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Haggai: An Inductive Bible Study

Student Guide



The Heights Church Adult Sunday School

“Work, For I Am with You...”

Welcome to a series on one of the more obscure books in the entire Bible. I must myself admit that I did not remember what Haggai was about before beginning this study, though this is not the first time I have read it. Needless to say, it did not leave the instant impact that reading Christian favorites such as Isaiah or Romans usually do for me. And this is not because it is small; many of my favorite books of the Bible are quite short. I probably did not remember the message of Haggai for a few reasons: 1) Christians do not often study or discuss it, 2) it is difficult to understand, and 3) I have never taken the mental effort to fully understand its message.

However, what we all must keep in mind is what Paul said to Timothy when speaking of the OT of which Haggai is a part: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16 ESV).” The Book of Haggai may be obscure (in the sense that it is not well known), but it is useful for every one of these purposes. If we will commit ourselves to do the hard work of searching this little-read book, we will find that there are treasures to be had.

This searching work is exactly what we will set out to do in this __ week inductive study. We will not focus on what others have had to say about the Book of Haggai, though their insights may be helpful and will be incorporated at times. Rather, we will probe the text itself to find the gold within, looking and asking questions and then looking again until we see what is really there and what we didn’t see at first. My goal is that, whether you are new to studying the Bible or have been doing so longer than I have been alive, you might use this study as a chance to grow in not just your knowledge of Haggai, but in your ability to read, understand, apply and live out the Bible for yourself. So I invite you to join me in the hard work of deep Bible study, knowing that, just as Haggai encouraged the returned exiles, we also can “work, for (he) is with (us) (Hag 2:4).”

A Word on Using This Study Guide

When it comes to studying Scripture, nothing can fully replace reading it ourselves. Thus, the best help to this class will be to read Haggai yourself before the class begins and to read the relevant passages recommended each week. The more study you put in, the more you are likely to get out of this class. That being said, everyone is welcome to attend and participate in the study regardless of how much time he or she is able to put into it out of class. I only want to stress that these materials are here to allow anyone who hopes to get the most possible out of this study to be able to do so.

The background, outline, and supporting materials are intended for this kind of study outside of class. The sections marked by each week of the class are intended for your benefit during class time especially.

Background of the Book of Haggai

Why Is It Called Haggai?

- The book is titled after the biblical prophet by the same name.

Canonical Placement

- In English Bibles, Haggai is near the end of the OT. It is part of what are considered the “Minor Prophets (Hosea–Malachi),” named not for their lesser importance, but their shorter length. In the Hebrew ordering of the OT, Haggai occurs near the end of the Prophets (נְבִיאִים) (specifically, in a group called the “Latter Prophets”). The book is part of a smaller grouping in the Hebrew Bible called simply “The Twelve.”

Genre

- Haggai is a collection of prophetic utterances. There are small narrative elements, but they are short and essentially serve to give context to Haggai’s prophecies.

Authorship

- There is no real way to know who collected and wrote down Haggai’s prophecies. It is possible he had followers (as many prophets did) or a scribe (such as Jeremiah had with Baruch [Jer 36:4]), but this is simply guesswork. The important matter is that the prophecies come from Haggai, and we have no compelling reason to question this.

Date

- The events of Haggai take place between August 29th, 520 B.C. and December 18, 520 B.C.,¹ a span of less than four months.
- Similarly to the question of authorship, attributing a date to the writing of Haggai is pure guesswork. There are no references or fixed dates which are mentioned which occur after the events of the book, so the actual composition could have been anywhere from the same day to centuries later. More likely, the work would have been written down within a generation, while there were still witnesses to testify to its events and contents.

The Prophet Haggai

- All we know of Haggai the person comes from the biblical witness. He, like his contemporaries, was a returned exile from Babylon. The Book of Ezra tells of how Haggai, along with his fellow biblical author-prophet Zechariah, encouraged the exiles to resume building the temple (Ez 5:1; 6:14).

