

Ezra 8:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;

Analysis

And by the good hand of our God upon us—יָד־אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַטּוֹבָה עָלֵינוּ (yad-Eloheinu hatovah aleinu, the good hand of our God upon us) is Ezra's repeated theological refrain (7:6, 7:9, 7:28, 8:18, 8:22, 8:31), attributing all success to divine providence rather than human effort. The 'hand' metaphor depicts God's active intervention and protection. This acknowledgment frames the entire narrative—Ezra never credits his own leadership but consistently points to God's sovereign enablement.

They brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel—אִישׁ־שֵׂכֶל (ish-sekel, a man of understanding/insight) emphasizes intellectual and spiritual qualification, not mere genealogical credentials, though those are meticulously recorded: מַחֲלִי (Machli) was Merari's son (Exodus 6:19), making this man a Merarite Levite. **And Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen**—שִׁרְבִיָּה (Sherebyah, 'Yahweh has scorched/sent burning heat') becomes a key leader in Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 8:24, Nehemiah 8:7, 9:4-5, 10:12, 12:8, 12:24). The eighteen family members represent substantial leadership capital agreeing to return.

Historical Context

Recruiting only 38 Levites and 220 Nethinim (8:18-20) from what must have been thousands in Babylon shows the dramatic reluctance to return. The fact that Ezra memorializes Sherebyah by name and traces his Merarite lineage suggests his recruitment was a significant victory—a respected leader whose participation encouraged others. These Levites would play crucial roles in post-exilic worship (Nehemiah 8:7's public Torah reading) and covenant renewal (Nehemiah 9-10).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Ezra's consistent attribution of success to 'the good hand of our God' challenge modern leadership's self-promotion?
2. What does the emphasis on 'understanding' alongside genealogy teach about qualifications for spiritual leadership?
3. Why is recruiting influential leaders (like Sherebyah) more strategic than merely increasing numbers?

Interlinear Text

עַל יְנוּ	הַטּוֹב הַ	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	כַּיָּד לְנוּ	וַבַּ יָּאוּ	
upon us they brought	And by the good	of our God	hand	us a man	
H5921	H2896	H430	H3027	H935	
וּבְנֵי יוֹ	לֵוִי י	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	מַחֲלִי י	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	שֶׁ כָּל
of the sons	of Levi	of the sons	of Mahli	of the sons	of understanding
H1121	H3878	H1121	H4249	H1121	H7922
וּבְנֵי יוֹ	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ
of the sons	of Israel	of the sons	and his brethren	and Sherebiah	and Sherebiah
H1121	H3478	H1121	H251	H8274	H8274
וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ
of the sons	of Israel	of the sons	and his brethren	and Sherebiah	and Sherebiah
H1121	H3478	H1121	H251	H8274	H8274
וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ	וּבְנֵי יוֹ
of the sons	of Israel	of the sons	and his brethren	and Sherebiah	and Sherebiah
H1121	H3478	H1121	H251	H8274	H8274

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 3:15 (Parallel theme): And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Nehemiah 2:8 (Good): And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Ezra 7:28 (References God): And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

1 Chronicles 6:19 (Parallel theme): The sons of Merari; Mahli, and Mushi. And these are the families of the Levites according to their fathers.

Daniel 1:20 (Parallel theme): And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

Ezra 7:6 (References God): This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

Ezra 8:22 (Good): For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org