

# The Paralyzing Power of the Past

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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Turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Ezra, Ezra 3. We'll be looking at verses 10 to 13 this morning. And as you turn, I do want to say something before we get into the message about the job fair or the ministry fair that we're having today after the service, immediately following this service, well, actually about 10 minutes after the service is over, in fact, I would encourage you not to rush over too quickly, you may beat the people to the tables and there won't be anybody there. But maybe 10 or 15 minutes, you know, we have time to encourage one another and then work your way over to the other building and we're going to have tables set up where you can learn about various ministries in the church. There will be a volunteer form but there will be all kinds of opportunities to inquire and sign up, everything from children's ministry, teenagers, youth, call it youth ministry, men's ministry, women's ministry, facilities, hospitality, home groups, outreach including the Good News clubs, the prison ministry, Belmont, and so it's an opportunity to find out more about potential areas to serve and we encourage you to take advantage of that today because there are many needs.

One of the perennial areas of need and I think one that we have undervalued is the children's ministry and I shared a little bit about last week before about my own conviction about the need to really work harder in this area of ministry. You know, we have been as elders really looking at the question of if someone attends our church from the time they're in the nursery until the time they're 18, how much have we as a church done to build God's word into their lives? What have we done at each stage of the process from the earliest time that they can begin to be taught Bible stories, all the way up until they go to college or begin to enter a career, what have we done? Now obviously we believe the primary responsibility for discipling children, as Scripture says, is with parents but how have we come alongside and even equipped and helped in that process, every time we have an opportunity to sow the word, what have we done?

So we've been doing a lot of thinking about, like just to give you kind of a quick overview of what we're thinking, our desire is from the time a child is able to be taught, you know, in the preschool classes all the way through grade school, we really want to work a lot on memorization. This is when the brain is especially fertile to be able to memorize and we want to take advantage of that and help them memorize Scripture, memorizing theology, catechism. We want to help them memorize the Bible timeline and

I want our kids, it's an opportunity for us to teach them while they can remember everything so that when they get older, when they come to faith and when they get older, these things will be building-blocks inside of their minds and their hearts that God can use. You know, when we're talking, we're getting ready to talk about Ezra/Nehemiah and for many of you that's a hard thing to put in place in your mind. Where is that in Bible history? I want our kids that come through our church to be able to just know that. They can tell you, "Well, of course, Ezra/Nehemiah is after the exile, the Babylonian exile when they'd come back, the people coming back to Israel from Babylon and under the Persian rule during that time and what God is doing in his kingdom in that moment." And so we're gonna try to actually help them memorize Bible timeline.

Now these things are gonna happen at different times. We have Sunday morning Bible study as an opportunity, we have children's church, and we have Wednesday PM, and we're working to put all of those things together but we're really gonna make in the early grades memorization a big part of it. There will be teaching. There will be crafts. There's gonna be some fun things, of course, but also really taking advantage of that. And we're really trying to ramp up, we've been doing some really good things, we're just trying to invest more and I'm gonna personally invest more in the training of our teachers and encouraging them.

So we want you to take advantage of these opportunities. If you're parents, we want you to bring your kids and if you would like to serve, there are places and ways for you to serve, and an important area... Well, before I get there, say also we're really also looking at how our Sunday morning Bible study, Wednesday evening program, can be more beneficial to every person, not just our children. We're looking at how to train our teenagers, you know, in thinking through the things of God, apologetics, putting things together in a way that really prepares them to go out into the world armed spiritually, as the Scripture says, their loins girded for action, they're ready to move out into a hostile world. We want that to happen and so we're even offering a Sunday morning Bible study class this fall, "What is Christianity?" that's gonna be aimed at that for our teenagers.

Adult classes. We're gonna start having two adult classes. This is gonna take logistics and set-up. We have one class right now. It meets in here and that class is gonna, we're gonna continue to have a class in here that is basically theology, Bible, theology, knowledge, starting with the Scripture, starting with doctrine and working itself out, but we're also gonna have a practical theology class we're gonna run alongside that and that'll meet in the overflow room. Practical theology starts with a need and then brings the Bible to bear, so it'll be things like, you know, parenting classes, shepherding a child's heart, or peace-making for families, how do you resolve conflict in your family.

And so we'll have a class starting in September on that and Sunday morning Bible study hour, and I say all that to say because we're really trying to invest a lot more in all of the teaching times, it means we also are going to have to have more nursery workers because right now for the last year we've not, we've only had one nursery from 0 to basically 3 ½ years old, and interestingly enough, we've had almost no children in that nursery each week. And I said something last week, if you build it, they will come, and if you don't

build it, they won't. So if you don't have nurseries, I mean, who wants to bring, you know, a 11-month-old crawler to be with, I mean, you know? Even though we know, we love all of our children, two and three-year olds have a way of trampling, right? And so you've got to divide the kids and have smaller groups.

