ERIC GEIGER

FOREWORD BY JOHN C. MAXWELL

Seven Rhythms
of Leaders
Who Bear Fruit
That Lasts

THE ROOTED LEADER



AFTERWORD BY CRAIG GROESCHEL

This is the leadership book we need right now. In *The Rooted Leader*, Eric masterfully unpacks the essential qualities every leader needs to navigate the complexities of leading in our chaotic, turbulent, and volatile times. If leaders focus on strengthening our root system, we will produce the fruit we earnestly desire and finish well. We desperately need leaders full of strength, courage, compassion, wisdom, conviction, integrity, and character. It's time to unleash a generation of Nehemiahs.

CHRISTINE CAINE, Founder of A21 and Propel Women

The Rooted Leader is like sitting down with a wise pastor and a battle-tested coach at the same time. Eric Geiger doesn't just talk about leadership skill; he shows you how to sink your roots deep into Jesus so when the storms hit you won't be toppled. Drawing from Nehemiah's story and seven gospel-shaped rhythms, this book will both comfort you and confront you in the best possible way. If you're tired of leaders who look impressive on the outside but are crumbling on the inside, read this book slowly, with your Bible open, and let the Spirit of God do His work in you. The people you lead will thank you.

JOBY MARTIN, Lead Pastor, The Church of Eleven22, and *New York Times* Bestselling Author

The Rooted Leader challenges commonly accepted cultural views of leadership by affirming that a leader's true greatness stems from a deeply held conviction to serve others over self-interest. Teaching from the biblical example of Nehemiah, Eric Geiger demonstrates that servant leadership is not soft or weak but instead is uniquely characterized by courage and humility. And those traits will yield much fruit.

CHERYL BACHELDER, Retired CEO, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Inc., and Author of *Dare to Serve: How to Drive Superior Results by Serving Others*

I have had the fortune to be around some of the most quality leaders our country has to offer, and Eric Geiger stands among the best of the best. His biblical knowledge and conviction shape the way he has fearlessly led our church. *The Rooted Leader* is a perfect example of this as Eric has taken the story of Nehemiah and delivered an incredible road map to biblical

leadership that is sure to impact everyone who reads it. This book is a must for those of us who desire to have a more positive and biblical influence in their lives as it not only teaches *what* the fruits of leadership are but more importantly *how* to go about developing those fruits. This book is a must for anyone who wants to have a more positive and sustainable impact on their surroundings.

JOEL KLATT, FOX Sports Lead College Football Analyst

What makes this book different is it's not theory. It's who Eric is and how he leads. And it's why he's leading one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic churches in the country. If you want to grow as a leader—really grow—read this book slowly. Let it challenge you, convict you, and deepen your roots. Your family, your church, and everyone you influence will be better for it.

ASHLEY WOOLDRIDGE, Senior Pastor, Christ's Church of the Valley

Eric Geiger gets it. He understands that leadership isn't about polish, position, or platform—it's about roots: deep, spiritual roots that hold firm when the inevitable storms hit. In *The Rooted Leader*, Eric takes us on a powerful journey through Nehemiah's life, showing us what healthy, lasting leadership truly looks like. I've known Eric for years, and I can tell you this book isn't theory—it's how he actually leads. He's the real deal: wise, biblical, and refreshingly honest. If you're tired of leadership books that promise hacks and shortcuts, this one will remind you of the only path that truly lasts—leading from the roots up. Every pastor, business leader, and Christ-follower who wants to finish well needs this book.

THOM S. RAINER, Founder and CEO, Church Answers

Toppling leaders is one of the great themes of our time, and Eric Geiger shows both why it happens and how to prevent it. Every leader wants to finish well, but few are given a road map for actually getting there. *The Rooted Leader* gives you the root system you need to stand strong in every season. If you want to finish well, start here. This book is a gift.

CAREY NIEUWHOF, Bestselling Author, Podcaster, and Speaker

If I could recommend just one leadership book to Christian leaders this year, this would be it. It's brimming with insight—formative frameworks that reshape your thinking, practical steps you can apply right away, and hard-won lessons forged over decades in ministry. And above all, it's saturated with biblically grounded wisdom drawn from the life of Nehemiah. Every chapter shines.

TREVIN WAX, Vice President of Resources and Marketing at the North American Mission Board and Visiting Professor at Cedarville University; Author of *The Gospel Way Catechism*, *The Thrill of Orthodoxy*, and *This Is Our Time*

Today's leader is faced with challenges from all directions, often leading to overwhelmed and discouraged feelings. Eric Geiger's material provides clear biblical solutions and a path for every leadership context. Based on the life of Nehemiah, *The Rooted Leader* addresses both the necessary leadership skills and the internal character capacities of the faithful and successful leader. As a member of Mariners Church, where Eric is senior pastor, I've also sat through his sermons that comprise the structure of this book and found the information extremely helpful. His warmth and vulnerability will engage your heart, and his concepts will equip your mind. Highly recommended!

JOHN TOWNSEND, PhD, Psychologist, Author of the *New York Times* bestselling *Boundaries* book series, and Founder of the Townsend Institute at Concordia University Irvine and the Townsend Leadership Program

The Rooted Leader is a valuable guide for anyone leading in fast-moving, high-pressure environments. What sets Eric Geiger apart is the way he seamlessly integrates spiritual formation with real-world leadership experience from both the marketplace and ministry. He shows that lasting influence isn't built on drive or strategy alone but on the inner roots that sustain leaders through growth, setbacks, and responsibility. Eric writes with a clarity that is both strengthening and deeply motivating, calling leaders to rise above short-term results and build what truly endures. This book will leave you grounded, inspired, and equipped to lead with conviction and character.

COMMISSIONER DAVID SK LEE, Chairman and CEO of Hing Wa Lee Group

That leadership is an institution in crisis in our day is unquestioned. Regardless of the enterprise—business, government, academia, the arts, or the church—when leaders fail, everyone suffers the consequences. In *The Rooted Leader*, Eric has built a lighthouse to help leaders navigate the current storm. This book brought me back to Jesus' mention of a house that was built on a rock. When the storms blew, it remained—not because the house was impressive, but because its foundation was. Eric shows how Nehemiah's leadership, an example tough to emulate, can be both accessible and deeply inspiring. Moreover, Eric isn't merely writing about leadership principles; he's bearing witness to realities I've watched him live out, both publicly and privately, for years. If you want to build something that lasts, you must first allow God to build you. *The Rooted Leader* is the right step in that direction. Read this book.

RICKY JENKINS, Senior Pastor, Wellspring Church, Indian Wells, CA

In a cultural moment when leaders fall with alarming frequency, *The Rooted Leader* offers a much-needed blueprint for cultivating strength beneath the surface. Eric Geiger brilliantly shows that lasting influence is not produced by charisma or giftedness but by the deep, unseen roots God forms in us. This book is a timely and wise guide for any leader who longs to hold fast when the storms inevitably come.

