Christ in all of Scripture. Gospel Transformation Bible Grace for all of Life.
“... the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

- The Apostle Paul
Introduction to Acts

Author and Date

The Gospel in Acts
Acts is the story of God’s grace flooding out to the world, from the cross and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Nothing is more prominent in Acts than the spread of the gospel. Jesus promises a geographic expansion at the outset (1:8), and Acts follows the news of his death and resurrection as it spreads from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the faraway capital of Rome.

The preaching of Jesus’ death and resurrection is central in Acts. The Greek verb for “preach the gospel” (euangelizo) occurs more in this book than in any other in the New Testament. About a third of the book of Acts consists of speeches, and most of these are speeches of Peter or Paul proclaiming the gospel. The good news of the salvation accomplished in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit extends to the “ends of the earth” through preaching.

In Acts, “grace” is a parallel for “the gospel” or “salvation.” Jesus’ message is summarized as “the word of his grace” (20:32), believers are said to have received “grace” or to be “full of grace” (6:8), and they are challenged to continue in grace. The missionaries in Acts proclaim the grace of God, and people are able to respond with faith.

The narrative of Acts shows the purpose of its people, beginning with his sending to Samaria, then to the rest of the region, and finally to Rome (20:21). In this book we see Paul living in Rome, “proclaiming the universal gospel about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31). The gospel draws people in, constitutes them as the church centered on the grace of Jesus, and then sends them out in mission to the world. The new group of believers is marked by the Holy Spirit, who creates such a distinctive community that others are drawn in, experiencing God’s grace. At the same time, they take the gospel message to new people and new lands, making God’s grace known to the ends of the earth.

The gospel’s expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing since the beginning. Luke consistently grounds salvation in the ancient context of the Scriptures, showing how salvation flows from God’s ancient promise to his ancient people.

Book Introductions
Show how each Bible book contributes to our understanding of the gospel.

Introductory Essay
Prepared by general editor Dr. Bryan Chapell, this essay outlines the importance of seeing Christ in all of Scripture, and of applying the gospel to all of life.

Index
Identifies where biblical themes and concepts occur throughout the notes.
38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” 40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The Fellowship of the Believers
42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food ‘with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and ‘having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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Maps
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Gospel Transformation Bible

A Sample Selection
Including the full books of Ruth and James and sample chapters from Exodus, Proverbs, Luke, and Acts

CONTENTS
Introduction ................................................... v
Contributors ............................................... xii
Exodus ......................................................... 1
Ruth ............................................................. 9
Proverbs ......................................................... 17
Luke ............................................................. 25
Acts ............................................................. 33
James ........................................................... 41
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Gospel Transformation Bible

Grace for all of Life.
Introduction
to the ESV Gospel Transformation Bible

The goal of the Gospel Transformation Bible is twofold: (1) to enable readers to understand that the whole Bible is a unified message of the gospel of God's grace culminating in Christ Jesus, and (2) to help believers apply this good news to their everyday lives in a heart-transforming way. Our hope is that, as Christians throughout the world learn to see the message of salvation by grace unfolding throughout Scripture, they will respond to God with greater love, faithfulness, and power.

This is not a new way of studying the Bible. Rather, this approach honors our Lord’s own instruction to see the gospel in all Scripture, so that his love empowers the transformation of our lives from the inside out.

The Gospel in All of Scripture

Christ’s grace does not wait until the last chapters of Matthew to make its first appearance, but rather is the dawning light increasing throughout Scripture toward the day the Savior came. Jesus himself made this clear when he spoke to the religious leaders of his day, saying, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39; see also 1:45). After his resurrection, he spoke similarly to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Luke records Jesus’ conversation this way: “and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27; see also v. 44).

Jesus says repeatedly that all the Scriptures bear witness of him. But of course, a key question remaining for us is, how do all the Scriptures do this? Jesus cannot be contending that all portions of Scripture make direct mention of him. Most verses and most accounts in the Bible make no explicit reference to Jesus.

We will understand what Jesus meant about all Scripture bearing witness to him as we remember the big picture of the Bible. An old cliché says, “Biblical history is ‘his-story.’” But how is this story of Jesus unfolding across the past and future millennia the Bible describes? A standard way of thinking about the whole picture of God’s dealing with humanity begins with a good creation, spoiled by Adam’s fall, redeemed by Christ’s provision, and renewed in the consummation of Christ’s rule over all things. This creation-
fall-redemptionconsumption perspective helps us map all the events of Scripture. All have a place in this great unfolding plan of “his-story.”

In addition to seeing the overall plan of “his-story,” it is important to remember that the “redemption” component of biblical history begins unfolding long before the crucifixion narrative in the Gospels. The Bible reveals the dawning light of redemption near the very beginning. Immediately after Adam’s and Eve’s sin, God says to the one who tempted them, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). Bible scholars refer to this verse as the “first gospel.” It is God’s first promise to redeem his world and people—broken by Adam’s sin—by the divine provision of One who would come through a human source to defeat Satan while also suffering an awful attack from him.

This early verse in Genesis sets the stage for all that follows in the Bible. The rest of human history will be played out on this stage. Thus, every piece of Scripture that follows has a redemptive context. Our goal as Bible readers who are interpreting as Christ intends is not to try to make Jesus magically appear in every text, but to show where every text properly stands on this redemptive stage. Jesus is the chief and culminating figure on this stage. The stage is set for him; all that transpires on the stage relates to him; and we do not fully understand anything on the stage until we have identified its relation to him.

It should be emphasized that placing every text in its redemptive context does not mean that every text mentions Jesus. Rather, every text relates some aspect of God’s redeeming grace that finds its fullest expression in Christ. Ultimately, we understand who he is and what he does by how he speaks of himself as fulfilling the message of redemption that unfolds throughout the Bible.

This unfolding gospel perspective may be communicated in a variety of ways in the commentary portions of this Gospel Transformation Bible. Many texts specifically describe, prophesy, or typify (set a pattern for) the ministry of Jesus. Straightforward identification of obvious gospel truths is sufficient for understanding these texts. There are many more texts, however, that prepare for or reflect upon Christ’s ministry by disclosing aspects of the grace of God that find their completed expression in Jesus. These “gospel windows” revealing God’s gracious nature and provision may be identified and/or described through a variety of means—for example, locating a text in its redemptive-historical context, identifying a literary motif typifying God’s redemptive work that carries through the Old and New Testaments, describing doctrinal developments that are foundational to gospel understanding, or simply showing how God’s divine care for his people evidences the grace necessary for our redemption.

Our goal will be to identify gospel themes through methods readers can identify and repeat in their own study of Scripture. We want to distinguish such interpretation from speculative approaches that have sometimes cast doubt upon the gospel focus or veracity of Scripture. In the past, some interpreters have understood Christ’s statements about all the Scriptures speaking of him to justify fanciful references to Jesus in Old Testament passages with little biblical support. Such “allegorical” interpretations may, for example, claim that because Noah’s ark was made of wood, and the cross was made of wood, therefore the ark represents the cross. Of course,
someone else could say that the wood of Noah’s ark represents the wood of the ark of the covenant, or the wood panels of the temple of Israel, or the wood of the boat from which Christ stilled the storm. The trouble with such allegorical interpretations is that they are more a reflection of human imagination than biblical revelation.

If the New Testament does not indicate that a specific object or account is about Jesus, it is best not to force an interpretation that logic cannot prove. At the same time, we should be very willing to learn principles of redemptive interpretation that the New Testament writers employed and exemplified. From these principles we learn that the more common approach to understanding the redemptive nature of all biblical texts is to identify how God’s Word predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the person and/or work of Christ. These four categories of gospel explanation are not meant to be exhaustive or kept rigidly separate, but they do help us explain how all Scripture bears witness to who Christ is and/or what he must do.

1. Some passages—such as the prophecies and the messianic Psalms—clearly predict who Christ is and what he will do. Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, that “his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9:6–7). This is a clear prediction of Jesus’ person and work, and there are many more such predictions in the prophetic portions of Scripture.

2. Other passages prepare God’s people to understand the grace that God must provide to redeem his people. When God uses his servant David to show mercy to King Saul’s lame grandson (a royal descendant who would be David’s blood-rival for Israel’s throne), we understand something about God’s ways of forgiving enemies and showing mercy toward the helpless.

Not only do many Old Testament passages prepare God’s people to understand the grace of his provision, they also prepare the people to understand their need. When Paul writes in Galatians 3:24 that the law was our schoolmaster or guardian helping lead us to Christ, we understand that the high and holy standards of the law ultimately prepare us to seek God’s provision of mercy rather than to depend on the quality of our performance to make us acceptable to him. The sacrifice system further prepares us to understand that without the shedding of blood there is no atonement for our failures to keep the law (Heb. 9:22). And because Abraham’s faith was counted to him as righteousness, we are prepared to understand that our standing before God depends upon our faith in the provision of another (Rom. 4:23–24).

Grace does not spring up like a surprise jack-in-the-box in the New Testament. God’s people have been prepared for millennia to understand and receive the grace of Christ on their behalf.

3. Because grace is the key to understanding the purposes of God throughout the whole Bible, culminating in Christ, aspects of the gospel are reflected throughout Scripture. When a text neither plainly predicts nor prepares for Christ’s person or work, the redemptive truths reflected in the text can always be discerned by asking two questions that are fair to ask of any text:
What does this text reflect about the nature of God who provides redemption?

and/or

What does this text reflect about the nature of humanity that requires redemption?

These simple questions are the lenses to the reading glasses through which we can look at any text to see what the Bible is reflecting of God’s nature and/or human nature. Inevitably these lenses enable us see that God is holy and we are not, or that God is sovereign and we are vulnerable, or that God is merciful and we require his mercy. Such reading glasses always make us aware of our need of God’s grace to compensate for our sin and inability. Christ may not be specifically mentioned in the text, but the reflection of God’s nature and ours makes the necessity of his grace apparent.

Using these reading glasses throughout the Old and New Testament will enable us to see the gracious nature of God who provides redemption as he gives strength to the weak, rest to the weary, deliverance to the disobedient, faithfulness to the unfaithful, food to the hungry, and salvation to sinners. We also learn something about the human nature that requires redemption when heroes fail, patriarchs lie, kings fall, prophets cower, disciples doubt, and covenant people become idolaters. These lenses prevent us from setting up characters in the Bible only as moral heroes to emulate, rather than as flawed men and women who themselves needed the grace of God.

