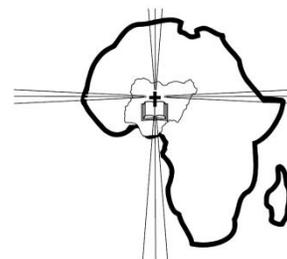


DAILY LINK WITH GOD 2015

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 22nd Sunday 2015

Text: Ezra 6:13-15

Topic: Tattenai's Compliance

Several factors resulted in the completion of the temple, which the writer brought together in verse 14. The reference to Artaxerxes (v. 14; cf. 4:7-23) does not mean that he had a part in completing the temple. As noted previously, he was the king who later supported the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. That action served to make the temple secure. He also contributed to the temple treasury (7:15-16, 21). Consequently, mention of him was appropriate at this point.

The most powerful word on earth at that time was the decree of a Persian king, but silently and mysteriously the king was being directed by an even more powerful divine word. The builders finished the temple on Adar 3 (in late February), 515 B.C. This was about four and one-half years after Haggai and Zechariah had gotten the builders moving again (in 520 B.C.). It was about 21 years after the Jews had laid the foundation (in 536 B.C.), and about 23 years after Cyrus had issued his decree allowing the Jews to return to Palestine (in 538 B.C.). (Josephus wrote that this temple was built in seven years.) It was 70 years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple (586 B.C.). Thus, God fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity would last 70 years (Jer. 25:11; 29:10). Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple down in the fifth month of 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-9), and the restoration Jews reopened it in the twelfth month of 515 B.C. Solomon's temple had stood for almost 400 years, but the second temple lasted

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longer, about 585 years, until Titus destroyed it in A.D. 70. God will fulfill His promises for us, wait upon Him.

Lesson: Do not trust in yourself but God.

Prayer: Help our nation to take the right direction Lord. Amen.

March 23th Monday 2015

Text: Ezra 6:16-22

Topic: The Jews' Celebration

Compared with the dedication of the first temple, this one was very modest. Solomon had offered more than 200 times as many animals. The Jews offered one sin offering, which involved slaying a goat, for each of the 12 tribes (v. 17). The reference to the number of Israel's tribes being 12 showed that none of the tribes was "lost" during the captivity, as some accounts claim. The people still considered the nation to be a confederation of 12 tribes, and they called it "Israel" (2:2, 59). The remnant who had returned made solemn confession of sin in the name of the whole scattered and dispersed race. They acknowledge the essential unity of Israel's tribes alike in the consequences of sin, in the possibilities of restoration, and in the renewed consecration to God's service." The Passover celebration took place five weeks after the temple dedication. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the day after Passover and lasted seven days (Lev. 23:6-8). Note that some Gentile converts had evidently accompanied the remnant from Babylon to Jerusalem (v. 21). God is sovereign, He is with us.

Lesson: If God is for us, no one is against us.

Prayer: You are sovereign, we worship You Lord Jesus. Amen.

March 24th Tuesday 2015

Text: Ezra 7:1-10

Topic: Ezra's Background

Ezra's genealogy (vv. 1-5) shows that he was a man of importance whom his fellow Jews would have respected. His name is a shortened form of "Azariah," meaning "Yahweh helps." He was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel (v. 5). There are gaps in this genealogy (cf. 1 Chron. 6:3-15). "Son of" occasionally means "descendant of," as is elsewhere in the Old Testament. The purpose of this linear genealogy was not to record all of Ezra's ancestors but to trace his lineage from Aaron. A "scribe" (v. 6) was a person who functioned as a copier, writer, and communicator. Scribes fulfilled various roles before the exile. These included military officer (Judg. 5:14; 2 Kings 25:19), messenger of the king (2 Kings 18:18), secretary to the king (2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25), clerk, and writer (Jer. 36:26, 32). In the Gospels we have many references to scribes. In Jesus' day they were primarily students and teachers of the Law. In Ezra's time this specialized function of the scribe was developing. Ezra himself, as a scribe and priest, was able to teach the Law (cf. Lev. 10:11; Neh. 8:1-9, 13). He also enjoyed special divine protection and enablement (v. 6; cf. 7:9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31). Divine protection is ours from the Lord.

Lesson: Do not be afraid, God is with us.

