

Ezra

Chapter 8

List of the Family Heads Returning With Ezra

These are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes: ² of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom; of the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel; of the descendants of David, Hattush ³ of the descendants of Shecaniah; of the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were registered 150 men; ⁴ of the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerahiah, and with him 200 men; ⁵ of the descendants of Zattu, ^a Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men; ⁶ of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men; ⁷ of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men; ⁸ of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men; ⁹ of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men; ¹⁰ of the descendants of Bani, ^b Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men; ¹¹ of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men; ¹² of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men; ¹³ of the descendants of Adonikam, the last ones, whose names were Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men; ¹⁴ of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

8:1–21 In vv. 1–14 Ezra lists those who accompanied him in his return from Mesopotamia, including the descendants of 15 individuals. The figures of the men given total 1,496 in addition to the individuals named. There were also women and children (see note on v. 21). About 40 Levites (vv. 18–19) are also included, as are 220 “temple servants” (v. 20). (CSB)

Like the lists in chapter 2, this list of returnees is intended to emphasize the grace of God. The fact that twelve groups are listed might have been a coincidence, but it was probably a deliberate representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moreover, it symbolized the reunification of the nation under the leadership appointed by God. The unity of God’s people under the priests and kings reached its fullness when Christ, the son of David and our great High Priest, came and gathered all believers, whether Jew or Gentiles, into one church. (PBC)

genealogy of those who went up with me. Group that returned from Babylonia with Ezra in 458 BC is much smaller than the one that had returned earlier in 538 BC (ch 2). (TLSB)

8:2 Gershom. For the meaning of the name see NIV text note on Ex 2:22, where we learn that Gershom was also the name of the firstborn son of Moses and Zipporah. (CSB)

Ithamar. Also the name of the fourth son of Aaron (Ex 6:23). (CSB)

sons of Phinehas ... Ithamar. Two surviving branches of priests named after sons of Aaron (Nu 3:2; 25:11). (TLSB)

sons of David, Hattush. Fourth-generation descendant of Zerubbabel of the royal family of David (1Ch 3:19–22). (TLSB)

8:3 Zechariah. Cf. v. 11. The name means “The LORD remembers”; it was the name of about 30 individuals mentioned in the Bible, including both the OT prophet and the father of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5–67). (CSB)

8:4 Eliehoenai. Means “On the LORD are my eyes”; the name occurs only here and in 1Ch 26:3. Cf. Ps 25:15. (CSB)

8:6 Ebed. May be a shortened form of Obadiah (cf. v. 9), meaning “servant of the LORD.” (CSB)

Jonathan. Means “The LORD gives”; it was the name of 15 OT individuals. (CSB)

8:7 Athaliah. Also the name of a famous queen, daughter of Ahab (2Ki 11). (CSB)

8:8 Michael. Means “Who is like God?” It was the name of ten other Biblical personages, including the archangel (Da 10:13; Jude 9; Rev 12:7). (CSB)

8:10 Shelomith. Although it is a feminine form (see also note on SS 6:13), it is often a man’s name, as here. The Greek equivalent is Salome. (CSB)

8:12 Azgad. See note on 2:12. (CSB)

Johanan. See note on 2:46. (CSB)

Hakkatan. Means “the little one”; the name occurs only here. (CSB)

8:1–14 More leaders and members of their families return from the exile in Babylonia. Near the head of the list are members of the royal household, which had nearly been destroyed. The Lord preserved the house of David, thereby preserving for you the promise of a Savior, the Son of David, Jesus. • Praise be to Your name, faithful Lord, for fulfilling Your Word to David and to me. Amen. (TLSB)

The Return to Jerusalem

¹⁵ I assembled them at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there three days. When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there. ¹⁶ So I summoned Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, who were leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of learning, ¹⁷ and I sent them to Iddo, the leader in Casiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his kinsmen, the temple servants in Casiphia, so that they might bring attendants to us for the house of our God. ¹⁸ Because the gracious hand of our God was on us, they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, 18 men; ¹⁹ and Hashabiah, together with Jeshaiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and nephews, 20 men. ²⁰ They also brought 220 of the temple servants—a body that David and the officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name. ²¹ There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. ²² I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." ²³ So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. ²⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, together with Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten of their brothers, ²⁵ and I weighed out to them the offering of silver and gold and the articles that the king, his advisers, his officials and all Israel present there had donated for the house of our God. ²⁶ I weighed out to them 650 talents ^a of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, ^b 100 talents ^c of gold, ²⁷ 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 darics, ^d and two fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold. ²⁸ I said to them, "You as well as these articles are consecrated to the LORD. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. ²⁹ Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the LORD in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel." ³⁰ Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem. ³¹ On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. ³² So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days. ³³ On the fourth day, in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold and the sacred articles into the hands of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, and so were the Levites Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. ³⁴ Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the entire weight was recorded at that time. ³⁵ Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all

Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. ³⁶ They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, who then gave assistance to the people and to the house of God.

