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HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH AND MALACHI

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

ANDREW E. HILL



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GENERAL PREFACE

The decision completely to revise the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is an indication of the important role that the series has played since its opening volumes were released in the mid-1960s. They represented at that time, and have continued to represent, commentary writing that was committed both to the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and a desire to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate. The commentaries aimed to explain the biblical text to a generation of readers confronting models of critical scholarship and new discoveries from the Ancient Near East, while remembering that the Old Testament is not simply another text from the ancient world. Although no uniform process of exegesis was required, all the original contributors were united in their conviction that the Old Testament remains the Word of God for us today. That the original volumes fulfilled this role is evident from the way in which they continue to be used in so many parts of the world.

A crucial element of the original series was that it should offer an up-to-date reading of the text, and it is precisely for this reason that new volumes are required. The questions confronting readers in the first half of the twenty-first century are not necessarily those from the second half of the twentieth. Discoveries from the Ancient Near East continue to shed new light on the Old Testament, whilst emphases in exegesis have changed markedly. Whilst remaining true to the goals of the initial volumes, the need for contemporary study

of the text requires that the series as a whole be updated. This updating is not simply a matter of commissioning new volumes to replace the old. We have also taken the opportunity to update the format of the series to reflect a key emphasis from linguistics, which is that texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses. Because of this, the treatment of each section of the text includes three segments. First, a short note on *Context* is offered, placing the passage under consideration in its literary setting within the book, as well as noting any historical issues crucial to interpretation. The *Comment* segment then follows the traditional structure of the commentary, offering exegesis of the various components of a passage. Finally, a brief comment is made on *Meaning*, by which is meant the message that the passage seeks to communicate within the book, highlighting its key theological themes. This section brings together the detail of the *Comment* to show how the passage under consideration seeks to communicate as a whole.

Our prayer is that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text.

David G. Firth, Series Editor
Tremper Longman III, Consulting Editor

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi preached to audiences who were jaded by the lack of relevance of organized religion to their daily economic and social life. They were self-absorbed, preoccupied with personal agendas, bent on comparing themselves with others, questioning the fairness of life, looking for an edge, pursuing material rather than spiritual things, morally ambivalent, apathetic with respect to civil responsibility, hypocritical with regard to religious practice, chasing much but grasping little – and the list goes on. Sound familiar?

The crisis of relevance persists today in numerous ways and at a variety of levels. Our three prophets sought to remedy the crisis of the relevance of the religion of YHWH for the people of God living in post-exilic Judah by calling them to *return to God* (Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7). Much of the teaching of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi still has currency for the people of God dealing with the various crises of relevance in our contemporary culture. Their sermons remain an open invitation to *be still before the LORD* (Zech. 2:13), to *seek the LORD Almighty* (Zech. 8:22), and to come to understand and acknowledge that YHWH is *a great king* (Mal. 1:14). In short, they continue to call us to return to God – godly repentance is always relevant.

I am honoured to stand on the shoulders of such an able scholar as the late Joyce G. Baldwin. Over the years, I have personally and professionally benefited from her TOTC commentaries, first as a seminarian, later as a graduate student, and now as a professor of

biblical studies. As a credit to her careful and insightful scholarship, I have intentionally made wide appeal to her analysis, where appropriate. I trust this iteration of the TOTC on the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi will serve the next generation of students and pastor-teachers equally well.

The New International Version (NIV) is the baseline English translation used for the commentary, and quotations from this version are given in italics. Other English versions are referenced where helpful, including the NIV 2011 edition when pertinent. Bible translation is necessarily interpretive in many instances, so the broad engagement with an array of English versions brings both breadth of perspective and depth of understanding to the analysis of particular verses of Scripture. Numerous insightful and readable commentaries are available on the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. I have benefited from this excellent scholarship and have attempted to interact with these resources (cited in the Select bibliography for each book) in such a way that the reader gains an understanding of the biblical text, informed by a variety of voices.

Special attention is given to intertextual relationships in our analysis, since each of the three prophets often appeal (whether directly or indirectly) to the messages of their earlier counterparts. We read the Bible as theology (the *revelation* of God and his redemptive plan for humanity), history (the *record* of God's dealings with humanity, and especially Israel) and literature (the *story* of God and human experience). All three lenses are employed in our analysis of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Emphasis is given to literary analysis of our three prophetic books, since each is a hybrid of sorts, combining a distinctive mix of genres and literary features in their sermons and visions to post-exilic Judah. This approach also assumes the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi have some inherent relationship by way of theme(s) and message, since they arise out of the same general period of history and address the same constituency. This reading of the three post-exilic prophets also recognizes that they belong to a larger collection of prophetic books, the Book of the Twelve (or Minor Prophets), which may tell a more extended story about God and his people Israel.

By way of acknowledgments, I would like to thank my graduate assistants, Brett Blum and Jordan Brown, for their work in the

process of compiling the manuscript for this commentary. I am indebted to the staff of IVP UK for their good work in seeing the volume through to publication. I would especially like to recognize Philip Duce (Senior Commissioning Editor) for the opportunity to contribute to this venerable commentary series. I offer my thanks as well to David Firth (Series Editor) for ably bringing this instalment of the TOTC to completion. I am grateful to both for their patience, professionalism and scholarly insight as overseers of the project.

I remain grateful for Teri, the wife of my youth. Thanks to her partnership, I am coming to understand more clearly, and practise more intentionally, the prophetic call to do justice and to love mercy. We look forward to the realization of Zechariah's vision of streets filled with boys and girls playing in safety – for our three (now grown-up) children, our several grandchildren, and for all children (Zech. 8:4–5).

To the reader, listen and learn from the preaching of these last three voices of the OT prophetic movement. Haggai reminds us to 'think carefully about our behaviour' (Hag. 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18, NJB). Zechariah exhorts us not to despise 'small beginnings' (Zech. 4:10, NLT), since *it is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit* that the LORD Almighty accomplishes his purposes (Zech. 4:6). And finally, Malachi encourages the people of God by affirming that, "I have always loved you," says the LORD' (Mal. 1:2, NLT).

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Advent 2011

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Historical background

The backdrop for the books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi is the Persian period of Ancient Near Eastern history (539–330 BC). Cyrus the Great had consolidated his power base by defeating the Medes in 549 BC, and he was welcomed into Babylon as king of Persia in 539 BC. Over a span of twenty years (c. 559–539 BC), Cyrus built an empire that sprawled across the Ancient Near East, from the Nile to the Indus Rivers. According to the Cyrus Cylinder, a decree issued in 538 BC permitted conquered people groups who had been deported by the Babylonians to return to their homelands. Naturally, this included the Jews, although they are not named in the decree.

The first wave of emigrants to Jerusalem numbered 42,360 (plus 7,337 servants; cf. Ezra 2:64–65). They were led by Sheshbazzar, a Judean prince and the first (Persian-appointed) governor of the Hebrew restoration community (Ezra 1:5–11). The foundation for a Second Temple was laid in Jerusalem during

the early stages of Sheshbazzar's administration (Ezra 5:16). The meagre project was soon abandoned, however, as the vision of Ezekiel's temple-state (Ezek. 40–48) and Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant (Jer. 31) quickly faded amid the stark reality of Persian domination. In addition, the problems of survival in Jerusalem and Judah for the former Hebrew captives were compounded by the resistance of surrounding hostile foreigners (Ezra 4:4–5), an agrarian society plagued by drought and crop failure (Hag. 1:6, 11), and economic recession and widespread lawlessness (Zech. 8:9–11).

A second group of returnees arrived in Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua about 522 BC. Zerubbabel, the new Persian-appointed governor, and the priest Joshua were inspired by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to mobilize the Hebrew community in 520 BC in another attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 5:11–12). The Second Temple was completed in 515 BC (Ezra 6:15; cf. 3:8–13), some seventeen years after the failed initiative under the supervision of Sheshbazzar.

More specifically, the books of Haggai and Zechariah are dated to the reign of King Darius I of Persia (521–486 BC). Haggai delivered his messages during a four-month period in 520 BC, while Zechariah's ministry is dated between 520 and 518 BC (and probably extended for some time beyond this). Both Haggai and Zechariah are mentioned as the prophets who sparked the building of the Second Temple (Ezra 5:1).

The book of Malachi is undated. The prophet refers to an unnamed governor of Persian-controlled Judah (Mal. 1:8), and no kings or priests are mentioned by name. The Second Temple had been completed, but the achievement did not usher in the awaited messianic age (Mal. 3:6–12; cf. Zech. 8:9–23). Instead, the apathy and disillusionment that had delayed the reconstruction of the temple for nearly twenty years persisted in post-exilic Judah. Malachi preached in Jerusalem during this pre-Ezra era of decline (c. 500–450 BC, assuming the traditional date of 458 BC is correct for Ezra's journey to Jerusalem). It is possible that the Persian wars with the Greeks prompted Malachi's message (perhaps the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC), and the prophet interpreted the titanic clash

between East and West as the shaking of the nations prophesied by Haggai (Hag. 2:20–22).¹

2. The Book of the Twelve

The title, ‘Book of the Twelve’, is a designation for the books known as the Minor Prophets in the HB/OT (cf. Sir. 49:10; and Josephus [*Antiquities* 10.2.2]). Jewish tradition, based upon the interpretive approach known as *midrash halakah* (i.e. story-telling exegesis), assumed that the collection of Twelve Prophets was arranged to tell a particular ‘story’ about Israel.

The ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscript traditions reveal that most, if not all, of the Twelve Minor Prophets were written on a single scroll (although scribal practice does not explicitly indicate that these books were considered a literary unity). This has led some scholars to postulate that the Twelve Prophets are a book, or a collection of prophetic books, organized into a unified composition with discernible literary structure and plot movement.² Such imposed literary structure tends to cloud rather than reveal, so that the whole reads as much less than the sum of its parts.