So we're gonna ask you to sign up to be a nursery worker and you may not have anybody show up for the first six weeks that you're there, and you if you come, you're building the kingdom. Come faithfully every week early, not like we've had a tendency to be, Providence time tends to be, you know, five minutes past time. We've got to change that. You know, we've been starting Sunday worship on time, if you've noticed that lately. It's a new day. A new sheriff in town. I don't know who he is. The Lord Jesus is our Ruler but he's gotten our attention a little more and so we want to be diligent and faithful. These things make a difference, though. These small things make a huge difference and so when you serve in the nursery, you are freeing up other people to take advantage of having the word of God sown into their lives and you have an opportunity through the love of Christ to love that child and in some way to sow into their life. We're gonna look, I'm gonna mention a little bit later one of the verses that will be referenced is from Zechariah 4:10, "Who among you despises the day of small things?" God sends Zechariah with a firm rebuke to the people, "You're not building. You stopped building because you despised the day of small things." Don't despise the day of small things, God does great big things when we think we're doing small things.

So we're gonna have that opportunity to learn more about that. I just wanted to share that this morning. So that's pre-sermon. We haven't gotten started. Now we're gonna get started in Ezra 3:10-13 and the title of the message this morning is "The Paralyzing Power of the Past." The paralyzing power of the past. Ezra 3:10-13, and what we want to do, we're gonna see, this passage describes how the people of God and the work that God had called them to do, they were paralyzed in the work because of the past and their failure to deal with the past properly, biblically. In fact, I almost titled the message, you might even subtitle it this because this is really the application point, is to put your past in its place. Now I borrow that title from Steve Viars and he's written a book, "Putting Your Past in Its Place," a helpful book that deals with this issue. But we'll see that the people of God are negatively impacted in a profound way by people who had not dealt properly with the past, regret over what once was and is no longer, regret over what was and is no longer kept them from living for the glory of God in the present, kept them from seizing the moment and acting as God's agent to bring about his kingdom and his glory.

We see it in the lives of the people of Israel who have returned from the Babylonian captivity in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, probably 536 BC. The people have gathered in the land of Israel under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the high priest, and they start the building process. We're going to see, the passage that we have is gonna show an important moment of progress that is being made but we're gonna see the seeds in the passage we read that lead to the stoppage of the work, the seeds for the 17-year delay that's going to happen in subsequent chapters, we're gonna find, I think, in our passage here this morning.

So I want to read verses 1 to 13 but we're gonna focus in on verses 10 to 13, just to set the context. The people are back in the land and in chapter 3, verse 1, this helps us to watch the time, even,

1 Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers 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. 3 So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; 5 and afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. 7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia. 8 Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. 9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God. 10 Now when the builders had 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 directions of King David of Israel. 11 They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. 12 Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we ask now that You might open our hearts that we might be ready to receive Your word and You might open Your word by the power of Your Spirit illuminate it for us that we might see and behold wonderful things in Your law, that we might treasure the Gospel, that we might treasure the reality of being right with a holy God and being now embraced in Christ as if we had never sinned, restored to loving communion in Your family room. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The paralyzing power of the past. You know, sometimes the past and often actually, the past has a controlling effect on the present. It can, in many ways, determine your future when you don't deal with it properly and appropriately. Sometimes this, I want to just lay out a couple of ways to help us think about this. One of the ways that our past can plague us is we haven't dealt with past failures biblically, where we have sinned, where we've sinned grievously, and that sin has not been dealt with properly and appropriately, that past failure continues to exert control on us in the present. Regret over that. And if you're in Christ, not understanding the implications of the Gospel.

So you can have regret over past failures. You can have regret over lost circumstances. This isn't necessarily sin but just the way things were, the good old days. You can regret so much how wonderful things were that you failed to live in the present in a way that honors God. So there's two ways to think about that and think about how that can relate to you where you are today. Are you struggling in some way to put your past in its place, impacted by guilt or impacted by just regret and longing for former days? This passage speaks to us and shows us the way to go from where we are forward for the glory of God.

Now what I want us to do is break down our outline in two major points with a number of subpoints because I want us to look at the doctrine first, that's the first point, and then the application, that's gonna be the second point. So we're gonna have several points under doctrine where we try to just look at the passage and see what is the passage saying, and then we want to try to apply the passage to us in the application, the second part, okay?

So the doctrine of this text. Five subpoints, so A, B, C, D, E we're gonna work through on the doctrine. The first thing we need to look at is the work to which God had called them. The work to which God had called them. This is a review if you've been with us, but it's important. Basically chapter 1, verse 1 of Ezra/Nehemiah, remember we said these are two books but they're really one book and we're gonna look at them in succession, Ezra and Nehemiah, so when I say Ezra/Nehemiah, I'm thinking of the whole. But chapter 1, verse 1 of Ezra to chapter 3, verse 9 is all about the work, predominantly about the work that God has called them to. I mean, in chapter 1 we saw that the beginning of this book is all about the Cyrus decree, that the Lord stirred up the king of Persia, the heart of Cyrus the king of Persia, to build a house for Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, the God of Israel, and he, then, issues a decree or an edict that says, "I want Israelites, Jews, throughout my kingdom who are willing to go back and to build the house of the Lord." Pretty amazing how God worked in doing that. Cyrus issues an edict and commands that the house of the Lord be rebuilt. He's the successor now, he's the one who conquered Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians are the ones who

destroyed the house and now the one that's destroyed them now says, "Go back and build the house."

