

27.13b Nehemiah's Religious Restitution, Part B (Nehemiah 13:15–31)

✓ “*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
- Sheaf of grain (optional) or use picture

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.

- *Sabbath*: the seventh day of the week, like our Saturday; the day on which God rested after creation. The fourth commandment commands Sabbath-keeping—no working on that day. Other nations did not have such a law. Keeping the Sabbath was a privilege, giving people and animals bodily rest (Gill). After the death and resurrection of Christ, Sunday, the first day of the week, became the Christian’s “Sabbath.”
- *wine press*: “In the ancient world the wine press was a large basin where men would tread [walk on] grapes. They would hold on to ropes above them and stamp their feet” (<http://www.bible-history.com/sketches/ancient/wine-press.html>). [see picture]
- *sheaves*: bundles of grain [see picture]
- *Tyre*: the city [locate] north of Israel on the Mediterranean coast known for its trade and business. This was also the area from which King Hiram sent wood for the Temple.
- *holy*: set apart to the Lord
- *merchants*: people who buy and sell things; businessmen

Scripture: (ESV)

Nehemiah 13:16 Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! 17 Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.”

19 As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. 21 But I warned them and said to them, “Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.” From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. 22 Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

23 In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. 24 And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. 25 And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. 26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. 27 Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

28 And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. 29 Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

30 Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; 31 and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Introduction/Review:

In our last lesson, we spoke quite a bit about intermarriage—marriage of a Jew with a non-Jew, which compares today to a believer marrying a non-believer. King Solomon, David’s son, had married many unbelieving wives, and they eventually turned him away from worshiping the one true God to worshiping false gods. This is often the case. Ezra had dealt with this problem, causing the men to “put away” their non-Jewish wives. When the Jews had made their oath of obedience to God, they had promised not to intermarry. Nevertheless, intermarriage continued to be a problem.

Nehemiah had gone back to Shushan in Persia and then returned to Jerusalem. Then he had thrown Tobiah, the Ammonite, out of the rooms in the Temple allotted to him by Eliashib, the Jewish high priest. So that the Levites and priests could be supported as God intended, Nehemiah had also reestablished the collection and distribution of the tithes and first fruits.

Story:

Sabbath law

Now Nehemiah saw another problem: Sabbath-breaking—not keeping the Sabbath day holy. What exactly had God commanded regarding the Sabbath day? We all know the fourth commandment; listen again to Exodus 20:8-11: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” These verses are basically repeated in Deuteronomy 5:14. Many other references about keeping the Sabbath are in the Old Testament.

So, what did it mean to “keep the Sabbath holy”? It meant that no person or animal could do ordinary work on that day. What about picking up sticks in order to start a fire? Well, in Numbers 15:32–36 a man did that very thing. The people were not sure what should be done to this man, so they asked God. God said the breaking of the fourth command by picking up sticks was so serious that the man should be stoned to death!

One of the main reasons why Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah was taken to Babylon was to fulfill the word of the LORD that the land not be plowed or planted until the land had enjoyed her *Sabbath years*—seventy years (2 Chronicles 36:21). What were Sabbath years? Let the Bible explain: “For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard” (Leviticus 25:3, 4).

Israel had not let the land rest one year out of seven for 490 years. To make up those Sabbath years, God took the people out of the land for seventy years so that the Sabbath rest for the land could be completed as God had originally commanded.

Does it sound as if Sabbath-keeping was important to God? It certainly was. In fact, God said holy Sabbaths were to be observed forever: “The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual [going on and on and on] covenant” (Exodus, 31:16).

Sabbath-breaking

Now, listen to Nehemiah as he tells us what he saw happening. “I saw people wine presses on the Sabbath, bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 13:15, 16).

Oh, Oh! What was going on? [People were treading wine presses, bringing in sheaves, loading donkeys, and buying and selling in Jerusalem on the Sabbath.] Is there something wrong with doing all of this? Yes, it is weekday work that should not be done on the Sabbath. Another scripture, Jeremiah 17:19–27, clearly and specifically informed the people not to bring burdens into Jerusalem on the Sabbath: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Take heed and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day.’”

