

THE REVIVAL OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Nehemiah 9:1-10:40

Key verse 9:3

„They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God.“

We thank God for the biblical research from the book of Nehemiah on spiritual renewal in Europe and the mobilization of global spiritual leaders.

In 458 B.C. Ezra had returned to Jerusalem and had prepared himself, the Levites and the people through Bible research (Ezra 7:10). 13 years later Nehemiah followed, mobilizing the Israelites to build the wall (Neh 2:17). He overcame all opposition, taught the Israelites to work and fight, and completed the wall in only 52 days. Then, through the cooperation of Ezra and the Levites, there was a repentance movement (8:3). The ears of the whole people had turned to the Book of the Law; they returned to God with tears and celebrated a great feast of joy. They also returned to the hope of God and gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Today we see that their penance continued. Through the prayer of repentance they returned to the grace of God, namely, to a life of faithful obedience to God's holy mission. The leaders made a firm agreement and all the people joined in. May God help us to come to God with life-changing repentance, to obey God's calling from Ezekiel 37:10 by faith and to make a firm agreement. May God bless our Bible study and bring about the revival of God's people in Europe.

1. The people's prayer of repentance (9:1-37)

Let us read verse 1: "On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads." Two days after the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites came together again. They were wrapped in sacks and had earth on their heads. They came to repent.

Unlike the assembly on the first day of the seventh month and the assemblies at the Feast of Tabernacles, this was not a prescribed assembly. It was their conscious decision to come together for repentance. This repentance was the fruit of the Holy Spirit through the Bible study of Ezra and the Levites. Three and a half weeks earlier, at the meeting in the square in front of the Water Gate, Ezra had been reading from the Law of the Lord from bright morning until noon, and the Levites trained by Ezra had interpreted it clearly and intelligibly (8:3,8). At the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd day, the whole Law of God was read out for eight days according to Gen 31:9-13 (8:18). We know that it is not easy to study even one chapter of the Bible so deeply that the Spirit of God brings about repentance in people's hearts. It requires an Ezra who has set his heart to researching, doing and teaching the law of the Lord. In recent years, we have had the privilege of studying the Letter to the Ephesians, the Gospel of Mark and all five books of Moses, among others, in order to obey God's Word and teach it. To do this, we divided the books into lessons, created questionnaires, studied the text in pairs and

in groups, prepared and delivered sermons, wrote and exchanged testimonies, passed on the Word itself again and repeated it at the May Bible conferences and the Global Leaders Conferences. The result was a penitential movement. Through Ephesians, we repented and renewed the fact that the new life in Christ is not a continuation of the old life, but a life in union with Christ in the good works he had prepared beforehand. Through the gospel of Mark we got to know Jesus' leadership and his discipleship and decided to follow his example with Jesus' hope, shepherd heart, dedication of life and faith.

The repentance of the Israelites was also the work of God through Bible study. The spiritual resurrection of God's people begins with repentance from the deep study of the Word of God.

How, then, did this repentance differ from the repentance in chapter 8? Verse 2 says that they confessed their sins and the iniquity of their fathers. They tested their own lives and the lives of their forefathers. By studying the Bible, they had realized that one-time repentance is not enough. It was not enough to shed tears once and hold a feast, but to return to the old life. They wanted to change their lives permanently.

Let us see how their repentance meeting went. Let's read verse 3: "They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God."

First, the role of the Word of God. Repentance began again with the reading of God's Word. For three hours they listened to the Word of God, and for three hours they confessed their sins and prayed to God. Repentance means to bow under the Word of God. The Word of God was the standard for their life-changing repentance. For three hours they listened to the words of their God that led them to repent, and

then for three hours they confessed what sinners they were and how badly they and their ancestors had sinned against the holy God and His sovereign grace.

One man had the habit of contemplating the "Daily Bread" in the morning by sitting down and quickly writing down his thoughts. By Nehemiah 9:3 he realized that this is not repentance. He began to read the Bible text for 20 minutes and bow under the Word and confess his sins for 20 minutes in the testimony. Then the daily bread became the source of renewal for him, his Bible students and his house church.

What is repentance? Repentance is turning away from sin and turning to life with God in His Word. We are allowed to repent by bowing to God's Word, e.g. by first listening to God's Word when writing the testimony and then confessing our sins. Such life-changing repentance is the great privilege of the people of God and the way to spiritual revival.

Second: The role of the Levites as Bible teachers. During the prayer of repentance, the Levites Yeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, Kenani, Hashabneiah, Hodiah and Petakhiah stood exalted and cried out to the Lord their God, praising God who is above all praise and glory. The people repented, but they did not all pray at once. The Levites led the people. They prayed vicariously and came before the throne of God with the praise of God and their requests for repentance. Now it became clear how important the training of the Levites as Bible teachers by Ezra had been. God had prepared them and given them insight into the will and history of God so that they could now work with Ezra and Nehemiah and lead the people in repentance.