Every text, seen in its redemptive context, is reflecting an aspect of humanity’s fallen condition that requires the grace of God. Focus upon this fallen condition will inevitably cause readers to consider the divine solution characteristic of the grace that culminates in the provision of the Savior.

4. Finally, we understand how God’s redemptive message appears in Scripture by those texts that are a result of Christ’s work in our behalf. We are justified and sanctified as a result of Christ’s atoning work and spiritual indwelling. Our prayers are heard as a result of his priestly intercession for us. Our wills are transformed as result of our union with him. We worship as a result of God’s gracious provision for every aspect of our salvation.

Ultimately, the reason to read Scripture with an eye to understanding how our actions and status are a result of grace is to keep straight the order of Scripture’s imperatives and indicatives. The imperatives (what we are to do) are always a consequence of the indicatives (who we are by God’s gracious provision); what we do is never a cause of who we are with respect to our eternal status in God’s kingdom and family. We obey as a result of being God’s beloved, not to cause God to love us. His grace toward us precedes, enables, and motivates our efforts toward holiness.

A key example of imperatives flowing from indicatives occurs when God gives the Ten Commandments to his people. He does not make their obedience a condition of his love. He first declares, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deut. 5:6), and then he gives the commandments. He rescued his people before they obeyed. Their obedience was expected
as a consequence of receiving God's deliverance, not as a condition for obtaining it. By understanding this consistent redemptive pattern in Scripture, we not only have a tool for understanding the Bible's structure, we have a way of seeing the grace of the gospel even in passages dominated by God's commands.

The indicative/imperative pattern of Scripture leads us next to consider why it is so important to see the grace message pervading Scripture and culminating in Christ. So far we have only considered how we can excavate grace from all Scripture, but we have not discussed why this is so important. The reason is that grace not only underlies God's imperatives, it is also the ultimate power that enables us to live out these standards from the inside out.

Empowered Application
A second major goal of the Gospel Transformation Bible is therefore to help readers apply gospel truths to their everyday lives. Faithful application typically answers four questions: 1) What to do? 2) Where to do it? 3) Why to do it? and 4) How to do it? Previous application-focused study Bibles have emphasized the first two of these questions. The Gospel Transformation Bible, while not ignoring the first two questions, seeks to be a primary resource for the latter two. Contributors' notes indicate how the unfolding gospel truths in any given passage of Scripture motivate and enable believers to honor their Savior from the heart—in short, how grace transforms them.

Our goal is to make plain the imperatives of God's Word, while undermining the human reflex to base God's affection on human performance. Contributors have therefore indicated how the indicatives of the gospel (i.e., the status and privileges believers have by virtue of God's grace alone) provide motivation and power for God's people to honor him from the heart.

The Motivation of Grace
The Bible recognizes no definition of grace that encourages moral license. Instead, feasting on grace fuels love for God that enables us to fulfill the commandment that is foundational to all others: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). When we love him rightly, we delight to walk with him in every dimension of our lives. Only the grace of God ultimately displayed in the provision of Christ for sinners can stimulate such loving obedience.

Warnings and rewards are also clearly given in Scripture to motivate believers through identification of the consequences of disobedience and the blessings of obedience. But in themselves, these motivations do not create an obedience that is a product of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In fact, if we only or primarily obey God to avoid consequences and/or to gain rewards, then self-love motivates us more than love for God. For the believer, biblical warnings must be understood as expressions of care from a loving Father, and blessings must be received as benevolent responses to inadequate performance. Without this perspective the warnings and blessings accomplish the opposite of their biblical purpose—creating fear and pride rather than love and thanksgiving.
Relishing the gracious provision God has made for us despite our sin and inability stimulates true humility, gratitude, sacrifice, obedience, and praise. We live to honor God in response to the love he has shown us, rather than seeking to benefit ourselves with temporal pleasures or gain. We pursue holiness because our heavenly Father has been gracious to us, not to bribe a divine ogre in the sky to be favorable toward us.

Since God’s love for us is the soil in which love for God grows, identifying his grace in all the Scriptures is not simply an interpretive scheme. It is supremely practical. For regular exaltation of the gospel is what ignites love for God in the hearts of believers. We identify the grace pervading Scripture in order to fan into flame our zeal for the Savior. Our goal is not merely good interpretation but stimulation of a profound love for God that bears holy fruit, as pleasing the One we love above all brings our most profound and compelling joy.

The Power of Grace

Grace pervades Scripture not only to motivate godliness, but also to empower it. In order to discern how grace empowers, we need to consider the sources of power for the Christian life.

Knowledge is power. One source of spiritual power is knowledge. We need to know what to do and believe in order to apply God’s Word to our lives. If we do not know what to believe, then we cannot honor the truths about God; and, if we do not know what to do, then we cannot truly please God. Among other things, this means that consistently uncovering the grace of God in Scripture does not render superfluous the law of God. The law reflects the character and care of God (Ps. 19:7–10). By the direction of his commands, God gives us a safe path for our lives and, in doing so, he reveals that he is good.

The law is ungracious when it is presented as a means of meriting God’s favor or acceptance, but Jesus taught us that the law itself is good—and that not one iota of it would pass away until heaven and earth did (Matt. 5:17–18). As counterintuitive as it may seem, we are not being gracious when we minimize the moral standards of God, because by doing so we rob others of the knowledge of the safe path that God’s Word provides and of the knowledge of the good God who laid that path.

Yet, as important as it is to know what to believe and what to do, such knowledge is still insufficient for living the Christian life. If we have no will or ability to act on the knowledge we have, we cannot please God. That’s why uncovering the message of grace in all of Scripture is so important. The love for God that the gospel of grace stimulates in us provides power for Christian living that knowledge alone cannot.

Love is power. To help us grasp the full power of love for God, we must consider a critical question: What is the primary reason that sin gains power over believers? Sin’s power has already been defeated; we are no longer its slaves (Rom. 6:14–17). By virtue of their renewed minds and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, sin no more has dominion over those united to Christ (Rom. 12:1–2; Gal. 2:20; 1 John 4:4). So why do we yield to sin? The answer is, because we love it. Consider this: If sin did not attract us, it would have no power over us. We turn from God because we are drawn to sin’s temporary pleasures and false promises (Heb. 11:25; James 1:14–15).
The understanding that sin takes control of our lives through our love of it leads to another critical question: What will drive our love for sin from our hearts? First, understanding that the pleasures of sin are temporary and that its consequences are ruinous will help turn us from sin. The warnings in Scripture confirm the importance of this understanding. But what will cut off love for sin at its source, so that it does not even have the opportunity to gain control of our heart? The answer is: a surpassing, transforming love.

Our love for sin, which grants it present power in our lives, is overcome when displaced by a greater love. Thomas Chalmers’s famous sermon two hundred years ago on “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” still rings true. When love for Christ exceeds all other loves, we want to please him above all other pleasures. This is why Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Understanding the power of a surpassing love leads to a final critical question: If a surpassing love for God makes his priorities our own, then what fills our hearts with such love for him? The answer is, in the words of John Newton’s famous hymn, “amazing grace . . . that saved a wretch like me.” He loved me before I knew him. He died for me while I was yet his enemy. He keeps me when I fall. He holds me when I fail. He remains faithful though I am faithless. He forgives me when I am wrong, and loves me still. Such grace is intended to fill our hearts with a surpassing love for God that empowers genuine Christian living. The power of grace to stimulate an all-conquering love for God is the ultimate reason we must identify the heart of the gospel in all of Scripture. Interpretation marked by consistent adulation of God’s mercy continually fills the Christian heart with more cause to love him. This love becomes the primary force for Christian obedience as hearts in which the Spirit dwells respond with love for their Savior. This is why the apostle Paul could say, “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor. 5:14), and that “the grace of God” is “training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:11–12). Grace leads to godliness.

In the Gospel Transformation Bible, we will consistently excavate the gospel truths that pervade Scripture so that the hearts of believers might be filled with love for God that drives out love for the world. Without love for the world, its temptations have no power. We are not tempted to do what we have no desire to do. Instead, a preeminent love for God makes doing his will the believer’s greatest joy, and this joy is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

By showing how grace motivates and empowers the Christian life, the heart-application that the Gospel Transformation Bible commentators provide is not a legalistic add-on to Bible exposition. These reflections on how we can apply the Bible to our lives in a grace-centered way are rather the spiritual unfolding of the implications of the gospel in the life of the believer. Because grace finds its ultimate expression in Christ’s love for us, we love him. As a consequence, we delight to love what and whom he loves. Our delight in his delight is not only the power behind personal holiness but the stimulus to love the unlovely, provide for the needy, and care for all that Christ loves.

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Exodus (meaning exit) was probably written by Moses, like the rest of the Pentateuch. There is no agreement among scholars as to the date when the events of the exodus took place. A common view is that the exodus occurred in c. 1446 b.c., though some scholars believe it took place around 1260 b.c.

The Gospel in Exodus

Exodus offers the greatest paradigmatic redemption event in the Bible prior to Christ’s incarnation. As such, it is profoundly Good News to captives, to those who labor in bondage to sin and misery. In addition, it shapes Christians’ continued understanding of and hope for redemption. In the redemption gained through the life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and continued ministry of Jesus, we have a new exodus, a fulfillment of what Exodus pictured for the people of God.

Exodus tells us that redemption begins with God remembering his covenant promises offered in Genesis: the promise of the death blow to our ancient enemy through the offspring of the woman (Gen. 3:15); the promise to Abraham of an offspring through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3); and the promise that Abraham’s offspring will be in captivity for a time, but will return to the Promised Land (Gen. 15:13–14). Exodus opens with God remembering his covenant with Abraham (Ex. 2:23–25) and coming down to redeem his people through his chosen mediator, Moses (chs. 3–4).

Through Moses, God goes forward to redeem his people “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (20:2). Central to this redemption is judgment and salvation: judgment on the gods of Egypt and especially on their representative, Pharaoh, through the plagues; salvation amid the death of the firstborn of Egypt, of both humans and beasts, through the substitutionary death of spotless lambs for Israel (chs. 7–13). In the final contest between God and Pharaoh, God as the true King of the world crushes his enemy in the floods of the Red Sea and delivers his people through the waters of salvation. No wonder Moses’ song ends, “The Lord will reign forever and ever” (15:18).

