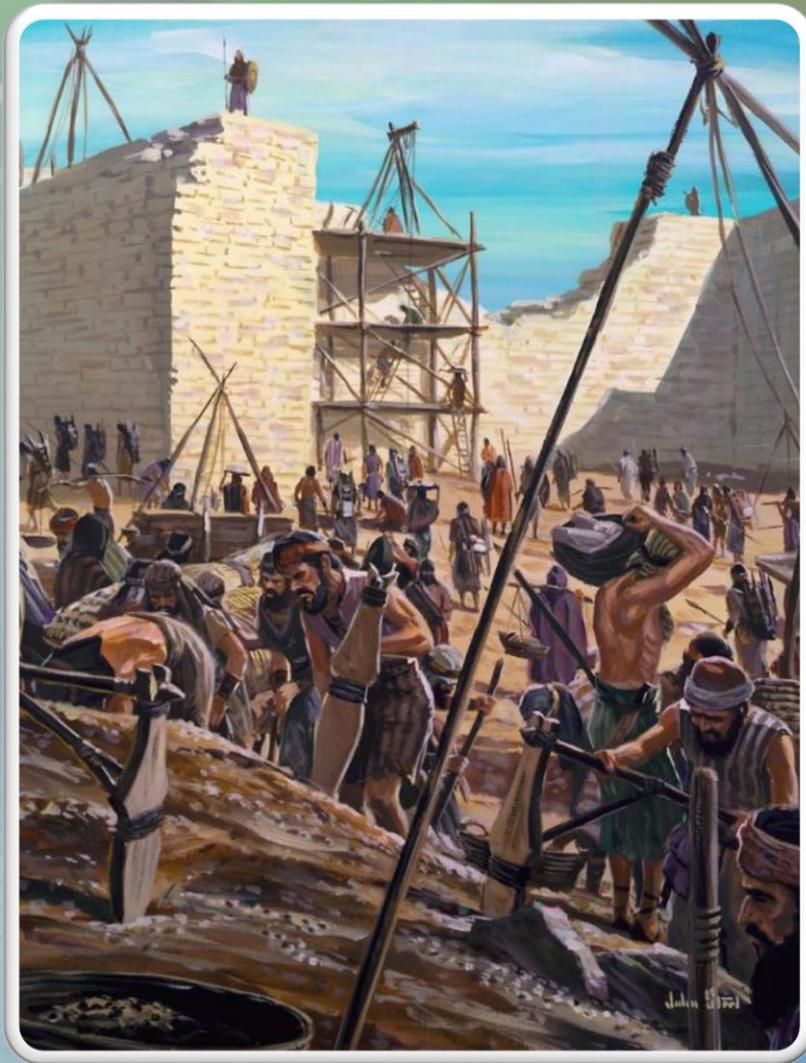


VIOLATING THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW





As the wall of Jerusalem was being rebuilt, Nehemiah had to face one sad challenge. Some people were oppressing their brothers and sisters.

Nehemiah 5 tells the story of this issue and how Nehemiah solved it.

- The poor are oppressed (v. 1-5)
- The spirit of the law (v. 6-7)
- Rebuking the sinners (v. 8-10)
- The oath (v. 11-13)
- Nehemiah's example (v. 14-19)

THE POOR ARE OPPRESSED (V. 1-5)

"And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren." (Nehemiah 5:1)

The oppression of the poor derived from three different situations:



Some people had borrowed grains to sow.



Some people had taken out a mortgage to buy grains.



Some people had gotten a loan to pay the king's tax.

In all the cases, people couldn't pay their loans because of a bad harvest. They had to give their children as servants instead.

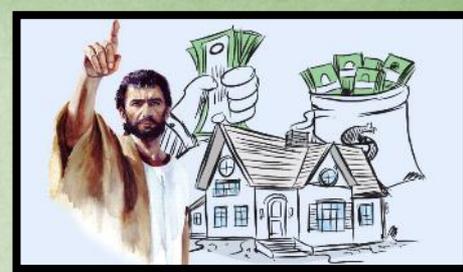
The creditors required them to pay their loans even when they already knew they couldn't.

We must do whatever possible to relieve those in need, no matter how they became poor.



THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW (V. 6-7)

“And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.” (Nehemiah 5:6)



God let Israel keep some customs which are considered unfair nowadays, like slavery (Matthew 19:8). However, He gave them laws that prevented abuse.

Hebrew slaves could serve for only six years, or until the year of Jubilee, depending on each individual case (Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:39-40).

Therefore, the creditors in Nehemiah's time were exercising their right, but they were forgetting the spirit of the law (to prevent slavery).

Nehemiah studied the case thoroughly to find a legal argument to rebuke them. He accused them of charging interest (see Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36; Deuteronomy 23:19).



