

## 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.”

Thank the Lord for abundantly blessing SBC 2020 as a celebration of the Word of God. We thank the Lord that by studying the book of Nehemiah we were able to learn how Nehemiah prayed in the face of the shameful situation of the Jews and planted God's hope in them, so that they were allowed to rise up by faith and begin and complete the work of rebuilding their city walls despite all opposition. Through the intensive Bible study of Ezra they were also allowed to come to God with repentance and be spiritually awakened and make a clear decision of faith to make a new beginning in obedience to God's Word.

Today's lesson is about how Nehemiah fought to the end to complete this spiritual revival. The unique repentance and faith decision was not everything, but needed careful follow-up. Above all, Nehemiah helped them to overcome the creeping relativism and to obey the Word of God with a new heart. May God help us to be used as leaders like Nehemiah, who fight the spiritual battle for the restoration of the people in obedience of faith until the end.

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

Chapter 11 begins with a resettlement plan for the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been inhabited until then mainly by the upper classes of the people, while the rest of the people were scattered throughout the land. Now one of 10 families was chosen by lot to go to Jerusalem. The people then blessed all the men who voluntarily wanted to live in Jerusalem.

The people who voluntarily live in the headquar-

ters are truly blessed people. Last week, M. Hanna Kuper went home in Argentina. She is a true soldier of Christ who has moved so many times to follow God's guidance and serve God's mission in the USA, Argentina, Paraguay and Korea. Now she can rest in the heavenly city and does not need to move. We also see in UBF so many devoted coworkers who have renounced their beloved home, their own house or their lucrative career for the sake of God's mission by putting God's mission in the first place.

The following verses list all the families who lived in Jerusalem, first of Judah and Benjamin, then the priests, Levites, gatekeepers and temple slaves. Every single family that served the building of the City of God is very important and precious, regardless of their position. In chapter 12,1-26 the leading priests and Levites are then listed, both in the time of Zerubbabel and in the time of Nehemiah.

The verses 27 to 43 report about the solemn consecration of the city wall. For this, the Levites from all places were gathered back to Jerusalem, especially those who were responsible for the music. Then they formed two choirs of thanksgiving, which climbed up the wall. One choir went east over the city wall under the direction of Ezra, and the other went west around the city under the direction of Nehemiah. They positioned themselves on either side of the temple and sang a beautiful hymn of praise. Verse 43 says: "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." Jerusalem was filled with joy because they had experienced the

mighty work of God. For so long they had been a destroyed, dejected, helpless city. But they had experienced the mighty work of God, who had allowed them to rebuild the city walls. Now it was again a safe and glorious city that could glorify God.

We can also have great joy because we have experienced God's mighty work. This year we will hold the 40th anniversary service. This is an important occasion through which we may remember the mighty work of God and thank Him with all our hearts. Starting with the house church of M. Peter and M. Sarah Chang, God has blessed the dedication of our missionaries abundantly. Without thinking of themselves, they served the work of God, even opened their families to serve the work of raising up disciples among the students through the community of life. In this way, God has done a great work and has established many determined disciples of Jesus and dedicated house churches. He has even established us as a headquarter for the European mission and into the Muslim world. Each one of us has experienced God's abundant blessings through this work. We may remember this mighty work of God and praise and thank God with great joy, so that this joy can be heard from far away.

Verses 44 to 47 report on the appointment of stewards for the offerings intended for the Levites. The whole people willingly gave their tithes because they enjoyed the priests and Levites, the singers and musicians who performed their service before God. This shows that the giving life is an important part of the service. Let us always remember the mighty work of God, so that we praise God with great joy. Let us bring our offerings out of gratitude and so that there is no lack of anything in the house of God.

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

Chapter 13 describes how Nehemiah fought to the end to purify the people and to awaken them spiritually. First, through continued Bible study, they realized that the Ammonites and Moabites should never enter the church of God because they had not received God's people kindly, but had tried to curse them with the help of Balaam. Therefore the Israelites now consciously separated themselves from these peo-

ples. In this sense it is always important to know who the friends and who the enemies of the work of God are.

Let us look at verses 4 to 14. Nehemiah had been with the king in Persia after the end of his governorship, and had only come back to Jerusalem after a long time. Then he found out that the chamber in the temple, which was originally intended for the tithe offering, had now been rented to Tobiah. Tobiah was an Ammonite from whom one should actually part with. He had also tried again and again to prevent the building of the wall. But apparently the priest Eliashib had lost spiritual insight because he was related to Tobiah and had now even given him a chamber in the temple. Now the enemy of God was sitting in the middle of the temple. But Nehemiah had spiritual insight for this injustice. He acted consistently by throwing out Tobiah's household goods, cleaning the chamber and returning it to its original purpose. Here Nehemiah did not show false kindness, but fought consistently to cleanse the house of God.

When the Israelites no longer brought their shares for the Levites, many Levites had left to find a job somewhere in the country, and so the temple service was deserted. Nehemiah rebuked the counselors for neglecting the house of God. Nehemiah then called the Levites back and saw to it that the tithes offerings were collected by reliable men and forwarded to the Levites.

