

Haggai's Temple of Peace

By Nene Rubrico

Historical Backdrop

The year was 520 B.C. Sixteen years had passed since Zerubbabel, of David's own royal line, and his motley group of returning Jews accompanied by their high priest Jeshua, made the dangerous journey from Babylon to the Holy Land, arriving thereat three months later in obedience to the decrees of Cyrus the Great and Darius to rebuild the Lord's Temple in accordance with the prophesies of Daniel (6) and Isaiah (44, 45).

The Restoration after 70 years' desolation that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold was about to commence (25).

Finding everything in what used to be a rich and fertile land in shambles and surrounded by a hostile population - most of whom were captives from other nationalities and forced to dwell there 50 years earlier by the fierce Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar - it came with little surprise that Zerubbabel and his high priest Jeshua acutely felt almost immediately the burden of leadership and heavy responsibility for God's command to restore His Temple.

Once settled in the land, the newly-returned Jews, numbering about 50,000-strong, began by rebuild the altar and lay the foundations of the Temple by contributing food and money to the masons and carpenters who brought cedar logs from the forests of Lebanon. Their work however was to be short-lived, for strong opposition came from their jealous neighbors and local Persian officials who wrote letters to the royal court in Persia. Finally, the Persian king Artaxerxes himself, to put an end to the intrigues, issued an order to stop the rebuilding work. And the work on the restoration of the Temple grounded to halt for 16 long years.

And, so, did it seem like God's plans had been frustrated by mere mortal men. Ah, not so! For the prophet Ezekiel, living in exile among the Jews in their adopted country of Babylon, had been given visions by the Lord in the 14th year of the fall of Jerusalem (around 573 B.C.; see Ezk.40:1), where once more he was brought to Israel where a temple of Solomonic proportions stood and where animal sacrifices were once more to be made (Ezk. 40-44).

The Rebuilding of the Temple

It was now 520 B.C. The new Persian king Darius reversed the order of his predecessors and decreed that the temple of God in Jerusalem be rebuilt. Haggai, the aging prophet who had originally come with Zerubbabel, had spoken the word of the Lord to the Jews four times in just four months. The Lord's message was:

“My House and the people’s houses are both in ruins (Hag.1:1-11). The people live in luxurious (paneled) homes while My House is still unbuilt after I gave a command long ago. This cannot go on. In a little while **political** and **natural** calamities will occur where ‘the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops (1:10)..’ and ‘I will shake the heavens and the earth...I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms (2:22).’ [But] because My people have heeded Me (1:12-15), I will replace my curse with blessings (Deut. 11:26-27). See, the House that you will build will be the ‘desire of all nations’ that I will ‘fill with glory’ (2:7). And, ‘the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house...AND IN THIS PLACE I WILL GRANT PEACE’ (2:9).

The Temple of Peace

The Lord had promised a Temple that was to be a Temple of Peace.

Sure enough, without further opposition the second Jewish temple was completed six years later, in 516 B.C., and dedicated amidst much celebration (Ez.6:13-18).

But wait a second! There were some misgivings even then among the Jews, especially by those had seen the splendor and opulence of the First Temple. The second, rebuilt Temple was nothing compared to the first! Was not the prophet Ezekiel shown in his vision the Temple of Solomon in all its grandeur? Why wasn’t the new temple like the first one? Did God short-change the Jews in the rebuilding of this second temple?

Not so, the Bible tells us! *And for a very good reason.* In Haggai 2:9, while the second temple was yet to be rebuilt, the Lord already had declared that “the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house.” For, what could be greater than the temple built by King Solomon, an earthly temple, than that of a Heavenly Temple? Jesus, some 500 years after Haggai, dared his critics to “destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19), referring of course to his body which would soon be crucified on the cross (destroyed) but be resurrected (raised up) in glory. His incredulous listeners, who understood only the present temporal temple, retorted “it has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” (v. 2:20). But already, in Haggai’s time, God was expressing the messianic hope. Zerubbabel was to be made “like my signet ring, for I have chosen you” (Hag. 2:23) and the high priest Joshua (the Greek variant of the Hebrew is Jeshua, or, Jesus) was to be crowned with silver and gold (Zech. 6:11).

Further reinforcing the messianic picture, Ezekiel’s temple vision alludes to animal sacrifices to be made (Ezk. 43:12-27), but now made *unnecessary* by Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross (cf. Jn. 2:19-22). Truly, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) reigns in the hearts of men and women, whose bodies have been made a temple where God’s spirit lives, according to the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 6:19). Moreover, Paul warns, anyone who

tries to destroy that temple, God will in turn destroy him, for God's temple (which is our bodies) has now been sanctified as His dwelling place! (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

Our World Today

Today, our world is not unlike the time of the prophet Haggai. Many are suffering hunger and economic dislocations. Nations are at war with one another. We are led by many corrupt leaders – in government, in the private sector, even in churches. Natural calamities visit countries with regularity. Our religious institutions are being challenged and our faith questioned. Liberal attitudes about abortion, same-sex marriage, pornography, human cloning, pedophile priests and pastors, gay clergy, and trial marriages continue to assault our moral senses. Truths that we have learned from our forebears and the Bible have become “less true”: the world appears to swirl in a pool of trivialities, doubts and half-truths and can only confuse the Christian.

Sadly, we cannot find peace in this kind of world. We can only find it in Haggai's Temple of Peace.

Inner Peace

One of the great enigmatic statements of Jesus was when he declared: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matt. 10:34). Rich in meaning, what Jesus could have meant was that we should not look to Him for what we perceive as ordinary, external, worldly peace, for that is a kind of peace that is at most temporary and fleeting. If anything, this world brings a sword, not peace!

Haggai's Temple of Peace is “the desire of all nations.” On one level, we *all* want to enter that Temple of glory. On a deeper level, that too is no longer necessary, for instead, it is **God who enters us** through Christ. Jesus now grants us **inner peace**, a peace that can be found only **within**, a kind of peace that transcends all understanding (Phil.4:7). Indeed, we do not have to look far outside our circle for Jesus Himself is our peace (Eph. 2:14). In Him, we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). We are now, each of us, Haggai's Temple of Peace.

The Book of Haggai was the topic of the Vespers Sunday School last October 18, 2004, under the “The Minor Prophets” Discussion Series. Nene Rubrico moderates the group discussions every Sunday, 3:30-5:00 P.M. at the GG Hall.