

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK

Timeless Lessons on Leadership

STUDY ONE

The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Nehemiah had a burden on his heart. When he heard about the broken walls in Jerusalem, God tapped him on the shoulder. So he prayed for guidance. In fact, all the way through this book, you find Nehemiah on his knees in prayer.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

OUR world needs leaders . . . *good* leaders. Perhaps now more than ever. And God wants *you* to be one of those leaders.

It's true! You may not earn your living as a manager, a director, or an executive, but you still influence others—from your family to your friends, from your coworkers to your church. And whether you realize it or not, you have the power to help or hinder these people in the journey of life. In other words, *you're a leader!*

So what does it look like to be a good leader? One whose Christlike example impacts others for their good and for God's glory?

Thinkers across the world have spilled gallons of ink attempting to articulate the difference between good and bad leadership. Yet human knowledge always appears dim compared to God's wisdom. God's Word addresses leadership! A prime example is found in cupbearer turned wall-builder turned governor . . . a man named Nehemiah.



insight.org | insightworld.org



INSIGHT FOR LIVING
MINISTRIES

Copyright © 1974, 2023 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide.
Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.
Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

S01
1

The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

See how Pastor Chuck Swindoll describes the book about this intriguing individual:

That's the purpose of this ancient book: to equip you, to build you into the kind of leader God desires—a true leader. If you allow yourself to get caught up in the story, you will find something wonderful begin to happen. As you watch the plot develop, as you see Nehemiah's character and his project built, shaped, and tested, you will find something in your hand that wasn't there before: a brick, something with which to begin building your own character.¹

This *Searching the Scriptures* study kick-starts a deep dive into the subject of *good* leadership through the book of Nehemiah. Reliable principles and practical tips arise in every chapter. Take these lessons to heart. God is building you into the Christlike leader the world desperately needs.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Righteous character stands on the foundation of prayer. Use these next few moments to open your heart to God. Ask Him to use this study in surprising ways in your life.

Father, I acknowledge that I can only have a positive influence on others insofar as I willingly submit myself to Your lordship. As I study the life of Nehemiah, use the example of his leadership to build me into a more faithful follower of Jesus Christ. It's in His name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Every *successful* leader—no matter how big or small the following—adheres to the same principles. And these principles are evident in the life of Nehemiah as he rebuilt Jerusalem's walls and later served as the city's governor. Get a bird's-eye view of Nehemiah's leadership journey in Pastor Chuck's book chart on the following page. You can also peruse his introductory article [online](#).



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah



INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES
The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll



NEHEMIAH
OVERVIEW BIBLE CHART

	CUP-BEARER TO THE KING	BUILDER OF THE WALL	GOVERNOR OF THE PEOPLE	
	Nehemiah 1:1–2:10	Nehemiah 2:11–6:19	Nehemiah 7:1–13:31	
	Prayer Nehemiah's prayer and request	"The wall was finished—just fifty-two days after we had begun." (Neh. 6:15)	Scripture read and explained (Neh. 8:3–8)	Lives changed (Neh. 8:1–3, 9; 10:28–31) Nation confronted and cleansed (Neh. 13:10–31) Prayer
LOCATION	Susa in Persia	Jerusalem in Judah		
FOCUS	Leadership of a man		Revival of a nation	
SUBJECT	Burden	Project	Scriptures	Reforms
OBSTACLES	King	Enemies	Tradition	Compromise
VICTORIES	Release	Accomplishment	Obedience	Changes
THEME	Nehemiah's trust in the covenant-keeping God			
KEY VERSES	Nehemiah 6:15–16; 8:8–10; 9:1–38			
CHRIST IN NEHEMIAH	Suggested in Nehemiah, who leaves an exalted position to identify with the plight of his people and lead them into restoration; pictured in Nehemiah's prayerful dependence on God			

Copyright © 1979, 1996, 2009 by Charles R. Swindoll Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.
 Chart taken from *The Swindoll Study Bible*. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah



Observation: Nehemiah's Place in Israel's Story

Nehemiah comes onto the biblical scene late in the story of Israel. A lot happened in those centuries that helps us understand Nehemiah, so let's begin with a review.

Israel's Establishment

God set apart the nation of Israel for one purpose: *to bless the whole world*. As a “kingdom of priests,” Israel was meant to be a beacon whose light would draw the rest of the world into a blessed relationship with the Creator (*Exodus 19:6*). To do so, Israel had to faithfully keep God's covenant by obeying His law (*19:5*).

God didn't want to abandon His people for unfaithfulness. But acting as father, king, and judge, God laid out the blessings of obedience and the warnings of disobedience. According to *Deuteronomy 28:15*, what discipline awaited the Israelites if they turned from God?

The following verses foreshadow what Israel would face hundreds of years into the future. In your own words, summarize the specific consequences for disobedience listed in *28:25, 36–37*.