Having redeemed his people, God then guides them through the wilderness and brings them to Mount Sinai to instruct them in his ways. That is always the order of the Bible: redemption, then response; grace, then law. However, the Mosaic covenant could not deliver people from their sins; it was not meant to do so—rather, it served to point beyond itself to One who would come to fulfill all the foreshadowings in the tabernacle and all the requirements of the law’s “rules” (21:1).
This Old Testament paradigm of redemption in Exodus, then, helps Christians see more clearly the ultimate redemption that God works out through Jesus, his Mediator between God and mankind (1 Tim. 2:5). In Jesus the Messiah, God acts because he remembers his covenant. His earliest promises to Adam and Eve and to Abraham find their fulfillment in Jesus (Gal. 3:7–18). And so, in Jesus, God himself comes down to deliver his people (John 1:14–18). Jesus is the Lamb of God whose blood serves as the redemption-price to deliver his people from God’s wrath and the enemy’s captivity (John 1:29; Rom. 3:24–26; 1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 1:7; 2:1-10). Those who trust in him are delivered from death itself—displayed in baptism—and brought to new life in Christ through his power (Rom. 6:1–11; 1 Cor. 10:1–4). That is why New Testament saints sing Moses’ song as well (Rev. 15:3): Jesus has thrown the Evil One into the sea of God’s wrath.

Moreover, as God’s redeemed people, we live our lives in the wilderness as we make our way to the Promised Land, looking for a permanent city built by God (Heb. 11:10–16; 13:14). As we go through this world, God’s Word and Spirit guide us as God’s people under the oversight of elders (cf. Exodus 18 with Acts 15; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). We know God’s presence. We are instructed in God’s ways: his law no longer condemns us, but serves as a guide for our lives as we pursue holiness (Heb. 12:14; 1 Pet. 1:16) as those already viewed as holy to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:11).

Thus, Exodus offers a paradigm for God’s redemption gained for us in Jesus Christ. As we read and meditate on this book, we are drawn into the drama of God’s working that helps us to see and delight in the work of Jesus, with the result that we love even more the One who first loved us.

Outline

I. God Hears, and Remembers His Covenant (1:1–2:25)

II. God Comes Down and Calls His Deliverer (3:1–4:17)

III. God Redeems His People (4:18–15:21)
   A. God redeems his people through his promise (4:18–7:7)
   B. God redeems his people through his plagues (7:8–10:29)
   C. God redeems his people through his Passover (11:1–13:16)
   D. God redeems his people through his power (13:17–15:21)

IV. God Leads His People (15:22–18:27)

V. God Instructs His People (19:1–40:38)
   A. God instructs his people through the commandments (19:1–20:17)
   B. God instructs his people through the covenant (20:18–24:11)
   C. God instructs his people through the tabernacle (24:12–40:38)
Israel Increases Greatly in Egypt

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: 2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3 Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5 All the descendants of Jacob were seven persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. 6 Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. 7 But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

Pharaoh Oppresses Israel

8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.

12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. 13 So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

15 Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” 17 But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. 18 So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” 19 The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and...
give birth before the midwife comes to them.”

20. So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong.

21. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. 22. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

The Birth of Moses

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. 2. The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. 3. When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. 5. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. 6. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” 8. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9. And Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him.

2. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

Moses Flees to Midian

11. One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. 12. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

13. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, “Why do you strike your companion?” 14. He answered, “‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid, and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” 15. When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.

16. Now the priest of Midian had seven sons. They brought him sevenewts of wheat and brought them to his mother. 17. His mother took the wheat and made cakes of it. And the child’s mother ate the cakes, and the child grew. And she brought him to her mother, who brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

2:1-10 Moses is introduced and will serve as the deliverer of his people. His special birth casts the mind back to another child of promise, Isaac, and forward to other cared-for children of promise, especially Samson (Judg. 13:1-25), Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1-20) and, later, Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25). God’s protection of his appointed deliverer occurs as Moses is himself delivered from Pharaoh’s decree of death. This calls to mind how Jesus, God’s appointed deliverer of his people, was delivered from Herod’s decree of death (Matt. 2:13-23).

2:3 In the same way that God delivered Noah from judgment by having him build an ark that floated upon the waters (Gen. 6:11-14), so God delivered Moses from Pharaoh’s judgment by having his mother build an ark that floated upon the waters. God rescued Moses through the faith of his parents, who not only hid him but also entrusted him to God’s care and deliverance (Heb. 11:23). Faith trusts the unseen God, knowing that he has delivered in times past and will deliver his people in future days as well. God uses and honors the faith of parents today as he keeps his promises to them and their children (Gen. 17:1-14; Acts 2:28-29).

2:10-11 Moses lived in Pharaoh’s household 40 years. During that time, he was “instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22-23). Like Daniel, who also excelled amid such “pagan” instruction (Dan. 1:17-20), Moses was prepared with the best that his culture offered. God’s purpose for Moses—leading a nation of millions through the wilderness—required such preparation.

Are we patient in similar periods of training? Do we see the value of our educations in areas of “general revelation” or “secular” topics? God uses these times to shape our minds for future usefulness. It is a mark of his great love for us.
died, and the people of Israel—but see Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19, where the angel of the
angel’s appearances in the Old Testament as those of the preincarnate Son of God
leading Israel to the Promised Land (23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). While many identify the
is identified with the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 14:19) and is the means of God’s
messenger, a distinct being who is yet so identified with Yahweh that to see him is to
trust the Lord in obedient faith, believing that God’s power would be displayed in
limitless sufficiency, and power will be with him. And that’s the point: God is the true
question or objection that Moses offers, God patiently shows how his presence,
and the adequacy of the God who calls him (cf. 2 Cor. 3:4–6). In response to every
promise (cf. 2 Pet. 3:1–9). He is the faithful, covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.
To remember his promise to make the world new; but God is not slow in keeping his
covenant promises to Abraham in Genesis 15:14. Often, we become impatient for God
Abraham.” In the exodus event, God specifically acts to save Israel because of his
holiness of God would not destroy or consume the object of his revelation.

God Hears Israel’s Groaning
25: During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel—because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their
cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham,
with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God “saw the people of Israel—and God knew.
The Burning Bush
3 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wild-
derness and came to Horeb, the “mountain of God. 2 And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a
bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3 And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight,
why the bush is not burned.” 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, ‘God called to him ‘out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And
he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy

2:23–25 These verses frame the section that began at 1:1. There, the list of the 12 tribes of Israel and God’s blessing with fruitful-ness recalled God’s covenant promise to Abraham. Here, the text explicitly says, “God remembered his covenant with Abraham.” In the exodus event, God specifically acts to save Israel because of his
covenant promises to Abraham in Genesis 15:14. Often, we become impatient for God to remember his promise to make the world new; but God is not slow in keeping his promise (cf. 2 Pet. 3:1–9). He is the faithful, covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.

3:1–4:17 Because God remembered his covenant, he chose Moses as a deliverer for his people. This section demonstrates both the inadequacy of Moses as a deliverer and the adequacy of the God who calls him (cf. 2 Cor. 3:4–6). In response to every question or objection that Moses offers, God patiently shows how his presence, limitless sufficiency, and power will be with him. And that’s the point: God is the true deliverer of his people in and through Moses, his chosen servant. Moses’ call was to trust the Lord in obedi-ent faith, believing that God’s power would be displayed in Moses’ weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9–10).

3:2 The angel of the Lord frequently appears in the Old Testament as the Lord’s messenger, a distinct being who is yet so identified with Yahweh that to see him is to see God (Genesis 16:18; 22:11–18; Numbers 22; Judges 6; 13). In Exodus, the angel is identified with the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 14:19) and is the means of God’s leading Israel to the Promised Land (23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). While many identify the angel’s appearances in the Old Testament as those of the preincarnate Son of God (but see Matt. 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19, where the angel of the LORD appears after Jesus has already been conceived), it can at least be said that he serves to foreshadow the way that Jesus reveals God to his people as one sent from and yet identified with God.

3:2–4 In the Bible, fire often accompanies the self-revelation of God (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:1–4:17; 13:21–22; 14:24; 19:18; 24:17; 40:38; Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29). It generally stands for God’s glory, holiness, and purity (Ex. 3:5). As a glorious and pure being, God cannot tolerate impurity, but must judge and consume it (1 John 1:5). The wonder of the burning bush—what made it a “great sight”—was that the fire did not consume the bush. Hence, what was a picture of God’s sovereign power over creation and his holy presence with his people was also a picture of his mercy and grace—that the fiery holiness of God would not destroy or consume the object of his revelation.

1 Gershom sounds like the Hebrew for sojourner
ground." And he said, "‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for ‘he was afraid to look at God.

7 Then the Lord said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

10 ‘Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.’ 11 But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’ 12 He said, ‘But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, “you shall serve God on this mountain.”

13 Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you,” and they ask me, “What is his name?” what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”’ And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is ‘my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. 16 Go and “gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, “‘I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that “I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”’” 18 And “they will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has ‘met with us; and now, please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.” 19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you

6 ch. 4:5; Gen. 28:13; 1 Kgs. 18:36; Cited Matt. 22:22; Mark 12:26; [Luke 20:37]
7 [1 Kgs. 19:15; Isa. 6:1, 2, 5]
8 ch. 2:23-25; Neh. 9:9; Ps. 106:44; ch. 5:13, 14
9 Gen. 11:5, 7; 18:21; Ps. 105:26; Mic. 6:4
10 ch. 6:12; [1 Sam. 18:18; Isa. 6:5, 8; Jer. 16]
11 ch. 4:12, 15; Deut. 31:8, 23; Josh. 1:5 [See ch. 19
12 ch. 2:23; Deut. 6:6; Ps. 68; John 8:58; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 4:8
13 ch. 3:17; Hos. 12:5; [Ps. 135:13
14 ch. 4:29; ch. 4:31; Gen. 50:24; [Luke 16] 6 Exod. 3:6
15 ch. 2:23 [ch. 13:1-4, 22
16 [Ps. 105:26; Mic. 6:4]
17 ch. 6:2; [1 Sam. 18:18; Isa. 6:5, 8; Jer. 16]
18 ch. 4:31; Num. 13:7, 10, 16
19 ch. 5:2, 7:4

3:11–12 God’s answer to Moses’ first objection should have been sufficient for all the rest: “But I will be with you.” This is far more than God’s omnipresence. Rather, this is God’s active, powerful presence with his people to deliver (cf. 3:14). Remember that God said, “I have come down to deliver them.” . . . Come, I will send you” (3:8, 10). God is present in and through Moses to deliver his people. The blessing that Jesus, God incarnate, gave to his disciples offers us this same confidence: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Our God, through the Spirit of Jesus, is powerfully present with us to guide, comfort, and deliver. We can take comfort, confidence, and courage in this reality.