DARREN WHITEHEAD, Pastor, Church of the City, Nashville, TN, and Author of *The Digital Fast*

The Christian journey is bound together by epiphanies and formation . . . not always in equal doses. Eric has put a spotlight on the formation needed to hold us and unleash the best God has for us. I love the seven rhythms and the way they are tied to one of the most extraordinary leaders to ever walk on the earth. Nehemiah is truly in the leader hall of fame.

STEPHEN R. GRAVES, Author, CEO Coach, and Business Owner

The Rooted Leader





A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

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Seven Rhythms
of Leaders
Who Bear Fruit
That Lasts

THE ROOTED LEADER



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Foreword

There are two things every leader needs: credibility with people and clarity of vision. Without both, you're going nowhere.

Eric Geiger recently told me that when he read my book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* in his early twenties, the law that hit him hardest was "the law of buy-in." People buy into the leader before they buy into the leader's vision. He told me he was convicted to work on his character and integrity more than on his strategy and direction.

Then Eric asked me if now, nearly thirty years later, I still feel as strongly about the law of buy-in. Here's what I told him: I *don't* feel the same about it. I actually feel more strongly about it! In thirty years you find out if what you wrote actually works. People follow the leader before they follow the direction.

Often younger leaders will say, "I have this vision for my business or church." They'll tell me their dream and then ask, "What do you think? Do you think people will go for it?" I always respond with a question: "Do they go for you? Have they bought into you?" If the answer is yes, then they're going to buy into where you're taking them. People don't follow vision. They follow leaders.

You can't buy, beg, or borrow vision. It has to come from the inside. When a leader borrows one, everything goes wrong. A

borrowed vision is one without a burden, and a vision without a burden is just a daydream. Leadership is heavy. If you've borrowed it, you'll give it back when challenges come. Because you can give back what you don't own.

On your leadership journey, you need credibility in your life that comes from your integrity, or people won't buy into you. And you need credibility in your direction that comes from burden, because there's no credibility in something that isn't really owned.

One of the reasons I've loved the book of Nehemiah is Nehemiah's credibility and clarity of purpose. The people bought into Nehemiah first, and then they bought into where he was taking them and gave themselves to the great work. Nehemiah was a person worth following who articulated a clear direction he deeply owned.

I love how Eric has pulled deep leadership insights from Nehemiah and offered them to us in this book. As you read, allow God to give you a clear burden for this season in your leadership. Don't settle for something borrowed. You want your life and your direction to be credible.

John C. Maxwell
Leadership expert and author of
The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

INTRODUCTION

TOPPLED LEADERS

Men fall in private long before
they fall in public.

J. C. RYLE

The email arrived at 8:47 p.m. on a Tuesday. "Effective immediately Marcus will no longer be in his role. He will be pursuing other opportunities. In the interim, we have asked . . ."

Most people stopped reading there and texted friends, asking if they'd read the email. People were stunned because Marcus was highly effective in his role. He had risen quickly through the organization. His supervisors had even declared him to be a HiPo—a high-potential employee for a senior role in the future.

By midmorning on Wednesday everyone had formed a view of what *really* happened based on whispers from those who worked closest to him: patterns of angry outbursts, unethical decisions to hit quarterly goals, and evidence of consistent lying. By Thursday morning everyone knew the decision was not about "strategic pivots" or for "budgetary reasons." Marcus toppled because the qualities that once seemed to make him effective—his confidence, initiative, and drive—had been corrupted, making him unbearable, even destructive.

Marcus surely did not begin his leadership journey with toppling in mind. Over the next several months the conversations with his family were deeply painful and the uncertain next steps

in his journey very different from the promising trajectory he once enjoyed, very different from the days when he seemed to stand tall among his peers.

LEARNING FROM TREES

The most photographed tree in the world, the largest tree in the world, and the tallest tree in the world all live in California, where I love living. The Lone Cypress along the scenic Pebble Beach drive is known as the most photographed tree in the world. A giant sequoia nicknamed General Sherman is the largest tree in the world. The world's tallest tree, Hyperion, is almost 380 feet tall, taller than the Statue of Liberty.[1]

You can't visit the world's tallest tree though. The tree is somewhere deep within Redwood National Park, but the location is classified, the area cordoned off. The tree is on lockdown because, you know, California. If you try to get to Hyperion, you could face six months in jail and a five-thousand-dollar fine. The tree is protected to prevent couples carving their initials, taggers graffitiing the tree, or collectors scrapping bark to take home as a souvenir. Scientists fear tourists would love the tree to death, so they believe it is best for the tree to grow in a secret location. The added attention of standing tall among its peers could be too much for the tree.[2]

Some might think, *I want to see that tree! Those tree enthusiasts are overreacting*. But are they? One could point to another tree . . .

You have likely seen photos of the iconic Pioneer Cabin Sequoia, often called the Tunnel Tree. The famous California tree was so large, you could drive your car through it. It was a very public tree, and it toppled in 2017. The official reason for the toppling was a rainstorm, but some believe the tree's fame and accompanying tourism contributed to the downfall, that creating space for cars carved the heart out of the tree.[3]

Lots of trees topple. The well-known ones make the news. Like the "Lorax" cypress tree, also in California, which inspired *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss.[4] It toppled in 2019 for unknown reasons. Or like beloved oak trees at Auburn University that had to be removed after being poisoned by a University of Alabama football fan.[5]

Lots of trees topple and for lots of reasons. Sometimes the tree can be poisoned or have the heart removed, as with the trees at Auburn or the one cars drove through. Other times, as with the tree Dr. Seuss loved, we don't know what happened. We just see the devastation. Toppling most often occurs, though, when storms meet trees with unhealthy roots.

People were saddened by the toppling of those great trees, but it's much more devastating when leaders topple. Leaders like Marcus.

When a tree topples, typically no one is harmed, but a toppling leader damages not only the leader but those surrounding the leader—a family, a company, a congregation. Trust is broken. Dreams and goals seem to be ruined. People are disoriented, struggling to reconcile the beauty that occurred under the leader's direction with the ugly truth of what has been revealed.

When a tree falls, the cleanup is done within a few days, new grass grows pretty quickly, and a new tree is often planted. When a leader falls, the cleanup lasts for years, sometimes decades. There is a lot of damage, and the debris can't simply be put in the back of a pickup truck and driven away.

Lots of leaders topple. The well-known ones make the news. And there are plenty of articles online and posts on social media mourning and sometimes seemingly celebrating the toppling of leaders. You are likely thinking of a current example as you read this. But if you were to read this again six months from now, you would likely be thinking of a different story. Sadly, the stories keep coming. Yet we know those are not the only stories, just the ones made public.

Lots of leaders topple and for lots of reasons. Sometimes we don't know what happened. The leader just disappears. We are not told much. We struggle with what has been communicated (or not), but our care for the leader, the family, and others restrains our speculation. Just as with trees, the toppling of leaders most often occurs when storms meet unhealthy roots.

STORMS + UNHEALTHY ROOTS = DISASTER

Whether leading in the home, in the marketplace, or in the nonprofit world, there are always storms in leadership.

