

THE RECOVERY OF THE CHURCH

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

The Recovery of the Church as God's House and God's City as Portrayed in Ezra and Nehemiah

Scripture Reading: Ezra 7:6-10, 21, 27-28; 8:21-23; 10:1;
Neh. 1:1-11; 2:4, 10, 17-20; 3:1-6; 4:4-5, 9; 5:10, 14-19; 8:1-4, 8-9, 14

- I. The recovery of a remnant of the children of Israel from Babylon to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple and the city signifies the Lord's recovery of a remnant of the church out of today's division and confusion back to the original ground of oneness for the building up of the church as the house of God and the kingdom of God—Rev. 17:1-6; 18:2, 4a:**
 - A. God's people need to be recovered out of Babylon back to the unique ground of oneness—Deut. 12:5, 11-14; Psa. 133; Rev. 1:11.
 - B. God's people need to be recovered back to the enjoyment of the unsearchably rich Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit, typified by the good land—Eph. 3:8; Gal. 3:14; Deut. 8:7-10; Col. 1:12; 2:6-7.
 - C. In the recovery of the church we are building up the Body of Christ, the temple of God, the house of God—Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 3:9-17.
 - D. In the recovery of the church we are living the kingdom life to reign in life in the reality of God's kingdom—Rom. 14:17; 5:17; cf. Matt. 5:3, 8; 6:6, 14-15, 20-21; 7:13-14.
 - E. This fulfills God's original intention to have a corporate man to express Him in His image and to represent Him with His dominion—Gen. 1:26.
- II. The Lord raised up Ezra to strengthen and enrich His recovery—Ezra 7:6-10:**
 - A. Ezra was a priest and also a scribe, one who was skilled in the law of God; as such a person, Ezra had the capacity to meet the need—v. 21:
 1. A priest is one who is mingled with the Lord and saturated with the Lord; Ezra was this kind of person—8:21-23.
 2. Ezra was a man who trusted in God, who was one with God, who was skilled in the Word of God, and who knew God's heart, God's desire, and God's economy—7:27-28; 10:1.
 3. Ezra was one with the Lord by contacting Him continually; thus, he was not a letter-scribe but a priestly scribe—Neh. 8:1-2, 8-9.
 4. Ezra spoke nothing new; what he spoke had been spoken already by Moses—Ezra 7:6; Neh. 8:14.
 - B. In the Lord's recovery we need Ezras, priestly teachers who contact God, who are saturated with God, who are one with God and filled with God, and who are skillful in the Word of God; this is the kind of person who is qualified to be a teacher in the Lord's recovery—Matt. 13:52; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; 1 Tim. 2:7.

- C. Ezra reconstituted the people of Israel by educating them with the heavenly truths so that Israel could become God's testimony—Neh. 8:1-4, 8:
1. 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—Isa. 49:6; 60:1-3.
 2. After the return from captivity, the people were still unruly, for they had been born and raised in Babylon and had become Babylonian in their constitution:
 - a. The Babylonian element had been wrought into them and constituted into their being—Zech. 3:3-5.
 - b. After they returned to the land of their fathers to be citizens of the nation of Israel, they needed a reconstitution.
 3. There was the need of teaching and reconstitution to bring the people of God into a culture that was according to God, a culture that expressed God; this kind of culture requires a great deal of education—Neh. 8:8:
 - a. Ezra was very useful at this point, for he bore the totality of the heavenly and divine constitution and culture, and he was one through whom the people could be reconstituted with the word of God—vv. 1-2.
 - b. Ezra could help the people to know God not merely in a general way but according to what God had spoken—v. 8.
 4. In order to reconstitute the people of God, there was the need to educate them with the word that comes out of the mouth of God and that expresses God—Psa. 119:2, 9, 105, 130, 140:
 - a. To reconstitute the people of God is to educate them by putting them into the word of God so that they may be saturated with the word—Col. 3:16.
 - b. When the word of God works within us, the Spirit of God, who is God Himself, through the word spontaneously dispenses God's nature with God's element into our being; in this way we are reconstituted—2 Tim. 3:16-17.
 5. As a result of being reconstituted through the ministry of Ezra, Israel (in type) became a particular nation, a nation sanctified and separated unto God, expressing God—Isa. 49:6; 60:1-3; Zech. 4:2:
 - a. They were transfused with the thought of God, with the considerations of God, and with all that God is; this made them God's reproduction.
 - b. By this kind of divine constitution, everyone became God in life and in nature; as a result, they became a divine nation expressing the divine character—1 Pet. 2:9.
 - c. The returned captives were reconstituted personally and corporately to become God's testimony.
- D. In the Lord's recovery today, we need Ezras to do a purifying work and to constitute God's people by educating them with the divine truths so that they may be God's testimony, His corporate expression, on earth—2 Tim. 2:2, 15; 1 Tim. 3:15.

