

Nehemiah 13

Verses 1- 3

On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud as the people listened; and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite was ever to enter the assembly of God, ² because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³ So when they heard the Law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.

^{1a} **On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud as the people listened;**

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after his return to and short stay in Persia.

See chart 1305

Nehemiah Time Line			
Chapter	Events		Year
1	Nehemiah in Susa	3rd return	445
2	His trip to Jerusalem	several months	445
3	Rebuilding of the wall begins		445
6	The wall completed	52 days	445
7	Two governors appointed		445
8	Ezra reads the law		444
9	Israelites confess their sin	1-24	444
10	Binding agreement signed		444
11	1/10th move to Jerusalem		444
12	Dedication of the wall	9-25?	444
13	Nehemiah returns to Persia	32nd year	433
13	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem		430
13	Final reforms		430

It is not clear whether this was a special occasion for reading God's law or if it was the prescribed reading at the Feast of Tabernacles. In either case, it was most likely the entire Pentateuch.

^{1b} and there was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite was ever to enter the assembly of God,

See Deut. 23:3 - 4

³ No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, may ever enter the assembly of the Lord, ⁴ because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

² because they did not meet the sons of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing.

If anyone thinks this judgment by God seems a bit harsh then he/she should go back and read Numbers 22 thru 25. This went far beyond just denying the Israelites some food or cursing them because their scheme was to separate the Jews from God by enticing them with sexual acts so they would participate in the worshipping of false gods.

³ **So when they heard the Law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel.**

Excluding all foreigners from Israel seems to have been an overreaction to God's command in Deuteronomy for the following reasons.

1. The Ammonites and Moabites were excluded from worshipping at the temple. But this was not a command to remove them completely from the land of Israel.
2. This command was not directed toward all foreigners.
3. Foreigners were allowed to participate in worship with Israel if they had converted to the Jewish faith.
4. If they did not convert then their access was limited to the outermost areas of the temple, known as the Court of the Gentiles.

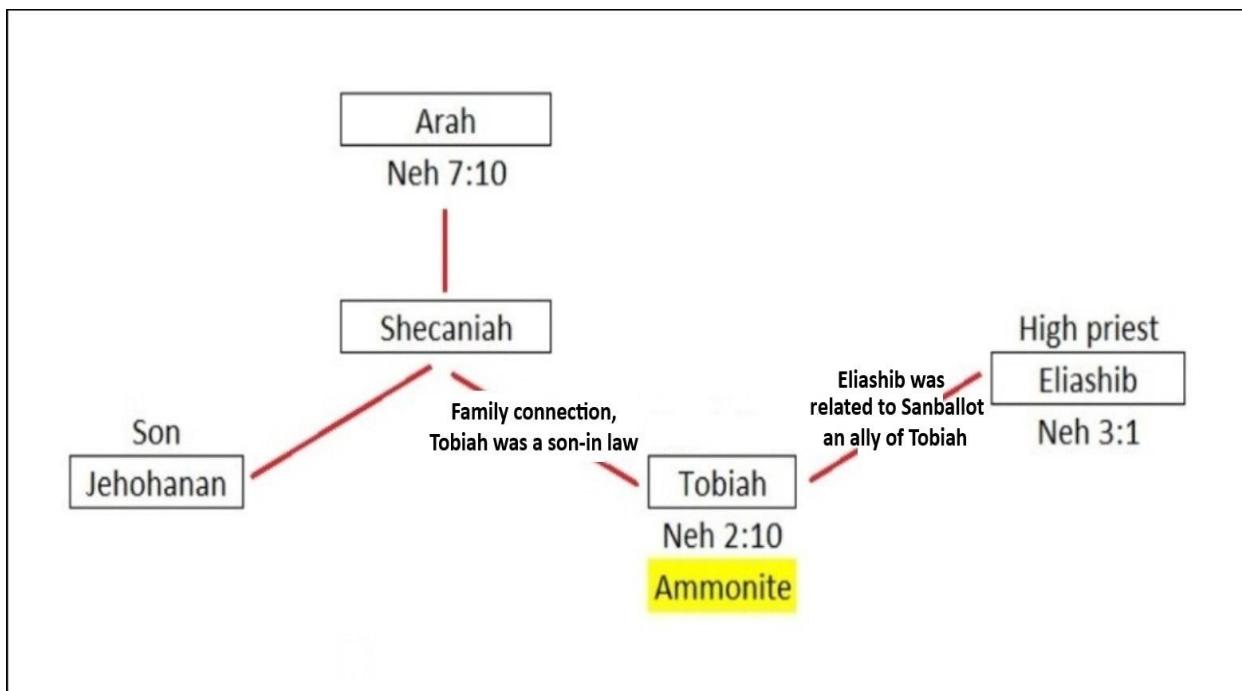
However, it is possible that the people were concerned that some Jews might give their sons or daughters to them which would be a violation of the law and they had recently dealt with this problem under the leadership of Ezra and didn't want to repeat it.