Historical Background

- After many long years of covenant unfaithfulness, God finally brought the promised curses (Deut 28:45–57) of said covenant in 586 B.C. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people were carried off to Babylon to live as exiles (2 Kgs 25).
- After the Babylonians are defeated by the Persians, King Cyrus of Persia allows the exiles to return to Jerusalem and makes provisions for them to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1). The exiles begin to rebuild the temple not long after returning and were able to lay its foundation (Ezra 3–4).
- The project was interrupted by adversaries from Israel's neighbors (Ezra 4), and the project stood unfinished all the way up until the prophecies of Haggai in 520 B.C.

¹ Robert Alden, "Haggai," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 572.

Major Themes

- Covenant
 - Haggai, like all the prophets, is first and foremost a *covenant enforcer*.² That is, he does not *mainly* or *only* make predictions; his primary concern is that the people of Israel maintain covenant faithfulness. Thus, he and the other prophets remind the people of what Yahweh has commanded, the consequences for disobedience, the blessings of faithfulness to the covenant, and will predict the covenant curses based on their breaking of the covenant. Thus, though the prophets were genuinely “carried along by the Spirit (2 Pet 1:21)” in making predictive prophecies, they were not completely new either. Much of what we find in the prophets goes back to covenants already in place in the history of Israel. We see this theme come out more or less explicitly in Hag 2:5, but the specter of the people’s predicament as a result of their forefathers’ covenant unfaithfulness stands over the whole book and serves as further reason to obey and fear Yahweh.
- Obedience
 - Both the blessings and curses that come from obedience (or lack thereof) to God are highlighted heavily in this book. The disobedience of the people in their neglect of the temple is given as the reason for their current drought and blight (Hag 1:9). Haggai assures them that this condition will end contingent on their continued obedience (2:15–19).
- The Sad State of the Remnant Community
 - Despite seeing what happened to their people due to obedience, there are many clues in Haggai that the remnant has not learned the necessary lesson sufficiently. They abandoned the temple project while fixing up their own houses (Hag 1:2–3), they need lots of encouragement (and warning) to finish the project (e.g. 2:4), and Yahweh even calls them an unclean people (2:14). These factors make clear that God’s blessing his people, even in the midst of their finishing the work and obeying, does not come because these people are worthy of it.

² I take this term from Jason DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017), 45.

- Messianic Hope
 - There are hints in Haggai that the restoration of the temple is a precursor to a much greater temple to come, namely the coming of the Messiah and the bringing in of a people from all the nations of the earth. The promise to Zerubbabel especially points to the expectation of a Greater Son of David to come.

The Book of Haggai's Place in Scripture

Connection(s) to the OT

- The events of Haggai are within the broader story of the Book of Ezra. Both books can be read in light of one another.
- As well, the prophet Zechariah prophesies at the same time as Haggai and speaks to many of the same issues, including very similar predictions (e.g. Zech 4).
- There are also connections to the covenant stipulations of Deuteronomy and Exodus. Exodus contains instructions for building the temple (Ex 25–31) which Haggai may refer to (Hag 2:5), and Deuteronomy sets the foundation for the blessings and curses connected to covenant obedience (Deut 28).
- Finally, the promises to Zerubbabel connect to the promise to David to have a royal dynasty (2 Sam 7) and the removal of this privilege from Jehoiachin (Jer 22:24).

Connection(s) to the NT

- Haggai is quoted in Heb 12:26–28. The specifics are discussed especially in the textual notes, but the main connection is that the author of Hebrews connected a prophecy in Haggai to the eschatological end of the age.
- The Messianic promises find their fulfillment in Christ, who makes his Church a new temple (1 Cor 3:16). As well, Zerubbabel is explicitly mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:12–13; Luke 3:27).

