

Looking Forward

Haggai 2: 1-9

G. Davison.

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In reading these verses I have in mind to draw a comparison between the state of the saints in the day of Haggai and our state today. One has been encouraged by the phrase "be strong," and it is this which has prompted me to refer to this prophecy.

In these verses we are carried back in thought to the book of Ezra, where we have the record of the rebuilding of the temple by the people who had been restored from Babylon and were back again in the land. Owing to the opposition from the hostile forces which surrounded them, the work on the temple had ceased, and the people were saying it was not the right time to build the house of the Lord. This state of things had existed for about two years, when God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who sought by the prophetic word to persuade the people to recommence the building again. Stirred to action by the word of the Lord through His servants, the people had resumed the building of the house of the Lord and the prophecy we have read — the third one Haggai uttered — was given to encourage them now that they were actively working. This then is a word to those who are active in their service for God.

The leaders of the people, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, are addressed first, but this work was not carried on by leaders only for "the residue of the people" are also addressed. We must not think that the work of the Lord is carried on by leaders only. All of us are in this work today, even as they were in their day; we all have work to do according to the ability given to us. We may thank God for those to whom He has given grace and ability to enlighten and lead the saints in a right path, but let us beware lest we think they only have work to do and thus be inclined to leave it to them.

We each have work to do; may we have grace and strength to do the service which has been allotted to us and for which we are equipped.

One major cause of their discouragement is referred to in verse 3. Some of the elders had been looking back in mind to the magnificent temple which Solomon had built and, comparing it with the work then going on, decided that the latter was so insignificant in comparison that their work was hardly worth while. "Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" Are we not in as great a danger from this same feature as they were? Do we look back to the early days when the truths connected with the assembly were ministered and acted upon by pious men whose names we have come to revere, and "in comparison" mourn over the state of things today? Sighing and lamenting because of what characterized the past will not effect anything substantial today. The days now past were *days of responsibility for the saints who lived through them* and who are now in heaven; but *today is our day* in which we have *our responsibility* to do the work of the Lord, until He takes us also out of the sphere of service. The rest of God is still before us; today is the time of labour. Having again put their hands to the work they are encouraged to "be strong," and in order to strengthen them the promise is given, "I am with you saith the LORD of hosts," v. 4. What a strengthening fact this is? We remember what Paul said to Timothy, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me," 2 Timothy 4: 17. We can well afford to go on when the Lord is with us, and we are assured He is with us today.

Moreover they were assured that the "word" was still with them, the same word which God covenanted with them when He brought them out of Egypt. We too have the word of God in our hands, the same word which the early brethren had to enlighten and to strengthen them in their service for our Lord. We do not need modern innovations, nor will we seek for such, for we are assured that all that is needed to enlighten, to guide and to strengthen us, is in this word which has been preserved to us by our Lord. We have already seen in the second chapter of Paul's second epistle to Timothy how the man of God can be fully fitted by it. We may well thank the Lord that this word is still being ministered to us today.

Added to this we read, "My Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not," verse 5. Here is the One who has given power to all the saints at all times, in order that they might be strong in the service of God. All that *we need today* the Spirit will supply; light, strength, ability and guidance. Do not let us underestimate the importance of what is being effected for the Lord today, and the importance of our own part in this work. We, as they, have all we need to keep us strong and active in the work of our Lord. He is with us; His word is in our hands and His Spirit is in our souls, "the spirit . . . of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Timothy 1: 7. May we all be strong and "work," and not give up in discouragement.

The next few verses project our minds on to the world-to-come when our Lord will be in control of the universe — heaven, earth, sea and all nations. The glory of that day, and the house of God in that day, will far eclipse any former glory seen in this world. Instead of looking back and lamenting because of what *has been*, rather let us look on with rejoicing to what *will yet be*. The greatest glory is not behind, it is still on before. May we be strong and go on with the work as having the coming glory before our souls. When we actually arrive there, as we most certainly shall, how glad we shall be that on the way to it we were given strength and grace to do our part in our day in the testimony of our Lord. We cannot go back a hundred years; we are here now, *today*; let us have grace to receive these words of encouragement and, as exhorted "be strong . . . and work."