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## Nehemiah 5

(2021)

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Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Nehemiah 5.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

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In 445 B.C. the Persian King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah, an Israelite who was a trusted official written permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah went with the third wave of returning Jewish exiles. There was intense opposition from other people in the land, and disunity within Jerusalem. Despite the strong opposition, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and overcame many threats. He served twice as governor and did what God had put in his heart (Neh. 2:12) (Neh. 7:5), and found that the joy of the LORD was his strength (Neh. 8:10). For an overview of the entire book see the title: "Overview of the Book of Nehemiah" (at the beginning of the index to Nehemiah).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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When Sanballat and Tobiah the Ammonite heard that Nehemiah was building the wall, they were greatly enraged and in the presence of the army of Samaria, mocked and ridiculed the builders of the wall. Nehemiah prayed that God would turn against them and the builders continued working. The entire length of the wall was joined together and built to half its height.

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### NEHEMIAH 5:1-2

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- **Nehemiah 5:1-2:** Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.<sup>2</sup> For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive."

The focus in the previous chapters was upon troubles from foreign enemies outside the walls of Jerusalem, now the focus is upon the harsh treatment of Jewish nobles and officers upon the common and poor Jewish people.

**There was a great cry of the people:** (v1-2) The seventy-year Babylonian exile had cured the Jewish people of their idolatry, but they were not cured of their other sins, for they loved foreign women (spoken of in the book of Ezra), and were so covetous that the nobles and chief men oppressed the poor and needy of their own brethren, so much so that the poor are crying out to the Jewish creditors, the nobles and officers for food.

The glorious hope of a happy future upon the return to their land from their seventy years in exile is now being crushed, and this by their own people. The rich were taking advantage of the poor by imposing upon them unscrupulous exorbitant taxes and loans of excessive interest that placed them in great debt and mortgages they couldn't pay putting them in oppressive financial bondage. In consequence of these oppressions many had been driven to such extremes that they had to mortgage their lands and houses to enable them to pay their taxes to the Persian government, and ultimately even to sell their children for slaves to maintain a means of survival.

The rich preying upon the poor is commonly seen in the world, but such a wickedness should never be seen in God's Kingdom, for such an evil is a disgrace and reproach against God. Christians of all nations are called to show compassion for the poor and oppressed, and have empathy for those suffering the hardships poverty brings to men, woman and children alike, whether they are Christian or secular for this is the compassionate

way and the calling of God, and not only brings honour to God but also a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who show no compassion and no mercy to the less fortunate, should not expect to receive compassion and mercy, at the judgment.

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### NEHEMIAH 5:3

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- **Nehemiah 5:3:** There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.”

Not long before this, there had been a great scarcity of corn because of the lack of rain, which God had withheld as a punishment for the people’s taking more care to build their own houses than His temple.

- You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. <sup>11</sup> And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.” (Haggai 1:9-11).

This famine and lack of harvests is still affecting the people at this time and in this time of extreme lack the rich had no empathy or compassion toward their poorer brethren, but forced the poor to mortgage their lands, vineyards and houses, and in many cases hand them over to the nobles and the rich as pledges for money received from them, so that they could buy food for their families.

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### NEHEMIAH 5:4

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- **Nehemiah 5:4:** And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards.

Some could afford to buy food for their family without mortgaging their houses, land and vineyards, but many of the poor were in such a dire state that they had no choice but to borrow money to pay the Persian kings’ taxes. To borrow this money many had to pledge the coming produce or offer their fields and vineyards to the nobles and the rich.

**NOTE:** priests of Israel, Levites, and temple servants were exempted from paying taxes, and it was common in ancient times that heavy taxation was imposed on the people and often resulted in great debt and distress.

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### NEHEMIAH 5:5

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- **Nehemiah 5:5:** Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it (neither is it in our power to redeem them in KJV) for other men have our fields and our vineyards.”

For the survival of their sons and daughters and their own survival, they were compelled to sell their sons and daughters, which was extreme evidence of the extreme poverty they were in, for no parent ever wants to put their children into such bondage, especially their daughters being more vulnerable to abuse than their sons.

