

EXEGETICAL BRIEF: HAGGAI 2:7—THE DESIRED OF ALL NATIONS WILL COME

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The central question dealt with in this study is whether the promise “the desired of all nations will come” has specific reference to the person of Christ. There is little doubt that the text and context are messianic in nature, but there is much debate about how this specific term is to be understood. A longstanding tradition in the Christian church, expressed in prose, poetry, and hymnody, is that the Messiah Jesus himself is the Desired of the nations that came in fulfillment to the promise. An even older tradition, expressed in the majority of ancient and modern versions, says that the reference is to desired or desirable things (i.e., wealth, treasures) of the nations that were to come to God’s people as one of the blessings attributable to the messianic kingdom.

The Immediate Context

These words of Haggai are part of the second of four messages the prophet proclaimed on behalf of the Lord in 520 BC (“the second year of King Darius,” 1:1). The Lord wanted the people of Jerusalem to return to the abandoned project of building the temple. Through Haggai, God rebuked attitudes of indifference and selfishness that contributed to the construction delay (1:2ff.) and restored a spirit of hope and anticipation to replace one of negativism and self-pity (2:3ff.). The rebuilding and continued use of the temple was an important element in the messianic program that the Lord was carrying out through and for his people.

The central assurance conveyed to the people was that the Lord remained present and active among them (See 1:13, 2:4). The faithful Lord declared that the heart of the covenant relation that had been established at Sinai following the exodus from Egypt (2:5) remained intact. The temple in Jerusalem was to offer a visible sign of the divine presence and serve as a distinctive assurance of future benefits that would surpass the blessings of the past.

The specific thrust of the verses now under consideration is that the temple which they were to build, although inferior in external appearance and adornment to the former temple built by Solomon, would actually signal a greater glory to come in the future. God’s people could and should commit themselves confidently to the task

because of distinctive future blessings here articulated by the Lord. The promise that “the desired of all nations will come” is in the middle of this cluster of promises.

The Hebrew Text and NIV Translation

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עוֹד אֶחָת מְעַט הִיא וְאֲנִי מְרַעֵשׂ
אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־הַחֲרֹבָה׃
וְהָרַעַשְׁתִּי אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם וּבָאוּ חֲמֹדַת כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם וּמִלְאֹתַי
אֶת־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה כְּבוֹד אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת׃
לִי הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת׃
וְגִדוֹל יִהְיֶה כְבוֹד הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הַאֲחֵרוֹן מִן־הָרִאשׁוֹן אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת וּבִמְקוֹם הַזֶּה אֶתֵּן שְׁלוֹם נְאֻם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת׃

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. “I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD Almighty. “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the LORD Almighty. “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,” says the LORD Almighty. “And in this place I will grant peace,” declares the LORD Almighty.

“The Desired of All Nations”

The phrase in Hebrew is *חֲמֹדַת כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם*. The noun *חֲמֹדָה* is derived from *חָמַד*, to desire or take pleasure in. Thus it refers to someone or something that is desired or desirable. Those who see this verse as a promise of the Messiah himself note how the word is used with reference to specific people like Saul (1 Sam 9:20, where *חֲמֹדָה* is an abstract longing for the man) or Daniel (Dan 9:23, 10:11, 19, where the closely related plural *חֲמֹדוֹת* is used). Those who favor the meaning of desirable things, however, remind us that the word is most frequently used to denote valued things or treasures as diverse as houses (Ezk 26:12), ships (Isa 2:16), fields (Jer 12:10), and treasures in general (Nah 2:9[10], Hos 13:15, 2 Chr 32:27). The reference to gold and silver in verse 8, moreover, strikes most commentators as an argument in favor of the meaning of precious things.

An argument advanced against the idea that this phrase refers to the person of the Messiah is that the promised Savior has never been desired or highly valued by all nations. Pagan nations and people in their spiritual darkness cannot and do not prize the Promised One. The counter-argument of those who see this as a reference to Christ is that he remains most desirable because he is most beneficial and needed by all nations, even if they are not conscious of this truth. While this concept is true and linguistically plausible, it is less compatible with the normal meaning and use of the word in the Old Testament.

