

BOOK OF EZRA
RESTORATION OF GOD'S THINGS
EZRA 1:7-11

Introduction

We're at that time of the year when it seems that everything is geared around material things. Now understand that **having material things is not necessarily bad as long as the material things don't have you!**

Materialism is bad! The Bible refers to it as covetousness! The desire for more things! But in and of themselves, material things are not bad. **It's how they're viewed and how they are used that makes them good or bad!**

There are people in the world today that believe things are inherently bad. Monks...Buddhists...Hindus...New Agers...and others believe that the only way to be free from evil is to be free from material things—including your own body!

The Bible teaches something very different! **All that God has created and allows us to enjoy of material things are good because God created them. In reality, material things are mostly good gifts from God. The problem is that man with his sin nature tends to put them before God or use them for the wrong purposes!** Now, that IS wrong! But material things in and of themselves are not necessarily bad!

Israel spent years using everything God had given them for the wrong purposes!

God gave them the Law—they ignored it and disobeyed it.

God gave them the land—they abused it and were disobedient in it.

God gave them abundance—they allowed that abundance to draw them away from God!

God gave them the temple—they defiled it and His worship!

So God sent them into exile!

But here in the Book of Ezra, it's time for God to fulfill His promise to bring them back. Israel underwent some stages before the Lord deemed they were ready to rebuild the temple foundations.

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I think it is interesting that the first stage we see here was about **restoring God's things! Specifically, it was about restoring the items God had specified and sanctified for the purpose of His worship!**

Think back to the book of Exodus. When Moses came down from the mountain the first time with the stone tablets in his hands they had made an idol (a golden calf) and were worshiping it! Moses was so angry he broke those stone tablets! The second time Moses came down with a replacement set of tablets, he gave the people the Word of the Lord, what did they do?

Well, they started making the **material things for worship—the tabernacle, the ark, the altar, the priestly garments. All the things that were to be sanctified unto the LORD and used in His worship!**

And all those things must have been pretty important to God because He spent the last 5 chapters of Exodus describing it in the minutest detail!

When the children of Israel got into the land that God gave them:

They forgot the One Who gave them what they had!

They abandoned the worship of God as He commanded them!

In so doing, they not only jeopardized the things God had given them, but they jeopardized the things that God had set apart unto Himself for His worship! I want you to stay with me on this thought!

We know that God is creator of all matter! And as creator of all matter, God owns it all! Material things are important to God, otherwise He wouldn't have created matter! **But the reason material things are important to God isn't because He needs them!** They are important to Him because of how we use them! God created material things for us to use to bring glory to Him!

All that God allowed Israel to be blessed with was to be used to bring glory to God with!

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The problem is they placed God's stuff in the wrong account! They saw it as being theirs instead of seeing themselves as stewards of all that God gave them!

Many folks have taken God's things that He has allowed to pass through their hands for them to glorify Him with...(Let's call it the "*Things for God's glory*" account)...and they have put it in their own personal materialism account (Let's call it the "*I'll do with it what I want*" account!) You see where I'm going?

How many have ever taken something God intended for the "*Things for God's glory*" account and transferred it to your own "*I'll do with it what I want*" account?

Listen, when it's in our account...when we see things as ours instead of God's, it's not going to be used for God's glory like He intended...and that needs to be fixed! If we've done that, we need to restore the use of God's things for His glory!

Israel did not restore things to their rightful owner...and not only did they lose the things that they had transferred into their "*I'll do with it what I want*" account, but they jeopardized the very things that were sanctified for the purposes of worshiping God! (The temple, the ark, the altar, the priestly garments, and all the utensils used in God's worship!)

God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar and his armies to not only plunder Judah of ALL her riches...but the temple was destroyed and the vast array of the gold and silver vessels and utensils that were once used in the LORD's service were carried away into Babylon to be used in the service of pagan gods!

I think there is a warning there for us. Could what we see happening in our own dear nation be a parallel to what happened in Judah?

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God determined 70 years of Judgment in Babylon for Judah! They chose to sin, but they could not choose the consequences! Our nation has chosen to sin, but neither can it choose the consequences!

But here in the Book of Ezra, it's time for God to fulfill His promise to bring them back. And the first stage we see here was about **restoring God's things! Specifically, it was about restoring the items God had specified and sanctified for the purpose of His worship!**

We see here that there were three account transfers that took place here that are similar to what we need to do to make that happen in our own lives.

