

Haggai

Lectures on the Minor Prophets.

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The prophet Haggai is the first of those who followed the captivity. There is great simplicity in his testimony. Nevertheless we shall find the Spirit of Christ working as decidedly in him as in any other with peculiar distinctness. He bears witness of the future glory of the Lord Jesus; at the same time none more emphatically deals with the actual state of the remnant which had returned from Babylon. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh Jehovah, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built." This is no uncommon excuse — a want of care for the glory of the Lord, under the pretext that His time is not come. We find exactly the same pretence now, the same misuse of the coming of the Lord Jesus — the excuse that because the time is not come for glory to set things right by divine power, therefore we may yield lightly to the moral confusion and irregularities and departure from the will of God found at the present moment.

Again it is an inevitable alternative that we must be occupied, either with the Lord's things, or with our own. The apostle judged it needful to specify this root of evil in writing to an assembly of more than usual vigour and subjection to the word, the church at Philippi. There were those who made manifest — what alas! is everywhere a too common symptom among Christians — their want of heart for the things of others, for the things of Jesus Christ. It was so whence he wrote: all were seeking their own things. With this before him, the apostle shows that the day of Christ, rightly understood and applied, has a powerfully counteracting effect in unsparingly dealing with the selfishness of our hearts, the light of that day being thrown directly on what occupies the present day.

Haggai does just the same. There is no one that brings out more emphatically the duty of the Israelite for the present, but no one that puts before us more steadily the light of the coming kingdom of Jehovah. They are not to be set one against another; but, contrariwise, the more we believe that He is coming, the more ought we to be in earnest that there should be nothing now inconsistent with His coming. So when they said, "The time is not come, the time that Jehovah's house should be built," the word of Jehovah comes by the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" Certainly there was in this a grievous forgetfulness of the glory of Jehovah; and it was the more painful because they had begun better. It had not been always so with the remnant.

Ezra is strongly connected with our prophet; for his book is a history which has the temple for its centre, as Haggai has evidently the very same centre — Jehovah's house. Nehemiah, as was natural, occupied himself most with the city and general state of the people. We are told in the book of Ezra that, when the remnant returned, the first thing they did was to set the altar upon its bases. In Ezra 3 we read: "And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." This is exceedingly beautiful. The effect of fear upon a godly spirit was not that they attempted to protect themselves by human means, but that their heart turned to Jehovah and the altar of acceptance they enjoyed by His means. Their first thought was Jehovah; they brought Him in between them and their difficulties from the foe. "And they offered burnt offerings thereon unto Jehovah, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is

written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; and afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of Jehovah that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto Jehovah. From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto Jehovah." It was the more remarkable because "the foundation of the temple of Jehovah was not yet laid." There was a fair pretext therefore for delay, if their heart had not been toward Him. Oh, if they had but gone on so! But it is no uncommon thing to begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh; and this was precisely what befell the remnant of Israel. Still there was the beginning in the Spirit. Haggai reproaches them with going on at any rate in the flesh. They did not walk according to their bright beginning. Having offered to Jehovah on the altar, they left off their care for the temple of Jehovah — they occupied themselves with their own things. Accordingly the prophet now points out to them what the result had been. Where was blessing or honour in their affairs? Was it that discouragements came in on account of the difficulties of the way?

Not merely so. This was true; but they were also occupied with settling themselves in the world. These two things constantly go together. As long as they looked to Jehovah, they found blessing and security; but directly Jehovah ceased to fill their eyes, then not merely the adversaries were seen, but plausible reasons for settling themselves down began to be felt. The altar was an admirable testimony to their faith. Before the temple was built, and while it was building, the altar was set on its base as the first thought: it was a beautiful feature among the returned Jews; but spiritual power failed to go on accordingly.

They allowed it to be a substitute, as it were, for the temple. Supposing persons showed a readiness and zeal, for instance, in emerging from mere forms of men to meet together in the name of the Lord, if this were made the whole matter, and there they stopped short without a thought of going on to learn the positive teaching of the Spirit and will of the Lord, or allowing room for God to act according to His own word, it would just answer to this very thing, that is satisfaction with the bare fact that they could meet as disciples together. There has been a constant tendency in many people to settle down into this as a finality, not to the name of the Lord, which would keep the door open for all that is of God, but to their meeting together as Christians, which in itself leaves things loose enough. For it does not raise questions as to condition or as to glorifying the Lord. What does not exercise souls as to Christ is a sorry comfort. Meeting simply as disciples may be a relief as a means of separating from what is positively bad and utterly condemned by God's word; but anything negative, or short of the glory of God, ought never to satisfy the soul that is renewed by grace. Hence, although the altar was in its place and time excellent, still as being specially connected with an Israelite it was liable to be rested in, and so become a hindrance. It was no doubt the altar of Jehovah, but it was such in relation to themselves, as it met them only in their first wants. It is not denied that this is all quite right; and a happy thing to see souls in earnest, and beginning with their real need. There is nothing more dangerous than straining after something grand when we ought to be feeling the depth of our necessities. At the same time the very same faith which bows to the sense of our true wants as seen of God will never rest there, but will go on attracted and encouraged by the grace of God to think of what is due to His glory. This is what the remnant ought to have done. The fact that God was graciously pleased to allow them the altar, which was the first want of an Israelite, whereon he should offer his burnt offerings, and be accepted of Jehovah, ought to have cheered them on to leave nothing undone, but to labour diligently in the face of all difficulties till the temple of Jehovah was finished. They did not; and the consequence of this lethargy, this contentedness with what just met their earliest wants and no more, and then turning round to provide for themselves and their own houses. was met by the Lord's permitting the courage of the adversaries to rise, who espied with jealous eyes, interfered with

them, and sought to stir their Persian masters effectually against them.

Thus unbelief constantly brings on us the very thing that we dread. It was not unnatural that the Jews should be afraid of their watchful enemies; but they should have looked to Jehovah. Where there is simplicity of confidence in the Lord it is astonishing how the tables are turned, and the adversaries stand in dread of the feeblest folk who have faith in the living God. We see it in the Israelites when they were near the land. Rahab told the truth about the fear of all in Jericho, at any rate, if not about the spies. She confessed that, spite of their high walls, the Canaanites were quaking because of the despised Israelites. So we see here, among the foreigners planted in Samaria and their governors, there was an effort to keep the sharpest watch after a little remnant. This alarmed them; but they need not have been alarmed if they had held Jehovah before their eyes. There was departure in heart; and this both relaxes all zeal for the Lord, and leads us to prefer to take care of ourselves rather than that He should care for us.

Hence to carry forward the house of God could be easily deferred to a more convenient season, though urgent call was for their own wants as men — their ceiled houses. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little." There was diligence for themselves; but there was the result, and what? "Ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm." Thus bitter disappointment, as always, must be in the people of God who live for themselves instead of confiding in Him who specially looks after the faithful. Our business is to care for His things; His gracious work is to care for us in our and indeed in all things. "And he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." In every way there was vexation for the selfish heart. In grace there is another call to consider their ways. The first was to reprove them; the second is to encourage and exhort them. "Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith Jehovah. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? said Jehovah of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house."

I do not know anything of its kind more touching than Jehovah's sense of neglect on the part of His unworthy people. It certainly was not the grandeur of stones, which suited the present condition of the remnant; nor was it of the inferiority of the house compared with Solomon's of which Jehovah complained; but He did feel their indifference. We assuredly know, or ought to know, that it was not that He needs anything of man's hand for His own glory, but He is very sensible of the lack of heart for Himself. The truth is that the glory of the Lord is bound up with the best blessing of His people. You cannot serve a soul better than by filling his heart with the Lord. Other means are at best negative, however valuable.

