

As we continue in Nehemiah we see the daily struggles that Nehemiah and the people of God experienced during their time in repopulating the land and in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem which contained the temple and the wall surrounding it.

These times were not easy for God's people. They had struggles from the existing peoples of the land who were not happy that the Jews were, in their minds, invading their space and being allowed to essentially take over at the command of King Artaxerxes, what had belonged to them, with no input or discussion from them.

And so, it is quite understandable that they would resist. But the Jews were also struggling within their own ranks. As we saw in the book of Ezra many of the young people were marrying the locals and defiling the people of God. We had seen that even the leaders were involved in this activity and turning a blind eye to this.

**Ezra 9:1-3** <sup>NAU</sup> Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, *those* of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. <sup>2</sup> "For they have taken some of their daughters *as wives* for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." <sup>3</sup> When I heard about this matter, I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair from my head and my beard, and sat down appalled.

But as we continue in Nehemiah we see another problem that was troubling the Jews and that involves more in-house issues that are directly related to a famine that was going on in the land at this time.

**Nehemiah 5:1-6** <sup>NAU</sup> Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. <sup>2</sup> For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." <sup>3</sup> There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." <sup>4</sup> Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our fields and our vineyards. <sup>5</sup> "Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet

behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others." <sup>6</sup> Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

It seems that every time Nehemiah turns around there are more fires he's having to put out. But as a leader who seeks God he is able to deal with these problems as God gives him wisdom.

The situation we see here is that because of a famine in the land at this time food was becoming scarce. When food becomes scarce people can do some strange things to either get food or to take advantage of those in need.

In the case before us notice that their issue is not with the locals of the land who were not Jewish but with their own Jewish brethren.

**Nehemiah 5:1** <sup>NAU</sup> Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.

This great outcry has to do with how certain people are being mistreated unfairly and unjustly, but I love the way one particular group is seen to be at the forefront of this outcry.

**Do you see who this particular group is according to the first half of verse one?**

The wives. When the wives are not happy, no one is happy. When a wife feels that she and her household and particularly her children are being mistreated there is no greater foe that someone has to contend with.

And the wives are going to make sure someone fixes this problem sooner than later. But let's look at the problem.

**Nehemiah 5:2-5** <sup>2</sup> For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." <sup>3</sup> There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." <sup>4</sup> Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our fields and our vineyards." <sup>5</sup> "Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage *already*, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

The general outcry is that because of the famine measures are being taken to alleviate their hunger. People are mortgaging their property which means they own property. And now to get money or resources to feed their families they are borrowing money to get food which means someone has money to lend.

Others who don't have land to borrow against are having their children enter into forced labor for those who are willing to lend money. In other words, according to the law, they are entering into slavery with the express purpose of getting money.

This was not unheard of even among the Jews because God had made provisions for His people so that they would not have to enter into some sort of welfare state but could care for themselves while someone took care of their needs in exchange for some type of work.

**Exodus 21:1-11** <sup>NAU</sup> "Now these are the ordinances which you are to set before them: <sup>2</sup> "If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. <sup>3</sup> "If he comes alone, he shall go out alone; if he is the husband of a wife, then his wife shall go out with him. <sup>4</sup> "If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone. <sup>5</sup> "But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out as a free man,' <sup>6</sup> then his master shall bring him to God, then he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him permanently. <sup>7</sup> "If a man sells his daughter as a female slave, she is not to go free as the male slaves do. <sup>8</sup> "If she is displeasing in the eyes of her master who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He does not have authority to sell her to a foreign people because of his unfairness to her. <sup>9</sup> "If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. <sup>10</sup> "If he takes to himself another woman, he may not reduce her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. <sup>11</sup> "If he will not do these three *things* for her, then she shall go out for nothing, without *payment of money*.

And so, even to take someone into slavery could very well have been an act of grace on behalf of the one providing the service as long as they did it according to God's law, which in the case of a man serving a Hebrew master, they were given a set time in which they would serve, specifically 6 years, and then were given the option in the seventh year to go free.

There were conditions attached to this as well to where that slave could continue on in his voluntary slavery for reasons that if he couldn't provide for himself in his freedom then it was to his advantage to stay a slave.

But the problem that is happening in our text has to do with certain wealthy lenders who weren't content to meet the needs of their brothers according to God's law, they were going to take advantage of their brothers with additional requirements including usury or charging interest on top of the principle that was loaned to these people.

Now the idea of charging interest was not unbiblical but what made it unbiblical was charging interest on a fellow Jew.

**Deuteronomy 23:19-20** <sup>19</sup> "You shall not charge interest to your countrymen: interest on money, food, *or* anything that may be loaned at interest. <sup>20</sup> "You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess.

**Why do you suppose God didn't want the charge of interest among His people but allowed it with those outside of Israel?**

This distinguishes the people of God who are under God's provisions from the people who are outside of the covenant of God's people.

God's people are to treat each other in a way that honors one another and shows grace and mercy to one another. It also forced them to depend upon God who could make up the lending of money in ways that could be equivalent to interest being earned on their money. This is why the added phrase at the end of Deut. 23:20, "so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess."

