



### Time to Reflect

- In what ways are the poor exploited in our twenty-first century world?
- How can we follow Nehemiah's example and demonstrate faithfulness when faced with significant challenges?

Last week our attention was, once again, drawn to the reality of opposition and we reflected on some leadership lessons from the life and example of Nehemiah. This week we see how Nehemiah led with justice and love. As he encountered selfishness and hardness of heart, Nehemiah responded with heart-felt love and compassion.

**“When the Enemy fails in his attacks from the outside, he then begins to attack from within; and one of his favourite weapons is selfishness. If he can get us thinking only about ourselves and what we want, then he will win the victory before we realise that he is even at work.”**

(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p71)

### Specifics

- There is much recorded in this week's passage and we can establish three main sections.
- 1. A Great Outcry (v1-5)**
    - (v1) tells us that the “...men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews.” This outcry was caused by the development of a desperate economic situation and it became so bad that even the wives (who usually kept silent) joined the protest.
    - As we look at the opening five verses of our passage it is clear that four different groups of people were involved in the crisis.
      - a) People who owned no land but needed food (v2). There was a famine and the people were hungry, so they called out to Nehemiah for help.
      - b) Landowners who mortgaged their property in order to buy food (v3). We get the sense that there was inflation of prices and this, combined with rising debts, proved disastrous.
      - c) People who entered debt in order to pay taxes (v4). The Persian king received a fortune in taxes and little of this money benefitted the local provinces.
      - d) Wealthy Jews who exploited their brothers and sisters for financial gain. This was not permitted under the Mosaic Law (Deut. 23:19-20).
    - The situation in Jerusalem was nothing sort of desperate. Greed was clearly evident and the poor were being exploited. This led to a great outcry.
    - Warren Wiersbe reminds us, “God has a special concern for the poor and will not hold those guiltless who take advantage of them.”<sup>1</sup>
  - 2. A Great Assembly (v6-13)**
    - Nehemiah heard the great outcry of the people (v6) and he responded to it with true leadership.

<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah* (David. C. Cook, 1992), p73.

- In the first instance, Nehemiah was angry with what was happening (v6). This was not the flaring up of his temper but rather the expression of righteous anger. Nehemiah was appalled at what was taking place.
- Wiersbe offers a helpful insight. **“Nehemiah was not a politician who asked, ‘What is popular?’ or a diplomat who asked, ‘What is safe?’ but a true leader who asked, ‘What is right?’<sup>2</sup>”**
- It is important for us to realise that the rebuilding of the wall didn’t create these problems but the project did reveal them.
- In (v7) we see how Nehemiah reflected on the problems that he encountered. We can be assured that he would have sought God, as he did so often before, and he put his head and heart together.
- Nehemiah got control of his emotions and then he proceeded to take action (v7-11). Note how his rebuke of the exploiters appealed to their love, was based on the Word of God and reminded them of God’s purposes for Israel.
- He also reminded the exploiters that they were supposed to offer a positive witness to their Gentile neighbours (v9). St. Paul issued a similar challenge to the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 6:1, 6).
- Once again, we also see how Nehemiah led by example (v10-11). He was lending money to the poor but he was not charging interest. Nehemiah practiced what he preached.
- The response to Nehemiah’s challenge was that this great assembly offered a collective ‘Amen’ and engaged in corporate worship (v13).
- Wiersbe reflects on this and he writes, **“The great assembly was not an ‘economic summit’; it was a worship service where Nehemiah had lifted a financial problem to the highest possible level. God’s people need to follow his example and deal with every problem in the light of the will of God as declared in the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>”**

### 3. A Great Example (v14-19)

- In this study series we have been consistently reminded that Nehemiah modelled faithfulness. This week we clearly see that he put the welfare of others ahead of personal gain.
- During his time as governor he used his privileges to help others and he sought no personal advancement. Wiersbe brilliantly suggests, **“Nehemiah never read Philippians 2:1-13, but he certainly practiced it.<sup>4</sup>”**
- Nehemiah devoted himself to the work that God called him to (v16). He was not just an advisor or an observer. Nehemiah was actively involved in the rebuilding of the wall.
- He never hid behind his position or status, and he paid for his own food and shared it with others (v17-18).
- Yet the greatest attribute of Nehemiah, as recorded in this week’s passage, is actually revealed in the final verse (v19). He sought to help others and bring glory to God. Nehemiah is a wonderful example of faithfulness and humility.
- As we conclude our reflections on Nehemiah 5, there are some final conclusions for us to take away.
- In our journey of life, and especially as we seek to be faithful to God and His call, we can expect problems to arise. The life and example of Nehemiah encourages us to confront problems courageously and in keeping with God’s Word.
- Finally, we need to be positive and see in every problem an opportunity for the Lord to work.

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Determined: Nehemiah*, p73.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p78.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p78.