

Devotion 40:

## **Our Father Is With Us**

Haggai 1—2

In 538 B.C. about 50,000 Jews were allowed to return to Judah and Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The magnanimous gesture was courtesy of the conqueror of Babylon, Cyrus of Persia. Two years later, when neighboring countries became alarmed over the possibility of a rebuilt Jerusalem and Judah, the work halted. No work was done on the temple for the next 18 years, partly due to the lethargy of the Jews. Enter Haggai and Zechariah.

*“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built.’ Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’” 1:2-4*

The entire remnant obeyed our Father’s voice and the message since the Lord had sent Haggai. They feared the Lord and began work again on the temple. From that point on, our Father gave continual encouragement:

*“Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: ‘I am with you,’ declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.” 1:13-14a*

About a month later, our Father spoke through Haggai again:

*“‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,’ declares the Lord. ‘Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’” 2:3-5*

It must have been quite demoralizing and depressing for older Israelites to have witnessed the first temple in all its magnificence and now witness the rebuilt version drastically scaled down in glory. But our Father, as He often does with all His children, tries to redirect their focus. If I may attempt a paraphrase, I think our Father in effect says this: “Don’t put your hope or your trust in mere stone and mortar; instead, put your hope and trust in My actual presence among you.”

The encouragement becomes clearly Messianic in Haggai 2:7-9:

*“I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations (Jesus) will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty.... ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”*

Again, the glory will be greater not because the second temple was more spectacular, for it clearly wasn't. The glory will be greater because “*the desired of all nations*” will step foot in it. And Jesus indeed came there and said curious and shocking comments about the rebuilt temple, which by that time had received yet a third facelift:

*“I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.”* Matthew 12:6

*“Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ‘As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.’”* Luke 21:5-6

For Jews expecting an earthly Messianic King to rise again to world domination in the mold of King David, these words must have been just as perplexing to the disciples as they were to Haggai's listeners.

In many ways, however, what our Father had in mind went far beyond what any of us children could have asked for or imagined. (Eph. 3:20) Our Father intended “*to be Immanuel, God with us.*” (Mt. 1:23) He didn't want to limit His presence to a tabernacle or to a temple. He does not “*live in temples built by hands.*” (Acts 17:24) Instead, “*We are the temple of the living God.*” (II Cor. 6:16b) “*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*” (I Cor. 3:16)

Like our Old Testament siblings, we, too, need to beware of overemphasizing the appearance of our houses of worship. I have found some Christians quite surprised to learn that there will not be a “church” in heaven:

*“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”* Revelation 21:22

It is one of the most amazing and awe-inspiring aspects of our Father. He is with us!