

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, after the preamble of the prophecy, we have,

I. A reproof of the people of the Jews for their dilatoriness and slothfulness in building the temple, which had provoked God to contend with them by the judgment of famine and scarcity, with an exhortation to them to resume that good work and to prosecute it in good earnest (v. 1-11).

II. The good success of this sermon, appearing in the people's return and close application to that work, wherein the prophet, in God's name, animated and encouraged them, assuring them that God was with them (v. 12-15).

~~300~~ HAGGAI 1:1-11

THE JEWS REPROVED

It was the complaint of the Jews in Babylon that they *saw not their signs*, and there was *no more prophet* (~~3749~~ Psalm 74:9), which was a just judgment upon them for mocking and misusing the prophets. We read of no prophets they had in their return, as they had in their coming out of Egypt, ~~3023~~ Hosea 12:13. God stirred them up immediately by his Spirit to exert themselves in that escape (~~3105~~ Ezra 1:5); for, though God makes use of prophets, he needs them not, he can do his work without them. But the lamp of Old-Testament prophecy shall yet make some bright and glorious efforts before it expire; and Haggai is the first that appears under the character of a special messenger from heaven, when the *word of the Lord* had been long *precious* (as when prophecy began, ~~3081~~ 1 Samuel 3:1) and *there had been no open vision*. In the reign of Darius Hystaspes, the third of the Persian kings, in the second year of his reign, this prophet was sent; and the word of the Lord came to him, and came by him to the leading men among the Jews, who are here named, v. 1. The chief governor,

1. In the state; that was *Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel*, of the house of David, who was commander-in-chief of the Jews, in their return out of captivity.

2. In the church; and that was *Joshua the son of Josedech*, who was now *high priest*. They were great men and good men, and yet were to be stirred up to their duty when they grew remiss. What the people also were faulty in they must be told of, that they might use their power and interest for the mending of it. The prophets, who were extraordinary messengers, did not go about to set aside the ordinary institutions of magistracy and ministry, but endeavoured to render both more effectual for the ends to which they were appointed, for both ought to be supported. Now observe,

I. What the sin of the Jews was at this time, v. 2. As soon as they came up out of captivity they set up an altar for sacrifice, and within a year after laid the foundations of a temple, ^{<R10>} Ezra 3:10. They then seemed very forward in it, and it was likely enough that the work would be done suddenly; but, being served with a prohibition some time after from the Persian court, and charged not to go on with it, they not only yielded to the force, when they were actually under it, which might be excused, but afterwards, when the violence of the opposition had abated, they continued very indifferent to it, had no spirit nor courage to set about it again, but seemed glad that they had a pretence to let it stand still. Though those who are employed for God may be driven off from their work by a storm, yet they must return to it as soon as the storm is over. These Jews did not do so, but continued loitering until they were afresh reminded of their duty. And that which they suggested one to another was, *The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built*; that is,

1. “Our time has not come for the doing of it, because we have not yet recovered, after our captivity; our losses are not repaired, nor have we yet got before-hand in the world. It is too great an undertaking for new beginners in the world, as we are; let us first get our own houses up, before we talk of building churches, and in the mean time let a bare altar serve us, as it did our father Abraham.” They did not say that they would not build a temple at all, but, “Not yet; it is all in good time.” Note, Many a good work is put by by being put off, as Felix put off the prosecution of his convictions to a more convenient season. They do not say that they will never repent, and reform, and be religious, but, “Not yet.” And so the great business we were sent into the world to do is not done, under pretence that it is all in good time to go about it.

2. “God's time has not come for the doing of it; for (say they) the restraint laid upon us by authority in a legal way is not broken off, and therefore we

ought not to proceed, though there be a present connivance of authority.”
Note, There is an aptness in us to misinterpret providential discouragements in our duty, as if they amounted to a discharge from our duty, when they are only intended for the trial and exercise of our courage and faith. It is bad to neglect our duty, but it is worse to vouch Providence for the patronising of our neglects.

