

Haggai 2:20–23: Call to Rebellion or Eschatological Expectation?¹

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates one of the most well-known passages in the book of Haggai, namely Hag 2:20–23. The following question is posed: Is Hag 2:20–23 a call to rebellion or eschatological expectation? An exegetical study of the passage focuses on the literary, historical and theological dimensions of the text. The final oracle in Haggai is introduced with a specific date formulae namely December 18, 520 B.C.E.. Some scholars opt for a later dating (e.g. during the time of the Chronicler or Hellenistic period), but several indicators favour an earlier dating. If one focuses on vv. 21 and 22, the impression could be that the prophet Haggai calls his people to rebel against the Persian empire and other oppressing kingdoms. However, these verses never emphasise that Zerubbabel or any other Israelite leader will take responsibility for the “overthrow of kingdoms.” YHWH is the subject of the Hebrew verbs הפך (overthrow) and שמד (destroy). If one focuses on v. 23 the call to rebellion fades away. Verse 23 does not use military symbols or political terms like “king” or “governor.” It rather uses eschatological terms and expressions like “on that day,” “servant” and “signet ring.” Haggai prophecies about an eschatological day when the Davidic kingdom will be restored by means of Zerubbabel, YHWH’s servant and chosen signet ring.

A INTRODUCTION

Coggins and Han² say the following regarding the interpretation of the book Haggai:

The book as a whole, therefore, has frequently been either dismissed or neglected in later interpretation; only particular verses, or phrases within them, have caught the imagination of most later writers.

¹ Herrie van Rooy did most of his recent research on the Psalms, Ezekiel, ancient versions of the Bible, *et cetera*. However, his first article published in *OTE New Series* (1988) discusses the eschatology of Haggai. In this article dedicated to Herrie I want to link to his “first article.” Cf. Herrie F. van Rooy, “Eschatology and Audience: The Eschatology of Haggai,” *OTE* 1/1 (1988): 49–63.

² Richard Coggins and Jim H. Han, *Six Minor Prophets Through the Centuries* (BBC; Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 139.

Haggai 2:20–23 may be labeled as one of these “particular verses” that caught the imagination of interpreters. This article focuses on the content of this passage and poses the following question: Is Hag 2:20–23 a call to rebellion or eschatological expectation? An exegetical study of the passage will be conducted in order to provide a possible answer to the above question. The literary, historical and theological dimensions of the text will be investigated.

B LITERARY DIMENSION

1 Literary Context and Genre

Haggai is closely associated with Zechariah, both in tradition and in the transmission of the books. According to Nogalski³ there are good reasons to suspect they entered the corpus of the Book of the Twelve at the same time.

In most English translations the book of Haggai is set out entirely in prose; however, the Hebrew text (BHS) interprets the following verses in Haggai as poetry: 1:3–11; 1:15; 2:3–9; 2:14; 2:20–23.⁴

Most scholars divide the book of Haggai in four or five sections.⁵ The creation of these sections is dictated by the date formulae in Haggai: (1) 1:1–15a:⁶ Oracle or speech delivered in the second year of Darius, on the first day of the sixth month (Aug 29, 520 B.C.E.); (2) 1:15b–2:9: Oracle delivered in the second year of Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month (Oct 17, 520 B.C.E.); (3) 2:10–19: Oracle delivered in the second year of Darius, on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Dec 18, 520 B.C.E.); (4) 2:20–23: Final oracle delivered on the same day as the previous one (Dec 18, 520 B.C.E.). The introductory datings (1:1; 2:1, 10 and 20) are all associated with the word-event formula “The word of YHWH came to Haggai.” The content of these different sections can be described as follows:

³ James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah–Malachi* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2011), 764.

⁴ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 206.

⁵ David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 55–106; Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 20–25; Julia M. O’Brien, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 131–312; Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 318; Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 2011, 769; Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (TOTC 28; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 48; John Kessler, “Haggai, Book of,” *DOT: Prophets*: 302.

⁶ This section can also be divided into the following two sections due to the date mentioned in 1:15a (Sept 21, 520 B.C.E.): Hag 1:1–11 and 1:12–15a. The other four sections have a specific chronological reference in the beginning of each oracle while 1:15a can probably be a closing date.

- 1:1–15a: Prophetic call to rebuild the temple
- 1:15b–2:9: Assurance of YHWH’s presence
- 2:10–19: Priestly ruling with prophetic interpretation
- 2:20–23: Zerubbabel, YHWH’s chosen signet ring

The prophetic word formula in v. 20 indicates a new action and thus marks the beginning of a new unit. However, there is a close relationship between this unit and its immediate literary context (vv. 10–19). We have the inclusion of the words “a second time” and the date citation that reiterates the information given in 2:10.⁷ YHWH speaks in the first person and the messenger speech appears three times in the final verse.⁸

It is difficult to determine the genre of vv. 20–23. According to Floyd⁹ the passage follows the conventions that characterise a “report of a prophetic revelation.” A more specific description would typify the genre as “prophetic promise,”¹⁰ “oracle of salvation,”¹¹ “divine promise,”¹² or “oracle of future hope.”¹³

2 Text and Translation

The ancient manuscripts and versions differ little from the MT; therefore, we do not have many text-critical problems. The LXX, Peshitta and Vulgate do offer some deviations from the MT, particularly by expansions of the MT, arrangement of verses and differences of rendering. One of the scrolls discovered at the Dead Sea, the Murabba’ât text, includes major portions of the book Haggai. In no place does the Murabba’ât text offer a reading superior than that of the MT.¹⁴

2a Verse 21

The LXX adds “the son of Shealtiel” to the name “Zerubbabel” to correspond with the MT in Hag 1:1, 12 and 2:2.¹⁵ Another emendation of the LXX is the

⁷ Michael H. Floyd, *Minor Prophets* (part 2; FOTL 22; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 297; Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets* (vol. 2; Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 533.

⁸ O’Brien, *Haggai*, 154.

⁹ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, 299.

¹⁰ Floyd, *Minor Prophets*, 300.

¹¹ Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 162; Hill, *Haggai*, 92.

¹² O’Brien, *Haggai*, 154.

¹³ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB 25B; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 82.

¹⁴ Petersen, *Haggai*, 39; Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Garland, Tex.: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 21.

¹⁵ Hans Walter Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 98.

words καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηρὰν (and the sea and the dry land) at the end of the sentence. The fuller reading of v. 21b is probably based on the phraseology of 2:6.¹⁶ There is not enough textual evidence to change the MT.

The construction of the independent pronoun וְאֲנִי and the *hip’il* participle שֹׁמֵר indicates the imminent future and places emphasis on YHWH as the subject of the impending action. It is called a *futurum instans* and corresponds with Hag 2:6.¹⁷ Some translations¹⁸ translate it into “I will shake,” but the specific Hebrew construction must probably be translated into “I am about to shake”¹⁹ or “I am going to shake”²⁰ or “I am ready to shake.”²¹

2b Verse 22

The singular nomen מְרֻבָּה may mean “rule” (1 Kgs 1:37) or it may be an example of a common Hebrew idiom – the use of the singular for the plural in the construct before the plural – and translate into “thrones.”²² The LXX reads βασιλέων (kings) but reflects no known Hebrew manuscript. It is therefore unnecessary to change the MT as the NEB translation does.²³ The Bible also portrays that it is kingdoms of the world that are overthrown as enemies of YHWH not the kings themselves (cf. Isa 13:9; Dan 2:44–45).²⁴

In v. 22b one might simply suggest the translation “the strength of the nations” instead of “the strength of the kingdoms of nations.”²⁵ It is probably a dittographic expansion based on the מְרֻבָּה present in the first part of the verse.²⁶ However the MT, LXX and the Murabba’ât scroll include the prolix “the strength of the kingdoms of the nations.”²⁷

LXX Alexandrinus (LXX^A) adds the following after וְהִפְכֵתִי מְרֻבָּה וְרֻבְּיָהּ: “and I will overthrow all of their power, bring down their borders, and

¹⁶ Petersen, *Haggai*, 96; John Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud* (VTSup 91; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 219.

¹⁷ Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219; J. Alec Motyer, “Haggai,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009), 990; Hill, *Haggai*, 95.

¹⁸ KJV; NEB; NIV.

¹⁹ ESV; NRSV; GNB; Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219.

²⁰ JB; JPS; NASB.

²¹ NET.

²² Hinckley G. Mitchell, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 77; Motyer, “Haggai,” 1001.

²³ Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219.

²⁴ Merrill, *Haggai*, 56.

²⁵ This is also the suggestion in the text-critical apparatus of BHS.

²⁶ Petersen, *Haggai*, 96.

²⁷ Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219.

strengthen my chosen ones.”²⁸ The text–critical apparatus of BHS also suggests that the last words of v. 22 (אִישׁ בְּהָרֵב אֶחָיו) is a gloss, inspired by Ezek 38:21. There is not enough textual evidence to accept the suggestions of LXX^A and BHS.

2c Verse 23

The text–critical apparatus of BHS suggests that the messenger formula נְאֻם־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת appears to be a late addition. However, repetitions are frequent in Haggai and we do not need to change the MT.²⁹ The translation of the epithet יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת is difficult to determine. It occurs mostly in the prophetic books³⁰ with fourteen references in the book Haggai. Most English translations translate it into “Lord of Hosts,” but the word “Hosts” can be understood in different ways. The LXX translates it into “Lord Almighty.”³¹ I suggest the translation “YHWH of all powers” in the light of the meaning and use of the Hebrew stem צבא. The word “powers” is understood as an inclusive word referring to all powers in heaven and earth.³²

Meyers and Meyers³³ translate the Hebrew עֶבְדִּי into “as my servant.” This term is still a vocative, in apposition to Zerubbabel and may rather be translated into “Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant.”³⁴

The position of the personal pronoun “you” at the beginning of v. 23b serves to emphasise the object of YHWH’s election namely Zerubbabel.³⁵ It is therefore possible to translate it into “for you I have chosen”³⁶ or “for it is you that I have chosen.”³⁷

2d Translation of Haggai 2:20–23

In the light of the above discussion I present the following translation of Hag 2:20–23:

²⁸ Petersen, *Haggai*, 97.

²⁹ Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219.

³⁰ The epithet occurs 251 times in the classical prophetic books out of a total of 284 times in the entire OT.

³¹ Cf. also the 1983 Afrikaans translation.

³² Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “The Use of the Epithet יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת in Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi,” *JNSL* 33/1 (2007): 84–85.

³³ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 48.

³⁴ Wolff, *Haggai*, 98; Kessler, *Book of Haggai*, 219.

³⁵ Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 140.

³⁶ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 48;

³⁷ REV; Motyer, “Haggai,” 999.

²⁰And³⁸ the word of YHWH came a second time to Haggai on the twenty–fourth of the month:³⁹

²¹Say⁴⁰ to Zerubbabel, governor⁴¹ of Judah, I am about⁴² to shake the heavens and the earth,

²²and I will overthrow the thrones of the kingdoms; and I will destroy the strength⁴³ of the kingdoms of the nations, and I will overthrow the chariots and their riders; and the horses and their riders will fall, every man by the sword of his brother.⁴⁴

²³On that day, says YHWH of all powers,⁴⁵ I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant, says YHWH, and I will make you like a signet ring,⁴⁶ for you I have chosen,⁴⁷ says YHWH of all powers.