Storms of expectations. Back in the day, I tweeted a saying from one of my mentors: "If you want to make everyone happy, don't be a leader. Go sell ice cream."[6] The tweet went viral because it resonates so deeply with leaders. There are high expectations and different expectations from all kinds of people and groups. Thus, it is impossible to make everyone happy with your approach or your decisions. Because of all the expectations on senior leaders and the heightened public scrutiny, "the probability that a CEO will crash and burn is now higher than ever. From 2000 through 2019, the average CEO tenure in the United States decreased from ten years to less than seven."[7]

Storms of life. The Christian worldview is that humanity rebelled against God, and when sin entered the world, everything was dramatically and adversely impacted. Because of an imperfect and bent-out-of-shape world, cancer and car accidents will happen to leaders or people on their teams. We are always one call, one email away from news of a new storm. That's just how it is.

Storms of challenges. Mike Tyson is famously credited with saying, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." This statement accurately describes challenges disrupting a leader's best plans. If you lead long enough, you will lead through an

economic downturn, a market disruption, unfulfilled promises, a natural disaster, a bad hire, a betrayal, undeserved criticism, and perhaps even a global pandemic. Some of the challenges we bring upon ourselves, and some are thrust upon us.

Storms of burden. A leader is burdened with an overwhelming sense of responsibility to steward their opportunity well and—if they are a good leader—a genuine love for the people on the team and the people being served. The burden is often the storm that is the most tumultuous to a leader's soul. At least that was true of the apostle Paul. When he listed his sufferings, including being beaten and shipwrecked, he ended the list with "the daily pressure" he carried for the people he was serving (2 Corinthians 11:28, CSB). He was declaring the internal burden to be heavier than the beatings, the stoning, and being shipwrecked three times.

There is no such thing as leadership without storms, so we must concern ourselves with the health of the roots. Two trees in the same field can respond very differently to a storm. The one with healthy roots endures while the one with unhealthy roots doesn't. While both trees looked similar before the storm, the storm revealed what was already true about the roots of the trees. Storms in leadership reveal what has already been true. Every leader lives continually with this battle: *Storm intensity vs. root health*. When the storm wins, leaders topple, careers end, families mourn, and organizations suffer.

If a leader's competence is greater than their character, collapse is almost certain. "Fake it till you make it" may sometimes work with competence. But the cliché never works with character. When the apostle Paul instructed his protégé Timothy to invest in other leaders, he told him to find the faithful who will be able, not to find the able who will maybe one day be trustworthy. Paul believed that faithfulness (character) was most important and that leaders could grow in ability (competence). The order must not be confused.[8]

If a leader's platform grows while their heart grows cold, devastation is looming. Leaders can grow a company or a church while their hearts grow cold. A leader with a cold heart will make stupid choices, as sin always makes us stupid. Success—however it has been defined—puts more eyes on the impending toppling, a toppling some would love to watch.

If a leader becomes more skilled but less sanctified, everyone loses. A struggle for leaders is that our roles and the opportunities we have because of them will develop our competence. We tend to get better at leading as we lead. The work develops our skills, so if we don't simultaneously work on our character with fear and trembling, a gap between our skills and our sanctification (our becoming more and more who God wants us to be) can develop over time.

Since we all know highly effective leaders who are not Christians or are not becoming more holy, at this point I need to own where I am coming from.

CHRISTIAN LEADERS, THE BEST LEADERS

Marketplace leaders sometimes use the term *unfair advantage* to acknowledge a skill, attribute, or discipline a company has that others do not have. Investors sometimes ask entrepreneurs what their unfair advantage is.[9] Christian leaders have the ultimate unfair advantage because we never lead alone. Our God is wise and promises us His wisdom when we ask. He is powerful and fills us with His strength and energy when we're weary. He is compassionate and gives us hearts that genuinely care for the people we lead. He is sovereign and works all things together for good, even our leadership mistakes and failures. We don't rely on ourselves, and the God we rely on guides us and refreshes us. The advantage is unfair because we did not earn Him with our grit.

By His grace, when we placed our faith in Christ, God graciously gave us His Spirit.

Being a follower of Jesus turns us into better leaders than we would be if we were not following Jesus. I do not believe and am not suggesting that all Christians are great leaders *or* that all great leaders are Christians. Rather, I am declaring that a follower of Jesus becomes a better leader of people because Jesus continually transforms His followers. Leaders who follow Jesus are more visionary, convictional, servant-oriented, persevering, credible, familiar with transformation, and filled with more resolve than they would be without Jesus as the center of their lives. (See appendix 1.)

I am also not suggesting that someone should follow Jesus *so that* they will be a better leader. If that is the motivation, it is not really Jesus they are following, but rather Jesus is treated as a means for some other end, namely being a better leader. Jesus is not interested in being a tool for one of our goals. He is the King over everything.

Research continually uncovers "groundbreaking and new leadership truths" that Christians have held to for centuries. Here are some examples.

Jim Collins, in his famous book *Good to Great*, uncovered that "level 5 leaders" are the best leaders and they are filled with . . . humility. Hmmm. Christians have always believed we are to be humble and honor others above ourselves.[10] We are motivated to serve others because our hearts are melted by the reality that our King served us by embracing a crown of thorns and absorbing our sin and shame on the cross.

In his popular books *Emotional Intelligence* and *Primal Leadership*, researcher and author Daniel Goleman wrote that the most effective leaders manage their emotions, genuinely connect with people, offer kindness and empathy, lead with joy and inspiration, and display the master skill of patience. Several of

the attributes Goleman uncovered are what Christians call "the fruit of the Spirit."[11] In other words, the Spirit of God enables the Jesus-follower to display what research says makes a leader more effective.

In the research-based leadership book *Return on Character*, Fred Kiel argued that just as there is a "return on investment," there is a "return on character," and better performing companies are led by leaders who are filled with integrity, compassion, and forgiveness.[12] Christians are compassionate because we have received compassion, forgive because we have been forgiven, and seek to walk in integrity because our Savior invites us to follow after Him.

Marketplace leadership research keeps "discovering" that humility works, emotional intelligence matters, and character impacts results. Christians have known this for two thousand years, and leaders who are being transformed by Christ are growing in all these attributes.

The Scripture that Christians cling to offers a vision of men and women who stand strong and bear fruit, a vision for life and leadership where we don't topple.

AN UNTOPPLED TREE

The psalmist compares people to trees too, painting a beautiful picture of a person planted, unwithered, and bearing fruit each season:

> How happy is the one who does not
> walk in the advice of the wicked
> or stand in the pathway with sinners
> or sit in the company of mockers!
> Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction,

and he meditates on it day and night.
He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams
that bears its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

The wicked are not like this;
instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
PSALM 1:1-4, CSB

My wife, Kaye, and I drove the beautiful seventeen-mile Pebble Beach drive several summers ago and parked in front of the famous Lone Cypress tree, one of the stops along the scenic highway. We were not the only ones there. A guy was painting a picture of the tree. A woman with a professional camera was taking pictures from multiple angles and positions. A couple offered to take our picture, and we returned the favor. "Is the tree in the background?" they asked. There was a guy proposing to his girlfriend.

