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HAGGAI

A 4-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 4 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

Consider Your Ways — Haggai 1:1–15

Scripture Scope: Haggai 1:1–15 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

PARTICIPANT STUDY EDITION

Synchronized Section-by-Section with the Leader Guide Edition · Includes Group Reflection Workspace

Haggai — 4-Week Group Bible Study (Participant Study Edition)

Week 1: Consider Your Ways (Haggai 1:1–15)

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- **The title:** The book is named for its prophet, Haggai, whose name is commonly connected with the Hebrew word chag, 'festival' or 'feast' (suggestions that the name reflects birth during a festival remain conjectural). He is named alongside Zechariah in Ezra 5:1 and 6:14.
- **The setting:** After Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC, his restoration policy permitted Judean exiles to return and rebuild the temple; the initial return is commonly dated to 538–537 BC (Ezra 1). The returnees rebuilt the altar and laid the temple foundation, but opposition, discouragement, limited resources, and shifting imperial conditions contributed to a long delay (Ezra 4–5 arranges opposition material thematically as well as chronologically, so the exact sequence should be stated cautiously). The temple project remained substantially stalled for roughly fifteen to sixteen years before Haggai and Zechariah urged the community to resume construction in 520 BC, while many had built their own homes (Ezra 3–4). In 520 BC, the second year of King Darius, Haggai brought four dated messages over about four months.
- **The main theme:** Honoring God's priorities when the returned community neglected his temple. Haggai calls a discouraged people to rebuild the LORD's house—without equating every modern church project with Haggai's assignment—promises that he is with them, and points ahead to a greater glory and a chosen king.
- **The main characters:** The LORD of hosts, the prophet Haggai, Zerubbabel the governor (a descendant of David), Joshua the high priest, and the remnant of the people.
- **The structure (four dated messages):**
- Consider your ways and build the house (1:1–15).
- Be strong and work; the latter glory (2:1–9).
- Clean and unclean, and blessing from this day (2:10–19).
- The LORD's chosen signet ring (2:20–23).
- **Why it matters:** Haggai speaks to anyone who has let God's priorities slide behind their own. It shows that God's presence is the ground of our work, that small beginnings are not to be despised, and that God keeps his promise to David. It points to Jesus, the greater temple and the Son of David, in whom God dwells with his people.

How This 4-Week Study Works

You may notice this study is shorter than our usual eight weeks. Even though we are 8weekbiblestudy.com, stretching Haggai to eight weeks would have left it thin on content, and we never want to trade quality for quantity.

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, each week of Haggai invites you to move with a prophet through four dated messages, from a stalled house to a chosen king together through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.

- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Haggai and the ancient Near Eastern world.
- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV. Haggai is short (38 verses), so the study prints only a small number of verses and retells the rest in its own words. The book speaks of crop failure, drought, and the shaking of nations; the study handles these with care, as a call to consider and to hope, not as a claim that every hardship is a punishment.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Haggai:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 4-Week Haggai Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**Consider Your Ways** (1:1–15)	These People Say the Time Has Not Yet Come (1:1–11) / I Am with You (1:12–15)	God's kingdom, God's presence, and the temple fulfilled in Christ
2	**Be Strong and Work** (2:1–9)	Who Saw This House in Its Former Glory? (2:1–3) / The Latter Glory of This House (2:4–9)	Be strong and work, a shaken heaven and earth, and the latter glory
3	**From This Day On I Will Bless You** (2:10–19)	Ask the Priests About the Law (2:10–14) / From This Day Onward (2:15–19)	A people made clean in Christ, and blessing from this day
4	**My Servant Zerubbabel** (2:20–23)	I Will Shake the Heavens and the Earth (2:20–22) / A Signet Ring (2:23)	The preserved Davidic line and Jesus the greater Son of David

WEEK 1 OF 4

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · HAGGAI 1:1–15

Week 1: Consider Your Ways

Scripture Scope: Haggai 1:1–15 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Haggai 1:2; 1:4–5; 1:8; 1:12–13 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: Consider Your Ways (Haggai 1:1–15)

Opening

In the previous study, Zephaniah ended with God's promise to bring his people home and restore their fortunes. Between that promise and this book lie Jerusalem's fall, the long exile, and the return under King Cyrus of Persia. The exiles came home, rebuilt the altar, and laid the foundation of the LORD's house. Then opposition came, the work stopped, and the years went by. Now, in 520 BC, the word of the LORD comes through Haggai to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest.

