

"The Desired Of All Nations" in Haggai 2:7

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"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. (7) I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come [*ûbâ'û hemdat kol-haggōyīm*], and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord Almighty. (8)'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord Almighty. (9)'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." (Hag 2:6-9, NIV)

Introduction

Two different interpretations of Hag 2:7 are left open by the translators of the above passage. On the one hand ""the desired of all nations"" could be taken as a prophecy of Christ, and mean ""the [One] desired of all nations,"" while on the other hand it could be taken as a preface to the remarks in the following verse about silver and gold, and mean ""the [things] desired of all nations."" Leaving room for both views is not the same as avoiding the issue of how to decide between them.

The Text of the Passage

Consulting the Hebrew (*ûbâ'û hemdat kol-haggōyīm*) in this case only illustrates the depth of the problem because in its present form the sentence does not parse. The verb *ûbâ'û* (lit., "and they will come") demands a plural noun as its subject, while the construct chain *hemdat kol-haggōyīm* (lit., "the desire of all nations") demands a singular verb as its predicate. There is no way to make the sentence grammatically complete without changing one part of it or the other.

Assuming that the plural verb *ûbâ'û* represents the author's original intent, one would expect the construct chain at the end of the clause to be *h^amūdōt* (not *hemdat*) *kol-haggōyīm*, thus, "the [things] desired of all nations". Alternatively, assuming that the singular noun *hemdat* represents the author's intent, one would expect the verb at the beginning of the clause to be *ûbâ* ("and He will come") rather than *ûbâ'û* ("and they will come"). For a summary of Hebrew forms expected under both models see table 1. For those that actually occur see table 2 (below).

Table 1
Possible Hebrew Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	ûbāʾ	ḥemdat kol-haggōyīm
Plural	ûbāʾû	ḥ ^a mūdōt kol-haggōyīm

Table 2
Attested Hebrew Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	...	ḥemdat kol-haggōyīm
Plural	ûbāʾû	...

If the subject and predicate of the above clause were both singular, or both plural, the evidence for one position or the other would be clear. In fact there is good evidence pointing to a messianic and a non-messianic interpretation. The evidence for both is reviewed below.

Nonmessianic Interpretation

The evidence for a non-messianic interpretation of Hag 2:7 comes from two of the ancient versions and from Old Testament passages which use *ḥmdt* (*ḥ^amūdōt*) in reference to inanimate objects such as precious metals. Unfortunately no information that could be used to support either interpretation has survived at Qumran or, in this case, Wadi Murabbaʿât.¹

Ancient versions

The two ancient versions that in one way or another support a non-messianic reading of Hag 2:7 are the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and the Syriac Peshitta.

Greek Septuagint. The Greek is quoted below and then followed by my own literal English gloss.

dioti tade legei kurios pantokratōr eti hapax egō seisō ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai tēn xēran: (7) kai susseisō panta ta ethnē, kai hēxei [sg.] ta eklekta [pl.] pantōn tōn ethnōn, kai plēsō ton oikon touton doxēs, legei kurios pantokratōr. (8) emon to argurion kai emon to chrusion, legei kurios pantokratōr. (9) dioti megalē estai hē doxa tou oikou toutou hē eschatē huper tēn prōtēn, legei kurios pantokratōr: kai en tō topō toutō dōsō eirēnēn, legei kurios pantokratōr (Hag 2:6-9, Greek Septuagint)²

Therefore thus says the Lord Almighty: Once more I will shake the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land. (7) And with them I will shake all the nations, and the choice things [pl.] of all the nations will come [sg.], and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty. (8) The silver and the gold are mine, says the Lord Almighty. (9) Therefore the glory of this last house will be greater than [that of] the first one, says the Lord; and in this place I will give peace, says the Lord Almighty. (Hag 2:6-9, literal English gloss)

Notice that here also, as in the Hebrew, we have a disagreement between the grammatical number of the verb (*hēxei* [sg.], lit. "it will come") and its noun (*ta eklekta* [pl.], lit. "the choice things"). For a summary of Greek forms that might have been used see table 3. To appreciate the unusual nature of those that are attested see table 4.

Table 3
Possible Greek Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	<i>hēxei</i>	ho eklektos (masc.) to eklekton (neut.)
Plural	<i>hēxousi</i>	ta eklekta (neut.)

Table 4
Attested Greek Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	<i>hēxei</i>	...
Plural	...	ta eklekta (neut.)

