

**Module** : Fasting**Session 6** : Apostolic-Prophetic Prayer and Fasting #2**Focus** : Principles of Fasting from Nehemiah

This study continues directly on from the previous one, in which we highlighted the necessity to PRAY God's broader kingdom-related will with fasting. We have examined four case studies in prior sessions.

### **CASE STUDY FIVE : NEHEMIAH'S FAST ACTIVATED AN APOSTOLIC REBUILDING FUNCTION**

**Neh. 1:4** When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah's personal fasting was fueled by a deep concern for the distressed and reproachful corporate state of the nation of Israel, as symbolically indicated by the reproach of the city of Jerusalem. He is a very good example of how fasting must transcend personal issues and become an expression of how we are seeking 'first' the ever-continuous coming of God's Kingdom. He also models for us how this concern was informed from his insight into God's Word, an awareness of how far Israel had gone away from God's Word and how that knowledge of God's Will released through His Word must be the foundation from which fasting with fervent prayer must be practised.

Nehemiah was instrumental in being used by God to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem. 'Rebuilding' is an apostolic function. Paul was a wise master-builder who laid the foundation of Christ by preaching principles from God's Word. Accurate fasting positions one to be a part of this apostolic grace or anointing to rebuild, repair and restore. The principal fasting chapter in the Old Covenant, Isaiah 58, contains a powerful promise to one who fasts according to God's chosen order.

**Isaiah 58:13** "Those from among you will **rebuild** the ancient ruins; You will **raise up** the age- old foundations; And you will be called the **repairer of the breach**, The **restorer of the streets** in which to dwell.

Nehemiah is an apostolic type in the Old Covenant. Apostles are foundational to the building of the church, which has Christ as its corner-stone (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:28). Together with prophets, they steward truths and mysteries revealed to them by which the church is to function (Eph. 3:5). They seek to establish Christ as the foundation of the church in its belief system and outward practise (1 Cor. 3:10-12). Where the church deviates from an accurate representation of Christ in doctrine, behaviour and function, the apostolic-prophetic dimension of ministry seeks to reform the Church, thus restoring it to God's original design for it. You might not necessarily be an apostle or prophet, but you are called to be apostolic and prophetic in your mentality and disposition as a son of God. You are called to 'do the work of the ministry'.

This will involve breaking in order to rebuild and uprooting in order to replant (Jer. 1:10). Erroneous positions which the church has adopted for generations will be corrected. Every 'ruin' will be rebuilt; timeless eternal

spiritual foundations will be raised up; every breach will be repaired; and every street restored (Is. 58:13). This apostolic-prophetic dimension will address mindsets, ideologies, worldviews, personal attitudes and behaviour, church governance/philosophy, doctrine and belief systems. It concerns a radical reformation process toward spiritual exactness and obedience within the individual son of God, and within the corporate Body of Christ (local, city and global). The issues discussed in this study could be applied on all these levels.

**Background to Nehemiah.** Read chapters one and two of the book of Nehemiah before proceeding. Bear in mind that the physical city of Jerusalem in Nehemiah's context prophetically symbolises the church, the Body of Christ in our present day (Rev. 3:12; Rev. 21:2: *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband*).

## **FACTORS TO CONSIDER**

### **1. PERSONAL CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF THE CHURCH**

He first enquired of the welfare of the Jews who had survived and escaped the captivity and then of the state of the city of Jerusalem.

**Neh 1:2-3** "... Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are **in great distress and reproach**, and the **wall of Jerusalem is broken down** and its **gates are burned with fire**."

**WALLS** were the primary means of **protection** from invasion by enemies or robbers. A broken wall made the city vulnerable to further and greater attack. Walls were physical structures of varying thickness and height; the thickness and height obviously determining the ability of the city to withstand a threat from without. In one respect walls represent biblical principles governing our lives, which act as protection against an attempt of the enemy to seek to intrude and bring destruction and ruination to the specific and unique Christian culture that sets us apart from others. The **height and thickness of the walls speak to the strength of a particular principle to which we are obedient – the extent to which it serves as a governing factor in our behaviour, attitudes and responses**.

**Walls were also points of demarcation – boundaries that determine the parameters of city life.** God has set 'lines' or boundaries by which we should live our lives, and in the absence of these, or where these are ignored, there comes a gradual but sure assimilation of a 'foreign' or alien worldly culture into our existence and sphere of operation. People at Jerusalem now began to take on the standards and the ethos of other surrounding nations as inter-marrying and cross-pollination at various levels occurred with their immediate neighbours.

Having no walls are indicative of an absence of self-control over one's spirit. Ideally, one's spirit should direct the soul which in turn determines behaviour in the body (Refer to my series on the Spiritual Man on my website). Thus absent walls allude to a culture where there is no prioritisation of the WORD, which is meant to configure and illuminate one's spirit in the first place.