Ancient versions invariably follow the direction of the Septuagint, which rendered the phrase “the select things of all nations” (τὰ ἐκλεκτὰ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν). They changed the singular noun into a plural largely because of the verb form Haggai used. That is now our focus.

“The Desired of All Nations Will Come”

The verb form used by Haggai is **יָשַׁעְוּ**, a plural, which requires a plural subject. So we may say that the plural form points to **כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם** as a collective (See GK 145b,d) and thus refers to the treasures of the nations rather than the Messiah. To the majority of translators through the centuries the plural verb more strongly suggests a collective noun (treasures) than a person (Messiah). A translation like “the treasures of all nations shall come in” (RSV) adequately conveys the thought.

However, it may also be argued that since **יָשַׁעְוּ** is in construction with the plural **יָגִיעוּ**, the whole is treated as a plural—and so the singular person of the Messiah remains a possible meaning (See GK 145e). Grammatically this is an acceptable argument.

A third way of translating the plural verb is to make the “nations” mentioned in the preceding clause its subject. The NASB does this and offers this translation: “I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations.” The NKJV takes a similar approach: “I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations.” These translations require us to understand the **כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם** as an accusative of accompaniment or direction without any preposition. This is grammatically possible. We notice, however, that these two translations are also split on the meaning of the specific phrase itself. One takes it as the “wealth” of all nations and the other as Christ, “the Desire of All Nations.”

Since the question cannot be answered with certainty on the basis of vocabulary and grammar, a look at the context is needed. So we begin to examine verses and words preceding and following the phrase itself.

The Shaking that Precedes the Coming of the “Desired”

The words **עוֹד יָשַׁעְוּ יְהוָה בְּעַתְּ הַזֶּה** in verse six literally read “again—once—a little while—it.” The use of **עוֹד** (again) to introduce an emphasis on a future event is parallel to the use in Ex 11:1 and Isa 49:20. For other examples of the temporal use of **יָשַׁעְוּ** (once), see Ex 30:10 and Ps 89:36. The New Testament writer to the Hebrews, echoing the Septuagint, also took the words as references to time and translated the words with **ἔτι ἅπαξ**, “yet once again” (Heb 12:26). All this means that the words **יְהוָה בְּעַתְּ הַזֶּה** (“it is a little”) must also have reference to time (a little while, soon).

God promises that he will be “shaking” (**יָשַׁעְוּ**) the heavens, the earth, the sea, the dry land, and all the nations. (On the use of the participle to announce future events and activities, see GK 116p.) God indicates that this shaking will be something of an encore to a previous event (“again”). The prior event is the one referred to in the preceding verse, the establishing of the covenant at Sinai following the exodus from Egypt and assurance of divine presence (Cf. Ex. 33:14-17). The verb **יָשַׁעְוּ** (to shake) is periodically associated with that earlier event, as in Jud 5:4, Ps 68:9[8], and 77:19[18]. This is so-called “theophany” language and need not refer to literal or physical shaking or quaking of the created universe. As the theophanic language is used in Ps 18:8[7], Jer 4:24-26, and Nah 1:5, for example, the emphasis is on the reality of the coming of the Lord and his activity. The use of terms like “heaven and earth” and “sea and dry land” is what used to be called a merismus, a literary device to express totality. The Lord is coming in full divinity to do things that have worldwide impact.

God also promises that this activity will take place soon (“a little while”) and that it will lead to the coming of “the desired of all nations.” Those hearing the words spoken by Haggai in 520 BC could consider the activity immanent. Later in this chapter Haggai’s fourth and final message of 520 BC offers assurances to Zerubbabel regarding the preservation of the messianic line. There also (in verses 21 and 22) the Lord through Haggai gives clarifying examples of what this shaking activity will involve: “I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.” The constant warfare, revolution and counter-revolution, and social-political upheavals that characterized the last five centuries of the OT era were used by God to prepare for the Christ’s first coming and his establishment of the messianic kingdom.