A better approach may be simply to regard the Twelve Prophets as a scroll unified by the prophetic genre, with an implied narrative and a central theme (or themes?).³ The plot-line (i.e. the message) of the Book of the Twelve, from a negative perspective, is one of

-
1. See further the commentary introductions for the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus that follow, and fuller discussions of the historical background of the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus in Baldwin (1972: 15–21); Merrill (1994: 3–10); and Berquist (1995: 51–73).
 2. House (1990). See the assessment in Hill (1998: 15).
 3. E.g. Petersen (2000: 9–10) identifies the prophetic concept of the Day of the Lord as the dominant theme of the Minor Prophets. Collins (1993: 65) recognizes several principal themes in the Scroll of the Twelve, including covenant-election, fidelity and infidelity, fertility and infertility, turning and returning, God’s justice and mercy, God’s kingship, the temple, and nations as enemies and as allies. See further Gottwald (1985: 83–96) and Redditt and Schart (2003).

covenant failure, as both the pre-exilic Hebrew kingdoms of Israel and Judah are conquered and exiled by the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively. From a positive point of view, the plot-line of the Book of the Twelve is one of worship renewal and the return of a remnant of the Hebrew community to YHWH, since there was a repatriation of Judah and the rebuilding of the Second Temple by the Jews returning from Babylonia during the restoration period. Placed in this larger literary context, the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus is foundational to this latter understanding of the message of the Twelve.

Additionally, the Twelve Prophets are framed by the prophetic call to repentance. Notably, the first two books, Hosea and Joel (cf. Hos. 6:1; 7:10; 14:1–2; Joel 2:12–14), and the last two books of the collection, Zechariah and Malachi (cf. Zech. 1:3–4; Mal. 3:7), admonish the Hebrews to turn back to God and restore faithful covenant relationship with him. The wider context for covenant renewal with YHWH in each case is *that day*, the eschatological Day of the Lord. Thus, the Twelve begin and end with a call to repentance, the threat of judgment and the promise of blessing in the Day of the Lord. Again, the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus contributes significantly to the themes of *repentance* and the *Day of the Lord* in the Twelve.

3. The theology of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

The Bible records God's progressive plan of redemption for humanity and all creation, culminating in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah (cf. Gal. 4:4–5). As such, the thrust of the OT is theological. 'The big picture is God ... In the end, the plotline [of the OT] offers us a worldview – an understanding of God and ourselves.'⁴ The books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi contribute much to our understanding of God, what we are to believe, and how we are to live as the people of God.

The repeated use of the divine title, *the LORD Almighty*, by our three prophets summarizes an important theological tenet – God

4. Walton and Hill (2004: 11).

is sovereign. More specifically, God is sovereign over the nations (Zech. 1:18–21; Mal. 1:3–4), accomplishing his purposes for judgment of sin and the redemption of those who are obedient to him (Zech. 8:14–15; Mal. 3:2–4; 4:1–2). He is sovereign over the created order, he controls the world of nature, and even the agricultural cycles are subject to his rule (Hag. 1:11; Mal. 3:10–11). God's sovereignty extends to Israel as his covenant people and their destiny as his elect nation (Zech. 1:14–17; 2:10–13; Mal. 1:2–3). The sovereignty of God assures his faithfulness to his Word: YHWH is both covenant maker and covenant keeper (Mal. 3:6). God's sovereignty only serves to accentuate both his compassion and his justice (Mal. 3:17–18).⁵

The Second Temple is the central theme of the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus. Haggai rallied the Hebrew people to rebuild the sanctuary (Hag. 1:14). Zechariah further encouraged the building project (Zech. 6:9–12) and witnessed the vision of cleansing and investiture for the High Priest Joshua who would oversee temple worship (Zech. 3; 6:9–15). Later, the prophet Malachi advocated the renewal of proper temple worship and the reform of a corrupt priesthood (Mal. 1–2).

The re-establishment of YHWH's temple in Jerusalem was a testimony to God's glory and holiness (Hag. 2:7–9; Zech. 14:20). It was also significant as a witness of his reputation among the nations as the one true God (Mal. 1:11, 14), and the eventual locus of worship for Israel and the nations in the eschaton (Zech. 14:17). Related to the temple theme is the return of God's presence to Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Each of the Persian-period prophets emphasizes the re-entry of the divine presence to the temple, and the reality of God living with his people in renewed covenant relationship (Hag. 1:13; Zech. 1:16; 8:3; Mal. 3:1–2).

The call to repentance unifies the three prophets of post-exilic Judah. The notion of repentance is implicit in Haggai's report that the people *obeyed* and *feared* the Lord (Hag. 1:12). Both Zechariah

5. On the theological message of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, see further: Dumbrell (2002: 226–244); and Patterson and Hill (2008: 493–643).

(Zech. 1:3) and Malachi (Mal. 3:7) formally call their audiences to repentance, to *return* to God. But it appears that only Haggai's preaching was successful in turning the Hebrew people to God in obedience.

A topic related to repentance, which is somewhat overlooked, is the role of the Holy Spirit in the theology of the post-exilic prophets.⁶ Haggai assured his audience that God's Spirit remained among them, even as the Holy Spirit rested on Moses and the seventy elders of Israel after the exodus from Egypt to enable them to lead the Hebrew people (Hag. 2:5; cf. Num. 11:16–17). Zechariah reminded Zerubbabel that God accomplishes his purposes by his Spirit, not by human might or power (Zech. 4:6). He also acknowledged (somewhat cryptically) that God's Spirit was allowed to rest as a result of an angelic being dispatched to the north country (Zech. 6:8), and that the Word of God spoken by the earlier prophets had been sent by the Spirit (Zech. 7:12). There is some question as to whether the *spirit of grace* poured out on Israel in the eschaton is a reference to the Holy Spirit (Zech. 12:10; see commentary, p. 245ff.). God's Spirit is not mentioned in Malachi, but may be implicitly understood in the obscure reference to the 'residue of the spirit' (Mal. 2:15, KJV). More generally, the NT indicates that the Spirit of God convicts the human heart of sin and prompts repentance (John 16:8; Eph. 4:30). As noted above, the message of repentance is shared by our three prophets. At one level, then, perhaps the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus anticipates the more robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant.

Zechariah and Malachi are concerned with the application of the precepts of the Mosaic covenant to daily life, including the demonstration of social justice (Zech. 7:8–10; 8:16–17; Mal. 3:5). The emphasis on the twin themes of the proper worship of God and the practice of social justice as prescribed by the Mosaic covenant anticipates the double love command (or 'Jesus creed') of the NT (cf. Matt. 22:34–40). Implicit in the first great commandment to love the Lord God completely is the response of appropriate personal and corporate worship. To love one's neighbour as oneself fulfils

6. See further D. G. Firth and P. D. Wegner (eds.) (2011).

the law of love (Deut. 6:4–5) and is the mark of true religion as taught in Scripture (cf. Isa. 1:17; Jas 1:27).

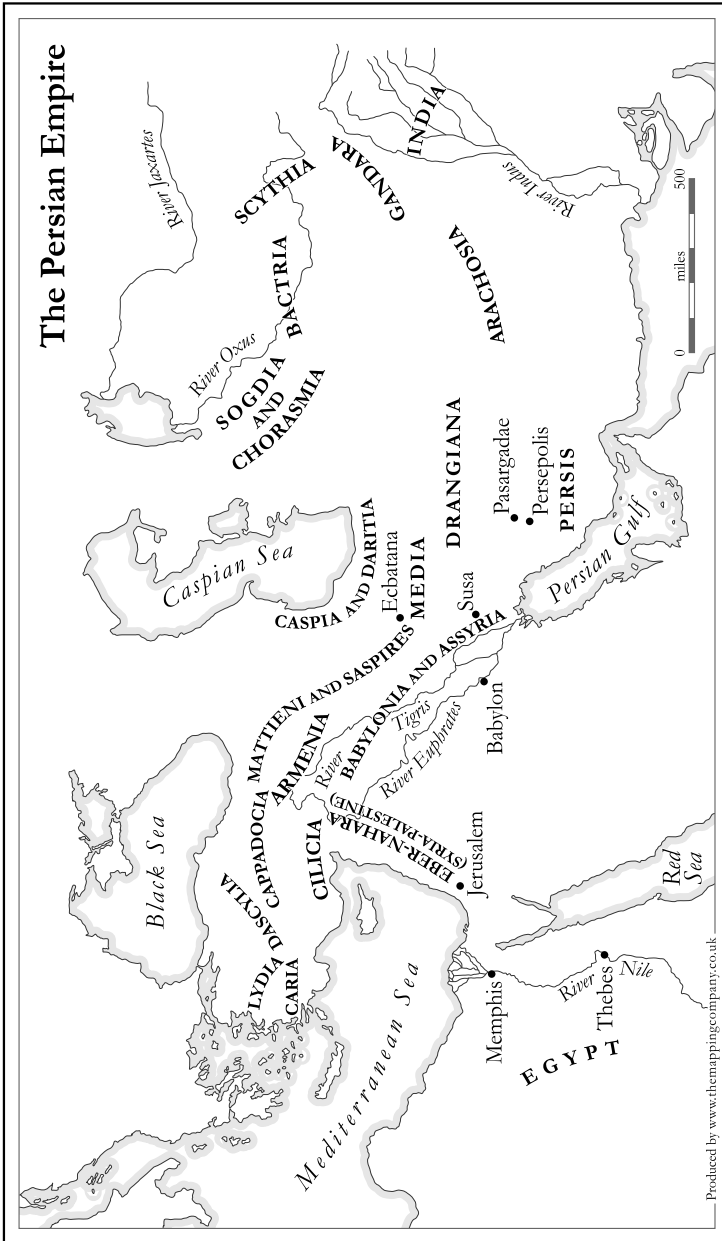
The theme of the *Day of the LORD* also unifies the messages of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Each prophet makes a contribution to the overall understanding of this future sequence of history-ending events. For example, Haggai intimates the restoration of Davidic kingship of Israel (Hag. 2:23; cf. Zech. 3–4; 6:9–15 on the issue of leadership in post-exilic Judah and beyond). Zechariah makes reference to an outpouring of a spirit of compassion that prompts mourning in Israel over the enigmatic figure – the pierced one (Zech. 12:10–14). He also speaks cryptically of a humble king who brings peace (Zech. 9:9–10), and the striking of God's shepherd and the scattering of God's flock, Israel (Zech. 13:7–9). According to Tollington, the promises of a new idealized David in Haggai and Zechariah led to the gradual development of messianic hope in Second Temple Judaism.⁷ The role of YHWH as divine warrior for Israel (Zech. 12:7–9), and the universal rule of YHWH as king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9), is noted as well.

