

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Haggai

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By

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A PREFACE BY THE AUTHOR

Setting the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, meant the dwelling of God in the midst of His people, reigning on them, sanctifying them, and filling their life with joy and gladness; of which they were deprived for decades in the land of captivity.

Zerubbabel came back from captivity together with 50,000 to rebuild the temple, and to give back to Israel her gladness in the Lord. But, facing resistance, some of them lost their enthusiasm, and everyone got preoccupied with building his own house, leaving the house of the Lord in ruins. This book came to provoke all of them to resume work; As though it is a divine call to every soul to regain in the Lord, her gladness of salvation through the dwelling of the Lord in her, and proclaiming her heart, a temple for the Lord, and her depths, a sanctuary for Him.

It is a divine talk, to admonish the soul, slothful to receive His kingdom inside her, and preoccupied with the things of this life.

(Father Tadros Y. Malaty)

AN INTRODUCTION

HAGGAI

Haggai:

❖ ‘Haggai’ is a Hebrew name meaning (Feasty); probably referring to the anticipation of the return from captivity with joy; Or because he was born on a day of feast. Anyway, his name came conforming to the content of this book, which, in its depths, is a call to a joyful life, or to an entrance into an incessant feast through the rebuilding the temple of the Lord in us by His Holy Spirit.

St. Jerome says: [‘Haggai’ means (joyful, or rejoicing); “*He who sows in tears, reaps in joy*” (Psalm 126: 5); He was preoccupied with rebuilding the temple¹].

❖ Haggai was born in the land of captivity. He ascended to Judah together with Zerubbabel during the first return from captivity 563 B.C. (Ezra 2: 1). He, Zechariah, and Malachi, are considered the prophets of the post-captivity era.

❖ Some believe that he was a priest, on account of that his greatest attention concentrated on the temple, giving us a new concept of its rebuilding. Although some others see in his words: “*Ask the priests concerning the law*” (2: 11), a sure proof that he was not, himself, a priest².

❖ Haggai practiced his prophetic task in about the year 520 B.C., the second year of the reign of Darius, the third Persian king; The same year in which the Chinese philosopher Confucius got famous. He started his work two months before the prophet Zechariah, with whom he was connected by a strong friendship, and a unity of goal; According to the Jewish tradition, both of them were buried in one tomb. Zechariah prophesied for three years, while Haggai prophesied only for three months and 24 days.

In the Talmud it came that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were all members in the great Sanhedrim³.

❖ Although he was influenced by the prophet Ezekiel on several aspects, Yet he was a man of action whose interest concentrated on rebuilding the temple; and did not share with the prophet Ezekiel his tendency toward visions {Ezekiel 1: 4}; practicing symbolic actions (Ezekiel 4); nor his poetic talents (Ezekiel 17, 19, 27, 28)⁴.

The circumstances prevailing around the prophet:

The prophet Haggai lived through the same circumstance of the prophet Zechariah, and bore his same feelings. We know how the pre-captivity prophets have often foreseen, and threatened captivation before it happened (568 B.C.). Although these prophecies were all realized, Yet God did not leave things that way; but through His prophets, he proclaimed beforehand, the return from the Babylonian captivity after 70 years (Jeremiah 25: 11, 12; Daniel 9: 2); Which was realized, as well, with the collapse of the Babylonian kingdom before the Persians; And when Cyrus King of Persia allowed

¹ Ep 53: 8.

² Jerome Biblical Comm, P388.

³ J.H. Raven: Introd. To O.T., P240.

⁴ Jerome Bib. Comm., p388.

Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Yet, after laying its foundations, the Samaritans opposed the builders (Ezra 4: 5), and, as we told in the introduction to the book of Zechariah, the work had to stop, for as long as 15 years, although there was no cancellation of the decree issued by king Cyrus. With the reign of King Darius, it was high time to resume work; Yet, the resistance which came anew, was not from outside, but from inside; as everyone got preoccupied with building his own house. Then the prophet Haggai, and the prophet Zechariah, two months after him, threatened the people, because of their slothfulness, and provoked them to concentrate on building the house of the Lord with strength and zeal of the heart.

