

RESTORING THE BROKEN

A Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

Read Nehemiah 5:1-13.

1. Skim back over chapter 4, where the Israelites faced an external threat from the peoples of the surrounding regions. Who does Nehemiah call “the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people” (4:14) to fight for? (4:14)
2. As chapter 5 begins, we see that some of those that were worth fighting for are now threatened not by outsiders, but by those charged with fighting for them. What are the three types of troubles that are plaguing these people? (vv. 2-5)
3. Famine and the king’s taxation are mentioned as “contributing factors [to the people’s troubles], but the real problem...is that the wealthier Jews had been exploiting those who were less well off.” Just how desperate has the situation become for some of the Jews? (v. 5)
4. How does Nehemiah respond emotionally to the situation brought up by his countrymen? (v. 6)

Even though Nehemiah is in an intense emotional state, what is the first step he takes before he acts? (v. 7a)

5. Nehemiah is angered when he hears of the plight of the poor and vulnerable in his community. We sometimes think of anger as an ungodly emotion, but as David Powlison writes, anger has a place in the life of a Christian: “Anger is the fighting emotion. Anger is the justice emotion. Anger is the deliver-the-oppressed-from-evil emotion. It stems from love for the needy. All of us come wired with a sense of justice.”² Take a minute to stop and think about when you get angry. How often is your anger about injustice against the vulnerable?

6. What would Nehemiah have known about God's instruction to his people concerning lending? (Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 15:7-11; 24:10-13)

7. What charge does Nehemiah bring against the nobles and officials? (v. 7b)
8. What Nehemiah reveals in verse 8 is far worse than charging interest against fellow Jews. What grave sin does he confront the nobles and officials with?

Think about the families in verses 5 and 8 whose children have been sold into slavery. How you would feel if you were in this situation?

Brothers or Brokers?

“The OT passages...prohibiting the giving of loans at interest were not intended to prohibit commercial loans but rather the charging of interest to the impoverished so as to make a profit from the helplessness of one’s neighbors.”³ The nobles and officials in Nehemiah 5 are ignoring the plight and poverty of their brothers and countrymen so that they can pretend that the loans constitute business deals and thus that they are within their rights to charge interest. “The lenders were behaving like pawnbrokers--and harsh ones at that--instead of like brothers.”⁴


9. What does Nehemiah demand these nobles and officials do in response to his charges against them? (vv. 9-11)
10. Even though the nobles and officials agree to do as Nehemiah has said, what further step does Nehemiah take? (v. 12b)

Why do you think Nehemiah shakes out his robes in verse 13? Do you think he trusts these leaders?

Read Nehemiah 5:14-19.

11. We already know that Nehemiah was a leader sent by the king to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (2:5-8). What office do we now find out he was appointed to by King Artaxerxes? (v. 14)

12. a. To what rights is Nehemiah entitled with this governmental position? (vv. 14-15)

- b. Why does he not demand his rights? (v. 18b) ( * 1 Cor. 9:1-18)

- c. How are we as Christians to view our rights? (1 Cor. 10:23-24; Gal. 5:13)

13. Nehemiah's generous hospitality is not motivated by a desire to impress those around him. Who does Nehemiah want to notice his care of his people? (vv. 15b, 19)

14. Skim back through this chapter and your answers to question 6. Nehemiah was living out not only the letter of the law but also the generous spirit of it. What is to inform and empower how we live out our lives? (Prov. 31:8-9; Phil. 2:3-7; 1 Jn. 3:16-18)

This study has been adapted and expanded with permission from a study of the same name by Bridge Community Church, Phila., PA.

 * For Further Study

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Nehemiah: an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 61.

² David Powlison, *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2016), 63.

³ Edwin Yamauchi, "Ezra, Nehemiah" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 Kings–Job*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 708.

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 96.