The people are saying the time has not yet come to rebuild. So the LORD asks a pointed question: is it time for you to live in your paneled houses while my house lies in ruins? "Consider your ways." They have sown much and harvested little; nothing satisfies. Go up, bring wood, and build. And then something remarkable happens. The leaders and the people obey. They fear the LORD. And the LORD sends them one short message: "I am with you."

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Haggai 1:1–15 (the first dated word through Haggai to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the people's claim that the time has not yet come to rebuild, the LORD's question about paneled houses and a ruined house, the call to consider your ways, the command to build, the obedience of the remnant, the LORD's message "I am with you," and the stirring of their spirits to begin the work)
Focal Passages	Haggai 1:2; 1:4–5; 1:8; 1:12–13
Literary & Structural Anchor	The book marks its messages by the calendar, and this first word comes on the first day of the month. "These people" (1:2) become "the remnant of the people" who obey (1:12). "Consider your ways" sounds twice (1:5, 7), framing the emptiness of their labor and the command to build (1:8). The same word, "house," covers their paneled homes and the LORD's ruined house. "I am with you" (1:13) is the hinge of the book and will be heard again in Week 2.
Big Idea	When God's people put their own comfort ahead of his honor, he calls them to consider their ways, and when they obey, he assures them that he is with them.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Call:** Understand Haggai's first message, the stalled house, and the LORD's promise "I am with you."
HEART	**Consider Your Ways:** Learn to look honestly at postponed responsibilities in light of the returned community's neglect of the temple, without equating every modern church project with Haggai's assignment.
HANDS	**Take Up Clear Responsibility:** Take one safe, concrete step toward a responsibility grounded in Scripture, an acknowledged commitment, or a trustworthy calling confirmed in community.

Opening Frame: Consider Your Ways

Zephaniah ended with the LORD rejoicing over his people and promising to gather them home. Haggai picks up the story after that homecoming. After Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC, Judean exiles began returning around 538–537 BC and laid the foundation of the LORD's house, but opposition, discouragement, limited resources, and shifting imperial conditions contributed to a long delay of roughly fifteen to sixteen years while many built their own homes. Haggai is a short book of four dated messages delivered over a few months in 520 BC, and this is a 4–Week study, one message each week. This week the LORD answers the people's excuse that the time has not yet come and calls them to consider their ways. Then comes a short message that changes everything. The question for this week: what are we putting ahead of God's priorities, and what difference does his presence make? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): What factors can cause a worthwhile project to stall, and what helps a group distinguish a wise delay from avoidable postponement?

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Home from Exile, with the Work Stalled (Haggai 1:1–15)

Entering the World of Haggai and the Returned Exiles

1. Historical Background

After Cyrus captured Babylon in 539 BC, his restoration policy permitted Judean exiles to return and rebuild the temple; the initial return is commonly dated to 538–537 BC (Ezra 1:1–4). They rebuilt the altar and laid the temple foundation, some shouting for joy and some weeping (Ezra 3:8–13). Opposition, discouragement, limited resources, and shifting imperial conditions contributed to a long delay (Ezra 4–5 arranges opposition material thematically as well as chronologically, so the exact sequence should be stated cautiously) until construction resumed in 520 BC, the second year of Darius (Ezra 4:24). Haggai and Zechariah spoke into that stoppage (Ezra 5:1–2).

2. Cultural Setting

The first day of the lunar month (the New Moon) was often marked by worship and public assembly in Israel (Numbers 28:11–15), making it a fitting day to address the leaders and community, though Haggai does not explicitly describe a festival gathering here. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, served as governor under Persia; Joshua was the high priest. The word comes to the civil and priestly leaders together, and then to the people.

3. Literary Structure of Haggai 1:1–15

- **The dated word to Zerubbabel and Joshua** (1:1)
- **The time has not yet come** (1:2–4)
- **Consider your ways** (1:5–7)
- **Go up and build** (1:8)
- **Much expected, little received** (1:9–11)
- **The remnant obeys** (1:12)
- **"I am with you"** (1:13)
- **The LORD stirs their spirits** (1:14–15)

4. Key Themes

Priorities; God's honor; considering our ways; obedience; God's presence; the remnant.