**Our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers:** (v5) meaning they of the same nature, nation, and religion with them, except some are rich and others are poor. The rich were treating the poor without any sense of humanity and any consciousness of the following law of God:

- If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother. (Deut. 15:7)

The major cry of the poor was the bondage of their children, especially of the daughters, whom they had been obliged to sell for money (until the year of Jubilee). The statement, "Our children are as their children," means that the children of the poor are as precious to their parents as the children of the rich are to their parents. The poor are literally saying, "just because we place our sons and daughters into bondage, because we are forced to sell them to survive, does not mean we love them less than the rich love their children."

**Neither is it in our power to redeem them:** because no one was willing to lend them money, because their lands were fully mortgaged to their oppressors. During the Old Testament it was permitted for Jews to sell themselves or their children as a slave/servant, if they had no other way of re-paying a financial debt. The freedom of the person that had been sold was granted upon full payment of the debt, and if that was not possible, they would be granted freedom in the seventh year of Jubilee. But here, the rich Jews, without any sense of empathy and compassion toward their own brothers, were forcing those who were poor, not because of any fault of their own, but because of the extreme famine in the land, to sell their own children.

This would be like parents lending their children a loan to buy a warehouse for a business, and then a storm comes and totally destroys the warehouse, leaving the children destitute of income, and unable to make the payments on the loan, until the warehouse is rebuilt, so the parents without any empathy or compassion sell their children to pay the debt owed to them. In times of disaster the right and proper thing to do is for families to rally together and help each other, this is what God expects from His people.

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## OVERVIEW OF SLAVERY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Slavery was permissible in certain situations, but they were to be treated humanely (Exod. 21:7-10) (Exod. 21:26-27) and receive the same rest periods and holidays as non-slaves (Exod. 23:12) (Deut. 5:14-15) (Deut. 12:12). If the owner inflicted any act of cruelty on his Hebrew slave, the slave was to be immediately given his freedom (Exodus 21:26-27) and most importantly, slavery for the Israelites was not a permanent condition, but a temporary refuge (Exodus 21:2) for people who were in such dire hardship, that they would be living a lifestyle of extreme poverty if they did not sell themselves as a slave/servant.

During these ancient times there was no social security, so in many cases it was better to go into temporary slavery, rather than try to survive in extreme poverty. This made male Hebrew slavery more like a long-term labour contract among individuals, and less like the kind of permanent exploitation that has characterized slavery in modern times. Female Hebrew slavery was in one sense even more protective, since the chief purpose for buying a female slave was so that she could become the wife of either the buyer or the buyer's son, much like an arranged marriage, which was common during this era. (Exod. 21:8-9).

As wife, she became the social equal of the slaveholder, and the purchase functioned much like the giving of a dowry. She is even called a wife by the law (Exod. 21:10), moreover, if the buyer failed to treat the female slave with all the rights due to an ordinary wife, he was required to set her free.(Exod. 21:11). In another sense, women had less protection than men because, every unmarried woman could be sold into a marriage against her will, and a girl or woman could be bought as a wife for a male slave, rather than for the slave owner or a son, and this resulted in permanent enslavement to the owner (Exod. 21:4). Even when the

husband's term of enslavement ended, the woman became a permanent slave to the owner who did not become her husband and therefore was not obligated to treat her as his wife, however, he would still be required to treat her and her children with decency and respect.

**SUMMARY OF SALVARY:** temporary slavery was a better choice than years in a prison or trying to survive in extreme poverty, but, lifelong slavery was certainly not a pleasant way of life. Regardless of a person's circumstances God's people are called to treat all people (whether free or not) with justice and compassion. Though in ancient time slavery was permitted, the thought of a human being someone's property should greatly disturb us. Nevertheless, consider working conditions today, many of the poor working in every corner of the world, especially those in third world countries (including children) would be labouring under much harsher conditions than a Hebrew slave would have been in ancient times.

Others are forced to ceaselessly work two or three jobs simply to survive and support their families. In many places the rich oppress the poor, those with the power take advantage of those who have no power, illicit business operators underpay their labourers and exploit their powerless employees. Millions work today with far less than the protective regulations of Moses law provided. During the Old Testament age, it was God's will to protect the poor of Israel from exploitation and abuse even in slavery, likewise, today, it is His will that followers of Christ should do likewise.

