LIFE-STUDY OF NEHEMIAH

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD AND THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM UNDER NEHEMIAH

Scripture Reading: Neh. 1—7

With this message we begin the life-study of Nehemiah.

I. AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

A. The Book of Nehemiah Being a History of the Rebuilding of the Wall of the City of Jerusalem

The book of Ezra is a history of the return of Israel's captivity and the rebuilding of the house of God as the initiation of God's recovery among His elect for His testimony on the earth according to His economy. The book of Nehemiah is a history of the rebuilding of the wall of the city of Jerusalem as a continual recovery among His elect for His testimony for the accomplishment of His economy.

B. The Writer

The writer of this book was Nehemiah, whose name means "comfort of Jehovah." He was the cupbearer to the king (1:11b). The whole book is a record of Nehemiah's trust in God for his comfort in the trials and attacks of his enemies.

C. The Time

The contents of this book cover a period of about twelve years, from 446-434 B.C.

D. The Contents

The contents of this book are the rebuilding of the wall

of the city of Jerusalem, which was destroyed by the enemies of Israel, and the further recovery of Israel's services and worship to God. In these messages I will use the word *constitution* to include the two matters of services and worship. The services plus worship equal constitution.

E. The Crucial Point

The crucial point of the book of Nehemiah is that the city of Jerusalem was a safeguard and protection for the house of God, which was in the city. This signifies that the house of God as His dwelling and home on the earth needs His kingdom to be established as a realm to safeguard His interest on the earth for His administration, to carry out His economy. The rebuilding of the house of God typifies God's recovery of the degraded church, and the rebuilding of the wall of the city of Jerusalem typifies God's recovery of His kingdom. God's building of His house and His building of His kingdom go together (Matt 16:18-19). The house of God on the earth needs His kingdom to safeguard the house and to carry out His eternal economy.

F. The Sections

The book of Nehemiah has two sections: the rebuilding of the wall of the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (chs. 1—7) and the reconstitution of the nation of God's elect (chs. 8—13).

II. THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL OF THE CITY OF JERUSALEM UNDER NEHEMIAH

A. The Report of the Condition of Jerusalem

In 1:1-3 we have a report of the condition of Jerusalem. According to this report the remnant of the returned captivity were in an exceedingly bad state and reproach (v. 3a). The wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates had been burned with fire (v. 3b).

B. Nehemiah's Prayer by Fasting

In his prayer by fasting (vv. 4-11), Nehemiah first praised God for what He is, praising Him for His keeping of His

covenant and lovingkindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments (v. 5). Then he confessed the sins of the children of Israel (vv. 6-7) and asked God to remember His word to Moses that He would bring the captivity of His people even from the ends of heaven back to the place of His dwelling (vv. 8-9). Nehemiah stood on God's word and prayed according to it. Thus, God was bound by His own word. Nehemiah continued by begging God to hear his prayer and the prayer of those who took delight in fearing His name and to cause him to prosper and to find compassion before Artaxerxes the king of Persia (vv. 10-11a).

C. The King's Favor in Giving Permission to Nehemiah

In 2:1-8 we see the king's favor in giving permission to Nehemiah.

D. Nehemiah's Journey to Jerusalem and His Personal Observation

Verses 9 through 16 speak of Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem and his personal observation of the condition of the wall of the city of Jerusalem. The leaders of the Moabites and Ammonites were greatly displeased about Nehemiah's seeking the good of the children of Israel (v. 10). The Moabites and the Ammonites, descendants of sons born of Lot, hated and despised the children of Israel.

E. The Rebuilding of the Wall of Jerusalem

Nehemiah 2:17-20 is a word concerning the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. The leaders of the Moabites and Ammonites mocked and despised the children of Israel and asked whether they would rebel against the king by doing this (v. 19). Nehemiah answered them by saying, "The God of heaven Himself will make us prosper; therefore we His servants will rise up and build. But you have no portion nor right nor memorial in Jerusalem" (v. 20). This answer indicates that Nehemiah was very aggressive. He surely was not cowardly. Anyone who is cowardly cannot be a servant of God.

F. A Record of the Building of the Wall in Consecutive Sections

Chapter three is a record of the building of the wall in consecutive sections by all the children of Israel with the priests and Levites.

G. The Frustration of the Enemy

Chapter four describes the frustration of the enemy.

1. The Enemies Becoming Angry

The enemies became angry and greatly enraged, and again they mocked the Jews and despised their building (vv. 1-3).

2. Nehemiah Trusting in God

Nehemiah trusted in God by praying that God would return their reproach to themselves. Thus the Jews built the wall, and all the wall was joined together to half its height, for they had a heart to work (vv. 4-6). Today, no matter how much we may be mocked and despised, we should have a heart to build and should be aggressive.

3. The Enemies Being Angry Because the Building Work Was Advancing

The enemies were angry because the building work was advancing, and they conspired to come and fight against Jerusalem (vv. 7-8).