C HISTORICAL DIMENSION

1 Socio–Historical Background

It is difficult to construct the exact historical setting of the book Haggai but the biblical text and non–biblical material provide us with a few clues. In 539 B.C.E. king Cyrus led Persia in displacing Babylon as the imperial power controlling the Mediterranean region. Cambyses, Cyrus’s son, succeeded his father (530–522 B.C.E.). At the end of his reign the Persian empire suffered with upheaval, and Cambyses died en route home from Egypt to attempt to settle things down. Darius I, one of his officers claimed the throne and won the support of Cambyses’ army in defeating a counter–claimant named Gaumata.⁴⁸ Revolt spread, so it was not until 520 B.C.E. that Darius established peace.⁴⁹

³⁸ We can perhaps use the adverb “then” to introduce the new oracle. Cf. NET; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 48; Wolff, *Haggai*, 97.

³⁹ Most commentators and translations will translate the Hebrew particle לְאָמַר as a colon. Wolff translate it into “saying.” Cf. Wolff, *Haggai*, 97.

⁴⁰ The Hebrew stem אָמַר is usually translated into “say” but other possibilities are “speak” (JPS; KJV, NRSV) or “tell” (NIV).

⁴¹ JB translate it into “high commissioner.”

⁴² Another translation option is “going to shake” (cf. JB; JPS; NASB).

⁴³ One can also use the word “power” (cf. Wolff, *Haggai*, 97) or “might” (NET).

⁴⁴ The Hebrew term אָח is usually rendered as “brother” but it can also mean “comrade” (NRSV) or “fellow” (JPS).

⁴⁵ Some translations find it difficult to translate this epithet and rather use the transliteration Yahweh Sabaoth (cf. JB).

⁴⁶ Alternative possible translations are: “I will set you as my signet” (cf. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 48) or “I will set you as a seal” (cf. Petersen, *Haggai*, 96)

⁴⁷ It can also be translated into “for it is you I have chosen.” Cf. Motyer, *Haggai*, 999.

⁴⁸ Gaumata is also known as the false Smerdis or Bardiya. Smerdis was the Ancient Greek name for Bardiya and Gaumata impersonated Cambyses’s brother Bardiya. Cf.

The text of Haggai places its historical setting in the year 520 B.C.E., the second year of Darius, the Persian king (cf. Hag 1:1; 2:1, 10 and 20). He was remembered for his administrative and trading skills. Darius organised his Persian empire in different protectorates or satrapies which included smaller units or provinces. Judah, now called Yehud in Aramaic, was part of the fifth satrapy called Abar Nahara (Beyond the river). Yehud was ruled by a governor (Zerubbabel) and consisted of a greatly reduced territory comprising of Jerusalem and its environments to a radius of about 25 km.⁵⁰

The Persian policy toward exiles, especially under Darius, was motivated by more than kind-heartedness. It was probably designed to foster loyalty in the provinces and to provide efficient means of imperial control, including the collection of taxes. Darius supported the reconstruction of provincial institutions under authorised local leadership. This might explain Darius’ lenient policy towards Judah and its people, and especially the role of Zerubbabel. In the province of Yehud the Jerusalem temple was more than a religious centre. It was the administrative, cultic and financial centre of an essentially agrarian economy. A rebuilt temple would bring more people to Jerusalem and the employment of more priestly personnel. More people with more skill would eventually also benefit the production of theological thought and literature in Jerusalem and its surroundings. Darius’ specific interest in detailed administration throughout the empire, may have been reflected in his concern for the Jerusalem cult. It is also possible that the Persian encouragement to codify laws in the different provinces may have been an impetus for the forming of the books Haggai and Zechariah.⁵¹

It is difficult to determine the specific historical setting of Hag 2:20–23. Sweeney⁵² believes that the references to the overthrow of the chariots, horses and their riders, and the portrayal of combat among comrades points to the internal warfare within the Persian empire during the early years of Darius. On the other hand Merrill⁵³ and Kessler⁵⁴ argue that Haggai’s words regarding the coming shaking of the nations and the exaltation of Zerubbabel should be read

Pierre Briant, “History of the Persian Empire,” in *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (ed. John Curtis and Nigal Tallis; London: British Museum Press, 2005), 13.

⁴⁹ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 530–531; Redditt, *Introduction*, 317; O’Brien, *Haggai*, 133–134; Briant, “Persian Empire,” 12–13.

⁵⁰ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, xxxi–xxxvii; Kessler, “Haggai,” 303.

⁵¹ Willie J. Wessels, “The Tip of the Iceberg: Leadership and Leader Interaction in the Book of Haggai in a Time of Resettling and Reconstruction,” *OTE* 16/2 (2003): 510–511; Daniel F. O’Kennedy, “Haggai and Zechariah 1–8: Diarchic Model of Leadership in a Rebuilding Phase,” *Scriptura* 102 (2009): 582.

⁵² Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 553–554.

⁵³ Merrill, *Haggai*, 14.