In verses 5-37 we find the content of their prayer.

First: God's sovereign grace and His promise (5-15)

What was God's grace to his people? God is the Almighty Creator, who made the whole earth and all things. This almighty God chose one man, Abram, for his work of world salvation and called him Abraham. He called him to be faithful and promised him to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites and to make it a blessing for all the families on earth. This was God's one-sided grace for an old man and idolater like Abraham. It was the grace of election for him and his descendants. God made the most impossible person a blessing for all the sexes on earth. From that time on, he led Abraham and his descendants and his people according to this hope. When the Israelites remembered Abraham in their prayer, they also remembered God's grace for themselves to be a blessing and a kingdom of priests for all nations.

God led His people according to His grace. Abraham's descendants were in misery in Egypt, but God heard their cry. God judged Pharaoh and his great ones and his people, who acted presumptuously towards Israel, with mighty signs and wonders. He divided the sea before the Israelites and led them through it while their persecutors were drowning (11). He led them through the desert with his pillar of cloud and fire. Then he brought them to Mount Sinai. There, through Moses, he gave them his true rights, laws, statutes and commandments and the holy Sabbath. When they hungered, he gave them bread, and when they thirsted, he gave them water. Then he commanded them to go into the land and take it.

They were his people, as precious to God as the apple of his eye. With great love and care and with his hope, he led them to the Promised Land, which they only needed to take in order to be a kingdom of priests for all nations on earth.

We too received this grace through the initiative love of God, who gave his only Son

Jesus Christ to redeem us from the bondage of sin and make us His people. This love of God is the basis of our repentance and our life with Him.

Second: God's incomprehensible goodness (16-25)

Although the Israelites were so privileged and loved and God had prepared everything for them, they refused to take the land. They became proud and stubborn and would not listen. Even they were determined to return to Egypt. At Sinai they had made themselves a cast calf and called it their god and spoke great blasphemies. What can you do with such a people? God let them wander in the desert for forty years and let a whole generation die in the desert, but he did not destroy them. His pillar of cloud and fire remained with them. He gave them His good spirit to teach them and gave them manna and water. For forty years he provided them with food, clothing and healthy feet. He smote the kings Sihon and Og before them and multiplied the Israelites and made them enter the Promised Land. There he humbled their enemies before them, so that they could conquer strong cities and a fat land, and take possession of houses full of goods, hewn out wells, vineyards, oil gardens and fruit trees in abundance. Verse 25 says, "They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness."

How can you understand God's goodness? God showed mercy to those who blasphemed so much. He did not abandon them and led their descendants into the Promised Land. In prayer they recognized God's mercy and goodness. God was merciful to them so that they would repent and live according to His calling in the Promised Land. Lamentations 3:22 and 40 say, „Because of the Lord 's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord.“

Third: Their impenitence (26-31)

God had led them into the land of Canaan according to His promise, where milk and honey flow. But they disobeyed and rebelled against God and threw his law behind them. They even killed the prophets whom God sent to call them to repentance and spoke great blasphemies. They did not live in the Promised Land as God's people and did not obey. God therefore delivered them into the hands of their enemies (27). When they were in need, they cried out to God. In his great goodness God heard their cry and sent rescuers to help them against their enemies. He sent Gideon against the Midianites, Jeftah against the Ammonites and Samson against the Philistines. This happened many times. But every time they were at rest, they did evil to God again. God wanted to help them urgently. Let us read verse 29: "You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen." It was not enough that they cried out to God for help in their hour of need as long as their lives did not change. Penance in need is penance in death. So things did not get better with them, but on the contrary, they only got worse and worse. Not only did they forget God's grace, but they even acted as God's enemies by rejecting His Word and killing His servants, the prophets, who were their admonishers. When they did not listen to any of his warnings, God had to send them into captivity, as he had announced.

Impenitence is not harmless. A life of impenitence is a life in a downward spiral. We must guard against impenitence and be warned by the Spirit of God in His prophets, which He sends to us before it is too late. Simon Peter was apparently a faithful man. He had confessed himself as a sinful man (Lk 5:8) and Jesus even confessed the Christ (Lk 9:20). But in truth he still lived in impenitence. Jesus admonished him (Lk 22:32): "And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Peter still clung

to his false hope of the earthly Messianic Kingdom. Finally, because of his impenitence, he had to deny Jesus three times. But he remembered Jesus' words and repented. At breakfast on the lake he received Jesus' love and orientation for his new life and was ready to praise Jesus even by his death (John 21:19). In 1 Peter 2:24 he testified about Jesus: "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; „by his wounds you have been healed." Impenitence is very serious. Only when we no longer deliberately reject God's love, in which He gave His only begotten Son, so that all who believe in Him may not be lost, but have eternal life, but obey it through faith, can we retain the blessing. But for the impenitent there is no other grace, and they will experience the judgment of God and the greedy fire that will consume the adversaries (Heb 10:27).