4. The Jews Praying to Their God and Setting a Watch against the Enemy

The Jews prayed to their God, and under Nehemiah's instruction and direction set a watch against the enemy day and night, ready to fight with weapons under the encouragement of Nehemiah, who instructed them to remember the great and awesome Lord and fight for their families. Half of Nehemiah's servants labored in the work, and half of them held weapons, ready to fight. Some built the wall and some carried burdens, taking the loads with one hand doing the work and with the other hand holding a weapon. The one who would sound the trumpet was beside Nehemiah, to gather

them to fight, trusting that their God would fight for them. This indicates that, as the commander-in-chief, Nehemiah took the lead to watch. Thus, they labored and half of them held spears from the start of dawn until the stars came out, and Nehemiah and his brothers, servants, and the men of the guard, none of them took off their clothes. Each had his weapon at his right hand (vv. 9-23).

On the one hand, the children of Israel were prepared to fight; on the other hand, they trusted in God that He would fight for them. In this matter also they were aggressive. Those who are cowardly might say that, since God will fight for us, there is no need for us to do anything. But in a very real sense, God will help those who help themselves. If you do not help yourself, God will not help you. According to history, God does not help the cowardly. It is the aggressive ones who have received help from God.

H. The Settlement of the Interior Problem

Chapter five is concerned with the settlement of the interior problem. Often as we are fighting outwardly, we have an interior problem.

1. The People's Complaint

The people complained concerning the nobles' and rulers' imposing interest on them (vv. 1-5).

2. Nehemiah's Rebuke and Resolution

Verses 6 through 13 tell us about Nehemiah's rebuke and resolution. He set a great assembly against the nobles and rulers and told them that they did not walk in the fear of their God because of the reproach of the nations their enemies (vv. 7-9). They should have feared God because of the reproach and opposition from the nations.

Nehemiah, his brothers, and his servants had set an example by lending money and grain to others freely, and he charged the nobles and rulers to abandon such taking of interest (vv. 10-11). The nobles and rulers responded, saying that they would do what Nehemiah had said. Then Nehemiah called for the priests and took an oath from them with a

solemn warning that God would shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who did not perform this promise (vv. 12-13a). The assembly said, "Amen," praising Jehovah, and acted according to their promise (v. 13b).

3. Nehemiah's Good Example

In verses 14 through 19 we see Nehemiah's good example.

a. Not Eating the Food Appointed for the Governor

Nehemiah and his brothers did not eat the food appointed for the governor for twelve years because of the fear of God (vv. 14-15).

b. Applying Himself to Work on the City Wall

Nehemiah applied himself to work on the city wall. He, his brothers, and all his servants, who were gathered there for the work, did not acquire fields. This means they did not receive any kind of payment. Rather, he fed richly at his table one hundred fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to him from the surrounding nations, not demanding the food appointed for the governor, for the building service was heavy on the people (vv. 16-18).

c. Asking God to Remember for Good All That He Had Done

Nehemiah asked God to remember for good all that he had done for the people (v. 19). He had the standing to ask God for this.

Here we should note that Nehemiah, as the governor, in the position of a king, was a man with a pure heart for the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall in carrying out God's economy. He was not selfish, he did not seek his own interests, and he was not indulgent in sexual lust like all the kings, including David. Therefore, he was qualified to enjoy the top portion, the kingship of the good land promised by God to His elect. Instead of being self-seeking, he fed others for the purpose of building up the wall. In human history he might have been the only leader of a nation to behave in such a way. As a result, he was used by God.

I. The Further Frustration of the Enemy

Nehemiah 6:1-14 describes the further frustration of the enemy. First, they pretended compromise as part of a conspiracy to kill Nehemiah (vv. 1-4). They also slandered and threatened to weaken their hands from working, but Nehemiah prayed to God, saying, "Now strengthen my hands!" (vv. 5-9). Finally, the enemy acted by treachery with the false prophets and a false prophetess to cause Nehemiah to sin that they would have cause for an evil report in order to reproach him. However, Nehemiah prayed to God, asking Him to remember what they were doing (vv. 10-14).

J. The Completion of the Building

In 6:15—7:4 we have a record of the completion of the building. The building was completed on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Elul, in fifty-two days (6:15). All the enemies and all the surrounding nations were afraid and fell very low in their own eyes, knowing that this work was done with the help of God (v. 16). Verses 17-19 speak of the intimidation by Tobiah, who had relationships with the Jews in their intermarriage. In 7:1-4 Nehemiah gave his brother Hanani and the commander of the citadel charge over Jerusalem. Hanani was "a faithful man and feared God more than most" (v. 2). Lastly, God put it into Nehemiah's heart to enroll the returned captives by genealogy for the increase of the population of Jerusalem (vv. 5-73; cf. Ezra 2:1-70).

Nehemiah received help from God to carry out a great success in the work of rebuilding the wall of the city of Jerusalem. It is surely worthwhile for us today, especially the leading ones in the churches, to consider his example.

LIFE-STUDY OF NEHEMIAH

MESSAGE TWO

NEHEMIAH'S AGGRESSIVENESS

Scripture Reading: Neh. 1:1—2:8, 17-20

In this message we will consider Nehemiah's aggressiveness and the need for the proper aggressiveness in the Lord's recovery today.

THREE SECTIONS OF THE WORK RELATED TO GOD'S HOUSE AND GOD'S KINGDOM

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the return of the captives from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and repair the wall for God's house and God's kingdom. In order for God to have a house and a kingdom on the earth, three sections of work were needed. First, there was a need for some of the captivity to come back from Babylon to Jerusalem to lay a foundation for the formation of a nation. This required a strong government, a strong administration. Second, there was the need of teaching and education to bring the people of God into a culture that was according to God. Such a culture was not an Egyptian kind nor a Canaanite kind nor a Babylonian kind but was God's kind, a culture that expressed God. This kind of culture required a great deal of education. Third, there was the need to constitute the nation organically. This section of the work was concerned with the constitution of God's people.

