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CONTENTS		
J. L. BERQUIST, Prophetic legitimation in Jeremiah		129
D. L. CHRISTENSEN, The identity of "King So" in Egypt (2 Kings xvii 4)		140
D. R. HILDEBRAND, Temple ritual: a paradigm for moral holiness in Haggai ii 10-19		154
Y. HOFFMAN, A North Israelite typological myth and a Judaeon historical tradition: the exodus in Hosea and Amos		169
S. MEIER, Job i-ii: a reflection of Genesis i-iii		183
H. SPIECKERMANN, Dies irae: der alttestamentliche Befund und seine Vorgeschichte		194
SHORT NOTES		209
Th. BOOIJ, The role of darkness in Psalm cv 28 — D. G. DEBOYS, 1 Samuel xxix 6 — P. B. DIRKSEN, Song of Songs iii 6-7 — U. HÜBNER, Schweine, Schweineknochen und ein Speiseverbot im alten Israel — K. KOENEN, Zum Text von Jesaja lvii 12-13a — O. LORETZ, Amos vi 12.		
Announcement: a concordance to Targum Jonathan to the Prophets		242
BOOK LIST		242

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TEMPLE RITUAL: A PARADIGM FOR MORAL
HOLINESS IN HAGGAI II 10-19

by

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State of the question and direction of this article

For the interpretation of the book of Haggai and for the place of the prophet in the history of the people of God, the pericope ii 10-19 is of the greatest importance. It begins with a request to the priests for a *tôrâ* concerning holiness and uncleanness. Their response is then directed to "this people, ... this nation", whose identity has been the focus of much debate. J. W. Rothstein¹ takes them to be the Samaritans whose help Haggai is rejecting in the rebuilding of the temple, and shifts ii 15-19, which concerns the remnant, to follow i 15a (for reasons see below, p. 159). E. Sellin² had already suspected there were verses missing after i 15a, and Rothstein's alteration of the order of the text provided an answer to Sellin. Rothstein's position has received wide acceptance,³ though recent commentaries have been less accepting, either in part or altogether.⁴ The most significant answer to Rothstein has come from Klaus Koch's form-critical study of Haggai's three longest speeches,⁵ showing ii 10-19 to be a unified whole directed to the

¹ *Juden und Samaritaner* (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 62, 78-82.

² *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der jüdischen Gemeinde nach dem babylonischen Exil* (Leipzig, 1900-1) 2, pp. 50 ff.

³ E.g. O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (3rd edn, Tübingen, 1964), p. 577; E. tr. *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford and New York, 1965), p. 427; D. W. Thomas, "Haggai", *IB* 6 (1956) pp. 1043, 1046, and W. A. M. Beuken, *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühnachexilischen Prophetie* (Assen, 1967), pp. 65 ff., 333-4.

⁴ E.g. D. L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8: A Commentary* (London and Philadelphia, 1984), pp. 81, 87-8. T. Chary, *Aggée-Zacharie-Malachie* (Paris, 1969), p. 31, puts ii 15-19 after i 15a, but he does not accept that the application of ii 10-14 was intended for Samaritans. W. Rudolph, *Haggai—Sacharja 1-8—Sacharja 9-14—Maleachi* (Gütersloh, 1976), pp. 23, 49-50, says that the order of the text must be left as it is, though he thinks that the application has reference to the Samaritans.

⁵ "Haggais unreines Volk", *ZAW* 79 (1967), pp. 52-66.

remnant (see p. 159 below). A. Deissler⁶ has recognized the force of his argument, and adds that Koch's work will oblige future exegesis to take up afresh the problem of this pericope.

I will follow Koch's form-critical work, but, unlike Koch, I will go on to show that the denunciation of "this people" (cf. i 2) was on account of a moral issue. Selfishness was their attitude in ch. i. And whether or not the temple was completed was not decisive for the acceptance of their offerings (ii 1, 4, 5), nor for the return of blessing (ii 18-19). Repentance was necessary: that is the point of ii 17b. And though some question the appropriateness of moral uncleanness since, in obedience, they had already begun work on the temple (i 14; cf. ii 3), Zechariah's first oracle (i 1-6) furnishes further evidence that repentance was still an issue at this time, for it is dated after Hag. ii 9. Thus the prophet used the priestly ruling that uncleanness is more contagious than holiness to bring into focus the effect of the remnant's sinfulness: prescripts that applied to meat and clothes and corpses were given a personal and moral application. The prophet here used the cult as a paradigm of holiness.

