

# Gifts for the Temple

**Bible Background • EZRA 8:24–30**

**Printed Text • EZRA 8:24–30 | Devotional Reading • MARK 12:38–44**

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## Aim for Change

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By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** that as an act of worship, we should be willing to give generously of our time and talents to the Lord; **FEEL** that we should give to the Lord; and **GIVE** to the Lord.

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## In Focus

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In response to an email Cleveland received from a reporter inquiring about his generous monetary gifts to the local church and shelter, he replied, “I remember what it felt like, wondering if the shelter where I slept was actually safe. I remember being hungry. I remember the kindness in the eyes of the pastor as he permitted me to sit at the church until I could check in at the shelter. Yet, I will never forget the kind words of encouragement, the shelter that provided me a safe place to sleep, or the soup kitchen that fed me. Unlike then, I now have the ability to live in a house and buy food. I am very thankful for how God kept me and still does. To express my gratitude to God, I have given back. I financially support the shelter that provided safety, volunteer at the soup kitchen, and I have paid for the badly needed repairs at the church so it may continue to be a safe haven for others.

“Generously giving of our money and time is one way to worship. When we give, we act as God’s instruments to bless those who do not have. By generously giving, we show that what we have really does belong to God, and we are just stewards of those possessions.”

*In today’s lesson, we see how Ezra prepared gifts of precious metals that were to be carried by the priests and the Levites to the House of God.*

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## Keep in Mind

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“And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers”  
(Ezra 8:28, KJV).

## Focal Verses

**KJV** Ezra 8:24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,

25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered:

26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents;

27 Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.

28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers.

29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.

30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

### The People, Places, and Times

**The Exile.** The exile was the period of time when the inhabitants of the land of Israel were taken into captivity. The people of Israel consisted of the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribes of Judah. The land of Israel was located in what is known as the Fertile Crescent which includes modern-day Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran. Led by Moses, the people of Israel fled Egyptian slavery and the people settled in southern Palestine. Generations later, the northern tribes of Israel formed a coalition apart from the Judean king. The southern kingdom of Judah was the counterpart to the northern kingdom of Israel.

**Ezra.** A priest who descended from Aaron's son Phinehas by way of Zadok (Ezra 7:1–5) and the author of the book of Ezra and probably also of Nehemiah and 1–2 Chronicles. He returned from the exile with Zerubbabel and was skilled in the Law of Moses.

### Background

The first six chapters of the book of Ezra record how the exiled people of the southern tribe of Judah returned to Jerusalem. “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them

whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:1–5).

Fifty-eight years had passed between the dedication of the Temple in 516 B.C. and the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem. “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra ... went up from Babylon” (7:1, 6). The words “after these” connect the completion of the building of the Temple with the arrival of Ezra in Jerusalem. Because of his skill with the Law of Moses, Ezra came to Jerusalem to deal with questions related to the Law.

After discovering no Levites were traveling with them, Ezra stopped at the Ahava Canal, sent leaders of his traveling party to approach Iddo, and made a request of Iddo that he permit some of his ministers to travel with them. Ezra then proclaimed a fast to seek protection from God while they traveled because he had refused the protection of the king. After the fast, they departed, going toward Jerusalem.

Traveling with the money given by the Persian people and the remaining Babylonian exiles, Ezra declared the money they were traveling with as holy to God. “And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers” (8:28). The declaration to call the men and the money they carried holy transferred them from secular to divine service.

## At-A-Glance

1. Doing Service (Ezra 8:24–27)
2. Consecrated for Service (vv. 28–30)

## In Depth

### 1. Doing Service (Ezra 8:24–27)

Ezra the priest led a second group of exiles back to Judah and Jerusalem approximately 80 years after the first group had returned. Even though he knew God had promised to protect His people, Ezra still led the people in praying and fasting before such a monumental undertaking; asking God to be with them on the journey (Ezra 8:21–23). As a priest, Ezra “knew that God’s blessings are appropriated through prayer” (Life Application Study Bible, NLT, 735).

Now that they had done their preparatory work, it was time to carry out the service of the Lord—to get the job done. Therefore, Ezra appointed 12 leaders of the priests (Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and 10 other priests) to be in charge of transporting all the cargo—the silver, the gold, the gold bowls, and the other items—that the king, his council, his leaders, and the people of Israel had presented for the Temple (vv. 24–26). They were in charge of a vast treasury that equaled “24 tons of silver, 7,500 pounds of silver utensils, 7,500 pounds of gold, 20 gold bowls, equal in value to 1,000 gold coins, 2 fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold” (Life Application Study Bible, NLT, 736). God was with Ezra (a godly leader) and this group of exiles, who traveled the dangerous route back to Judah and Jerusalem, without military escort (8:22). They arrived at their destination after several months without harm.

### 2. Consecrated for Service (vv. 28–30)

With his declaration, “Ye are holy unto the Lord: the vessels are holy also” (Ezra 8:28), Ezra commissioned the leaders of the priests and the offerings they carried into service for God. To consecrate simply means to be set apart for the sole purpose of service to God. Every object used in Temple service, therefore, was dedicated to God.

Ezra 1:1 demonstrates how the king of Persia obeyed and then served God. With his statement describing how the Lord stirred up his spirit, the king was being placed into position by God to set the stage for Ezra’s return to Jerusalem. The king continued his declaration of obedience to God by saying, “The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charge me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah” (1:2).

### Search the Scriptures

1. What was the purpose in giving an account of the offerings (Ezra 8:26, 30)?
2. Why did Ezra set the 12 leaders of the priest apart (vv. 24, 28)?

### Discuss the Meaning

What God has designated for His use will always prosper. If we agree with this statement, why do we act first, before seeking guidance from God?

### Liberating Lesson

Giving is an act of worship to God. So if we truly believe in God and we truly intend to be the light in the world that God has directed us to be, we need to identify one need where we can sincerely make a contribution. Some suggestions are to volunteer at a local school; establish an after-school tutoring program at church; volunteer at a local women’s or men’s homeless shelter; or permit a 12-step substance abuse program to meet at our facilities. Once we have identified the need, our next step is to commit to that need with our time and, when appropriate, our finances.

### Application for Activation

As our community is experiencing unusually high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and lack of affordable health care and decent

housing, the one way to show that God through His Son Jesus Christ is compassionate is to extend ourselves as believers into the community where we worship. Let’s begin by helping one of our own, a family in need. After we have helped them stabilize themselves, let’s go out in our community. We can do this by giving away food or hosting a food distribution. We can also designate a portion of our benevolence offering to help those who encounter emergencies such as keeping their utilities on. As we commit to doing these acts of kindness, our satisfaction will come from the statement from our Lord, “Ye shall be holy: for the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Our holiness comes from our obedience to God when we see the need and act on that need.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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**Sources:**

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## Say It Correctly

Babylonian. bab-uh-LOH-nee-uhn.  
Nehemiah. nee-(h)uh-MI-uh.  
Zadok. ZAY-dok.  
Zerubbabel. zuh-RUHB-uh-buhl.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

A Single Offering for All Time  
(Hebrews 10:1–14)

### TUESDAY

Stirred Hearts and Willing Spirits  
(Exodus 35:20–29)

### WEDNESDAY

Bring Offerings before the Lord  
(Numbers 7:1–6)

### THURSDAY

Contributing Tithes and Offerings  
(2 Chronicles 31:2–10)

### FRIDAY

More Important Than Offerings  
and Sacrifices  
(Mark 12:28–34)

### SATURDAY

The Gift of a Poor Widow  
(Mark 12:28–34)

### SUNDAY

The Offering for God's House  
(Ezra 8:24–30)

## Notes

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