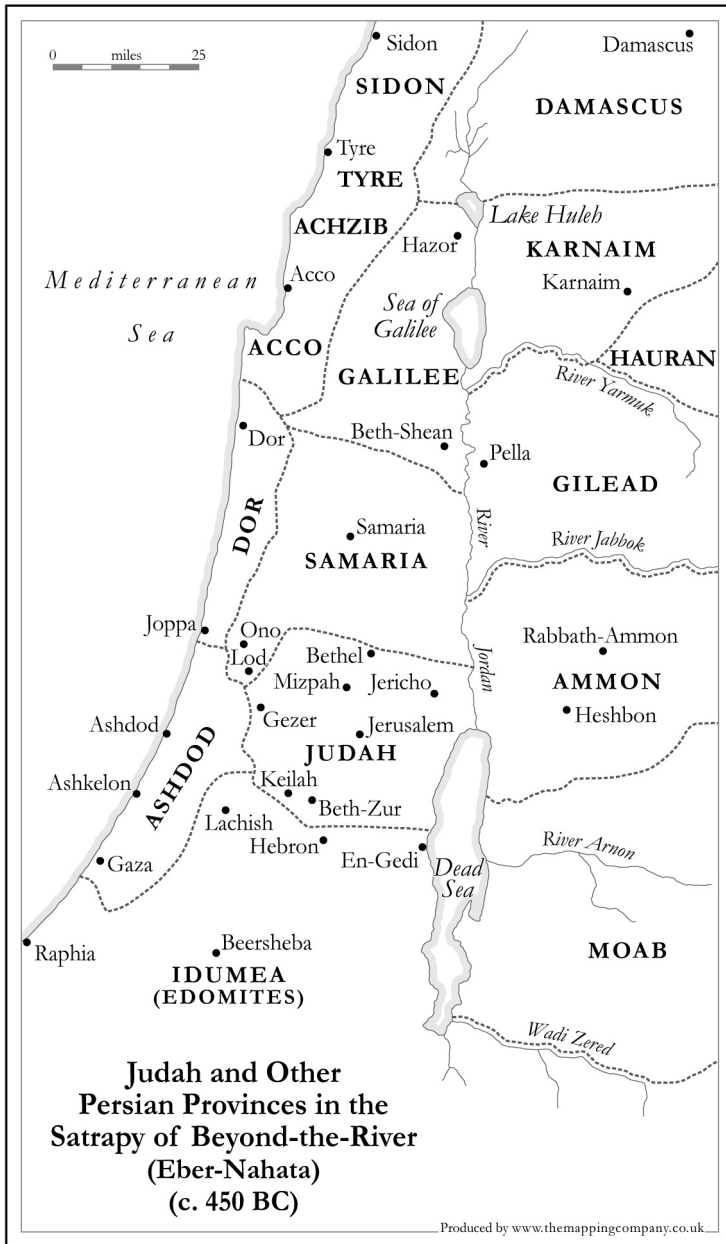
Finally, Malachi warns the people that the *day of YHWH* is not only retribution for the wicked, but also refining that brings purification to the people of God (Mal. 3:3–4). Malachi makes unique contributions to OT eschatology with his reference to the scroll of remembrance in which the righteous are enrolled, and the Elijah figure who is the forerunner to 'the great and terrible day of the LORD' (Mal. 4:5, NRSV). Malachi's admonition remains pertinent: *Who can stand when he appears?* (Mal. 3:2).

As noted above, all three prophets reference the Day of the Lord. This is the day of God's visitation when he suddenly appears in his temple, to bring judgment to the wicked and vindication to the righteous (Mal. 3:1–2; 4:1–3). This eschatological day is usually couched in the language of the imminent future (e.g. 'See, I am about to ...', Zech. 12:2, NRSV), suggesting a 'theology of waiting'. Yet it would be another four centuries before the Lord, in the person of Jesus the

7. Tollington (1993: 181). On messianic expectations in post-exilic Judah, see further Baldwin (1972: 24–27); Hanson (1992: 67–75); and Rose (2000).

Messiah, would appear in the Jerusalem temple (Luke 2:22–38). The prophets' understanding of God's ultimate theophany in the imminent future may have been rooted in Daniel's teaching regarding the four great empires that would rise and fall (including Babylonian and Persian) before the kingdom of God breaks into history (cf. Dan. 2:36–45; 8:15–26). The theology of waiting is still ours, as the church anticipates the second advent of Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 24:29–31; Acts 1:6–11), and the realization of all things made new (Rev. 21:5).





HAGGAI

INTRODUCTION

1. Title and text

The book takes its title from the name of the prophet Haggai, identified in the superscription (1:1) as the bearer of God's message to the leaders of post-exilic Judah. Jewish tradition deemed Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi to be the only prophets belonging to the Second Temple era, so these books were naturally placed at the end of the collection also known as the 'Twelve Prophets'.¹ Haggai is the tenth book in the collection known as the Minor Prophets (or the Book of the Twelve in the Hebrew Bible). The Twelve Prophets are usually grouped with the Latter (or Major) Prophets, and without exception are found in the earliest delineations of the Old Testament canon. These twelve books were usually copied on one scroll in the ancient Hebrew manuscript tradition. The order of the Twelve Prophets does vary in some renditions of the canon

1. See *EncJud* 11: 50.

of the Hebrew Bible, but the sequence of books from Nahum to Malachi seems quite stable in the various canon lists.²

The Hebrew or Masoretic text (MT) of Haggai is in an excellent state of preservation.³ Portions of Haggai are attested by fragments from the Dead Sea caves of Qumran (4QXII^B: Hag. 1:1–2; 2:2–4; 4QXII^C: Hag. 2:18–19, 20–21) and from the caves of Wadi Murabba'at (MurXII) for 1:12 – 2:10; 2:12–23 (dated to the second century AD). Verhoef cites only two minor variations in the extant Dead Sea manuscripts (which include 289 out of a total of 600 words in Haggai).⁴

The Septuagint (or LXX) largely corresponds to the MT, although it does rearrange several verses (e.g. 1:9 and 10 are spliced together; 1:15 becomes 2:1, affecting versification for all of ch. 2). Generally speaking, the LXX is marked by both expansionist (e.g. 2:9, 14, 21, 22) and harmonizing tendencies (e.g. 2:17, 21). The Lat. Vulg., Syr. and the Aram. Targ. are essentially faithful witnesses to the MT (granting some influence of the LXX on the Syr. and the Targ.).⁵

2. The prophet Haggai

The Hebrew name Haggai means 'festal' and is related to the Hebrew word (*hag*), meaning 'procession, festival'. This is a fitting name for the prophet who called the Hebrews to rebuild the temple of God (which had been destroyed by the Babylonians) and to reinstate the festal worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem.

2. See Jones (1995: 43–54).

3. Meyers and Meyers (1987: lxvii).

4. Verhoef (1987: 18). The Dead Sea caves fragments of Haggai support the verse order of the MT and yield only two minor divergences from the MT: 2:1 MurXII reads, 'the word of the LORD came *to* [Heb. 'el] Haggai ...', instead of 'by [Heb. *b'iyad*] Haggai'; and in 2:3 MurXII reads, 'are you seeing *with him* [Heb. 'ittō] now?', instead of 'seeing *it* [Heb. 'ōtō] now?'

5. See further the discussions of the text of Haggai in Verhoef (1987: 18–20); and Merrill (1994: 17–18). For an original translation of Haggai's oracles and a thorough discussion of pertinent textual criticism, see Kessler (2002: 103–242).

The Bible records no biographical information for Haggai, but his prophetic ministry in post-exilic Jerusalem is attested by Ezra (Ezra 6:14). Two expressions identify Haggai as God's agent. He is called *the prophet* (Heb. *nābî*, 1:1; 2:10–11; Ezra 6:14), and he is labelled *the LORD's messenger* (Heb. *mal'ak*, Hag. 1:13). Both titles verify the prophet's divine commission.

According to Jewish tradition, the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were among the founders of The Great Synagogue.⁶ This body of Jewish leaders is alleged to have played a major role in post-exilic times in preserving Scripture and passing on the traditional precepts and lore. It is further believed by the rabbis that after these three prophets died the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.⁷

The LXX includes the names of Haggai and Zechariah in the preface to Psalms 138 (MT 139) and 145 – 148 (MT 146 – 149), suggesting they were responsible for the Hebrew recension from which the Greek version was translated.

3. Historical background

A decree issued in 538 BC by Cyrus the Great, the first of the Persian kings, permitted conquered people groups who had been deported to Mesopotamia by the Babylonians to return to their homelands (Ezra 1:1–4; cf. 2 Chr. 36:22–23). The royal edict was issued on a clay barrel, the famous Cylinder of King Cyrus, discovered in 1879 at the Esagila temple in ancient Babylon (now held by the British Museum). This pronouncement naturally included the Jews, although they are not actually named on the cylinder.