Yet again, with the resumption of work, some elders who have seen the old temple, unfortunately started to dampen the enthusiasm of the builders, counting the new temple as nothing compared with the old one. And if it was not for the wisdom of the two prophets, the work would have stopped completely, and the joy would have turned into sadness through the spirit of despair invoked by those elders.

The goal of the prophet:

The role of the prophet Haggai was not only to provoke the people to rebuild the temple, but he brought them to deep spiritual concepts that touched their relationship with God on the inner level of the heart; The prophet made the following points clear:

1- Confirming of the principle “God should come first”. Getting preoccupied with rebuilding their own houses, disregarding the house of the Lord, reveals a very serious tendency on their part, to count God of secondary importance in their life! God does not dwell in houses, nor seek temporal glories; But He seeks to be the first in the life of His children; Having given them priority over His whole creation; they should pay Him back by showing equal love toward Him. If through His condescendence, He consents to have a temple among His people, it is to confirm His dwelling in their midst. Therefore it is befitting of them to care for His temple, as a sign of inner love, longing, and joy in God who dwells among them. God seeks no gold or silver. Not even the work itself, but He seeks to have their hearts as a dwelling place for Himself.

2- The prophet Haggai managed to move their thoughts away, not only from the stone building to the heart, as an inner home or the Lord; But also to reveal the glory of the new home that will be set through the incarnation of the Word of God; namely, through the appearance of “the Desire of all Nations”. By whose resurrection and ascension, He gave us the eternal glory in His temple, namely, His body. He spoke about this temple to the Jews, saying: “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (John 2: 19). Then the Evangelist goes on to say: “*Then the Jews said: ‘It has taken 46 years to build the temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’*. But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said that to them; and they believed” (John 20-22).

The divisions of the book:

This book embraces four prophecies uttered by the prophet:

1- The first prophecy (Ch. 1): He proclaimed on the first day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of king Darius; in which He rebukes the people on their forsaking the temple of the Lord, lying in ruin. This prophecy came with the required fruit; as everyone of them got back to work with zeal.

2-The second prophecy (2: 1-9): He proclaimed on the 21st day of the seventh month; in which he encourages the laborers to keep on working without feeling sad on the glory of the old temple; Confirming the rejection of the thoughts, destructive to the soul; And proclaiming the appearance of a new temple, exalted in glory.

3-The third prophecy (2: 10, 19): He proclaimed on the 24th.of the ninth month; considered as an annex to the previous prophecy; in which he confirms that, by disregarding for the priority of God in their life, they will lose the blessing; And encouraged them to keep on embracing the spiritual life with flaring zeal.

4-The fourth prophecy (2: 20-23); He proclaimed on the same day of the proclamation of the previous prophecy. In this prophecy, the Lord confirms that He will shake the nations, and will hold fast to Zerubbabel as His signet ring.

CHAPTER 1

A DIVINE COMMAND TO BUILD THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

As the people's zeal to build the house of the Lord cooled down, and they were saying: "*The time has not come that the Lord's house should be built*"; The prophet Haggai kept on provoking them to resume work, and his effort gave the required fruition.

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| 1- The theme of the first prophecy | 1 - 2 |
| 2- A reproach on their care for temporal things | 3 - 11 |
| 3- The fruition of the call | 12 – 15 |

1- THE THEME OF THE FIRST PROPHECY:

The introduction to the first prophecy included its date, by whom it was delivered, to whom it was addressed, and its theme.

(1) As to its date, the prophet uttered it in the second year of the reign of the Persian king Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month. He probably was among those who celebrated the monthly feast (the Jews used to gather together on the first day of the lunar month for collective worship; which is still practiced to this day by the Orthodox Jews). The prophet used the chance to proclaim the frank and active word of the Lord.