II. What the judgments of God were by which they were punished for this neglect, v. 6, 9-11. They neglected the building of God's house, and put that off, that they might have time and money for their secular affairs. They desired to be excused from such an expensive piece of work under this pretence, that they must provide for their families; their children must have meat and portions too, and, until they have got before-hand in the world, they cannot think of rebuilding the temple. Now, that the punishment might answer to the sin, God by his providence kept them still behind-hand, and that poverty which they thought to prevent by not building the temple God brought upon them for not building it. They were sensible of the smart of the judgment, and every one complained of the unseasonable weather, the great losses they sustained in their corn and cattle, and the decay of trade; but they were not sensible of the cause of the judgment, and the ground of God's controversy with them. They did not, or would not, see and own that it was for their putting off the building of the temple that they lay under these manifest tokens of God's displeasure; and therefore God here gives them notice that this is that for which he contended with them. Note, We need the help of God's prophets and ministers to expound to us, not only the judgments of God's mouth, but the judgments of his hands, that we may understand his mind and meaning in his rod as well as in his word, to discover to us not only wherein we have offended God, but wherein God shows himself offended at us. Let us observe,


1. How God contended with them. He did not send them into captivity again, nor bring a foreign enemy upon them, as they deserved, but took the correcting of them into his own hands; for his mercies are great.

(1.) He that *gives seed to the sower* denied his blessing upon the *seed sown*, and then it never prospered; they had nothing, or next to nothing, from it. *They sowed much* (v. 6), kept a great deal of ground in tillage, which, they might expect, would turn to a better advantage than usual, because their land had long *lain fallow* and had *enjoyed its sabbaths*.

Having sown much, they looked for much from it, enough to spend and enough to spare too; but they were disappointed: *They bring in little*, very little (v. 6); when they have made the utmost of it, *it comes to little* (v. 9); it did not yield as they expected. ^{<350>}Isaiah 5:10, *The seed of a homer shall yield an ephah*, a bushel's sowing shall yield a peck. Note, Our expectations from the creature are often most frustrated when they are most raised; and then, when we look for much, it comes to little, that our expectation may be from God only, in whom it will be outdone. We are here told how they came to be disappointed (v. 10): *The heaven over you is stayed from dew*; he that has the key of the clouds in his hands shut them up, and withheld the rain when the ground called for it, the former or the latter rain, and then of course *the earth is stayed from her fruit*; for, if the heaven be as brass, the earth is as iron. The corn perhaps came up very well, and promised a very plentiful crop, but, for want of the dews at earing-time, it never filled, but was parched with the heat of the sun and withered away. The restored captives, who had long been kept bare in Babylon, thought they should never want when they had got their own land in possession again and had that at command. But what the better are they for it, unless they had the clouds at command too? God will make us sensible of our necessary and constant dependence upon him, throughout all the links in the chain of second causes, from first to last; so that we can at no time say, "Now we have no further occasion for God and his providence." See ^{<302>}Hosea 2:21. But God not only withheld the cooling rains, but he appointed the scorching heats (v. 11): *I called for a drought upon the land*, ordered the weather to be extremely hot, and then the fruits of the earth were burnt up. See how every creature is that to us which God makes it to be, either comfortable or afflictive, serving us or incommoding us. Nothing among the inferior creatures is so necessary and beneficial to the world as the heat of the sun; it is that which puts life into the plants and *renews the face of the earth* at spring. And yet, if that go into an extreme, it undoes all again. Our Creator is our best friend; but, if we make him our enemy, we make the best friends we have among the creatures our enemies too. This drought God called for, and it came at the call; as the winds and the waves, so the rays of the sun, obey him. It was universal, and the ill effects of it were general; it was a drought *upon the mountains*, which, lying high, were first affected with it. The mountains were their pasture-grounds, and used to be *covered over with flocks*, but now there was no grass for them. It was *upon the corn, the new wine, and the oil*; all failed through the extremity of the hot weather, even *all that*

the ground brought forth; it all withered. Nay, it had a bad influence upon men; the hot weather enfeebled some, and made them weary and faint, and spent their spirits; it inflamed others, and put them into fevers. It should seem, it brought diseases upon cattle too. In short, it spoiled *all the labour of their hands*, which they hoped to eat of and maintain their families by. Note, Meat for the belly is meat that perishes, and, if we labour for that only, we are in danger of losing our labour; but we are sure *our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* if we labour for *the meat which endures to eternal life*. For the *hand of the diligent*, in the business of religion, will infallibly *make rich*, whereas, in the business of this life, the most solicitous and the most industrious often lose the labour of their hands. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.*

(2.) He that gives *bread to the eater* denied his blessing upon the bread they ate, and then that did not nourish them. The cause of the withering and failing of the corn in the field was visible — it was for want of rain; but, besides that, there was a secret blast and curse attending that which they brought home.

