

## NEHEMIAH FOUGHT TO THE END FOR THE REVIVAL WORK

Nehemiah 11:1 – 13:31

Key verse 13:25

“I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.”

We thank God for the blessed May Bible Conference and His Word from the Book of Nehemiah, which encourages us to rebuild the spiritual walls in Europe. By forming one-to-one Bible study teams with the young people, we can take the good work into our hands. We may reject the cunning attacks of Satan through godless humanism and relativism, and raise up the obedience of faith so that Europe may be spiritually revived and used as a pastoral nation for world mission.

Through the final lesson of Nehemiah we want to know how Nehemiah fought to the end. Even after the completion of the wall and the spiritual revival through the penitential movement and the Bible study of Ezra, his struggle was not over. It still required diligent and careful work to populate the city, to establish order and to overcome the relativism that had crept in. Nehemiah did not compromise with the spirit of the times, but established obedience to the Word of God so that Israel could live as a holy people of God. Let us fight the spiritual battle to the end, challenge the spiritual revival of the students through one-to-one Bible study and the next generation through GLEF and live as a holy people of God.

### 1. The dedication of the city wall (11:1 – 12:47)

Chapter 11 first deals with the measures for the resettlement of Jerusalem. Nehemiah had noted that the number of inhabitants in Jerusalem was very low. Not even 3000 men were counted. Therefore, a resettlement plan was decided upon. Let us read 11:1: „Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to

live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns.“ In times of need, life in the country is much more attractive as a self-sufficient life than in the city. In the country there's always enough pasta and toilet paper. In other words, everyone had only thought of themselves and their own safety, but hardly anyone wanted to give themselves in the long run to build the City of God. Therefore, Nehemiah had to implement a good strategy to make Jerusalem strong again. Finally, by lot, one in ten of the people was chosen to move to Jerusalem so that the Holy City could grow. They blessed those who wanted to live in Jerusalem. Those who give their lives to serve others and build God's city are true heroes. They are those who love God more than themselves. In this sense, life in the headquarter is a blessed life. Those who give up their comfortable lives to build God's city and God's people are truly blessed people.

Nowadays we see many people who come to the church only when it promises them a personal benefit, but not to give themselves to the work of God. "What's in it for me?" is one of the most popular questions. But the work of God is not about what benefit I can get from it, but how I can put myself out there and get involved so that God's house and God's people are built. In this respect, our God- and mission-centered house churches are very precious before God. For they do not seek their personal advantage or their feelings or happiness, but want to work and give themselves wholeheartedly for God's mission.

A young student in the 1st semester decided to enter the life community and work together for the work of God. Instead of pursuing the goal of

getting a lot of recognition as a professor as in the past, he selflessly works together for the campus mission by learning from the servants of God and now serves the work of God with spiritual leadership.

In 11:3-36 Nehemiah recorded all the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem. First those from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, then the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers and the temple slaves. Finally he also listed the inhabitants of the cities. This shows Nehemiah's awareness of history, who considered each individual who had built the city of Jerusalem and the land of Israel to be very important. In 12:1-26 Nehemiah paid special attention to the priests and Levites, who were the spiritual leaders of the people. We may know that every co-worker, especially the spiritual house churches are very precious in the work of God. A house church of M. Petrus and M. Pauline which lives in the center in a small space without thinking of itself and prepares the surroundings for the work of God is very precious. A prayer worker like Sh. Joyce, who forms the prayer vessel despite the chemotherapy, is very precious before God.

12:27-43 is about the dedication ceremony for the city walls. Let us read 12:27: "At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres." The dedication of the city wall was an important event in the history of Israel and it was celebrated with a great gathering. It was a time to praise and thank God. For this purpose, the Israelites formed two large choirs of thanksgiving, one east and one west of the city wall, one under the leadership of Governor Nehemiah and the other under the priest and scribe Ezra.

Let us read verses 31 and 38: "I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate." The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people-past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall." Then there was a wonderful concert by this double choir, which stood on both sides of the wall and framed the temple from there. Maybe they sang songs like number 40 with several voices to-

gether. How wonderful their singing must have sounded when everyone praised God with all their hearts.