(2) The prophecy was delivered "*by the hand of Haggai the prophet*" How could the prophecy be delivered by the hand? The word "hand" here, according to **St. Augustine** means (power); the prophetic word is delivered by the hands of the prophets, as a sword to destroy evil. [They received in their hands the word of God with the power to utter what they intend, to whom they intend to address; without fear of any power, or worry about poverty. They had the authority as preachers to have In their hands a spiritual sword, they could hold, draw, and strike with it at will¹].

(3) The prophet addressed the prophetic word to the governor and the priest, who listened to it, and with great zeal, they started to work; yet, outer and inner resistance stopped them.

The governor's name was 'Zerubbabel', a grandson of king Jehoiakin, a descendant of David; his name means (born in Babelon); and was also called by the Persian name 'Sheshbazzar'. He was made governor on Judah by the Persian king Cyrus (Ezra 5: 14).

As to 'Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, his name means (Jehovah is salvation); and his father's name means (Jehovah sees); we previously talked about him as a symbol of the greatest King, Jesus Christ, our salvation and righteousness in God the Father².

In our study of the book of Zechariah, we saw that 'the governor' symbolizes the (human will), set by God in man, to ordain his life in the Lord, as a king of authority over his soul, body, mind, and senses. On the other hand, we saw that the 'priest' refers to the (heart), sanctified to God by the Holy Spirit, for our Christ the Bishop of our souls, and our Intercessor by His blood to His father to dwell in.

¹ On Ps. 149.

² راجع تفسير هوشع أصحاب 3.

So, if the prophetic talk, there, was addressed to the governor and the priest; that was because the word of God talks to the human will, together with the heart. The temple of the Lord would not be built in us, unless our will bows down, and our heart submits before God, to say: *"I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word"*.... In other words, in order to enjoy the divine sanctuary, whose foundations were set by the Holy Spirit in the water of Baptism, and conformed, to increase in glory day after day, by the work of God in us; It is befitting of us to deliver our inner Zerubbabel and Joshua in His hands; Namely, to deliver to Him our active living will, together with our heart with all its feelings.

Yes, Our will is 'Zerubbabel' indeed; having been born in Babylon under the captivity of sin; But it is the Lord, alone, who can liberate it from her captivity, and bring it forth to the higher Jerusalem; not to lead 50,000 men to work, but to bear inside her the energies and possibilities of the Lord Himself; to work by it, and by all its talents and feelings, to the account of His Kingdom.

And as we are in need of sanctifying the will by liberating it from its violent captivity, by the work of the cross; So we are also in need of sanctifying the heart, to be dwelt by the true Joshua; namely, our Jesus (God our Savior), and at the same time our Jehozadak (God our Righteousness).

(4) As to the theme of the prophecy, It is: ***"Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says: 'The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built'"*** (2).

Starting His talk to the people by saying: *"Thus speaks the lord of hosts"*; He intends to confirm to them that if they work to the account of His kingdom, they would be His hosts, and He would be their Leader, who knows only the spiritual strife with no slothfulness, He is *"the Lord of hosts"* He might also mean to reproach them, that if they forsake the work in slothfulness and disregard; He, being the Lord of the heavenly hosts, is in no need of working hands, If He seeks their work, It is only because He loves them, and longs to work through them.

At the beginning of His talk, He does not say "My people", but *"This people"*. In our study of the book of Exodus, and certain other books of the prophets, we noticed that when the people did wrong, God did not call them "His people"; As it happened when He said to Moses *"Your people have corrupted themselves"* (Exodus 32: 7); referring the people to Moses and not to Himself. While when they were sanctified, He became proud of them, and counted them as His people, their Sabbaths His Sabbaths, their feasts His feasts, and their offerings His offerings.

The secret of God's sadness on those people, is that they set excuses to justify their reluctance to work. They claimed that the outer oppositions are divine signs that *"The time that the Lord's house should be built has not come"*. They might as well, justified it that they should first care for building their own houses, to settle down with their families, then work to the account of the house of the Lord with comfortable hearts. They did not realize that it is befitting of them to have God first in their life, according to His own words: *"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"* (Matthew 6: 33).

