

## 100 HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

people who suddenly flooded into it to build the wall. The existing limited crop could not sustain them. Add to the increased demand for food the fact that the whole area was experiencing a famine, apparently caused by a drought.

2. There were *too many taxes* exacted from them by Artaxerxes. Verse 4 reads:

... "We have borrowed money, for the king's tax on our fields, and our vineyards."

You see, Artaxerxes controlled the known world at that time. Taxes were collected from all who lived in the kingdom, and these laborers, even though they lived eight hundred miles from Persia, were not exempt. It is also possible that those collecting the taxes exploited the taxpayers by demanding more than the tax called for.

3. The *high and inappropriate interest rate* caused them to sell their children and themselves into slavery. Read verse 5:

"And now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children... we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

Their creditors were taking their land as payment and when they ran out of land, the creditors took their children as slaves. So the work on the wall ground to a halt.

Is the Bible outdated? Does it sound like a book that's irrelevant? It speaks here of overpopulation, famine, and high taxes. Interest rates were higher than ever with no relief in sight. There were inequities and strikes. Verses 1 through 5 read like today's *Wall Street Journal*.

Look at the leader's reaction in verse 6:

## LOVE, LOANS . . . AND THE MONEY CRUNCH 101

Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words.

Nehemiah heard them griping and complaining. When he saw they had stopped the job they were called to do, he was infuriated!

### WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, READ THE INSTRUCTIONS

Why was Nehemiah angry when he heard their outcry? Should not a leader be given to compassion when people complain? At times he should, but not always. Sometimes the very best response is justified anger.

Nehemiah was angry because the people had forgotten the Mosaic Law. Today we are living in the era of grace and so we look disparagingly (unfortunately) on the law. We shouldn't. It preserved the people of Israel by telling them how to live with one another. God's tribes were to live differently than others because of His personalized instructions to them. His law gave the Jews instructions for living a just and godly life as a family. But the chosen ones were having problems in Nehemiah's day because they had failed to follow instructions.

Twentieth-century Christians would also do well to pay close attention to God's guidelines. Notice the instructions in Exodus 22:25:

If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest.

Notice that God says this has to do with "My" people, the Jews. "If you find one in a poor financial situation," God continues, "don't act as a creditor. When you lend, lend *without interest*."