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Identifying the Priests and Levites

Nehemiah 12: 1-26

Identifying the priests and Levites DIG: In verses 1-7, Nehemiah lists the divisions of priests and Levites returning from the Babylonian Captivity in 538 BC. What purpose does this dated list serve? In verses 12-21, Nehemiah updates the list to include those priests who are contemporaries of his, and peers of Joiakim (12:26). What do these two lists have in common? What does that say about God's faithfulness and human loyalty across two generations? What effect would the reading of this list have on the Jew about to dedicate the walls of Jerusalem?

REFLECT: If you had or have children - how would you like to be remembered by succeeding generations? What one thing are you doing regularly to help assure this happens? Are you a "traditionalist" (loyal to the ways of your parents and their parents)? Or are you a "pioneer" (charting a new course for future generations to follow)? How so? Give examples!

**445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (to see link click [Bt](#) - The Third Return).
Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs
(see [Ac](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Nehemiah Memoirs).**

This section was probably a later addition by the Chronicler. The purpose was to provide a running commentary on the status of the community. Continuity is the major point. Here, Nehemiah furnishes a summary list of the Priests and Levites who served the community under all three of the main characters of the book: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.



Now these are the **cohanim** and the **Levites** who returned with **Zerubbabel** son of **Shealtiel**, and **Jeshua** almost one-hundred years earlier: **Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremot, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah**. These were the leaders of the **kohanim** and their brothers in the days of **Jeshua** (**Nehemiah 12:1-7**).

The **Levites** who returned with **Zerubbabel** were **Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah**, and also **Mattaniah** - he and his brothers conducted the songs of praise - and **Bakbukiah** and **Unni**, their brothers, were opposite them in ranks (**Nehemiah 12:8-9**). This fills out the summary given in **Ezra 2:40ff**, which has only the family names **Jeshua, Kadmiel, Hodaviah** and (of the singers) **Asaph**. Other names on the list, like **Sherebiah**, were treasured enough to still be used as **Levitical** names in **Nehemiah's** day, attached in some cases to the same office as at the first. So **Mattaniah** and **Bakbukiah**, leaders of the responsive singing at the time of the return, are the names we see in identical roles in **Nehemiah 11:17** where the scene is a century later.

A list of High Priests: This list bridges the gap between the first generation after the exile and the contemporaries of **Nehemiah**. It carries forward the genealogy of **First Chronicles 6:3-15**, which ran from **Aaron** to the **Babylonian exile**; and like that document, it does not include every generation. Then **Jeshua** returned from **Babylon** with **Zerubbabel** (**Ezra 2:1-2; Nehemiah 11:1**), fathered **Joiakim**, **Joiakim** fathered **Eliashib**, the high priest during **Nehemiah's** day (**Nehemiah 3:1, 13:4, 7, 28**), and **Eliashib** fathered **Joiada**, **Joiada** fathered **Jonathan** (verse 22 below), and **Jonathan** fathered **Jaddua** (**Nehemiah 12:10-11**). We know that **Jeshua** was **High Priest** at the time of **the First Return** and during the time of **Haggai** and **Zechariah**. **Eliashib** was **High Priest** in the time of **Nehemiah**. So **Joiakim** must have been **High Priest** some time before, perhaps, at the time of **Ezra's** arrival in **Jerusalem**.²⁹³

The heads of families in the second generation: The priestly families held on to their traditional names, not changing them with successive leaders. In the days of Joiakim, the son of Jeshua the High Priest above, the family leaders of the cohanim were: Meraiah for Seraiah, Hananiah for Jeremiah, Meshullam for Ezra, Jehohanan for Amariah, Jonathan for Melicu, Joseph for Shebaniah, Adna for Harim, Helkai for Meraiot, Zechariah for Iddo, Meshullam for Ginnethon, Zichri for Abijah, Piltai for Miniamin and Moadiah, Shammua for Bilgah, Jehonathan for Shemaiah, Mattenai for Joiarib, Uzzi for Jedaiah, Kallai for Sallai, Eber for Amok, Hashabiah for Hilkiah, and Nethanel for Jedaiah (Nehemiah 12:12-21).

The heads of Levitical families: Before the monarchy, successive eras were reckoned by the lifetimes of the High Priests (Numbers 35:28), and now again, in the absence of a king, theirs are the names that mark the times. The family heads of the Levites were recorded in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan (see below), and Jaddua, as well as for the kohanim, up until the reign of Darius II the Persian. The family leaders among the sons of Levi were recorded in the Book of Chronicles, the official record book of the family heads of the Levites, up to the days of Johanan son of Eliashib (see [Af](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah Chronology: The dates of the high priests) (Nehemiah 12:22-23).

David had instituted responsive singing using different choirs. The Chronicler here emphasized that they were following what David had inaugurated. So the leaders of the Levites were: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua son of Kadmiel, with their brothers facing them, to give praise and thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, one section responding to the other. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers guarding the storehouses at the gates. These served in the days of Joiakim son of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the cohen-scribe (Nehemiah 12:24-26). This stresses, once more, the continuity of family responsibilities for Temple service, spanning the best part of a century.

The Chronicler was giving details covering a rather long time period of about one-hundred years. In representing the whole process as a unit, he tended to compress history and include later additions to the lists. The same process can be seen in Chronicles. The author did not propose to give us a careful chronology; he was showing the continuity of the community and how ADONAI used these leaders during that process.

Not only were the outstanding leaders necessary for God's work in the community; the

singers, the gatekeepers, and the Levites were all indispensable. In **the LORD's** work each believer is important. According to **Ephesians 4** **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** has given gifts to each one, and the Body of Messiah grows together when all these gifts are used and coordinated in **YHVH's** work. In a time when self-centeredness seems to dominate, the Word of **God** calls us to work and live together as a community, to be dependent upon one another, and to help one another in achieving the task that **ADONAI** has put before us.²⁹⁴