

## THE SHAKING OF THE NATIONS: AN ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEW

John A. Kessler\*

Haggai's oracle concerning "the shaking of the nations" (Hag 2:7) has attracted the interest of exegetes throughout the centuries. It is widely held that his words refer to political convulsions and upheavals within or between the Gentile nations. The older, more traditional interpretation viewed the phrase in its primary sense as a prediction of the imminent breakup of the Persian empire and secondarily as having reference to the demise of the successive world empires in the Near East, culminating in the establishment of the messianic kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

More recently it has been maintained that the oracles of Hag 2:6-9, 20-23 are closely linked to the political events of 522-520 B.C. It is assumed that the "orgy of revolt"<sup>2</sup> that broke out following the accession of Darius I provided Haggai with the assurance that the Persian empire was about to crumble and the glorious new age to begin.

The present essay maintains that both of these approaches are inadequate. Rather, Haggai's words must be understood in light of the eschatological motifs upon which they draw. This study will therefore seek to demonstrate that "the shaking of the nations" is in fact the nations' subjective response of incapacitating fear to Yahweh's eschatological intervention. In Haggai's scenario the ominous celestial and terrestrial portents and judgments that accompany the day of Yahweh will so terrify the nations that in panic and terror they will destroy each other's armies and be reduced to impotence. Four considerations converge to buttress this conclusion.

### I. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Most commentators date Haggai's prophecy in 520 B.C. (the second year of Darius, 1:1).<sup>3</sup> According to P. R. Ackroyd, the rebellion of Nebuchadnezzar III

\*John Kessler is associate professor of Old Testament at Ontario Bible College in Canada.

<sup>1</sup>See for example E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, reprint 1970) 584-585; C. G. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1949), 2, 196; R. Wolff, *The Book of Haggai: A Study Manual* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 52-54.

<sup>2</sup>This picturesque phrase is used by J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 369. Others taking this position include W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1943) 404; P. D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, (Philadelphia: Fortress) 275; T. Chary, *Aggée-Zacharie, Malachie* (Paris: Gabalda, 1969) 10.

<sup>3</sup>H. G. Mitchell et al., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1912) 42.

commenced about October 3, 522, and was crushed December 18 of the same year.<sup>4</sup> The rebellion of Nebuchadnezzar IV then began about September 9, 521, and was subdued November 27, 521. Thus "the re-acceptance of Darius I after the defeat of Nebuchadnezzar IV can be demonstrated from December 521 and January 520."<sup>5</sup>

Two major lines of approach seek to link Haggai's oracles to these events. First, some have maintained that Haggai's prophecies were made before the most current news from the east could reach him. Thus he is constantly speaking under erroneous assumptions. Waterman maintains this correlation by ascribing Haggai's ministry to 521.<sup>6</sup> Yet even given this date, as Ackroyd demonstrates (citing D. J. Wiseman) the intervals of time suggested (approximately one to two months) are too large for Haggai to have been unaware of events in Persia.<sup>7</sup> Theophane Chary maintains that in August 520 Haggai was still unaware of Darius' victory of December 521.<sup>8</sup> Yet in light of Ackroyd's evidence this appears highly improbable.

A second approach is taken by H. G. Mitchell and A. van Hoonacker, who date the suppression of the second Babylonian revolt in 519.<sup>9</sup> But the evidence seems conclusive for a date of January 520 for the Babylonian acceptance of Darius. Thus by the time Haggai uttered his first oracle in August 520 Darius' rule was firmly established. With the rebellion of Nebuchadnezzar IV crushed, resistance to Darius faltered. Bright suggests that stability did not return until late 520.<sup>10</sup> Yet it seems apparent that the second Babylonian revolt was the last major revolt against Darius.<sup>11</sup> There seems little doubt that Haggai was aware of Darius' successes. By February 519 Zechariah was aware of the peace that attended the empire (Zech 1:11).<sup>12</sup> This was only two months after Haggai's final oracle (2:10). Thus one may conclude with Ackroyd: "The occasion of the rebellions against Darius may well provide the background to the prophecy, but not its cause."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup>P. R. Ackroyd, "Two Old Testament Historical Problems of the Early Persian Period," *JNES* 17 (1958) 14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>Chary, *Aggée* 10.