Our life, being a group of opportunities; If one is lost, it may not come again, It would be befitting of us not to say: *"The time has not yet come"*; We should not be like 'Felix' the governor who postponed the opportunity to repent until he has a convenient

time (Acts 24: 25); which we did not hear he ever had. But we should say instead: *“Exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘today’, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (Hebrews 3: 13); and, *“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5: 16).

2- A REPROACH ON THEIR CARE FOR TEMPORAL THINGS:

While saying the time that the Lord’s house should be built has not come, they dwell in houses paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling, fit for kings (1 Kings 7: 7; Jeremiah 22: 14). They, not only prefer the temporal to the eternal, but they even overdo it by living in palaces fit for kings.

He says to them: *“Consider your ways”* (5); (Or as it came in the Arabic version: *“Put your hearts on your ways”*). Using the word “hearts” here, means meditating in the inner life, or examining the soul; according to the words of the apostle: *“Let each one examine his own work”* (Galatians 6: 4); namely, judge himself by himself, before others judge him .

Here, to help them reconsider themselves, the prophet says: *“You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes”* (6).

By rejecting to attach himself to God, his Creator, man rejects the blessing in his life. Nature would come against him, and the earth would not give him its fruition. However much he eats, or much he drinks, his body would not enjoy satisfaction. This is what the Holy Book warns in several locations, saying: *“When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back to your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied”* (Leviticus 26: 26). *“Because of your sins, you shall eat, but not be satisfied; Hunger shall be in your midst; You shall sow, but not reap; You shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; And you make sweet wine, but not drink wine”* (Micah 6: 14, 15; Hosea 4: 10).

St. Clement of Alexandria believes that, to put wages in a bag with holes, is to gather wealth and shut it in without giving alms to the poor¹. Commending ‘Epiphanius’ the blind priest, **St. Jerome** said to him: [You are not putting your wages in a bag with holes, but are putting your treasures in heaven²]. And in **St. John Cassian’s** debates, Father Ibrahim says that the one with a bag with holes is he who hears the wise sayings of others, then loses what he hears, because of his lack of self-control, and of concentration of mind³.

Man would lose the blessing even in temporal things, through forsaking the Source of the blessing. That is what the Lord again confirms, by threatening them, not for the sake of revenge, but of bringing them back to Him, saying: *“Because of My house that is in ruins, while everyone of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands”* (9 – 11).

¹ Instr. 2: 3.

² Ep. 76: 3.

³ Conf. 24: 13.

When man disregard his Creator, all creation will disregard him: Heaven will withhold its dew, and the earth will withhold its fruit; Even the atmosphere will not be mild anymore, Temperature will go so high, to have a drastic effect on man, livestock, and plants, on mountains and plains, to corrupt all the labor of hands. In the book of Deuteronomy it came: *“Your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed”* (Deuteronomy 28: 23, 24). Once man hardens his heart, heaven over his head will be as hard as bronze, and the earth will be like iron without fruit. And once his thoughts become earthly and dusty, the rain for him will change to dust to destroy him. It is as though nature will present to him, of what is hidden inside him.

In the Septuagint version it came: *“I called the sword to come down on the earth and the mountains, etc ...”* It would not be just the anger of nature on him, but he will also lose his peace with his fellow men, who will chase him with the sword wherever he goes, even if he hides in the clefts of rocks on the mountains; and with their violence, they will scatter all his fruit.

We can also interpret the divine words: *“Because of My house that is in ruins, while everyone of you runs to his own house”*; That, by ‘His house’, He means His inner dwelling place in us, that would turn into ruins through losing God Himself as a Dweller; Then the soul would run to her own house, to shut herself in, to hold fast to her selfishness, And instead of gaining, she would enter into complete loss and deprivation. When the soul loses the grace of God (the dew of heaven), and be deprived of the work of the Holy Spirit; And when the earth withholds its fruits; namely when the body loses its sanctification, and lacks the fruits, rejoicing to God and man; The life of man would become immensely disturbed; The inner sword would chase him wherever he goes; would destroy his land (his body), and his mountains (his haughty potentials); and would corrupt his wheat, new wine, and oil; to become hungry, thirsty, and sick.

Yet, the Merciful God would not forsake us like this, but provides us with the following treatment: ***“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified’ (7, 8):***

a- The treatment begins by saying: *“Consider your ways”* (or put your hearts on your ways). Without considering his ways, there would be no reform for the soul of man; He should consider, not only his outer apparent behavior, but also meditate in the heart itself. This book concerns the rebuilding the inner house of the Lord; It raises our thought to what is inside the heart, being the center of work; As though he says: ‘Prepare your heart, so that the Lord would make His dwelling place in you by His Holy Spirit’.

b- It does not stop at mere meditation in the heart, but He says: *“Go up to the mountains”* Instead of our haughty mountain, namely (the ego), that brings us down to the pit, We should go up to that mountain, about which the prophet Daniel said: *“The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth”* (Daniel 2: 35). The mountain about which is said: *“A city that is set on a mountain cannot be hidden”* (Matthew 5: 14).

Let us therefore ascend by the Lord Himself; to be set on Him, as the Mountain that fills the whole earth; and to be raised by Him, being the Rock of our faith, as a luminous city and a holy temple. From there we bring wood to build the house of the

Lord; namely, to bear His cross, and to partake of His sufferings; as the sanctuaries of the Lord would not be set in us outside His sufferings,

c- He finally says: “*Build the temple (the house), that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified*”. Although He is the Builder of the house, according to the words of the Psalmist: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (Psalm 127; 1); Yet He says: “*Build the house*”; to confirm that He sanctifies the human freedom of will; and that He does not set His house in us against our free will, nor without us; He even refers the work to us, although He is the One who works in us.

3- THE FRUITION OF THE DIVINE CALL:

The prophetic words produced their joyful fruition; As the governor, the priest, and all the people listened to the words of the Lord; And, filled with fear before His face, they started working. It is as though, when man listens to the divine words, his will (the governor) would submit; his heart (the priest) would bow; all his energies (the people) would respond; And being filled with the fear of the Lord, he would work with all his strength through joyful inner harmony.

CHAPTER 2

THREE CONSECUTIVE PROPHECIES

If the prophetic voice flared the hearts to work, God in His love for His people, provided them with three consecutive prophecies, to encourage all hands to strive by the spirit of God to the account of the inner house, set upon the Lord Christ, the ‘Desire of All Nations’. These three prophecies came to speak of the following:

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| 1- The temple of the “Desire of All Nations | 1 - 9 |
| 2- God seeks the temple of the heart | 10 - 19 |
| 3- The new temple and the divine seal (the signet ring) | 20 – 23 |

1- THE TEMPLE OF THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS:

The second divine message came while the builders have been working for almost a month, as a message of encouragement and support. If the first prophecy wounded them by reproach, This prophecy came to heal their wounds by divine words of comfort and encouragement.

The date of this prophecy was *“in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month”* (1); Namely in the seventh day of ‘the feast of the tabernacles’, the last feast of the harvest in the Jewish year (See Leviticus 23: 39-44). That feast was characterized by joy and offerings of sacrifices of thanksgiving, especially on its last day.

It was befitting of everyone to be filled with joy, not only for the feast, but also for beginning the work to build the house of the Lord; And to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to the lord who is restoring to them the lost glory. But the devil, not enduring to see the joy and the thanksgiving of the children of God, invoked thoughts of despair, through some elders who were contemporaries of the old temple before its destruction (70 years ago), who counted the current work as nothing compared to the splendor of the glory of the old one. While the Priests and the Levites were praising and blowing the trumpets in joy for the work, those elders were bitterly weeping on the glory of the old temple; almost turning the joyful day into one of grief and depression of heart.