The first wave of Hebrew emigrants to Jerusalem left soon after the Cyrus edict and numbered 42,360, along with 7,337 servants (Ezra 2:64–65). They were led by Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah and the first governor of the restoration community in post-exilic Judah (Ezra 1:5–11; cf. 5:14–16). The foundation for a new temple was laid during the early stages of his administration, some time in 538 or 537 BC (Ezra 5:16). The meagre project was soon abandoned,

6. E.g. *Aboth Rabbi Nathan* 1; *b. (Talm.) Baba Bathra* 15a.

7. See Neusner (2007: 41, 77, 208).

and the construction site lay neglected for nearly two decades, due to the problems of sheer survival in a ruined city surrounded by hostile foreigners and plagued by drought and crop failure. Not until the preaching of Haggai in August 520 BC did the initiative to rebuild the Jerusalem temple resume under the leadership of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah (Hag. 1:14).⁸ The Second Temple was completed some four and a half years later in March 515 BC, under the auspices of the Persian king, Darius I (cf. Ezra 6:6–12). The monies granted for the rebuilding of the Second Temple probably took the form of ‘rebates’ returned to Judah from satrapy, and provincial taxes paid to the Persian royal treasury (cf. Ezra 6:5; Neh. 5:4, 15).⁹

4. Author

The book is silent on the issue of authorship, although it is assumed that the prophet Haggai penned his own oracles on the basis of the prophetic word formula: *the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai* (1:1).¹⁰

5. Date and occasion of writing

The date formula serves to root the speeches of Haggai in a specific historical context: the early years of the great Persian Empire (539–330 BC). The speeches are dated precisely to the day, month and year of the rule of Darius I, king of Persia. King Darius I (Hystaspes) ruled Persia from 522 to 486 BC. The equivalents for the date formulas are listed below:

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8. On Persian rule and the early history of post-exilic Judah (or Yehud), see Meyers and Meyers (1987: xxix–xl); and Kessler (2002: 63–96).
 9. See *ABD* 5, p. 85; cf. Meyers and Meyers (1987: xxxix); and Berquist (1995: 63).
 10. On the genitive of authorship, a particular form of agency involving speaking and writing, see *IBHS* §9.5.1c, p. 143.

1:1	Year 2	month 6	day 1	= 29 August 520 BC
2:1	Year 2	month 7	day 21	= 17 October 520 BC
2:10	Year 2	month 9	day 24	= 18 December 520 BC
2:20	Year 2	month 9	day 24	= 18 December 520 BC

The post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah dated their prophecies exactly during the days of Persian rule, because earlier Isaiah had foreseen the importance of King Cyrus and the Persians to the fortunes of elect Israel (Isa. 45:1–13). It seems likely that both Haggai and Zechariah were influenced by Ezekiel's temple vision (Ezek. 40–48), as well as his tendency to date his oracles. The rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple was understood as the cornerstone event of the long-awaited messianic age. The chronological precision attached to their oracles served as important reminders of YHWH's faithfulness to his covenant promises (Ps. 111:9) and his good intentions to restore unified kingship in Israel with David as their prince (cf. Ezek. 37:15–28).

It seems likely that the book was written some time between Haggai's challenge to rebuild the temple (520 BC) and its completion (515 BC), since the prophet does not mention the latter event. The immediate occasion that prompted the speeches of Haggai was probably a severe drought affecting the province of post-exilic Judah (1:11). It is this event that permits God's messenger to address the more important occasion for his oracles, the continued desolation of YHWH's temple, despite the return of the Hebrews from Babylonian captivity (1:4). A second issue related to the prophet's concern for the rebuilding of the temple is the public affirmation of the leadership of the Judean state in the blessing of Joshua (2:4) and Zerubbabel (2:23).

6. Audience

Haggai's first two oracles (1:1–15 and 2:1–9) are specifically addressed to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest – the two leaders of post-exilic Jerusalem. As a part of these pronouncements, the prophet also spoke a word of encouragement to the people of Judah (1:13; 2:5). Haggai's third speech is directed to the priests (2:10–19), while the fourth prophecy is spoken exclusively to Zerubbabel the

governor of Judah (2:20–23). We also learn that Zerubbabel, Joshua and the people obeyed the words of Haggai and applied themselves to rebuilding God's temple (1:14).

7. Form and structure

The book of Haggai is a literary hybrid that combines elements of historiography (e.g. date formulas and historical reports) with oracular speech (e.g. exhortation, admonition and prediction), yielding a type of prophetic narrative with a plot-line that progresses from a beginning (a temple in ruins) towards an end (a rebuilt Second Temple in Jerusalem). The brief account is complete with theme (the restoration of Judah), character development (as seen in the response of the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and the people in obeying the prophet's call to work) and dramatic movement (eschatological implications with cosmic impact). According to Kessler, 'The book reads somewhat like a story.'¹¹

The book is comprised of four oracles or sermon-like speeches. Each of Haggai's four messages is dated precisely to a day and a month of the second year of the rule of King Darius of Persia. Baldwin identifies a paired pattern of accusation (1:1–11 and 2:10–17), response (1:12–14 and 2:18–19), and assurance of success (2:1–9 and 2:20–23) in the macro-structure of the book.¹² Kessler prefers to divide the book into four units or scenes, following the pattern of the four sermons, with each scene containing an introductory formula, a dramatic conflict, a divine response and a declaration of promise.¹³

Whether one structures Haggai into three, four or even five literary units, the book is clearly marked by chronological sequencing and narrative progression that features problem and resolution.¹⁴

11. Kessler (2002: 244); on the literary synthesis of Haggai see further pp. 251–257.

12. Baldwin (1972: 34).

13. Kessler (2002: 247–251).

14. *Ibid.*, p. 251: 'In the course of the book we move from failure (1:4–11; 2:15–18) to blessing (2:18–19), from humiliation (1:4–11; 2:15–17) to exaltation (2:6–9, 20–23), and from alienation and rejection (1:2) to

Some biblical commentators confidently identify significant redactional activity in the book of Haggai. For example, Wolff postulates a complex editorial process that shapes Haggai's sermon fragments into the book as it now stands.¹⁵ He identifies several growth rings framing Haggai's five original proclamations (1:4–11; 2:15–19 [considered a separate sermon and relocated earlier in the work]; 2:3–9; 2:14; 2:21b–23), and even these are assigned to a disciple of Haggai. The next stage of development witnessed the addition of historical introductions to Haggai's sermons, with the final stage of redaction accounting for the various interpolations to the book. It should be noted that the location of 2:15–19 with respect to 2:3–9 is still debated (see commentary below). The observation that: 'The book is so brief that it seems almost ridiculous to suspect its unity' is still apropos.¹⁶ Yet this reality does not preclude the fact that the final form of the book of Haggai was probably the result of a limited editorial process. The superscription (1:1) and the historical introductions (1:15; 2:1, 10, 20) indicate that the prophet's sermons were organized chronologically and framed within a particular historical context. The slight variation in the historical introductions ('the word of the LORD came *through* the prophet Haggai', 1:1; 2:1 vs 'the word of the LORD came *to* the prophet Haggai', 2:10, 20) may suggest that the book went through multiple editions or that the final editor drew from diverse sources.¹⁷ It is impossible to ascertain when such editorial activity took place, whether for the publication of Haggai's sermons as part of the temple dedication ceremony, or at the compilation of

acceptance and restoration (1:13–14; 2:5, 18, 23).¹⁵ See further on the structure and unity of Haggai, Taylor and Clendenen (2004: 59–66); and Christensen (1992: 445–456), who understands Haggai as a prosodic composition and divides the book into three major cantos. On the more form-critical structuring of the book, see Floyd (2000: 53–257); and the commentary by R. L. Smith (1984: 146–163).

15. Wolff (1988: 17–20); Nogalski (1993: 216–237); and Redditt (1995: 11–12).
 16. J. M. P. Smith (1912: 28).
 17. Boda (2004: 38).

Haggai into the Book of The Twelve Prophets, or in stages between the two events.¹⁸

The literary relationship of Haggai and Zechariah 1 – 8 is part of a broader discussion that seeks to ascertain whether or not the post-exilic books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi form a distinct prophetic corpus. Haggai-Zechariah 1 – 8 is probably ‘a single compendious work, published in anticipation of the auspicious event of the temple’s rededication’.¹⁹ Supporting evidence adduced for this literary unity includes the congruencies of message and historical context, similarities in style and theme, and the interlocking chronological headings. A related question is the broader relationship of Haggai with Zechariah and Malachi, and whether or not the three books constitute a literary corpus. Others have noted the use of the interrogative (especially the rhetorical question) as literary threads unifying the post-exilic prophets, as well as a storyline (i.e. a spiritual history of the restoration community) and common themes that tie the works together.²⁰

Naturally, there are dissenting voices raising legitimate questions in response to reading Haggai-Zechariah 1 – 8 as a composite work and reading the three post-exilic prophets (Hag-Zech-Mal) as a corpus. For example, Kessler notes differences of style, vocabulary, historical emphasis and genre (especially the vision experience) between Haggai and Zechariah, to the degree that he prefers reading Haggai as a discrete literary unit.²¹ Likewise, Nogalski questions treating Zechariah 9 – 14 on the same level as the remaining material, since it differs by way of genre and lacks the interrogative style central to Pierce’s thesis for reading Hag-Zech-Mal as a corpus.²²

18. Nogalski (1993: 234) observes only minimal alteration in Haggai in the editorial process of appropriating the book into the larger corpus of the Book of the Twelve.

