

# Nehemiah 13:4-31

## Tobiah in a Chamber on the Temple Court

Nehemiah 13:4 – Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah,

7138 [e] qā·rō·wb קרוב [was] allied Adj-ms	430 [e] 'ē·lō·hē·nū; אלהינו of our God N-mpc   1cp	1004 [e] bēt- בית of the house N-msc	3957 [e] be·liš·kaṭ בלשכת over the storerooms Prep-b   N-fsc	5414 [e] nā·tūn נתון having authority V-Qal-QalPassPrtcppl-ms	3548 [e] hak·kō·hēn, הכֹּהֵן the priest Art   N-ms	475 [e] 'el·yā·šīb אלישיב Eliashib N-proper-ms	2088 [e] miz·zeh, מִזֶּה this Prep-m   Pro-ms	6440 [e] wə·liṭ·nē ולפני Now before Conj-w, Prep-l   N-cpc
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"allied" or "related" from *qarob* /kaw-robe/meaning "near", "close relative", "kinsmen"

2900 [e]  
le·ṭō·w·bî·yāh.  
לטוביה

with Tobiah  
Prep-l | N-proper-ms

13:5 – 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.

13:6 – 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

1. Nehemiah had been governor of Judah for 12 years 445-433
2. Nehemiah then returned to Artaxerxes
3. Nehemiah had been in Persia (Susa) for 2-5 years? Long enough for Nehemiah's reforms to have been overthrown
  - a. Nehemiah may have returned in 431-428?
  - b. Nehemiah's second term as governor had to be over by 407 BC because according to the Elephantine papyri Bagohi (Bagvai) was then the governor of Judah.
  - c. Nehemiah had left his brother Hanani in charge while he was away. Hananiah is recorded in the Passover Papyrus of 419 BC.
4. The storeroom was in the inner court of the temple.
5. The 32<sup>nd</sup> year of Artaxerxes is between April 1, 433 to April 19, 432 BC.
6. Artaxerxes reigned for 40 years from 465-425 BC.

13:7 – 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.

13:8 – And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.

13:9 – 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.

## Levites Not Supported and Temple Neglected

13:10 – 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.

1. Basically, Nehemiah found:
  - a. The Levites broke.
  - b. Their storehouses depleted
  - c. No one refilling them with the tithe.
2. Who was to blame for this neglect?
  - a. Part of the problem is the people
  - b. This is the fault of the Levites for not collecting
  - c. It is the failure of the High Priest and the leadership (elites) in Judah
  - d. The people, Levites, High Priest did not care.
3. They were more concerned about:
  - a. Other commitments
  - b. Persian taxes
  - c. Influence from Tobiah (Amon) and Sanballat (Samaria)?
4. The Levites were in the rural areas working secular jobs working in their fields as farmers to supply for themselves and their families, instead of working in the Temple of the Lord.

13:11 – **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.**

1004 [e]	5800 [e]	4069 [e]		559 [e]	5461 [e]	854 [e]		7378 [e]
bêṭ-	ne'è-zab	mad·dū·a'		wā'ō-mə-rah,	has·sə-gā-nīm,	'eṭ-		wā'ā-ri·bah
בַּיִת־	נֶעְזַב	מִדְּוַע		וְאָמְרָה	הַסֹּגְנִים	אֶת־		וְאָרְיְבָה
the house	is forsaken	why		and said	the rulers	with		so I contended
N-msc	V-Nifal-Perf-3ms	Interrog	Conj-w   V-Qal-Conseclmperf-1cs   3fs		Art   N-mp	Prep	Conj-w   V-Qal-Conseclmperf-1cs   3fs	

*“to take one's stand”; the Levites were reinstated in their positions*

5977 [e]	5921 [e]		5975 [e]		6908 [e]	430 [e]
'ā-mə-dām.	'al-		wā'a'ā-mi-dēm		wā'eq·bə·šém,	ha'ē-lo·hīm;
עַמְדָּם:	עַל־		וְאָעֲמָדָם		וְאָקְבָּלָם	הָאֱלֹהִים
their place	in		and set them		and I gathered them together	of God
N-msc   3mp	Prep	Conj-w   V-Hifil-Conseclmperf-1cs   3mp		Conj-w   V-Qal-Conseclmperf-1cs   3mp		Art   N-mp

