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## SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lesson for April 18  
Golden Text—No man, having put  
his hand to the plough, and looking  
back, is fit for the kingdom of God.  
—Luke 9:62

**The Lesson as a Whole**  
There are seven Old Testament  
books that are linked together very  
intimately—three historical and  
four prophetic. I refer to Ezra,  
Nehemiah, and Esther in the first  
group, and Haggai, Zechariah, and  
Malachi, with Daniel, in the second.  
All have to do largely with a special  
work of God subsequent to the  
close of the seventy years' captivity  
of Judah in Babylon, as predicted  
by Jeremiah, during which time the  
land of Palestine was to make up  
her lost Sabbath years (Jer. 25:12-  
14; 2 Chron. 36:21; Dan. 9:2). After  
this period of bondage came to a  
close, God opened up the way for a  
remnant of His people to return to  
Jerusalem, according to a special  
mandate issued by Cyrus, king of  
Persia, whose armies defeated the  
Chaldeans and overthrew the  
Babylonian Empire.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah  
tell us of this return and the events  
that took place in the land after-  
ward. Haggai and Zechariah were  
prophets of God raised up to exhort  
and encourage this remnant as they  
proceeded to rebuild first the  
Temple and later the ruined city of  
Jerusalem.

There are many precious and  
important lessons in these post-  
captivity books for the people of  
God today who mourn the mani-  
fold grievous errors that have  
brought many into captivity, and  
who long to walk with God in  
separation from all that is false and  
unholy.

Gathered back from their bond-  
age among the Gentiles, a few in  
Israel realized the blessedness of  
being in the place where Jehovah  
had set His name, there to worship  
and serve Him as they found it  
written (Neh. 8:14), and as they  
were guided by the prophetic  
ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.  
It speaks loudly of the privileges  
of those who in this day of apostasy  
and of departure from God find  
their joy in the Lord and endeavor  
to walk in obedience to His Word.

**Verse 1**—"The Lord stirred up  
the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia."  
The time had come for the fulfill-  
ment of the promise that after  
seventy years a way would be  
opened for the Jews to return from  
their captivity; so God moved the  
heart of the conqueror of Babylon  
to look favorably upon His people  
and to open the way for them to go  
back to the land of Judah.

**Verse 2**—"The Lord God of  
heaven hath charged me to build  
him a house at Jerusalem." Cyrus  
was conscious that he had a man-  
date from Jehovah to enable the  
Jews to rebuild the Temple, which  
the Chaldeans had laid in ruins.  
**Verse 3**—"Who is there among  
you of all his people?.....let him go  
up to Jerusalem." There was no  
compulsion. All who had a heart for  
God and who valued His Word  
were free to go. Those who pre-  
ferred to remain where they were  
would forfeit blessing, however, if  
they did not grasp the opportunity  
afforded them to return to the place  
where God had set His name.

**Verse 4**—"Whosoever remaineth  
in any place.....let the men of his  
place help him." God's time to favor  
the Jews had come. The Persians  
were more lenient toward them  
than the Chaldeans had been. Even  
if they did not go up to Jerusalem  
themselves, it was taken for  
granted they would want to help  
their brethren who did go, and at  
Cyrus's command they were to be  
given every assistance possible.

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**Chap. 4:23**—"They.....made  
them cease by force and power."  
An effort had been made to thwart  
the command of Cyrus by misrep-  
resenting the activities of the Jews,  
and Artaxerxes, his successor,  
demanded that the work of rehabili-  
tation cease, something which the  
enemies of God's people took  
immediate advantage of.

**Verse 21**—"Then ceased the work  
.....unto the second year of the  
reign of Darius king of Persia." The  
Jews were too easily persuaded to  
give up, instead of making clear  
their right to rebuild the Temple  
as Cyrus had given them permis-  
sion to do.

**Haggai 1:3**—"Then came the  
word of the Lord by Haggai the  
prophet." It was a word of admoni-  
tion and encouragement, reproving  
them for being so easily turned  
aside from the work in which they  
had been engaged, and urging them  
to take it up again, as King Darius  
had but recently given permission  
to do.

**Verse 4**—"Is it time for you, O  
ye, to dwell in your cieled houses,  
and this house lie waste?" No  
Persian decree had hindered their  
providing warm and even expen-  
sive houses for themselves, but it  
was used really as an excuse for  
indifference to what should have  
had the first place in their thoughts  
—the rebuilding of the Temple of  
the Lord.

**Verse 5**—"Consider your ways."  
The literal translation of the  
Hebrew would be, "Set your heart  
upon your ways." It was a sum-  
mons to self-judgment, for one's  
ways manifest the state of his mind.  
God would have them recognize the  
selfishness and slothfulness that  
had made them overlook His para-  
mount claims upon their energy  
and their time and ability.

**Verse 6**—"Ye have sown much,  
and bring in little." Weigh this  
verse carefully. It gives the secret  
of much of the lack of blessing  
following our efforts to succeed, as  
it did with Judah so long ago. No  
matter how strenuously one may  
labor, God will not give success if  
He is dishonored.

**Verse 7**—"Consider your ways."  
A second time the call comes to  
consider their true condition before  
God. It is not vain repetition, but an  
emphatic summons to face things  
honestly and to get right with God.  
**Verse 8**—"Build the house; and I  
will take pleasure in it." When the

people of God rise from their  
lethargy and "put first things first,"  
giving the Lord and His will the  
supreme place in their lives, they  
have His Word for it that He will  
be glorified in them.

**Verse 13**—"Haggai the Lord's  
messenger in the Lord's message."  
It is quite possible to be the Lord's  
messenger—that is, to be appointed  
by God to speak for Him, and yet  
to miss the Lord's message. But  
Haggai was in intimate touch with  
Him who sent him as he now  
encouraged an obedient people with  
promises of divine assistance.

**Verse 14**—"The Lord stirred up  
the spirit of Zerubbabel..... and the  
spirit of all..... the people; and they  
came and did work in the house of  
the Lord." Aroused by the stirring  
exhortation of the prophet, and  
comforted by the knowledge of the  
Lord's presence among them, the

people went to work with a will,  
and soon completed the building of  
the house of God.

**The Heart of the Lesson**  
When the failures of the people  
of God have brought them into  
bondage to the world and to worldly  
religion, He is ever ready to grant  
restoration to those who seek His  
face. It was in Jerusalem He had  
set His name, and to that name He  
gathers His own. But it is one thing  
to be in the right position before  
Him and quite another to be in the  
right condition of soul. It is all-  
important that those who profess  
to value what is of God and who  
seek to appropriate the privileges  
He gives should ever recognize the  
principle of the divine priority over  
their hearts, their lives, and their  
service. Thus His blessing will be  
assured.

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