

Ezra 8:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding.

Analysis

Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan...—Ezra dispatches a delegation of eleven men, carefully listed by name. The שָׁלַח (shalach, sent) indicates formal commission. The names reveal theological significance: אֱלִיעֶזֶר (Eliezer, 'God is my help'), אֲרִיאֵל (Ariel, 'lion of God'), שְׁמַיָּה (Shemaiah, 'Yahweh has heard'). These weren't random selections but strategic choices of influential leaders.

Chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding—רָאשִׁים (rashim, chief men/heads) indicates tribal or family leadership status. The phrase אַנְשֵׁי בִינָה (anshei binah, men of understanding/discernment) distinguishes the final two as particularly wise, suitable for the delicate task of persuading reluctant Levites to leave comfortable Babylonian life for uncertain future in impoverished Judah. This combination of political authority (chiefs) and wisdom (understanding) shows Ezra's strategic leadership—he knew convincing the Levites required both status and eloquence.

Historical Context

The eleven delegates represent significant families within the exile community. 'Men of understanding' likely means those skilled in Torah interpretation and

persuasive argument—necessary to counter the Levites' rational objections to returning. The journey to Casiphia (v. 17) was probably 10-20 miles from Ahava, suggesting the Levites had established a separate religious community, perhaps a diaspora study center or synagogue, making their absence from Ezra's caravan even more puzzling.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What does Ezra's strategic selection of influential and wise men teach about mobilizing people for difficult ministry?
2. Why is 'understanding' (wisdom) as important as positional authority when calling people to costly obedience?
3. How might modern ministry leaders learn from Ezra's approach to recruiting reluctant but necessary workers?

Interlinear Text

וְאֶשְׁלַח הַ	לְאֶלְיָעִזֶּר זֶר	לְאַרְיֵא ל	לִשְׁמַעְיָה	וּלְאֶלְנָתָן
Then sent	I for Eliezer	for Ariel	for Shemaiah	and for Elnathan
H7971	H461	H740	H8098	H494
וּלְיָרִיב	וּלְאֶלְנָתָן	וּלְנָתָן	וּלְזַכְרְיָה הַ	וּלְמִשְׁלָם
and for Jarib	and for Elnathan	and for Nathan	and for Zechariah	and for Meshullam
H3402	H494	H5416	H2148	H4918
רָאשֵׁי יָם	וּלְיֹאֲרִיב	וּלְאֶלְנָתָן	מִבִּינִים:	
chief men	also for Joiarib	and for Elnathan	men of understanding	
H7218	H3114	H494	H995	

