



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH Lesson 5

Well, my friends, it's time to move a little closer and take a peek into the city itself and see what's going on. The first four chapters of Nehemiah record the opposition they faced from those on the outside. The enemy of our souls will try anything he can to stop us in our tracks when we are doing something for the Lord. He will try ridicule, mockery, hatred, and other vicious types of attacks to distract, destroy, or discourage. But here in chapter 5 we find a new tactic. Those working on the wall held something of a "spiritual strike" and let their needs and complaints be known. You'll notice no building going on in this chapter. With the same wisdom, strength, and grace he handled the other issues, Nehemiah meets this next form of opposition head on. It shouldn't surprise us that money has something to do with the problems. Selfishness and greed have been around since the Garden, and unfortunately, it was no different in Nehemiah's time.

Before you begin, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and give you understanding and application of the text. He has something to say to you this week in this chapter. Expect it. Look for it. Receive it. And lastly, apply it.

First Day

1. Let's begin today by reading Nehemiah 5:1-19. List all the facts you find. Ask yourself the questions who, what, where, when, and why.

2. Who are the main characters in this chapter?

It's interesting to me that Nehemiah had to deal with finances, unfair taxes, breaking of the law, and people being exploited for personal gain. It sounds like this came right out of the CBS News update in 2010!! It's important to see that personal and corporate finances have always been a concern on God's heart. He cares about how we treat others, how we use our money, and how we care for the poor. He cares about wise stewardship; He cares about loving the brethren. And because God cares, so does Nehemiah.

Memory Verse of the Week: "And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words." Nehemiah 5:6

Second Day

Review your memory verse.

You probably find it strange that I chose verse 6 as our memory verse for the week. The reason is simply that it seems to reveal a very important part of Nehemiah's heart. He cares for his brethren, and the injustice of what was happening moved him. He didn't ignore their plight and their distress; his anger moved him into action. That's my prayer for each one of us: that the social injustices, the distresses around us, and the cries of the poor would move us into action. That we would do more than just "feel" bad, we would put feet to our faith, actions with our prayers.

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19 again, focusing on verses 1-13. What would you title this section?
2. What economic crisis had developed in the land and was causing distress? (vs 3)
3. Who were the Jews crying out against?

A famine had swept the land that most likely had been developing over time. It had only been a few weeks since the building of the wall had begun, so most likely the city could not meet the demands of the hundreds of people who had come with Nehemiah to accomplish this mission. The crops that they had simply could not sustain all of them.

4. What were the specific complaints of the different groups of people?

5. What was Nehemiah's reaction to their cries?

Not only did Nehemiah hate that the people were being exploited by their own people, they were violating God's law.

6. Read the following verses and write the main point of each.

A. Deuteronomy 15:7-11

B. Deuteronomy 15:12-18

C. Exodus 22:25

D. Leviticus 25:35-38

E. Leviticus 25:39-41

These verses help us to get a better understanding of why Nehemiah was so angry. His anger was certainly justified. Charles Swindoll wrote, "Nehemiah was angry because the people had forgotten God's Mosaic Law. Today we are living in the era of grace and so we look despairingly (unfortunately) on the law. We shouldn't. It preserved the people of Israel by telling them how to live with one another. God's tribes were to live differently than others because of His personalized instructions to them. His law gave the Jews instructions for living a just and godly life as a family."

Some of the people were just poor and needed food; some were mortgaging all they had for food, some were borrowing from the Jews to keep their land and pay their taxes to the king, but were being charged way too much interest (usury). Those in really bad shape were being forced to forfeit their property and sell their children into slavery.

It was not wrong for Jews to lend to one another; they just weren't supposed to charge interest. They could collect interest from foreigners but not each other. The Mosaic Law offered the hope of releasing the young people of their debts every seven years or in the 50th year of Jubilee. Their custom made it possible to "buy back" or "redeem" them at almost any time, but in the conditions of the time, this would have never happened. Greed and selfishness crept in, and some of the brethren allowed their desire for gain to overshadow what was right in God's eyes. They wanted God's blessings but ignored His commands.

7. Give some present-day examples of how people are being exploited for selfish gain.

8. Time to take a look at your own heart. Are you a person who tries to get ahead by using others' misfortunes? Would you be considered an "opportunist"? Do you think more about how to get ahead than how to minister to people? These are tough questions, I know.

