

The Danger of Domination Facing Danger from Within

Nehemiah 5:1-6 HCSB There was a widespread outcry from the people and their wives against their Jewish countrymen. (2) Some were saying, "We, our sons, and our daughters are numerous. Let us get grain so that we can eat and live." (3) Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and homes to get grain during the famine." (4) Still others were saying, "We have borrowed money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. (5) We and our children are *just* like our countrymen and their children, yet we are subjecting our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters are already enslaved, but we are powerless because our fields and vineyards belong to others." (6) I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints.

1. A Great Cry v.1-5

God hears the cry of the poor for justice. There were three problems confronting the poor: a famine; loss of earnings because of their part in rebuilding the wall; taxes payable to the Persian King. The rich were lending money to the poor taking their land and vineyards as collateral and had taken away their ability to provide food for their families during the famine. The poor had been forced to sell their children into slavery just in order to eat. It was Egypt all over again, except this time it was their own countrymen who were the oppressors!

God's people were and are supposed to be "A light to the gentiles."

- **Isaiah 42:6-7 HCSB** "I, the LORD, have called you for a righteous *purpose*, and I will hold you by your hand. I will keep you, and I make you a covenant for the people *and* a light to the nations, (7) in order to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, *and* those sitting in darkness from the prison house.
- **Acts 13:47 HCSB** For this is what the Lord has commanded us: **I have appointed you as a light for the Gentiles, to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.**"

The poor cried out to Nehemiah and as we will see they found help. Today we are presented with the plight of the poor. There are many kinds of poverty. There are those who are economically poor; those who are socially poor, who have been deprived of justice; and there are those who are spiritually poor, who are yet enslaved to their sin.

Let's look at how Nehemiah responded to the great cry of the poor in his day and commit ourselves to using him as a model for our own lives, shall we?

2. A Great Assembly v.6-13

i. Nehemiah's Anger

First, let's get something straight. God is not anti-business. He is not against you having ambition and building a good business and leaving behind an inheritance for your children.

- **Proverbs 13:22 HCSB** A good man leaves an inheritance to his grandchildren, but the sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.

The ideal woman was described as being successful in business.

- **Proverbs 31:16-19 HCSB** She evaluates a field and buys it; she plants a vineyard with her earnings. (17) She draws on her strength and reveals that her arms are strong. (18) She sees that her profits are good, and her lamp never goes out at night. (19) She extends her hands to the spinning staff, and her hands hold the spindle.

When I say that I'm against the "health and wealth" doctrine that is so prevalent in Cultural Christian churches I'm not debating that God wants to provide for our needs. My problem is that these so-called Christians go WAY beyond needs and ask that their GREED be satiated. The Bible goes on to say this about the ideal woman:

- **Proverbs 31:20-21 HCSB** Her hands reach out to the poor, and she extends her hands to the needy. (21) She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all in her household are doubly clothed.

Adonaic Christians may be successful. They may be wealthy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, King David, and King Solomon, among many others were wealthy. However, we recognize that wealth is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself!

There is nothing in Halakha that says that it is unlawful to loan money. However, they were not to act like money lenders and charge interest to each other.¹ They were to treat one another with love, even in the matter of collateral.² When someone becomes destitute, not through their sin but through unforeseeable circumstances, Halakha dictates the following:

- **Leviticus 25:35-36 HCSB** "If your brother becomes destitute and cannot sustain himself among you, you are to support him as a foreigner or temporary resident, so that he can continue to live among you. (36) Do not profit or take interest from him, but fear your God and let your brother live among you.

These rich people had forgotten the source of their wealth. They had forgotten that God gave them their skills. He gave them their strength. He provided the opportunity to make money. Worse – they forgot the character of their God who said,

- **Isaiah 10:1-3 HCSB** Woe to those enacting crooked statutes and writing oppressive laws (2) to keep the poor from getting a fair trial and to deprive the afflicted among my people of justice, so that widows can be their spoil and they can plunder the fatherless. (3) What will you do on the day of punishment when devastation comes from far away? Who will you run to for help? Where will you leave your wealth?

Nehemiah was outraged at these charges brought against the rich. His anger flared up at the utter injustice of the situation. Greed was one of the sins the prophets repeatedly spoke against.³ God has always had a heart for the poor and oppressed and I'd say "heaven help" those who commit that sin, but I know it's futile because heaven won't.

There's a place for righteous anger. Moses got angry and shattered the first set of Commandments. Jesus got angry when He saw the Temple being used for the wrong reasons. He grew angry over the faithlessness of the disciples. Paul got angry about those who kept trying to persuade young disciples that they had to follow all the Law, including circumcision, in order to be saved. I wouldn't give a plug nickel for a man that doesn't have a temper. On the other hand, I wouldn't give a plug nickel for a man who can't CONTROL his temper!

- **James 1:19-20 HCSB** My dearly loved brothers, understand this: everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, (20) for man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

A good leader is not a politician who asks "what is popular?" or a diplomat who asks "what is safe?" but a true leader asks "what is right?" Nehemiah was such a man and we could use a few more like him around here.

ii. Nehemiah's Prayer

- **Nehemiah 5:7 HCSB** After seriously considering the matter, I accused the nobles and officials, saying to them, "Each of you is charging his countrymen interest." So I called a large assembly against them

Nehemiah was angry yes, but he was not hasty. He took the time to think and pray. How do I know this? I know this because it was an ingrained habit of his.⁴ It was his initial reaction when he heard of the mess Jerusalem was in and it was his reflex when King Artaxerxes

¹ Deuteronomy 23:19-20

² Deuteronomy 24:10-13; Exodus 22:25-27

³ Isaiah 56:9-12; Jeremiah 22:13-19; Amos 2:6-7; 5:11-12

⁴ Nehemiah 1:4, 6, 11

demanded what was wrong with him. Reflex is always based on habit. Nehemiah was a praying man. He was a godly man. A godly man will always consider prayer to be an integral part of “seriously considering the matter.”