The book of Haggai—time and purpose of writing and type of literature

With Deissler⁷ I think that the content of the messages goes back to Haggai himself, and that they were fixed in writing shortly after 520 B.C.⁸ The book was written to help the new community

⁶ "Aggée", *DBSup* 8 (Paris, 1972), col. 706. So also B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London and Philadelphia, 1979), p. 465.

⁷ Col. 705. The main arguments for an early written text are the precise dates for each message and the decisive role of Zerubbabel (esp. ii 20-3).

⁸ In respect to the chronicled results of the messages, P. R. Ackroyd considers i 12-14 as part of the framework which is intimately related to the oracle and which belongs to the prophetic tradition, presumably from the prophet himself or his circle ("Studies in the Book of Haggai", *JJS* 2 [1951], pp. 163-76). Beuken, p. 31, on the other hand, takes this to be a notice of the results added by the chronicler. Further, Beuken (p. 331) holds that the traditions began with dated prophecies, while Ackroyd assigns the dates to the independent framework (p. 169), adding a note of caution, however, in that these dates agree with Ezra iv 24 and v 1. As Rudolph argues (p. 39), if historical dates are reliable only when they are verified by further evidence, it becomes difficult to write history. R. A. Mason is another who allows for, "perhaps", a long period of redaction showing the outlook of the Chronicler (*The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi* [Cambridge, 1977], p. 10). He argues elsewhere that the outlook of the framework is an attempt to interpret the prophet's oracles as partially fulfilled and partially to be fulfilled ("The purpose of the 'editorial framework' of the book of Haggai", *VT* 27 [1977], pp. 413-

remember henceforth that they owed their existence and well-being to God. All four of the messages happen within the span of three months and twenty-four days. It is Haggai's third message (18 December 520 B.C.)⁹ which constitutes the pericope of this study.

There is a question whether Haggai's oracles are prose or poetry. *BHK* represents them as prose; *BHS* represents them as poetry. To the point is J. L. Kugel's conclusion that the distinction between poetry and prose is not native to the biblical world: elevated language on any occasion is expressed by the use of parallelism or seconding, whose "structuredness" increases with the frequency and intensity of this idealized norm.¹⁰ The parallelism in Hag. ii 14 (so *BHS*) is an example.

Translation of ii 10-19

The past—a critique of their situation

10. On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Haggai, the prophet,

11. "Thus says Yahweh of hosts, Ask the priests for a ruling:

12. 'If a man carries holy flesh in the fold of his garment, and with this fold touches bread or stew or wine or oil or any food, does it become holy?' " And the priests answered, "No."

13. Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" And the priests answered, "It does become unclean."

14. Then Haggai answered, "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, declares Yahweh; and so is every work of their hands, and what they offer here is unclean.

The present—a call for change

15. But now, consider from this day on. Before one stone was placed upon another in the temple of Yahweh,

21). Since the only part stated to be fulfilled is that which Haggai witnessed himself, i.e., the rebuilding on the temple, Mason's purpose does not require a long period of redaction.

⁹ R. A. Parker and W. H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.-A.D. 75* (Providence, 1956), p. 30.

¹⁰ *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallellism and Its History* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1981), pp. 69, 85.

16. How did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty.

17. I smote you and all the work of your hands with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me", declares Yahweh.

The future—a promise of blessing

18. "Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day when the construction of the temple began, consider:

19. Is there still seed in the granary? Until now the vine and the fig tree and the pomegranate and the olive tree have yielded nothing. From this day on, I will bless you."

Textual criticism

The text of this pericope appears to be in good order. In the Scroll of the Twelve discovered in the caves of Murabba'at (dating from c. A.D. 135), there are two fragments of Haggai: i 12-ii 10 and ii 12-23.¹¹ They contain no variants from the MT of ii 10-19. The LXX also has little variation from the MT. One addition is found in the LXX at the end of ii 14: ἔνεκεν τῶν λημμάτων αὐτῶν τῶν ὀρθρινῶν, ὀδυνηθήσονται ἀπὸ προσώπου πόνων αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐμισεῖτε ἐν πύλαις ἐλέγχοντας, "because of their early burdens: they shall be pained because of their toils: and you have hated him that reproved in the gates". There is no room in the Murabba'at fragment for the inclusion of this addition, nor does it have support from other ancient versions. It appears to be a gloss taken from Amos v 10.

mihyôtām at the beginning of v. 16 is difficult (literally, "since they were"). As Rudolph has observed (p. 45), the plural suffix has no antecedent, and whether it is taken to refer to the day or to the stone, it is redundant. The LXX reads τίνες ἦτε, "what (manner of men) were you?"—apparently from *mah-hēyîtem*. This reading is preferred, and accordingly I have translated, with the RSV, "How did you fare?"

