

# "The Glory of the Latter House"

By  
Elder Enoch Ofori Jnr  
(Sabbath Sermon, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2014)

## An Unfinished House of Glory

An artist's skill lies in his ability to turn nondescript material, such as a piece of wood or stone, into a beautiful work of art. It may be sculpture or painting. But the wonder is that the once pedestrian material has become a fine work of art people stop to admire and even spend good money to buy. The artist sees something in the raw uncut stone or bland scene no one else with ordinary eyes sees. He sees hidden beauty in the crude material and his job is to bring it out by hammering the material into shape or painting with dexterous strokes of the brush.

King Solomon speaks to the principle in Proverbs: "Take the impurities out of silver and the artist can produce a thing of beauty" (Prov. 25:4 *GNB*).

So what does God see in us?

He sees us with an artist's eye! Come to think of it, God is the universe's greatest artist. Look at just the human figure. No work of art beats it. The facial symmetry, the well positioned features: everything appears at just the right place--the eyelashes, the eyes, the pointed nose and ears. Not to mention the limbs, the fluidity of movement and poise.

It is 6000 years since He got down to creating man to be a beauty like Himself. But once and artist always an artist. Thus it's no surprise that God sometimes conceptualizes our salvific relationship with Him as a building, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: <sup>22</sup> In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22).

This building is not yet finished, it's still expanding and rising but God, the architect and on-site engineer has already declared its outcome: "the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former".

You and I are this "building" (1 Cor. 3:9). To turn out the way the Architect has planned for us requires that we listen to whatever instructions He has for us.

And His message is simple: *Work at the building; My Spirit among you is the impetus to work!* His messenger is the prophet Haggai:

Hag 2:1-9

<sup>1</sup> In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying,

<sup>2</sup> Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying,  
<sup>3</sup> Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?  
<sup>4</sup> Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:  
<sup>5</sup> According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.  
<sup>6</sup> For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;  
<sup>7</sup> And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.  
<sup>8</sup> The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.  
<sup>9</sup> The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

### **God Speaks to a Specific Generation**

Our God is a God of precision--He dated His speech! "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month". And He addressed a specific group of people, "the residue of the people", calling their leaders by name: Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest.

The talk is about a house. It was once an architectural jewel but is now nothing to write home about.

Work on the house is still in progress, and so He addresses us now. We are the building, a spiritual house of holy priests (1 Pet. 2:5), and we ourselves are engaged in the building of it as co-workers with God (1 Cor. 3:9-15). As His co-workers, God knows each one of us by name and, more important, our attitude towards the work.

His co-workers back then, at the time of the prophet Haggai, were the Jewish returnees from Babylon, where they had been in captivity for seventy years. And the house they were to rebuild (together with God) was the famed King Solomon's Temple. But it was not a standing temple which only needed minor repairs to put it back to use. It was a temple in ruins. It was burnt down by the Babylonians in 586 BC as divine judgment on the disobedient people of Judah (2 Chron. 36:18-19; Jer. 52:12-13).

With zeal, under the leadership of the same Zerubbabel and Joshua, the pioneer returnees had started work on the temple from scratch with the resources Cyrus, King of Persia, had given them (Ezra 1, 3). The laying of the foundation was an emotional moment for the people. While it was pure joy for the younger generation, for the older generation who had seen the glory of the original Solomon's temple, the nostalgia was unmistakable, and it reduced them to tears:

<sup>10</sup> And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

<sup>11</sup> And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

<sup>12</sup> But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

<sup>13</sup> So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

The mingled joyful and mournful noise eventually died down. And the reconstruction work continued for some sixteen years and then came to a halt. The people were simply disenchanted with the reconstruction effort and began giving excuses: The time has not come for the house of God to be built (Hag. 1:2). But God made it clear that the urgent business of His house could not wait. He warned that the ruin of His house was the ruin of their lives and that they would come to this same realization if only they would consider their circumstances--their lives lacked satisfaction amid worsening economic conditions:

Hag 1:3-11

<sup>3</sup> Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,

<sup>4</sup> Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

<sup>5</sup> Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

<sup>6</sup> Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

<sup>7</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.

<sup>8</sup> Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit.

<sup>11</sup> And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

Apart from disillusionment, another reason for the work stoppage was the opposition of the enemies of the Jews. They managed to prejudice the Persian authorities against the Jews and thereby succeeded in convincing them to stop the Jews from continuing with the reconstruction (Ezra 4).

