Haggai - Commentaries by Edward B. Dennett

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 2:6-9: The Book of Haggai

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The Lord directs their thoughts, in the next place, to the future glory of His house. After having ministered to their present spiritual needs by encouraging their souls, He proceeds: " 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; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house" (rather, the latter glory of this 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." (vv. 6-9)

This important prophecy requires a careful examination; and as a preliminary, it is necessary to understand two of the terms found in it. The first is, " The glory of this latter house." Now, comparing the words with verse 3, it becomes clear that it should be read as we have given it above-the latter glory of this house. It is doubtless the fact, that the temple during the days of our Lord on the earth was not that which was built by the remnant; and it is also certain, that the one which the Lord will visit, in the time of His kingdom, will be another; but still we gather from the Word, that God does not regard them as so many different houses. It is the same house to His eye, and hence He asks in, verse 3 of this chapter, " Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? " The temple therefore is one, whatever the changes it underwent, and notwithstanding the fact that it was, and should be, destroyed and rebuilt. The second term referred to is, " The desire of all nations." This phrase has given rise to great divergence, both in translation and interpretation. It can scarcely be doubted, however, by any one who enters into the scope and spirit of the passage in which it occurs, that it has been rightly applied to the Messiah. Concerning the word itself, we give the remarks of another. "The expression which I have rendered by the object of desire shall come' is very difficult to translate. It appears to me that, looking at the context, I have given the sense, and that the Spirit of God designedly expressed Himself in vague terms, which, when the mind apprehended the true glory of the house, would embrace the Messiah."

The first thing announced then, is that in a little while the Lord would shake all things, as preparatory to the coming of the Desire of all nations. The heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land, as well as all nations, should be shaken. Compare verses 21-23. The same thing is found in almost all the prophetic writings, both in the Old and New Testaments. One passage may be cited from Matthew: " Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory." (24: 29, 30; see also Isa. 2: 24 Joel 2: 3 Zeph. 3; Zech. 14; Rev. 6 etc)

(* We add a note by the same writer. "Diodati's Italian version, which is considered very accurate, agrees with the English. De Wette renders it, ' The precious things;' but it is not what is very generally used for mere costly things, though the same root. This is Chemdath, that Chamudoth. The difficulty is that [the term] shall come' is in the plural.... The Italian has le scelta verra, the chosen object (the choice one) of the nations shall come." We fully endorse these observations, and have therefore no hesitation in regarding this as a distinct Messianic prophecy. This will be more clearly seen in our interpretation.)

The time referred to is not that of the first advent of our blessed Lord, for the apostle, in writing to the Hebrews, gives the passage a future application (chap. 12: 26, 27), and this future period will be that immediately preceding the appearing of Christ, when He comes with His saints to establish His kingdom on the earth. What a prospect! And what a contrast to the thoughts of man! He labors to secure permanence and stability, and dreams as he labors of a time of peace and prosperity-but without God. The unrest of evil men, revolutionary thoughts and schemes, the fall of thrones, these are all looked upon as an interference with human order and social laws. And they are; but no efforts of man will succeed in producing tranquility; no laws, however beneficent their object; no reforms, however desirable, will secure the happiness of the nations; for God hath spoken, " I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is. Hence disorder and confusion will increase; iniquity will manifest itself in ever more startling forms; governmental authority will be more and more defied; until at length the incarnation of opposition to God and His Christ will appear in the man of sin, and then God Himself will intervene in judgment, according to these words of the prophet, and by the thunder of His power He will arise and " shake terribly the earth." Happy is it for those who have a present portion with Christ, and who will be kept from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. (Rev. 3)

Such then is the future in store for the poor godless world. Judged in the cross of Christ, convicted already by the Holy Ghost of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16), its sentence, now delayed in the long-suffering grace of God, who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, will at length be executed; and who can stand in His sight when once He is angry? The nature of the strokes wherewith He will shake all things may be gleaned from the prophets, and especially from the book of Revelation. (Chaps. 4-20) In view of what is to come, would that men everywhere would listen to the offers of grace and mercy that are everywhere being made known through the gospel; for now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation.

All these judgments are preparatory to the coming of Christ. "And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come." Adopting the interpretation given above, it may be asked by some, In what sense can Christ be thus named? It is not to be supposed for one moment that He is the object of their conscious desires. This could not be, for the carnal mind is ever enmity with God, and the nations will eventually accept the leadership of the Antichrist, who will deny both the Father and the Son. This is quite true; and yet, on the other hand, Christ, the true King, is what the nations need. In all their passionate longings and outcries for peace, righteousness in government, justice between man and man, in their groanings under poverty, tyranny and oppression, who, we ask, could meet their desires but the One who shall judge His people with righteousness, and His poor with judgment. Yea, let the nations read this Psalm (72nd), and especially verses 12-14, and then let them say whether they have not here the answer to all their wants. And if we look deeper into the needs of the human heart, the

inexpressible desires that often find an outlet thence in tears and groans, the unspeakable longings begotten by a sense of disquiet, unhappiness, and unrest, we may see at once the appropriateness of the term which the Holy Spirit employs. Spite of what the nations are, and will be, Christ, Christ as the coming King, though they neither own nor know Him, is their desire, because He alone can govern the world on the foundation of justice and judgment, and cause the whole earth to be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

The effect of His coming here is given in the words, " And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." This certifies us, as indeed may be learned from other Scriptures, that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem; and Ezekiel even gives its divine plan and measurements. It is this house which will yet be rebuilt, identified in the thoughts of God with that built by the remnant from Babylon, that will be filled with glory. God has always filled HIS house with glory. He did the tabernacle erected in the wilderness (Ex. 40), the temple in the kingdom (2 Chron. 5:14), the church Pentecost (Acts 2); and the last house to be raised on earth will be no exception. But what constitutes the " glory "? It is the Lord's own presence-the sign of which was the cloud, both in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple; but in the temple of the returned captives, as in the assembly of the saints gathered to the name of Christ, this presence, this glory, is only to be apprehended by faith. For the glory of the Lord is the display, whether outwardly or to the vision of faith, of what He is, of the sum and excellency of all His attributes; and He thus fills His house with the manifestation of all the perfections of His own spiritual being. Ezekiel actually beheld in prophetic vision the return of the Lord to the house of which Haggai speaks, and which he himself describes. He says, " And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east; and his voice was like a noise of many waters; and the earth shined with His glory.... And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.... And, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house." (Ezek. 43:2-5) Thus the Lord will take possession of the house, and dwell in it, in a more surpassingly excellent way than He did either in the tabernacle or the temple. Taking up, therefore, the comparatively mean building His poor people were at that time engaged upon, He comforts their hearts by unveiling before their eyes the transcendent glory and blessing that would be yet associated with it through the Lord coming suddenly to His temple.