8:15 *canal that flows toward Ahava.* Probably flows into either the Euphrates or the Tigris (the Kebar "River" in Eze 1:1 was also a canal). (CSB)

Unidentified place on a river of the same name near Babylonia. (TLSB)

three days. Perhaps from the 9th to the 12th day of Nisan; the journey began on the 12th (see v. 31). (CSB)

I reviewed. Likely when Ezra compiled his list of names. (TLSB)

I found there none of the sons of Levi. Situation must have disappointed Ezra. For reluctance on the part of Levites to return to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

no Levites. Since they were entrusted with many menial tasks, they may have found a more comfortable way of life in exile. A rabbinic midrash (comment) on Ps 137 relates the legend that Levites were in the caravan but that they were not qualified to officiate because when Nebuchadnezzar had ordered them to sing for him the songs of Zion, "they refused and bit off the ends of their fingers, so that they could not play on the harps." In the Hellenistic era (following Alexander's conquest of Palestine in 333 B.C.) the role of the Levites declined sharply, though the "Temple Scroll" among the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran (see "The Time between the Testaments," p. 1437) assigns important roles to them. (CSB)

8:16 *Ariel.* Means "lion of God" or "altar hearth" (see note on Isa 29:1, 2, 7). It occurs only here as a personal name. (CSB)

Meshullam. Perhaps means "rewarded." Some assume that he is the same as the Meshullam who opposed the marriage reforms (10:15). (CSB)

men of learning. Lit. "those who cause to understand." The Hebrew for this phrase is translated "teacher" in 1Ch 25:8 and "instructed" or "instructing" in 2Ch 35:3; Ne 8:7, 9. (CSB)

Specially skilled musicians, such as Chenaniah in David's time (1Ch 15:22). (TLSB)

8:17 *Casiphia.* Some have located it at the site that was later to become the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon on the Tigris River, north of Babylon. (CSB)

Site remains unidentified. Ezra was aware that there were Levites here, perhaps at a training school for temple personnel. (TLSB)

ministers. From Hbr *sharath*; describes temple attendants in distinction from priests, who presided over the services. (TLSB)

8:18–19 *18 men ... 20 men.* Only about 40 Levites from two families were found who were willing to join Ezra's caravan. (CSB)

good hand of our God. Ezra acknowledged God's Levi's grandson. Cf Ex 6:19. *Sherebiah ... Hashabiah ... Jeshaiiah.* Three of the 38 Levites who were recruited are named. All three have names ending with the divine syllable "iah" (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hezekiah), derived from the name Yahweh. (TLSB)

8:20 *temple servants.* See note on 2:43–57. (CSB)

8:20 Temple servants (Hbr *nethinim*) assisted the Levites. Only priests, descendants of Aaron, could preside at temple worship. The rest of the descendants of the tribe of Levi ("Levites") were given other responsibilities, including serving as musicians (Nu 3:5–10; 1Ch 25). (TLSB)

all mentioned by name. Names of the 220 temple servants were known to Ezra, but he did not record them here. (TLSB)

8:15–20 The Lord helps Ezra discover the Levites and temple servants whose roles at the temple were going unfulfilled. Today, each believer has a valuable role of service to fulfill in his or her church, whether leading or attending to other duties. Do not despise anyone's office of service, for any unfulfilled office disrupts the work of all. Along with your office, the Lord will grant you His Spirit and gifts, which will build you up. • Lord, Your Son, Jesus, humbled Himself to serve us. Teach me my role in my congregation, and equip me for every good work of my calling. Amen. (TLSB)

8:21 *fast there ... that we might humble ourselves.* Refraining from food was meant to heighten the feeling of shame and self-denial and so enhance humble prayer. (TLSB)

safe journey. Lit. "straight way"—unimpeded by obstacles and dangers (see v. 31; cf. Pr 3:6). (CSB)

Ezra made necessary preparations for the journey. He sought God's protection, since their convoy loaded with treasures would have provided an ideal target for bandits, raiders or unscrupulous officials along the way. It is only 500 miles from Babylon to Jerusalem as the crow flies, but it is about 900 miles by the caravan route that passes around the desert to the north. If we assume that Ezra's group did not travel on the Sabbath, they had to walk an average of about twelve miles a day. (PBC)

children. Elsewhere (e.g., Ge 43:8) the term also includes the elderly and the women. (CSB)

Though Ezra lists only the names of males, women and children were included in the caravans. (TLSB)

possessions. The vast treasures they were carrying with them offered a tempting bait for robbers. (CSB)

8:22 *I was ashamed*. Scripture speaks often of unholy shame (Jer 48:13; 49:23; Mic 3:7) and on occasion, as here, of holy shame. Ezra was quick to blush with such shame (see also 9:6). Having proclaimed his faith in God’s ability to protect the caravan, he was embarrassed to ask for human protection. Grave dangers faced travelers going the great distance between Mesopotamia and Palestine. Some 13 years later Nehemiah was accompanied by an armed escort. The difference, however, does not mean that Nehemiah was a man of lesser faith (see note on Ne 2:9). (CSB)