The word *constitution* is ambiguous. According to the common notion, this word refers to a document which is the constitution of a country, for example, the Constitution of the United States of America. This understanding of constitution is too narrow. In our usage, the word constitution refers to something organic which has a number of elements. If the government of a country is constituted not only

organizationally but also organically, that government will not be lifeless. On the contrary, such a government will be something that is living and organic.

The Leadership of Zerubbabel

At the expiration of the seventy years of the captivity in Babylon, the omnipotent, sovereign God moved in a hidden way to stir up King Cyrus openly to release the Israelite captives to go back to their own land to build up God's temple (Ezra 1:1-4). Also, King Cyrus brought out the vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and had put into the house of his gods (v. 7). These vessels were then returned to Jerusalem (v. 11). This return from captivity was under the kingly leadership of Zerubbabel, a descendant of the royal family of David (2:1-2). If we study carefully the record concerning him in the Bible, we will see that he was a strong governor and was very able in managing the people.

The Leadership of Ezra

Later, there was a second return from captivity under the priestly leadership of Ezra, a descendant of the priestly family. Ezra was not a high-ranking official in Persia. Rather, he was a priest and a scribe who was skilled in the law of Moses (7:6). Although he did not have any rank there in Persia, he was bold, strong, and aggressive in presenting a petition to the king of Persia. The king granted all his request, doing everything Ezra had asked.

The presenting of this petition was not initiated by God—it was initiated by Ezra. As the one who took the initiative in this matter, Ezra was a man who trusted in God and who was one with God. He was skilled in the Word of God and he knew God's heart, God's desire, and God's economy. Because of all this, he was a person of excellent character and reputation before the king. If Ezra had not had such a standing in the eyes of the king, the king would not have authorized him to appoint magistrates and judges (v. 25).

The Leadership of Nehemiah

Nehemiah, the son of Hacaliah, was not a counselor of the king nor a captain of the army. He was just a cupbearer, one who served wine to the king. But in his living and behavior he must have built up something that earned the king's respect. Nehemiah had never been sad in the king's presence (Neh. 2:1). One day the king said to him, "Why is your face sad, since you are not ill? This is nothing other than sadness of heart" (v. 2). Being aggressive, Nehemiah took advantage of this opportunity and said, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in waste and its gates are consumed with fire?" (v. 3). The king asked him what his request was, and Nehemiah asked the king to send him to Judah that he might rebuild the city of his fathers (v. 5). Nehemiah went on to request that letters would be given to him for the governors so that they would let him pass through. He asked also for a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the Park, so that he would give him timber (vv. 7-8). The king granted to Nehemiah all that he had requested.

THE AGGRESSIVENESS OF NEHEMIAH IN VOLUNTEERING HIMSELF TO HIS BURDEN

We are not told that Nehemiah was stirred up by God. Rather, according to 1:1-2, he asked one of his brothers and some others who came from Judah about those who were left from the captivity and about Jerusalem. They told him that the people were in an exceedingly bad state and reproach and that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates had been burned with fire (v. 3). When Nehemiah heard this report, he wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed (v. 4). He did not call a prayer meeting, and he did not ask those who gave the report to pray about the situation. He prayed by himself with a real burden.

In principle, these three sections—government, education, and constitution—have been present in the Lord's recovery through the centuries. Some are raised up and stirred up by God, and some volunteer. Some are in a high position, and

some are common people. But all must be bold and strong in character and aggressive. All who have been used by God through history have been aggressive persons. For example, both Paul and Martin Luther were very aggressive. Brother Nee also, even though he was a gentleman, was very aggressive.

Nehemiah surely was an aggressive person. He volunteered himself, in a sense, not to God but to his burden. He had a burden to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. His aggressiveness was very much used by God.

In the Lord's recovery today there are many good saints, but we are short of aggressiveness. If just five thousand among us were aggressive, the world would be turned upside down. If there were seven hundred aggressive ones in each continent, a great deal would issue forth for the carrying out of God's economy.

In our reading of the book of Nehemiah, we need to pay attention to Nehemiah's aggressiveness. Although he was a common man, a servant of the king, he was aggressive to volunteer himself to God and to his burden concerning the building up of the city. He was also aggressive in making his requests known to the king. When the king asked him about his sad face, he spoke to the king in a bold, aggressive way about his burden for the city of Jerusalem. It is important that we see this in the Word.

THE NATURAL VIRTUES AND CAPACITIES BEING BROUGHT TO THE CROSS IN ORDER TO BE BROUGHT INTO RESURRECTION

At this juncture we need to consider a matter that is significant in the typology in the Old Testament and in the fulfillment of the types in the New Testament. In typology many persons were temporarily used by God according to their natural capacity and natural virtues to signify something spiritual. An example of this is Nehemiah and his aggressiveness, which was a virtue in his human conduct. Whereas in typology natural things were used by God temporarily, in the fulfillment of the types in the New Testament, all the natural virtues and capacities should be

brought to the cross. They need to be put to the cross and crossed out.