⁵⁴ Kessler, “Haggai,” 303.

against the backdrop of imperial peace and stability. I would be hesitant to accept Sweeney’s viewpoint, because Hag 2:20–23 is an eschatological oracle that refers to the future and does not necessary explain the historical situation of the day. One can say that the prophetic oracle was inspired by the tradition-historical themes of the Day of YHWH and the restoration of the Davidic kingship rather than the political background.⁵⁵

There is a possibility that Zerubbabel actually laid a ceremonial stone in the founding ceremony of the temple (cf. Zech 4:9). One also finds references to the laying of the temple’s foundation in Hag 2:18 and the placing of “a stone upon a stone” in 2:15. It is therefore tempting to understand Hag 2:20–23 as a part of this founding ceremony.⁵⁶

2 What Happened to Zerubbabel?

The book of Haggai closes with a reference to Zerubbabel as YHWH’s chosen signet ring. Unfortunately Zerubbabel disappeared from the scene and there is no OT reference after the description of his important role in the laying of the temple’s foundation (Zech 4:9–10).⁵⁷ In Ezra 5:3–6:15 the authority to rebuild the temple was questioned by Tattenai the governor of the province. King Darius gave his approval for the work to continue. However, no reference is made in the correspondence with the Persian court to Zerubbabel’s presence or of his presence at the temple dedication in 515 B.C.E. (Ezra 6:15). There are at least three different hypotheses about the “disappearance” of Zerubbabel:

- (i) Perhaps he was exterminated or removed from the office by the Persians. Waterman⁵⁸ argues that the political propaganda of Haggai and Zechariah (also the predictions in Hag 2:20–23) contributed to Zerubbabel’s replacement as governor. It was made in the early period of Darius reign when he was facing a series of rebellions by local rulers and therefore did not like this prediction. Some earlier interpreters claim that an

⁵⁵ Adam S. van der Woude, *Haggai, Malachi* (POut; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1982), 70.

⁵⁶ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 66; Paul L. Redditt, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 31; Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 30.

⁵⁷ In the OT Zerubbabel is mentioned only in a limited number of texts outside of Haggai: 1 Chr 3:19; Ezra 2:2; 3:2, 8; 4:2, 3; 5:2; Neh 7:7; 12:1, 47; Zech 4:6–7, 9–10. There is also one reference in 1 Esd 3:1–5:3 and another reference in Sir 49:11–12. Three NT verses include him in the genealogy of Jesus but these verses make no further comment about him (Matt 1:12, 13; Luke 3:27). Cf. W. Eugene March, “The Book of Haggai,” in *NIB* 7:731.

⁵⁸ Leroy Waterman, “The Camouflaged Purge of Three Messianic Conspirators,” *JNES* 13 (1954): 73, 78. Cf. also Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 796.

actual rebellion took place under the leadership of Zerubbabel, leading to his execution.⁵⁹

- (ii) Zerubbabel could have simply left the office of governor peacefully, either due to old age or death from natural causes.⁶⁰
- (iii) The enigmatic passage in Zech 12:10 may suggest that he was killed by his own people after a dispute, perhaps by a pro-Davidic faction.⁶¹ Some scholars believe that he was removed as governor by the priestly class led by Joshua, the high-priest.⁶²

At this stage all the above mentioned hypotheses are speculative. We simply do not know for what reason we stop hearing about Zerubbabel. There is not enough biblical or extra-biblical evidence to support any of these hypotheses.

3 Composition and Dating

The text of Hag 2:20 refers to a specific date namely December 18, 520 B.C.E.. Does it simply mean that the final oracle was written on this date? Scholars generally agree that the book of Haggai may be seen as a series of oracles set in an editorial framework. Options concerning the book’s date tend to favour either an early date close to the dates mentioned in the text or a far later date.

I want to mention two scholars arguing for a later date. Beuken⁶³ states that Haggai’s oracles were edited by someone from the same religious and intellectual milieu as that of the Chronicler. In a recent study Hallaschka⁶⁴ dates the final oracle during the Hellenistic period together with other texts that

⁵⁹ See discussion of Sarah Japhet, “Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel: Against the Background of the Historical and Religious Tendencies of Ezra–Nehemiah,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 78.

⁶⁰ Tamara C. Eskenazi, “Zerubbabel,” *New IDB* 5:980; Beyse argues that Zerubbabel died shortly after the completion but before the dedication of the second temple in 515 B.C.E.. Cf. Karl–Martin Beyse, *Zerubbabel und die Königserwartungen der Propheten Haggai und Sacharja: Eine historische und traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (AzTh 1/48; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972), 49.

⁶¹ J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 459–460.

⁶² See discussion of Wolter H. Rose, *Zemah and Zerubbabel: Messianic Expectations in the Early Postexilic Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 33–34.

⁶³ Willem A. S. Beuken, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühachexilischen Prophetie* (SSN 10; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), 184–216.

⁶⁴ Martin Hallaschka, *Haggai und Sacharja 1–8: Eine Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BZAW 411; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 120, 138.

promised the restoration of the Davidic dynasty. On the other hand we have several scholars⁶⁵ opting for an earlier date.

According to Kessler⁶⁶ several indicators favour an earlier date for the entire book: (1) the oracle predicting Zerubbabel’s exaltation (2:23) is not toned down, suggesting that he still held office; (2) the second temple’s rededication ceremony (515 B.C.E.) is not mentioned; (3) no attempt is made to distinguish between Darius I and Darius II; (4) the eschatological zeal of the oracles is left largely intact; and (5) the date formulae are closely woven into the editorial framework.

We have referred to the dating of the entire book and the date formulae in v. 20, but the question still remains: Were the references to Zerubbabel in vv. 21 and 23 part of the original oracle or were they inserted by an editor? It is not the intention of this article to provide a detailed redaction–critical study. However, one can support the following viewpoint of Van Rooy:⁶⁷

If Zerubbabel was introduced into this oracle by the redaction, the redaction must be dated to a time when Zerubbabel was still a factor – a time about which we know fairly little, but which must have occurred not long after the completion of the temple.⁶⁸

A Hellenistic or late dating for vv. 20–23 is unlikely, because Zerubbabel “disappeared from the scene” as argued above. His name is not even mentioned at the dedication of the second temple. A late editor would not insert an eschatological passage with Zerubbabel as “signet ring” if there was uncertainty about his whereabouts.