The plural verb form corresponding to singular *hēxei* would be *hēxousi*. It is possible that the translator was trying to convey a sense of the grammatical problem found in his Hebrew source--if the problem was present in his Hebrew source--although in that case the situations are reversed. In the Hebrew the verb is plural and the noun is singular, while in the Greek the verb is singular and the noun is plural. Nevertheless it is possible to understand something of the difficulty in the original of this clause by reading its Greek counterpart.

The fact that *ta eklekta* "the choice things" is plural in vs. 7 shows that the Septuagint translators applied the term in reference to the "silver and gold" of vs. 8 and not to an individual, messianic or otherwise. Silver and gold would enter the newly rebuilt temple and would give it glory.

This interpretation is further illustrated by another interesting fact about the Septuagint rendering. At the beginning of vs. 9 the translators insert the word *dioti* "therefore." It is true that translating is not the same as listing equivalents in a target language for each successive word in a source document, but the Hebrew conveys no thought that would correspond to *dioti*. It does not prevent us from assuming that the metals of vs. 8 are what vs. 7 and 9 both have in view, if we wish to make that assumption, but it does not require us to do so. The only link between the two verses in the Hebrew is that one comes before the other. The Septuagint, on the other hand, forces a nonmessianic reading of vs. 9 by establishing a definite logical link ("therefore") with vs. 8 and thus goes beyond the sense of the original in a significant way.

Syriac Peshitta. The Syriac Peshitta is based on the Hebrew but has been influenced more or less heavily in individual books by the Greek.³ As a source of insight into the original text it is secondary to the Septuagint.⁴ The Syriac is quoted below and then given a literal gloss.

mtl dhknʳ ʳmr mryʳ hyltnʳ. twb hdʳ zbn mzye ʳnʳ šmyʳ wʳrcʳ. wymʳ wybšʳ. (7) wʳzyc lklhwn
cmmʳ. wnytwn [pl.] rgtʳ [sg.] dklhwn cmmʳ. wʳmlywhy lbyʳ hnʳ šwbhʳ ʳmr mryʳ hyltnʳ. (8)

dyly hw s'm' wdyly hw dhb' 'mr mry' hyltn'. (9) wnhw' rb šwbhh dbyt' hn' 'hry'. tb mn qdmy'. 'mr mry' hyltn'. wb'tr' hn' 'tl šlmy 'mr mry' hyltn'. (Hag 2:6-9, Syriac Peshitta)⁵

Because of this, says the Mighty Lord, yet again I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land (7) and I will shake all peoples and and the desire [sg.] of all peoples will come [pl.] and I will fill this house [with] glory, says the Mighty Lord. (8) Mine is the silver and mine the gold, says the Mighty Lord. (9) And the glory of this latter house will be better than the former, says the Mighty Lord. (Hag 2:6-9, literal English gloss)

Here for the third time we find a disagreement between the grammatical number of subject and predicate in Hab 2:7. The verb *wnytwn* (*w^enaytôn* [Nestorian]/*wenītōn* [Jacobite])⁶ "and they will come" is plural, while the noun *rgt'* (*reggetā*) "desire"--as vocalized in the traditional Nestorian text of the Old Testament--is singular. A plural vocalization using the same consonant letters would be equally possible (**reggātā*), but it is not attested in any source available to me.⁷ See tables 5 and 6.

Table 5
Possible Syriac Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	nyt'	rgt' [regg ^e tā] (fem.)
Plural	nytwn	*rgt' [reggātā] (fem.) rg' [reggē] (masc.)

Table 6
Attested Syriac Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	...	rgt' [regg ^e tā] (fem.)
Plural	nytwn	...

If the lack of agreement between the grammatical number of subject and predicate in both the Greek and the Syriac of Hag 2:7 reflects what the translators were finding in the original, then their renderings indicate that the problem under review has a long history. If it does not reflect what the translators were finding in the original, then we must ask why the Hebrew, Greek, and Syriac all agree in allowing the subject and predicate of this one clause to disagree.

Evidence from Qumran and Wadi Murabba'at

No Haggai scroll has been found at Qumran, but there were some fragments of one in Wadi Murabba'at cave 2 and these include Hag 1:12-2:10 (Mur 88, xxii).⁸ Unfortunately the remains of Hag 2:7 on this scroll are so fragmentary that nothing of any substance can be learned from them. Only two words of vs. 7 are preserved at all--by a single letter in each case and neither of them is entirely clearly. Thus, we have the final letter of *haggōyīm* ("the nations") and the final letter of *habbāyit* ("the house," i.e., "the temple").

