

# Justice and Generosity

In the midst of building, internal conflict erupts. The people cry out against exploitation by their own countrymen. Nehemiah confronts the wealthy and sets an example of selfless leadership.

Nehemiah 5:1-19

CHARACTERS: Nehemiah, The nobles and officials, The poor families

THEMES: Justice, Generosity, Leadership, Compassion, Self-sacrifice

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NOW THE MEN and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Sometimes the greatest obstacles to God's work come not from outside enemies but from internal injustice.

Some were saying, 'We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.' Others said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.' Still others said, 'We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.'

While the poor were working on the wall, they couldn't work their fields. Meanwhile, wealthy Jews were charging interest on loans and taking their property, even their children, as collateral. It violated God's law and made a mockery of the community's restoration.

When Nehemiah heard their outcry and these charges, he was very angry. He pondered them in his mind and then accused the nobles and

officials. 'You are charging your own people interest!' He called together a large meeting to deal with them publicly.

He said to them, 'As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!' They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

Nehemiah continued, 'What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them.'

'We will give it back,' they said. 'And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.' Then Nehemiah made them take an oath to do what they had promised.

Then Nehemiah shared his own example. For twelve years, from his appointment as governor until then, neither he nor his brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. The earlier governors had placed a heavy burden on the people and taken food and wine from them, plus forty shekels of silver. But out of reverence for God, Nehemiah did not act like that.

Instead, he devoted himself to the work on the wall. He did not acquire any land. All his men were assembled there for the work. Moreover, 150 Jews and officials ate at his table, as well as those who came from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep, and some poultry were prepared, along with an abundant supply of wine. Yet Nehemiah never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on the people.

Leadership, Nehemiah demonstrated, means serving others at cost to yourself. He had the right to collect taxes and live luxuriously. Instead, he

fed others and worked alongside them. He confronted injustice even when it meant challenging powerful people. He cared more about God's reputation and the people's welfare than his own comfort.

The wall could not be completed while the community was divided by injustice. Before the stones could be fully set, hearts had to be made right. True revival always includes justice, generosity, and leaders who serve rather than exploit.

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