REBUKING THE SINNERS (V. 8-10)

"Then I said, 'What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?'"
(Nehemiah 5:9)

Nehemiah tried to solve the issue in private first (v.7). Then, he summoned the people.

The creditors were judged in public. Was their behavior morally acceptable?



Some of them had rescued Jews who had been sold as slaves to pagan people. Then how could they make their brothers and sisters their slaves now?

Wouldn't this give their enemies a reason for mockery?

The creditors were ashamed and said nothing. They couldn't defend themselves.

THE OATH (V. 11-13)

“So they said, ‘We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say.’ Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.” (Nehemiah 5:12)

Nehemiah proposed a pact:



- To remit the debts.
- To give the possessions back.
- To give the interest back.

The creditors agreed. However, Nehemiah thought a solid agreement was necessary, so he called the priests to make an oath.

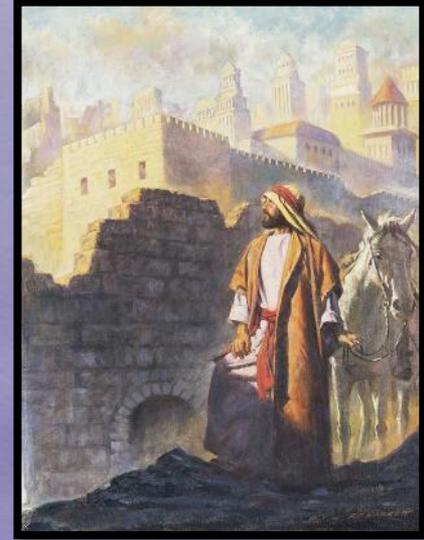
This way, the creditors were legally forced to fulfill the pact. Breaking an oath meant breaking the law (Leviticus 19:12).

The Bible advises us to think carefully before making a commitment (Ecclesiastes 5:5).



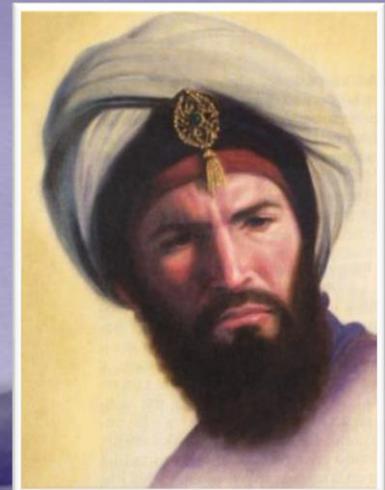
NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE (V. 14-19)

"Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions." (Nehemiah 5:14)

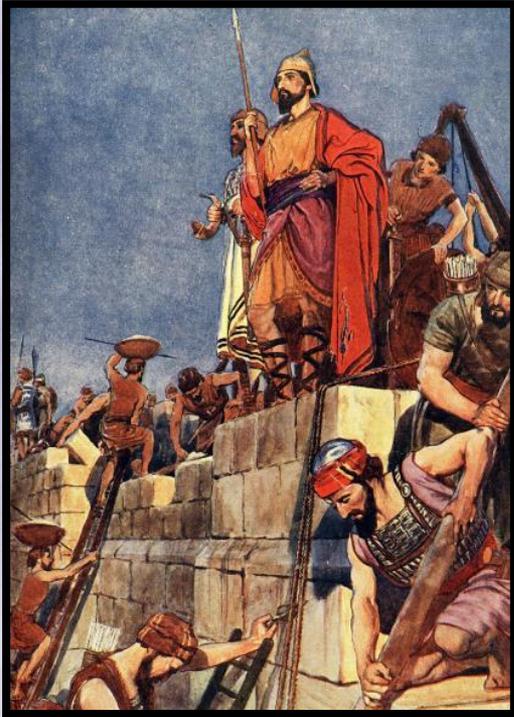


As Nehemiah was writing about this incident, he recalled how his behavior was so different to his miserly brothers'.

- ★ Nehemiah didn't collect any tax for himself during his first term as the governor (twelve years), contrary to what the other governors had done before.
- ★ He provided for the restoration of his part of the wall.
- ★ He provided for the expense of the court (150 people).



Nehemiah's main priority was the Lord and His work above his own benefit.



“We were all debtors to divine justice, but we had nothing with which to pay the debt. Then the Son of God, who pitied us, paid the price of our redemption. He became poor that through His poverty we might be rich. By deeds of liberality toward His poor we may prove the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercy extended to us. ‘Let us do good unto all men,’ the apostle Paul enjoins, ‘especially unto them who are of the household of faith.’ Galatians 6:10”

E.G.W. (Prophets and Kings, cp. 54, p. 652)