

## THE COMPLETION OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM

Nehemiah 5:1 – 7:72a

Key verse 6:3

„So I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?”

Thank God for his living word from John's gospel. God has mercy on Europe and raises young people on campus as spiritual leaders like John the Baptist, who lead Europe to the hope of God with the message on repentance. The spiritual situation in which we find ourselves today, seems very similar to the broken walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's time. Many Christians in Europe have lost their spiritual identity as God's people and live in great trouble and disgrace like the Jews from Babylonian captivity. They live in the captivity of the spirit of the times. They need Bible study so that they can grasp God's hope. May God continue our Nehemiah Bible study so that many of us, especially our next generation, may be mobilized as influential leaders for His revival work in Europe.

Today we see that Nehemiah's church suffered very strong inner temptation. It was just the time when the building of the wall was well advanced. The cause of the temptations was the selfishness of the officials and nobles who destroyed the unity without walking in the fear of God. After that, Nehemiah again experienced harsh attacks from outside by the archenemies like Sanballat and Tobiah who wanted to hinder and destroy Nehemiah's work of faith. Nehemiah fought and dedicated himself to his mission in absolute trust in God. Then God gave him his grace to defeat all enemy attacks and complete the construction of the wall. May God give us Nehemiah's faith and leadership that we can resist the adversary, the devil, in the time of crisis, form the spiritual unity of cooperation and fulfill our mission.

### 1. Overcoming the inner challenge through Nehemiah (5:1-19)

Let's look at verse 1: "Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews." Nehemiah and his congregation worked together in the midst of the temptations and attacks of the enemies under the leadership of Nehemiah, working with one hand and fighting with the other. (Chapters 3 and 4) They built a good unity of cooperation in spite of mockery, derision (2:19), blasphemy, contempt (3:33-35), conspiracy (4:2) and murder plans (4:5). Where God works mightily, the devil does not pause. Now there was the inner temptation. A famine began. The poor cried out, because they had to pawn their sons and daughters, fields, vineyards and houses in order to buy grain. They had to borrow money to pay the king's taxes. Let us look at verse 6. When Nehemiah heard about the injustice of the rich brothers taking advantage of the weakness of the poor, he became very angry. How did Nehemiah deal with the internal strife?

Let us read verses 7 to 9: "I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the re-

proach of our Gentile enemies?" In this perilous situation, the rich should think of their poor brothers. But they thought only of their own gain. Nehemiah was not indifferent. He prayed and thought about everything very carefully. He found out that the unity of the people was destroyed because the officials and nobles had no fear of God. For they did not obey God's command to take care of their poor brothers. (Leviticus 25:36) They acted just like the Gentiles who had made slaves of the Jewish brothers. We must know that the devil exploits those who live without the fear of God to destroy the work of God. God worked mightily through the loving fellowship among the early Christians of the Jerusalem community. The devil also worked there (Acts 5:2.3). The family of Ananias and Sapphira acted without fear of God. Although they sold a piece of land, they secretly withheld part of the money for themselves. The consequence of their sin was very serious, namely death.

A house church was privileged to experience God's blessing through much prayer support from numerous world mission coworkers, especially through the shepherd love of their shepherds, that they were blessed to build a marriage by faith. They were able to experience God's gracious hand and the great work of God among the next generation through the GLEF. But the devil became jealous. The woman acted without fear of God by breaking her marriage vow and slandering the church of God. Her hypocrisy had bitter consequences and left a bitter aftertaste not only for the house church, but for the work of God in Europe. The devil has achieved his goal when coworkers of the next generation speak recklessly against their parents and against their church without fear of God. Who-ever walks in the fear of God, honors his parents, prays for God's co-workers and works edifyingly in prayer and love in the church. The one who has no fear of God, sows discord among the coworkers.

God appointed a local shepherd as the next leader of our church last November. In this transition phase we should pray with fear of

God for the new leader. The transition phase is always a time of crisis. Some have tried to assert their own opinions strongly during Bible studies without fear of God, so the new leader had to pray with concern to form an edifying community based on the Word of God. Speaking or acting without fear of God has serious consequences. May God give each of you fear of God, so that we may form unity and work together for the building of the spiritual wall in Germany and Europe.

Let us look at verses 10 and 11. Although Nehemiah had also lent money and grain to his brothers, he wanted to forgive them this debt. In this way he showed an example of how to act godly. Nehemiah asked the rich to return their pawns and forgive them the same day. He called the priests and made the nobles and officials swear before them that they would keep their promise. In this way he helped them to repent of their injustice.

