

A Call to Faithful Stewardship

Nehemiah 5

(Class starts at ~10:55a)

Theme of Nehemiah

Rebuilding of the Wall

He whose ear listens to the life-giving
reproof Will dwell among the wise. He
who neglects discipline despises
himself, But he who listens to reproof
acquires understanding.

Proverbs 15:31–32

NASB95

Whoever loves discipline loves
knowledge, But he who hates reproof
is stupid.

Proverbs 12:1

NASB95

Theme of Nehemiah 5

God Has Provided Everything
to His People as His Stewards
for His Purposes

I. The Outcry

Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, “We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live.” There were others who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine.” Also there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards.

Nehemiah 5:1–5

NASB95

“Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others.”

Nehemiah 5:1–5

NASB95

and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:4

NASB95

II. The Response

Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, “You are exacting usury, each from his brother!” Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. I said to them, “We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?” Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. Again I said, “The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? “And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain.

Nehemiah 5:6–13

NASB95

Please, let us leave off this usury. “Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them.” Then they said, “We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say.” So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. I also shook out the front of my garment and said, “Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen!” And they praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah 5:6–13

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It was not unlawful for Jews to loan money to one another, but they were not to act like money lenders and charge interest (Deut. 23:19–20). They were to treat one another with love even in the matter of taking security (24:10–13; Ex. 22:25–27) or making a brother a servant (Lev. 25:35–46). Both the people and the land belonged to the Lord, and He would not have anybody using either one for personal gain.

Be Determined

‘Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. ‘Do not take usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you. ‘You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain. ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. ‘If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave’s service.

Leviticus 25:35–43

NASB95

‘He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. ‘He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. ‘For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt; they are not to be sold in a slave sale. ‘You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God.

Leviticus 25:35–43

NASB95

Both the people and the land belonged to the Lord, and He would not have anybody using either one for personal gain.

Be Determined

Usury in its purest sense was the charging of interest for a loan. An individual was forbidden to charge a fellow Israelite interest on a loan (see comments on Ex 22:25; Lev 25:38; and Deut 15:1–11). It was permissible, however, to charge a foreigner interest. Interest is mentioned as being permissible in the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.). However, these were commercial loans, and there was no counterpart in Israel. An Israelite loan was considered charity and was done to help a needy fellow countryman, not to help a merchant build up his business.

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament

Hebrew term used here, *arivoh*, has legal-judicial significance. The prophets often used this term to describe Yahweh's covenantal lawsuit against those guilty of breaking His laws (e.g., Isa 3:13; Jer 2:9; Hos 4:1; Mic 6:1).

Faithlife Study Bible

And do not be conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of
your mind, so that you may prove
what the will of God is, that which is
good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

NASB95

III. The Example

If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things.

1 Corinthians 9:11–18

NASB95

And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:11–18

NASB95

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1 Corinthians 4:1–2

NASB95

In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1 Corinthians 4:2

NASB95

Discussion Questions

1. How can we be tempted to conformity of the world around us in rejection of God's law? (Compare and contrast with the Jews who took interest from their countrymen and Nehemiah who did not act like the governors before him.)
2. What attitude and actions can we take to cultivate an environment that is open to reproof that we might walk more faithfully?
3. Share ways that we can be faithful stewards of what God has provided just like Nehemiah.