You know where people don't get engaged? Next to the Lone Chaff. People don't drive hundreds of miles to see chaff. Chaff is the shell surrounding a seed. When you finish a bowl of popcorn and the peelings that were surrounding the popcorn seeds are still in the bowl or between your teeth, that's chaff. You are not Instagramming chaff or declaring it to be beautiful or amazing.

Most believe the Lone Cypress is more than two hundred fifty years old. Hundreds of storms have passed over the tree, and it still stands. The tree is a symbol of strength and the logo for the area and many golf tournaments.[13] You could stand in front of the tree and marvel, "How have you stood through it all?"

The psalmist says we can be like the tree that is planted, bears fruit, and does not wither—which is what all leaders want. We want to stand strong, endure the storms, and bear fruit for the

people we serve and lead. It is what all those we lead want from us too.

In our homes, we want our families to be blessed by the fruit of our character—that we would be leaders who display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We want our family name to be marked by integrity and compassion for others because we believe we should "choose a good reputation over great riches" (Proverbs 22:1). In our work, we want the organizations we lead to enjoy the fruit of our leadership, both from our unwavering character and our skillful competence, from our "pure hearts" and our "skillful hands."[14] We want our leadership to inspire and develop others, and we want those we lead and the organizations we steward to be healthier and more effective because of our leadership. In our churches, we want the fruit of our ministries to be changed lives, people transformed by God's love who show the world the beauty of God's grace and the power of His truth by how they live.[15] In our communities, we want our neighbors to enjoy the fruit of our presence, that we would help preserve society from decay and make our communities better and more flavorful.[16]

The psalmist knows what we know, that not everyone is like a rooted and fruitful tree, that some are blown away by the wind. The psalmist has seen leaders topple too.

THE WAY TO TOPPLE

Before giving us a vision of a rooted and fruitful tree, the psalmist also offers an insightful warning about how someone topples. The poetic language of the psalm reveals a progression toward being blown over and blown away by the wind. I have marked the progression with *italicized* words, <u>underlined</u> words, and **bolded** words.

> How happy is the one who does not
> *walk* in the advice of the **wicked**
> or *stand* in the pathway with **sinners**
> or *sit* in the company of **mockers**!
>
> PSALM 1:1, CSB

Notice the progression in a person's posture toward what can destroy them—from *walking* to *standing* to *sitting* on the wrong path. First a person is tempted to *walk* toward something that can destroy them. Then they are tempted to *stand* and check it out, and finally they *sit* and plant their life in a place that brings destruction.

We also see progression in how a person can be influenced, from *listening* to *participating* to *belonging*. Someone is first offered advice from people who counsel them down the wrong path. Then that person is invited to join them on the pathway, and finally to belong in their company.

And we see progression in what can happen to our souls. **Wicked** is a general term, **sinners** refers to a more specific breaking of God's law, and **mockers** speaks of celebrating rebellion against God and feeling no remorse for it.[17] When leaders topple, they likely are in a place they never thought they would be and not feeling the remorse they thought they would feel if they ever got there.

The psalmist paints a devastating picture of the path to destruction, to being blown away by the wind. Our hearts can get harder as we move to sitting in our sin, belonging to people who are far from God, and celebrating our disobedience. As our feet get calloused if we get used to walking around outside, our hearts can get calloused as we walk away from the only One who gives true joy. This is why the psalmist declared "how happy is the one" who does not walk the wrong path and why C. S. Lewis

declared, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself. . . . There is no such thing."[18]

Growing up there was a common warning that made little sense to me. "It's all fun and games until someone gets their eye poked out." I am sure someone, somewhere got their eye poked out playing Red Rover or King of the Hill, but I never knew anyone who did. I never even heard of someone who did. The warning sounded hollow.

We all know the warning about toppling isn't hollow.

While it can appear that toppling happened overnight, both for trees and for leaders, the toppling was always the result of an unholy progression. Without God's grace at work in our lives, we all head down the path toward toppling. We don't drift toward holiness and healthy leadership. We drift down the path of destruction, away from holiness and healthy leadership. Left alone, our bodies drift to unhealth, our garages drift into chaos, and our hearts drift to destruction. Left alone, our hearts are "prone to wander" and leave the God we love. All we have to do to drift down the path of destruction is nothing.[19]

WISDOM TAKES ACTION

The action taken to keep the tallest tree in the world, Hyperion, from falling is to keep people away from the tree and keep the tree out of the spotlight. Some have suggested that about leaders too. "Put more systems around them." "Don't give them too much freedom." "Limit the scope of their influence for their own good."

With all the toppling of leaders and the damage these leaders were responsible for, it's understandable to want to take some action, any action.

While leaders, like all of us, need accountability and benefit from wise structures, God prescribes actions greater than

protection. He does not merely tell us to *not* go down the road of destruction; He also offers a better path, a way that leads to transformation. After all, an overarching message throughout the Scripture is that our hearts are wicked and in need of transformation, not innocent and in need of protection.[20] All the boundaries and safeguards, even the wise ones, will be insufficient if the leader's heart is not transformed. Let's return to the psalmist's vision of a life that is like a fruit-bearing tree:

> Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction,
> and he meditates on it day and night.
>
> PSALM 1:2, CSB

The one who is blown away like chaff in the wind delights in the instruction of the ungodly; the one who is rooted and fruitful delights in the instruction of the Lord. The psalmist does not *command* us to be like strong trees who bear fruit. We can't make ourselves strong. Instead, the psalmist *commends* those who delight in the Lord's instruction. The action we must take that leads to transformation is to delight in God and His Word.

There are appointments that pop up on your calendar that make you think, *Ugh, if this were canceled today, that would be great*. You attend those appointments out of duty and obligation. You *have* to. And then there are appointments on your calendar you would hate to miss. They are a delight. You *want* to be there.

There are meals you eat out of duty and meals you delight in eating. I took each of my daughters, when they turned thirteen, to one of the best steakhouses in Southern California. Both Eden and Evie had prime filet mignon for the first time on those nights. I did not have to give them a pep talk to eat the steak, did not have to convince them they would enjoy it, and did not have to tell them it was their duty as some sort of rite of passage.

Their eyes lit up when they took their first bite, and the meal was a delight.

The action the psalmist commends is delighting in God's Word. Perhaps you are wondering, *What if I don't delight in His Word that way?*

As a pastor I have learned that for some people the longing for God's Word is immediate, and for others the longing is more of an acquired taste. Just as my daughters immediately loved the prime filet, I immediately loved sushi once I tried it. I wondered, *Why have I not tried this before? Why haven't my friends recommended this to me?* I tasted something I did not even understand before and was immediately hooked. Some people are rescued by Jesus and immediately hunger for and delight in God's Word because He has changed their spiritual taste buds.

For others, delighting in His Word is an acquired taste, like kale salad has been for me. When I turned thirty, I decided I wanted to eat healthier, as in "not always getting the burger for lunch" healthy. Kale salad with salmon became part of my diet. I did not love it the first time or even the fifteenth time. But I kept eating healthier, and in time my taste buds changed. I kept eating what was better for me, and in time I craved it.