We dare not limit the fulfillment of the prophecy, however, to those events leading to and culminating in Christ’s first coming. Centuries later, after Christ’s first coming, the Letter to the Hebrews repeated Haggai’s promise for encouragement concerning Christ’s second coming (Heb 12:26,27, most likely written in the late 60s AD). So this promise is not limited to only one particular series of events that began at the time of Haggai and his contemporaries. It also has application to the period of time preceding Christ’s second coming. Haggai is speaking of the whole future and that includes both comings of Christ and the messianic kingdom that prevails forever. The continuing wars and rumors of wars, the shaking and sifting of nations and regimes, and the Lord’s manipulation of earthly powers (and natural

phenomena: Mt 24:7) remind us that the promise of the coming of “the desired of all nations” remains in force in our age.

Does this truth of God’s Old and New Testament shaking activity help us decide if “the desired of all nations” is the Messiah himself or treasures of the nations that will flow to God’s people in connection with the messianic kingdom? We must admit that both ideas are compatible with other promises given through prophets and apostles. There is no question that the “shaking” work of God pointed and still points to the coming of Christ himself (Hag 2:21-23, Dan 2:36-44, Mt 24:6-8, Heb 12:26,27). There is also no doubt that the wealth of the nations comes toward believers because of the Messiah. Isaiah eloquently spoke of this in 60:5, “The wealth (תְּבָרָה) of the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches (גִּיל) of the nations will come.” Zechariah (14:4) and St. John (Rev 21:26) use the same imagery as well.

The House, Glory, and Peace that are Promised with the “Desired”

We now look at the promises of God stated in verses seven and nine: “I will fill this house with glory,” “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,” and “In this place I will grant peace.” Since these blessings are intimately connected with the coming of the “desired of all nations,” we ask if they might help us identify the “desired” more precisely.

The words הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה (this house), הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה הַשֵּׁנִי (this present house, literally “this latter house” contrasted with the former one built by Solomon), and וּבַמְקוֹם הַזֶּה (and in this place) have obvious reference to the temple the people are to build in Jerusalem the sixth century BC. Those who identify Christ himself as “the desired of all nations” see this as significant, since Christ physically entered that temple, as recorded in Lk 2:27,46, etc. (They consider Herod’s Temple to be the same temple, although with extensive additions and improvements. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 15, 1, 1) Herod probably felt the same way.)

Does this language limit the promise to the particular building being constructed at the time of Haggai, or may it have a broader reference? In many prophetic statements the “house of God” concept is a single idea that denotes the active presence of the Lord among his people regardless of the duration or outward appearance of a particular building at a particular location. As confirmed by the use of this section by the New Testament writer to the Hebrews, Haggai is including various elements from previous proclamations with regard to the house of God. Isaiah and Micah had prophesied of the nations coming to the house of the Lord and spoke of their enjoyment of peace

(Isa 2:2-5, Mic 4:1-5). Ezekiel had blended promises of the Messiah, the eternal covenant of peace, and the enduring sanctuary (שְׁכֵנְיָהוּ) of God among his people (Ezk 37:26).

As the Old Testament prophets often do, Haggai takes important elements of other prophecies and combines them in a way that encourages his audience to resume the building project God gave them. They were to understand that they weren’t simply building a material structure on a piece of real estate. They were participating in the progressive building and establishment of the messianic kingdom that will endure everlastingly and will be marked by the Lord’s active presence among his people. This is our understanding of Old Testament messianic promises generally, and we find this confirmed in the way that the New Testament periodically adapts and interprets Old Testament prophecies. So we maintain that the specific mention of the temple that was begun and finished in the decades immediately following the end of the Babylonian exile does not prohibit application of Haggai’s words to the New Testament church and God’s presence among his people as they anticipate Christ’s final coming.

The words “glory” (כְּבוֹד) and “peace” (שְׁלוֹם) as they are used in this section of Scripture are common to many messianic prophecies. When God here promises, “I will fill this house with glory,” he draws on events and terminology already well known to his people. Similar language was used regarding the tabernacle (Ex 40:34,35), Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:10,11, 2 Chr 5:13,14), and Ezekiel’s temple (Ezk 43:4). The glory Haggai has in mind is not external size or adornment with gold or silver, but the Lord’s presence. That was true in the sixth century B.C. and remains true till the end of time.