[1.] When they had it in the barn they were not sure of it: *I did blow upon it, saith the Lord of hosts* (v. 9), and that withered it, as buds are sometimes blasted in the spring by a nipping frost, which we see the effects of, but know not the way of. *I did blow it away*; so the margin reads it. When men have heaped wealth together God can scatter it with the breath of his mouth as easily as we can blow away a feather. Note, We can never be sure of any thing in this world; it is exposed, not only when it is in the field, but when it is housed; for there *moth and rust corrupt*,  Matthew 6:19. And, if we would have the comfort and continuance of our temporal enjoyments, we must make God our friend; for, if he bless them to us, they are blessings indeed, but if he blow upon them we can expect no good from them: they *make themselves wings and fly away*.

[2.] When they had it upon the board it was not that to them that they expected: “*You eat, but you have not enough*, either because the meat is washy, and not satisfying, or because the stomach is greedy, and not satisfied. You eat, but you have no good digestion, and so are not nourished by it, nor does it answer the end, or you have not enough because you are not content, nor think it enough. *You drink*, but are not cooled and refreshed by it; *you are not filled with drink*; you are stinted, and have not enough to quench your thirst. *The new wine is cut off from*

your mouth (²⁰¹⁵ Joel 1:5), nay, and you *drink your water too by measure and with astonishment*; you have no comfort of it, because you have no plenty of it, but are still in fear of falling short.”

[3.] That which they had upon their backs did them no good there: “*You clothe yourselves, but there is none warm*; your clothes soon wear out, and wax old, and grow thin, because God blows upon them,” contrary to what Israel’s did in the wilderness when God blessed them. It is God that *makes our garments warm upon us*, when he *quiets the earth*, ⁸⁵⁷¹⁷ Job 37:17.

[4.] That which they had in their bags, which was not laid out, but laid up, they were not sure of: “*He that earns wages by hard labour, and has it paid him in ready current money, puts it into a bag with holes*; it drops through, and wastes away insensibly. Every thing is so scarce and dear that they spend their money as fast as they get it.” Those that lay up their treasure on earth put it into a bag with holes; they lose it as they go along, and those that come after them pick it up. But, if we lay up our treasure in heaven, we provide for ourselves *bags that wax not old*, ⁴¹²³ Luke 12:33.

2. Observe wherefore God thus contended with them, and stopped the current of the favours promised them at their return (³¹²⁴ Joel 2:24); they provoked him to do it: *It is because of my house that is waste*. This is the quarrel God has with them. The foundation of the temple is laid, but the building does not go on. “Every man *runs to his own house*, to finish that, and to make that convenient and fine, and no care is taken about the Lord’s house; and therefore it is that God crosses you thus in all your affairs, to testify his displeasure against you for that neglect, and to bring you to a sense of your sin and folly.” Note, As those who seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof shall not only find them, but are most likely to have other things added to them, so those who neglect and postpone those things will not only lose them, but will justly have other things taken away from them. And if God cross us in our temporal affairs, and we meet with trouble and disappointment, we shall find this is the cause of it, the work we have to do for God and our own souls is left undone, and we *seek our own things more than the things of Jesus Christ*, ³¹²¹ Philippians 2:21.

