

A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families for the week of June 21, 2020

Walk in the Fear of Our God

This week, Pastor Steve Shelby preached from [Nehemiah 5:1-13](#)

¹ Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. ² 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." ³ There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." ⁴ And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. 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, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ 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 ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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? ¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. ¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.

Nehemiah has his hands full. The Hebrews are scared from the threat of an outside attack, and internal issues boil between them. The complaints to Nehemiah come from three different groups of people whose men left their day jobs to build the wall.

In an agrarian society, this means the wives and children stayed home to do the work in the field, and the men lost the fruit of their labor. This sacrifice cost their families, and they were forced to mortgage their land, put their children into debt slavery and ask for help with basic food. The interest on their debt was high, and either they couldn't pay or they had mortgaged all just to survive.

The issue was that those who were charging the interest, the ones foreclosing on debts and taking fields and vineyards away from the Hebrews, were other Hebrews. The upper class of the nation was forcing their own countrymen to sell their children into debt slavery, and they were selling Hebrews to Gentiles for a profit: "Now our flesh is the flesh of our brothers, our children as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves...but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards" (5).

Nehemiah doesn't mince words about his feelings in response, he considers the issue and takes time to think it through. He takes counsel with himself and then calls a meeting.

- **Read v1.** The Hebrews are the people of God, but they fail to protect their unity at God's people because of sin. What things tempt you to live as if you do not have unity with your Christian brothers and sisters?
- **Read v.2.** Summarize this cry of the people in your own words.
- **Read v.3.** Summarize this cry of the people in your own words.
- **Read v.4-5.** Summarize this cry of the people in your own words.

- The nobles and officials succumb to greed, resulting in injustice & selfishness. How does greed damage our church& relationships today?
- **Read vv.6-13.** Nehemiah responds to the situation with anger and carefully chosen words. Summarize what he says to the nobles and officials in response to their actions.
- Nehemiah charges the Hebrew nobles and officials to “walk in the fear of our God” (9)? How do they respond? How does walking in the fear of God move them to action?
- What does it mean for the church to “walk in the fear of God? How can we repent in light of God’s generosity and kindness to address injustice and brokenness?

Pray in response to God's Word.

- *Pray for the Lord to grant greater unity to His people*
- *Ask the Lord to deliver us from pride, arrogance, and greed that can lead to oppression. Ask Him to stir our hearts to repent and to practice justice & generosity.*
- *Thank Jesus that He is faithful, just, generous & good.*

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 Questions? Contact Pastor Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org