Old Testament parallels

It would be possible to vocalize the consonant letters *hmdt*, found in Hag 2:7 (*hemdat* "desire of"), as a plural construct or absolute. In either case the form would be pronounced *h^amūdōt* and could function grammatically as either a noun or an adjective. For the attested plural forms of *hemdâ* see table 7.

Table 7
Examples of Hebrew *hemdâ* as a
Plural Noun or Adjective

Reference	Hebrew	Use	Gloss
Plural Absolute (<i>h^amūdōt/ōt</i>)			
Treasure			
Dan 11:38	ûbaḥḥ ^a mūdōt	Noun	"treasures"
Person			
Gen 27:15	b ^e nāh haggādōl haḥḥ ^a mūdōt	Adjective	"beloved"
Dan 9:23	h ^a mūdōt ʾāttâ	Adjective	"beloved"
Dan 10:11	ʾîš-h ^a mūdōt	Adjective	"beloved"
Dan 10:19	ʾîš-h ^a mūdōt	Adjective	"beloved"
Food			
Dan 10:3	leḥem h ^a mūdōt	Adjective	"dainty"
Vessel			
Ezra 8:27	h ^a mūdōt kazzāhāb	Adjective	"precious"
2 Chr 20:25	ûk ^e lê h ^a mūdōt	Adjective	"precious"
Plural Construct (<i>h^amūdōt/ōt</i>)			
Treasure			
Dan 11:43	h ^a mūdōt mišrāyim	Noun	"treasures of"
Hag 2:7	h ^a mūdōt kol-haggōyīm	Moun	"treasures of"

Whether or not it is also plural, the form *hmdt* in Hag 2:7 is clearly construct. So if *hmdt* in Hag 2:7 is vocalized *h^amūdōt*, there is only one other passage directly parallel to it:

"He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt [*h^amūdōt mišrāyim*], with the Libyans and Nubians in submission." (Dan 11:43)

In Dan 11:43 *h^amūdōt mišrāyim* ("the riches of Egypt") refers to "gold and silver" (cf. "silver and gold" in Dan 11:8) just as it does in Hag 2:8 under the assumption that a nonmessianic interpretation is to be preferred.

Other sources

After the reference to silver and gold in Hag 2:8 the next clause reads as follows: "'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the Lord Almighty" (vs. 9). If Haggai is saying that the glory of the second temple, which reached its

greatest development under Herod, was to be greater than the glory of Solomon's temple because of the way silver and gold were used in its construction, then we must ask whether this condition was ever satisfied. The temple of Herod was certainly a magnificent structure.

It used to be said: He who has not seen the Temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building.⁹

Josephus describes the temple in the following passage as being made of white marble overlaid with gold.

. . . the exterior of the building wanted [lacked] nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. From its summit protruded sharp golden spikes to prevent birds from settling upon and polluting the roof. Some of the stones in the building were forty-five cubits in length, five in height, and six in breadth.¹⁰

A description of Herod's temple which may build on that of Josephus, but adds further details to it, is Ellen G. White's description in her biography of Christ entitled *The Desire of Ages*.

While the westering sun was tinting and gilding the heavens, its resplendent glory lighted up the pure white marble of the temple walls, and sparkled on its gold-capped pillars. From the crest of the hill where Jesus and His followers stood, it had the appearance of a massive structure of snow, set with golden pinnacles. At the entrance to the temple was a vine of gold and silver, with green leaves and massive clusters of grapes executed by the most skillful artists. This design represented Israel as a prosperous vine. The gold, silver, and living green were combined with rare taste and exquisite workmanship; as it twined gracefully about the white and glistening pillars, clinging with shining tendrils to their golden ornaments, it caught the splendor of the setting sun, shining as if with a glory borrowed from heaven.¹¹

But even if Herod's temple were the most beautiful building of its day anywhere--and it might have been--that still would not prove it was more beautiful than Solomon's earlier temple. It would surely be futile to argue that it was. And yet if Herod's temple was not more beautiful than Solomon's, we must ask whether it is appropriate to interpret Hag 2:6-9 as a prediction that it would be. And if we cannot sustain this final feature of the nonmessianic application, there is a question what value all our grammatical arguments in favor of it have. After all the negative evidence is in, if the passage cannot mean what that evidence implies, then it is time to consider other alternatives.

Messianic Interpretation

Just as some facts about Hag 2:6-9 support a nonmessianic interpretation, some also support a messianic interpretation. The evidence again is mixed. The case for a messianic interpretation rests on one ancient version, the literary structure of the passage, those Old Testament passages that use *hmdt* (*hemdat*) as a singular construct form with reference to persons rather than things, and above all on the ways that the passage is applied in the New Testament.

