

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: **אֵלִישֶׁר** (Eliezer, 'God is my help'), **אַרְיָה** (Ariel, 'lion of God'), **שְׁמַעְיָה** (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—**רָשִׁים** (rashim, chief men/heads) indicates tribal or family leadership status. The phrase **אַנְשֵׁי בִּנָה** (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

וְלֹא לְנָתָת | לְשָׁמְעָה | לְאַלְיָזֶר | לְאַרְיָא | לְאַשְׁלָחָן |
Then sent I for Eliezer for Ariel for Shemaiah and for Elnathan
H7971 H461 H740 H8098 H494

וְלֹמֶשֶׁל | מִזְכָּרִי | הַלְּגָת | וְלֹא לְנָתָת | וְלֹיְגָר | יְבָבָן |
and for Jarib and for Elnathan and for Nathan and for Zechariah and for Meshullam
H3402 H494 H5416 H2148 H4918

מְבִינִים: | וְלֹא לְנָתָת | וְלֹיְגָר | יְבָבָן | בָּאָשָׁר |
chief men also for Joiarib and for Elnathan men of understanding
H7218 H3114 H494 H995