The Word is better for us than anything the world offers. According to the psalmist, delighting in the Word is the way we get strong roots and bear fruit. And according to Jesus, the Word is the seed that brings forth good fruit. In one of the few parables Jesus explained, the Parable of the Sower, He made clear that when His Word is planted in a heart that receives it, the Word will produce fruit and endurance in the person's life.[21]

When it comes to leadership, we are wise to want beautiful fruit, but we must understand the roots beneath the surface that produce the fruit. The fruit can inspire us and give us a picture of what we hope our leadership will be for others, but wisdom calls us

to focus on healthy roots that bring about healthy fruit and keep us from toppling.

In the midst of toppled trees and toppled leaders, the psalmist gives us a picture of a rooted and fruitful life.

Scripture also gives us an example of a rooted and fruitful *leader*.

While there is a chapter in the Bible about a rooted and fruitful tree, there is a whole book about a rooted and fruitful leader, a book in God's Word about leadership you can delight in, meditate on, and learn from. As we explore what it means to be a rooted and fruitful leader, we will journey through this book, Nehemiah, together.

Nehemiah was fruitful, and he did not topple. Here is the bio I would use to introduce him if he were speaking about leadership at a conference:

> This man needs no introduction, but let me give him one anyway. Nehemiah led effectively in very different contexts: Persia and Jerusalem. Leaders have studied and written about his visionary and strategic leadership, resulting in the rebuilding of the wall surrounding Jerusalem. Less discussed but more staggering, he led the charge to repopulate the city and change the attitudes of the people. One of the sixty-six books in the Bible is his leadership memoir. Nehemiah did not lead as a prophet or priest but as a chief-of-staff turned visionary builder turned governor. And he excelled in each role. What I appreciate about him the most, and one of the reasons I keep going back to his memoir, is he never toppled. His leadership memoir opens and concludes with prayer, his dependence on God. He is an amazing leader but an even more devoted follower.

Let's turn to Nehemiah's memoir now and see what we can learn about being rooted and fruitful leaders.

CHAPTER 1

NEHEMIAH: A ROOTED MENTOR

It is not what a man does
that determines whether
his work is sacred or secular,
it is why he does it.

A.W. TOZER

"You need to find a mentor" was common and wise counsel when I took a role way bigger than my résumé said I was ready for, which has happened at least twice. In all honesty, I have felt that way about every leadership assignment I have accepted, but on two particular occasions, lots of people thought I was in way over my head. The first time was when I became an executive pastor in Miami, which meant I was responsible for all the staff, operations, and ministries of the church. I was twenty-seven years old, and many thought I was young for the job. I tucked in my shirts and wore glasses, trying to look the part. The second time was when I was invited to lead a division at a publishing company, with revenue in the hundreds of millions. Though a Christian ministry, we were financed via a business model and not via donors. I did not even understand all the terms—product margin, fully loaded

contribution statements, variable costs, obsolescence—and yet I was responsible for the profit and loss of the whole division.

In both leadership roles, I knew I needed help. In the first role, I found a group of experienced executive pastors to join. They were so kind to the "young guy," available to answer questions and to share templates and resources they used. In the marketplace role, I had an executive coach, and I read everything I could about the different disciplines I was responsible for, my least favorite being finance. I found the syllabuses online for several top MBA schools and ordered a stack of textbooks about finance. I read them over several months and showed up to the CFO's office with a list of questions. He patiently helped me apply all I read to our context.

I am deeply grateful for the mentors who invested in me. The phone calls, texts, and discussions over breakfast were massively helpful.

If Nehemiah were alive today, I would call in every favor, travel as far as necessary, and work every possible angle for breakfast with him, a time to ask him some questions and soak in his wisdom.

MENTORED BY NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah is like the Tom Brady or Kobe Bryant of leadership. Sports analysts have declared that both Tom Brady and Kobe Bryant had multiple hall of fame careers because of their longevity in playing for multiple decades at a high level.[1] From a leadership perspective, Nehemiah is in that category. He led effectively in multiple roles and contexts—trusted leader for the king of Persia, visionary builder during a turnaround in Judea, and governor during a season of growth and sustainability. From a human vantage point, he accomplished what most people thought was impossible—twice! The rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall while surrounded by enemies was an insane leadership feat. Convincing

people to move back to Jerusalem and rebuild their way of life there was another.

If I could share a meal with Nehemiah, there are so many questions I'd ask: How do you inspire people to do what previously failed? How should you communicate upwardly to a leader with a different agenda? How can you motivate people who seem demoralized? How do you coordinate lots of people for a single task? What is the balance between encouragement and accountability? How do you get a new vision once the first one has been realized? What comes first: behavior or belief, systems or culture? How do you increase your credibility? How do you keep going when facing what seem like endless challenges?

If someone sent me an email with all those questions, there is no way I would answer them. It would take all day, and I already have a full day. So I would know better than to shoot Nehemiah an email like that, if he were alive and if that were possible.[2]

While a breakfast appointment with Nehemiah would be epic, if someone offered me his leadership journal, the place where he recorded all that transpired and the decisions he made, that would be even more valuable. When people have asked to "pick my brain" over breakfast, they typically aren't getting the best I have. My thoughts are colored by the current season or the current problem I'm wrestling with. To read Nehemiah's leadership journal would be like having breakfast with him regularly as he lived through all his opportunities and challenges.

Here's the exciting news: We have his journal!

The book named after him in the Bible recounts God's faithfulness to His people despite their unfaithfulness but also chronicles Nehemiah's thoughts and actions. Many times in my leadership journey I have devoured sections of Nehemiah's personal journal.[3] So, though I have never met him, I feel like I know him, like we have spent some time together.

Nehemiah's name means "the Lord has comforted."[4] His credibility and servant's posture comforted a Persian king he worked for, so much so that the king trusted Nehemiah with his life. His conviction, vision, and perseverance pulled the people of Jerusalem out of disgrace, bringing comfort to them. As a result, people were willing to move back into the city. His resolve to remember the promises of God has comforted me and reminded me that God is with me and keeps His promises to me.

Nehemiah did not topple. He was rooted until the end of his life. Each time a storm came—and there were many—the storm was unable to damage the healthy roots in his life. Nehemiah's leadership was also incredibly fruitful. He persisted through trials, criticism, slander, and threats of violence. He repopulated a city that is still standing (Jerusalem). The collective attitude of those who were under his care was changed from disgrace to joy. Nehemiah, via his journal, is a mentor and example you can look to for inspiration on how to remain rooted and insight on how to be fruitful in your leadership.

Not only is the book of Nehemiah his leadership journal, it is also God's inspired Word. All Scripture is from God and for you. His instruction is perfect and makes "the inexperienced wise" (Psalm 19:7, CSB). His Word is timeless and will never pass away. The book of Nehemiah has lasted for more than 2,400 years. Of all the books that will pop up if you type "leadership" into your Amazon search bar, few if any were published that long ago. Nehemiah's journal will last because God has promised to keep His Word.[5] Because all Scripture is inspired by God and will prepare you for every good work, the book of Nehemiah can equip you as a leader.