<sup>9</sup>Mitchell, *Haggai* 20; A. van Hoonacker, *Les Douze Petits Prophètes: Traduits et Commentaires* (Paris: Gabalda, 1908) 545.

<sup>10</sup>Bright, *History* 370 n. 65. Bright's political interpretation of Haggai fits this chronology.

<sup>11</sup>A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago: Phoenix, 1959) 114-115. This is a revision of his earlier dating cited in Ackroyd, "Two Problems."

<sup>12</sup>As Ackroyd points out, Waterman must discard this date as inaccurate to maintain a date of 521 for Haggai and Zechariah's ministry. "Two Problems" 19.

<sup>13</sup>P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 163.

Two conclusions flow from this. First, we ought to greatly doubt any reconstruction that ascribes to Haggai motives of open rebellion.<sup>14</sup> Second, we ought to resist ascribing to Haggai the view that the eschatological shaking had begun. If the rebellions in Persia had dissipated, the shaking was of necessity a future occurrence. The "shaking of the nations" therefore must be something other than "the expectation of the prophet with reference to the war *then in progress*."<sup>15</sup>

## II. LEXICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The meaning of the verb *r's* is crucial to the understanding of Hag 2:6-7, 20-22. Its basic sense is "to quake, shake, tremble, quiver."<sup>16</sup> It may be used transitively (Isa 14:16) or intransitively (Judg 5:4) with either personal (Ezek 31:16) or impersonal (Ps 77:18) subjects or objects. The verb and its corresponding noun are used frequently with reference to earthquakes (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5; Ezek 38:20) or of the shaking of buildings (Amos 9:1; Ezek 26:10). The Hiphil is used only seven times out of thirty occurrences.<sup>17</sup>

An important distinction, however, may be made with reference to the metaphorical use of *r's*. This is the difference in nuance between its use with an impersonal as compared to a personal subject/object. When used with an impersonal subject/object it functions as an hyperbole. That which is humanly considered steadfast and immovable, such as the mountains or stars, is said to be shaken. The point of the hyperbole is to stress the infinite strength and awesomeness of the one who performs the shaking.

Examples of the impersonal usage abound. In Nah 1:5 the earth, mountains and hills quake and dissolve at Yahweh's presence. In Joel 3:16, when the Lord roars the heavens and earth shake. Other such references include Pss 18:7; 77:18-19; Isa 13:13; Jer 10:10; 50:46; Ezek 26:10; 27:28; 38:20.

A second nuance appears with a personal subject/object (or a personification). In this sense the verb is used metaphorically to denote trembling with fear. The basic thrust of the metaphor lies in the abject impotence of the one who trembles. The ability to resist or fight has vanished. Those who thus tremble sit in complete submission before the one who causes the trembling. This "trembling with fear" appears frequently as the response of the nations to an act of judgment by Yahweh. Thus in Ezekiel 30-31 Yahweh promises to abase the pharaoh (30:20-21), destroy the power of Egypt, cause Lebanon to mourn (31:15) and make the nations quake (31:16). This quaking is an expression of

<sup>14</sup>See Ackroyd, "Two Problems" 21. "That Haggai, Zechariah and Zerubbabel should engage in active rebellion in 520 . . . appears unlikely in the extreme." See also A. Bentzen, "Quelques remarques sur le mouvement messianique parmi les Juifs aux environs de l'an 520 avant Jesus-Christ," *RHRP* 10 (1930) 493-503.

<sup>15</sup>Mitchell, *Haggai* 62 (italics mine).

<sup>16</sup>BDB.

<sup>17</sup>Job 39:20; Ps 60:2 (4); Isa 14:16; Ezek 31:16; Hag 2:6, 7, 20.

their fear of the same fate overtaking them.<sup>18</sup> The same response of trembling may be observed in Jer 8:16; Joel 2:10.