1. “Confront” or “Contend” is rib or rub which means “to strive”, “to contend”.
  - a. This refers to a legal case or a law suit
  - b. Nehemiah is not merely chewing them out and calling them names
  - c. Nehemiah is pressing legal charges (backed up by the Persian court system and the Jewish Law of the Land) to hold the leadership responsible for failure:
    - i. Failure before the Lord
    - ii. Failure before Artaxerxes
2. Haggai had rebuked the people 100 years before for also neglecting the rebuilding of the temple.

13:12 – **Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.**

13:13 – **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.**

1. Nehemiah appointed as treasurers over the storehouses to organize and distribute the tithe:
  - a. Shelemiah the priest
  - b. Zadok the Scribe
  - c. Pedaiah the Levite
  - d. And, assistant Hanan

13:14 – **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.**

1004 [e] be-bét	6213 [e] 'a-sî-tî	834 [e] 'ā-šer	2617 [e] hă-sā-day,	4229 [e] te-mah	408 [e] we'al-	2063 [e] zōt;	5921 [e] 'al-	430 [e] 'ē-lō-hay	li	2142 [e] zā-ke-rāh-
בֵּית	עָשִׂיתִי	אֲשֶׁר	טוֹבוֹתַי	לֹאֲמַחַ	וְאֵל-	זֶאת	עַל-	אֱלֹהֵי	לִי	זְכֹרֵהּ 14
for the house	I have done	that	my good deeds	do wipe out	and not	this	concerning	my God	me	Remember
Prep-b   N-msc	V-Qal-Perf-1cs	Pro-r	N-mpc   1cs	V-Hifil-Imperf.Jus-2ms	Conj-w   Adv	Pro-fs	Prep	N-mpc   1cs	Prep   1cs	V-Qal-Imp-ms   3fs

*hesed* is "covenant love". Nehemiah's good deeds were his response to the covenant relationship he had with YHWH

4929 [e] ū-be-miš-mā-rāw.	430 [e] 'ē-lō-hay
וּבְמִשְׁמָרַי	אֱלֹהֵי
for its services	of my God
Conj-w, Prep-b   N-mpc   3ms	N-mpc   1cs

1. Nehemiah was doing this for the Lord and his hope was in a future reward. Meaning, Nehemiah was not doing this for favor from men and was losing out on position and power in this age for being faithful to God.
2. Nehemiah's strength to obey was reinforced by the fact and the prayer that God would remember and reward him according to his sacrifice and commitment to the plan of God.

## **Sabbath Violated**

13:15 – **In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food.**

1. Out in the countryside of Judah people were not observing the Sabbath
  - a. They were treading grapes on Sabbath
  - b. They were taking product to market on Sabbath
  - c. They were setting up shop in Jerusalem on Sabbath
2. Tyre is about 12 miles north of the Israel's northern border in Phoenicia (Lebanon)

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!**

1. The Phoenicians were seafaring traders with North Africa, Greece, the islands and as far away as Tarshish (Spain) and more.
2. Not only did they Tyrians have fresh fish to sell, they had goods, wares and commodities from all over the Mediterranean world.
3. In many cases The Tyrians were the only source of these goods coming to Judah and Jerusalem from the Sea.
4. The fish would have been sardines either dried, smoked or salted

13:17 – Then I **confronted** the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day?”

1. “Confront” is once again “rib” which refers to a legal case or a law suit against the nobles.
2. “profaning” or “desecrating” means to turn what is sacred, holy and set apart for the Lord into common use for normal, personal, human purposes.
  - a. It does not mean to use it in a “profane” way like the Western world might think of certain media being “profane” (movies, songs, dancing, language, etc.)
  - b. It means to use it in a common way after it has been set apart for the Lord.

13:18 – 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.”