Another difficult expression comes near the end of v. 17, *wē'ên-*

¹¹ P. Benoit, J. T. Milik and R. de Vaux, *Les Grottes de Murabba'at*, DJD II (Oxford, 1961), pp. 202-5.

ʔetkem ʔelay (literally, “and you were not to me”).¹² The LXX translates καὶ οὐκ ἐπιστρέψατε πρὸς μέ. Most of v. 17 is borrowed from Amos iv 9, and is often translated in accord with Amos and the LXX and the versions (Syriac, Targ., Vulg.), “yet you did not return to me”. Generally, then, it is thought that the Hebrew should read *wēlōʔ šabtem ʔelay*.

An alternative, proposed by Sellin (p. 462) and Rudolph (p. 46), is that the phrase should read *wēʔēn ʔittēkem ʔānī* (“I am not with you”) as a contrast to the “I am with you” in i 13 and ii 4. Rudolph argues that the contrast has to do, not with their relationship to Yahweh, but with his relationship to them. But surely the latter is dependent on the former, i.e., if the people will do Yahweh’s pleasure, he will bless them.

Moreover, the MT is upheld by the Murabbaʿat fragment,¹³ and there was almost certainly a genuine use of ʔ with the nominative in classical Hebrew, as P. P. Saydon¹⁴ and J. Macdonald¹⁵ have shown. Saydon regards *ʔkm* as emphatic, and translates “you yourself did not return to me”. Macdonald thinks that ʔ in Hag. ii 17b introduces an appositional phrase, as does the ʔ in the earlier part of the same verse: “I smote you with blight and mildew and hail, (yea) all the work of your hands, but you are not Godward...”¹⁶ (or in smoother English: “but you are/have not turned [back] to me”). Later he notes a use of ʔ with *yš* in the Samaritan Chronicle II, and compares its use with *ʔyn* in Hag. ii 17. I prefer

¹² It is seen by some to be a gloss which contradicts i 13 and ii 14 (“I am with you”), e.g. Ackroyd in M. Black and H. H. Rowley (ed.), *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (London, New York, etc., 1962), p. 643, and in “Some Interpretive Glosses in the Book of Haggai”, *JJS* 7 (1956), pp. 163-76; also K. Marti, *Das Dodekapropheten* (Tübingen, 1904), p. 389, and a footnote in *BHK*. Whether it be taken as a gloss or not does not solve the difficulty of the construction. The apparent contradiction in interpretation will be treated below.

¹³ *wʔyn ʔjkm ʔjly* Only *km ʔ* can be deciphered—enough to identify the phrase and also to uphold the MT.

¹⁴ “Meanings and uses of the particle ʔ”, *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 192-210, esp. pp. 193, 207.

¹⁵ “The particle ʔ in Classical Hebrew: some new data on its use with the nominative”, *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 264-75, esp. pp. 270, 272. Already GKC §§ 117i, m, and 152n, noted that sometimes ʔ serves to introduce or emphasize the nominative, which could be the case with *ʔēn ʔetkem*, but that probably one should read with the LXX *šūbʔkem* for *ʔkm*.

¹⁶ Similarly Petersen, p. 86: “But you did not side with me...” Cf. the final phrase of Hos. i 9: *wēʔānōkī lōʔ-ʔhyeh lākem* (literally, “and I am not toward you”, or as the *RSV*, “and I am not your God”).

to leave the MT as it stands, and since the context does not seem to call for an emphatic “you”, I have taken ʔetkem as an appositional phrase with ʔen (so Macdonald), only I have smoothed the translation and kept the tense in past time, in accord with the earlier part of the sentence and in accord with the LXX: “yet you did not return to me”.

$wēʕad$ “and until/and even”, *v.* 19, has been pointed $wēʕod$ in accordance with the LXX and the Vulgate, and translated “still/yet/as yet/ until now”.

Form criticism

The main arguments for moving ii 15-19 to follow i 15a, as Rothstein and others have done are three. One is the problem of chronology in the text: *v.* 18 talks about the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month in the same breath as the “day that the foundation of the Lord’s temple was laid” (*RSV*), which also is the day that marks the beginning of blessing (*v.* 19). Yet the work was begun in the sixth month (i 1, 14, 15). Therefore, it is thought that the ninth month in ii 18 should be amended to read the sixth month.¹⁷ The second argument is the unlikelihood of a second call to repentance (ii 17), since the people had already repented in i 14 ff. The third argument is the change in address from the third person to the second person between ii 14 and 15.