**It is not in our power to help it (neither is it in our power to redeem them in KJV):** (v5) which they were permitted to do, but they did not have the assets or financial means to do so.

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## NEHEMIAH 5:6-8

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- **Nehemiah 5:6-8:** I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. <sup>7</sup> I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them <sup>8</sup> and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say.

**I was very angry:** (v6) Nehemiah had a great passion for the wellbeing of God's people, for God's law and for God's will to be carried out in Israel, so when he heard that the nobles and the officials were not only demanding interest from other Jews struggling to survive, but also selling Jewish people to other Jews, it not only raised within him pity and compassion toward the poor, but also disgust and outrage toward the nobles and the officials.

**I took counsel with myself:** (v7) after hearing such upsetting news, Nehemiah was aware that he was in no emotional state to respond so rather than respond in anger he restrained his emotions and withdraw to be alone and give himself some time to calm down and consider what was best to be done.

**I brought charges against the nobles and the officials:** (v7) who had lent money with interest and mortgaged the homes and vineyards of the poor, and by doing so had gained their lands, vineyards, and houses for themselves. Charging interest to the poor was totally against the law of God.

- If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. (Exodus 22:25).

**I held a great assembly against them:** (v7) since we are not told who this large assembly of people were, it could be any of the following three or a combination of them all:

1. The poor that were oppressed, who brought in their accusations and complaints against them
2. A large body of the people, who were not guilty, so that the nobles and the officials might be put to public shame.
3. A public congregation of both of the rulers and the people who were free from this guilt.

**I said unto them:** (v8) “you, exact usury everyone from his brother,” the following verse shows that this was against the law of God, especially in this time of public calamity and famine.

- You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest. <sup>20</sup> You may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land you are entering to take possession of it. (Deut. 23:19-20).

The evil goal of the nobles was to ultimately bring all thing into their hands through the means of usury (moneylending with interest). The hope of Nehemiah was that the nobles, the rich and the officers would be convicted of their evil and be reformed, either from the fear of God, or the love for their brethren or from public shame.

**You even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us:** (v8) Nehemiah contrasts this evil with his own response to the poor. During the seventy-year Babylonian captivity, when he saw that through debt or some other means some Jewish exiles had lost their personal liberty, rather than take advantage of their helplessness, he urged the rich creditors to abandon their oppressive system of usury, and return the fields and vineyards back to the poor, so that this evil would be put to an end.

**Will you even sell your brethren?** (v8) Nehemiah’s appeal is a strong one. Do you expect that we should pay you a price for our own brothers? Many of our brothers before us have done all that was possible to redeem their brethren from bondage, and I and those with me redeemed those in servitude in Babylon and Persia whose owners would not part with them without a price, so we paid for their freedom, and you put our own brothers into bondage and servitude, this is a great wickedness, especially since God has delivered us from the bondage of the Babylonians, and you now make our own brethren our slaves?

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**NOTE:** not that Nehemiah and others had given a ransom to the king of Babylon or to the king of Persia or any other king, for this would be contrary to the prophecies concerning their redemption

- I have stirred him up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts. (Isaiah 45:13).

But rather paid the ransom for those who had sold themselves to various men in those cities or countries, who, without being redeemed, could not take the advantage of the liberty that Cyrus and other kings had granted them.

**They were silent and could not find a word to say:** (v8), after hearing Nehemiah’s strong rebuke and knowing they had done wrong they had no reply, because they could not deny what he had said or justify their wicked actions, since such practises were clearly against the law of God and love for their brethren. The nobles, the rich and officers, with emotions of shame, remorse, and fear all agreed to comply with Nehemiah’s recommendation and bound themselves by a solemn oath, before the priests, that they would carry out their promise. There is no doubt that had Nehemiah not put an end to this evil, the continuance of it would have ultimately led to the ruin of the newly restored city of Jerusalem, since such a practise were violating the principles of God’s law.