3:13–16 Naming has great importance in the Bible. In the garden of Eden, the giving of names demonstrates lordship over the creation (Gen. 1:26–27; 2:19, 23; 3:20) and can often relate to hopes (Gen. 4:1), memories (Gen. 35:18), or prophecies (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:21). In naming, one’s character is revealed.

Moses’ question is therefore supremely important: what is the name, the character, of this God of whom I will speak? God’s response seems enigmatic. But notice how the revelation of God’s name builds: “I AM WHO I AM.” (3:14a); “Say this . . . , ‘The Lord [I am], the God of your fathers’” (3:15, 16). In other words, this living, personal God who revealed himself to Abraham and made covenant with him is the God who is moving to deliver his people now.

All of this makes Jesus’ own use of this divine name significant as well, not only in the seven “I am” statements in the Gospel of John (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1), but especially his declaration to the Pharisees that “before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In saying this, Jesus was claiming to be the same living, personal God who made covenant with Abraham, the same God who revealed himself to Moses, and the one who was now moving to deliver his people.
Moses Given Powerful Signs

Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” 2 The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” 3 And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. 4 But the LORD said to Moses, “Put your hand by the tail”—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— 5 that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” 6 And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your cloak.” So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8 “If they will not believe you,” God said, “or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

But Moses said to the LORD, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but “I am slow of speech and of tongue.”

Then the LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.”

But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.”

Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him, and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. 16 He shall speak to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him. 17 And take in your hand this staff, with which you shall do the signs.”

Moses Returns to Egypt

Moses went back to “Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, “Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

1 Septuagint, Vulgate; Hebrew go, not by a mighty hand 2 Hebrew into your bosom; also verse 7 3 Leprosy was a term for several skin diseases; see Leviticus 13

3:19–20 God tells Moses, “I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go” (3:19). But this is not mere foreknowledge; rather, this foreknowledge is related to God’s overarching purpose—“I will stretch out my hand . . . ; after that he will let you go” (3:20). Even more, God’s purpose is not simply to defeat Pharaoh, but to “plunder the Egyptians” (3:22; 12:36). What confidence Moses should have known because God already had told him what would happen! Likewise, what confidence we should have because we know that our God is the Lord of history. He knows “the end from the beginning” because his sovereign purpose rules and overrules all (Isa. 46:7–10!)

4:1–9 In response to Moses’ objection that Israel “will not believe me or listen to my voice” (v. 1), God gives him signs (vv. 8, 9). These serve as confirmations of God’s word and pictures of God’s power. As confirmations, they were meant to persuade Israel to “believe that the LORD . . . has appeared to you” (v. 5). As pictures, they demonstrate how God will act as Israel trusts him: as Sovereign King he will seize the tail of Egyptian power (in the serpent). As the Redeemer he will purify his unclean nation (in the leprous hand). God condescended to Israel’s weak capacities in giving these signs to strengthen their hearts.

He continues to do the same for us today in his signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, signs that confirm his promises and picture his good news for us.
And the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead.” So Moses took his wife and his sons and had them ride on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.

And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the ‘miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my ‘firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’ If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’”

At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and ‘sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a ‘flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” So he let him alone. It was then that she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” because of the circumcision.

The Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness ‘to meet Moses.” So he went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him to speak, and all the signs that he had commanded him to do. Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had ‘visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, ‘they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Making Bricks Without Straw

Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.’” But Pharaoh said, “‘Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, ‘I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “The ‘God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword.” But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your ‘burdens.” And Pharaoh said, “Behold, ‘the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens!”

The same day Pharaoh commanded the ‘taskmasters of the people and their ‘foremen, “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as in the past; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the number of bricks that they made in the past you shall impose on them, you shall by no means reduce it, for they are idle. Therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’ Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.”

So the ‘taskmasters and the foremen of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw. ‘Go and get your straw yourselves wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced in the least.’” So the people were scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. The ‘taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, your daily task each day, as when there was straw.” And the foremen of the people of Israel, whom Pharaoh’s ‘taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, “Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday, as in the past?”

Then the foremen of the people of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, “Why do you treat

1 Hebrew his 2 Samaritan they are now more numerous than the people of the land

5:5–21 Not only does Moses’ appeal to Pharaoh that he let Israel go fail, it produces a disastrous result: the intensification of Israel’s hardship and affliction. Underlying this increased affliction is a larger battle: a battle between the Lord, the God of Israel, and Pharaoh, representing the gods of Egypt. Whereas Moses came with “thus says the Lord” (5:1), Pharaoh speaks to Israel with “thus says Pharaoh” (5:10). As God will tell Moses, this was exactly the point: this confrontation was so that “the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord” (7:5).
Author and Date
The story of Ruth takes place in the time of the judges (after the conquest of Canaan and before c. 1050 B.C.). No author is named, but the mention of David and his genealogy (4:17–22) places the writing sometime after David became king (2 Samuel 2) in c. 1010 B.C.

The Gospel in Ruth
Ruth is the story of a young Moabite widow who comes to know the covenant love of the one true God and the joy of belonging to his people through her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi. As these two women navigate through difficult as well as ordinary circumstances, there is unmistakable evidence of God’s sovereign hand at work to redeem a people for himself. He is the hero of the story as the faithful God who with great lovingkindness (hesed) cares for his own and provides what they need. In Ruth’s story we see a reflection of our own. For we too were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Like Ruth, we too need a Kinsman-Redeemer who will do what is necessary to remedy our helpless condition.

The language of redemption permeates the story of Ruth; words built on the root “redeem” (ga-al) appear 23 times. Key to understanding the narrative is the concept of the kinsman-redeemer, the closest living male relative who had the duty to preserve the family name and land. He could do this in a number of ways: buying back either land that a poor relative had to sell or the family member that had sold himself into slavery to pay debts (Lev. 25:25, 47–49); avenging the death of a family member (Num. 35:19–21); or marrying the widow of a deceased relative (Deut. 25:5–10). All of these duties could be refused, including marriage to the late relative’s widow (now known as “levirate” marriage, levir being the Latin translation of the Hebrew word for brother-in-law). In certain cases, one could be a goel (“close relative” or “redeemer”) without being a levir (one who would provide an heir to the deceased relative through marrying his widow). In Ruth’s case, the kinsman-redeemer Boaz elects to carry out the duties of both, buying her estate and taking her as his bride.

Readers of the New Testament will recognize Jesus Christ as the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer who voluntarily paid the price for the redemption of his people and takes them as his beloved Bride (Eph. 5:23–32; Rev. 19:7).
INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

Outline

I. Introduction: Naomi’s Family Dies (1:1–5)
II. Scene 1: Naomi Returns to Bethlehem with Ruth (1:6–22)
III. Scene 2: Ruth Gleaners in Boaz’s Field (2:1–23)
IV. Scene 3: Ruth, at the Threshing Floor, Asks Boaz to Marry Her (3:1–18)
V. Scene 4: Boaz Arranges Redemption at the Gate (4:1–12)
VI. Conclusion: Naomi Blessed with a New Family (4:13–17)
VII. Genealogy: Extended Blessing (4:18–22)
Chapter 1

Although the times of the judges were dark, when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6), God still was calling to himself a believing remnant. Through Elimelech’s decision to take his family to Moab (whether right or wrong), God would work to fulfill his promise to Abraham, “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This story is an important piece of the overarching story of redemptive history. The last word in the book will make this abundantly clear.

1:6–13 Naomi hears that the Lord had shown favor to his people by ending their famine in Judah. She starts on the return journey from Moab with Orpah and Ruth, but then considers their situation and pleads with them to turn back. Using the language of covenant love, “deal kindly” (hēsed), she prays that the Lord will give them the security of home and family in Moab. She has no other sons to fulfill the levirate marriage law, and at her age she cannot provide them now. She grieves that her own circumstances have affected them so disastrously, feeling that the Lord’s hand was against her.

But death of loved ones is ultimately the result of living in a fallen world; it comes to all. Far from being against her, the Lord is working through Naomi’s grievous circumstances to bring into the world One who ultimately will redeem her and all his people from death forever (Col. 2:13–15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Rev. 21:4).

1:14–18 Orpah tearfully kisses Naomi good-bye, but Ruth insists on staying with Naomi. She declares her faithful, loving commitment to Naomi, her people, and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of your husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.
15 And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has
gone back to her people and to her gods; return
after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said,
“Do not urge me to leave you or to return
from following you. For where you go I will
go, and where you lodge I will lodge. 17Your
people shall be my people, and your God my
God. 18Where you die I will die, and there
will I be buried. 19May the LORD do so to me
and more also if anything but death parts
me from you.” 18And when Naomi saw that
she was determined to go with her, she said
no more.

Naomi and Ruth Return
19 So the two of them went on until they
came to Bethlehem. And when they came
to Bethlehem, 2 the whole town was stirred
because of them. And the women said, “Is this
Naomi?” 20She said to them, “Do not call me
Naomi; 21call me Mara, 2 for the Almighty has
dealt very bitterly with me. 21I went away full,
and the LORD has brought me back empty.
Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testi-
fied against me and the Almighty has brought
 calamity upon me?”

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite
her daughter-in-law with her, who returned
from the country of Moab. And they came to
Bethlehem 2 at the beginning of barley harvest.

Ruth Meets Boaz
2 Now Naomi had 3 a relative of her hus-
band’s, a worthy man of the clan of
Elimelech, whose name was 4 Boaz. 2 And Ruth
the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the
field and glean among the ears of grain after
him “in whose sight I shall find favor.” And
she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” 3 So she set
out and went and gleaned in the field after
the reapers, and she happened to come to the
part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was
of the clan of Elimelech. 4 And behold, Boaz
came from Bethlehem. And he said to the
reapers, “ 5 The LORD be with you!” And they
answered, “The LORD bless you.” 9 Then Boaz
said to his young man who was in charge of
the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” 6 And
the servant who was in charge of the reapers
answered, “She is the young Moabite woman,
7 who came back with Naomi from the country
of Moab. 7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and
gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’
So she came, and she has continued from early
morning until now, except for a short rest.”
8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my
daughter, do not go to glean in another field
or leave this one, but keep close to my young
women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field that
they are reaping, and go after them. Have
I not charged the young men not to touch

1 Naomi means pleasant 2 Mara means bitter 3 Compare Septuagint, Vulgate; the meaning of the Hebrew phrase is uncertain

God until death. Ruth is willing to leave her native country and its worship of the pagan
god Chemosh to become a part of the people of God in the land of Judah—despite
poor earthly prospects there. In these ways, Ruth not only demonstrates the reality
of her faith in God by her actions, she also becomes a living demonstration of his
benevolent plan.