Undoubtedly the moral application of Haggai to the present day is very striking in many points of view. Their call to care and concern for Jehovah's name and His house and His glory, not only the whole bearing but the detailed instruction, have a wonderful application to the present hour; but in all there is none more important than the value the Lord attaches to devotedness to Himself and His worship on the part of the saints.

It is then pointed out that the failure was deeper than in mere circumstances. And what made it the more remarkable is that God was no longer maintaining His throne in Israel! but He did not for all that relax His moral government. This is to be weighed. A royal throne in His name as a witness to the nations was no longer the question. It was thrown down. The throne of Jehovah was not in Zion, nor

anywhere else on earth for the time, though of course the purpose is not given up; but still He governed morally; and this is the thing that is now made plain. "Therefore" (so He begins with them) "the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands." It was Jehovah who blighted their selfish efforts. He was dealing with the unbelief and consequent neglect of the returned remnant. It was not because He loved them not, but because He did. "Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." When the Lord allows persons to go away without rebuke, it is the evident and sure sign that all practical bond is broken, — if any bond ever did exist, — that He now disowns them, at any rate for the time. Hence these very chastenings which fell on the Jews were the proof, though of a sorrowful kind, that His eye was over them, and that He felt their negligence of Him and resented — in divine faithfulness of course, but still in government — the failure of His people in care for His glory.

Nevertheless Jehovah blessed the testimony of His prophet Haggai at this time. "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Jehovah their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Jehovah their God had sent him, and the people did fear before Jehovah. Then spake Haggai Jehovah's messenger in Jehovah's message to the people." It is exceedingly gracious, I think, to see how God provides with special care for a day of weakness. I am not aware that any of the prophets was called "Jehovah's messenger." before. Haggai is the least of the post-captivity prophets in extent, and the earliest of them in point of time; but he is the one called to have this peculiar name of honour. Men would never have selected him for it. Mere critics when giving their thoughts of Haggai would speak of him as the tamest in point of style, the most prosaic of all the prophets; but he was Jehovah's messenger for all that. The wisdom of men is foolishness. "The foolishness of God," as men think it, "is wiser than man." The very prophet who is most simply dealing with the commonest things, — talking about their ceiled houses, and their sowing much, and their bags with holes, nothing but the most trite and ordinary appeals, as it might seem, — was Jehovah's messenger.

I am persuaded that it is precisely the same principle now. One sees it in our Lord's provision, already referred to, in Matthew 18, where He warns the disciples of stumbling-blocks. And we know well how truly it has been so — that what was once fair and vigorous and free in its progress over the waste of waters has been wrecked and broken in pieces. We know well how the united testimony of Christendom has been long gone, and become as a whole the seat of Satan's power; that now the testimony of truth is most partial; that even what is sound and good is dislocated to serve man's pride, not the glory of the Lord in separation from the world; that consequently the circumstances are such that it is impossible to defend the present state of the house of God, so as to carry conviction to an unbeliever, who contrariwise gathers his strongest weapons from the gross contrariety of Christendom to the New Testament. No doubt a spiritual mind can see through the confusion, and see in it a confirmation of the divine warnings; but this does not hinder that which has the greatest show and the highest claims under the cloak of Christ's name, from being the farthest removed from the truth of God. Consequently there are a great many moral perplexities for simple souls which should lead us, I think, to have great tenderness and concern for them at the present time; but above all there is this comfort, that God gives those who love Christ and the church — His peculiar forethought in providing for a day of difficulty and weakness when people might be more than ever deceived. Thus it is an example of this very care, when there might be literally but two or three gathered to the name of the Lord in some places, that He expressly says beforehand, "there am I in the midst of them." What can be lacking where He is? Or is it that the mixed multitude lead those who should know and feel better to

loathe that light bread? Is the manna distasteful, and does the old habit of Egypt induce any to pine after its flesh-pots and garlic? I know not where we find His presence more expressly and emphatically pledged than when His assembly might consist of only "two or three gathered unto his name."

We see also a similar principle in the Epistle of Jude. The downfall of the Christian testimony is set forth there in a more stringent and awful manner than in any other part of the New Testament. "Woe unto them," he says, "for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core." Yet in this very epistle it is said, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith." Here only in the New Testament is our faith called "most holy;" and I think that the reason why the Spirit was pleased to use such a term in this connection alone was to guard against the tendency to lower the faith in consequence of the difficulties of the state of things and times. People feel vaguely that Christendom is in confusion. Hence the temptation in such perplexities is always to give up unswerving fidelity to the will of the Lord where it is hard to follow and costs much every way. In a day of laxity we need most of all to hold the truth of God inflexibly. The only thing for which we ought to be uncompromising is the name of Christ. We are not called to fight for our own name, or honour, or any earthly object or connection: still less should we oppose others unless to fight for His name which is theirs as well as ours; but we are called to be unhesitating and unbending where the faith is in question. Therefore, building up themselves in their most holy faith, they are told to "keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Both the gravity and the comfort of such a word as this, for such a day as ours, seem to me beyond exaggerating. No, we are not to become Laodicean; we are not to say, because the faith has been encroached on in all sorts of ways, that therefore truth, holiness, and love are hopeless. It is not so. "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, keep yourselves in the love of God," etc. We are not to sink down with the declension of Christendom; we are rather the more strenuously by the grace of God to rise up, and, if we have nothing else to boast of, at any rate, to cleave to the faith of God's elect which works by love. We owe it to Christ and the church so much the more because of the danger and the difficulty; not merely for our own souls, but for His sake who died for us and is coming back to receive us to Himself, when we shall taste the sweetness of His approval for whatever of obloquy we may have known for His name. Doubtless all is worthless which is not founded on the person of the Son of God, who is the object of faith; and the only test of maintaining it intact.

Admirable is the manner in which the New Testament provides for a dark day, so that without pretension there should always be a real provision for the church. Let me illustrate my meaning. God took care in apostolic days that the holy apostles should acknowledge that which some men call disorderly, but what is really of the Spirit; and certainly they should beware of going too far when He is concerned. So in writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle called on the saints to know those that were over them in the Lord. Probably they themselves were surprised that the Lord should make so much of them. So here, though of course on higher grounds, Haggai is called Jehovah's messenger. Isaiah and Ezekiel did not require it so much; Haggai did. The sublimity of Isaiah, the extended scope and deep nature of his prophecies of Ezekiel spoke for themselves. But it was not so with Haggai as is too plain from the depreciatory estimate of our critics. There is a quiet homeliness in Haggai's communications for the most part, which has exposed him to be thought by some merely a good man doing his best under the circumstances. Yet up to this time he and he alone is called Jehovah's messenger. No one had ever been so carefully supported, and covered over, so to speak, with the shield of the Lord in the midst of adversaries. He was sent forth with a veritable coat of mail round about him. If more exposed, he was more protected. After some such style was the Lord providing, not merely for those early days when He drew attention to the fact that these labourers apt to be despised were over them in the Lord.

But there is more instruction and value still. For assuredly in these days we want no new directory; and if such was the true principle then, it abides no less true now. The Thessalonian saints had no title from the Lord to give their brethren authority, which was the case where the apostle chose elders for the brethren. A truly admirable method it was to call the saints to recognise what was of God where apostolic choice could not be had. But the apostle makes it a clear duty to own spiritual power in the way of rule without anything more. As we have seen, the inspired word carefully draws attention to their place, and maintains it jealously. Hence when as now we cannot have the regular appointment of elders by apostolic authority, we can thankfully fall back on that which was true before and independently of it. So wisely and graciously does the Lord think of us in this day of weakness and wants and deceits.