Sabbath-keeping

Nehemiah was disgusted to see the Sabbath day being treated like any other day and not being holy to the Lord. He scolded the rulers of Judah: “What evil thing is this that you do, profaning the Sabbath day? Didn’t your fathers do this, and didn’t our God bring all this disaster on us? You bring wrath on us by doing this.”

Nehemiah not only scolded but also took action; he knew how to stop this practice. At sundown on the day before the Sabbath, which was Friday evening, he commanded the gatekeepers to shut the gates and keep them shut all day Saturday, the Sabbath. The gates could not be opened until Sunday morning.

When the merchants came Friday night or Saturday morning, they might have said, ✓“What?! We can’t get into the city? How can we make money?” The next week, when they came again, Nehemiah yelled at them, “Why are you hanging out around the wall? If you do it again, I will lay hands on you!”

That stopped the merchants: they came no more to sell on the Sabbath. However, they would have come again if Nehemiah hadn’t continued to prevent their Sabbath business. Therefore, from then on, Nehemiah ordered the Levites to guard the gates to make sure that Sabbath-breaking did not happen again.

Intermarriage problem

Another persistent problem came up again. We just talked about it in last week’s lesson and today in our review time. What was it? [Intermarriage.] Yes, again intermarriage was a big problem! This time, Nehemiah saw Jews who had married wives from Ashdod in Philistia [locate these places], from Ammon, and from Moab. Ammon and Moab and Philistia were all long-time enemies of God’s people. Remember, Goliath was from Philistia, Sanballat was from Moab, and Tobiah was from Ammon. They were non-Jews, and they were unbelievers! Children born to these families were so into the non-Jewish ways that they couldn’t speak the Jewish language but spoke the languages of the Philistines, Ammonites, and Moabites!

Nehemiah was disgusted. Actually, he was more than disgusted; he was angry. He physically attacked the men by pulling out their hair and by hitting and cursing those who had intermarried. “Swear by God,” he ordered as he grabbed them, “that you will not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves! Didn’t Solomon sin by taking non-Jewish wives who led him astray? You are doing great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?!”

Again, Eliashib, the high priest, was deeply involved, for his grandson, who might eventually have become high priest, had married the daughter of Sanballat, the great enemy who had tried to stop the building of Jerusalem’s wall.¹ Nehemiah was so displeased that he chased Eliashib’s grandson out of Jerusalem, ✓never again to serve in the Temple of God.

Leaders sometimes have difficult, negative work to do, but they also do positive things. Nehemiah did both. He not only dealt severely with the sinners but also built up the priesthood by organizing for the collection of wood for the altar, by setting up the priests and Levites for their work, and by getting the first fruits and the tithes to the Levites. He was a great man of God.

Old Testament conclusion

This is the last story of the Old Testament. One other book, the book of the prophet Malachi, was written after this time. It basically repeats the preaching of Nehemiah and Ezra about tithing, sacrifices, divorce, and intermarriage.

After Malachi four hundred years follow in which God reveals nothing to His people. These are called “The 400 Silent Years” or “The Inter-Testamental Period” because they come between the Old and New Testaments.

¹Eliashib was likely related to the priests whose daughters had married Tobiah and his son. “Tobiah was married to a Jewess, who may have been a relation of Eliashib; and his son Johanan was married to another [Nehemiah 6:18](#), of whom the same may be said” ([Nehemiah 13 Barnes' Notes](#)).

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
Jesus Himself is the Christian’s Sabbath. “In Him we find complete rest from the labors of our self-effort, because He alone is holy and righteous. ‘God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). We can now cease from our spiritual labors and rest in Him, not just one day a week, but always ([How is Jesus our Sabbath Rest? | GotQuestions.org](#)). [Teacher, many more aspects of Jesus’ being our Sabbath are found at this site.]
- Eliashib, the high priest, had helped build the wall (Nehemiah 3:20) but failed to follow God’s Word by allowing intermarriage among the priests, even his own family. Consistent obedience is always required.
- A leader has to do hard things, but God brings blessing even in the midst of trouble.