Ancient versions

The Latin Vulgate takes Hag 2:7 as a straightforward prophecy of Christ.¹² The translation at this point, however, is not strictly literal. Instead Jerome translates what he sees is the correct sense of the passage.

Quia haec dicit Dominus exercituum: Adhuc unum modicum est, et ego commovebo caelum et terram, et mare, et aridam. (7) Et movebo omnes gentes, et veniet [sg.] Desideratus [sg.] cunctis gentibus; et implebo domum istam gloria, dicit Dominus exercituum. (8) Meum est argentum, et meum est aurum, dicit Dominus exercituum. (9) Magna erit gloria domus istius novissimae plus quam primae, dicit Dominus exercituum; et in loco isto dabo pacem, dicit Dominus exercituum. (Hag 2:6-9, Latin Vulgate)¹³

Because of these things, says the Lord of Hosts: It is still a short time, and I will shake the heaven and earth, and sea, and dry land. (7) And I will shake all nations, and the One desired [sg.] of all nations will come [sg.], says the Lord of Hosts. (8) Mine is the silver, and mine the gold, says the Lord of Hosts. (9) The glory of this latter house will be greater than that of the former, says the Lord of Hosts; and in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of Hosts. (Hag 2:6-9, literal English gloss)

The verb *veniet* is singular in Latin and the substantive participle *desideratus* is also singular.¹⁴ See tables 8 and 9.

Table 8
Possible Latin Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	veniet	desideratus (masc.)
Plural	venient	desiderati (masc.) desiderata (neut.)

Table 8
Attested Latin Forms

Number	Predicate	Subject
Singular	veniet	desideratus (masc.)
Plural

Literary structure of the passage

Pronoun reference. Notice the following sequence of pronouns spanning Hag 2:6-9: "I will shake the heavens" (vs. 6), "I will shake all nations" (vs. 7), "the desired of all nations will come" (vs. 7), "I will fill this house with glory" (vs. 7), "And in this place I will grant peace" (vs. 9). Here we have: "I will shake," "I will shake," "[He] will come," "I will fill," and "I will grant." It would be possible to argue that only one Agent is responsible for all of the above and in this case the meaning is equivalent to five first person pronouns in succession. The Lord

performs all five actions. Notice that the arrangement is chiasmic, with "[He] will come" at the center of the chiasm.

Time reference. There is a tension between past and future time reference within the broader passage that includes vss. 1-5 as well as 6-9. In vs. 5 the nation's historic deliverance under Moses is referred to and in vss. 6-7 there is a promise of future deliverance on an even larger scale.

"This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and my spirit remains among you. Do Not fear." (Hag 2:5)

"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. (7) 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. (Hag 2:6-7)

The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt (vs. 5a). His Spirit moves upon them as they attempt to rebuild the temple in what was then the present under Persia (vs. 5b). In a little while He will "shake the heavens and the earth" (vs. 6) and "all nations, and the desired of all nations will come" (vs. 7a). The Lord was with Israel in the past, He is with them in the present, and He promises to be with them in the near future in some special sense that is different from the ways He has been with them before. What this sense is requires explanation.

If what God had in mind for the future was only an extension of what He had already done in the past, we would read of His continuing to be with them. But instead, "the desired of all nations will come" (vs. 7).¹⁵ God would no longer be present at a distance--concealing Himself in a pillar of cloud or fire, working silently through the policies of foreign kings to accomplish His purposes. He would be present more immediately than that. He would become one with His people by becoming one of His people. Under this interpretation Hag 2:7 is a prophecy of Christ, who did indeed come soon and whose personal presence filled the temple with a glory that it could never have under any other circumstances (vs. 7b).

Old Testament parallels

Uses of ḥemdâ. There are three passages in the Old Testament where a form of *ḥemdâ* spelled *ḥmdt* is vocalized as a singular construct (*ḥemdat*) and where the reference either can be or is to a person. See table 10.