1:19-22 Naomi rightly attributes her circumstances to the sovereign Lord, but she sees
only what he has taken away. Her grief blinds her to what he has provided: in his grace
God had given her a husband, two sons, and two daughters-in-law. She is returning to
Bethlehem with one of them, and with Ruth her life is anything but empty. God’s timing
is also gracious and full of hope as they return at the beginning of the barley harvest.

2:1 By introducing Boaz here, the author prepares us for what is coming so that as
the story unfolds we will recognize the overruling hand of God administering his
gracious plan.

2:2-13 Biblical law provides grace for those who struggle by instructing reapers to
leave a portion of the field unharvested. The purpose of this was to allow the poor,
widows, and sojourners to provide for themselves by gleaning (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22;
Deut. 24:19–22). Ruth does not presume this will apply to her, but in hopes of find-
ing “favor” (Ruth 2:2, 10, 13, often translated “grace”), she asks permission from the
young man in charge of Boaz’s reapers to glean in his field (v. 7; cf. v. 2). She finds
favor not only with him but also with Boaz, who has heard of her faith in the Lord
and his faithfulness to her mother-in-law. Boaz gives instruction for her protection
and provision, then prays the Lord’s rewards on her as one who has found refuge under
his wings (cf. Deut. 32:11f; Ps. 17:8; 36:7ff.; 57:1; 63:7; 91:1–4).
you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"

11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. 19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." 21 And Ruth the Moabitite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' " 22 And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." 23 So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor

3 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight.

1 An ephah was about 3/5 bushel or 22 liters

Ruth is overwhelmed by such grace given to "a foreigner." As a Moabitite, she would have been considered an enemy of God's people and forbidden to enter the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23:3). But as one who put her faith in the Lord and his covenant promises—ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ—she is a child of Abraham by faith (Rom. 4:13–16; Gal. 3:7–9).

2:14–23 Boaz continues to shower his favor on Ruth by having her sit with his reapers at mealtime and by serving her more than she can consume. He instructs his young men to let her glean among the sheaves—not just at the edge of the field—and to leave extra grain for her to gather. When Naomi sees the large amount of barley and the leftover food that Ruth brings home and learns that Boaz is the generous landowner who has taken notice of Ruth in this way, her bitterness and despair dissipate. She prays blessing on Boaz and praises the Lord for his covenant kindness (hesed, v. 20) that never forsakes his own. Naomi reveals to Ruth that Boaz is a close relative, one of their redeemers (goel). For them such a goel holds the promise of help, protection, security, and redemption—a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

The same is true of us when we hear for the first time that there exists a Redeemer who may save us from our spiritual poverty and hopelessness, who can take away our guilt of sin and its wages of death and give us right standing before God, bringing us into his very family (Rom. 6:23; 8:16).

3:1–9 Naomi's hope gives birth to a plan by which Ruth may ask Boaz to enter into a levirate marriage with her and take on the duty of being their redeemer. As strange
at the threshing floor. "Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do." And she replied, "All that you say I will do."

So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am your servant, for you are greater than my daughter. You have made this last kindness to your mother-in-law, she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."

So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer." And he said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will 'redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, "as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning."

So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." And he said, "Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did you fare, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, 'You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' " She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today."

3:10-18 In response to Ruth's proposal, Boaz commends her for her kindness (hesed, v. 10) in favoring him over a younger man. He assures her that he will do everything to make sure that she has a redeemer (v. 13). Although he is not the first in line to fulfill this duty, he promises to investigate as soon as possible whether or not the nearer relative is willing to do so; if not, Boaz promises to be that redeemer. Ruth and Naomi are proven right to put their trust in Boaz's own kindness and generosity. He is careful to protect Ruth's reputation (v. 14). He makes sure that Ruth does "not go back empty-handed" to her mother-in-law (vv. 15-17), giving an abundant gift for the one who thought the Lord had brought her "back empty" from Moab (1:20-21).

This is a beautiful picture of the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ. This true and final Redeemer willingly did everything necessary for the redemption of his bride, the church—"‘for the joy that was set before him [Christ] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God’" (Heb. 12:2). In him, God, in his covenant love and mercy, provided redemption from our sins, "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-7). We are right to put our trust in such covenant kindness and generosity.

1 Compare 2:12; the word for wings can also mean corners of a garment.
Boaz Redeems Ruth

4

Now Boaz had gone up to ‘the gate and sat down there. And behold, ‘the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 So I thought I would tell you of it and say, “Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.’ If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not tell, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.” 5 Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabitite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.” 6 Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.” 7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to ‘Chilion and to Mahlon. 10 Also Ruth the Moabitite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, ‘to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.” 11 Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the L ORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, ‘who together ‘built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in your house, like Rachel and Leah, ‘who were witnesses this day.” 12 And may your house be like the house of Perez, ‘whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the L ORD will give you by this young woman.”

1 Hebrew he 2 Masoretic Text you also buy it from Ruth

4:1–6 Boaz tells the next of kin that Naomi is selling land that belonged to her late husband, Elimelech (v. 3). If Naomi were the only surviving relative, the land would be all there was to redeem because she was beyond childbearing age and therefore the duty of the redeemer would not include a levirate marriage. Boaz makes clear up front that if the relative will not redeem it, he will do so as the next closest kin. After the relative agrees to redeem the land, Boaz lets him know that this also involves marrying Naomi’s daughter-in-law, Ruth, the Moabitite, the widow of Elimelech’s son Mahlon, in order to continue the family line (v. 5). This is more than the relative can accept (whether the cost is too high because of an existing family or insufficient funds or some other reason, we do not know), and he yields the “right of redemption” to Boaz (v. 6).

Boaz is the only one who has the willingness and the ability to redeem Ruth. In this respect he represents the nature of grace ultimately found in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was under no obligation to redeem sinners, and could have left them all to their just condemnation (Rom. 3:8), but willingly took on human flesh and paid the required redemption price: death on a cross (Rom. 6:23; Phil. 2:5–11).

4:7–12 The witnesses verify that Boaz has done everything necessary to redeem Naomi’s land to continue the legacy of her husband Elimelech and that of his sons, and to perpetuate their line by taking Ruth to be his wife. In evoking the Lord’s blessing of offspring, the witnesses first refer to Israel’s wives Rachel and Leah, and then to the unsavory story of Perez’s parentage. This was another levirate marriage situation, but whereas Judah’s son had refused Tamar’s legitimate claim (Genesis 38), Boaz had honored the obligation.

The story of God’s people has always been one of human frailty and God’s overriding grace (2 Cor. 12:9–10). Contrary to our natural instincts and the way the world intuitively operates, God delights to draw near and magnificently use those whom the world considers weak, needy, helpless, and marginalized.
Ruth 4:13

Ruth and Boaz Marry

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, *and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son.*

14 Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! *He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.*”

15 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. *And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

The Genealogy of David

18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

4:13–17 After a son is born to Boaz and Ruth, the very women whom Naomi had told to call her Mara (“bitter”) after she returned “empty” from Moab (1:20) now celebrate with her. They bless the Lord, who has provided a redeemer, and who has restored Naomi’s life and nourished her old age through Ruth and her son.

Like Naomi, so often we look at our outward circumstances and feel bitter toward the Lord because we cannot see beyond our situation to what he is doing or why. Yet, as he did for Naomi, God still provides for us a Redeemer, who is the Restorer of Life and nourishes us by his faithful lovingkindness as he works out the plan for our lives and for our part in the proclamation of his gospel.

4:18–22 This final genealogy that terminates in David, the royal forefather of Jesus, reveals marvelous aspects of God’s gracious nature that may be hidden to modern eyes. First, it reminds us that grace flows where the world may see only shame or cause for rejection. Boaz’s father was Salmon, who married Rahab, the harlot who saved the spies at Jericho (see Matt. 1:5). Boaz continues the line of Judah by marrying Ruth, a Gentile woman from one of Israel’s ancient enemies, Moab. And Judah, though privileged to be prophesied as the head of the line from which the messianic King would come (Gen. 49:10), initiated the line by impregnating Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law. He thus fathered twins (Genesis 38) whose illegitimacy would have kept his seed from citizenship in Israel until the tenth generation (see Deut. 23:2)—represented by Boaz. So the line of Christ is replete with scandalous grace.

Note that this genealogy is symbolic as well as chronological. Ten key figures are mentioned from Judah to David (with some names obviously skipped in the time frame from Judah to Boaz). This shows that David’s kingly line is an echo of the covenant purposes of God represented in ten generations from Adam to Noah (in Genesis 5 and 1 Chronicles 1) and, again, from Noah to Abraham (in Genesis 11 and 1 Chronicles 1). Here again these are symbolic and not purely chronological lists, as is indicated when Matthew chooses to represent the line another way to demonstrate God’s covenant faithfulness to and through David (see Matt. 1:17).

Thus, this genealogy shows us the Lord’s sovereignty over our private and seemingly ordinary decisions, such as Ruth’s decision to go with Naomi and worship the God of Israel. Little did she know when she set out from Moab that day that she would become great-grandmother to Israel’s King David, ancestor to David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Kinsman-Redeemer of all of God’s people.
Introduction to Proverbs

Author and Date
Proverbs itself mentions Solomon (reigned c. 971–931 B.C.) as the author or collector of its contents (1:1; 10:1), including the proverbs copied by Hezekiah's men (25:1). There are also two batches of sayings from a group called “the wise” (22:17–24:22; 24:23–34), and “oracles” from Agur (30:1–33) and Lemuel (31:1–9). No author is named for the song in praise of the excellent wife that ends the book (31:10–31).

The Gospel in Proverbs
The book of Proverbs is one of the “many ways” God spoke (Heb. 1:1), leading us to his only Son Jesus. What stands out about the book of Proverbs is its gracious offer of divine wisdom for foolish and weak people. The book of Proverbs is an outpouring of grace from God. Again and again, the author appeals to the reader as his dear “son” (Prov. 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24; 19:27; 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11). This book breathes with the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15). We may therefore study Proverbs not to earn a sonship still out of reach but to bear witness to a sonship already given.