Let us read verse 43: "And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away." The great joy does not come from personal gain. Great joy comes from the fact that God has had mercy on his people. Jerusalem had been a completely destroyed city. The Jews were so miserable and fearful that for over 100 years they could not even dream of reconstruction. But this city was rebuilt and its wall was consecrated. Now the enemies could no longer triumph and scoff and bring shame upon it. It was once again a glorious city that pleased God. Verse 43 says, "God had given them great joy... and the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar."

We also have great joy because he has saved us, because he uses us as a royal priesthood for the work of spiritual revival in Europe. With this awareness of history, we celebrate the Jubilee service every year with great joy. We remember the work of God and thank God for it with all our heart. This joy includes great sacrifices and also includes those who are not directly involved.

God has given us great joy when we see our faithful house churches, which from early prayer form a vessel of prayer and devoutly serve the bearers of hope through one-to-one Bible study. It is a great joy that our baptized children may study God's Word with all their hearts and decide to give their lives to Jesus and grow as global spiritual leaders. Let us praise the Lord with great joy so that the joy of Jerusalem can be heard from afar.

Verses 44-47 deal with the appointment of the stewards for the firstfruits and tithing offerings of the Israelites. These gifts served to provide for the Levites and the priests. Let us read verse 44: "At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites". All brought their offerings with joy, and the Levites, singers and priests fulfilled their

service before the Lord according to the law of Moses and the ordinances of David and Solomon.

## 2. Nehemiah fought to the end for purification (13:1-31)

Chapter 13 takes place a few years later, when Nehemiah's governorship had already ended. We learn here what Nehemiah did to cleanse his people once again when he returned to Jerusalem after a long period of absence. A one-time revival is not everything, but it took careful follow-up work to enable them to live as God's people and to obey God's Word practically. Let us read verses 4 to 6: "Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests. But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission."

While Nehemiah was with the king in Persia, the priest Eliashib had provided Tobiah with a chamber in the temple. Actually, Tobiah was an Ammonite, a heathen. But since he was related to Eliashib, he felt a sense of obligation to him. After all, he had even given him the chamber in the temple, which had actually served to collect the tithe offering. Now the man who had always been against the Jews and had tried to prevent the building of the wall by all means, sat in the middle of the temple of God. Nehemiah was very angry and realized that it was wrong. Therefore he unceremoniously threw Tobiah's household goods outside the door and cleansed the chamber and returned it to its proper purpose.

Normally we expect God's people to be very friendly and gentle. But here we learn that sometimes we also have to be hard and consistent to protect the work of God. When enemies or false teachings enter, we should consistently throw them out and purify God's church. Peter had not been kind to Ananias and Sapphira either when they let lies, deceit and selfishness into the church of God, but rebuked them so

harshly that they died. Purification from the godless people is necessary so that God's people can live as God's people.

While Tobiah had lived in the temple, the collection of the tithe offering had been neglected. As a result, many Levites and singers had left and moved to the country to survive. Now Nehemiah brought them back to revive the temple service. He saw to it that the tithes were collected by reliable men and that the Levites were well provided for. Thus the orphaned temple could be revived.

The second action was about keeping the Sabbath. Let us read verse 15: "In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day." Actually, God had appointed the Sabbath day as a day of rest, when no one was to work, but to rest and seek God. But apparently it had always been tempting to work on that day as well, and in this way to sell a little more goods and earn a little more money. So the Sabbath was eventually turned into a shopping day, and many came to Jerusalem to go to the market and do good business.

Nehemiah first rebuked the superiors for desecrating the Sabbath. Apparently they had no historical awareness that it was the Sabbath sanctification that had been a major reason for the fall of the kingdom of Judah. So they fell back into the same sin as their ancestors. Then Nehemiah acted consistently to enforce the observance of the Sabbath.

First, he had the city gates completely closed on the Sabbath. He also set up additional guards to prevent the transportation of goods. However, despite the lockdown, many merchants and vendors simply stayed outside the city, tempting people to go shopping after all. Nehemiah warned the merchants about these clandestine businesses and threatened them with violence so that they would not come to Jerusalem on the Sabbath the following week.

In Europe there is also a great relativism towards the commandment of God. Thus little importance is attached to the observance of Sunday rest. People are very precise in observing

rules of hygiene in order to somehow protect their health. They accept week-long lockdowns in order to reduce the danger of a virus. But at the same time they are softening the Sunday rest more and more. We need to know how important the Sabbath commandment is for maintaining our spiritual health. A people who honour God and worship him on his day is a blessed people. Let us renew our identity as a people of God by sanctifying the Sunday. It is the day to worship God, hear his word and put him first. Let us trust in God and keep the Sunday rest and worship God on His day.

