

COME, LET US REBUILD THE WALLS

Nehemiah 1:1- 2:20

Key verse 2:17

“Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”

In a time of hopelessness for the people of Israel, the book of Nehemiah bears witness to the message of God's hope that he will fulfill his promise to his people if they obey his word. - Israel will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, just as God promised Abraham. This lesson is about how Nehemiah will return to Jerusalem and prepare to rebuild the walls of the Holy City.

We can learn about Nehemiah's broken heart, his prayer and his faith based on God's promise. In our sinful generation, God seeks spiritual leaders like Nehemiah who are dedicated to rebuilding the spiritual walls and restoring their people to a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

1. Nehemiah prayed before the God of heaven (1-11)

Let us look at chapter 1, verse 1: "The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa."

In order to be able to place this beginning in the situation of the Israelites at that time, we must look back a little on Israel's history. In his mercy, God had sent his prophets to his chosen people Israel again and again to call them to repentance for their idolatry. But the Israelites killed God's servants and repeatedly despised God's words until God's wrath came upon them. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians. Southern Judah was invaded by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. It was the beginning of the Babylonian captivity. Finally, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed Jerusalem. He burned down the temple, tore down the wall and set fire to all the buildings. He brought all the objects of the temple and the royal treasures together with the remains of Israel to Babylon. Since then the land has been devastated for 70 years, as God had prophesied through the prophet Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 25:8-12) But when the 70 years were fulfilled, God had mercy on His people and ended the Babylonian captivity by the Persians conquering Babylon. Then God worked in the heart of the Persian king, so that he allowed the Israelites to return to their beloved land.

The first group of returnees returned to Judah in 536 BC under the leadership of Serubbabel. They completed the reconstruction of the temple and dedicated it to the Lord with a joyful celebration. Under King Artaxerxes, the second group of exiles, led by Ezra, returned to Jerusalem in 458 BC. The situation at the beginning of the book of Nehemiah is about 13 years later.

Let us now look at verses 2-3. Let us read these verses together: "Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

Although Nehemiah was born and grew up in Persia and he had never been to Jerusalem, 1000 kilometres away, his heart was in Jerusalem, the city he always longed for as if it were his own home. For the Jews, Jerusalem had been the centre of their lives for centuries. That is where the Temple was, that is where people were to appear before God at least three times a year. (Deuteronomy 16:16) Since Ezra had returned to Jerusalem 13 years earlier, Nehemiah had wanted to know how the people of Jerusalem were doing. But the news of this was devastating. "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been burned with fire." (3)

What was Nehemiah's immediate reaction? Let us look at verse 4. "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." He had to sit down and weep because he could not bear it. It was not the news of the death of his loved ones, but of the crumbling wall of Jerusalem that made him very sad. Nehemiah was deeply saddened, so he wept, mourned for several days, fasted and prayed to God.

Why was his heart affected so much? Nehemiah knew God's heart, which was deeply grieved because of the crumbling wall of Jerusalem, the city God had chosen as the holy city for His people. God's heart was also very sad because God's people were not living according to God's grace and hope as God's people and were no longer exercising their ministry as priests and mediators between God and the people. Rather, they lived in great misery and shame and led only a petty bourgeois life without God's vision. The enemies and thieves had freely entered and left Jerusalem as if it were their own home. Some of them had mingled among God's people and seduced them into idolatry and sexual immorality. As a result, the Jews had lost their identity and mission as God's people and had become increasingly godless, no longer living for the glory and joy of God. Even the temple, the holy house of God, had become defenceless and godless.

- The crumbling walls of God's holy city and the shame of God's people did not leave Nehemiah cold and indifferent.

Although Nehemiah was not a priest or minister, he could not ignore the suffering people in Jerusalem. The broken wall of God's holy city and the depressed state of his people made him deeply sad. He practically had to or wanted to do something. Nehemiah wept in fear, mourned, fasted and prayed before God - not for days, but for four months. In the time of shame and catastrophic condition of God's people, God needed a shepherd like him, who knew God's heart and God's will and was ready to give himself for the spiritual renewal of his Vokes. It was God who worked mightily in Nehemiah and planted in his heart his vision of the reconstruction of Jerusalem and the renewal of God's people (2:12).