Outline of the Message of Haggai

- I. Haggai in a Sentence:
 - a. Yahweh commands Zerubbabel, Joshua and the remnant to rebuild his house in order that he might be glorified.
- II. Introduction: What the People Were Saying (And When They Were Saying It) [1:1–2]
 - a. Date of the 1st prophecy (1a)
 - i. i.e. August 29th, 520 B.C.³
 - b. Yahweh sends word to Zerubbabel and Joshua through Haggai (1b–d)
 - c. Yahweh Summarizes the Setting (2)
 - d. Section in a Sentence:
 - i. Yahweh sends Haggai the prophet to the remnant of Israel and her leaders in order to rebuke them for putting off rebuilding the temple.
 - e. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. God notices when we make excuses and delay obeying him.
- III. Set Your Heart on Your Ways and Build! [1:3–11]
 - a. The state of Yahweh's house and the houses of the people (3–4)
 - i. Yahweh's word comes again (3)
 - ii. One of these things is not like the other (4)
 1. Contrast between unnecessary (possibly even lavish) touches on the peoples' homes while the temple project has been abandoned.
 - b. Signs of the times (cf. Matt 16:3) (5–6)
 - i. Reflect on your deeds (5)
 1. "Set your heart on your ways" likely is roughly equivalent to "consider/reflect on/ponder your ways."
 - ii. Investments with little return (6)
 1. As hard as the remnant tries, their efforts at taking care of themselves are futile.
 - c. The Imperative: Get some supplies and build! (7–8)
 - i. Reflect on your deeds (again) (7)
 - ii. Build for my pleasure and my glory (8)

³ Ibid, 572.

1. This verse reflects God's most central concern: he does not need workers or a building; he cares for his name and his pleasure in the obedience of his people.
 - d. What happened and why (1:9–11)
 - i. Remember all your troubles (9a–f)
 1. Yahweh reminds them of what happened to the work of their hands and then invites them to ask why.
 - ii. On account of my house, which you neglected (9g–i)
 1. Yahweh again draws attention to the difference between the people's preoccupation with their own dwellings while ignoring the more important work of God's house.
 2. He makes explicit that this is why they have had a drought (and probably many other troubles).
 - iii. That drought didn't cause itself (10–11)
 1. Yahweh connects their troubles to a drought which they have been experiencing.
 2. He gets very specific about all of the ways in which this has affected them (land, hills, grain, wine, oil, man, beast, and all their labor).
 - e. Section in a Sentence:
 - i. The drought has been caused by the remnant's neglect of Yahweh's house, so they must finish the temple that he may be glorified.
 - f. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. God wants and expects us to connect what happens in nature to his work and plan.
 - ii. We must not delay in doing the work calls us to.
 - iii. Yahweh is greatly concerned with his glory and will even bring harm to those who do not care about it.
- IV. The People Obey as Yahweh Is with Them [1:12–15]
- a. They obeyed (12a–h)
 - i. Zerubbabel obeyed (12b)
 - ii. Joshua obeyed (12c)
 - iii. The remnant obeyed (12d–e)
 - iv. They obeyed Yahweh's voice (12f)
 - v. They obeyed Haggai's voice (12g–h)
 1. Obeying Yahweh and the messenger of Yahweh are equivalent.

- b. They feared (12i)
 - i. This is not an indictment; it is parallel to “they obeyed.”
 - ii. To obey Yahweh and to fear him are two sides of the same coin.
 - c. Yahweh encourages them through Haggai (13)
 - i. The remnant was (rightly) afraid of Yahweh and started the task he set them.
 - ii. The assurance of Yahweh’s presence indicates (at least) the assurance that (1) Yahweh approves of their actions and (2) he will see to the completion of the task.
 - d. Yahweh stirs up the people and leaders (14)
 - i. Yahweh is considered the active agent in the beginning of the work.
 - e. The date when they resumed construction (15)
 - i. i.e. September 21, 520 B.C.⁴
 - f. Section in a Sentence:
 - i. The people listened to Yahweh and feared him while Yahweh assured them of his presence, which led to Yahweh stirring them to start the work that he commanded.
 - g. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. Listening to God’s words is intimately connected with obeying him.
 - 1. See James 1:23.
 - ii. It is right to fear God, but not like we fear something evil.
 - 1. We fear God because to be on the wrong side of the king of the universe is a dangerous thing.
 - 2. See Prov 9:10.
 - iii. God’s presence should motivate us to obedience in the assurance that he cares for those who find refuge in him
 - iv. See Ps 34:8.
- V. Be Strong, Work, and Do Not Fear [2:1–2:9]
- a. The start of the second prophecy (1)
 - i. The date of the second prophecy (1)
 - 1. i.e. October 17, 520 B.C.⁵
 - b. The state of the current temple (2–3)
 - i. Yahweh speaks by Haggai to: (2)
 - 1. Zerubbabel

