

Studies In Nehemiah 4

Walking In the Fear of the Lord

Neh. 5:1-5

Introduction:

1. Our studies in Nehemiah have taken us through chapter 4.
2. After some absence from this study it will be good for us to refresh ourselves on what has transpired before we go on to chapter 5.

Discussion:

I. Review of the history up to this time.

- A. Nehemiah was in Susa, in Babylon, among those who had survived the captivity.
- B. The report he heard from Hanani, his brother and others who had been to Jerusalem resulted in his being grief stricken.
- C. As cupbearer to King Artaxerxes he was regularly in the king's presence. His grief was so pronounced that the king asked him about it.
- D. Nehemiah prayed to God that the king might be favorable to his request. He wanted to go to Jerusalem seeking the welfare of the sons of Israel. Nehemiah would lead in rebuilding the city walls and labor to restore what the people had lost in their relationship with God.
- E. The labor on the walls was begun. The people had a mind to work. But the opposition was stiff. Sanballet, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites not only ridiculed their work, but determined to fight against Jerusalem.
- F. The workers armed themselves and planned what to do in case of an attack. They used one hand to build the wall and held their swords in the other.

II. As is often the case, the people of God were not only stressed by these external pressures. They were plagued by internal problems. Chapter 5 describes what was happening (5:1-5).

A. Economic depression was a problem (5:1-5).

1. John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), a well-known author and preacher in the Anglican church in London, at Asbury Theological Seminary, distinguished between socialism and capitalism. He said, "In socialism man takes advantage of man and in capitalism man takes advantage of man."
2. In Jerusalem the nobles and rulers (5:7) were exacting usury from their brothers.
 - a. It is a matter of having financial power over another and using that power in a

way

that takes power from another. The nobles and the rulers were weakening the financial stability of their brothers.

- b. Originally usury involved charging interest of any kind.
- c. Today it is defined as the practice of making unethical loans that unfairly enrich the lender. An equivalent term for us is "loan shark."

3. In ancient Israel interest could be charged to strangers, but not to a Hebrew brother (Ex. 22:24; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20).
 4. This was seen as extending compassion to the poor and thus supporting the people of God (Ezek. 18:17; Psa. 15:5).
 5. There is much to be learned in this text regarding the use of power, financial or otherwise. Power is to be used to empower the weak rather than to take advantage of them. Use what you have to help others! (Eph. 4:28).
- B. There were three groups that were oppressed.
1. Those who did not have property (v. 2).
 2. Those who had mortgaged their fields (v. 3).
 3. Those who had borrowed money for the king's tax on their fields (v. 4).
- C. Nehemiah had a powerful argument. "We have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" (v. 8). We redeemed them from others to enslave them to ourselves???
- D. "Should we not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" (v. 9). In other words, Nehemiah is saying, "We should not treat our brothers harshly because this will give our enemies occasion to charge us with improper actions."
1. And we should "walk in the fear of our God."
 2. We live our lives before God and our actions should be designed to honor Him in every way so that we give our enemies no occasion to blaspheme Him (Matt. 5:16; James 2:1-7).
 3. This has far-reaching implications. We should avoid that that would cause the world to view us as living inconsistently with the instruction of our God.
- E. A change was in order—repentance (v. 10-13).
1. They promised.
 2. They took an oath.
 3. They praised the Lord.
 4. They followed through on their promise.

III. Nehemiah disciplined himself according to the fear of God (14-19).

- A. He did not domineer over the people like former governors had.
- B. Instead he was a contributor.
- C. Indeed in our world it seems that everyone is out for what they can get.
 1. Politicians seem to be more about what they can do for themselves than what they can do for the people.
 2. The people are out for what the politicians can do for them, for their sex, for their race, for me economically.
 3. It comes over into the church in a consumer philosophy. "What can I get?" People are promised health, wealth and prosperity for their contributions. Both the religious organization and its members are self-centered. They play on one another as each attempts to take advantage of the other.
- D. How could Israel expect to be successful in building the walls of the city of God if they were taking advantage of one another? How can we expect to build the city of God if we are taking advantage of one another?

- E. If we are to serve the purpose of God we must do so in light of the fact that we live in His presence. If we are to lead God's people we must walk in the fear of the Lord (1 Pet. 5:2-3) in every way proving to be examples that the flock can follow.

Conclusion:

1. Are you walking in the fear of the Lord?
2. Are you contributing to that which builds up the city of God?
3. Or are you taking advantage of others by diminishing their power so that you can gain power?
4. Do you not realize that this destroys the very purpose for which we are working?
5. These people repented. They promised different behavior. They did according to what they promised. Will you?