And we saw in chapter 1, verse 5, that the Lord used the same verb here, stirred up the hearts of the spirits of the people to go and rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. So he stirs up the hearts of many of the Jews, not all of them, actually a minority of them, but he stirs up the hearts of about 45-50,000 when you add everybody together, to go back under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the high priest, to rebuild the house of God, and they're going back to do that work. They're not stirred up to go back and just live in the land, they're stirred up to go back and get to work building the house of the Lord which means restoring right worship, the place of worship, the one place at that point in time in redemptive history, the one place that you could meet God at that time. Now today the one place you can meet God is Jesus Christ, but at this point in time, it was the temple in Jerusalem that needed to be rebuilt and he says, "Go back and build the temple."

It was a high and holy work to which they were called. Chapter 2 unfolds for us and lists for us all the people that went back, the names and so many families and how many people were in each family, and it tells us about the different groups. Remember the priests and the Levites and the singers and the gatekeepers and the temple servants and the builders, and so essentially we see that God has all of these different people ready to build. We see God working. He stirred up Cyrus, he stirred up the people and, look, he's got the people necessary to make temple worship work again. Look at the great things God is doing, look at the great things that God has got his people doing. That's the flow and force of Ezra as we're reading through from the beginning. Excitement is building.

Then in chapter 3, verse 1, "when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem." So the seventh month of the first year of their return. They're moved by God, now not just they've gone back, they've kind of established their homes again, they've unpacked their bags and their boxes maybe, at least most of them. Isn't it amazing how long it takes to unpack your boxes when you move? We have a confession thing sometimes about how long did it take you to really, I don't want to go there. But anyway, so, they unpacked, they reestablished their residence and now let's get to work. As one man, they go to Jerusalem and the first thing they do is the first thing they should do, they rebuild the altar which is the place of sacrifice so that they can meet with God again by offering a blood sacrifice because sinners need a sacrifice to meet with a holy God. And they began, as we read and you heard a minute ago, all that burnt offering, burnt offering, burnt offering, burnt offering repeated again and again and again, the sacrifices have been reinstated. Man can meet with God again and it continues to build. Look, everything is going according to plan.

Now there's one discordant element, we hear about them being terrified of the people in the land. We begin to see there's opposition. It kind of is touched on in verse 3 and then moved on past it. They keep doing the work and we saw that after the burnt offerings are offered and they have this time of worship, they celebrate the Feast of Booths, they reinstitute all the festivals, they send the order for materials. They've got the money

together and they pay for the materials to be brought so that they can begin the work. Then in chapter 3, verse 8, five months have elapsed since they reinstated burnt offerings and sent for the materials. It takes a while. It's not like they had Amazon that can deliver it in two days or, you know, whatever. They had, it takes a long time to get that much lumber delivered in that day. So it comes and now they're here and the idea is they're not delaying. They're right on schedule. It's amazing that they're getting it done this quickly. The second month of the second year, they're ready to go. And we saw in verse 8 that they have Zerubbabel, they have Jeshua, they have all their brothers, the priests, the Levites, and look at verse 8, "and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem began the work." Everybody is there. This is good.

They get right to work and they have overseers. We talked about that last time. They're called to the work. They're equipped for the work. Everything's beginning. They lay the foundation and now, I mean, so they're at the work. That's the first subpoint. The work to which God has called them is progressing. The second subpoint, B under doctrine: the worship of God is even being carried on in the work. We know it's being carried on because of the offerings, but look what he says in verse 10, "Now when the builders had 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 directions of King David." Verse 11, "They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, saying, 'For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.'" So the idea is the trumpets are played, the cymbals are clashing, the instruments are accompanying, and the singers are singing, and the people, the singers are leading them in song, and they are singing, worshipping God. They're doing exactly what God wants them to do.

So the worship of God is going. That's the second point. Doctrine: the work, the worship, and C, they're echoes of the past that ought to advance the work. Echoes from the past that ought to advance the work. There's very clearly in the text and what the people would have been experiencing at the time, and then the reader who's reading this would be seeing as well is the echoes, you could say Solomonic echoes, echoes of Solomon and David in their experience, what's going on right then that should have motivated and encouraged them. Now let me explain what I'm talking about. First of all, in the timing of the building that's happening now, the foundation being laid, we were told in verse 8 the second year of their coming to the house of God, in the second month. The second Jewish, the second month of the Jewish year there's an echo of Solomon even here because that was the month that Solomon built the temple and dedicated the temple. The second month.

