

LESSON 7

In Ezra 2:2, we have a list of 11 leaders: Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

In Nehemiah 7:7, we find a similar list:

They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.

Aside from a few variations in spelling, the big difference between those two lists is that the one in Nehemiah has 12 names instead of only 11 names. Nahamani is added to the list in Jeremiah and is not present in the list from Ezra 2:2.

Why the difference? The simplest explanation is that, for whatever reason, Nehemiah just gives a longer list.

But in this case there may be another explanation. I very seldom opt for an explanation that involves an error in the process of copying, but we know that on very rare occasions that happened. We can see some minor differences in the various manuscripts that we have.

That may be what happened here. It is possible that the original version of Ezra 2:2 matched the version we have in Nehemiah 7:7 but somewhere along the way a name was inadvertently dropped from Ezra 2:2.

Why do I put that forward as a possibility? Because of the importance of the number 12. The list in Nehemiah has 12 leaders, while the list in Ezra has only 11 leaders. For a book with the major theme of continuity, the number 12 would have reinforced that theme. The number 12 would also have provided yet another link to the first exodus out of Egypt.

We can't say for sure, but I lean in the direction of thinking that the original list had 12 names just as in Nehemiah.

And now, let's look at the next list!

Ezra 2:2b-20

2b The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.

Verses 3-20 are the names of the clans that returned. The end of verse 2 describes them as the men of the people of Israel.

The Bible usually reserves “Israel” for the entire nation of twelve tribes or for the Northern Kingdom that fell to Assyria. Why is “Israel” used here? The answer is our two main themes — continuity and restoration.

The word “Israel” is a reminder that this group was the heir to God’s covenants to the nation as a whole. The restoration that was about to occur was going to go all the way back to the beginning – which is the only place to go if you want a true restoration. You need to strip away all of the layers of new paint until you get back to the original!

The names in this list are nearly identical to those in Nehemiah 7, but there is more variation in the numbers between the two lists. Why is that?

One commentator suggests this variation may be due to what he describes as “the notorious difficulty in copying Hebrew numbers.” Vertical strokes were used for units, horizontal strokes were used for tens, and the initial letter in the Hebrew word “meah” was used for hundreds. Single strokes could easily be overlooked or miscopied.

“While the proper names are in general agreement, the numerical notations frequently disagree. These discrepancies seemingly occur at random. Neither list consistently has the higher number.

[The author of one article] provides a table listing twenty-nine differences between the lists of Nehemiah 7 and Ezra 2 out of the 153 individual numerals or ciphers. Observing that the divergences usually occur in proper names and in numerical statistics, he believes the discrepancies between the lists to be the result of scribal error and shows how the Hebrew numerals could have been misinterpreted. ... Names and numbers were the great bane of copyists. Although scribes took great care to ensure the accuracy of their work, genealogies and numerical lists invariably proved to be the most difficult of all passages to accurately reproduce.”

The article referenced in that quote is a 1954 article from the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, and I can provide a copy to anyone who wants to dig a little deeper on this issue.

Again, a copyist error is not my favorite explanation, but sometimes we need to consider it because we know it sometimes happened. Here we are faced with two lists having differences in the numerical counts, and errors in copying is the leading explanation.

Another possible explanation is that we have two lists separated by time with the list in Ezra being the counts that were made at the time of the first return, and the list in Nehemiah including updates that were made to that original list over time.

One older commentary found what it called “very curious coincidences with regard to numbers” in this list, and found them “coincidences hardly to be accounted for except on the supposition of some secret but perfect method of numerical reconciliation.” There is not much support for that view.

Several of these clan names occur elsewhere in the Bible. Eleven of the names are also found in Ezra 8 among those who later accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem. Fourteen are listed in Nehemiah 10 as signing the covenant of separation.

As for the names themselves, there is not a lot we can say. Some of them appear only here and in the parallel list from Nehemiah.

Parosh in verse 2 is the Hebrew word for “flea.” Some members of this clan later came with Ezra in Ezra 8:3. Others helped Nehemiah repair the wall in Nehemiah 3:25. But others of this clan were guilty of ignoring God’s law against intermarriage in Nehemiah 10:14 – which tells us that at least one “flea” did not “flee” when he should have!

The name Shephatiah in verse 4 is found several times in the Bible beginning with the fifth son of David. It was also the name of one of Jeremiah’s enemies in Jeremiah 38:1. It is possible that he was

carried into captivity after Zedekiah's rebellion and that some of his descendants were now returning. If so, they must have had the respect for Jeremiah that their ancestor lacked.

