

NE 5:1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup> Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."

NE 5:3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."

NE 5:4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."

NE 5:6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. <sup>7</sup> I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them <sup>8</sup> and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

NE 5:9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? <sup>10</sup> I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! <sup>11</sup> Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them--the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil."

NE 5:12 "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!"

At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

NE 5:14 Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year--

twelve years--neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. <sup>15</sup> But the earlier governors--those preceding me--placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. <sup>16</sup> Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

NE 5:17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. <sup>18</sup> Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

NE 5:19 Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.

**What we have here is economic crisis.**

Those affected by the economic crisis were (1) the landless, people who worked for others, who were short of food (v. 2); (2) the landowners who were compelled to mortgage their properties (v. 3); (3) those forced to borrow money at exorbitant rates because of oppressive taxation (v. 4); and (4) those forced to sell their children into slavery (v. 5).

**I** The gravity of the situation is emphasised in that the wives joined in the protest (usually women didn't have a voice in that society) as the people ran short of funds and supplies to feed their families. Their complaints were not lodged against foreign authorities who taxed them highly but **against their own fellow countrymen** who were exploiting the poor at a time when both were needed to defend the country. The cry of the oppressed people is a cry to God for justice

**The** Economic conditions forced even those with considerable property to mortgage to the wealthy few.

The rich got richer, the poor poorer. The economic situation was aggravated by drought and famine conditions. In times of dire need the wealthy usually have enough stored up to feed themselves. It is the poor who suffer because of the huge rise in prices caused by the lack of supplies. Here we see an issue of basic greed and selfishness. A basic taking advantage of a situation to get rich and powerful. As I said it is not the foreign ruler in power but the local, fellow countryman, who is probably related to them!!!!

**The king taxed them for sure.** On taxes see [Ezr 4:13, 20; 6:8; 7:24](#). It is estimated that the Persian king collected the equivalent of twenty million darics a year in taxes. Little of this was returned to the local areas. Rather, it was the custom to melt down the gold and silver and to pour it into jars that were then broken and the bullion stored. At Susa alone

Alexander the Great found nine thousand talents of coined gold (about 270 tons) and forty thousand talents of silver (about 1,200 tons) stored up as bullion. As coined money was increasingly taken out of circulation, inflation became rampant. The acquisition of land by the Persians and its alienation from production helped produce a 50 percent rise in prices. Yeh, he is greedy too but

#### **Greed seems to be contagious.**

While the king got richer, others got greedy. This has an impact on the normal people on the farm and in the street.

5 In times of economic distress, families would borrow funds, using members of the family as collateral. If a man could not repay the loan and its interest, his daughters, sons, wife, or even the man himself could be sold into bondage. A Hebrew who fell into debt would serve his creditor as "a hired servant" ([Lev 25:39-40](#)). He was to be released in the seventh year ([Dt 15:12-18](#)), unless he chose to stay voluntarily. The ironic tragedy of the situation for the exiles was that at least in Mesopotamia, where they had been in exile their families were together. Now because of dire economic necessities, their children were being sold into slavery.

#### **Nehemiahs reaction**

**NE 5:6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.**

7 After reflecting on the issue, Nehemiah calls a meeting with the "nobles and officials." "Usury" means to impose a burden or claim for repayment of debt. The OT passages prohibiting the giving of loans at interest ([Ex 22:25-27](#); [Lev 25:35-37](#); [Dt 23:19-20](#); [24:10-13](#)) were not intended to prohibit commercial loans but rather the charging of interest to the poor so as to make a profit from the helplessness of one's neighbors. And v10

In view of the gravity of the situation, Nehemiah urged the creditors to relinquish their rights to repayment with interest. (v10)

Verse 9 states it plainly.

**NE 5:9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?"**

**What can we expect God to punish us for?**

For doing this you should expect God to punish you.

9 Failure to treat others, especially fellow believers, with compassion is an insult to our Maker and a blot on our testimony. How does this affect us?? Well get to that in a minute.

11 The interest being charged was "the hundredth part," i.e., one percent per month. Let's work it out. You need a loan to pay the taxes. On a normal wage these days we'll say for round figures benefit \$80,000 you pay say \$300 tax a week. Your loan will need to be \$10,000 roughly 1% a month interest = \$100 but you are only paying \$400 a week tax. I'm not sure that is worked out quite right but that is how it was explained in one of the commentaries. American commentary, so I'm not sure how their system works. They were ripping people off big time.

#### **Nehemiah's example – leadership on show.**

14 Nehemiah served his first term as governor for twelve years before being recalled to the king's court (13:6), after which he returned for a second term of indeterminate length. Provincial governors normally assessed the people in their provinces for their support, e.g., "food allotted to the governor." But Nehemiah bent over backwards and sacrificed even what was normally his due to serve as an example to the people. This is interesting. He placed no burden on the people, He looked after himself, paid to be their leader. Paul did a similar thing<sup>7</sup>

**For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,<sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. - 2Th 3:8**

Interesting – they both tried not to burden people. Servant leadership, leadership on show. We should aspire to lead and not burden our people. Not burden the other people in the congregation but serve and support.

Perhaps part of the reason we don't have the deacons we require is because of this principle - we don't want to serve, we just want to lead. Mm, I'll have to think that through a bit more.

16 Nehemiah's behavior as governor was guided by principles of **service** rather than by opportunism--unusual in the ancient world.

16 Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.  
(Interesting – our leaders are called deacons – which means what – servants.)

Commented [1]:

#### **Providing for others – at your expense. – leadership / service on show.**

Look how Nehemiah demonstrate this principle.

17. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant

**supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.**

Commented [2]:

The meat listed here would perhaps be sufficient to provide one meal for up to 800 persons, including the 150 Jews and officials mentioned in v. 17.

When Marianne and I first had Jackson we experienced a similar thing. The people at the church we were at feed us for a week at night. So we could adjust to this being parents thingy. The leadership of the church organised it. That was leadership and service on show. I see this church do the same thing when people are in crisis.

#### **How do we continue to apply it?**

Well it is probably individual and different for us all.

Serving people and expecting nothing in return is what it is about.

Doing things for their benefit not because we want to look good.

This is not about tithing or giving to church or anything like that. It is about serving and supporting people. Assisting people in need. You need to see those people and react with service and leadership. I see some people come in and ask for a hand out. Sometimes we have the resources to help, sometimes we don't. But that's people who come in – you have contacts each week that I will never see. They don't come in here, but they know you. That is up to you to react to individually.

It isn't only about financial service – it is about life support. Helping people to do life. And none of us as christians are exempt. We are not to burden but to assist, that's how we apply this passage. Now, lets do it.