Many among us think that to put a certain thing to the cross means to put that thing to an end. In a sense, this is correct. However, according to the real significance of the cross of Christ, the cross does not mean merely that something is put to an end but that the natural things are crossed out in order to be brought into resurrection. The cross of Christ brings all natural things to death and burial. But according to the Bible, burial is followed by resurrection. Burial is therefore the threshold of resurrection. Whatever is buried will be resurrected. According to John 12:24 a grain of wheat falls into the ground, dies, and is buried. But this is not the end. After burial, something will come forth in resurrection.

The Example of Moses

Let us consider the example of Moses. I believe that Moses had a strong character and that in his natural constitution he was even more aggressive than Nehemiah was. At the age of forty Moses aggressively volunteered to save Israel out of the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, but God came in to limit him, allowing him to fail and be disappointed. Moses was then "buried" in the wilderness for forty years. Eventually, the resurrecting God came in to resurrect Moses (Exo. 3:2-6).

The Example of Peter

God made us with certain virtues and capacities in our natural constitution. Matthew 25:15 tells us that the "talents" are given according to our "own ability," that is, our natural ability, which is constituted of God's creation and our learning. This ability needs to be crossed out and then brought into resurrection.

This was the experience of all the able and capable apostles, such as Paul and Peter. Peter, for instance, was in the "tomb" for three and a half years. Whenever he crept out of the tomb, the Lord Jesus would send him back to the tomb. On the night of the Lord's betrayal, Peter was so bold and aggressive as to say to the Lord, "Even if I must die with

You, I will by no means deny You!" (Mark 14:31). Peter went on to tell Him that others might forsake Him but he would never do so. What boldness! What aggressiveness! The Lord told Peter, "Truly I say to you that today in this night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times" (v. 30). Once again, Peter was put to the cross and buried.

Entering into Resurrection

If our natural capacity, natural ability, and natural virtues are not crossed out, they will cause a great deal of trouble and will be the source of big mistakes. But if we allow our natural capacity, ability, and virtues to be brought to the cross and die, we will be resurrected. Then in resurrection our capability, ability, and virtues will be many times greater than they were in the natural life. These things are still ours, but having passed through death and burial, they are now in resurrection. This means that we ourselves, with our capacity, ability, and virtues, have entered into resurrection. We continue to exist, but we with our natural ability have been brought into resurrection.

The reality of resurrection is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the consummated Triune God. Resurrection, therefore, is the consummated Triune God. Our natural capacity, ability, and virtue need to be transferred from our natural life into the consummated Triune God through death and burial. In ourselves we are natural, but when we are transferred out of ourselves into God, who is resurrection, we enter into resurrection.

An Important Principle

This is a very important principle for interpreting the types and their fulfillment. If we do not apply this principle, all the natural capacities, abilities, and virtues, unchecked by crucifixion, will be like "wild beasts" among us.

This has been the situation with many capable ones who came into the recovery and stayed for a while. They eventually realized that in the recovery there was no ground for them to employ their natural capacity and ability. Eventually, they left the recovery and formed a work for themselves. They were not willing to accept crucifixion and burial in order to

be brought into resurrection. They could not take the cross. This is the reason why certain capable persons who have come into the recovery do not remain.

God needs people who are highly educated. For example, he needed someone like Moses, who was "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). If Moses had not been an educated person, God would not have used him to give the law. However, we should not trust our natural wisdom or education. It is risky to put our trust in such things. We need to be one with God. If we are one with God, we will put our natural wisdom and education to the cross. The more we do this, the more we will be in resurrection.

It is never a loss to sow the "seed" of our natural ability into the ground. When we sow a seed we lose it temporarily, but eventually there will be a harvest in resurrection.

NEHEMIAH'S LIVING IN RESURRECTION

Nehemiah was one who lived not in his natural man but in resurrection. He was aggressive, but his aggressiveness was accompanied by other characteristics. First, he loved God. There is no doubt about this. He was born in captivity and was appointed to be the king's cupbearer, but he loved God. He also loved the holy land (signifying Christ), the holy temple (signifying the church), and the holy city (signifying the kingdom of God). He loved God and, in typology, he loved Christ, the church, and the kingdom. As a person who loved God, Nehemiah was one who contacted God. We are told a number of times that Nehemiah prayed to God (Neh. 1:4; 2:4b; 4:4-5, 9). Furthermore, Nehemiah trusted in God and even became one with God.

In himself Nehemiah's aggressiveness was natural, but in God his aggressiveness was in resurrection. Nehemiah was an aggressive person who loved God, the holy land, the holy temple, and the holy city, who contacted God and had fellowship with Him, who trusted in God, and who was one with God. As a result, he became the representative of God. We need to be clear about this in order to understand the intrinsic significance of the type according to the insight given by the Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF NEHEMIAH

MESSAGE THREE

THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

(1)

Scripture Reading: Neh. 8—10

III. THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

In this message we will begin to consider the reconstitution of the nation of God's elect (chs. 8—13).

A. Coming Back to God by Coming Back to His Law, His Word

In order to be reconstituted, we need to come back to God by coming back to His law, that is, His word (ch. 8). Suppose a fallen person wants to come back to God. If he would come back to God, he must come back to God's word. No one can come back to God without coming back to His word.

