

Discerning the Sounds of the Time: A Time of Transition and Growth

By

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Introduction: The Big Six

1. What do you hear?
2. Who are you listening to?
3. What are the people saying?
4. What is God saying?
5. What are you saying?
6. What are you doing?

Ironically we believe what we hear and not what we see. What we hear, listen to and internalize determines how we walk this walk of faith. Faith actually comes by hearing!

Romans 10:17

¹⁷ So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. KJV

- What you listen to!
- What you say!
- What you repeat!

Will directly influence what you choose to believe.

So I ask you again, in this time of transition and growth:

1. What do you hear?
2. Who are you listening to?
3. What are the people saying?
4. What is God saying?
5. What are you saying?
6. What are yo doing?

What and who is feeding your faith or feeding your fear?

Whenever there is a time of transition there is an opportunity for God inspired growth.

Also during times of transition there is an opportunity for chaos and disorder.

Transition is a time of change, there is going to be tension because things are going to be different. Our ways of doing things are disturbed and we are now in

a time where things are different. What was normal and comforting to us becomes undone. By definition the process of transition and change is uncomfortable. We are disheveled and we will experience some discomfort. It is during times of transition that each individual has to make a conscious decision as to how they are going to respond to the realities of change.

How are you choosing to respond to this time of transition and change?

Don't answer this question to fast. This isn't an either or question. This isn't are you responding good or bad, in favor or against.

This is a question that is meant for introspective reflection. Reflect on what is going in you and be honest about what you are feeling. To put it simply for most, if not all, it is a time of mixed emotions / feelings.

The question then becomes what do you do with those emotions / feelings and how are your emotions submitted to the will of God?

As Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ, in the end we want to be in the will of God! We want to know what God's will is and be

Matthew 25:20-23

²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' NRSV

In this time of transition how are you being a good and faithful servant?

We are called to serve. Jesus came to serve. How are you being a "faithful servant" in this time of transition?

Matthew 20:24-28

²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶ It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and

whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Now the key here is servants serve their master.

- In times of transition we have to ask how do I serve my master?
- How do I serve the Lord?

To answer these two questions we have to know what the will of God is! We have to seek first and foremost to know the will of God and then follow the will of God as a faithful servant.

Discerning the Sounds of the Time: A Time of Transition and Growth

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5. What are you saying?
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The Story of Rebuilding the Temple: Servants and Saboteurs

Servants: Ezra 3:8-13; 5:1-2; 6:1-7; 6:11-12; 6:13-18

Whenever there is a time of change there are those who are with God's program, they hear God and they seek to be faithful in the times of transition. They seek to grow God's kingdom and they see this as a time for growth. They embrace the tension of change and transition, they lean into it and get the work done to build.

Saboteurs: Ezra 4:1-23

During times of change in the midst of the chaos that is inherent in times of change and transition there are those who choose to seize the moment to attempt to undermine what God is doing.

They use this time as a time to grab power and create chaotic moments that put fear in the people.

They pretend to have the best interest of the body in mind but in reality they don't. They are not being used by God.

In Times of Transition: The Focus Must Be GOD!

In times of transition and change each and every believer must keep their focus on God. They must work to maintain and feed their personal relationship with God. Every believer must, especially during times of change and transition do the following:

- Increase their prayer life (time with God in prayer)
- Praise God each and every day (private and corporate worship)
- Stay in God's word (read the word, study the word and meditate on the word)
- Listen to and feed on the taught word and preached word (the preached and taught word at your home church)
- Have times of silence, solitude and meditations with God
- They need to fast regularly while praying
- They must worship God in the sanctuary at all times

In the book of Ezra we see a time of transition. The people of God have come back home after being in exile. It is an intense time of transition and they lean into this time. What is the first thing they do?

The first thing they do is praise God!

Ezra 3:1-7 - Sit at the Altar: God FIRST! - The Servants

When the seventh month came, and the Israelites were in the towns, the people gathered together in Jerusalem. ² Then Jeshua son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his kin set out to build the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as prescribed in the law of Moses the man of God.

³ They set up the altar on its foundation, because they were in dread of the neighboring peoples, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the Lord, morning and evening. ⁴ And they kept the festival of booths, as prescribed, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the ordinance, as required for each day, ⁵ and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the sacred festivals of the Lord, and the offerings of everyone who made 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 was not yet laid. ⁷ So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia.

They set up an altar to praise God, offer prayers to God and seek the will, protection and guidance of the Lord.

They knew the task before them was great.

They knew they had enemies all around them.

They confess that they were afraid of their enemies.

Enemies are bullies and they use their position and power to intimidate believers.

They can't stop believers, they don't have the power to stop them but if they can put fear in them they will stop themselves.

The Israelites focus on worship. They focus on prayer. They focus on giving God, God's due in offerings. They don't give less they give more. They know to make through this transition resources are key and they step up.

In times of transitions leaders don't back down but they step up. They give more and they lead during the transition.

