

HAGGAI ... the prophet with a punch  
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(HAGGAI I: 6)

The minor prophets were men who believed in short sermons ; they did not waste words. Undoubtedly they were raised up to meet specific needs. They were called of God to minister at a certain time in a certain way, and once their task was performed they disappeared from the scene. Haggai was one of these men, and we cannot read his message without wishing there were more of it. His words were vital, gripping, and sometimes scathing. He knew how to preach ; he was a prophet with a punch! His appearance was most providential, for the city of God was in ruins. Selfishness dominated the hearts of the nation ; and as long as the people enjoyed the comfort of their own homes, the temple was forgotten.

#### A Bag with Holes

" Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little ye eat, but ye have not enough ; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink ; ye clothe you, but there is nor f-warm ; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put .,t into a bag with holes. . . . Consider your ways " (1 : 3-7). It would not be difficult to imagine the prophet giving Israel an object lesson with an old bag. His coins fell to the ground, and the folly of his action increased the effectiveness of his preaching. And after each forceful point in his message, the prophet pointed to the wrecked house of God. No man can be truly prosperous when His sanctuary is neglected. No person can be supremely happy when the music of his soul is silent. Haggai continued, " 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" (2: 3). The prophet's questions reached the hearts of the hearers, and the people were humbled before God.

#### A Building with Holiness

Within seven weeks (Haggai 1 : 1-2: 1) the Spirit of the Lord completely changed the outlook of the self-satisfied nation, and the prophet was able to encourage the repentant people. "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts ; and in this place will I give peace . . . " (2: 8, 9). And as the work of reconstruction proceeded, the prophet watched and waited, and finally, "In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts ; Ask now the priests concerning the law . . . " (2: 10, I 1). This inspired speaker excelled in the noble art of painting word pictures. His bag with holes was followed by his building of holiness. He had very definite ideas concerning the path to prosperity and happiness. God's hand had been against His people because their sin had offended Him. He said, " I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands ; yet ye turned not to me, said the Lord " (2: 17). " Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and this fact had been very evident in the divine dealings with Israel. Haggai seemed to be saying, " Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall

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be added unto you " (Matt 6: 33).

#### A Benediction with Hope

" Consider now from this day and upward ... from the day that the foundation of the Lord's house was laid, consider it . . .from this day will I bless you " (2: 18, 19). The promises given to Israel were far-reaching and assuring. No weapon formed against them should prosper. God would destroy the kingdoms of the heathen, and overthrow every opponent of Israel. The sanctuary should be the guiding star in Israel's destiny, and beneath its shadow, every man should dwell safely. " In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant ... and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord" (2: 22, 23). Thus would the holes be repaired in the bag of Israel's fortunes ; thus would happiness return to the hearts of the people. Haggai was a man with a message. He knew how to hit hard-very hard. He knew also how to encourage repentant souls, and lead them to greater heights of spiritual endeavour. What was the secret of his success? " . . . the word of the Lord came to him." Haggai never preached until he was certain of his message. He lit his torch at the altar of God, and went forth as a flame of fire. Alas, others were like glow-worms-their lights disappeared in face of danger.

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