

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

HAGGAI

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are the post-captivity prophets. They exercised their office after the return from the exile at Babylon.

The great majority of the Old Testament prophets bore their testimony prior to that epoch-making event. Jeremiah's ministry extended into the period, but he was not an exile. Only two, Ezekiel and Daniel, prophesied during the captivity.

1. The three ministered to the restored remnant.

The circumstances of the returned Jews made it needful for such beneficent work as these prophets could render. We learn from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah under what difficulties and obstructions the Jews labored in rebuilding the temple, and reorganizing the commonwealth and the services of Judaism. Opposition and discouragement beset them on every side. To every achievement they had to fight their way.

They built the house of God and the city "**in troublous times,**" in very truth. And these prophets, particularly Haggai and Zechariah were raised up to strengthen the heroic but feeble remnant.

2. The throne of God was not again set up at Jerusalem on the restoration of Judah.

Power still remained with the Gentiles. The first great empire, Babylon, upon which God conferred supremacy, had proved itself unworthy of the mighty trust imposed and had been set aside. Another, the Medo-Persian, had succeeded, and it was the governing power even over the Jews in their own land. They were never again independent. And the prophets served to instruct and to comfort them amid the trials incident to their subject life.

3. Their main effort was to maintain fidelity and obedience in the new position.

As the center of faithfulness was the temple and the service connected with it, these prophets labored to keep the people attached to the place and its rites of worship and to all therein implied.

As failure in the remnant became apparent the prophets turned away from the present and fixed their eyes on the advent of the Messiah whom they describe minutely and for whom they yearned with an intensity of desire that challenges our admiration, in whom they well knew there would be no failure.

Haggai prophesied in the sixth month of the second year of Darius the king, 1:1. It was probably Darius Hystaspes. His ministry covered a period of about four months, B. C. 520.

I. The design of his testimony was to encourage the restored captives in the arduous labors in which they were engaged.

The decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1) induced a large number of Jews to set out for the Holy Land, some 50,000 in all. But on the death of Cyrus the emigration ceased. Under the reign of some of his successors, particularly Cambyses and the Pseudo-Smerdis, the work on the temple and the city was suspended. Nor was it resumed until the second year of Darius, Ezra 4:24.

The arrest of the good work of restoration and rebuilding was accomplished through the determined hostility of the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin, Ezra 4:1-23. It was by means of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah that it was recommenced, Ezra 5:

II. The contents of Haggai.

The prophecy consists of only two chapters, but it contains four addresses, each marked off from the other by clear lines of separation.

(1) The first address, with a notice of its effect, is found in chapter one.

It was spoken to Zerubbabel and to the high priest Joshua. The former was a prince of the house of David, and the head of the government; the latter was at the head of the priesthood.

Its object was to rouse these leaders and the people under them from the apathy into which they had sunk. Haggai sharply reproves them in that, while they lived in ceiled (paneled) houses, the house of the Lord was neglected. Their own were comfortable and well furnished, whilst the temple had only its foundation and bare walls with no protecting roof, with no pavement, door, furniture, altar, form or beauty. The address achieved its aim, as 1:12-15; Ezra 5:6, show.

(2) Chap, 2:1-9: The design of the second address is to correct a tendency to discouragement and depreciation which had begun to appear.

It is to the same officers and through them to the people. They were peculiarly disposed to discouragement. When the foundations were laid old persons who had seen the first temple wept at the contrast. After the first burst of enthusiasm in the work of rebuilding, there came, as almost always comes in human enterprises, the reaction, the time of flagging interest and waning energy.

Haggai set himself to reanimate their drooping spirits and rekindle their fainting ardor.

In the latter part of this address, vss. 6, 7, the prophet grounds his appeal on the great fact that God will ere long shake heaven, earth, sea, and all nations—a passage quoted in Hebrews 12:26, 27; and adds, “**and the desire of all nations shall come,**” or “the things desired of all nations shall come.” It is a difficult phrase, but in view of what is said of it Hebrews 12:25-29, it must in some way be connected with the kingdom of God and the Messiah.

(3) Chap, 2:10-19. *Instruction, reproof, appeal and promise.*

(4) Chap, 2:20-23. *This last address was delivered on the same day as the preceding.*

It was spoken to Zerubbabel alone and was designed to stimulate that officer to zealous efforts in the good work undertaken. The prophet again refers to the supernatural shaking of earth and sky and kingdoms, but amid it all the prince shall be as a signet, firm and immovable, because chosen of the Lord.

This can be no other than the day of the Lord, the day of the Prince Messiah.

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