

# Nehemiah—Building for the Future

## STUDY 5

### Dealing with internal division

#### Nehemiah Chapter 5 Introduction

The Jewish community have made an impressive start to the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. But the task is enormous! If completed the circumference of the wall is over four kilometres. The average height is 12 meters and the average thickness is over 2.5 meters. The walls included many watch towers which, were taller and larger sections of the structure. Ten fortified gates are listed in chapter three of Nehemiah for reconstruction; the Sheep Gate, Fish Gate, Old Gate, Valley Gate, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, Water Gate, Horse Gate, East Gate and Muster Gate.

They also had to deal with external opposition! The last thing they need is internal division; Jews disputing with Jews. But when people find themselves pressured with an ambitious project often disunity occurs. From chapter 5 of Nehemiah we will discern some practical principles of how to deal with internal division. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 73. Copyright 1998. Ezra and Nehemiah, Tyndale Commentaries. Derek Kidner. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 93. Copyright 1979. Also, Online Bible Commentaries.)

#### Opening Discussion Questions

Some people state, "I enjoy a good argument!"

Do you enjoy conflict?

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If somebody has hurt you, how easy do you find it to talk with them about it?

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Do you prefer to talk with others about it?

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As a group, read Nehemiah 5:1-19.

1. Consider Nehemiah 5:1-5. List the difficulties some of the Jewish people were facing.

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Greek historian Herodotus who lived during the reign of King Artaxerxes records that Darius the 1<sup>st</sup> introduced a taxation system for all the nations in the Persian Empire and this remained in place during the time of Artaxerxes and beyond. Persian rule, during this period was draining away local resources from the provinces to finance the imperial court and the building of magnificent palaces. The Persian people were exempt from paying taxes.

When the Greek, Alexander the Great conquered the capital city of Susa in 331 B.C. in Susa alone 9,000 talents (340 tons) of gold were found stored and 40,000 talents (1,500 tons) of silver. (The Message of Nehemiah, The Bible Speaks Today series. Raymond Brown. Inter-Varsity Press. Page 87. Copyright 1998. Also, NIV study notes.)

2. Read Nehemiah 5:6-7. How did Nehemiah respond after he had listened to the people's concerns?

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2a. Nehemiah seemed to have a solid knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, what had particularly angered him? Read Leviticus 25:42-43.

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2b. What three things did Nehemiah do about the situation?

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3. What are Christians called to do amongst one another when somebody has been wronged in some way? Consider Matthew 18:15-17.

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3a. Can you recall an occasion that you have put this model into practice? How did it go?

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3b. Why is it important to talk about the issue with the person first, before involving others?

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In the next passage Nehemiah calls for “the exacting of usury to stop.” Who were the Jews exercising usury?

- a. Jews who had become wealthy whilst away in exile and had re- turned with the wealth.
- b. Those that had returned almost a century earlier under the leader- ship of Zerubbabel and had established lucrative businesses.

“These people would lend large sums of money; then when the debtors missed a payment, they would take over their fields. Left with no means of income, the debtors were forced to sell their children into slavery, a common practice of this time.” (NIV Life Application Bible commentary. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois And Zondervan Grand Rapids, Michigan. Page 701.)

4. Read Nehemiah 5:8-10. In the Persian culture, what the wealthy Jews were doing was perfectly acceptable, it's just business. Why did Nehemiah have an issue with it? Consider Exodus 22:25 in giving your answer.

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4a. As Nehemiah deals with internal division, he seems to clarify the issue in the light of Scripture. Why is this important?

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5. How did Nehemiah proceed in dealing with the internal division? (Neh. 5:11)

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6. How did the wealthy Jews and nobles respond? (Neh. 5:12)

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7. When the solution had been agreed upon, how did the large assembly of people respond? (Neh. 5:13)

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8. Reflect upon Nehemiah 5:14-18. Nehemiah as the governor, and those officials working with him were also prepared to make a financial sacrifice for the good of the nation and not require as much as previous governments. Why was this important?

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In conclusion; when dealing with internal division we have learnt some very practical principles from Nehemiah that can be summarized as follows:

- A. Listen to the people's concerns (Neh. 5:1-6).
- B. Consider the problem, confront those involved and call a meeting (Neh. 5:7).
- C. Clarify the issue in the light of Scripture (Neh. 5:8-10, Lev. 25:24- 43, Ex. 22:25).
- D. Create a solution, act on that solution, remain faithful to that solution (Neh. 5:11-13).
- E. If the solution involves a cost, model a similar example of sacrifice in your own life (Neh. 5: 14-18).

Is there division between you and another person at the moment?

- A member of your extended family?
- An old friend you don't get along with anymore?
- A work associate?
- A Church member?

Does God want you to take any of the previous steps learnt in Nehemiah to restore that relationship?

Perhaps it seems too confronting or potentially painful to approach them. Ask for some prayer from your group or the person who is discipling you, that the Holy Spirit may help and guide you.

## Study Notes: