

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION
Nehemiah: Pattern For Solutions In Spiritually Hard Times
F. Relieving The Financially Oppressed
(Nehemiah 5:1-19)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We face widespread financial oppression in today's world:

(1) We face financial oppression from the federal government. "President Biden . . . spoke to Congress" on "April 28" about his "\$2.3 trillion American Jobs Act . . . and on its \$1.8 trillion companion, the American Families Act . . . The Jobs Act . . . would be paid for in part by increasing the corporate tax rate from 21% to 28%," what "can hurt lower-income Americans by reducing business investment, workers' wages and job opportunities. As for the Families Act . . . Mr. Biden would pay for it by taxing wealthy Americans," what can also hurt lower-income people. ("The divisions of Mr. Biden," Republican-American, April 30, 2021, p. 10A) "Mr. Biden . . . advocated increasing the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$15," which, "like an increase in the corporate tax rate, could hurt the folks the president ostensibly is trying to help. A 2020 report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office concluded a \$15 federal minimum wage could result in job and income losses among low-wage workers," Ibid.

(2) We face financial oppression from the state government: "Connecticut's progressives have proposed more than a billion dollars of new spending . . . all to be funded by new taxes imposed exclusively on upper-income taxpayers, including a capital-gains tax surcharge." (Red Jahncke, "Even progressives are fretting," Ibid., May 3, 2021, p. 8A) However, Mr. Jahncke, president of a Connecticut-based business consultancy, warns that these taxes will "backfire as taxpayers leave the state, tax receipts ultimately decline and service cuts become unavoidable," Ibid.

(3) The cause of this oppression was noted in a Gary Varvel political cartoon in the May 4, 2021 Republican-American, Ibid. It depicted a coronavirus marked with the word "socialism" that was surrounded by variant forms of the virus marked with the words "communism," "identity politics," "spending," "tax hikes," "progressivism," "green new deal" and "fascism." Marxism and its effects, or "wokeness," is "a problem, and everyone knows it," said Democratic strategist James Carville in an interview with Sean Illing on Vox, April 27. ("Quotable," Ibid., May 3, 2021, p. 8A) He added, "It's hard to talk to anybody today -- and I talk to lots of people in the Democratic Party -- who doesn't say this. But they don't want to say it out loud . . . (be)cause they'll get clobbered or canceled," Ibid.

Need: So, we ask, "How does God direct that we find relief amid financial oppression?!"

- I. Nehemiah faced the stressful issue of great financial oppression of fellow Hebrews, Nehemiah 5:1-5:**
- A. Due to a famine and their involvement in rebuilding the Jerusalem wall, some workers and their families were short on food since they were unable to tend to their crops, Nehemiah 5:1-2; Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 683.
 - B. Others had obtained grain, but to do so, they had mortgaged their fields, vineyards and homes, Nehemiah 5:3.
 - C. Other Hebrews had borrowed money for food from wealthier Hebrews to pay their property taxes to Persia's King, a problem that was compounded by high interest charged by the creditors, Nehemiah 5:4, 7b; Ibid.
 - D. Such debt had led some of the Hebrews to sell their children into slavery to pay their creditors, Neh. 5:5; Ibid.
- II. Nehemiah responded to this crisis in ways that are instructive for us (as follows), Nehemiah 5:6-19:**
- A. First, he became righteously indignant at the unjust oppression of His countrymen, Nehemiah 5:6. We Christians today are likewise to be angry at such sins, Ephesians 4:26a.
 - B. Second, Nehemiah "considered carefully" (*malak*, Niphal stem of an Aramaic loan word, B. D. B., A Heb. and Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 576) how to respond (Nehemiah 5:7a), what also fits Paul's command in Ephesians 4:26b not to let our anger fester into causing us to react to sin by sinning ourselves!
 - C. Third, Nehemiah countered the unjust oppression by using his authority as governor to call a meeting of all the Hebrews involved to direct them to heed Scripture in treating one another honorably, Nehemiah 5:7b-13:
 - 1. Nehemiah rebuked the rich for violating Exodus 22:25 in loaning to other Hebrews with interest, v. 7b.
 - 2. He also exposed the contradictions between what he and others did in redeeming fellow Hebrews from slavery to foreigners and loaning them money without interest versus the acts of sinful creditors, v. 8, 10.
 - 3. Nehemiah noted that the deeds of the sinful creditors also harmed God's testimony with the Gentiles, v. 9.
 - 4. This meeting proved successful, and the creditors repented of their wrongs, Nehemiah 5:11-13.
 - D. Fourth, Nehemiah gave of his own money to relieve fellow Hebrews of their financial burdens, Neh. 5:14-18:
 - 1. Nehemiah refused the Persian food allowance for the governor that was gained by taxing the people, declining to lord it over the people in accountability to God not to oppress the people, Nehemiah 5:14-15.

