

Ezra 2:43

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha,
the children of Tabbaoth,

Analysis

The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth—This verse introduces the Nethinim (נְתִינִים, netinim), literally "those given" or "the given ones," temple servants dedicated to assist the Levites in menial tasks. The Hebrew root natan (נְתָן, to give) indicates they were "given" to the tabernacle service, originally including Gibeonites whom Joshua assigned as woodcutters and water carriers (Joshua 9:21-27) after their deception.

The three family heads—**Ziha** (זִיחָה, possibly "drought" or "brightness"), **Hasupha** (הַסּוֹפָה, "stripped" or "made bare"), and **Tabbaoth** (תַּבְבָּאֹת, "rings" or "signets")—represent distinct clans within this servant class. That their names and genealogies were carefully preserved demonstrates their valued place in Israel's cultic life. Though performing humble tasks, the Nethinim were essential to temple function, embodying the principle that all service to God carries dignity regardless of status.

The preservation of these names teaches that God remembers every person dedicated to His service, no matter how lowly their station. The inclusion of Nethinim in the return census (along with priests and Levites) shows that temple worship required diverse roles—from high priestly ministry to carrying water—all necessary for corporate worship.

Historical Context

The Nethinim's origins trace to Joshua's encounter with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9), who deceived Israel into a treaty. Though condemned to perpetual servitude, they gained the privilege of proximity to God's sanctuary. By David's time, the Nethinim had expanded to include other foreigners and captives assigned to temple service (Ezra 8:20). Their willing return from Babylonian exile—392 total (Ezra 2:58)—demonstrated remarkable covenant loyalty despite their servile status.

Archaeological and textual evidence suggests Nethinim lived in special quarters near the temple (Nehemiah 3:26), received portions from temple revenues, and enjoyed tax exemption (Ezra 7:24). Their role involved hauling water, chopping wood, cleaning vessels, preparing sacrifices, and maintaining temple grounds—physically demanding work enabling priestly ministry. Post-exilic community valued them enough to record their genealogies meticulously.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's remembrance of the Nethinim challenge modern assumptions about the relative importance of visible versus behind-the-scenes ministry?
2. What does the Gibeonites' transformation from deceivers under curse to honored temple servants teach about redemptive grace?
3. How can the church today honor and value those performing humble, essential service roles?

Interlinear Text

טַבְּעֹת: of Tabbaoth

Additional Cross-References

1 Chronicles 9:2 (Parallel theme): Now the first inhabitants that dwelt in their possessions in their cities were, the Israelites, the priests, Levites, and the Nethinims.

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