

27.13a Nehemiah's Religious Restitution, Part A (Nehemiah 13:1-14)

✓ “*Check*” it out. An opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows.

[...] Brackets indicate a remark to the teacher that will not be read aloud; they also show answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional needed materials. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print on colorful cardstock and cut apart.

- [illegible]

Scripture: (ESV)

Nehemiah 13:1 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, 2 for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. 3 As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, 5 prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. 6 While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king 7 and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. 8 And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. 9 Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

10 I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. 11 So I confronted the officials and said, “Why is the house of God forsaken?” And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. 12 Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. 13 And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. 14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service.

Introduction/Review:

Let's think back one thousand years before Nehemiah. Israel had come out of Egypt, had crossed the Red Sea, had gotten the Law from God at Sinai, had refused to conquer Canaan, and had wandered forty years in the wilderness until all the adults who came out of Egypt had died. That was the time when the Israelites were just about to enter the land God had promised them. Between the wilderness and Canaan were two nations, Ammon and Moab, populated by descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

Ammon

"Please allow us to pass through your country," the Israelites asked. "We will stay on the highways; we will not hurt your land. We will gladly give you money for water we drink."

"No!" answered Ammon. "You go around some other way. You may not pass through our land!"

✓ "Did they say, 'No?'" Israel asked. "That makes us angry. We will fight against Ammon!"

But God said, "Don't fight against them. Do as they say: go around them."

Moab

When the Israelites came to the country of Moab, they were allowed to pass through. But when Balak, the king of Moab, saw how many people there were, he became quite frightened. Balak hired a prophet named Balaam to curse the multitudes of Israel. After all, this huge nation might fight against him and defeat his people or make them slaves.

"Curse them for me, Balaam," Balak ordered.

"I can do only what God says," answered Balaam.

Do you remember the story? Do you remember how Balaam's donkey talked to Balaam on his way to Moab?

Balaam, instead of doing what the king of Moab asked by pronouncing a curse upon Israel, announced, rather, some of the greatest prophetic blessings found in the whole Bible. These words made Balak really angry. However, crafty Balaam suggested a plan to make God curse His own people—intermarriage between Israelites and Moabites and other heathen.

We know that Israel intermarried over and over again during the years from Moses to Nehemiah. Marrying people who served other gods caused Israelites to turn away from the one true God to worship false gods. Forsaking God was the reason God caused them to be taken out of their land and exiled to Babylon.

Even after they returned to Jerusalem, the Jews continued to practice marrying the pagans. Ezra and Nehemiah had just recently dealt with this problem, and the people had even promised to put away the "strangers." Nevertheless, the problem continued.

Ammon and Moab not to be in the congregation of Israel

But back in Moses' time, a thousand years earlier, God had been so displeased with Ammon's and Moab's actions against Israel that He had told Moses to write important words in the book of Deuteronomy. Listen: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation, [even] . . . for ever" (Deuteronomy 23:3). Never was an Ammonite or a Moabite to become part of Israel—not by marriage or any other way.

Story:

Now, Nehemiah had promised King Artaxerxes of Babylon that he would return to Babylon after a certain time. Twelve years had passed. It was time for Nehemiah to go back. We don't know how long he stayed in Babylon, but we do know the situation in Jerusalem had deteriorated quite a bit by the time he returned.

Tobiah in the Temple

This is what had happened: That old enemy, Tobiah, the Ammonite, had gotten himself a place to live, not just near Jerusalem but . . . in Jerusalem, not in just any old place in Jerusalem but in . . . the Temple!

“What?!” you say. “How did he get to live in the Temple? He’s God’s enemy!”

It’s unbelievable, but the answer to that question is he got there by intermarriage.

“Really?” you say.

Yes, for Tobiah had married the daughter of a Jewish priest, and his son had married the daughter of another priest. Eliashib, the current priest who was in charge of the Temple, ✓probably was related to those priests.

✓Maybe Tobiah came to family dinners, and Eliashib became his friend. We don’t know that for sure, but we do know that Eliashib, the priest, prepared a large room for Tobiah. That room, ✓or group of rooms, had formerly housed the grain offerings, the frankincense, the vessels used in the Temple, the tithes of the grain, the new wine, and the oil which was supposed to be given to the Levites, the singers, the door-keepers, and the priests. The enemy of God was living in the very storerooms of food and supplies for God’s servants!