Fourth: The repentance of the people (32-37)

Let's look at verses 32 to 34. These verses start with the word "now". The Israelites realized that God is the great and terrible God who keeps covenant and faithfulness. He is righteous in all that He does. They confessed, "But we have been ungodly." Their leaders, the kings, princes, priests and fathers, had not done according to the law of God. We find their main penitential concern in verse 35: „Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways." Their sin was that they had not served God even though God had given them authority to do so. Not to obey God's holy mission is rebellion against God. 1 Samuel 15:23 says, "For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." They had not served God in the time when they could have, nor had they converted. Now they were servants in the land that God had given their fathers to rule in. This was the result of their sin. The profit was now made by others, and foreign

kings ruled over them. They were no longer heads but tails (Genesis 28:44).

But now they came to God with their desire for repentance and a broken heart. They were ready to change their lives and obey His holy mission. Their prayer of repentance was the beginning of a new beginning for the people of God. Without their repentance they would never have been restored as God's people. But through the revival they preserved their identity in the transitional period until the coming of the Messiah.

God has blessed Europe abundantly. Throughout history, God has repeatedly awakened his servants, who through Bible study exhorted God's people in Europe to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Many were admonished, and Europe was used as a missionary-sending continent. Among the peoples of Europe, Germany is especially blessed. In each of the darkest times, God appointed men like Luther or Bonhoeffer to help God's people live as a kingdom of priests. But the history of God's people in Germany is also a history of impenitence. The impenitence of those who live with earthly hope and reject God's mission in their hearts has destroyed many churches and displaced Bible-believing Christians. It has made Christianity in Germany and Europe weak, helpless and without influence. This shame and great need is the consequence of our sin of rejecting God's holy mission and obedience to faith. But the revival begins with our Bible study, that we may remember God's grace and calling, and be restored as a nation of Bible teachers.

I myself was a typical man, influenced by godless humanism, who called himself good and kind and Christian, but in reality was dominated by Satan and the evil spirits of envy and hatred. When God's servant wanted to encourage me to live according to God's grace as a shepherd, I rebelled by clinging to the sin of lust and ambition at all costs. But God's servant prepared the envi-

ronment for my repentance through Bible study and daily word fellowship. Finally, the Word of God from Romans 13:14 broke my pride and arrogance, and I accepted Jesus as the Lord of life. My life was changed from a life of impenitence as an enemy of God to a life of faithful obedience as a disciple of Jesus.

At GLEF 2019 we studied the five books of Moses. Many of the young people had no insight into the meaning of the laws of God because of the teachings of humanism. Some said that faith without works was enough. Others said that one could not obey God's commands anyway. Through the five books of Moses, they came to know God, who redeemed his people to holy life, and renewed their identity as a kingdom of priests and holy people. They began to serve the younger leaders of the next generation with a sense of responsibility by studying the Bible. It was actually unimaginable to find a church in Europe that would study all five books of Moses with young people. But the great and terrible God, who keeps covenant and faithfulness, blessed the Bible study of the servant of God and the cooperation of preachers and Bible teachers and started a work of spiritual revival of the people of God and the establishment of self-motivated Bible teachers and discipleship trainers all over the world. Some could not bear this work of repentance and rebelled fiercely. God's living Word always provokes two reactions: repentance or even greater hardening. Repentance is the way to life. No matter how serious our sin is, God accepts repentance and begins His work of spiritual revival. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by godless humanism in studying the Bible and teaching God's people to obey His holy mission. Then God's people will be resurrected in Europe and Europe will once again be used as a missionary-sending continent.

2. The decision of the people of God to believe (10:1-40)

Let us read 9:38: "In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it." "In view of all this" here refers to the grace of God. Now they wanted to record their decision in a firm agreement. They wanted to write it down, and the princes, Levites and priests should seal it and sign it. This penance was no longer an emergency penance. They made a binding decision, which they documented in writing and testified to the whole world. Their decision was binding and firm. A firm agreement no longer has a back door and is no longer reversible.