Verses 4 - 9

⁴ Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah,⁵ had prepared a large room for him, where previously they used to put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.⁶ But during all this *time* I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had come to the king. After some time, however, I requested a leave of absence from the king,⁷ and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had committed for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courtyards of the house of God.⁸ It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household articles out of the room.⁹ Then I gave an order, and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned the utensils of the house of God there with the grain offering and the frankincense.

⁴ Now prior to this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, being related to Tobiah,⁵ had prepared a large room for him, where previously they used to put the grain offerings, the frankincense, the utensils and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil prescribed for the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

See chart 1310



Eliashib the High Priest gave Tobiah (an Ammonite) space in the temple store rooms because he was an ally of Sanballat who Eliashib was related to through a family marriage. However this was a direct violation of the law and Nehemiah was a strong leader who would not shrink in the face of opposition even from a High Priest.

⁶ But during all this time I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had come to the king. After some time, however, I requested a leave of absence from the king, ⁷ and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had committed for Tobiah, by preparing a room for him in the courtyards of the house of God.

The 32nd year of Artaxerxes was 433 BC.

See chart 1315

Kings of Persia		539 to 330 BC
King	Reign	
Cyrus	559 - 529	
Cyrus captures Babylon	539	
Cambyses	529 - 522	
Smerdis (Bardiya)	522 BC	
Darius I (Hystaspes)	521 - 486	
Xerxes I (Ahashuerus)	485 - 465	
Artaxerxes (Longimanus)	465 - 424	
Xerxes II	424	
Sogdianus of Persia	424 – 423 BC	
Darius II (Nothus)	423 - 405	
Artaxerxes (Mnemon)	404 - 359	
Artaxerxes III of Persia Ochus	358 – 338 BC	
Arses of Persia (Artaxerxes IV)	338 – 336 BC	
Darius III of Persia Codomannus	336 – 330 BC	

Nehemiah left Jerusalem in 433 BC and returned to Persia but then returned to Jerusalem after some time. Some scholars believe it was 3 years later.

⁸ It was very displeasing to me, so I threw all of Tobiah's household articles out of the room. ⁹ Then I gave an order, and they cleansed the rooms; and I returned the utensils of the house of God there with the grain offering and the frankincense.

Nehemiah had left two leaders in charge but it seems they did not want to challenge the authority of the High Priest. Nehemiah, on the other hand, was the cupbearer for the king and his authority in Jerusalem was unmatched.

Verses 10 -14

¹⁰ I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field. ¹¹ So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why has the house of God been neglected?" Then I gathered them together and stationed them at their posts. ¹² All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. ¹³ To be in charge of the storehouses, I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah from the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. ¹⁴ Remember me for this, my God, and do not wipe out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

¹⁰ I also discovered that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so the Levites and the singers who performed the service had gone away, each to his own field.

Without the financial support, the Levites and singers had to support themselves so they were unable to perform their service at the temple.

¹¹ So I reprimanded the officials and said, "Why has the house of God been neglected?" Then I gathered them together and stationed them at their posts.

Nehemiah reprimanded the officials, whose duty it was to see that the tithes were collected and that the temple service was properly maintained. However, it should be noted that not just the leaders but all of those who had a responsibility in the house of God had made a vow to the Lord to obey all of the law.

See Nehemiah 10:28 - 29

²⁸ Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, ²⁹ are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to comply with all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and statutes;

¹² All Judah then brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.

The common people know when there is good leadership and they react accordingly.

¹³ To be in charge of the storehouses, I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah from the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen.

Good leadership is always important especially in the Lord's work.

¹⁴ Remember me for this, my God, and do not wipe out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services.

Some of Nehemiah's hard work was lost to the neglect of others so he asked God to remember what he had done for God's house and its services.

