

Broken & Building

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Nehemiah

This inductive Bible study is designed for individual, small group, or classroom use. A leader's guide with full lesson plans and the answers to the Bible study questions is available from Regular Baptist Press. Order RBP0066 online at www.regularbaptistpress.org, e-mail orders@rbpstore.org, call toll-free 1-800-727-4440, or contact your distributor.

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The Doctrinal Basis of Our Curriculum

A more detailed statement with references is available upon request.

- The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures
- Only one true God
- The Trinity of the Godhead
- The Holy Spirit and His ministry
- The personality of Satan
- The Genesis account of creation
- Original sin and the fall of man
- The virgin birth of Christ
- Salvation through faith in the shed blood of Christ
- The bodily resurrection and priesthood of Christ
- Grace and the new birth
- Justification by faith
- Sanctification of the believer
- The security of the believer
- The church
- The ordinances of the local church: baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper
- Biblical separation—ecclesiastical and personal
- Obedience to civil government
- The place of Israel
- The pretribulation rapture of the church
- The premillennial return of Christ
- The millennial reign of Christ
- Eternal glory in Heaven for the righteous
- Eternal torment in Hell for the wicked

BROKEN AND BUILDING: BECOMING A SPIRITUAL LEADER, NEHEMIAH

Adult Bible Study Book

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Preface

What does it take to become a spiritual leader? Is there a course we can take? Is there a degree we can get? Are there certain requirements we need to meet? A checklist to check off?

Nehemiah teaches us that leadership begins not with a course or a degree but with brokenness. He humbly recognized that he fell short of God's standard for His people and confessed his sin to God. That humble act opened the way for Nehemiah to become God's leader in post-exilic Jerusalem.

The book of Nehemiah records God's process of rebuilding the wall and city of Jerusalem through Nehemiah, a rebuilt spiritual leader. Nehemiah's leadership of the Jews through years of struggle and triumph provides an excellent example for us to follow, beginning with his brokenness.

God doesn't want us to offer ourselves to Him as a polished, self-prepared person He could use to do great things. He wants us first of all to come to Him in humility with an honest understanding of who we are and an honest dependence on Him. God is not interested in self-made leaders. He is interested in broken servants ready to be built by Him. God uses the leaders *He* builds as the builders in His work.

All adults are spiritual leaders to some degree by virtue of being an adult. Children, young people, and new believers all look to established believers for leadership. You influence people whether you realize it or not. This study is important for everyone.

Let God use the book of Nehemiah to build you into a godly leader and prepare you for the leadership roles He has for you.

Lesson 1

A Broken Leader

*A spiritual leader shows concern for people
and God's name.*

Nehemiah 1:1–3

**"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee,
when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the
rock that is higher than I" (Psalm 61:2).**

Someone once said the best way to know if you are a leader is to look behind you. If no one is following you, then you are not a leader. In reality, we all have people who look to us as leaders. And they are following us no matter how we live our lives. So where we are leading those who are following is the question we should consider. If we care for those who follow us, then we will be careful how we live.

Getting Started

1. Are all adults spiritual leaders? Explain.
2. In what sense are you a spiritual leader?

Every adult believer is a leader to someone. Children look to them as examples as do believers who are less spiritually mature. The tasks God gives us as believers will vary greatly, but He still expects us to conduct our leadership responsibilities with godly care for those we lead.

Searching the Scriptures

This study begins with a focus on the backdrop to the story in Nehemiah 1:1–3, where we find Nehemiah, a faithful Jew, serving in the court of the king, Artaxerxes, in the Medo-Persian Empire.

The Babylonian/Medo-Persian captivity had originally come upon Judah as a chastisement from God due in part to her violation of the law of the seventh-year Sabbath. God warned that there would be one year of captivity for every year of failure to institute this law.

The Babylonian captivity of Judah was originally presided over by Nebuchadnezzar, who succeeded his father as king of Babylon in 605 BC. When Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, it appears the Jews submitted to him without a battle (2 Chron. 36:6, 7). Thus began the first of three waves of captivity and destruction which Babylon brought upon Judah as her 70-year Babylonian captivity commenced.

Those taken captive in 605 BC included Daniel and his three friends (Dan. 1). Those taken captive in 597 BC included Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:14–16). The final round of captivity in 586 BC affected Jeremiah who was forced to go to Egypt. The city of Jerusalem and the temple were also destroyed in the third wave of captivity (2 Kings 25:1–21).