The rest of the Bible makes clear that Jesus is the one who perfectly embodies this unique wisdom. According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would be anointed with “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:2). According to the New Testament, Jesus is God’s gift of wisdom to sinners (1 Cor. 1:30). Solomon was a genius, but Jesus was greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). He amazed people with his wisdom (Matt. 13:54). To this day, he counsels his church through his Word (Rev. 3:18). The wisdom of Jesus can be hard to accept, since it led not to popularity but to a cross (1 Cor. 1:18–25). But if we will humbly receive the divine wisdom hidden in Christ (Col. 2:2–3), the book of Proverbs will open up as a powerful word from our Wonderful Counselor (Isa. 9:6).

Through the book of Proverbs God our Father guides his children into practical sanctification. But the book offers far more than handy tips. Proverbs provides profound wisdom given by God for our complex decisions (Prov. 2:6). Thus, its wisdom is a provision of grace, enabling us to navigate the problems and perils of life with a fatherly guidance we have not earned nor can provide by our own devices. Because this wisdom is “from above” (James 3:15–17; cf. 3:19; 8:22–31), we will have to rethink our lives with humble reverence before God (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). We will even have to “call out for insight,” seeking it like silver and searching for it as for hidden treasures (2:3–4). But we have the privilege of asking a willing God who delights to provide what we need (cf. 2:5–7; 22:4; James 1:5), helping us to understand that the sanctification taught in this book is a gift of God.
that will ultimately be understood as having been won for us already by Jesus (1 Cor. 1:30). Through his Spirit, Jesus shares it freely with the undeserving. Thus, we can pursue his wisdom with every expectation of gaining it as our own.

The way to read the book of Proverbs is to slow down and prayerfully think it through, one proverb at a time. Consider what each instruction reveals of God’s nature by what he values and instructs. Then consider what each proverb reveals about human frailty and need by the instruction we require. Such careful reflection will reveal much about the grace humanity requires, which God will ultimately provide in Christ. Reading this unusual book is more like savoring a piece of hard candy than gulping down a mouthful of fast food. But to those who accept the way God has chosen to speak here, he makes this priceless promise: “Wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul” (Prov. 2:10).

Outline

I. Introductory Chapters (1:1–9:18)
   A. Title, goal, and motto (1:1–7)
   B. A father’s invitation to wisdom (1:8–9:18)

II. Proverbs and Sayings (10:1–31:31)
   A. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1–22:16)
   B. The thirty sayings of “the wise” (22:17–24:22)
   C. Further sayings of “the wise” (24:23–34)
   D. Hezekiah’s collection of Solomonic proverbs (25:1–29:27)
   E. The sayings of Agur (30:1–33)
   F. The sayings of King Lemuel (31:1–9)
   G. An alphabet of womanly excellence (31:10–31)
The Beginning of Knowledge

1 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight,

3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity;

4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—

5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance,

6 to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.

7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The Enticement of Sinners

8 Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching,

9 for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.

10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

11 If they say, “Come with us,” let us lie in wait for blood;

12 like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;

13 we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder;

14 throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”—

1:1–7 The word “proverbs” alerts us to the style of this book. A biblical proverb is a briefly stated, time-tested insight into real life. The mention of Solomon, David’s son, locates this book within the biblical story leading to Jesus, the ultimate son of David, and history’s greatest expert on foolish sinners who need help from beyond themselves.

Verses 2–6 explain how this book helps us. Wisdom, the primary goal, is skill for living daily life well. Starting with beginners—the simple, the youth—and including the mature—the wise, the one who understands—everyone is invited to grow in wisdom together. All anyone needs is an open mind.

Verse 7 defines that openness: the fear of the Lord. We begin our journey into wisdom by revering the Lord with holy awe, and we never grow beyond it, because all true wisdom is his alone. We do not master it by our giftedness; he gives it by his grace. The fear of the Lord makes us repentant (3:7), decisive against sin (8:13), stable (14:26), refreshed (14:27), humble (15:33), and satisfied (19:23). We struggle with the Hebrew word “fear,” because there is not a near English equivalent. So it is important to recall that Jesus also came in, and delighted in, “the fear of the Lord” (Isa. 11:2–3).

This description of the loving and respectful relationship that the eternal Son had for his Father reminds us that holy “fear” is not terror or dread of harm, but proper and worshipful regard for all that God is in his wisdom, power, holiness, mercy, and love.

1:8–19 We grow not in isolation but in community. But wisdom refuses sinful community (1 Cor. 15:33). “Greedy for unjust gain” (Prov. 1:19) marks those who are out for themselves, willing to step on people to get their way. They recruit others: “Come with us” (v. 11). By contrast, God calls us to purity and safety, ultimately expressed in Jesus’ call for us to come to himself (Matt. 11:28). He did not lie in wait for our blood (Prov. 1:11); he gave his own, leaving us a beautiful example (1 Pet. 2:21).
1:15 my son,  don’t walk in the way with them;  hold back your foot from their paths,  for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.  For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives.  Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

The Call of Wisdom

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.

Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,

I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.

For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

The Value of Wisdom

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding;

yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,
4.4 If you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. 

6. For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; 

7. he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. 

9. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 

11. discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways. 

15. So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God; 

18. for her house sinks down to death, and her paths to the departed; none who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. 

20. So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it, but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. 

Trust in the Lord with all your heart 

2. My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. 

1 Hebrew strange 2 Hebrew foreign woman 3 Hebrew to the Rephaim

2:5–11 After the “if” statements in verses 1–4, verses 5–11 are marked by the word “then” (vv. 5, 9). Growing believers can expect two things. First, according to verses 5–8, we “will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (v. 5). True wisdom is not an abstract principle. It is our walk with the living God. Second, according to verses 9–11, wisdom will come into our hearts (v. 10). We will not need external pressure to turn toward what is right, for we ourselves will change from within (1:23; Ezek. 36:26–27). Our hearts will have a taste for the wise choice. 

2:12–19 With a heart newly awakened to God’s wisdom, a growing believer is fortified against two dangers. First, in verses 12–15, “men of perverted speech” (v. 12). Such people twist words around, to sneak things in that honesty would be ashamed of—in politics or in advertising, for example. But a heart made wise will not be fooled. Second, in verses 16–19, “the adulteress with her smooth words” (v. 16). However she might flatter, there is no “safe sex,” except in marriage. “Her house sinks down to death” (v. 18). By contrast, our risen Lord is “a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45), and our spirits have been eternally joined to him as our loving Husband (1 Cor. 6:17).

2:20–22 But wisdom is more than avoiding trouble. It is also a path into life, and the only path into life. Rather than the place of death (vv. 18–19), the upright “will inhabit the land” (v. 21), the place of blessing—in New Testament terms, Jesus himself, who said, “Abide in me” (John 15:4).

3:1–12 God our Father urges us toward a rewarding life. He gives us counsel in the odd-numbered verses of this section and offers us incentives in the even-numbered verses. His counsel is not bare ethical principles but a call to himself: “Trust in the Lord”
Let not 'steadfast love and 'faithfulness forsake you;  
bind them around your neck;  
and write them on the tablet of your heart.

So you will 'find favor and 'good success  
in the sight of God and man.

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways 'acknowledge him,  
and he 'will make straight your paths.

Be not wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

It will be 'healing to your flesh  
and 'refreshment to your bones.

Honor the Lord with your wealth  
and with 'the firstfruits of all your produce;

then your 'barns will be filled with plenty,  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,  
for the Lord reproves him whom he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

Blessed Is the One Who Finds Wisdom

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,  
and the one who gets understanding,

for the gain from her is better than gain  
from silver and her profit better than 'gold.

She is more precious than 'jewels,  
and 'nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand;  
in her left hand are 'riches and honor.

Her 'ways are ways of pleasantness,  
and all her paths are peace.

She is 'a tree of life to those who 'lay hold of her;  
those who hold her fast are called blessed.

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;  
by understanding he established the heavens;

by his knowledge 'the deeps broke open,  
and 'the clouds drop down the dew.

My son, 'do not lose sight of these—  
keep sound wisdom and discretion,  
and they will be 'life for your soul  
and adornment for your neck.

Then you will walk on your way securely,  
and your foot will not stumble.

If you lie down, you will not be afraid;  
when you lie down, 'your sleep will be sweet.

Do not be afraid of sudden terror  
or of 'the ruin of the wicked, when it comes,

for the Lord will be your confidence  
and 'keep your foot from being caught.

Blessed Is the One Who Finds Wisdom

1 Or repute 2 Hebrew navel 3 Or medicine 4 Hebrew storm

3:13–26 This passage strengthens the Father's appeals in 3:1–12. His wisdom matters for three reasons. First, according to verses 13–18, “blessed is the one who finds wisdom” (v. 13). The word “blessed” describes a person to be admired. As “a tree of life” (v. 18), God's wisdom, ultimately revealed in Christ, restores the ideal we lost in Eden (Gen. 3:22–24; Rev. 2:7; 22:2). Second, according to Proverbs 3:19, “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth.” His wisdom is embedded in how the creation works. Ignoring him cannot succeed. Trusting him cannot fail. Third, according to verses 21–26, “you will walk on your way securely” (v. 23), because the Lord will “keep your foot (v. 5), “fear the Lord” (v. 7), “honor the Lord” (v. 9). His incentives are not worldly but the life and peace that result from obeying his commands (v. 2; cf. John 10:10; 14:27). Even the pain of his discipline and reproof (Prov. 3:11) opens our hearts more deeply to his love (Heb. 12:5–11; Rev. 3:19). The commands and the discipline are ultimately seen as coming from the same father-like love that provides the Christ we need for our disobedience and lack of discipline (Prov. 3:12).
27 ‘Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,  
when it is in your power to do it.
28 ‘Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come again,  
tomorrow I will give it”—when you have it with you.
29 ‘Do not plan evil against your neighbor,  
who ‘dwellst trustingly beside you.
30 ‘Do not contend with a man for no reason,  
when he has done you no harm.
31 ‘Do not envy a man of violence  
and do not choose any of his ways,
32 for the devious person is an abomination  
to the LORD,  
but the upright are ‘in his confidence.
33 ‘The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked,  
but he ‘blesses the dwelling of the righteous.
34 Toward the ‘scorners he ‘is scornful,  
but to the humble he gives favor.
35 The wise will inherit honor,  
but fools get disgrace.