Ezra 3:8-11 - The Servants

⁸ In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work on the house of the Lord.

⁹ And Jeshua with his sons and his kin, and Kadmiel and his sons, Binnui and Hodaviah along with the sons of Henadad, the Levites, their sons and kin, together took charge of the workers in the house of God.

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; ¹¹ and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,

"For God is good,

for God's steadfast love endures forever toward Israel."

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. NRSV

During this time of transition we see three things servants do:

1. The first thing we see is the people joined together to build. They were committed to following Zerubbabel and building. They weren't looking back to where they had come from or what they had come through. They were focused on building the house of the Lord. They are focused on growth! They were moving full speed ***ahead!***
2. The adults, twenty years old and older, provided leadership. The designation of twenty years old and older is a sign that the young people were included.

In times of transition the elders have to make room for the young leaders to lead because they are the ones who will inherit what is being built. The people took charge and they worked together to build the house of the Lord up. **They united around the work that God had called them to do during this time of transition.**

3. They praised the Lord. As the work began they took time to proclaim loud and clear, “For God is good, for God’s steadfast love endures forever towards Israel.” The priest put on their vestments, they brought the entire praise band together (trumpets, cymbals and the singers) and they praised God.

This was the foundation of their work. It is this foundation that will get them through what they are about to go through. What they are about to go through is not going to be easy.

Remember, they are in a time of transition, they are unsettled, this is hard work, they are moving from the old to the new. They are moving from yesterday to tomorrow. They are trying to look forward but the rear view mirror is forever present.

In times of transition you not only do you have to be careful as to what you hear and you must also be careful as to what you see.

1. What are you looking at?
2. Who are you allowing to paint a picture of what you see?
3. Are you looking at where God brought you from or where God is taking you to?
4. Are you looking at yesterday with rose colored glasses or are you looking the faith-filled promise of the future?
5. Which way you look will determine what you see?
6. Are you looking behind you or in front of you?

The direction you look will determine your response to what God is doing!

Ezra 3:10-13

¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; ¹¹ and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,

“For he is good,

for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, **though many shouted aloud for joy,** ¹³ so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away

1. What do you hear?
2. Are you shouting sounds of praise?
3. Are you weeping for what was and is now no more?
4. Is it a mixture of shouting and weeping?
5. Do you even recognize or know what you are feeling because the tears are mixed with tears of joy and sorrow?

Now, the key here is that those that are weeping aren't fighting against what God is doing. They are weeping because they remember the times of old. They remember the first temple. They have a right to cry.

On the other hand those who are excited about what God is doing and are praising God. The weeping of the older generation could also be interpreted as tears of joy because they see the new. They are excited about the new.

During times of transition we have to give people the space to feel what they feel. We have to make room for shouts of joy and the cries of pain. It is an emotional time.

While we make space for people to feel what they are feeling we cannot allow how we feel to determine how we act. We have act as servants of the true and living God who are in support of what God is doing. While we may lament in the moment we are not given the freedom to be disobedient in the moment or side with those who are opposing what God is doing. Opposition in times of transition is real. It is in times of transition that the enemy tries to seize the moment to turn the tables upside down.

Ezra 4:1-4 - The Resistance to the Plan of God: The Saboteurs

When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, ² they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here."

³ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we

alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us.”

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, 5 and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

This is where the enemy gets us, and the enemy is real. We are not fighting against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness:

Ephesians 6:12-13

¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. NRSV

It is hard for us to believe that there are people who frequent the church, appear nice but are yet an adversary to the work of God. The devil couldn't get his work done if he didn't have demons in the church who could fool you!

In this text the adversaries try to trick them by trying to get them to believe they are with them. That is how evil wiggles itself into the equation. They trick us by appealing to us. Because Zerrubbabel and his team were focused on God and the will of God they sniffed this out and tell them NO we don't want your help and don't need your help!

But look at what they did in response to Zerrubbabel standing with the Lord!

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, 5 and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.
They discouraged them and made them afraid.

A discouraged people who are afraid will stop building. They will turn and listen to the saboteurs. They will even start repeating what they are saying.

The saboteurs are sometimes conscious of how they are being used and there are times when they are unconscious of how they are being used.

Saboteurs can be well intentioned people but you can't judge them by their intentions you have base your judgement on their actions. When their actions result in undermining what God is doing by using discouraging fear tactics you know what you are dealign with.

What see is the people of God don't let them stop them from doing what God has called them to do. When you are in the midst of a transition, a time of discernment, that is made difficult as you are trying to hear God, the enemy is going to come. You have to decide how YOU are going to respond.

Ezra 4:6 - The Enemy Writes a Letter

⁶ In the reign of Ahasuerus, in his accession year, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Ezra 4:11-16- What Did the Letter Say? What are they trying to do here?

¹¹ this is a copy of the letter that they sent):

“To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the people of the province Beyond the River, send greeting. And now ¹² may it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations.