What then answers to a messenger of Jehovah now? The man who uses the testimony of God for His glory, — who unflinchingly holds to it, yet perseveringly seeks the good of God's people, and who bears all odium and scorn and rejection, yet cheers others as well as his own soul with the bright anticipations of glory and triumph with Christ at His coming. But he who is helping on the delusive hopes of the world, and the vain dream of Christendom's improvement, is, I think, a very different messenger. Of one thing be assured, no truth avails unless you are prepared to carry it out in every day's practice. The world will let you hold and even say anything, provided they see that you have no serious thought of being faithful, and so calling them to be the same. He then has not the smallest resemblance to Jehovah's messenger, who says one thing and does another, who denounces the world yet seeks it for his family, judges rightly, yet never thinks of acting out his convictions. Is this living so as to give effect to a divine testimony? He who is the living spring of the truth is also the Holy Spirit. What can be more calculated to destroy the truth than practical inconsistency with it?

In the New Testament "the man of God" supposes one faithful in the service of souls; but the term is by no means confined to Christianity, being rather in itself a familiar Old Testament expression. By it we may understand a believer who has the moral courage and the spiritual power to identify himself with the Lord's interests, and to maintain the good fight of faith in the midst of perils and obstacles of every sort. Such a testimony is incompatible with yielding to human principles and the spirit of the age.

We must not suppose however that fidelity in such a day as ours wears an imposing garb. An appearance of strength is not of course when declension has come in and judgment is approaching. God will have a state of ruin felt, and His testimony must be in keeping. When He calls to sackcloth and ashes, He does not give such a character of power as has price in the world's eyes. Thus one of the truest signs of practical communion with the Lord is that at such a moment one is heartily content to be little. This is reality, but it is only a little strength. It is according to the mind of God. But that which attracts the world must please and pander to the self-importance of man. The world itself is a vain show, and likes its own. Consequently there is nothing which so carries the mass of men along with it as that which flatters the vanity of the human mind. It may assume the lowliest air, but sinful man seeks his own honour and present exaltation. But when a servant of God is thus drawn into the spirit of men, he naturally shrinks back from fairly facing the solemn call of God addressed to His own, loses his bright confidence, and gets either hardened or stands in dread of the judgments of God. When Christians lose the power and reproach of the cross, philanthropy has been taken up, which gives influence among men, and general activity in what men call doing good replaces the life of faith with the vain hope of staving off the evil day in their time at any rate. One need not deny zeal and earnest pursuit of what is good morally; self-denial too one sees in spending for purposes religious or benevolent; but the man of God, now that ruin has entered the field of Christ's confession, is more

urgently than ever called to be true to a crucified Christ. And as surely as He is soon coming to take us on high, He will in due time appear for the judgment of every high thought and the fairest looking enterprises of men which will all be swallowed up in the yawning gulf of the apostacy.

"Then spake Haggai Jehovah's messenger in Jehovah's message unto the people, saying, I am with you." What a remarkable analogy there is in that which has been occupying us! "I am with you" is the saving principle for faith in the weakest possible day: and, let me repeat it, what had they better in the brightest day? Nay, what else so good as having the Lord with them? To have the most blessed servants would have been small if they had not the Master Himself. This was the great safeguard and unfailing source of supply and counsel when Israel came out of Egypt. How gracious to have His presence reassured after Babylon, when all was apparently gone and broken! "I am with you, saith Jehovah." The words were few, but they implied every succour and blessing; and they sunk deep in pious hearts. "And Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, the 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 Jehovah of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."

The remarkable fact here is, that they built without waiting to hear that the king sanctioned it. They did the work, because it was Jehovah's message, not because it had the king's sign-manual. His sanction was given subsequently, but they had ventured to go on confidently in faith, simply acting on the word of Jehovah, without waiting for anything else. Nor did the Lord fail to work for them. Israel were now Lo-ammi. They had forfeited for the time their public place in the world; but Jehovah did not fail to try, to guide and to bless the faithful. His righteous government goes on none the less because it is the times of the Gentiles. There is even more scope for faith; and we may always be confident that, if we are within with the Lord, He will work outwardly, whatever hinders. If there is opposition, the Lord knows how to turn the many adversaries so as to further the work; if, on the other hand, His providence controls the outward powers and they cherish a friendly spirit, the Lord will use this for good. *All* things work together for good to them that love Him. It is impossible for faith to be overcome, however sorely it be tried. It brings in God who cannot fail, and who loves to strengthen the believer when all else fades. He is the God who quickens the dead. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Christ is the true power of this; and the joy of the Lord is His people's strength. May our only confidence be in Him!

It appears, however, that the Jews, like ourselves, were apt to get discouraged; consequently every now and then the prophet comes in a way somewhat similar, but with increasing force. As unbelief increases, the testimony of God becomes more energetic as long as He continues to send His words to the people. "In the seventh month, on the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of Jehovah by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" There is no allowance of self-complacent thoughts. God would make us real in our souls and ways. It is a good thing not to have too high imaginations, but the truth, a just weight and measure. At the same time let us leave room for the grace and power of God. Take, for instance, the present moment, as we are looking at this in a practical way. There is no greater danger than forgetting the spirit that becomes those to whom God has shown His mercy in giving true understanding of what suits Him in the actual and broken state of Christendom. Is it not one of the things we need most to look to that the tone in which we use the truth should be becoming? The more we learn of God, the more we should cultivate lowliness of mind. This does not imply that you should

have indecision in your convictions, but that along with this you have a just sense of your own weakness, and that you are broken in spirit, remembering how the glory of the Lord has suffered by the failure of His people. It was quite right, therefore, that they should feel the feeble condition of all that bore the name of Jehovah in their midst. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory?" We feel how far the church has fallen and whence also, but we ought not to be discouraged. There is no element of Christ in despair or distrust. The Holy Ghost never produces doubt. As there is sometimes a difficulty in minds about what is called the ruin of the church, a few words may be well on the present broken state of things among those who call on the Lord's name.

We must bear in mind the church in two points of view — the church or assembly as built by Christ and as built by man, that is, by His servants. The assembly as built by Christ never fails. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." But that which has been built by the servants of the Lord is always liable to be injured by elements more or less worthless if not worse. It may suffer through worldliness, haste, carelessness, fleshly feeling, a thousand things according to nature allowed to act without being judged, and so leave results to shame and the Lord's dishonour. Hence we find among the Corinthians there were materials of which the apostle speaks in tones of grave admonition. They have let in what was not unprofitable only but even corrupting: "wood, hay, and stubble." Yea also there might be a power of defilement with the hand of destruction there. He who built what was worthless might be saved while his work perished, but the man who defiled, or destroyed, the house of God would himself be destroyed by the judgment of God. All this is where men are the builders. Thus we see the two aspects justified. There is that in the assembly of God here below which is built of Christ, and so never fails, the stones of which are living, and in no case dead ones. On the other hand there is the bad workmanship, more or less careless service, as the case may be — either bad men doing what is according to themselves, or good men who are not in everything guided of God; and consequently there is an accretion of inferior material having no value for God which sullies His temple, and so far incurs the charge of confusion, disorder, and weakness. It is in the last point of view that we see the springs of the ruin which soon overspread the church. These perishable things, "wood, hay, and stubble," mean, I think, ill-put or light doctrine generating persons akin. It might thus easily mean both; it is in the first instance doctrines palatable to the flesh, and therefore attractive to persons in a fleshly state, perhaps unconverted or natural men.