Activities:

- Play dough: Make seven marble-sized balls. Set one marble aside, showing one day/year in seven.
- Snack: Taste figs (not liked by kids) and grapes and grape juice freshly squeezed from grapes.
- Mash grapes with the back of a spoon in a container, or use people toys’ feet to “tread” the grapes.
- With the chart found below, explain the Jewish arrangement of Old Testament scripture.
- Review questions: (Game: Students who answer questions correctly may find and point to particular locations on the map found below. Choose from Tyre, Moab, Ashdod, Jerusalem, Ammon, Philistia.)
 1. Name one of two godly principles that was being disobeyed. [Sabbath-breaking; intermarriage.]
 2. Name the second principle being disobeyed. [Sabbath-breaking; intermarriage.]
 3. How did Nehemiah take care of the Sabbath breaking problem? [Had the city gates closed; threatened to deal with those who tried to work or sell on the Sabbath.]
 4. How did Nehemiah deal with the grandson of Eliashib because he had married a heathen? [Chased him out of Jerusalem.]

Memory Verse[s]: (ESV)

- Hebrews 4:9–11: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Handwork:

- Students may do the maze and/or color the black-line picture found below.

Sabbath

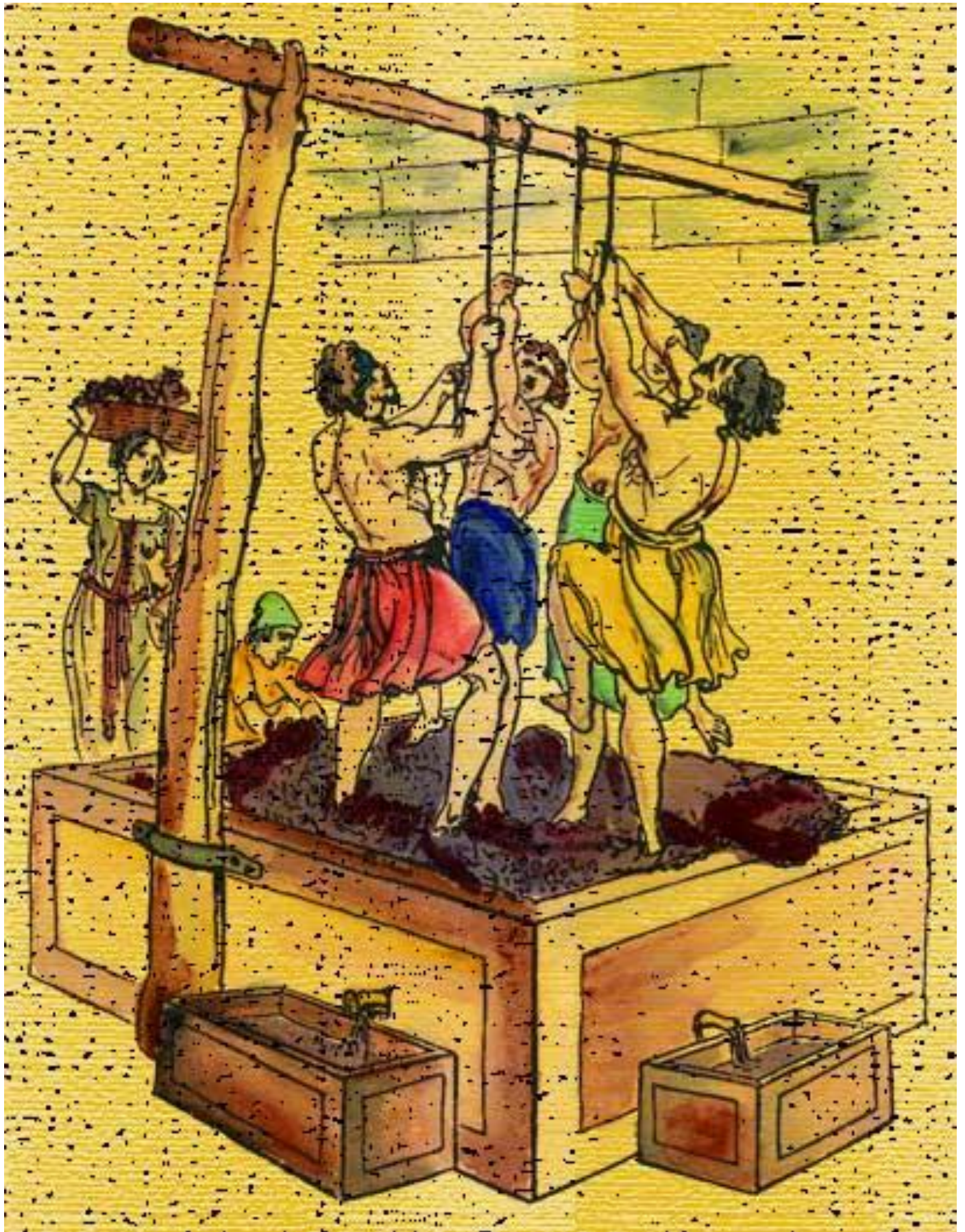
wine presses

sheaves

Tyre

holy

merchants

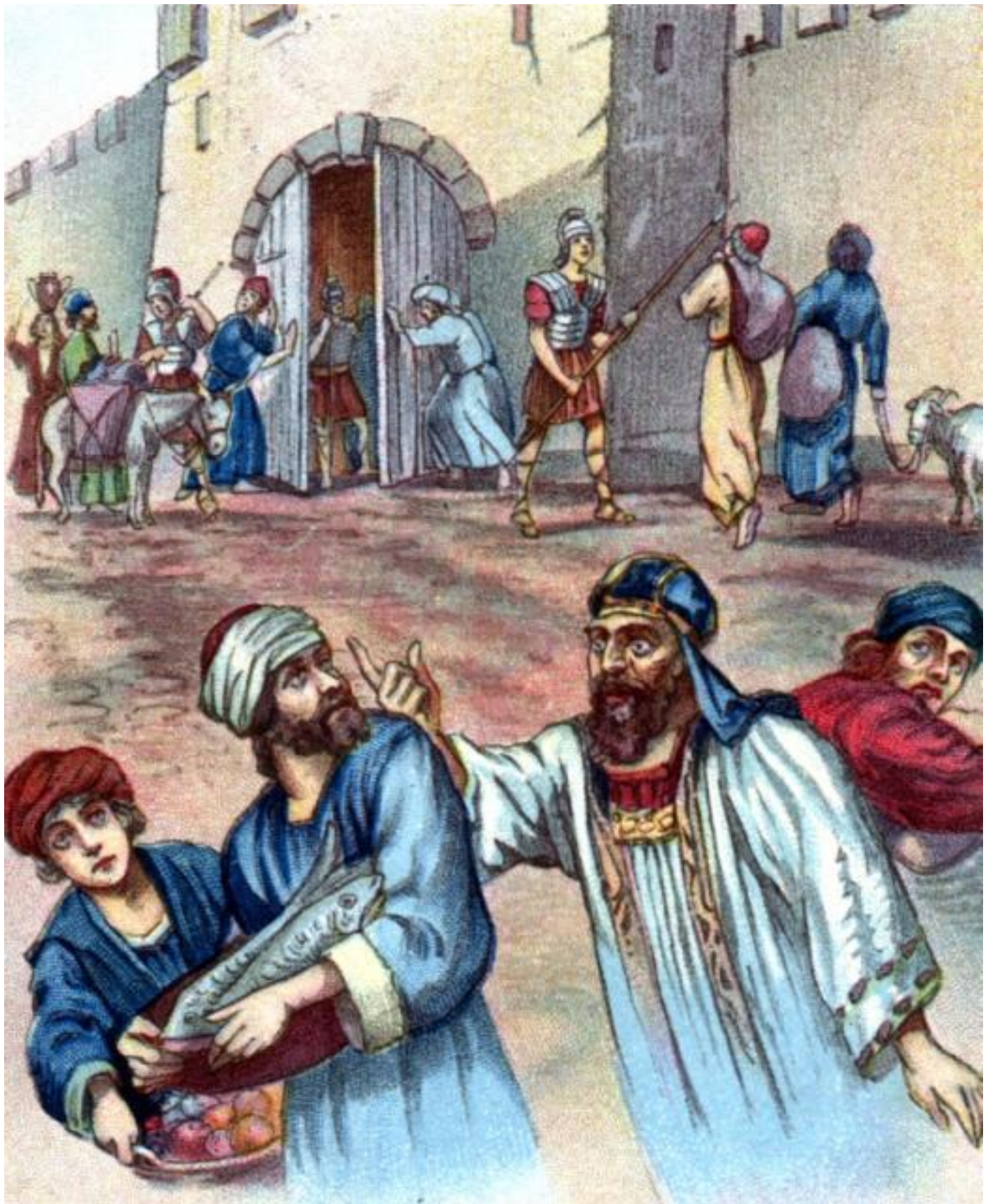