Table 10
Examples of Hebrew *hemdâ* as a
Plural Noun or Adjective

Reference	Hebrew	Use	Gloss
Singular Absolute (<i>hemdâ</i>)			
Behavior			
2 Chr 21:20	wayyēlek b ^ē lō ^ʔ hemdâ	Noun	"value"
Land			
Jer 3:19	ʔēreṣ hemdâ	Adjective	"desirable"
Zech 7:14	ʔēreṣ hemdâ	Adjective	"desirable "
Ps 106:24	b ^ē ʔēreṣ hemdâ	Adjective	"desirable "
Vessels			
Jer 25:34	kik ^ē lî hemdâ	Adjective	"precious"
Hos 13:15	k ^ē lî hemdâ	Adjective	"precious"
Nah 2:10	k ^ē lî hemdâ	Adjective	"precious"
2 Chr 3:27	k ^ē lê hemdâ	Adjective	"precious"
Singular Construct (<i>hemdat</i>)			
Person			
1 Sam 9:20	hemdat yiśrāʔel	Noun	"desire of"
Hag 2:7	hemdat kol-haggōyîm	Noun	"desire of"
Dan 11:37	hemdat nāšîm	Noun	"desire of"
Vessels			
2 Chr 36:10	k ^ē lê hemdat bêṯ-YHWH	Adjective	"valuable"

The two passages from table 10 which are directly parallel to Hag 2:7 in their use of *hemdat* are 1 Sam 9:20 and Dan 11:37.

"As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel [*hemdat yiśrāʔel*] turned, if not to you and all your father's family?" (1 Sam 9:20)

"He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women [*hemdat nāšîm*], nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all." (Dan 11:37)

Another passage that should be considered is 2 Chr 36:10. There *hemdat* is vocalized the same way as a singular construct noun but is used as an adjective and so does not provide a direct parallel to Hag 2:7.

Moses a type of the Messiah. The reference to Israel's past deliverance from Egypt and to a future deliverance from all oppression in the future brings together the related figures of Moses (who delivered Israel from Egypt) and the Messiah (who delivers the true Israel of God from all oppression). Moses was the first to make the comparison between himself and the promised Messiah.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. (Deut 18:15)

The deliverance motif is found throughout the Old Testament. In Deut 5:15 deliverance from Egypt is given as a reason for keeping holy the weekly seventh-day Sabbath--alongside God's creatorship of the world, which is the reason given in Exod 20:15. On the strength of this parallel, the death of Christ ought to give Christians as much more reason to keep the seventh-day Sabbath now as the deliverance He provided is greater than the earlier one ministered by Moses (Heb 3:3). If a local deliverance from physical slavery was worthy of commemoration, then a spiritual deliverance from sin made freely available to all mankind should be also. In both cases the symbol of rest is appropriate. But with or without reference to this particular example, there is a distinct similarity between the work of Moses and that of Christ that is captured with all its messianic implications in the passage before us.

Contemporary usage. In the vision of the man with a measuring line Zechariah gives us a close parallel to Hag 2:7.

Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him (4) and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. (5) And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.'" (Zech 2:3-5)

In this passage the city is referred to rather than the temple, but the glory that would fill it in both cases derives from the Lord's own presence. The promise would not be fulfilled because Jerusalem was a chosen city, or because the temple was a chosen place, or because the Jews were a chosen people, but because the Lord Himself would come personally to be with His people in His temple in Jerusalem. It was He and not they that would give significance to their efforts at rebuilding.¹⁶

New Testament parallels

Shaking the heavens in the gospels. Christ borrows words from Hag 2:6 in each of the synoptic gospels when He states that the heavenly bodies will be shaken at the end of the age.¹⁷

"Immediately after the distress of those days
 "the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light;
 the stars will fall from the sky,
 and the heavenly bodies will be shaken [*kai hai dunameis tōn ouranōn saleuthēsontai*]" (Matt 24:29)

"But in those days, following that distress,
 "the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light;
 (25) the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken [*kai hai dunameis en tois ouranois saleuthēsontai*]" (Mark 13:24-25)

"Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken [*hai gar dunameis tōn ouranōn saleuthēsontai*]. (27) At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21:26-27)

Thus, for Christ Hag 2:6 had more than local interest. It was not confined to the immediate future from Haggai's point of view, but included last events within its scope.

Shaking the heavens in Heb 12:26. A fourth New Testament reference to shaking the heavens occurs in Heb 12:26, quoted here along with vs. 27-29 which explain the author's understanding of the passage.

At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens [*eti hapax egō seisō ou monon tēn gēn alla kai ton ouranon*]." (27) The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. (28) Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, (29) for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:26-29)

In vs. 26 Hag 2:6 is quoted from the Septuagint with modifications based on what the author wishes to emphasize in the rest of his paragraph. Below the Greek wording of the passage quoted is compared with that in which it appears.

eti hapax egō seisō ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai tēn xēran (Hag 2:6, LXX)
"yet again I will shake the heaven and the earth and the sea and the dry land" (literal gloss)

eti hapax egō seisō ou monon tēn gēn alla kai ton ouranon (Heb 12:26)
"yet again I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven" (literal gloss)

Notice that here as well as in Luke 21:26-27 the shaking of all creation is associated with the second coming of Christ, when the saints receive "a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb 12:28) and when God appears in all His glory as "a consuming fire" (vs. 29) at the end of the age.

