us to observe how perfect in their seasons the divine thoughts and purposes are, though so various and different. David proposed to build a house for the ark of God, a house of cedars, costly and stable, but the word of a prophet forbad him; the time had not come. There would have been moral unfitness in the ark taking its rest before Israel had reached theirs; or seating itself in a sure dwelling-place in a land as yet unpurged of the blood of the sword of battle. But in the day of Haggai, we find the contrary of all this. Israel are rebuked by a prophet for not building the house of the Lord. David erred in saying that the time had come for such a work; the returned captives now err in saying that the time had not come. And the Spirit of the Lord knew the times, and what Israel ought to do, whether to build or not to build. God "is a rock. His work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). He is true, though every man be a liar.

But again, as we find also in the book of Ezra, the returned captives had refused the Samaritans, rejected alliance with people of such mixed blood and principles. They had done rightly in this—surely they had. They had kept themselves pure. But this was a provocation, and under the suggestions of those Samaritan adversaries, the great king, the Persian "breast of silver," had stopped the building of the house.

This, however, becomes a temptation. As soon as their hands get free of the work of the Lord's house, the people go, every one to his own house. How easy to understand this! Nature is ready to take all its advantages. We know this every day. But faith acts above nature. Paul, for instance, becomes a prisoner after he had been for years a servant. His activities abroad are stopped by the adversaries. But Paul, though a prisoner, though stopped in his work abroad, waits on the same Master still. There is prison-service, as well as field or pulpit-service. He will receive, at his own hired house, all that come to him, though he is in chains, and talk with them from morning until evening, expounding and testifying the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. This was faith, not nature. But the returned captives employ their hands for themselves; tied up from working in God's house, they use them, as free, for the work of their own house; and thus Satan masters them as well as the Samaritans. And it is upon this condition of things that the Lord breaks in by the voice of Haggai.