

HAND ME ANOTHER BRICK: TIMELESS LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP

The Matter at Hand
Survey of Nehemiah



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In his roles as cupbearer, builder, and governor, Nehemiah exemplified the qualities of a wise, godly leader. Regardless the extent of our own realms of leadership or the skills and experiences we bring to the table, we can learn from Nehemiah's example as we examine our own character and God-given place in life. Like the bricks and mortar of a solid, ancient city wall, the bricks of excellent leadership must be placed on a foundation of God's Word and godly character with the mortar of faith and fortitude.



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1. Historical Setting of Nehemiah (2 Chronicles 36:18–23)

In order to fully appreciate Nehemiah's leadership, we need to understand the historical situation during which God called him to his task.

All Jewish history flows down from Abraham, whom God promised to make into a great nation which would bless the world from their own land (Genesis 12:1–3). During Solomon's reign, his moral compromises became so great that God finally judged him (1 Kings 11:11–12). In 931 BC, the ten northern tribes revolted and formed their own nation, Israel. The two remaining tribes in the south bore the name of Judah. The corrupt leadership of the northern kingdom embraced pagan idolatry for the next two centuries, and in 722 BC God removed this corrupt branch of Abraham's offspring, using the Assyrians as His tool of judgment.

In the south, Judah had a number of wise, godly leaders who launched several revivals among the people, rebuilding the crumbling leadership of predecessors and returning the people to the Lord and His Law. However, the kings of Judah eventually turned away from the Lord, and from 606 to 586 BC, God used the Babylonians to discipline His people. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple and the city walls (2 Chronicles 36:17–20).

After an appointed time of seventy years, God shifted the balance of world power from the Babylonians to the Persians and Medes. He then prompted King Cyrus, and later Artaxerxes, to allow the Jews to return home and to pick up the pieces of their ravaged lives and land (2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 7:11–13). The first band of returnees, led by Zerubbabel in 536 BC,



Quotable

*Leaders,
are you building
with the twigs
of worldly
strategies or the
solid rock of
God's Word?*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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focused on rebuilding the temple. The second band, led by Ezra in 457 BC, focused on rebuilding the spiritual lives of the people. Finally, in 444 BC, Nehemiah returned to rebuild the walls needed to protect the remnant of Israel from the outside forces bent on destroying them.

2. Nehemiah the Man (Survey of Nehemiah)

Nehemiah's leadership revealed itself in three successive roles he played: cupbearer, builder, and governor. Each position adds an important element of perspective on his leadership qualities and reveals that solid, godly principles of leadership are applicable regardless of one's position.

First, Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia (Nehemiah 1:11). This high office placed Nehemiah in an unparalleled position of continual and personal access to the king. During this time of service, Nehemiah received devastating news concerning Jerusalem's broken walls (1:1–3). Instead of taking advantage of his place in the presence of the king, however, Nehemiah took his heartfelt petition for the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the King of Kings in prayer (1:4–11).

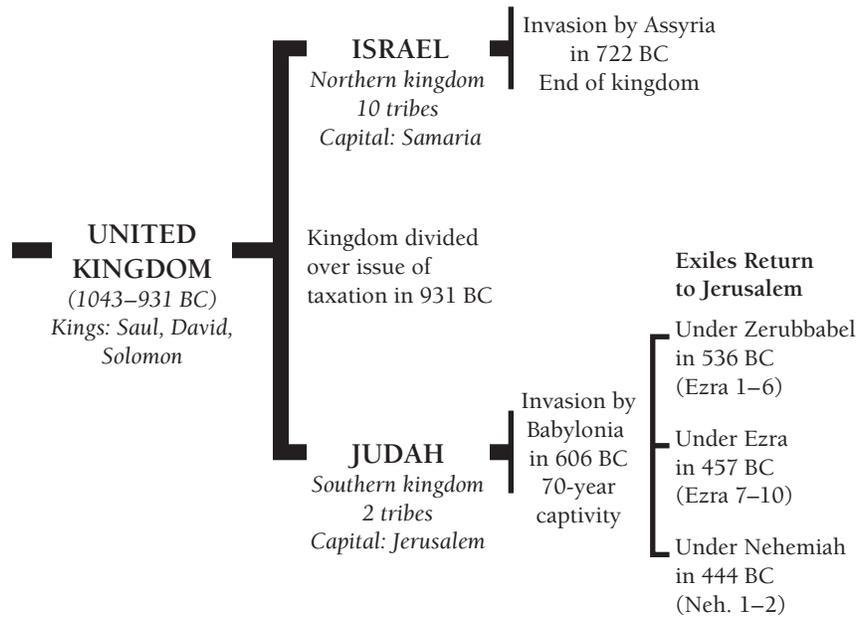
Second, Nehemiah served as a builder. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, he set to work. He inspected the broken-down wall, formed a strategy for reconstruction (2:11–15), and presented his plans to the people (2:17–18). Chapters 3 through 5 describe the work they carried out in spite of great odds, obstacles, and enemies. But eventually the people's prayers, planning, and perseverance resulted in a strong defensive wall.