A Father’s Wise Instruction

4 ‘Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction,  
and be attentive, that you may gain insight,

1 Hebrew Do not withold good from its owners 2 Or grace 3 The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain 4 Hebrew know

do not forsake my teaching.
When I was a son with my father,  
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,
he taught me and said to me,  
‘Let your heart hold fast my words;  
keep my commandments, and live.
Get wisdom; get insight;  
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;  
love her, and she will guard you.
7 ‘The beginning of wisdom is this:  
Get wisdom,  
and whatever you get, get insight.
Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;  
she will ‘honor you ‘if you embrace her.
She will place on your head ‘a graceful garland;  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”

10 ‘Hear, my son, and accept my words,  
that the years of your life may be many.
I have taught you the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.

from being caught” (v. 26; cf. 2 Tim. 4:18). “Do not lose sight of . . . sound wisdom and discretion” (v. 21) calls for diligent attention to our lives, moment by moment, confident in the Lord’s protection.

3:27–35 Now the Father explains the point of Proverbs chapter 3—how we treat one another. God’s wisdom creates responsibilities of responsible generosity (vv. 27–28), trusting safety (vv. 29–30), and careful discernment (vv. 31–32). The Lord is active among his people, with both blessing and discipline (vv. 33–35). James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5 draw upon verse 34 as a practical application of the gospel. Humility started in heaven and came down to us in Jesus (Phil. 2:5–8). The humble find favor with the Lord, not because they demand it by their merits but because he gives it to those who are open.

4:1–27 Surprisingly, God is nowhere mentioned in chapter 4. But he is everywhere present, speaking through the wise father as he introduces his son to their family tradition of sacred wisdom (vv. 1, 10, 20).

4:1–9 In the Old Testament, the priests taught the law of God, and the prophets declared the word of God (Jer. 18:18). But the fathers and mothers gave their children the wisdom of God (Prov. 1:8; 6:20). Their tone is urgent: “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom” (4:7). The strong expressions “hold fast,” “keep,” “get,” “love,” “prize,” and “embrace” set the tone of the section. We grow wise not by brains but by bold decisiveness. Do we want the mind of God, ultimately revealed in Christ? We may, we must, receive his wisdom through the gospel. Getting it will cost us, but not getting it would cost us infinitely more (Matt. 13:44–46).

4:10–19 This passage locates us at a fork in the road, with two paths before us. “The path of the wicked” (v. 14) leads away from the Father and into compulsive cravings
12 When you walk, “your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble.
13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.
14 Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.
15 Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.
16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
17 For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.
18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
19 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.
20 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.
23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
24 Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.
25 Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.
26 Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure.
27 Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

Warning Against Adultery
5 My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.
2 For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.
3 Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.
4 And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
5 Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.

1 Hebrew his 2 Or Make level 3 Hebrew stranger; also verse 20 4 Hebrew palate 5 Hebrew lay hold of

4:20–27 We make progress toward wisdom by staying intensely focused: “Let your eyes look directly forward” (v. 25). Many distractions in this world would draw us away. How can we remain loyal to God through it all? “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (v. 23). Jesus may have been thinking of verse 23b in John 7:38: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” True life does not flow into us from external circumstances; true life flows out of us from the internal fullness of the Holy Spirit.

5:1–6 The Father warns us against sexual sin, pointing out its surface appeal but its hidden destruction.

5:7–14 “Keep your way far from her” (v. 8) is decisive and safe. Sexual sin carries unforeseeable but inevitable impact, painfully felt (vv. 9–14). God, in grace, redeems the consequences of our sins; but, by the same grace, he also warns us against sinning in the first place (1 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 5:19–21; Heb. 13:4). Warning is part of the ministry of the gospel.
Author, Date, and Recipients


The Gospel in Luke

Luke informs us from the beginning (1:1–4) that his is not the only Gospel to have been written nor the only Gospel account that could be written (cf. John 21:25). Nevertheless, the church has always recognized the great gift that the Third Gospel is to us. There are many beautiful and essential teachings of Jesus and pictures of the gospel that come to us from Luke alone.

While the historical and theological witness of all four Gospels contains many consistent themes, Luke describes for us the gospel and its application in several specific and important ways. At the broadest level we learn from this Gospel account that the gospel is multi-faceted and full-orbed. That is, the gospel is explained and applied as being about our whole lives, physically and spiritually, externally and internally, for now and for the future, in our relationship with God and with others. The gospel is not simply a message about religion and the “religious” portion of our lives. Rather, Luke’s presentation helps us see clearly that the gospel of Jesus is about the comprehensive blessedness of God available to us through Jesus Christ.

At a more specific level Luke retells the stories and teachings of Jesus in a way that consistently emphasizes that the gospel is a matter of the heart, the inner person, not mere external religion. Jesus constantly reveals the heart motivations behind our actions and pushes us toward opening our hearts in humility toward God. As a result, the gospel in Luke is often presented as a call to reevaluate everything in the world according to God’s perspective, not ours. This means valuing humility over prestige, mercy over justice, favor with God over favor with people, and—especially challenging to us—valuing a rich relationship with God over the power of money.

To emphasize this comprehensive understanding of the gospel, Luke uses a variety of complementary images to describe it. The gospel includes the message of peace, the offer of forgiveness of sins through repentance, the promise of inheriting eternal life, the invitation to enter the kingdom of God, and the joy of being with Jesus as a disciple. In all of this, the gospel is good news because it announces the grace and peace that have now come to sinners in Jesus Christ.
INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

Outline

I. The Prologue (1:1–4)
II. The Infancy Narrative (1:5–2:52)
III. Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1–4:15)
IV. The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:16–9:50)
V. The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27)
VI. The Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem (19:28–21:38)
VII. The Suffering and Death of Jesus (22:1–23:56)
VIII. The Resurrection of Jesus (24:1–53)
Dedication to Theophilus

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, \(^2\) just as those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word \(^3\) have delivered them to us, \(^3\) it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, \(^4\) most excellent Theophilus, \(^4\) that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, \(^1\) of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. \(^6\) And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. \(^7\) But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

\(^1\) Greek Zacharias

1:5–25 This historical story addresses key heart issues. It is a story of human suffering and sadness, coming from the brokenness of infertility. Like Sarah and Abraham of old, Zechariah and Elizabeth are advanced in age but without children, even though they were righteous followers of God (v. 6). This barrenness is a deep sadness for them and is even viewed as a reproach among others in their community (v. 25).

Yet from the bird’s eye perspective that we are given, we learn that even in the midst of this decades-long trial for two godly people, God is working out a perfect plan of grace. He is using this couple’s barrenness and brokenness to show forth his miraculous power and to witness to the world that his final plan of redemption is now at hand in Jesus Christ. The story of this couple’s suffering turned to joy reminds us that in the pain of our own trials our limited perspective is not able to grasp the good plans that our kind God is perfecting for us (Rom. 8:18–28; 1 Cor. 2:9). We are called by this story to renew our active trust in God’s will, even through our veil of tears.

Overlapping with this lesson, this story also shows the gospel’s real call on us to believe and trust in God’s words. While God is gracious from beginning to end in this story, with the miracle of barrenness broken there is also a message of the

\(^8\) Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, \(^9\) according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter “the temple of the Lord and burn incense.” \(^10\) And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. \(^11\) And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. \(^12\) And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. \(^13\) But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. \(^14\) And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, \(^15\) for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. \(^16\) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, \(^17\) and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,
and “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. 19 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” 20 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 21 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. 22 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. 36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed are you for the child Jesus, righteous and godly though he is (Luke 1:6), fails to believe God’s message delivered through the angel Gabriel (v. 18). This is likely because of a natural jadedness that comes from years of trial, difficulty, and disappointment. Zechariah can only see the obstacles of his age and his wife's closed womb. The result is a gracious but real discipline from the Lord. God does not condemn Zechariah, though he does experience a new trial of muteness. Yet even in this God is perfecting a greater and more robust faith in Zechariah, who will soon be not just a priest but also a prophet (vv. 67–79).

1:26-38 This story is the next stop on the angel Gabriel's mission from God to prepare God's people for the coming Savior. The engaged virgin Mary receives a message even more shocking than that given to Zechariah: she is going to give birth to the Son of God, who will reign as King forever (v. 32), even though she is still a virgin! Unlike Zechariah (v. 18), Mary exhibits the childlike faith that always brings joy to our Father God (18:16–17). Despite some lingering confusion and uncertainty and probably no small amount of fear, she responds to God's gracious provision with faith: “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (1:38).

17 Rom. 10:21; ch. 7:27; Mal. 3:1; Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2
18 Gen. 15:8; (Gen. 17:17)
19 Ver. 26; Dan. 8:16; 9:21
20 Rev. 8:2; (1 Kgs. 17:1; Job 16; Isa. 63:5; Matt. 18:10)
21 Ezek. 3:26; 24:27
22 See ver. 9
23 See ver. 21 above; ver. 62
24 2 Chr. 23:8; (ver. 8; 2 Kgs. 11:1; 1 Chr. 9:25); Heb. 10:11
25 (Gen. 30:23; 1 Sam. 1:6; Ps. 113:9; Isa. 41)
26 Ver. 19; See Matt. 2:23
27 Matt. 1:16, 18; ch. 2:4; Matt. 1:20
28 Ps. 45:2; Dan. 9:23; Judg. 6:12
29 See ver. 12
30 Acts 7:46
31 Isa. 7:14; ch. 2:21; Matt. 1:21, 25
32 Ver. 76; ch. 6:35; Acts 7:48; See Mark 5:7; ver. 69; 1:26–38 This story is the next stop on the angel Gabriel's mission from God to prepare God's people for the coming Savior. The engaged virgin Mary receives a message even more shocking than that given to Zechariah: she is going to give birth to the Son of God, who will reign as King forever (v. 32), even though she is still a virgin! Unlike Zechariah (v. 18), Mary exhibits the childlike faith that always brings joy to our Father God (18:16–17). Despite some lingering confusion and uncertainty and probably no small amount of fear, she responds to God's gracious provision with faith: “I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (1:38).
2 Sam. 7:11–13; 16; Ps. 89:4; 132:16; Isa. 9:6; 7:16; Acts 2:30; [Rev. 3:7]; See Matt. 1:13; 33; Dan. 2:44; 7:14; 18, 27; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 11:15; (John 12:34); 35 Matt. 1:18, 20; (See ver. 32 above); (John 6:69; See Matt. 14:33; 36; ver. 7); [Judg. 5:24]; [Deut. 28:4]
The Birth of John the Baptist

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” 61 And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And “fear came upon all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For “the hand of the Lord was with him.