Who should sign this firm agreement? These were the governor Nehemiah and the priests (1-8), the Levitical superiors (9-13) and the leaders of the people (14-27). Verse 29 calls them the "mighty among them". In other words, they were the responsible leaders. They had accepted their special responsibility through repentance and now made this firm agreement for themselves and for their house churches, clans and families. According to verse 28, the rest of the people, priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple slaves, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands and kept the law of God, together with their wives, sons and daughters, all those who could understand it, were to join the firm agreement. Let us read verse 29: "All these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our Lord." For the leaders, "we will"; for the rest of the people, "they shall". The people should join the leaders who had made a firm agreement before God. Perhaps some thought that they were not leaders and did not need to be firmly bound. But the firm agreement was for all. Even the children, their sons and daughters, were to commit

themselves to keep and do God's commandments.

Let us look at the content of their agreement.

First, they did not want their daughters and their sons to marry with the nations of the land (30). God had commanded His people not to make a covenant with the peoples of the land and not to mingle with them. Deuteronomy 7:4 says, "For they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you." They wanted to serve the Lord alone, so they wanted their children to form God-centered families. Because of this firm agreement, Nehemiah was able to purify God's people again years later, when intermarriages had again taken place (13:23-30).

Second, they wanted to sanctify the Sabbath and feast days and not buy anything from the people of the land (31). Through the Sabbath and the feast days, God taught His people to walk with Him (Leviticus 23). For many years they had not kept the feasts or the Sabbatical year because they had thought about how they could earn more money, not how they could walk with God. Now they confessed with their firm agreement that it was more important for them to walk with God.

Thirdly, they wanted to give one third of a silver coin each year for the service of the house of God, namely for the shewbread, the daily food offering and burnt offering, the sacrifices on the feast days, the most holy thing, the sin offering and for all the work of the house of God (32-33). This temple money was not much, but it allowed each of them to remember God's grace every year.

Fourthly, they committed themselves to cast lots each year among their families for who would provide firewood for the burnt offerings. Leviticus 6:9 required that the fire

on the altar of burnt offering never be put out. Who was to make sure that the fire never went out? They themselves wanted to ensure that the fire of prayer and devotion to spiritual revival in the universities of Europe never went out, by making a firm commitment to do so, just as the house churches ensure through early prayer that the fire of prayer and devotion to spiritual revival in the universities of Europe never goes out.

Fifthly, they wanted to bring annually the first fruits of the land and of the fruits into the house of God (35) and the first birth of men and cattle to the priests who serve in the house of God (36). All firstborn children should be sanctified to the Lord (Ex 13:2; Numbers 18:15). Sometimes the birth of the very first child is a temptation to give up serving the Lord's work. But they chose to sanctify the first birth, that is, even if they had many children, to continue to live their lives for God's mission.

Finally, they made the agreement that there would be no lack of anything in the house of God (36-38). To this end, they wanted to bring their contributions for the priests and make the tithes available for the Levites. From the tithes, the Levites in turn brought their tithes for the priests. Verse 39 "The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the 787 ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay. "We will not neglect the house of our God." With their firm agreement they supported the servants and the service of the house of God not only idealistically but also financially.

Besides marriage and children, money is another touchstone of faith. Many a servant of God or family of faith has already been brought down by Satan through money. The problem is never the money itself, but the lack of trust. God's work is based on trust. If someone takes care of his own house first, it shows that this person does

not trust that God blesses a giving life with the priority of making it lack nothing in the house of God. Because God's priests and God's Levites serve God, we can trust that God will bless both the house of God and our own house abundantly.

Many of us have made a firm commitment. The house church of M. Dr. Peter and M. Sarah Chang made a firm agreement according to Jn 10:11 to open their house for the life community with the German students and since then they have been serving the work of discipleship training in Germany and Europe, which seemed to be impossible for a long time, victoriously and influentially.

I myself was allowed to make a firm agreement with Genesis 15:5,6 to found a God- and mission-centered house church for world mission. And in April 2008, in the time of unemployment, I was able to make a firm agreement with Mk 15:34 to never reduce my world missionary sacrifice, to stay in Bonn and to work together for the work of God. I can testify that I was able to experience God's rich blessing through this. What firm agreement did you make? Let us make a firm agreement for the world campus mission:

- Through Bible research with inductive Bible study, factual study and testimony warfare,
- By forming one-to-one Bible study teams,
- Through early morning prayer,
- Through baptism,
- Through the foundation of God- and mission-centered house churches,
- Through our sacrifice,
- By establishing mission bases for the Muslim world.

Then we want to seal and sign them and also invite our sheep to join them.

Today we learn that the revival of God's people began with Bible study. We learn that repentance must not only be emergency repentance, but must lead to a changed life of faithful obedience to God's holy mission. Finally we learn to make a firm agree-

ment. Let us repent and make a firm agreement to obey his calling from Ezekiel 37:10 for spiritual renewal at the universities in Bonn, Germany and Europe. May God bless your Bible research and the formation of one-to-one Bible study teams and spiritually revive His people at all universities in Germany and Europe.