While these arguments will be referred to (in reverse order) in the exegesis below, it is Koch’s form-critical work (pp. 56-66) which is fatal to Rothstein’s displacement hypothesis. He shows that Haggai, like the earlier prophets, used the form of the salvation-prophecy, though he and Zechariah change it for their own purposes. His study covers the three speeches which are preserved in greater detail, i 1-8, ii 1-7, ii 10-19. Each begins with an exact dating and a word-receiving formula, and the detailed specifications of the addressees, these probably added when the messages were written down. Otherwise, they follow a sequence of three

¹⁷ Rothstein, p. 61, thinks that the month was lost, and since the date corresponds with ii 10, someone assigned it to the same month. He also argues (p. 66) that the glorious promise of a bountiful harvest would not be suitable after the feast of tabernacles (7th month) which celebrated harvest. But such a promise is too late, for most of the harvest is in by then (see below), and for whatever is not yet harvested, the yield is mostly already determined.

parts, past, present and future, each introduced with "thus says Yahweh". The second part each time has a significant modification that marks a turning-point: "But now (*wē^cattā*) thus says Yahweh". Koch argues that the old messenger formula, "thus says Yahweh", is not arbitrarily inserted, but stands in each case at the start of a new section, and also at the end of the speech.¹⁸

Haggai's speech in ii 10-19 agrees step by step in form with i 1-8 and ii 1-7. This pericope lacks the description of those addressed, unless that is to be seen in the priests who are specified in *v.* 11. Then follows a sketch of the unfavourable condition that has existed for a long time with the people (*vv.* 11-14). This is brought out through asking the priests for a *tôrâ* on two questions. The replies are applied to the people in *v.* 14. Next is the turning point, "but now",¹⁹ which brings a call to spiritual awareness (*vv.* 15-17). Finally, there is the future prospect, "I will bless you" (*vv.* 18-19). The concluding formula, "thus says Yahweh", is missing here.²⁰ Koch says that it was probably left out when the message was written down, for the next verse begins, "The word of Yahweh came..."

Haggai has intentionally adapted the salvation oracle to his own purpose, using a fixed form that reappears in the three speeches which are preserved in greater detail. While the appendages to i 1-8 and ii 1-7, and the use of the messenger formula pose some variations to the pattern Koch has observed, I find Koch's outline convincing. Accordingly ii 10-19 will be treated as one message comprised of three parts, past, present and future.

Exposition of the text

The past—a critique of their situation—ii 10-14

This message came to Haggai on 18 December 520 B.C., two months and three days since his last recorded message (ii 1), and

¹⁸ Koch thinks that i 9-11 are a much abridged second speech on the same theme, and therefore out of consideration with respect to form; ii 8-9 may be a similar case (p. 58).

¹⁹ Cf. Chary, p. 12, who sees *wē^cattā* as an abrupt beginning (in ii 15) which denotes a break—no connection of 15-19 with 10-14.

²⁰ "Thus saith the Lord" was also left out at the beginning of *vv.* 15 and 18, though *v.* 17 ends with "declares Yahweh", and *v.* 14 includes the same, perhaps making the formula redundant.

exactly three months since the people began to work on the temple (i 14, 15). Haggai is told to ask the priests for a *tôrâ*, a ruling,²¹ on two questions of holiness. The questions begin with a pun, *šēʾal-nāʾ ʾet-hakkōHĀNim tôrâ lēʾmôr. HĒN...* (cf. *ʾim* in v. 13). The first asks whether holiness can be passed from holy flesh via the fold of a garment to foodstuffs. To this the priests answer, "No." Their response is in line with the priestly tradition in Lev. vi 27-8 concerning the sin offering: that holiness is contagious, but only the second degree is specified.

The second question concerns uncleanness. Can a person, contaminated by contact with a corpse, contaminate foodstuffs? And the answer is affirmative, in accord with the priestly tradition of Lev. xxii 4-6 (cf. also Num. xix 22). The two questions contrast holiness with uncleanness, both concerning contact to the third degree. Uncleanness is passed on to the third degree; holiness is not. In a word, uncleanness is more contagious than holiness.

V. 14 goes on to make a pointed application to "this people and...this nation", whose identity has much been discussed by the commentators. Rothstein (p. 62) takes them to be the Samaritans, "the people of the land" mentioned in Ezra iv 3 (v. 4 Eng.).²² But this is impossible in view of Koch's argument, for if the message is a unified whole (ii 10-19), the blessing pronounced upon the people in v. 19 is appropriate only to the Jews, and therefore they must be the intended recipients of v. 14 as well.