Two things are added. The assertion that the Lord of hosts is the owner of the silver and the gold-all belonging rightfully to Him; and then-after reminding His people that the latter glory of the house should exceed the former, because, as we have seen, the Lord Himself will personally take possession of it-the promise, " In this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts." The explanation of the first statement may perhaps be found in the language of Isaiah-"The forces" (margin, wealth) "of the Gentiles shall come unto thee." Again, " All they of Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense," etc. And once more, " Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee," (Isa. 60:5-9. See also Rev. 21:26) Yea, just as when Christ was born into the world, wise men from the east came and laid their costly gifts at His feet, so will the Gentiles in a future day come and offer of their treasures to the Lord in His temple at Jerusalem. Christ, the desire of all nations, will be the object of their homage, and they will delight to present their desirable things for the adornment and service of His house, as well as for the glory of His name; and thereby they will confess that the silver and the gold are His.

Then there is also the blessed promise of peace. For indeed it will be in the virtue of accomplished atonement, of His death for the nation (John 11), that the Lord will come back to His people; and inasmuch as through His grace they will, according to His appointment, have afflicted their souls (see Lev. 16, Zech. 12), He will righteously bring them into the enjoyment of all the efficacy of His death, and cause their peace to flow like a river. He will speak peace to all His seed; for " thus saith the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both." (Zech. 6:12, 13)

This prophecy, we may say in conclusion, is a beautiful illustration of the tender ways of the Lord. Viewing the desponding thoughts of His people, when engaged in His work, He steps in and unfolds before their eyes the certainty of the coming glory, and of their full millennial blessing. To live in God's thoughts, and in the assurance of the certainty of the accomplishment of all His purposes at the coming of Christ, is a sure antidote to all feebleness or fear.

E. D.

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 2:20-23: The Book of Haggai

This concluding prophecy, or the message of the Lord through Haggai to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, was received on the same day-the four and twentieth day of the month-as the one immediately preceding. And there is an intimate connection between the two connection as evident as it is beautiful. The last words of the former were, "From this day will I bless you." Now the blessing of the remnant in the land became at once prophetic of the restoration and blessing of Israel in the kingdom; but this involves two things, as revealed everywhere in the prophetic scriptures, viz., the manifestation of the Messiah, and the judgment of the nations; and it is these two things which are found in this brief prophecy.

The first in order, however, as mentioned here, is the judgment of the nations. The period referred to is exactly defined in a previous prophecy (vv. 6-9); but here we have, in addition to shaking the heavens and the earth, the overthrow of the throne of the kingdoms, etc. Concerning this, the question is sometimes raised whether this is the destruction of the beast and the false prophet (see Rev. 19:19-21), or only of the nations that gather themselves together against Jerusalem. On this another has said, " The judgment mentioned in verse 22 appears to me not the judgment of the head of the beast.... All that sets itself up against the rights of Jehovah, established according to His counsels at Jerusalem (rights that were identified with the house they were building), should be utterly overthrown. No doubt this is true, in general, of the kingdom of the beast; but the conditions of its existence are quite different. God had put Jerusalem under the power of the head of this empire. The crimes that draw down judgment on him are yet more audacious and intolerable than those of which the nations are guilty." We concur in this opinion. (Compare Zech. 12 and 14; see also Isa. 24:25, 29, etc) For the present the throne of the earth is in the hands of the Gentiles, a throne which they have corrupted and used for their own evil purposes, a throne which has surely become one of godless tyranny and oppression-one that exalts man and shuts out God. Its true nature has already been declared in the crucifixion of Christ; for the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. "For of a truth," as the apostles said before

God, "against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou Nast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together."

And yet again the heathen will rage and the people imagine a vain thing, and in their rage against the people of God will assemble themselves against Jerusalem. But when thus gathered in all the might of their strength, it is only to meet the outpouring of the wrathful indignation of God, who at length executes judgment upon the earth, preparatory to the establishment of the throne of Him who shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the ends of the earth. The princes of this world reck not of the coming storm which is so surely and so rapidly approaching; and, in the meanwhile, they delude themselves with their "progressive ideas," and dream of a millennium without God and without His Christ. But this word has proceeded from the mouth of God, and cannot be recalled, " I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down every one by the sword of his brother."

But there is a star of hope rising up out of this night of judgment in the promise to Zerubbabel. " 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." (v. 23) We have seen that this prophecy refers to the judgment of the nations on the eve, or rather on the morning, of the thousand years. In what sense then does the prophet speak of Zerubbabel in that day? It will be observed that he alone is addressed in this message, and that he is spoken to in his official capacity as the governor of Judah. Now it is in this aspect that he becomes a type of the Messiah; for, as Jacob prophesied, " the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be;" and as Micah spake, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." (Chapter 5:2) It is God's Christ who is thus spoken of in Haggai-the One who is both the root and the offspring of David, and who, in relation to Israel, will then sit upon the throne of His father David; "and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32,33) He it is who will in that day be displayed by God as a signet, and as His chosen vessel for the blessing. of His people. Thus Isaiah cries, in the name of the Lord, "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." (Isa. 42:1) These three things, as already stated, are ever connected in the Scriptures-the appearing of the Messiah in glory, judgment of the nations, and the establishment of the kingdom in power and blessing.

And the certainty of the divine word is assured by a -threefold affirmation. Three times in one short verse we find " saith the Lord," or " saith the Lord of hosts." In condescension to the weakness of His people, Jehovah thus lays an immovable foundation for their faith. To Abraham were given "the two immutable things" (the oath and the promise) "in which it was impossible for God to lie, that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us " (Heb. 6); but to Zerubbabel, and to the remnant through him, Jehovah gave this triple assertion of the unchangeable verity of His word. Though, therefore, the promise still waits, the time is not far distant when He who has made it will accomplish it to the joy and blessing of His longing elect remnant of Israel.

Before closing our remarks upon this book of Scripture, two observations may be made. The first is, that we learn from it the true function of the prophet. (See chap. 1:12-15; and Ezra 5:1,2) The prophet was not himself a builder, but his words were used to stir up and to encourage the people to build. This is, we apprehend, the meaning of the statement in Ezra, "And with them the prophets of God helping them." The Lord thus calls one of His servants to one kind of work, and one to another; and it is their wisdom to do and to keep to the work which He gives them. How much confusion would have been spared in the church of God had this truth been remembered! For what has happened? Prophets have turned builders, and builders prophets; teachers have sought to become evangelists, and more generally evangelists have taken to teaching; while pastors have left the care of the sheep for another kind of work to which they were never called; and as a consequence the sovereign grace of the Head of the Church in the bestowment of gifts has been slighted, and the distinctness of gift has been overlooked. And it is still an evil of no ordinary magnitude-an evil, it may be, the result in measure of the ruined state of things in which we are found; but one for which there is no justification with those who are instructed in the Word, and who are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The exhortation of Peter needs to be pressed anew upon our hearts and consciences. " As every man path received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God " (1 Peter 4:10); and also that of Paul, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry (service), let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." (Rom. 12:6-8)

The second observation is, that the whole of the recorded service of Haggai is comprised in the short period of three months and twenty-four days. He might have been a devoted servant for years-of this we know nothing; but his work which stands out for special remembrance is that found in this book. And how simple it was; and in Haggai's eyes it might have appeared very insignificant. It consisted of a few short messages-all of which might be delivered in a few minutes But it is this simple service which God selected to stand out in the light for the instruction of His people in all future ages. Surely it is not the quantity, but the quality of work; and not success, but fidelity, which commends the servant to the Lord. May it be therefore our one desire, in this busy age, to be acceptable to the Lord.

