

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

Today's reading brought to mind the words of Joshua: "...and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed" (Josh 23:14). You promised that you would restore Judah to the land, and you were faithful to keep your word. Praise the LORD!

Today in Your Word

Today you told me about the arrival of the exiles in Jerusalem. Ezra records that some of the people who returned were not able to prove that they were Israelites. Also, some of the "sons of the priests" could not be found in the ancestral registration lists. Because of this, they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood until their status was decided with the Urim and Thummim (cf. 1 Sam 14:41). This shows how important the genealogies were in following your covenant law, and it teaches me that you are serious about the requirements you place on your people. The Christian life is not only about matters of the heart; it's also about holiness in word and deed. When the seventh month came, the people gathered together in Jerusalem to build the altar and celebrate the festival of booths. Ezra said, "Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices" (Ezra 3:3 NIV). This teaches me that there will be times when I'll be afraid to do what I know is right (maybe even terrified!). In such times, I must overcome my fear by your grace and obey in spite of the risks and the unknowns.

Reflection

Ezra pointed out that the people paid attention to detail—the altar was set "in its place," and everything was done "as it is written in the Law of Moses" (Ezra 3:2). This showed that the people honored your word and did their best to follow your direction. Am I being careful to obey your rules and carry out your commands? (cf. Rev 2:5).

Request

Father, it would have been easy for the remnant to be content with the fact that they had arrived back home safely. But they put your business—the altar and the temple—first, and they focused on their calling to be a holy priesthood. Help me to imitate their example. Give me the grace I need to resist the thorns of life that choke out your word and to bear fruit for your Kingdom! (Matt 13:3–8).

Thanksgiving

Thank you for being a God of second chances. How grateful I am for the many times you have forgiven me and restored me to fellowship with you. All praise to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world! (John 1:29).

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: "Be Still" – William Ebel.

Meditation Verse: Ezra 3:4.