

DAVID, ZERUBBABEL, AND CHRIST IN HAGGAI 2:23 (Eugene Merrill)

The name "Zerubbabel" occurs seven times in Haggai (1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 4, 21, 23), five times as the recipient or intended recipient of divine revelation (1:1, 2:2, 4, 21, 23). Only in this last section is he described as something other than the governor of Judah, namely, as Yahweh's servant (v.23). The implications of this, particularly in a context freighted with apocalyptic language, are most significant.

Following his rebuke of the nation for its moral and spiritual lapses and the consequent economic disasters that ensued, Haggai had disclosed the totally unexpected promise that from that day forward God would bless them (2:19). That blessing, it turns out, will have special fulfillment in an eschatological age in which Zerubbabel somehow will play a major role.

The connection between the promised blessing and Zerubbabel is clear from the chronological datum that the word of Yahweh came to him on the twenty-fourth day of Kislev, the same day on which the promise was made (v.20; cf. vv.10, 18). Moreover, the revelation was delivered to him alone and not to the population at large, a sign that he will be the conduit through which God's favor will be displayed. But in what sense will Zerubbabel be the divine agent? Despite his Davidic ancestry, are the times propitious for this governor of a tiny state to bring to pass the cumulative hopes of all the prophets?

The scenes of cataclysmic upheaval and destruction that portray the collapse of all human kingdoms and the establishment of that of Yahweh are enough to put beyond doubt that Zerubbabel is a type or foreshadowing of a greater one to come, a ruler not just with Davidic lineage but with independent Davidic authority. He will be like Yahweh's signet ring, one chosen to rule on Yahweh's behalf (v.23). In terms identical to those of vv.6-9, Yahweh says he is about to *shake* (thus the participial form of [the word]) the heavens and the earth, a reversal of his work of creation when he brought the heavens and the earth into existence (Ge 1:1; cf. Jer 4:24). Beyond this act, he will overthrow royal thrones, along with the military might of the nations that rely on them (v.22).

The scene here is somewhat different from that in v.7, in which it is said only that the nations will be *shaken* [the same word used in verse 21] but not destroyed. The sequence is that the nations will first acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh and pay tribute to him but then will suffer total defeat by internecine war. The messianic Psalms 2 and 110 are particularly pertinent here in this context of a coming Davidic ruler. Psalm 2, speaking of Yahweh's adopted son, declares that he will be the heir to the nations of the earth (Ps 2:8), the claim to which can be actualized only in the destruction of those nations (2:9). Psalm 110 describes the nations as the Messiah's footstool (Ps 110:1) over which he will reign (110:2), having brought them to submission by God's mighty power (110:5-6).

The NT is not silent on the matter. In Revelation, John describes the coming of Jesus in the eschaton as a warrior who, with the heavenly hosts, will defeat the nations of the earth and



rule over them with an iron scepter. His name will be "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:11-16). The connection between Zerubbabel and the NT Messiah is inescapable, at least in terms of Christian hermeneutical tradition.

The characteristically eschatological phrase "on that day" (v.23) further sets the scene for the identification of Zerubbabel. He is a figure of the last days, one to be called "servant" and "signet." The former epithet immediately calls to mind those texts that feature a coming one who will carry out the will of God by proclaiming the message of reconciliation to the nations both by his words and his atoning death. Isaiah 41:8 speaks of him as "Israel"—one, like Zerubbabel, who is chosen (Isa 41:9). This same combination of servant and chosen occurs in Isaiah 42:1 to describe the servant who will establish justice in the earth (42:4).

The reference to the future Zerubbabel as a signet ring is especially instructive in the light of its only other occurrence in this sense, in Jeremiah 22:24. In that passage Yahweh, addressing Jehoiachin by the name "Coniah;" says that even if he were the signet ring on Yahweh's right hand, Yahweh would pull him off and deliver him over the Babylonians (22:25). Jehoiachin was, of course, Zerubbabel's grandfather (see comment on 1:1), so the connection here is especially noteworthy. But Jeremiah went on to say of Jehoiachin that no descendant of his would ever sit on David's throne—thus, it seems, disqualifying Zerubbabel from rulership (Jer 22:30). And since Jesus was also descended from Jehoiachin (Mt 1:11), is he also not precluded from that royal privilege?

The answer is twofold: (1) Zerubbabel is never explicitly told that he will be king, and (2) the royal lineage of Jesus came to be traced not through Joseph, the descendant of David through Solomon and thus Jehoiachin, but through David's son Nathan (Lk 3:23-38). Historical Zerubbabel thus gives way to eschatological Zerubbabel, the chosen signet ring of Yahweh. It is he who will fulfill the regal purposes of God in the ages to come.