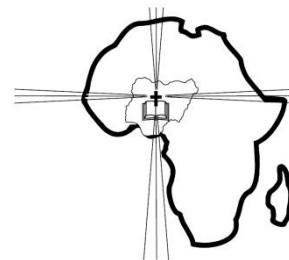


DAILY LINK WITH GOD 2015

A Daily Devotional Guide from the EYN (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria)



EYN leaders in Nigeria believe prayer is one of the most important ways to support the Nigerian people and the Church. These daily devotions were written by EYN members and published by the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria. Reading them daily is a powerful way we can be in solidarity and connect with our brothers and sisters caught in this crisis. EYN's daily devotional for 2015 will be posted a week at a time on the blog site www.brethren.org/nigeriablog, appearing mid-week for the following week. More information about the crisis can be found at www.brethren.org/nigeriacrisis.

March

Text: Ezra 1-2

Brief Introduction

In this month, we are reading about the merciful God at work. We can see how He delivered his people from slavery in Babylon. God is merciful; He does not look at your ability. What God requires from us is faithfulness to Him.

March 1st Sunday 2015

Text: Ezra 1:1-4

Topic: God Can Use Any Person

One of Cyrus' first official acts after capturing Babylon was to allow the Jews to return to their land. This took place in his "first year" (v. 1), that is, as king over all Medo-Persia including Babylonia. The writer of Ezra regarded 539 B.C. as the beginning of Cyrus' reign probably because when Cyrus defeated Babylonia he gained authority over Palestine that had until then been under Babylonian sovereignty. About 150 years earlier, Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). Cyrus proclaimed his edict 67 years after the first Babylonian deportation from Judah (605 B.C.) Verse 2 reads as though Cyrus was a believer in Yahweh. However, Isaiah presented him as an unbeliever (Isa. 45:4-5). Evidently he was a polytheist and worshipped several gods. On the Cyrus Cylinder, the clay cylinder on which Cyrus recorded his capture of Babylon, the king gave credit to Marduk for his success. He also recorded how he restored prisoners to their own lands, as Ezra 1 describes. He said he hoped the people under his authority would pray for him to Bel and Nebo. Probably Cyrus gave lip service to all the gods his people worshipped, but the evidence suggested that he did not believe that Yahweh was the only true God. Cyrus did not believe in Yahweh, but God used him for his purpose. God can use whoever He decides.

Lesson: God is no respecter of persons, he does as he pleases.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be diligent in your service. Amen.

March 2nd Monday 2015

Topic: The Two Tribes

Text: Ezra 1:5-6

Judah and Benjamin were the only tribes the writer mentioned, because these were the tribes that made up the Southern Kingdom, which had suffered exile in Babylon. Those who gave to the reconstruction project evidently included Jews who decided to remain in Babylon, as well as Babylonian Gentiles. Many Jews choose not to return because they did not want to leave their possessions. This was contrary to the will of God (Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6; cf. Jer. 29:10; Deut. 30:1-5). They should have returned. Follow the will of God in all your dealings; do not depend on material wealth.

Lesson: Focus not on things that will divert your mind from God.

Prayer: May You help us Lord in this difficult situation. Amen.

March 3rd Tuesday 2015

Text: Ezra 1:7-11

Topic: Images of Other Gods

Sometimes warring armies in the ancient Near East carried images of their gods into battle to help secure victory (cf. 2 Sam. 5:21; 1 Chron. 14:12). When one army defeated the other, the victors would take the images of their defeated foes captive, and lock them up to testify to the impotence of those gods. "To displace the authority of a city, it was normal practice for a conquering power to carry off the emblems of deity (cf. Jeremiah 48:7)." Since the Israelites had no images of Yahweh, Nebuchadnezzar took the temple utensils in their place. Cyrus released these utensils so the returning Jews could take them back to Jerusalem (cf. Dan. 5:1-4). "The return of the temple vessels (Ezra 1:7) reverses this and empowers Jerusalem once more in Persian eyes to become the city of Yahweh. Doubtless in this task Cyrus saw himself in typical Achaemenid fashion, as the representative and thus the "servant" of Yahweh. "Achaemenid" refers to the dynasty of Persian rulers who were in power from the seventh through the fourth centuries B.C. Achaemenes, who ruled from about 700 to 675 B.C., founded this royal dynasty. The book of Exodus warned against idolatry. Whatever takes our interest away from God is idolatry.

