

**III. New Testament and Christianity**

Although Haggai is the second shortest book of the HB/OT (after Obadiah), its theological content has been drawn upon by generations of Christians in their spiritual and moral reflections.

**1. New Testament.** Already in the NT there are many references to the book. There is one direct citation and christological interpretation of Haggai in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is found in the context of the admonition to follow Jesus, the “mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 12:24). For as God has in past times warned man “on earth” there is also a graver warning “from heaven” (Heb 12:25). “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens” (Heb 12:26; cf. Hag 2:6). A possible allusion to the book is found in the Great Commission where the resurrected Christ calls his disciples to teach the nations “to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). This may echo Hag 1:12–13 which recounts that the holy remnant “obeyed the voice of the Lord their God... And the people feared the Lord. Then Haggai... spoke to the people with the Lord’s message, ‘I am with you, declares the Lord.’” The NT also has other allusions to Haggai. At 2 Cor 1:22 Paul teaches that God establishes believers in Christ, has anointed them, and “has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” This reflects Hag 2:23 where the second chapter comes to a close with God making God’s servant “like a signet ring, for I have chosen you.” (Compare also Hag 2:7 and Luke 2:27, 32; Hag 2:4 and Eph 6:10; Acts 7:9; see also Matt 1:12.)

**2. Christianity.** One of the strong lines of reception in the patristic readings (see Ferreiro: 220–29) is drawn from Haggai’s emphasis on God’s sovereign power. Haggai 2:6–7 recounts that God will again “shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land... and all nations, so that the desire of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory.” Gregory the Great refers this verse to God’s examination of all powers in heaven and earth at the Day of Judgment (*Forty Gospel Homilies* 10). Gregory of Nazianzus explains the world-shaking divine covenants here. The first covenant is the shift from idolatry to the divine teachings of the law, the second is from the law to the gospel (*Theological Oration: On the Holy Spirit*). Augustine finds the two advents of Christ here, for “the desire of all the nations” came already once in Christ, while the second shaking is to come with the second advent at the end of the world. The shaking is already underway, however: “we ourselves are witnesses of the fact that all nations are being moved to accept the faith” (*Civ.* 18.35). Jerome’s commentary remarks on the nature of the word of God (as mentioned in Hag 1:1). It strikes through those false teachings that are built without the “authority of the Scripture” (*Commentary on Haggai* 1). For many of the church fathers, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, Zerubbabel was a figure of Christ and his work was a sign of the church (*Hist. eccl.* 10.4).

The moral impulse of the passages regarding the correct use of wealth is conveyed by many inter-

preters, such as Jerome, Augustine, and Ambrose. Maximus of Turin (5th century) used Hag 1:6 (“you drink, but you never have your fill”) to condemn lapsed priests who were “delighting in worldly pleasures” (*Serm.* 28); Ambrose, on the other hand, encouraged his readers to do good works on the basis of Hag 1:8 (“Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house”; *Ep.* 80).

The spiritual interpretations are strong in medieval glosses. To Hag 1:14 (“And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel”), a trinitarian interpretation is provided in the *Glossa Ordinaria*. Here the “desired one” (*desideratus*, Vg., Hag 2:7) is Jesus Christ the Savior (*salvator*) and the temple is the church (*ecclesia*). “In the seventh month” (Hag 2:2) is understood as “in the full mystery of the Trinity” (*in pleno trinitatis sacramento*).

In the post-Reformation period (see Coggins/Han: 137–49), Luther’s rendering of Hag 2:6–7 was used in the early 17th-century church hymn of Friedrich von Spee: “O Savior, open up the heavens” (“O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf”). The line, “Where are you, comfort of all the world” (“Wo bleibst du, Trost der ganzen Welt”) is also the opening line of Novalis’ twelfth Sacred Song. The Geneva Bible presented the temple in Haggai as the church and understood “the desire of all nations” as Christ. In the debates about church order, Richard Hooker drew upon Hag 2:2–3 in support of specific localities for Christian worship (*Laws of Ecclesiastical Policy* 5:11). The famous exegete John Pearson used Hag 2:3–9 to show that the messiah would be born at the time of the Second Temple. Charles Wesley used “Dear desire of every nation” in his “Come, thou long-expected Jesus.” Handel integrated these verses into his *Messiah*.

Modern Christian preachers often use the book to console the faithful to trust in God: “do not fear” (Hag 2:5). It is also used to challenge apathy or self-centeredness (Hag 1:9) and to remind Christians to contribute to the ministry with their time and money. The most well-known verse in the book is certainly the one used in messianic theology: the Savior is not for one nation, but is “the desire of all the nations” (Hag 2:7).

**Bibliography:** ■ *Biblia latina cum glossa ordinaria: Tomus*, vol. 3 (ed. A. Rusch; Strasbourg 1480). ■ Coggins, R./J. H. Han, *Six Minor Prophets through the Centuries: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai* (Malden, Mass. 2011). ■ Ferreiro, A. (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. 14: *The Twelve Prophets* (Downers Grove, Ill. 2003).

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