Let us look at verses 14 to 18. Nehemiah testified how he lived unselfishly in his practical life. He was an example as a leader because he feared God. He renounced his income as governor and did not take money from the people. He worked on the wall himself. He also had a daily meal with 150 Jews and officials. Because of his fear of God, he was able to overcome all his selfish, advantage-seeking thinking and give himself up for the people of God, whatever the cost. Nehemiah's prayer in verse 19 is: "Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people." Nehemiah's fear of God was the source of his unselfish life. He gave himself selflessly without calculation and believed that God sees and uses all his service for the renewal of God's people.

Our common life is a sign of the unselfish life of our missionaries and shepherds and some of the next generation. Through common life we have been able to challenge the spiritual revival work in Europe in the past 40 years and to bear many fruits of faith through one-to-one Bible study. Our

native shepherds and leaders of the next generation are witnesses to this. Not only that, but through the unselfish lives of our local shepherds and leaders of the next generation, we were able to build this church building together for world mission. Let us learn Nehemiah's example with the fear of God and mobilize our sheep and next generation to work together for the spiritual building of the wall in Europe and for Muslim mission.

## 2. The completion of the wall (6:1 – 7:72a)

After their victory of faith over the inner temptations of the church, we learn how persistently and maliciously the enemies of God attacked Nehemiah and his church.

First: A deceitful invitation

Let's look at verses one and two: "When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it—though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates – Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me." The enemy learned that there was no gap left in the wall. Now they resorted to feigned friendship and tried to lure Nehemiah out of the city.

How did Nehemiah react to the invitation? Let us read verse 3: "so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" Nehemiah declined the invitation. Through prayer he realized that Sanballat and Geschem wanted to do evil to him. The meeting in the Valley of Ono would have been the beginning of the end. Nehemiah was not seduced, but concentrated on the work of building the wall.

Let us look at verse 4. Nehemiah was invited to the Valley Ono four times in the same

way. Each time he gave the same answer, "I have a great work to do, I cannot go down..." The enemies tried persistently and repeatedly to kill Nehemiah by their feigned invitations. Nehemiah, however, remained resolute in his mission and made it his priority to complete the wall.

In the past six months, I have received several invitations to leave the church and meet my wife elsewhere. They were invitations to a hypocritical reconciliation. God helped me to reject the deceitful invitations and to concentrate on the revival work in Europe.

When we serve the work of God, we must expect repeated invitations from the devil. Nowadays we have a smartphone and in just a few seconds we can get to sites like Instagram and YouTube. Behind these pages is the devil who wants to have full control over us, steal our precious time and keep us away from the great work of God. The devil is also extremely envious when Christians gather for early prayer. His invitation is so persistent and insistent: "Come and have early prayer elsewhere or at another time." One is invited to have better fellowship in other churches. The devil's aim is always to destroy the work of God in us. We may respond clearly to the devil's invitations: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" May God give us spiritual insight for the devil's deceitful invitations and lead us to focus on forming 10,000 1:1 Bible study teams.

Second, an open accusation

Let's look at verses 5 to 7. After Sanballat was unsuccessful with his fourfold invitation, he sent his aide to Nehemiah with an unsealed letter. It contained the report that Nehemiah was building the wall to plot to revolt and become king in Judah. How did Nehemiah re-act? Let us read verses 8 and 9: "I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head." They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it

will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." Nehemiah recognized the enemy's aim to slander him with the biased and wrong claim and to make him fearful so that he would have to give up building the wall. Fear is the weapon of Satan. In unexpected difficulties, fear creeps into our hearts first. It paralyzes us so that we can only look at ourselves and do nothing. Because of fear, some people have great difficulty inviting someone to Bible study. Some are so fearful that they cannot even leave their homes because of the Corona crisis. But Nehemiah held fast in prayer to his mission of building the wall and strengthened his hands all the more. During the time of the temptation he trusted God completely and worked diligently to fulfill his mission to the end.

Especially leaders are Satan's target no. 1. It is the well-known strategy of the devil to spread rumors and slander about the leaders in order to discredit the work of God and finally destroy it. Although Nehemiah had served the work of building the wall so selflessly and with total devotion from the shepherd's heart for his people, they simply claimed that it was all about his personal power, money and honor and that his goal was to become king. It is significant that such accusations usually come from people who themselves exercise power and want to control everything, like Sanballat and Tobiah.

