

Nehemiah 5:1-19

1. When do the events of this chapter occur?
 - a. 5:1-13 - Likely during the 52 days of building the wall after the situation with the enemy had been dealt with.
 - b. Workers staying in Jerusalem instead of returning home added to the hardship
 - c. But, the problem was already occurring while Nehemiah was still in Susa as seen in 1:3: *“They said to me, “The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.”*
 - i. Three problems in 445 BC:
 1. Great trouble
 2. Shame
 3. Walls broken down (Gates destroyed with fire)
 - d. It appears Nehemiah has just been made aware of this hardship and the wall project may have been the final unbearable strain on the community.
 - i. Work on the wall took men away from their homes
 - ii. Work on the wall prevented work in the fields
 - iii. Work on the wall was not a paid labor position, so men who labored for a living were not making a daily wage
 - e. It would seem that during the 52 days of wall building Nehemiah stops the construction project to deal with this problem that is going to crush the very people he is building the wall for.
 - f. 5:14-19 are Nehemiah’s report on how he lived and behaved from 445-433 BC (12 years in Jerusalem and his later visit when he returned from Susa the second time.

2. Surprisingly this is a problem of oppression of the Jews from within Judaea by the elite Jews.

5:1 – **“Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.**

3064 [e]	251 [e]	413 [e]	1419 [e]	802 [e]	5971 [e]	6818 [e]	1961 [e]
hay-yə·hū·dīm.	’ā·hē·hem	’el-	gə·dō·w·lāh;	ū·nə·šē·hem	hā·’ām	ša·’ā·qat	wat·tə·hī
הַיְהוּדִים:	אֶחָיוֹתָם	אֶל-	גְּדוֹלָה	וּנְשֵׂיהֶם	הָעָם	צַעֲקוֹת	וַתְּהִי 1
the Jews	their brothers	against	great	and their wives	of the people	a outcry	And there was
Art N-proper-mp	N-mpc 3mp	Prep	Adj-fs	Conj-w N-fpc 3mp	Art N-ms	N-fsc	Conj-w V-Qal-Conseclmp-3fs

1. The people waiting at home, namely the wives(!), began to complain about their impossible financial situation becoming ridiculously stupid.
2. “Brothers” or “fellow Jews” had already used the situation to profit by loaning money and buying up land and businesses.
3. Now with the lack of income in an already oppressive economy the people and the wives give a “great outcry”

5:2 – **“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.”**

1. Problem #1 – Taking time off to build the wall!
2. FIRST GROUP: This seems to be the complaint that is made while the men are all building the wall:

“We have children at home that need to eat and be kept alive! Give us time to get grain by working in the fields or laboring at our day jobs for pay.”

5:3 – **“There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.”**

1. Problem #2 – The recent famine!
2. SECOND GROUP: This second complaint is from those who had already been financially defeated by the elite Jews when they had to take loans out using their fields, vineyards and houses as collateral just to buy food during some famine that had recently occurred.
3. There had been a famine that had destroyed many family estates and financial portfolios.

5:4 – **“And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards.**

1. Problem #3 – Taxes paid to the Persian Empire!
2. THIRD GROUP: Some of the Jews had borrowed money to pay taxes to Artaxerxes who had sent Nehemiah.
3. Persian military tax revenue at this time was demanding.
 - a. Estimates say Artaxerxes collected 20 million dollars a year in taxes.
 - b. Very little of this money that was collected from the provinces was spent for the benefit of the provinces. Once the money was gone to the empire, it stayed there.
 - c. The custom was to melt down the gold and silver. In the hot liquid state the gold and silver were poured into jars that would be broken once the metal had cooled. This bullion, or solid shapes of gold and silver, were then stored
 - d. When Alexander plundered Persepolis in 330 BC he sent incredible amounts of treasures on donkeys and dromedaries (3,000 of them) to be kept at cities such as Babylon and Susa. At Susa alone Alexander found 9,000 talents of coined gold (270 ton of gold) and 40,000 talents of silver (1,200 ton of silver) stored as bullion.
 - e. The Persian loss of coinage in circulation because of this led to inflation that resulted in 50% rise in prices.
 - f. Documents from the Persian Empire outside of Judah show that inhabitants of other satraps also had to mortgage fields and orchards to get silver just to pay their taxes. Often, they lost their property and became laborers on their own land. Egyptian documents record land owners becoming peasants and fleeing to the cities, but being arrested by the elites and taken by force back to the farms to work the land.
4. (Problem #4 – not mentioned in the text, but definitely in the context, is the fact that the province of Judaea was cutoff from the trade routes except for the roads and trade that came through the Ammonite, Arab, Ashdod or Samaria provinces. All were hostile towards Judaea. So, any commodities coming into Judaea would be expensive and taxed by their neighbors.