God's word reconstitutes us. We all have our own kind of disposition and habitual behavior, but God is able to reconstitute us through His word. This is why we need to read the Bible. God's word gradually changes our mind and our way of thinking. The word of God is one with the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). When the word of God works within us, the Spirit, through the word, spontaneously dispenses God's nature with God's element into our being. We may not even be aware that such a dispensing is taking place within us. By this way we are reconstituted.

Most of those who had returned to Jerusalem from the captivity in Babylon had been born not in Israel but in Babylon, and they were raised in Babylon. The Babylonian element had been wrought into them and constituted into

their being. Therefore, after they returned to the land of their fathers to be citizens of the nation of Israel, they needed a reconstitution. Ezra was very useful at this point, for he was one through whom the people could be reconstituted with the word of God.

The constitution of a person provides the foundation for the constitution of a nation. A proper nation is not merely an organization but also a constitution. This is especially true of a nation's army. The army of the United States, for example, is constituted with many elements, and these elements afford the way for the individual soldiers to be reconstituted as parts of the army. Thus, the army is a constitution and not merely an organization.

God's intention with Israel was to have on earth a divinely constituted people to be His testimony. In order for God's people to be His testimony, they had to be reconstituted with the word of God. Under Ezra and Nehemiah the returned people of Israel were collectively constituted by and with God through His word to be a nation as God's testimony.

1. All the People of Israel Gathering as One Man and Telling Ezra to Bring the Book of the Law of Moses and Read to Them

According to Nehemiah 8:1-8 all the people of Israel gathered as one man before the Water Gate and told Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses and read to them. Ezra did it and blessed Jehovah the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground. This indicates that rebellious Israel had been fully convinced and fully subdued by the word of God spoken through Moses.

The word of God is the solid base for the Spirit of God, who is God Himself, to dispense God's element into our being to cause us to be constituted with God. This should be our personal experience day by day. When we come together, we then need to read even more of the Word of God. To do this is to come together according to the way of the divine constitution.

In order to be reconstituted, we need to read the sixty-six books of the Bible again and again. As one who has been reading the Word for more than sixty-five years, I can testify that I have been reconstituted through the daily reading of the Word. Every day I am reconstituted a little more.

2. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites Charging All the People to Sanctify That Day unto Jehovah Their God

Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who helped the people understand charged all the people to sanctify that day unto Jehovah their God and not to mourn or weep, for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Nehemiah charged them to have a feast without grief, a feast full of joy. It was hard for the people to do this, because they had been convinced and subdued by the word to realize they were sinful (vv. 9-10a). Nehemiah said to them, "Do not be grieved, for the joy of Jehovah is your strength" (v. 10b). Then all "went their way to eat and to drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing" (v. 12).

3. The Heads of the Fathers' Houses, the Priests, and the Levites Being Gathered to Ezra in order to Gain Insight into the Words of the Law

On the second day the heads of the fathers' houses, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe in order to gain insight into the words of the law (v. 13). Today many read the Bible without insight. Who has genuine insight into the word of the Bible? Here in verse 13 "insight" refers to the intrinsic significance. We all need to be helped to see the intrinsic significance of the word of the Bible.

Verses 14 through 18 tell us that they found in the law that Jehovah commanded the children of Israel to dwell in booths during the feast in the seventh month (the Feast of Tabernacles) and to publish and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem to go out to the mountain and bring olive branches and other kinds of branches to make booths. All the assembly did it accordingly for seven days with great rejoicing,

and day by day Ezra read in the book of the law of God. On the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance. This indicates that they did everything according to the complete law, with the commandments, the statutes (the supplements to the commandments), and the ordinances (the judgments). They had a revival and became a new nation, constituted through and with the word.

B. Making a Clear Confession to God of Their Past and Making a Firm Covenant with God

In chapters nine and ten the people made a clear confession to God of their past and made a firm covenant with God.

1. The Descendants of Israel Separating Themselves from All Foreigners

The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners and stood, confessing their sins and the iniquities of their fathers and reading the book of the law of Jehovah (9:1-4).

2. Praising God as the Only God

They praised God as the only God, who created the heaven of heavens, the earth, and the seas with all that is in them, and who chose Abraham, brought him forth from Chaldea, and made a covenant with him to give him and his seed the land of Canaan (vv. 5-8). They knew God in this way and praised Him accordingly.

3. Enumerating All the Good That God Had Done for Their Forefathers

Next, they enumerated all the good that God had done for their forefathers, bringing them out of Egypt through the wilderness into the good land and giving them His law in spite of their arrogance and their stiffened neck and their refusing to listen to His commandments (vv. 9-25). What can deal with our arrogance, our stiffened neck, and our refusal to listen to God's commandments? Only the word of God can deal with these ugly things. The word of God can annul our

arrogance. The word of God also can bend our stiff neck and cause us to listen to God's commandments.

4. Making a Further Confession of Their Disobedience and Rebellion

Following this, they made a further confession of their disobedience and rebellion (vv. 26-37). They confessed that, with a stiffened neck and a stubborn shoulder, they had cast God's law behind their back and had slain His prophets. Thus, they provoked God's wrath to give their good land to the oppression of the nations and give them, the people of Israel, into captivity to foreign lands. As a result, since the days of the kings of Assyria until that day, they had been in great distress.

5. Making a Firm Covenant in Writing

Because of all this they made a firm covenant in writing, and upon the sealed document were the names of their rulers, their Levites, and their priests (9:38—10:27).