Tobiah out of the Temple

What do you think Nehemiah did when he discovered what Eliashib had done for Tobiah? If you look at Nehemiah 13:8, you will see that, first, Nehemiah was angry. That led him to throw out all of Tobiah’s household stuff—his furniture and everything else he had in the rooms. Then, Nehemiah ordered that those rooms be washed. Last, he brought the grain offerings and other supplies back to those rooms.

For months now the Jews had been listening to Ezra and others reading the Law of God. Indeed, they had recently listened to Deuteronomy 23:3 and 4: “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation . . . for ever because they met you not with bread and water . . . but they hired Balaam.” Tobiah, an *Ammonite*, had been living in the Temple. He wasn’t supposed to be in the congregation of Israel at all, much less living in the Temple! ✓We don’t know exactly what the reaction of the people to all of this was; surely they were happy Nehemiah had thrown Tobiah out. ✓I hope the people said, “Yay for Nehemiah!!”

Levites and first fruits and tithes

Now, if Tobiah had been living where the food for the Levites had been stored, what do you suppose had happened to the food for the Levites? We can correctly assume that again the Levites had not been getting their tithes and first fruits. In fact, Nehemiah discovered this. situation immediately upon his return to Jerusalem. He wrote in Nehemiah 13:10, “I found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field.” There they were again—back in their fields and villages outside Jerusalem, growing their own food instead of being supplied according to God’s plan.

✓Perhaps the Jewish people excused themselves from giving tithes and first fruits because they were concerned they might be given to Tobiah. ✓Maybe they didn’t trust Eliashib, the unworthy priest, to give food to the Levites, so they kept their tithes and first fruits rather than give them.

Great leader that he was, Nehemiah took care of this problem. First, he scolded the rulers. “Why is the house of God forsaken?” he asked sternly. Then, Nehemiah gathered the Levites together and put them back in the places where they were supposed to be so that they could minister. Next, he appointed treasurers to take good care of the items at the Temple.

Do you suppose he selected men because they were good-looking? Were they rich, and that’s why they were chosen? No, he selected them because they were faithful men.

Last, he prayed to God: “Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!” He knew God would one day judge the good and the evil. He wanted to be remembered for his good work for Jerusalem and its people.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
Although God said no Moabite could enter the congregation of Israel, He made a notable exception. David's great grandmother was Ruth, a Moabite, who married, with God's blessing, Boaz, an Israelite. Ruth thus became an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Nehemiah selected faithful men. We should be faithful to God. Maybe God will use us in positions of responsibility as we grow up—as deacons, pastors, missionaries.
- It is still wrong for a believer in Jesus to marry a non-Christian.
- Tithes and first fruits are not commanded in the New Testament, but God wants his ministers to live by the supply of the people. We each need to be faithful in tithes and offerings.
- For what do you want to be remembered before God? Your intelligence? Your good looks? Your faithfulness to God?

Activities:

- Play dough: wedding ring; furniture; fruits and vegetables
- Snack: Graham cracker sandwiches with frosting in the middle
- Watch the last minute (start at 4 minutes, 35 seconds) of the video “No Time for Enemies” found at [Bible Stories for the Young : Stories](#). Click “Stories” and scroll down about 3/5 of the page. This video will be in the center column.
- Put a puzzle together. Print the picture of Nehemiah's sending Tobiah away on card stock, or glue the paper picture to stiff cardboard. Cut the picture into puzzle pieces. Let students put the puzzle together.
- Play “Pin the Tail on the Donkey.”
- Review questions: (Game: Print and cut apart the clipart of furniture, etc., found below. Place these on a flannel board or, if printed on card stock, in a pocket chart. A student who answers a question correctly may remove one of “Tobiah's” items and place it in a designated spot, even a waste basket.)
 1. Why had Nehemiah left Jerusalem? [He had promised King Artaxerxes he'd return to Babylon.]
 2. Who was living at the Temple? [Tobiah.]
 3. What was wrong with Tobiah's living at the Temple? [He was God's enemy; he was an Ammonite.]
 4. What had God said about the Moabites and Ammonites regarding being part of Israel? [They could not be part of Israel for ten generations or even forever.]
 5. What, again, caused these problems in Jerusalem? For example, who had Tobiah married? [A daughter of an Israelite priest—intermarriage.]
 6. Tell one reason why the Levites were again not getting the first fruits and tithes? [1) Because the priest in charge was not collecting them; 2) because the priest let Tobiah stay in the storeroom used for the first fruits and tithes.]
 7. What did Nehemiah do with Tobiah's stuff at the Temple? [Threw it out.]

