

Nehemiah 5:1-19 – Study Leader’s Questions

Internal Problems, Nehemiah 5:1-5

1. *What did some Jews claim other Jews had done? What problems resulted?*
2. *How can we balance the needs of our families and the needs of the church with the needs of the wider world?*
3. *Why do you think that Nehemiah had the boldness to take a stand against the leaders in the way that he did?*
4. *In what ways is God’s concern for hurting people revealed in this passage?*

Nehemiah Responds, Nehemiah 5:6-9

5. *How did Nehemiah react when he heard (Nehemiah 5:6)? Is anger always wrong?*
6. *What Old Testament Scriptures had these Jews violated?*
7. *What steps did Nehemiah take to deal with the situation (Nehemiah 5:7-9)?*
8. *Why was the conduct of the Jews bad at this point in the story (Nehemiah 5:9)?*

Nehemiah’s Example, Nehemiah 5:10-19

9. *What example did Nehemiah set (Nehemiah 5:8, 10)?*
10. *What did he tell the erring Jews to do (Nehemiah 5:11)? What did the people agree to do, and how did Nehemiah respond (Nehemiah 5:12, 13)?*
11. *What had Nehemiah done to help ease the people’s burden (Nehemiah 5:14-15, 18)? Why is a good example important to God’s people?*

Further Thought and Consideration

List and explain passages showing what the New Testament church should do when members sin.

List and explain passages showing the need for repentance and restitution.

Nehemiah 5:1-19 – Answers to Questions

See Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* pp 237-243 and the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 700-701 for detailed comments.

Internal Problems, Nehemiah 1-5

1. *What did some Jews claim other Jews had done? What problems resulted?*

They ***“the nobles, and the rulers”*** Nehemiah 5:7 in particular, had acquired lands and vineyards from their Jewish brethren as security for loans, for which usury was being charged illegally and also purchased their sons and daughters as bond servants, not hired servants. The Jews affected were, understandably, grieving over their losses and despairing of any relief from their plight i.e. ***“neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards”*** Nehemiah 5:5. It appeared that no end was in sight.

Their despair typified that of Israel in the End Times.

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts” Ezekiel 37:11.

The encouragement for the Old Testament saint and indeed for the New Testament saint is that the end will come and it will be good, according to God's purposes.

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” Jeremiah 29:11.

2. *How can we balance the needs of our families and the needs of the church with the needs of the wider world?*

Paul and the Lord Himself give practical guidelines, with respect to priority, prosperity, purpose and poverty.

Priority – the family is first

“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” 1 Timothy 5:8.

Prosperity – the gift is proportionate

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:” 2 Corinthians 8:12-13.

Purpose – the gift is appropriate

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.

Poverty – the gift is considerate

“For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always” Mark 14:7. The Lord would have had in mind Deuteronomy 15:11 ***“For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.”***

“Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do” Galatians 2:10.

Practically speaking, the above scriptures may have wide applicability. This is one reason for giving to charitable organisations such as the Royal British Legion and St Dunstan’s. Gifts made by post can have tracts enclosed.

Though applying to the local church in particular, note also the admonition from James 2:15-17.

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

3. Why do you think that Nehemiah had the boldness to take a stand against the leaders in the way that he did?

Nehemiah was not guilty of the wrong-doing himself. See Nehemiah 5:7- 9.

“Then 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. And 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. 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?”

Nehemiah checked out his own life and actions and then he uses the term “Ye,” not “We” as found in Nehemiah 5:12. “The nobles, and the rulers” Nehemiah 5:7 appear to have been exacting usury for “borrowed money for the king’s tribute” Nehemiah 5:4, which was forbidden under the Law of Moses, Exodus 22:25. See Question 6.

“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.”

See remarks under Question 9 on “the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them” Nehemiah 5:11, which appears to have been a legitimate exaction because Nehemiah did no wrong but he includes himself in the exaction of “money and corn” when he states “I pray you, let us leave off this usury” Nehemiah 5:10. “The hundredth part” may have precedence with respect to “a tenth part of the tithe” Numbers 18:26. See also Leviticus 27:30, 32, Numbers 18:24 with respect to tithing and Genesis 14:20 and Hebrews 7:2, 4 with respect to the tithe as a tenth. The lesson would be that privilege is very likely to be abused. See Numbers 16:9-11, 22:18 and Jude 11 “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” with respect to real problem, which is greed. Note Paul’s warnings in Ephesians 4:19 against “uncleanness with greediness” and in 1 Timothy 3:3, 8 against being “greedy of filthy lucre.” As Solomon states in Proverbs 28:20, with respect to both Nehemiah and “the nobles and the rulers” Nehemiah 5:7, “**A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.**”

Further concerning Nehemiah and his innocence of wrong-doing, no-one answered him back after the manner of Romans 2:1.

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

4. *In what ways is God's concern for hurting people revealed in this passage?*

God heard, recorded and caused to be reported ***"a great cry of the people and of their wives"*** Nehemiah 5:1 to His servant Nehemiah, who immediately responded and took particular steps to bring relief to the victims, Nehemiah 5:6-11.