The people of Jerusalem were in great need and shame because of the problem of the broken wall. When the spiritual wall is torn down, any hostile doctrine such as humanism, relativism, materialism, individualism, genderism or others will come freely into the hearts of the people and destroy the image of God.

The spiritual walls in our country have also fallen down. Many houses of God are empty or are no longer used according to their original meaning as a house of the Word of God and prayer, but often as a meeting place for social purposes, some have even been abused as a disco or converted into a mosque. Many places of worship in Germany stand completely empty. Most priests and religious superiors in this country act more like social workers or politicians instead of being God's servants of the Word and of prayer for the souls entrusted to them. They are anxious and adapt themselves to the respective situation and prefer to be peaceful with all people, but without addressing sin as sin or false doctrine as false teaching according to the Bible. When a pastor in Northern Germany did this recently, he was relieved of ministry by his superior and officially charged by the authorities.

And how are the German people currently doing from God's perspective? The spiritual situation of most Germans is catastrophic. Many Germans are unbelievers and know little or nothing of the Word of God from the Bible. Even in the first years of school, children are taught the Word of God only marginally in religious education mixed with other human teachings. Many religion teachers themselves do not believe in the Bible as the absolute Word of God. Most parents also do not educate their children according to the Word of God, but rather according to their humanistic ideas, which they too have learned from their parents or teachers or others. In this way, children also develop into unbelieving, godless people who live only after their conditions have improved and only according to their sinful, selfish feelings or their own will. In this way they are quickly enslaved by sin and bound by very harmful, godless temptations, such as alcohol, drugs, computer games, pornography, money and other material things. In fact, all this does not make them happy. And a great many young and old Germans are mentally ill, suffer from anxiety, restlessness, depression, eating disorders or behavioural problems. - Most people in Germany live in great misery, disoriented and enslaved by the power of sin; the spiritual walls of

our country have crumbled. - Can we be indifferent or passive in the face of this situation? - No.

We can learn from Nehemiah. Let us look at verse 4. Let us read this verse together: "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven."

First, Nehemiah mourned for days because of the spiritual condition of his people.

He was not only superficially affected, but he mourned for days and wept before God for the misfortune and shame of the Israelites and Jerusalem. - What did Nehemiah do?

Second, he fasted.

Nehemiah did not mourn only with his mouth or in his thoughts, but he mourned before God by fasting. To show God his sorrow, he fasted. - And what else did Nehemiah do?

Third, he prayed before God.

Indeed, prayer is the first step to make something impossible possible. In verse 5 we can see that Nehemiah, in his prayer, acknowledged God as the almighty God of heaven. He prayed: "LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments."

This shows Nehemiah's humility and his complete trust in God.

Then he confessed in his prayer in verses 6 and 7 the sins of his people, as well as the sins of his ancestors and his own. "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses."

He knew that the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem was the disobedience and idolatry of the Israelites before God. Nehemiah blamed neither other people nor God for what had happened. He also confessed the sins of his father's house and his own and repented of them. He believed that God would fulfil His Word on those who repented and converted to Him.

Finally, Nehemiah referred to God's promises in his prayer. Let us look at verses 8-9. Let us read these verses together: "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the

farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.“

Nehemiah reminded God of his merciful promise he had once made to Moses. He believed that God could bring his people back to their homeland, no matter how far they were scattered, if they returned to him and obeyed his command. He was willing to obey God's commands with the Israelites. Nehemiah's request of faith moved God's heart.

On the basis of God's promise, Nehemiah decided to return to Jerusalem and, together with the Israelites, rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and make his people God's people again by obeying God's law and living as royal priests and God's holy people. Nehemiah believed that God, who had made the covenant with his people and was faithful, would help them in this. With this faith he finally asked God to bring his request successfully before King Artaxerxes (11).

2. Let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (2:1-20)

Nehemiah had been wrestling with God in prayer for four months since he had heard the news of the crumbling wall of Jerusalem. In his prayer he was waiting for the time of God. Finally God's time came for Nehemiah, when he took the wine and gave it to the king in the month of Nisan. Let us look at chapter 2,2. "so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid." Nehemiah was very afraid because he had seen how many people had been executed because they had said something wrong in front of the king. Although this was a moment of danger, it was also a great opportunity God had given him.