Some no doubt think it a hard saying to speak of the church in ruins; but why so? There is no impeachment of God but only of man. God called Israel out of Egypt; yet Israel became a ruin. Why then should we wonder that the Gentile has not continued in His goodness? Compare Romans 11, where we may see how little the apostle could be surprised at such an issue. The principle runs through every dealing of God with man. The creature always fails, but all turns to God's glory. No doubt the church, like Israel, exists, but in a ruined state. Does not the Protestant own it when he thinks of Popery? the Romanist when he looks on Protestantism? Upright and spiritual men own it without reserve.

All these are but cases of a still more general truth. The first man fell and is fallen universally. But there is another great fact — the Second man is risen from the dead, and has begun a new creation which will never perish or even fail. Thus the same principle applies far and wide; as always; as far as we touch on the responsibility of man, we behold ruin and confusion. Everybody feels it; every godly intelligent person owns it, even though he might not be used to the expression, and so feel difficulty, fearing it might compromise the grace and faithfulness of God. Impossible to love Christ and the church without groaning. Doubtless I could easily name a well-known high church leader who as a pious man mourns over the present state of the church. I take him as occupying a zone ecclesiastically

far removed from that of most of us here present. Yet as we cannot doubt of real godliness there, so also a heart that loves Christ and those that are Christ's. Now it is impossible to have these divine affections of the new nature without feeling that the present state of things is contrary to Christ's glory. I confess that I have incomparably more sympathy with the groaning of such a man than with others who trumpet the onward progress of Christianity in the nineteenth century, and look for the triumphs of the millennium as the fruit of the church's labours. How can one sympathize with such insensibility to the actual dishonour done to the Lord? It is really, though unconsciously, playing into the hands of Satan.

As to the comforting assurance through the prophet of the Holy Spirit being with the Jews as in the day when they were brought out of Egypt, we must remember that the power of Jehovah is in everything good wrought by the Spirit. He it is who always gave energy in man, whether in Israel or in the church, in man, creation, or anything else. The energy is always of the Spirit, and therefore he says, "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Jehovah; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Jehovah, and work: for I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you." It is not the Spirit given in the special power, still less the personal presence, vouchsafed when Christ went up to heaven and the church was being formed on earth; but according to the way in which He had wrought at first in Israel, so would He in grace even after the captivity in Babylon.

This was not merely by Haggai speaking to them, but His gracious operation also in strengthening the remnant who needed the word of Jehovah. He was ready to bless them afresh; but of course only in such a sort as suited the then dealings of God, that is, after a Jewish pattern and measure. The additional thing is not as some suppose the distinction in John 14, where the Lord speaks of the Spirit not only dwelling *with* them, but being "in them." He was to *dwell* with them, instead of going away like Jesus; and He was to be not merely *with* but *in* them, after being given in the new way the Christian knows Him. So intimately does the Spirit of God identify Himself with all our matters according to Christ. Whatever privileges and powers were known of old, His personal presence was not and could not be, as the Lord lets us know, till He returned to heaven after His death and resurrection. Thenceforward it becomes to us a new power of fellowship with the Father and with His Son. There is also more of a heavenly character.

But the Spirit of God was with the Jews suitably to the earthly dispensation they had under the law, and in accordance with their being a nation in the flesh. With us He is and acts suitably to the glory of God in exalting Christ in heaven; and He is in us according to the efficacy of redemption. He could not be in us until all that was of us had been completely annulled before God. There is therefore that which is absolutely new, while a higher character attaches to what abides kindred to what they possessed of old. But as in John 14 there are two main elements of comfort — the presence of the Spirit and the coming of the Lord Jesus; so here we have the permanence of the action of the Spirit in the feeblest remnant of Israel, and then further the day of Jehovah, when their Saviour God reveals Himself to His waiting people. "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land." The analogy is great throughout this prophecy from first to last with what we have now in Christ for heaven. "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come."

After mature consideration and research I cannot doubt that this phrase, "the desire of all nations," points to the Messiah. There are difficulties about it, so much so that a learned person in Convocation the other day denied its reference to anything of the sort. This seems to me more rash

than wise. How often we betray the state of our own minds and hearts by our judgments of scripture! When in a low condition spiritually, without having God's object before us, we are apt to prefer a more human and consequently more incorrect interpretation of God's word; we shall be satisfied with its lowest application, and use this to deny what is incomparably more important and full.

The truth is that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, is the constant object of the Holy Ghost where He speaks of any object or office supremely excellent, no matter what its shape or nature. If it be a great priest, prophet, or king; if it be a Saviour, conqueror, or judge) always the One whom the Holy Ghost contemplates from beginning to end is Christ; and it will be the same with our interpretation, where the Holy Ghost identifies our spiritual affections with Christ, and forms our minds according to God's purposes and ways. Thus in fact the Spirit of Christ is characteristic of the Christian. Surely he of all men ought to be the first to see this running through the written word. So among the apostles we find constantly in Paul — but indeed it belongs to the New Testament generally — this quickness of scent in the fear of the Lord, which sees Christ everywhere.

I do not then stand on the ground that "the desire of all nations" is generally accepted as the Messiah. Such has been the ancient and prevalent interpretation, though some, especially in modern times, have laboured to throw doubt on it. English followers have caught up the cavils of German critics and repeated them, little knowing that most of these doubts have been expressed by Deists of a former day. Most of the sceptical theories of the land of Luther in the present day are the reproduction of what England cast out as a filthy rag in the seventeenth century. The English would not have it then; it got into Germany; and now it has come back again decorated with a goodly show of erudition after a new pattern, but only the old material after all.

It is a fair enquiry in what sense the Messiah could be the desire of *all* the nations or Gentiles. Not it seems that He must needs be said to be subjectively their desire; but objectively He is, and will be one day owned as, the precious treasure of all nations; for indeed in the past or present which of them have prized Him as they ought? He is not only the hope of Israel, but will be the means of true riches and blessing to all other nations. There never can be the full happiness of the world till He comes. In itself I see no more difficulty in such a phrase than in the kindred expression said of the Jews in Malachi 3: 1: "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." They have both been far from feeling as became them the worth of Jesus. But the day hastens for both, however tremendous the dark hour which comes before it.

As to the grammar, it is a peculiar phrase in the Hebrew, where the subject* is a noun feminine singular, the predicate is a plural masculine. Some suppose what is called a *zeugma* with *ha'goim*. But explain as we may the want of concord, neither the older nor the later Jews were deterred by the construction from supposing the Messiah intended. So Et. Ahika (in Sanh. cap. 135)). Parkhurst and Lee take it similarly, as did Jerome of old in the Vulgate. If one puts it thus: "And the desire of all nations, they shall come," the English reader may understand better the harshness involved. The Septuagint gives "the choice things of all the nations shall come," which may remind us of its strange rendering of Gen. 49: 10: ἕως ἔαν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῇ καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν, † "till there come the things stored up for him, and he [is the] expectation of nations." It is nearly answered by Hengstenberg's "the beauty of all the heathen," if not by Ewald's "loveliest of all people." Some have taken it as "all the Gentiles shall come *with* their delightful things," others as "come *to*," etc., that is, Jerusalem; but I think we may well dismiss these as possessing little claim on general attention and as proving scarcely more than the difficulty of the construction. And as for the version "costly or precious things," whether we take it, as would be most natural, for the Jewish temple from the heathen,

or as others do as contributions to the church, I am surprised that any Christian should hesitate in judging that such a meaning cannot be the true one. Dr. Davidson is right enough in rejecting Stonard's "they shall come to the desire of all nations," and D. Kimchi's "with the desire of all nations," or even Henderson's "the things desired by all the nations shall come," that is, the blessings of the gospel.