The passage has a parallel in Genesis 18:20-21.

"And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know."

Nehemiah 5:1-5 has End Times implications.

"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" James 5:4.

For the Christian, again Philippians 4:6-7 applies, which should be memorized. That is basic. See *Nehemiah 4 Part 2*.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Nehemiah Responds, Nehemiah 5:6-9

5. *How did Nehemiah react when he heard (Nehemiah 5:6)? Is anger always wrong?*

With anger as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 11:29.

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

Anger is not always wrong, either for God, the Lord Jesus Christ or the Christian.

"God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" Psalm 7:11.

"And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other" Mark 3:5.

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:" Ephesians 4:26.

6. *What Old Testament Scriptures had these Jews violated?*

The main scriptures were those relating to imposition of bond service and illegal usury.

"If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" Exodus 22:25. See Nehemiah 5:3, 4, 7.

"And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile:" Leviticus 25:39-40. See Nehemiah 5:5, 8.

As a principle of how the Jews were supposed to care for each other during ***"the dearth"*** Nehemiah 5:3, see Deuteronomy 15:7-8, which clearly had also been violated.

"If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth."

The evil of bond service imposed by some of the Jews' brethren i.e. "***The nobles, and the rulers***" Nehemiah 5:7, see *Question 3*, was made worse by Jews selling their brethren as bond servants to the heathen round about, in extreme violation of Leviticus 25:39-40, as Nehemiah 5:8 shows. See *Question 3*.

"And 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?"

7. *What steps did Nehemiah take to deal with the situation (Nehemiah 5:7-9)?*

Nehemiah's steps consisted of:

- *public rebuke of offenders*, Nehemiah 5:7-8 i.e. mainly "***the nobles, and the rulers***" Nehemiah 5:7, some of whom, it should further be noted "***put not their necks to the work of their Lord***" Nehemiah 3:5. See *Questions 3, 6* about "***the nobles, and the rulers.***"
- *personal renunciation of privileges* (i.e. setting the example even with respect to *legitimate* usury, possibly "***the hundredth part***"), Nehemiah 5:10
- *pleas for restoration of lands, cultivation and houses*, Nehemiah 5:11
- *promises for obedience exacted by means of an oath*, Nehemiah 5:12, 13. See also James 1:22, 23.

Nehemiah 5:7-13 is an illustration of Psalm 119:126 in action.

"It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law."

That is a good prayer for today.

8. *Why was the conduct of the Jews bad at this point in the story (Nehemiah 5:9)?*

It was a bad testimony to the heathen round about. Note Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

1 Timothy 5:14 explains the reason why believers should "***may walk honestly toward them that are without***" even though in a different context.

"I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."

The over-arching aim is to "***Neither give place to the devil.***" Ephesians 4:27.

Nehemiah's Example, Nehemiah 5:10-19

9. What example did Nehemiah set (Nehemiah 5:8, 10)?

See Question 7.

Nehemiah set a practical, caring example.

“And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen;...” Nehemiah 5:8.

Note Paul's equivalent exhortation in 1 Corinthians 12:25.

“That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”

Nehemiah set a self-denying example.

“I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury” Nehemiah 5:10.

Nehemiah 5:10, 18 indicate that some exaction of money and consumable goods by the rulers was legitimate. This exaction was most likely ***“the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them”*** Nehemiah 5:11. See Question 3. Nehemiah insisted that all such exactions, though legitimate, be cancelled and enforced the cancellation on himself first of all.

Note Paul's equivalent testimony in 1 Corinthians 9:7, 14-15.

“Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?...Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void...What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.”

Paul was willing to ***“gladly spend and be spent”*** for the sake of the gospel, 2 Corinthians 12:15. So should any of Paul's followers, 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1, not imitators* as in the 1984 NIV, 2005 TNIV, 2011 NIV, NKJV.

*The greatest imitator of the Lord Jesus Christ is the Devil, ***“for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light”*** 2 Corinthians 11:14, in imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ Who is ***“the light of the world”*** John 8:12. The Devil does not follow God, the Lord Jesus Christ or Paul. See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 1521.

Note Paul's testimony in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10 with respect to his willingness to ***“gladly spend and be spent”*** for the sake of the gospel.

“For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

See Question 7 with respect to nobles that ***“put not their necks to the work of their Lord”*** Nehemiah 3:5.

Application of ***“the sword of the Spirit”*** Ephesians 6:17 with respect to 2 Thessalonians 3:10 would encourage a torrent of reverse immigration from the UK, as a devotional, practical outworking of Jeremiah 50:16.

“Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him that handleth the sickle in the time of harvest: for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn every one to his people, and they shall flee every one to his own land.”

Note however Paul’s exhortation to those who have received the Gospel ministry.

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” Galatians 6:6.

Nehemiah set a God-fearing example.

“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 fear of God*” is a good, indeed excellent basis for doing *right* and *not* doing *wrong*, as Paul exhorts twice.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” 2 Corinthians 7:1.

“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” Ephesians 5:21.

10. What did he tell the erring Jews to do (Nehemiah 5:11)? What did the people agree to do, and how did Nehemiah respond (Nehemiah 5:12, 13)?