III. The reproof which the prophet gives them for their neglect of the temple-work (v. 4): “*Is it time for you, O you! to dwell in your ceiled houses*, to have them beautified and adorned, and your families settled in

them?" They were not content with walls and roofs for necessity, but they must have for gaiety and fancy. "It is high time," says one, "that my house were wainscoted." "It is high time," says another, "that mine were painted." And God's house, all this time, *lies waste*, and nothing is done at it. "What!" says the prophet, "is it time that you should have your humour pleased, and not time you should have your God pleased?" How much was their disposition the reverse of David's, who could not be easy in his *house of cedar* while the *ark of God* was *in curtains* (¹⁰⁷2 Samuel 7:2), and of Solomon's, who built the temple of God before he built a palace for himself. Note, Those are very much strangers to their own interest who prefer the conveniences and ornaments of the temporal life before the absolute necessities of the spiritual life, who are full of care to enrich their own houses, while God's temple in their hearts lies waste, and nothing is done for it or in it.

IV. The good counsel which the prophet gives to those who thus despised God, and whom God was therefore justly displeased with.

1. He would have them reflect: *Now therefore consider your ways*, v. 5 and again v. 7. "Be sensible of the hand of God gone out against you, and enquire into the reason; think what you have done that has provoked God thus to break in upon your comforts; and think what you will do to testify your repentance, that God may return in mercy to you." Note, It is the great concern of every one of us to consider our ways, to *set our hearts to our ways* (so the word is), to *think on our ways* (¹¹⁹Psalm 119:59), to *search* and *try* them (³⁴⁰Lamentations 3:40), to *ponder the path of our feet* (¹⁰⁶Proverbs 4:26), to apply our minds with all seriousness to the great and necessary duty of self-examination, and communing with our own hearts concerning our spiritual state, our sins that are past, and our duty for the future; for sin is what we must answer for, duty is what we must do; about these therefore we must be inquisitive, rather than about events, which we must leave to God. Many are quick-sighted to pry into other people's ways who are very careless of their own; whereas our concern is to *prove every one his own work*, ⁸¹⁶Galatians 6:4.

2. He would have them reform (v. 8): "*Go up to the mountain, to Lebanon, and bring wood*, and other materials that are wanting, *and build the house* with all speed; put it off no longer, but set to it in good earnest." Note, Our considering our ways must issue in the amending of whatever we find amiss in them. If any duty has been long neglected, that is not a

reason why it should still be so, but why now at length it should be revived; better late than never. For their encouragement to apply in good earnest to this work, he assures them,

(1.) That they should be accepted of him in it: *Build the house, and I will take pleasure in it*; and that was encouragement enough for them to apply to it with alacrity and resolution, and to go through with it, whatever it cost them. Note, Whatever God will take pleasure in, when it is done, we ought to take pleasure in the doing of, and to reckon that inducement enough to set about it, and go on with it in good earnest; for what greater satisfaction can we have in our own bosoms than in contributing any thing towards that which God will take pleasure in? It ought to be the top of our ambition to be *accepted of the Lord*, ^{<418B>}2 Corinthians 5:9. Though they had foolishly neglected the house of God, yet, if at length they will resume the care of it, God will not remember against them their former neglects, but will take pleasure in the work of their hands. Those who have long deferred their return to God, if at length they return with all their heart, must not despair of his favour.

(2.) That he would be honoured by them in it: *I will be glorified, saith the Lord*. He will be served and worshipped in the temple when it is built, and sanctified in those that come nigh to him. It is worth while to bestow all possible care, and pains, and cost, upon that by which God may be glorified.

^{<5012>}HAGGAI 1:12-15

THE PEOPLE'S OBEDIENCE

As an ear-ring of gold (says Solomon), and *an ornament of fine gold*, so amiable, so acceptable, in the sight of God and man, *is a wise reprov-er upon an obedient ear*, ^{<4152>}Proverbs 25:12. The prophet here was a wise but faithful reprov-er, in God's name, and he met with an obedient ear. The foregoing sermon met with the desired success among the people, and their obedience met with due encouragement from God. Observe,

I. How the people returned to God in a way of duty. All those to whom that sermon was preached received the word in the love of it, and were wrought upon by it. Zerubbabel, the chief governor, did not think himself

above the check and command of God's word. He was a man that had been eminently useful in his day, and serviceable to the interest of the church, yet did not plead his former merits in answer to this reproof for his present remissness, but submitted to it. Joshua's business, as high priest, was to teach, and yet he was willing himself to be taught, and willingly received admonition and instruction. *The remnant of the people* (and the whole body of them was but a remnant, a very few of the many thousands of Israel) also were very pliable; they all *obeyed the voice of the Lord their God*, and bowed their neck to the yoke of his commands, and it is here recorded to their honour that they did so, v. 12. Their father said, *Sons, go work to-day in my vineyard*, in my temple; and they not only said, *We go, sir*, but they went immediately.