That "this people" refers to the people of Yahweh has good support from usage by other prophets. Ten out of twelve times in Isaiah, *hāʿām hazzeh* is used for God's people and with a nuance of reproach.²³ Twenty-five times out of twenty-nine, the same is true of Jeremiah. For example, in xiv 10, 11²⁴ the phrase appears twice

²¹ In Zech. vii 3 ff., another ruling requested from the priests becomes the occasion for an oracle from Yahweh.

²² Cf. Haggai's reference to "all you people of the land" (ii 4) who are clearly Jews.

²³ *hāʿām hazzeh* in Isa. vi 9, 10, viii 6, 11, 12, ix 15 (v. 16 Eng.), xxviii 11, 14, xxix 13, 14. In xliii 21 *ʿam-zū* is used for God's people, but not negatively. In xxiii 13 *zeh hāʿām* refers to the Chaldeans. Chary, p. 31, found eight occurrences in Isaiah, all of them with reference to God's people and with overtones of reproach.

²⁴ "Thus says the Lord concerning *this people*: 'They have loved to wander thus, they have not restrained their feet; therefore the Lord does not accept them, now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.' The Lord said to me: 'Do not pray for the welfare of *this people*. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and cereal offering, I will not accept them;

pejoratively, and in neither case is the identification of "this people" felt to be necessary. The only other uses of this expression in the prophets are Micah ii 11,²⁵ again with reproach, and Zech. viii 6, 11, 12, all three of these in the expression *šē'ērūt hā'ām hazzeh*, not with reproach but still with reference to the Jews. In all these instances, with one exception (Isa. xxiii 13, to the Chaldeans), the people of God are intended and there is usually a nuance of reproach.²⁶

Even more to the point is Haggai's use of *hā'ām hazzeh* in i 2, "Thus says Yahweh of hosts: This people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of Yahweh." God's people are clearly intended in this reproach of the prophet, and one might expect that *hā'ām hazzeh* in ii 14 is intended for the same group.

In parallel with *kēn-hā'ām hazzeh* is *kēn-haggōy hazzeh*. Rudolph (pp. 49-50) thinks the second phrase is redundant, unless it be taken as a reference to the Samaritans. *haggōy hazzeh* is rare in the Old Testament,²⁷ occurring only five other times, and in all five instances referring to God's people. Four of these are in Jeremiah (v 9, 29, vii 28, ix 8 [v. 9 Eng.]), all these with negative overtones (e.g. three times, "And shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?"; v 9, 29, ix 8). The other Old Testament instance is Exod. xxxiii 12-13. On behalf of a people who have just worshipped the golden calf, Moses says to Yahweh, "See, thou sayest to me, 'Bring up this people'; ... Consider too that this nation is thy people."

but I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence" (Jer. xiv 10-12).

All the examples of "this people" in Jeremiah refer to the people of God. The following are with a nuance of reproach: (iv 11), vi 19, 21, vii 16, 33, viii 5, ix 14, xi 14, xiii 10, xiv 10, 11, xv 1, 20, xvi 5, 10, xix 11, xxi 8, (xxiii 32), xxiii 33, (xxvii 16), xxviii 15, (xxxiii 24), xxxv 16, xxxvi 7, xxxvii 18. Those in parenthesis are less clearly pejorative than the others. The references which are emphatic only, and not with overtones of reproach, are iv 10, xxix 32, xxxii 42, xxxviii 4, lii 28.

²⁵ "If a man should go about and offer wind and lies, saying, 'I will preach to you of wine and strong drink', he would be the preacher for *this people!*"

²⁶ Koch, p. 61, points out that "this" is often used by Haggai without value attached to it, e.g., this temple/house (i 4, ii 3, 9) and this day (ii 15, 18). I have shown that "this people" was nearly always used by the prophets in words of reproach for Israel. As for Hag. i 2 and ii 14 (and for any other instance), the context is finally determinative. Both instances come within messages of reproach.

²⁷ The plural form (*haggōyīm hā'ēlleh*) occurs in the Old Testament twenty-three times for pagan nations (11 in Deuteronomy, 5 in Joshua, 3 in Jeremiah). Cf. also *haggōy hahū'* which appears four times, against pagans in Jer. xii 17, xxv 12, xxvii 8, and for Israel without negative overtones in Jer. xviii 8.

“Nation” and “people” are used together for the same group of persons.²⁸ And, as Ackroyd and Chary have observed,²⁹ there is nothing in Haggai to specify any other people than the Jewish remnant.

Therefore, from the unity of the pericope which form-criticism has shown, from usage of the terms, and from the context in Haggai (i.e., Hag. i 2 and nothing to specify anyone else), I conclude that the priestly *tôrâ* was applied by the prophet to all the remnant in Judah.