6. The Rest of the People Entering into a Curse and an Oath

The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands unto the law of God entered into a curse and an oath (vv. 28-39). For them to enter into a curse meant that they would curse themselves if they did not keep the covenant. For them to enter into an oath meant that they could not cancel the covenant which they had made.

a. To Walk in the Law of God

In verses 29 through 31 we are told that they entered into a curse and an oath to walk in the law of God, which was given through Moses, and to keep and do all the commandments of Jehovah their Lord as well as His ordinances and statutes, not giving their daughters to the peoples of the land nor taking their daughters for their sons, keeping the Sabbath by not doing business, and foregoing the crops of the seventh

year. To forego means to give up. According to God's ordination in His law, in the seventh year they were to give up sowing and reaping so that the land would have rest. Then the land would grow something by itself for the poor and the needy. This law concerning the seventh year reveals that God, the Lawgiver, is full of love, caring for the widows, the orphans, the needy ones, and the strangers.

The people agreed also to forego the exaction of every debt. They were not to force others to pay their debts. Therefore, in the seventh year they were not allowed to use the land, and they were not permitted to exact payment for every debt. The rich had to lend to the poor and then forego the exaction of the debt if the poor were unable to pay. For those who were unwilling to lend to the poor, God had many ways to balance the social wealth among the rich and the poor. In His wisdom and love God balances the wealth of His people. This matter also is related to the reconstitution of the nation of God's elect.

b. Laying upon Themselves Obligations to Offer Their Produce from the Land for Their Sacrifices

Furthermore, they laid upon themselves obligations to offer their produce from the land for their sacrifices to God and to provide for the service of the temple (vv. 32-39).

All these matters are items of the reconstitution of the people of Israel. The "wild" Israel was reconstituted with a divine constitution to be a separate, particular, sanctified people as a testimony of God on earth.

LIFE-STUDY OF NEHEMIAH

MESSAGE FOUR

THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

(2)

Scripture Reading: Neh. 11—13

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah bear a strong intrinsic significance for the Lord's recovery today. We should not think that the Old Testament is unrelated to us. The Bible is written in two sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The first section contains pictures, while the second section contains the fulfillment of what is signified by the pictures. Without an intrinsic understanding of the Old Testament types, it is not easy to understand the fulfillment of God's economy in the New Testament.

In this message we will continue to consider the reconstitution of the nation of God's elect.

C. The Arrangement of the Dwelling Place of the People and the Appointment of the Officers of the Levitical Service and of the Civil Affairs

The reconstitution of the nation of God's elect involved many aspects. In Nehemiah 11 we see that it involved the arrangement of the dwelling place of the people and the appointment of the officers of the Levitical service and of the civil affairs.

1. The Rulers of the People Dwelling in Jerusalem

The rulers of the people dwelt in Jerusalem, the holy city, and the rest of the people cast lots in order to bring one in ten to dwell in Jerusalem. The people blessed all the men

who offered themselves willingly to dwell in Jerusalem (vv. 1-2).

At that time it was a real burden for anyone to dwell in Jerusalem. Because of the constant threat of foreign invasion, not many were willing to live in Jerusalem. Therefore, there was the need of some arrangement by casting lots. Otherwise, there would not have been a sufficient number of people living in Jerusalem. The ones whose lot was to live in Jerusalem were required to move there. However, some were willing to volunteer to dwell in Jerusalem, and all the people blessed them. Today those who voluntarily go full time will be blessed by all.

2. A Record of the Arrangement and the Appointments

In verses 3 through 36 we have a detailed record of the arrangement and the appointments.

D. A Record of the Priests and Levites

Nehemiah 12:1-26 is a record of the priests and Levites. The main serving ones in the worship of God, which is the main thing in God's kingdom, were not the kings. The kings were not for worshipping God but for ruling the people. The main serving ones for the worshipping of God were the priests with the Levites, who were the servants of the priests.

1. Those Who Went Up with Zerubbabel and Joshua

In verses 1 through 21 we have a record of those faithful ones who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua.

2. Those Who Served in the Days of Joiakim the Priest

Verses 22 through 26 are a record of those who served in the days of Joiakim the priest, of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe. They all were living in Jerusalem.

E. The Dedication of the Rebuilt Wall

The reconstitution also included the dedication of the rebuilt wall (vv. 27-43).

1. The People Seeking the Levites from All Their Places

The people sought the Levites from all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem in order to hold the dedication with rejoicing, thanksgiving, and singing with cymbals, harps, and lyres (vv. 27-29). The main service of the Levites was to sing in praise to God. For us today, singing hymns in the meetings is a primary need. Singing opens the heavens and brings us to the heavens. We should spend time to sing in different ways whenever we meet.

2. The Priests and the Levites Purifying Themselves

During the dedication the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they also purified the people, the gates, and the wall (v. 30). Everything was purified, for they would not dedicate to God anything that was not pure.

3. Nehemiah Appointing Two Great Companies

Nehemiah appointed two great companies to give thanks to God, to go in procession, and to stand in the house of God with him (vv. 31-42).

4. The Offering of Great Sacrifices

They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced with their women and children, for God had caused them to rejoice greatly; and the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar (v. 43). Today our neighbors should know that we are singing Christians, that we are the worshippers of God.