5:5 – **“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.”**

853 [e]	3533 [e]	587 [e]	2009 [e]	1121 [e]	1121 [e]	1320 [e]	251 [e]	1320 [e]	6258 [e]
'et-	kō-be-šim	'ā-nah-nū	we·hin-nēh	bā-nē-nū;	kib-nē-hem	be-sā-rē-nū,	'a-hē-nū	kib-sar	we-at-tah,
את-	כְּשִׁים	אֲנַחְנוּ	וַיְהִי	בְּנֵינוּ	כְּבָנֵיהֶם	בְּשָׂרֵנוּ	אֶחָיו	כְּבָשָׁר	וְעַתָּה
-	are forcing	we	And indeed	their children	as our children	our flesh [is]	of our brothers	as the flesh	And yet now
DirObjM	V-Qal-Prtcl-mp	Pro-1cp	Conj-w Interjection	N-mpc 1cp	Prep-k N-mpc 3mp	N-msc 1cp	N-mpc 1cp	Prep-k N-msc	Conj-w Adv

410 [e]	369 [e]	3533 [e]	1323 [e]	3426 [e]	5650 [e]	1323 [e]	853 [e]	1121 [e]
le-'él	we-'ēn	nik-bā-šō-wš	mib-be-nō-tē-nū	we-yēš	la-'ā-bā-dīm,	be-nō-tē-nū	we-'et-	bā-nē-nū
לְאֵל	וְאֵין	נִקְבְּשׁוּתָם	מִבְּנֹתֵינוּ	וַיֵּשׁ	לְעַבְדֵינוּ	בְּנֹתֵינוּ	וְאֶת-	בְּנֵינוּ
in the power	and [it is] not	have been brought into slavery	[some] of our daughters	and	to be slaves	our daughters	and	our sons
Prep-l N-msc	Conj-w Adv	V-Nifal-Prtcl-fp	Prep-m N-fpc 1cp	Conj-w Adv	Prep-l N-mp	N-fpc 1cp	Conj-w DirObjM	N-mpc 1cp

Kabash = "to subdue, bring into
bondage"
"subjugate"
Est. 7:8 - "assault, rape"

312 [e]	3754 [e]	7704 [e]	3027 [e]
la-'ā-hē-rīm.	ū-ke-rā-mē-nū	ū-sē-dō-tē-nū	yā-dē-nū,
לְאַחֵרִים:	וּכְרָמֵינוּ	וּשְׂדֵתֵינוּ	יָדֵינוּ
have other men	and vineyards	for our lands	of our hands [to redeem them]
Prep-l Adj-mp	Conj-w N-mpc 1cp	Conj-w N-mpc 1cp	N-fsc 1cp

1. Even before Nehemiah's wall project became a burden the people had taken out loans and lost their property. To survive with no property or income some of them had sent their children into slavery for money or another loan.
2. Now with the additional burden of the wall project others will have to give their children into slavery.
3. "enslaved" – kabash – meaning "to subdue, bring into bondage, subjugate" in Esther 7:8 Xerxes accuses Haman of "kabash" ([lik·bō·wōš](#)) which meant "assault" or "rape"
4. In the Law of Moses a person could pay off his debt by becoming a debt-slave or "a hired servants" (Lev. 25:39-40, but he would be released in the seventh year (Deut. 15:12-18). Even the code of Hammurabi limited a bond servant to three years.
5. In Joel 3:6 the Jews were being sold to the Greeks (Joel 3:6)