⁶⁵ Rex Mason, “The Purpose of the ‘Editorial Framework’ in the Book of Haggai,” *VT* 27 (1977): 421; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, xliii–xliv; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 10; Michael H. Floyd, “The Nature of the Narrative and the Evidence of redaction in Haggai,” *VT* 45 (1995): 470–490. Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 530–531, Petersen, *Prophetic Literature*, 205–206; Merrill, *Haggai*, 14; O’Brien, *Haggai*, 136–137; Wessels, “*Tip of the Iceberg*,” 510–511; Hill, *Haggai*, 47; and others.

⁶⁶ Kessler, “Haggai,” 303.

⁶⁷ Van Rooy, “Eschatology and Audience,” 61.

⁶⁸ I still maintain the viewpoint that the dedication of the Second Temple took place at 515/6 B.C.E.. However, there are other opinions challenging the original dating. For example, Edelman moves the date to a time early in the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–425 B.C.E.). Cf. Diana Edelman, *The Origins of the “Second Temple”: Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem* (London: Equinox, 2005), 332.

D THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION

1 Eschatology⁶⁹ in Haggai

In a study of the eschatology in Haggai Van Rooy⁷⁰ arrives at the conclusion that the eschatology of Haggai does not introduce many new elements to the history of eschatology in Israel, but largely follows known traditions. According to Van Rooy eschatology was not the main thrust of Haggai’s message, but rather to encourage the people to complete the restoration of the temple.

The book of Haggai holds together at least two elements on eschatology: (1) a “realised eschatology” of the temple that assures prosperity, peace and blessing in the present time (in the first three oracles); and (2) a “futuristic eschatology” of Davidic restoration (in the fourth oracle).⁷¹ The divine judgment in the “shaking of the nations” present in the second oracle (2:6–9) and fourth oracle (2:20–23) can be described as a third element.⁷²

2 Shaking of Heaven and Earth (v. 21)

The words of v. 21b (“I am about to shake the heavens and earth”) repeat 2:6b verbatim, but the accent changes and becomes in tone with vv. 22–23. The first cosmic “shaking” leads to the wealth of the nations streaming into the temple (2:7), while the second cosmic “shaking” brings about the subjugation of the nations under YHWH’s rule (2:23).⁷³

The *hip’il* form of the verb רעש (shake) has a distinct eschatological dimension which is present here and which is sustained in the following verse by the verb “I will overthrow.” The *hip’il* of רעש is used in Hag 2:6 and 7 where it also has distinct future overtones.⁷⁴ In the rest of the Bible “shaking” is associated with theophany, the dramatic appearance of YHWH. The Hebrew stem רעש (shake) occurs in Judg 5:4 and 2 Sam 22:8 in the context of YHWH’s appearance as the Divine Warrior. Other passages link YHWH’s shaking of the earth to his anger (cf. Ps 18:7, Isa 13:13 and Jer 10:10).⁷⁵

⁶⁹ There are many definitions for the term “eschatology.” I want to link with the definition of Martins in a recent OT dictionary: “Eschatology from the Greek words *eschatos* (‘final, last’) and *logos* (‘study of’) has to do with the future, but chiefly the kind of future that is significantly discontinuous from the present, a future that represents the culmination of Yahweh’s purposes.” Cf. Elmer A. Martins, “Eschatology,” *DOT: Prophets*: 178.

⁷⁰ Van Rooy, “Eschatology and Audience,” 62.

⁷¹ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 251.

⁷² Hill, *Haggai*, 94.

⁷³ Boda, *Haggai*, 161; Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 795.

⁷⁴ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 66.

⁷⁵ O’Brien, *Haggai*, 149, 154.

3 Overthrow of Kingdoms (v. 22)

In v. 22 the text moves from the terrifying upheavals in the natural world to their effect upon humankind. The imagery used in v. 22 is military in nature: overthrow; destroy; chariots; riders; and sword. The Hebrew stem **הפך** (overthrow) is frequently found with YHWH as subject in descriptions of divine judgment (e.g. Amos 4:11). The “biblical paradigm” of such divine activity is the overthrowing of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Gen 19:21, 25, 29; Deut 29:22; Jer 49:18; 50:40).⁷⁶ In the second part of v. 22 the overthrow of “chariots and their riders” and the fall of “the horses and their riders” also draws on the Exodus tradition in which Pharaoh is defeated (cf. Exod 14:23–25).⁷⁷

The object of the verbs “overthrow” and “destroy” is not as specific as in the Sodom and Gomorrah and Exodus traditions. Rather than specific cities, nations and rulers, Hag 2:22 refers to generalised entities: “throne/s of the kingdoms” and “strength of the kingdoms of the nations.” However, Petersen⁷⁸ emphasises that there are striking similarities between the language in Hag 2:22 and that found in Isaiah and Jeremiah. These similarities serve to confirm Haggai’s role as a typical prophet.

The words “every man by the sword of his brother” refer to the enemies of Israel killing one another. This idea is an ancient one (Judg 7:22) and became part of the traditional language associated with YHWH’s final intervention in history (cf. Ezek 38:21; Zech 14:13).⁷⁹

4 Call to Rebellion?

O’Brien⁸⁰ states that Haggai’s particular understanding of the temple implicitly criticizes Persian control. Haggai stresses the sovereignty of YHWH over all human institutions by stressing the importance of the temple’s glory and by linking its completion with a cosmic shaking that will overthrow kingdoms. However, the question still remains: does this passage call for rebellion against the Persian empire or is it merely a general criticism of all kingdoms?