**Prov. 25:28** *Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.*

A city with broken walls is vulnerable to attack by an enemy. It is insecure. The Word of God is the controlling mechanism within our spirits. The Word is the means and power by which we can exercise control over our spirits. A Wordless spirit is susceptible to indiscipline and a lack of control. The spirit of man is the controlling factor in the being of the man. It is to lead the soul into obedience. But if this spirit is defiled and is not marinated in the speaking of God's Word, it is left disempowered and weak to fulfill its God-ordained function. Thus, when there is a lack of control in the spirit, there will also be indiscipline in the soul and body.

Note in Nehemiah's day the walls were broken and the gates burned down. **Gates** imply issues of authority, governance, the ability to legislate, to transact, etc. Gates were hung on walls. In the absence of sound biblical principles by which you live and function (walls), there will be no, or a limited capacity to wield authoritative power over demonic hosts, circumstances and events.

The absence of gates and walls lead to a particular condition of the people. **Note the state of the people and the city** : "distressed and in reproach"

**'Distress'** in the Hebrew language means "straits" or "distress" in a psychological or spiritual sense. It also implies a 'narrowness' – a kind of restriction placed upon you – a kind of suffocation – a limitation placed upon movement – no options available.

**'Reproach'** implies a disgrace felt in the eyes of others.

Note the personal sense of responsibility and accountability which Nehemiah feels. In essence, his concern and prayer is expressed in: **'What can I do to bring repair and restoration to deficient aspects of the Church?'** Compare David when he said, **"What can I do to bring the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem?"** The concern of one person can make a huge difference and can have tremendous impact in the process of rebuilding Zion, the church of the Firstborn. Nehemiah proves this.

## **2. PRAYER IS THE PRIMARY FOUNDATIONAL EXPRESSION OF A REFORMER**

A first response to a perceived area of weakness in the life of the Church should be one of intense **PRAYER and FASTING**.

Nehemiah became consumed over the state of Jerusalem. **For four months he prayed**. His every thought was for Jerusalem. It became his **singular passion**. It dominated his thoughts, concerns and his prayers. The deep sadness he felt within now **manifested outwardly on his face**. Such is the extent of his concern. He now assimilated fully what was truly God's posture toward Jerusalem. The effect of his grave interest in Jerusalem's condition on his physical person testifies to the fact that it was neither fleeting nor momentary, but was to become a permanent and enduring feature until it was corrected.

**Nehemiah 1:4** When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

"I sat down"	:	Affected him physically
"I wept and mourned"	:	Affected him emotionally
"I was fasting and praying"	:	Affected him spiritually

You either have one of **two postures before the throne of God whenever you perceive error or weakness in a brother /church**, viz. **accusation or intercession**.

**Accusation**: Satan is called the accuser of the brethren in **Revelation 12:10**

**Rev.12:9, 10** And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the **accuser of our brethren** has been thrown down, **he who accuses them before our God day and night**.

Accusation embodies lies and satan is the 'father of lies'. A lie is not just outright error, but could also be a misrepresentation of truth. To accuse is not just to slander, but to make a judicial appearance and to speak publicly against. The spirit of accusation grips a brother against his brother and this is proof that the spirit of the accuser – satan – is operative.

**Intercession**: This is the posture of Christ Jesus the Son – and should be ours also in reference to our brothers and the corporate church.

**Rom. 8:31-34** What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The spirit of judgement, accusation and fault-finding is a serious hindrance to effective fasting with prayer. This is hinted at by the phrase, 'the pointing of the finger', in Isaiah 58 (the fasting chapter) as one of many reasons God does not respond to inaccurate prayerful fasting :

**Isaiah 58:9** "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, **The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness.**"

Our instinctive response to sin, weakness, error or failure of a brother/sister, minister of God, or whole group, should not be one of arrogant judgement and accusation, but one of prayerful intercessory fasting in a spirit of humility, like Nehemiah demonstrates.

The first two questions that Father God asked mankind were: **(1) Where are you? and (2) Where is your brother?** If you cannot locate yourself, you will never locate your brother. When man disconnects from God as Father, he becomes lost, losing accurate spiritual placement in reference to God. When this becomes normative, his brother becomes devalued in his eyes and in fact the murder of his brother is entertained as necessary for his own survival. We are our brother's keeper. Our brother's plight or tribulation becomes our priority when we maintain our intimacy with Father God and our oneness with our brother. Love, and not hatred, should regulate all our responses toward each other. We have no right to desire to be used by God to minister to a dysfunctional individual or church, if LOVE for them is not our driving factor. Every reformer is motivated by sincere love for people.

### 3. NOTE THE CONTENT AND FABRIC OF NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

#### Neh. 1:5-11

5 I said, "I beseech You, **O LORD God of heaven**, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,

His understanding of God: Indicates that God is superior and events of the earth are within His control; A God of infinite power and might; A covenant-keeping God.