*In Daniel 11: 37, "desire of women" clearly means the Messiah. Gesenius admits some deity, "flagitante contextu intelligendum idolum à mulieribus Syris studiose cultum." Rationalism ever curtails and degrades.

† Augustine wrote better (De Civ. Dei, 18: 35), though we see in him the usual slipping away from the truth. He applies the prophecy partly to the past, but, strange to say, applies "*veniet Desideratus cunctis gentibus*" to His second advent only. Still more explicitly he reasons later (48), "Nam prius ejus adventus nondum erat desideratus omnibus gentibus. Non enim quem deberent desiderare, sciebant, in quem non crediderant." Jerome is equally decided, though noticing the Septuagint, that the Hebrew points to the Messiah, though he sees in the words only His first advent.

But Dr. D.'s own rendering, as often happens with critics, is not better founded than those he rejects, and results in a sense altogether beneath the requirements of the verse. "The right translation is (says he, iii. 316) *the choice of all nations*, that is, the noblest or best of them will come. All nations are represented as fearing God; but only the best of them as coming to do Him homage. Perhaps the LXX. too meant this." Now it is true that the substantive is used frequently in a wholly different construction as a qualifying noun, and so as a virtual adjective for the sense. Hence it is often rendered in such instances "pleasant," "goodly," etc. But in a construction analogous to the one before us such a meaning as the choice, that is, noblest or best, is to set at nought Hebrew usage, and would give elsewhere, as I am bold to say here also, a sense foreign to and irreconcilable with the context. Thus 1 Sam. 9: 20 means "all the desire of Israel." "The choice" of Israel, that is, the noblest or best, is not at all the thought. This was far from being the fact as to Saul and all his father's house. Again, Dan. 11: 37, though of course Dr. D. adopts the notion of its being Astarte, still even so his version of the same construction in Haggai seems to me refuted by his view of Daniel. Surely all this violence done to language is not without instruction, and shows that it is easier to find fault with the current version of a clause, no doubt peculiar, than to suggest a better.

The truth is, as it may be well to add, that the Jews used a totally different word when they meant to say the choicest of any objects; and this Dr. D. knew; for immediately after he says, "We have a synonym to the noun desire in *mibchar* (Isa. 22: 7; Ex. 15: 4.) In this case also the construct state ceases to be an adjective-description of the latter substantive, and requires another to make sense." Now it is not correct to call this a synonym; for the true notion is *choice*, as in the former word it is *desire*; and these are in no way interchangeable, even where both might apply to the same, which is not always possible. Thus in Genesis 23: 6, "in the *desire* of our sepulchres" would be nonsense or at least not the sense intended, but the choice or best; and so with every other occurrence in the Bible. Dr. D. is therefore as mistaken as he can be in such a case. If the reader compare Isa. 22: 7 with Zech. 7: 14, he will see that the idiomatic use of the one is the inverse of the other, one being literally "the choice of thy valleys," the other "the land of desire;" the construct state being thus reversed in the two phrases. Dr. D. therefore is premature in expecting that "books and sermons" will cease to identify the Messiah with the desire of all nations in this passage: certainly those who make them may be excused till weightier grounds take the place of bad Hebrew and as bad exegesis. On the whole, though the phrase is peculiar and may be vague, it appears to converge on the Messiah.

A partial illustration might be found in Isaiah 11, where we have the Messiah described: "In that

day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek." Thus the Gentiles will be then brought to the feet of Jesus. They will be, so to speak, clothed and sitting at the feet of the true King. The difficulty is freely granted. There appears to be a purposed want of precise terms; and we may gather from it that it is not necessarily subjective. Personal faith gives definitiveness to the object of trust. Christ is the one who really is so before God, and the one that will be made so before them by and by; for He is in sober truth, so to speak, the concentration of all that is good and precious. Thus there is no difficulty to a spiritual mind about it. The difficulty is to scholars who want everything formally regular; and where this is not so, they seem not sorry to profit by the occasion to leave Christ out. Certainly this is not the way of faith, which delights to trace Him even if for wise reasons veiled for a season.

Further, even when one departs from Christ to any of the alternatives, there is much violence done. Prepositions are either unwarrantably interpolated by the mind, or a very unworthy sense is extracted. Even so the difficulty remains pretty much in the phrase itself, no matter how it may be rendered, the subject being singular and feminine, and the predicate plural and masculine. Difficulty of explanation does not destroy the version, "the desire of all nations shall come." Even though the construction look irregular, we may be sure that all is designed. All languages, including those of the classics, admit of *anacolutha* — none so much as the Greek of the Apocalypse; but we can often see the reason, and should learn to conclude that there is always a holy motive for them. I am persuaded that nothing else would give the force so well; but still that is the very circumstance which furnishes occasion for disputation. Where persons do not rest on Christ by faith, they will find abundance to perplex their minds: if they do not take advantage of it, they seem themselves carried away captive by a mere notion. That there is here a certain indeterminateness in the object of desire they have laid hold of in order to eliminate Christ from the passage. And this they think a feat of criticism and-a consequence of superior discernment; whereas it only proves that they are out of the current of the Spirit's testimony, and have not an ear to hear.

The truth is that there is no security even in the most accurate and comprehensive scholarship without the teaching of the Spirit, if the subject-matter be the scriptures. Christian translators may often fail through ignorance of idiom; but a worldly scholar never can be trusted at all, spite of consummate linguistic skill, because of his necessary lack of still deeper qualifications. He knows not God and His Son, and has not therefore the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the intelligence of the truth. He who singled out Haggai 2: 7 is probably the most learned on the bench of English prelates. I do not doubt his abilities learning, or honesty. Nevertheless the prize at stake and imperilled for many by the temerity of such statements is too great to close one's eyes and lips, when those who by their public position ought to be zealously defending the faith are really carrying on the tactics of unbelief with so much the more opportunity for mischief. Nor is it that he made any serious attempt to set the truth clear. The doubt, familiar enough in sceptical writings, was thrown out in a speech about the revision of the English Bible. Dr. T. was of course one of those who supported the motion for the revision of the Authorised Version, and this was a particular instance from the Old Testament adduced as an example of the necessity for an amended translation.