1. The people are repeating the sins of their forefathers from which the nation is just recovering.

13:19 – 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.

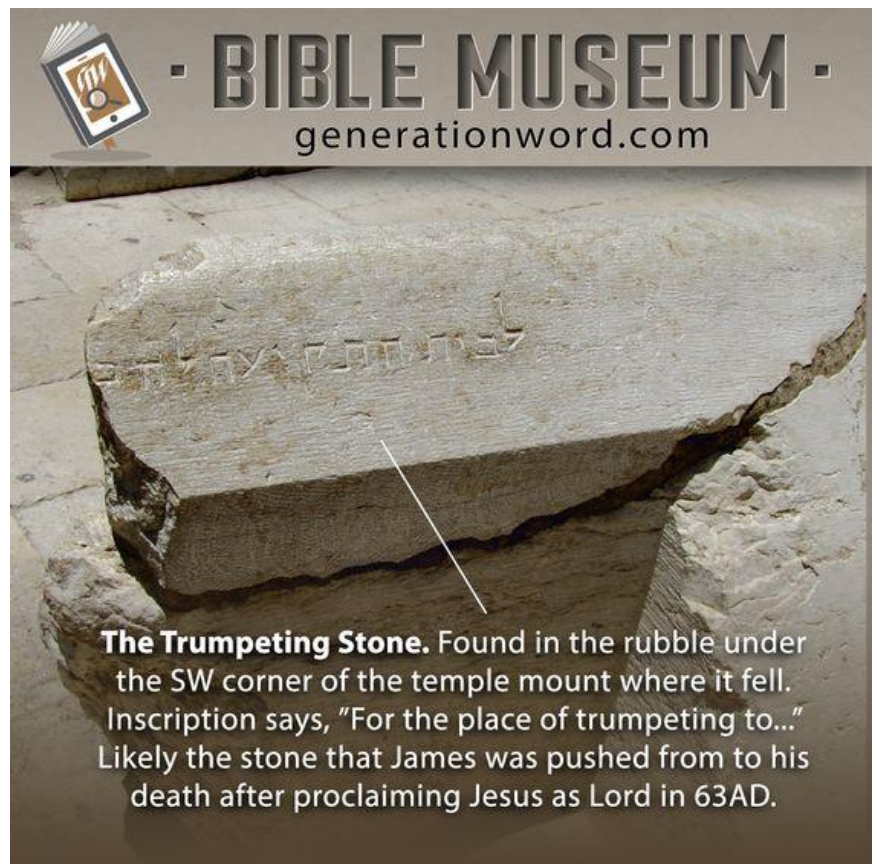
1. Nehemiah enforced the law, but also practically made it impossible to break the law by locking the gates and guarding the gates
1. Days were counted from sunset to sunset (as did Babylon; Egypt counted from sunrise to sunrise.)
2. The priest would announce the beginning of the Sabbath with a trumpet blast

13:20 – Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice.

13:21 – 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.

1. Some tried to set up outside the gates so the Jews would come out to them.
2. Nehemiah threatened physical violence against them if they did it again.
3. Nehemiah was the governor and had Persian power plus Levitical forces to enforce the Law

13:22 – 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.



## Intermarriage with Foreign Women and Children Who Did Not Speak Hebrew

13:23 – In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

1. Women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab:

a. Ammonites worshipped the god Molech, a god that was honored with child sacrifices (Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 23:10, 13)

b. 2 Kings 23:13 tells us what Josiah had to cleanse out of the land because of Solomon's practice of bringing foreign women into marry: *"the king (Josiah) defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites."*

c. Archaeology and inscriptions from Ammon confirm this:

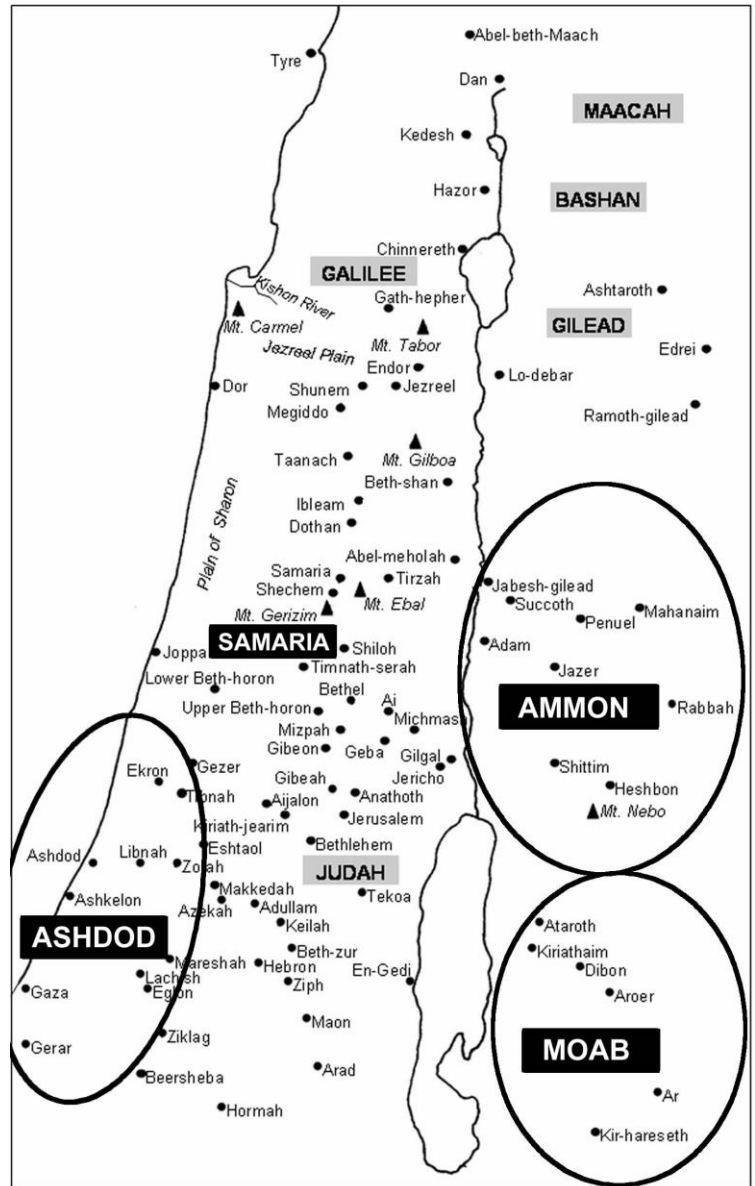
- i. Inscriptions from 800-600 BC honor Milcom which is variant of the name Molech.
- ii. Text from "The Ammonite Citadel Inscription" attest to the children that were offered to Milcom (Molech)

d. Moab worshiped Chemosh with the sacrifice of their children (Num. 21:29; 2 Kings 3:27)

2. Going back to the days of Hosea (760-710 BC) some 330 years before this situation in 430 BC of Nehemiah's day, before Northern Israel was conquered by the Assyrians (722 BC) and Judah was deported by the Babylonians (586 BC), Hosea the prophet had said, "Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not." (Hosea 7:8-9)

3. Malachi was the prophet about this time. The date of Malachi is not set, but it was after Ezra's return and likely during the time of Nehemiah (first or second term). If we place Malachi at 432 BC then Malachi's prophetic ministry would be speaking to the same issues as Nehemiah chapter 13. Malachi addresses these issues and accuses the priests and people:

- a. the priest of not honoring God
- b. the people of unlawful marriages
- c. the people of having given up on the Lord's return
- d. the people of failing to give properly to God



4. Malachi 2:14-16 – “the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? **And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.** So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers[k] his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”
5. The concern is the producing, training and developing the next generation of Jews to partake in the Covenant with YHWH.