6 let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, **day and night**, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; **I and my father's house have sinned.**

His prayer is persistent, consistent and importunate. He gave himself to prayer and fasting. His prayer is on behalf of others. He is not self-absorbed nor self-centred.

7 **We** have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.

He identifies with the sins of Israel. This indicates his perception that he is at one with the nation in both its present condition and past failure – he takes personal responsibility for the state of affairs as they exist. His personal prayer has a corporate character.

8 **Remember the word** which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples;

9 but *if* you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.'

His prayer is fueled and empowered by reference to an ancient promise made to Moses. His prayer is rooted in God's perfect will as revealed through His Word (Deut. 30:2-4). He was probably familiar with Moses pattern of intercession (Ex. 32:11; Deut. 9:29).

10 They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

What he is praying for is really for God to restore His own image and reputation through His people. His prayer is motivated by passion for God's glory and image to be restored. Nehemiah is appealing on the same basis that Moses appealed. When God wanted to destroy the Jews, Moses interceded and reminded God that He had redeemed the Jews. Therefore, how could He now destroy them (Deut. 7:8; 9:26, 29)? Nehemiah appeals to the faithfulness of God. Because they **fear** God, God must restore and **prosper** them.

11 (a) O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, ...

He is fully conscious that he is not the only one praying and burdened by this issue. This realisation gave his personal prayer great corporate power – and thus he was supernaturally aware of the fact that there were other 'servants of God' praying over the same issue. Nehemiah's private prayer had the power of corporate prayer attending it. To pray alone, but to be aware that you are not alone in praying, is powerful. Corporate prayer power of agreement can be harnessed whilst praying alone individually in secret, when there is a knowing that the thing burdening you in prayer is also the simultaneous burden of others who are also praying. This then equates to "... if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." (Matt 18:19) When you pray alone, have a corporate mindset in your prayer.

(b) .... and **make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.**" Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

He is not satisfied just to pray about the problem, but to be used by God in a practical way to remedy it. The thing that burdens you is usually the area in which God will empower you to fulfill His will in that area. Become a part of the solution of the issues that God burdens you with.

#### 4. PRAYER OPENS UP AVENUES / OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESTORATION

**Heb. 7:25** Therefore He is **able also to save** forever those who draw near to God through Him, **since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

Jesus is able to save because He lives to make intercession. You can only be of benefit in correcting a wrong situation if you are gripped by a divine compassion that is expressed in and through prayer (and prayer with fasting I might add).

When concern for the welfare of the Church becomes an issue of concern, then God makes a way to use you in the process of its restoration. A sphere of opportunity for service opened up for Nehemiah. His sadness is noticed by the King, he is asked what he really wants. OUR KING also will observe those who are truly passionate about the state of the Church and will open up a way or avenue they may use to bring restoration and healing.

#### 5. PRAYING ALWAYS WITHOUT CEASING

**Neh. 2:4,5** Then the king said to me, **“What would you request?” So I prayed** to the God of heaven. I said to the king, “If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, **send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”**

Just before hastening to utter his request before the king, Nehemiah ‘prays to the God of heaven’ (2:4). He needn’t have, but he did. This speaks **to a cautiousness in him and complete reliance upon God** – the request from the King to the rational mind demanded an instantaneous response – it even seemed like it was God’s answer to his initial prayer (and it was), but nevertheless, he still prays before he gives his answer. He already had been praying for four months, so why still pause to pray more? Somebody once said, “you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man who prays more”. At times, a pause for prayer is wise, even in the face of what seems like an obvious answer to prior prayer.

This second reference in the book of Nehemiah to him praying was probably an extremely short prayer – probably a second or two. He lived in the spirit of prayer. Like Daniel, he knew the custom of praying – he prayed always with all kinds of prayer (Eph.6:18) and knew ‘how to pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess.5:17). Thus even between the King’s request and his answer, **his mind was permanently conditioned to consult with God first**, his spirit was so in-tune that the ‘God of Heaven’ guided his answer.

It is amazing at how much the mind can process within a few seconds. We have often heard the report of people whose lives were about to be snatched from them by some threat or danger, that they say the whole panorama of their lives passed before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the winking of an eye; like a flash of electricity it was done intuitively; yet it was done powerfully, and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God. His eyes were not shut, neither did his lips move, but powerful prayer was made – so immersed was Nehemiah in the spirit of prayer. His pray was short and silent, yet it was a very intense and directed prayer. “So I prayed to the God of heaven”.

Those that desire to be used by God in the restorative process of rebuilding the walls of the Church must, of necessity, be people who live constantly in the context of perpetual and persistent prayer.