However, God Almighty who commissioned them to rebuild His temple was greater than all, and He again urged them to get back to work. Thankfully, the people heeded the message and began to build again (Hag. 1:12-14). Even so, they still fell short of God's expectations.

The people were lethargic; their work lacked vigour and spirit. They only went back to the work because God said they should do so. Personally, they had no faith in what they were doing. After all, what could they possibly achieve with their puny efforts and puny resources? What great temple could they build?

The older folks had wept at the commencement of the building when they recalled the glory and beauty of the Solomonic Temple and the great number of resources committed to it. Sixteen years on, long after the foundation had been laid and some walls erected, they were still not impressed. The temple structure built so far was nowhere near Solomon's in glory. It paled into insignificance beside it. The whole thing looked very depressing.

But God said they needed not lose courage but were to be strong and work diligently *because* He was with them. What they considered as bleak was their own perspective, not His. The challenge of scarce resources, which they had bemoaned from the beginning, was not a problem to Him. "The silver and the gold is Mine", He assured.

### **His Spirit Makes all the Difference**

The divine message to Zerubbabel and the people of the time was that His Presence in their midst was all the motivation they needed to work. But how was He with them?

He was with them by His Spirit based on the covenant He made with their fathers when they came out of Egypt.

The exodus from Egypt was a high point in Yahweh's salvation work on earth. He showed His power in Egypt and brought out His people with an outstretched arm. When Pharaoh sought to entrap the Israelites by the Red Sea, He parted the river for them to walk on dry ground. And He defeated Amalek when it came against Israel in the wilderness. For their food in a dry arid place, He rained manna for them and they ate to their fill.

In the third month, the children of Israel reached the wilderness of Sinai, and God introduced them to His covenant whereby He will make them a kingdom of priests, a holy nation and a peculiar treasure unto Himself (Ex. 19).

In preparation to proclaim to the Israelites the terms of His covenant, God declared the third day of the month a holy time and asked the people to consecrate themselves. True to His word, Yah Himself descended on Mount Sinai in awesome power and might and spelt out to them the Ten Commandments amid thunder and lightning.

Thereafter God summoned Moses up the mountain to receive the Decalogue on tablets of stone. He spent 40 days on the mount with God.

The 40-day interval bristled with spiritual danger! Satan was keen to upset their spiritual relationship with Yah. The physical absence of Moses was the weapon used to deadly effect by the devil. He managed to sow in the minds of the people the wrong idea that Moses may never come back. Several weeks is too long a time to receive just a set of Ten Words! He

shipwrecked their faith, and they made the golden calf as the new embodiment of their hope.

Yahweh reacted angrily and swiftly, hurt that the people He had only recently delivered from the house of bondage would soon turn away from Him. He threatened to wipe out the entire nation and raise a new nation from Moses. But the prophet would not let Him! Moshe pleaded and pleaded with Yahweh and He relented from His intended judgment but not without punishing the most culpable of the Israelites--3000 were slain in a single day! As part of this mitigated judgment, God said He would no longer guide and accompany them on their journey to the Promised Land but would send an angel to lead them in the way.

Moses was again on his knees before the LORD pleading with Him, insisting that if He, the LORD Almighty, intended not to accompany them then He had better not brought them up from Egypt. God relented again and said His Presence would accompany them:

Ex 33:14

And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

It's this 'covenant of His Presence' of which He reminds the people in Hag. 2:5:

According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.

His spiritual Presence which gave their forefathers victory over their enemies, ensured their survival, fed and secured them in the wilderness still remained among them. So long as His Spirit remained among them, fear was out of the question. They needed not fear. All fear recedes before Him--fear of enemy attacks, fear of failure, or of disgrace. To have fear while He's with you is to have misguided fear.

This year, there will be things to frighten us, so many things to fear - fear of sickness, fear of accident, fear of spiritual attacks, fear of poverty, of debt and even of death. Yet we really have no reason to fear as long as God Almighty is with us. His Spirit is here with us to take care of all our concerns and worries. Those are matters of His to deal with. What He will have us concentrate on is the work of building His house. While at it, let's do away with all the ifs and buts and work hard. He's with us in spirit, and we work with Him in the Spirit and power of His presence.

As our chief superintendent, He spurs us on; He encourages us to focus on the work. A beautiful work is coming up, He says, and it's going to be more glorious than the former house!

Do you believe Him? Your commitment and work output in the ongoing work of expanding God's church will tell.

