

Ezra 8:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

Analysis

Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites—the נְתִינִים (Netinim, 'given ones/dedicated ones') originated when דָּוִיד (David) and הַשָּׂרִים (hasarim, the princes) formalized temple support roles, possibly incorporating Gibeonite woodcutters and water-carriers (Joshua 9:27) plus war captives into permanent service class. The phrase אֲבוֹדַת הַלְּוִיִּים (avodat haLeviyyim, service of the Levites) means they functioned as Levitical assistants, freeing Levites for teaching, music, and gatekeeping by handling menial labor.

Two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name—מְאַתִּים וְעֶשֶׂרִים (matayim v'esrim, 220) far outnumbered the 38 Levites recruited (vv. 18-19), suggesting Nethinim were more willing to return—perhaps because they had less economic security in Babylon than Levites. The phrase נִקְׁבוּ בְּשָׁמוֹת (niqvu v'shemot, expressed by name/designated by name) indicates careful registration, treating temple servants with dignity despite their menial status. David's original appointment gave them permanent legitimacy and honor.

Historical Context

The Nethinim appear in Ezra-Nehemiah lists (Ezra 2:43-58, 8:20, Nehemiah 3:26, 7:46-60, 10:28, 11:3, 11:21) as a recognized temple servant class. Despite their foreign origins and low status, they're consistently included in the covenant

community and even participate in covenant renewal (Nehemiah 10:28). Their willingness to return (220 vs. only 38 Levites) is striking—perhaps their 'outsider' status made them more committed to Jerusalem than assimilated Levites were.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does the careful registration of Nethinim 'by name' teach about God's valuing of seemingly insignificant servants?
2. How does the Nethinim's greater willingness to return (vs. Levites) challenge assumptions about status and commitment?
3. In what ways do modern churches honor or dishonor 'behind the scenes' servants who enable visible ministry?

Interlinear Text

וּפְשָׁרִים אֲלֹמִין שְׁפָתִים נְתִינִים יְמִין
H4480 **Also of the Nethinims** H5411 H5414 H1732 H8269
had appointed whom David and the princes

וְעִשְׂרֵה מֵאָתָה יְמִין נְתִינִים כָּלִי
H6242 and twenty two hundred also of the Nethinims of the Levites for the service
H3967 H5411 H5411 H3881 H5656

בְּשִׁמּוֹת: נִקְרָב וְכָל
by name H8034 H5344 all of them were expressed
H3605

Additional Cross-References

Ezra 2:43 (Parallel theme): The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

Ezra 7:7 (Parallel theme): And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

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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