Gifts for the Temple
Ezra 8:24-35
SS Lesson for 07/28/2013

Devotional Scripture: 1 Chron 29:10-18

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson teaches about how God's people carried out transporting the Gifts for the Temple with honor and integrity. The study's aim is to show that the timeless principles of handling God's finances can be used today. The study's application is to understand that God will enable and bless us when we employ these godly principles in our Churches.

Key Verse: Ezra 8:28

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Note how the physical preparation was made for the journey. Ezra divided the silver... gold, and articles among 24 of the key men in the group. These items were gifts for the temple, given by Persian officials and by non-returning Israelites. They included 25 tons of silver, silver articles weighing 3-3/4 tons, 3-3/4 tons of gold, 20 bowls of gold that weighed about 19 pounds, and two expensive bronze objects. All this would be valued at many millions of dollars today. No wonder Ezra was concerned about the people's safety (v. 21). Ezra charged these key men with the responsibility of getting the precious metals and valuables back to Jerusalem safely. In his charge he said that these material possessions were consecrated to the Lord and that the silver and gold were freely given by God's people. He emphasized the need for guarding the money and articles carefully by noting that they would all be weighed on arrival to be sure none had disappeared. The priests and Levites accepted the responsibility of taking the metals and utensils to Jerusalem.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Those who would bear the sacred articles must themselves be consecrated to God. So Ezra spoke of them as being holy also. We need to be very careful about the things of God and especially about how we handle His Word. The Word of God is the foundation of God's covenant with His people; it is what makes them special and directs them in truth. "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). Just as those in Ezra's time who carried the holy vessels were holy in their assignment, so we must show the same dedication to holy responsibility as we carry forth the Word of God. The Bible reminds us of this important truth: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). Ezra also spoke about the vessels being holy. They were holy because they were made for a holy purpose, and the holy and profane can never mix. Moses taught the people this concept of special vessels that were not to be used for anything other than their intended use in the tabernacle. "And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy" (Exod. 40:10). Christians now do more than carry holy vessels; they are holy vessels. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Cor. 3:16). If Ezra's people were cautioned regarding holy vessels that were only gold, silver, and the like, how much more must we be careful being the vessels of God in our day? Our bodies must reflect the holy presence of God, and our actions must be consistent with His will. "Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh" (Jas. 3:12). If we were to visit another country that was very different from our own, we would stand out as strangers because of our mannerisms. Our language would be immediately noticed, and our clothing might be different. The list could go on and on. Ezra was well aware of why God's people had been in a strange land for so long. It was because of their sin. Now he wanted to be sure that they would not fall back into the same error and desecrate God's holy vessels and even themselves. There was no room for sin. God had called them back to their inheritance and especially to the most holy place of all—His temple. They must be a holy people. "Ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (Lev. 20:26). The bonds of their captors had been loosed; God was their Captain and Leader. Soon they would be in their rightful place and could once more...
have the temple as their most holy place. They would be able to meet with God as Moses had prescribed by the commandment of God. This was the day they had so long awaited. They were going home!

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

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Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today’s study relates a time when tons of material were transported a great distance to support a rebuilding effort. The occasion was the return from captivity that was led by Ezra in the spring and summer of 458 BC. The distance was 880 miles, from Babylon to Jerusalem. The biblical text for this lesson follows immediately after the previous study, so the historical background is the same. But perhaps a bit more can be said about Ezra’s place in history. He was important in his own time, and he is often considered very important in shaping Judaism. His influence extended down to the Judaism of the first century ad and beyond. This high regard for Ezra has much to support it. First, he is termed a teacher (or scribe), and to have such a title was an honor. This meant that Ezra was an expert in the Law of Moses. It was said of Ezra that he was so worthy that the law could have been given through him “if Moses had not preceded him.” Ancient rabbis wrote that if Ezra had lived at the same time as Aaron (Moses’ brother, who became the first high priest), then Aaron would have been considered inferior to Ezra. Ezra has also been called “a second Moses,” and the two men can be compared and contrasted in various ways. Moses wrote down the law; Ezra went to Jerusalem to teach it. Both led groups on long trips to the promised land. Moses’ group was protected by a special cloud; Ezra wrote that the hand of God provided protection. The Lord supplied manna and water in special ways for those in the exodus from Egypt; there is no record that this was done in Ezra’s time. Moses performed miraculous signs before Pharaoh to persuade him to allow the Israelites to leave; Ezra had letters from the king of Persia that credentialed his mission. Moses’ group received gifts from the Egyptians; Ezra’s group had gifts from the king of Persia. The Israelites of Moses’ day gave generously to build the tabernacle; those in Ezra’s time gave generously for the house of the Lord. It took 40 years for the Israelites first to enter the promised land; it took Ezra’s group 4 months. Moses appointed others to help him with administration; Ezra utilized priests and Levites to assist him for the trip.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Wealth is a subject that is hard to keep in balance. On the one hand, its lure is universal, and many live their lives to accumulate as much as possible. Their love of money overrides every other consideration, and they throw themselves headlong into the pursuit of it. We know that this is utter foolishness, leading to the ruin of the greedy. On the other hand, we Christians often go to the other extreme and refuse to mention wealth in the
same breath as our faith. We have come to think of money itself as filthy lucre and the root of all evil. We fear to talk about the legitimate use of wealth in God's work or the blessing He can bring into the life of one who is generous. While Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles warned often of the evils of greed, they also recognized the need for legitimate use of wealth in God's work. Gold, silver, and rich fabrics were found in abundance even in the tabernacle, and the wealth poured into Solomon's temple is almost beyond our comprehension. It should therefore not surprise us that great wealth was again invested in the second temple in Ezra's day.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Carefully Assessing the Gifts (Ezra 8:24-27)**