### **A Latter House of the Latter Days**

As a church, the ambivalence of "the residue of the people" towards the rebuilding of the temple - to the point of downright disenchantment - is an experience we can well identify

with. Our Solomonic temple whose glory we wistfully long after with nostalgia is the Seventh Day Pentecostal Assemblies of the late Apostle Ofori's era. This church established by the Lord by his hands in the country of Ghana, with the able support of the American saints Bro. L. A. Higley and Elder Garver C. Gray, flourished under his Spirit-led leadership for 40 years (amid challenges, of course). The church had nearly 70 branches, including one in the Republic of Benin, plots of land, two mission-run Preparatory schools, an International Camp Meeting Centre, fleet of vehicles and a vibrant publishing department whose publications reached "the uttermost parts of the world". At one time, Apostle Ofori used to preach five times a week on different radio stations. And our camp meetings were attended by the faithful from all parts of the country in their thousands. It was a church making progress, a glorious ministry where the truth was proclaimed with signs and wonders following and testimonies given almost daily in affirmation of the power of God at work in the church.

With the demise of Apostle Ofori in 2007, however, the church was plunged into a leadership crisis resulting in the break-up of the church into various factions and the scattering of the flock. We believe we are the remnant church continuing the work of apostle but the church we are now - and been commissioned to build - is not, in a sense, the same glorious church of elder era. Doctrinally and operationally it is, but in terms of outward structures and paraphernalia we are a pale shadow of the former church. We have been driven from our place of worship, our lands taken over by others, vehicles sold by some and our membership reduced.

Amid this heap of despondency one thing gives us hope, though. The Spirit of God which operated in Elder's time still remains among us! And God says that's our motivation to work. Yes, we have the challenge of insufficient resources and cash; yes, there are enemies dead set against us; indeed, some of our plans for accelerated growth have not yet been realized, but these are no reason to fear. His Spirit is alive to our concerns and will see to all needs.

How will He provide our needs?

Here's His answer:

Hag 2:6-9

<sup>6</sup> For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;

<sup>7</sup> And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.

<sup>8</sup> The silver is mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the LORD of hosts.

<sup>9</sup> The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

The heavens and the earth, the creation, will feel the power of His might; it would be His mighty power at work to equip and endow His people to complete the reconstruction work. And that enabling power of His will shake the Gentile nations as well because they hold the wealth of His people. But once shaken, "the treasures of all nations shall come in" (ESV).

Those treasures, to begin with, are not even theirs but His. "The silver is mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the LORD of hosts". The earth belongs to Him and the fulness thereof (Ps 24:1).

With all the power He has, with who He is in His nature, with all that He plans to accomplish by His Spirit, and with all the resources at His disposal, we have no reason to disbelieve Him when He says the house He's building by our hands will turn out to be more glorious than the former! He's "the LORD of Hosts". And He promises and decrees peace in the house when the work is done.

But in the long term, He promises us the peace of the Messiah when at His return He shakes the unsaved nations of the world and installs His government on earth. He is the true but elusive "desire of nations":

Heb. 12:18-13:1

<sup>18</sup> For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

<sup>19</sup> And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

<sup>20</sup> (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

<sup>21</sup> And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

<sup>22</sup> But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

<sup>23</sup> To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

<sup>24</sup> And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

<sup>25</sup> See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

<sup>26</sup> Whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

<sup>27</sup> And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

<sup>28</sup> Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

<sup>29</sup> For our God is a consuming fire.

It's a tale of two shakings, but there's a difference in the magnitude of their effects. In the past when He spoke on earth, the tremor was localized in and around Mount Sinai, a specific area of the earth; now He speaks from heaven, and it's not only the earth that will shake but the universe itself! And it's being shaken to remove it so that the eternal blessing of God's immovable Kingdom may come. We are not immovable in ourselves; we are transient, but grace is from Above, from the Immovable God. His grace will qualify us for the Kingdom by instilling in us the prerequisite qualities of "reverence and godly fear".

Otherwise, the dire warning is that "our God is a consuming fire".

By grace the fire of God which is meant to devour His "adversaries" (Heb. 10:27) has been averted. What has been won is the Kingdom corresponding to the latter house of greater glory and peace!

Our entrance into the Kingdom is the consummation of the work begun in the power of His Spirit, sustained by it and completed by it. It may have an unimpressive beginning, even dogged by occasional frustrations, but the ending is certainly glorious. It reminds one of the scripture in Job 8:7, "Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase".

So let's not give up but press on in the work of God (1 Cor. 15:58). The "greater glory" is in sight. Amen!