DEFINING LEADERSHIP

Leadership is easier to recognize than it is to define, but that has not stopped scholars and practitioners from offering a plethora of

definitions.[6] One of the most common and helpful is that "leadership is influence."[7]

Because leadership is influence, people without titles or positions can be leaders. And sometimes people with titles and positions are not. Though their job or their email signature can give the impression they are leading, if they are unable to influence people under their care, they are not actually leading anyone. As I have heard John Maxwell quip, "If you think you are leading and turn around and no one is following, you are only taking a walk."

Leadership being defined as influence means parents, youth soccer coaches, school teachers, tech entrepreneurs, civil servants, politicians, business owners, Sunday school teachers, musicians, medical professionals, pastors, nonprofit leaders, counselors, construction foremen, restaurant managers, and the barista who sets the tone for a café all lead in some capacity, whether they realize it or not.

Nehemiah was not a priest or a prophet. He was a governmental leader in a foreign land who became a governor in Judea. The first role mentioned in his journal is the cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. When you read "cupbearer," you might think of a menial role, as if he merely poured expensive wine for the Persian king who was being fanned with palm branches in his posh palace. But the cupbearer was more like a chief-of-staff whom the king trusted with everything, including his own life.[8]

While those of us who serve Christ's church surely influence others, Scripture does not limit spiritual leadership to those who serve God's people. The fact that Nehemiah, who would not be considered clergy in his context or ours, is given to us as a great example speaks to God's desire to use leaders in all types of fields and disciplines. God cares for the whole world. There is "not a square inch" in all creation that is not under His authority,[9] and He has placed people in all different realms of society, in all types of disciplines, to watch over and work in His creation as stewards.

Leadership defined as influence invites Christians to see themselves as leaders because we have been called by God to serve others. Scripture is packed with metaphors describing our sacred privilege and responsibility to influence others for their good and God's glory. We are "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20, CSB) speaking for Him in every interaction; "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14-16) bringing light to dark places; and "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9, CSB) set apart to represent Him to others.

Leadership defined as influence changes the question from "Am I a leader?" to "Am I an effective leader?" or to "Am I a rooted leader who bears fruit in season?"

LEADERSHIP FRUIT

The first time I spoke at "kid's church," my message completely crashed. I was twenty years old, the youth pastor at a traditional church where we had "kid's message" every week in "big church." After the kid's message, the kids would leave to go to their classes. I designed an illustration about spiritual fruit—that God does not want us to fake spiritual fruit but for the outside of our lives to match the inside. All the kids came to the front, and I held up a banana. They ooed and ahhed. "Who wants this banana?" I asked. All the kids lifted their hands. But I had taken the banana out of the peel and replaced it with a hot dog on the inside. So I opened up the peel and declared, "Look, it's a hot dog!" The kids were devastated. A few started crying. Several ran back to their parents. None had ever seen a hot-dog-stuffed banana before. Nor should they ever again. After that, I was never asked to lead kid's church again.

Jesus gave a much better object lesson about fruit, one that made much more sense to His disciples than my illustration did to those poor kids. Jesus told His disciples He is the vine and they are the branches. If they would simply remain in Him, they would

bear fruit, and apart from Him, they could do nothing.[10] Later the apostle Paul wrote about the fruit of God's Spirit in the lives of followers of Jesus: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). The "fruit of the Spirit" is often misquoted as "fruits," which can give the impression we have some of the fruits but not all and that it is on us to work on developing the fruits we don't have. But Scripture teaches the opposite. We can't make ourselves bear the fruit. Fruit comes from being rooted in Him.

Within my role and stewardship of responsibilities is the Rooted Network, a discipleship resource provider for churches and groups. We serve thousands of churches each year with a ten-week discipleship journey called Rooted. We have seen God transform people's lives as they have been rooted in God's Word, community, and prayer. The fruit in people's lives is beautiful and amazing, but the fruit has come from people being connected to the Vine, Jesus.[11]

What about the fruit of a leader? While there is no verse in sacred Scripture that begins with "the fruit of a leader is," leaders also want fruit in their lives and leadership. Fruit like Vision. Conviction. Servanthood. Perseverance. Credibility. Transformation. Resolve.

Lots of leadership books have been written on each leadership fruit. Those characteristics are embedded in what it means to be a leader, in what people expect from their leaders, and in what leaders expect from themselves. But we must not miss the healthy roots beneath the surface.

We see all this fruit in Nehemiah's leadership, but what makes his journal so helpful is we see the roots beneath the surface that led to the fruit. In our Christian lives, we must be focused on the Vine, knowing our virtues come from our Savior and not ourselves. We see the fruit, but we must be concerned with the roots beneath the surface. In leadership we must be concerned with the roots too.

INTERMINGLING ROOTS

The giant sequoia trees, just above San Francisco, are an amazing site to behold. Standing as tall as the length of a football field and living for thousands of years, they are impressive. If you walk through the forest, you will see signs explaining that the trees have been able to stand because they grow in groves. Though their roots are only a few feet into the ground, they intermingle with other roots, which keeps them standing.

As we walk through the book of Nehemiah, we will see the intermingling roots that keep Nehemiah standing through lots of storms, intermingling roots that produce his fruitful leadership.

INTERMINGLING ROOTS	FRUIT
Being shaped by burden *and* belief	Vision
Displaying clarity *and* courage	Conviction
Thinking big *and* acting small	Servanthood
Fighting *and* trusting that God is fighting	Perseverance
Growing in character *and* commitment *and* competence *and* chemistry *and* capacity	Credibility
Changing behaviors *and* beliefs	Transformation
Living with restlessness *and* resting	Resolve

Without healthy leadership roots, you will not have the fruit you and others desire. Or worse, you will have artificial fruit that gives the mere appearance of life. You'll be like a hot dog inside a . . . never mind.

Vision. If a leader runs to the fruit of vision but doesn't focus on the roots of burden and belief, the leader could be tempted to borrow someone else's vision, a vision severed from a deep burden

for their specific context. If the leader doesn't really believe in the lofty statement, the people receive a fake form of vision.

Conviction. If a leader desires to give the appearance of being a convictional leader but skips over clarity and courage, the leader will speak inconsistently because the leader's "convictions" are constantly changing and thus are not real convictions.

Servanthood. If leaders know they need to be servants because they have heard that is what the best leaders do, they can be tempted to pretend—to do a few things that look servant-like. But if they have not really embraced thinking big and acting small, the lack of healthy roots will be uncovered when a storm hits.

Perseverance. We want this. *I* want to make it to the end. You likely picked up this book because *you* want to persevere. But perhaps your idealism has been shattered by the stories of toppled leaders. While longing for the fruit of perseverance can be motivating, leaders must focus on the intermingling roots of fighting and being content that God is fighting for them.

Credibility. We cannot lead without credibility. While leaders long for the fruit of credibility, both professionally and personally, the fruit comes through the intermingling of character, commitment, competence, chemistry, and capacity.

Transformation. Leadership has always been associated with change. Transformation theorists have debated which comes first, beliefs or behaviors. But theorists, no matter which they say comes first, agree the fruit of real organizational transformation is the result of both beliefs and behaviors being transformed. A leader who talks about transformation but has not worked on the roots of beliefs and behaviors is engaging in wishful thinking.