I. FIRST WE SEE THE TRANSFER FROM ONE HOUSE TO ANOTHER! (EZRA 1:7)

Can you imagine how terrible it must have been to see the beautiful vessels of God's temple in the hands of these pagans?

These vessels had been specially created for use in the worship of God!

They had been made from only the finest gold and silver!
They were decorated by only the most skilled artisans!
They were sanctified with the blood of a pure animal!

All of that care and attention was to insure that they were only the best ...only the finest...and only the purest for God before they were placed in service!

But not only were the items the purest they could be, **they couldn't be used by just anybody! They were only allowed to be used by the priests!**

God had determined who the Priests were! They were called out and set aside specifically by God!

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These Priests had to cleanse and purify themselves with water and blood before touching the vessels!

These Priests could only use them in specifically prescribed ways to honor and glorify God!

It was bad enough when those priests began to misuse them!

But can you imagine what it was like after the temple was destroyed and those vessels were carried off?

They weren't just carried off for their resale value!

They weren't just carried off so they could be used by ordinary people.

They were carried off so they could be used in the pagan temples of idols!

Vessels that God called for! That He provided the materials for! That He gifted artisans to design! That were supposed to be for the sole purpose of bringing Him honor and glory!

And there they were in the temples of false gods! Temples where the most vile, immoral, disgusting things took place as part of their worship! Temple prostitutes, orgies, even human sacrifice sometimes went on there!

Remember Belshazzar calling for the vessels in Daniel 5 for his drunken party? Well, after his party, he lost the kingdom and the vessels along with it. King Cyrus had taken possession of them.

Now it was time for them to be transferred back to where they belonged! God's resources were being transferred. They were being transferred from pagan houses eventually to be back in God's house!

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They would be transferred to the remnant that returned to Jerusalem and rededicated back to their original purpose!

I want us to think about the resources God has given us. Think about the things God has given us that were originally intended to be used by us for God's purposes in our lives to bring Him glory!

What have we devoted God's precious resources to?

Just like the things of the house of the Lord, God called for our things! He provided our resources. He gifted us to earn and build and maintain our resources.

So what have we done with them? Have we devoted them for His service and for His glory? Or have we through our disobedience allowed Satan to plunder and defile them and use them in the service of the pagan god of materialism?

In our passage, God's precious vessels had been taken away to the houses of demons. But now they were being restored. They were being transferred from pagan houses back to God's house!

II. WE SEE THE TRANSFER FROM ONE HAND TO ANOTHER! (EZRA 1:8-10)

The people involved here are very significant. They're not exactly household names, but they are significant.

The only thing we know about Mithredath is what we see in this passage. But verse 8 tells us he was Cyrus' treasurer. We don't know if he was **THE** treasurer or just **A** treasurer. But we do know that he was a money guy for the Medo-Persian empire.

He was the one that King Cyrus directed to handle the transaction.

He was to make sure the resources passed from the Persian account to Israel's account.

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And that's how he viewed it. He viewed it as a money transfer! It was! exactly the kind of transfer of inventory you would expect an accountant would give!

When those items passed from his hands, it sounded like a cold inventory! But whose hands were they received into? *Sheshbazzar*.

There is some debate among scholars as to who *Sheshbazzar* was. I think it's pretty clear from the text—not just here, but later on in the book. Here in verse 8, the text says he was the prince of Judah.

So who would that be? The only one who could legally claim the throne of Judah! The only one who was in the line of David! The only one who could rightfully become king, had God allowed it!

Sheshbazzar, no doubt, is the name the Babylonians gave him! (*Sheshbazzar* = “O Sun-god protect the Son.”) But his Hebrew name was *Zerubbabel* = “begotten in Babylon.” He's called the prince of Judah because Cyrus was the king of Persia.

Judah was still a territory of Persia so it would be considered sedition if he were called a king (so we will notice that he is also called a “governor” later on).

So that's the people who were involved. The vessels of God were transferred from the hands of a treasurer to an heir!

Picture it like this. If there were a transfer of the contents of an art gallery from an accountant to an artist, how would it sound?

“Monet--\$1,000,000. Van Gogh--\$500,000. Picasso--\$750,000. Painting—amount, painting—amount.”

No meaning, no attachment, no feeling.

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But once they passed from the accountant's hands into the artist's hands, how do you think the artist would view them?

