

Nehemiah 5

‘CO-WORK not forgetting the needy’



5 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. ² Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”

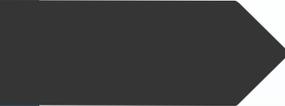
³ Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”

⁴ Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. ⁵ 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.”



⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them ⁸ and said: “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.

⁹ So I 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? ¹⁰ I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!



11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

12 “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”

What had happened?

- There had been a famine (verse 3)
- The people were heavily taxed (verse 4)
- In order to get food, they had to borrow money:
 - With their fields and vineyards as security
 - Against interest: which is forbidden in Torah (exodus 22:25/lev:25-35)- 1% per month (verse 11) – usury
- When they could not repay, they lost their fields and had to sell their children into slavery
- Families were torn apart
- Hence the outcry of the ‘people and their wives’
- The result: division (outcry against fellow jews)

The sin is taking interest from the poor:

³⁵ “ ‘If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. ³⁶ Do not take interest or any profit from them, but fear your God, so that they may continue to live among you. ³⁷ You must not lend them money at interest or sell them food at a profit.

³⁸ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.



Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?

- The honour of God is at stake when we mistreat our fellow man, our neighbour.
- The first and second commandment are equal!
 - Love God
 - Love your neighbour



¹² “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!”

At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

Nehemiah is rich:

- He did not tax the people
- He fed 150 Jews and officials and many foreign guests:
- “17 Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. 18 Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.”



Riches are no sin...

But the love of money

- Goods (or labour) > money > goods
 - Money used to provide needs is OK
- Money > goods > money
 - Goods to increase money makes money an end in itself
 - Money as end in itself can become an object of worship
 - Object of worship = an idol = mammon



Lending money...

- ▶ In order to help provide is OK, if a poor person cannot pay back, let it go:
- ▶ Psalm 37:21 The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously;
- ▶ Psalm 37:25-27 I once was young and now I am old, but I have not seen a righteous person forsaken or his descendants begging for bread. Every day he is generous, lending freely, and his descendants are blessed. Depart from evil, and do good, and you will live in the land forever.



For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil

- ▶ 1 Timothy 6:9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.



Root of all kinds of evils

- ▶ Love of money brings division between people
 - ▶ Lender/borrower
 - ▶ Rich / poor
- ▶ Division results in loneliness
- ▶ Loneliness results in all kinds of sins, vain attempts to fill the felt emptiness
- ▶ Hands that cling cannot connect, cannot receive!



1 Timothy 6:17-19

Command those who are rich in this world's goods not to be haughty or to set their hope on riches, which are uncertain, but on God who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. **Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others.** In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future and so lay hold of what is truly life.