

Victoria Fellowship Church
International & Interdenominational
Bible Study Worksheet – May 17, 2020

Theme: Nehemiah: A Vessel of Restoration

Topic: Overcoming evil with good

Main Text: Nehemiah 5:1-19

Key verse: Romans 12:20 - 21 – *Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,”* (NKJV)

INTRODUCTION: The nature of things is that at any given time and place, there are the haves and the have-nots. Wars, famine, general economic downturn, etc. have a way of emphasizing or even amplifying this imbalance. Knowing this, God commanded the children of Israel concerning the poor in their midst: *“There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I command you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need”* (Deuteronomy 15:11 NLT). But when the rich and powerful use these inequities to their advantage, they give rise to the evil of social injustice and oppression. Social injustice usually leads to outcry by the poor against their wealthy brethren and neighbors, as happened in Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah.

1. (a) How are the grievances recorded in Nehemiah 5:1-5 like the issues faced by the poor in the Church and in our society today? (b) What are possible reasons for the situation in 1a above. How do those reason(s) compare with the reasons people give for not helping the needy today? (c) How should we respond to the poor who call on us for help amidst the uncertainties occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic?

The social injustice reported in Nehemiah 5 appears to have preceded Nehemiah’s time in Jerusalem. Yet he and his officials did their best to buy back some of those who had been sold into slavery (Nehemiah 5:8). But while Nehemiah was trying to help the poor, those nobles started selling more Jews into slavery. Interestingly, Nehemiah does not call for private meetings with the nobles. He rebuked them publicly, calling the action of the nobles as sin! *‘Then I said, “What you are doing is not good...’* (Nehemiah 5:9).

2. (a) Consider Nehemiah 5:6-11; 1 John 5:17a. Let participants identify the underlying motivations for the call to repentance. (b) If the Law forbade the Jews from charging interest in lending to a poor Israelite, now that we are under grace, how should our response be similar or even better than the requirements of the Law? (c) In what ways has the common business or social practices of our society influenced our concern and care for fellow believers?

Greed is one of those sins we hardly notice in ourselves. On the onset of the lock-down, some business owners, Christian business owners inclusive, laid off staff to save cost. Many of the poor in Jerusalem were pressured to sell their lands to survive. And Nehemiah could have taken advantage of those opportunities to buy land cheaply. Buying land from fellow Jews who were in distress did not sit well with his conscience nor was it in line with the word of God. Likewise, he waived his right to food allotment out of a genuine concern for the welfare of the people he had charge over. Instead, he boldly denounced the nobles for the error of their ways. He did not appeal to conscience, rather he drew attention the glory of God (Nehemiah 5:9b).

3. (a) Let participants share possible lessons from Nehemiah’s leadership style and example. See Nehemiah 5:6 -10, 14- 19 (b) Nehemiah got the nobles to take an oath, witnessed by the priests (v. 12). What is the applicable principle for us today? (c) In what practical ways can we emulate Jesus’ unselfish giving of Himself on the cross in responding to the needs of others at a time like the Covid-19 pandemic presents?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to live by your word, obeying you in good times and hard times, so that our lives can mirror Christ to the evil world around us. In Jesus Name, Amen