In Isa 14:16, one of the seven Hiphil occurrences of *r'š*, the kings in Sheol are addressing the fallen king of Tyre. The sense of their question could be either "is this the man who overthrew (*mar'iš*) the kingdoms" or "is this the man who caused the kingdoms to tremble with fear." The parallel verb, *rgz*, clearly indicates the latter sense. That root overwhelmingly refers to an agitated emotional state (of rage or fear).<sup>19</sup>

When this distinction is observed in Hag 2:6-7, in v 6 *r'š*, with reference to the impersonal heavens and earth, hyperbolically expresses the greatness and might of Yahweh, while in v 7 that verb describes the terror-stricken nations trembling with fear in the presence of the Lord.<sup>20</sup>

It might be objected that *r'š* would not be used in such close proximity with two shades of meaning. Yet just this occurs in Ezekiel 26. In that chapter the siege of Tyre is described. In v 10 the walls (impersonal) shake, to demonstrate the overwhelming strength of the invading cavalry. However, in v 15 the coastlands (personal) shake at the sound of Tyre's fall. That this shaking is a trembling with fear is confirmed in the following verses. Thus princes of the sea will step down, remove their robes, clothe themselves with trembling (*hārad*),<sup>21</sup> sit on the ground, tremble and be appalled (*šāmēm*).<sup>22</sup>

Thus when Haggai speaks of Yahweh's shaking of the heavens and earth his primary reference is to the convulsion and dissolution of the elements of nature before One of infinitely superior might. When the nations of the earth are described as shaking, it is their subjective response of terror and submission that is in view.

### III. THE SYNTAX OF VERSES 6-7

The syntax of vv 6-7 clarifies the relationship between the convulsions of nature and the terror of the nations. Haggai introduces his oracles with a brief temporal indicator, the exact sense of which is the subject of some debate.<sup>23</sup> It

<sup>18</sup>A. Deissler and M. Delcor, *Les Petits Prophètes* (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1964), 2. 492.

<sup>19</sup>BDB. Note the cognate usages.

<sup>20</sup>It is noteworthy that LXX Vg differentiate the participial and perfect forms in vv 6-7. *Mar'iš* in 2:6 is translated by *seiō* and *moueō*; for *hir'aštī*, 2:7, the strengthened forms *susseiō* and *commoueō* are used. This shift may reflect either syntactical or lexical considerations, but it indicates at least a sensitivity to the slightly divergent nuances of the two occurrences of *r'š* in the verse.

<sup>21</sup>Always "dread, fear." See for example Isa 19:16; Ezek 32:10; Exod 19:16; Isa 45:1.

<sup>22</sup>Commonly expressing horror, devastation; cf. BDB.

<sup>23</sup>A great deal of discussion surrounds the textual integrity and exact sense of this temporal phrase. Without entering into detail here, the present writer maintains that 'ōd 'aḥat and mē'aṭ hi' do not stand in apposition to each other and are not synonymous.

is generally agreed, however, that the phrase denotes imminence.<sup>24</sup> Haggai then describes the shaking of heavens and earth using a participial, *futurum instans* construction, which is intended to announce the event as imminent or at least at hand.<sup>25</sup> The participle is then followed by a series of three perfects, each prefaced by a *wāw*-consecutive. This construction generally indicates a consecutive relationship between the participle and the subsequent perfects. Gesenius notes that it is used "to express future actions as the temporal or logical consequence of tenses or their equivalents which announce or require such future actions or events."<sup>26</sup> Joüon states:

*weqatali* continuant un participe à sens futur. Comme generalment on ne continue pas un participe par un participe, un participe à sens futur est normalment continué par un *weqatali* egalment à sens futur. Le plus souvent il y a idée de succession.<sup>27</sup>

Whether the consecution is logical or temporal is not at issue here. The significant point is this: The syntax of the text sets *wēhir'astt* apart from *mar'is*, thus indicating the former to be in some sense an outworking of the latter.

This raises certain difficulties for one wishing to identify the shaking of the nations (and subsequent enrichment of the temple) with the breakup of the Persian and later empires. It would be possible to assert that v 6 is an eschatological prediction while v 7 is a near authentication underlining the veracity of Haggai's claim. However, converted perfects following a participial *futurum instans* frequently describe actions resulting from and flowing out of the action of the participle. It could be argued that v 7 expresses a logical consequence of v 6—that is, "I will shake the heavens then, so I will fill this house with glory now." Yet is the disruption of the temporal flow of the sentence required in the context? Thus in the most natural reading of vv 6–7 the shakings to which Haggai referred were to be preceded by ominous terrestrial and celestial portents. The view that the shaking of the nations is the rise and fall of world empires reverses this order.<sup>28</sup>

#### IV. ESCHATOLOGICAL TRADITIONS IN ZION THEOLOGY

It is generally agreed that Haggai is rooted in Jerusalem Zion theology.<sup>29</sup> Von Rad maintains that Zion theology contained two basic eschatological mo-

<sup>24</sup>G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1965), 2, 283; O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 149.

