

Nehemiah

Chapter 12

Priests and Levites

These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3 Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4 Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, 5 Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6 Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua. 8 And the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his brothers was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. 9 And Bakbukiah and Unni and their brothers stood opposite them in the service. 10 And Jeshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, 11 Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua. 12 And in the days of Joiakim were priests, heads of fathers' houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; 13 of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14 of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; 15 of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; 16 of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17 of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; 18 of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19 of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20 of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21 of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel. 22 In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, the Levites were recorded as heads of fathers' houses; so too were the priests in the reign of Darius the Persian. 23 As for the sons of Levi, their heads of fathers' houses were written in the Book of the Chronicles until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. 24 And the chiefs of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers who stood opposite them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, watch by watch. 25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. 26 These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra, the priest and scribe.

12:1-9 This list of twenty-two families of priests and eight Levitical families is said to be from Zerubbabel's time. Originally David had appointed twenty-four priestly divisions to serve in the temple, perhaps each for one month out of every two years (1 Chr. 24:1-19). Apparently only twenty-two of these families returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel, since Neh. 12:1-7 gives only twenty-two names of priests. The service was "in the days of Jeshua" (12:7), who was the first high priest after the return from the exile and who served in that capacity from 533 BC to about 500 BC. (CC)

12:1-7 Names of 22 leaders of priestly families who came up with Zerubbabel and Jeshua from Babylon to Jerusalem c 100 years earlier (Ezr 2:2). Many of these names also appeared on the list of recent covenant signers, which means these are likely family names, not those of individuals (10:2-8). (TLSB)

12:1 *these were the priests* – The main purpose of this list seems to be to assure the people that the priests and Levites whom they were following were really descendants of the families God appointed to serve in this capacity. This was important if God's people were to have confidence in the validity of the sacrifices offered on their behalf. A second purpose of the list may be to

honor those who played a leading part in the restoration of the nation. This catalog of priests demonstrates the preservation of the line of priests. Piecing together the various scriptural lists, we can trace the priesthood, which began with Aaron, over a thousand year period, roughly 1400-400 B.C. This shows how carefully God preserved his chosen nation and its institutions. The priesthood was to reach its greatest glory in Christ. He would offer the supreme sacrifice – his spotless life for the sins of the world. (PBC)

Jeshua. Returned from Babylonian exile in 538 B.C. (CSB)

Ezra. Not the Ezra of the book, who was the leader of the exiles who returned 80 years later. (CSB)

12:7 *leaders of the priests*. The rotation of 24 priestly houses was established at the time of David (1Ch 24:3, 7–19). Twenty-two heads of priestly houses are mentioned in vv. 1–7. Inscriptions listing the 24 divisions of the priests probably hung in many synagogues in Palestine. So far, only fragments of two such inscriptions have been recovered—from Ashkelon in the 1920s and from Caesarea in the 1960s (dated to the third and fourth centuries A.D.). (CSB)

12:8–9 List of Levitical leaders and temple singers who came with Zerubbabel. (TLSB)

12:9 *opposite them*. The singing was antiphonal, with two sections of the choir standing opposite each other. (CSB)

For alternate or antiphonal singing. (TLSB)

service. The Hebrew for this word (*Mishmarot*) is the title of a work from Qumran, which discusses in detail the rotation of the priestly families' service in the temple according to the sect's solar calendar and synchronized with the conventional lunar calendar. (CSB)

12:10-11 The list of priests and Levites in the days of the high priest Jeshua (533 BC ca..500 BC) is followed by the line of high priests from Jeshua down to the last high priest under Achaemenid rule, Juaddua (ca. 370-ca. 370 BC). There are six generations in all, making the average length of the reign of a high priest during this era about thirty-four years. (CC)

Six high priests from the time of Zerubbabel until the writing of Ne. Some names are likely missing, or perhaps the office was vacant at times. (TLSB)