When Luther fought against the corrupted church to reform it and defended the preaching of the gospel, he was immediately accused of wanting to become pope himself. When a servant of God fought with much effort and shepherd heart for discipleship ministry and for mobilizing the next generation and opened his house church, he was also confronted with various slanders from envy. But he did not become fearful, but strengthened his hands all the more by holding on to Philippians 1:21: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Third, a spiritual seducer not sent by God

Let's look at verse 10: "One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." Shemaiah apparently tipped Nehemiah off to warn him about a murder plot. He offered him to hide in the temple. But, in fact, it was a seduction to think of his own safety and thus ignore God's commandments.

But let us read verse 11: "But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should some-one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" It was a devil's trick. Only the priests were allowed to enter the temple. It would have been a violation of God's law. Nehemiah realized that Shemaiah was not sent by God. In fact, he had accepted a bribe from his enemies.

From Nehemiah we learn to defeat all evil attacks and to concentrate fully on the great work of building the wall. Nehemiah's secret was his prayer. Verse 14 says, "Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophet Noadiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me." Nehemiah did not fight with the people. Like the psalmist, he trusted in God's righteous judgement, who gives to everyone according to his works (Psalm 62:13).

Let us read verse 15: "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days." Once the wall was broken and the gates were burned with fire. When one man Nehemiah challenged the impossibility in prayer, God gave them the glorious victory of faith.

Let's look at verse 16: "When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this

work had been done with the help of our God." The enemies acknowledged that this work was from God. It was the wonderful work of God that the helpless, depressed and fearful Jews, who could not even begin to build the wall in 100 years, rose up and, despite all the resistance and temptations, were able to rebuild the wall in 52 days. Even the Gentiles recognized that it was not the work of men but the work of God. The work of men flourishes in normal times, but when difficulties arise, it perishes. In times of crisis and hardship, it becomes clear whether a work is from God or not. Through this work of faith of Nehemiah, God encourages us to strengthen our hands and to complete the great work of spiritual revival in Europe in times of crisis.

During this time many people are full of fear, especially of a small virus. But we may know that God sits on His throne and rules everything: "All countries are full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:3). God can and will use the crisis to bring his people together. How quickly we have simply listened to the experts and politicians, who themselves are helpless instead of praying to God. God shows us our own helplessness so that we come to him and live dependent on him. Let us pray to God at this time for the spiritual revival in Europe, so that everyone can see that this is the work of God.

### 3. An unexpected new challenge for Nehemiah (7:1-72a)

The temple and its inhabitants had to be protected from the enemies within the walls of Jerusalem. Therefore, Nehemiah appointed responsible officials to secure the city. First he appointed the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites. Then he put in charge of Jerusalem two leaders. The first was Hanani, Nehemiah's brother. The second was Hananiah, who is described as a man of integrity and one who feared God more than most people do. Nehemiah knew that God does not use the able people, but those who are faithful and God-fearing. Finally, he introduced rules for opening and

closing the gates and had guards posted to secure the city from the enemies.

Let's look at verse 4. After the wall was built, Nehemiah recognized the problem that Jerusalem was large and spacious, but few people lived there. He found the old record of the first wave of returnees from Babel in 538 B.C. (cf. Ezra 2). 100 years later, the record of the first returnees would encourage all returnees from Babel to resettle in Jerusalem.

Let us read verse 6: "These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town," Nehemiah held the first returnees in high esteem and regarded them as the precious main characters in the history of God. They had left their secure life in Persia to return to the land of God's promise and restore the destroyed temple. Nehemiah helped the people to have historical awareness and to re-member the faith heritage of their ancestors and their decision of faith by listing their ancestors.

Nehemiah also found the voluntary contributions to the temple construction of the first homecomers. The contributions show the heart of the then returnees for the temple of God. The UBF missionaries left their safe life in Korea and gave themselves completely for 1:1 Bible study with the students. Our house churches have each prepared a great offering to build the house of God even in the time when they had practically nothing. God bless the next generation that they may take over the heritage of faith of their parents and Bible teachers and be used precious in God's world salvation work.

In today's lesson we learned that Nehemiah was allowed to defeat the strong inner temptation and all malicious attacks of the enemies and complete the wall in 52 days. Let us follow the example of Nehemiah. Let us strengthen our hands for the spiritual revival in Germany and Europe!