

Encouraging the Temple Builders

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

—Haggai 2:4

THE DECREE OF CYRUS,

king of Persia, represented a great call to all the faithful of ancient Israel to leave Babylon, and return to Palestine and rebuild the Tem-

ple that had fallen down. Likewise, at the beginning of the harvest of this present Gospel Age there was a decree that went out to the faithful ones in mystical Babylon to come out of her—to rebuild the spiritual temple that had fallen down during the long period of the Dark Ages. This is referred to in Revelation 18:4,5,23, which reads, “I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee.”

Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra, and Nehemiah were all prophets who lived at the same time, and their

work was in connection with the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. The Temple and the city had been destroyed by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, nearly seventy years before and in keeping with God's punishments upon Israel for their unfaithfulness. The land itself was to lay idle during this same seventy-year period. The people of Israel were taken captive to Babylon, and there they developed a lifestyle that was quite comfortable. Apparently they were not oppressed, and so long as they obeyed the laws of Babylon they were able to prosper, both in numbers as well as temporally.

THE END OF THE SEVENTY YEARS

At the end of the seventy years, the time had come for the desolation of Jerusalem to end, and under the direction of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah, and the cooperation of King Cyrus of Persia, an edict went forth that the Israelites should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and the Temple. King Cyrus saw it as an opportunity to get the Jews out from under his direct responsibility as they were prospering more than his own people. These events are all recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Lord raised up Zerubbabel as a leader in Israel to perform this great task, through his appointment as governor of Judah by King Cyrus. The Israelites under Zerubbabel returned to Palestine and began the work of rebuilding. They worked diligently for a while, but then began to weary of the task. They had also begun to mingle with the other peoples of the area. Jewish men were marrying Gentile women, and they were living more or less among the Canaanites of the land. They began

spending a lot of time fixing up and beautifying their own houses that they dwelt in, leaving the work of the house of the LORD. Also, opposition to the rebuilding of the Temple began to grow, to the point that some of the other governors of the area formed a confederacy and wrote a letter to King Darius, urging him to stop the rebuilding work. These opposers remembered how that Temple represented the mighty power of Israel's kings that had so destroyed and conquered their peoples and kingdoms years before. For all these reasons, work on the Temple stopped for several years, with only the foundation having been completed.

About fifteen years after the initial work of rebuilding the Temple had begun, we find the setting for the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. They were prophets who dwelt in Judah at Jerusalem, and their prime concern was to encourage the people under the rule of Zerubbabel, the governor, to complete the rebuilding of the Temple. In Zechariah 8:3,9, they received instructions from the LORD. "Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built."

THESE EVENTS TYPICAL

The question might be raised as to why the Lord dealt with Israel as he did, especially since the

rebuilt Temple itself was later destroyed when Israel fell under the Roman yoke at the time of the Maccabean rebellion. We believe this roughly hundred year period of Jewish history was to provide in a prophetic and typical way one of the outstanding pictures of the Gospel Age and the building of New Jerusalem and a spiritual temple, to become God's habitation. There are many scriptures that directly tie in that period of Jewish history with time and events as they have unfolded during this present age, and especially during the harvest of this age.

First, we understand that Israel as a nation was a type, or representation, of the church—spiritual Israel. During the time that Israel had kings, God dealt with her as his special people. They made a lot of mistakes, they had good kings and bad kings, but as long as God dealt with them they continued to worship God to some extent in the Temple that Solomon had built. Israel, however, became very unfaithful, going into various forms of idolatry, to such an extent that the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah warned the people that God was going to destroy them if they did not reform. They continued in their sins, though, and God permitted Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, and to haul all the vessels of the Temple, as well as the people, back to Babylon.

THE GOSPEL AGE TEMPLE

This represents an important development in the history of the church of the Gospel Age. God dealt with the Early Church as his 'temple people' and the vessels of the Temple represent the doctrines

of truth, the doctrines of the Divine plan of the ages—God’s Word. Because of carelessness, and the sin and iniquity that came into the church after the apostles fell asleep, God permitted the temple structure—the organized church—to be taken captive by King Constantine of Rome, and he, like Nebuchadnezzar, set up his own temple, and he called it the Holy Roman Empire. The vessels of truth were brought in to this temple and, according to the Scriptures, were to be clothed in sackcloth until the harvest. “Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.”—II Chron. 36:7

Throughout the dark period of this present Gospel Age, there was a remnant of the true church existing as ‘captives’ in the Babylonish system. We remember Jesus, in his parable, said, let the wheat and the tares—the true church and the counterfeit church—“grow together until the harvest” at the end of the age. (Matt. 13:30) At the end of the age he said there was to be a separation and the true temple of God—the organization of the true church—would begin to be built, during troublous times. The faithful remnant down through the dark period of this age is well represented by the faithful remnant in Israel, Daniel, and the three Hebrew children during the long rule of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in Babylon.