19. See Meyers and Meyers (1987: xlvii).

20. E.g. Pierce (1984a: 277–289; 1984b: 401–411); Craig (1996: 224–244); Boda (2007: 127); and Redditt (2007: 188, 191–195).

21. Kessler (2002: 56–57).

22. Nogalski (1993: 238–240).

Despite these objections, the commonalities of interlocking chronological markers, the congruencies of message and historical context, the rhetorical use of the interrogative, and the overarching theme of God's restoration of post-exilic Judah, at the very least, commend an integrated canonical reading of the three prophets of the Second Temple.²³

8. Literary style

The speeches of Haggai are essentially prose summaries set in the third person. The messages are oracular in nature: that is, they represent authoritative prophetic speech motivated or inspired by God himself. The speeches are also sermons, a type of hortatory discourse intended to motivate the audience to take some course of action. This kind of prophetic speech is often characterized by formulaic language. Several of these stylized expressions occur in Haggai, including the date formula (*the second year of King Darius*, 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20), the prophetic word formula (*the word of the LORD came*, 1:1; 2:1, 10, 20), the messenger formula (*this is what the LORD Almighty says* [or variations], e.g. 1:7; 13; 2:4 [found 29 times in the book]), and the covenant relationship formula (*for I am with you*, e.g. 2:4–5). The book of Haggai, although not an artistic masterpiece like Isaiah or Jeremiah, does demonstrate literary polish.²⁴

This is especially the case in the use of a rhetorical question to emphasize a point in three of the four messages (e.g. 1:4; 2:3, 19), the repetition of words or phrases to set a tone or mood (e.g. the repeated imperative, *give careful thought to* [or variations] in 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18), and even wordplay on occasion – for instance, the similar sounds of the words 'ruin' (*ḥārēb*, 1:4) and 'drought' (*ḥōreb*, 1:11).

23. See further 'The Book of the Twelve' in the General Introduction (pp. 35–36).

24. On the impressive rhetorical strategies in Haggai, including the use of interjections, interrogatives, repetition and dialogical speech, see Boda (2000: 295–304).

9. Intertextuality

Like other OT authors, Haggai was familiar with earlier and contemporary biblical texts. Similarities in the use of words, phrases and wider literary, thematic and theological contexts suggest Haggai's interdependence with these portions of the HB/OT.

The listing of verses containing shared words, phrases and clauses does not necessarily presuppose the reliance of the book of Haggai upon the corresponding citation, nor does it attempt to distinguish categorically between an intertextual allusion and a quotation.²⁵

Hag. 1:4//Jer. 33:10–12

Hag. 1:6, 10–11//Deut. 7:13; 11:13–17; 28:18, 22–24, 38–40, 51

Hag. 2:4//Jer. 30:11; Ezek. 34:30; 37:27

Hag. 2:4–5//Josh. 1:6–9

Hag. 2:5//Exod. 12:51; 13:3

Hag. 2:6–7, 21//Isa. 13:13; Joel 3:16 [MT 4:16]

Hag. 2:10–15//Zech. 8:9–23

Hag. 2:12//Lev. 6:26–27

Hag. 2:13//Lev. 11:28; 22:4–7

Hag. 2:17//Deut. 28:22; 1 Kgs 8:37; 2 Chr. 6:28; Amos 4:9

Hag. 2:19//Gen. 12:2

Hag. 2:22//Exod. 15:1, 4

Hag. 2:23//Exod. 6:7; Jer. 22:24

The NT directly cites the book of Haggai but once:

Heb. 12:26//Hag. 2:6, 21

10. Message

The prophet Haggai was a champion for the 'homeless' – in this case, the 'homeless' God of the Hebrew people. He was a prophet on a solitary mission – to stir the post-exilic Jewish community to

25. See further the discussion of intertextuality in Haggai in Taylor and Clendenen (2004: 83–89).

action in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple. Yet Haggai is a book with more than one single theme. Certainly the *primary* message of Haggai's preaching is the call to post-exilic Judah to rebuild the temple of God, which had been sacked and plundered nearly seventy years earlier by the Babylonians. His four related speeches were designed to awaken the residents of post-exilic Jerusalem to the responsibilities, obligations, privileges and promises of their covenant heritage. The prophet's charge to rebuild the temple is part of the broader theme of Haggai and the other post-exilic prophets (Zechariah and Malachi) – namely, God's restoration of Judah after the Babylonian exile.

Haggai also emphasizes the abiding presence of God's Spirit (1:13; 2:4–5), a theme shared with the book of Zechariah (cf. Zech. 1:16; 8:23). This pronouncement sparked the enthusiasm of the leadership and the people so that they began the work of rebuilding the temple (1:14). It is possible that Haggai intends his message concerning the restored presence of God in the post-exilic community of Judah as a fulfilment of Ezekiel's earlier promise that God would again make his home among his people (Ezek. 37:27–28).

The book presents two additional themes in a minor key: the divine blessing of spiritual and material prosperity bestowed upon the post-exilic Hebrew community, resulting in the restoration of glory to the Jerusalem temple (2:7–9, 19); and the overthrow of the nations (2:20–22). Both connect the message of Haggai with the larger eschatological themes of OT prophetic literature: God's promise of blessing to Israel, and God's threat of judgment upon the nations. According to Ezra, post-exilic Judah did realize a partial fulfilment of God's blessing as a result of the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah (cf. Ezra 6:14). Post-exilic Judah may have felt the tremors of God shaking the nations in the great wars between the Persians and the Greeks (during the reigns of Darius I and Xerxes). But apart from the relative peace and political stability the people of Judah enjoyed under Persian rule, Haggai's promise of great glory and of the wealth of the nations pouring into the rebuilt Jerusalem temple remained just that – a promise of a glorious future for God's earthly sanctuary.

11. Theological concerns

Each of Haggai's four messages highlights a different theological concern the prophet has for post-exilic Judah. The first (1:1–15) is the call to the people of Jerusalem to reprioritize community life. Haggai directs the leadership of the Judean province to focus on the restoration of proper worship of God, instead of the ease and security of their own *panelled houses* (1:4). This restoration of proper worship will be accomplished by rebuilding the Jerusalem temple for a homeless YHWH, reinstalling the Levitical priesthood, and reinstating the festival calendar and the sacrificial liturgy.

The second message (2:1–9) assures the post-exilic Hebrew community that God has not forgotten those previous promises of blessing and restoration made by earlier prophets like Isaiah (e.g. Isa. 61), Jeremiah (e.g. Jer. 32:36–44) and Ezekiel (e.g. Ezek. 37). It was important for community morale to understand that Haggai stood in the revered train of those prophetic predecessors. By his word of blessing and promise of restoration, he confirmed the continuity of his message with previous prophetic utterances concerning God's plan for the restoration of Israel after the Babylonian exile. These were not just more empty words of hope deferred to bolster a beleaguered remnant; these were the words of God's promise to his chosen people.

Ritual purity (for both the priests and the people) is the dominant theme of the third message (2:10–19). Haggai reminds his audience that the injunctions of the law of Moses are still operative. God expects his people to be holy, even as he is holy (Lev. 11:44–45).

Haggai's final, and perhaps most important, message re-establishes the prominence of the Davidic line in the religious and political life of the nation of Israel (2:20–23). The Davidic dynasty was singled out as the key to the restoration of the Hebrew people after the Babylonian exile (cf. Jer. 23:5; 31:15; Ezek. 37:24). Tragically, God was forced to pronounce the curse of judgment upon King Jehoiachin (and the line of David) at the time of the exile (Jer. 22:24–30). Haggai's last speech overturns that curse of judgment upon Jehoiachin (and the lineage of David) and reinstates that ancient covenant of David as the vehicle by which God intends to

make good his promises of blessing and restoration to Israel (note especially the echo of the *signet ring* in Jer. 22:24 and Hag. 2:23).²⁶

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26. On messianism in Hag. 2:20–23, see the discussions in Taylor and Clendenen (2004: 195–201); Kaiser (1995: 205–211); and Wolf (1976: 54–55). On the theology of Haggai more broadly, see *NIDOTTE* 4: 691–693; *NDBT*: 255–257; and Dumbrell (2002: 226–229).

ANALYSIS

I. FIRST MESSAGE: HAGGAI'S CHALLENGE TO COVENANT RENEWAL (1:1–15)

- A. Superscription (1:1)
- B. The call to reconsider priorities (1:2–6)
 - i. Excuse of the people (1:2)
 - ii. God's response: Consider the current conditions (1:3–6)
- C. The call to rebuild the temple (1:7–11)
 - i. Go to work (1:7–8)
 - ii. Failure to rebuild the temple tied to current distress (1:9–11)
- D. The response of the people (1:12–15)
 - i. The people obey and fear the Lord (1:12)
 - ii. Reassurance of God's presence and renewed commitment by the people to rebuild the temple (1:13–15)

2. SECOND MESSAGE: THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION (2:1–9)

- A. Introduction (2:1–2)
 - i. Date and prophetic word formulas (2:1)
 - ii. Origin and audience of message (2:2)
- B. Present condition of the temple (2:3–5)
 - i. Gone is the glory of Solomon's temple (2:3)
 - ii. Exhortation to take courage and work (2:4–5)
- C. Promise of future glory for the temple (2:6–9)
 - i. Warning of divine judgment against the nations (2:6–7)
 - ii. Wealth, splendour and peace mark the rebuilt temple (2:8–9)

3. THIRD MESSAGE: THE CALL TO HOLINESS (2:10–19)

- A. Introduction: Date and prophetic word formulas (2:10)
- B. Haggai requests Torah instructions from the priests (2:11–14)
 - i. A question about transferring ritual holiness (2:11–12)
 - ii. A question about transferring ritual impurity (2:13)
 - iii. Assessment of the people (2:14)
- C. The call to reflect upon current conditions (2:15–19)
 - i. Effects of disobedience (2:15–17)
 - ii. Promise of blessing (2:18–19)

4. FOURTH MESSAGE: ZERUBBABEL, DAVIDIC SERVANT AND SIGNET RING (2:20–23)

- A. Introduction: Date and prophetic word formulas (2:20)
- B. Warning of divine judgment against the nations (2:21–22)
- C. God's appointment of Zerubbabel as leader (2:23)

COMMENTARY

1. FIRST MESSAGE: HAGGAI'S CHALLENGE TO COVENANT RENEWAL (1:1–15)

A. Superscription (1:1)

Context

The literary form of the opening verse is that of superscription, a formal statement of taxonomy prefixed to a literary work that serves to classify the literature by genre (in this case as an oracular or prophetic text) and to identify the author, audience, date and sometimes the occasion prompting the message from God, as well as the source of the prophetic revelation – God himself. It is understood as distinct from an introduction, in that the superscription stands outside the body of literature it prefaces.¹ It is unclear whether these superscriptions were added by the author or by later editors during the process of collecting and arranging the contents of the OT canon.