So there's an echo there even in the timing. There's an echoing in the manner. We're told that they had the priests in verse 10, the trumpets, the cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. The author wants us to remember King David of Israel and what this does is reminds us that when you read Chronicles, you know how there's 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, you have six books of the Bible memorized if you just remember that, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, then Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, now you're through the historical

books. But anyway, so 1 & 2 Chronicles covers essentially what 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings covers. It's a retelling of the same stories with different details in a different authorial purpose. When you read 1 & 2 Chronicles and you get the retelling of David and Solomon and then the divided kingdom just like you have in 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, what you see is there is less of the details of David's life and what really comes to the fore is David's passion to build God's house in 1 Chronicles. It's all about his preparation for the house of the Lord to be built, the movement of the ark back, the recruiting, and what you find there is he's getting it all down. I mean, he's dividing the Levites, he's having auditions, it looks like, for the singers. You know, "You can sing. No, you can't or sing a little quieter," or whatever. "You sing louder. Get by the mic." He's getting it all together to make the temple worship work and he's laid out the rules. I mean, he's dividing the Levites according to what God had said, the Levites are the ones that are to be in charge. Aaron's family is the priests. He sets up rotations for the priests. He sets up rotations for the singers, rotations for the gatekeepers. And what this is telling us is that they are looking at what David said and they're doing exactly according to how David set things down. What this is saying is and the echo is look at David and Solomon, the God of David and Solomon is still with us now. It should have been an encouragement to them. I mean, the music, the instruments and the singing and the words they sung, if you were to compare this to 2 Chronicles 5:11-13, this is when Solomon dedicates the temple. The wording is very similar what you read in our verses 10 and 11 to what is said there in 2 Chronicles 5:11-13, almost word for word what they sing to the Lord, "For He is good. His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." The mention of the trumpets and the cymbals, the instruments, the singers.

So the idea is the God of Solomon and David is with us. He's not abandoned us. He is with us. All of the Solomonic echoes, all of the echoes of the past should be motivating them in the moment. So the problem is that they're not motivating all of them. The older people are having a problem. The echoes for them have not brought motivation but have brought discouragement and so the fourth point, D, is a crisis of faith. It's interesting how the author of Ezra/Nehemiah handles this and often this is the case when you're reading narrative, that is the telling of historical events in the Scriptures, when you're reading how the author tells it, sometimes you'll find authorial comments where he's telling you, "This was bad or this was good," sort of in the way he makes a comment outside of the story. Here the author doesn't make any comments. He doesn't make any evaluations. He just tells you but what he, and when you don't have an evaluation, how do you know what he's telling you? Well, he's giving you the events in a certain order and you've got to look at them carefully and observe and put it in context so that you can see what he's telling you, and what he's telling us is in an understated way, he's telling us that these older Levites and priests that are discouraged are completely missing the boat.

We can understand why they might be discouraged, but this is not the time for it. They're having a crisis of faith. That's why verse 12 is there, he says, "The people," look at verse 11, you have a crescendo basically building. All that's been happening, all these wonderful things are happening through the first three chapters and, "They sang, praising and giving thanks to the LORD," verse 11, "saying, 'For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.' And all the people shouted with a great shout



when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." End of chapter. That's how I wish it would end. Or they could jump on down to verse 13b, "for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away." It's like a roar of like something you can imagine like you were driving by an open air stadium and the winning touchdown was scored in a big game and people were going crazy and you had this, "Wow!" and you hear it for miles. This was a much more meaningful thing than anything that happens in a stadium but it was that number of people and the shout was heard far away.

But you have this troubling insertion of verse 12 and 13a, "Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy." They wept with a loud voice. One of the things you see as you read the Scriptures and you learn the words, I mean, this word "weeping" is not just meaning that they were just crying softly, and he tells us they wept with a loud voice. Weeping for the Semitic peoples was something that was loud. It wasn't quiet. They expressed their grief audibly, moaning, groaning, crying out in agony.

So simultaneously the shout of joy goes up from the majority of the people and a shout of grief goes up from these who remember what the former temple was like. And why are they weeping? This crisis of faith? Well, because they're comparing the first temple to the second temple. It's clear when he says that in verse 12, "the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice." The original audience would know the rest of the story because this book was written 110 years or so after the events. They would know the rest of the story is coming and they would know at the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah. Remember I mentioned that they're gonna, we're gonna see the work get stopped for 17 years and then God raises up two prophets, Zechariah and Haggai. Their ministries are discussed briefly in chapter 5, verse 1, and again in kind of an understated way. "When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them," chapter 5, verse 1. Well, when you read Haggai and Zechariah, both of them have to deal with this which is a sin of these people of despairing in a way that was not godly.

Now listen, one of the things that's so important to understand about biblical Christianity is it's not about, biblical Christianity is not about always be happy, like it's a Pollyanna thing, "Hey, I'm just happy. I'm saved and I'm happy and I'm gonna be happy and you should be happy. And even when I'm not happy, I'm gonna act like I'm happy and I'm gonna smile all the time. And if you ask me how I'm doing, I'm doing great." That's not biblical Christianity. That is Pollyanna and what a goofy dumb movie that was anyway. Forgive me, girls, that you may, whoever may have liked that. But anyway, just look how they make the minister look. Okay, that's probably one of the reasons I don't like it, if you've watched Pollyanna. But anyway, so I lost my train of thought.