¹³ Now may it be known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be reduced. ¹⁴ Now because we share the salt of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king, ¹⁵ so that a search may be made in the annals of your ancestors. You will discover in the annals that this is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and that sedition was stirred up in it from long ago. On that account this city was laid waste. ¹⁶ We make known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, you will then have no possession in the province Beyond the River.”
NRSV

They have created enemies. What the enemy does is set you up against others and makes them see what God is doing as an attack against them.

They make it personal, they attack persons, they name you as an enemy. The people they attack who are doing the work of God then becomes your enemy and they try to get you to side with them against the person.

What we have to realize that when you attack what God is doing it is not the person who is doing the work you are fighting. You are actually fighting against God! This is never personal. Don't take it personal.

In the end they are trying to stir up an army to stop what God is doing. After they write to the King look how he responds:

Ezra 4:19-24

¹⁹ So I made a decree, and someone searched and discovered that this city has risen against kings from long ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it. ²⁰ Jerusalem has had mighty kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid.

²¹ Therefore issue an order that these people be made to cease, and that this city not be rebuilt, until I make a decree. ²² Moreover, take care not to be slack in this matter; why should damage grow to the hurt of the king?"

²³ Then when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and the scribe Shimshai and their associates, they hurried to the Jews in Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease. ²⁴ At that time the work on the house of God in Jerusalem stopped and was discontinued until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Look at how the people of God respond. They don't respond by attacking those who attacked them. They don't fight they way the enemy fought.

Ezra 5:1-5

Now the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah 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.

² Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them.

³ At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?"

⁴ They also asked them this, "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" ⁵ But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report reached Darius and then answer was returned by letter in reply to it. NRSV

The people listened to the Prophet Haggai and the Prophet Zechariah. In times of transition you have to listen to the prophet.

You have to listen to the one God has set in your midst to lead you through the wilderness.

God never allows God's people to go through transition without leadership.

The people of God must follow and support Godly leadership and not be distracted by the wiles of the devil. Once again:

1. What do you hear?
2. Who are you listening to?
3. What are the people saying?

4. What is God saying?
5. What are you saying?
6. What are you doing?

The story goes on and another letter was sent by the enemy, the people of God responded and this is how the story ends:

Ezra 6:16-18

¹⁶ The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

¹⁷ They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁸ Then they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

The people made a decision not to be intimidated by those who were against what God was doing.

1. They focused on doing the work of the Lord.
2. They sought the Lord in their work so they would have the strength to get through what they were going through.
3. They listened to the word of God as spoken by God's priest, prophets and choose leaders.
4. They followed those God had sent to lead them during this time of transition.
5. They persisted, stayed focused, worshipped, gave their offerings and did the work of building / rebuilding and securing the foundation of the house of the Lord.

In times of transition it is a time to build.

It is a time to refocus and build.

Don't let the enemy distract you from the task at hand. Israel understood that God was with them.

You must be clear that in times of transition God has not forsaken you, God is with you.

God will lead you, guide you and protect you as long as you stay in the will of God.

The details to the rest of the story (read at your leisure):

Ezra 6:6–12. King **Darius** then gave three instructions to **Tattenai** and his associates: (1) He told them to leave the Jews alone and **not interfere** with the building of the **temple** (vv. 6–7). The words **stay away from**

there were a common Aramaic legal statement. This was to be in accord with the edict of the great King Cyrus. (2) Tax money was to be used to help finance the project and animals were to be supplied **daily** so that **sacrifices** could be made at the altar of the new temple along with food items for the **offerings** (vv. 8–10). Flour (from **wheat**), **salt**, and **oil** were to be used in the grain offerings (Lev. 2:1–2, 7, 13), and **wine** for drink offerings (Lev. 23:13) on feast days. (3) **Anyone** who disobeyed the edict was to suffer a horrible fate (Ezra 6:11–12). He was to be **impaled on a beam** taken from **his own house**, and **his house** was to be demolished. Execution by impaling was practiced in the Assyrian and Persian Empires. Darius wanted no disturbance in this part of his vast kingdom. The pagan king acknowledged that **God** had **caused His name to dwell at Jerusalem**. Darius probably thought of Yahweh as a local deity (cf. comments on 5:6–10), whereas Ezra, in recording that statement, knew of the covenantal significance in Yahweh’s name dwelling in Jerusalem.

So Tattenai’s inquiry backfired. Instead of stopping the temple work, he had to let it proceed and even had to help pay for it out of his **revenues!** Darius’ curse on anyone who would **destroy the temple** was fulfilled in: (a) Antiochus Epiphanes, who desecrated it in 167 b.c., and died insane three years later; (b) Herod the Great (37–4 b.c.), who added extensively to the temple to glorify himself, and who had domestic trouble and died of disease; and (c) the Romans, who destroyed the temple in a.d. 70, and later had their empire destroyed.¹

¹ Martin, J. A. (1985). [Ezra](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 663–664). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.