12:10 *Eliashib*. See vv. 22–23; the high priest who assisted in rebuilding the wall (3:1, 20–21; 13:28). A priest named Eliashib was guilty of defiling the temple by assigning rooms to Tobiah the Ammonite (13:4, 7). It is not known whether this Eliashib was the same as the high priest. (CSB)

12:11 *Jonathan*. Since v. 22 mentions a Johanan after Joiada and before Jaddua, and v. 23 identifies Johanan as “son” of Eliashib, some believe that “Jonathan” is an error for “Johanan.” Further complicating the identification are attempts to identify this high priest with a “Johanan” mentioned in the Elephantine papyri and in Josephus (*Antiquities*, 11.7.1). Such an identification, however, is disputable. (CSB)

12:12–21 All but one (Hattush, v. 2) of the 22 priestly families listed in vv. 1–7 are repeated (Rehum, v. 3, is a variant of Harim, v. 15; Mijamin, v. 5, is a variant of Miniamin, v. 17) in this

later list, which dates to the time of Joiakim (v. 12), high priest in the late sixth and/or early fifth centuries B.C. (CSB)

Individuals who represented priestly families in the days of the chief priest Joiakim (v 10). Names of some priests appear on Judean coins, which demonstrates the important relationship of the priests to the Persian government. It may also mean that a mint was established in connection with the temple. (TLSB)

The next list is an updating of heads of priestly families now under the high priesthood of Jeshua's son Joiakim. They represent the second generation after the first Judeans returned from exile with Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua. Each family is listed by the name of the ehad of the family that first returned with Zerubbabel. The order is the same as in Neh. 12:1-7. (CC)

12:12 *fathers' houses*. Priestly families. (TLSB)

12:22-23 Nehemiah 12:22 proceeds to inform the reader that the Levite family heads were also recorded in the days of each of the high priests that succeeded Joiakim, though none of those records are repeated here. It then tells us that the priests also were recorded during this same period. (CC)

12:22 *Darius the Persian*. Either Darius II Nothus (423–404 B.C.) or Darius III Codamannus (336–331). (CSB)

Darius II (423–405 BC), one of three Persian kings who had the same name. Lists found in Ne were likely gathered during the reign of Darius II. (TLSB)

12:23 *book of the chronicles*. Cf. 7:5. This may have been the official temple chronicle, containing various lists and records. Cf. the annals of the Persian kings (Ezr 4:15; Est 2:23; 6:1; 10:2); cf. also the “book of the annals of the kings,” mentioned frequently in 1, 2 Kings. (CSB)

12:24-26 To match the second list of priests from the second generation (12:12-21), here we are presented with a second list of Levites who also were from the second generation after the first Judeans returned from exile with Zerubbabel. (CC)

What is the point of preserving these names of priests and Levites who were contemporaries of Nehemiah? First of all, their preservation demonstrates the Judeans' commitment to following God's Word, since they were very careful to allow only the priests and Levites who could prove their lineage to serve in the temple (Ezra 2:36-63/Neh. 7:39-65). Second, it demonstrates the Judeans' concern that the rites which God had given to Israel, notably the sacrifices, were properly administered according to God's command, thereby ensuring that the promises God had attached to them were received by the worshipers. (CC)

12:24 *man of God*. God chose David to arrange temple worship (2Ch 8:14). (TLSB)

watch by watch. Hbr expression describes stations in the temple from which the groups sang responsively. (TLSB)

12:25 *standing guard*. The gatekeepers were responsible for guarding the temple's storage areas (7:1). (TLSB)

12:26 *Joiakim*. High priest prior to the coming of Ezra and Nehemiah. (TLSB)

days of Nehemiah. 445–c 415 BC. (TLSB)

Dedication of the Wall

27 And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. 28 And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; 29 also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. 30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. 31 Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. 32 And after them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, 33 and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, 35 and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; 36 and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. 37 At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. 38 The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, 39 and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. 40 So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; 41 and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; 42 and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. 43 And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

12:27 *dedication.* Dedication” translates the Aramaic word *hanukkah*. The Jewish holiday in December that celebrates the recapture of the temple from the Seleucids and its rededication (165 B.C.) is also known as Hanukkah. (CSB)

Previously, it had been reported that the wall of Jerusalem was finished (6:15). The dedication ceremony is not dated, so it may also have taken place when the wall was finished but only described now as the capstone to Nehemiah’s achievements. (TLSB)

cymbals. Cymbals were used in religious ceremonies (1Ch 16:42; 25:1; 2Ch 5:12; 29:25). Ancient examples have been found at Beth Shemesh and Tell Abu Hawam. (CSB)

harps. Used mainly in religious ceremonies (1Sa 10:5; 2Sa 6:5; Ps 150:3). Ancient harps have been reconstructed from information derived from the remains of harps at Ur, pictures of harps, and cuneiform texts describing in detail the tuning of harps. (CSB)

lyres. Had strings of the same length but of different diameters and tensions (see 1Ch 15:16; Da 3:5). (CSB)

12:28 *Netophathites*. From Netophah, a town near Bethlehem (7:26). (CSB)

Members of the guild of singers are noted particularly because the festivities called for jubilant vocal and instrumental music. (TLSB)

12:29 *Beth Gilgal*. Perhaps the Gilgal near Jericho, or the Gilgal of Elijah (2Ki 2:1), about seven miles north of Bethel. (CSB)

Gilgal, 17 mi NE of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

Azmaveth. C 6 mi N of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

12:30 *purified*. The distinction between clean and unclean was a matter of ritual or religious purity, not a concern for physical cleanliness (see chs. 11–15 for examples; see also Mk 7:1–4). *burn*. Since the sins of the offerer were symbolically transferred to the sacrificial bull, the bull had to be entirely destroyed and not thrown on the ash pile of 1:16.) The Levites are said to have purified all that was sacred in the temple (1Ch 23:28) and the temple itself (2Ch 29:15) during times of revival. Ritual purity was intended to teach God’s holiness and moral purity (Lev 16:30). (CSB)

Purification rites for Levites are described in Nu 8:5–22. Ceremonial cleanness of priests was demanded in Lv 21:1–9; 22:1–9 (cf Ezr 6:20; Ne 13:22). Removal of uncleanness was required of the people (Nu 19:11–22). When the temple was reconsecrated at the time of Hezekiah, Levites who had sanctified themselves “brought out all the uncleanness” from the sanctuary (2Ch 29:12–16). (TLSB)

12:31 *I brought*. Nehemiah’s first-person account resumes. (TLSB)

two great choirs. The two great processions probably started from the area of the Valley Gate (2:13, 15; 3:13) near the center of the western section of the wall. The first procession, led by Ezra (v. 36), moved in a counterclockwise direction upon the wall; the second, with Nehemiah (v. 38), moved in a clockwise direction. Both met between the Water Gate (v. 37) and the Gate of the Guard (v. 39), then entered the temple area. Cf. Ps 48:12–13. (CSB)

went to the south. Or “to the south.” The Semite oriented himself facing east, so the right hand represented the south (see Jos 17:7; 1Sa 23:24; Job 23:9). (CSB)

One choir processed south from the point of departure in the west wall, the Valley Gate (TLSB)

Dung Gate. At the very south end of the wall. (TLSB)

12:35 *trumpets*. Each choir had priests blowing trumpets, as well as Levites playing other musical instruments. (CSB)

12:36 *musical instruments of David*. Some are listed in v 27. (TLSB)

12:37 *Fountain Gate*. See note on 2:14. (Possibly in the southeast wall facing toward En Rogel) (CSB)

12:38 *choir*. Lit. “thanks,” i.e., “thanksgiving choir” (see v. 40). (CSB)

north. Second choir moved north from the Valley Gate (cf v 31). This group included Nehemiah. (TLSB)

Tower of the Ovens. See note on 3:11. (It was on the western wall, perhaps in the same location as one built by Uzziah (2Ch 26:9). The ovens may have been those situated in the “street of the bakers” (Jer 37:21) (CSB)