9. Although you may have answered "no" to all the questions above, let me throw one more at you. Do you consider yourself and your own needs first before you consider the needs of others? Do you ever take advantage of someone to get your own way? What does Philippians 2:3-4 say about this?

10. How would you define "selfishness"? In what areas can you be considered selfish?

Thomas Merton said, "To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell." Let's pray Psalm 139:23-24; "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my anxieties; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Third Day

Review your verse.

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-13. After Nehemiah heard their complaints, he was angry. Did he react hastily?
2. Nehemiah had valid reasons to be angry, but he used self-control. Read Proverbs 16:32 and 14:29. What do these verses say about using self-control?
3. When you are angry, how hard is it for you to use self-control? Is your first response to lash out or react hastily? Galatians 5:22-26 tells us that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. What do those verses instruct us to do?

Verse 7 says, "After serious thought." Some translations say, "I consulted with myself." In Hebrew it means "My heart consulted within me" or "to counsel oneself." Wiersbe said, "He got control of his feelings and his thoughts so that he could give constructive leadership to the people. If a leader can't control himself, he will never be successful in controlling others." Nehemiah took the time to gather his thoughts, ponder the problems, and seek God's counsel.

4. What did Nehemiah do next, according to verse 7?

If you remember back to chapter 3:5, the elders and nobles "wouldn't put their shoulders to the work of their Lord." Obviously, their commitment to this building project was not where it should have been.

5. What did he accuse them of? Why did he remind them of God's goodness?
6. How was Nehemiah setting an example for them?

7. How did the people respond to Nehemiah's words?
8. What did Nehemiah expect them to do in order to remedy the problem?

Nehemiah didn't just accuse them and leave it at that; he came up with a solution to correct the problem.

9. Nehemiah leaves no room for second thoughts or a change of heart. What does he make them do? And in the presence of whom?
10. Warren Wiersbe points out six different things Nehemiah appealed to as he confronted his Jewish brethren. See if you can find the verse that coincides with the appeal.
 - A. He appealed to their duty to obey the law.
 - B. He appealed to the truth of God's Word.
 - C. He appealed to their knowledge of the redemptive purposes of Israel.
 - D. He appealed to their desire to be a witness to their Gentile neighbors.
 - E. He appealed to the example of himself and his own personal practice.

Raymond Brown wrote, "The inconsistent conduct of the offenders not only dishonored God and ignored Scripture; it nullified their witness to the unbelieving world. The offenders must rectify this evident social injustice, for only in this way could they avoid the reproach of their Gentile enemies. Israel had been entrusted with a unique testimony to the nations. They were not only to declare what God is like but manifest those qualities in their lives. It was both a visual as well as verbal testimony. If their pagan neighbors saw them behaving cruelly towards their own people, how could they possibly be persuaded of the uniqueness and reality of Israel's distinctive faith? Who would believe that Israel's God was kind, merciful, and compassionate when His worshippers were cruel, merciless, and mean towards people He loves?"

11. After reading the above quote, how do you think this same principle applies to you and I?

12. Are you bringing honor to the Lord by the way you treat others? Are you treating any of the people God loves in a cruel, merciless, or unkind way? What should you do about it?

"Shaking off the robe" (vs 13) was a symbolic act, calling down God's wrath upon anyone who didn't follow through on their commitments to release debts. This was serious business!

That's it for today. Let's not exploit others for our gain. Let's not allow selfishness to creep in and take over our heart. And let's not dishonor God by how we live our life. Amen, sister? Amen!!

Fourth Day

Think about our verse today. Ponder the injustices you see around you. Ask the Lord to break your heart by the things that break His.

1. Read Nehemiah 5:1-19, **focusing on 14-19**. We find out that Nehemiah was appointed as Jerusalem's governor at some point. Governors were appointed by the King, not elected by the people. The thirty-second year (vs 14) refers to the year Nehemiah returned to Artaxerxes in Persia (about 433 B.C.)

Verses 14 and 15 are parenthetical statements, comparing Nehemiah's 12-year reign as governor with the unjust governors before him.

2. How was Nehemiah different from the previous governors?

With promotion come privileges. With privilege comes responsibility. Nehemiah wanted to be a good example to the people by never abusing his privileges. He saw taking advantage of the people and his position as an act of disobedience towards God.

