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Nehemiah's Unselfish Example

Nehemiah 5: 14-19

Nehemiah's unselfish leadership DIG: What changes in the governor's office does Nehemiah enact for the sake of his people (5:14-19)? How did Nehemiah protect himself so he wouldn't be accused of being selfish or unfair? What does he hope to gain in return for his personal sacrifice? How do you suppose he made ends meet?

REFLECT: Nehemiah shows us that loving God and others may require personal sacrifice. What privileges and rights are you ready to give up so that God's work may prosper? When have your spiritual beliefs really cost you something? What are some examples of unselfishness that you have observed this past week?

445 BC During the ministry of Nehemiah (to see link click [Bt](#) - The Third Return).

Compiled by: The Chronicler from the Ezra and Nehemiah Memoirs

(see [Ac](#) - Ezra-Nehemiah From a Jewish Perspective: **The Nehemiah Memoirs**).

Evidently, when Nehemiah later wrote his memoirs regarding his years in Jerusalem, he reflected on his leadership position and included them here. It appears that he included these verses in the narrative at this point because of their relationship to the events described in the previous file (see [Cf](#) - **The Complaints of the Poor Israelites**).



In the tenth example of leadership in the life of Nehemiah, successful leaders lead by example (see [Bt - The Third Return](#)). **Nehemiah** was entitled to collect taxes from the people in **Judah** because **he** had been officially appointed as **the king's** representative. Yet **he** didn't. **He** refrained from taxing **Jews** in order to serve as an example to **them** of self-sacrificial love. **Moreover, from the day when I was appointed to be the governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artakh'shasta - twelve years - neither I, nor my relatives have eaten the bread allocated to the governor. The earlier governors during the days of Zerubbabel, those preceding me, placed heavy burdens on the people, and took bread and wine from them, in addition to forty shekels of silver. Their attendants also lorded over the people. But I did not do so, out of fear of God. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall, without even buying a field. All my attendants were gathered there for the work (Nehemiah 5:14-16). Nehemiah** dealt with issues that came up, but **his** central focus was always on completing the work **ADONAI** had called **him** to do. **He** was not there for personal profit, and **he** did not waste **his** time buying land or striving to further **his** career. **He** was there to build **the wall**. . . and build **he** did.²⁵¹

Furthermore, 150 Judeans and officials, as well as those that came to us from the nations around us, were at my table. Now, each day one ox and six choice sheep, as well as some fowl, were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundance of every kind of wine was prepared. Despite all this, I did not require the governor's food allowance, because the work was already heavy on this people. Nehemiah's role as **governor** carried certain social obligations, just as any important political official is expected to entertain influential guests today. The costs were quite high for such obligations, and previous governors had not hesitated to make **the Jews** pay the bill through

taxes. But **Nehemiah** met **his** obligations out of **his** own pocket, refusing to add to the financial burden of **his** fellow **Jews (Nehemiah 5:17-18)**.²⁵²

Leading by example, **Nehemiah** had set an example of generosity. **He** wanted those who had developed a lifestyle of greed and opportunism to develop a lifestyle of generous giving. But what were the motives that drove **Nehemiah** to generous giving for the sake of the Kingdom of **God**? Two specific things are mentioned here: **his fear of God (Nehemiah 5:15)**, and **his** compassion for the suffering of **his people (Nehemiah 5:18)**.

Nehemiah feared God more than **he** feared men. **He** lived for the glory of **ADONAI**, seeking in everything that **he** did to bring **his** life into conformity with the Torah. **He** loved **YHVH** because **YHVH** had shown **His** love to **him**. **He** took the TaNaKh seriously as though **Ha'Shem Himself** was speaking directly to **him**.

Following Shavu'ot, the early believers practiced a generous lifestyle (see the commentary on **Acts**, to see link click [Ao - The New Covenant Community Begins](#)), sharing **their** possessions with the needy as though **they** did not own **them**. It is interesting that the reason for **their** behavior was that **fear came upon every soul (Acts 2:43)**. **The LORD** was more than merely a theological proposition to them; **the LORD** was *everything* to **them**. They saw the need to have a light touch on the things of this world. And the absence of **fear** was the reason **the nobles and officials** treated **the poor and the needy** so badly (see [Cf - The Complaints of the Poor Israelites](#)).

But there was a second motivation for **Nehemiah's** generosity: **the people's** poverty brought forth in **him** a deep sense of compassion. **He** did not demand of **them** what **they** could not pay **because the work was already heavy on this people (Nehemiah 5:18)**. **His** calling was to minister to an economically depressed community from the lifestyle that **he** had known as a servant to the most powerful man in the world. As a relatively wealthy man, **Nehemiah** saw that it was **his** duty and joy to share **his** bounty with others. The poverty of **the people** moved **him**.

Nehemiah displayed a shepherd's heart. **He** was a leader, and **he** needed to ask **the people** to engage in the hard work of building **the wall of Jerusalem**. But **he** was also a pastor. **He** loved **his people**. **He** had compassion on **them**. **His** heart was moved by the sight of **their** distress and need. In that respect, **he** exhibited a spirit like that of **Yeshua**, who, when **He** viewed the city of **Yerushalayim** from a distance, saw **the people** as **sheep without a shepherd**, and **wept (Luke 19:41)**. Glimpses of **Messiah's** heart are seen in **Nehemiah**. They are only glimpses, of course, but as we keep on turning the pages of the Bible, another **Shepherd-Ruler** comes whose heart melts at the sight of our desperate

need.

This section ends with another one of **Nehemiah's** prayers. This is the sixth of twelve **prayers** recorded in **Nehemiah (9:5ff, 1:5-11, 2:4, 4:4, 4:9, here, 6:9, 6:14, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29, 13:31)**. He prayed: **Remember me for good, O my God, for all that I have done for this people (Nehemiah 5:19)**. Only a man who truly knows **ADONAI** speaks of **Him** in this way. Was **Nehemiah** flaunting about all **his** good works? Hardly! We are **justified by faith apart from works of the Torah (Romans 3:28)**, for **God counts righteousness apart from works (Romans 4:6)**. But what **Nehemiah** was talking about was the fruit of **his** ministry, not the root. We are saved by **faith** alone, **apart from works**, but that **faith** is never alone . . . it is always accompanied by **good works (James 2:14-26)**.

Nehemiah was not bragging about **his** accomplishments, but professing **his** sincerity. **He** was saying, "I have attempted to live in accordance with the way **You** have desired. **I** have not done that perfectly. Where **I** have sinned, **I** claim the forgiveness that you promise to those who confess and repent of their sins, who trust in the promise of salvation offered in the blood of sacrifice made for sinners like **me**. But **You** have also promised **never to leave us or forsake us**. **You** have promised to **direct our paths**. I have acted in good faith."

It takes courage to pray like that! To be so in touch with one's heart that we can believe that we can come before our **Father** in heaven and tell **Him**, "I have done what you asked! **I** may not have done it with the absolute purity that **You** require, and for that **I** plead the blood of **Jesus Christ**. But I have done it with sincerity, poor and feeble though it was! Now **remember me**. I have done this for no other reason than to bring **You** glory." That is a bold prayer indeed. And it is the kind of praying that comes from a redeemed heart without reservation for the glory of **God**.²⁵³