

# Walk Through The Bible

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;  
8The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;  
9The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.  
10More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;  
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
11Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.  
(Psalm 19:7-11. NKJV)*

*25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.  
(James 1:25. NKJV)*

## **Serving In Seasons Of Lesser Glory**

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**Ezra 3 - 6**

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### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles this morning to Ezra chapter 3. If you missed last week you will want to download the message from the website because in it I gave you an introduction that will serve for each of the next four sermons including this one. Last week I talked about how the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther collectively tell one story covering about 100 years. The books of Zechariah and Haggai also belong to this time period and they take place during the time frame of Ezra 1-6. The whole story is best broken down into three major narrative sections and the texts we are focusing on this morning all come from the first of these three sections, the time of revival and foundation laying. They are seasons of lesser glory as we shall shortly see but they are important times and you cannot by-pass them on your way to greater things. My plan for today is to guide you through the text, not reading all of it, but reading some good chunks of it and then to pull out for you the major patterns and principles we need to see in order to serve well in seasons of lesser glory. Let's start at Ezra 3:1.:

<sup>1</sup>And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>Then **Jeshua** the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, **and Zerubbabel** the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as *it is* written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

<sup>3</sup>Though fear *had come* upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, *both* the morning and evening burnt offerings.

<sup>4</sup>They also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day.

<sup>5</sup>Afterwards *they offered* the regular burnt offering, and *those* for New Moons and for all the appointed feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and *those* of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

<sup>6</sup>From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

<sup>7</sup>They also gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

<sup>8</sup>Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began *work* and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>Then Jeshua *with* his sons and brothers, Kadmiel *with* his sons, and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God: the sons of Henadad *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

<sup>10</sup>When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.

<sup>11</sup>And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: “For *He is* good, For His mercy *endures* forever toward Israel.” Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

<sup>12</sup>But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ *houses*, old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes. Yet many shouted aloud for joy,

<sup>13</sup>so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. (NKJV)

Let’s stop there for just a second. You have to understand where we are in the cycle of things in order to appreciate what is going on. Last week we introduced a big word that you are going to need to know to make sense of most of the preaching you are going to hear over the next year: typology. It means that God works in patterns, particularly patterns in history many of which climax in Christ and are ramped up, relaunched and then continue to govern God’s activities until the end of time. God hasn’t changed so when we observe how he worked then, in these stories, and we look forward through Christ we are able to predict how God will act throughout the entirety of Church history. That is the basic idea of typology. So we are looking for cycles and patterns and we are looking at one right here. There were two types of people at this ceremony celebrating the rebuilt altar and the foundation of God’s house. First of all, there were younger people who had been born in exile in Babylon. Zerubbabel, the Governor, his name actually means ‘born in Babylon’. Secondly, there were older people who as children had seen the collapse of the last cycle. They had seen Jerusalem in its hay day, they had seen the temple of Solomon, one of the wonders of the ancient world. They had heard stories about the dedication of that temple and they knew enough to weep over these pitifully small beginnings. Do you

remember what the Bible says about that day, Solomon's day, a day which represented the HIGH WATER MARK of the old cycle? Its' found in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, just go back left in your Bible a few dozen pages. Let me read to you what happened when Solomon's temple first opened for business:

the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,<sup>14</sup>so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God. (2 Chronicles 5:13-14. NKJV)

That service was charismatic! The priests were all slain in the Spirit, the manifest GLORY OF GOD FILLED THE TEMPLE! Oh what a day! But this day in Ezra 3 was not like that day. There was no cloud, no one was slain in the Spirit, the temple had none of the former size or glory and so the old people wept. Now you need to understand how dangerous this moment was. Let me make an analogy. Imagine that we had a 500 year old lady attending our church and she LIVED through the Protestant Reformation. She knew Martin Luther, she READ Calvin's Institutes and she sat under the ministry of these great men and she saw Europe SET AFLAME by the Word of the Gospel and the power of Holy Scripture. And then she came here and she watched us get excited about a couple of hundred new converts over a 4-5 year span and a new energy around Bible reading and rough draft plans for expanding our ministry into new parts of the city. We're pretty excited. We're young and stupid and we don't remember the glory of those former days. And she comes along and she says: "What are you young idiots so excited about? You have plans to reach a city of 30,000 people. Hah! Luther set all of Europe ablaze. You plan to read the Bible do you? Read a few chapters a day will you? I sat through 300 sermons on the Book of Job under John Calvin! You've got what? 6 of those planned have you? What are you so excited about? These are days of far lesser glory." And you would feel the air going out of this place like a balloon pricked by a pin. This was dangerous. So dangerous that both of God's prophets thundered into this moment. Both Zechariah and Haggai recognise the danger and speak out against it. Zechariah says in Zechariah 4:

"This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup>'Who *are* you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel *you shall become* a plain! And he shall bring forth the capstone With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"'"

<sup>8</sup>Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying: <sup>9</sup>"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple; his hands shall also finish *it*. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

<sup>10</sup>For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. (Zechariah 4:6-10. NKJV)

Zechariah says: “God sees the obstacles, but God’s Spirit is mighty! He who began a good work will be faithful to complete it. You Zerubbabel, child of the Exile, full of hope and full of faith, you will speak to mountainous obstacles and they will become flat as a plane before your very eyes. The hand of the Lord will do it!”

Haggai the prophet also spoke into this moment. In Haggai 2:3-4 he says:

<sup>3</sup>‘Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, *is this* not in your eyes as nothing? <sup>4</sup>Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ says the LORD; ‘and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,’ says the LORD, ‘and work; for I *am* with you,’ says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:3-4. NKJV)

Listen to me church at the start of every new upward cycle, following as they do after a season of deconstruction and collapse, there will always be those who look backwards instead of forwards and who live in the past and who will not work for the future. Do not listen to them! This is how the process works in the Sovereign plan of God. You begin small but you ramp up and the glories ahead are always greater than the glories behind even if they must of necessity begin small, in the ashes and in humility. Do the work church, for God is with us!

Let’s pause in our progress through this story and capture the encouragement of these prophets for serving in seasons of lesser glory. We’ll phrase them negatively because that is largely how they are given.

## **The Counsel Of The Prophets For Seasons Of Lesser Glory:**

### **1. Do not despise the day of small beginnings.**

Zechariah said that in Zechariah 4:10. It is the pattern of God to move history forward in cycles of growth, expansion, and glorification which because of the fallenness of man are soon infected with pride, compromise and apostasy which inevitably lead to collapse. But then on the ruins, God begins to build again. After the cliff comes a CALL and a new generation begins to lay a foundation in the ashes of devastation. What that generation builds always looks pitiful to those who remember the glory of former days. That is why these seasons are always led by younger people. Most of the time in the Bible age is a real asset. Most of the leaders in the Bible were

older men. Think about Abraham, think about Jacob, think about Moses. But at times like this, the leaders are younger men, men born in Babylon. Men like Zerubbabel. Men who've known only ruin and men who then can rejoice without regret in the day of small beginnings.

Now listen to me church, days of lesser glory are very dangerous days. They are dangerous for two types of people. The old who remember better days and so cannot enjoy what God is doing now. Their trap is bitterness and lack of prayerful support of leadership. Do not fall into that trap. They are also very dangerous for the impatient and the gullible. There are always people who think you can skip the rebuilding phase and go right back to glory. There are always people who believe in the short cuts. The pattern of the Bible is that glory always FOLLOWS sufferings. Look at 1 Peter 1:10-11:

<sup>10</sup>Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, <sup>11</sup>searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand **the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow**. <sup>12</sup>To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10-12. NKJV)

Peter says that the prophets of old were looking into their own prophecies trying to understand this pattern. They always prophesied doom and destruction, followed by revival, rebuilding and then glory. It was revealed to them that this cycle would climax in the Christ. He would show us once and for all how God's plan of salvation works: SUFFERING FOLLOWED BY GLORIES!!!!!!! That is the plan friends, that is the path and there are NO SHORTCUTS! But there have always been simple minded, gullible Christians who have bought the lie of the devil that there are short cuts. The devil says: "Why walk through the Bible? Why study? Why suffer? Come to our church for the FIRE!!!! We've got priests right now who are slain in the spirit, lying dumb in the temple just like in the days of Solomon! Come for the cloud, stay for the cookies!" It's nonsense and distraction. There are no short cuts! We are in a season of lesser glory, a season of rebuilding and glories lie ahead, praise the Lord, but we will not take short cuts because we follow a Christ who did not take short cuts. The devil offered him a short cut, do you remember? Fling yourself from the top of the temple and fly down to the people and they will worship you as God, why go to the cross? Jesus would have none of it and neither should we. Why do we fall for this nonsense? What does the Bible say to us by way of warning? Who is that falls for this silliness?