1. On the contents and purpose of the superscription in prophetic literature, see G. M. Tucker, 'Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of a Canon' in Coats and Long (1977: 56–70, esp. pp. 57–58).

Comment

The date formula of the superscription to Haggai assigns the speech to the precise day and month: *In the second year of King Darius of Persia* (or 520 BC). The post-exilic prophets Haggai and Zechariah dated their prophecies with precision during the days of Persian rule, because earlier Isaiah had foreseen the importance of King Cyrus and the Persians to the fortunes of elect Israel (Isa. 45:1–13; see further Date and occasion of writing, pp. 46–47). *The first day* of the month was the day of the new moon in the lunar calendar, and it was a feast day or holy day for the Hebrews (Num. 10:10; cf. Isa. 1:13, 14; 66:23; Hos. 2:11; Amos 8:5). This was a time of Sabbath-like celebration for the people of God, as they both remembered God's past provision and anticipated even greater things ahead as they trusted in the Lord their Provider (cf. Ezek. 46:1, 3). The date was also a momentous occasion simply from the standpoint of a word from God breaking into the Hebrew community after the catastrophe of the Babylonian exile. Assuming a Hebrew calendar system with the new year beginning in the spring season (cf. Exod. 23:16; 34:22), the *sixth month* places Haggai's first message in the autumn harvest season (equivalent to our August/September).² By way of modern calendar equivalents, Haggai's first message was delivered on 29 August 520 BC.

The prophetic word formula, *the word of the LORD came*, introduces a prophetic revelation in the OT and classifies the book of Haggai as prophetic or oracular literature (cf. Hag. 1:1, 3; 2:1, 10, 20). The formula serves both to legitimate the recipient of the divine revelation and to lend authority to the prophet's message as the revealed 'word of God'. The frequent use of the speech formula in Haggai (and the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus) is intended to demonstrate the continuity of the message of the post-exilic prophets with earlier Hebrew prophetic tradition. The word *through* translates the literal

2. The historical development of the Hebrew calendar within its Ancient Near Eastern context remains a topic of debate in OT studies. See further the discussions in Baldwin (1972: 40, n. 1); Verhoef (1987: 49–50); cf. 'Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish Calendars', *ABD* 1:814–820; 'Calendar' in *NIDB* 3:521–527; and 'Festivals and Feasts' in *DOTPer*: 300–313.

expression ‘by the hand of’ (ESV), a phrase linking Haggai and Malachi. The phrase denotes writing or speaking, understood grammatically as a genitive of authorship.³

Next, *the prophet Haggai* is introduced. His name is fittingly related to the word for ‘festival, procession’ (Heb. *ḥag*). The term *prophet* (Heb. *nābî*) designates Haggai as an emissary, one who speaks with the authority of the commissioning agent (see the discussion of *The prophet Haggai*, pp. 44–45).

Finally, the recipients of Haggai’s first message are identified, namely the two leaders of the post-exilic Hebrew community. *Zerubbabel* (whose name means ‘seed, shoot of Babylon’) was the governor of post-exilic Judah, and *Joshua* was the successor to the office of the high priest. The expression *governor of Judah* is applied to Zerubbabel only by the prophet Haggai (1:1, 14; 2:2, 21). The term *governor* (Heb. *peḥâ*) is an Assyrian loan word and is a rather vague title describing a governmental official during both the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods of Hebrew history (cf. 2 Kgs 18:24; Esth. 8:9; Jer. 51:23; Ezek. 23:6). What is clear is that Zerubbabel was appointed governor by the Persian king, and Judah was a rather insignificant provincial territory firmly under the jurisdiction of the Persian Empire. Zerubbabel is mentioned in Haggai’s second message (2:2, 4), and he is the subject of the prophet’s fourth sermon, linking the governor to the line of David and hinting at the restoration of Davidic kingship in the reference to Zerubbabel as the Lord’s *signet ring* (2:20–23). Zerubbabel is identified as the son of Shealtiel, the eldest son of the exiled King Jehoiachin (Ezra 3:2, 8; cf. 2 Kgs 24:12–17), and thus his lineage can be traced to the family of David as Jehoiachin’s grandson. The Chronicler, however, lists Zerubbabel as the descendant of Jehoiachin’s third son, Pedaiah (1 Chr. 3:19). Commentators speculate as to whether Shealtiel adopted his eldest nephew, or if he was born to Shealtiel’s widow by levirate marriage.⁴

3. See *IBHS* §9.5.1c, p. 143.

4. E.g. Baldwin (1972: 41); cf. Meyers and Meyers (1987: 10–11) who conclude that the confusion over Shealtiel’s lineage cannot be satisfactorily resolved, yet they recognize Zerubbabel as his legitimate heir.

Zerubbabel is also mentioned in Zechariah (4:6, 7, 9, 10) and then mysteriously disappears from biblical record. Significantly, each leader is introduced with a brief genealogical record designed to recall the Babylonian exile and God's faithfulness in preserving and bringing back a remnant of his people to the land of covenant promise.

Joshua was a descendant of Levi and the son of Jehozadak, who was taken captive and deported to Babylonia when King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 587 BC (cf. 1 Chr. 6:15; alternately spelled Jeshua in 1 Chr., Ezra and Neh.). Joshua is also mentioned in Zechariah (3:1; 6:11), and later records indicate some of his descendants were listed among those who married foreign women in the time of Ezra (Ezra 10:18). It is unclear whether Zerubbabel and Joshua were in the first wave of Hebrew emigrants who returned to Jerusalem soon after the decree of King Cyrus under the leadership of Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:5–11; cf. 1:1–4), or if they led another caravan of Hebrew returnees to Jerusalem some time around 522 BC (Ezra 2:2, 64–65; 3:1–13). It seems likely that Ezra 2 presents a composite emigration record spanning the years from the edict of Cyrus to the completion of the Second Temple. If so, then Zerubbabel and Joshua probably led a mass emigration of Hebrews back to Judah, prompted by the ascension of Darius I to the Persian throne in 522 BC.⁵ This may explain the enthusiasm and vigour of the restoration community for the temple construction project (vv. 12–15), since those more recent emigrants would not have been jaded by the previous two decades of failure to rebuild the temple.

Meaning

The superscription to Haggai legitimizes the prophet as a divine messenger and validates the authority of his message as the word of God to post-exilic Judah.

5. See Hill (1998: 69).

B. The call to reconsider priorities (1:2–6)

Context

Haggai's audience had assumed that the time had not yet come to rebuild the Lord's temple (1:2). The restoration community in Jerusalem was still struggling to establish itself politically and economically after the Babylonian exile. The degree of self-sufficiency attained was understood to be below expectations, at least to the extent that the people considered it unwise to divert their already meagre resources for the sake of investing in a high-profile campaign such as rebuilding YHWH's temple. Yet the prophet rebuked his audience for their preoccupation with their own standard of living (v. 4). Haggai's contemporary, Zechariah, also discerned that the real issue was one of self-interest, when he queried, 'Were you not eating and drinking for your own sake?' (Zech. 7:6, NJB). Those who argued for fiscal responsibility knew that the realities of an economic recession meant it was not the time to take on the funding of 'special projects' (cf. Zech. 8:10). Yet Haggai knew, like Hosea, that now was the time to seek the Lord (Hos. 10:12, NLT) – the gist of his first sermon to leaders and people of post-exilic Jerusalem.

Comment

2. The messenger formula, *This is what the LORD Almighty says*, is another common prophetic speech form (e.g. vv. 5, 7; 2:6). The construction signifies the oral transmission of a message by a third party. The expression suggests the divine assembly or council of the gods in Ancient Near Eastern thought. The messenger stands as an observer in the divine sessions and then reports what he has heard as an envoy of the council to others.⁶ Since the verb form technically represents past action, the formula is more precisely translated, 'This is what the LORD Almighty said', indicating the prophet only conveys the message he has already heard from God.

The messenger formula occurs eight times in Haggai and ninety-one times in total in the Hag-Zech-Mal corpus. The expression

6. On the divine council motif in the ANE and OT see *ABD* 2:214–217.

places emphasis on the divine source and authority of the message, and the heavy repetition of the formula in the post-exilic prophets may have served to connect their ministries and messages to the earlier Hebrew prophetic tradition. Calling attention to such continuity may have been helpful in defusing a possible crisis concerning the prophetic word in the minds of some in Haggai's audience. The people had returned to the land of Judah more than twenty years earlier, and yet the promises of Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarding Israel's restoration after the Babylonian exile remained unfulfilled (cf. Jer. 31:31–33; 33:14–16; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–28).

