

# Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

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## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### THE MESSAGE OF HAGGAI

#### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

##### I. A Revelation of the peculiar Perils of an Age of Adversity.

- i. A false Content. They looked at their Conditions only.
- ii. A false Discontent They looked at their Building in the Light of the Past.
- iii. A false Expectation. They looked at their Adversity in the Light of their Building.
- iv. A false Fear. They looked at their Position in the Light of the Nations.

##### II. A Declaration of the Duty of Men of Faith In such an Age

- i. The Corrective of false Content.
  - a. The Duty. **“Build.”**
  - b. The Dynamic. **“I am with you”** (1:13).
- ii. The Corrective of false Discontent.
  - a. The Duty. **“Be strong . . . and work.”**
  - b. The Dynamic. **“I am with you”** (2:4).
- iii. The Corrective of false Expectation.
  - a. The Duty. **“Ask a Torah.”**
  - b. The Dynamic. **“I will bless”** (2:19).
- iv. The Corrective of false Fear.
  - a. The Duty. Patience.
  - b. The Dynamic. I will
    1. Shake.
    2. overthrow.
    3. destroy.

#### B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

##### I. The Wickedness of waiting for psychic Moments, set Times, Is of the Essence of Rebellion

##### II. The Folly of attempting to interpret the Present In the Terms of the Past A better Thing is always at hand.

##### III. The Paralysis of expecting immediate Results

- i. The Necessity for Patience.
- ii. The Certainty of God.

##### IV. The Sin of fearing opposing Forces

4. overthrow.
- c. I will
  1. take.
  2. make.

The final Word.

**“Be strong and work.”**

HAGGAI stands first in the last group of the prophetic books. In common with Zechariah and Malachi it is post-exilic.

In considering the messages of these three books we find ourselves in new circumstances and in a new atmosphere. The history of the people was at once full of glory and full of shame. It is easy to imagine how they felt as they thought of the ancient glory of the nation. Some amongst them would be filled with shame as they came back to their own city and their own country, and found themselves without national constitution and without power, tributary to the Gentiles. Their circumstances were those of difficulty and discouragement. Their hopes were of the most shadowy and uncertain kind. These three men prophesied in the midst of such circumstances.

- Haggai had one burden upon his heart, that of leading the people to build the temple.
- Zechariah helped him in the delivery of that message, and then produced his great apocalypse.
- Malachi uttered the final mourning and warning to the ancient people of God.

Let us consider a little more particularly the circumstances in which Haggai delivered his message.

About sixteen years earlier the people had returned to their own land under Zerubbabel, and had begun to build the temple a year later. They had laid the foundations, and perhaps the first course of stones, when the work of building was abandoned through Samaritan opposition. For fifteen years nothing more was done. Then Haggai delivered his message and exercised his ministry. He dealt with the immediate.

He was a man of .faith, whose one business was that of persuading the people to do one thing.

The greater part of his ministry consisted not of public preaching but of private application thereof. He delivered four brief messages, and succeeded in persuading the people to build. His first message was delivered, and they commenced. Then a difficulty arose and they halted. He immediately delivered his second message, and they resumed the work. After a while another difficulty arose, and again they halted. He delivered his third message, and on the same day his fourth and last; and the work was completed.

The permanent value of this book is twofold.

- First, it is a revelation of the peculiar perils of an age of adversity; and
- Secondly, it is a declaration of the duty of the man of faith in such an age.

Haggai helps us to see the perils of the hour when everything looks dark; and to understand the duty of the man of faith in such an hour, and in the presence of such perils.

There are four perils indicated in the prophecy, and the four addresses deal with them respectively.

- First, the peril of *a false content*.
- Secondly, the peril of *a false discontent*.
- Thirdly, the peril of *a false expectation*.
- Finally, the peril of *a false fear*.

First, a false content. As these people looked at the conditions in the midst of which they found themselves they said,

**“The time is not come . . . that the LORD’s house should be built.”**

Secondly, a false discontent. After the work had commenced they looked at their building in the light of the olden days, and they said,

**“Who is left among you that saw this house in its first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?”**

Thirdly, a false expectation. When the building had proceeded further they expected immediate material results from their moral reformation.