⁴ Ibid, 572.

⁵ Ibid, 572.

- 2. Joshua
 - 3. the remnant.
- ii. The current temple disappoints (3)
 - 1. Some would have been there who remember what the temple looked like before Babylon destroyed it.
 - 2. Something about its appearance disappointed them.
 - a. Could not possibly have been as opulent as Solomon's temple.
- c. Be strong, work, and do not fear (4-5)
 - i. Be strong (4a-e)
 - 1. Yahweh addresses all three subjects (Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant)
 - ii. Work (4f-5c)
 - 1. The reason the people should and can work is given: Yahweh is with them.
 - 2. Yahweh reminds them of his covenant with them at the Exodus.
 - iii. Do not fear (5d-e)
 - 1. Yahweh assures them that his Spirit is among them.
 - 2. Though they (rightly) feared him earlier (1:12), Yahweh exhorts them not to fear.
 - a. Likely meaning not to fear their adversaries who might come back to stop the work.
- d. One more little thing (6-7)
 - i. Yahweh promises something additional to his presence:
 - 1. He will shake all creation (6d-h)
 - 2. He will shake the nations (7a)
 - 3. The desire of all nations will come (7b)
 - 4. He will fill the house with glory (7c)
- e. Yahweh owns it all (8)
 - i. Yahweh reminds the people who owns all the riches of the world.
- f. The Latter Temple will surpass the Former (9)
 - i. Yahweh compares the two houses and says the one they are building will outstrip Solomon's temple. (9a)
 - 1. Could be physical glory, but likely includes (if not is totally about) spiritual glory.
 - ii. Yahweh promises peace (9c)
- g. Section in a Sentence:

- i. Yahweh commands the people to be strong, work, and not fear because he is with them, he will give the house glory, and will bring peace to it.
 - h. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. God supplies the grace for what he commands.
 - ii. If he promises to do it, he will ensure it gets done.
 - 1. Therefore, we must take courage and do what he commands with faith and not fear.
 - iii. What is impossible with man is possible with God.
- VI. The People Are Unclean, Yet Yahweh Will Bless Them [2:10–19]
 - a. A question for the priests (10–13)
 - i. Date of the third prophecy (10a)
 - 1. i.e. December 18, 520 B.C.⁶
 - ii. Yahweh's word comes again (10b)
 - iii. Does holy meat make other things holy? (11–12)
 - 1. Meat dedicated to Yahweh and the service of the temple does not make other things clean just by touching it.
 - iv. Does an unclean person make other things unclean? (13)
 - 1. Unclean persons do transfer their uncleanness to other things.
 - b. The point of the question (14)
 - i. The people are unclean, and whatever they touch becomes unclean.
 - c. Look at your ways again (15–17)
 - i. Remember before the 1st prophecy? (15)
 - 1. Yahweh reminds them how they fared before starting to rebuild the temple again.
 - ii. Your efforts were in vain (16)
 - 1. The expected results and the amount of work they put in did not match up.
 - iii. I caused it (17)
 - 1. Yahweh reminds them that this was no accident; he struck them because they did not turn to him.
 - d. Look again with an eye toward the future (18–19)
 - i. Set your heart from today forward (18a)
 - ii. From the day the temple was laid (18b)
 - 1. Two "days" mentioned
 - a. First is the same day as the prophecy (18a)

⁶ Ibid, 572.