The addressees have been identified; now we turn to the content of Haggai's charge to them. As parallelism was used in their naming, so it is also in their charge.³⁰ The first phrase applies the *tôrâ* to all the work of their hands. To judge from the context, this refers to their agricultural activities and their work on the temple site. The second phrase *wa'ăšer yaqribû šām*, is commonly translated, “what they offer there”.³¹ Rudolph has noticed (p. 45) that “there” has no antecedent and accordingly translates, “where they offer”, i.e., the temple site, is unclean. But to take *ăšer...šām* as a substantive is unusual.³² And the reference would have been clear from the context, i.e., the locality of the priestly ruling, presumably the temple. Accordingly I have translated with the *NEB*, “what they offer here is unclean”. Their offerings were representative of the “work of their hands”, and therefore the parallel structure of the two is apt.

There is a question whether Haggai intends ritual holiness³³ or ethical holiness.³⁴ Clearly, the questions put to the priests were ritualistic, involving corpses, holy meat, clothing and foodstuffs.

²⁸ This is the case also in Isa. i 4 and x 6. Cf. Ps. xxxiii 12 and Zeph. ii 9. See H. G. May, “‘This people’ and ‘this nation’ in Haggai”, *VT* 18 (1968), pp. 190-7.

²⁹ Ackroyd (n. 12), pp. 563-4; Chary, p. 31.

³⁰ This argues against Beuken, pp. 71-3, and Chary, p. 33, who would see the end of v. 14 as a later addition. Their deletion has no manuscript support.

³¹ So *RSV* and most, if not all, versions in English, French and German.

³² GKC § 138e: *ăšer* can itself express a substantival idea, e.g. *ba'ăšer hû' šām* “where he is” (Gen. xxi 17). Cf. *el-ăšer* “whither/where” in Judg. xvii 8 and Ruth i 16.

³³ So S. R. Driver, *The Minor Prophets: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Edinburgh, 1906), p. 163, and more recently, Koch, pp. 62-6, and Petersen, pp. 84-5. Petersen says Haggai is calling for the seven-day purification of the altar and temple as referred to in Ezek. xliii 18-25.

³⁴ So May, p. 195; Chary, p. 32; T. N. Townsend, “Additional comments on Haggai ii 10-19”, *VT* 18 (1968), pp. 559-60.

But if the application is ritualistic, there are significant problems with the context. For one, the problem stated in ch. i was selfishness: every man has given his own house priority over the house of God (i 2, 4, 9). For another, some of the work of their hands must have been accepted, for, as Rudolph observes,³⁵ the offerings which presumably were offered on the twenty-first day of the seventh month (which was the last day of the feast of tabernacles, cf. Lev. xxiii 34-6) were acceptable, since on that day the people received the assurance from God that he was with them (ii 1, 4, 5).³⁶ And thirdly, we shall see that blessing will come before the temple has a chance of being finished. Therefore, rather than the uncleanness of an unfinished temple being passed on to the people, the prophet must intend the uncleanness of the people being transmitted to the cult, indeed to all the work of their hands.³⁷ An ethical interpretation will be further borne out in this pericope.

The present—a call for change—ii 15-17

In *vv.* 11-14, the prophet refers to the people using the third person; now in 15-17, he addresses them in the second person. The reason is that he began by talking to the priests about “this people”, and then has turned to continue his message to the people themselves. This is similar to ch. i where he began speaking to Joshua and Zerubbabel and then turned to address the people (i 1-2; cf. *vv.* 4 ff). This need not be construed as the mark of a new occasion.

In accordance with the *RSV*, I have translated this section as a parenthesis between the two calls to “consider from this day on” (*vv.* 15, 18). This is required by the meaning of *wāmā^clā* (literally, “upwards”). The term as used in this reference is given the meaning “backwards” in *BDB*. Then in the *addenda et corrigenda*, the given meaning is “onwards” (pp. 751, 1125). While the term is more commonly used with persons’ ages, there are two other in-

³⁵ p. 49. Cf. also Ezra iii 2-6. The altar of burnt offering was built before construction on the temple began, and the offerings of the feast of tabernacles were made that year already.

³⁶ This counters Petersen’s theory (pp. 84-5) that the problem was an unpurified temple or altar which rendered the sacrifices impure.

