

Ezra 2:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The children of Beth-lehem, an hundred twenty and three.

Analysis

The children of Beth-lehem, an hundred twenty and three. This entry shifts from patrilineal to geographical designation: **Beth-lehem** (בֵּית לֶחֶם, Beit Lechem, 'house of bread') returnees numbered 123. This small Judean town, six miles south of Jerusalem, held enormous redemptive significance. Ruth gleaned in Bethlehem's fields (Ruth 2); David was anointed there (1 Samuel 16:1-13); and centuries later, Jesus would be born there, fulfilling Micah 5:2.

The name 'house of bread' proved prophetic: Jesus, the Bread of Life (John 6:35), came from Bethlehem. The preservation of this town through exile, ensuring inhabitants could return and maintain community, formed part of God's sovereign preparation for Messiah's advent. Every detail of restoration served ultimate redemptive purposes.

The relatively small number (123) reminds us that God often works through obscure places and people. Bethlehem was 'little among the thousands of Judah' (Micah 5:2), yet from this insignificant village came Israel's greatest king and humanity's Savior. Kingdom impact doesn't correlate with worldly prominence.

Historical Context

Bethlehem's agricultural richness (hence 'house of bread') made it economically viable despite small size. Located in Judah's central hill country, it benefited from adequate rainfall for wheat and barley cultivation. The town's survival through Babylonian devastation and subsequent repopulation enabled its role in gospel

accounts five centuries later.

Maintaining Bethlehem as distinct settlement preserved Davidic associations. Jesus's birth there wasn't geographical accident but fulfillment of specific prophecy requiring the town's continued existence and identification. God's providence operates through mundane details—census lists, town preservation, family records—to accomplish cosmic redemption.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Bethlehem's preservation through exile demonstrate God's sovereign orchestration of redemptive history?
2. What does God's choice of small, obscure places teach about worldly versus kingdom values?
3. How can believers in 'small' ministries or locations resist insignificance-thinking and embrace God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

וּשְׁלֹשָׁה:	עֶשְׂרִים	מֵאָה	לְ חָם	בֵּית	בְּנֵי י'
and three	twenty	an hundred	of Bethlehem	H0	The children
H7969	H6242	H3967	H1035		H1121