- b. Second is “the day the temple was laid (18c)
 - i. Likely another way to refer to the same day, and not a different day than 18a-b.
 - iii. Is there seed? (18a)
 - 1. Rhetorical question expecting a negative response: “no, there isn’t”
 - iv. There’s no fruit (18b-f)
 - 1. Though the seed is gone (probably because it was planted), there’s still no fruit
 - v. From today forward I’ll bless you (18g)
 - 1. There’s no fruit yet, but Yahweh’s control over the previous blight points to his ability to (and the assurance that he will) bring in fruit in response to their obedience.
- e. Section in a Sentence:
 - i. Though the people and all that they touch are unclean, yet Yahweh will bless them in response to their obedience to his command to build.
- f. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. We do not earn God’s blessings; any person he blesses, he does so in spite of their sin.
 - 1. Indeed, he can only bless them *because* of Christ’s work.
 - ii. Sin is contagious.
 - 1. Contact with the holy (whether church, God’s people, the Bible, even good works) does not cleanse a person’s uncleanness; there must be a sacrifice (i.e. Christ).
 - 2. See Mark 5:25–34.
 - a. Jesus’s righteousness is contagious and makes an unclean woman clean.
 - iii. Just as God can and does bring harm to those who ignore him, he also is faithful to bless those who turn to him in faith.
- VII. Yahweh Will Shake Creation and the Nations, and He Chooses Zerubbabel [2:20–23]
- a. Date of the fourth prophecy (20)
 - i. Yahweh’s word comes again (20a)
 - ii. On the same day (20b)

1. This change in wording and the date alert us that the prophecy is distinct, yet on the same day as the third prophecy
- b. I will shake creation again (21)
 - i. Yahweh will shake the heavens and the earth (21b)
- c. Yahweh will overthrow kingdoms and their armies (22)
 - i. The subjugation of God's people by the Persians will not stop Yahweh's purposes.
- d. A day is coming when Yahweh will appoint his chosen servant, Zerubbabel, as a signet ring (23)
 - i. Very likely a Messianic prophecy, highlighting Zerubbabel's role in Yahweh's plan of redemption.
- e. Section in a Sentence:
 - i. Yahweh promises to do a mighty work in overturning the nations and appointing Zerubbabel as the successor to David's Messianic line.
- f. Principle(s) for Today:
 - i. God is faithful to all his promises.
 1. He promised David that he would have someone on his throne forever, and this has ultimately come true in Jesus the Messiah.
 - ii. God is sovereign over all the nations.
 - iii. We must trust in God's promises and most of all in his chosen servant, the Messiah Jesus.

Week 1: Background; 1:1–1:2

Questions

1:1

- Who is Darius? (1:1)
 - Where else is he mentioned in the Bible?
 - How is he important?
- What might it mean that Yahweh's word came by Haggai's hand? (1:1)
 - That is, what does the language of "by the hand of" suggest?
- Who is Zerubbabel? (1:1)
 - Where else is he mentioned in the Bible?
 - How is he important?
- Who is Joshua? (1:1)
 - Where else is he mentioned in the Bible?
 - How is he important?

1:2

- Why might the people not "be ready" to build the temple? (1:2)
 - What happened last time they tried?
 - Was this a good enough reason to stop?

Application

- What does God's method of transmission tell us about the Bibles in our hands?
 - How is it significant that he speaks through people?
- How is it significant that God noticed that the people weren't obeying him?
 - How should we respond?

Suggested Reading for Next Week

- Ezra 1–6

Week 2: 1:3–11

Questions

1:3–4

- What's the problem being addressed in v. 4?
- Why does it matter that the houses are paneled? (1:4)

1:5–6

- How does this section connect with the previous one? (see v. 5)
- What is the general theme of these different realities described in v. 6? What do they have in common?