Lesson: Do not worship any other god.

Prayer: Teach us to be humble our Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

March 4th Wednesday 2015

Text: Ezra 2:2b-35

Topic: The General Population

The designations "sons of" and "men of" in these verses point out the two ways whereby the exiles demonstrated their Jewish ancestry: by family genealogy or by residence in Palestine. Few of the returning exiles had personally lived in the Promised Land, but many could give evidence that their ancestors had lived in a particular town and or had owned property there. "It was not considered a compromise of one's Jewish identity to give a child a name which was not Yahwistic, nor even of Hebrew or Aramaic stock. Family name is very important, what names do you give your children, friends and relations. Do you have a family name and can you trace your genealogy?

Lesson: Know your family background.

Prayer: Jesus our Lord, without You we are nothing. Help us to stand firm. Amen.

March 5th Thursday 2015

Text: Ezra 2:36-42

Topic: The Priests

Only four of the 24 priestly families that David organized (1 Chron. 24:7-18) had representatives among the returning exiles. Nevertheless, these would have been sufficient to serve the worship needs of the other Israelites who returned. The priests comprised of about 8.6% of the total returnee population at this time (cf. vv. 64-65). Few Levites, only 341, chose to leave the comforts of life in Babylon. They assisted the priests. There were fewer Levites than priests, the opposite of the situation that existed before the exile. Every believer is a priest. It is expected that our commitment should be in serving the Lord.

Lesson: Be a priest for the service of the Lord.

Prayer: You are the King of kings and Prince of peace. Be with us Lord. Amen.

March 6th Friday 2015

Text: Ezra 2:43-58

Topic: The Temple Servants

The "temple servants" were an order of Israelites that David had established to assist the Levites (8:20). They may have been the descendants of the Gibeonites whom Joshua had subjugated (Josh. 9:27), and or the descendants of other war captives. These people seem to have been those who descended from the servants Solomon had appointed to serve in his temple during his administration. Other views are that they were the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon enslaved or the descendants of the royal officers who were merchants in Solomon's service. Since the grand total in verse 58 includes both the temple servants and this group, it appears that they cooperated closely in their work. As believers, we are expected to cooperate and unite together in the service of the Lord.

Lesson: There is need for cooperation in the body of the Lord.

Prayer: Help us to continue to trust in You our Lord. Amen.

March 7th Saturday 2015

Text: Ezra 2:59-63

Topic: Israelites of Doubtful Origin

We may infer from this periscope as it is clearly stated in 1 Chr. 5:17 and Neh. 7:5 that Jewish families kept genealogies to prove their Jewish descent and to ascertain that; mixture with foreign groups was somehow excluded. Even though these people could not establish their Jewish ancestry with certainty, the leaders of the restoration permitted them to return with those who could. It is understandable that some of the Jews born in Babylon, perhaps of mixed parentage, would have had trouble tracing their genealogies. These men returned but could not serve as priests until the high priest could determine that they were indeed descendants of Aaron (cf. Num. 16:40; 18:9-10). Perhaps the high priest did this using the Urim and Thummim, if these were still in existence (Exod. 28:15-30; cf. 1 Sam. 23:9-12). Perhaps other records were available to him. Are you ready to be traced as a family member of the Lord, Jesus Christ? Jesus is the centre of our genealogy.

Lesson: Be in the Lord Jesus at all times.

Prayer: You are the Pillar of our life, our Redeemer. In You is our help. Amen.