

# CHAPTER 5

## INTRODUCTION TO EZRA 5

In this chapter is a complaint of the poor against the rich for oppression of them, (<sup><1078></sup>Nehemiah 5:1-5) for which Nehemiah being angry, reproved them, and made them promise, and swear to it, to make restitution, (<sup><1076></sup>Nehemiah 5:6-13) and set them an example himself, taking nothing of them during his twelve years' government, supporting himself and his at his own expenses, (<sup><1054></sup>Nehemiah 5:14-19).

**Ver. 1.** *And there was a great cry of the people, and of their wives, etc.]* Those of the poorer sort:

*against their brethren the Jews;* the rich that oppressed them; and this cry or complaint was made to Nehemiah for redress.

**Ver. 2.** *For there were that said, we, our sons, and our daughters, are many, etc.]* Not that they complained of the number of their children, for a numerous offspring was always reckoned a blessing with the Jews; but this they observed to show that their families, being large, required a considerable quantity of food to support them:

*therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat and live;* that is, they were obliged to take it at an exorbitant price, which is the thing complained of; or otherwise they must starve, the rich taking the advantage of their poverty and present dearth.

**Ver. 3.** *Some also there were that said, we have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, etc.]* Made them over to others, put them into their hands as pledges for money received of them:

*that we may buy corn;* for the support of their families:

*because of the dearth;* or famine; which might be occasioned by their enemies lying in wait and intercepting all provisions that might be brought to them; for this seems not to be the famine spoken of in (<sup><3010></sup>Haggai 1:10,11) for that was some years before this, and for a reason which now was not.

**Ver. 4.** *There were also that said,* etc.] Who though they were able to buy corn for their families without mortgaging their estates: yet, say they,

*we have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards;* for though the priests, Levites, and Nethinims, were exempted from it, yet not the people in common; and some of these were so poor, that they could not pay it without borrowing upon their estates, and paying large usury for it, (see <sup><518></sup>Ezra 6:8 7:24)

**Ver. 5.** *Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren,* etc.] We are of the same nature, nation, stock, and religion: our children as their children; are circumcised as they, and have a right to the same privileges in church and state:

*and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and daughters to be servants;* shall be obliged to it, unless relieved:

*and some of our daughters are brought into bondage already;* sold to be servants, as they might in case of the poverty of parents, (<sup><1210></sup>Exodus 21:7), and some were sometimes taken to be bondmen in payment of their parents' debts, (<sup><1211></sup>2 Kings 4:1)

*neither is it in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards;* as pledges for money borrowed.

**Ver. 6.** *And I was very angry when I heard their cry, and these words.*] Their complaint expressed in this manner; it not only raised pity and compassion in his breast towards these poor distressed people, but indignation at the rich that oppressed them.

**Ver. 7.** *Then I consulted with myself,* etc.] What was to be done, what method to be taken to redress such grievances:

*and I rebuked the nobles and the rulers;* who were the men that monopolized the corn in this dear season, and sold it at an extravagant price, and had got the lands, vineyards, and houses of the poor mortgaged to them, and to whom they had lent money on usury:

*and said unto them, you exact usury everyone of his brother;* which was contrary to the express law of God, (<sup><1225></sup>Exodus 22:25) and which even the Indians <sup>f31</sup> strictly observed, who neither let out money, nor took any upon usury:

*and I set a great assembly against them*; either of the poor that were oppressed, who brought in their accusations and complaints against them, or a large body of the people, who were not guilty, to hear them, that the delinquents might be put to public shame; or he called a large court of judicature, and set them to examine these allegations, and to do justice.

**Ver. 8.** *And I said unto them*, etc.] The nobles, and rulers, and other rich persons that exacted usury of the poor:

*we after our ability*; speaking of himself in the plural number, which now obtained in the court of Persia; or of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and others, who, according as their worldly circumstances, having been captives, would admit of:

*have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the Heathen*; not that they had given a ransom for them to Cyrus, or any other king of Persia, which would be contrary to the prophecies concerning their redemption, (<sup>23513</sup>Isaiah 45:13 52:3) but such who had sold themselves to particular persons in Babylon, who, without being redeemed, could not take the advantage of the liberty granted by Cyrus, and his successors; and it may be there were others also in the like circumstances, in other neighbouring nations, that had been redeemed this way. The Jewish canon <sup>f32</sup> now is, he that sells himself, and his children, to Gentiles, they do not redeem; but they redeem the children after their father's death; which the commentators <sup>f33</sup> explain of the third time that he sells himself:

*and will you even sell your brethren?* their lands and vineyards mortgaged to them, and even their persons:

*or shall they be sold unto us?* must we be obliged to buy them, and to redeem them:

*then they held their peace, and found nothing to answer*; being convinced they had done wrong, by the arguments used, to which they could make no reply.

**Ver. 9.** *Also I said, it is not good that ye do*, etc.] The meaning is, that it was very bad; it is a “meiosis”, by which more is intended than is expressed:

*ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God*; in reverence of him and his law, and according to that:

*because of the reproach of the Heathen our enemies?* whose mouths will be open to reproach the true religion, and the good ways of God; and say, these are the men that pretend to fear God, and serve him, and yet break his law, and use their brethren ill, (see <sup><45124></sup>Romans 2:24).

