



Nehemiah 5

DEALING WITH INSIDE CONFLICTS

Up to this point Nehemiah's challenges as a spiritual leader focused primarily on those outside of Judah. But before the walls were finally rebuilt, he encountered the most difficult and intense kind of problem almost every spiritual leader has to face sometime—problems within. ...As with all internal conflicts, they must be resolved—and as soon as possible. If they're not, they'll get worse. In Israel's case, if Nehemiah had not faced this problem head-on, it could have scuttled the whole building project and would have spelled victory for Israel's enemies. Worse yet, it would have brought reproach on the name of the Lord.

—Gene Getz

The task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was making substantial progress. All the people were involved...and all were working hard. Even in the midst of fear, discouragement, threats, and opposition, the people remained focused on the task. But times were tough for many families working on the wall and soon Nehemiah faced perhaps his biggest challenge—mistreatment and conflict among his own people.

THE WIDE OUTCRY AMONG THE PEOPLE (5:1-5)

The work on the wall was a noble task but it stretched people to their limits, particularly the wives who were struggling to care for their children and provide food on the table. Families were forced to sell everything they had in order to survive.

There were four major contributing factors to the crisis:

1. _____ families.
2. _____ of food.
3. _____ taxes from the king.
4. _____ interest from money-lenders.

THE WISE RESPONSE OF NEHEMIAH (5:6-13)

Nehemiah was focused on the wall but he did not ignore this problem. It had to be addressed. Nehemiah was also angry at the injustice but he did not respond in anger. Instead he “took _____ in his heart” and came up with the solution.

In this chapter the enemies and the city walls recede from view to reveal a more subtle problem. Here the menace is hunger and exploitation, and the structure at risk is the community itself.

—Derek Kidner

The economic pressures created by the rebuilding program may have brought to light problems long simmering that had to be solved before work could proceed.

—Edwin Yamauchi

True justice is...expressed in acts of mercy and compassion, particularly for those who are destitute (widows, orphans, aliens and the poor). Real justice, then, involves the application of power and influence to other-centered concerns.

—Kenneth Boa

Serious thought (5:7). Hebrew, *malak*, “to counsel oneself; to give oneself advice” (Swindoll).

Nehemiah's anger was directed at selfishness, greed, and insensitivity. People were hurting and suffering—and those who should have been the most compassionate were the most guilty of exploitation.

—Gene Getz

Nehemiah's Response:

1. He focused on the one problem that could be remedied—the charging of _____ on loans made by the wealthy.
2. He dealt with the issue _____.
3. He confronted them with the _____ of their actions in light of the fear of God, the needs of their brethren, and their witness to those around them.
 - Exodus 22:25-27 (cf. Deut. 23:19-20)
 - Leviticus 25:35-38
4. He called them to stop charging interest (getting profit from the crisis) and to restore all the money and possessions they received from their money-lending _____.

The Wealthy's Response: _____

The People's Response: _____

THE WILLING GENEROSITY OF NEHEMIAH (5:14-19)

As governor, Nehemiah set the example of generosity. He used his power and resources for the good of the people. Why? Because...

- He _____ God.
- He _____ the people.

A FEW PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY

- Relationships are the _____ priority (Mk. 12:28-32).
- Conflict must be addressed _____ (Prov. 17:14).
- Conflict must be handled _____ (Matt. 18:15-20).
- Grace recipients are to be grace _____ (2 Cor. 8-9).

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. —Edward Neufeld

Hundredth part of the money (5:11). "Interest at a rate of 1% per month or 12% per year" (Ryrie Study Bible).

In those days people kept some of their personal belongings in the folds of their garments. We may call it the pocket of the gown. Nehemiah emptied the pocket before the people...to signify that, if they should fail to keep the promise, they would be shaken out in the same manner and they would have nothing left. —F. Charles Fensham

Walls against enemies are useless if walls between God's people are already erected.

Few things are sapping the strength of the church of Jesus Christ more than the unreconciled state of so many believers. So many have matters deeply imbedded in their craws, like iron wedges forced between themselves and other Christians. —Jay Adams

How people deal with conflict shows you the kind of people they are. —Stephen Moyer

A long dispute means that both parties are wrong. —Voltaire

Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means. —Ronald Reagan