

where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O LORD? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?" In this prayer the prophet presented the attitude of a large portion of the people. They could not see how God could permit His temple thus to be destroyed and felt that surely He would be greatly moved by the importance of rebuilding it very soon.

The first three verses of the chapter take this as their starting point. Important as the temple may be as a center of worship, the attitude of heart of the one who comes before God is far more important. God declares that He cannot be confined to an earthly temple. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool. A temple is useful as a place where people may gather to serve Him, but an earthly house is nothing in comparison with the far more fundamental matter of the personal relation of the believer to God. In the first two verses the attitude of the one who seeks to win God's favor by building Him a temple is contrasted with that of the one who "is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word." Humility and obedience mean far more to the Lord than any material gift that we may undertake to give Him.

Thus in verses 1 to 3 great emphasis is placed on the inadequacy of mere form or ceremony to bring one into true relationship with God. Verses 1 and 2 stress the inadequacy of any temple apart from a right heart attitude toward the Creator. In verse 3 the sacrifices and religious services are singled out, and it is shown that, if one performed the best of these religious services with a wrong heart attitude, it would be no better than if he had blessed an idol or offered swine's blood to the Lord.

Formalism Rebuked

This emphasis upon the spiritual attitude required of the true worshiper is nothing new in the Bible. From beginning to end of the Scripture, constant emphasis is placed upon the necessity of a personal relation to the Lord. Mere form and ceremony can never save a man. Only those who truly desire to follow God and who have received the blessing of regeneration and renewal of heart can do anything that is worthwhile