Finally we learn about the dissolution of mixed marriages. Let us read verses 23 and 24: "Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah." Nehemiah realized that intermarriage was a big problem. In Ezra chapters 9 and 10, Ezra had led the people to repentance and dissolved the intermarriages. They had decided to live as a pure people of God and not to enter into marriages with Gentiles. But now the same problem had occurred again. They had forgotten their promise and lost their purity. Even there were children who no longer received a spiritual education, who could not even understand the language. So they were practically completely rooted in the pagan culture of the neighbouring peoples.

What did Nehemiah do? Let us read verse 25: "I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves." In an emotional action he scolded and cursed the men who had married their children to pagan partners. Nehemiah pulled their hair and beard and shouted violently at them for forgetting their decision of faith and marrying pagan women again. He reminded them of the bad example set by King Solomon. He was the most powerful king of Israel and the builder of the first temple. He was loved by God. But he had ignored God's command not to marry pagan women. Instead, he was guided by his lust and political calculation. He married the daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt and many other pagan women. Apparently,

these marriages strengthened his kingdom and made it very powerful. But when he was old, these pagan women seduced him into idolatry. As a result, Israel was divided into two kingdoms after his death. In light of this historical catastrophe and the commandment of God, Nehemiah rebuked the Israelites harshly. Verse 27: "Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?" Even a grandson of the high priest Eliashib was affected by this, who had married a daughter of Sanballat (28). Politically, such a union seemed to be wise. But because he had broken the commandment of God and defiled the priesthood, Nehemiah chased him away.

Starting a family is not just a personal matter; biblically speaking, marriage is founded by God and brought together by God. The goal of marriage is not personal happiness, but the glorification of God. Some Christians think that they could lead their unbelieving spouses to faith after marriage. But this is wishful thinking, and in most cases, it works the other way around. God's children are to give God dominion in all areas of their lives, including marriage. That is why it is important to form God- and mission-centered house churches, which raise their children spiritually and can be used as a backbone for God's work of salvation.

Nehemiah is leading a spiritual fight against secularization among his people. Purification actions are often painful for the individual. But they are necessary so that we can live as a people of God and be used by God. We must exclude enemies of God like Tobija from the house of God. We have to enforce the observance of the spiritual order such as the Sabbath order. We also have to keep God's people pure by forming house churches based on God's calling and mission so that the next generation can live as God's people. A person who obeys God's Word and establishes the obedience of faith among His people is very precious and important before God. Through one person, Ezra, who worked as a Bible teacher, and one person, Nehemiah, who established the obedience of faith, Israel was resurrected as God's people.

I am encouraged by this text to be used by God as a spiritual leader for the work of revival, just like Ezra and Nehemiah. In his grace, he has called me as a shepherd and Bible teacher for the campus of the University of Bonn-Rhein

Sieg to courageously proclaim the saving gospel there and to fight against secularization. God wants to use me to lead many lost souls to Jesus for the ark of salvation according to Genesis 6:9. Let us fight the spiritual battle to the end and so be used for the spiritual purity and renewal of God's people.

God has used the house church of M. Peter and M. Sarah preciously in the past 40 years by not compromising with the spirit of the times, obeying the Word of God and experiencing God's powerful work in the local shepherds and the next generation. Despite misunderstandings and slander, they hold fast to Ezekiel 37:10 to restore Germany to a pastoral nation and Europe to a missionary sending continent.

God used this spiritual revival at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah to restore the identity of the people of Israel. This had repercussions right into the time of Jesus. We see that in the time of Jesus the Feast of Tabernacles was still celebrated. We also see the people like Zechariah and Elizabeth, who lived blamelessly before God and waited for the fulfillment of God's promise.

Through today's lesson, we learn how Nehemiah fought to the end to save his people from secularism and establish them as a people of God who obey the Word of God. God used this one person so that the Israelites could obey the Word of God and maintain their identity and so that Jesus could come from the people of Israel. Let us establish the obedience of faith like Nehemiah in our hearts and so be used for the spiritual revival work in Europe.