1. They looked upon the prophet to be the Lord's messenger, and the word he delivered to be the Lord's message to them; and therefore received it *not as the word of man, but as the word of Almighty God*; they obeyed his words, *as the Lord their God had sent him*, v. 12. Note, In attending to God's ministers we must have an eye to him that sent them, and receive them for his sake, while they act according to their commission.

2. They *did fear before the Lord*. Prophecy was a new thing with them; they had had no special messenger from heaven for a great while, and therefore now that they had one, and but one, they paid an extraordinary regard to him; whereas their fathers, who had many prophets, mocked and misused them. It is sometimes so; when good preaching is most scarce it does most good, whereas the manna that is rained in plenty is loathed as *light bread*. And, because they so readily received this prophet, God, within a month or two after, raised them up another, ³⁰⁰Zechariah 1:1. They *feared before the Lord*; they had a great regard to the divine authority and a great dread of the divine wrath, and were of those that *trembled at God's word*. The judgments of God which they had been under, though very severe, had not prevailed to make them fear before the Lord, until the word of God was sent to expound his providences, and then they feared. Note, A holy fear of God will have a great influence upon our obedience to him. *Serve the Lord with fear*; if we fear him not, we shall not serve him.

3. *The Lord stirred up* their spirits, v. 14.

(1.) He excited them to their duty, and put it into their hearts to go about it. Note, Then the word of God has its success when God by his grace stirs up

our spirits to comply with it; and without that grace we should remain stupid and utterly averse to every thing that is good. It is in the day of a divine power that we are made willing.

(2.) He encouraged them in their duty, and with those encouragements enlarged their hearts, ⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾Psalm 119:32. When they heard the word they feared; but, lest they should sink under the weight of that fear, God stirred them up, and made them cheerful and bold to encounter the difficulties they might meet with. Note, When God has work to do, he will either find or make men fit to do it, and stir them up to it.

4. They applied to their work with all possible vigour: *They came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts their God.* Every one, according as his capacity or ability was, lent a hand, some way or other, to further that good work; and this they did with an eye to God as the *Lord of hosts*, and as their God, the God of Israel. The consideration of God's sovereign dominion in the world by his providence, and his covenant-relation to his people by his grace, should stir up our spirits to act for him, and for the advancement of the interest of his kingdom among men, to the utmost of our power.

5. They did this speedily; it was but on the first day of the sixth month that Haggai preached them this sermon, and by the twenty-fourth of the same month, little more than three weeks after, they were all busy working in the house of the Lord their God, v. 15. To show that they were ashamed of their delays hitherto, now that they were convinced and called they were resolved to delay no longer, but to strike while the iron was hot, and to set about the work while they were under convictions. Note, Those that have lost time have need to redeem time; and the longer we have loitered in that which is good the more haste we should make when we are convinced of our folly.

II. How God met them in a way of mercy. The same prophet that brought them the reproof brought them a very comforting encouraging word (v. 13): *Then spoke Haggai, the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message, in his name, and as from him, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.* That is all he has to say, and that is enough; as that word of Christ to his disciples is (⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾Matthew 28:20), "*Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. I am with you,* that is, I will forgive your neglects hitherto, and they shall not be remembered against you; I will remove the judgments you

have been under for those neglects, and will appear for you, as I have in them appeared against you. *I am with you* to protect you against your enemies that bear ill-will to your work, and to prosper you, and to give you success in it — with you to strengthen your hands, and bless the work of them, without which blessing those labour in vain that build.” Note, Those that work for God have God with them; and, if he be for us, who can be against us? If he be with us, what difficulty can stand before us?