F. The Appointment of the Services of the Priests and the Levites and the Supply of Their Needs

The reconstitution also included the appointment of the services of the priests and the Levites and the supply of their needs (vv. 44-47). Nehemiah not only brought the serving

Levites and priests into function; he also supplied their daily necessities. Before that time, no one had taken care of this matter properly.

G. The Clearance Exercised on Israel as God's Elect

Nehemiah 13:1-30a describes the clearance exercised on Israel as God's elect. There were many cleansings. This clearance was also part of the reconstitution of the nation of God's elect.

1. Separating All the Mixed Multitude from Israel according to the Law

First, all the mixed multitude were separated from Israel according to the law (vv. 1-3). When the people heard the law concerning Ammonites and Moabites not entering the assembly of God forever, they separated the mixed multitude from Israel.

2. Purifying the Chambers of the House of God

In verses 4 through 9 Nehemiah purified the chambers of the house of God from the evil occupancy by a relative of the priest who had been appointed over the chambers of the house of God. Eliashib the priest prepared for his relative Tobiah the Ammonite (2:10; 4:3; 6:1) a large chamber in the courts of the house of God where they had previously put the meal offering, the frankincense, and the vessels (13:5, 7). When Nehemiah perceived the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, he was grieved and would not tolerate the situation. He cast all the household utensils of Tobiah out of the chamber and commanded that it be purified. Then Nehemiah returned to the chamber the vessels of the house of God, the meal offering, and the frankincense (vv. 8-9). In this matter there was a thorough clearance.

3. Removing the Negligence in Taking Care of the Need of the Levites

According to verses 10 through 13, Nehemiah went on to remove the negligence in taking care of the need of the

Levites. He found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them and he contended with the rulers regarding this. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, the new wine, and the oil to the storehouses. Thus Nehemiah took care of all the daily necessities of the Levites.

4. Getting Rid of the People's Profaning of the Holy Sabbath

Nehemiah also got rid of the people's profaning of the holy Sabbath (vv. 15-22a). The Tyrians had been bringing their merchandise into Jerusalem and selling it there on the Sabbath. Nehemiah caused this profaning of the Sabbath to cease. He commanded that the gates of Jerusalem be shut before the Sabbath and not opened until after the Sabbath (v. 19). Then he commanded the Levites to purify themselves and keep the gates in order to sanctify the Sabbath day (v. 22a).

5. Cleansing the People and Especially the Priests from the Defilement of Their Marriages with the Nations

In verses 23 through 30a the people and especially the priests were cleansed from the defilement of their marriages with the nations. Nehemiah required those who married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab to separate themselves from their foreign wives. In this matter he cleansed the people from everything foreign (v. 30a).

H. Appointing Duties for the Priests and the Levites, for the Wood Offering, and for the Firstfruits

Lastly, Nehemiah appointed duties for the priests and the Levites, for the wood offering at the appointed times, and for the firstfruits (vv. 30b-31a). All these arrangements were a reconstituting. Before Nehemiah's time the situation was a mess. The duties of the priests and the Levites were not clear, and there was not a proper arrangement for the wood offering and for the offering of the firstfruits of the produce

of the land every year. There surely was the need for the reconstituting accomplished by Nehemiah.

In doing all these things Nehemiah asked God to remember him and spare him according to the greatness of His lovingkindness (13:14, 22b, 31b).

LIFE-STUDY OF NEHEMIAH

MESSAGE FIVE

THE LEADERSHIP OF NEHEMIAH FOR THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

The leaders of the returned captivity were Zerubbabel of the royal family, Ezra of the priestly family, and Nehemiah of a common family. Among all the leaders in the history of Israel, these three were the top ones. Nehemiah was very common with no rank. There is no indication that his family had a high standing in society, and he did not have a high profession. Even though he served in the palace of the king of Persia, he was just a household servant.

Although Nehemiah was a common person without any position, he was placed in a very high position, a position which involved close contact with the king. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king (Neh. 1:11b). While wine was being set before the king, Nehemiah would take up the wine and give it to him (2:1a). Eventually, the king appointed this cupbearer to be the governor of Judah.

NEHEMIAH'S PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS

As one of the leaders of the returned captivity, Nehemiah had some particular and special characteristics.

Being a Pleasant Person with a Proper Attitude and Behavior

As a cupbearer to the king, Nehemiah must have been a person who was pleasant and sweet and who was always proper in his attitude and behavior. He was never sad in the king's presence (v. 1b). If Nehemiah had not been a pleasant person who fulfilled the king's requests, the king would not have allowed him to continue serving as a cupbearer.

A Person Who Loved God and God's Interest on Earth

Nehemiah loved God, and he loved God's interest on earth concerning His economy. This interest included the good land, the temple, and the city of Jerusalem, all of which Nehemiah loved. Even though he was a common person without a rank such as that of a king or of a captain in the army, he took care of God's interest on earth.

One Who Prayed to Contact God in Fellowship

Nehemiah was also one who always prayed to God to contact God in fellowship. When he heard that the people in Jerusalem were suffering and that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and that its gates had been burned with fire, he wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed (1:2-4). In verse 11 he prayed, saying, "I beseech You, O Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and to the prayer of Your servants, who take delight in fearing Your name; and cause Your servant to prosper today, and grant him to find compassion before this man." Here Nehemiah was praying that he would find favor with the king. When the king asked him regarding his request, Nehemiah "prayed to the God of heaven" (2:4).