It is well known that there are passages printed as scripture which have no real title to be in the Bible, as the three heavenly witnesses, for instance, in 1 John 5. This also, I think, was then referred to; where every serious and unbiassed student would agree with him, because it is only ignorant prejudice that accepts these verses. Men versed in the diplomatic evidence of the New Testament know that the same grounds which demand our reception of the apostolic prophetic writings in general compel us to reject those clauses as an interpolation. Besides, I am assured that internally they weaken the truth, and

do not help but hinder the effect of the full light on the capital truth of the Trinity. Testimony in heaven (to whom, and for what end?) is a strange doctrine. Again, the phraseology is unexampled in scripture; there is never such a correlation in it as "The Father and the Word." When the "Father" is spoken of, we hear of "The Son," if named in the same context; never of "The Father and the Word." For this answers not to "Father" but to "God." Wherever scripture treats of these terms, the true correlates are "God and the Word," or "The Father and the Son;" never, as in the spurious insertion, "The Father and the Word." I am not reasoning now on mere *à priori* grounds; for if a passage comes with sufficient outward authority, whether understood or not, I hold myself bound to receive it. Where there is evidence that it was originally given and received as an inspired document on God's authority, I receive it without dispute, question, or reasoning whatever. But in this case the fact is that the only Greek manuscripts known to support this particular portion are proved to be either forgeries or valueless from their want of antiquity. There is not one ancient Greek copy that contains the passage. Hence it was very properly left out in Luther's translation of the Bible into German, as also in the first Greek Testaments edited by Erasmus. That it was subsequently brought in was mainly due to the clamour of Roman Catholics, who were naturally anxious to have it accredited in Greek, because the Latin Vulgate, with some Latin ecclesiastical witnesses, vouches for it; and especially since the Council of Trent pronounced the Latin version to be authentic scripture. Consequently, if we are compelled by truth to give it up, their authentic scripture is seriously wrong. Thus Romanists have a palpable interest ecclesiastically in supporting it, whereas nobody else ought to have. But this a wholly different case and question from the one before us.

As to the seventh verse then of Haggai 2,* it is admitted that there is an idiomatic difficulty *for every rendering* of the clause translated in our Bible — "the desire of all nations shall come." The modern Jewish version, which is generally that of German rationalists, is no more literal than the usual Christian one. As I have already explained, there is a peculiarity independent of every version and inherent in all; but I believe that "the desire, or object of desire, of all the Gentiles," is as literal and, what is of more moment, more true, as far better suiting the grandeur of the verse than that which some would force on us, "the precious things," meaning the gold and silver, etc., which are distinctly named afterwards. It must be borne in mind that the most literal version is not necessarily the most faithful or best, especially in such a case as this, where an irregularity occurs in the concord, no doubt for special emphasis. The Chaldee paraphrase, or Targum of Jonathan, takes the sense apparently just as our English Bible.† The Syriac is decidedly loose; the Arabic seems to give the sense much as the Septuagint.

*One might have hoped that the famous Grotius was sufficiently free for the freest handlers of scripture. But they use him when he suits, and discard his judgment when his conscience was too strong for the aberrations they desire. This is his comment on the passage: "*Ubi venerit desiderium omnium gentium, id est, quem desiderare omnes gentes debent. Respicit ad verba Jacobi de Siloh, quae in ore erant Judaeis et vicinis gentibus, ut diximus ad Matth. ii. LXX. hic pluraliter legere tWDMj cum Holem, eximia, τὸ ἐκλεκτὰ, minus recte.*" (*Crit. Sacr.* Amst. tom. iv. 671.)

† Let me here transcribe a long critical note of Dathe, who was certainly a more careful Hebraist than most, and far too disposed to lower the full sense of scripture. But here his judgment was sound and decidedly against those who oppose the Messianic application. I purposely give the opening words, which are worthy of a rationalist. "Commotionem caeli et terrae, de qua in hac pericopa a versu 6-9. sermo est, ego quidem cum Illustri *Michaëlis* explicandam putem de bellis Alexandri M. cum Persis. Etenim haec sententia cum aliis argumentis, tum inprimis ex versibus 22, 23, 24. plane probatur, ubi propheta idem vaticinium tertio die post primam ejus promulgationem repetit. Cf. Viri Illustris

Paraphrasis Epistolae ad Hebraeos, pag. 379 seqq. ubi ex instituto de hoc vaticinio disserit. Sed de verbis versus 7. *td'mjj, Wab;W* $\mu\lambda/\text{Nh}'\text{Aik}$; aliter sentio. Explicat ea Vir Celeberrimus de donariis gentilium templo Hierosolymitano illatis, quod etiam ab aliis factum est, cum Judaeis, tum Christianis. At enim vero tantum abest ut per rationes grammaticas probari non posse putem vulgariorem illam de Messia in hoc templo quando apparituro sententiam, ut potius ita statuam de ea quam Vir Celeberrimus defendit. Etenim quam movet difficultatem contra numerum pluralem verbi *Wab*; cui non conveniat nomen singularis numeri *td'mjj*, haec quidem facile removetur, si in memoriam revocemus Grammaticorum observationem, quod in regimine duorum substantivorum verbum in numero nonnunquam posteriori respondeat, non priori, v. c. 2 Sam. 10: 9, Job 15: 20. Sed haud scio, an Vir Celeberrimus aequae facile probare possit, verbum *Wab* < *venient* idem esse quod *afferentur*. Verbum *Wab* < in Kal nunquam habet hanc significationem. Semper Conjugatione Hiphil utuntur Hebraei ad notionem afferendi vel adducendi indicandam. Qui verbi usus, cum tot ejus extent exempla, non potest in dubium vocari. Analogia praeterea linguarum Chaldaicae et Syriacae eum confirmat. Hinc etiam interpretes Chaldaeus et Syrus Conjugatione Aphel usi sunt ad eum sensum exprimendum. Vocatur vero Messias *desiderium gentium*, h. e. ex Hebraismo *gentibus desiderabilis et expectandus*, eodem sensu, quo a Jacobo Genes. 49: 10. *obedientia gentium* dicitur. Atque miror, Virum Celeberrimum hoc non vidisse (pag. 387) cum *gentium commotionem* paullo ante (pag. 385) explicasset de conversione gentilium ad religionem Judaicam, quae cum notitia Messiae Judaeis expectandi non poterat non esse conjuncta. Equidem fateor, versum octavam favere explicationi de donariis templo inferendis, attamen eam non necessariam facit. Possunt enim illa verba sic quoque accipi, ut Deus neget, sibi in aede sua ornamentis ex auro vel argento opus esse, (quemadmodum de sacrificiis simile quid dixit Ps. 50: 10,) atque tamen vel illis ornamentis deficientibus majorem futurum esse posterioris templi splendorem, quam prioris. Non contemnendum argumentum pro hac explicatione in esse putem ultimis ejusdem versus verbis $\mu/\lambda\zeta; \text{^Tea, hw,h}' \mu/q\text{Mib}'\text{W}$ Constat enim ex historia, quantopere Judaei in istis bellis et regnorum eversionibus afflicti fuerint; ex quo satis probabiliter concluditur, prophetam intelligere pacem, non tam corporalem quam potius spiritualem, a Messia omnis pacis et salutis auctore afferendam." (*Proph. Min. ex rec., etc.* a J. A. Dathio, Halae, 1773) It is plain that had Prof. D. seen the future coming and kingdom of Christ to be its only complete meaning (as determined by Heb 12) verse 8, far from presenting a difficulty, only falls in with the character of that age to come (compare Isa. 59: 20, 21; Isa. 60: 1-7) as contrasted with the present call of Christians while the hour is come when it is a question neither of the mountain nor yet of Jerusalem, but of the true worshippers worshipping the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. Dr. Davidson (O. T. Introd iii 316) tells us that "Dathe thinks Michaëlis has proved *Wab*; may be rightly translated *afferentur*, and in a note refers to his note, p. 230, third edition." Not having that edition I cannot verify what is possible: if so, it would only be a proof how easy it is for some men to change their minds on serious points. In his first edition, as my reader sees, he gives not bad reasons to prove Michaëlis wrong.