**Ver. 10.** *I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn,* etc.] For our maintenance, in consideration of the services done by us, which would appear but reasonable, but this we decline for the sake of easing our poor brethren:

*I pray you let us leave off this usury;* and not exact it, as has been too much and too long used.

**Ver. 11.** *Restore, I pray you, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses,* etc.] Which they had made over to them for corn they had had, or money they borrowed of them; it is entreated that an immediate restitution be made, and the rather, if what Aben Ezra observes is true, that this was the year of release, when debts were not to be exacted, but forgiven, (<sup><45131></sup>Deuteronomy 15:1-3),

*also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them;* the hundredth part of the money might be what they took for usury, as the Romans did in later times, even so much a month; so that if the loan was one hundred pounds, a pound was given every month for it, and so one hundred and twelve pounds in the year; and the hundredth part of the corn, wine, and oil, might be the hundredth part of those fruits of the earth which the rulers demanded for their salary, (see <sup><4615></sup>Nehemiah 5:15).

**Ver. 12.** *Then said they, we will restore them,* etc.] The lands, vineyards, oliveyards, and houses:

*and will require nothing of them;* not the hundredth part of the fruits of the earth by way of salary:

*so will we do as thou sayest;* they approved of his proposal, and readily agreed to it:

*then I called the priests, and took an oath of them that they should do according to this promise;* not that the priests were delinquents, they were not charged with anything of this kind, nor were they the men that promised restitution; but the priests were called to administer the oath to

the nobles, and rulers, and rich men, to oblige them the more to keep their word; an oath being sacred, priests in an holy office were made use of to give it, that it might be the more solemn, and the more strictly regarded.

**Ver. 13.** *Also I shook my lap*, etc.] The fore skirts of his garment, shaking the dust out of them, as a symbol of what follows; a like rite was used in the case of peace and war, the choice of either, by the Romans, as proposed by their ambassadors to the Carthaginians, as having either in their bosom to shake out <sup>f34</sup>:

*and said, so God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour*; what he has got by his labour:

*that performeth not his promise*; confirmed by an oath:

*even thus be he shaken out, and emptied*; of all that he has in the world, and out of the world too, as Jarchi adds:

*and all the congregation said, Amen*; so let it be, even those that had taken pledges and usury, as well as others:

*and praised the Lord*; that had given them such a governor to direct, advise, and exhort them to their duty, and had inclined their hearts to attend thereunto:

*and the people did according to this promise*; they punctually kept it, and the oath they had sworn.

**Ver. 14.** *Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah*, etc.] That is, by the king of Persia, which was not done when he was first sent into Judea; but very probably when he had finished the wall in fifty two days, he returned to Persia, and gave the king an account of his success, and how things stood in those parts, when he judged it necessary to send him again in the character of a governor, and which was still within the same year, as follows: from the twentieth year, even unto the thirty second year of Artaxerxes, that is, twelve years; (see <sup><6316</sup>Nehemiah 13:6).

*I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor*; which was fit and proper for him, and used to be given him; neither he, nor those that assisted him in the government, the principal men he brought along with him, and put into posts and places under him.

**Ver. 15.** *But the former governors, that had been before me, were chargeable to the people,* etc.] Between him and Zerubbabel, for Ezra was no governor; according to the Jewish chronology <sup>f35</sup>, when Ezra came to Jerusalem, Zerubbabel returned to Babylon, and there died, and his son Methullam was in his stead, and after him succeeded Hananiah his son:

*and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver;* which amounted to between four and five pounds, and this they had every day:

*yea, even their servants bare rule over the people;* required a salary, or at least perquisites of them, which the governors connived at:

*but so did not I, because of the fear of God;* neither took anything himself of the people, nor suffered his servants; because the fear of God was upon his heart, and before his eyes, and therefore could not allow himself to oppress the poor.

**Ver. 16.** *Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall,* etc.] Of building the wall of Jerusalem; here he gave his constant attendance to direct and encourage the workmen, and see that they kept to their work, and did it well:

*neither bought we any land;* neither he nor the principal men with him, though they could have bought it cheap, but they chose not to take the advantage of the poverty of the people:

*and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work:* all were employed in it, taking no wages for their work, being maintained at his expense.

**Ver. 17.** *Moreover, there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers,* etc.] Every day at his own cost, which must be considerable to provide for such a number, and of such rank:

*besides those that came unto us from among the Heathen that are about us;* who were proselytes, and came thither to worship, or on a civil account, to give intelligence, and take directions.

**Ver. 18.** *Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep,* etc.] Or fat ones; of beef and mutton a considerable quantity, abundantly sufficient for his guests and servants, and shows what a good table he kept:

*also fowls were prepared for me*; what number is not said:

*and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine*; the country afforded; that is, either once in ten days his stock of wine was renewed, or a more liberal entertainment was made, a banquet of wine, (<sup><1786></sup>Esther 5:6),

*yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor*; the salary that used to be given him, but did this at his own expense, out of his own estate in Judea; or what he had got by his office as cupbearer to the king of Persia, the salary of which perhaps was continued:

*because the bondage was heavy upon the people*; the tribute of the king of Persia, and their labour and expense in building the walls of the city.

**Ver. 19.** *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.*] He expected not any recompence from the people, but from the Lord; and from him not in a way of merit, but of grace and good will, who forgets not what is done for his name's sake, (<sup><360></sup>Hebrews 6:10).