

WORKING AND FIGHTING AT THE SAME TIME

Nehemiah 3:1 – 4:23

Key verse 4:17

“Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.”

Let us thank God for the Nehemiah Bible study for the spiritual reconstruction in Germany, Europe and all over the world through the UBF campus mission. In the first lesson we saw that when Nehemiah heard about the broken walls of Jerusalem, he sat down, wept, mourned for days, fasted and prayed to God. Believing in God's promise, he returned to Jerusalem and mobilized the Jews there: "Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace! They answered, "Let us start rebuilding," and so they began this good work. The reconstruction begins with a leader who has absolute faith in God's promise.

Today we want to learn more about Nehemiah's leadership, namely how he helped different people to work together for the great work. We also learn about his victorious strategy of faith to work and fight at the same time.

1. Working together (3:1-32)

Let us read verse 1: "Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel." The enumeration of the builders and their building phases begins with the priests. Eliashib and his brothers set a good example. They built the shaft gate with their own hands, covered it and set its doors in place. Not only did these priests want to appear dignified, but they did not want to lift a finger themselves (Mt 23:4). They helped themselves. A leader must always be a role model. A pioneer must also lead by example. At the European Summer Bible Conference 2009, we asked the senior missionaries to come on stage

to honour them for 40 years of campus mission in Europe. The first ones who came were M. Sarah Barry and M. Grace A. Lee. They were still full of pioneering spirit because they were used to lead by example in mission life.

We also see that the first gate was the gate at the temple through which the sacrificial animals were brought in. This gate also had no locks and bolts (1). Here we learn that the focus of the reconstruction was to support the temple service so that God's people would live a God-pleasing life in obedience to His commandments.

How then did the work go? Let us read verse 2: "The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zakkur son of Imri built next to them." "Beside them" and "next to them" say that the work was done in sections. A total of 43 construction phases are mentioned, among them ten gates: the Shaft Gate (near the temple), the Fish Gate, the Old Gate, the Valley Gate (towards the Hinnon Valley), the Dung Gate, the Spring Gate (near the pond Siloah), the Water Gate (towards the Kidron Valley), the Ross Gate, the East Gate (opposite the Mount of Olives) and the Watchtower Gate. Each one was responsible with his people for a certain construction phase. Everyone worked together on the great work, the reconstruction of the walls. How was this great work possible?

It was made possible by Nehemiah's leadership and by the cooperation of his people. Although Nehemiah's name is not mentioned in verses 1-32, the account of the construction of the walls clearly testifies that without Nehemiah as leader, this work would have been impossible. Under his leadership, the walls, which lay in ruins for 120 years, were rebuilt in 52 days. Let us

learn the mystery of his leadership and the cooperation of God's people through the report on the building of the wall.

Firstly, everyone collaborated. Among the builders there are six professions: priests, Levites, goldsmiths, merchants, ointmen, and goalkeepers; in addition there are eight district leaders. Six groups of builders came from far away: the people of Jericho, Tekoa and Sanoah, the priests of Jordan, the men of Gibeon and the men of Mizpah. One of them, Shallum, had no sons, so he and his daughters worked on the wall.

Everyone cooperated. The goldsmiths didn't say: We can add beautiful decorations to the gates later, but we can't clear away rubble and carry stones, we're not trained to do that. The ointmen could have said: "If someone is injured, we can put hand lotion on them, but we don't mix mortar. The people on the other side of the Jordan could have said that the work was none of their business and that Nehemiah was not their governor and had nothing to say to them. But Schallum's daughters also did not lament their fate, but, like the German women after the Second World War, cleared away the rubble and rebuilt with their own hands. No one needed an excuse. Everyone cooperated. Five groups even worked on two sections of the wall: Binnui, son of Henadad, the people of Tekoa, the priests, Meremot, son of Uriah, and Meshullam, son of Berechiah. In verse 5, Nehemiah points out that the nobles of Tekoa did not bend their necks to serve their masters. This shows that not cooperating was not normal, but a disgrace. All those who had been mobilized by Nehemiah cooperated.

Nehemiah recorded each of them by name. This means that each of them was very precious to him. He took care of them and talked to each of them and learned about their concerns, strengths and weaknesses. He listened to them much, but did not give in. In the end, he gave them God's word every time. There were understandable reasons for each of them not to be able to work. But they accepted Nehemiah as their shepherd. When they accepted his leadership, great joy came into their hearts. They took the good work into their hands, each one starting to work on his section with pickaxe and trowel and bucket and their bare hands. They did not ask, "Why me?" They were happy to participate in the great work because they had

a shepherd who carried God's vision in his heart.

A shepherd encouraged a young woman to complete her studies. She kept saying, "I cannot. Finally she confessed: "I don't want to. Her shepherd gave her God's word: "Have faith in God." He could not write her master's thesis in her place. But she realized that he loved her absolutely and served her with the vision of God for her house church, for her people and her continent. She overcame her unwillingness through repentance and took the good work in hand and wrote faith history.

