

Ezra 2:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

Analysis

The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel (הַלִּוִּים בְּנֵי־יֵשׁוּעַ לְקַדְמִיָּאל)—The shift to haleviyim (the Levites) marks a dramatic statistical change: only 74 Levites returned versus 4,289 priests (vv. 36-39), a ratio of 1:58. This severe underrepresentation suggests most Levites (assistants to priests, musicians, gatekeepers) had assimilated into Babylonian society. The name Jeshua means 'Yahweh saves,' while Kadmiel means 'God is ancient/eternal'—together proclaiming salvation through the eternal God.

Levites' duties included teaching Torah (Deuteronomy 33:10), suggesting this low return rate meant a knowledge deficit in restored Judah. The mention of Hodaviah (meaning 'praise Yahweh') as their ancestor emphasizes the worship dimension of Levitical service. Later, Levites would lead national repentance (Nehemiah 9:4-5), their small numbers making their spiritual impact even more remarkable—quality over quantity in God's economy.

Historical Context

Levites received no land inheritance, depending on tithes from the other tribes (Numbers 18:21-24). The exile's disruption of agricultural economy likely pushed Levites into trades, making return economically difficult. Their low response rate (74 vs. thousands expected) created severe staffing shortages, later necessitating recruiting efforts (Ezra 8:15-20). This scarcity made those who did return especially valuable.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does the severe underrepresentation of Levites (74 vs. 4,289 priests) suggest about the cost of ministry roles that depend on others' generosity?
2. How does the low Levite return rate challenge modern assumptions about who will staff restoration efforts—and why many qualified people decline?
3. In what ways might God use a 'faithful remnant' within a remnant to accomplish His purposes more effectively than large numbers?

Interlinear Text

הַלְוִיִּם	לְבָנֵי י	יֵשׁוּעַ	וְקַדְמִיֵּאל	לְבָנֵי י	הוֹדָבְיָה
The Levites	of the children	of Jeshua	and Kadmiel	of the children	of Hodaviah
H3881	H1121	H3442	H6934	H1121	H1938
שִׁבְעִים	וָאַרְבָּעָה:				
seventy	and four				
H7657	H702				

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 3:9 (Parallel theme): Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.