Summary. Hag 2:6 is consistently applied in the New Testament to the time of the second coming. Unfortunately there is no direct reference to Hag 2:7.¹⁸

In Hag 2:6-9 the distinction between the two comings of Christ is collapsed. Both are viewed together. At His second coming Christ "will shake not only the earth but also the heavens" (Heb 12:26). The most natural messianic sense of Hag 2:7, however, has to do with the first coming. Christ would fill the earthly temple with a glory greater than silver and gold could ever give it by simply being there. As a child Christ questioned the learned rabbis in the temple (Luke 2:46). As an adult He expelled merchants from its courts (John 2:16; Matt 21:12; Mark 11:15); He taught in its colonades (Luke 22:53), and wept over its unresponsive beauty (Luke 19:41-44). He was Himself the glory of the temple—the central theme of all its ceremonies, the reason for its existence.

Discussion

The strongest reason for adopting a non-messianic interpretation of Hag 2:7 is that the verb $\hat{u}b\hat{a}^{\hat{u}}$ "and they will come" is plural. The text does not say, "and He will come." But if we apply this prophecy in a physical sense to the silver and gold of vs. 8, we are in the position of arguing that Solomon's temple had less physical beauty than Herod's and there is no reason to believe that this was the case.

The strongest reason for adopting a messianic interpretation is that other inspired writers in both the Old and New Testaments take positions that are identical to the messianic claims of the passage under such a model. In the Old Testament alongside Hag 2:7 which says, ""I will fill this house with glory"" (Hag 2:7), we have Zech 2:5 which says, ""I will be its glory within." This is as close a parallel as one could expect apart from direct quotation and the two writers quoted were not only contemporaries of each other but worked side by side on the same project and were dealing with the same issues when they wrote.

In the New Testament Hag 2:6 is applied to the second coming of Christ in both the gospels (Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 21:26) and the book of Hebrews (12:26). There is no direct reference to Hag 2:7, but Matt 23:38 provides such a direct contrast with it that the two passages must be taken together. In Matt 23:37-39 Christ laments Jerusalem's unwillingness to accept Him as its rightful Lord. Then in vs. 38 He says, ""Look, your house is left to you desolate." His presence had filled the temple with glory but now it was being withdrawn, to be seen no more until the next time He would appear in person--leading all the armies of heaven at His second coming.

The vocalization of *hemdat* as a singular noun demanding a singular verb is both equivocal and secondary. It is equivocal because another vocalization ($h^am\ddot{u}d\ddot{o}t$) is equally possible and secondary because in this case we are changing vowel points rather than consonant letters. Vowel points were not added to the text until more than a thousand years after the prophet's lifetime. The noun spelled *hmdt* can be vocalized either $h^am\ddot{u}d\ddot{o}t$ or *hemdat*, as stated above, but the verb $wb^{\hat{u}}$ cannot be vocalized $\hat{u}b\hat{a}^{\hat{u}}$.¹⁹ It can only be $\hat{u}b\hat{a}^{\hat{u}}$. Thus, while the noun can be singular or plural, the verb can only be plural.

The exegete cannot give the evidence from vowel points and consonant letters equal weight. The vowel pointing was added by mediaeval Jewish scholars in order to document pronunciations that had become traditional in the synagogue over the course of centuries. Thus, while the following argument is used to support a position that may prove to be the correct one, it is not a good example of exegetical method:

Shall come. This verb is plural in the Hebrew, whereas its subject, *chemdah* (see above), is in the singular. Some translators have changed *chemdah*, "desire," into *chamudoth*, "desirable things," or "treasures," in order that the subject might agree with the plural verb. However, this destroys the time-honored Messianic import of this passage. If it is necessary to make a change in the Hebrew in order to secure agreement between subject and predicate, the context would suggest that the verb be made singular to agree with the subject, *chemdah*.²⁰

If we take a position on a textual issue, we should have textual evidence for it. Asserting that the text of Hag 2:7 should read $wb^{\hat{u}}$ rather than $wb^{\hat{u}}$ is a textual position, and it could well

be correct. But there is no textual evidence demanding, confirming, or even allowing such a change. On textual grounds Hag 2:7 must be left alone. The verb is simply plural.