5:6 – "I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

428 [e]	1697 [e]	853 [e]	2201 [e]	853 [e]	8085 [e]	834 [e]	3966 [e]		2734 [e]
hā-'ēl-leh.	had-de-bā-rim	we-'ēt	za-'ā-qā-tām,	'et-	šā-ma'tī	ka-'ā-šer	mā-'ōd;	lī	way-yi-ḥar
הָאֵלֶּה:	הַדְּבָרִים	וְאֶת	וְצִקְתָּם	אֶת-	שָׁמַעְתִּי	כַּאֲשֶׁר	מְאֹד	לִי	וַיִּחַר
these	words	and	their outcry	-	I heard	when	very	I	And became angry
Art Pro-cp	Art N-mp	Conj-w DirObjM	N-fsc 3mp	DirObjM	V-Qal-Perf-1cs	Prep-k Pro-r	Adv	Prep 1cs	Conj-w V-Qal-Conseclmpf-3ms

1. "angry" – *charah* – meaning "to burn or be kindled with anger"
2. Nehemiah's anger was the manifestation of his concern, his care for the people and his commitment to the Jewish people in covenant with the Lord

5:7 – "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

2715 [e] ha·hō·rīm	853 [e] 'eṭ-	"Rib" or "Rub" =	7378 [e] wā·'a·rī·bāh	5921 [e] 'a·lay,	3820 [e] lib·bî	4427 [e] way·yim·mā·lēk
הַחֲרִים	אֶת-	" to strive, contend"	וְאָרִיבָהּ	עִלִּי	לְבִי	וַיִּמְלֶךְ 7
<u>the nobles</u>	-		<u>and I rebuked</u>	with	serious	<u>And after thought</u>
Art N-mp	DirObjM	Conj-w V-Qal-ConseclImperf-1cs 3fs	Prep 1cs	N-msc 1cs	Conj-w V-Nifal-ConseclImperf-3ms	

Nasha = "to beguile, deceive"

859 [e] 'at·tem	251 [e] bē·'ā·hīw	376 [e] 'iš-	5378 [e] maš·šā	lā·hem,	559 [e] wā·'ō·mē·rāh	5461 [e] has·sē·gā·nīm,	853 [e] wē·'eṭ-
אתֶּם	בְּאָחִיו	אִישׁ-	מַשָּׂא	לָהֶם	וְאָמְרָהּ	הַסֹּגְנִים	וְאֶת-
You	of from his brother	each	usury	to them	and said	<u>rulers</u>	and
Pro-2mp	Prep-b N-msc 3ms	N-ms	N-ms	Prep 3mp	Conj-w V-Qal-ConseclImperf-1cs 3fs	Art N-mp	Conj-w DirObjM

Root: "upon, above, over"

1419 [e] ge·dō·w·lah.	6952 [e] qe·hil·lah	5921 [e] 'ā·lē·hem	5414 [e] wā·'et·tēn	5383 [e] nō·šim;
גְּדוֹלָהּ	קְהִלָּה	עֲלֵיהֶם	וְאָתָּן	נֹשִׂים [נֹשִׂים נֹשְׂאִים]
a great	assembly	against them	so I called	is exacting
Adj-fs	N-fs	Prep 3mp	Conj-w V-Qal-ConseclImperf-1cs	V-Qal-PrtcpI-mp

1. Translations of the first line:

- NIV: "I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials."
- ESV: "I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials."
- Berean: "after serious thought I rebuked the nobles and officials."
- KJ: "Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles"
- NAS: "So I thought it over and contended with the nobles and the leading people."
- Young's Literal: "my heart reigneth over me, and I strive with the freemen, and with the prefects."

2. "I rebuked"

3. "nobles" and "rulers"

4. "usury" – *massa* –

5. "is exacting" – *no-sim* –

6. "against them" – *a-le-hem* – legal term

7. "assembly" – *qe-hil-lah* – to serve as witnesses of the legal charges

8. The nobles and rulers were following a strict business relationship, but were acting as harsh loan sharks instead of fellow Jewish brothers trying to rebuild a nation.

a. The nobles and rulers were getting the best security for the loan – land, vineyards, houses, children.

b. The nobles and rulers were manifesting the worst of motives – repossessing property and people

5:8 – "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.

1. Nehemiah puts the behavior of the nobles and rulers in perspective.

a. Nehemiah and other Jews had been buying back Jews from the Gentile world that had been dispersed by the Assyrians (722 BC), the Babylonians (605, 597, 586 BC), and

now, out of the Persian Empire and from the Gentiles living in the Persian provinces. These Jews are brought into Judaea.

