

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Haggai 1

The story of the rebuilding of the temple is an opportunity to review briefly the original plan and furnishings of the tabernacle. Point out that the ark disappeared from the Bible story at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. In all classes stress the fact that the people were allowed to return because the Lord was to be born among them in the Holy Land. This will make a good point for the transition to the New Testament.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord must come first in our lives if we are to have a sound character.

Notes for Parents

The honor in which the prophet Daniel was held in Babylon is evidenced by the fact that he was kept in high position not only under Nebuchadnezzar but also under Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, who in turn took over the throne of Babylon. The ancient Hebrews were not made slaves in Babylon, but settled there, and many of them became prosperous and lost their interest in their own country.

But in order to fulfill many prophecies the Lord had to be born among the Jews and in the Holy Land. So it was necessary that at least some of them should return and that Jerusalem and the temple should be rebuilt. It had been prophesied through Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) that this should happen after seventy years of captivity. Cyrus was the king who permitted the return—the historian Ezra says that Cyrus believed that the Lord charged him to build Him a house in Jerusalem—and Cyrus proclaimed that all who wished might go and also told those who did not wish to

return to give them aid in money, food, clothing, and animals. He himself restored to them the gold and silver vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off.

When they reached their own land, the people set up an altar for sacrifice on the site of Solomon's temple and laid the foundations for a new temple. Then they did no more on it for sixteen years. They used as an excuse a difficulty they had with the Samaritans—the foreigners who had been brought in by Assyria to take the place of the people of Israel—but our chapter for today shows us that this was not the real reason.

The prophet Haggai was sent by the Lord to rebuke them and spur them on to finish the temple. He showed that the real trouble was that they were more interested in building their own houses and making themselves comfortable than they were in building the Lord's house.

How true this still is of many of us today! Our house is a symbol of our character. Our character is a temple of the Lord if it is built according to His directions and for His service, but many build only for their own comfort and advantage, and let this house of the Lord in themselves “lie waste.”

Haggai succeeded in shaming the people into resuming the building of the temple, and it was finished four years later.

Primary

The story of the return and rebuilding will interest even the little ones, and they can also get the lesson of Haggai's rebuke. It is not too early to put into their minds the thought that service of the Lord should come first in our lives. Speak of the Minor Prophets, noting that the last three were prophets of the restoration. Then tell the story and end with the lesson taught in Haggai 1, verse 4.

Do you remember about the beautiful temple of the Lord which king Solomon built in Jerusalem? When the people of Judah were conquered by the king of Babylon, this temple was destroyed and all its vessels of gold and silver were carried away with the people to Babylon.

But the Lord had promised the people of Judah that after seventy years they would be allowed to return to their own land, and the Lord always keeps His promises. After seventy years a king named Cyrus was inspired by the Lord with the thought that the temple at Jerusalem should be rebuilt.

He said that all who wanted to return might go, and that those who did not want to go should help them with money and animals and clothing.

About fifty thousand went back.

Cyrus let them take back the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off when he burned the temple.

When the people got back they first set up an altar where the temple had been.

The next year they laid the foundation for the new temple.

Then they became discouraged and anxious to build their own homes, and for sixteen years they did no more on the temple.

What prophet was sent to rebuke them?

What did he tell them was the reason they had stopped building?

Of what kindnesses of the Lord did he remind them?

Did the people listen to him?

Yes, they began to build again and finished the new temple in four years.

Then they celebrated the Passover.

Junior

There is much interesting historical material for the Juniors in this lesson. The teacher should read carefully the first part of the Adult notes and summarize it for the children. Have them find the book of Ezra in the Bible and repeat the information they have already received concerning the books of the Bible which are not part of the Word and their value to us. Stress Haggai's rebuke and the necessity of putting the Lord first in our lives.

The people of Judah were not ill-treated in Babylon. And also they had something to look forward to, for the Lord had promised that after seventy years they would return to their own land. Read Jeremiah 29:10.

What Hebrew prophet rose to great power in Babylon?