24 And I separated twelve of the leaders of the priests — Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them —

25 and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the articles, the offering for the house of our God which the king and his counselors and his princes, and all Israel who were present, had offered.

26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles weighing one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold,

27 twenty gold basins worth a thousand drachmas, and two vessels of fine polished bronze, precious as gold.

**Assessing with trustworthy handlers (24)**

*God is pleased with trustworthiness (1 Chron 29:17)*

17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

*God rewards trustworthiness (Luke 16:11)*

11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?

*Trustworthiness in small things allows management in larger things (Luke 19:17)*

17 "Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'

*It should be a goal to be trustworthy before God and man (Acts 24:16)*

16 So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

*Great pains should be taken to be trustworthy (2 Cor 8:19-21)*

19 What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. 20 We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. 21 For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.

*A result of trustworthiness is faithfulness (3 John 5)*

5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.
A result of trustworthiness is accountability (2 Kings 12:15)

15 They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty.

A result of trustworthiness is uprightness and hope (Ps 25:21)

21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

A result of trustworthiness is to be guarded by righteousness (Prov 13:6)

6 Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner.

A result of trustworthiness is to be kept safe (Prov 28:18)

18 He whose walk is blameless is kept safe, but he whose ways are perverse will suddenly fall.

Assessing by recording the sources of the gifts (25)

Recording so that it can be known how much can be done with it (2 Kings 12:4-6)

4 Joash said to the priests, "Collect all the money that is brought as sacred offerings to the temple of the Lord-the money collected in the census, the money received from personal vows and the money brought voluntarily to the temple. 5 Let every priest receive the money from one of the treasurers, and let it be used to repair whatever damage is found in the temple."

Recording so that all items could be accounted for (1 Chron 9:28)

28 Some of them were in charge of the articles used in the temple service; they counted them when they were brought in and when they were taken out.

Assessing by counting accurately (26-27)

Accuracy is a delight to God (Prov 11:1)

11 The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.

God will judge the dishonest (Mic 6:11)

11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?

Accuracy will be blessed by God (Deut 25:15)

15 You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

God punishes those who take advantage of others (1 Thess 4:6)

6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

Communicating the Holiness of the Gifts (Ezra 8:28-30)

28 And I said to them, "You are holy to the Lord; the articles are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord God of your fathers.

29 Watch and keep them until you weigh them before the leaders of the priests and the Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses of Israel in Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord."

30 So the priests and the Levites received the silver and the gold and the articles by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.
Respecting the holiness because all freewill offerings are holy to God (28)

Offerings are holy because all things dedicated to God are holy (Ezek 42:13)
13 Then he said to me, "The north chambers and the south chambers, which are opposite the separate area, they are the holy chambers where the priests who are near to the Lord shall eat the most holy things. There they shall lay the most holy things, the grain offering, the sin offering and the guilt offering; for the place is holy.

Offerings are holy when they are acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5)
5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Offerings are holy when they are an act of worship (Rom 12:1)
12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

Offerings are holy when they are pleasing to God (Phil 4:18)
18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Respecting the holiness by handling with integrity (29-30)

God upholds those with integrity (Ps 41:11-12)
11 I know that you are pleased with me, for my enemy does not triumph over me. 12 In my integrity you uphold me and set me in your presence forever.

Blamelessness through integrity (Titus 2:7-8)
7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Pure in heart means to have integrity (1 Chron 29:17)
17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.

Integrity guides the Just (Prov 11:3)
3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

We can have integrity during trials because of hope in God (Ps 25:21)
21 May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.

Leaders must be committed to integrity (1 Sam 12:1-5)
12 Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. 2 Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. 3 Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right." 4 "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You
have not taken anything from anyone's hand." 5 Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." "He is witness," they said.

