

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Lesson 1: Consider Your Ways: Build the Lord's House -- Haggai 1:1–15

Picture a man coming home at the end of a long day. He kicks off his shoes in a house he is proud of, walls finished, ceiling paneled, everything in its place. He has worked hard for it, and there is nothing wrong with the house itself. But there is a strange ache he cannot name. He plants more, and somehow harvests less. He earns a good wage, and the money seems to leak out of his pocket before the month is over. He eats, and stands up still hungry. Something is off, and he cannot put his finger on it. That man is every one of us at one time or another, busy and tired and oddly unsatisfied, and Haggai walks straight into that ache with a word from God.

The people who first heard Haggai had come back from exile in Babylon. They had returned to Jerusalem with high hopes and a holy assignment: rebuild the house of the Lord, the temple that lay in a heap of rubble. They started well. Then the work stalled. The years slipped by, sixteen of them, and the foundation sat there, weeds growing through the stones, while the people quietly turned their energy toward their own homes and their own comfort. Their excuse was reasonable enough on the surface: the time has not yet come, they said. Not now. Later. When things settle down.

Then God speaks, and He does not scold so much as He invites them to stop and look honestly at their own lives. Twice He says it, like a parent gently turning a child's face toward the truth: Consider your ways. Give careful thought to where your days are going. Is it a time for you to live in your finished houses while my house lies in ruins? Notice He does not begin with their religious failure. He begins with their frustration, the sense that nothing quite works, and He traces it back to its root. When God is not first, nothing else falls into place. The center will not hold when the center is empty.

This is not first of all a lesson about bricks and mortar. It is a lesson about what sits on the throne of a life. The temple was where God met His people; today His house is His people, the church, and the question Haggai presses is the question Jesus would later press in His own words: seek first the kingdom of God. So read this short chapter slowly, and let it do its gentle, searching work. There is an honest diagnosis here for the tired and scattered heart, and at the very end there is a promise worth more than any paneled house: I am with you, declares the Lord.

Group Discussion: The people said, "The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord" (Haggai 1:2). What are some of the reasonable-sounding ways we tell ourselves that wholehearted devotion to God will have to wait until later? Why is "later" such a dangerous word in the life of faith?

Personal Reflection: God told the people to “consider your ways” (1:5, 7). If you traced the frustration or restlessness in your own life back to its root, where might you find that you have quietly put your own house first and God’s house second? Be specific with yourself.

Read Haggai 1:1–15

Study Questions

1. The word of the Lord comes through Haggai to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest (1:1). What does it tell us about God that He does not abandon His discouraged people to their stalled obedience, but sends His word to stir them back to the work? What does this reveal about how God deals with His people?
2. The people had time, energy, and money for their own paneled houses, but not for the house of God (1:4). If someone studied your calendar and your spending for the last month, what would they conclude that you have actually put first? Where is the gap between what you say matters most and where your time and resources actually go?
3. Three times in this chapter God says, “Consider your ways” (1:5, 7) and points to harvests that disappoint, food that does not satisfy, and wages that leak away (1:6). What is God teaching about the futility that follows when His people push Him to the margins? How is this frustration an act of His mercy rather than mere punishment?
4. Haggai names the quiet drift honestly: “each of you busies himself with his own house” (1:9). What is the “own house” that most easily absorbs your attention and energy right now, the thing you build first and protect most? Be honest about what it is.

5. God says the heavens withheld their dew and the earth its produce, and that He had “called for a drought” (1:10–11). What does this teach about God’s active hand in the circumstances of His people, and about His willingness to let us feel the emptiness of misplaced priorities so that we will turn back to Him?
6. When the people finally obeyed, they did not wait to feel inspired; they simply got up and went to work on the house (1:12, 14). Where in your walk with God are you waiting to feel ready before you obey? What would it look like to start obeying this week before the feelings arrive?
7. The text says Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant “obeyed the voice of the Lord” and “the people feared the Lord” (1:12). How are reverent fear of God and glad obedience related here? Why does a low view of God so often show up as a casual approach to His commands?
8. Haggai’s central appeal is, in effect, the same as Jesus’ call to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). What is one concrete area where seeking God first would reorder your priorities, your money, or your week, and what is the first step you could take?
9. Into a discouraged, half-hearted people God speaks the great promise, “I am with you, declares the Lord” (1:13), and then “stirred up the spirit” of the leaders and the people to work (1:14). What does it mean that the same God who calls us to the work also empowers and accompanies us in it? How does God’s presence change the nature of obedience from grim duty into glad partnership, and how does this guard us against thinking we build His house in our own strength?

10. Look back across the whole chapter, from the people's excuse to their renewed work and God's promise to be with them. Name one specific way the Lord is calling you to "consider your ways" and put His house first this week, and how the promise "I am with you" gives you courage to begin.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:31-33, seeking first the kingdom of God and trusting Him for the rest; Luke 14:28-33, counting the cost and finishing what we begin for the Lord; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, the people of God as His temple today; Proverbs 1:7, the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom; Matthew 28:20, the risen Christ's promise to be with His people always.

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