Arah in verse 5 is most likely the Arah mentioned in Nehemiah 6:18. If so, then one of Arah's descendent had intermarried with Tobiah's family, who was Nehemiah's adversary. Tobiah was a Persian official, who along with Sanballat and Geshem, tried to stop the reconstruction of the walls. His marriage into Arah's family tied him to an aristocratic Jewish family and caused some of the Jews to pledge their allegiance to him instead of to Nehemiah. We should note that this problem was caused by someone who violated God's law about marriage – a problem that Ezra will address later in this book.

Since "Pahath-moab" in verse 6 literally means "governor of Moab." It is possible that an ancestor had been a ruler over part of Moab prior to the exile. Although marriage to Moabites was forbidden among the returnees, it did occur as early as the times of the Judges, and we know that David's ancestry was partially Moabite.

The name Zaccai in verse 9 has also been found in an archaeological discovery on a stamp seal.

The name Azgad in verse 12 means "mighty is Gad" and has been found in Aramaic documents from Egypt.

In verse 16, we find "the children of Ater of Hezekiah." This is most likely not King Hezekiah because we would otherwise have expected Ater to have more prominence than he does.

As we said, the next list differs from the first list by describing the people, not based on their clan, but rather based on where they had lived prior to the exile. Presumably, those in this next group had either forgotten their clan, or perhaps some were from clans with so few people that they did not make the main list. (95 and 98 are the smallest counts in the previous list.)

Ezra 2:21-35

21 The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25 The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29 The

children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. 31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

Although the list of place names we just read starts at verse 21, it is possible that the list actually starts with verse 20: “The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.” The parallel passage in Nehemiah 7:25 has Gibeon rather than Gibbar, and Gibeon is about five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Some of the descriptions begin with “the **sons** of” or “**children** of” while others begin with “the **men** of.” The NIV obliterates this distinction, and, while it is true that the phrases appear to be synonymous here, it should make you wonder what else the NIV is obliterating. (If there is ambiguity in the original text, a good translation carries that ambiguity over into the English version – a poor translation does not.)

By listing people both by clan and by geographical location, God is confirming their connection to those who occupied the land prior to the exile. This was not just some new group with which God decided to start over, but rather this group was very closely connected to those who had been taken captive. These people were **returning** (Ezra 2:1 “came again”) – and that word makes no sense unless they are connected to those who were taken away.

Again, we can say a few things about some of these places.

Bethlehem in verse 21 is the place of Jesus’ birth and is located about five miles south of Jerusalem.

Anathoth in verse 23 was a priestly settlement in Benjamite territory and was Jeremiah’s hometown (Jeremiah 1:1). It is about three miles northeast of Jerusalem.

Ramah in verse 26 was Samuel’s home, about four miles north of Jerusalem.

Geba in verse 26 was located five and a half miles northeast of Jerusalem and was used to denote the northern limit of the Jewish people Zechariah 14:10, a great prophecy about the church.

Micmash in verse 27 is located just to the north across a deep valley from Geba. Before a decisive battle in 1 Samuel 13, Saul encamped at Geba and the Philistines at Micmash.

The “other Elam” in verse 31 refers back to the Elam we saw in verse 7.

Lod in verse 33 is seven miles southeast of Joppa, and is located today near Israel’s international airport.

Jericho in verse 34 is about 18 miles east of Jerusalem.

So far we have seen the list of clans and the list of towns. Next we will see a list of the priests.

Ezra 2:36-39

36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.
37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

Starting in verse 36, Ezra begins to list the priests and the temple ministers who returned.

From the numbers given here, it seems that about 10% of the returnees were priests.

While that number may seem high, we should remember that priests had the most to gain from a return to Jerusalem. They would have a steady source of income combined with a high social status. Also, they were very much needed by a group whose mission was to rebuild the temple and restore proper worship.

David had organized the priests into 24 family groups in 1 Chronicles 24, but only four of those 24 groups are represented here. These same four groups are also the only ones listed later when Ezra returned (Ezra 10:18-22).

According to Jewish tradition, the original 24 courses of priests were reconstituted from these 4 families, with each of the reconstituted families taking the name of the one of the original families. If so, that would explain how Zechariah in Luke 1:5 was of the course of Abia or Abijah.

Notice that the house of Jeshua is mentioned in verse 36. Some point to this verse as evidence that the author was getting these figures from a much later list (at which point Jeshua, they say, had 973 descendants). But all the verse says is that the **house** of Jeshua had 973 people; that is, it is the clan or family size rather than the number of descendants. Also, we could be seeing another Jeshua here;

it was a very common name, and in fact we do see another Jeshua in verse 40.

