

Nehemiah 5

King James Version (KJV)

5 And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.

²For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. (These people were city dwellers, working full time to rebuild the wall)

³Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. (These were the farmers going through hardship because of the famine. The rich Jews <nobles and leaders> were taking advantage of their own people through usury <high interest loans> and overtaxing)

⁴There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. (The combined usury and taxes were driving them to bankruptcy)

(Nothing changes. The same thing happens today, where the rich get richer through corruption and usury, while the poor get poorer)

⁵Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards. (They are forced into bondage because of usury that they can never repay)

⁶And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. (Nehemiah was not corrupt. He stood for right)

⁷Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. (Nehemiah was calling them out, with the truth)

⁸And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. (When confronted by the people with the facts, they had no defense. They were guilty of usury and corruption)

⁹ Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

¹⁰ I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. (Trying to reason with them. As governor, Nehemiah could have taxed the people. He didn't because they were working full time rebuilding the wall, at his request. Therefore it would have been wrong to tax them. These nobles did it regardless)

¹¹ Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. (Give the people back their properties and good that you grabbed through usury)

¹² Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. (Even the priests were guilty of usury. He also brought them in to bring God as a witness to the promise he was asking of them. They and the nobles probably agreed to return everything because they know that as governor, Nehemiah could have lowered the boom on them and overtax them into poverty)

¹³ Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise. (Let God financially destroy anyone who refuses to end the usury and return the stolen property to the rightful owners)

(I shook my lap = men wore skirts. They would sometimes carry things by lifting the front of their skirt to put things in. By shaking the lap, Nehemiah was indication that they lose what they had taken from the people. If they refused, then God would shake them out of His lap)

¹⁴ Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. (Nehemiah didn't take a salary from the people or from the king, because he knew that the people could not afford to pay it. He lived on his own savings. That's the sign of a good leader)

¹⁵ But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. (The previous governors took everything that they could get their hands on – bad leaders)

¹⁶ Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. (He also supported all his servants with his own money)

¹⁷ Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. (He was supporting 150 people)

¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. (The people were living in poverty, while rebuilding the wall. He didn't tax them any money)

¹⁹ Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. (Let God be the judge of everything that I did)