Nehemiah knew that, no matter how high or wide or how strong, he built the walls of Jerusalem the city could not be safe while there remained men in power abusing and taking advantage of those who had none. The only true way to reform the lives of humanity, is to convict their consciences and bring them to repentance for the wrong they have done. Those who walk in a right relationship with God, will not be covetous for worldly gain and will certainly not abuse and be cruel toward their brethren. Nothing brings a bad testimony to God more than ministers and overseers of God's word than worldliness and hard-heartedness toward His people. In reasoning with selfish people as these nobles and officers were, it is good to contrast their conduct with Christ who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich, (2Cor. 8:9).

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## NEHEMIAH 5:9-11

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- **Nehemiah 5:9-11:** So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?"<sup>10</sup> Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.<sup>11</sup> Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money (the hundredth *part* of the money in KJV) grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them."

**Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God:** (v9) meaning they should uphold God's law, treat their brothers with compassion and respect etc., otherwise they give their enemies justified reasons to mock and ridicule God's name. In the following chapter we see that all matters concerning the Jews including every Jewish act of abuse and oppression amongst them were reported to the heathen, which of course would not only give the heathen a good reason to criticise the Jews but also bring a terrible testimony to the name of the LORD their God. Those who walk in the fear of the LORD will not be covetous of worldly gain, nor cruel toward their brethren nor will they deliberately do anything that would bring a bad testimony to the name of God. Because everyone around about them observe their behaviour and actions and judge God and their faith accordingly.

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For more concerning the fear of the LORD, see the title:

- Fear of God (Christian and Secular Fear)

At the end of this study.

**Return to them this very day** (v11) immediately return to them, their houses, fields, land, vineyards olive yards, and their possessions and cancel their interest, and mortgages. The nobles and officers had gained all of these for themselves by taking a mortgage against the people's possessions or by lending them money with interest so the poor of their brethren could buy food.

**The percentage of money (the hundredth *part* of the money in KJV):** (v11) it is speculated that the hundredth part was payable each month, meaning that the people were to pay a monthly payment of one per cent per month (twelve per cent a year) according to the custom in those countries at this time and later adopted by the Romans. The following verses show that it was forbidden for Israel to charge the poor of their own people interest:

- If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. (Exodus 22:25).
- If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.<sup>36</sup> Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. (Leviticus 25:35-36).

- **Nehemiah 5:12-13:** Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said “Amen” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

**We will restore:** (v12) the promise was given to return the mortgaged homes and land and to require no more interest.

**Then I called the priests:** (v12) Nehemiah also required the oath to be made before the priests who being witnesses would give it the highest religious sanction and most likely make a deeper impression on their conscience.

**I also shook out the fold of my garment:** (v13) shaking the dust out of a garment was a symbol of getting rid of everything detestable and not wanted. It was common for a prophet to symbolise what he was saying by some kind of external sign. The idea carried here of Nehemiah shaking out the fold of his garment is of God shaking every man who did not keep this oath from his house and to be emptied of all his possessions, just as they had done with their brethren, which was a most appropriate penalty.

**All the assembly said, “Amen!”** (v13) the guilty were so convicted and so influenced by Nehemiah’s strong speech that all praised the LORD, no doubt with gladness and thankfulness for giving them such a good governor, and for the nobles, the rich and the officers repenting and promising to make things right.

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**NEHEMIAH 5:14**

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- **Nehemiah 5:14:** Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. (the bread of the governor in KJV).

**My brethren:** refers to Nehemiah’s fellow-officers principal men and deputies, who, supported him in his work and who he had placed into positions of authority under him for supervision of the work.

**Twelve years:** this does not mean that he had continued for twelve years at Jerusalem; but that he had been the governor of the Jews in the land of Judah for twelve years.

- Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. (Neh. 5:14).

**The food allowance of the governor (bread of the governor in KJV)** referring to the allowance that by the law of God and the law of nations the king of Persia and governors would require to maintain their office, their stately position and their public service. Nehemiah and his brethren did not receive the portion of food that all governors before him exacted from the people.

