

# OpenTheo

## Nehemiah 7

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### Alastair Roberts

The list of returned exiles.

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## Transcript

Nehemiah chapter 7. The number of the men of the people of Israel. The sons of Perosh, 2,172. The sons of Shephatiah, 3,372.

The sons of Arah, 652. The sons of Pehath-Moab, namely the sons of Jeshur and Joab, 2,818. The sons of Elam, 1,254.

The sons of Zatu, 845. The sons of Zacchae, 760. The sons of Inui, 648.

The sons of Bibai, 628. The sons of Asgad, 2,322. The sons of Adonikim, 667.

The sons of Bigvi, 2,067. The sons of Aden, 655. The sons of Eta, namely of Hezekiah, 98.

The sons of Hashem, 328. The sons of Bezai, 324. The sons of Hereth, 112.

The sons of Gibeon, 95. The men of Bethlehem and Netopha, 188. The men of Anathoth, 128.

The men of Beth-Atmabeth, 42. The men of Kiriath-Jerim, Kephira and Beeroth, 743. The

men of Ramah and Geba, 621.

The men of Mikmas, 122. The men of Bethel and Ai, 123. The men of the other Nebo, 52.

The sons of the other Elam, 1,254. The sons of Herim, 320. The sons of Jericho, 345.

The sons of Lod, Haded and Ono, 721. The sons of Sinai, 3,930. The priests, the sons of Jediah, namely the house of Jeshua, 973.

The sons of Emma, 1,052. The sons of Pasha, 1,247. The sons of Herim, 1,017.

The Levites, the sons of Jeshua, namely of Kadmiel, the sons of Hodeva, 74. The singers, the sons of Asaph, 148. The gatekeepers, the sons of Shalom, the sons of Eta, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Aqab, the sons of Hataita, the sons of Shobai, 138.

The temple servants, the sons of Zihar, the sons of Hesuphah, the sons of Tabeoth, the sons of Kiros, the sons of Seir, the sons of Padon, the sons of Labanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanun, the sons of Gidil, the sons of Gehar, the sons of Reiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nicodah, the sons of Gazam, the sons of Uzzah, the sons of Passir, the sons of Bessai, the sons of Miunim, the sons of Nefu-Shissim, the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hequphah, the sons of Haheh, the sons of Basleth, the sons of Mahida, the sons of Harsha, the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tima, the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatifa, the sons of Solomon's servants, the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sofereth, the sons of Parida, the sons of Jeala, the sons of Dachon, the sons of Gidel, the sons of Shephethiah, the sons of Hatil, the sons of Pokereth-hazabiim, the sons of Amon. All the temple's servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two. The following were those who came up from Telmila, Telhasha, Cherub, Adon, and Imer, but they could not prove their father's houses nor their descent, whether they belonged to Israel, the sons of Deliah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nicodah, six hundred and forty-two, also of the priests, the sons of Habiah, the sons of Hachaz, the sons of Barzillai, who had taken a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.

These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but it was not found there, so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until a priest with Urim and Thummim should arise. The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven, and they had two hundred and forty-five singers, male and female.

Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six, their mules two hundred and forty-five, their camels four hundred and thirty-five, and their donkeys six thousand seven hundred and twenty. Now some of the heads of fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor

gave to the treasury one thousand darrochs of gold, fifty basins, thirty priest garments, and five hundred miners of silver.

And some of the heads of fathers' houses gave into the treasury of the work twenty thousand darrochs of gold, and two thousand two hundred miners of silver. And what the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darrochs of gold, two thousand miners of silver, and sixty-seven priest garments. So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their towns.

And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns. Following the completion of the wall's construction, Nehemiah committed the security of Jerusalem to the charge of reliable men, or possibly just a reliable man, and established procedure for the gatekeepers. That verse one mentions the singers and Levites is somewhat surprising.

Charles Fensham is among the commentators who holds that this is most likely a gloss that was added upon the word for gatekeepers, as that term is most typically used for those guarding the gates of the temple and its precincts. Hugh Williamson raises the possibility that, given the low population of the city at the time, responsibility for its defence lay in large measure in the hands of the singers and Levites, other trained forces who could supplement a smaller contingent of lay guards. If the city and not merely its temple were largely guarded by Levites and singers, it might also imply an extension of holiness, formerly focused more narrowly upon the temple complex, to include the wider city around it.

This will become much clearer in chapter 11. The whole city is in some sense now set apart. The great work that had been undertaken in rebuilding the wall would be in vain if the people did not adequately guard the city.

Appointing trustworthy men over this duty and determining wise security procedures was essential at this point. Commentators are divided on the question of whether Hanania is another name for Hanani. It is possible to read the text as Hanani, that is, Hanania the governor of the castle.

The fact that the next verse speaks of them is used as an argument against this position, although advocates of it, such as Andrew Steinman, argue that the them might also refer to the gatekeepers, singers and Levites mentioned in verse 1. Hanani is also mentioned back in chapter 1 verse 2 of the book. There Hanani travelled from Jerusalem to Susa, giving Nehemiah a report of the beleaguered state of the city of Jerusalem, one that first led him to come to the city. I am inclined to see Hanani and Hanania as two different people.

