

# Kingdom Report

Week of 4 March 2019

## Nehemiah's Economic Reformation: A Template for Prosperity

When the Israelites returned from Babylon, first order of business was spiritual restoration under Ezra....but that was followed by economic restoration under Nehemiah. And there is a lesson for us as Church here....

In our ongoing series on Biblical economics for the Second Reformation of healing the nations, I want to remind you of an interesting comment that Paul made to the church at Rome:

Romans 15:4: *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

In my blog last week I gave you scriptural ideas on helping folks who need immediate poverty relief...emergency intervention.

However there is a scriptural case to be made for structural reform to create an economy that will promote national prosperity. This has been the great silence in our pulpits....nobody that I know of is tackling this issue from the pulpit. This is an issue left to economists, political parties, ideologues, etc.

What is left to the church is to man the emergency room of the economy...the desperately poor who fall between the cracks of the economic system.

I am approaching this issue of structural reform of the economic system from the following perspectives just to warn you:

- I expect the inevitable collapse of the economic world system as now constructed.
- I expect the inevitable crumbling of the nation state system as now constructed.

I will not here give my reasons as that will take too much space.

So in anticipation of the inevitable....I am doing this series on economic policy for the Second Reformation. Because as Paul states...scriptures written long ago were for our instruction and we need patience to study and we need to draw hope that the Lord is with us when we follow His Word...He will perform.

The instruction from Nehemiah I find fascinating as it is to me a perfect template for where we are as a charismatic evangelical movement. As such it informs with a wonderful template for the next great reformation....economic reformation!

Just a bit of context:

It's 5th century BC, the 42,260 Israelites led by Ezra and Zerubbabel had returned to Jerusalem from 70 years of captivity in Babylon. The first project by them was the rebuilding of the destroyed temple and reconstituting of the priesthood and sanctifying them for temple work. Ezra also did the very important work of restoring the lost scriptures of Israel and setting them in order and having them written and copied and getting the priesthood trained and the people taught.

However as the years pass something bad is happening. The temple and priests are functioning but the economy was not. In fact the Israelites had come out of political bondage to Babylon only to end up in economic bondage in their new country of a restored Israel. They had become debt slaves.

Does this sound familiar? It does to me. I see it everywhere in evangelical circles. You see the people under Ezra and the new priesthood had given liberally to finance the reconstruction of the new temple and to support the new priesthood....but still ended up as debt slaves in an unjust economic system.

This issue resonates today. We have behind us a 40 year old "prosperity gospel" movement where huge amounts of money has been tithed to churches and ministries everyone stirred by the need to restore the five-fold ministries and get churches built and ministry outreach operating....but around the world our people are in debt bondage still as virtual economic serfs living month by month, paycheck to paycheck.

Nehemiah hears of the terrible economic distress of his people. Nehemiah was in a very high position in the court of king Artaxerxes of Persia and obtained the permission of the king to go to Jerusalem as the new governor to set things right.

Nehemiah 5 gives you the desperate cry of the people to their new governor and the steps that Nehemiah took to bring back prosperity to the people. Lets have a look at these scriptures and see what economic restructuring lessons we can learn from this.

What I want to do here is to analyze the problem and then analyze Nehemiah's solution but I want to do it in such a way that it gives us an indication of what needs to be done. The path we take to doing the right thing is going to be different to how Nehemiah did it but the principles remain the same. Lets look at it closer...

### **The Problem**

Nehemiah 5:1 *"And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews."*

This was a local economic issue among their own people, it was not Babylon's fault or Persia's fault....the fault was among our own people, our own economy, our fellow Jews.

**Nehemiah 5:2-3 *"We our sons and our daughters are many therefore we take up corn for them that we may live but we have had to mortgage our lands, vineyards and houses that we might buy corn because of the dearth."***

We do not have enough income to meet our basic needs to feed our families so we have had to take out equity loans on our assets just to live.

**Nehemiah 5:4 *"We have borrowed money for the king's tribute upon our lands and vineyards."***

We don't even have enough money left over after trying to feed our families to pay our taxes.

**Nehemiah 5:5 *"...and lo we bring into bondage our sons and daughters and servants and it is not in our power to redeem them for other people have our lands and vineyards."***

Not only are we deeply in debt but we are leaving a huge debt for the next generation and we cannot pay back this debt because the capital assets we need for higher productivity and increased income has been sold off to others and we have no means to buying back our investments. Sounds like most countries of the world today....the national debts are so high that the next generations will also be debt slaves for all their lives trying to pay off this generation's debt accumulation.

**Nehemiah's response....**

**Nehemiah 5:6 *"And I was very angry when I heard their cry and their words."***

Tell me when are we going to get really angry about the cry of the poor?