<sup>25</sup>GKC 116p.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., sec. 112p.

<sup>27</sup>P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hebreu Biblique* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1965) 119n. See also S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892) 117–118.

<sup>28</sup>It is not necessary to assert that the participle *mar'is* implies a long series of events (cf. J. Baldwin, *Haggai*, pp. 47–48). The participle may "merely announce future actions or events" (GKC 116p) without reference to their duration. Note 1 Kgs 2:2, where the participle refers to death.

<sup>29</sup>Bright, *Kingdom of God* 165; *History of Israel* 370–371.

tifs:<sup>30</sup> (1) a battle cycle wherein the nations launched a unified campaign against Zion, which culminated in the coming of Yahweh with "earthquake and darkness, a great battle and the final preservation of Zion"; and (2) a second cycle involving the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion in worship. In recent discussion Haggai 2 has been identified as standing within both traditions.<sup>31</sup>

Further support for an eschatological understanding of Haggai 2 is found in its similarity to the pattern of events specifically involved in the battle cycle mentioned above, the most significant being the cosmic portents accompanying the intervention of Yahweh against his enemies. These events bring terror and disarray upon Yahweh's foes, whose armies turn and attack one another. F. M. Cross has noted the frequent use of earthquake imagery in "divine warrior" and "storm god" contexts. He maintains that this motif became highly significant in proto-apocalyptic sixth-century literature, including Haggai 2 and Zechariah 9 and 14.<sup>32</sup>

Four prophetic texts akin to Haggai 2 may be noted that demonstrate this pattern. The shaking of the heavens appears in Joel 2:10; 3:16 (4:16). The latter passage with its clearly eschatological reference speaks of portents in the heavens and earth. The nations assemble themselves to do battle when Yahweh intervenes on behalf of his own. Leslie C. Allen comments that this scenario utilizes the terrifying traditional motif of the disfigurement of sun and moon, which would cause people to faint from fear and anticipation of what is to befall the world.<sup>33</sup>

A parallel also occurs in Isaiah 19 with reference to Egypt. The chapter opens with the appearance of Yahweh as one who rides upon a cloud. Shaking imagery abounds. The idols of Egypt tremble and the hearts of the Egyptians melt (v 1). They tremble with fear before the hand Yahweh shakes over them (v 16). The ultimate result of their terror is self-destruction (v 2). The verbal parallel to Hag 2:7, 22 is striking. The confusion of the enemy is also apparent in the staggering of v 14. Thus the presence of Yahweh and the convulsions of

<sup>30</sup>Von Rad, *Theology*, 2. 293-297.

<sup>31</sup>The following, among others, identify Haggai 2 with the pilgrimage cycle: W. J. Dumbrell, "Some Observations on the Political Origins of Israel's Eschatology," *Reformed Theological Review* 36 (1977) 38; G. von Rad, "The City on a Hill," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966) 232; R. Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations* (Edinburgh: Oliver Boyd, 1962) 61. On the other hand, F. M. Cross identifies Haggai 2 with the appearance of the storm god as divine warrior; *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973) 170.

<sup>32</sup>Cross, *Canaanite Myth* 70, 100, 102, 170. P. D. Miller (*The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973] 36, 74-141) has also drawn attention to "shaking" terminology in divine warfare narratives. See also von Rad, *Theology*, 2. 124. For a more detailed discussion of the eschatological patterns current in the postexilic period see D. L. Peterson, *Late Israelite Prophecy: Studies in Deutero-Prophetic Literature and in Chronicles* (SBLMS 23; Missoula: Scholars, 1977); P. D. Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern," *JBL* 92 (1973) 37-59. Hanson and Peterson view the following as a basic pattern: theophany, cosmic conflict, conflict with the nations, victory and return to Zion, securing of the temple, manifestation of Yahweh's universal reign, and fertility of the restored order. Several of these features are evident in Haggai 2.

