

NEHEMIAH CHAPTER 12:1-26
Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Verses		Dates
Chief Priests who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel & Jeshua		
	<p>Neh. 12:1 Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra (vv. 13, 33, 36), 2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3 Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4 Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah, 5 Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6 Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua.</p>	536 BC
Levites who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel		
Neh. 8:7, 9:5 ; Ezr. 2:40, 3:9	<p>8 Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah (vs 25, 11:17), which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. 9 Also Bakbukiah & Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches.</p>	536 BC
Genealogy of the High Priests		
	<p>10 And Jeshua (540-501 BC, vv. 1 & 10) begat Joiakim, Joiakim (500-469 BC) also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib (468-442 BC) begat Joiada (441-439 BC), 11 And Joiada begat Jonathan (438-407 BC) & Jonathan begat Jaddua (406-387).</p>	
Chief Priests in Joiakim's days (son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, 586-541)		
vs. 26	<p>12 And in the days of Joiakim (500-469 BC) were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; 13 Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14 Of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; 15 Of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; 16 Of Iddo, Zechariah;</p>	500-469 BC

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	<p>of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17 Of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; 18 Of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19 And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20 Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21 Of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel.</p>	
Chief Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua to the reign of Darius the Persian (Darius II Nothus – 423 to 405 BC)		
<p>Ezra 8:18, 19 & 24</p>	<p>22 The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. 23 The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan (438-407 BC) the son of Eliashib. 24 And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. 25 Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub (11:19; 1 Chr. 9:14-17), were porters keeping the (watch) at the thresholds of the gates.</p>	<p>467 BC</p>
Time Span covered by verses 12-25		
	<p>26 These were in the days of Joiakim (vs 12, c.500 to 469 BC) the son of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, & in the days of Nehemiah the governor (454-442 BC, Hebrew word is the <i>pechah</i>), and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.</p>	<p>500–442 BC</p>

Nehemiah 12:10-26 is: (1) a list of high priests beginning with Jeshua, who returned with Zerubbabel in 536 BC, down to Johanan and Jaddua – high priests who served in the days of “Darius the Persian” (vv. 10, 22 & 23; c.423–405 BC) – their terms of service date this king to be Darius II Nothus; and (2) a list of chief priests under Jeshua’s son Joiakim (circa 500-468 BC) during the days of Nehemiah and Ezra (vv. 12 & 26) and a few of the chief Levites.¹

¹ Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 18th ed., (Master Books Pub., 2009), pp. 240-249.

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When the list of 31 priests and Levites returning with Zerubbabel in the first year of Cyrus as sole rex of Persia and Babylonia (536 BC, Nehemiah 12:1–9) is compared to the list of priests and Levites who sealed a covenant with Nehemiah (Neh. 10:1–10), at least 16 and possibly 20 of the 31 who returned with Zerubbabel in leadership positions over Israel (hence 30 years and older) were still alive – supposedly in 445 BC, the 20th year of Artaxerxes.²

Jeshua, Kadmiel, and Hodaviah (or Judah, Ezra 3:9 or Hodevah, Neh. 7:43) were among the chief fathers of the Levites returning with Zerubbabel in 536 BC (Ezra 2:40). They assisted in laying the Temple foundation (Ezra 3:9), the reading of the law (Neh. 8:7, along with Sherebiah, cp. Neh. 12:8 and possibly Binnui, Neh. 10:9; 12:8, cp. 8:7; 9:5, all designated in blue), and in making and sealing the covenant (Neh. 9:5; 10:9–12) in 536, the first biblical year of Cyrus, – not in the 20th year of Artaxerxes!

The consensus of nearly all scholarship is that the sealing of the covenant took place in 445 BC, the year they mistakenly believe is the 20th year of “Artaxerxes” Longimanus. But if this were true, this generation of leaders would still have been alive 91 years (536 – 445 = 91) after they returned to Jerusalem! The youngest would then have been 121 (91 + 30 = 121) and others even older. Yet Scripture reveals that life spans had foreshortened such that for over 700 years only one man was recorded as having lived past age 100 (Jehoiada, 130 years, 2 Chr. 24:15). It is thus inconceivable that a generation suddenly lived so long.

Consequently, it must be seen that a 91-year gap *does not exist* between chapters 10 and 12 or 7 and 8 of Nehemiah as is commonly reported. This resolves the unlikely anomaly whereby an entire generation was suddenly presumed to have lived to and far beyond 120 years. After all, not since the time of Moses, almost 1,100 years prior, had an entire generation reached such an advanced age.

The traditional modern solution, dealing as it does with only Ezra and Nehemiah, is totally inadequate. Unless one chooses to believe the preposterous alternative that in two successive generations the leaders of a nation just happen to have the same names and titles, they must now deal with the fact that although they have removed the great age problem concerning Nehemiah and Ezra by “creating” a second Nehemiah and Ezra, they have not noticed the excessive age question concerning this entire generation of leaders (and that of the general population).

Moreover, there were *not* two Nehemiahs and two Ezras who followed one another in successive generations – all in positions of leadership and bearing the same general positions of authority. The Nehemiah and Ezra found in the Book of Ezra are the same as those mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah.

The Lord granted long life to these two men in order that they might fulfill His desires with regard to the Temple, the wall, and city of Jerusalem similarly to that which He had done in imparting the unusual span of 130 years to Jehoiada the priest nearly four centuries earlier (2 Chron. 24:15). Aged men with such vigor would have been seen as unique agents of God by their far younger contemporaries; thus their advanced ages would have greatly added to their stature. Significantly, Josephus states that Ezra “died an old man”³ and says Nehemiah died at a “great age”.⁴

Furthermore, every Scripture in Ezra and Nehemiah that uses the title “Tirshatha” (Heb. = at'v'r>Ti) *always* refers to Nehemiah (Ezra 2:2, 63; Neh. 7:65, 70; 8:9; 10:1). Tirshatha does *not* mean “governor” as nearly all maintain. It is the title of one that is second in command, one just below the rank of governor.

² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XI, 5, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, XI, 5, 8.

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It was not until after Zerubbabel's death that Nehemiah was referred to by the appellation of governor (hx'P, pechah), a position he held for at least 12 years (Neh. 5:14 – 454 to 442 BC: but 13:6–31 indicates he served a 2nd term)⁵ Seeing this is absolutely crucial to ascertaining the correct dates throughout the Book of Nehemiah, especially when the above mentioned Levites (Jeshua, Kadmiel, Hodaviah, Sherebiah, and possibly Binnui) are also considered. Whenever Nehemiah is designated as the “Tirshatha”, the date is *prior* to 454 BC, the year he first became governor. Anytime he is referred to as governor, the date is between 454 and 442 (but 13:6-31 is in 441 BC – his 2nd term).

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⁵ Comparing Neh. 5:14 to 12:47 could be taken to imply that there were only these two governors from 536 to 442 but “former governors” before me (5:15) indicates otherwise.