The instructions of verse 3 are most naturally read as instructions to those overseeing the security of the city, as the guards seem to be spoken of as if they were not members

of the group being addressed. The guarding of the gates of the city, as we will see in chapter 13, is not merely a matter of military security, but also has moral importance, as those overseeing the gates determine who and what is and is not to be permitted to enter the city. Once again this could be related to the extension of the principle of holiness in Jerusalem.

The meaning of the instructions given in verse 3 is another point on which commentators differ. It is most likely that the instructions are not to be understood as to leave the gates barred until the sun is completely up, but that during the warmest part of the day, when regular activities would be largely suspended and people would enjoy a siesta, special care should be taken so as not to leave the city vulnerable to attack. To make the city more secure, guards from among Jerusalem's population were to be appointed and, as in the building of the wall, many of the men were to be given charge chiefly over guard posts nearest to their own homes.

Nehemiah was faced with a further challenge. Despite the great physical size of the city of Jerusalem, it was sparsely populated, and although it now had a rebuilt and well-defended wall, the houses within the city had not been rebuilt but were largely in ruins. Now that the defences of the city had been re-established, however, it would be easier to encourage people to rebuild houses within its walls.

It is possible that after an initial influx of people in the first waves of return, the city of Jerusalem had languished and had been left in ruins. The lack of security of the city and economic factors may have led many of the initial returnees to move elsewhere. Decades later, only a small population remained there.

Steinman speculates that its population may have dwindled to as low as 1,000 men by this time. Repopulating Jerusalem would be a concern for Nehemiah now that its walls were rebuilt. With the city of Jerusalem underpopulated and in ruins, Judah was like a body without its head.

To deal with this problem, Nehemiah determined to assemble the people and their leaders and enrol them by genealogy. This would give Nehemiah a sense of the number of the people and of their places of origin. In particular, he would have a clearer indication of how many had ancestral roots in Jerusalem.

A good place to begin was with the record of the first of the returnees. Williamson argues that the list was likely not of the places to which people returned but rather of the places from which they had first been exiled. This is largely the same list that we find in Ezra chapter 2 where it is given in the context of those first waves of returning exiles.

Now however, the great tasks that lay before the returnees have been completed. The temple and the city's wall have both been rebuilt. Looking back to the initial numbering of the people at this point provides a bookend or for the greater tasks that unite the

books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The details from verse 6 onwards are drawn from the book of the genealogy that Nehemiah used, a book that likely dated from the years during or immediately after the first waves of return. The list here is largely identical to that of Ezra chapter 2 but there are several variations in the names, numbers and ordering. A few of these might be variations in spelling or be alternative names for figures.

However, many of the variations are best explained as textual corruption through scribal errors, whether occurring to the original document or documents or subsequently to the texts of Ezra and Nehemiah and perhaps also as evidence that Ezra and Nehemiah were working with different versions or editions of the source. If as Williamson has argued the list was a composite one, it is possible that there were different versions of it in circulation, perhaps dating from different stages of the initial waves of return. The character of many of the discrepancies, where numbers are largely the same save for a difference in one element such as 2818 and 2812 or 845 and 945 or 3630 and 3930, gives weight to the claim that scribal errors are responsible for the vast majority of them.

The discrepancies do not seem to follow a tidy pattern, with one generally having the larger numbers for instance. Of the 17 discrepancies in the numbers, 7 are under 10 and 6 are over 100, all 300 or less save for a huge difference of 1100 between the numbers of the sons of Asgard. That many of these discrepancies could be accounted for through births and deaths strains credulity.

If the higher numbers generally belong to one or other of the accounts, we might argue that it came from a later edition of the original after more had returned or as more had been born of the original population. It is much harder to explain how the sons of Asgard might have increased by 1100 and the sons of Senea by 300, while the sons of Ere decreased by 123 and of Zatu by 100, all while most numbers remained the same or largely stable. Despite the differences in the subtotals given for various clans and towns, the total number of the assembly is the same as that of Ezra chapter 2, 42,360.

Oded Lipschitz has observed that once you subtract the number of those who couldn't prove their lineage and the servants from the total number of returnees in Nehemiah, one gets a total of 30,447. This he maintains needs to be related to the fact that the number of the settlers in Jerusalem given in Nehemiah chapter 11 makes a total of 3,044. As one out of every ten had to live in Jerusalem, it seems that these two numbers are related and that the number of the initial returnees provided the basis for the number of those who were selected to live in Jerusalem.

By recalling the people to their ancestral origins at this point, Nehemiah is pursuing the ongoing work of return and resettlement, ensuring that they truly reclaim their roots as a people. The re-establishment of Jerusalem at the heart of the people is foundational to

this. A question to consider, why does Nehemiah's enrolling and ordering of the people not violate earlier commands against censuses?