

ZEAL FOR THE LORD: NEHEMIAH 5:1-19

“...during the half-century that I have been a Christian [Nehemiah] has helped me enormously, more perhaps than any other Bible character apart from the Lord Jesus Christ...no one should wonder, therefore, that I now regard him as a particular friend.” – J.I. Packer, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, 29.

I. Review

- A. Nehemiah stirring calls the people to build the wall (“*The God of heaven will make us prosper...*”, Neh 2:20)
- B. The people of God have met opposition from without (“...*they all plotted to come fight against Jerusalem...*”, 4:8) and within (“...*the Jews who lived near them...said to us ten times, ‘You must return to us...*”, 4:12).
- C. Nehemiah’s instinct for prayer and strategic planning propels the work ahead (“*Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, you sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes*”, 4:14).

II. The Outcry of the People: Nehemiah 5:1-13

Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.² For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive.”³ There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.”⁴ And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards.”⁵ Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards.”

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” And I held a great assembly against them⁸ and said to them, “We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!” They were silent and could not find a word to say.⁹ So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?”¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.”¹² Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.¹³ I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said “Amen” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised. (Neh 5:1-13)

1. Who lobbed the first allegation of the “great outcry” (vv. 1-2)? What was the issue? What was the second allegation (vv. 3-5)? What was their worry?
2. What was the third complaint (vv. 4-5)? What was the imminent danger?

Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless. (Deut 28:32)

3. How do these issues strike you as an American reader living in 2009? What issues threaten the church in similar or different ways?

4. What was Nehemiah’s response (Note: not so much for state legislation as church legislation)? How is Nehemiah’s candidness required for the peace of Christ’s church today?
5. What do you think Nehemiah’s symbolic gesture meant to the people? How do we “withhold” from our fellow church members and so threaten the peace and fellowship of the church body?

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10)

6. What is so amazing about the people’s response to Nehemiah’s action (v. 13)? How is true unity in among Christians achieved, particularly in the face of selfish personal interest?

III. The Attitude of Nehemiah: Nehemiah 5:14-19

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. ¹⁵ The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people. (Neh 5:14-19)

1. What did Nehemiah rightfully have access to after he was appointed governor of Jerusalem? Would it have been wrong for Nehemiah to take those things?
2. What Christian principle is Nehemiah exhibiting here? What were the two primary reasons he did this (vv. 15, 18)? Why should we as Christians exhibit this trait more than anyone else we know?

“Meekness is a controlled desire to see the other’s interests advanced ahead of one’s own.” - D.A. Carson

“There is probably no more beautiful quality in a Christian than meekness.” - Sinclair Ferguson

“... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...” (Phil 2:6-7)

*“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. **15** Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. **16** Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (Heb 13:14-16)*

**I will not boast in anything:
No gifts, no power, no wisdom,
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer,
But this I know with all my heart:
His wounds have paid my ransom.**

-Stuart Townend