That is the way some elders, even nowadays, who are used to belittle the work of the new generation, counting it as nothing, compared to their own efforts. That is why the wise Solomon advises us, saying: *“Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’”* (Ecclesiastes 7: 10).

In order to take away from them that spirit of despair, He encouraged and supported them by saying:

(1) *“Now, be strong, Zerubbabel, and be strong Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and be strong, all you people of the Land, and work; for I am with you’, says the Lord of hosts”* (3). As though He demands from the governor, the priest, and all the people, not to be preoccupied with the comparisons between the new and the old, but to concentrate on the work, strong for the sake of God who dwells in their midst. I wish every believer would not scatter his energy by thoughts destructive of the soul, but make his will, heart, and all his energies stronger; through being sure that the Lord, who is with him, is the secret of his joy and glory.

If the goal of the building is to encounter with God through the covenant, and to enjoy His dwelling among them; In the midst of the work, He says to them: *“According to the words that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My spirit*

remains among you; Do not fear''' (5). It is as though He says to them: 'Do not fear; I will enter into a covenant with you, and My Spirit will dwell in your midst, as long as you work That is the true glory!'

(2) *"For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (in a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations; And I will fill this temple with glory', says the Lord of hosts"* (6, 7). In the old, when He set the covenant on Mount Sinai, the Lord shook the location, and caused the mountain to smoke. But now, He shakes the heaven (the soul), the earth (the body), the sea (the talents), and the dry land (the energies). He destroys the old man, to set in us the new man; to carry His features in our souls, and to have our bodies, talents, and energies sanctified. Together with shaking our old nature, we shall get a new life, working to the account of the kingdom of God, with harmony in the body and soul.

This shaking is a sign of the coming of the 'Desire of All Nations', who comes to dwell inside us, in the water of baptism, when we are buried together with Him; and the forces of darkness, and our outer man are destroyed. ... And at the end of time, with the coming of the Lord, as an eternal heavenly King; nature will strongly shake, and the material world will be wiped away.

Some interpret the expression *"when the Desire of All Nations comes"* as (when the riches of All Nations comes); Namely, when the new temple is filled with splendor, through the entrance of the Gentiles into the fellowship of the church, presenting their faith in the Savior; and their zeal, as a secret of spiritual riches.

(3) *"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine', says the Lord of hosts"* (8). If the measures of glory is the abundance of silver, gold, and precious stones, that filled the old temple; In the new temple, Him being our gold, silver, the adornment and the glory of the house. the Lord says: *"Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts"* (Matthew 10: 9); **St. John Chrysostom** believes that the prophet uttered these words, because many of the Jews found it difficult for the old temple to come back, with its gold and silver, after turning into dust and ashes; To whom the Lord says: 'Why do not you believe, that the gold and silver are mine? I am in no need of borrowing from anyone to adorn my house! '¹.

(4) *"The glory of the latter temple shall be greater than the former', says the lord of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace', says the Lord of hosts"* (9). If we compare between the glory of the first temple, built by Solomon, and the second one, built by Zerubbabel, We shall find that the former, beside the greatness of its building, is greater, with what it contained of gold, silver, and precious stones. In the Babylonian 'Telmud', it came that the temple built by Zerubbabel lacked the holy fire, the Ark of the Covenant, the Orim and the Thummim, and the spirit of prophecy. But here, we are raised, not to the temple of Zerubbabel, but up to the temple, referred to by the Lord Himself, as His body (John 2); the glorious new temple, in which the reconciliation between God the Father and humanity through the bloodshed on the cross (Colossians 1: 20) took place; That is why He says: *"In this place I will give peace', says the Lord of hosts"*.

¹ In 1Cor. Hom 34: 9.

If God has chastened His people by captivity, and the destruction of the temple of Solomon; It was to make them rebuild a temple of greater glory. That is how the Lord, according to the words of **St. John Chrysostom**¹, chastens us to grant us better splendor.