No doubt the artist would receive them and would carefully and passionately examine every contour and texture and brush stroke! He would receive them with emotion and attachment and passion!

They would mean so much more to him than simply a list of dollar amounts! As a matter of fact they would be priceless to him!

Don't you imagine that's how Zerubbabel felt as he received the precious vessels of God! It was more than just a collection of bowls and knives and vessels! **It was the restoration of the resources God had provided to worship Him with!**

When Zerubbabel saw those items, he saw the promise of the future temple! He saw what God was working in them! He saw what God was going to do through them!

As those items transferred from Mithredath to Zerubbabel's hands... they went from being just items on an accountant's spreadsheet to **items of hope!**

The same thing happens when we watch our resources transfer from our hands to God's hands! They move from being just numbers in our checkbook register to a source of joy and hope. They move from simply being squandered away on our passing needs of the moment... to being invested in the future hope of the Lord's work!

God restored His resources by transferring them from one hand to another! From a hand that was focused on the cold, hard facts of the moment... to a hand that was passionately and hopefully focused on God's people's future! Which hand are your resources in?

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Are they in the hand that says, “money—bills. Money—bills. Money—bills?” Or are they in the hand that receives everything with an eye on how God will use it for His purposes? Transfer from one hand to the other. God’s precious vessels had been transferred from one house to another and from one hand to another.

When resources have been used for the wrong purposes, all it takes to change them is a transfer.

I want us to think about the resources God has given us. Think about the things in our possession. What have we devoted our precious things to?

Just like the vessels of the house of the Lord, God called for you to have the things, the resources, He has allowed to be in your hands. He provided your precious things. He gifted you to earn and build and maintain your things.

So what have you done with them? Have you devoted them for service in His house? Or have you, through disobedience, allowed the enemy to plunder and defile them and put them to use in the house of the god of materialism?

In our passage, God’s precious vessels had been taken away to the houses of demons. But now they were being restored.

They were being transferred from pagan houses back to God’s house. And, they were being transferred from one hand to another.

**III. WE SEE THE TRANSFER FROM ONE LAND TO ANOTHER!
(EZRA 1:11)**

There they were, taking God’s resources from captivity in Babylon to freedom in Jerusalem. It had been over 70 years since Judah had seen the precious vessels of the temple.

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They had spent over 70 years in a land that God had cursed. Years before they were even carried away in exile, God cursed Babylon for what they were going to do to His people. He spoke His curse through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 25:12-14: 12 “And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. 13 And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. 14 For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.”

The land of Babylon, now possessed by the Persians, was a cursed land. The Persians may have thought that things were going great at the moment for them, but Israel knew the curse was coming on the Persians too!

If the exile taught them anything, it was to take God at His word and listen to His prophets!

Israel was in a land that wasn’t their home! God’s vessels were in a land they didn’t belong in!

Did you know that they could have stayed if they wanted to? And the sad thing is, many of them did. They were pretty comfortable in Babylon. They had adjusted to life in Babylon. They had made lives for themselves. So many of them chose to stay. Many of them chose to take the familiar comfort of the right now over the promise of the yet-to-come.

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But there was a remnant that didn't stay. A remnant chose to go where God wanted them to go. And that remnant chose to take what God wanted them to take. They took His things with them!

They transferred God's treasure from a cursed land to a land that God His! They chose God's future promise over their present comfort!

And what a future promise that is. The Lord tells us about it in *Isaiah 62:1-5*.

That is where they were going! That is where they were taking God's treasure! And their treasure was no longer going to be in a cursed land with no hope for the future! They were taking their treasure to a land of promise and hope!

As they moved from Babylon to Jerusalem, they transferred the treasure from one land to another!

Where is your treasure? Is it stored up in a land that is cursed? In a land that is comfortable right now, but you know isn't going to last? If it is, it's time for a transfer.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned us about trying to have our treasure in the wrong place. Look at **Matthew 6:19-21**.

So, where is your heart? You know how you can tell? **By what you're doing with God's resources!**

Just like those vessels were created for the sole purpose of glorifying God, everything you have was created for the same purpose!

The Lord gave you everything you have to use for His glory! Are you? Jesus said, the answer to that question will tell you where your heart is! Do you need to transfer some treasure? Or would you rather let the moths, rust, and thieves have it? Fleeting comfort for today or bright hope for tomorrow—the choice is yours!