Ezra, who had committed himself prayerfully to “the hand of our God,” believed it would be a humiliating reflection on his faith if he now accepted a military escort from the king. However, Nehemiah demonstrated that taking such a precautionary measure need not be evidence of lack of trust (Ne 2:7, 9). (TLSB)

enemy. Gangs of bandits were a threat to ambush caravans at isolated spots along the trail (v 31). (TLSB)

8:23 *fasted and petitioned*. For the association of fasting and prayer see Ne 1:4; Da 9:3; Mt 17:21 (NIV text note); Ac 14:23. (CSB)

8:21–23 The Lord listens as Ezra’s caravan prays for protection. Likewise, the Lord hears our prayers, and He answers according to His loving-kindness in Christ. • Make me wise to pray and fast, O Lord, and to focus on Your kindness. Amen. (TLSB)

8:24 *set apart twelve of the leading priests*: The colon after “priests” suggests that two of them were named Sherebiah and Hashabiah. However, these two names were also used for Levites in vv 18–19. Ezra likely selected 12 priests and 12 Levites to transport silver, gold, and vessels (cf v 30). (TLSB)

8:25 *offering*. Lit. “what is lifted,” i.e., dedicated (cf. Ex 25:2; 35:5; Lev 7:14). In Dt 12:6 the Hebrew for this word is translated “special gifts.” (CSB)

Israel there present. God’s people living in Babylonia. Cf 7:16. (TLSB)

8:26 *650 talents ... 100 talents*. Enormous sums, worth millions of dollars today. See also note on 7:22. (CSB)

If the figures for the silver and gold in the text have been correctly understood, the total value of the gifts would be the equivalent of millions of dollars, which explains the urgency of prayer and fasting in vv 21–23. (TLSB)

8:27 *darics*. See NIV text note. The word occurs only here and in 1Ch 29:7 (but see note on 2:69). (CSB)

polished. This kind of bronze may have been orichalc, a bright yellow (the Hebrew for “yellow” in Lev 13:30, 32, 36 is related to the Hebrew for “polished” here) alloy of copper, which resembles gold and was highly prized in ancient times. (CSB)

consecrated for divine service. This emphasis was meant to discourage theft. (TLSB)

8:29 *Guard ... keep ... weigh*. Ezra carefully inventoried the treasures entrusted to these 24 men, who were to act as trustees and guardians. (TLSB)

8:30 *took over the weight*. Based on current calculations of the figures given, the total weight of the silver and gold would be over 35 tons, plus the weight of the vessels. (TLSB)

8:31 Report of the journey to Jerusalem in 7:7–9 was a summary in the third person. Here, Ezra gives his first-person (“we”) report. (TLSB)

twelfth day. See notes on v. 15; 7:7–9. (CSB)

hand of our God ... hand of the enemy. Ezra’s confidence in the Lord was not misplaced (vv 21–23). (TLSB)

8:32 *rested three days*. Nehemiah also took a similar rest period after his arrival in Jerusalem (Ne 2:11). (CSB)

Three-day pause was a repeat of what Ezra had done at the river Ahava at the beginning of the journey (v 15). Before Joshua and the people of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they also paused for three days (Jsh 3:1–2). (TLSB)

8:33 After the three-day rest, the priests and Levites appointed by Ezra (v 24) transferred the treasure into the hands of the temple authorities, two priests and two Levites, who carefully recorded everything. (TLSB)

Meremoth son of Uriah. Probably the same as the man who repaired two sections of the wall (Ne 3:4, 21). (CSB)

Name found written on ostraca (potsherds) near the temple site. (TLSB)

8:34 *recorded*. According to Babylonian practice (e.g., in the law code of Hammurapi) almost every transaction, including sales and marriages, had to be recorded in writing. Ezra may have had to send back to Artaxerxes a signed certification of the delivery of the treasures. (CSB)

8:35 *sacrificed*. Except for the identical number of male goats, the offerings here were far fewer than those presented by the returnees under Zerubbabel (6:17), who brought with him a far greater number of families. (CSB)

Bulls, rams, and goats were sacrificed in multiples of 12, signifying the tribes of Israel. Lambs were sacrificed in multiples of seven. (TLSB)

8:36 *commissions*. The orders issued by the king (7:21–24) to his highest representatives, the satraps, and his minor officials, the governors. For the administration of the Persian Empire.

aided. Financial support for temple worship. (TLSB)

8:24–36 By the hand of God, Ezra's caravan successfully delivers their offerings to Jerusalem. Like Ezra, commit yourself body and soul to the Lord's service. For the Lord supports the service of His people; He serves them graciously in Christ. • Bless our service, dear Lord, and lead us by Your hand to heaven's promised land. Amen. (TLSB)