The translation of specific words has an influence on the understanding of a so-called rebellion against Persia or not. If the singular word **כִּסֵּא** (v. 21) is translated into a plural like some commentators suggest, it ought not to be taken as a specific reference to the Persian throne, but to the thrones of many kingdoms.⁸¹ Haggai does not speak of the overthrow of Persia, but the subjugation

⁷⁶ Kessler, *Haggai*, 223; Hill, *Haggai*, 95.

⁷⁷ Boda, *Haggai*, 162.

⁷⁸ Petersen, *Haggai*, 99–100.

⁷⁹ David J. Clark and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2002), 62.

⁸⁰ O’Brien, *Haggai*, 157.

⁸¹ Kessler, *Haggai*, 219.

tion of all nations to YHWH.⁸² The eschatological language in Haggai cannot be read as a specific call to rebellion against the Persian empire or be seen as an indication of disloyalty on Zerubbabel’s part. Haggai 2:22 speaks about the overthrow of kingdoms, but it is important to note that Haggai does not prophesy that Zerubbabel or any other political figure will overthrow the other kingdoms. YHWH will be the agent of that cataclysmic change.

5 On that Day (v. 23)

The expression בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (on that day) is associated with the “Day of YHWH” and occurs only once in Haggai. It is standard prophetic language for eschatological time and is frequently used in oracles of salvation. This eschatological phrase refers to a time of YHWH’s unmistakable and powerful intervention in world history, whether to bring blessing upon the righteous or punishment upon the wicked (cf. Isa 2:11, 17, 20; 3:7, 18; Amos 8:3, 9; 9:11; Hos 2:18; Jer 25:33; Zech 13:2; 14:4–20).⁸³

The use of the expression “on that day” in v. 23 seems to mark a transition point from the more general statement of divine judgment of the nations (vv. 21–22) to a more concrete promise addressed to Zerubbabel. Verses 21–22 refer to YHWH’s action in the future, but it remains rather vague action that will be undertaken in the general future. When the text employs “on that day” it describes a specific day in the future.⁸⁴ The phrase was regularly used as a connective formula in prophetic writings; however, Tollington⁸⁵ believes that it does not merely indicate a new thought in v. 23, but introduces the key point of the oracle as a whole.

The words “says YHWH / YHWH of all powers” appear three times in v. 23. This expression emphasises that each element of the promise, the certainty of the coming day and the divine election and status of Zerubbabel, is thus signed, sealed and settled.⁸⁶

6 Zerubbabel as Servant and Signet Ring (v. 23)

Haggai 2:23 refers to the following: Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel and YHWH’s servant, will become like a signet ring because YHWH has chosen him. What is the meaning of these words in the specific historical context?

⁸² Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1986), 105.

⁸³ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 67; Merrill, *Haggai*, 56.

⁸⁴ Petersen, *Haggai*, 102.

⁸⁵ Janet E. Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation in Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (JSOTSup 150; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 136.

⁸⁶ Motyer, “Haggai,” 1002.

Verse 23 identifies Zerubbabel as “son of Shealtiel” in contrast to the original address in Hag 2:21, which called him “governor of Judah.” The expression “son of Shealtiel” alludes to his genealogical connection to the royal line of David. Zerubbabel’s Davidic lineage is never explicitly mentioned in the book of Haggai, but his genealogy is made clear in 1 Chr 3.⁸⁷

Zerubbabel is not merely called “son of Shealtiel” but also YHWH’s servant. The designation “servant” or “servant of YHWH” is applied to a select group of divinely appointed figures in the OT: Abraham (Gen 26:24); Isaac and Jacob (Exod 32:13); Moses (Num 12:7–8); Joshua (Judg 2:8; Josh 1:1, 7; etc.); David (2 Sam 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13; 14:8; 2 Kgs 19:34); and others.⁸⁸ The prophet Haggai does not use the political terms “king” or “prince,” but rather the word “servant.” Darius was already the Persian king and to have a similar claim of royal status for Zerubbabel would create unnecessary conflict. The ambiguity entailed in the use of the term “servant” enabled Haggai to reflect about the role of Zerubbabel, the Davidite without causing a political crisis.⁸⁹

Petersen⁹⁰ emphasises that there was also a “tradition” during the sixth century, one that called non-Israelite monarchs “YHWH’s servants.” Two prominent examples are those of Nebuchadnezzar in Jer 25:9 and Cyrus in Isa 45:1. From the perspective of this counter tradition, Haggai’s prophecy represents something of a refocusing of authority on a Judahite, rather than a foreign king.

Besides the term “servant,” Hag 2:23 portrays Zerubbabel as YHWH’s “signet ring” (חֶטֶם).⁹¹ The titles of “servant” and “signet ring” give him a subordinate role to YHWH. Both images of “servant” and “signet ring” are passive images of instrument. A servant is one who responds to the commands of his master and has no authority without his master.⁹² A signet ring has no value apart from its connection to the king who wears it. Zerubbabel as Davidic king was expected to execute YHWH’s authority and represent YHWH’s interests.⁹³ The only other OT text that applies the term “signet ring” to a person is Jer

⁸⁷ Boda, *Haggai*, 164; O’Brien, *Haggai*, 155.

⁸⁸ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 554; Merrill, *Haggai*, 56; Kessler, *Haggai*, 228.

⁸⁹ Petersen, *Haggai*, 106; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 68–70.