Third, Nehemiah laid his hard hat aside and took up the keys to the city as its governor (5:14). As his first official task, Nehemiah commissioned spiritual men to occupy places of authority in the city (7:1–2). He also reestablished the practicing of God's laws and purified the people from harmful foreign influences (13:30).



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

The Cupbearer

In ancient royal palaces, the cupbearer was far more than just a robed servant, butler, or slave. He was entrusted with the responsibility of tasting the king's food and drink to make sure it was not poisoned. In such an important, self-sacrificing role, the cupbearer often enjoyed great trust and confidence in the Near Eastern royal courts. One writer notes that the cupbearer "in ancient oriental courts was always a person of rank and importance. From the confidential nature of his duties and his frequent access to the royal presence, he possessed great influence."¹



LET'S LIVE IT

If your personal walls of spiritual discipline are in need of repair, take a moment now to apply some of the principles Nehemiah's life offers.

1. **Concern for Character.** *Develop a genuine concern for the condition of the walls.* The work to restore the walls of Jerusalem didn't start when the people began laying bricks. It began as a burden in one man's heart. Like Nehemiah, we must have a genuine concern for the condition of the walls in our own lives.



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2. **Foundation of Prayer.** *Express direct prayer for guidance and protection.* Before he ever began to rebuild the wall, Nehemiah started working on it from eight hundred miles away—in prayer before the Lord. For many of us, prayer is too often an afterthought. Get in the habit of acting on your burdens only after you have given them a firm foundation of prayer.

3. **Spirit of Determination.** *Face the situation honestly and with determination until the task is finished.* When Nehemiah met with the people of Jerusalem, he didn't attempt to gloss over the true condition of the walls. Likewise, without an honest appraisal of our own spiritual condition, we will always run out of determination and motivation before the gaps are filled.

4. **Attitude of Humility.** *Recognize that we cannot correct the condition by ourselves.* Our natural tendency is to retreat alone into a spiritual wilderness. But only when we are willing to live in dependence upon God and in humility toward others will we have the power to erect the spiritual fortification we need for protection and for fulfilling the roles of leadership God has given to us.

If an enemy were to attack your spiritual walls, which of these four principles would show the most weakness and neglect? Why?

ENDNOTE

1. "Cupbearer," in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, rev. and updated ed., ed. Merrill F. Unger (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 267.



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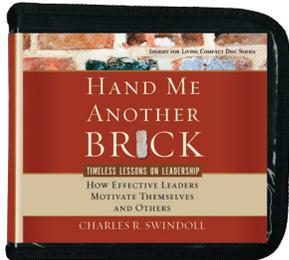
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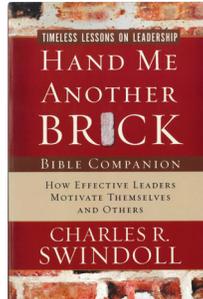
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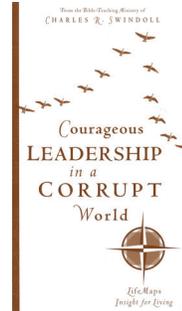
Tools for Digging Deeper



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