Memory Verse[s]:

- Hebrews 4:12: “The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” [This may be shortened to only the first clause.]

Handwork:

- Color the picture of Balaam found at the end of this story.

wilderness

Canaan

to curse

heathen

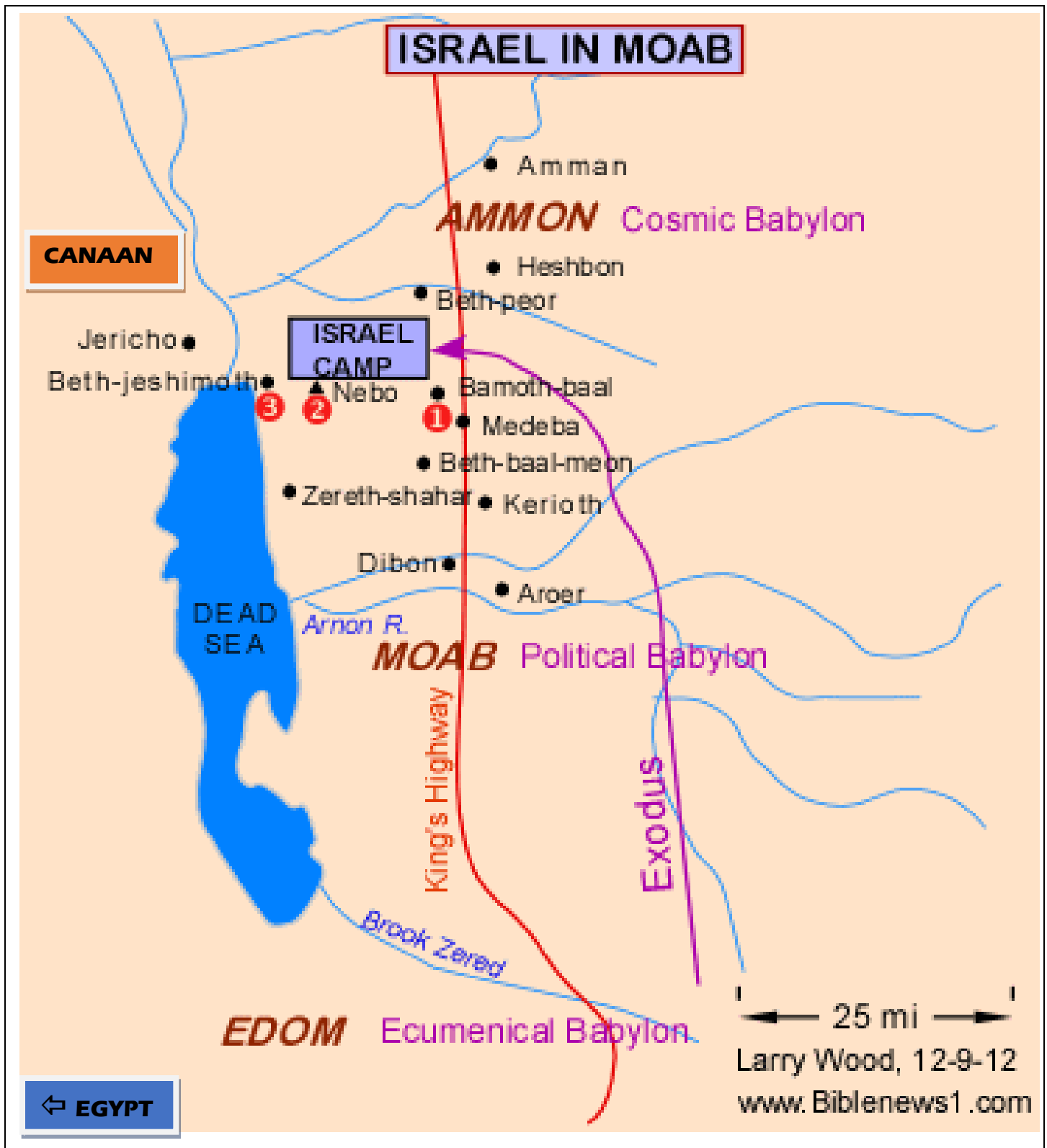
strangers

mixed multitude

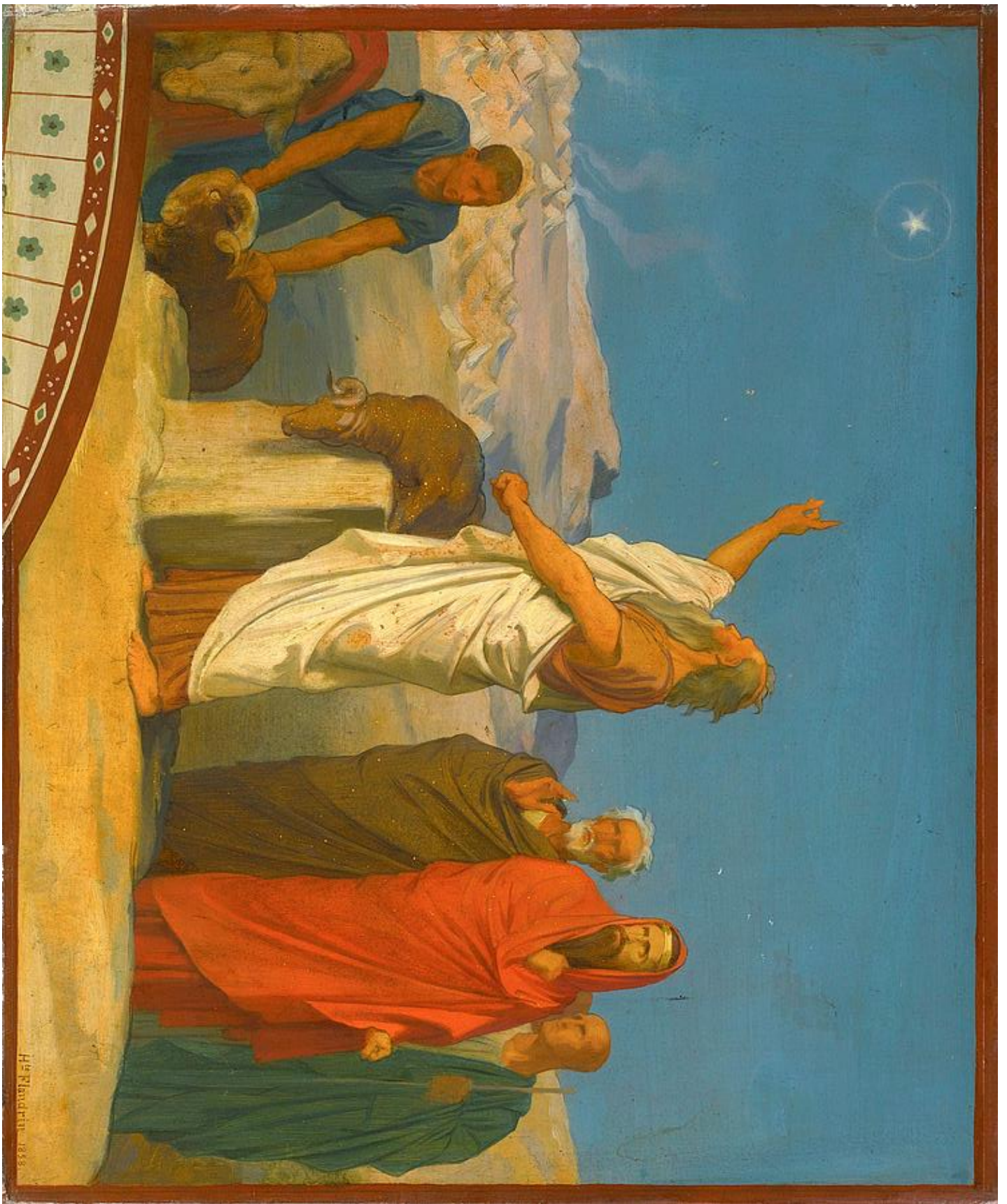
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intermarriage