Finally, a false fear. They were filled with fear of the nations by whom they were surrounded.

*The first peril is that of a false content.*

These people were waiting for the psychic moment in which to begin to build the house of God. They said, The set time is not yet come. They expected some manifestation of Divine readiness to help them. On that side of their life which had to do with God, they were waiting; but they were busy building their own houses. They were only psychologists in the matter of religion. They were preeminently practical when they had to do with the places in which they themselves had to live.

*The next peril is that of a false discontent.*

When in obedience to the prophet they began to build, they looked at their building in the light of the past, and their outlook was entirely material. They compared the poverty of the material erection with the glory of the ancient temple of which they had heard, and which some of them had seen. The old men amongst them, in childhood’s days had gazed upon the glory of the past temple, and they put this new temple in its material poverty, into comparison with the one of old and its material glory. The result was that they were filled with discontent, and broke out into lamentation. That was a note of false discontent.

*The third peril is that of a false expectation.*

They looked at their adversity in the light of their building.

They said, We have begun to obey, and the weeks have passed away and grown into months, and yet there is no sign of better conditions. It was autumn when we began to build, and now it is winter, and there is no improvement. Haggai taught them that it was an unwarranted expectation in view of the appalling penetration of evil resulting from their sin.

*Finally, they looked at the surrounding nations, saw their strength and the solidarity of the opposition, and were filled with a false fear.*

In each case the prophet sought to counteract the perils by declaring an immediate duty, and revealing an available dynamic. For the correction of their false content, he declared that their immediate duty was to build.

As dynamic, he gave them the inspiration of the Divine declaration, **“I am with you, saith the Lord.”**

The people said, The time has not yet come to build. The prophet affirmed, The set time has come, because the Lord is with us. For the correction of the false discontent the prophet declared that their duty was to **“be strong . . . and work.”** Again as dynamic, he gave them the inspiration of the Divine word, **“I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.”**

For the correction of false expectation the prophet bade them **“Ask now the priests concerning the law”**; and there follows the account of the opinion given by the priests, evidently in answer to the appeal. This needs to be considered carefully. In order to understand this passage we must go back to Deuteronomy. There will be found instructions given to the people that in any case of difficulty, the priest was to declare a law, that is, declare the principle involved in the difficulty. Here Haggai framed the enquiry of the people in the words,

**“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? And the priests answered and said, No.”**

That was the statement of the law or principle, and the prophet applied it thus. The pollution of nature which had resulted from their sin could not be immediately set right by their reformation and return .. The lesson he drew from this declaration was that of patience. There must be return and obedience; but not eager anxiety for immediate material results. There must be return and obedience, although there seemed to be no immediate benefit accruing therefrom.

In spiritual revival there should be freedom from anxiety about material results. That is the principle. There will be material results, but the inspiration for patient waiting is found in the words, **“From this day will I bless you.”** The material blessing that will follow will not be created by obedience, but will be given as a gracious act on the part of God. The people said in effect: We are giving God obedience, we are building; but He is giving us nothing in return. The lesson they had to learn was that obedience must be without bargaining. Yet the prophet did not leave them with that stern application of the principle; he gave them this word out of the heart of God, **“From this day will I bless you.”** The blessing must come from God.

Men must never imagine that by their return and obedience they have a right to blessing.

For the correction of false fear the prophet laid down the duty of patience, and uttered for their inspiration the great promises of the Lord.

The consciousness of the people concerning the strength of the enemies about them is revealed in the references to those enemies in the promise of deliverance; **“the throne of the kingdoms . . . the strength of the kingdoms . . . the heathen . . . the chariots, and those that ride in them . . . the horses and their riders.”** These were the forces of which the remnant were conscious. Wherever they lifted their eyes they saw the strength of the kingdoms; chariots and them that ride in them; horses and their riders; massed military powers! There was no hope of deliverance. All these things filled them with dull despair. There seemed to be no chance of their ever regaining national constitution and power. The corrective of the prophet was that of his utterance of the word of the Lord,

**“I will shake . . . I will overthrow . . . I will destroy . . . I will overthrow.”**

By that activity of the Lord there would issue the degradation of the strength they feared, and the disintegration of the forces which held them prisoners.