The divine title, *LORD Almighty*, is prominent in prophetic literature and is Haggai's favourite designation for God (found 14 times: 1:2, 5, 7, 9, 14; 2:4, 6, 7, 8, 9 [twice], 11, 23 [twice]). The expression is often understood as a construct-genitive relationship: 'the LORD of Hosts' (e.g. NAB, NRSV; the Heb. word *šēbā'ōt* meaning 'host, army, warrior'). More precisely, the construction is one of absolute nouns in apposition, perhaps conveying a verbal force: 'Yahweh *creates* [angel] armies.'⁷ In either case, the epithet emphasizes 'the invincible might behind the Lord's commands'.⁸

The prophet addresses *these people* (lit. 'this people'), perhaps a rebuke in itself, since he does not identify them with the possessive pronoun ('my [i.e. God's] people'). The NIV (*The time has not yet come*) follows the LXX here, reading the word *time* in the MT construction as the adverb *yet*. The repetition of *time* in the clause is awkward (lit. 'The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built', KJV). The repetition may function rhetorically, perhaps reflecting the words of objection posed by Haggai's audience or simply injecting a sense of urgency into the prophet's message (since the word *time* is used in v. 4). The malaise of the people with respect to the rebuilding of the temple was due, in part, to their understanding that their current plight was a continuation of the divine judgment associated with the Babylonian exile.⁹

4. The rhetorical question is an emphatic speech device in

7. *TDOT* 5: 515.

8. Baldwin (1972: 42).

9. Patrick (2008: 5).

prophetic literature, requiring agreement with the expected answer to the question, rather than a formal reply (cf. 2:3, 19). The repetition of the pronoun (*you yourselves*) adds emphasis to the prophet's indictment of the people's self-interest.

The phrase *panelled houses* is probably better understood in the sense of 'roofed' or 'completed' houses, in contrast to YHWH's 'unfinished' house – lacking even a roof! The word *panelled* (Heb. *sāpan*) is quite rare, occurring only in 1 Kings 6:9, 15; 7:3 and Haggai 1:4, and can mean 'to cover, roof' or 'to panel'. The contrast expressed by the prophet is not one of elaborate adornment with lack of decoration, but rather the comparison of the habitable dwellings of the people complete with roofs with Yahweh's uninhabitable temple precinct.¹⁰ The reference to the *ruin* of the temple seems to be a deliberate echo of Jeremiah 33:10–12, using the same word found in the promise of restoration for the *ruins* of Jerusalem.

5. The idiom *give careful thought to* (lit. 'set your heart toward') is a favourite expression of Haggai, occurring in 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18 (twice). The repetition of this clause in the imperative mood calls attention to the human will or volition. The people must choose to reflect and act upon the prophet's message. The imperative form of the exhortation further stresses the urgency of the hour and demands an immediate and specific response on the part of the addressee(s).¹¹

6. The prophet first addresses the independent farmer who has *planted much*, but *harvested little*. The OT prophets often interpreted current events affecting the corporate life of the Hebrews through the lens of covenant blessings and curses (cf. Deut. 28:22–24). Haggai is no exception, as he understood the calamity of drought (or perhaps blight?) as the hand of the Lord Almighty at work in the realm of nature.¹²

10. See *BBCOT*: 797; and *ZIBBCOT* 5: 196.

11. See *IBHS* §34.4A, p. 571.

12. Merrill (2008: 709–710) notes that Haggai's 'list of disasters is not random ...', but reflects the curse section of Deuteronomy (Deut. 28:16, 18, 19, 23–24, 38, 39, 44), so that 'now their self-centered disloyalty to the Lord is bringing further covenantal curses on them'.

You eat ... drink ... put on clothes. The form of the verb used in each case conveys continuous action (cf. *The Message*, ‘you keep filling your plates ... you keep drinking and drinking ... you put on layer after layer of clothes’ – without result!). The catalogue of divine punishments for disobedience in the Mosaic covenant included drought, such that ‘all your work will be for nothing’ (Lev. 26:19–20, NLT).

Next, the prophet addresses the one who *earns wages*, or the hired hand. The word belongs exclusively to the vocabulary of the post-exilic prophets and describes those who work for others to earn a living, or possibly a self-employed individual.¹³ In either case, the poor standard of living experienced by the labour force of the post-exilic community was designed to instruct the people in the matter of priorities.

The word-picture of *a purse with holes* (lit. ‘a pierced bag’) emphasizes the almost instantaneous loss (and ongoing trickle-out effect) of a significant portion of wages, apparently unawares! No doubt, inflation and rising prices were also complicating factors and eroding the earning power of the workforce. Although coinage was minted by the Persians in limited quantities at this time, it is unlikely that a labourer’s wages were paid in coins. The moneybag most likely would have contained discs or wedges of copper, silver or the like, approximately defined in value by weight.¹⁴

Meaning

The poverty and poor harvests referenced by Haggai (1:6) were not just ‘bad luck’ for the Hebrew restoration community. The OT prophets often interpreted current events affecting the corporate life of Israel through the lens of covenant blessings and curses (cf. Deut. 28). Haggai proves no exception, as he understood the

13. See the discussion in Meyers and Meyers (1987: 26).

14. So Baldwin (1972: 44). Though Persian coinage is attested in the late sixth century BC, Taylor and Clendenen’s (2004: 127) speculation that Haggai presupposes the use of coins for remuneration probably overstates the case, since the widespread use of Persian coins at this early date in the far western sectors of the empire is unlikely.

calamity of drought (or perhaps crop blight) as the hand of God at work in the realm of nature. God delivered a ‘wake-up call’ to his people through the economic circumstances of ‘supply and demand’. The message was a call to restore them to right relationship, demonstrated in the tangible act of rebuilding the Jerusalem temple.

C. The call to rebuild the temple (1:7–11)

Context

Haggai challenged his audience to extend the idea of the sovereign rule of the Lord Almighty to the realm of nature. The people seemingly made no connection between their bleak agricultural situation and the rule of God in this sphere of their daily life. Yet such associations should have been obvious from the terms of YHWH’s covenant with Israel. The blessings and curses attached to the Mosaic law specifically mention drought, crop blight and poor harvests as divine plagues for covenant disobedience (cf. Lev. 26:19–20; Deut. 28:22–23).

Comment

7. This verse is an exact repetition of verse 5, but without the introductory adverb *Now*. The context indicates this further admonition for careful self-reflection is warranted, since the prophet suggests a direct cause-and-effect relationship between the depressed economic conditions, drought and crop failure experienced by the restoration community and the ruins of the temple precinct (vv. 8–11).

8. The charge to secure lumber for the temple reconstruction project is an indirect call to repentance. By taking action to remedy their plight, the leaders and the people are rejecting the defeatism bred by apathy and indifference. It is unclear whether the local timber was intended for construction equipment such as ramps, ladders and scaffolds, or for use as structural reinforcement between the courses of stone masonry to help minimize earthquake damage (cf. Ezra 5:8). Given the precedent for Lebanon cedar used in Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 5:6, 10–12), and the presumed deforestation of the environs of Jerusalem as a result of the Babylonian siege

(2 Kgs 25:1–2), it is unlikely that this lumber would have been sufficient to meet the demands of the temple project.

The Lord takes delight in those who fear and reverence him (Ps. 147:11). This fear or reverence which God savours is demonstrated in the act of willing obedience, in this case responding to the call to rebuild the temple. God is honoured or glorified in the obedience of his people, since this is one of the ways in which the name of the God of Israel is known and exalted among the nations (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Mal. 1:11, 14; 2:2). The passive verb form (*be honoured*) possibly preserves a rare subjunctive ending: ‘that I may be glorified’.¹⁵

9. Verses 9–10 recapitulate the message of verses 4–6, with the operative word being *little*: the people had little to show in proportion to the investment of time, energy and capital. The use of the infinitive form of the verb *expected* is an example of an excited style, as the prophet hurries to deliver the crux of his message: *my house ... remains a ruin* (see comments below).

What you brought home, I blew away. This may refer to the bulk of the grain harvest kept by the worshipper after the first-fruits sacrifices had been made at the altar of burnt offering. This sacrificial altar had been rebuilt and put to use immediately by the first wave of Hebrew returnees to Judah during the reign of Cyrus (cf. Ezra 3:2–3). Some commentators note the definiteness of the word *house*, minus any possessive pronoun, and translate ‘the house’ with reference to the temple precinct.¹⁶ This understands the expression as a reference to the first-fruits offerings themselves. The context favours the notion of disappointment among the people in the harvest yields that they brought to their own homes.¹⁷ The ambiguity may be intentional, indicating God’s disdain for the sacrificial worship given the ruined condition of the temple precinct, as well as the disappointing reality of how quickly the scanty harvest disappeared when the people brought their portion of the crops home.

15. Based on the Qere or Masoretic reading of the form in the margin notes of the MT. See the discussion of the form in Meyers and Meyers (1987: 28).

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 29.

17. So Motyer (1998: 977–978).

The verb *blew away* is rather uncommon in the OT and may suggest the effect of wind in the process of winnowing grain,¹⁸ or a more forceful gust of destructive wind (cf. NJB, ‘I blasted it’), or even blowing in the sense of casting a curse (cf. NJPS, note c, ‘cast a curse on’). The same verb is used in Malachi 1:13 to describe the contempt of the people for God and temple worship when they *sniff at* the sacrificial rituals.

The rhetorical question *Why?* introduces the punchline of the prophet’s first oracle – the direct cause-and-effect relationship between the plight of the people and the disrepair of YHWH’s temple. The expression combines preposition and interrogative (lit. ‘on account of what?’) and may be understood emphatically in the sense of ‘reason being?’

The repetition of this clause, *my house ... remains a ruin*, completes an *inclusio*, or envelope construction, linking 1:4 and 1:9. This is the core message of 1:2–10, the prophet’s challenge to the people to reflect upon their situation in light of the reality that God’s temple is still in shambles.