The burden of God’s Word to the prophets in Israel at that time was to encourage the people to build a Temple for the Lord at Jerusalem. The burden of God’s Word to his people during this present age is also to build the temple of God. Let us notice

some scriptures. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God.” (I Cor. 3:16) “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” (Eph. 2:20-22) When this temple is completed beyond the veil, it will be opened in heaven for the blessing of the people. “The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament [covenant].”—Rev. 11:19

When Solomon’s Temple was dedicated, we read, “There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb.” (I Kings 8:9) Those tables of the Law Covenant represent the New Covenant that will bring blessings of life to all the people through the spiritual temple of God—our Lord and his glorified church.

THE TIME OF HARVEST

When the seventy years of foretold desolation of Jerusalem was about to end, God raised up two prophets in Israel—Ezra and Nehemiah—who instructed the people about leaving Babylon and going down to Jerusalem and rebuilding the city and the Temple. Likewise, as the Gospel Age began to draw to a close the Lord’s people were instructed to leave Babylon, to ‘come out of her,’ and begin the work of harvest—to rebuild the temple of God that had fallen down. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. . . . And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be

heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.”—Rev. 18:4,23

The time had come for the true wheat—who had the light of the candlestick—to separate from Babylon. The doctrines of Truth also had been hidden in the sackcloth of error throughout the age, and when the time of harvest came it was important for those vessels to be returned to the true temple of God. “In the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar [Zerubbabel], whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.”—Ezra 5:13-15

There were many who began to see more clearly certain features of the Truth at the beginning of the harvest of this present Gospel Age, and a faithful servant was specially used by the Lord to bring these vessels of Truth out of the sackcloth and pollution of the mystical temple of Babylon. This servant laid them straight, brought them all into focus with the length and breadth of God’s character of love, justice, wisdom, and power—the beautiful ‘Divine plan of the ages.’

The decree by Cyrus, King of Persia, that the Temple and Jerusalem were to be rebuilt, was carefully

arranged by God beforehand. We read in Isaiah 44:27,28, "That saith to the deep, Be dry, [Euphrates River] and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." This was prophesied by Isaiah about two hundred years before Cyrus even lived—and the record of its fulfillment is in Ezra 1:1,2, when the decree went forth from Cyrus. This is a reference to the drying up of the Euphrates River, allowing the army of the Medes and Persians to walk into Babylon on the dry riverbed and overthrow Babylon in one night.

HAGGAI'S PROPHETIC TESTIMONY

We previously noted that Haggai's prophecy dates from a period about fifteen years after the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity. The people had started off well the first few years and the foundation of the Temple had been laid. But it appears that they had become discouraged and lukewarm toward the work of completing the Temple, to the extent that very little work was being done on the Temple at all. "Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? 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. . . . Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came

to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.”—Hag. 1:3-6,9-11

HARVEST SIFTINGS AND TESTINGS

Considering this current harvest period, we note the enthusiasm and the sacrificial love that characterized the early work of the harvest. Surely the foundation work of the harvest church had been well prepared through the zeal of the brethren in those early years. Then, however, came a number of discouraging events that nearly brought to a halt the preparation of God’s spiritual temple. There came a gradual replacement of most all the important doctrines of Truth with so-called ‘new light.’ This new light destroyed the doctrine of the ransom; it relegated the doctrine of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus to a back burner; it even began to destroy the moral teachings of the Bible—high moral standards and developing a Christlike character no longer was considered essential to one’s spiritual life. Faith was replaced by works—the doctrine of fear was rampant. The doctrines of God’s grace and love were put into the background, and the doctrine of the Second Death was magnified and loomed up prominently

in the teachings of some. A great pall of fear and suspicion enveloped the Truth movement. Brethren were judging brethren, and it was accepted that anyone who resisted any of the edicts of the central authority were, as evil servants, consigned to the Second Death, as were most of the people throughout the world, who were judged as 'goats.'

In God's program for this harvest period of the Gospel Age, it was necessary for the hearts of all the professed people of God to be tested that he might see who are truly his. The test of love and faithfulness to the Lord was the issue at stake. Haggai 1:5 states, "Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways." The Hebrew word 'consider' here means 'set your heart on your ways' (*Marginal Translation*). During the harvest, indeed the hearts of the brethren were being tested and the Lord allowed a spiritual drought to rest over the land—the Truth movement.