Nehemiah urged “*the nobles, and the rulers*” Nehemiah 5:7 to make full restitution of what they had exacted from their brethren including “*the hundredth part*” that they appear to have been entitled to.

The offenders promised to obey Nehemiah’s urging and Nehemiah confirmed their pledge with an official oath before the priests, see *Question 7* and effectively pronounced a curse for disobedience.

Note Hebrews 6:16, the essence of which would have applied in Nehemiah’s time.

“For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.”

Imposition of a curse for disobedience was embedded in the Law.

“Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen” Deuteronomy 27:26.

In principle, the same applies now. See Proverbs 13:13, which has never been rescinded. (Note the 13s in these references.) Proverbs 13:13 should be memorized.

“Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.”

See the New Testament admonition in 1 Thessalonians 4:2, 7-8.

“For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus...For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.”

11. What had Nehemiah done to help ease the people’s burden (Nehemiah 5:14-15, 18)? Why is a good example important to God’s people?

He had refrained from the governor’s personal food and drink allowance and that for his staff and guests and from his personal expense account.

See *Question 9* with respect to Nehemiah’s example.

Examples will be followed, including wrong examples, as Solomon warns in Proverbs 29:12.

“If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.”

Right examples are meant to be set so that they *can* be followed for that which, like “*godliness is profitable unto all things*” 1 Timothy 4:8, for that which, like “*good works...are good and profitable unto men*” Titus 3:8 and the avoidance of all “*that is unprofitable for you*” Hebrews 13:17, as Paul exhorts in Hebrews 13:7.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you *the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*”

Further Thought and Consideration

List and explain passages showing what the New Testament church should do when members sin.

The main passages are Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The over-arching lesson is that sin should be confronted, not condoned or allowed to fester. See Romans 6:11-18 and 1 Corinthians 6:18 in particular with respect to the sin of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.”

Matthew 18:15-17

See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 1270 and Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Book of Matthew* pp 348-350.

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

Matthew 18:15-17 is a pre-Pentecost statement with a post-Pentecost application, showing the increasing severity of the steps taken with respect to a saved individual who persists in a particular sin or fails to repent of it. Ejection from the church assembly is the final stage. See 1 Corinthians 5:2, 13, to follow.

Note the expression **“as an heathen man.”** A wilfully erring saved individual cannot, by definition, revert to being an *unsaved* individual but he can be treated as one.

Matthew 18:15 cross references to Luke 17:3-4, showing that every effort should be made for the sinfulness to be overcome at the initial, individual stage.

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”

Matthew 18:15-17 also cross references to Titus 3:10-11 with respect to heretics.

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”

1 Corinthians 5:4-5, in the context of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, see also Genesis 35:22

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

See Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Books of First and Second Corinthians* pp 97-104.

The deliverance to Satan has to be through prayer, such that Satan, being **“a rod”** 1 Corinthians 4:21 for chastisement, causes the individual to repent, 2 Timothy 1:20. Note Exodus 4:2, 4 and Isaiah 10:5, where God says **“O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation”** but **“the king of Assyria”** is in type the Devil, Isaiah 10:12, 13. See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* pp 787, 927.

Dr Ruckman describes in his commentary *The Book of Job* pp 246-248 three cases of sinning individuals, two of whom were saved, who appear to have got right with the Lord after undergoing satanic chastisement. One in particular suffered severe **“destruction of the flesh”** but the rest of his life and testimony i.e. **“the spirit”** was salvaged for when the Lord comes back, 1 Corinthians 3:13, 14. That is the sense of 1 Corinthians 5:5. See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 1515. A saved indi-

vidual is already spiritually saved, according to 1 Corinthians 6:17 ***“But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.”***

Paul also urges, indeed commands, the removal of the individual from the church assembly while he persists in his sin.

“And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you” 1 Corinthians 5:2.

“But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person” 1 Corinthians 5:13.

Nehemiah 5:7 indicates that where ***“the nobles, and the rulers”*** had sinned, Nehemiah was compelled to instigate the final stage in that ***“I set a great assembly against them.”***

List and explain passages showing the need for repentance and restitution.

The main passages are 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 in the context of 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 and Galatians 6:1. 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 is Paul’s exhortation on bringing the individual in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 back into fellowship and Galatians 6:1-5 is a warning on refraining from a ***“holier than thou”*** Isaiah 65:5 attitude when restoring an individual who has sinned.

See Dr Ruckman’s commentaries *The Books of First and Second Corinthians* pp 401-404 and *The Books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians* p 174.

2 Corinthians 2:6-8, Galatians 6:1

“Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.”

The individual should be received back into fellowship on genuine repentance, in part in order to avoid overwhelming despair that forgiveness and cleansing from sin is impossible for certain sins, which it isn’t according to Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

The individual’s reception should in turn be genuine, not grudging or condescending i.e. looking down, in the light of Galatians 6:1.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Nehemiah 5:11, 12, 13 show that Nehemiah had achieved repentance and restitution among his sinning brethren and had effectively applied Leviticus 19:17.

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.”

“The devil” had, of course, only ***“departed...for a season”*** Luke 4:13.