

Ezra 8:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

Analysis

Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. This genealogical notation within Ezra's returnee list embodies profound theological significance beyond mere record-keeping. The Hebrew attention to names, lineages, and numbers reflects covenant identity and God's faithfulness to preserve His people through exile. Each name represents a family choosing to abandon Babylonian security for the uncertain journey back to devastated Jerusalem—a physical expression of spiritual commitment to God's promises.

Bigvai's family appears twice in Ezra's account: 2,067 returned initially with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2, 14), while this verse records seventy males returning later with Ezra himself (458 BCE). The name Bigvai (בִּגְבַּעַי) possibly means "in my bodies" or "in my midst," though its etymology remains uncertain. Uthai (עָתָי, "helpful") and Zabbud (צָבָד, "given" or "endowed") represent the second generation's renewed commitment to covenant faithfulness after seventy years of exile.

Theologically, this verse illustrates:

1. God's preservation of distinct family lines through captivity, fulfilling promises to Abraham
2. the importance of individual names in God's redemptive plan—each person matters
3. the pattern of remnant theology—not all returned, but the faithful remnant rebuilt God's kingdom

4. the necessity of recording covenant community for maintaining identity and accountability;
5. the multi-generational nature of God's restoration work, requiring sustained faithfulness beyond initial enthusiasm.

Historical Context

Ezra 8:14 falls within the second major return from Babylonian exile, approximately 458 BCE during the reign of Persian King Artaxerxes I (465-424 BCE). This return occurred roughly eighty years after Zerubbabel's initial group returned in 538 BCE under Cyrus's decree. The returning exiles faced a restored but struggling Jerusalem community, with the rebuilt temple (completed 516 BCE) but lacking proper religious instruction and reform.

The genealogical lists in Ezra 8 served crucial legal and religious functions. Persian administration required documentation of population movements, while Jewish covenant identity demanded proof of legitimate lineage—especially for priests and Levites. The "seventy males" (zakar, זָקָר) likely represents males of military age or family heads, not total family members including women and children. Total numbers for Ezra's caravan approached 1,500 males plus families, significantly smaller than Zerubbabel's initial 42,360 returnees.

Archaeological evidence from this period includes Aramaic papyri from Elephantine, Egypt, documenting Jewish communities maintaining genealogical records and temple worship outside Israel. Persian period stamp seals and coins confirm administrative continuity and growing Jewish autonomy under Persian rule. The historical context reveals the precarious nature of this restoration—surrounded by hostile neighbors (Samaritans, Ammonites, Arabs), facing economic hardship, and struggling to maintain covenant distinctiveness after generations of assimilation. Bigvai's seventy males represented families choosing prophetic vision over Babylonian comfort, demonstrating faith in God's unfulfilled promises regarding restored Jerusalem.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 – Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does God's preservation of specific family lines through seventy years of exile reveal about His faithfulness to covenant promises across generations?
2. How does the detail of recording individual names like Uthai and Zabbud demonstrate that God values each person's contribution to His redemptive purposes?
3. What spiritual principles can we learn from families who chose to leave Babylonian security for uncertain restoration work in Jerusalem?
4. In what ways does the remnant theology evident in this verse challenge our expectations about the size or success of God's faithful community?
5. How might the multi-generational aspect of Israel's restoration (initial return under Zerubbabel, later return under Ezra) inform our understanding of God's timing in spiritual renewal and reformation?

Interlinear Text

הזכרים:

males

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