Who were his three friends?

What did they do which brought them into danger?

Who saved them?

What was the effect on the king of Babylon?

When, not many years after the people of Judah were taken captive, the Persians became rulers of Babylon, their kings followed the example of Nebuchadnezzar and recognized Jehovah as a God to be respected. Finally the Lord put it into the heart of king Cyrus to allow the Hebrews to go back to the Holy Land and rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Find the book of Ezra in your Bible. Ezra does not have an inner sense and therefore is not a book of the Word, but it gives us the history of the return of the people from captivity.

The first six chapters of Ezra tell the story of the rebuilding of the temple. It is an interesting story. When the people arrived at Jerusalem and looked at the ruined site of the temple, they first took an offering to pay for the work of rebuilding. Then they scattered to set up their own homes throughout the land and to plant crops. In the seventh month they went to Jerusalem to celebrate their harvest feast, the feast of tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36). At that time they set up the great altar for burnt offerings, and the next year they laid the foundations of the temple. But the Samaritans (who, you remember, had been brought into the land to take the place of the people of Israel) made trouble for them, and for sixteen years they were afraid to continue building.

What prophet did the Lord send to rebuke them?

What did Haggai say was the real reason for their delay?

What had been the result to them?

This time they obeyed the prophet, and in four years they finished the temple.* Cyrus had allowed them to bring back the vessels of the temple worship which had been carried off to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. But there was one thing that never came back. That was the ark. We know that the ark was in the Holy of Holies of Solomon's temple, but there is no record of what happened to it when the temple was destroyed. The presence of the Lord with the people was through the ark. So after they came back, they no longer represented the Lord's church on earth. The reason they

*See Ezra 3:8-6:15 for fuller details. –Ed.

were allowed to return was because it had been prophesied that the Lord would come into the world among the Jews and in the Holy Land. There are some records of their history during the four hundred years before that event took place, but they are not in our Bible. All we have are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which tell of their return and the events which immediately followed it, and the books of three prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—who were sent to make sure they did what was necessary and to encourage the few good people who still remained among them by renewed promises of the coming of the Messiah.

After the temple was completed, they celebrated the Passover. Then they settled down into a type of national life, but they were always under the control of some foreign nation—Babylon first, and others later. You remember that when the Lord finally came, although the Jews had their own king, Herod, they were really ruled by the Roman governor.

Intermediate

In teaching this lesson emphasize the fact that, while the returned people of Judah felt that external circumstances were keeping them from finishing the temple, Haggai showed the real cause. In the same way, our own failures to grow spiritually actually come from within ourselves, no matter what excuses we may give for them. “Be honest with yourself” is a good rule to remember.

After Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon the captives from Judah were told that they might return to their own land. Many preferred to remain in Babylon because they were prosperous there. Those who returned were those who cared enough for their religion and their homeland to give up the comforts of Babylon for an unknown future in Canaan. Babylon represents the love of dominion from the love of self. This shows itself in each one of us in the tendency to think of ourselves as the center of everything and to expect others to do what we want. Such an attitude does enable people often to become successful and rich in a worldly sense, but Babylon is not our true home and we are called to leave it and return to the Holy Land of spiritual living.

The gold and silver vessels of the temple, carried off at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, had been preserved in Babylon in the houses of the Babylonian gods and were now given up by Cyrus to be restored to their proper use. Any container is a symbol of doctrine; the gold and silver vessels of the temple picture the doctrines of good and truth from the Word which teach us how to live rightly. But even these teachings can be employed in the service of self. The person who acts from so-called “enlightened self-interest” will keep the commandments in their external form. This is like the temple vessels kept in the houses of the Babylonian gods. But we ought to obey these doctrines from a desire to serve the Lord and not self, to do right because the Lord wills it and not because we feel we shall gain by it. The world today needs this type of return to the Lord from its captivity to selfish and worldly principles.