“And in this place I will grant peace,” is the final assurance of God in these verses, a promise intimately connected to those promises of the Lord’s presence, of the Lord’s “shaking” of the nations, and of the coming of the “desired” of all nations. We understand this שְׁלוֹם to be more than a cessation of hostilities between nations, and we learn from its wider meaning in other portions of Scripture that spiritual peace and contentment are included as gifts only God can give. The peace that the remnant sought to enjoy in post-exile Jerusalem (“and in this place,” וּבַמְקוֹם הַזֶּה) was a genuine part of the Haggai’s promise, but also a foreshadowing of the greater peace that all of God’s people would receive. Ultimately all such promises point to an eternal peace that is inseparable from the arrival and reign of the Messiah (See Is 9:7, 11:1-9, Ps 72:7, Lk 1:79). Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14).

Does the filling of God’s house (the Jerusalem temple or the New Testament church) with glory, or the provision of peace for Old or New

Testament believers cast deciding votes on whether the “desired of all nations” is Christ specifically or treasures generally? Again, there is ample room for both concepts in the cluster of promises and their fulfillments as presented in Scripture.

So Who or What is the “Desired of All Nations?”

Advocates of both positions are able to cite lexical, grammatical, and contextual evidences that either support or allow their preferred interpretation in this issue. A study of the text and its immediate context invariably strengthens our conviction that we are dealing with predictive messianic prophecy, but does not allow us to say with certainty that the כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם הַמְּדֻבָּרִים must be identified as Christ himself or as desirable things of all nations.

If asked to state our preference we would side with those who see the term as a reference to desirable things rather than the person of the Messiah. Major factors for leaning this way are the fact that הַמְּדֻבָּרִים is more frequently used in the Old Testament to identify treasured things, it is coupled with a plural verb form that most likely indicates a collective noun, and it is doubtful if the word “desired” is the best word to indicate what unbelieving nations need but don’t consciously desire.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

THE GOSPEL IS THREATENED. WE MUST TAKE ANOTHER ROAD.

“The gospel is threatened.” “We must take another road.” The opening speakers sounded these two themes at a historic gathering in the Luther Foundation’s hall in Gothenburg, Sweden, on January 18, 2003. About eighty people gathered to discuss a report that a work group had prepared for their consideration. The work group proposed the establishment of a non-geographic “mission province” within the Church of Sweden, that is, the creation of a 14th diocese of the Church of Sweden which would provide a shelter of sorts for opponents of the ordination of women in the national church of Sweden.

Those assembled were united by one cause, their opposition to women pastors. Beyond that, it was clear that there are many other doctrinal questions which certainly will require much work before agreement can be reached. Only time will tell if that is possible. One can identify three groups that are considering participation in the formation of this “mission province”: the high-church people, the low church people, and the old-church people. In discussions during the course of the meeting, it became clear that these groups wanted to make their respective positions known.

Problems to Solve

One important question which received considerable attention was how the ordination of pastors would be carried out. Temporarily, such ordinations could take place somewhere outside of Sweden where opponents of women’s ordination are still allowed to become pastors and where there are bishops willing to ordain men who oppose women pastors. For example, one pastor who had been denied ordination in the Church of Sweden because of his opposition to women pastors had been ordained by the Ingrian Church, a Finnish Lutheran Church in Russia.

A goal of the high-church group is to preserve and carry forward *apostolic succession*. Goran Beijer, Stockholm, said that this was a requirement for his group to be able to participate in the new diocese. After that demand the low-church group could not remain quiet. Two young men from the Bible-believing Friends Mission Society stepped forward. Jan-Ulri Smetana emphasized that the group must carry out regular doctrinal talk in order for the movement to proceed any further. Missionary Henrik Birgersson was critical of the idea that apostolic succession should play such a prominent role in the proposed mission province. He pointed out that the ministry has been entrusted to the congregation, whose call takes precedence over apostolic succession.