E. D.

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 2:10-19: The Book of Haggai

The message contained in this section is addressed to the priests, and connects itself historically, as may be seen from verse 18, with Ezra 3:8-13. Its object was to teach the nature of true separation unto God, and that His blessing was connected with its maintenance. a principle which obtains throughout all dispensations, because it is grounded upon the holiness of God Him-. self. (See Lev. 11:44,45, and 1 Peter 1:16) In Malachi we read that "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" (chap. 2: 7); and it. is on this account that Haggai was sent " in the four and twentieth day of the ninth month," two months. since his last message, to ask the priests these questions concerning the law.

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

" 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."

Before entering upon the application of these truths, which the Lord Himself made, through His servant the prophet, it will be good for us to consider their importance. No priest, instructed in the law, could have answered in any other way. Read, for example, the directions for the Nazarite (Num. 6); and the ceremonial directions, found everywhere in Leviticus, concerning' cleansing and defilement-all of which contain principles of the deepest significance for believers in every age, for ourselves now, even though we rejoice in the truth that Christ by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.

The meaning then of the answers, given by the priests to Haggai (answers which, it should be observed, are grounded on the sure word of God), is, first, that a holy thing has no power to sanctify; and, secondly, that uncleanness must defile everything it comes into contact with. Let us look a little at these two things. It is necessary, first of all, to be clear as to what is meant by a holy thing. It is that which is set apart for the service of God; and thus " holy flesh " might be, for example, a part of an animal which had been devoted to God in sacrifice. (See Lev. 7:28-36, etc) It was not therefore that which is intrinsically and absolutely holy from its very nature. God is thus holy, and such holiness is necessarily exclusive of evil, even as light is exclusive of darkness; but a holy thing in Scripture is that which is consecrated, set apart for God. Israel as a nation was holy in this sense, because they had been taken out from all the other peoples of the earth, and separated unto God; and in like manner everything they themselves, under divine direction, devoted to God's service was holy. But whatever was holy in this way had no power, as we learn from our passage, to sanctify other things. Well had it been for the church, as also for individual believers, if this lesson had been laid to heart, for the attempt has been made in every age to accomplish that which the Jewish priests declared to be impossible. For example, the prophet Isaiah says that they must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord; but how has Christendom carried out the spirit of this requirement? By ordination and consecration, as if the recitation of solemn words, and a human touch, even though it were from a holy hand, could sanctify to the Lord's service, or a " holy" office make the holders thereof holy. The same remark applies to the " sacred " things and places that abound on every hand, all of which are made " sacred " by one bearing, as it were, "holy flesh in the skirt of his garment," and by " touching " claiming to impart holiness to them. All this is but a parody upon that which is really and divinely sanctified; and whenever the church seeks to appropriate the things of the world by her " holy " contact for her own use and advantage, she does but betray her ignorance of her true place and character, and become defiled by the very things she has sought to sanctify. It is on this very account that her " holy" orders of men and things and places are but the evidences of her own corruption.

The second principle does but affirm the above conclusion. Uncleanness must defile, but what is the uncleanness spoken of? It is of one who had been clean, but who has been rendered unclean by a dead body. Now death is the fruit of sin, and this therefore is the source of the defilement. (See Num. 6;19) It is not then, applying the truth to ourselves, the uncleanness of a sinner before God, but that of a believer who has become defiled by evil associations; and the solemn lesson concerning such a one is, that, like pitch, he pollutes everything he touches. What a responsibility then rests upon us individually in our fellowship with the saints of God Have we become defiled through unwatchfulness, through contact with a " dead body"? and do we mingle with the saints, as if all were well with our souls? Ah! how little do we remember the effect of our state one upon another. Again, Do any plead that believers, whatever their associations, should be welcomed into the holy fellowship of the saints, in their breaking of bread and prayers? Let them read and ponder the truth of this scripture, and then let them confess that nothing that defiles, if it be known, can 'be associated with the holy name of Christ. As with individual believer so with assemblies, the responsibility is to be holy because God is holy.

The prophet, having received his answers from the priests, applies the truth to their own condition. He answered 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." The significance of this solemn statement is evident. Israel -for the restored remnant occupied the place of the nation before God- were a holy people, separated unto God. But this entailed upon them the responsibility of walking according to the place they were in by God's sovereign grace; to be for Him to whom they were separated. What, however, do we find? At this moment God's mind was on the building of His house; their minds were on their own houses. (Chapter 1) They therefore, out of communion with Him who had called them, were for themselves, and not for Jehovah; occupied with their own, and not with His things. They had thus become practically defiled; they had lost, so to speak, their Nazariteship, by becoming unclean through contact with the dead body of their own selfish thoughts and desires. And what was the consequence? The work of their hands was defiled, and so also were the sacrifices which they laid upon Jehovah's altar. Themselves unclean, they polluted everything they touched; and nothing they did, whether in their daily occupations, or in their professed worship, was acceptable to God. And what a lesson for ourselves in this day is thereby taught! We may never be so diligent in activity, or in the assembling ourselves together with the saints; but if we are not right with God, if we are not maintaining our separation, if we have ceased to judge ourselves, and to confess our sins, both our work and our worship are defiled. We have this same lesson taught in the epistle to the Hebrews. After having pointed out that it is the privilege of the believer to have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, the apostle proceeds, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Chapter 10:19-22) Having the way open into the holiest, and every qualification for entering into it, we may yet not be able to avail ourselves of this unspeakable privilege because of our practical condition. The want of a true heart, a heart that has no reserves before God, that has been fully exposed in the light of His presence in self-judgment, may prove, and will prove, an effectual barrier before the new and living way which Christ has initiated for us through the veil. And should we, in forgetfulness of our practical state, seek to appear before God, like Israel, we shall only in like manner as they defile our offering. (See also 1 Cor. 9: 27-29,1 John 3:19-22)