10. The NIV properly retains the MT *dew* (Heb. *ṭal*), while the BHS proposes ‘rain’ (Heb. *mātār*; so NJB; cf. NJPS, ‘moisture’ [*BHQ* omits the conjectural emendation]). *Dew* is sometimes a symbol of God’s blessing (e.g. Prov. 19:12; Hos. 14:5), but more practically the moisture of overnight dews was crucial in late summer and early autumn to prevent the ripening grain from withering in the heat. Baldwin observes that ‘the heavens and earth obeyed their Creator’s word but his people did not’.¹⁹ Yet they were without excuse, given the known threat of covenant curse in Deuteronomy 28:24 and the earlier preaching of Amos associating similar calamities with the people’s disobedience (Amos 4:6–10).

11. The wordplay with *drought* (Heb. *ḥōreb*) and *ruin* (Heb. *ḥārēb*; v. 4) reflects the oral culture of the biblical world and is a feature of prophetic speech. The device is one of the ways in which the orator keeps the audience engaged with the message, and on occasion heightens the rhetorical impact. The LXX misreads the word *sword*

18. Ibid., p. 978.

19. Baldwin (1972: 44).

(Heb. *ḥereb*) for *drought* (Heb. *ḥōreb*), translating, ‘I will bring a sword’ (NETS).

Meaning

Haggai’s call to rebuild the temple of YHWH should not be construed as some kind of ‘magical formula’, holding the promise of a remedy for the numerous problems facing the post-exilic Hebrew community. God cannot be manipulated into showering material blessings upon his people because of their diligent work in the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple (1:5–6).²⁰ Nor should Haggai’s message be viewed as contradictory to the words of warning pronounced by Jeremiah concerning misplaced trust in the physical structure of the temple (Jer. 7:4). Rather, Haggai summoned the people to the proper worship of God in contrast to heartless faith in a ‘sacred building’.

The appropriate attitudes of reverence and humility and a genuine posture of obedience to the law of God identified explicitly in Zechariah (e.g. Zech. 7:4–10) are implicit in Haggai. The prophet was familiar with the ‘temple theology’ of King Solomon’s prayer of dedication – God does not dwell in houses made with human hands (1 Kgs 8:23ff.). Haggai also knew the ‘worship theology’ of his predecessors – God desires mercy, not sacrifice (Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:8) – and he understood, without doubt, that reviving the flow of God’s covenantal blessings to Israel was contingent upon the people’s careful and heartfelt obedience to the commandments of YHWH’s covenant, not the rebuilding of the Jerusalem sanctuary (cf. Deut. 28:1–2, 9, 13).

D. The response of the people (1:12–15)

Context

The passage simply reports the fact that the whole community responded to Haggai’s preaching. This demonstration of unity of spirit and commonality of purpose was so striking that it merited recording. Often overlooked is the importance of the phrase ‘of

20. Cf. Achtemeier (1986: 98–99).

God's people' (v. 12, NLT). The theological emphasis of the report of the people's response to Haggai's message is the faithfulness of God in preserving an element of his elect people and re-establishing them in the land of covenant promise. He is a God who *remembers his covenant for ever* (Ps. 111:5).

Comment

12. The repetition of the phrase, *the whole remnant of the people*, in 1:14 emphasizes the unity of purpose within the restoration community for the temple rebuilding project. Haggai's use of the word *remnant* has triggered considerable debate among biblical commentators as to the theological nuance intended by the prophet. Some understand the term to refer to a core of righteous people embedded within the larger Hebrew community. Others consider the expression as simply one of several designations used by Haggai for the entirety of the covenant people resident in Judah (e.g. *the/se people*, 1:2, 12; *all you people*, 2:4; *this people*, 2:14). The term as used here designates the entirety of the people and is simply a report that the whole community responded to the prophet's message.

The people *obeyed*, understanding Haggai's message as the *voice of the LORD*. The lone use of this verb in Haggai is significant, in that it is a measure of the prophet's success – more often the message of the OT prophets fell on deaf ears.

The word *feared* indicates a willing response to the prophetic message motivated by reverence for God, rather than a reluctant obedience prompted by terror and dread of divine punishment.²¹ The people '*feared* in the sense that they had been startled wide awake by the voice of God'.²²

13. This unusual prophetic title (*the LORD's messenger*) may be explained by the literary device of wordplay with *messenger* (Heb. *mal'ak*) and *message* (Heb. *mal'akût*) in the following clause.

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21. Cf. Boda (2004: 107–108) who suggests that both 'the posture of reverent submission and trust in Yahweh' (e.g. Deut. 10:12, 20) and the response of 'trembling fear' to the awesome presence of God (e.g. Deut. 5:5; 13:11) are appropriate in this context.
22. Baldwin (1972: 45).

Elsewhere, the priests (2 Chr. 36:16; Mal. 2:7) and the prophets generally (cf. Isa. 42:19) are identified as God's messengers. The title legitimizes and ascribes distinctive authority to Haggai as YHWH's agent and validates his message as a true word from God.

The term *messenger* signifies an agent entrusted with a word of revelation from God. The expression is sometimes associated with the divine council or assembly of the gods motif common to the earliest mythical literature of the Ancient Near East.²³ By analogy, the Hebrew prophets are understood as couriers of the council of YHWH. As a member of the council, the prophet hears the proclamation of YHWH and is commissioned to report the exact word of revelation directly to the people. This helps explain the repetition of the numerous speech formulas in prophetic literature. YHWH's prophets uttered the appropriate speech formulas to validate their role as divine messengers and to clarify the source of the message, the fact of its transmission and the authority of its contents.

This covenant relationship formula (*I am with you*) assures the audience of God's personal presence and support in the temple rebuilding project (cf. Gen. 26:3; Isa. 41:10; 43:5; Jer. 30:11). Haggai may have had Isaiah's exhortation in mind when he announced God's vested interest in seeing the temple restoration through to completion (cf. Isa. 43:5).

14. The root of the verb *stirred* means 'to rouse, awaken, set in motion' and is frequently attributed to God's sovereign work in enlivening people to accomplish his purposes (e.g. Ezra 1:1; Isa. 13:17; 41:25; Jer. 51:1, 11). Like Zechariah, Haggai recognizes the dynamic relationship between the empowering presence of God's Spirit and the spirit of the people in rousing the community to action (2:5; cf. Zech. 4:6). The NIV understands the stirring of the people as a result of the affirmation of the covenant formula, *I am with you* (v. 13).

23. See the discussion of the divine council in Meyers and Meyers (1987: 35); cf. *ABD* 2: 214–217. Boda (2007: 129–131) sees a shift in emphasis from the earthly messenger (e.g. the prophet) in Hag-Zech 1–8 to more of an emphasis on heavenly messenger figures in Zech. 9–14 and Mal.

15. Haggai's first oracle concludes with a date formula (*the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month*), including the regnal year of King Darius (his second year). The opening verse of the prophet's second oracle (2:1–9) also records a date formula (*the twenty-first day of the seventh month*), but with no regnal year cited. Many biblical commentators assume that the reference to the second regnal year of King Darius has been lost in the MT due the scribal error of haplography.²⁴ Some EVV insert the regnal year formula of 1:15b in 2:1 to provide a consistent reading of the opening date formulas for each of Haggai's four oracles, assuming the verse division has been misplaced (e.g. NIV, NRSV). It is more likely that the single reference to the regnal year of King Darius serves double duty in both date formulas (i.e. 1:15 and 2:1).²⁵

Baldwin accounts for the twenty-three-day delay between the prophet's original message (*the first day of the sixth month*, 1:1) and the resumption of the work on the temple (*the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month*, 1:15) by noting that the sixth month was the month of harvesting in the orchards and fields.²⁶ The twenty-three-day interim period provided time to complete that important task before the workers assembled at the temple site to commence the rebuilding effort.

Meaning

As we have noted, the OT prophets often interpreted current events affecting the corporate life of the Israelites through the lens of covenant blessings and curses (cf. Deut. 28). Here Haggai under-

24. J. M. P. Smith (1912: 58); cf. Meyers and Meyers (1987: 37) who mention the possibility of the scribal error of haplography causing the loss of one year. Mason (1977: 23) considers the date formula of Hag. 1:15a a gloss, perhaps inserted when the oracle was misplaced from the end of ch. 1 to bring it into line with 2:10–14. March (1996: 720) comments that no anc. manuscripts support such a radical rearrangement of the text.

25. See Meyers and Meyers (1987: 36–37); cf. NLT: 'This was on September 21 of the second year of King Darius' reign. Then on October 17 of that same year ...' (1:15 – 2:1a).

26. Baldwin (1972: 46).

stood the calamity of drought (or perhaps blight, 1:6) as the hand of the Lord Almighty at work in the realm of nature (cf. Zech. 10:1, *the LORD ... makes the storm clouds*). The law of Moses forecasts just such a scenario for the people of Israel, should they violate YHWH's covenant. The catalogue of divine punishments for disobedience includes drought, such that 'all your work will be for nothing' (Lev. 26:19–20, NLT).

The final section of the prophet's first sermon reporting the response of the remnant to Haggai's message offers an interesting sequence of verbal action. First, the people obeyed (1:12). Next, we learn that the people feared the Lord (1:12). Finally, we are told that the people began to work on the house of the Lord (1:14). This ordering reinforces the biblical pattern of worship followed by service. A similar model of response to God may be seen in the post-exodus experience of Israel at Mount Sinai. There the obedience of the people to the directives of Moses included acts of preparation necessary for entering God's presence (Exod. 19:14). The subsequent experience of formal worship (Exod. 24:1) prompted acts of service in the form of giving to the construction of the tabernacle (Exod. 25:2–3).