<sup>9</sup>The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup>and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup>And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup>that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. NKJV)

God says: “If you are not going to bother to love the truth, to read the Bible and live by the patterns and principles set out therein then I will give you what you want. I will let the devil offer you the short cut that leads to hell and you can run down merrily to your doom.” Do not be deceived!

Seasons of lesser glory are dangerous times, for the old who look back and for the gullible who do not love the truth and seek shortcuts that bypass process and suffering.

## **2. Do not obsess over obstacles.**

Don't look at the mountain, look at the Messiah! If God is for us, who can be against us?

Leaders should know what obstacles exist, they should count the cost as Jesus said, but they must also know the Christ! The author of Hebrews says it this way:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2. NKJV)

I love that phrase: “despising the shame”! Who are you, Oh Mountain?! Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plane! See the obstacles but despise them, push through them and keep your eyes on Jesus who holds the future in his hand.

## **3. Do not forget the grace of the Lord.**

Don't measure things in terms of resources and talent pools and balance sheets. It wasn't those things that got you to the top in the last cycle and it won't be those things that bring the greater glory in this cycle. The prophet says to the people: “When Zerubbabel lays the capstone, you will not say: talent, talent. You will not say: money, money. You will say grace, grace.” God gives us the grace to work and God knows no end to his supply.

#### 4. Do not deviate from your instructions; do the work!

The prophet Haggai says:

<sup>4</sup>Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, '**and work**; for I *am* with you,' says the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:3-4. NKJV)

Do the work! You have your marching orders, now do it! Doesn't that sound like Jesus? Work, for I am with you? Aren't those the instructions that he left to us? Go into all the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you AND LO I am with you always, even to the end of the age? Isn't that just a more detailed way of saying: "Do your work for I am with you?" Its the same! Listen church, in seasons of lesser glory when church is not as sexy or mainstream as it used to be, there will always be people who start deviating from the plan. "Maybe we should start a ministry on the internet, maybe we should do evangelism with dolphins, maybe we should live like hippies in communes and call each other by Jewish names – OH MY GOODNESS!!!! STICK TO THE PLAN!!! GO. MAKE DISCIPLES. BAPTISE PEOPLE. TEACH THEM THE BIBLE. OBEY GOD. That's the plan; its worked before, it will work again because its God's plan and we need to stick to it in seasons of lesser glory.

These are the words that the prophets spoke into this very dangerous moment. Let's jump back into the story. We pick it up in Ezra 4:1:

<sup>1</sup>Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the LORD God of Israel,

<sup>2</sup>they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' *houses*, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you *do*; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

<sup>3</sup>But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' *houses* of Israel said to them, "You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us."

<sup>4</sup>Then the people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building,

<sup>5</sup>and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra 4:1-5. NKJV)

**Principles From The Pattern:**

From this piece of the story let me begin pulling out some positive principles from this Divinely given pattern. In seasons of lesser glory:

### **1. Do exercise extreme caution and prejudice in making your alliances.**

People showed up and said: “Hey we want to play too! We worship the same God you guys do, we should all work together like they do in every Barney episode!” And God’s people were smart enough to say: “No thank you. We don’t join hands with pagans who pretend to be God’s people. We will build alone.” Let me show you why this was a good decision. We know who these people are, they tell us who they are. They say:

we seek your God as you *do*; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.” (Ezra 4:2. NKJV)

That story is in the Bible; its found in 2 Kings 17:33-34. After the Assyrians wiped out Northern Israel and sent those people away into exile in foreign lands, they sent other people they had defeated in other places to Northern Israel to farm the land. These people developed an interest in Judaism and a priest was sent to them to teach them the Bible. However, they never really adopted Judaism wholesale. This is what the Bible says about them:

<sup>33</sup>They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. <sup>34</sup>To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel (2 Kings 17:33-34. NKJV)

These people worship God but LIVE LIKE PAGANS!! They are half converted, fully compromised PRETENDERS and Zerubbabel and Joshua will have nothing to do with them!! Listen to me church, from time to time people will come to me and say: “Why aren’t we in partnership with this church or that church, shouldn’t we work with anyone who says they are a Christian?” NO!!!!!! Friends, nothing has changed. There are still a ton of people who worship God but live like pagans. This city is full of so called Christians who are half converted and fully compromised. We will NOT JOIN HANDS WITH SUCH AS THESE! In seasons of lesser glory when you feel helpless and when you feel behind the 8-ball it is so tempting to take help from people you have no business taking help from. We build with the people of God and them alone.