Resolve. Predeciding you will stick to your convictions and persevere through difficult challenges of leadership takes resolve. While leaders want the fruit of resolve, they must learn to live with two roots intermingled—restlessness and resting.

Each of the following chapters focuses on the leadership fruit we all want, and the people we lead want from us, but in each chapter, we will discover the roots beneath the surface. As we journey through Nehemiah's leadership account, we will see the healthy roots of his leadership, not only the beautiful fruit.

The next chapter begins with vision, which is the fruit Nehemiah is most known for, or at least what most of the leadership books who mention him highlight in his leadership. But before we get there, knowing how his story fits into the whole story of the Bible will help you. (You may want to bookmark this section so you can come back to the names and timelines.)

THE BIGGER STORY

Nehemiah's story is part of the bigger story of Scripture and God's plan to pursue a people for Himself. The self-sufficient and eternal God who created everything pursued Abraham and promised him that his family would become a nation who would bless all nations. Abraham's grandson Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) and his twelve sons eventually moved to Egypt, initially to be saved from a famine, but then became enslaved. God rescued the nation of Israel from Egypt through Moses and gave them His law as His distinct people and instructed them to build the Tabernacle, a tent where the people could offer sacrifices and where God could dwell among them.

God brought His people back to the land He had given them through their leader Joshua, who replaced Moses. He commanded them to only worship God and warned them that if they pursued other gods, God would remove them from the land.

The people begged for a king so they could be like the surrounding nations, and God gave them Saul, who was like them. When Saul disobeyed Him, God graciously raised up David as

their new king, a man committed to God and His ways, and promised that his kingdom would never end. David's son, Solomon, built the Temple in Jerusalem, replacing the Tabernacle with a more permanent place for God's presence to remain with His people. Solomon took wives from other nations and allowed the gods of those nations to clutter the land God gave His people. Because of their sin, the kingdom was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms.

God sent prophets to confront the people for worshiping other gods, but they kept disobeying Him. God kept His promise to remove His people from the land if they pursued other gods. The northern kingdom fell to Assyria, and the people of the southern kingdom were carried away into Babylonian captivity. Jerusalem was largely destroyed. But God also promised He would bring the people back to the land, that they would return from their exile.

Which is where Nehemiah enters the story (see "Exile and Return" in the following timeline).

Hundreds of years after Nehemiah, Jesus the Christ was born from the people of Israel. Like Nehemiah, He left a high position to serve His people, faced opposition, wept for Jerusalem, and would not abandon His mission. Christ was born from the nation of Israel to seek and to save people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, as He will bless people from all nations, and the fulfillment of the promise made to David, as His Kingdom will never end.[12]

CREATION AND FALL

The self-sufficient and eternal God lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. Falling for Satan's temptation, humanity rebels and sin enters the world bringing death, pain, and strife. Instead of giving up on humanity, God promises that from the womb of a woman will come the One who will crush Satan's head.

2000 BC

PROMISE AND A PEOPLE

God pursues Abram (who is renamed Abraham), a man from an idol-worshiping family who has no children with his wife, and promises that he will be the father of many nations. God promises land to Abraham and assures him that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. God continues to be faithful to this family. He restates the promise to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (who is renamed Israel). A famine strikes the promised land, so Jacob and the family move to Egypt, where one of his sons, Joseph, is already there to provide for them.

1400 BC

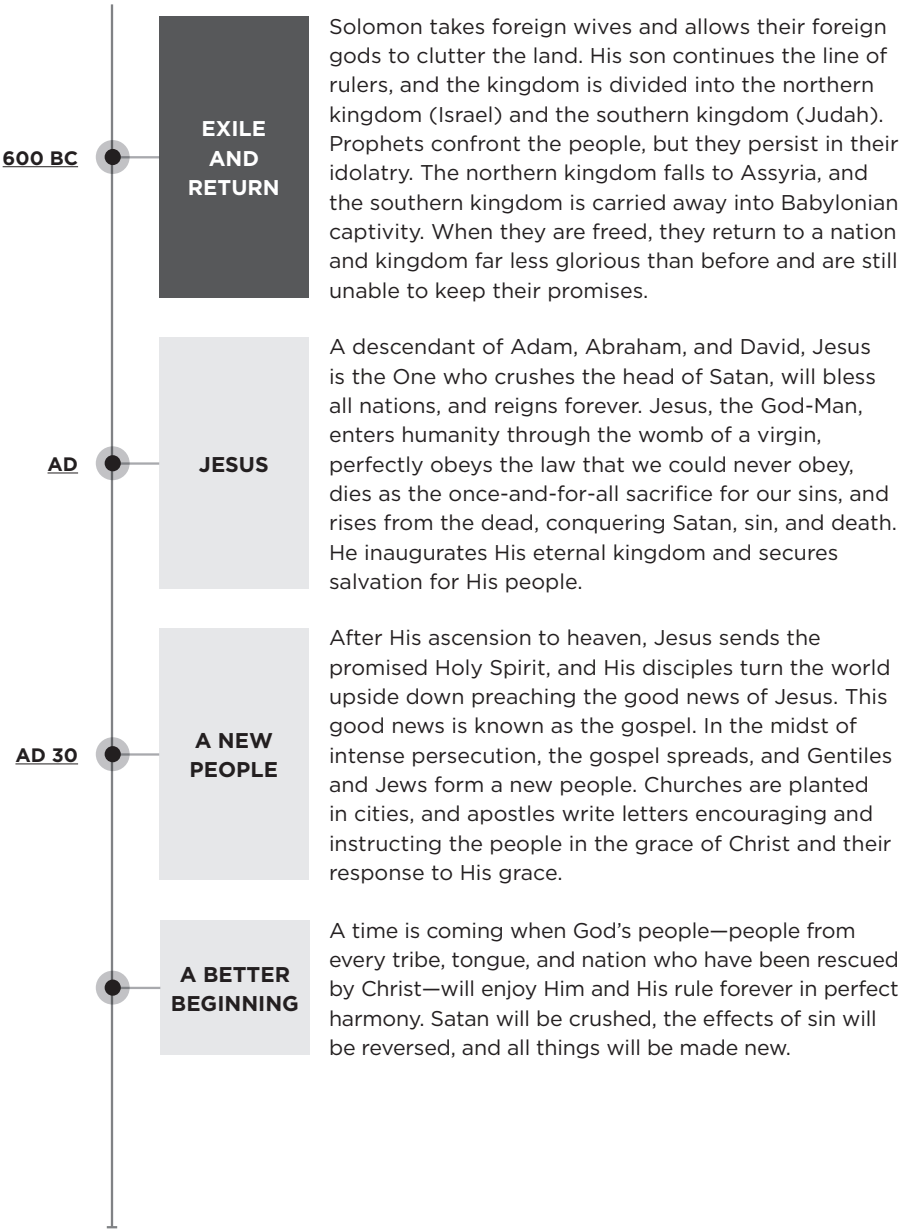
RESCUE AND LAW

The family becomes a nation while living in Egypt but also becomes enslaved to the Egyptians. God raises up Moses to lead His people to freedom. Pharaoh is unwilling to let God's people go, so God strikes dead the firstborn son of everyone living in Egypt but "passes over" Israel as they put the blood of lambs on their doorposts. After miraculously rescuing His people, God gives His people the law. He also instructs them to build a Tabernacle and offer sacrifices so He may dwell among them.

