



April 10, 2016

Nehemiah 5

Ever Changing, Never Changing Part 16

*"Being Others-Oriented"*

Pastor Gary Hamrick

In Nehemiah 5, we find out that infighting and conflict within the Jewish community nearly derailed the rebuilding of Jerusalem. During a time of economic hardship, Jews started taking advantage of their fellow Jews by leveraging land and even selling their sons and daughters to each other in slavery. When Nehemiah realized the problem, he confronted it head-on and rebuked the nobles and officials for such actions. In the end, land and children were returned to their rightful families and the building of Jerusalem continued. This account is a lesson for us concerning the ways we need to serve one another, love one another, and care for one another in the Body of Christ. It's a lesson about how we need to *"look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others."*<sup>1</sup>

### Family Conflict

1. Economic crisis precipitated conflict within the Jewish community.
2. There were three factors that created the crisis:
  - a. Population explosion
    - i. **Nehemiah 5:1-2** - *"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, 'We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.' "*
    - ii. Approximately 50,000 people were in the first wave of exiles to return to Jerusalem from 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Philippians 2:4** - *"Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

- iii. The second and third groups of exiles to return numbered approximately 10,000 people.
  - iv. The people returned to a city with zero infrastructures in place!
  - v. They were all vying for the same food, water, and other resources.
  - vi. No economy can handle an influx of tens of thousands of people, so a time of crisis was sure to come.
- b. Famine in the land
- i. [Nehemiah 5:3](#) - *“Others were saying, ‘We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.’ ”*
  - ii. The prophet Haggai tells of a drought that God allowed in judgment against the people.<sup>2</sup>
    - 1. Pastor Gary said: “Sometimes droughts are brought on by God as a way of judging people, because of their disobedience, to get their attention. Sometimes God will allow us - it’s not that God delights in seeing us suffer - but sometimes he will allow us to get to the place where we just have nowhere else to look, except up. And that’s what he does in our lives, because he loves us.”
  - iii. When the exiles first returned to Jerusalem, all they were concerned about was settling down and building their homes, and in the process, they neglected the Temple of God and the worship of God.
  - iv. [Haggai 1:10-11](#) - *“Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.”*
  - v. Even though Haggai ministered about 75 years before Nehemiah, the effects of this drought were still evident.
- c. Taxation by the Persian king
- i. [Nehemiah 5:4](#) - *“Still others were saying, ‘We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards.’ ”*
  - ii. At this time, Israel was part of the Persian Empire, which covered the territory from Iran all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.
  - iii. When King Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah, his cupbearer, to return to rebuild Jerusalem, he sent letters with Nehemiah for the purpose of making available all of the supplies that were needed to complete the rebuilding project.
  - iv. The hard reality of the “everything is going to be free” situation was big-time taxes on their fields and vineyards!

---

<sup>2</sup> [Haggai 1:1-11](#)

3. To make matters worse, the people who were well off were taking advantage of those who weren't so well off.
4. **Nehemiah 5:5-6** - “ *‘Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons 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.’ ‘When I [Nehemiah] heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.’ ”*
5. **Nehemiah 5:9-10** - “*... 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? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop!*”
6. Pastor Gary said: “There is [an] unsaved world that is watching how the church treats itself; how the Body of Christ treats one another. And, when we don't treat each other right, and when we bicker and fight, and have conflict, strife, division, animosity, and discord... it brings reproach on the name of God to a watching world.”
7. **Nehemiah 5:11-12** - “ *‘Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury [interest] you are charging them - the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.’ ‘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.’ ”<sup>3</sup>*

### An Others-Oriented Church

8. When there is a population explosion, everyone takes care of his or her self; figuring that each person would take care of their own needs, and the same thing could happen in a growing church.
9. Pastor Gary said: “The Lord has blessed us and grown our church over the years. And, the tendency can be, if we're not careful and we don't work on this... [people can say to themselves], ‘I just need to [take care of myself] and not be too worried about anybody else.’ ”

---

<sup>3</sup> The “*hundredth part*” was one-percent interest per month, which was in effect 12% per year.

10. The Body of Christ should always be about the business of looking out for one another, helping, serving, loving, and caring for each other.
11. The Body of Christ should always be guarding against those things that can cause division, strife, envy, etc.
12. In a growing church like Cornerstone Chapel, people must be intentional about looking out for each other.
13. There are a variety of ways to get to know other people in the church, such as joining a K-Group or Men's Bible study group or Women's Bible study group or joining a ministry team and serving in the church.
14. Pastor Gary encouraged us to be part of the process of breaking down a large church into a smaller group of people, for the purpose of developing relationships, so we can share the joys and the difficult times with others.
15. We must be focused on how we can love and care for people, share with people, serve with people, etc.
16. [Philippians 2:3-5](#) - *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus..."*
17. [2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#) - *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

#### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Nehemiah 5:1-12](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the "unsaved world watching how the church treats itself." (See #6 above)
4. Read and discuss [Philippians 2:3-11](#).

5. Read and discuss [2 Corinthians 1:3-4](#).
6. How is the Lord leading you to consider what you can do to either ease someone's burden or bless someone?
7. What are some of the ways you are intentionally breaking down a large church into a smaller group of people?
8. How have others ministered you to when you were in a time of crisis?
9. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).