So the remnant of Judah had to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple on its true site. It was also necessary for them to return because the Holy Land was to be the scene of the Lord’s life on earth. This was partly because He came to fulfill the prophecies in the Word and partly because of the correspondence of all the places in the Holy Land, which had been established in the time of the Ancient Church.

But, even after their return, they were more than twenty years in completing the new temple. The book of Ezra, although it does not contain an inner sense, tells the story. The Samaritans, you may remember, were the descendants of the people brought in by the Assyrians to take the place of the people of Israel in the northern part of the Holy Land. Because the returned people refused to allow the Samaritans to have a part in the rebuilding of the temple, the Samaritans misrepresented them to the king of Babylon and he commanded them to stop building. This action was used as an excuse to abandon the building, but it was only an excuse.

The prophet Haggai gives the real reason when he says: “Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?” Our “ceiled houses” are our little narrow selfish satis-

factions, our comforts, our pleasures, our “rights” of which we take such good care. The house of the Lord which we should be building first is a character based on humility and service to the Lord. The building may seem to interfere with our getting things we want, even things we imagine to be necessary to our physical life, but Haggai shows that no matter how hard we work, if we do not build the Lord’s house in the center of our lives, nothing we do will really prosper or bring us the satisfaction we expect. “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.” Those who are thinking of themselves are never satisfied with what they have.

Basic Correspondences

any container = doctrine
the gold and silver vessels = doctrines of good and truth
of the temple from the Word

Senior

The same point suggested for the Intermediates should be further developed with the Seniors, carrying it into wider fields—business, politics, etc. Young people should face this tendency, which we all have, to shift responsibility for our failures to other influences of heredity or environment, and to put off real self-examination and correction.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give us the historical account of the return of the people of Judah from captivity, the rebuilding of the temple, and the reorganization of national life immediately following. These two books do not have an inner meaning, but like other such books which are bound in our Bible they give us much helpful information and background material for our study of the Word. In Ezra 1:1-2 we read that “in the first year of the reign of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia,” and Cyrus, in the proclamation he made at that

time, said that the Lord “charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.” Persia had at this time conquered and taken over the territory which had been Babylon. Jeremiah (29:10) had prophesied that after seventy years of captivity in Babylon the people would return to the Holy Land. Their return was necessary in order that the temple might be rebuilt and Judaism re-established in the Holy Land in preparation for the Lord’s Advent there according to prophecy.

It is interesting to compare the circumstantial account of the rebuilding of the temple in the historical record of Ezra with the brief picture of the real heart of the matter given through the prophet Haggai. In Ezra we see the events as they looked on the outside, particularly as the people wished to record and remember them. In Haggai we see the hidden spiritual causes behind the events. From Ezra we might assume that the interference of the Samaritans was the real cause of the sixteen-year lapse in building operations. But from Haggai we learn that the cause was the willingness of the people themselves to find excuses for taking care of their own comfort instead of serving the Lord.

In verse 2 of our chapter we read: “This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.” How often we allow apparent difficulties to persuade us to put off something we know we ought to do! This is true even in our own church. People say, “The world is not ready for the New Church doctrines; let us build up a strong organization first, and then the world will listen to us.” We draw back from possible opposition, just as the people in Haggai’s time drew back before the threats of the Samaritans, when all the while our failure to bring forth fruit is the result of this very faint-heartedness and concern for our own comfort. Notice that the conditions described in Haggai 1:6 are the fulfillment of a prophecy made in Micah 6:14-15.

All history can be studied in the light of a comparison between the point of view of Ezra and that of Haggai. We may imagine, for example, that the world wars were the result of certain political and economic conditions created by our enemies, but the real

cause was worldliness and selfishness in the hearts of all people, including ourselves. Wars, even world wars, begin in the hearts of individual men and women. Again, people imagine that peace can be attained and preserved by economic and political adjustments and by armies and navies and air forces and nuclear weapons. But peace begins in the hearts of individuals with humility and love to the Lord and the neighbor, for peace can come only from the Prince of Peace. If we cannot be just and merciful in our personal relations and settle our personal differences in the light of the Lord's teachings, we are not on the side of world peace. The temple of the Lord must be built first, the dwelling place of the Lord in the hearts and minds of individual men and women.

