

Ezra

Chapter 8

Genealogy of Those Who Returned with Ezra

These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king: 2 Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. 3 Of the sons of Shecaniah, who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men. 4 Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men. 5 Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men. 6 Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men. 7 Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men. 8 Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him 80 men. 9 Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men. 10 Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith the son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men. 11 Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, the son of Bebai, and with him 28 men. 12 Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men. 13 Of the sons of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men. 14 Of the sons 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 *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 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)

Ezra Sends for Levites

15 I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. 16 Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of insight, 17 and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. 18 And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; 19 also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; 20 besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

8:15 river that runs to 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)

none of the sons of Levi. 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. (CSB)

8:16 Ariel. Means “lion of God” or “altar hearth.” 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 insight. 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). (TL SB)

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. (TL SB)

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

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. (TL SB)

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). (TL SB)

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

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. (TL SB)

Fasting and Prayer for Protection

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect

us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

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)

goods. 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. (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 implored.* For the association of fasting and prayer see Ne 1:4; Da 9:3; Mt 17:21; 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)

Priests to Guard Offerings

24 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. **25** And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. **26** I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents, and 100 talents of gold, **27** 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. **28** And I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. **29** Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD.” **30** So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. **31** Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. **32** We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. **33** On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. **34** The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded. **35** At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven 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 commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

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. (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.* The word occurs only here and in 1Ch 29:7. (CSB)

bright. 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)

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

8:32 *remained 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 *offered burnt offerings.* 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. (CSB)

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)