³⁷ Still, one may add, with Chary, pp. 32-3, that without being pointed directly against the Samaritans, this message did raise a barrier against all contamination from without.

stances where it is used with dates. One is 1 Sam. xvi 13: Samuel anointed David, "and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward". The other is 1 Sam. xxx 25: those who go to battle and those who stay with the stuff are to share alike in the spoils. "And from that day forward he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day." The required meaning, therefore, is "onwards", and the succeeding statements call the audience to change, in view of their past experience, namely, crop failure which God had sent in judgement.

He asks them how they fared in the days before construction on the temple began (stone on stone, *v.* 15). With grain, the yield was only 50 per cent of that expected; with wine, it was even worse: 40 per cent. Yahweh ordained it this way (*v.* 17), yet they did not return to him. The issue is stated to be repentance. The prophet has in mind the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people. *V.* 17 is nearly all a quotation of Amos iv 9, one of five sections in that chapter that all end with the phrase *wēlō²-šabtem 'āday* ("yet you did not return to me").

Some (see above) think it is inappropriate for Haggai to call the people to repentance at this time, for they were stirred to begin work already in ch. i (*vv.* 12-14; cf. ii 3). And the assurance that Yahweh is with them (i 14, ii 4, 5) presupposes a right relationship with God. But a careful comparison with Zechariah's first message shows that repentance was indeed still an issue after Hag. ii 1-9. "I am with you" comes in Haggai's message on the twenty-first of the seventh month (520 B.C.). Yet in Zechariah's message of the eighth month (520 B.C., Zech. i 1-6), the people are told, "Yahweh was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, Thus says Yahweh of hosts: Return to me, says Yahweh of hosts, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of hosts. Be not like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, 'Thus says Yahweh of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not hear me, says Yahweh" (*vv.* 2-4).

And if some had lost heart in the seventh month (ii 3-5), who is to say that all is well in the ninth month?³⁸ Encouragement to be strong comes yet once again in Zech. viii 9-13, which appears to be dated in 518 B.C. (vii 1-3 cf. viii 18-19). Thus the need of intermit-

³⁸ So Mitchell in H. G. Mitchell, J. M. P. Smith, and J. A. Bewer, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah* (Edinburgh, 1912), p. 66, and Mays, p. 190.

tent urging and particularly the need for repentance in the eighth month (520 B.C.) strongly support the appropriateness of Haggai's call to repentance on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month.

The future—a promise of blessing—ii 18-19

There is one important matter yet to be decided in the third part of Haggai's message. That is the apparent contradiction in *v.* 18 between the twenty-fourth of the ninth month when Haggai is speaking, and the day on which the temple construction began (*RSV*: "the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid"). This difficulty has been one reason for moving *ii* 15-19 so as to fall in the sixth month rather than the ninth (see above). Three solutions have been proposed. Rothstein and others³⁹ have taken *v.* 18b, with perhaps the exception of the last two words, as a gloss. This is without manuscript evidence, and Koch has argued strongly for the unity of *ii* 10-19. Another solution, suggested by Koch (p. 64) and Petersen (pp. 88-90), is to consider the twenty-fourth of the ninth month as the day when the foundation stone was laid. The context raises problems here. The work began three months previously—enough has been done to make the old men weep (*ii* 3). The foundations would probably not have been disturbed when the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. And already some work was done when the people first returned from Babylon, according to *Ezra* *iii* 10. Surely, any foundation laying would have been done before now. In fact, such a ceremony is referred to in *Ezra* *iii* 10-11.⁴⁰

³⁹ Rothstein, p. 58; Marti, p. 389; Sellin, p. 463; Chary, p. 24; Mason p. 22. Rudolph, p. 51, thinks that the ninth month is false, and owes its provenance to carelessness, though he still maintains the unity of the pericope.

⁴⁰ Cf. D. L. Petersen, "Zerubbabel and Jerusalem Temple Reconstruction", *CBQ* 36 (1974), pp. 366-72, and B. Halpern, "The Ritual Background of Zechariah's Temple Song", *CBQ* 40 (1978), pp. 167-90. Halpern argues for the unity of Zechariah's night visions from their allusions to the ritual rededication of temple sites in Mesopotamia. Petersen thinks the rededication day was probably the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of Hag. *ii* 18, reflected in the ceremony of *Ezra* *iii* 10-13. A problem is that Hag. *ii* 10 specifies the second year of Darius (520 B.C.), and *Ezra* *iii* 8 specifies the second year of Cyrus (538 B.C.). While Haggai and Zechariah do not explicitly state a rededication ceremony, Halpern's work on Zechariah's visions surely points in that direction. J. S. Wright, in *The Building of the Second Temple* (London, 1958), p. 17, says it was customary to have more than one foundation ritual for temples and houses. The renewal of work after an eighteen year lapse would be an apt occasion for a second ceremony. *Ezra* *vi* 15-17 records another dedication at the completion of the project (516 B.C.). Cf.