Daniel 5 tells the story of the fall of Babylon to the Medes and Persians on Oct. 12, 539 BC. The Medo-Persian Empire then had control of the captive Jewish people. Truly God is in sovereign control of the nations.

Nehemiah's Family and Place in History

Just as there had been three waves of captivity, so there would be three waves of return. Zerubbabel led the first wave of roughly 50,000 back in 538 BC, upon the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–4).

The group that returned with Zerubbabel was significant primarily for its ultimate rebuilding of the temple in 516 BC, as prompted by the

preaching of Haggai and Zechariah.

Ezra led a much smaller group, 7,000 to 8,000, to return back in 458 BC (Ezra 7:1–10). Despite its size, this group was significant for the spiritual revival that Ezra spurred among the people.

Nehemiah himself led the third wave back from captivity in 445 BC (Neh. 2). While the Bible does not record a great number of Jews returning with Nehemiah, his efforts were most significant for what he accomplished upon his return in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall.

Scripture tells us nothing about the man Nehemiah apart from the information given in the book of Nehemiah. Surprisingly, there are no direct references to this great leader in the New Testament.

It must have been difficult for Nehemiah's parents to raise their family in a strange land. Judging by the name they gave him—"the comfort of Jehovah"—and the character traits they instilled in him, it seems evident that they were a godly couple. We know nothing of them except the testimony of their son.

3. Why would the name "Jehovah comforts" be a reminder of the need to show concern for others?

History can rightly be called "His story." God is in control of times, events, and people. Although it seems strange that a Jew served in the court of a Persian king, it was by no means an accident. God had Nehemiah right where He wanted him.

By reporting in Nehemiah 1:1 that Nehemiah lived in the Persian king's winter palace ("Shushan" or "Susa") during the winter months (Chislew: November/December of 446 BC), the author was implying that Nehemiah held a vitally important position in the land of Persia, as he was always needed in close proximity to the king. As the Lord had used Daniel in the preceding century, so He again had a man in a place of authority that He would use for the blessing of His people.

4. Knowing that God controlled key people and events in Bible history, can you safely say that He controls key people and events in your life today? Explain.

5. Why is a belief that God is sovereign such a key conviction for a spiritual leader?

6. Share an example of God's obvious working in your life.

The Setting

Like Daniel before him, Nehemiah was fixated on Jerusalem and, more specifically, its long-destroyed temple. In verse 2 he showed concern for Jerusalem even though he had never yet physically visited the city. In God's plan, he would be privileged to lead the third return back to Judah's capital in just a few months.

The issues referred to in verse 2 came at the culmination of 92 years worth of activity since Zerubbabel first led a return of captives back to Jerusalem. Many events occurred during this century (as seen from the books of Ezra and Esther) that demonstrated the Lord's use of several of the Persian kings in accomplishing His plan for Judah's return and restoration. Just as the Lord used Babylon as an instrument of chastisement, He would use Persia as an instrument of deliverance.

Judah and Jerusalem after Captivity

Some commentators believe that Hanani came from Jerusalem on business unrelated to Jerusalem's condition (1:2). The text does not explain the timing or nature of his trip, so we do not know with certainty how he got to Jerusalem or why he came back to see Nehemiah. We

can say that this episode shows how Judah's population suffered tragic family separations through this time, and we do know that the condition of Jerusalem was foremost on both of their minds.

Nehemiah expressed his concern for the Holy City, Jerusalem, and for its residents. His pointed questions evidence his character (1:2). He especially showed the qualities of genuine interest and concern for others—all motivated by his zeal for the glory of God to be displayed through His people. Nehemiah could have been proudly content with his noble position in Persia and disinterested in Jerusalem and the needs of those less fortunate. This was not in his character, however.

7. Put yourself in Nehemiah's place. What thoughts and feelings might you have upon learning about the plight of your fellow Jews in Jerusalem while you lived in comfort in Persia?

8. What might happen to the ministry of a spiritual leader who does not have the qualities of genuine interest and concern for others?

9. Why are those qualities important for a leader as he faces difficult circumstances?

An Afflicted People

Nehemiah's direct questions received direct answers. Hanani wasted no time in pouring out his heart to his brother. He evidently trusted Nehemiah and felt he could be transparent with him.