But through grace the word of God, as before delivered by the prophet, had already reached their consciences, roused them from their indifference and neglect, and, producing in them a sense of their failure, had brought them back to Jehovah. From that moment His things, His house, occupied their minds, and, animated by the encouragement ministered to them through the Lord's tenderness, they proceeded to lay the foundation of His temple. And the object of the Lord in this new message to His people was to call their attention to the change of His attitude towards them since they had become obedient to His word. Thus from verse 15 to 17 we have a description of His dealings with them while neglecting His house. God could not, consistently with His holiness and with His love to His people, bless them when their hearts were turned back from Him, when they were using His grace, in their restoration from captivity, as a means to their own ease and comfort. He therefore dealt with them in judgment, chastising them, to awake them out of their spiritual torpor, and to teach them the lesson which God's people ever need, that their true blessing and prosperity could only be found in the Lord's ways, and not in their own. This explains the words of the prophet: " And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward" (i.e. looking back upon the past, the word " upward " being used in the sense of taking a retrospect), "from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord" (when the people said, " The time is

not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built "): " 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. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labors of your hands; and ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." (vv. 15-17)

Such was the past condition of the people, and so hardened were they, that they were insensible to the chastisements of the Lord-they turned not 'to Him. But at length, as we have seen, the Lord's object (as must ever be the case) was attained, and He stirred up the spirit of all, from the highest to the lowest, "and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." (Chapter 1:14) It is in reference to this, their spiritual restoration, in fact, that the prophet proceeds with his message: " Consider now from this day and upward" (the word " upward " here being used in the sense of forward), " 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. 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." (vv. 18, 19)

From a comparison of chap. 1:13-15 with this scripture, it will be perceived that it was exactly three months from the time when the people commenced to work on the Lord's house, that the foundation was laid. This time would be spent in the necessary preparation; and it is striking to observe that the Lord did not begin to bless them until the foundation was laid. He waited during those three months to test His people's hearts, the reality of their restoration to work in them a sense of their past condition, and thus to prepare them to receive the blessing which He was about to bestow. It is always so in His ways with His people. His heart towards them never changes, but the manifestation of His heart must depend upon their condition. His heart is always to bless, and if He withhold blessing, it is only because of their spiritual state. And then, when by His grace there is true self-judgment and confession, there is yet oftentimes much work to be done-as in the case of Peter, for example-much searching of heart to be undergone, before He can make them enjoy again the sense of His restoring grace and love. So in our passage. The people had labored for three months in obedience to Jehovah's word, and now when they, at the end of this period (a period doubtless of much reflection and self-examination), had reached that which was nearest to the Lord's heart, the foundation of His temple, He proclaims that from that time He would bless them; for now they were walking according to the place in which they had been set. Separated as they had been to God, a holy people, they were now for Him -for Him who had called them. They had therefore lost their uncleanness, their Nazariteship was restored, and thus the work of their hands and their offering were no longer rendered unclean (v. 14); and God's heart was free to go out towards them in abundant blessing.

It is ever so in all dispensations. The blessings here promised to Israel were temporal, in accordance with the economy under which they were; but the principle of blessing, as we have often shown, is the same for believers now. Whenever God's people are walking in subjection of heart to His word, in communion with His own mind, they are in the sure and certain path of blessing and soul-prosperity. And nothing short of this satisfies God's desires for His own. He has in His grace brought us into fellowship with Himself and with His Son Jesus Christ, and it is our blessed privilege to enter upon the enjoyment and realization of this unspeakable blessing. But to do so will involve, as it did in their measure with the remnant, the losing sight of ourselves and our things, that we may be absorbed in God's thoughts, aims, purposes, and desires. But if we examine ourselves, or if we test the various activities and the manifold ministrations of the truth of this day, we shall have to confess how little any of us know what it is to rise to the full height of our calling. But in doing so lies the secret both of strength and blessing -to live in the power of. the Spirit even now in a region where man disappears, and God is all in all, where it is our joy to be occupied with His things, and where we want nothing because we are satisfied to the full in the circle of unbounded grace into which we have been introduced, and in which God has condescended to associate us with His own purposes, as well as to link us with the glory of His beloved Son.

And we may add, in conclusion, that whenever the heart of a believer responds through grace to God's call to walk thus with Him, this word, " From this clay I will bless you," will be found as true as when spoken to Israel by the prophet.

E. D.

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 2:1-5: The Book of Haggai

We have seen, at the close of chapter i., how mightily the Lord wrought with His word upon the minds of the people, and how, thus stirred up, they responded to the message they had received through the prophet whom He had sent. Before a month had elapsed, " in the seventh month, in the one-and-twentieth day of the month," He again addressed Himself to the hearts of His servants for their sustenance and encouragement. The subject of this message, like the preceding ones, is still the house of the Lord at Jerusalem.

And what, let us inquire, before we enter upon it, was the occasion of this further prophecy? It was undoubtedly the thoughts of some of His people while occupied with their work. This may be gathered from the opening words: "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, 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?" (vv. 2, 3) There were some then among the remnant who had seen the temple of Solomon in all its magnificence and splendor, and who, as they contrasted it with the building on which they were now engaged, were sadly despondent if not disheartened. We read of them in the book of Ezra. After describing the joy of the people, when the foundations of the temple were laid, he says, " But many of the chief priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy; so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a great shout, and the noise was heard afar off." (Ezra 3:12,13)

And this sorrow of the ancient men was perfectly natural; for to the outward eye, the contrast present to their minds was humbling in the extreme. The first temple was built amid the glories of Solomon's reign-the king who was the type of the Prince of peace, and one who used all the resources of his mighty empire and of his tributary peoples to erect an house to be the dwelling-place of Jehovah in the midst of His people; for, as David said, "The house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries." (1 Chron. 22:5) But the house was now being raised by a few feeble captives, dependent upon a Gentile king for the very materials they were using, surrounded by hostile tribes, and, beyond all this, without any of the visible signs of the Lord's presence-no Shechinah, and no fire to come down from heaven to consume the sacrifices they laid upon the altar. (See 2 Chron. 7:1-4) More even than this, for the very things that forced their sad condition upon their minds would but call to remembrance that the loss of the first temple, and their present

abject state, were but the consequences of their own sins and transgressions. While therefore not insensible to the Lord's present mercy and goodness, it was not surprising that sorrow should fill their hearts when they were thus reminded of the past glory of their nation, at a time too when they walked in the sunlight and joy of Jehovah's countenance. As another has said, " Alas! we understand this. He who now thinks of what the assembly of God was at the first will understand the tears of these old men."

The point however to which we desire to call attention is, that the Lord read these thoughts of His people, and sent a message of comfort and consolation. It is well for us to understand this; that even the feelings of the saints-feelings engendered in connection with the Lord's ways or service-are regarded by Him with tender concern. How many instances of this might be gleaned from the Scriptures. David says, "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" Again, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." Also, " Thou understandest my thoughts afar oft:" And it was because the Lord Jesus entered into the feelings of His disciples that He said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." How different would be our daily lives, if we were in the realization and power of this simple truth!