2. Also, Nehemiah and his men persevered in rebuilding Jerusalem's city wall, acquiring no land as compensation for failed loans that they had made to other needy Hebrews, Nehemiah 5:16; *Ibid.*, p. 685.
 3. Furthermore, Nehemiah served 150 Hebrews and visiting Gentile rulers besides the Gentiles who came to them from neighboring nations, doing so out of his own income, Nehemiah 5:17; *Ibid.* Regardless of the expense involved, what included an ox, six choice sheep and birds every day along with all kinds of wine every tenth day, Nehemiah served many people at his own expense without using the governor's food allowance since his Hebrew subjects were so greatly financially oppressed, Nehemiah 5:18 ESV.
- E. Fifth, Nehemiah asked God to remember him for all the good he had done for his people, Neh. 5:19. As a man of prayer, he kept in touch with God, obeying Him and treating other people well in accountability to the Lord.

Lesson: *To offset the financial oppression his fellow Hebrews faced, Nehemiah became righteously indignant over the oppression, he considered carefully how to address the problem, he used his power as governor to persuade unjust creditors to end their oppression, he did his personal best to ease the oppression on others and he kept in touch with God by prayer in accountability to Him for how he treated his countrymen.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-11. (2) May we heed Nehemiah's example to counter financial oppression.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We apply Nehemiah's example toward relieving financial oppression that we and others around us face:

- (1) We like Nehemiah can be internally angry at the financial oppression we or others face, Ephesians 4:26a.
- (2) We like Nehemiah can carefully consider how to counter such financial oppression, Ephesians 4:26b.
- (3) We like Nehemiah can take practical steps to end financial oppression. (a) Note: Unlike Nehemiah, we are not in a position of civil authority legally to check financially oppressive parties! Yet, we **can help alleviate** such oppression by (b) giving of our means like Nehemiah to help the needy and (c) promoting the examples of people who are overcoming financial oppression in ways that also match Biblical guidelines, and there is a business owner in our state who offers such an example. His name is "Larry Torto, Jr. owner of Quality Sheet Metal" in "Naugatuck," who began his business in 1976, growing it from \$36,000 in sales in its first year to \$3.5 million today. (Steve Barlow, "45 years of getting job done," *Republican-American*, May 3, 2021, p. 1B) We view and apply Mr. Torto's Biblical actions as recorded in this story: (i) Mr. Torto showed great dedication to his customers, at one point drawing "something on the back of a napkin" in a "brainstorming" session to solve a customer's problem, *Ibid.* Proverbs 14:23 teaches that in all labor there is profit, so it is worth making dedicated efforts financially to succeed. (ii) Mr. Torto credits his success to being "loyal to our customers and our customers" being "loyal to us," *Ibid.* Proverbs 3:3-4 claims that "loyal love" (*hesed*, Kittel, *Biblia Hebraica*, p. 1157; H. A. W., *Theol. Wrdbk. of the O. T.*, 1980, vol. I, p. 305-307) and truth will cause us to find favor and good understanding with God and man, what creates opportunities for financial advances. (iii) Mr. Torto shouldered much risk to start his company (*Ibid.*), but Proverbs 14:4 teaches one must tolerate having manure in the barn to care for an ox because having an ox makes for great agricultural gain. Some costs are necessary for one to succeed, so we must be willing to pay them. (iv) Mr. Torto's business makes "products out of sheet metal" for customers in many industries (*Ibid.*), and Ecclesiastes 11:2 directs that we diversify our investments [and businesses] to limit risk. (v) Mr. Torto's business began with "hand-stamped" products, but now "it's a high-tech process done by computers and lasers that has trimmed the time to finish a job to a fraction of what used to be, "what keeps you competitive" says Mr. Torto, *Ibid.* This effort reflects Proverbs 10:5 that indicates wisdom leads a man to gather food in the summer during harvest when it is opportune, and Mr. Torto's insight that he needed to adjust in how his company made its products to stay competitive illustrates it. Also, Proverbs 1:5 calls us to be wise in increasing our learning, and ongoing education in whatever field of endeavor we have will help us adjust to stay competitive to succeed financially. (vi) Mr. Torto has seen several big business downturns over which he had no control, but instead of wastefully quitting his initial business investment, he did what Proverbs 12:27 directs -- he kept working though "sales plummeted," *Ibid.* Also, Ecclesiastes 11:1 claims that significant gain in business [or investment] ventures occurs in the long-term. (vii) Mr. Torto reports that now, "Business is so good that Quality is looking to expand its workforce. 'That's our biggest problem: finding the right people,' Torto said." (*Ibid.*) An experienced business owner in Naugatuck is looking for reliable, teachable, versatile employees to help him and themselves succeed in today's financially challenging and oppressive environment! May we be such people.

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gifts of eternal life. May we then heed Nehemiah's example to counter financial oppression wherever we face it.