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5 And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.² For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters *are* many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."³ There were also *some* who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."⁴ There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax *on* our lands and vineyards."⁵ Yet now our flesh *is* as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and *some* of our daughters have been brought into slavery. *It is* not in our power *to redeem them*, for other men have our lands and vineyards."⁶ And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.⁷ After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them.⁸ And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing *to say*.⁹ Then I said, "What you are doing *is* not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?¹⁰ I also, *with* my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!"¹¹ Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."¹² So they said, "We will restore *it*, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.¹³ Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.
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1. Wailing at the wall

- a. While the wall was being built, the people were troubled
 - a1. Neh. concentrated on the wall & the opposition
 - a2. As with Ezra with the mixed marriage issue, Neh. had no idea that deeper issues existed
- b. Finally, the people gathered to complain
 - a1. Notice that the wives were prominent in the protest, since they dealt with home matters
 - a2. What good is a wall if the people suffer?
- c. The distress of the people called for strong action:
 - a1. There was a famine
 - a2. The poor had to mortgage their land in order to buy grain to eat
 - a3. They had to sell their daughters into slavery in order to pay the king's taxes (the king collected silver & gold, but did not recirculate it in coin)
 - b1. Inflation increased with the scarcity

b2. Alexander the Great found 270 tons of gold bullion & 1,200 tons of silver in the Persian royal treasury

a4. The Jewish nobles charged high interest, which the poor could not pay, so they took the land

2. Nehemiah outraged

- a. There was nothing wrong with proper commercial transactions (Mt. 25), but taking advantage of poor was evil
- b. Famine, inflation, & impoverishment called for compassion, generosity, & leniency rather than business norms
- c. Neh. had to get control of his emotions
 - a1. To speak out of anger is to spout foolishness
 - a2. Neh. took counsel within himself (considered what needed to be done)
- d. Neh. acknowledged that transacting business was a normal activity ("our"), but business deals that do not work for both parties are unjust
 - a1. Shall we sell our brothers into slavery?
 - a2. Should you not walk in fear of the Lord?
- e. Neh. called a great assembly to call out the nobles

3. Justice in Jerusalem

- a. In the law, land was to be returned in the Sabbath year
- b. Neh. shames the nobles to do what is right:
 - a1. Return to the poor their land
 - a2. Pay back 1% (per mo.?) of the interest earned off of their land to them
 - a3. Redeem those sold into slavery
- c. The nobles, feeling both the shame of Neh.'s words & the pressure of the assembly, agreed to do so
 - a1. Neh. was not convinced of their sincerity
 - a2. Neh. made the nobles swear before the priests that they will follow through with their oath
 - a3. Neh. invokes heaven & shakes his robe as if he were removing crumbs as a warning to nobles
- d. Neh. 13:10-12 good intentions expressed while being moved emotionally often fall by the wayside (foxhole oaths)
 - a1. Unless there is a core commitment to the Lord & his ways, promises are empty & oaths are lies
 - a2. Eccl. 5:4 the Lord takes every promise seriously & will bring to account every idle word
- e. Rarely do people keep forced vows
 - a1. Pressured commitments are not true pledges
 - a2. A change of heart precedes just actions