⁹⁰ Petersen, *Haggai*, 103.

⁹¹ Early in the church history Christian interpreters (e.g. Ambrose) understood the reference to the signet ring typologically as a messianic title for Jesus the Messiah. Cf. Hill, *Haggai*, 100.

⁹² One can say that a servant with his master’s signet ring has power but the power still comes from his master.

⁹³ Boda, *Haggai*, 165.

22:24 where it refers to Zerubbabel’s grandfather Jehoiachin (Coniah), albeit in the sense of removing the signet ring from YHWH’s hand.⁹⁴

The image of a signet ring is common in the ANE, designating a piece of metal jewelry on which was etched an impression of the seal of the king. The signet ring of the Persian king was the ultimate symbol of royal authority and power in the Persian empire (cf. Esth 3:10; 8:2). Documents that were impressed by the king’s signet ring, carried the force of law in the Persian empire equivalent to the word of the king himself.⁹⁵

The oracle closes in v. 23 with the words “For you I have chosen.” The verb בחר (to choose) is associated with the dynastic hope of the house of David (cf. Ps 78:70).⁹⁶ It refers to YHWH’s election of Israel as a nation (e.g. Deut 4:37). In Hag 2:23 it is used with “my servant” and refers to YHWH’s choice of David (cf. 1 Sam 16:8–10; 2 Sam 6:21; Ps 78:70).⁹⁷ When these two terms are used together the redemptive role of the person so designated is enhanced all the more. It anticipates the eschatological rule of a righteous and just leader after the model of an idealised David (cf. Isa 41:8; 42:1; 44:4; 49:7).⁹⁸

There is also a relationship between the use of the verb בחר (choose) and the verb לקח (take) employed in the beginning of the verse. The verb לקח when used with YHWH as subject frequently conveys the setting apart of groups or individuals (cf. Exod 6:7; Num 3:12; Deut 4:20; etc.). Like in Hag 2:23 the individual or group is “taken” and appointed to a new position or responsibility.⁹⁹

7 Jeremiah 22 and Haggai 2:23: Jehoiachin and Zerubbabel

We have mentioned earlier that the only other OT text that applies the term “signet ring” to a person is Jer 22:24. However, there is a sharp contrast between the message of Jeremiah in 22:24–30 and that of Hag 2:23. In Jer 22:24 YHWH declares that even if Jehoiakim were his signet ring, He would tear it off. The passage concludes with the following words in v. 30:

Thus says the LORD: Record this man as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah (NRSV).

⁹⁴ Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 796.

⁹⁵ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 554; Boda, *Haggai*, 164.

⁹⁶ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 70; Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 796.

⁹⁷ Boda, *Haggai*, 165.

⁹⁸ Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 70; Merrill, *Haggai*, 56.

⁹⁹ John Kessler, “Haggai, Zerubbabel, and the Political Status of Yehud: The Signet Ring in Haggai 2:23,” in *Prophets, Prophecy and Prophetic Texts in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. Michael H. Floyd and Robert D. Haak; LHBOTS 427; New York: Clark & Clark, 2006), 114.

This “offspring” is defined in Jer 22:28 as his “children” who went into exile with him. Haggai now addresses Zerubbabel,¹⁰⁰ one of those who was born in the exile. It appears as if Haggai sees the matter differently declaring that Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, will be YHWH’s signet ring. The prophetic predictions of Jeremiah were revisited and revised by Haggai.¹⁰¹

Boda¹⁰² argues that Haggai is not contradicting Jeremiah’s prophecy but rather making a creative play on the prophecy and revealing a future for the Davidic line. This may explain why Haggai refers to Zerubbabel as “the son of Shealtiel”¹⁰³ throughout this book. The question may be posed: is it only a “creative interplay” or does the prophet Haggai use the term “signet ring” with a specific purpose? It is difficult to determine the real relationship between the texts of Jer 22 and Hag 2:23, but I tend to follow Kessler¹⁰⁴ who argues that the use of the term “signet ring” in Hag 2:23 is highly intentional. Its purpose is to “correct” or “update” Jer 22:24 in light of the circumstances of Early Persian Yehud. Haggai 2:23 provides a further comment on Jer 22:24–27 and juxtaposes Zerubbabel’s faithfulness to Jehoiakim’s lack thereof.

8 Zerubbabel: King, Vice-regent, Messiah or Blurred future?

We have already discussed the references to “signet ring” and “servant” in v. 23. However, there is still a question about the specific role of Zerubbabel, YHWH’s chosen signet ring. Scholars present the following divergent viewpoints:

(1) Some commentators believe that Zerubbabel would rule as a king in a reconstituted nation.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand Redditt¹⁰⁶ emphasises that Haggai

¹⁰⁰ The name Zerubbabel denotes the meaning “seed of Babel.”

¹⁰¹ Van Rooy, “Eschatology and Audience,” 61; Redditt, *Introduction*, 321.

¹⁰² Boda, *Haggai*, 165.

¹⁰³ Haggai, Ezra and Nehemiah list Zerubbabel’s father’s name as Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh 12:1; Hag 1:1), whereas 1 Chr 3:19 has Pedaiah, brother of Shealtiel. One can assume that there is an error in the MT and that the LXX reading of 1 Chr 3:19 (the son of Shealtiel) is correct. Some scholars attempted to harmonise the two lineages (e.g. assuming adoption when Zerubbabel lost his biological father). According to Eskanazi these attempts are unconvincing and argues that one must rather accept different traditions with the “Shealtiel tradition” the more firmly established one. Cf. O’Kennedy, “Haggai and Zechariah 1–8,” 584; Eskanazi, “Zerubbabel,” 980.