This act of self-denial manifests the truth that Nehemiah considered the well-being of the people far more important, than indulging himself in luxuries he did not need, even though by law he was entitled to. At the close of Nehemiah twelve years’, he was able to say that he and his official attendants had not drawn the customary allowances from the people. He no doubt mentions this to put the nobles to shame and further entice them not to burden the poor.



It is perfectly reasonable that the government of the people would be supported by those they govern, which is why the law of God grants this allowance to Israel's kings, governors and governments, and likewise the kings of Babylon, Persia and most other nations then and today embrace this same law. But Nehemiah saw that it would be extremely burdensome to his countrymen so he chose not to accept it, and rather live from his own estates, which he may have had in Judah, or upon his own resources, he had gained at the court of Shushan when he was the king's cup-bearer, or from payments he may have been receiving from the king of Persia.

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## NEHEMIAH 5:15-16

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- **Nehemiah 5:15-16:** The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver (had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver in KJV). Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. <sup>16</sup> I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

**The former governors:** (v15) naturally Ezra is not included in this statement, since he was a priest and scribe sent to teach and to correct abuses, not a governor, nor Zerubbabel, but other governors that rather than govern for the wellbeing of the people not only took advantage of their privileged position, but brought those they governed under great oppression. They and their officers lorded it over the people and demanded from them more than they needed, simply to indulge themselves in pleasures and luxuries, while the people suffered extreme oppression and hardships. This evil is charged upon the governors, because they did not restrain those that served them. Nehemiah, does not name any of these governors, because his intention was not to disgrace any particular person, but to reform the abuses. History shows us that many in places of trust, use their position of trust to benefit themselves more than the public welfare of the people they govern. This is not a new thing, even today this attitude of "Me first" is happening in governments around the world and even in some churches.

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**The forty shekels of silver:** (v15) some feel that the forty shekels means that the cost of the bread (meaning all sorts of eatable provision) and wine were forty shekels, but since it was a common practice for the income of Eastern governors to be paid partly in produce (i.e., food) and, partly in money, it more likely means that the daily allowance was bread and wine, plus forty shekels to cover other expenses. Verse seventeen tells us that there were one hundred and fifty Jewish men and officials, plus all who came to them from surrounding nations that attended this feast.

**The fear of God:** (v15) the following verses show that usury and inflexibility were prohibited, with the express affirmation, "Fear your God."

- Take no interest from him (a poor brother) or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. (Leviticus 25:36).
- You shall not rule over him (a poor brother) ruthlessly but shall fear your God. (Leviticus 25:43).

The fear of God or, the New Testament equivalent, 'the love of Christ,' makes it possible for a believer, with all their inward sinful aberrations, dysfunctions and desires to be like those that are near them to refuse to be one of the crowd that follow after sinful worldly ways. Jesus Christ has set the example for all who know his love and grace, to follow, which is to do our utmost to imitate Him and not to do as those who do not have the blessing of knowing his grace and love. Jesus has given us the strongest possible motive to imitate him, as the Apostle said:

- You were bought with a price; do not become servants of men. (1 Cor. 7:23).

The great price paid for our redemption and the knowledge and feeling that we belong to Him because He died for us should inspire and arouse us from following after the opinions and sinful ways of the majority of a group, a crowd or the world

**The fear of God:** (v15) Nehemiah had an awe of God's majesty, and a fear of offending Him, and therefore he did not do as the former governors had done. It is a principle of Christian life and of justice and charity that those who truly fear God will not dare to do anything cruel or unjust. Every minister, pastor and leader in God's Kingdom is called to do good, and not to use their privileged position to enrich themselves. The fear and love of God in the heart, and true love of those in His Kingdom, will lead to every good work, which are the proper evidences of justifying faith and being reconciled God. It is only believers of this faith and character that attract those outside God's Kingdom to seek after Him.

**I also persevered in the work on this wall:** (v16) overseeing, as general superintendent directing, and encouraging the workmen, at his own cost.

**We acquired no land (neither bought we any land):** (v16) Nehemiah and those with him did not take advantage of the general poverty to buy homes, land, vineyards, orchards etc., of the poor even though they had abundant opportunities to enrich themselves by taking ownership of the people's possessions, because of their hardships. Nehemiah and the principal men with him, could have greatly enriched themselves by gaining many valuable possessions very cheaply, but they chose not to take advantage of the people's hardships, but rather do what was right before God, which was to show compassion.