**13:24 – 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.**

1. The children of these women were not learning Hebrew, but instead their mother’s native language.
  - a. The children in the streets of Jerusalem and in Judah sounded like foreigners and Gentiles.
2. The problem with this was NOT that the children were bilingual, or spoke a Gentile language, but the obvious fact that if they did not speak Hebrew then:
  - a. most likely they could not read or understand Hebrew
  - b. They did not know or understand the Law of the Hebrews (Word of God)
  - c. They did not keep or follow the Law of Moses
  - d. They did not worship (at least not correctly) on the Temple Mount
3. This generation of parents who were responsible for the recovery of the nation had already given up before the second generation had a chance.

**13:25 – 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.**

<p>376 [e] 'ā·nā·šîm אֲנָשִׁים certain N-mp</p>	<p>1992 [e] mê·hem מֵהֶם some of them Prep-m   Pro-3mp</p>	<p>5221 [e] wā·'ak·keh וְאָכָה and struck Conj-w   V-Hifil-ConseclImperf-1cs</p>	<p>7043 [e] wā·'ā·qal·lēm, וְאָקַלְלֵם and cursed them Conj-w   V-Piel-ConseclImperf-1cs   3mp</p>	<p>5973 [e] 'im·mām עִמָּם with them Prep   3mp</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <p>7378 [e] wā·'ā·rîb וְאָרִיב So I contended Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-1cs</p> </div>		
<p>Meaning "to smite", "beat", "wound"</p>			<p><b>rib or rub</b> meaning "to strive", "contend" including LEGAL, LAWSUIT 4803 [e]</p>				
<p>1323 [e] bē·nō·tê·kem בְּנֹתֵיכֶם your daughters N-fpc   2mp</p>	<p>5414 [e] tit·tə·nū תִּתְּנֵנִי Ye You shall give as wives V-Qal-Imperf-2mp</p>	<p>518 [e] 'im- אִם [saying] not Conj</p>	<p>430 [e] bē·lō·hîm, בְּאֵלֹהֵימֶם by God Prep-b   N-mp</p>	<p>7650 [e] wā·'aš·bî·'ēm וְאָשְׁבִיעֵם and made them swear Conj-w   V-Hifil-ConseclImperf-1cs   3mp</p>	<p>4803 [e] wā·'em·rə·tēm; וְאָרְטֵם and pulled out their hair Conj-w   V-Qal-ConseclImperf-1cs   3mp</p>		
		<p>wə·lā·kem. וְלָכֶם: or yourselves Conj-w   Prep   2mp</p>	<p>1121 [e] lib·nē·kem לְבָנֵיכֶם for your sons Prep-l   N-mpc   2mp</p>	<p>1323 [e] mib·bē·nō·tê·hem, מִבְּנֹתֵיהֶם their daughters Prep-m   N-fpc   3mp</p>	<p>5375 [e] tis·'ū תִּשְׂאוּ take V-Qal-Imperf-2mp</p>	<p>518 [e] wə·'im- וְאִם nor Conj-w   Conj</p>	<p>1121 [e] lib·nē·hem, לְבָנֵיהֶם to their sons Prep-l   N-mpc   3mp</p>

1. Ezra’s response to the same situation in Ezra 9 in the year of his return in 458 BC, just 28 years before 430 BC:

*“After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race[a] has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” **As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.** As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.”*

2. Twenty-eight years after the priest and scribe responded to the intermarrying of the Jews with Gentiles by tearing his garments, pulling hair from his beard and head, and sitting appalled, Nehemiah is faced with the same problem.
  - a. Ezra responded with personal grief demonstrated his own anguish for the failure of the people.
  - b. Nehemiah responds with grief, but demonstrates his anguish on the people for the failure of the people in five ways to demand a change and action to preserve the next generation:
    - i. confronted them
    - ii. cursed them
    - iii. beat some of them
    - iv. pulled out their hair
    - v. made them take an oath
3. The different response to the same problem by Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the Governor is exactly that:
  - a. Ezra was a scribe and a priest leading the people
  - b. Nehemiah was a governor punishing the disobedient and lawbreakers (under Jewish and Persian law)
4. Jesus did both – he wept over Jerusalem, but he also made a whip, cleared the temple and turned over the tables. Both, responses by the very definition are “Christian”!