- b. But, within Judaea the nobles and rulers had been taking Jews as debt slaves, then selling those Jews who were in debt to the Gentiles. And, these are now the Jews Nehemiah and the righteous leadership is buying back from the Gentiles
- c. The nobles and rulers are in the same line as the Assyrians and Babylonians in their treatment of Jews.

5:9 – “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?”

5:10 – “Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.

5800 [e] na'az-bāh- נֶעֱזְבָהּ Let us stop V-Qal-Imperf.Cohort-1cp	1715 [e] 3701 [e] wə-dā-gān; ke-sep̄ וְדָגָן כֶּסֶף and grain money Conj-w N-ms N-ms	bā-hem בָּהֶם them Prep 3mp	5383 [e] nō-šîm נֹשִׂים am lending V-Qal-Prtcpl-mp	5288 [e] ū-nə'ā-ray, וְנַעֲרָי and my servants Conj-w N-mpc 1cs	251 [e] 589 [e] 'a-hay 'ā-nî אֶחָי אֲנִי [with] my brothers I N-mpc 1cs Pro-1cs	1571 [e] wə-gam- וְגַם and also Conj-w Conj	10
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4x Nehemiah says "I", "my" or "us"

2088 [e] haz-zeh. הַזֶּה: this Art Pro-ms	4855 [e] ham-maš-ša הַמַּשָּׂא usury Art N-ms	853 [e] 'et- אֶת- - DirObjM	4994 [e] nā נָא please Interjection
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1. Nehemiah catches himself as having followed the same “business” practice (but, without the harsh attitude).
2. Nehemiah says that he, his brothers (fellow leaders), his Persian servants must stop this practice of loaning, and instead, start giving to the struggling Jews.
3. This is not a time for loaning money, but of giving money.

This poverty called for financial gifts, not a financial shovel to dig deeper into debt.

5:11 – “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.”

1004 [e] ū-bat-tê-hem; וּבְתֵיבָהֶם and their houses Conj-w N-mpc 3mp	2132 [e] zê-tê-hem זֵיתֵיהֶם their olive groves N-mpc 3mp	3754 [e] kar-mê-hem כַּרְמֵיהֶם their vineyards N-mpc 3mp	7704 [e] śe-dô-tê-hem שְׂדֵיהֶם their lands N-mpc 3mp	3117 [e] ke-hay-yô-wm, כֶּהַיּוֹמַם even this day Prep-k, Art N-ms	4994 [e] lā-hem לָהֶם to them Prep 3mp	7725 [e] hā-šî-bū נָא now Interjection	11 Restore V-Hifil-Imp-mp
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Nosim from **Nashah** meaning "to lend, become a creditor"

Meah = "hundred"

bā-hem. בָּהֶם: them Prep 3mp	5383 [e] nō-šîm נֹשִׂים have charged V-Qal-Prtcpl-mp	859 [e] 834 [e] 'at-tem 'ā-šer אַתָּם אֲשֶׁר you that Pro-2mp Pro-r	3323 [e] wə-hay-yiṣ-hār, וְהַיֵּצֵאָר and the oil Conj-w, Art N-ms	8492 [e] hat-tî-rō-wōš הַתֵּירוֹשׁ the new wine Art N-ms	1715 [e] wə-had-dā-gān וְהַדָּגָן and the grain Conj-w, Art N-ms	3701 [e] hak-ke-sep̄ הַכֶּסֶף of the money Art N-ms	3967 [e] ū-mə'at וּמֵאָת and a hundredth Conj-w Number-fsc
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1. Nehemiah, the Persian governor of Judaea, speaks his decree:
Immediately, as in today, return:
 - a. the fields
 - b. the vineyards
 - c. the olive orchards
 - d. the houses
 - e. And, return “the percentage of money, grain, wine, oil that you have been exacting”
 - i. This means one either of these two things:
 1. A full refund of the interest charged on the loans
 2. The handing over of the income made on the property the loan sharks had confiscated. This would be the money they had made from the land, vineyards, olive groves or rental property.
2. “the percentage” is from *meah* in Hebrew which means “hundred”
 - a. If it is the loan rate of 1/100th then it is merely 1% interest. But, it could have been charged annually (1%) or monthly (which would be equal to our 12% interest rate.)
 - b. This word “the hundredth part literally means the “hundred” pieces of silver.

5:12 – “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.

1. The nobles and rulers (“loan sharks”) immediately admit their mistake and promise to make immediate correction.
2. Nehemiah took the “loan sharks” to the priests at the Temple to make this confession an oath before the Lord.