The story takes a bit of a jump here that I will walk you through. The book gets real confusing at 4:6. Part of the reason is that all the dates are given as references to the reign of various kings and if we don't know our Persian history then these make no sense to us. Here is what is happening. When Zerubbabel and Joshua refuse the help of the half breeds and hybrids, those people became their most bitter enemies. By the way, isn't that always the case? Do you know who will hate us most in this city? Those whose partnership we have rejected because they worship God and live like pagans. Its not the full blown pagans who hate us, they don't care one way or the other, its the ones who want to think of themselves as Christians who know we don't buy it. They hate us and they will hate us more yet. Anyway, these folks start a letter writing campaign. Three different letters over a multi-decade stretch are referenced here in verses 6-8. The third letter is reprinted in detail as the climax of the campaign. They were trying to get the Persian government to withdraw support for the project. They pulled on the fears of the Persians and suggested that the Jews would stop paying taxes and would become instigators of rebellion. Anyway, they write to the authorities and the authorities write back saying, put a hold on the work until we can investigate whether this is legal. That's in verse 21, but that is the answer to the third letter which actually takes place years in the future from our place in the story. The point is simply this: the work will be opposed. You must press on. And that is what they did. Look at 5:1:

<sup>1</sup>Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who *were* in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, *who was* over them. <sup>2</sup>So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God *were* with them, helping them. (Ezra 5:1-2. NKJV)

They did all of this work while their legal status was being challenged. Their enemies were trying to take away their privileged tax status and erode the legality of their efforts. In today's terms this would be the equivalent of our getting a notice from our lawyers saying that the clergy housing allowance, which is a tax privilege we enjoy that basically helps churches pay for a pastor and our property tax exemption were both being subject to crown scrutiny. Any receipts we issue in 2012 may be invalidated by the process. You may not get a receipt for these gifts and even worse, we may have to fork over thousands of dollars in back taxes. What do you do? Do you freeze all ministry and sock money away in case you have to pay the piper? That is the situation here. Their legal status is up in the air, the old people are whining about the

insignificance of the work to begin with and the whole thing is about to collapse. The prophets show up and speak words of encouragement and strengthening. And the people PRESS THROUGH THE RESISTANCE.

## 2. Do press through opposition.

That's the point I want you to see here; they press through! They don't stop! They do the work and God is with them. The decision of the government finally comes back to them, look at 6:1ff:

<sup>1</sup>Then King Darius issued a decree, and a search was made in the archives, where the treasures were stored in Babylon. <sup>2</sup>And at Achmetha, in the palace that *is* in the province of Media, a scroll was found, and in it a record *was* written thus: <sup>3</sup>In the first year of King Cyrus, King Cyrus issued a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem: "Let the house be rebuilt, the place where they offered sacrifices; and let the foundations of it be firmly laid....

So they finally find the original law and they read it. Then Darius says this in verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> Now *therefore*, Tattenai, governor of *the region* beyond the River, and Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Persians who *are* beyond the River, **keep yourselves far from there.** <sup>7</sup>Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site. <sup>8</sup> Moreover I issue a decree *as to* what you shall do for the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: **Let the cost be paid at the king's expense from taxes** on *the region* beyond the River; this is to be given immediately to these men, so that they are not hindered. (Ezra 6:1-8. NKJV)

Not only does Darius uphold their legality he ups the ante and gives them additional government support and tax money to finish the job! From this we draw our final principle:

## 3. Do believe in the faithfulness of God to his promises.

God does what he promises. God keeps his word. God turns the hearts of kings this way and that way in order to bring it all about. Don't worry about it. Don't stress about it. Don't stop working because of threats and rumours. Don't stop building because there are clouds on the horizon. Those clouds that you fear are pregnant with RAINS OF BLESSING!!!! Never forget what God has promised. Look forward to verses 14 + 15 of chapter 6.

<sup>14</sup>So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished *it*, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

<sup>15</sup>Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. (Ezra 6:14-15. NKJV)

Again, we miss some of the impact here because we don't know our history. The sixth year of King Darius' reign was 516 BC. Do you know what that means? The new temple was finished 70 years after the old one was destroyed. Just like God said. Do you remember Jeremiah 29 which I read to you last week?

<sup>10</sup>For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. (Jeremiah 29:10. NKJV)

All of your worrying, all of your fears, this could not have happened any sooner! This happened on exactly the time table of God's degree. What you need to understand church is that God cannot be rushed nor can he be thwarted so fear is useless, short cuts are useless, the only thing a man or woman can reasonably do is BELIEVE IN THE PROMISE and DO THE WORK we've been given to do. And it will all work out in the end. That my friends, is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.