But let us now see how Jehovah comforts the hearts of His people before us. He says, "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: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not." (vv. 4, 5) It will be perceived that the Lord addresses all the people-the people as well as their leaders. All are before His mind. We too often deal in generalities. Not so Jehovah; the humblest of His servants does not escape His notice, and if therefore He would encourage His people, He cares for the small as well as the great. He recognizes the distinction which He Himself has made, and therefore specifies the governor and the priest; but He is equally concerned for the people under their charge and direction. If, on the one hand, His heart is so large as to embrace the multitude of His saints; He, on the other hand, individualizes every one, that all alike may feel that they are the objects of His mind and heart.

And what is the exhortation He sends? It is, " Be strong;" and the source of their strength is the knowledge of the fact that He is with them., It is so everywhere in the Scriptures. Take two examples: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15 I) Again, " Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Josh. 1:9) It was on this account, when the Lord commissioned the twelve to go and teach all nations, etc., that He added, "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." (Matt. 28) It is indeed impossible but that the assurance of the Lord's presence should inspire His people with fortitude and courage. If He is with us, resting confidently in what He is for us, we measure our foes and difficulties, not by what we are, or by our own resources, but by what He is in all His own omnipotence. Then we can boldly say with one of old, " They that are with us be more than they that be with them;" or with the apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" It was in this way the Lord would strengthen His poor feeble people in all the poverty of their circumstances; He would attract their eyes to Himself, that they might labor in faith, fearing no foe because their God, who was with them, had thrown around them His impenetrable shield. He reminds them, moreover, of His faithfulness to His covenant which He made with them, when He redeemed them out of Egypt, according to which His Spirit remained among them. (See Isaiah 18: 11-14) Hence He adds, "Fear ye not." Jehovah Himself in their midst, and His Spirit remaining among them, they might well take up the language of the Psalmist: " The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

There are few, we apprehend, who will fail to see in this double assurance a remarkable foreshadowing of the blessings of God's people in this dispensation. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst." "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever." There is indeed a striking correspondence between the position of this poor remnant, and that of believers who are now gathered to the name of Christ. All was in ruin then, for governmental power had been transferred to the Gentile, because of the sin of Israel and Judah; and those who returned from Babylon, in the mercy of their God, were but a feeble few, and were, as we have seen, without a single external sign of the presence of their God. The fact of His being with them, the acceptance of their sacrifices, the influences of His Spirit, were only known by faith. So now the Church has lost its first estate, and God's people are scattered in disunion and disorder throughout the world. But in these last days a remnant has been gathered out from spiritual Babylon, and as was the house of their God to these Jewish captives, so the name of the Lord Jesus is to them their only center. Gathered to that ineffable name-expressive of all the truth of His person, work, and authority-on the ground of the Church, as defined by the Scriptures, they have likewise the assurance of these two things-the Lord's presence, and the abiding of the Holy Ghost. That is all; but we may reverently add, What an "all!" for everything is comprised in the term-the source of all blessing, and the source of all power. If, therefore, Jehovah sent this message at that time to His people, "Be strong; fear ye not;" no less certainly would He address to us the same words. It is true that " a little strength " may now characterize the most faithful of the remnant, that they may have in themselves the most overwhelming sense of their own feebleness (and it is right that it should be so); but if they enter, even in the smallest measure, into the power of these blessed truths-that the Lord is with them, and that His Spirit abides-they will be strong and fearless in the face of the most determined efforts of the enemy, because they will have learned that the Lord's strength is made perfect in weakness, and that greater is He that is in them than he that is in the world. But it is our failure that we are more occupied with our feebleness, with our circumstances, and with the activities of the adversary, than with the Lord's presence and the power of His Spirit. May the Lord Himself draw us away, both from ourselves and our surroundings, and engage our thoughts with these blessed assurances of His own word; that He may thus be enabled to use us more in testimony to His glory, His grace, His power and claims.

E. D.

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 1:1-11: The Book of Haggai

Some introductory words are necessary to enable the reader to enter intelligently upon the study of this most interesting prophet. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all prophesied after the return of the remnant from their Babylonish captivity; and this fact gives their writings a special interest for those who have been delivered, in any measure, from the corruptions of Christendom in these last days. It must be remembered that they, as we, are in the times of the Gentiles; for God had removed the seat of His sovereignty from Jerusalem, and bestowed the throne of the earth upon the Gentiles. This is indicated by the manner in which this book commences. The prophets before the

captivity are dated according to the period of the kings of Judah or Israel in which they exercised their office. Haggai is reckoned from the second year of Darius the king, so also Zechariah. (Compare Luke 3:1) It could not indeed be otherwise; for God never ignores His own arrangements. He recognized the sovereignty of the Gentiles, as deriving its right and authority from Himself, and He will have His people also in subjection to the powers which He has ordained. (See Rom. 13) While therefore He Himself stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to interest himself in the building of His house at Jerusalem, and to issue his proclamation giving the people permission to return, He made it manifest to all that His people were dependent upon this proclamation for their liberty. It is partly on this account that the position of the remnant, addressed in the last three prophets, corresponds so intimately with that of our own. Owning God as supreme in authority and power, confessing that His will is our only law, we are yet subject to kings and all that are in authority; and when oppressed by the unjust exercise of power, by tyranny or persecution, we do not seek relief in agitation, disobedience, or rebellion, but we look to the Lord, who turneth the hearts of kings whithersoever He will (as illustrated in the case of Cyrus) to interpose on our behalf, to influence the governments, which have their source in Himself, to moderation and tolerance. The Christian for this very reason, if indeed he understand his place and position, cannot be a politician, to say nothing of the heavenly character of his calling. Subject to human authorities, he is dependent only upon God; and hence, whatever his needs, difficulties, trials or perils, to God alone does he look. Such is the path of faith, and the path of faith is one of peace and liberty.