Let's look at Nehemiah's response. By the way if you are looking for Nehemiah to say "Hey folks calm down, I have good news for you. God has this miracle prosperity program for you. You see your problem is that you are not tithing!"....that is not what happens next.

**Nehemiah 5:7 *"Then I consulted with myself and I rebuke the nobles and the rulers and said unto them You exact usury every one his brother. And I set a great assembly against them."***

So Nehemiah mediated on the problem, got the facts and got into action.... He rebuked the financial elite of the nation. They had control of the economic system and shaped the economic dynamics of the economy to extract wealth from the people for their own enrichment through the mechanism of usury. And after rebuking them he mobilized a mass people's movement against the financial oligarchs!

Let me just explain something here about the essence of what they were doing and what is still happening today....Thomas Piketty in his world best seller book "Capital" put it very succinctly:

If the owners of capital keep demanding 15% return on capital but the economy is only growing at 2% then a small financial elite are accumulating the assets of the nation and the vast majority of people are getting poorer all the time.

Furthermore...if central banks are issuing new money at 1% to the big banks and they lend it to their favourite corporations at 2,5% and the corporations use that cheap loan capital to buy up operating assets that produce 15% returns then the world's assets then year by year financial assets are being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and destroying the middle class and impoverishing the nation.

This is what was happening to new Israel nation.

***Nehemiah 5:8 'And I said unto them we after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews which were sold unto the heathen and will you even sell your brethren?...and I said unto them it is not good what you do...should you not walk in the fear of God?'***

Nehemiah is saying we were sold as slaves to Babylon and were released from bondage and now you are making our people into debt slaves all over again....this is not acceptable in the sight of God. I demand debt forgiveness!

***Nehemiah 5:11 "Restore I pray you to restore them even this day their lands their vineyards their olive groves their houses....."***

Nehemiah demanded that the people must become once again be owners of capital assets of the nation. Productive assets so that they not only have income from their labour but passive income from their productive assets and investments. That is the only way to support growing families.

***Nehemiah 5:15 "The former governor that had been before me which were chargeable unto the people had taken bread and wine and forty shekels of silver, yea even their servants bare rule over the people: but I did not because of the fear of the Lord....and I did not require the bread of the governor because the bondage was heavy upon the people."***

Nehemiah drastically lowered the cost of government over the people. Governors before him abused their taxing authority but he did not. Previous governors had many bureaucrats that ruled the people and claimed high maintenance taxes....Nehemiah drastically cut down on government over head costs.

I see dramatic parallels to our day and age to that of Nehemiah.

Our church leaders need to get angry about poverty like Nehemiah did. The Lord is angry with the economic elite and corrupt government. They do not fear the Lord. They are gods unto themselves.

We cannot keep preaching miracle money. We cannot blame endemic poverty just on the people or lack of tithing and giving. There is such a thing as systemic poverty caused by how the economic system is structured and how government is structured. That is the economic lesson from Nehemiah.

We cannot keep giving Sunday morning pep talks and lifestyle coaching and send people out into a system that is taking more out of their labour and out of their finances than what people get back in return. Families especially are suffering. The overhead costs of raising a family are horrendous. Corporations grow...families struggle to survive.

We cannot just rely on the old clever talk of "Teach a man to fish and he will never be hungry again...." What if there is no fish in the sea because the big corporates have vacuumed the ocean clean. What if the hungry man has no capital savings to buy a fishing rod?

Nehemiah gives us the outline of the Lord's economic revolutionary prosperity program...

- Recognize that the people are crying out and need help...get angry!
- Rebuke the governmental and financial elites....and start a mass movement as Nehemiah did.
- Restructure the financial system so that people can be redeemed out of debt....that is develop a means by which we implement debt limitation and debt redemption.
- Restructure the financial system so that the economic surplus produced by the labour of the people finds its way back to the people in the form of higher wages.
- Restructure the financial system in such a way that people through various means such as a national wealth fund or share allocation to workers, that common workers become asset owners of productive assets in the economy.
- Restructure government in such a way that the high overhead costs of government in the form of taxes, regulations and inefficiencies are lowered and eliminated.

That is a big job here in South Africa. But Nehemiah showed the way. We Christians are the majority of the population. We can be the economic revolutionaries.

We South Africans are also the 9th highest taxed nation in the world and what are we getting from government for all our tax money? We are also one of the most financially unequal economies in the world. We have an incredible debt burden that is a bondage not only on ourselves but we have sold off the productive capital assets of the nation to foreigners so that our children will remain debt bondage for the long term future.

The Bible has a template for economic reform and prosperity....and the Lord demands that His people must come out of poverty. Are we going to heed that call?

So bear with me as I research policy ideas for a new Biblical economic revolution and share them with you. Nehemiah is a good start. He gave us what the end result of what the Lord wants...debt free, asset rich, happy and productive and prosperous families.