

# You Win The Prize!

## Taken from Nehemiah 5

### Foundation

Start your time today by asking God to examine your heart. Ask Him to show you how you can become more of a blessing (rather than a burden) to others.



*Have you ever been around people who are only out to help themselves?*

“This is enough!” Nehemiah said angrily. It was one thing to have the *Samaritans* attacking the morale of his people, but when the *Israelites* turned on each other, it was more than Nehemiah could stand.

Looking into the weary eyes of some Israelite families, Nehemiah listened to their complaints. Everyone knew that the families who were the first exiles to return almost 90 years ago with Zerubbabel had all become well-established. Some who had great wealth in Babylon were able to bring it with them, gaining a good start for themselves. But the newer exiles who had journeyed back from Babylon most recently didn’t have established fields or businesses—or even great wealth. They had to borrow money to keep the land they did have. Instead of being helped by their fellow Israelites, the recent exiles were being taken advantage of. The money loaned to them wasn’t loaned in an effort to help, but with the purpose of making a profit—for the loaned money had to be repaid with an extra fee! Several families had no more resources to draw upon and soon their children were sold into slavery

just to get enough money to live. This angered Nehemiah, so he called a meeting to address the problem.

“Some of us are doing all we can to redeem our fellow Israelites who have had to sell themselves to pagan foreigners. But you are causing them to have to go back into slavery again! How long will you continue this?” Nehemiah accused. Those who were guilty of trying to benefit themselves remained silent, saying nothing in their own defense.

“This practice is sinful,” Nehemiah stated, reminding them of God’s Law which forbade such actions. “This lending of money and grain for an additional fee needs to stop—now,” Nehemiah ordered. “You should immediately return their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses—as well as the extra you charged!”

Those guilty knew they had no choice but to obey, for Nehemiah was governor over Jerusalem. “We will return it all and not take anything more,” they answered.

Nehemiah knew talk of trying to benefit others was easier than actually doing it, so he required that they take an oath to ensure they took the decree seriously. While he had everyone’s attention, Nehemiah dramatically shook out his robe as if attempting to rid it of filth.

“Just like I’m doing this, so will God attempt to rid himself of every man who fails to keep this oath.”

“Amen,” the Israelites agreed in unison.

Ruling as governor, Nehemiah was sensitive to the needs of his people. Although he held a position that would allow him to gain benefits for himself, he declined those privileges. His actions were different than Jerusalem’s previous governors, who used the system to their advantage by demanding a daily ration of food and wine, as well as a pound of silver. They placed a

***According to Deuteronomy 23:19-20, God clearly commanded the Israelites not to take advantage of one another by charging interest “...so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess.”***

heavy burden on the people, but Nehemiah would not—even though he had a legal right to do so. Instead, Nehemiah threw himself into the task of repairing the wall alongside the other Israelites. Although as governor he could make loans and legally take the land from those who could not repay, Nehemiah chose not to do so. Rather than lay a burden on the people, he fed 150 Jews and officials at his own expense. Nehemiah did this—not to bring glory to himself—but to be a blessing to others. And he sought to be a blessing to others because of his love for God.

**FOOTWORK**

Open your Bible to Nehemiah 5:15-16 and read it. What does it say? Now, look at verse 19. What does this tell you about Nehemiah's priorities? Where did Nehemiah seek his reward?



When we serve other people instead of ourselves, we only give up small benefits to gain a greater prize—a reward in heaven. This week, will you use others to benefit yourself, or will you strive to benefit and help others?