The book of Ezra must be read side by side with that of Haggai. Turning thus to the former, it will be seen that the first verse of Haggai links itself with 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 connection must be briefly developed. The object of the people's return concerned the building of the house of the Lord. This was the subject of the proclamation of Cyrus, who indeed had been raised up for this very purpose (see Isa. 43:28, and chap. 46); and it was for this end that God had wrought in the hearts of those who were made willing to return to the land of their fathers-all, as we read " whose spirit God had raised, to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." (Ezra 1:5) When they arrived their first concern was to verify their claims to be of Israel, all who could not produce the register of their genealogy being refused (chap. 2); for when the Spirit of God was working in their midst, and when, in fact, they had already entered upon the enjoyment of deliverance from captivity, the imperative necessity of a holy separation was deeply felt. It is only in times of coldness, lethargic indifference, or open backsliding, that the people of God become insensible to the claims of God's holiness. Accordingly this feeble remnant, in the first flush of their restoration, purified themselves from all doubtful associations. Some who were put away from the priesthood as polluted might have their claims recognized at a future day, when a priest should stand up with "'rim and Thummim (see Ex. 28:30); but for the present place of service and testimony it was essential that the reality of their priesthood should be beyond suspicion, attested by the holy registers. So now many a true child of God may be absent from the Lord's table because he is not able to point to his qualifications as written in the Scriptures. The work of separation accomplished, liberality of heart was displayed in offering " freely for the house of God to set it up in his place." (Ezra 2:68-70) Then on the seventh month, which was the month for the blowing of trumpets, figure of the restoration of Israel in the last days, the children of Israel, like the disciples on the day of Pentecost, gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem, (Chapter 3:1) They were all animated by one desire and one aim-a blessed concord, which can only be produced by the action of the Holy Spirit. There assembled, they builded the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. Divine intelligence thus marked them; for they in this way declared that their only ground of acceptance before God, and their only hope of securing His favor and blessing on the work which they had in view, lay in the sweet savor of the sacrifice; and in their subjection to the Word (see verses 2-4) they confessed that divine wisdom alone could guide their feet and preserve them from dangers and snares. They were now formally placed under the protection of the God of their fathers.

Still it was not until "the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem " that they actually laid the foundation of the temple (chap. iii. 8). From the sixth verse it would almost seem that at the very outset-as has been the case in every new movement of the Spirit of God-there was some decline in spiritual energy. At least, the statement is very significant, But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. Be this as it may, the work at length was commenced, and the foundation was laid. To many it was a time of great joy, and their joy found expression in the ancient and divine song, " O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever." (1 Chron. 16:34; comp. 2 Chron. 5:13) With others their joy was mingled with grief; for "many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy," etc. 12, 13) Speaking of the sorrow of the ancient men, another has beautifully said, "Alas I we understand this. He who now thinks of what the assembly of God was at the first, will understand the tears of these old men. This suited nearness to God. Further off, it was right that joy, or at least the confused shout, which only proclaimed the public event, should be heard; for, in truth, God had interposed in His people's behalf."1

The work commenced so auspiciously was soon to be interrupted. Nothing arouses the anger of Satan like any attempt to testify for, and to acknowledge the claims of, God on the earth. Immediately, therefore, on the foundation of the temple being laid, we read of the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin seeking to hinder the progress of the building. In the first place they, like the Gibeonites in the days of Joshua, " did work wilily, professing a desire to build with Judah and Benjamin" (chap. 4: 2); and then, on being refused, they threw off the mask of their hypocrisy, "and weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia." (vv. 4, 5) It is to this point that special attention must be directed in order to understand the commencement of Haggai. Let it be recalled, then, that the remnant who had returned were under the protection and favor of Cyrus, and that in building the house of the Lord they were acting in accordance with the king's decree. With confidence in God, they had therefore nothing to fear from their adversaries. If the king commanded them to desist, they might have obeyed, as they were in subjection to the Gentile power; but the fact was, as may be gathered from a comparison of Ezra with Haggai, that the people were deterred from continuing their work by their adversaries before the letter of Artaxerxes was obtained. The work of the "house of God which is at Jerusalem" ceased from fear of man-fear of man from having lost faith in God; and once having given up all care for God's interests and claims, they began, with all the more energy, to mind their own things, to build their own houses, instead of building the house of God. Such was the state of things amongst the remnant when Haggai began to prophecy; and bearing this in mind, we shall be the better able to comprehend his words.

Note, first of all, that the word of the Lord came unto him in the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month (see Ezra 4:24), and that it was addressed to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest. Then, in one verse, the condition of the people is displayed.

"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." (v. 2)

Such was the occasion of the Lord's message and remonstrance through Haggai. He had wrought in the heart of Cyrus, He had stirred up the spirit of His people, to accomplish His purpose in rebuilding His house; and now, forgetful of the object of their restoration, they professed to discern that it was not a seasonable opportunity for their work. And what led them to this conclusion? The fact that there were adversaries, that the times were not peaceful. As if enemies to the Lord's work would ever cease! As if the time would ever come when the natural eye would perceive the opportunity for labor for the Lord! Ah, we have all to learn the lesson that the Word-the mind of the Lord-is the warrant for service, and that when He speaks it is but for us to go forward, whatever the circumstances and however numerous the adversaries. As He said to Joshua: " Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." (Josh. 1:9) Their spirit is a complete contrast to that of the apostle who said, '"A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." (1 Cor. 16:9)

It was then to meet this condition of things that the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, " Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house to lie waste?" etc. (vv. 4-11) Every word of this message is fraught with instruction, and contains principles of the utmost value, applicable to the people of God at all times. They had said, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. "Is it time, then," said the prophet, "for you to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house to lie waste?" This was indeed a challenge for their hearts, and one that raised an issue that could not by any ingenuity be evaded. For on what ground could they pretend that it was an opportune moment to give the preference to their own interests, to the neglect of the Lord's claims? The secret lay in the fact that building and decorating their own houses raised no opposition. Doing good to themselves would rather elicit the commendation of their adversaries. It is only testimony for the Lord-testimony in word, work, and life-that provokes the hostility of the world. They had chosen therefore the path of selfish ease and self-interest, minding their own things, and not the things of the Lord. They knew nothing of the spirit of the psalmist who " sware unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." (Psa. 132) They were rather like those of whom Amos speaks, who lay upon beds of ivory, and stretched themselves upon their couches... but were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. (Chapter 6) For not only were they diligent in caring for their own comfort, but they were also indifferent to the fact that the. Lord's house was lying waste. God's eye and heart were upon His house (see 2 Chron. 6:28); their thoughts were upon their own habitations, and they thus showed that they were utterly out of communion with the mind and heart of God.

And let our own hearts speak, and speak honestly as before God, in the presence of such a charge against this indifferent remnant, whether God's house occupies the first place in our minds, whether its desolate condition touches our hearts in His presence, whether we are amongst those who sigh and cry because of its ruined condition, whether, in a word, amid the comfort of our own dwellings we are indifferent to the state of the house of God. Let us be clear upon what is meant. It is not asked if we are interested in the Lord's work, if we are in sympathy with the preaching of the gospel,' if we are diligent in visiting and caring for the Lord's poor. All these things are important, and have their rightful place in the heart of every Christian; but our present question concerns " the house of God, which is the Church of the living God." What then is our attitude to it? For if it is the dearest thing to the heart of Christ, if His eye is upon it perpetually, if He is ever engaged in cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word, we cannot be in communion with His heart unless His thoughts and desires concerning it are also ours. Alas might not the word of the prophet be also addressed with reason to many of us, " Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house to lie waste Let us then ponder upon the word of the Lord to His people through the prophet.

"Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. 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." (vv. 5, 6)

As our own blessed Lord taught, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it," so was it with the remnant. Setting their hearts upon rest, ease, and prosperity in this world, desiring to find their "life" in their comforts, they lost it; for they had left God out of the account. Making themselves, and not God, their object, putting their own things in the first place, and becoming indifferent to His honor, claims, and interests, they forfeited the very blessings for which they labored. How common is this mistake even with Christians; for though the character of the blessing may differ, the principle still obtains. Thus you may see a child of God who, because of his domestic or business claims, as he will tell you, is constantly absent from the assemblies of the saints, and has scarcely any heart for the Lord's objects, but who is withered up in his own soul, and has little peace in his family, and not much prosperity in his affairs. And why is this? Not because of his lack of attention to his own concerns; for, as we have seen, these have the foremost place in his mind. No; but it is because such an one is caring for his own things, all indifferent to the desolation of the house of God; because, in other words, he exalts his own interests above those of the Lord. Let us never forget that there is such a thing as a present judgment of God; that He notices the conduct of His people, and, in His paternal government and care, deals with them according to their state of heart and walk. (See, for example, 1 Peter 1:17) It was so in the case before us. They were diligent in sowing their seed, but God gave them but a scanty harvest; they ate and drank, but were not satisfied, for God withheld His blessing; they clothed themselves, but found no warmth, and their savings melted away. In this way God dealt with them, to exercise their souls, to wean them from their selfish aims, and to recall them to the object of their restoration to their own land, that, losing sight of themselves, they might find their blessing in communion with the mind and heart of God. It is this truth which is set before them in the following verses: " Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways. 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." (vv. 7, 8)

Again, the Lord calls His people to consider their ways. Blessed occupation this for His saints at all times, for the tendency ever prevails, especially in seasons of declension, to deceive ourselves into the belief that all is well, even when we may be actually under the chastening hand of God for our unfaithfulness. Many an evil, many a break-down, many a startling manifestation of iniquity in the midst of the assembly would be spared us if we did but heed this admonishing call. It should be, in fact, our constant and habitual employment to consider our ways in the presence of God. There all delusions disappear; there, in the pure light of His holy presence, the secrets of the inmost heart are revealed; and there it is alone that, discerning our true condition and failures, we can receive grace to judge ourselves by the infallible standard of God's glory; and thus, confessing our sins, enter once again upon the enjoyment of forgiveness and restoration. The Lord would therefore call His people, whom He had brought back from Babylon, to come before Him, that they might discover whence they had fallen, and that they might repent and do their first works.

Thereon He commands, or rather perhaps reminds them of, what He desires. They, as we have seen, had set their hearts on their own houses, and the Lord, as it were, says to them, " My heart is on my house. Go up therefore to the mountain, and bring the wood, and build the house."

This was the object of their restoration, and the Lord would still have them share the privilege of fellowship with His own purposes. He moreover condescends to say, " I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified." By building the house, they would evoke the satisfaction of His heart and exalt His name. We thus learn that the true way to glorify God is to be in fellowship with His own mind-not in the activities we may choose, however good in themselves; not in works of beneficence and philanthropy, however the wants and sorrows of others maybe thereby alleviated, but in laboring for the object God has before Him at any given time, in working in communion with His mind and heart for the accomplishment of His ends, and not our own. Thus in the time of Haggai no laborers would have been acceptable to God as long as the building of His house was neglected. The only proper attitude therefore for any servant of God " Lord, what wilt THOU have me to do?" and his only proper aim is to labor or to strive diligently to be acceptable to the Lord.

In the next three verses (9-11) the people are reminded that they are being chastised because of their indifference to the Lord's house. God was drying up the source of every earthly blessing. He " blew " upon their crops, withheld the dew, called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn-upon everything the earth brought forth, and upon men„ and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands. And wherefore did He send this universal blight upon all the labor of their hands and upon all their expectations? Let the answer be indelibly written upon our hearts: "Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own house."

Is there no voice in these words to the saints of this day? God is still God, and He has His objects now as He had then. If then His objects are not ours, is it any wonder that we are suffering from spiritual dearth and barrenness? that when we have sown much, in preaching the Word, we bring in little? that feeding continually upon the ministrations of teachers, we have not enough? that we are neither " warm " nor satisfied, and that there should seem to be a drought throughout the assembly of His saints? Let our hearts, we again say, answer the question, whether this is true, in any measure, of ourselves, that we prefer our own houses above the Lord's house. We learn from Rev. 1-3 how jealous the Lord is of the state of His Church, and that His cry is ever raised in the midst of His saints, " He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Well, therefore, might we listen to the teaching of the scripture before us; and if our hearts are but bowed to its solemn lessons, unspeakable blessing cannot but be the result. May the Lord Himself make His word with us, as He did with His people in this chapter, living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, for the glory of His own most holy name

E. Dennett

As to confession, I can only say for myself that, first, the want of individual spirituality (in its divine and heavenly character), of singleness of eye, and of full purpose of heart; and, secondly, the presence of unjudged flesh and worldliness (shown in mixed motives and intentions, in plannings, and oft in an energy not of God, as well as in ways and doings) press on my own heart, as being among existing obstacles to the Father's working fully and freely for the honor of the Lord Jesus in the present day in England.

G.V.W.

The Book of Haggai, Haggai 1:12-15: The Book of Haggai

In this section we have the effect of the message sent by the Lord through the prophet, which we considered in our last paper. From Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, down to the lowest of the people, obedience was rendered to the voice of the Lord with one consent. The word of the prophet had been with power, and all hearts recognized the truth of his message, and the claims of their God. And it is important to note, as a principle everywhere affirmed in the Scriptures, that the voice of the Lord is linked with the words of the prophet. (v. 12) When God sends a messenger He is pleased to identify Himself with His servant. Our blessed Lord thus said to His disciples, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." (John 13:20; see also Matt. 10:40-42) So in our passage it stands, "And the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him." This is a solemn consideration for the people of God; for the converse is true, that if one who is really sent of the Lord is refused, it is the Lord who is refused in the person of His servant. (Matt. 25:41-45) Not that everyone who claims to be sent of God is to be received as such; for the test is, Do such speak the words of God? (John 3:34) And as we are taught elsewhere, many false prophets are gone out into the world; but it is just on this very account that the responsibility is cast upon the saints of "trying the spirits whether they are of God." (1 John 4:1) The apostles could say, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." (1 John 4:6) They could take this ground because they were inspired men, and they had therefore the infallible word of truth on their lips. No servant, however devoted, could now adopt this language; but he might apply the principle to the message he delivered, if that message were indeed the pure word of God. While these limitations are necessarily made in our present circumstances, yet let us not forget that the Lord does in these last days send His servants with messages to His people, and that wherever the soul is in the presence of God they will be readily discerned; and hence that it is no less grave now than at any former time to turn a deaf ear to the words of admonition and warning they may utter. Look at the case before us. Were not Zerubbabel and Joshua the leaders of the people? And who was Haggai? Why should he set himself against them all? Why should he find so much fault, and prophesy such bitter things? And what had he to recommend himself to the attention of the people? He was evidently of no birth or standing, for his parentage or genealogy is not recorded. He had but one qualification. It was not his position, his office, or his gift; it was simply that he was sent by the Lord their God. So now the only questions for any of us, when a professed servant of the God stands before us, is, Has he been divinely sent? and does he speak the word of the Lord?