5. Theological Considerations

The temple was the covenant center of worship and the place where God caused his name and glory to dwell, but God was never confined to the building (1 Kings 8:27). The point is not that buildings matter more than people, nor is Haggai a template for every modern church building project; rather, a people who had found time for their own houses had neglected the house God commanded.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The drought and failed harvests (1:6, 9–11) recall the covenant warnings of Deuteronomy 28. Haggai speaks them as a call to consider, not as a diagnosis of every hardship. About three weeks pass from the first word to the start of work (1:1, 15).

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: The people had come home, laid a foundation, and then stopped. What causes good beginnings to stall?

1.2 Q2: Zerubbabel was a descendant of David, and Joshua was the high priest. Why might it matter that God's word comes to both civil and religious leaders together?

1.2 Q3: Haggai marks each message by its date. What difference does it make that God speaks into a particular time and place?

Section 1.3

Movement 1: These People Say the Time Has Not Yet Come (Haggai 1:1–11)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Summary of Haggai 1:1** — In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through Haggai to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest.
- **Reader 1: Haggai 1:2–4** (focal passage) — The people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house. The LORD asks whether it is time for them to live in paneled houses while his house lies in ruins.
- **Reader 2: Haggai 1:5** (focal passage) — Therefore the LORD of hosts says: consider your ways.
- **Summary of Haggai 1:6–7** — They have sown much and harvested little; they eat and drink but are never satisfied; their wages go into a bag with holes. Consider your ways.

- **Reader 3: Haggai 1:8** (focal passage) — Go up to the hills, bring wood, and build the house, so the LORD may take pleasure in it and be glorified.
- **Summary of Haggai 1:9–11** — They looked for much, and it came to little, because the LORD's house lay in ruins while each ran to his own house. So the LORD called for a drought on the land and its harvest.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Haggai 1:2:** "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD."
>
> **Haggai 1:4:** "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?
>
> **Haggai 1:5:** Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways.
>
> **Haggai 1:8:** Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.

Teaching Narrative: These People Say the Time Has Not Yet Come

1. A Dated Word (Haggai 1:1)

The LORD speaks to the governor and the high priest on a particular day.

2. A Delayed House (Haggai 1:2–4)

The people have declared that the LORD's house can wait while their own houses are finished.

3. Consider Your Ways (Haggai 1:5–7)

The LORD calls them to look honestly at their lives: much effort, little satisfaction.

4. Go Up and Build (Haggai 1:8)

The constructive command: build, that the LORD may take pleasure in it and be glorified.

5. Much Expected, Little Received (Haggai 1:9–11)

Their labor came to little while the LORD's house lay in ruins.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" (1:2). What reasons might the people have given for waiting?

1.3 Q2: "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" (1:4). What does this question reveal about the people's priorities?

1.3 Q3: What does 'consider your ways' require the returned community to examine, and what keeps reflection from becoming either defensiveness or unhealthy self-condemnation?

1.3 Q4: What connection does Haggai draw between the community's misplaced priorities and its frustrated labor? Why should this passage not be used to diagnose another person's depression, poverty, debt, or dissatisfaction?

1.3 Q5: "Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified" (1:8). What does it mean to live so that God takes pleasure and is glorified?

Section 1.4

Movement 2: I Am with You (Haggai 1:12–15)

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Haggai 1:12** (focal passage) — Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the words of Haggai, as the LORD had sent him, and the people feared the LORD.
- **Reader 2: Haggai 1:13** (focal passage) — Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke the LORD's message to the people: "I am with you, declares the LORD."
- **Summary of Haggai 1:14–15** — The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, of Joshua, and of all the remnant, and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

Haggai 1:12: Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

Haggai 1:13: Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, “I am with you, declares the LORD.”

Teaching Narrative: I Am with You

1. The Remnant Obeys (Haggai 1:12)

Governor, priest, and people obey together and fear the LORD.

2. "I Am with You" (Haggai 1:13)

The LORD's own message to a people who have begun to obey.