My solution is to leave the date as it is in the text, and not to equate it with the day that rebuilding began on the temple. Three matters call for attention: the meaning of *yussad*, the grammatical construction of *v.* 18, and the context stated in *v.* 19.

yāsad not only means "laying the foundation", but is also used of continuing work in the sense of repairs and renewing. This broader usage is most clearly brought out in 2 Chr. xxiv 27 where *wisôd* is used for Josiah's temple renewal work in xxiv 4, 12 (*lēhad-dēs*).⁴¹ Hag. ii 15 accords with construction work rather than just foundation laying: "Before one stone was placed upon another in the temple of Yahweh..."

I have made a sentence break in the middle of *v.* 18,⁴² as has the *RSV*. In the first half there are two adverbial phrases which begin with *min*, the one in apposition to the other, *min-hayyôm hazzeh wāmā'ēlā* and *mîyôm 'ēšrîm wē'arbā'â latšî'i*—consider "from this day on, (that is) from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month". The second half begins with *lēmin*, marking a *terminus a quo* (BDB, p. 583): "Since the day when the construction of the temple began, consider." The sentence break suits the context of events in Haggai, i.e., it seems that construction had started before the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Also, it makes something of a parallel with *v.* 15. In both, there is first a call to consider from this day on, then a statement of the time period in which past experience should influence their considerations,⁴³ and then a state-

also S. Smith, "Foundations: Ezra iv, 12; v, 16; vi, 3", in I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth (ed.), *Essays in Honour of the Very Rev. Dr. J. H. Hertz* (London, 1945), pp. 385-96. Smith describes two stages of building a temple in Babylon in which a foundation was laid.

⁴¹ Cf. also 2 Chr. xxxi 7 where *ysd* is used for Hezekiah's work on the temple. A. Fernández, "El Profeta Ageo 2 15-18 y la Fundación del Segundo Templo", *Bib* 2 (1921), pp. 206-15, esp. p. 214; F. I. Andersen, "Who Built the Second Temple?", *Australian Biblical Review* 6 (1958), pp. 3-35, esp. pp. 13 ff.; A. Gelston, "The foundations of the Second Temple", *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 232-5. So also Rudolph, p. 46.

⁴² Contra P. A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 129; similarly *v.* 15, p. 124.

⁴³ Cf. Hag. ii 18b with Judg. xix 30: "... Nothing like this has ever happened ... from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day. Consider it ..." As in Haggai, the writer of Judges includes an expression for "consider" after outlining a time interval. The people in Judges were bemoaning the rape-murder of the Levite's concubine by the Benjamites—nothing that bad had happened before. Similarly Haggai says that nothing good has characterized conditions since the construction started on the temple.

ment of conditions during that time. *V.* 15 dealt with the more distant past before construction began: crop failure; *v.* 18 deals with the recent past since construction began: still no sign of blessing.

The context stated in *v.* 19 is appropriate to this translation, namely, that barrenness and want prevail. In Palestine, grain harvest took place from April to June (cf. Josh. iii 14, iv 19). The early rains came at the end of October. Seeding and ploughing followed. This work would be completed by mid-December (Marti, p. 390), before this message was preached. By means of a question, which has often been his style (i 4, ii 3, 11-13, 16), Haggai asks, "Is there still seed in the granary?" The implied answer is, "No", or at least, "Not much", for he goes on to speak of blessing which implies a contrast with the present state of affairs. The last harvest of grain had been skimpy (i 9-11), and by 18 December with seeding finished, the granaries can be expected to be very low. As Rudolph notes (p. 52), this situation is more appropriate for December (the ninth month) than for three months earlier.

Haggai continues by stating the similar situation with the harvest of the orchards.⁴⁴ Grapes, figs and pomegranates were harvested in August and September, and olives from September to December.⁴⁵ Harvest is in, and there is little to show for it.

But from this day on things will be different, for Yahweh promises to bless them. The blessing will come before the temple is finished. Therefore, the prophet's primary concern is for a change in the people rather than in the physical plant. Cultic ritual has been used figuratively to bring into focus the remnant's sinfulness—to make a point for personal and moral holiness.

⁴⁴ *V.* 19b has been translated as a declarative statement rather than an interrogative because of the absence of the interrogative particle *hā* to begin the sentence, and because the usual word order in a verbal sentence (verb-subject) does not obtain here.

⁴⁵ G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (Philadelphia and London, 1957), pp. 180 and 182.