Christianity is not about putting a smile on your face when you're not, when you're sorrowful. The beauty of the Bible is it's a realistic book. God is a God who in the amazing reality, the way Scripture reveals him, he is a God who feels things emotionally.

Now, there's also the sense that his emotions don't change him in any way, so the impassibility of God is a truth. He doesn't change. But Scripture shows that he does feel. He was grieved. In Genesis 6:5, he was grieved that he had made man. It wasn't that he was just fed up with man, no, he was grieved that he had made man. He shouts for joy over his people, Yahweh does this. He feels emotions. He's angry with the sinner every day. So our God is a God who created us in his image to think and to feel, to want and to do. So please understand we're not saying it's never appropriate to grieve, it's very appropriate to grieve and as Scripture says, mourn with those that mourn. There's a time to mourn, there's a time to laugh. Jesus, look at Jesus. You see him, his heart is troubled. He is sorrowful to the point of death he tells his apostles, his friends in the hour before, hours before the crucifixion.

So our God is a God who feels and that's one of the most precious things. You can know in your deepest moments of grief that you have a High Priest who will meet you in that grief and mourn with you. He understands. He is compassionate and sympathetic. Read chapter 2 of Hebrews, chapter 4 of Hebrews, chapter 5 of Hebrews, and see there what a wonderful gift it is to have a Savior that has experienced everything that we experience, to have a God who cares like that. So we're not saying it's wrong to feel things. No, we're not saying that at all. What we're saying is that you must not let your past grief control your present circumstance in the sense of not being faithful to God in what he's called you to do.

This is where they had failed. It was reasonable that they would have twinge of grief and sorrow as they looked at the foundation. They could see when they looked at the foundation, "This temple is going to be nothing like Solomon's temple." And why is it that way? Because of our sin. It was appropriate to feel grief but they didn't deal with their grief properly. That's the problem. They didn't know how to biblically deal with their past or they didn't do it, and it had great consequence.

Let me show you how, I think we, the author shows us this in point E, 1E, the context. We said the work, the worship, echoes of the past that should advance the work, a crisis of faith, now the context. When you read out of chapter 3 into chapter 4, verse 1, it's important to do this from time to time to make sure, remember the chapter divisions aren't inspired, they were added later. When Ezra or whoever wrote this book about Ezra/Nehemiah, when it was finally compiled, it wasn't Ezra, it was someone after him, but they took the documents that Ezra had written, Nehemiah, and they put it together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and made it, gave us a perfect work here. They didn't have chapter divisions so those were added later.

So you read out of verse 13, the end of chapter 4 and I think it helps us to see something. When you look at the concept that's repeated again and again, I think emphasized is the loudness of the shout. So before we go into chapter 4, let me show you chapter 3, verse 11 again when it says, "And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." Then in verse 12 they "wept with a loud voice, while many shouted aloud for joy." Verse 13, they "could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people,

for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away." He wants us to note how loud the shout was and it was heard far away.

This word "shout," it's actually "loud shout" is actually the same Hebrew word repeated. It's like "shouting they shouted," and so it's translated and it's also "shouting they shouted greatly." So "they shouted with a loud shout" is how the English translates it. The word pictures a loud noise. The idea is it sort of hurts your ears to hear it. This was a word that could be the shout when you look at how it's used in the Old Testament, was often used of shouts of joy, of victory, could also occasionally be used for shouts of grief, but the most common usage by far in the Old Testament is the shout of a war cry. In fact, the phrase "to shout with a loud shout or with a great shout," which is exactly the Hebrew in verse 11 and verse 13, though in verse 13 I'm reading the New American Standard Bible and it says, "shouted with a loud shout," in verse 11 it said, "shouted with a great shout," both times exactly identical in Hebrew.

That identical phrase is found in Joshua 6 twice, just like it is twice here. Joshua 6. Joshua 6 is the story of the conquest of Jericho. The people are instructed in verse 5, "It shall be that when they make a," remember Jericho that has to be conquered, great walled city, "It shall be that when they," this is Joshua 6:5, "It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead." Then you also have that word "shout" repeated again and again, actually two other times. Verse 10, "Shout. Then you shall shout. When I say shout, you shall shout," Joshua tells them. And then verse 20 after they march around the city the seven times, once a day for seven days and seven times on the seventh day, and they're told, "Now the Lord's given you this city." It says in verse 20, "So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city." They utterly destroyed Jericho. They shouted with a great shout twice.