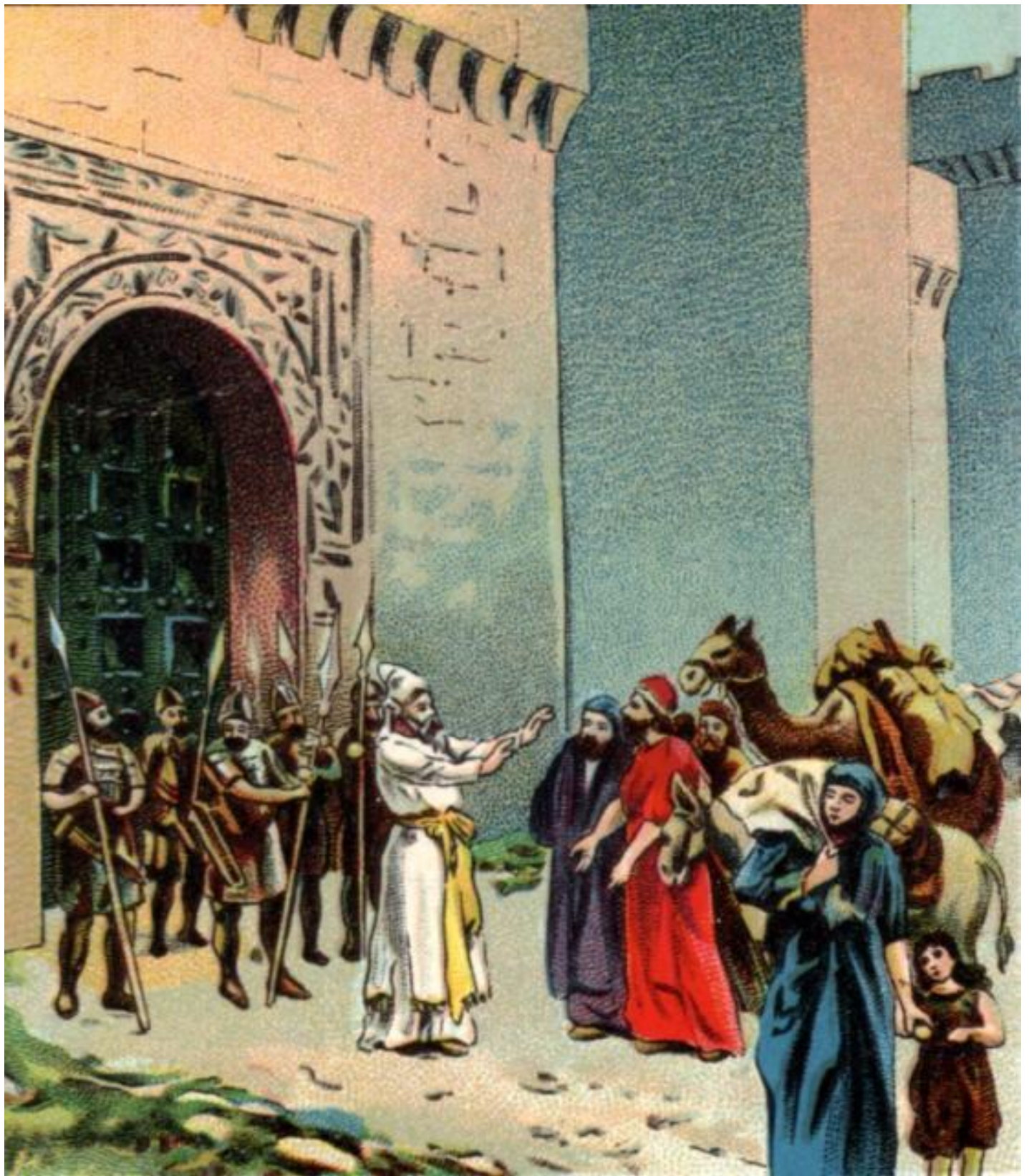














[Nehemiah 13:28 Artwork | Bible Art](#)



Eliashib with priestly phylacteries on forehead [Nehemiah 2:10 Artwork | Bible Art](#)

Jesus in
Luke 24:44

*“.. which were written
... concerning Me.”*

Old Testament Books

Arrangement in the Hebrew Bible

in the Law of Moses,

and the Prophets,

and the Psalms

The Law (Torah)

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Leviticus
4. Numbers
5. Deuteronomy

The Prophets (Nebhim)

A. Former Prophets

1. Joshua
2. Judges
3. Samuel
4. Kings

B. Latter Prophets

1. Isaiah
2. Jeremiah
3. Ezekiel
4. The Twelve

The Writings (Kethubhim or Hagiographa)

