

THE LORD'S HOUSE

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Lessons: *Haggai 1 & 2*

Imagine yourself as one of the children of Israel returning to the kingdom of Judah. For seventy years your family has been away from its homeland. You were born in a foreign country, and all you know about the kingdom to which you are returning is that your grandparents called it home. Now you get back to the land, the land that is supposed to be a land flowing with milk and honey, the land you've heard about all your life as the wonderful place of the Lord. And what do you find?

As you look at the city, Jerusalem, you see the burnt shell of what once was a temple. It looks terrible. More than that, the whole land has been laid to waste. People aren't living in nice homes. Instead, they're hiding in caves. Nor are people able to grow crops, because the land has not been farmed in a long time and weeds have grown up everywhere.

The people who came back from the land in joy are afraid. They're afraid for their lives from wild animals and thieves, and they wonder why they left Babylon. Wasn't it better to stay in the slavery of Babylon than to return?

It was in such a land that the prophet Haggai spoke to the children of Israel in the name of the Lord. He called upon them to find a new strength. The children of Israel had left slavery before, and entered into the holy land and conquered it. They had the courage to obey the Lord, to follow what the Lord told them to do. And so these new captives, coming back from Babylon, must find similar courage.

What must they do first? Should they build nice homes for themselves? Should they start farming? No! Haggai said the first thing they needed to do was to look to the Lord. And if they, as a people, would look to the Lord, then they would find the courage to do all the important tasks of rebuilding their land. To begin, they had to rebuild the Lord's temple. If they put a place for the Lord in their land first, then all else could be added.

What an important message. What an important truth! Many times in your life you will feel that the things which you have to do seem to overwhelm you. You will look around and see everything apparently in shambles. And how will you ever get anything done?

The prophet Haggai speaks to you at those times just as he spoke for the Lord to the children of Israel: "Put the Lord first, and then you can find happiness."

In the beginning of the *Arcana Coelestia*, Swedenborg, the Lord's servant, wrote a motto which he took from the New Testament. This motto is just as important for us as it was in the New Testament, and as important as it was for the children of Israel at the time of Haggai. That motto said "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (*Matthew 6:33*).