Let us read verses 3-4a together (until "What is it you want?") "but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" The king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Nehemiah overcame his fear and seized the opportunity. He could do this because he had prayed for this moment. Otherwise he would probably miss the opportunity out of fear or hesitation. When the king asked, "What is it you want?" Nehemiah knew that it was God who had just opened the door for him. What did Nehemiah do then? Verse 4b says, "Then I prayed to the God of heaven." Nehemiah was a man of prayer who always took the opportunity to ask God for help. Certainly he prayed for God to open the king's heart.

What did Nehemiah ask the king for? Let us look at verses 5-8. After his short prayer, he immediately asked for 3 things: First, to let him travel to Judah to rebuild the city of his fathers (5). He also told the king a certain amount of time that he would need to build the walls (6). Second, he asked for letters to the governors on the other side of the Euphrates for safe conduct. And thirdly, Nehemiah also asked the king to write a letter to Asaph, the chief warden of the forests, to obtain wood for making beams. - Wow! What a request! Nehemiah was a man of prayer and a man of faith. Nehemiah overcame his fear of the king and asked him courageously by faith in God. In doing so he relied on God's omnipotence. The king granted him all the things he had asked for. Furthermore, the king provided him with army escort to Jerusalem. When Nehemiah challenged the impossible through his prayer and faith, he experienced God's almighty arm as help. - Then he testified to the grace of God in verse 8: "And because the gracious hand of my God was on me, the king granted my requests."

From Nehemiah we can learn here that when God has opened the door, we should make precise demands through faith. - To act in faith is not to act in ignorance. Nehemiah knew exactly how long it would take, what materials he needed and what else he needed. For 4 months Nehemiah had been praying and planning for his project. Prayer and planning belong together.

Some people have great prayer requests. But when they are asked: "What is your plan?" they say: "I pray for it", which means: "God will do it". But this shows that they neither pray nor plan.

Prayer is good, but prayer should lead to a plan. Otherwise, when the king asks: "What do you want?" we could not make a concrete request. In this way we miss the opportunity.

Prayer is not a passive but an active and productive time of preparation. That is what Nehemiah had done - praying and preparing, by meditating on the Word of God, on the promise of God. At God's time and on God's way we will then be ready to move as God leads us. Let us look at verse 11. Finally Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem after a journey of about four months. Nehemiah arrived not only with a military escort, but also with the authority of the throne of Persia, according to his request of faith in the Persian king.

What was the first thing Nehemiah did when he arrived in Jerusalem? In Jerusalem he recovered from his journey for 3 days. Then he got up in the night and together with only a few men he began to examine the extent of the crumbling city wall of Jerusalem. Verses 12-16 describe his thorough inspection during the night. He saw with his own eyes what was to be done. What did he do after he had examined the wall? Let us look at verses 17-18. Let's read these verses together: "Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the

king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Since he came with the king's letter, with soldiers and money, he could have simply ordered the Jews to work. But he did not. He understood that for many years they had lived in shame and despair, with a feeling of failure and defeat. The worst of all was that they did not dare to build the Wall. They were idle for 38 years, just like the paralysed man at the Betesda pond. - How did Nehemiah motivate the Israelites? How did he enable them to stand up and start rebuilding the city wall? Nehemiah reminded them of their identity as God's people and planted God's vision and hope in them. "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

Admittedly, Jerusalem was nothing but a destroyed city at the time. It was spiritually in disgrace. But that was not what Jerusalem was supposed to be. That was not God's will for his people. God's will for us, as for Jerusalem then, is to reveal the glory of God. It is to make us a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. - Although we are sometimes fearful and ineffective, like a nobody, and it looks as if we cannot do anything about the power of sin in people, this is not how God looks at us. Do not think or consider yourselves as a nobody or as if you cannot do anything for God.