A REMNANT STIRRED UP

Going back to the prophecy of Haggai, we see that God did not forsake his people, but simply was giving them time to 'consider their ways.' Verse 2 of the second chapter indicates that only a residue of the people were stirred up sufficiently to return to the work of the Temple. The majority chose to remain in their own sealed houses. However, it was enough—this faithful remnant bound themselves together and completed the work and the Temple was finished. It took much longer than would seem necessary because so few had returned to the work—but it was completed.

Transferring this thought to this Gospel Age harvest—God had not forsaken his dear people as it may have seemed—but was giving them a chance to ‘consider their ways’—to set their hearts on their ways—and in due time the spirit of the Lord again began to direct his people, and there was a great revival in the land. The Lord was saying, “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.” (Hag. 1:7,8) That revival may well be marked at the beginning by a group of brethren that began to meet in Pittsburgh in 1929, and that same year sponsored a convention in October. Interestingly enough, this convention was held in the old Bible House Chapel where the ministry of Truth had been carried on for so long a time in the early years of the present harvest.

These brethren had one concern—to return to the work of the temple, to begin once again to project the High Calling of God as the central theme of God’s message to his people—to return once again to a proper view of restitution for all—to begin once again the work of preparation of their hearts and minds as ‘living stones’ through the developing of a Christlike character in which love, not fear, would be the motivating force in their lives. Though it was only a small beginning—a remnant, or residue of faithful ones as Haggai 2:2 points out—it was the Lord’s work, and could not fail. The message to the brethren at that first convention in Pittsburgh was indeed the message of Haggai 2:4, “Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, . . . and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts.”

THE TEMPLE BUILDING WORK CONTINUES

Many decades have passed since these events took place. Thankfully, the Lord's work has continued. The High Calling, the ransom, restitution hope for all, the work of character development—the proclaiming of all these important elements of our faith continues. The sowing of the seeds of Truth still goes on even today through the collective working together of the brethren in many ways, and as each ecclesia feels the direction of the Lord in their particular circumstances and opportunities.

The building up and nourishing of the spiritual life of the church is of paramount importance—the development of a Christlike character, in which love itself is the predominant influence. The entire commission of the church is outlined in Isaiah 61:1-3, where it is shown to include a ministry designed to reach and nourish Christians, as well as to give a message to the mourning ones of the world—and finally to “proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God.” Proclaiming the ‘day of vengeance’ comes under the hand of general witness work, being merely an up-to-date application of the Truth message to present world conditions. We are not commissioned to pronounce vengeance upon the world. We are not to smite the people. They are being smitten by the great Time of Trouble, and are mourning because of it. Our privilege is to explain the cause of their mourning, and thus to comfort them. We are to tell them about the silver lining beyond the trouble of our day—when the ‘desire of all nations’ shall come—when this temple class will be complete, beyond the veil, and the glory of the Lord shall fill this temple.

FINAL SHAKING AND THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

According to the Prophet Haggai, we are standing just before this great transition, when the winds of Armageddon will be unleashed to rid the earth of all sin and unrighteousness, and then the wonderful kingdom of Christ will be established throughout all the earth. Concerning this we read, “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.” (Hag. 2:6,7) There will not be a corner of this world, no matter how remote, that will not be touched with the shaking of all things—the ecclesiastical ‘heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land.’ To further emphasize how worldwide this shaking will be, he added, ‘I will shake all nations.’ This suggests that Armageddon will finally conclude in a state of total anarchy, ‘every one by the sword of his brother.’

This suffering and trouble will be permitted only so long as is necessary to accomplish God’s purpose in the earth—and he has promised to cut those days short, lest all flesh be destroyed. The Prophet Haggai tells us of the wonderful hope that awaits all mankind. The ‘desire of all nations’—to live in peace, in happiness, and in good health, will surely come when the glory of God fills his temple and the blessings begin to flow out to the people. The blessings of “this latter house,” this spiritual temple, will be greater than of the former temple—made with literal stones—and it surely will be able to accomplish God’s eternal purpose for man.—vs. 9

LET US CONSIDER

Finally, the prophet seems to have a special and final word to the Lord's people, living at this particular time. "Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider it." (Hag. 2:18) Let us 'consider'—'set your heart upon'—the beautiful truths of God's plan that he gave to the temple builders when the foundation was laid at the beginning of the harvest. Let us never depart from those beautiful truths. May we remember the comforting message of the Lord to you and me, and all the dear consecrated of the Lord living at this particular time—our theme text Haggai 2:4. "Be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you."

"Thus speaketh 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 s