## **6. LIVING IN THE SPIRIT OF MARTYRDOM AND SELF-SACRIFICE FOR THE CORPORATE GOOD**

Nehemiah's entire life embodies the spirit of martyrdom. He lived under the possibility of constant death, in his bid to serve others or that others might receive 'life'. He describes himself as the 'king's cup bearer' – his job was to taste any drink first before the king drank in case it was poisoned.

This particular act of total service was to an earthly Persian King, and yet he did it self-sacrificially. This same spirit of commitment God now takes and redirects it toward the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem- a task that demanded the kind of total sacrificial commitment Nehemiah exemplified. God never uses the lazy and passionless. Every time He called someone in the Old Testament, they were usually always busy with something.

Nehemiah **expresses frustration with his present engagement** and responsibility toward the king **in the light of the state and need of Jerusalem**. God opened up a way for him, granting him favour in the eyes of the king. Many feel a similar frustration. There is coming a 'relief' from tasks and activities that seem to monopolise our time and energies, which we would like to use more directly for things we know we should be directly involved with – and these things have the effect of rebuilding the lives of people – of contributing towards the re-building and restoration process in the Church and broader Kingdom and society.

## **7. WORKING WITHIN THE PRESCRIBED DIVINELY DETERMINED TIME FRAMES**

**Neh. 2:6** Then the king said to me, the queen sitting beside him, "How long will your journey be, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, **and I gave him a definite time.**

Nehemiah set a specific time frame. He was convinced he could do the task within a set time. Thus every day, every activity, every hour, every minute was to be consumed by the task that God had burdened him with. The wall was completed in **52 days** according to Neh.6:15 and the nations round about '**perceived that this was a work done by God**'.

The Scripture encourages us to work the works of Him who has called us while it is yet day, for the night comes when no man can work (John 9:4). God is opening up to us a 'day' of work, within which He is going to amplify our effectiveness and effort. The 'day' in the context of John 9, refers primarily to having an accurate spiritual perception and appraisal of people and circumstances. If your 'eye' or perception is inaccurate, you are living in the night in blindness and thus you cannot do apostolic work. Functioning in the 'DAY', there must come a raised diligence and work ethic that accomplishes the task within divinely determined time frames.

## **7. THE ISSUE OF UNHINDERED PASSAGE – PROTECTION AND IMMUNITY**

**Nehemiah 2:7-8** And I said to the king, "If it please the king, let **letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the River**, that they may **allow me to pass through until I come to Judah**,

These were the governors on the west bank of the Euphrates. 'Letters' here represent governmental power granting access or privilege. They bore the king's seal indicating the full weighted-ness of his authority as though he were physically present. The first set of letters requested by Nehemiah was to allow him safe and



unhindered passage through some provinces en route to Jerusalem. Governors of these provinces represent spiritual demonic hosts. 'Provinces' are literal geographical areas over which these governors have jurisdiction. Similarly, demonic hosts have power over certain areas, either geographically or spiritually. As we seek to rebuild the walls of Zion, the Church, we will be entering into areas perhaps where the devil has legal hold or authority. We have Kingly authority to go and reclaim that which was taken and to positively construct God's house – the lives of His people. As we execute God's will of reforming, rebuilding, repairing and restoring, we will enjoy immunity and protection, even though we may have to endure much affliction at times.

## **8. THE ISSUE OF PROVISION FOR THE TASK**

**Neh. 2:8**      "...and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go. And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me"

Nehemiah requests building resources for the task he is called to and the King obliges to his request. God has made available every provision necessary for us to accomplish what He has called us to do as a Church. Again, the 'letter to the keeper of king's forest' has governmental power behind it. There is a realm of provision that we must access based upon our unique calling as a Church. Where there is divine vision, there will be supernatural provision. What heaven commissions, heaven is able to finance. This degree of provision goes beyond the realm of us simply praying "give us this day our daily bread". This is not provision for daily needs, which is important, but there is a much higher expression of the ability of God to provide, that is realised only within the context of 'rebuilding' and 'restoring' the image of God in His Church in the world today.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The entirety of all the factors highlighted above flowed out from the context of very strong prayer with fasting. I submit to you that the same could hold true for us today. Your fasting with strong prayer over issues of concern in the Church and Kingdom can pave the way for you too, to be used by God in playing a role in God's reformative and restorative programme for the earth and God's people. God will burden you; He will favour you; He will resource you; He will 'grace' you, granting resource and immunity; He will crown your sincere efforts with great success; He will raise others to support you; He, the God of Heaven, will be with you and His hand upon you.

## **Meditate on these verses:**

**Neh. 2:17,18**      Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach. I told them how the HAND OF MY GOD HAD BEEN FAVORABLE TO ME and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "LET US ARISE and BUILD." So they put their HANDS to the GOOD WORK."

**Ezra 10:4**      Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act."

**TO BE CONTINUED**



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