The tithe offering is a command of God and the expression of gratitude and recognition of God's right to property. God promised to bless His people if they brought their tithes in full to the house of God. The American entrepreneur William Colgate decided to always tithe to God from the first dollar earned. Later he brought 2 tithes, then 3 tithes, then finally 5 tithes of his earnings to God, acknowledging that everything came from God.

Verses 15 to 22 deal with the sanctification of the Sabbath. God had given the Sabbath as a day of rest on which one should not work. It is rather a day to seek God and worship him. But apparently even then there was a great temptation to work on the Sabbath to earn a little more money. Many merchants came to Jerusalem, even from faraway Tyre, to sell their fish and goods. So the Sabbath was turned into a shop-

ping day. Nehemiah rebuked the nobles in Jerusalem harshly, reminding them that the Sabbath had been the very sin of their ancestors, which is why God had brought so much disaster upon the city. Let us read verses 17 and 18: "I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing-desecrating the Sabbath day? 793 18Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

Then Nehemiah took concrete action. He stopped opening the gates of the city on the Sabbath. He put guards on the city gates to stop the transportation of goods. When some merchants remained outside the city walls on the Sabbath day, thereby seducing the Jews, he threatened them with physical violence so that they would no longer come to Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

God gave us six days to work and the seventh day as a day of rest. Therefore, on this day we may worship God with all our heart. Sunday is not the day to sleep late or to do all the work we did not do during the week. It is rather the day when we come to God and worship him in the service. We are allowed to give this whole day to God by celebrating the service, by bringing our sheep to the service and also by writing a personal statement to the Word of God. Nehemiah fought consistently to establish the Sabbath order so that the Israelites would worship God on His day with all their hearts and live as God's people.

In verses 23 to 31 we learn of another grievance, namely intermarriage. Actually the people had already repented of this in Ezra 9 and 10, and mixed marriages with Gentile women had been dissolved. But also this problem had come back and some had married with pagan partners. The result was that their children grew up without identity and without spiritual education. Many of them could not even speak the Jewish language, so they could not understand God's word.

How did Nehemiah react? Let's 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." Out of the broken shepherd's heart, Nehemiah rebuked the men who had married their children to pagan partners. He reminded them of the bad example of King Solomon, who was an outstanding king and was loved and blessed by God. But he disobeyed the commandment of God and married Pharaoh's daughter and other pagan women. This seemed politically wise, but when he grew old, these women seduced him into idolatry, as God had foretold. Verse 27 says, "Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?"

For Nehemiah, marriage was not a private matter, but vital to the future of his people. That is why he fought until the end so that they could form believing families and live as God's people. Even a grandson of Eliashib was affected, who had married a daughter of Sanballat. Since he had thus defiled the priesthood, Nehemiah chased him away.

Biblically, God founded the marriage. The goal of marriage is to form a unity that glorifies God and pleases God. Therefore, our own feelings or imagination should not be the focus of attention, but we should first ask what God desires. Those who seek God's will and trust in God will experience God's blessing. A family that has a firm foundation in faith in Jesus and in the common mission is blessed by God.

Here we got to know the consistent faith struggle of Nehemiah to establish his people as a people of God. I thank God that he has given me a shepherd who also fought so consistently to help me obey the Word of God. Without this spiritual training, I would probably still be a cold-hearted computer person who would be mouldy behind a screen somewhere. But because he helped me to take God's calling in Luke 5:10b seriously and follow it, I was allowed to start a new life as a fisher of men. Through the community of life he helped me not to live according to my human imagination, but to seek God's kingdom first, to give God priority and serve his mission. So I was not only allowed to grow up to be a responsible shepherd, but also to found a blessed family of faith for God's mission.

I learn here from Nehemiah to help God's people with the clear consequence to obey the Word of God. We call this disciple making. In

our society, one's own opinion and individualism seems to be above everything. But Jesus helped his disciples to deny themselves and to take up the cross of discipleship so that they could be used as main characters in the history of God. Apostle Paul served the work of educating disciples in Ephesus by teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus. Even Jesus learned obedience by what he suffered, and when he was finished, he became the author of eternal salvation for all who obeyed him (Hebrews 5:8,9). God's hope is that we will obey his word and thus be used as a kingdom of priests and as a holy people, so that the young people of Europe may be spiritually awakened and again be used as a pastoral nation for world mission. That is why we should also fight spiritually to establish the obedience of faith first in the hearts of the disciples and also among all pagans. God needs spiritual leaders like Nehemiah, who will not remain indifferent, but who will fight to the end to establish the obedience of faith, and thus raise determined disciples of Jesus for this generation.

Today we learned how Nehemiah fought to the end to spiritually awaken his people and help them to obey the Word of God in a practical way. God needs spiritual leaders who do not follow the spirit of the times or depend on people, but obey God's Word and establish this obedience of faith. Let us not live overwhelmed or remain indifferent to the relativistic spirit of the times, but raise up the obedience of faith in the hearts of his children, so that we can be used as a royal priesthood for spiritual revival in Europe, and beyond for the Muslim world.