3. How can positions of authority be abused today? Are you abusing any privileges you have been given?

As governor, he most likely had a food allowance for entertaining, etc. The phrase "ate the governor's provisions" refers to the provisions from the Persian administration. Nehemiah chose never to touch it because it would have come from taxing his poverty-stricken people. The former governors over-taxed the people, took payment from them when they shouldn't, and promoted their servants to a place of leadership.

4. Nehemiah simply said, "I did not do so." What reason did he give?

5. According to verse 16, did Nehemiah relax and watch everyone else work?

These simple verses reveal so much about Nehemiah. The word that comes to mind is integrity. He would not compromise his job or his relationship with God. He wouldn't take money; He wouldn't take bribes. He wouldn't listen to the complainers or cave to the pressures of how things had been done in the past. He stood strongly in the face of adversity, through the temptations of position and under the weight of responsibility.

6. Verse 16 also tells us that Nehemiah didn't "buy any land." Why do you think that is significant in light of what had been happening?

7. Notice the amount of people that sat at Nehemiah's table. What does that tell us?

There couldn't have been a better time to buy property than a time like this. So many Jews had been forced to sell, and Nehemiah could have capitalized on that. But he made a personal decision not to take advantage of any person's misfortune. He continued working on the wall rather than spending all his time investing and counting his wealth.

It's obvious that he was well-liked and extremely generous. But popularity and position didn't distract Nehemiah from what God had called him to do. He didn't allow his wealth to become his focus or separate him from the people. Nehemiah stayed in touch with his people's needs and worked alongside them.

8. Notice Nehemiah's final words in verse 19. What does this reveal about his heart? What was his motivation?

This is the fourth recorded prayer of Nehemiah (1:5; 2:5; 4:4), but this is the first of four prayers asking God to "remember" him (13:14, 22, 31). These prayers show us that his greatest concern was to please the Lord. He wasn't looking for praise or glory from the people, only from the Lord. So often we look for our rewards from the people we are serving, desiring to be appreciated and thanked. Forgive us, Lord; forgive me, Lord, for forgetting that YOU are the one we should be aiming to please.

9. What did Paul say about this? Read 1 Corinthians 2:2; 4:1-5, and Galatians 1:10.

10. How do you respond when you don't receive any credit for things you do? What is your motivation and reason for serving? (How can we keep the right perspective?)

Warren Wiersbe wrote, "Leaders are people who accept more of the blame and less of the credit, but they are also people who quietly sacrifice so that others may have more." Nehemiah is a great example of this. Are you?

11. Jesus is our greatest example of a leader. He was unselfish, generous, honest, humble, and full of integrity. Can you give Scriptures or examples that prove this?

See you tomorrow, ladies. May WE be seen less so HE can be seen more!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory!

Today we're going to recap the chapter by looking at some of the important principles we find in it. Begin by reading it through one more time.

1. Nehemiah was angered by the social injustices taking place within his city and was moved into action. What social injustices do we see today, in our world? Has the Lord put any one specifically on your heart? What can you do? Is He calling you to take action in some way?

Nehemiah was angry that the people were being robbed. He knew God had a heart for the poor and that people should never be taken advantage of. We should help those in need, whenever we can. The Lord desires us to be good stewards of our money and use it wisely. Helping those in need is one of the ways we can.

2. Read the following verses and write the main point of each.

A. Proverbs 11:24-25

B. Proverbs 19:17

C. Proverbs 21:13

D. Proverbs 22:9

E. Proverbs 28:27

3. Are you helping those in need? Is God calling you to be more generous in some way?

4. Nehemiah "consulted himself" before he did anything. Do you stop and take time to gather your thoughts, think it through, and ask God for wisdom, BEFORE you move forward? Why is this so important? What can happen if we don't? Can you think of a time you made a hasty decision? What was the outcome?

5. The people were being exploited. Have you ever been taken advantage of when you were vulnerable? How does it feel? How can we make sure we never do this to anyone?

6. Nehemiah was not only a great example to the people; he had a great amount of influence. I read somewhere that "the average person will influence some 10,000 others in his or her lifetime." **What kind of influence are you on those around you?** (Good or bad?) Think of the people you see every day and the person you meet in passing. How can you be a better influence? Any changes you need to make?

7. Write a character sketch of Nehemiah as a leader, from what we've seen so far. (What leadership qualities and characteristics does he have? What's his leadership "style"?)

8. What challenged you the most from this chapter?

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28. That is our main "Reason to Rejoice"!

See you next week!

