



Cooperative Program Bible Study Series

Cooperating For Good - Biblical Background -

NEHEMIAH 1:1-3; 2:11-18; 4:6; AND 6:15

I told them how the gracious hand of my God had been on me . . . They said, 'Let's start rebuilding,' and they were encouraged to [do] this good work. Nehemiah 2:18 HCSB

Introduction

As a child, you probably had read to you a fairy tale where, by the end of the story, everyone lived “happily ever after.” Do you ever wish you lived in the land of “happily ever after?” As Christians, someday we will; it’s called heaven. In the meantime, we live on earth in a fallen, sinful world. And because we live in a sinful world, problems exist, even problems that affect the work of God’s kingdom. However, just because problems exist does not mean we should not work to overcome them. In today’s lesson, Nehemiah was made aware of a problem within Judah, the nation of his Jewish ancestors. His brother Hanani had come to Susa, the winter capital of Persia where Nehemiah served as an official of King Artaxerxes, to tell him about the devastating condition of Jerusalem, Judah’s capital city. The wall around the city was in shambles. As such, Jerusalem was unprotected and, therefore, vulnerable to enemy attacks. Nehemiah was deeply saddened by the news, but with God’s

help sought to do something about the situation.

Often God gives us unique opportunities to help improve situations. In many ways, that’s what our giving through the Cooperative Program (CP) does. When ministries need your support and it is within your power to do something about them, what is your response? Nehemiah serves as an admirable role model for accomplishing a task that could have more easily been left undone. Because of his commitment, focus, hard work, and faith, however, a remarkable achievement occurred. When people give what they can and do their best, extraordinary things happen.

An Extraordinary Leader for an Extraordinary Task

1. A problem existed which needed attention. (Nehemiah 1:1-3)

Jerusalem was not just an ordinary city. Throughout the Scriptures its religious and political significance is

emphasized. Under David's kingship it became the capital city of the nation of Israel. Later, King Solomon directed the building project of God's temple there. In many ways Jerusalem was synonymous with God, faith, and the Jewish way of life. Now, close to a century after the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland—having been exiled in the nation of Babylon—the city remained a disgrace. Nehemiah's reaction was to "weep," "morn," "fast," and "pray" (Nehemiah 1:4). He knew that ultimately it would take God's help to rebuild Jerusalem's wall, so he prayed first and then took the initiative to oversee making the needed repairs. He even had the blessing of King Artaxerxes in doing so.

2. Nehemiah, as directed by God, had the desire and the will to do something about the problem. (Nehemiah 2:11-18)

It is possible that Nehemiah had never been to Jerusalem. Although a descendant of Jewish exiles with family currently in Judah, Nehemiah had risen to power within the Persian government: he was cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 2:1). The position of cupbearer was a position of high rank, filled only by a person the king fully trusted. His job was to serve the king wine, tasting it first to protect the king from possible poisoning. Even though Nehemiah lived in Persia, he had a burden for Jerusalem's condition, which he knew was given to him by God. Thus, he wanted to help his people. Sometimes God places a burden or concern upon our hearts, maybe even for people in other parts of the world, as a way of prompting us to

do something for them. The CP is an excellent means of helping others, both stateside and around the world.

Nehemiah was wise about how he handled the situation. He surveyed the condition of the wall for himself after three days in Jerusalem (not acting hastily), taking only a few men with him (Nehemiah 2:11-12). Only after this did he share with the "*Jews, priests, nobles, officials, [and others] who would... [do] the work*" (Nehemiah 2:16) what he had seen and how God had prompted him to rebuild the wall. His concern motivated them to the point that they, too, wanted to help remedy the problem. They were encouraged when they heard Nehemiah's testimony of "*the gracious hand of . . . God*" upon him for doing this task (Nehemiah 2:18); and they stood ready to begin the work!

What a beautiful example this is of those willing to work together to accomplish God's purpose and improve a less than ideal situation. The CP is a means whereby Southern Baptists may work together to accomplish God's purpose and improve situations. Hearing testimonies of those directly affected by CP funds gives us a broader perspective of God's work and inspires our giving. Prompted by God, motivated by needs, and encouraged by the testimony of others, we should find ourselves ready to give—be it our money, time, talents, or efforts.

3. Nehemiah directed others as they together addressed the problem to bring about a positive outcome. (Nehemiah 4:16)

Nehemiah's administrative skills motivated and encouraged others to work cooperatively as they focused on what needed to be done in repairing the city wall. There were those who sought to distract them from the task, to be sure (Nehemiah 4:1-3). Often things that are worth doing will meet with opposition. Satan likes nothing better than to distract us from doing what honors God. Because of the distraction, only half of Nehemiah's men were able to work on the project, while the other half kept guard with their "*spears, shields, bows, and armor*" against their enemies.

Unfortunately, that is sometimes how it is in the church. Because of opposition, the energies and efforts that could have been put into God's work must be directed toward dealing with situations or people that seek to distract us from doing God's will. Even so, Nehemiah and his men did not let this discourage them. Nehemiah's capable leadership, God's clear direction, and the commitment to hard work on the part of the Jews resulted in nothing less than a successful end. Nehemiah, despite opposition, accomplished what he set out to do.

4. The project was accomplished in an extraordinary manner. (Nehemiah 6:15)

Remarkably, because of the cooperative efforts of those who sought to help Jerusalem, the wall around the city was rebuilt within an impressive fifty-two days. The wall, which had been a wreck for nearly a century and a half, was rebuilt in less than two months. Nehemiah and his men could have responded to the

condition of the ruined wall by saying something like, "Why bother; Jerusalem's wall has been this way for a long time? No one else is doing anything about it. What good will it accomplish? Besides, some people may get upset if we try to repair it. There are more important things to do. I'm too busy." However, they rose to the challenge before them as they persisted in a cause worthy of their efforts. What's more, when those who sought to discourage them heard about their success, they "*were intimidated*" and "*realized that this task had been accomplished by . . . God*" (6:16). Even their enemies recognized this was something extraordinary, resulting from the power of God.

Conclusion

When God's people focus on His plan and cooperate together to fulfill it, extraordinary things can and do happen. This lesson emphasizes what is possible when people are willing to give to God. Because Nehemiah was willing to give, a nation was strengthened. You may not be asked to oversee a project or exert hard labor, but your prayerful and monetary support can help strengthen God's work and provide solutions for many problems. When you give to the CP, you say "yes" to more missionaries, "yes" to equipped, godly leaders, and "yes" to more baptisms. Are you concerned enough over situations that you are willing to give to the CP when you know there are things your money will help improve? If so, don't be surprised when God works the impossible!