¹⁰⁴ Kessler, “Haggai, Zerubbabel,” 111, 115.

¹⁰⁵ Japhet, “Sheshbazzar,” 78; Petersen, *Haggai*, 104; Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 69–70.

¹⁰⁶ Paul L. Redditt, “The King in Haggai–Zechariah 1–8 and the Book of the Twelve,” in *Tradition in Transition: Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 in the Trajectory of the Hebrew Theology* (ed. Mark Boda and Michael Floyd; London: T & T Clark), 59.

never uses the word “king” of Zerubbabel. There is also an absence of other oracles dealing with the theme of kingship in Haggai.¹⁰⁷

(2) Several scholars argue that the use of the terms “servant” and “signet ring” signify that Zerubbabel was to become YHWH’s vice-regent.¹⁰⁸

(3) A few earlier interpreters see Zerubbabel as a messiah or as a messianic figure.¹⁰⁹ Sweeney¹¹⁰ argues that Zerubbabel’s role as Davidic scion and temple builder effectively marked him as YHWH’s messiah or anointed Davidic monarch. Tollington¹¹¹ differs from these viewpoints. She believes that Haggai uses messianic connotations but that this is far removed from suggesting that he understood Zerubbabel to be the messiah, a concept which belongs to a later age.

Some of the above mentioned hypotheses may be correct but there is a strong possibility that the text deliberately uses symbolic language to blur the future and therefore makes it impossible to delineate the reference in any detail. Verses 20–23 use evocative language in a generalised fashion. The book of Haggai ends on an ambiguous note. It is open-ended.¹¹² We can conclude this discussion on the role of Zerubbabel with the words of O’Brien:¹¹³

The primary role that the temple plays in the book of Haggai, as well as the even greater importance that the book places on the temple rededication ceremony, suggests that whatever role Zerubbabel is to play will be possible only after the reestablishment of the temple as the center of the community.

9 True or False Prophecy?

True prophecy is usually characterised by the fulfilment of the prophecy. This is a useful test but according to Lundbom¹¹⁴ this never became the last word for

¹⁰⁷ Rose, *Zemah*, 250.

¹⁰⁸ Van der Woude, *Haggai*, 75; Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, 148; Boda, *Haggai*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ Waterman, “Camouflaged,” 78; Karl–Martin Beyse, *Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen de Propheten Haggai und Sacharja: Eine historische und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchung* (AzTh 1/48; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972), 59; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai – Sacharja 1–8 – Sacharja 9–14 – Maleachi* (KAT 13; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 54; Rex A. Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 25; Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, 105.

¹¹⁰ Sweeney, *Twelve Prophets* 2, 555.

¹¹¹ Tollington, *Tradition and Innovation*, 143.

¹¹² Petersen, *Haggai*, 106; Kessler, “Haggai, Zerubbabel,” 117.

¹¹³ O’Brien, *Haggai*, 157.

¹¹⁴ Jack R. Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 151.

authenticating Israel’s prophets. Prophets with the best of credentials gave predictions of judgment that went past any point of fulfilment. Most often, it was prophecies of salvation that were allowed to go unfulfilled. According to Smith¹¹⁵ and Nogalski¹¹⁶ Hag 2:20–23 represents one of these prophecies of salvation that did not come true. Haggai prophecies that the strength of the kingdoms will be destroyed and that Zerubbabel will be YHWH’s signet ring. Zerubbabel disappears quickly from the scene and the Persian empire lasted almost 200 years after this prediction was pronounced.

One may ask the question why such an oracle was preserved in the book of Haggai. The prophet Haggai has the principles right, but it can happen in eschatological language that one collapses time. Haggai expects to see something in future that surpasses his own time. But those who preserved Haggai’s message saw in it a larger perspective. God’s new world would indeed be brought about with a representative of the line of David, albeit not Zerubbabel.¹¹⁷

E CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the introduction we posed the question: is Hag 2:20–23 a call to rebellion or eschatological expectation? An exegetical study of the passage lead me to make the following concluding remarks.

If one focuses primarily on vv. 21 and 22 the impression could be that the prophet Haggai calls his people to rebel against the Persian empire and other oppressive kingdoms. These verses use strong verbs like “shake,” “overthrow” and “destroy.” They are military terms with a political connotation. However, these verses never emphasise that Zerubbabel or any other Israelite leader will take responsibility for the “overthrow of kingdoms.” YHWH is the subject of the verb “overthrow” just like the “overthrow” of Sodom and Gomorrah. We can say that Haggai appeared to be a strategic thinker who knew something about politics. He knew that to revive the role of the Davidite he would require the support of the Israelites and the Persian authorities.¹¹⁸ However, we can never describe Haggai as a rebellious prophet who openly called his people to rebel against the Persian Empire. There are scholars who believe that Zerubbabel disappeared from the scene because of the political propaganda against the Persian Empire (e.g. Waterman). However, there is not enough evidence to support this hypothesis.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 163

¹¹⁶ Nogalski, *Micah–Malachi*, 796.

¹¹⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (vol. 2 of *Twelve Prophets*; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 153.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Petersen, *Haggai*, 105.

If one focuses on v. 23 the “call to rebellion” fades away from the text’s frame of reference. The text does not use political terms like “king,” “governor” or “prince.” It rather uses eschatological and religious words and expressions like “on that day,” “servant” and “signet ring.” The final verse or verses may be seen as the climax of an oracle or entire book. The climax of the book Haggai focuses on the eschatological expectation that YHWH will restore the Davidic kingdom or dynasty, specifically the role of Zerubbabel whom he has chosen.

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