The Nethinim were a group of temple of servants in ancient Israel, appointed to assist the Levites in the daily operations of the temple. The term *Nethinim* (Hebrew: הַנְּתִינִים, *hanethinim*) literally means “the given ones” or “dedicated ones,” implying they were given over to temple service.

They are prominently mentioned in the post-exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which record the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem.

Their Role in the Temple

The Nethinim were not priests or Levites but performed supportive tasks such as cleaning, carrying water, and preparing wood for sacrifices (Joshua 9:27). Their work was essential for the smooth functioning of the temple.

> *Ezra 8:20 (ESV):*“Besides the 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites, they were all mentioned by name.”

> *Nehemiah 7:73 (ESV):*“So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants [Nethinim], and all Israel lived in their towns. When the seventh month came, the people of Israel were in their towns.”

Additional references: Ezra 2:43, 2:58; Ezra 7:24 – these verses further establish their identity and the number of families among them.

Possible Origin: The Gibeonites

Although the Bible doesn’t state their origin explicitly, many scholars connect the Nethinim to the Gibeonites, a Canaanite group mentioned in Joshua 9. The Gibeonites deceived Joshua and the Israelites into making a peace treaty with them. As a result, Joshua assigned them to be “hewers of wood and drawers of water” for the house of God.

> *Joshua 9:27 (ESV):*“But Joshua made them that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the

> altar of the Lord, to this day, in the place that he should choose.”

Later Jewish leaders such as King David and the temple leaders further organized these servants under the term “Nethinim.” Over time, they became an official group, living in designated areas near the temple (Nehemiah 3:26).

Spiritual Significance

The presence of the Nethinim in temple service reflects God’s inclusive nature and His ability to redeem people for holy purposes, even those outside of Israel’s bloodline. Despite their likely non-Israelite origin, they were welcomed into God’s service and were given a role in sacred duties.

Moreover, their return from exile with the Israelites signifies their spiritual commitment and integration into the covenant community. Though they held a humble position, their dedication played a vital role in maintaining worship in the temple.

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