**13:26 – 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.**

**13:27 – Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”**

1. Nehemiah does not enforce the policy of divorce as set up by Ezra 28 years before
2. As governor Nehemiah could have legally dissolved the marriages by simply calling them illegal or not official.
3. It is possible that (especially in light of Malachi’s sharp and timely stance on divorce) Ezra’s enforcement of divorce in all marriages that involved foreign women solved one problem, but created another problem.
  - a. The wives could be sent away by Ezra

- b. But, what happened to the children? Where did they go? What training did they receive? Jewish or pagan?
- 4. Nehemiah's change in Ezra's approach may have been led by Malachi and his familiar verses:
  - a. ESV – *“For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”* (Malachi 2:16)
  - b. NASB – *“For I hate divorce,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the LORD of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”*

## Priesthood Challenged through Marriage to Sanballat's Daughter

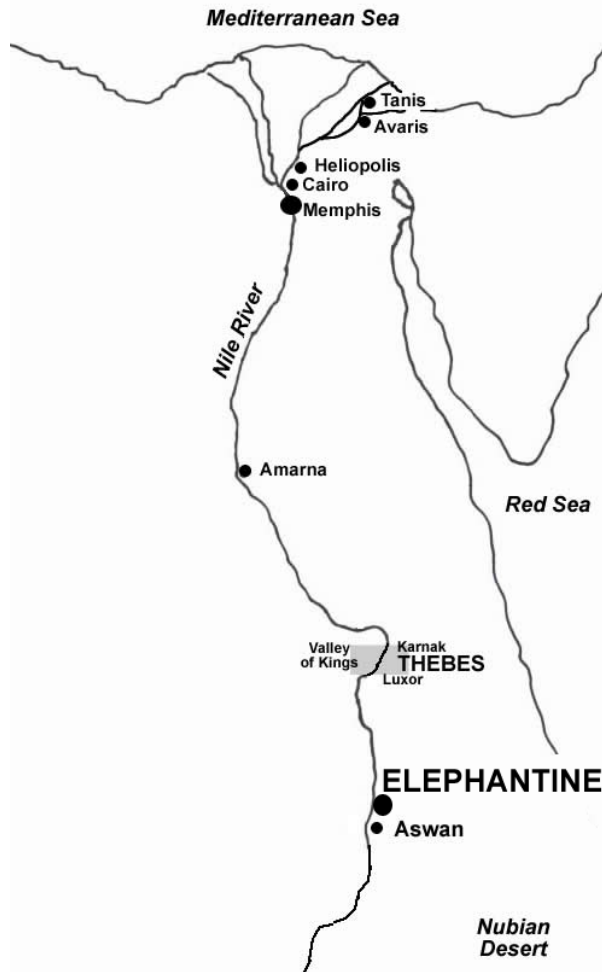
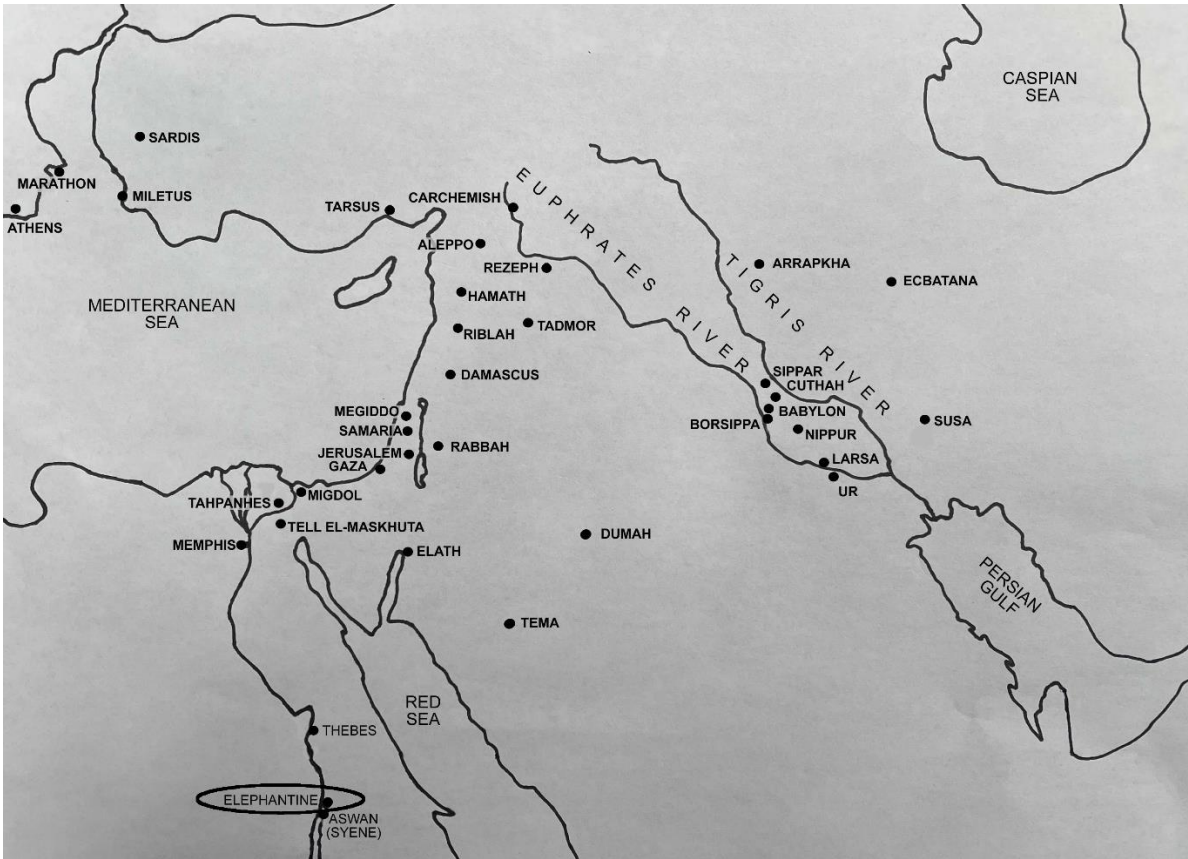
13:28 – **And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me.**