This is ever the case where there is an object before us different from the divine one: the true force of scripture is lost. The only way of receiving scripture is to receive simply as a child what God says, and seek to understand it by faith; whereas if we are possessed by a theory, it warps the mind before we begin and we are sure to miss if not to pervert the word of God. "I will shake all nations." It is not here, be it observed, the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, nor anything of a church character of any kind. Hence the Lord's first coming is not in question, but rather the prominent topic of prophecy, namely, the coming of Jehovah Messiah in His kingdom. Then He shakes all the nations, and not these only, but the earth and even the heavens. Nothing can be plainer than the sense and scope. He shakes the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. Now this is the very scripture

that is referred to by Paul as unfulfilled in Heb. 12 — "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Thus all can understand that Jehovah will fill the house with glory. Herod's great porticoes in the outer court, and any offerings of gold and silver in his days, utterly fail to reach up to this promise, even if such accessories were not mentioned expressly and apart. That the temple before Christ ever approached that of Solomon in internal splendour, or anything but size, there is no reason to believe. Zerubbabel's exceeded Solomon's, and Herod's was much greater than that of Zerubbabel.

Even the Jews however felt that, not to speak of its sumptuousness, "the former glory of this house" consisted in its possession of the Urim and Thummim, the ark, the tables written by God's finger, and the visible glory. To say the Spirit is an oversight corrected by the express declaration of the prophet in the immediate context. Further, Aaron's rod and the pot of manna disappeared from the ark. When Solomon's temple was reared, they were not found; they characterize the wilderness state, not the reign of glory. But the law still abode in the ark, the rule of the kingdom as well before as when it came. What then *could* more than compensate for their actual deficiency in all these respects? All but one sense is excluded. The promise which enfolds all promises of blessing must be intended, whatever be the precise service preferred, or the solution of the original phrase.

Nothing then can be plainer than the necessary inferences. The Lord is coming, and will then shake the universe, not merely the earthly part of it but the whole of it, including the heavens. This was not the case even in the chaos before Adam was created. (Gen. 1: 2) But, besides, He will shake all nations. It is not, therefore, what is called "the end of the world," by which is meant the dissolution of all before the judgment of the great white throne. For there are nations recognized as living still on earth, however shaken. "And the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith Jehovah of hosts." Clearly therefore it is not the destruction of the universe. It is the dawn of the blessed time for which all creation groans but waits, and all nations then shall have the promised object of desire in whom they were to be blessed and are yet to trust. (Gen. 12, Isa. 11) Then they will understand His preciousness. They as well as the Jews have despised Him, but He will then come, the concentration, yea, at once the giver and the attracter, of all that is desirable. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith Jehovah of hosts." He draws out to God's glory what people most of all value; but what of all that which is Jehovah's and will then be felt to be so in comparison with the glory?

Verse 9 seems however to be faultily given in many versions old as well as modern, and by our own among the rest. For the unity of Jehovah's house* is forgotten and destroyed, and of course the true point of comparison lost — another state of the same house at a later day when Jehovah should give peace in this place. The Greek version, as it is the oldest, so in this it seems to me the most correct; and the Arabic, as far as I can judge, supports it: so do some of the German critics as De Wette, Hitzig, Maurer, and Ewald. Ezra 3: 12 determines nothing as to Haggai 2: 9; though it be of great moral importance, there is no connection between the two scriptures. No one doubts the fact of two if not three houses; but the Spirit carefully identifies the house all through, as is plain in Haggai 2: 3. Now here would have been no bad instance for those disposed to call for emendation. It is melancholy to think how often the same features reappear in criticism just as in morals: men doing what they ought not, and omitting to do what they ought. In both respects they have erred as much as was possible. They have in fact robbed the passage of its brightest light and true power by denying Christ to verse 7; and they have failed to remove a blemish which obscures the beauty and connection of the argument in verse 9. Let them weigh Ezra 5: 11-13, where, as Secker long ago observed, the

house that was built, destroyed, and rebuilt, is treated as the same house. Compare 2 Thess. 2: 4: it is "the temple of God" right through.

*I will here show how embarrassed a late pious and learned man was through not observing (or rather the common misunderstanding produced by) the misrendering of verse 9. About forty years ago Mr. T. P. Platt, the eminent Ethiopic scholar, published "Thoughts on certain Old Testament Prophecies interpreted in the New Testament, and on some General Errors of the Interpreters of Scripture." In opposition to the mystical school, which reduces minds to the same uncertainty as the rationalistic school, Mr. Platt shows that the Spirit supplies in the New Testament the interpretation of many prophecies contained in the Old, and thus seeks to point out a sure help to the godly enquirer. In examining four passages (Isa. 25: 6-9 compared with 1 Cor. 15: 54; Isa. 59: 20 compared with Rom. 11: 25, Jer. 31: 34-40 compared with Heb. 8: 7-12, and Haggai 2: 6-9 compared with Heb. 12: 18 to the end), he mentions among other perplexities this, "the mention made of 'THIS house,' 'THIS latter house,' the house standing in the days of Haggai, into which it certainly does not appear that the riches of all nations [for such he was disposed to think might be the meaning of the contested phrase in verse 7] were ever brought. This difficulty, I confess, I cannot get rid of."

But it is evident from the explanation given above, and indeed without this to any one who reads with care the prophecy itself, once it is pointed out there, that the Spirit views the house as one from beginning to end. He may also elsewhere draw attention to the earliest form under Solomon, to the post-captivity stage, to that of Herod, and finally to that of the latter day, not to speak of our having to distinguish even then between that phase of it when the Antichrist or man of sin shall sit there, and when, after his (and probably its) destruction, there will be a concluding and very different state, inasmuch as the ideal as men say of Ezekiel 40 - 42 shall be then first realised. But All are here spoken of as "*this* house."

Hence one may learn how precarious are many of the stock arguments addressed to Jews, built on the assumption that verse 9 teaches the coming of the Messiah before the destruction of the second temple. Daniel 9 goes far more precisely to a similar conclusion; but emphatically as *this* house is expressed, it is a mistake to lay stress on a *second* house, where we have seen the object is to carry on the idea of the house till it is filled with the glory of Jehovah after the second appearing of the Lord. Nor is there any force in straining "yet a little while" to this end: for as is well-known, in the Old Testament as in the New, prophecy shows no real rest short of that day. Two thousand years seem long; but it will not be so when looked back on from the glory of God. And how can any sober-minded man* really think that the shaking of the universe, or of all nations, agrees only with the first advent, even if we had not the application of Hebrews 12 to fix it to the second? No doubt the Jews themselves are as blameable as any for speaking so much of the second house and missing the point of the divine message; and their way of accounting for its superiority over the first (as *e.g.* its lasting a few years more; or owing to the visit of Alexander the Great, or because of Gentile gifts during the Asmonean times, or through Herod's re-edifying) are truly pitiable. So too Abarbanel's effort to escape by making out, by dint of changed punctuation and assuring emphasis, a third house for the Messiah to fill with a glory which shall exceed not only Zerubbabel's but Solomon's. It is evident that this is but a specious ingenuity, exaggerating into a third house the ordinary deduction of a second from verse 9, and wresting† it thus exaggerated against the use to which Christians generally turn it.

* I cannot so characterise a comment like that of C. a Lapide on the place, who first enumerates eleven instances of commotion in heaven, then eight on the earth, then four on the sea, with three causes for all, and lastly a general statement of movement among the nations. Jerome, it is true (*Comm. in loc.*), had written similarly of old; but not so Theodoret, who takes it as a prediction of Gog

and Magog, about to perish by mutual slaughter, and to leave their treasures to the builders of the temple. No wonder those who follow guides so crude and conflicting fall into error or scepticism.

† It is curious that C. a Lapide, though as loose first and last as most others in discussing verse 9, makes some good remarks which correct himself as to this without intending it. "τὸ *hariscon* propriè non referre *habbait*, id est, domum, sed *kebod*, id est, gloriam. Unde Septuag. disertè vertunt, διότι μεγάλη ἔσται ἡ δόξα τοῦ οἴκου ἢ ἐσχάτη ὑπὲρ τὴν πρώτην, id est, *magna erit gloria domus istius novissima quam prima*. Loquitur enim de templo Salomonis et Zorobabelis quasi de una et eadem Dei domo: quia una alteri successit, eidemque loco inaedificata est; ac ei dicit, quod gloria posterior, putà domus Zorobabelis, sit futura major gloria priori, puta domus Salomonis. Et hoc ad punctum respondet querulis Judaeorum verbis Hebraicis vers 4. *Quis est qui vidit*, etc., *domum istam in gloria sua prima?* quasi dicat. Quis vidit gloriam priorem prioris templi Salomonici? nonne dolet et gemit, quod haec posterior gloria domus posterioris longe illi sit impar? At sumat animos: ego enim promitto me facturum, ut gloria posterior priorem superet. Itaque articulus *he* hic iteratur, quia propriè non respicit *bait*, id est, domum, sed *kebod*, id est gloriam, quae major futura erat posterior quam prior," etc.

The plain meaning then of verse 9 is that "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of hosts." The house of God has a unity in the mind of the Spirit, and this would be a signal comfort to every thoughtful Jew who might otherwise be dejected. It might be afterwards pulled down and rebuilt, and after that burnt down, or turned to a wholly different use in the hands of the enemy; it will surely revert to the Jews once more, and once more be defiled as ill or worse than ever. But "*this house*" it abides in His mind, and He will own it as His house for ever when He dwells in the midst of His people, redeemed and settled there, never more to depart from Him nor to be dispersed more.

To me I confess, the thought of the house viewed as one and the same is not only different, but, as truth always is, a far nobler conception. Besides, it maintains much more the sense of moral responsibility, as well as the stability, among the Jews' changes, of God's purpose. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith Jehovah of hosts." The ordinary rendering is not only feebler, but confusing; for it gives the notion that we now hear of one house, now of two; the true version makes verse 9 to harmonize completely with verse 3. The expression, "*this house*," keeps up its oneness; and once we have taken in the connection we feel how incongruous, to say the least, it is to read, "The glory of this latter house." The balance is forthwith restored when we hear the prophet say, "The latter glory of *this house* shall be greater than the former . . . and in *this place* will I give peace." It is the same house in God's mind, as it is the same place. Let it be defiled, or even razed to its foundations and built again and again, still it preserves the character of unity the inspiring Spirit stamps on it. "And in this place will I give peace." It will be so in that day. The nations will learn war no more. Every one then left of all the nations will come up to pay Him homage in that house of prayer for all nations, after He shall have shaken not the earth only but also the heavens. He made peace at His first coming, He will *give* peace at His second. For indeed we know Him meanwhile in heaven, and know that He is our peace. Moreover, as Zechariah says, "He shall speak peace to the heathen and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

There is scarce a more frequent or more delightful aspect of the kingdom than this universal peace which He the King, reigning in righteousness, will establish throughout the world till the end, when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God even the Father. There is an evident connection with Micah 5 which we have already discussed. "This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian shall come," where also we may see how Jehovah Messiah magnifies Himself in Jacob, and makes His people to be both as a lion to put down revolt without hope of escape, and as a dew of blessing and

refreshing showers in the midst of many peoples. Truly He will be the desire of all the nations in that day.

Then comes another message (verses 10-19), but here a moral instruction; and we are best able to judge of what is moral when we have the Lord Himself before us. This has been done as I believe in the preceding verses; another but wholesome admonition follows: "On the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of Jehovah by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy?" Of course the priests answered truly when they said "No." He that is holy imparts no holiness to aught else. "Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean?" The answer was no less precise in the affirmative. He that is defiled communicates defilement. "And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith Jehovah; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer thereon is unclean." As with the unclean condition of a man, so the nation of Israel defiled whatever they took up. All works and offerings are unclean. There must be personal cleanness before one can act or offer aright.

Who can fail to see that this is most applicable to the present day? The common notion is that you can cleanse the world by going into it and by associating with it; instead of which you cannot fail to be defiled yourself. The direction to the Christian now is to purge himself from every vessel of dishonour, and to follow after righteousness and peace with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. There is no more salutary word for the Christian in the present confusion of Christendom. There we have every sort of snare and trial — both the negative and the positive. Negatively we are bound to separate from what is dishonouring to the Lord. Positively we are bound to follow after what is good, according to His will, with those who have His glory and will at heart. Isolation is wrong; but to separate from what is evil in the Lord's sight is an imperative duty for the Christian — to separate in order to unite according to God's word with those that call on Him with a pure heart. The notion of this day that you can benefit or set to rights what is evil by association with it is not only a fallacy which must end in disappointment if not in dragging you where you think not; but in itself the principle really is nothing less than a giving up of God. It is a practical abandonment of His holiness, and of our obligation to walk as Christ walked, under the plea of doing good. What more ruinous?

Along with this the prophet calls on them again to look at the ways of God. "And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of Jehovah: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith Jehovah. Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of Jehovah's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you."

Now the Lord challenges them to see how faithful He will be to His own word. And did not the disciples find it thus of old? There cannot be a more marked fact than this — the blessing that God has given so far surpassing what their largest thoughts looked for. Some of us may have proved as much in God's dealing with us spiritually. Enough, if we may refer to our own experience in a matter which after all is important both for ourselves and for others. The love of Christ alone gives whatever there may be of holy obedience, as indeed it alone is its spring and only full standard and rule in waiting for

His return. To many it was simply a practical question of doing the will of God, and therefore a fixed duty of keeping clear of what dishonours the Lord; but who ever expected, as He has given since, the opening out of His word, the recovery of forgotten truth, and the enjoyment of His presence, and the extended, if indirect, blessing of others far and wide through it? Can we not say that the Lord has surpassed all the expectations that we ever had, not only in His grace, but in rejection and reproach among men? Therefore let us speak well of His name for both. The blessing has and will come beyond all our thoughts if by grace we but cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart; just as to the returned Jews of old, the Lord here vouchsafes the promise, "From this day will I bless you."

The last message comprises and amplifies the change of the heavens in its effect on the earth. It is not the church, but the kingdom when no longer in patience but in power and glory. "And again the word of Jehovah came unto Haggai on the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother. In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith Jehovah, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith Jehovah of hosts." The throne of David should be established by the gracious power of Jehovah on the judgment of the Gentile kingdoms. The figure of His special intimacy and choice looks onward to "that day." Zerubbabel, though but governor, is clearly the type of Christ as King: as being David's son and heir in his own day, it was the more natural that he should be. Messiah alone will fully set up and for ever maintain, while earth endures, the kingdom of Jehovah here below; and this in the midst of the chosen people gathered back from captivity and dispersion. As heathen expected from the world that which was to be manifested in the church, so now Christendom expects from the church that which God reserves for Christ, and for Christ in relationship with Israel on earth as well as the church glorified on high. The revealed truth of the age to come embraces both the restoration of the kingdom to Israel on earth and the reigning of the saints above, changed indeed into the glorious likeness of the Lord, but none the less reigning with Him over the earth.