The same word is used in a number of places in the Old Testament. You have it in Judges 7:18, not shouted with a great shout but shouted when Gideon tells his soldiers, remember the 300 that destroy the Midianite army? He says, "Shout for the LORD and for Gideon," in Judges 7:18. 1 Samuel 4:5-8, has "shouted with a great shout" there and that is where the Philistines are warring against Israel and they defeat Israel in a battle, and the Israelites go and get the ark of the covenant out of the tabernacle, they bring it into the camp and when the ark of the covenant comes into the camp, they shout with a great shout and the shout is so loud that the Philistine army hears it miles away and they know what has happened and they say, "The Lord has come into the camp of his people," basically, "We are in trouble. Really, guys, get ready for a fight. We've gotta be ready." Ironically, the Philistines win the next battle, but they knew when the shout, that war cry shout was a shout of war and also the presence of God.

Now I think all of that informs how the readers, the original readers who knew their Old Testaments would have seen this. When he says, "the sound was heard far away," now

read with me into chapter 4, verse 1, "Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel," and here's where the opposition really intensifies. Actually the first word in Hebrew, you know, the word order is different in Greek and Hebrew than in English, of course, the first word in Hebrew is "when they heard." It's one compound phrase, "when they heard." So it's like the sound was heard far away, when they heard, the enemies of the Lord, that they were building." He's emphasizing the fact that this shout was basically a witness to the enemies of God, it's time to do battle. Now we're talking about spiritual battle, not physical battle anymore. But this is telling us what? This is telling us that the worship of God, to rebuild the temple, to restore right worship in our day is not about building buildings. I mean, we have to build buildings but that's not what we're really about, what we're doing is we're building the spiritual temple by building people to be true worshipers of the living God through faith in Jesus Christ, and what this is telling us and how it applies to us is when you are about God's business and you are building the house of God in your own life, in the lives of others around you, you are evangelizing, you are discipling, what you are doing when you do that is you are doing acts of war. "Well, I'd rather not be involved in a war." Me, too, but we have no choice because there is an enemy in this world, Satan and all of his kingdom, who hate the things of God and so for us to try to lift up Jesus Christ, you will be opposed. There's no way around it.

So this is what this passage is telling us. They were gonna have the opposition. The Lord intended this day to be a great day of excitement and joy and the praise on his people's lips and that shout going up was gonna be the beginning of another advance forward, but I think the author wants us to see there was enough of a seed of discontent and even despair that it hindered the people dramatically. The people who were looking back and thinking what the temple had been and looking at what it was now, they thought, "Whatever we do, it's not gonna be worth anything." And even though they may have been still trying to be involved in the process, their hearts weren't fully engaged because their past was not in its place. They weren't really fully committed to the work. They weren't seeing things as they really were because they were seeing the temple is gonna be less than it was. It was. It's not gonna be as impressive. It's not as big. Look at the floor plan, it's not as big, but is God here? Is the God of heaven at work among us? Then he's doing something among us and he has a way of always doing the right thing, and just because he's not doing what I want doesn't mean he's not doing what he ought to do.

So the temple's gonna be smaller because God is doing something bigger and, yes, we can lament appropriately, they could think back and say, "How awful that we were idolaters and we sinned against the Lord and we lost Solomon's temple because of that." Yes, and they should put that in its place properly, confessing their sin and looking to the sacrifice to be clean, and then they should say, "But now we are here in this moment, let us build together with God for the glory of God." They should be, the old guys should be the ones leading the charge saying, "It is amazing what God has done. He's given us everybody back that we need. He's brought us back to this place. He's building a smaller building. Listen, it's a lot smaller than the other building. The other building was

amazing. But He must have, His kingdom doesn't go backwards. His kingdom is advancing."

So somehow a smaller temple is a better thing. Now essentially what happens is 17 years, they get stymied in the work, we'll see this in chapter 4, and for 17 years nothing happens in the building of the temple. It stops. The foundation is there, nothing else. Haggai, Zechariah come along and they say, "Who is despising the small things? You look at the small things and you think nothing's happening here?" Basically in Zechariah 4 he says, "I'm gonna take Zerubbabel and I'm gonna make My kingdom through him. We're gonna build this temple and it's gonna be awesome." Then Haggai 2, Haggai comes and he says, "Are you guys looking at the temple as if it's nothing?" They started back to work and he can tell they're discouraged and he comes up under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and says to them, "Are you looking at the temple as though it's nothing? I tell you that this, the glory of this smaller temple will exceed, far exceed the glory of the previous temple." It doesn't look like it to me. And if they were sitting there with their earthly eyes, they would have argued with him. Maybe in their hearts they were, and if they were, do you know what? They were wrong.

The glory of that temple, he says and, in fact, in Haggai 2 let's read that. Haggai 2:3, it's near the end of your Old Testament. Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, that's how the last four. I'm helping you out with your Bible memory, even the adults, not the kids. Okay, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Haggai. It makes it better if you say Haggai because it kind of rhymes better, but anyway. Sorry.