However, Nehemiah didn't just pray about it. He confronted the nobles and officials with the unjust treatment of the poor. Too many people, when challenged on an issue of justice or good works or behavior modification will respond with a lame “I'll pray about it.”

Listen to me, sometimes you use prayer as a cover for apathetic laziness. Yes, you should pray! However, somewhere down the line, and I mean soon, if it doesn't result in action then you are not truly praying.

Those who hear the word but don't practice the word are deceiving themselves!

- [James 1:22 HCSB](#) But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Faith that doesn't result in works is dead!

- [James 2:21-26 HCSB](#) Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? (22) You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was perfected. (23) So the Scripture was fulfilled that says, **Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness**, and he was called God's friend. (24) You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. (25) And in the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by a different route? (26) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

When you are faced with the issue of thousands of lost souls in this county, and ministry opportunities going to waste because we lack the appropriate facilities, resources, and manpower to adequately service them – by all means drop to your knees in prayer. Then get up, get out your wallet and put your money where your mouth is. Then roll up your sleeves and get to work. Pray and post guards. Cry out to God and then pick up a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other.

iii. Nehemiah's Rebuke

Nehemiah saved his rebuke for the large public meeting. Lest you get upset with brother Nehemiah and charge him with not going to his brother privately first, you need to consider,

- [James 3:1 HCSB](#) Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment;

When you take leadership in a community or a congregation you are not above the law. You are held to a higher standard! The more people you lead the more accountable you become! “Much will be required of everyone who has been given much. And even more will be expected of the one who has been entrusted with more.”⁵

- [1 Timothy 5:19-20 HCSB](#) Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. (20) Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will also be afraid.

Be cautious about bringing about an accusation against a community leader, much less an elder in God's congregation. You'd better make sure you have plenty of witnesses or some clear, unequivocal, corroborating evidence because if you come up short or you end up falsely accusing them, you are going to be up a stream without a paddle in the boat with a God who can whip up a storm at will.

Having said that, no leader is above the law and if it can be demonstrated that they are doing something wrong, then deal with them publicly. It helps having everyone in the same room at the same time. It keeps the stories straight, avoids “he said, she said” and ensures that any other leaders who may be considering taking that low path will carefully consider!

⁵ Luke 12:48

However, notice that Nehemiah uses the term “Brothers” 4 times in his rebuke. He’s not out to alienate them or crucify them. He is basing his response on God’s word, on the Law of Moses, which forbade charging interest to fellow Jews (they were charging 12% annual rate). The rebuke was based on love for each other, and on God’s redemptive purpose in the world. Nehemiah told them what they should do; return the land and interest to correct this injustice. He warned the rich to fear God’s judgment.

Once the rich had agreed to do what Nehemiah told them, he had them make an oath before the priests, city officials, and the whole assembly. Shaking out his robes was a sign that if you don’t keep your promises may God shake you out of the Jewish community. For those of you who have been with me for a while and have a better understanding of Adonaic theology, that’s a great point to add to your understanding of the concept of Ezrach’, citizenship in God’s family/kingdom.

The congregation’s response was Amen meaning: so be it. This was not just a public meeting, this was an act of worship to put things back the way that God had intended the community to behave towards each other. Every act of charity, every attempt to restore justice in the world may be an acceptable sacrifice of praise to our God.

3. A Great Example v.14-19

Nehemiah put serving the people ahead of selfish ambition and personal gain. He used his privileges for helping the people, he did not use people to build a kingdom for himself. Previous governors had used their position to promote their own importance, influence, and authority. For leaders EGO so often gets in the way of serving the people. EGO stands for Edging God Out which is a direct result of pursuing selfish ambition.

Nehemiah is a positive example that stands in startling contrast to the previous governors. He kept an open table for at least 150 people which he supplied out of his own pocket. He and his staff did not receive the daily allowance that was their right. They did not want to burden the people.

If you want to have leadership in this congregation, you better settle in your mind that you are not going to be able to dominate, abuse, and profit off of our people. The elders of this church will not allow it. There was a time when that was not true. We’ve had people who tried to rule this church through domination; by throwing fits when they didn’t get their way, or by keeping not just strings but huge steel cables on any gifts they gave to the church. All you old timers cast your minds back to those days and remember how they felt! Do you want to go back there?

If not, then keep your noses firmly pressed into the pages of the Book. Keep your eyes glued on the Master who never allowed the under-shepherds to abuse their sheep or his servants to abuse one another.

If we are going to keep this church healthy and growing we’re going to have to recognize the tremendous spiritual needs in our community. We’re going to have to have a healthy, righteous anger sweep over us about every soul that goes out into eternity into the clutches of the enemy. We’re going to have to be a praying people who put feet to their prayers and who do not put stock in this world but instead desire heavenly treasure. We’re going to have to keep each other accountable and choose strong, selfless leaders.

If we do these things we will be a force to be reckoned with. What Jesus promised will be made true here, in these four walls: “I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.”⁶

⁶ Matthew 16:18