And so, it becomes a dependence on God's blessing rather than on taking advantage of God's people for the increase to their principle.

But in the case of lending to those outside of Israel, since they are not under the covenant of God, they are not partakers of such grace and therefore interest is allowed to be charged to them.

And so, when the Jews in Israel are charging interest on the mortgages of their brethren and causing their brethren to be

enslaved, presumably in an unbiblical manner with unbiblical rules, then the wives, who evidently knew the law, raise an uproar and it reaches the ears of Nehemiah.

And Nehemiah takes immediate action. He gets with the rulers and lays down the law if you will and confronts them.

**Nehemiah 5:8** <sup>8</sup> I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word *to say*.

Nehemiah has essentially said that the people of God have been bought back, or redeemed, and to place another payment on them is to put them back into the same condition from which they were already redeemed, kind of like double jeopardy.

### **Where do we see this same teaching of redemption in the N.T.?**

**Galatians 4:4-7** <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

### **What is the condition of those who were once not redeemed according to verse 7?**

They were considered slaves.

### **Well, to what were they enslaved according this passage in Galatians?**

Slaves to the law, needing to be redeemed from the law.

### **Why would anyone need to be redeemed from the law if the law of God is holy and perfect?**

Because the law can only produce death.

**Romans 7:4-5** <sup>4</sup> Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. <sup>5</sup> For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

The law does have a fruit, but it's not the kind of fruit you want to partake in unless you prefer death.

But the law is still in effect. In fact, this is precisely what Christ said. I did not come to abolish the law. We know this to be true by what the word of God says of itself.

**Isaiah 40:8** <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

**Is the law part of the word of God?**

**How long then does it stand?**

**Well, how can this be since the other part of that statement from Christ says, I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it?**

Christ fulfilled it but that doesn't make the law go away. The law is still in effect but not for the believer.

**But is the believer required to obey the law?, and yes this is a trick question, so be careful.**

Unless the law has been satisfied by you personally then you have no access to God and His kingdom, no reconciliation.

**Well, if we can't keep the law and the law condemns us and the penalty for not obeying the law perfectly is death then how in the world can we keep the law perfectly and have access to God and be reunited to Him forever?**

Only if we can keep the law through someone who keeps it perfectly on our behalf and then extends that keeping of the law to us who accepts it by faith as though we kept it perfectly.

**Romans 8:3-4** <sup>3</sup> For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

This is what it means to be in Christ. When we are in Christ we are viewed by the Father as though we are Christ in all His perfection. This is the picture of the union with Christ in marriage. We are no longer seen as separate but now united with Him in all His perfection.

This does not mean that God sees us as little gods, but as human beings who have been covered by the blood of Christ in such a way that we are indistinguishable from Christ who is perfect as it relates to our new standing in Christ.

**And so, in a very real sense we are keeping the law on a daily basis.**

**We keep the law of the Passover on a daily basis. How so?**

**1 Corinthians 5:7-8** <sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**1 Peter 1:18-19** <sup>18</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

**We keep the law of the Sabbath on a daily basis. How so?**

**Hebrews 4:8-11** <sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. <sup>9</sup> So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. <sup>11</sup> Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.

We have entered into that rest or that Sabbath by faith in the One who is our Sabbath. The Sabbath is not simply a day for the believer, it is a person.

**Romans 6:5-11** <sup>5</sup> For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, <sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup> for he who has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, <sup>9</sup> knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup> For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**So, if we have died to the law because Christ died in our place to fulfill every aspect of the law, including the 10 commandments, which is to say that Christ redeemed us from the law, then what is the picture of adding interest to what has already been paid for as we see back in Nehemiah?**

**Nehemiah 5:7-8** <sup>7</sup> I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. <sup>8</sup> I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word *to say*.

**If the people have already been bought and paid for in full to go to the Promised Land, then how do you require more of what has already been paid for in full in the form of interest? Or to put another way, what do we add to the payment of Christ in the form of interest if interest on the full payment is unlawful?**

We add nothing. There is nothing more required. You cannot keep any law of God and deem that pleasing to God unless you approach God in Christ and simply give back to Him what He requires, which is perfection.

**How do we do that?**

By approaching Him in faith in Christ who is our only perfection.

**Does this mean we don't keep the law?**

Again, yes and no. Because it has been fulfilled in us through Christ we have already kept it perfectly, but on a daily basis we keep it because of where this law has been put forever. God spoke of the relocation of the law when speaking to Isaiah.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Jeremiah 31:33** "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Ezekiel 36:26** "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

**2 Corinthians 3:1-4** <sup>NAU</sup> Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation

to you or from you? <sup>2</sup> You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; <sup>3</sup> being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. <sup>4</sup> Such confidence we have through Christ toward God.

<sup>NAU</sup> **James 1:25** But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

God sums up the law for us in this way.

**Matthew 22:37-40** <sup>37</sup> And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' <sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' <sup>40</sup> "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

There is no law that we could ever keep to satisfy God. It's already been kept for us by Christ. There is nothing to add. Our response is found in the law of liberty and love and to humbly come before God in thanks and adoration.