Ezra records that when the foundation of the new temple was laid, the old men who had seen the temple of Solomon mourned because the new one was so much less complete and impressive, and Haggai (2:3) reminds them of this feeling of disappointment. We are likely to be disappointed with our first efforts to rebuild a character that has been allowed to deteriorate. We all know how hard and discouraging is the effort to break a bad habit once it has been formed. But Haggai promises that if we are faithful the final result will be beyond all our expectations: "The glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

Adult

In this lesson the Adults will probably be most interested in the historical facts concerning the return and rebuilding, as these facts are so scattered through the Bible that most people do not have a clear picture from their own reading. The reason for the return is also an essential lesson, and the meaning of the lesson for our own lives should, of course, be pointed out.

In the last verse of the second book of Kings we read that in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Judah the king of Babylon began to show favor to Jehoiachin, the captive king. This was the beginning of the Lord's mercy in the fulfillment of the prophecy

of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10)* that after seventy years the people should be permitted to return to the Holy Land. In Ezra 1:1 we read that “the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia” to have the temple rebuilt. We recall that Daniel converted Nebuchadnezzar to belief in Jehovah as the God of heaven. The later conquerors of Babylon, Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, accepted this belief. The captives of Judah had prospered in worldly ways in Babylon and many of them had lost the desire to return to their own land. Cyrus bade all those who wished to do so to return and rebuild the temple, and he commanded those who preferred to remain in Chaldea to help the others “with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” Cyrus also gave them back the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. We are told that those who chose to go back in this first return numbered 42,360 beside 7,337 servants and maids. Zerubbabel was the leader of this return.

About eighty years later, in the reign of Artaxerxes, there was a second return under Ezra. At least 1750 men with their families returned at this time. Ezra was a direct descendant of Aaron and thus a priest as well as a scribe. Josephus says that he had been high priest of those who were left in Babylon. It is apparent that he was in high favor with the Persian king and he was given full authority to raise funds for the journey and for the service of the temple, to dispose affairs in Jerusalem, to appoint judges and magistrates, and to punish offenders even by death. The book of Ezra does not claim to be prophetic; it is a simple historical record beginning with the return under Zerubbabel and ending about a year after Ezra’s return. Nehemiah (chapter 8) gives us an account of a great gathering of the people in Jerusalem at the feast of tabernacles, at which Ezra read to them from the Law. (Ezra and Nehemiah do not have an inner sense.)

In AE 1029^e Swedenborg gives us an interesting explanation of

*See also 25:11-12. Cf. Ps. 90:10.

the captivity and return (see below). This passage explains in part why there is no actual account in the books having an inner sense of the return from captivity. The people returned because it was necessary that the Word and the forms of worship be preserved in the Holy Land until the time was ripe for the Advent, but the people themselves could no longer be used to represent anything of good and truth. Three prophets—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—were sent to them to show them their condition and to hold forth to the few good individuals the promise of the Messiah, but the details of their further history were no part of the prophetic Word, and are of interest to us only as they may help us to see the background of the Lord's life.

The purpose of Cyrus in allowing the people to return to the Holy Land was that they should build the house of the Lord, but after the foundations were laid, the work was discontinued for some sixteen years. The Samaritans—the aliens who had been brought in to take the place of the Israelites—offered to help in the rebuilding of the temple, but their assistance was refused by Zerubbabel, and from that time they hindered the work in every possible way and finally sent a letter to the current king of Babylon representing that Jerusalem had always been a rebellious city and should not be rebuilt. Their letter influenced the king to order the work on the temple stopped. And the men of Judah made no protest at that time. At last, however, under the exhortation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they sent a delegation to the new king, Darius, and at their request Darius hunted out the original decree of Cyrus, which as a law of the Medes and Persians could not be changed. So the work was undertaken again and completed in four years, a period of a little more than twenty years elapsing between the laying of the foundation and the completion of the temple. It was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies and offerings and with the celebration of the Passover. Throughout the Old Testament the celebration of the Passover signaled the accomplishment of each step in the progress of the nation and each great reform.