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Israel's Downfall

Sadly, as time passed, these frightful warnings faded to a whisper in the eyes of the Israelites. So they pursued the self-indulgent desires of their own sinful hearts. God gave His people chance after chance to turn back. But their hearts grew ever harder. So God kept His word. In [2 Chronicles 36:17–20](#), we read of the climax of God's firm discipline.

According to [2 Chronicles 36:17–19](#), whom did God send against Jerusalem? What did they do to the people and the city?

This scene was brutal—certainly one of the lowest points in Israel's history. Yet God couldn't abandon His people, so He allowed a remnant of Israelites to survive. According to [36:20](#), what happened to these survivors?

Through this remnant, God would “give rest to the people of Israel” ([Jeremiah 31:2](#)). They would need to wait for a long time, but God promised, “I will rebuild you” ([31:4](#)).



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Israel's Restoration

The book of Nehemiah is the sequel to the book of Ezra, and Ezra picks up where [2 Chronicles 36:20](#) left off: when “the kingdom of Persia came to power.” After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Israelites found a new source of optimism. The Persians had conquered the wicked Babylonians. And the Israelites’ new ruler, King Cyrus of Persia, was far more sympathetic to the exiles.

According to [Ezra 1:2–4](#), what proclamation did Cyrus make?

Cyrus allowed Zerubbabel to lead a company of Israelites back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. A few years later, King Artaxerxes, Cyrus’ successor to the Persian throne, followed suit and allowed Ezra to lead a second group back to Jerusalem. While Zerubbabel reconstructed the *house* of the Lord, Ezra taught the law and recommitted the people to the *way* of the Lord.

You see, these people had been in captivity. They had known spiritual desolation. And for the first time they saw their city showing signs of beginning anew. And what an emotional moment it must have been when Ezra said, “Let’s all stand and hear the Word of God.”

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Finally, Artaxerxes allowed Nehemiah to lead a third company back to Jerusalem. According to [Nehemiah 1:3](#), what report did Nehemiah receive? According to [1:4](#), how did he respond to this news?



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

So began Nehemiah's leadership journey. He led not by standing strong and tall but by humbly getting *on his knees*, weeping and pleading with God to guide him as he led others in the journey to restore Jerusalem's walls to their former glory.



Interpretation: True Walls of Protection

Though the book of Nehemiah provides us with a bounty of practical leadership lessons, this account is far more than a handbook of tactics and techniques in how to lead people. Instead, Nehemiah teaches that good leadership flows from a close and consistent relationship with God.

Why was Nehemiah's heart so grieved to hear the news about Jerusalem's walls? What do walls provide for a city?

Nehemiah certainly cared deeply about the safety of his people's lives, property, and land. But he had deeper concerns. Specifically, he was worried about the Israelites' hearts. Read Nehemiah's lament in *Nehemiah 1:5–8*. How do these words reflect God's warnings from *Deuteronomy 28:25, 36–37*?



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Nehemiah knew his Bible. He knew that Israel went into exile because of its unfaithfulness to God. And he knew that God was giving His people another chance. If Israel was to avoid facing the consequence of exile again, what would it need to do? To carry the thought further, what was Israel's *true* source of protection?

Physical walls provide great security, but they still can fall. That's why Nehemiah was interested in far more than building up Jerusalem. He wanted to build up the people too. He knew God will never be defeated. And neither will His people—so long as we commit our lives to Him and to His ways. Doing so will build up strong spiritual walls that will endure for eternity.

Application: Building Spiritual Walls

Jerusalem's walls fell because the people turned from God. So Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls *and* to recommit the people to God. Based on Nehemiah's example, Pastor Chuck has set up a four-phase building plan for any leader who wants to improve the condition of his or her spiritual walls:

- *Phase 1:* Maintain genuine concern for the condition of your walls.
- *Phase 2:* Recognize that you can't repair the walls on your own.
- *Phase 3:* Go directly to God in prayer for guidance and correction.
- *Phase 4:* Face the situation honestly. Determine to stay with the task until it is complete.



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah

Take a moment to survey your spiritual walls. How are they looking? What aspects of your walk with God are standing strong? What elements of your character require some reconstruction? In the space below, write an honest prayer, and commit yourself to working with God to build your life into one that looks like Christ's. This firm foundation in Christ will equip you to lead others well.

Now think about those whom God placed in your circle of influence. Write their names below, and as you do, brainstorm some ways you can pray for them and how you can impact their lives for good.

The old axiom is true: good leaders are made, not born. The process is long and often painful, but if you let Him, God will build you into the leader He wants you to be. Brick by brick, He will form Christlike qualities in you that will make you a faithful, effective, and inspiring leader.



The Matter at Hand

Survey of Nehemiah



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for preserving this account of Nehemiah's life in Your Word. As I study his life, build me into the leader You want me to be by cultivating Christlike qualities within me. You have the blueprints, and I trust Your plan for my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Hand Me Another Brick: Timeless Lessons on Leadership* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 4.