A. Poetical Books

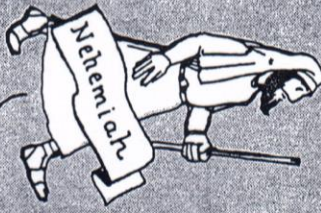
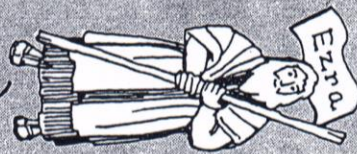
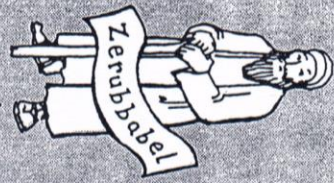
1. Psalms
2. Proverbs
3. Job

B. Five Rolls (Megilloth)

1. Song of Songs
2. Ruth
3. Lamentations
4. Esther
5. Ecclesiastes

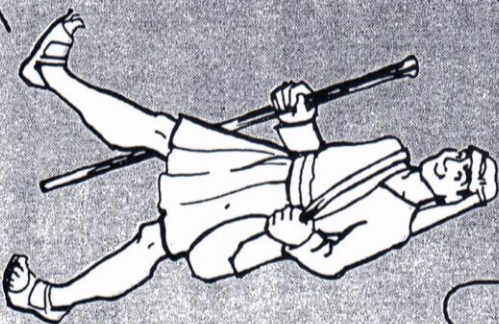
C. Historical Books

1. Daniel
2. Ezra-Nehemiah
3. Chronicles



Memory verses:
Hebrews 4:9-11: There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

This young Jew wants to go to Jerusalem. He can travel with any of these leaders. Find which one he goes with.





**Nehemiah
told the
traders
not to sell
in
Jerusalem
on the
Sabbath.
No work
was to be
done on
that holy
day.**