

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 GLEF 2020 and His Word from the Book of Nehemiah. We are encouraged to rebuild the spiritual walls in Europe, in the US, in the whole world, in this generation. Through the final lesson of Book of Nehemiah we want to learn how Nehemiah struggled for the spiritual reconstitution to the end. Even after the completion of the rebuilding of the wall and the spiritual revival through the Bible study of Ezra, his struggle was not over. It still required diligent and careful work to populate the city, to establish spiritual 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, challenging the spiritual revival of the students through one-to-one Bible study and raising the next generation through GLEF 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. 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 Nehemiah's times life in the towns around Jerusalem was much more attractive than living in Jerusalem itself. Everyone had only thought of themselves and their own safety. But hardly anyone wanted to live and build the City of God. Nehemiah did not stay passive or helpless. He actively invited people from the towns to live in Jerusalem, not to improve their living conditions but to become a “living stone” in the City of God and to build the ministry of God. By lot, one in ten of the people was chosen to move to Jerusalem so that the Holy City could grow. The others 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 “center” or “common life” 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. "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. President John F Kennedy once challenged the American people: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country!” When American people asked what they could do for their country, for the world and for God, God blessed them abundantly in every way. They sent the first man to the moon and became the world's prevailing super power. UBF missionaries, shepherds and next gens are the people who made a conscious decision not to live comfortably and easily and selfishly, but to give their lives and the lives of their children to build the ministry of God in the campuses of Germany, USA, Russia, Turkey until the ends of the earth. They overcame so many barriers, shedding many tears and

participate in the sufferings of Jesus. They are the unsung heroes of the world mission and the spiritual reawakening in this generation.

A next generation coworker graduated with best marks from his economics studies. He could have sought to get a job to make a lot of money. Instead he made a conscious decision to stay with God's people. He selflessly works together for the campus mission and for the Muslim mission through KBG by learning from the servants of God and now serves the work of God with spiritual leadership. His wife could not stand his decision and ran away. But he made a decision not to go after an easier or more comfortable life, but to stay and to be mistreated with God's people and to keep God's mission despite his personal pain. Another next generation medical doctor received many attractive job offerings from throughout the world. But he made a decision to stay with his parents participating the sufferings of Christ and to build the ministry of God.

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. Not the people who leave for whatever understandable reason, but those who stay are very precious in the work of God and they are part of God's main stream of history. 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.

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 with several voices together. 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." They had great joy. Great joy does not come from personal gain. Great joy comes from the fact that God has revealed his 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.

With this awareness of history, we also want to celebrate this year's historical fortieth anniversary worship service of Bonn UBF with great joy. We have great joy because God has saved us and because he uses us as a royal priesthood for the work of spiritual revival in Europe. We have great joy, because just in the midst of the worst suffering God reveals his grace and glory in each one of us.

God has given us great joy when we see that God has used one house church, Dr. Peter and M.

Sarah Chang, to raise many shepherds, house churches, next generations, even third generations as bible teachers and leaders, in the past forty years until this very day, even in the midst of the most severe persecution and Satan's attack. God has given us great joy when we see our faithful house churches, who from early morning prayer faithfully and diligently serve the students and next generations through one-to-one Bible study. It is a great joy that our next generation leaders serve the ministry together with native shepherds responsibly as bible teachers, messengers and leaders for the Campus ministry, Medical mission, PR mission, business mission, even Muslime mission with a vision to establish three mission base camps in Kairo, Istanbul and Dubai. It is a great joy that even our children and teenagers study God's Word with all their hearts and with a decision to give their lives to Jesus and grow as global spiritual leaders like Martin Luther, John Wesley and the Pietists with a sense of spiritual history and heritage. Let us praise the Lord with great joy so that our joy like the joy of the rebuilt Jerusalem can be heard from afar.

Verses 44-47 report about the appointment of stewards for the gathering of the firstfruits and tithing offerings from the Israelites. These offerings 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 for purification (13:1-31)

Chapter 13 takes place a few years later, when Nehemiah's governorship had already ended. 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. It seemed to be a win-win deal. Eliashib could make Tobiah a friend by practicing "forgiveness" and "grace". At the same time he could make money out of the empty rooms in the temple. Humanly, it was so smart. But spiritually it was devastating. Now the man who had always been against the Jews and had tried to prevent the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem by all means, sat in the middle of the temple of God. Nehemiah was very angry at Eliashib's pragmatism 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 when enemies or false teachings enter the church of congregation of God, we should drive them out with consequence and purify God's church from them. Apostle 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 Tobija 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 gradually, they slipped in keeping the Sabbath. First, they made the message shorter and shorter. Then, they stopped writing testimony. Finally, they started working even on Sabbath, to sell a little more goods and earn a little more money. Eventually, the Sabbath was 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 letting down of the Sabbath sanctification that had been a major reason for the fall of the kingdom of Judah. They had fallen back into the same sin as their ancestors.

Then Nehemiah acted very consequentially to enforce the observance of the Sabbath. 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 threatened the merchants with violence so that they would not come to Jerusalem on the Sabbath the following week.

We need to know how important the Sabbath commandment is for maintaining our spiritual integrity and identity. A people who honor God and worship him on his day is a blessed and a strong people. Nowadays, Sunday has become a family day, sleeping day, shopping day or a day to do everything what one was not able to do during the week. Some students say that they have to prepare for the exams because during the weeks they were so busy doing something else. But God said. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns." (Exodus 20:9,10) 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. The problem was not racial purity. The problem was that their children no longer received spiritual education. They could not even understand the language. They were not able to read, memorize and understand the books of Moses and the stories of the people of Israel. They were practically completely rooted in the pagan culture of the neighboring peoples. They should grow with God's hope as God's kingdom of priests that God could use to save the world. But effectively, they became pagans, that were in need to be saved themselves.

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 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 smart. 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 and especially in marriage. That is why it is important to form God- and mission-centered house churches, who raise their children spiritually and can be used as a backbone for God's work of salvation.

He we also learn that we must teach our children and the young people of this generation the language of God, which is the Bible. It is very important that they receive the best education, e.g. in Honors Review. But it is even more important that they become fluent and well versed in the Bible. That is why spiritual education and training through 1:1 bible study, testimony writing, daily bread, and GLEF is most important. When they become fluent and well versed in the Bible, they will be able to make their own informed choice. When they become fluent and well versed in the Bible they will grow as great leaders who are transforming this world.

Nehemiah was not passive nor helpless. He fought against the secularization among his people with all his might, by faith. Purification actions are often painful. Nowadays nobody wants to do that or carry the responsibility of these. But these are necessary so that we can live and grow as a people of God and be used by God. 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. 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.

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 many misunderstandings and slander, they hold fast to Ezekiel 37:10 to restore Germany to a pastoral nation and Europe to a missionary sending continent.

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.

Through today's lesson, we learn how Nehemiah struggled to save his people from secularism and establish them as a people of God who obey the Word of God. God used one person Nehemiah 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 in Europe.