2- GOD SEEKS THE TEMPLE OF THE HEART:

This prophecy came two months after the previous one; In it God clarifies that, if the glory of the temple is the dwelling of the Lord in the midst of His people; The goal of the temple is therefore the sanctification of the heart. Hence God seeks from us, not to concentrate our thoughts on the stone building, but on the heart. As, What would be the benefit, if we set the stone building with unclean hearts?! ... In this prophecy, it is to be noticed:

(1) God demands from the prophet to “*ask the priests concerning the law*” (11). Although he was a prophet, and was sent by God to provoke the priest to work, Yet He demands from him to ask the priests concerning the interpretation of the law; to teach us that, every member of the church is concerned with a certain work, with no preference of one over the other, except as far as his performance of the work allotted to him, is concerned – The prophet in his prophecy, and the priest in the interpretation of the law.

St. Jerome says: [Great is the task of priesthood -- answering the questions concerning the law; Any lack of knowledge in the teaching of the priest would therefore, affect his performance in doing his job. And as much as he edifies the church of Christ by the virtues of his life, he would harm her more by his failure to confront those who tend to draw her downward²].

(2) If one carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and with the edge he touches something; he will not make it holy. But the one who became unclean because he touched a dead body, whatever he touches he will make unclean (12, 13). By this He intends to confirm that contagion moves to the life of others, in sin faster than in holiness; As demolition is faster than building. It is as though He demands from them to care for their spiritual well-being and sanctification, because every sickness and uncleanness move and get around fast.

(3) He says: “*If one carries holy meat*”, and does not say “*holy sacrifice*”. With their persistence on evil, God would not let them build His house, however magnificent and beautiful; and would not receive their sacrifices, but would see it as “*meat*”. He demands from them to reconsider themselves, lest while being preoccupied with the outer building, they lose the sanctification of the heart; saying: “*And now, carefully consider from this day forward; from before stone was laid upon stone in the temple of the Lord...*” (15).

(4) Without having their heart sanctified, Even if they build a temple for the Lord in their midst, they will not enjoy the blessing; God says:

“*Since those days, when one came to a heap of twenty ephahs, there were but ten; When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty baths from the press, there were but twenty. I struck you with blight and mildew and hail in all the labors of your hands, yet you did not turn to Me’, says the Lord*” (17, 18). There will be no blessing, neither on the threshing floor nor in the wine vat. The plants, likewise, will be struck with blight

¹ *Letters to The Fallen Theodore 1: 13.*

² *Ep. 53: 3.*

(violent wind), mildew (pests), and hail; namely, even the nature will oppose him, hoping to bring him back to his Creator.

3- THE NEW TEMPLE AND THE DIVINE SEAL (THE SIGNET RING):

This last prophecy was proclaimed on the same day of the proclamation of the previous one; In the first prophecy, the Lord confirms the necessity of paying attention to the sanctification of the temple of the heart, so that the believer would be filled with blessing, and would enjoy the dwelling of the lord inside him. Whereas here, He proclaims to Zerubbabel the governor, a descendant of David, that He will bless him through destroying the opposing heathen Gentile nations, and being chosen by Him, He will set him as a seal (signet ring) for the Lord.

If Zerubbabel represents the Lord Christ (who was born in Babylon); Having borne our body, came to our land, and entered with us even to the tomb; Yet, He is the only-begotten Son, in whom God the Father is pleased, and in whom we have become God's elect (Ephesians 1: 4). In Him, we enjoy conquest, not over human nations, with their chariots and horses, But over the evil hosts of darkness.

By baptism, the works of the old man, as collapsed heathen nations, would be defeated under our feet; and we would enjoy the heavenly seal; Something coveted by the bride of the song, who says: "*Set me as a seal upon your heart; As a seal upon your arm*" (Song 8: 6). By Him we became like a seal, baring the honor, riches, and spiritual authority of the lord; to testify to Him like a bride united with Him on an exalted level.

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