We recall that the temple pictures the dwelling place of the Lord in us, a character built according to the Lord's plan. The rebuilding of the temple pictures an effort to return to goodness after one has fallen into evil. The prophet Haggai shows us how quickly the people were turned from their high purposes when once they had actually returned to the Holy Land. They built their own houses but let the house of the Lord lie waste. This is a picture of a life outwardly reformed but lacking genuine consecration to the Lord—still caring for self first. This kind of reformation does not bring happiness or peace. "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." The ark was gone from the Holy of Holies. There is no mention of its being preserved or restored after the destruction of Solomon's temple. The heart was empty of the Lord's presence. The restoration of the nation was merely an external one.

So it is with us sometimes when we try to reform. The way back is not so easy or so happy as we expected. We reinstate ourselves in orderly external living and perhaps in the respect of the community, but our real character must be built up all over again, and that is a long, slow process. The Lord does not come to the new temple until we have fully realized our own helplessness and know that nothing but His presence can save us or bring us happiness and peace. No temple which we erect with our own reputation or glory in view can endure. The temple of Zerubbabel suffered one partial destruction and another rebuilding before the Lord's time, and this structure fell into complete decay, and under Herod a new temple—the one of the Gospels—was erected. This was finally destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

But the prophets of the restoration period firmly held out to those who would be faithful the promise that their days of mourning should end. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings" (Malachi 4:2). "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith

the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Haggai 2:9) The Old Testament closes with the promise of sure reward to those who look to the Lord instead of to self and persistently obey Him.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 1029^e: “When, therefore, the sons of Israel wholly departed from the statutes which were representative of the spiritual things of the church, through which they had communication with heaven, they were all given into the hands of the king of Assyria; for there was no longer with them any representative church and consequently no communication with heaven. . . . The same thing happened to the Jews. When they had adulterated and profaned all the statutes, judgments, and laws that represented good and truth of faith, to the extent that there was no longer any thing of good and truth left, and when their church thus became Babylon, then not only their kings and princes and the whole people, but also all the treasures of the house of Jehovah, and afterwards all its golden vessels, were given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon; and moreover the temple itself was burned. . . . All these things signify the profanation of the holy things of the church. Such profanation is signified also by ‘Babylon.’ That the land, therefore, which signified the church might no longer be profaned by them, and also that Babylon might thus fully put on its representation, it was said to them by Jeremiah that they should surrender themselves voluntarily into the hands of the king of Babylon, and if they did not so surrender themselves, but remained in the land, they should die by the sword, famine, and pestilence (Jeremiah 25:1-11). But since the Lord was to be born in that nation and make Himself manifest where the church then was and where His Word was, so that nation after a captivity of seventy years was brought back from Babylon, and the temple was rebuilt. And yet no other church remained with them except a church like that called Babylon, as can be seen from many things which the Lord Himself said about that nation, and from the way they received Him; and for this reason Jerusalem was again destroyed, and the temple burnt with fire.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. Under what ruler were the people of Judah allowed to return to the Holy Land? *Cyrus*
- J. How long was this after they were taken captive? *seventy years*

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- P. What did king Cyrus tell them to do? *rebuild the temple*
- P. What did he give them to take back? *gold and silver vessels taken from the temple*
- J. What excuse did they give for not finishing the temple? *not yet time*
- P. What prophet was sent to rebuke them? *Haggai*
- J. What did he tell them was the real reason they had stopped? *more interested in their own comfort*
- I. What do the gold and silver vessels of the temple picture? *teachings from the Word of how to live rightly*
- S. Why was it necessary that the Jews return to the Holy Land? *to rebuild temple and re-establish Judaism in the Holy Land preparatory to the coming of the Lord*