Hanani did not merely say the Jews back home were afflicted, he reported that they were "in great affliction" (1:3). Nehemiah's kindred wrestled against discouragement and danger. Their enemies hassled

them relentlessly with political and military pressure, and their enemies had destroyed their efforts to rebuild Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Jews often strayed from the high and holy purposes God had established for them, causing themselves further pain.

A Reproached Province

Hanani reported also that the Jews in their homeland were in “reproach,” which communicates disgrace (1:3). To be sure, the province of Judah knew the agony of shame by virtue of her own apathy and neglect, but since the Jews boasted of a glorious and faithful God, the Lord’s own name suffered reproach. Hanani’s comments bring to mind the fact that God’s people constantly found it difficult to get their spiritual “act” together. In fact, were it not for the fiery preaching of Haggai (cf. Hag. 1:2–5), they wouldn’t have rebuilt the temple by this time.

10. Read Haggai 1:3–15. Summarize Haggai’s message to the remnant of Jews living in the land.

11. What was the result of his message?

12. Why is a desire to glorify God such a necessary quality in a spiritual leader?

13. How does that desire help the spiritual leader successfully face seemingly insurmountable circumstances?

A Broken-down Wall

The message of Hanani had a life-altering effect on Nehemiah. Obviously, this was a very pointed and powerful report that he gave him.

Was Hanani merely rehearsing in verse 3 the story of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon 142 years earlier in 586 BC? Obviously not, as Nehemiah would have learned this aspect of Biblical history from childhood. The retelling of it—even with an emphasis on the fact that the walls were still unrepaired—would not have forced Nehemiah into action in the way that he responded here.

What, then, was Hanani referring to? The key is found in a rather difficult section of the book of Ezra (4:6–23). Here Ezra is writing about the situation that occurred about 90 years before his own time during Zerubbabel's leadership, when the people of God were attempting to rebuild the temple for the first time (536 BC).

In the midst of his writing, he draws a parallel to something that happened in his time (which is covered in Ezra 7–10). Thus, the situation he describes in Ezra 4:6–23 is inserted without its historical context to explain the type of opposition that the Jews had faced earlier, in the days of Zerubbabel. When understood correctly, however, Ezra 4:6–23 gives tremendous insight into what the Jews were facing probably just a few months before the unfolding of Nehemiah 1.

In our best attempt to reconstruct the situation, we may infer the following: The people of Judah, influenced by the revivalistic fervor of Ezra's ministry, had used funds sent by King Artaxerxes with Ezra (Ezra 7:17, 18) to begin rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, even though the Jews had no legal authority to do so. When their enemies, the Samaritans, came to realize this, they wrote a letter to the king Artaxerxes, warning him that a rebuilt city would doubtless be a threat to his power (Ezra 4:12–16).

Artaxerxes sent a letter in reply, forcing the Jews to stop rebuilding until he issued any additional directions (Ezra 4:21). The enemies of the Jews, however, went beyond the intentions of the king's letter and mounted an attack upon the Jews, completely destroying the newly rebuilt walls (Ezra 4:23). The loss likely drained the Jewish settlers of all hope and robbed them of a significant portion of their resources.

It was news of such a devastation as this that moved Nehemiah to tears and prayer for his nation. He certainly encountered “troubled times,” as Daniel 9:25 predicted. God’s temple and people were left seemingly defenseless.

14. What did the broken walls remind the Jews of?

15. In what way were they a symbol of what needed to happen to Jerusalem’s leaders and people? What “walls” in their lives needed to be broken down in order for the rebuilding of the physical walls to begin?

Fire-ravaged Gates

Six major city gates needed to be repaired (Neh. 1:3). As long as this sad condition persisted, the city would remain completely vulnerable to the enemy.

Nehemiah’s glowing leadership strengths would develop in the furnace of testing. His concern for God’s people was just the beginning of his leadership journey.

We shall begin to see in the next study what types of drastic action he took, and how he put his personal position and comfort at risk for the sake of serving God by leading his people.

Making It Personal

16. Name some people who look to you as spiritual leaders.

17. What do your efforts as a spiritual leader say about the level of concern you have for those who look to you for leadership?

18. How do your efforts as a spiritual leader reflect on God's name? Do your actions glorify God? In what ways?

19. What are some ways you could increase your concern for those you are responsible for leading?

20. Whom will you be more faithful in leading?

21. Memorize Psalm 61:2.