We are God's chosen people. We are a holy nation. God's will stands because God, who is faithful, wants to fulfil His promise to us. We are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Not because of our deeds, but because God has promised it. - Let us rebuild the spiritual walls of Germany and Europe! Nehemiah also appealed to them with his testimony that God had moved the King's heart and had already helped them. Nehemiah's convincing appeal inspired the Jews, who had been like a man paralysed for 38 years. They all came together and replied: "Let us start rebuilding!"

Let us look at verse 19. When God's people began to rebuild, the enemies mocked and derided them, saying, "What are you doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Whenever God's work is done, Satan's resistance comes. That is true! When we started the GLEF to pray for the formation of the New Generation to spiritual leaders, resistance was immediately expressed to stop this work.

Let us see how Nehemiah dealt with the resistance, verse 20: "I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it." Nehemiah was not intimidated, but he spoke clear words of faith to them.

Here the leadership of Nehemiah reminds me of the leadership of M.Dr. Peter Chang. God gave him his broken shepherd's heart for the young students in Bonn, in Germany and Europe and the sense of responsibility for the task entrusted by God. - Today we are celebrating the 40th anniversary service of our church in Bonn. In the past 40 years, God has blessed M. Peter's efforts, especially through the Sunday message, through group and one-to-one Bible studies, through the Daily Bread and through the personal testimony letter, to help the missionaries, the shepherds and the young people and children to relate God's word to themselves, to believe in it and to live by it.

This is the work of rebuilding the spiritual walls of Germany and Europe. This spiritual struggle is not easy. It required self-denial, dedication, patience and above all faith. Calling the workers early in the morning, during the day, in the evening or even at night, motivating, encouraging, admonishing, comforting, inviting, planting God's word, God's hope in them, helping them to take responsibility for God's mission and much more. In order to inspect the mission field in Germany and Europe closely, M.Peter undertook many mission trips. As UBF director of Germany and Europe, he not only led the churches from afar, but he visited co-workers and house churches in many countries to encourage them, pray with them and support them in their faith struggle. Above all, he planted God's vision into the hearts of the co-workers based on the Word of God. For this he himself fought with all his heart with the Word of God and prayer. Through his struggle of word and prayer and thanks to the cooperation of M.Sara and many co-workers, God used our church as a spiritual headquarters for the reconstruction of the spiritual walls in Germany and Europe in the past years in a precious way. There have been ups and downs, temptations and slander. But through it all, the Lord has faithfully accompanied us until today and blessed our common prayer to use our church as a house of God's word and prayer, as a headquarters for the spiritual revival of Germany and Europe and for world mission.

Despite the gracious work in and through our church over the past 40 years, the spiritual walls of Germany and Europe are still crumbling in many places, and most young people and students live a disoriented and ignorant life without God's word, a life of pleasure and selfishness according to their feelings, desires and own ideas. But in his wonderful grace and hope, God nevertheless has the hope to change them into good shepherds and royal priests and to establish further God- and mission-centred house churches among them. He wants to raise up 10,000 determined Bible teachers and 5,000,000 prayer co-workers for the spiritual reconstruction of Germany and Europe and for world mission.

Today, God has once again reminded us of the spiritual situation in Germany and Europe, that the spiritual walls in this country and in the countries of this continent are lying down in many places and that Satan has seduced and enslaved people with many false teachings. God is very sad about this. - That is why He has let us hear this lesson today, so that we can reflect on it and get to know and attract His broken

heart for the young people in Germany and Europe. - Let us repent of our indifference and passivity regarding the spiritual situation of the people in Germany and Europe and learn Nehemiah's consternation and his prayer and how he makes a decision of faith based on God's promise, which God will surely bless.

But God does not only want to make us concerned or sad on this day of the Jubilee, but He encourages us through Nehemiah's great trust in God's promise and through his decision to obey God's commandments. Through Nehemiah, God calls us today on the day of the 40th anniversary of our congregation: Come let us rebuild the spiritual walls of Germany and Europe! - Let us do this above all through one-to-one Bible study and discipleship training. Let us pray and work that God will continue to bless our one-to-one Bible study and discipleship training, that He will continue to build up the spiritual walls in Germany and Europe, and that we will also be able to serve Muslims and world mission.