

NEHEMIAH

pray plan build



Daily Worship Booklet

Week 7

God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law, day after day and the people of God were filled with joy!

Friday – Nehemiah 5:14-19 – A great example of godly leadership.

From this, we learn several things about Nehemiah's leadership.

First – he was appointed as a governor in Judah by king Artaxerxes and held the post for twelve years.

Second – he didn't take what he was entitled to – As governor in Judah, Nehemiah and his assistants were entitled to an official expense account, but he didn't use it, choosing instead to pay for his own expenses out of his own pocket. Well, it couldn't have been that much. Really? Reread verse 18 – it was a huge bill he was swallowing (excuse the pun) every day. Obviously, he had accumulated substantial personal wealth during his years of service as cupbearer to the king, and was able to draw on that, but the point is that he didn't have to. He could have taxed the people in Judah, quite legitimately, to cover his household expenses, but he chose not to. Why? Because he understood the ramifications of doing so on a people who were in financial difficulties, and didn't want to add to their already not inconsiderable burden. A real contrast to what the previous governors had done – see verse 5. What an indictment upon the so called 'health and wealth' gospel 'preachers' who gorge themselves as financial piranhas on the weak and vulnerable to keep their personal aeroplanes flying and maintain their multimillion-dollar homes. While Paul did "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching." (1 Timothy 5:17), a day of reckoning will come for those who abuse the Bride in this way.

Third – verse 16, he gave himself wholeheartedly to the work. We read that he persevered in the work, which tells us that he didn't find it easy. Devoted, conscientious leadership never is. People can tend to be quick to judge the perceived inadequacies and failures of godly men, while at the same time slow to express appreciation, but the leader who looks to the applause of others to feel valued has his head in the wrong book.

Fourth – he was a godly man. Going back to verse 15, we see the reason for Nehemiah's doing what he does – it is because of his fear of God. That was the chief characteristic of this man, it flowed from his heart and mind through every fibre of his being and affected everything he choose to do. Verse 19 underscores this. He did what he did to please God. That is the sign of a man of God, he fears only God and lives to please no one but God.

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The book of Nehemiah focuses on the work involved in labouring to see Christ build his church.

Q1. What are the first two things we learn about Nehemiah in these verses?

Q2. What other two things do these verses teach us about Nehemiah?

Thursday – Nehemiah’s 5:6-13 - Nehemiah’s rebuke to the abusers - 7!

Today we come to the last of the seven calls we have been looking at by which Nehemiah addressed the wrongdoing of some wealthy men in Jerusalem.

He calls on them to remember the judgement of God that awaited those who did not do as He had commanded. Nehemiah does this by first summoning the priests to witness the promises the nobles and officials made. In doing so, he is letting them know that this is not merely a promise between them and himself, what they are doing is talking an oath before God. Nehemiah then does something to impress upon them the eternal seriousness of what they have just committed to. He shakes out the fold of his robe, indicating how God would deal with any of them who did not follow through on their promise. He also declares in words what his graphic illustrative demonstrated – “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labour who does not keep this promise. So, he may be shaken out and emptied.” Chilling stuff. But it again shows that God and His Word are not to be treated lightly or messed with, and you do so at the peril of losing everything you have. (And it didn’t just happen in the Old Testament, see Matthew 10:14 and Acts 13:51; 18:5-6).

What were the consequences of these appeals? Well, there were three:

First – “All the assembly said “Amen”. This is much more than just a ritual ‘Amen’. It was a serious, solemn, heartfelt response of assent to what had been said in expectation that it would be done – ‘Amen’ means ‘so be it’. The whole gathering was saying this is what needs to, and will, happen, in the will of the Lord. And that’s important because it speaks to the fact that the people had recognised that all that had taken place during Nehemiah’s governorship had taken place because of the Lord’s blessing upon them.

Second – As well as saying ‘Amen’, the people “praised the Lord”. They certainly would have appreciated, respected, and loved Nehemiah, and I am sure that he would have received a few solid handshakes and maybe several hugs for all that he had done; but in terms of ‘praise’, that was reserved, and rightly so, for the Lord. Men can work their heart out for the kingdom and be used in some incredible ways, but the eternally blessed fruit of their work is seen in who the people praise. If they praise the man, then there’s something wrong with the fruit that’s been produced. The praise of God is the only thing that should be on the lips of God’s people.

Third – “The people did as they had promised”. That is, the wealthy abusers were good on their word. Another sign of eternally blessed fruit.

Q1. What is the seventh appeal Nehemiah makes?

Q2. What are the three consequences of these appeals?

Monday – Nehemiah 5:6-13 – Nehemiah was very angry!

Confronting opposition from outside the church is one thing, but opposition is frequently also found within the four walls of the church. Moses certainly found this to be true in his life. From the two Jews who were fighting in Exodus 2, through the opposition of Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12, Moses often found himself having to deal with issues in the church. And so it is today. Here Nehemiah has to deal with the abuses of wealthy men exploiting the circumstances of their Jewish brothers and sisters by giving them loans, but taking their property and enslaving their children as collateral, and charging interest, something which we saw on Friday was wrong according to the Law of God (Leviticus 25:39-40).