Broad Wall. In 1970–71 archaeological excavations in Jerusalem uncovered such a wall west of the temple area. It is dated to the early seventh century B.C. and was probably built by Hezekiah (2Ch 32:5). The expansion to and beyond the Broad Wall may have become necessary because of the influx of refugees fleeing from the fall of Samaria in 722–721.) (CSB)

12:39 *Gate of Ephraim*. A gate of the oldest rampart of Jerusalem.. It was restored by Nehemiah (12:39). (CSB)

Not far from the northwest corner. (TLSB)

Gate of Yeshanah Gate. On the northwest corner. Its name has been interpreted to mean Old Gate, or gate to Jeshanah (lying on the border between Judah and Samaria, 2Ch 13:19), or as a corruption of *Mishneh* (the Hebrew word for “New Quarter”; see Zep 1:10) Gate. In any case, it may be another name for the Gate of Ephraim (see 12:39), which otherwise is not mentioned in ch. 3. (CSB)

Fish Gate. During the days of the first temple, it was one of Jerusalem’s main entrances (2Ch 33:14; Zep 1:10). Merchants brought fish from either Tyre or the Sea of Galilee to the fish market (13:16) through this entrance, which may have been located close to the site of the present-day Damascus Gate. (CSB)

Tower of Hananel ... Tower of the Hundred ... Sheep Gate. The towers were associated with the “citadel by the temple” (2:8) in protecting the vulnerable northern approaches to the city. (CSB)

Gate of the Guard. Cf. Jer 32:2. (CSB)

Probably refers to the Muster Gate (TLSB)

12:40 *stood in the house of God* – Two choirs (vv. 31, 38) converged at the temple on the northeast side. (TLSB)

12:43 *sacrifices*. As when the altar and temple were dedicated (Ezr 3:3–5; 6:17), so sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered to the Lord to celebrate completion of the walls. (TLSB)

Service at the Temple

44 On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. **45** And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. **46** For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. **47** And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers

and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.

12:44–47 As with 13:1–3, a brief supplement loosely connected to the dedication ceremony. Both emphasize that the community was united in observance of the Law. (TLSB)

12:44 *appointed*. Persons were assigned to administer the items brought to the temple for the support of the clergy. (TLSB)

contributions. Cf 10:32–34, 39. (TLSB)

firstfruits. Cf 10:35–37a. (TLSB)

tithes. Cf 10:37b–38. (TLSB)

Judah was pleased. The people cheerfully contributed their offerings to support the priests and Levites (cf. 2Co 9:7). (CSB)

ministering. See Dt 10:8. (CSB)

12:45 *purification*. Duty of the Levites was “to assist the sons of Aaron” in “the cleansing of all that is holy,” i.e., set aside for sacred use (1Ch 23:28). (TLSB)

David and his son. David’s organization of the temple officiants (1Ch 23–26) was put into operation by his son Solomon (2Ch 8:14). (TLSB)

12:46 *long ago*. More than 500 years earlier. (TLSB)

12:47 *Zerubbabel*. Under his governorship, the temple was built (Ezr 5:2; 6:14–15), and Nehemiah surrounded it with protecting walls. (TLSB)

gave. The Hebrew for this verb implies continued giving. (CSB)

The enthusiasm generated by the celebration spilled over. The people gladly increased their support for the temple, and the priests and the Levites carried out their duties with renewed diligence. (PBC)

The people provided for the daily needs of temple personnel. (TLSB)

set apart. Tithe (10:38). (TLSB)

Ch 12 With careful organization, the priests and Levites lead God’s people in worship and in dedicating the walls of Jerusalem. Though some today insist that spontaneity is a most important quality of Spirit-led worship, Scripture describes carefully organized services for God’s people. The most important feature of genuine worship is focus on the Lord and His blessings of salvation and care. • I dedicate to You, O Lord, all that I am and have. Amen. (TLSB)