Verses 15 - 18

¹⁵ In those days I saw in Judah people who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and every kind of load, and they were bringing them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food.

¹⁶ Also people of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did your fathers not do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath against Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

¹⁵ In those days I saw in Judah people who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and every *kind* of load, and they were bringing them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food.

Every Jew knew it was against the law to work on the Sabbath so there was no excuse for this activity.

¹⁶ Also people of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

Verse 3 says, “**So when they heard the Law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel**”. So why were there still people from Tyre living in Jerusalem?

Nehemiah is informing the reader about the various issues that he had to deal with and each of these issues took some time to follow through with. Therefore not every event in this chapter can be seen as taking place in a strict chronological order.

¹⁷ Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did your fathers not do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath against Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

The Jews also knew that they were not allowed to buy and sell on the Sabbath because it was a day of rest. But if those in charge allow it, or even worse, take part in it then the common people will continue to break the law. This is why Nehemiah reprimanded the nobles. He also reminds them that they should learn from the past and not add to the suffering of the people or the city.

Mankind's work schedule was modeled after God's work schedule. He created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the 7th day.

See Exodus 20:9 -11

⁹ For six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Verses 19 - 22

¹⁹ And it came about that just as it became dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered that the doors be shut, and that they were not to open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the Sabbath day. ²⁰ Once or twice the traders and merchants of every *kind* of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.

²¹ Then I warned them and said to them, “Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.” From that time *on* they did not come on the Sabbath. ²² And I ordered the Levites that they were to purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day. *For* this also remember me, my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of your mercy.

¹⁹ And it came about that just as it became dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered that the doors be shut, and that they were not to open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the Sabbath day.

The Jewish day starts at sunset so this was done on Friday night at sunset. The Jews grounded this practice on the Genesis creation account.

See Genesis 1:5

⁵ **God called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night.” And there was evening and there was morning, one day.**

By closing the gates just before the Sabbath, Nehemiah used the most efficient way to stop the sale of goods on the Sabbath.

²⁰ Once or twice the traders and merchants of every *kind* of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. ²¹ Then I warned them and said to them, “Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you.” From that time *on* they did not come on the Sabbath.

When some of the merchants spent the night outside Jerusalem, Nehemiah went one step further and threatened to use force against those who camped outside the wall. Nehemiah was the governor and had special authority from the king in to inforce the Jewish law and punish anyone who did not obey it.

²² And I ordered the Levites that they were to purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day. For this also remember me, my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of your mercy.

Nehemiah was a man of good deeds but he acknowledges that his salvation is dependent on God's mercy. Even those under the law understood that they needed God's grace.