Missionary Sarah Chang served a foreign single mother with a teenage child. Not many considered her as a co-worker candidate. But M. Sarah served her relentlessly with Bible study. God's Word from Ezra 7:10 was powerful so she accepted God's calling and decided to work as a shepherdess for the campus mission. Where there are leaders with shepherd hearts and vision, there are also coworkers.

Second, all worked together in one spirit. When we read verses 1-32 again, the terms "next to them", "after them" and "beside them" stand out. They built a wall. Each piece of wall had to fit the next. It couldn't be of different height, different width, made of different material. They were building in one mind. They had to overcome their individualism. Probably Nehemiah gathered the leaders every morning to encourage them with the promise of God and to give them instructions. Thus a unified ministry was born.

In our time individualism is very much emphasized. It is said that children need to be educated to think independently and develop their own opinions and ideas. But in the work of God individualism is a great obstacle. If everyone serves God's work in the way that seems right to him or her, no wall is built. This is a challenge for leaders. Being a leader does not mean letting everyone act according to his or her own ideas, but rather forming a vessel of cooperation.

Nehemiah managed to form a unity from the different individuals. 43 Leaders and groups worked together in one spirit, section by section, on the great work of building the wall. Nehemiah was a leader in the image of Jesus. Jesus formed a unity of fishermen, customs offi-

cers, rebels and intellectuals who worked together in one spirit. They learned to deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. They also helped the scattered Christians to build themselves up as living stones to the spiritual house (1 Peter 2:4,5). Missionary Dr. Samuel Lee led the UBF campus mission with God's vision of 1 Peter 2:9 and mobilized countless people to work together. They worked in more than 100 countries in very many stages of construction, but in a spirit according to the orientation which we now call the spiritual heritage of UBF. Missionary Dr. Peter Chang was confronted as a leader with the different cultures of the native shepherds, the first, second and third generation. But he mobilized them with God's word from Ezra 7:10 and Ezekiel 37:10 to cooperate. He then challenged the even greater work of mobilizing the leaders of the next generation of UBF through GLEF as self-motivated Bible teachers, discipleship educators and global spiritual leaders. Because he was full of God's vision, a great, sensational work of cooperation was born.

The different generations and cultures are now working together in house churches, teams and pioneering ministries, with the vision to bring the bones of the dead to life through 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams and to raise up an exceedingly large army of 100,000 Bible teachers and 5 million prayer workers for world mission. Sh. Jochen's house church is building a great gate at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences through early morning prayer, prayer on campus, invitations and the one-to-one Bible study teams. In addition, M. Dr. Petrus and Sh. Dr. Johannes with their staff at the medical faculty are building on Venusberg with the prayer intention according to Mt 6:33 and Ezra 7:10 to establish Bible teachers among the prospective doctors. Next to them, Sh. Ehrfurchts is building a house church at the Faculty of Philosophy. Sh. Peter Ryu is even working on several sections, at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences in collaboration with Sh. Peter and Sh. Anja and at the Center for Mobilization of the Next Generation. The next generation of workers are also mobilized to work together for the great work of spiritual revival in Germany and Europe. At the EMA the people of Chang, Schweitzer and Pilawa are working, next to them Josua is building with his fellow students at the Helmholtz gymnasium, after them Anna-Petra at the HBG and Esra at the

CoJoBo.

They are all working for the formation of one-to-one Bible study teams and for Global Leadership Empowerment together with the vision that Europe will once again become a missionary sending continent and young people grow as global spiritual leaders and God's people are used as a kingdom of priests and holy people. The work of building the wall, as it was done through Nehemiah, is still done today through the faith of a leader who dares to do something great and to implant the vision of God in the hearts of the workers, and through the cooperation of God's people. Let us learn from Nehemiah to be leaders who win coworkers for the great work of rebuilding the spiritual walls through the Word of God.

2. The strategy of faith (4:1 - 4:23)

Let us read 4:1: "When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews." Sanballat, the Horonite, heard in Samaria that the Jews under Nehemiah's leadership had begun to build the wall. This news was unbearable for him. He became very angry and began to mock the Jews in public: "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble-burned as they are?" Tobiah the Ammonite heard this and added: "What they are building-if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" Sanballat and Tobija thought that they could harm the Jews by making them despicable. But the opposite was the case. Nehemiah was filled with holy anger and prayed: "Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders." The effect was that the Jews became even more determined. They built the wall and closed it down to half its height, and the people gained new courage to work.