5:13 – “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.

1. Nehemiah pronounces the curse on those who do not keep their word or do not fulfill their oath.
2. Nehemiah acts this curse out by shaking his garments - “shook out the fold of my garment”
3. This would be the equivalent of us emptying our pockets of cash, phones, credit cards, ID’s and any other possessions to signify that if this oath before the Lord is not kept then the Lord himself will make sure you are penniless with no possessions.

PART TWO of CHAPTER 5:

At this point Nehemiah adds some detail concerning his financial behavior among the Jews as their governor. This account includes part of the timeline of Nehemiah’s time in office in Judaea.

5:14 – “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

1. Nehemiah’s first term was 445-433 BC, or twelve years as governor of Judaea.
2. Nehemiah has either a second term or merely visits Judaea as a Persian delegate in Nehemiah 13:6-31 -

“While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes

king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God....” (Nehemiah 13:6-7)

- a. Artaxerxes died in his 41st year in the winter of 424/423
- b. This makes Artaxerxes 32nd year to be 433-432
- c. Nehemiah left Susa to serve as governor in Artaxerxes 20th year which is 445-444 BC.
- d. The details of chapter 5 are taking place in 444 BC if it is during the building of the wall.
- e. The second part of chapter 5 verses 5:14-19 are editorial notes made by Nehemiah after his time as governor or at the time he compiles and edits his personal notes into this book since part of chapter 13 occurs after Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem a second time sometime after 433 BC.

5:15 – “The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

1. “daily ration” or the “daily food allowance” was decreed by Persian Empire but paid for by the local citizens. So, Nehemiah was to eat a public expense according to the Persian law.
2. The daily ration was 40 shekels of silver.
3. Previous governors had used this allotment
4. Even the servants (Persian servants) were given authority to collect their own taxes for their own rations, needs, housing, and whatever else was needed in an ever-growing list of government funding.
5. Nehemiah did not come to Jerusalem as a career politician, but came to help the people of God and the plan of God. How could he help the people and advance the plan of God by first building a career on those very principles? Nehemiah did not, because:
“I did not do so, because of the fear of God.”
6. Archaeologist Naham Avigad translated a collection of bullae that provided names of some of the governors before the time of Nehemiah.
 - a. See online article here: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43575944>
 - b.

5:16 – “I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

1. During this crisis of building the wall in the midst of poverty and famine, Nehemiah did these things:
 - a. Persevered in the work on the wall, and did not let the economic crisis become an excuse to stop.
 - b. Did not use the crisis or his position to acquire land. Nehemiah had the financial resources to buy land, vineyards, olive groves, houses in order to build his estate. He did not.
 - c. The Persian servants that came along to help Nehemiah rule did not themselves buy property, tax the people or advance their political careers. Instead, Nehemiah’s Persian servants (these are rulers, delegates, noblemen, etc; these are not slaves, Jews or even common men). These men “were gathered there (at the wall) for the work.”

5:17 – “Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

1. Nehemiah did not collect money from the Jewish people to feed himself for his daily food allotment which previously had been 40 shekels a day.
2. The burden on the people would have been very great because Nehemiah was not just needing money to feed himself and a few servants. Nehemiah lists who ate daily at his table and how much food was needed for his table. This is not a party or a luxurious celebration. Instead, this is what it took to feed the people who were part of Nehemiah's government including Persian delegates and officials traveling from province to province on governmental business along the Persian highways.
 - a. 150 staff members, men who worked for Nehemiah
 - b. Jews
 - c. Officials
 - d. Traveling delegates ("those who came to us from the nations that were around us")

5:18 – **“Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people.**

1. What did these 150+ men eat each day:
 - a. One ox
 - b. Six sheep
 - c. Birds
 - d. Abundance of fresh wine brought in every ten days
2. Nehemiah refused to use Persian money for this because it would simply be translated as “taxes on Judaea” and taken from the very people the “loan sharks” had been abusing.
 - a. Nehemiah rebuked the “loan sharks”
 - b. Nehemiah wasn't going to be caught before God doing the very same thing, just in a different way.

5:19 – **“Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.**

1. A great verse. Nehemiah will do what is right and honorable today even though it cost him money, opportunity, power, pleasure, and more, because he knows the Lord will remember the good Nehemiah did for the people and purpose of God.