

## February 23

**Scriptures:** Read Nehemiah 5 & 6

**Key Verse:** “Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?” (Nehemiah 5:9b)

### Overview

There was yet another reason God had sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem besides leading in the rebuilding of the walls: to reform a great evil in the minds and hearts of many Jews, which was part of the cause for the “great distress and reproach” (1:3) of the people. There was social inequality caused by the wealthier Jews taking advantage of the hard times due to the drought and high tribute required of everyone. Out of necessity, the poorer Jews had to borrow from the richer Jews who oppressed them by charging usury, confiscating their land, and even taking their children as slaves in order to pay off their debts.

The disadvantaged groups brought their complaint to Nehemiah, whose reaction was one of righteous indignation. The wealthier Jews were not only being cruel and cold-hearted, they were breaking the Law of God. God had promised to hear the cry of the economically oppressed when they called out to him (Exodus 22:27). Nehemiah came in answer to the prayers of those poor and exploited people. He knew the Law and what was expected of the people of God. Within the Israelite community, a poor person was not to be charged interest on a loan (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19-20); also, in the year of Jubilee all property was to be restored to the original inheritor, and all Israelite slaves were to be freed (Leviticus 25:8-17, 39-40). It is likely that this Law of Jubilee had never been fully obeyed. If the people of God were to reflect their God, they had to change their ways and live in obedience to Him, otherwise their bad example would bring reproach upon not only themselves but God as well (5:9). The same is true of believers today; by our unity and love “in deed and in truth” for one another, others will know we are true disciples and God will be glorified (1 John 3:16-21; 4:20-21).

Nehemiah first contemplated the grievous situation and then, in keeping with his character, he would have prayerfully decided his course of action which would lead to justice. His first course of action was to boldly confront the guilty elders and nobles with a rebuke. Then he called a public gathering wherein he exposed the wrongdoing which had no justification. He then demanded restitution. The guilty, convicted of their sin, agreed to obey Nehemiah and thereby obey God. Their promise to restore all the land they had taken from the poverty-stricken was sealed with an oath before God to ensure it would be kept (5:12). Nehemiah graphically called upon God to be the judge if anyone did not keep his promise (5:13). Nehemiah’s faithfulness to God brought healing, peace, and reconciliation to the community, that they might bring glory to God.

Nehemiah, himself, was a good example. Although he could have used his authority from king Artaxerxes to take additional taxes from the people to pay his salary as governor, he would not do it. No doubt the Lord blessed him for his kindness. He was a true leader; not concerned with amassing wealth or prestige, but concerned firstly to serve the Lord and then to be of service to the people and fulfill his God-given call of leading them in the ways of the Lord. Since his

priorities were right, the Lord blessed Nehemiah and gave him success (cf. Luke 17:10; Matthew 10:42; 25:31-40).

As the Jews continued to diligently work, they closed up the gaps in the wall (4:7; 6:1). In our own lives, we must not leave any gaps for the enemy to get in. When there were no gaps, the adversaries saw that the work was indeed being accomplished and thus came greater opposition. Their mockery and attempt of conspiracy had failed, so now Satan tried another means to destroy Nehemiah and his work: by feigning friendliness and using false prophets to trick him. Nehemiah, however, was grounded in the Word of God and had the gift of discernment to know it was a trick of the enemy. He did not let their attempts take him away from the work of the Lord, for he was determined to finish the work he had begun (Luke 9:62); his mind and heart were steadfast.

Despite all the opposition, the wall was miraculously completed in only fifty-two days. Even the adversaries had to admit that the Lord made it all possible; therefore, the co-operation and faithfulness of the builders brought glory to God (6:16). Under Nehemiah's good leadership, the Jews were kept busy at work and remained watchful and prepared for an attack. In such a way, they gave no opportunity for the enemy to cause harm. If believers today follow Nehemiah's example, Satan cannot bring harm to them either. Nehemiah knew beyond any doubt, God is greater than any foe. Truly, "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

## **Prayer**

Lord, grant that we will love and serve You in deed and in truth. We want to glorify You as true disciples. Thank You for the success of Nehemiah and the people in Jerusalem. We ask that You would help us build in our lives the protection we need against the enemy.