The enemies heard that the gaps had begun to close and became even more angry (4:7). How did they proceed now? They conspired with the Arabs and Ammonites and Ashdodites around them to fight against Jerusalem and cause con-

fusion. They realized that the mockery had strengthened the unity of the Jews. They decided to attack this unity and cause confusion and discord. What did Nehemiah do? Let's read verse 9: "But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." Nehemiah and his people remained vigilant and set up guards against the enemies. But now a challenge emerged from within. Let us read verse 10: "Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, 'The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.'" The activities of the enemy had an effect. So far, powerlessness and the amount of debris had never been an issue. The walls were already half built and the gaps were gradually closing. But in the face of the mockery and threats and the large number of enemies, some lost the vision of God from their hearts and became cowards. They said to Nehemiah, "We cannot continue building" and wanted to give up. Verse 11 shows that the enemies thought that the Jews were defenseless. They wanted to secretly sneak in among them and then kill them and finish the work. But the Jews from the surrounding villages reported in Jerusalem that the enemies were approaching from all sides. The enemy's evil plan was revealed. Nehemiah reacted immediately. First he equipped them with weapons and placed them behind the wall in the open places. They obeyed, but despite the swords, spears and bows, they were still full of fear. Therefore Nehemiah rebuked their disbelief. Let us read verse 14: "After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'" Nehemiah's blame struck her heart. They recognized their spiritual sin that they had forgotten his grace without holy fear towards the great and terrible Lord. They repented and decided to fight for their brothers, sons, daughters, wives and houses. Nehemiah learned that God himself dealt with the enemies and destroyed their counsel. The enemies had to leave. The builders all returned to the wall, each one to his work (15).

We learn how the enemies work, but how God protects His work through the vigilance of His servants. For the past 40 years we have been allowed to serve the work of spiritual reconstruction by educating disciples of Jesus through one-to-one Bible study and fellowship

and mobilizing the next generation as co-workers. As we served God in this way, we learned that the enemies could not bear the work of God through the leadership of God's servant and the cooperation of the co-workers. A young man set up a large website and collected all kinds of slanderous statements to take action against this ministry. Probably he thought that all this would put an end to the work. But we were allowed to pray to our God and set up guards. So he had to delete all contents and even give up the website which he had unjustifiably taken. When I mobilized Sh. Matthew and Joshua at the Helmholtz Gymnasium three years ago to pray together once a week during the school break, the first reaction was not that of my classmates, but of the school administration, which forbade prayer. But the two decided not to be afraid, but to fight for their fellow students and their school. The prayer circle grew to five people who are now working on the spiritual reconstruction. Thanks be to God who protects his work. God will undo the attacks of the enemies and help many to return to building the walls through discipleship training and GLEF.

The attacks of the enemies convinced Nehemiah to change the strategy in building the walls. Let us consider verses 16 and 17: "From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other." Nehemiah's strategy of faith was to work and fight at the same time. He halved the number of workers and left the other half ready with spears, shields, bows and tanks. The porters worked with only one hand while holding the weapon with the other. Everyone who built had his sword girded around his sword. Next to Nehemiah stood the man with the trumpet. There, where the trumpet could be heard, they were to gather in case of an attack. Nehemiah encouraged them. "Our God will fight for us." Let us read verse 21: "So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out." The workers remained in Jerusalem for the duration of the reconstruction. Nehemiah and his guard did not take off their clothes even at night, and everyone held his spear on his right hand.

If we want to serve God's work, we must work and fight at the same time. As we have seen, God's work is unbearable for the enemies. All the servants of God throughout history who had started God's work have experienced such resistance. Therefore, their strategy was to work and fight at the same time. When Paul served in Ephesus for Bible study, some stood up and spoke evil of the teaching in front of the others. Then he separated from them and separated the disciples as well and taught daily in the school of Tyrannus. He and the disciples struggled spiritually as they worked for the gospel ministry. As a result, many churches were pioneered from Ephesus and the whole province of Asia heard the Word of God. By the grace of God we are allowed to work and fight. We fight through early morning prayer, through the letter of testimony, through daily word fellowship to obey the Word of God in all circumstances and to resist the godless spirit of the age. Some say that we should change the strategy. Fighting is no longer appropriate. They are the enemies of God. Early morning prayer, personal word warfare with testimony and daily fellowship are as much a part of God's work as inviting, forming one-to-one Bible study teams and disciple making. If we would slacken in our struggle, Satan would devour us, our sheep and our children. We must continue to fight while we work. God will bless this struggle and by forming one-to-one Bible study teams will spiritually conquer all 1700 colleges in Europe and through GLEF will establish the next generation as global spiritual leaders for his worldwide work of salvation.

Today we learn that a great work of God is happening where a leader with the vision of God mobilizes the people of God to work together. We also learn that where God's people work and fight at the same time, the enemies are trying in vain to hinder God's work. Let us work and fight at the same time and rebuild the spiritual walls in Germany, Europe and worldwide and be used as a kingdom of priests and holy people.