

March 2, 2025

## Nehemiah 5:1-13

Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." <sup>4</sup> And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. <sup>7</sup> 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 them <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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? <sup>10</sup> Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

Scriptures for further study:

Galatians 6:10

Philippians 2:6-8

Galatians 3:13

“To undertake work on the wall, the people had taken a step of faith. They left their normal trades, crafts and professions, farms and small holdings, for a period of two months, and the sacrifice was now beginning to cut deeper into home and family life...greedy merchants used the opportunity to inflate the price of grain... moreover the Persian king’s taxes on their fields and vineyards added to the pressure...”

-Raymond Brown



### **The Hand of God in Our Fellowship Nehemiah 5:1-13**

**BIG IDEA:** The more my heart is moved by the One shaken out for my welfare, the more ready my hands are to seek the welfare of others.

#### **OUTLINE**

1. Verses 1-5 – Conflict
2. Verses 6-11 – Confrontation
3. Verses 12-13 – Conviction

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These "Sermon Discussion Questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Have you received a lavish kindness, gift, or act of service from someone (other than Jesus) whose gift from the heart showed that they thought more about you than themselves?
2. For background, read Deuteronomy 15:12–15 and 24:10–15. What is the issue in Nehemiah 5:1–5, and how does Deuteronomy shed light on it?
3. Read verses 6–11. Note the various stages of Nehemiah's response. Which do you find most thought-provoking or convicting, and why?
4. Refer to 5:12–13. Think about how the people responded to Nehemiah. Read Philippians 2:6–8 and Galatians 3:13. What do these verses show about how Jesus thought about himself and others?
5. In light of what Jesus did, what change needs to happen in your heart to move you to be known and to know the needs of those in your church family and to be active in seeking their welfare?

"Relations between God's covenant people should never be treated purely as business transactions, but rather as spiritual service that is pleasing to God and blessed by Him."

-Mervin Brenneman

"God does good to all, but in an especial manner he is good to his own servants...we are to have a special regard to the household of faith, or to those who profess the same common faith, and are members of the same body of Christ, with us: though others are not to be excluded, yet these are to be preferred."

-Matthew Henry

***Praise to Jesus.*** Today, praise Jesus, that though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8), so that you may enjoy the eternal riches of being known as a child of God and united into a family that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

***Repentance through Jesus.*** Spend time in prayer. Confess and repent for keeping folks in your church family at arm's length. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to confess neglect of priority and preference of your church family. Confess the ways that you have viewed relationships with brothers and sisters in the church as business transactions or projects rather than as family.

***Consecration for Jesus.*** May the Gospel move you to great things and more by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let your heart be moved more and more by the one who became a curse so that the blessing of never being alone, in terms of fellowship with God and other believers, would be an eternal reality for you now. Willingly walk alongside other people in the church despite what the cost may be.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Nehemiah deals with injustices in the community. The paint hardly dries on the canvas of the prior chapter's portrait of unity in the face of external opposition before the sketch for the next painting begins. The unity revealed in the two previous chapters quickly transitions to complaints from some members of the body that others within the community are exploiting current events for economic advantage. Nehemiah takes measures to end the exploitation of the weak in the community by its powerful members, who are ignoring God's commandments.

-ESV Expository Commentary and ESV Study Bible

## FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. Read 5:1-5 Who is involved in this conflict? What is the issue causing the conflict? (This passage deals with a conflict within the covenant community. The conflict involved a shortage of food due to the work on the wall taking away workers from the fields. It led to some children being enslaved.)
2. How did Nehemiah react in 5:6-9? (He was “very angry” because the Jewish nobles were charging interest to their fellow Jews. This broke God’s Law given to them in Deuteronomy 23:19-20. In 5:9, Nehemiah reminds these Jews that they are hurting their fellow Jews, and they also are hurting God’s name among the unbelieving neighbors. We are made to bring God glory (Isaiah 43:1-7). Talk with your children about how our sin hurts us, those we sin against, and brings dishonor to the name of God.)
3. How did Nehemiah bring this conflict to an end in 5:10-13? (He called the people to swear that they would stop charging interest and restore things according to God’s covenant Law.)
4. Read Luke 19:1-10 and discuss the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. What did repentance look like for Zacchaeus? How has the grace of Jesus led you to repentance and good works? (Zacchaeus was so moved by the amazing grace of Jesus to save him that he swore that he would restore the money he stole from his fellow Jews and even give more money back. These good works of Zacchaeus were not to earn Christ’s grace. They were because of Christ’s grace.)

Scriptures for further study:

Matthew 6:9

Romans 3:23

Romans 11:36

Psalm 67:1-3

Luke 19:1-10

Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 101

Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 190

## FOR STUDENTS

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-5. What was the main conflict among God's people, and why was it such a big issue?
2. In verses 6-9, how did Nehemiah respond when he heard about the injustice? Why was he so angry, and what does this teach us about how we should respond when we see injustice or wrongdoing?
3. Read Nehemiah 5:10-13. How did Nehemiah bring the conflict to an end? What does this show about the importance of living according to God's Word in our relationships with others?
4. Read Luke 19:1-10. How did Zacchaeus respond when he encountered Jesus? What does his repentance teach us about how we should respond when we recognize sin in our lives?
5. How has the grace of Jesus led you to repentance and good works in your own life? Are there any areas where you need to make things right with others because of past mistakes?

## FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. We have seen already in the Nehemiah story how the Israelites faced real external threats. But here, the challenges and conflicts come from within the people of God. As Christians, remember that our enemy (Satan) will often switch tactics. If one tactic fails, he will try another.

QUESTION: Examine your own church, your own family, your own Christian organization. Do you detect any current threats by the enemy? What can you do to effectively deal with any internal problems?

2. Nehemiah's reaction to the issues of poverty, usury, debt, enslavement (etc.) is one of anger (verse 6). But before he takes action, he first "ponders these things in his mind" (verse 7).

QUESTION: When is it right for us to feel anger towards a situation? And how can we ensure that the way we communicate that anger is appropriate?

3. This passage might call for us to do some of our own heart-searching and life evaluation.

QUESTION: In particular, are there any ways we may be taking advantage of other people, especially other believers? Are we perhaps seeing our brothers and sisters in Christ more as business opportunities or merely for what we can get out of them? Is it more transactional than relational? Is there any way in which we might be leveraging our personal relationships for personal profit?

4. In verse 10, Nehemiah says, "I am...also lending the people money and grain." Some scholars believe Nehemiah is confessing his own sins and shortcomings here. Other scholars believe Nehemiah is holding himself up as a positive example of how to lend money but without taking advantage of others in doing so.

QUESTION: In either event, how is Nehemiah acting in a way that is noteworthy and exemplary?

5. Nehemiah calls upon the people to "immediately" (v.11) take action to correct their unjust practices and make restitution, and then "promise" to never do so again (v.12).

QUESTION: What can we learn from this story about how repentance should work?

## The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



*The Ancient of Days*, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)



## Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)