III. The crucial point in the book of Nehemiah is that the city of Jerusalem with its wall was a safeguard and protection for the house of God within the city:

- A. 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 of His kingdom go together—Matt. 16:18-19.
- B. The city of God is the enlarged, strengthened, and built-up church as the ruling center for God's reign in His kingdom; eventually, in God's economy the house of God becomes the holy city, the New Jerusalem, as God's eternal habitation and the ruling center of His eternal kingdom—Rev. 21:2-3, 22; 22:3.
- C. When we realize and enjoy Christ as our life, we have the church as the house of God; if we go further and realize His headship, the house will be enlarged to be the city, the kingdom of God—Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; Rev. 22:1.
- D. Nehemiah's aggressiveness shows us the need for the proper aggressiveness in the Lord's recovery today:
 - 1. The leaders of the Moabites and Ammonites were greatly displeased about Nehemiah's seeking the good of the children of Israel; these descendants of the impure increase of Lot hated and despised the children of Israel—Neh. 2:10, 19; cf. Ezek. 25:3, 8.
 - 2. In relation to the mocking, despising, and reproach of these opposers, Nehemiah was very pure and aggressive, not cowardly—Neh. 2:17-20; 3:1-6; cf. Acts 4:29-31; 1 Thes. 2:2; 2 Tim. 1:7-8.
 - 3. It is the aggressive ones who receive help from God; like Nehemiah, the apostle Paul was allied with God and realized God's assistance in this alliance—Acts 26:21-22.
 - 4. Nehemiah's aggressiveness, as a virtue in his human conduct, shows that our natural capacity, ability, and virtues must pass through the cross of Christ and be brought into resurrection, into the Spirit as the consummation of the Triune God, to be useful to God in the accomplishing of His economy.
 - 5. Nehemiah did not live in his natural man but in resurrection; he was a pattern of what a leader among God's people should be; he was aggressive (cf. Neh. 2:1-8), but his aggressiveness was accompanied by other characteristics:
 - a. In his relationship with God he was one who loved God and also loved God's interests on the earth, including the Holy Land (signifying Christ), the holy temple (signifying the church), and the holy city (signifying the kingdom of God)—cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-5.
 - b. As a person who loved God, Nehemiah prayed to God to contact Him in fellowship; for the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah stood on God's word and prayed according to it—Neh. 1:1-11; 2:4; 4:4-5, 9.
 - c. Nehemiah trusted in God and even became one with God; as a result, he became the representative of God—5:19; cf. 2 Cor. 5:20.
 - d. In his relationship with the people, Nehemiah was altogether unselfish, without any self-seeking or self-interest; he was always willing to sacrifice what he had for the people and for the nation—Neh. 4:18; 5:10, 14-19; 13:27-30.

- E. The great and high wall of the holy city is for our separation unto God, the protection of God's interests, and the expression of God:
1. The function of the wall of the city is to separate, to sanctify, the city unto God from all things other than God, thus making the city the holy city—Rev. 21:2a, 10b; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2 Cor. 6:14—7:1:
 - a. The wall of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, is built with jasper, and the foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every precious stone—Rev. 21:18-20:
 - 1) By our growth in the divine life in Christ as the precious stone (1 Pet. 2:4), we are transformed into precious stones (1 Cor. 3:12a).
 - 2) Precious stones indicate transformation; the more we are transformed, the more we are separated—Rom. 12:2.
 - b. While the transformation work of the Spirit is going on in the divine life, we, the transformed precious stones, are being built up together to be one complete wall with its foundations—1 Cor. 3:6-12a.
 2. The function of the wall of the city is to protect the interests of the riches of God's divinity on the earth and the attainments of Christ's consummation; we must put out the pure truth from the Word for this protection—cf. John 17:17.
 3. The function of the wall of the city is to express God; God's appearance is like jasper, and the jasper wall signifies that the whole city, as the corporate expression of God in eternity, bears the appearance of God—Rev. 4:3; 21:18.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELDERS
TO TEACH THE SAINTS WITH THE TRUTHS**

In the church life today, the main responsibility of the elders is to teach the saints with the truths. The Bible says that one of the qualifications of an elder is being apt to teach (1 Tim. 3:2). Paul tells us that certain elders may not have a job but may “labor in word and teaching” and therefore should be supported by the church (5:17-18). However, I have observed that some elders are deficient in the knowledge of the truth and may not even be clear whether a particular matter is an item of the truth.