Prayer: Help us to encourage one another in times of trial Lord. Amen.

March 25th Wednesday 2015

Text: Ezra 7:11-26

Topic: Artaxerxes' Decree

This decree appears in Aramaic, the official language of the Persian Empire, in the Hebrew Bible. The king appointed Ezra as the person responsible to him for the affairs conducted in the Jewish community in Judah. He held a position in the Persian court equivalent to Secretary of State for Jewish Affairs. This decree encouraged any Jews in exile to return to their land (vv. 12-13). The Persians had respect for the laws of other nations as long as they did not conflict with their own. Artaxerxes' decree promised provisions for the temple worship (vv. 14-20), authorized Ezra to withdraw funds from the provincial treasury (vv. 21-23; cf. 4:12), and permitted him to establish judicial and educational systems in Judah (vv. 24-26). The reason Artaxerxes permitted all this was evidently so there would be peace and good will among his Jewish subjects, and so he might appease Yahweh's wrath (v. 23). Jesus is our peace.

Lesson: Depend on the Prince of Peace.

Prayer: You are our refuge Lord Jesus. We look up to you. Amen.

March 26th Thursday 2015

Topic: Ezra's thanksgiving

Text: Ezra 7:27-28

Ezra recognized and acknowledged that God had moved Artaxerxes to do what he had done (cf. Prov. 21:1). "Lovingkindness" (v. 28) is more precisely "loyal love" (Heb. *hesed*). This Hebrew word has linguistic connections to the word translated "stork," a bird known for its affectionate devotion to its young. Yahweh was proving faithful to His promises to care for His chosen people. Again Ezra acknowledged God's enabling grace in his life (v. 28). What makes the Jews' restoration so remarkable is not simply that they should return, but that kings should supply their needs in relation to worship (cf. 7:27). It is this that makes the 'new exodus' so evidently an act of God's salvation. Compare the gifts that the Egyptians gave the Israelites at the first Exodus (Exod. 12:36). God is faithful to His children.

Lesson: Jesus will never disappoint us.

Prayer: Your name is mighty. Teach us Lord Jesus to revere You. Amen.

March 27th Friday 2015

Text: Ezra 8:1-20

Topic: The Leading Men Who Returned

The descendants of the priestly and royal families in Israel appear first in this list (vv. 2-3). Then the names of the rest of the Jews follow. A comparison of verses 3-14 with 2:3-15 shows that Ezra's companions were mainly the relatives of those Jews who had returned 80 years earlier under Sheshbazzar. The one exception was Joab's family (v. 9). The returnees assembled on the banks of the Ahava waterway that flowed through the district of Babylon that bore the same name. The site is presently unknown. Babylonia was crisscrossed by a network of irrigation canals that tapped the water of the Euphrates and flowed toward the Tigris, which had a slightly deeper bed. No Levites had volunteered to return to Judah. In view of his plans for the restoration, Ezra needed more Levites than those already in Judah. Due to his recruiting efforts in Casiphia (site unknown, probably a district of Babylon), 38 Levites and 220 temple servants joined the immigrants. One writer estimated the total number of men who returned with Ezra as about 1,700—plus women and children. Another calculated the total number of men, women, and children as between 4,000 and 5,000. No matter the situation, the Lord is with us. He will keep and protect us.

Lesson: Is there anything impossible to God?

Prayer: We are your children Lord Jesus. Protect us from the evil one. Amen.

March 28th Saturday 2015

Text: Ezra 8:21-23

Topic: The Immigrants' Spiritual Preparation

As it is quite clear from these verses, Ezra sensed his great need for God's help in the dangerous trip that lay before them. Fasting enabled the people to give more time and concentration to their praying (cf. Neh. 1:4; Acts 13:3). Fasting facilitates prayer; it does not manipulate God. Ezra's primary concern, as these verses indicate, was God's reputation. "The refusal of an armed escort (historically surprising, the amount of bullion being transported) brought into play the same providence which was vouchsafed to the ancestors in the wilderness (Ezra 8:22)." It is well to *affirm* faith, as many Christians do regularly in the creeds. Yet it is salutary to ask whether anything that one ever does actually *requires* faith.

Lesson: Jesus is our helper always.

Prayer: Blessed be your name Lord Jesus. Keep us in the right path. Amen.