Let us put the perils and the corrective teaching side by side.

The people were content to let the temple remain unbuilt, saying, The set time has not yet come. The prophet bade them arise and build, knowing that the set time had come, because God was with them, knowing that

“God is on the field when  
He is most invisible.”

The people were filled with discontent as they compared the house as they saw it in the course of building with the glory of the previous house. The prophet called them to be strong and to work, because God was with them; and therefore the glory of the latter house would be greater than that of the former, because the method of God is always progressive. The former glory was material, but to the latter house would come the fulfillment of all things foreshadowed in the former.

The people expected immediate material benefit as the result of their moral reformation. No, said the prophet, you do not know the meaning of sin, how deep its pollution goes, how all nature is affected by it. There must be patient waiting for God from Whom the blessing will come as a gift of grace, and not as a result created by human amendment.

The people were looking at enemies, at thrones, at chariots, and horses, at the military multitudes, and consequently they were filled with fear. The prophet called them to cease looking at the foes and to look to God Who would break the power of the surrounding nations.

The living message of the book is patent. It teaches first the wickedness of waiting - waiting for the psychic moment, for the set time - is of the essence of rebellion when immediate duty calls. God's windows wait man's opening.

**“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven.”**

Those windows are never opened in response to sighing and crying.

In that hour in which we bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, the windows will be opened and the blessing will come.

**“Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation”** is a word of constant application, and constitutes the true answer to man's declaration that the set time has not come.

The next peril is that of lamenting the past; desiring an experience to-day like that of the past.

In Wales men to-day are desiring to go back to the experiences of the revival. Christian men are sighing after the experiences of '59. Some sigh for a return to apostolic times, to that peculiar manifestation of the Spirit, necessary in the first stage of the Church's history, but unnecessary to-day. It is impossible to unlock the present with the rusty key of the past. The attempt to crowd the Spirit of God to-day into the manifestation of the past is of the nature of sacrilege.

It is utterest folly to attempt to interpret the present in the terms of the past.

There is always a better thing at hand than anything the past has seen; better, that is, for to-day, for the present time. Many of the ecclesiastical quarrels of the Christian Church are due to attempts to live in the past, and the consequent failure to recognize the living presence of the Spirit of God, and the fact that in one age He must use one method and in another age an entirely different one. In the gift of the Spirit we have the charm and value of perpetually changing methods. The simplicity, the commonplace, the dullness of the present hour, may be of the very essence of God's method. Let us get to work. The word of God to us also is, **“Be strong . . . and work.”**

Again, we need to be reminded that there is a grave peril in expecting immediate material results.

Those who serve in spiritual things in a world permeated with the virus of sin need great patience.

That was a wonderful vision of Isaiah in which he saw that the poison of human sin had permeated the very earth, and that the only way in which God could get it out was by burning, smiting, and destruction. We must be content to do our best work with perhaps but little result that can be tabulated.

Finally, we need the message of this book for the correction of our fear.

Do we not still hear men of faith saying, Those that are against us are mighty and strong? What we supremely need is a new vision of God, a new understanding of the fact that He will overthrow the thrones, and the kingdoms, and break their strength, and finally set up His government in the earth.

We may summarize the whole message of Haggai in one brief word of his second prophecy, “**Be strong . . . and work.**”

If we do that, we may leave the issues with God; but we have no right to leave the issues with God unless we work. The initial sin was that of waiting for the psychic moment. When we are strong and work, then we may be, and shall be delivered from all anxiety about the ultimate, knowing that He will bless, and accomplish, and perfect. It should be the highest honour of life, its crowning glory, and its chief joy in the midst of the ages, to have done one day’s work with God.

“Yet will I live my life,  
Dim though its mystery be,  
Not wholly lost to sense, nor yet  
Absorbed in what I see.

“For me - to have made one soul  
The better for my birth:  
To have added but one flower  
To the garden of the earth:

“To have struck one blow for truth  
In the daily fight with lies:  
To have done one deed of right  
In the face of calumnies:

“To have sown in the souls of men  
One thought that will not die -  
To have been a link in the chain of life:  
Shall be immortality.”

~ end of chapter 36 ~

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