Haggai 2:3, "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now?" Realism. Look at it. How do you see it now? "Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts. As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!' For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." It may look like less but it's going to be far more. The glory will be greater because on a day, one certain day, a young Jewish woman and a young Jewish man are gonna come into this temple holding a baby, a boy, and they're going to be bringing him to dedicate him in obedience with the law after 40 days after his birth. They're gonna bring him in to present him and there's gonna be an old man named Simeon and an old woman named Anna, a prophet and a prophetess, who are gonna lay eyes upon that baby and the Spirit of God is gonna come upon them and they're gonna say, "This is the salvation of Israel. This is the Savior for which we have waited."

The glory will fill the temple. That baby was the God-man, fully God. God of heaven left the glory of heaven and became a man and we, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld his glory, and that same man is gonna come back again and again in obedience to the Jewish law, for each festival we're told about when he's 12 years old and he's at the feast and he stays there and he confounds the men, they can't understand how a man, a young man at 12 years old can know the Scriptures like he does. He's gonna come and he's gonna cleanse the temple at the beginning of his ministry, he's gonna cleanse the temple at the end of his ministry, and he's going to say, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it." They're gonna think it's about that building and he was talking about the true temple that has now been replaced. Solomon's temple was impressive but it was not the temple. The second temple was less impressive than Solomon's temple but it was still not the temple because God was saying it's not the building, it is the true temple, Jesus Christ. So when he says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it," they didn't understand that he was speaking of the temple of his body and his disciples remembered that when he was raised from the dead. The place of God's glory will come to this temple, and they are rebuilding that temple so that it will one day be there for Jesus' parents to come and offer, his step-dad Joseph and his mother Mary, to come and offer that sacrifice.

Now what does that mean for us for putting our past in our place, in its place? How does this passage speak to that? They were looking at their past, maybe the glory of the circumstances. Maybe they were looking at their sin and despairing over the fact that, "We've been so sinful. Look what we've done. We'll never have it like it was before. It'll never be wonderful again." And they don't realize that the God of heaven is a God who says, "I will give you beauty for ashes. I will restore the years the locusts have eaten. If you will surrender to Me, I will take this house and make it greater than the former. I will take your life and make it greater than it would have been.

I want to suggest four ways that we can put our past in its place. This is the application, point 2, application. Covered the doctrine, now application. There are four subpoints how to put your past in its place. The first subpoint is resolve to deal with it biblically. Resolve to deal with your past biblically and honestly. Biblically means honestly but I want to emphasize that. Deal with it honestly. Face it. If you don't deal with it, it will paralyze you. We're not saying just forget whatever's happened and move on. That's not dealing with your past. A lot of times sinful people want to do that, they want to hurt people and then just say, "Hey, get over it. Move on." That's not the way God deals with our past failures. When there is conflict, there's distance created and there needs to be reconciliation effected and that takes some work and ultimately it takes the cross work of Jesus Christ, but it has to be applied in that situation.

So you have to resolve to deal with it biblically. You're not just gonna ignore it, you're not gonna pretend it's not there. That's not what these guys needed to do, they just needed to forget the past, they needed to deal with it biblically. The second thing, B, is commit to confess your sins fully and thoroughly. Now we're thinking here of where you have failed. I'll say a word about when it's not failure on your part after this, after these four points. Commit to confess your sins fully and thoroughly. Confess means to say the same

thing as. It means to call sin what God calls it. It means to call my action and see it the same way God sees it. It doesn't mean to try to explain it away. It means to evaluate the way God evaluates it and that's the only way you can put your past behind you, really truly behind you, is you have to confess your sins. You have to see it the way God sees it.

So if it's some sin in your past, something happened before you were a believer or something that happened after you were a believer, no matter how ugly it is, you think it is, and the reality all sin is ugly, we just have different flavors but everything that is not in accordance with God's word is ugly. But you may have some things that because of just the social impact that you've hidden and you've not really dealt with, and they are hindering you in the present, the way that you put that behind you truly biblically is you deal with it honestly, you don't just try to stuff it, you call it what it is and you confess it. You say the same thing that God says about it. You take 100% responsibility. You stop hiding it from him, first, and often to really deal with these kind of things, we often need the help of a trusted brother or sister to help us. This is back to James 5:16, confess your sins to one another that you may be healed. There's times for sharing those things with another brother or sister that can keep us accountable but also just be there to pray with us. You do that with wisdom but it's an important thing. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy." God invites us to come to him honestly, confessing our sin. 1 John, well, 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So resolve to deal with it biblically. You have to confess it. Now this is gonna take some work sometimes. This is why you need help from a friend, too, that can help you even think through it sometimes to see really own my sin. So often what we do is we blame it on someone else, at least partially. We're willing to take, you know, 75% I was wrong, 25% it was the other person. Well, they may have been guilty and they may have been even a stumbling block but to call it what God calls it, you must take 100% responsibility for whatever percent of the whole conflict is yours. You have to take 100% responsibility for how you did not obey God no matter what they did. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says God's faithful in every temptation to give you a means of escape, therefore when I sin, when I don't escape, it wasn't anybody's fault but my own. 100% my fault and what comes out of the heart, Mark 7, is what's in the heart. It's not what squeezes the toothpaste that's the problem, the toothpaste is in the tube. That's when you squeeze it, it comes out. When somebody squeezes you and something ugly comes out, it's not their fault that it came out. Well, I mean, they helped, they just helped reveal what was already there, the problem was it was in there. And you have to call it that. You have to say, "No, I am a sinner. I have this sinful anger. I have this sinful lust. I have this sinful greed. I have this sinful lying tendency." Whatever it is, call it what God calls it.