The obedience, moreover, which is here spoken of was no mere external compliance with the exhortations they had received, but it was of that sort which proceeds from the action of the word of God on the conscience; for it is added, "And the people did fear before the Lord." This is the sure sign of a real work in the hearts of this feeble remnant. Whether in sinners or saints, if the conscience is not reached, whatever outward and apparent effects may be produced by the ministry of the truth, nothing is gained. In all such cases it will be as Ephraim and Judah, of whom Hosea speaks; their "goodness" will be "as a morning cloud, and as the early dew which passeth away." (Hos. 6:4) On the other hand, fear of the Lord will always be produced in a soul when the conscience is in exercise before God; for it is then that God's holy presence is apprehended and His claims acknowledged, while at the same time the sense of failure and sin will not be forgotten. Obedience therefore is the result, as in this instance, God Himself being the object before their souls. It was, in other words, a real turning of heart to the

Lord; and recovered from minding their own things, they now desired to give the Lord and His things the first place.

From what follows we learn that if the Lord chastises, or if He speaks in words of warning and admonition, it is only that He seeks to remove out of the way every barrier to His people's blessing. He had watched the effect of the prophet's words, and immediately the signs of repentance and self-judgment appeared He sends them a message of consolation-" Then spake Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord." (v. 13) The Spirit of God, as it would seem, amplifies the description of the prophet-the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message-to identify him with his Lord, and to assure the people of the certainty of the truth of his message. There is great significance, moreover, in the message itself. As we have seen, it was fear of their adversaries that deterred the people from the work of building the Lord's house, and now the antidote is administered. How often do we read, for example, in Isaiah, "Fear not; I am with thee." And the Psalmist exclaims, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" Nothing indeed dissipates fear like the assurance of the Lord's presence. But if it is consolation it is also an encouragement, reminding the people that if the Lord called them to go forward in a path of danger, He Himself was in their midst, and would go before them, as He had done in the wilderness, to show them the way. What grace, what condescension, we may add, lies in such a message! These poor, feeble people had but ill responded to the Lord's faithfulness n restoring them from their captivity, and yet, spite of their unfaithfulness and backslidings, the moment their hearts are bowed before the message of the prophet the Lord with unwearied love declares, "I am with you." Yea, His heart is ever upon His people, and if He punish, it is that in their affliction they may seek Him early, so that He may return to them with the assurance of His love. If His people are indifferent to Him, He is never indifferent to them, and He is never satisfied until in the midst of His people He can rest in His love, and joy over them with singing. (See Zeph. 3:17)

In the next place we have power for work. We thus read: " 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 all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king." (vv. 14, 15) This statement presents two or three points of special interest and instruction. It should be noticed, first of all, that while the people had left off building, as described in Ezra, from fear of their enemies, before the decree was obtained to prohibit their work, they now recommenced their labors without waiting for the king's permission. Concerning this we quote the remarks of another: " Neither was it because the king's decree was brought them that they began again to build, but because they feared Jehovah, and feared not the king's command, as seeing Him who is invisible. God was not any more to be feared in the reign of Darius than in that of Cyrus or of Artaxerxes; but the source of their weakness was their having forgotten God.... All this shows us that, in ceasing to build the temple, Israel was in fault.... They hack no excuse for this, since even the king's commandment was on their side. That which they lacked was faith in God. When there was faith they dared to build, although there was a decree against it. The effect of this faith is to give rise to a decree in their favor, and that even through the intervention of their adversaries. It is good to trust in God. Blessed be His gracious name." 1We thus learn the supremacy of God's authority, and that all His people need concern themselves with in their path and service is the undoubted direction of His infallible Word. If God command, it is ours to obey; and we can leave it with Him to remove, as He did for the remnant, whatever obstacles may seem to lie in the way of obedience.

The source of the power for labor should also be observed. It was not in the people, but in the Lord. It was He who stirred up the spirit of His people, and constrained them to go forward in His service, even as He had in the first instance "raised" their spirit to go up from Babylon to Jerusalem with the object of rebuilding the temple. It takes us a long time to learn that there is no power but in the Lord, that in the Lord's work human energy, will, or perseverance not only go for nothing, but are also really barriers in the way of divine strength. As indeed was said to this same remnant, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zech. 4:6) Thus it is that when we are weak we are strong, because in the sense of our perfect weakness we are led to dependence on the Lord, and He can then display unhinderedly in and through us His own power. The perception of this truth puts our souls also into the right attitude for blessing; it leads our eyes upward, and keeps us waiting on the Lord in expectation.

And the place in which power comes is most instructive. It is not before but after obedience, and is connected moreover with the assurance of the Lord's presence in the midst of His people. The apprehension of this would dissipate the fallacy often entertained, and sometimes expressed, that we must wait for power in order to obedience. It is not so; but on obedience the Lord gives power; first, there must be the obedience of faith, and then power will be bestowed to walk in the divine paths. For example, when the Lord said to the man with the withered arm, " Stretch forth thy hand," he might have replied, " I have no power; " but with the spirit of obedience he hastened to comply with the command he had received, and he received strength, and was made whole. It is the same order in the account of the remnant in this scripture, and it is ever the same in the history of believers. To be in a right condition of soul is the one thing to be desired. This removes all difficulties, and makes it possible for the Lord to take us up and use us as the vessels of His will. Hence as soon as the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and did fear before the Lord, all was ready; for the Lord at once stepped in, and said, " I am with you; " and He stirred up their spirit to accomplish His purpose in building the temple.

The date, moreover, is given when they recommenced their work. It was in the four-and-twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king; i.e. twenty-three days after Haggai commenced to prophesy. (Verse 15 compared with verse 1) Three short weeks thus sufficed for the recovery of the people from their backsliding. When God acts in power His work is soon done, and His people are made to rejoice in His restoring grace and pardoning mercy. His delight in the obedience of His people is plainly seen from the record of the date. How yearningly He watches over His saints, and how minutely He notices the first movements of response to His word!

E. D.

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