- 1. In 13:4 Eliashib had allied with Tobiah
- 2. In 13:28 a more serious problem and a bigger problem and more serious adversary is presented in the Governor of Samaria.
  - a. The high priest's son Jehoiada had married the daughter of the governor of Samaria
  - b. Sanballat's daughter was the Jewish high priest's daughter-in-law.
  - c. Sanballat the Samaritan and governor of Samaria had married his family into the line of the Jewish high priest
- 3. Sanballat was the Governor of Samaria



- 4. Priests
  - a. 458 BC - Eliashib's grandson Jehohanan was high priest when Ezra came
  - b. **445 BC – Eliashib** was high priest when Nehemiah came to build the walls (Neh. 3:1)
  - c. **430 BC – Jehoiada, son of Eliashib the high priest**, was son-in-law of Sanballat
  - d. **410 BC - Johanan** was high priest in 410 according to Elephantine papyri
- 5. Nehemiah chased the high priest's son away, and we assume his wife went with him back to Sanballat in Samaria.
- 6. Josephus records that Joannes was succeeded as high priest by his son Jaddus and another son married the daughter of Sanballat named Nikaso. Josephus says many other Israelites and priests practiced intermarriage around the time of Alexander the Great's invasion. Alexander entered Jerusalem in 332 BC.





## **Summary of Nehemiah's Work and Closing of Book**

**13:29 – Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.**

**13:30 – Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work;**

**13:31 – and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.**

### **Remember me, O my God, for good.**

1. We remember Nehemiah as the man who rebuilt the walls, but Nehemiah ends his book asking God to remember him as the man who
  - a. “Cleansed them from everything foreign”
  - b. “Established the duties of the priests and Levites”
  - c. “Provided for the wood offering at the appointed times”
  - d. And provided “for the firstfruits”
2. We remember “BUILT”, Nehemiah remembers “CLEANSED”, “ESTABLISHED”, “PROVIDED”
3. Nehemiah would say, “I cleansed, I established, I provided.”