

ENCOURAGING THE PEOPLE.

Jan. 15.

B.C. 520.

Lesson Haggai 2 : 1-9. Golden Text, Ps. 127 : 1.
Memory vs. 8, 9. Catechism, Q. 4, 5.

Remember the lessons for this quarter are, God's people after the exile. The time is from the return, 536 B.C. to about 400 B.C., a little more than a century. The governors of Jerusalem are Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah. The prophets are Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The history of this lesson is found in Ezra 4 ; read it carefully.

The building of the temple, as we saw in last lesson, made jealous the strangers who had come into the land, and they wanted to join in the work. No, you are not Jews, was the reply. This annoyed them and they worried the Jews and misrepresented them at the Persian court, see Ezra 4, until a successor of Cyrus ordered the work to be stopped. Fifteen years passed. The people are poor and discouraged. The prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, are sent urging them to begin anew. Permission is obtained from the king, Darius Hystaspes, and the work again begins. The present lesson is Haggai's word of cheer.

1. The departed glory of the old temple, vs. 1-3.
2. The Lord's presence still with them vs. 4, 5.
3. The coming glory of the new temple, vs. 6-9.

I. Vs. 1-3. Just 16 years after rebuilding the altar and restoring the sacrifice. *Residue*—His message was to the rulers, priests, and all the people. *See it now*—What a change! How full of discouragement. They were not allowed to go on with even the poor mean building that they had started. All seems dark. The prophet's opening words are full of sympathy.

II. Vs. 4, 5. *Be strong*—O ruler, O priest, O people, and work. Fear not all that can be against you, for I am with you. This is the strength of God's people in every age. In trouble, trial, temptation, danger, want, bereavement, sickness, death, I am with you. *Covenanted*—Nearly a thousand years before, when he brought them out of Egypt, He had made them promises. They had forsaken Him, and He had allowed their enemies to chasten them sore, but He had not forsaken them. His covenants and agreements stand fast. *Fear ye not*.

III. Vs. 6-9. *Smith the Lora*—This is the authority for the teaching of the Scripture. *Will shake*—Nations were to be overturned, but it would all be but preparatory to the bringing in of His own kingdom. *Desire*—Christ, the Savior. *All nations*—Not merely the Jews. *Fill this house*—This temple that seemed so poor was to know a glory of which they did not dream. *Silver*—The Lord did not need gold and silver to give His home glory. He had abundance of that ; all is His. *Greater*—Though so poor in their eyes, this house would have a glory greater than the old for it should see the Christ. *Give peace*—When Christ came the angels sang their song of peace on earth. Nought else can give peace to the troubled heart.

1. Satan will always stir up some kind of opposition to those who are trying to do God's work.

2. God is always with those who are doing His work.

3. We need never fear when God is with us. We are strong in Him.

4. The chief glory of a man, or home, or church, is not its wealth, but its having Christ.

JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST.

Jan. 22.

B.C. 519.

Lesson Zech 3 : 1-10. Golden Text, Heb. 4 : 14.
Memory vs. 7, 8. Catechism, Q. 6.

There are twelve men by the name of Zechariah in Jewish history. This one, the greatest of them, was probably born in Babylon, and came to Jerusalem with the first band of returning exiles. He began to prophecy about fifteen years after the return, and continued for two years, acting in concert with the prophet Haggai.

He sees a series of eight visions, picturing Israel's past, present, and future. This lesson is the fourth of the series, and shews Israel sinning, Israel cleansed, Israel receiving her Messiah.

1. The filthy garments, vs. 1-3.
2. The clean garments, vs. 4-7.
2. The coming Messiah, vs. 8-10.

I. Vs. 1-3. *He*—i.e. the angel that talked with the prophet, who was doubtless the angel of the Covenant, Jehovah God. *Joshua*—The high priest (See Ezra 2 : 2 ; 4 : 3 ; Haggai 2 : 2.) As high priest he represents in this vision the whole people. *Satan*—Representing the people who were opposing Israel in their temple building, as well as picturing him, who at all times is the great accuser of God's people. See Gen. 3 : 1 ; Job 1 : 8 ; Matt. 4 : 1 ; 1 Pet. 5 : 8, 9 ; Rev. 12 : 9, 10. *Filthy garments*—Representing sin and, in this case, Israel's sin, which Satan is industriously pointing out as a reason why Joshua (Israel) should not receive mercy. How like is the picture in Job, of Satan appearing as the accuser of that good man. *Rebuke thee*—God's thoughts are not those of accusation, but of mercy and love.

II. Vs. 4-7. *Take away*—How like to the story of the Prodigal Son, full of comfort to those discouraged people. *Fair Mitre*—Like the ring of the prodigal. Thus by this vivid picture of Joshua their high priest cleansed and forgiven and honored, God teaches through Zechariah, what he will do for Israel.

III. Vs. 8-10. *O Joshua*—Still personifying Israel. Not only will He cleanse and receive them once more as God's people, but He will bring to them their long looked for Messiah. *The Branch*—See Is. 11 : 1. Amid all their present distress and trouble they were to hold fast the hope of that coming deliverer and king of whom their psalmists and prophets had often sung.

This is a picture of what is continually going on.

1. Satan still the accuser of the Christian, pointing out his inconsistencies.

2. Christ rebukes the accuser and forgives the penitent. How often He did that when on earth. Give instances.

3. Art thou discouraged on account of thy weakness and sin? Christ looks kindly on the penitent.

4. He takes away the guilt of sin by His pardoning mercy.

“He takes away the uncleanness of sin by His renewing grace.”

“Come unto me all ye that are heavily laden and I will give you rest.”

“Him that cometh unto I will in no wise cast out.”