A Person Who Trusted in God and Who Was One with God

Furthermore, Nehemiah was a person who trusted in God and who was one with God. Burdens were placed upon his shoulder by God, but in bearing these burdens he trusted in God. Nehemiah knew that the good hand of God was upon him (vv. 8, 18), and he asked God to remember him (5:19; 13:14, 31). This indicates that he trusted in God and was one with God.

It was not easy for God to gain such a person as Nehemiah. In rank and profession he was very low, but he loved God and God's interest, he prayed for God's interest, contacting Him in fellowship, and he trusted in God and became one

with Him. These are Nehemiah's particular characteristics in his relationship with God.

Altogether Unselfish

In his relationship with the people, Nehemiah was altogether unselfish. With him, there was no self-seeking. Even though he gained a high position as the governor of Judah—he was actually the acting king of Judah, representing the king of Persia—he never sought anything for himself. With Nehemiah there was no self-interest. He was always willing to sacrifice what he had for the people and for the nation. He was the governor, but he did not take any compensation for twelve years, because he realized that the building of the wall was a heavy burden on the people (5:14-18). He did not want to increase the burden on them. Instead of receiving compensation, he provided for the daily necessities of more than one hundred fifty men.

Nehemiah also was among those who were ready to fight against the enemy and he took part in the night watch (4:17-23). He did not leave these matters to others but participated in them himself.

Not Indulging in Lust

It is quite striking that there is no word concerning Nehemiah's marriage. I believe that, in contrast to the judges and the kings, Nehemiah had only one wife. He did not indulge in sexual lust. David and Solomon were both indulgent in this way. The indulgence in sexual lust was the main factor of the rottenness of David's family and the main factor behind the loss of the kingdom for David and his descendants. Nehemiah, however, was altogether different.

I believe that in the whole six thousand years of human history, there has never been such a one as Nehemiah. There were no complaints about Nehemiah from the people. Everyone appreciated him and was grateful for him. We may say that Nehemiah was an outstanding elder, the best example of what an elder should be. I hope that all the elders in the churches today will be like Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH GOING TO EZRA FOR HELP IN RECONSTITUTING THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

Nehemiah was a head, a ruler, of a nation, but he was altogether not ambitious. This is indicated by the fact that he recognized his need of Ezra. In reconstituting the nation, Nehemiah realized that he did not know God's Word. But Ezra, who was famous for his knowledge of the Word of God, was still alive, and Nehemiah was willing to go to Ezra for help. Many of today's leaders would not seek help in such a way. Instead, being ambitious, they would hold on to their position and not bring in an Ezra to help them. But because Nehemiah was not ambitious, he brought in Ezra. Nehemiah knew that without Ezra he could not reconstitute the people of God.

RE-EDUCATION FOR RECONSTITUTION

In order to reconstitute the people of God, there is the need to educate them with the word that comes out of the mouth of God, which expresses God. This means that to reconstitute the people of God is to educate them by putting them into the Word of God that they may be saturated with the Word.

The Israelites had been in Egypt for at least four hundred years. During those years they must have been constituted with Egyptian learning. Then they were brought to Babylon for seventy years. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were all born and raised among the Babylonians. After the people of Israel returned from Babylon, they mixed themselves with the Canaanites. Thus, the Israelites were constituted with the Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite culture. Nevertheless, they returned to be the testimony of God. But how could a people with a constitution of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Canaanite culture be God's testimony, the expression of the God-man? Such a people were not the God-men. How could they express God? In order to be the testimony of God, His expression, they needed to be re-educated in the Word of God.

THE RETURNED ISRAELITES BECOMING GOD'S TESTIMONY

In addition to being re-educated, the people of Israel needed to be raised up in much the same way as parents

raise their children. Parents not only educate their children but spontaneously and unconsciously impart themselves, nearly their whole being, into their children. Parents transfuse what they are and what they think into their children. Eventually, this constitutes their children to be the same as they are. This is what the children of Israel needed.

Before Nehemiah came back, the nation of Israel was a mess. The duties of the priests were not certain, and no one was taking care of the Levites and the serving ones. The singers were there, but no one had opened the way for them to sing and to be formed into companies. Nehemiah, with the help of Ezra, totally reconstituted the nation. Then Israel became a particular nation, a nation sanctified and separated unto God, expressing God. They were transfused with the thought of God, with the considerations of God, and with all that God is, making them God's reproduction. Everyone became God in life and in nature by this kind of divine constitution. As a result, they became a divine nation on earth expressing the divine character. They were reconstituted personally and corporately to be God's testimony. The returned captives became God's testimony through the reconstitution which took place under the leadership of Nehemiah.

The central and crucial point of the recovery books, which end with Nehemiah, is the matter of proper, adequate leadership. Whereas the record of the leadership in Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles is dark, the record in Ezra and Nehemiah is bright. In Ezra and Nehemiah three leaders are mentioned: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. They were all excellent leaders, but the best and the highest was Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the perfect leader, the best leader in human history. Only under the leadership of such persons as Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah could Israel be reconstituted to be the testimony of God, the expression of God on earth, a people absolutely different from the Gentile nations. This is a type of what God wants the church to be today.