3. Stirred Spirits (Haggai 1:14–15)

The LORD stirs their spirits, and within about three weeks the work begins.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: The remnant "obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet" (1:12). What stands out to you about how they responded?

1.4 Q2: "And the people feared the LORD" (1:12). What does it mean to fear the LORD, and how is that different from being afraid of him?

1.4 Q3: "I am with you, declares the LORD" (1:13). Why do you think God's first word after their obedience is a promise of presence?

1.4 Q4: What actions are attributed to the LORD, and what actions are attributed to the leaders and people in Haggai 1:12–15?

1.4 Q5: What does the community's response reveal about taking a clear command seriously, and when might faithful obedience still require preparation, counsel, safeguarding, or legal compliance?

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: God's Kingdom, God's Presence, and the Temple Fulfilled in Christ

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

Haggai first calls a returned community to rebuild the physical temple in Jerusalem. The New Testament reveals Jesus' body as the temple and describes his people as a Spirit-built dwelling. This is a canonical development, not permission to bypass Haggai's original command or turn it into a modern building campaign. Jesus calls his followers to seek God's kingdom first (Matthew 6:33); he is Immanuel, God with us, who promises to be with his people always (Matthew 1:23; 28:20), he spoke of his own body as the temple (John 2:19–21), and in him believers are being built together into a home where God lives by his Spirit (Ephesians 2:19–22). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. Seek First the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33)

Jesus calls his followers to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, trusting the Father for their needs. The call is about God's honor, not a fundraising slogan.

2. God with Us (Matthew 1:23; 28:20)

The Son is Immanuel, God with us, and he promises his presence to the end of the age.

3. The Temple of His Body (John 2:19–21)

Jesus spoke of his own body as the temple, raised in three days.

4. A Dwelling Place for God (Ephesians 2:19–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5)

The church is being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit, living stones in a spiritual house.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Haggai 1:13:** Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, “I am with you, declares the LORD.”

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: What shared priority appears in Haggai's call to honor the LORD's house and Jesus' call to seek God's kingdom first? What distinct covenant settings should remain?

1.5 Q2: What continuity do you see between the LORD's presence with the temple builders and Jesus' promise to remain with his disciples in their mission? What distinct setting does each promise retain?

1.5 Q3: Paul says believers are "being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). How does this change the way you think about God's house today?

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	When God's people put their comfort ahead of his honor, he calls them to consider their ways and to build, and when they obey, he assures them, "I am with you."
HEART	In Christ, God is with us always, and his people are being built into a dwelling place for him.
HANDS	Faith considers its ways honestly, seeks first God's kingdom, and takes up the work he gives, resting in his presence.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: Is there a clear scriptural responsibility, acknowledged commitment, or community-confirmed task that you have postponed? What safe first step would be appropriate?

1.6 Q2: What is one practical way to align time, attention, work, or resources with a clearly identified responsibility this week, without comparing contributions or pressuring anyone financially?

1.6 Q3: What does the LORD's promise 'I am with you' contribute to the community's obedience and courage in this passage?

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, Haggai called the returned exiles to consider their ways and rebuild the LORD's house; the leaders and people obeyed, and the LORD assured them, "I am with you."

Transition: The work has begun. Next, a month later, some who remember the old temple are discouraged, and the LORD speaks again: be strong, work, and do not fear.

Week 2 Overview — Be Strong and Work (Haggai 2:1–9): Movement 1, Who Saw This House in Its Former Glory? (2:1–3), covers the second dated word and the discouragement of those who remembered Solomon's temple. Movement 2, The Latter Glory of This House (2:4–9), covers the call to be strong and work, the Spirit remaining among them, the promise that God will shake the nations, and the latter glory of this house. The Canonical Horizon traces a shaken heaven and earth and the glory of God in Christ.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Haggai 2:3
- Haggai 2:4–7
- Haggai 2:9

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

> **Closing Group Prayer**
>
> LORD, you call us to consider our ways. We confess the times we have put our own comfort ahead of your honor. Thank you that you stir the hearts of your people and that you are with them. We pray for leaders and members of our church to work together in obedience to you. Thank you for Jesus, God with us, the true temple. Give us willing hearts to take up the work you give us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.