<sup>33</sup>L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 101.

nature that accompany it produce panic and destruction.

Ezekiel 38–39 presents a similar train of events. The assembled hosts proceed against the regathered remnant (38:3–16). Yahweh responds by bringing a great shaking upon the whole land (v 19). This involves the sea and mountains and is accompanied by pestilence, rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone (v 22). Again the hostile forces are overcome by panic and confusion and bring their destruction upon themselves, again by their own swords (v 21).

Finally Zechariah 14 manifests a corresponding pattern. The nations are gathered together against Jerusalem (v 2). The Lord goes forth to defend his people and brings an earthquake in his train (vv 3–5). Plagues overtake the enemy, and in their confusion they annihilate each other's armies (v 13).

This brief survey, notwithstanding the numerous differences between the accounts,<sup>34</sup> demonstrates that—in its broader outline, at least—Haggai 2 stands in general continuity with broader patterns in Zion-Jerusalem theology: the assault of the nations (2:22), the intervention of Yahweh and its attendant shaking (2:6, 21), the resultant terror and self-destruction by the armies of the nations (2:7, 22), and the submission of the remnants of the nations to Yahweh and their worship at Jerusalem (Hag 2:8–9; cf. Zech 14:16–19 among many examples of this motif). It would appear that Haggai's thoughts, like those of his contemporaries and near predecessors, were upon the inauguration of the coming age, not the demise of a long series of Near Eastern and Mediterranean empires.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the four considerations above, the present writer maintains that Haggai's intended reference was not to the recently quelled revolutions in the east, nor was it to the succession of world empires that rose and fell in the Near East from 520 B.C. onwards. Rather, Haggai's purpose was to express the certainty and imminence of the coming age. It must be admitted that the shaking of these historical empires is a prefiguring of the final shaking to come. But this process began at Babel, was evidenced at Sodom and Gomorrah,<sup>35</sup> and continues throughout the age. The successive demises of world empires may also be viewed as earnest of the final<sup>36</sup> eschatological victory. The enrichment of the temple by Darius, and then Herod, and the presence of Christ<sup>37</sup> may be

<sup>34</sup>Von Rad maintains that individual prophets utilized contemporary eschatological beliefs, held them as "correct and axiomatic" and adapted them to specific situations ("City on a Hill" 232). The evident difference between Haggai 2 on the one hand and Zechariah 14; Ezekiel 38 on the other led the present writer to believe that in his use of the eschatological battle motif Haggai has broadened and "delocalized" the conflict at Jerusalem. In this sense Haggai 2 is akin to Isa 25:6–12 in its wider description of judgment.

<sup>35</sup>Note especially Haggai's use of *hpk* in 2:22. The OT paradigm for the use of this term with Yahweh as subject is Sodom and Gomorrah. See Gen 19:21, 25, 29; Deut 29:23; Jer 20:16; Amos 4:11; Lam 4:6.

<sup>36</sup>As Keil notes in *Minor Prophets*, 2. 199. See also H. Wolf, "The Desire of All Nations in Haggai 2:7: Messianic or Not?", *JETS* 19 (1976) 98.

<sup>37</sup>Baldwin, *Haggai* 48–49.

viewed in a similar fashion. But Haggai's primary references in the light of these considerations must be to the ultimate consummation of the age, not the intervening stages.

Hag 2:6-9, then, is an oracle describing the eschatological glory that the temple will receive. Yahweh is the divine warrior, coming judge, and ultimate victor. In a way superseding the defeat of the gods of Egypt and the spoiling of the Egyptians (Exod 12:36b) Yahweh will destroy the resistance of the nations (Hag 2:20-23) and lay claim to the riches of the world. As a result of his eschatological victory he will recall his wealth from the nations (2:8; cf. Joel 3:5; Zech 14:1, 14)<sup>38</sup> and devote it to the beautification of his house. Great prosperity will thus attend the new age. It will flow out from the temple and encompass the whole land.

<sup>38</sup>Von Rad, *Theology*, 2. 296.