Those who truly fear God, or love Christ, will not do anything cruel or unjust or use their privileged position to enrich themselves (especially at the expense of the poor and less fortunate), but to humbly serve God for the good of His people and the benefit others, which manifests true evidences of justifying faith and being reconciled God. This type of good, kind and compassionate character will store up rewards in heaven.

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## SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION

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Nehemiah had Jerusalem in his heart, loved God and His people, and was noble of character and brave, yet because he did not live in the heroic age, was not a prophet and had no glowing words, no lofty visions or miraculous commission, he is one of the great men of Scripture who is often neglected. When he was appointed governor of the returned exiles in Palestine, he found that the nobles and the rich were bringing great oppression on their brethren, by taking from them their entitled food allowance to keep the governor's table richly spread, which left them greatly lacking in food for themselves. At that time this was the custom, no-one would have questioned Nehemiah if he had continued in this practise, but he cared about the people and valued their well-being above spoiling himself with the riches he was entitled to for the following two reasons:

1. The fear of God.
2. Compassion for the people.

Nehemiah did not conform, he said, no, even though he was entitled to what he and other leaders before him had practised. The great lesson we can all learn from this, is to say no, which is sometimes the most-godly thing to do, if you cannot say, no, your life will be run and controlled by others, or by tradition. Many solely shape their lives based upon what people around them are thinking and how they are living. The common thought concerning Scripture, is, "what the majority says is true," but the reality is that any given time in history this is very often a false statement

Truth has always lived with minorities, so do not let widespread opinion mindlessly sweep you away, but make every effort to be like Nehemiah and have a mind of your own. Nehemiah could have said: "There never was a governor yet that did not take from the people whether they were poor or not his forty shekels a day of provisions, because it is the custom, therefor I will continue to do it." Just as "the fear of God" compelled Nehemiah and all other faithful Old Testament believers like him to do what was right before God, likewise "the love of Christ" compels faithful New Testament believers to do all they can to live a lifestyle that honours God and brings a good testimony to the name of Jesus.

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## NEHEMIAH 5:17-19

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- **Nehemiah 5:17-19:** Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. <sup>18</sup> Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days (once in ten days store in KJV) all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. <sup>19</sup> Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

in the East it was customary for a king or governor to layout a lavish banquet table of quality food and wine for his guests, at the expense of a king's or the governors empire or kingdom for it was by these feasts their kingdom and prosperity would be judged.

**At my table 150 men:** (v17) a hundred and fifty official Jews and rulers to discuss their complaints and future plans for their nation and the surrounding countryside and receive Nehemiah's orders. Those who came with them, most likely refers to the heads, officials and rulers of the surrounding nations and their business men and others who had news concerning the state of the people in the surrounding countries. The cost for the governor to occasionally show hospitality and provide free food to such a large company of men of high rank would have been quite considerable, yet Nehemiah from his own personal monies covered the cost every day.

Since this was a large daily personal expense, it is unlikely such feasts occurred every day that Nehemiah was at Jerusalem and the land of Judah, but only occurred on special occasions at certain times of the year or during times of great emergencies and distresses of the Jews. Similar to our world's global G7 consisting of the following group of industrialized democracies, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, who annually meet together to discuss issues such as global economic governance, international security and energy policy etc. Nehemiah's personal income may have come from one or all of the following:

- From his own estate in the land of Judah, since his office in the Persian court was not only a place of honour, but also a position of great financial reward.
- From what he had gained from his salary while cupbearer to the king of Persia.
- From an income that he may have still have been receiving from the Persian court.

**Every ten days (once in ten days store in KJV):** (v18) either once in ten days the stock of wine was renewed, or once in ten days a more abundant and bountiful entertainment and enjoyment was made

**Remember for my good, O my God:** (v19) even though Nehemiah had great success he had no interest in fame, but rather prays that God would show him kindness, similar to that which he had shown to His people. If Nehemiah had a copy of the book of Hebrews in his hands, as we do today, he could have been fully confident God would reward him according to his good deeds, for in it we read:

- For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still **do**. (Heb. 6:10)

The fear and love of God in the heart, and true love for those in His Kingdom, will lead to every good work. Such works are not only true evidences of justifying faith and being reconciled God, but this kind of good character will store up rewards in heaven.

