



After Judah's seventy-year captivity in Babylon,

The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up! (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3)

Where Jeremiah predicted the seventy-year captivity (Jer. 29:10), Isaiah predicted that Cyrus would be the one to grant their return—150 years before Cyrus lived and became king of Persia!

[The LORD] says of Cyrus [called him by name], 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all my pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid.'" (Isa. 44:28)

Upon Cyrus' proclamation, nearly 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem in 536 B.C. Because of resistance, discouragement, *and* apathy, work on the new temple began and stopped in 535 B.C. Only the foundation was completed. This temple however, would pale in comparison with Solomon's temple. In fact, Solomon's temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Zerubbabel's temple would be smaller and less glorious. The wealth and splendor of the kingdom was gone. The nation was weak and small. The ark was gone. When the temple finally was completed twenty years later (516 B.C.), no where do we read:

[That] *the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*

God's *shekinah* glory had filled the tabernacle and Solomon's temple—a visible manifestation of God's presence; but not this time. No wonder many of those who had seen and remembered Solomon's temple "wept with a loud voice" (Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3).

Things appeared hopeless. There was uncertainty and fear. Why such instability among the nations and their kings? Such feelings are expressed even today regarding our own world events: domestic and international affairs; continued and heightened instability in the Middle East; and terrorism has taken the place of the cold war.

Fourteen times in two short chapters of Haggai, God refers to Himself as the *LORD of hosts*. This is extremely significant when you consider that Judah's morale was running low. This name of God reveals Him as Controller and Commander of all created agencies. He is the Sovereign Ruler of this vast universe. While exiled in Babylon, under king Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said,

[That God] removes kings and raises up kings. (Dan. 2:21b)

That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses. (Dan. 4:25, 32; 5:21)

After God judged Nebuchadnezzar for his over-inflated pride and ego, the king,

. . . Blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: [and said] For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:34-35)

God said to this demoralized remnant who returned to Jerusalem,

“I am with you,” says the LORD of hosts.  
“My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!” (Haggai 2:4, 5)

God is saying: “Although things appear to be unstable and shaky right now, just remember that I am still the Creator, Controller, and Commander of this universe. Earth’s kings and kingdoms will come and go, but My kingdom is forever. For I am the LORD, I do not change (Mal. 3:6a). I work all things according to the counsel of My will (Eph. 1:11b). I am the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth (Gen. 14:19). I will never leave you, nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5).

Church, although this old world may crumble around us and things may sometimes seem to be a total disaster, just remember: God forever remains! His Word endures forever. What He promises He will perform. His eternal plan and purpose cannot and will not be shaken. Jesus, the Lord of the Church, is still alive and alive forevermore! And although His Church at times may *appear* defeated and demoralized, Jesus promised that the “Gates of hell would not prevail against it.” His kingdom cannot be shaken and shall forever remain! (Heb. 12:25-29).

The psalmist of Psalm 46 wrote:

*God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble,  
Therefore we will not fear,  
Even though the earth be removed,  
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;  
Though its waters roar and be troubled,  
Though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah*

*There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,  
The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.  
God is in the midst of her,  
she shall not be moved [shaken];  
God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. [at just the right time]  
The nations raged, the kingdoms moved;  
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
[He is the Divine Commander and Conqueror. Our greatest Ally.  
In fact, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”]  
The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah*

*Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
Who has made desolations in the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;  
He burns the chariot in the fire.  
Be still, and know that I am God;  
[take your hands off and don’t panic; He’s the Strong One;  
Almighty One; Absolute Ruler over all His creation!]  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!  
The LORD of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.*

It was Martin Luther who penned these words:

*Did we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right man on our side,  
The Man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth [LORD of hosts] His Name,  
From age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle.*

Over and over again we see God's hand in the glove of human events. God shakes nations and kings. But He also shakes families, churches, and individuals. He might use what seems to be normal, everyday occurrences. Or, it could be a crisis: the loss of a job, the death of a loved-one, a severed relationship, an illness, or a divorce. God seeks to use such times to remind us to think of and build on things eternal. Only things eternal will truly stand the test of time.

What are you leaning on and trusting in to get you through this world? Will those things get you through the storms of life? Will they get you to heaven? If these props were knocked out from under you, would anything of eternal significance be standing? After all, it's only the things which cannot be shaken that will remain (Heb. 12:27).

***Hold To God's Unchanging Hand***

*Time is filled with swift transition,  
Naught of earth unmoved can stand,  
Build your hopes on things eternal,  
Hold to God's unchanging hand.*

*Trust in Him who will not leave you,  
Whatsoever years may bring,  
If by earthly friends forsaken  
Still more closely to Him cling.*

*Hold to God's unchanging hand,  
Hold to God's unchanging hand;  
Build your hopes on things eternal,  
Hold to God's unchanging hand.*

*Covet not this world's vain riches  
That so rapidly decay,  
Seek to gain the heav'nly treasures,  
They will never pass away.*

*When your journey is completed,  
If to God you have been true,  
Fair and bright the home in glory  
Your enraptured soul will view.*

*Hold to God's unchanging hand,  
Hold to God's unchanging hand;  
Build your hopes on things eternal,  
Hold to God's unchanging hand.*

—Franklin L. Eiland

