

“Is The Seed Yet in the Barn?”

“Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you” (Haggai 2:19).

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah “*prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem*” (Ezra 5:1). They prophesied during the reign of Darius King of Persia, at which time efforts were made to re-establish the Jews’ national life in their own land, and to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.

The book bearing Haggai’s name comprises four discourses, which make natural divisions, and which are accurately dated (Haggai 1:1; 2:1-9; 2:10-19; 2:20-23). In the first discourse, Haggai reproved the Jews for dwelling in their “*ceiled houses*” while the house of God lay “*waste*” (1:4). In the second discourse, Haggai seems to lament the inferior glory of the rebuilt house of God, while prophesying further of a later dispensation when “*the desire of the nations shall come*” (regarded by many as the Messiah) whose house (the church) would be greater in glory than that of the former (2:3,7-9). In the third discourse, Haggai applies the principles of ceremonial defilement under the law of Moses, showing that the Jews in their neglect toward the house of God (cf. 1:2) were “*unclean,*” and their efforts unfruitful. He also let it be known that upon their obedience the blessings of nature would again be theirs (2:18,19). In the fourth and last discourse (Hag. 2:20-23), the prophet announced spiritual blessings to Zerubbabel who served as head of the nation and representative of the house of David. This prophecy seems to find its fulfilment in Christ, the Antitype of Zerubbabel, in whose hand the “*signet*” of authority was committed. (cf. Matt. 1:1,12; Luke 1:32,33); Matt. 28:18).

The question “*is the seed yet in the barn*” (Hag. 2:19), is taken from Haggai’s third discourse, in which the prophet raised the question of priestly law to show that all their activity was corrupted by lethargy. As long as they dwelt in their “*ceiled houses,*” taking care of their own wants and desires while the house of God lay “*waste,*” they were as “*unclean*” as if they had touched a dead body. Consequently, the blessings of heaven had been withheld. When they expected the threshed sheaves to yield “*twenty measures, there were but ten,*” and when they expected “*fifty vessels*” (from the wine press) there were “*but twenty.*” It was as if the seed were “*yet in the barn.*”

How well do I remember the seed in the barn! Almost as if it were yesterday, I can remember going to the barn in the Spring of the year, picking up the best “*ears*” of corn, shelling off the rounded end kernels into a pan for the chickens, and then shelling the well developed kernels into a bag for planting. Even at that young age, I knew that “*seed*” left “*in the barn*” would not yield a corn crop in the field. The seed, however good it was, **had** to be planted in order to bear fruit!

As I see it, there are two vital lessons we need to learn from Haggai’s third discourse which included the scripture about “*seed yet in the barn.*” They are as follows:

1. God’s people at that time were regarded as “*unclean*” as if they had touched a “*dead body.*” Why? Not because they had actually touched a dead body, but because they had **neglected** the house of God!

2. The work of their hands in the fields, in consequence, had been denied the blessings of heaven. It was as if the **seed** was “*yet in the barn.*”

Application No. 1

Today many brethren almost boast of their soundness but, in a sense, are “*unclean*” before God. You see, they claim to have “restored New Testament Christianity,” but they are, nevertheless, neglecting its requirements. They would not dare have a piano in worship (and this is commendable), but they often either won’t show up to sing, or simply won’t sing when they do show up. Is it really worse to do what **God has not** authorized than it is to refuse to do what He **has** authorized? They would not think about changing the elements on the Lord’s table, but often they neglect to even meet around His table, and to partake thereof! Is the one worse in the eyes of God than the other? They would rise up in holy indignation if the preacher should fail to preach from the Bible, but they refuse to **attend** to study the Bible and to **hear** it preached, Is it worse to sin by commission than it is to sin by omission? They lament that “we are not able” and that “we cannot afford” to support more gospel efforts, while dwelling in their “*ceiled houses,*” and keeping those “*houses*” well supplied with every kind of new fangled gadget imaginable. Is it possible that our actions belie our words? Is it possible that we have paid the tithe of “*mint and anise and cumin*” in the form of “book, chapter, and verse” for what we do in worship (which is necessary), while omitting such weighty matters as zeal, dedication, personal sacrifice, and personal commitment?

Application No. 2

Today many brethren cry out against human creeds and emphasize the all-sufficiency of the word of God, the seed of the kingdom (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Luke 8:11-15). Good! We **must** do this!

However, is it possible that we pray for a gospel harvest while leaving the gospel “*seed*” in the barn, er, I mean the meeting house? Could it be that whereas the **Lord** said, “*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15), we have simply built meeting houses and in various ways advertised, saying, “come to church,” while making little or no effort to actually **share** the gospel with others? Is it possible that we have sung “Give me the Bible,” and once we received it we thought it was ours to keep, and not to share? Is it possible that we would not dare pass up an opportunity to make an extra dollar, while ignoring every opportunity to secure a home Bible study, so as to deliver the “**seed**” from “the barn” to the soil of human hearts?

Conclusion: Brethren, instead of criticizing the world, saying, “nobody is interested anymore,” and, in general, bemoaning our lack of progress, isn’t it a fact that we ought to first stop and ask ourselves two very important questions: (1) Are we dwelling in our “*ceiled houses*” while simultaneously neglecting “*the house of God*”? And (2) Are we leaving the seed in the barn?

**** — B. Witherington