Nehemiah’s first reaction was righteous anger. It is right to get angry, even in the church, when the situation merits it. Jesus expressed his anger (John 2:13-17 and Mark 3:5) when he saw the desecration of the Temple and the hardening of the Pharisees’ hearts. The issue is not anger, but what we do with it. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus and says, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26). Nehemiah is an example of what to do next – he tells us that “I took counsel with myself”. He didn’t lash out and say something that would have given the devil an opportunity. He took time to think, to consider, to weigh up what was happening, and responded in a way that was right and appropriate.

It is important to note that these problems were not created by the work that was being done, they were revealed because of the work. That happens when the church becomes more active. People who were previously happy with their role or influence begin to feel threatened, or perceive their value being diminished, because others are becoming increasingly involved and engaged. This is because their erroneously held views on the nature of the church begin to be revealed and people don’t like being exposed, so they object. These objections tend not to be direct, they’re too afraid to do that lacking the knowledge to affect a biblically grounded case, so they work behind the scenes complaining and creating issues.

Nehemiah was not slow to deal with what he sees. He brought legal charges against the nobles and officials before an assembly of the people. Why deal with it publicly and not privately – because their sin was public, everyone knew what was going on, and it needed to be addressed accordingly. While there are many situations in the church where sin must be dealt with quietly by the minister and elders, there are occasions when, because of its public nature, it must be dealt with publicly.

Q1. What made Nehemiah so angry?

Q2. How does he respond?

Tuesday – Nehemiah 5:6-13 - Nehemiah’s rebukes to the abusers - 1,2,3!

Nehemiah’s rebuke of the abusive nobles and officials takes the form of seven appeals. We’ll look at three of them today.

He calls on them to realise who it is that they are abusing – namely their fellow Jews and not the Gentiles. Not that abusing anyone is justified in Scripture, but there was a difference in God’s Law as to how Jews could engage in business with their brother Jews as opposed to the Gentile World (Exodus 22:25-27 and Leviticus 25:35-46). The Jews were commanded to treat one another with love, even when taking security or making a brother a servant. Nehemiah uses the term ‘brother’ four times in presenting his case.

He calls on them to remember the redemptive purposes of God for Israel - God had redeemed His people from Egypt, and more recently had delivered them from their Babylonian captivity. By their actions these men were now placing the people of God under a fresh bondage, and for what reason? To make money. Motivated by greed, they were ignoring one of the principal truths of redemptive history – God redeems His people to set them free to live for His glory and their good. That’s the context of the ten commandments – Exodus 20:2. These men were throwing that out the window as they shackled their brothers in debt-ridden slavery. And Nehemiah wasn’t having it.

He calls on them to “walk in the fear of our God” – note, he doesn’t say they have forfeited their place in the kingdom by their actions, but that they are to repent and start doing what is right. When we, as truly converted believers, sin, no matter what the sin there is hope for us, but there must be true repentance. True repentance means turning from the practice of that sin forever and VERY importantly turning unto God for the strength to do so. You can’t turn from sin if you don’t turn to God. It just cannot be done. Men have tried it from the dawn of time, and everyone who has tried has failed and fallen back into whatever pattern of sin they’ve been held in bondage to. Please think upon and learn this simple but phenomenal lesson. Integral to it is owning a personal ‘fear’ of God. But how do we do that? By abiding in His Word, through specific and intentional obedience of it. Doing so will lead to a ‘walk’, a life lived, that is marked by faith and trust. Such a life will be a true testimony to the world that God’s ways are perfect and life changing, which in turn will help silence the world’s taunts.

- Q1. What is the first appeal Nehemiah makes?
- Q2. What is the second appeal Nehemiah makes?
- Q3. What is the third appeal Nehemiah makes?

Wednesday – Nehemiah’s 5:6-13 - Nehemiah’s rebukes to the abusers - 4,5,6!

Nehemiah’s rebuke of the abusive nobles and officials takes the form of seven appeals – we looked at three of them yesterday, here are another three.

He calls them to consider his example and the example of those working with him – Why? Because it shows them how a man who fears God lives. He too was lending money to people who needed it. But the difference, between what he and these wealthy abusers were doing, is that he was not charging interest nor robbing those who he was lending to of their personal freedom. He was doing what God commands and requires of those who profess to walk in His ways.

He calls on them to stop what they are doing – I say he calls on them, but in fact it’s a command with an expectation of compliance. Although, again, it is interesting how he says what he does. We know because he’s just made the point that he’s not lending out of greed, yet he includes himself in the call to abandon the exacting of the interest. “Let us abandon this exacting of interest.” (Italicises mine). So, he is recognising these men as part of the people of God, and constantly giving them a way out of their wrong. That must be the first, second, third and line of approach when elders seek to discipline wrongdoing by church members. However, and sadly so, a day must come for those who will not take the loving rebuke, and consequences must be levelled.

He calls on them to make restitution – Stopping past practice is a must do, but so also is restitution for the previous wrongdoing. The reference to the “percentage of money, grain, wine and oil that you have been exacting from them” makes this unequivocally clear. It wasn’t that this was going to make full redress for all that had transpired in the lives of the victims, but it certainly was going to help them. Their immediate situation would be alleviated and the means to make a fresh start would be provided through this restitution.

The response to these calls of Nehemiah is immediate and heart-warmingly significant. The abusing nobles and officials declared – “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” Nehemiah couldn’t have asked for a better response. And, while I am sure he was glad for it, he doesn’t just take it at face value. As we shall see tomorrow, God willing, he presents them with one final call.

- Q1. What are the fourth, fifth and sixth appeals that Nehemiah makes?
- Q2. What response does he get?