Unfortunately, however, a number of questions must remain unanswered if this is the case. How could a singular vocalization of the noun *hmdt* originate alongside an unequivocally plural verb? Conversely, why would a singular vocalization of the noun be retained if the verb was changed from singular to plural at some later time? It is unlikely that even the most bitter form of anti-Christian sentiment could have influenced a Jewish scribe to add a letter to the sacred text if it had been absent originally,²¹ and in any event the evidence of the Septuagint and the Peshitta is against such a possibility. One must assume that the verb *ûbâ'û* was originally plural and reserve judgment on the puzzling question of why its subject is singular.

Conclusion

The difficulty of saying that Herod's temple was more beautiful than Solomon's prevents me from wholeheartedly accepting a non-messianic interpretation of Hag 2:7. And yet the grammatical problems of the passage prevent me from accepting the alternative messianic interpretation as the only one. There are times when emending the text is appropriate, when one has strong textual evidence to support the change. But here there is none. Here we have only an interpretation that we would like to sustain and for which there are significant parallels. But emending the text without textual cause gives a bad lesson in exegetical method, whatever one's motives, and is unacceptable.

It may be, as one writer has said in a different context, that both horns of the dilemma are in fact blunt.²² An argument that the nations desire more things in Hag 2:7 than one is not simultaneously an argument that the list of things they desire must be limited to two (silver and gold). Nor is it the case that we are under obligation to limit the things desired by the nations to ones having only superficial interest. One does not have to be Jewish to feel a deep heart longing for real acceptance with God, or a loathing of sin, or the hope of a coming Redeemer. This fact is illustrated by the later history of the church. Over the centuries there have been vast numbers of spiritually responsive Gentiles, as well as Jewish Christians, whose experience in Christ has been genuine and lasting.

There is a question whether silver and gold are mentioned in vs. 8 to show what the prophet is talking about in vs. 9 (there will be more silver and gold in the second temple than there was in the first) or what he is not talking about in vs. 7 (God will fill the temple with glory independently of any silver and gold used to beautify that structure outwardly). When all the evidence has been weighed I conclude that the things desired by the nations in Hag 2:7 do include silver and gold and that these would adorn the newly constructed temple. Not stopping there, however, we must recognize a desire in every soul at some time in his or her life for the type of full and complete acceptance with God that one can have only through God's Son, Jesus Christ. Both sets of factors are addressed in the passage. It is neither exclusively material nor exclusively messianic in intent.

The thing to be learned from the present discussion is not just that Hag 2:7 can be added to a long list of other Old Testament passages which look forward prophetically to Christ. The messiahship of Jesus does not rest on one passage of Scripture in isolation from others (Luke 24:27), but it does rest crucially on the Scriptures' integrity as a whole. The surest way to establish the one objective is by defending the other. Thus, while one can have an intelligent

faith in Christ independently of whether Hag 2:7 refers to material objects as well as the Messiah, one cannot have an intelligent and mature faith in Christ without the united witness of both testaments.²³

It is much more damaging therefore to establish a precedent for altering the text of a given Old Testament passage to make it say what we want--however noble our reasons for wanting to do so--than it is to leave the passage partly or even wholly unexplained, acknowledging honestly that we cannot account for all the problems we find there.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer lists a fragment containing Hag 1:12-2:10 (Mur 88, see *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Major Publications and Tools for Study*, Sources for Biblical Study, no. 8 [Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977], pp. 41, 42), but the present verse is represented by only two letters and even they are not entirely clear (see n. 8 below).

²*Septuaginta*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

³Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 699-701; Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 80-81.

⁴The direction of influence is Septuagint to Peshitta rather than the reverse (Eissfeldt, *Introduction*, p. 702; Würthwein, *Text*, pp. 63-68).

⁵*The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), Part III, fascicle 4: *Dodekapropheton--Daniel-Bel-Draco*, p. 72.

⁶See Carl Brockelmann, *Syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1951), p. 91; J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 31.

⁷Nineteen examples of feminine *rgt'* are cited in Werner Strothmann, *Konkordanz zur syrischen Bibel: die Propheten* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), part 4: p-t, p. 2336: Jer 25:34; Ezek 24:16, 21, 25; Hos 9:6, 16; Hag 2:7(8) (*rgt'*); Ezek 25:15; Dan 11:38 (*brgt'*); Isa 2:16; Ezek 23:6, 12, 23; Dan 10:3, 11, 19; Hos 13:15; Amos 5:11; Zech 7:14 (*drgt'*). None of the above are vocalized as plurals in my Nestorian Peshitta. Even in Dan 11:38, where a plural sense appears to be unavoidable, the vocalization is singular.