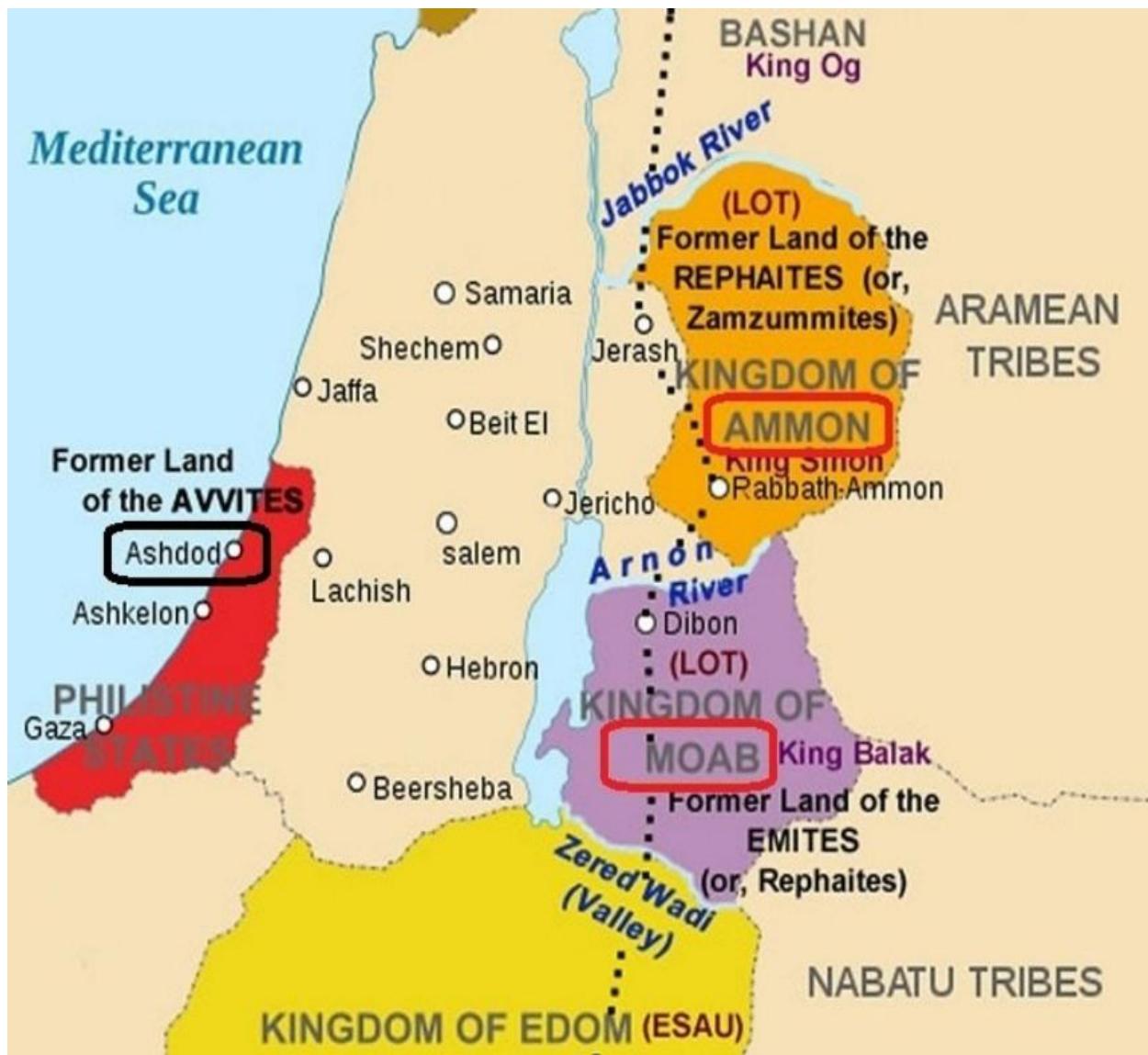
Verses 23 - 30

²³ In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them knew how to speak the language of Judah, but only the language of his own people. ²⁵ So I quarreled with them and cursed them, and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take any of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did Solomon the king of Israel not sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; yet the foreign women caused even him to sin. ²⁷ Has it not then been reported about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God, by marrying foreign women?" ²⁸ Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, became a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I chased him away from me. ²⁹ Remember them, my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. ³⁰ So I purified them from everything foreign, and assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each in his work, ³¹ and I arranged for the delivery of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

²³ In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

Ezra had dealt with this problem in 458 BC. (Ezra 10) and here they are just 28 years later and the problem has risen once again in 430 BC. One generation had passed and they find themselves committing the same sin.

See Map 1320



²⁴ As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them knew how to speak the language of Judah, but only the language of his own people. ²⁵ So I quarreled with them and cursed them, and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take any of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

The use of violence may seem a little extreme but this was a very serious infraction of the law and the punishment could have been more severe. Nehemiah did not demand that these people get rid of their wives like Ezra had done but he did make them swear not to give their daughters or sons to a foreigner.

²⁶ Did Solomon the king of Israel not sin regarding these things? Yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel; yet the foreign women caused even him to sin.

This was a rhetorical question because the people knew Solomon had sinned. If Solomon with all of his wisdom fell prey to the influence of his foreign wives how could these people not do the same.

²⁷ Has it not then been reported about you that you have committed all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God, by marrying foreign women?"

Nehemiah calls their marriages to foreign woman "this great evil". Not all sin is equal in its consequences and this is why the various O.T. laws had different degrees of punishment. Some sins brought differing amounts of monetary fines and some brought the death penalty.

²⁸ Even one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, became a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite, so I chased him away from me.

Not only had a grandson of the High Priest married a pagan but Eliashib the High Priest himself was allied with Tobiah.

See Pic 1310 again. (Hey, I'm a poet and didn't know it) ☺

³⁰ So I purified them from everything foreign, and assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each in his work, ³¹ and I arranged for the delivery of wood at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

This is now the 4th time that Nehemiah has said this.