Jedaiah was the second order in 1 Chronicles 24:7. Immer was the 16th order in 1 Chronicles 24:14. Harim was the 1 Chronicles third order in 24:8.

Pashur is not listed in 1 Chronicles 24. But 1 Chronicles 9:12 tells us that Pashur was the son of Malchijah, and Malchijah was the fifth order in 1 Chronicles 24:9.

Later in Ezra 10:22, six of Pashur's sons will be encouraged by Ezra to divorce their foreign wives.

Ezra 2:40-42

40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. 41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight. 42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.

Verses 40-42 list the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers.

Jeshua the Levite in verse 40 is not the same Jeshua from verse 2 who was the High Priest – again, it was a common name.

The Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who were not also descendants of Aaron. They were prohibited from offering sacrifices on the altar. Because they had no land inheritance, they lived in 48 Levitical cities and were supported by tithes. They were butchers, doorkeepers, singers, scribes, teachers, and sometimes even temple beggars.

The first thing we notice about the Levites listed here is that their number was small compared to the number of priests. Later, Ezra would have only 38 Levites travel back with him (Ezra 8:15-20).

Why so few? It may be because the Levites had no inheritance to which to return. (But Ezra 7:24 tells us they were exempt from taxes.)

Other possibilities are that fewer Levites were deported initially because they were from the poorer class, or perhaps many Levites had moved over to secular work during the exile and liked their new social status in Babylon better than their old social status in Jerusalem.

Ezra will describe his problem in finding enough Levites in Ezra 8:15-30, which tells us that the problem did not go away any time soon.

In our introduction, we talked about the false notion of some that Ezra wrote or rewrote the Law of Moses so that the version we have today in our Bibles did not exist prior to the time of Ezra. The extremely small number of Levites is very strong evidence **against** that common modernist view. Why?

In the law (Numbers 18:21, 26), it is assumed that the Levites would greatly outnumber the priests. For example, the Levites received the tithes and passed only a tenth (a tithe of the tithe) to the priests. What that means is that at that time the priests were likely about 10% of the tribe of Levi.

Plus, under the Mosaic Law, the Levites lived in 48 Levitical cities — whereas here we hardly have 48 Levites in total!

Had the law been rewritten during the time of Ezra as some argue, it would never have reached us in the form that we now have it.

“Nothing proves more clearly how mistaken is the view that in post-exilic times, the Torah was still being added to and revised.”

After the Levites in verse 40, we have the singers in verse 41.

According to 1 Chronicles 15:16-24, David had organized the singers into 24 groups to correspond to the 24 groups of priests, but only one group (“the children of Asaph”) is mentioned here.

The name Asaph in verse 41 is associated with a number of the Psalms, including, for example, Psalm 50, which has the heading “A Psalm of Asaph.”

Why so few singers? Again, most likely the demand for singers was small in Babylon and so they gradually moved to secular occupations, while also failing to teach their children how to sing.

After the singers in verse 41, we find the porters or the gatekeepers in verse 42.

The gatekeepers were responsible for locking and unlocking the gates of the temple and to keep watch over the treasury, according to 1 Chronicles 9:17-29. Another descendant of Shallum is

mentioned as a gatekeeper in the time of Jeremiah (35:4).

What we are seeing here is that the people who returned were the same people who had been exiled – but they were also different. They had been changed by the exile, and some things had been lost.

For example, it seems that many of those with skills dedicated to the temple had neglected those skills and moved to secular jobs while in exile. Much about the law had been forgotten as well, as we will see later in this book. The difficult task of restoration lay ahead, and the further the drift, the more difficult the task.

There is a big lesson for us hidden in these simple lists. Instead of 24 divisions of priests, there were only four. Instead of 24 divisions of singers, there were only one. Instead of 48 Levitical cities, there were hardly 48 Levites in total!

What had happened? Babylon had happened. God's people had been changed by Babylon. In some ways, they had been changed for the better by learning the lessons that God had intended them to learn in the exile. But in other ways they had been changed for the worse; they had forgotten much and neglected much. Most likely there were Jews who had no desire to move to Jerusalem and no interest in what was going on there.

And what is the lesson for us? Simple. Babylon hasn't gone anywhere. The church today is also exiled in Babylon. We are not located in our promised land of rest, but rather we are living in pagan Babylon.

Will we change Babylon or will Babylon change us?

Will we let the distractions of this world cause us to forget God's word and neglect our Christian duties? Will we transfer our loyalties to the world?

The call of the book of Ezra is a call for God's people to return to God's word – and that is a call for all of us.

#ezra-esther