Payne Smith shows both a masculine singular form *reggā* and a feminine singular *reggetā* but no plurals of either gender. Stephan F. Bennett of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon project at John Hopkins University very generously took time to discuss the above problem with me. He points out that a masculine plural form *reggē* does exist, but it is unclear at this point what its relationship is to feminine singular *reggētā*. It could well be that the feminine singular has a corresponding masculine plural, in which case we would not expect to find a feminine plural form **reggātā* even with further searching. But it could also be that a feminine plural was available to speakers and writers of the language and we have simply not found an example of it yet. Either possibility remains open. Of the two, I lean toward the latter. With both genders of singular attested, one's first assumption would be that masculine plural *reggē* corresponds to masculine singular *reggā* and that feminine singular *reggētā* has its own feminine plural not yet attested. If there is in fact a feminine plural, it would have the same consonant letters (*rgt'*) as the attested feminine singular (*rgt'*). The only difference would be in the way the letters are vocalized. Thus, after all the available evidence is considered, the singular vocalization must be presumed to reflect a choice on the part of the translator or editor and not a restriction imposed

by the language. The singular form of the word *regg^etā* therefore shows an intent to convey singular meaning and the original problem of grammatical agreement in this passage remains.

⁸P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, R. de Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 2: Les Grottes de Murabba^cât* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), Planches LXXII; Textes, p. 204

⁹*Babylonian Talmud*, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino Press, 1935), Baba Bathra 4a (p. 12).

¹⁰Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.222 (Loeb 3:269), quoted in C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2 vols. (Mountain View, CA/Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1981/85), vol. 2: *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, p. 15, footnote.

¹¹*The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, Pacific Press, 1898), p. 575.

¹²In the Latin Vulgate Hag 2:7 is Hag 2:8. The last verse of chap. 1 is considered to be the first of chap. 2. Thus, there are only fourteen verses (not fifteen) in chap. 1 and twenty-four verses (not twenty-three) in chap. 2. The passage is here given with the more common English verse numbering system, used also in the other ancient versions cited above.

¹³*Biblia sacra juxta vulgatam Clementinam* (Paris: Desclée, 1947).

¹⁴On the participle used as a substantive see George M. Lane, *A Latin Grammar for Schools and Colleges* (New York: Harper, 1898), sect. 2287, p. 399.

¹⁵Bear in mind that the sentence in Hebrew does not parse (see above).

¹⁶The above interpretation is not a spiritualization of more tangible covenant blessings, although tangible benefits surely did follow from participating in the covenant (Matt 6:23). It is supported by what God told Abram the second time He appeared to him: "After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward'" (Gen 15:1). What is being promised here should be carefully understood. It is not that, if faithful, Yahweh would give Abram great rewards--descendants, a homeland, whatever. Yahweh Himself was the patriarch's "very great reward." The covenant blessings were primarily spiritual, but they carried other benefits with them.

¹⁷The reference in each case is conflate. More than one passage is involved. Thus, Isa 13:10 says, "The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light." And Isa 34:4 says, "All the stars of the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree." But the one passage does not say the heavens would be shaken and the other does not say why the stars would fall like withered figs. Joel 2:30-31 says, "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." But Joel does not state that the heavens would be shaken. The only prophetic source that supplies this particular bit of information is Haggai. From these facts I conclude that in Matt 24:29; Mark 13:25; and Luke 21:26 Christ was drawing on Haggai as well as Isaiah and Joel as He said what He did.

¹⁸For an opposite counterpart see Matt 23:37-39.

¹⁹If the word were spelled *wb[?]*, however, it would be possible to vocalize it *ûbā[?]û*. Thus, the non-messianic interpretation would not be ruled out even by the spelling required to make the messianic interpretation fully available.

²⁰*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 4:1079.

²¹But, according to a very convincing line of argument by Klaus Koch ("Is Daniel Also Among the Prophets?" *Interpretation* 39 [April 1985]: 117-30), anti-Christian sentiment did cause Jewish scholars to move the book of Daniel out of the section called the Prophets and place it among the Writings.

²²Jerry A. Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, The Language and Thought Series (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975; reprint ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 2.

²³At his defense before Festus and Agrippa Paul says, "'King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'" (Acts 26:28). Agrippa took Paul to mean that believing the prophets was a reason for accepting Christianity.