Let me check with you about calling on the name of the Lord. Is calling on the name of the Lord a truth? No, it is not a truth. Calling on the Lord is necessary, and we need to have such a practice in our daily life, but calling on the Lord's name is not a truth. Likewise, baptism, presbytery, footwashing, and pray-reading are not truths. On the other hand, justification by faith is a truth. Regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, transfiguration, being made God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead—all these are truths.

Some elders may speak about life-practices such as calling on the Lord, pray-reading, praying without ceasing, not quenching the Spirit, and not despising prophesying, but they do not know how to teach the truths to the saints. For example, if these ones are asked about sanctification, they may be able to say only that to be sanctified is to be separated unto God. If they are asked about the difference between sanctification and renewing, they may not be able to explain the difference. Therefore, I say once again that all the elders need to know the truths and be able to teach the truths to others.

All the elders need to spend much time to learn the truths. This is the duty, the responsibility, of an elder. Anyone who accepts an appointment to the eldership must fulfill this responsibility. Like Ezra, all the elders and co-workers must be skilled in the Word of God.

A GREAT FAMINE THROUGHOUT THE EARTH

Throughout the whole earth there is a great famine of God's Word. In Christianity today, both in Catholicism and in Protestantism, there is very little teaching of the truth. In many places, instead of the truth there are superstitions and pagan practices. For instance, in all of Latin America there is very little of the truth. I believe that this is the reason why our publications, which are full of the truth, are so well received there. In Latin America the people who love God also love our publications. These publications cover the entire Bible from the first page to the last.

THE NEED FOR EZRAS TO CONSTITUTE THE PEOPLE WITH THE HEAVENLY TRUTHS

Both Brother Nee and I spent a great deal of time in learning to be skillful in the Word. Much of what we have learned has been put into print. We have almost completed the life-study of the Scriptures, and we have begun what we call the crystallization study. Today there is the need not just for Zerubbabels but for more Ezras. It would be unseemly for an elder to make decisions and expect the saints to follow them but not visit the saints with the truths. The real eldership is not to exercise authority. The real eldership is to visit the saints and to shepherd them, feed them, and take care of them by speaking to them concerning the truths. Today we need Ezras to teach the people, to educate them, and to constitute them with the heavenly truths.

TYPES OF THE RICHES OF CHRIST

I thank the Lord that, even though we are still so short in many ways, He, for His own sake, has spread His recovery, with His riches, to more than two thousand cities throughout the earth. When the Israelites went back to Jerusalem, they were stirred up, they rose up, they went up, and they brought up 5,400 vessels of gold and silver (Ezra 1:7-11). These were the vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his gods. During the first return from the captivity, all these vessels were brought back to Jerusalem. Those vessels are types of the riches of Christ. After I came to this country, I released messages on the riches of Christ, and I also wrote a hymn on the unsearchable riches of Christ (*Hymns*, #542). In Ephesians 3:8 Paul speaks not only of Christ's riches but of Christ's unsearchable riches. Today the enjoyment of the riches of Christ is by His word.

THE LORD MOVING IN HIS RECOVERY BY HIS WORD

In His recovery the Lord is moving by His word, by the truth. His word is in the Bible, but the Bible needs the proper interpretation, which is found in the life-studies. If the co-workers and the elders study all our publications, there will be many Ezras in the Lord's recovery to constitute people with the heavenly truths. (*Life-study of Ezra*, pp. 33-35)

THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE NATION OF GOD'S ELECT

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 (Neh. 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.

***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.

***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).

***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. (*Life-study of Nehemiah*, pp. 17-20)

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 (Neh. 2:1b). 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. (*Life-study of Nehemiah*, pp. 29-33)