*Our conscience, which is controlled by the Holy Spirit, convicts us to have integrity (2 Cor 1:12)*

12 Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.

### Safely Delivering the Gifts (Ezra 8:31-35)

31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road.
32 So we came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.
33 Now on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the articles were weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui,
34 with the number and weight of everything. All the weight was written down at that time.
35 The children of those who had been carried away captive, who had come from the captivity, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord.

### Safely delivered by relying on God (31)

*Rely on God because He is a refuge (Ps 91:1-2)*

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

*Rely on God because He is a shelter (Ps 32:7)*

7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

*Rely on God because He is a fortress (Prov 18:10)*

10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

*Rely on God because of His mercy (Rom 9:16)*

16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

*Rely on God because He is a mighty rock (Ps 62:7)*

7 My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

*Rely on God because we can take Him at His word (Acts 27:21-26)*

21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."
Safely delivered through accountable balancing of gifts (32-34)

Accountable by acting faithfully (2 Kings 22:7)

7 But they need not account for the money entrusted to them, because they are acting faithfully."

Accountability is required of those who have been given a trust (1 Cor 4:2)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Accountable by being men of integrity (Neh 7:2)

2 I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do.

Accountable by living good lives (1 Peter 2:12)

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Accountable knowing that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:9-10)

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Safe delivery celebrated by worshiping God (35)

Worship keeps one focused on God (Ps 22:27-29)

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, 28 for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. 29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him — those who cannot keep themselves alive.

Worship prepares an attitude of thanksgiving, reverence and awe (Heb 12:28)

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

Worship God with humility (Ps 95:6-8)

6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,

Worship facilitates bringing an offering (Ps 96:8)

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Worship and come before God with gladness and joy (Ps 100:2)

2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Worship refreshes (Ps 132:7-8)

7 "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool — 8 arise, O Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.
Worship by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1)

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

Worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

Worship by coming to God in sincerity (Col 2:18-23)

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. 20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

Some scholars have questioned the amount of gold and silver mentioned here, which amounts to many tons and represents millions of dollars in today’s currency. But if the king thought that Ezra’s God really existed, he would have wanted to give a gift fitting for a king. When you add in the gifts from the king’s counselors, princes, and the Jews who did not return (8:25), it added up to a sizeable amount. Ezra was concerned to give a report back to the king that the entire amount was delivered to Jerusalem without any of it being skimmed off through greed and corruption. Thus he parcelled the items out by weight and let them know that they were accountable to deliver that amount to God’s house in Jerusalem. When they got there, everything was numbered and weighed, recording the numbers (8:34). Perhaps some of the leaders grumbled, “Doesn’t he trust us? Why does he have to weigh everything on both ends and write it all down? After all, God is watching all that we do.” But as Paul put it with regard to his careful handling of the gift for the poor in Jerusalem, “We have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21). If we do not follow proper accounting procedures, it exposes workers to temptation and to accusations. We need to be scrupulous in matters of financial integrity, even on small matters. We have each staff member pay for personal long distance calls on church phones and for personal copies on the church copy machine. None of the pastoral staff have access to our giving records. Those who do are charged with maintaining confidentiality. Other accounting procedures insure that the work here is honorable, not only in the Lord’s sight, but also in the sight of men. When Jesus said, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10, the “very little thing” in the context is money. He went on to promise that if we are faithful in money matters, then the Lord would entrust true riches to us (16:11), which in the context are the souls of people. The matter of integrity extends beyond financial integrity to the whole of a man’s character. Ezra was a man of moral integrity. That is one reason that God’s hand of blessing was upon him. Thus God blesses the work that seeks to honor Him by humble faith and by scrupulous integrity.

(Adapted from Sermon notes by Pastor Steven J. Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship www.fcfonline.org)
Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

A prayer of thankfulness is not mentioned after Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem. Even so, prayers would have accompanied the sacrifices of burnt offerings. Petitioning God is noted at the beginning of the trip (Ezra 8:23), and Ezra offers a lengthy prayer of confession in Ezra 9:6-15. Ezra is a man of prayer! The familiar words of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 are a good reminder that God wants us to “pray continually.” In so doing, we will be “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. A wise leader often uses delegation to better accomplish the work of God (Ezra 8:24)
2. Accountability is necessary for everyone involved in the work of the Lord (vs. 25)
3. Seek to choose people you can trust, and then trust the people you choose (vs. 26-27)
4. All we have comes from the Lord and ultimately belongs to Him (vs. 28)
5. Responsibility and accountability go hand in hand in doing the work of God (vs. 29)
6. Believers should serve willingly, joyfully, and faithfully (vs. 30)