

Ezra 8:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Analysis

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava— קָרָא צְמַדְתָּא (qara tzom, proclaimed a fast) was a formal act of communal humiliation before God. The צְמַדָּת (fast) involved abstaining from food and water to focus entirely on prayer, typically during crisis (Judges 20:26, 1 Samuel 7:6, Joel 2:12-13). **That we might afflict ourselves before our God—** לְהִתְעַנּוּת (l'hitannot, to humble/afflict oneself) means voluntary self-humbling, recognizing human weakness and dependence on divine strength. **Before our God—** לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִינוּ (lifnei Eloheinu, before our God) indicates covenantal approach—they come as His people seeking His help.

To seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance— בָּקָשָׁה (baqesh, to seek) means earnest petition, not casual request. The יְשָׁרָה (derekh yesharah, right/level way) implies both physical safe passage and moral guidance. The inclusion of טַף (taf, little ones/children) and רְכֻשׁ (rekush, substance/possessions) shows comprehensive concern—this wasn't just Ezra's personal journey but an entire community's vulnerable migration with women, children, and all their wealth through 900 miles of bandit-infested territory.

Historical Context

The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem took four months (7:9: departing first month, arriving fifth month) and crossed the Syrian desert, a route notorious for bandits. Caravans typically requested military escorts from Persian authorities.

Ezra's decision to travel without armed guard (explained in v. 22) was extraordinarily risky—his caravan carried 24 tons of silver and 3.75 tons of gold (vv. 26-27), an immense fortune that would attract raiders. The fast expressed desperate dependence on God's protection where human means were rejected.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does Ezra's proclamation of corporate fasting teach about leading vulnerable communities through dangerous transitions?
2. How does including 'little ones and substance' in prayer demonstrate comprehensive trust rather than spiritual escapism?
3. In what ways should modern believers practice 'afflicting ourselves before God' when facing overwhelming challenges?

Interlinear Text

אָהָבָה אֲ	פֶּגֶג רַ	עַל צָוֵם שָׁמֶן	וְאַקְרֵב אַ	מִ	אָהָבָה אֲ
Then I proclaimed	H8033	a fast	H5921	there at the river	of Ahava
H7121		H6685		H5104	H163
דְּרָרָה מִתְּפָעֵל וְתַ	לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים יְנַחֲשָׁה לְבַקֵּשׁ	מִתְּפָעֵל וְתַ	דְּרָרָה מִתְּפָעֵל וְתַ		
that we might afflict	H6031	ourselves before	H6440	our God	H430
				to seek	H1245
				H4480	way
					H1870
רְכֹשֶׁתְנוּ	וְלִכְלָל	וְלִטְפֵּחַ נָנוּ	לְנָנוּ יְשַׁבֵּה הָ	וְלִכְלָל	רְכֹשֶׁתְנוּ
and for all our substance	H3605	for us and for our little ones	H2945	H3605	and for all our substance
הַ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ	וְ
of him a right	H3477	H0			

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 20:3 (Parallel theme): And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

Joel 1:14 (References God): Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD,

Isaiah 30:21 (Parallel theme): And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

1 Samuel 7:6 (Parallel theme): And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

Jonah 3:5 (References God): So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.

Leviticus 23:29 (Parallel theme): For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people.

Leviticus 16:29 (Parallel theme): And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you:

Isaiah 42:16 (Parallel theme): And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.

Psalms 5:8 (Parallel theme): Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.

Ezra 8:15 (Parallel theme): And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