generation

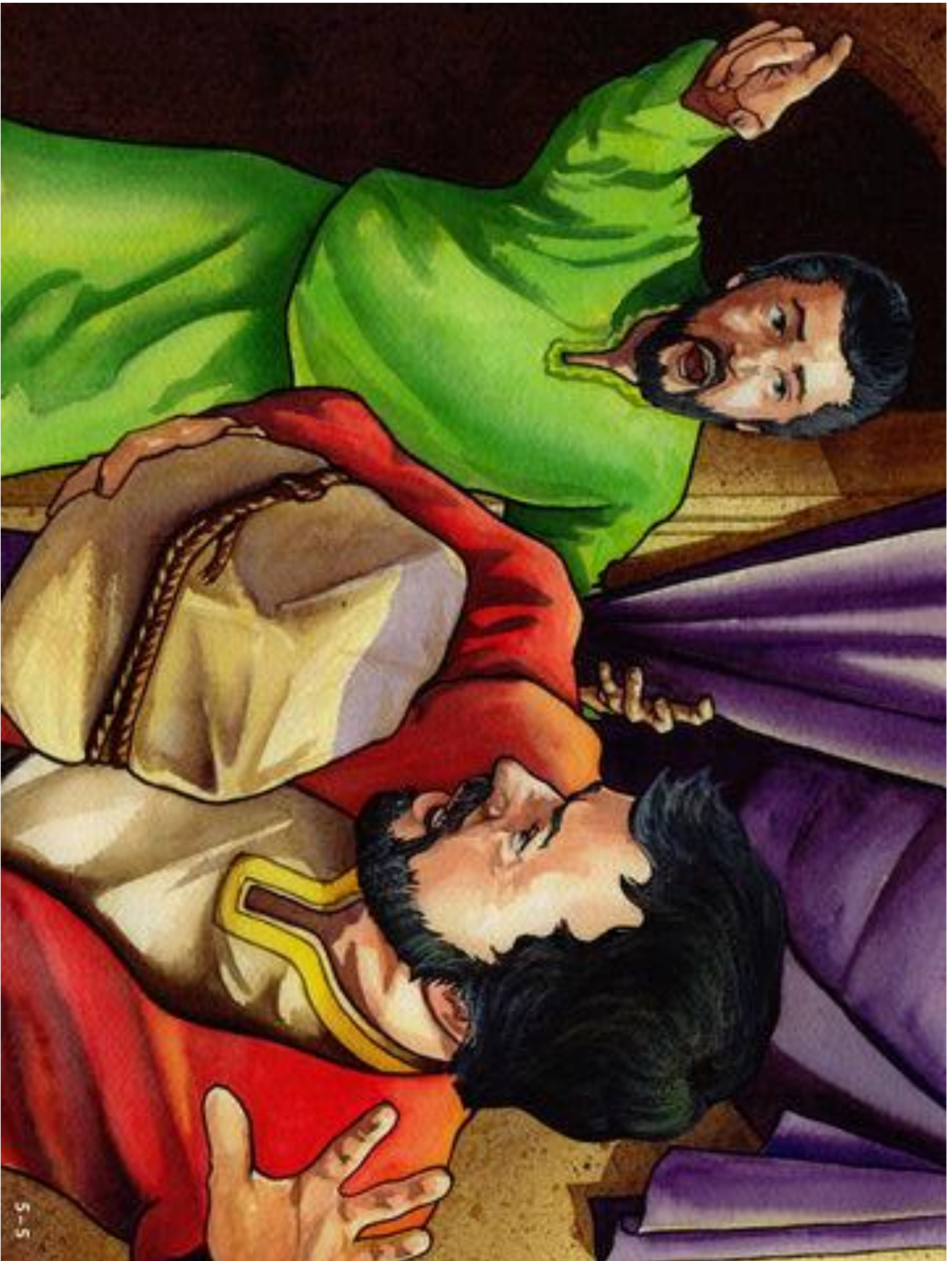


Note that the Israelites reached Moab first; however, this lesson mentions Ammon first.
(<http://www.biblenews1.com/balaam/balaam.htm>)



[Prophets of Balaam - Search Images](#)











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Balaam went through the vineyards so tall
But seeing the angel the donkey turned towards the wall
After saving his life don't you think it odd
That Balaam repaid her with a stroke of his rod?

And again came the angel to stand in their way
And seeing no exit the donkey did lay
But Balaam was angry as the donkey sat down
And struck her again right there on the ground.

"What have I done?" said the donkey with ease
"That caused you to hit me three times as you please?"
So Balaam just answered this donkey who talked
And threatened his donkey who had not walked.

The donkey spoke softly to Balaam's reply,
"Am I not your donkey, is it not I?"
Then Balaam's eyes saw for the very first time
The angel, the sword and he knew of his crime.