

## **The Internal Sense Of The Word - Part 5: The rebuilding of the Temple after the Exile.**

In my last talk, one of a series on the subject of the internal sense of the Word, I spoke on the story of Daniel in the lions' den; a story which is set against the background of Israel's captivity in Babylon. Only a youth at the time, Daniel was one of thousands of captives taken to Babylon and resettled there after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 587 B.C. Of those captives many succumbed to the pressures and became integrated into the Babylonian community, but a hard core resolutely maintained their national and religious identity and waited for the day when their exile would end and they could return to their homeland.

Unexpectedly, and after a period of only fifty years, the opportunity for return came when Persia conquered Babylon. Though not in large numbers, many made for home, dreaming of a future of wealth and prosperity when again their nation, Israel, would be strong and nations would pay tribute to it. But this was not to be. As has been said "The glowing picture of the triumphant new exodus and the establishment of Jehovah's rule in Zion bore no resemblance to realities". (John Bright, *A History of Israel*). Naturally, other people had moved on to their lands during the exile and did not readily give them up. Much of it, in any case, was in ruins. And a succession of poor seasons and partial crop failures left many destitute and without adequate food or clothing. Between poverty and discouragement their faith faltered and hope drained away.

It was at this stage that the prophet Haggai rose up and spoke to the people. Though it is uncertain, Haggai was himself, in all probability, an exile returned from Babylon, and he chided the people, pointing out that their hardships were due to their indifference regarding the Temple of the Lord. "The abundance you expected" he said to them, "proved to be little. When you brought the harvest in, my breath spoilt it. And why saith the Lord of hosts? Because while my House lies in ruins, you are busy with your own, each one of you." (Chapter 1, verse 9).

Haggai's words by no means fell on deaf ears. "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." (Chapter 1, 13).

But discouragement seems soon to have set in. As the structure arose they saw how poor a building it was going to be by comparison with what had existed before. Some remembered the beauty and glory of the Temple as it had been before the Exile or had, at least, heard others talk about it. So once again Haggai spoke to them, building visions and rekindling hopes. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?" he asked, "and how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong... For thus says the Lord of hosts; Yet once, and in a little while, I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I shall shake all nations, and the desirable things of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts.... The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give peace." (Ch. 2, verses 3, 6, 7, 9),

But such promises were never fulfilled. These hopes never materialised. Those ancient days of wealth and power never returned. Though the Temple was rebuilt, no wealth flowed into it. And for many people the prophecy of Haggai would seem to speak only of the unfulfilled expectations of people long ago.

On the surface, this is so. And we cannot wonder that people question its value and importance to them today. How is it that the words of a prophet, so obviously directed to certain conditions and circumstances such as existed centuries ago, have meaning and relevance to man today?

As with the statements and stories of the Lord's Word in general, the prophecy of Haggai contains an internal, spiritual meaning. Do you remember the passage from Swedenborg I quoted in the previous talk? "The Christian world" he wrote, "is as yet profoundly ignorant of the fact that all things in the Word, both in general and in particular, indeed, the very smallest particulars down to the least iota, signify and enfold within them spiritual and heavenly things". (*Arcana Caelestia* 2). Truly, the Lord is speaking to us through the words and promises of Haggai the prophet. But His message for us lies within, at a deeper level, which in the Revelation given through Swedenborg is now disclosed to us.

Haggai's prophecy concerns the rebuilding of the Temple, in its time the most sacred of all places in the thinking of the people and the very dwelling place on earth of the Lord. A lengthy section in the first Book of Kings is given over to a description of its construction. Later we read of repairs to it under Josiah the king and here, in Haggai, of its rebuilding after the return from exile.

The Temple represents the Church, particularly the Church in a person, built of the truths one knows and lives by, and which is the dwelling place of the Lord with us. (*Apocalypse Explained* 220).

"Everyone" wrote Swedenborg "who lives in the good of charity and faith is a Church, and is hence called 'a temple' and also 'a house of God'".

(*Arcana Caelestia* 6637<sup>5</sup>).

He also wrote that "every regenerated person is a temple of the Lord". (*Arcana Caelestia* 40<sup>2</sup>). People who are striving to become regenerate are building a temple for the Lord to dwell in their lives. And it is this temple, this dwelling place of the Lord in a person's life, with which the prophecy, in its internal or spiritual meaning, is concerned.

In the early stages, and particularly as children and young people that temple, that dwelling place of the Lord, is a very beautiful thing. Children are full of trust in the Lord. They readily believe, and He is very real to them. But then Babylon, which represents the love of self and trust in one's own intelligence, enters in. Things which have been very meaningful are reexamined and often cast aside. Other forces enter into one's life and thinking; forces which can reduce to a shambles the trust and faith of former times. Indeed, this can happen time and time again. It happens most dramatically, and most noticeably, in early adulthood; but worldliness, selfcentredness and false thinking recur to wreck their devastation upon us.

In time there can be deliverance from captivity to such things, and then commences the task of rebuilding, of reconstructing the Lord's dwelling place in our lives. And here is where discouragement so easily enters in. It may seem to us that thoughts and attitudes, as well as feelings, which have been ravaged and laid waste by evils and falsities entering our lives, can never be beautiful again and fit to welcome the Lord once more. The effort to rebuild can seem altogether too much and we can become dispirited and dejected. But the Lord through Haggai speaks to us, and His message of encouragement is that the rebuilt temple can outshine what has been before. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the Lord of hosts: and in this place I will give peace."

"The Lord" as we read earlier "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 remnants of the people, and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts." (Ch. 1, 14).

Zerubbabel represents our understanding of the Lord's truth. Joshua represents the will to obey it. People mean the practical efforts we make to obey it in day to day affairs. With all three combining together, the work can be done and the Temple rebuilt. We must go to the Lord's Word and renew our understanding of what is said there. We must resolve to obey it. And then carry that resolution into everyday life.

The prophecy of Haggai contains a promise which can be fulfilled in the life of everyone of us. Though the Lord's dwelling place with us can be reduced to a ruin, as it is from time to time, when evil and falsity enters in, it can be rebuilt and, in the end, be a worthier place for Him.

That's not to say that it will happen overnight or that we won't have times of discouragement when, like the returned exiles we will want to lay down our tools. This will happen. We know that they, at times, felt it more important to turn to what they considered to be more pressing things. Just as we do. We have to make our way in the world and establish our careers, we tell ourselves. And, in the process, the spiritual side of life comes to be neglected. Here again, the returned exiles were easily put off and discouraged. And that, too, is just like us. But the promise is that the rebuilding can be done and that genuine effort will, ultimately, meet with success.

"The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts: and in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:9.

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