1000 BC

LAND AND KINGDOM

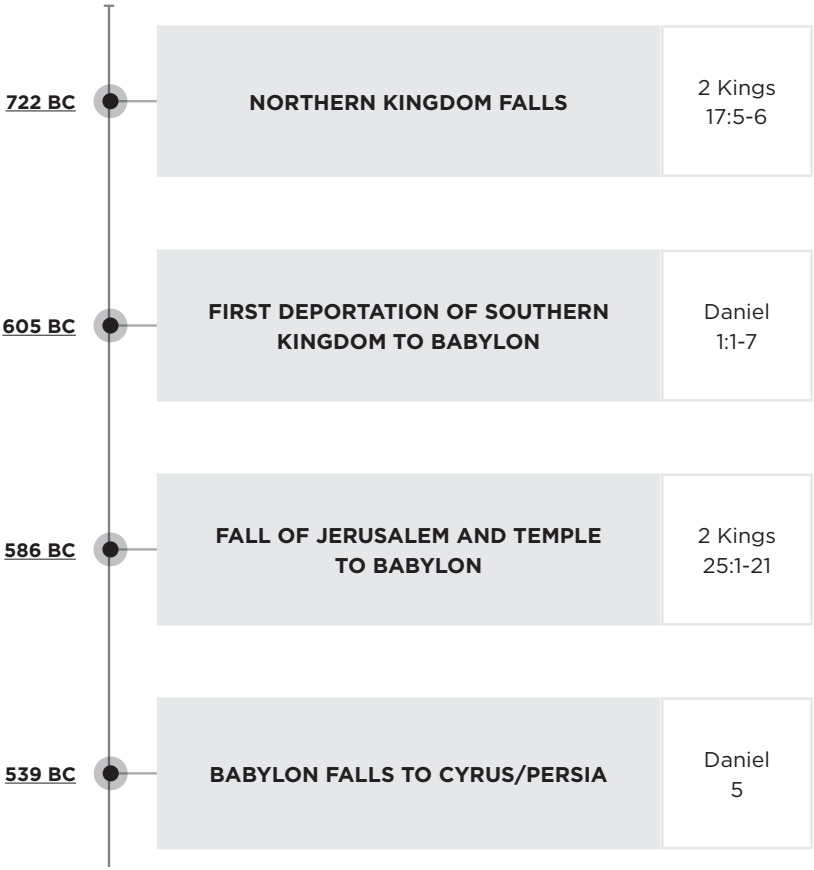
God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nations surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God then raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a Temple to replace the Tabernacle.


600 BC
EXILE AND RETURN
Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry. The northern kingdom falls to Assyria, and the southern kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.
AD
JESUS
A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man, enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal kingdom and secures salvation for His people.
AD 30
A NEW PEOPLE
After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit, and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. This good news is known as the gospel. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.
A BETTER BEGINNING
A time is coming when God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

NEHEMIAH'S BACKSTORY

After the Babylonians dragged the southern kingdom, including many living in Jerusalem, into captivity, the Persians conquered Babylon. Nehemiah was born under Persian reign. Under God's authority, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed the Israelites living in the Persian empire to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple and resettle. Zerubbabel led the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem and oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple. Ezra arrived

▼ ***Nehemiah Timeline***



in Jerusalem decades later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia. He focused on restoring worship, teaching the law, and leading spiritual renewal among the people. Then Nehemiah, while serving under Artaxerxes, heard the wall was torn down and the people were in disgrace. He had never been to the land of his ancestors, but he knew all the promises God had made to His people (see "445 BC" on the timeline below).

538 BC	**CYRUS ALLOWS EXILES TO RETURN AND BUILD TEMPLE (ZERUBBABEL LEADS); CITY BUILDING STOPPED**	Ezra 4:1-24
458 BC	**EZRA LEADS MORE EXILES TO RETURN UNDER ARTAXERXES OF PERSIA**	Ezra 7
445 BC	**NEHEMIAH HEARS OF THE DISGRACE OF HIS PEOPLE**	Nehemiah 1
444 BC	**NEHEMIAH GOES TO JERUSALEM TO BUILD THE WALL IN 52 DAYS**	Nehemiah 2

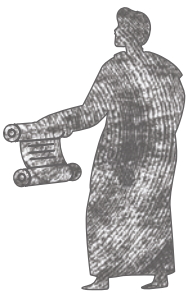
People to Know



ARTAXERXES (THE KING): Artaxerxes I was the son of Xerxes/Ahasuerus, the king who made Esther his queen and stopped Haman's plan to completely destroy the Jewish people in Persia. According to the Greek historian Diodorus, Artaxerxes became king after killing his brother, who was in line to be king, after being told his brother was the one who killed his father.[13] He played a crucial role in Nehemiah's mission to rebuild Jerusalem. He granted Nehemiah permission to return to Jerusalem, provided him with letters of safe passage, and supplied materials for the reconstruction of the city wall. God is willing and able to use a foreign ruler to fulfill His purposes for His people.

HANANI (THE BROTHER): Hanani was Nehemiah's brother and the one who first brought him the devastating news about Jerusalem's broken wall and vulnerable condition. His report deeply moved Nehemiah, prompting him to fast, pray, and ultimately seek permission from Artaxerxes to return and lead the rebuilding effort. Later, Nehemiah appointed Hanani to be one of the leaders overseeing Jerusalem because he was faithful and trustworthy.





EZRA (THE SCRIBE AND PRIEST): Ezra was a priest and scribe who arrived in Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah. He was a devoted teacher of the Law, leading a spiritual revival among the people by reading and explaining God's Word. Ezra partnered with Nehemiah in renewing the people's faith and commitment to God's commands, emphasizing the need for spiritual restoration, not just physical rebuilding.

SANBALLAT (THE ENEMY): Sanballat was the governor of Samaria and a fierce opponent of Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild Jerusalem's wall. He led the external opposition, using mockery, threats, and political schemes to try to stop the work. He hated the thought of Jerusalem becoming prosperous less than forty miles away from his territory.





TOBIAH (THE ENEMY): Though his name is Jewish, meaning "God is good," he saw an opportunity for power among the Ammonites, where he became an official. He had deep connections within Jerusalem's elite, marrying into influential Jewish families, allowing him to exert pressure on Nehemiah from within. He mocked the builders, conspired against Nehemiah, and later gained unauthorized access to a Temple storeroom.

GESHEM (THE ENEMY): Geshem was an Arabian leader who joined Sanballat and Tobiah in opposing Nehemiah. He viewed Jerusalem's restoration as a threat to his economic and political influence. He used intimidation and false accusations to try to halt Nehemiah's work, even attempting to lure him into a trap.





ELIASHIB: Eliashib was the high priest and initially played a key role in rebuilding the wall. However, he later compromised by forming alliances with Nehemiah's enemies, particularly Tobiah. Nehemiah's challenges were not only external.