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## THE FEAR OF GOD (CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR FEAR)

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**The fear of the LORD has the following two aspects:**

1. **An eternal aspect:** wisdom teaches that mankind is separated from God because of sin and without God a person has no hope of eternal life and will be judged accordingly. The fear of the LORD in this context is wisdom because it motivates a person to seek God and eternal life.
2. **An aspect for the present moment:** the fear of the LORD in the present moment motivates mankind to obey God's Ten Commandments which are all designed to protect the innocent from harm, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally and spiritually. The fear of the LORD in this context is also wisdom because if everyone feared the LORD humanity would live in harmony with each other. Sadly, there is very little fear of the LORD in the world today and so we see rampant rebellion, violence, crime and wars in most countries.

**The fear of the LORD is to have a spirit that is afraid to:**

- Harm another human physically, financially, sexually, verbally, emotionally, or spiritually.
- Deliberately destroy the planet God created that we live on (i.e., arsonists who set forests on fire, companies who pour toxic poisonous waste into rivers and such like things).
- Treat animals with brutality and cruelty.

Having a fear of the LORD is having a fear of doing any of these things, because they are all destructive and bring pain, hurt and harm to others. Having a fear of the LORD means respecting the lives of others, respecting creation and doing what is right before God. The apostle John wrote:

- If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:1-10).

Fear is about recognising that though we might be a good person in this world we are nevertheless sinners before the Holiness of God and will give an account of our actions and behaviour and be judged accordingly. It is, knowing that there will be a day when we will stand before God and be judged to eternal life or eternal death and allowing this truth to motivate us to seek God and his forgiveness. Peter said:

- In every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts 10:35).

Those desiring eternal life (if they are wise) should be motivated by the knowledge of judgment to seek God and treat others with decency and respect and do the right thing. This is why the Bible says:

- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Psalm 111:10) (Proverbs 1:7)

The fear of the LORD should motivate a person to seek after God and eternal life.

**False fear:** is generated by the mind imagining and believing something terrible is about to happen in the future or imagining something is real and true that is not true. These kinds of fears produce real fearful feelings in the emotions even though the fears are fantasies of the mind. This is because our nervous system cannot tell the difference between a real event and a false event that is played out on the screen of our imagination and therefore our emotions respond according to the mental movies, we play in our minds whether they are real or false.

**Real fear:** is fear that is generated by something real such as a family who loses their house in a bush fire and fear having absolutely nothing and no-where to live, or fear of jumping off a cliff and being hurt and such like things. These are very real and justifiable fears.

### **The Fear of God and Christians and Love.**

- Jesus said: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Those in Christ understand this great love of God and no longer act from fear, but from love in the same way that a man in love with a woman does not do things to please her from fear, but from the love dwelling in his heart. Likewise, it is with those who belong to the Lords global family.

Once a person is saved in Christ and experiences God’s forgiveness and His love and grace their heart is transformed and the mind and passions are changed in such a way that they now desire from the heart to live in a manner that brings honour God and a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their motivation to follow God is not from fear anymore, but from love because they now know, understand and experience the love God’s has for them.

**Fear trust and faith:** this is about our will being fully surrendered to God’s will and trusting that regardless of the circumstance (good or bad) God has our life in his hand and believing that through all our confusion, disappointments and lack of understanding our lives are in his control. Without this kind of faith fear and its allied partner doubt have an open door to attack.

**Fear and overcoming it:** to shut the door on fear we need to have the same great faith that Job and Habakkuk expressed in the following words:

- Though he slay me, I will hope in him. (Job 13:15).
- Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup>yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup>GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

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### **FOOTNOTE**

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After observing mankind, the author of Ecclesiastes gave the following advice to those who choose to deny God and live for themselves:

- Eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which they toil under the sun the few days of their life that God has given them, for this is their lot. (Eccles. 5:18).

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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