

# Paperwork, Hair, and the Gospel: Nehemiah 7:61-65

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Sunday, July 16, 2023  
Covenant Church  
Pastor Zack Phillips

## Nehemiah 7:61-65

**61 The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not prove their ancestral houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: 62 the descendants of Delaiah, of Tobiah, of Nekoda, six hundred forty-two. 63 Also, of the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, of Hakkoz, of Barzillai (who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name).**

**64 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; 65 the governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until a priest with Urim and Thummim should come.**

### A. Introduction

Genealogies were kept, it seems, in villages and elsewhere (e.g., Neh 7:5; 1 Chron 9:22a).

Near the end of a 73-verse chapter, those-who-cannot-prove-their-ancestry are listed, both laypersons and priests. It is unclear what the implications are for laypeople, but, because the priesthood was hereditary (see, e.g., Num 16:40), these priests cannot eat the most holy food.

### B. Grace of Relationship: Different Censuses

This census—versus David’s in 1 Chron 21//1 Sam 24:1-17

David’s “sin” was likely instituting a census for military purposes—but was it more than this?

**“May the LORD increase the number of his people a hundredfold! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord’s servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?” (1 Chron 21:3)**

### C. Grace of Intimacy: Urim and Thummim

Urim and Thummim are mentioned 8ish times in the OT. They go in the high priest’s breastplate (Exod 28:30) and function, it seems, to allow for discernment/speaking to God (e.g., Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6; 1 Sam 14:41-42), perhaps in a casting-lots-type fashion.

Here, I think, they allow for God to evaluate individuals otherwise crushed by a system, e.g., Meremoth (see Neh 3:4, 21; Ezra 9:33; Neh 7:63).

### D. Grace of Accommodation: Allowing This Census

God’s love has *always* been incarnational—taking flesh in particular cultural moments. God takes us as we are!

## E. Grace of Hope: Hairs on Our Head

**Luke 12:6-7** Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet -not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

*Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?*