1:7–8

- Why does v. 7 repeat v. 5?
- Yahweh gives two purposes for building the temple in v. 8
 - What are they?
 - How do these purposes connect with the work?

1:9–11

- Why point out that they had much, and it became a little? (1:9)
- Why is v. 11 so repetitive?

Application

- Should we also take notice and consider our catastrophes as a message from God?
- What should we make of God punishing his people to get them to work for his glory?

Suggested Reading for Next Week

- Ex 25:1–9; Deut 28.

Week 3: 1:12–15

Questions

1:12

- How did the people respond?
- What were the two objects of their obedience?
 - How is this significant?
- What does it mean that they “feared” Yahweh?

1:13

- Why does Haggai point out Yahweh’s presence?

1:14–15

- What caused the remnant to get to work? (1:14)
 - Why is this significant?
- How much time has passed since Haggai’s initial prophecy? (1:15)
 - What was the delay?

Application

- Is there any sense in which we should actually be afraid of God (not just respectful)?
 - If so, what?
 - If not, why not?
- How can God’s presence (especially now that we have the promised Spirit) motivate us to do what God has called us to do?
 - What is God calling you to do that he also promises to be with you in?

Suggested Reading for Next Week

- Zech 3–4

Week 4: 2:1-9

Questions

2:1

- How long has it been since the work started?

2:2-3

- What was the house's former glory? (2:3)
 - How is it like nothing?
- Why does Haggai bring up the state of the current temple compared with the former? (2:3)

2:4-5

- Why do they need to be strong? (2:4)
- Why does Yahweh bring up the covenant? (2:5)

2:6-7

- What two realms (or spheres) is Yahweh going to "shake"? (2:6)
- If anyone has an NIV Bible or a KJV, what does it say will "come" in v. 7?
 - What might this refer to?

2:8

- Why does Yahweh emphasize his ownership over the gold and silver?

2:9

- Does the "former glory" refer to Solomon's temple, or to the current state of the temple?
- When did Israel have peace after this prophecy?

Application

- How do we benefit from the prophecies here?
 - Someone read Heb 12:26–28.
 - What is the response the author calls us to? (Heb 12:28)
- What is the new peace which Christ gives to us? How can we experience it?

Suggested Reading for Next Week

- Rev 21 (esp. vv. 22–27).

Week 5: 2:10–19

Questions

2:10–13

- How much time has passed since the last prophecy? (10)
- What is going on with holy meat and unclean persons? (12–13)
 - Someone look up and read Num 19:11–16.

2:14

- Why does Yahweh consider the people unclean?
- What does this have to do with the rest of the passage?

2:15–17

- What does Yahweh want them to “consider”? Why?(15)

2:18–19

- What is the timeframe which Yahweh wants them to consider? (18)
- Why might there be no seed in the barn? (19)
- How does the blessing relate to what was said before? (19)

Application

- What does the unclean state of the people and God’s plan to bless them anyway say about his mercy?
 - What does it say about us?
- Does God still bless or curse us on the basis of our obedience?
 - Why or why not?

Suggested Reading for Next Week

- Jer 7:1–15; Mark 5:25–34 (keep in mind that the woman would have been ritually unclean)

Week 6: 2:20–23

Questions

2:20

- When does this prophecy take place? (2:20)

2:21

- What is meant by “heavens and earth”? (21)

2:22

- What is meant by the overthrowing of “kingdoms,” “riders,” etc.?
 - Is this literal or symbolic? Or both?

2:23

- Why is Zerubbabel singled out here?
 - Someone read Jer 22:24–25. Who is Jehoiachin and why does he matter?
 - What is the significance of a signet ring?
- What is Yahweh promising to do concerning Zerubbabel?
 - Someone read Matt 1:12–13.

Application

- Why should we care that the Davidic line? What significance does God’s appointment of Zerubbabel have for us today?
- How should we respond to the Book of Haggai? What real-life lessons can we take away from such an obscure book?