

## HAGGAI and the rebuilding of the temple

As we open the pages of Haggai we move on through 90 years. The people of Judah have been marched off into captivity in Babylon, have lived there for a lifetime, and have returned under the amnesty of Cyrus king of Persia in 539 BC. Arriving back at a ruined Jerusalem, they lay with great rejoicing the foundation of a new Temple, glad to be home. But another 20 years crawl by, and somehow, as we have already seen in the book of Ezra, the Temple is still unfinished. Enemies obstruct the work. Their own farms and families take priority, and the king's taxes have to be paid. Weeds grow over the foundation stone that was laid with such rejoicing.

It is the second year of Darius the Great. Haggai springs into action. His whole book covers a period of only four months, but in that time he starts the ball rolling again. The lethargy of the people, and their preoccupation with their own affairs, is a reproach to the God who has given them back their land. With the accession of a new king, the political climate is favourable. It is time to start building.

First Haggai insists they needed to change their approach. They had been earning wages, only to put them into a bag with a metaphorical hole in the bottom (Haggai 1:6). If they put God's business first, then God would see that their crops flourished, and they would have plenty for themselves. It is the same message Jesus taught – *“seek first the Kingdom of God”*, he said, *“and all the other things will be added unto you”* (Luke 12:31). Of course, it takes faith to trust God to look after us, but faith is what the gospel is all about. Twenty three days later, the people started work on the Temple (see Haggai 1:15).

One month later (see chapter 2:1) Haggai was back again. Some of the people were complaining that the temple they were

building was a poor imitation of the magnificent one that the Babylonians had destroyed. Their morale was dropping. Was it really worth continuing? The prophet's comforting reply is a lesson for all ages. Gold and silver mean nothing to God, he said. Whatever we give to Him belongs to Him anyway. It is the fact we are labouring for Him that matters.

*“For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts.”* (Haggai 2:6-9)

How could the latter glory of the house they were building be greater than Solomon's? The answer is that whatever we do for God is filed away for the Day of Judgment. When our lives are reviewed, it is not how much money we donated that will be important, but the fact we left God's house better than it was before we came along. God's house, ultimately, as the Apostle Peter says, is made up of living stones. The Temple in which he will dwell is not made of bricks and timber. It is a living church, with his Son as the cornerstone. As we labour for him now, we are preparing for the glory that will fill our bodies with eternal light in the day when Jesus will come to shake all nations.