Confess it to the Lord and then confess it to others. In fact, a really helpful chapter in a book, "The Peacemaker," is the seven A's of confession when you have to confess to another person but it's also good even in confessing to God to look at some of this as well. You address everyone involved. You accept responsibility for your sin. You avoid "if, but" or "maybe." That if those words come out in a confession, you can just about

guarantee you just ruined your confession. "You know, I want to tell you how sorry I am for what I did. If you, you know, if you were offended or, you know, if I was wrong in that," you haven't confessed. Or you say this is worse, even but is worse than the if, I think most of the time. "I'm really sorry for what I said. I was wrong. It was terrible what I said, but you really got under my skin. Really it's your fault. You need to repent." That's what you're essentially saying. It's ridiculous. Or, "Maybe you were offended." No, when you see what God has told you that you've done wrong, you go and you avoid "if, but, maybe." And the other seven A's of confession are in the book, so it's a good book but you could also look it up.

You confess, thirdly, you repent. You alter your behavior. You determine you're not going to continue along that path. You turn away from your sin back to God. "I did this. I own it. I confess it. Lord, I don't want to do it again. I don't want to go there anymore. I want to honor You with that." Repentance is a fruit of the Spirit of God working in your life when you're willing to turn from it. We said earlier if you cover your sins, you won't prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them finds mercy.

Then the fourth step, not just deal with it biblically, confess it, repent, trust God and the Gospel. Trust God in his promise that he does forgive sinners who trust in Jesus Christ. Trust God that Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary is enough to cover your sin; that when he died, he died for your sin no matter how bad you think it is, no matter how bad you think other people might think it is. It really doesn't matter what other people think, you've sinned against God, but the good news is Jesus Christ has paid for every sin of everyone who will come to him and the wonder of the Gospel is that he's taken your sin out of the way and he's given you his righteousness and so you can now rejoice in that you are washed, you are clean. God sees you, this is truly the way God sees every believer, he sees you as if you had never sinned. Not only that, now think about that for a moment, he sees you as if you had never sinned one time but that's not all, that's pretty amazing, he sees you as if you had lived the perfect life of Jesus Christ. Meditate on that. Your sin is taken out of the way and you have a standing and righteousness, you stand in grace. When God looks at you if you've repented and placed your faith in Jesus, his heart delights in you the same way he delights in his Son. You say, "Well, what about what I did?" It's under the blood of Christ. He's delighting in you. He's chosen to remember your sin no more. He sees you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life. When you understand that, you can put your past in its place. You can accept the fact that, yes, and then you can even in the appropriate moments tell a testimony to someone else in similar circumstance. "You know, I did this." You may say, "I had an affair or I had an abortion or I stole this. Even as a believer I did this, but God has forgiven me. I've dealt with it properly. I've made restitution. I've done what I need to do." But the blood of Jesus Christ, we have a wonderful Savior.

And if it's not situations of past sin, it's a matter of just putting, we wish things were like they were, we just have to put it in light of God's word. For the Christian, listen, every day you're being made more like Jesus if you belong to him. Every day you are getting closer to glory. Every day you are moving upward and onward. That is reality. Christians aren't to be the people who look back and say, "Man, I wish it was, I wish I was back in high school, or I wish I was back in college, or I wish I was back in the early days of my



marriage, or the early days when our kids were young." I mean, sure, you can think about that for a moment but if it's hindering you in the present, repent of that and look to God and trust him, "Lord, I want to be faithful to You right now to build Your kingdom today and rejoice in what You are doing right now. I lament all my failures in the past, sins of commission, sins of omission, but I thank You they're under the blood. Let me get on with doing Your will now."

That's the kind of mindset that God will use and we will see his glory in the same way they saw his glory in their day.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank You for Your word and the power of Your word. We thank You, Lord, for the Gospel, the reality of the forgiveness of our sins, the reality of a right standing, the reality of a relationship of love with a God who knows everything about us and everything that we've ever done, everything that we've ever thought, who through Jesus Christ is able to look at us and see us robed in garments of perfect righteousness. We pray for those that are here today who don't know that reality, who have not placed their faith in Christ. Lord, help them see how foolish it is to reject such a glorious and loving Savior. Give them grace, Lord, to turn to You in repentance and faith. And Father, for we who belong to You, may we not be hindered by failures in the past in our lives, right now help us resolve all of them, and as we go forward, we're gonna fail again and again until we get to glory. Help us deal with our sin biblically and faithfully and always keep building Your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*