Zechariah’s Prophecy

67 And his father Zechariah “was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

68 “Blessed be the Lord / God of Israel, / for he has visited and redeemed his people

and “has raised up a horn of salvation for us / in the house of his servant David, / the Lord’s Servant, / as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, / that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us;

All of this happens because God has set his favor upon Mary (1:30). Such initiating and reassuring grace from God toward us finds fullest expression in Christ, who enables us to respond with this kind of faith, which itself brings great pleasure and glory to God (Eph. 2:1-10).

1:67-79 This Spirit-inspired proclamation from Zechariah gives us a beautiful and powerful picture of the gospel. We often think of the gospel as the message of God legally forgiving our sins (“justifying” us) because of Jesus’ work on the cross. While this is true, Zechariah’s song (along with many other Bible passages) shows us that the gospel is even more comprehensive.
The Birth of Jesus Christ

2 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world
should be *registered. 2This was the first *registration when Quirinius was governor
of Syria. 3And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4And Joseph also went up
from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called
Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5to be registered with
Mary, his betrothed, 6who was with child.

5And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 6And she gave birth
to her firstborn son and *wrapped him in swaddling cloths and *laid him in a manger, because
there was no place for them in "the inn.

The Shepherds and the Angels

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over
their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord 10appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord
shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 11And the angel said to them, “Fear not,
for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 12For unto
you is born this day in "the city of David a

1Or when the sunrise shall dawn upon us; some manuscripts since the sunrise has visited us 2Or This was the registration before 3That is, one legally pledged to be married

The Shepherds and the Angels

Chapter 2

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Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

6And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 6And she gave birth
to her firstborn son and *wrapped him in swaddling cloths and *laid him in a manger, because
there was no place for them in "the inn.

77 to show the mercy promised to our fathers
and *to remember his holy *covenant,
the oath that he swore to our father
Abraham, to grant us
that we, being delivered from the
hand of our enemies,
might serve him *without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before
him *all our days.

8 And you, child, will be called *the prophet of *the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to
prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the *tender mercy of our God,
whereby *the sunrise shall *visit us
 *from on high
to *give light to *those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into *the way of peace.

9 And the child grew and became strong in
spirit, and he was *in the wilderness until the
day of his public appearance to Israel.

1 Or when the sunrise shall dawn upon us; some manuscripts since the sunrise has visited us 2Or This was the registration before 3That is, one legally pledged to be married

The Shepherds and the Angels

Chapter 2

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6And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 6And she gave birth
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there was no place for them in "the inn.
Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

14 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 15 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 16 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 17 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 18 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 19 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. 20 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, “he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Jesus Presented at the Temple

21 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 22 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 23 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 24 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 25 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen “the Lord’s Christ. 26 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 27 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 28 for my eyes have seen your salvation 29 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 30 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

31 And “his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 32 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 33 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” 34 And there was “a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin. 35 And then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer 36 In Simeon’s words we see the universal scope of the gospel. Now in Jesus, God’s plan from the beginning of creation is being accomplished—the spreading of God’s grace to all the earth, to Jew and Gentile (vv. 31–32). Yet this gospel which corporately unites all people together also divides all people at the level of the heart (vv. 34–35). Because Jesus is God himself in the flesh, to face the gospel of Jesus is to face God. And to face God is to have our thoughts and hearts opened and revealed (Heb. 4:12). This will result in a fall for any who are proud or opposed to Jesus (Luke 2:34). But for those like Simeon who see Jesus and respond to him with hope, there is great news! This story invites us to see Jesus rightly and receive him at the level of the heart as Savior and Lord, holding back nothing because God sees and knows all things, even in our hearts (Ps. 139:1–6).”

1 Some manuscripts peace, good will among men 2 Greek bondservant 3 Or as a widow for eighty-four years

16 Acts 2:36; 10:36; [ch. 23:2] See Matt. 1:17 [ch. 145] 17 Sam. 2:34; 2 Kgs. 19:29; 20:8; 9; Isa. 7:14 18 Acts 2:14 19 Gen. 28:12; 32:1; 1 Kgs. 22:19; 2 Chr. 18:18; Ps. 103:15; 148:2; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 5:11 20 ch. 19:38; [Ps. 148:2; Matt. 1:17; Matt. 6:10; 28:18; John 17:4; Acts 7:49; Eph. 3:15; Col. 1:16; 20; Rev. 5:13] ch. 179; Ps. 85:10; Isa. 9:6; 7; Hag. 2:9; Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14, 17; Col. 120 [ch. 3:22; 12:52; Eph. 1:5, 9; Phil. 2:13] 1 Acts 28:22 36 See Ex. 15:20 37 ch. 5:5 [ch. 5:33; Matt. 6:16-18; Acts 13:2; 14:23; 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27

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night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth
39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

The Boy Jesus in the Temple
41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. 43 And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. 44 His parents did not know it. 45 but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances. 46 And when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. 47 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 48 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 49 And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” 50 And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. 51 And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

John the Baptist Prepares the Way
3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

7 He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the
Introduction to Acts

Author and Date

The Gospel in Acts
Acts is the story of God's grace flooding out to the world, from the cross and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Nothing is more prominent in Acts than the spread of the gospel. Jesus promises a geographic expansion at the outset (1:8), and Acts follows the news of his death and resurrection as it spreads from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the faraway capital of Rome.

The preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection is central in Acts. The Greek verb for "preach the gospel" (euangelizo) occurs more in this book than in any other in the New Testament. About a third of the book of Acts consists of speeches, and most of these are speeches of Peter or Paul proclaiming the gospel. The good news of the salvation accomplished in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit extends to the "ends of the earth" through preaching.

In Acts, "grace" is a parallel for "the gospel" or "salvation." Jesus' message is summarized as "the word of his grace" (20:32), believers are said to have received "grace" or to be "full of grace" (6:8), and they are challenged to continue in grace. The missionaries in Acts proclaim the grace of God, and it is through this grace that people are able to respond with faith.

Acts reveals God's passionate pursuit of his people, beginning with his followers in Jerusalem, expanding to Samaria, then to the rest of the world. By the end of the book we see Paul living in Rome, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31). The gospel draws people in, constitutes them as the church centered on the grace of Jesus, and then sends them out in mission to the world. The new group of believers is marked by the Holy Spirit, who creates such a distinctive community that others are drawn in, experiencing God's grace. At the same time, they take the gospel message to new people and new lands, making God's grace known to the ends of the earth.

The gospel's expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing since the beginning. Luke consistently grounds salvation in the ancient
purpose of God, which comes to fruition at God's own initiative. Acts shows that the new Christian movement is not a fringe sect but the culmination of God's plan of redemption. What was seen only as shadows in the Old Testament God reveals finally and fully through Jesus Christ. The book of Acts does not primarily provide human patterns to emulate or avoid. Instead, it repeatedly calls us to reflect upon the work of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, establishing the church by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to enter and participate in a story that is much bigger than we are.

In Acts, the gospel expands not through human strength, but through weakness, opposition, and persecution. Demonic forces, worldly powers and authorities, governmental opposition, language and cultural barriers, intense suffering and bloody persecution, unjust imprisonment, unbelief, internal disunity, and even shipwrecks and snakes all threaten to slow down the gospel's advance. But opposition and suffering do not thwart the spread of Jesus' grace; rather, they fuel it.

The gospel spreads despite barriers of geography, ethnicity, culture, gender, and wealth. Many of these barriers appear so inviolable that when the gospel is preached to a new segment of society, riots ensue. But Luke makes clear that no one is beyond the scope of God's saving power, nor is anyone exempt from the need for God's redeeming grace.

All people receive the grace of God through one man, Jesus Christ. Jesus' gospel goes out to all places and all types of people, because Jesus is Lord of all.

Outline

I. Preparation for Witness (1:1–2:13)
II. The Witness in Jerusalem (2:14–5:42)
IV. The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1–14:28)
V. The Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
VI. The Witness in Greece (15:36–18:22)
VII. The Witness in Ephesus (18:23–21:16)
VIII. The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
IX. The Witness in Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

1 Or eating 2 Or in

Chapter 1


Acts depicts the continuing actions and teachings of Jesus in a way that no other book of the Bible does. Luke claims that as the budding Christian movement spreads, Jesus himself is at work (cf. Acts 1:8; 4:10, 30; 4:11-12; 10:44). The church is Jesus’ vehicle to continue his work in the world. This is true for us today as well: as Paul says, we who are in Christ are his body (Col. 1:27).

There is an awesome responsibility here, but the responsibility rests on Christ. The church is Jesus’ church, and what he began in his earthly ministry, he will finish (Phil. 1:6).

The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Luke “rewinds” a little, and the key event that he reviews is the resurrection. The resurrection is a key topic in the evangelistic speeches in Acts. The word “resurrection” (Greek anastasis) occurs more times in the book of Acts than in any other New Testament book (eleven times in Acts; the next highest is Luke with six). The first item on Jesus’ mind, post-resurrection, is that the apostles wait for the power of the Holy Spirit. This power leads to their being a “witness” in four concentric circles, leading out from Jerusalem. The fact that Jesus notes Samaria shows that the gospel will transcend not just geography (Jerusalem and Judea), but ethnicity as well.

The primary task of the people of God is to bear witness to his great deeds. The first disciples were charged to bear witness to the risen Christ, whom they had seen with their eyes. This witness would begin in Jerusalem, but would move outward to “the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In these verses, Jesus did not command his disciples to perform certain rituals, to act according to certain rules, or to refrain from certain

The Ascension

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking
into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, ‘will’ come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. 13 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, 14 Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon ‘the Zealot and Judas the son of James. 15 All these ‘with one accord “were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and ‘his brothers.’

16 In those days Peter stood up among ‘the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, “Brothers, ‘the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke depending on the context, 18 about 120) and said, “You, Lord, ‘who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen 20 to take the place in ‘this ministry and ‘apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 21 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

2 When ‘the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the

activities. He promised them that they would testify to his power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

This is not a concept unique to Acts or the New Testament. God has always been concerned that his people reflect on what he has done and tell others about it. God’s people have always been primarily witnesses to his greatness. “I have redeemed you,” God says in Isaiah. “ ‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the Lord, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he’” (Isa. 43:1, 10).

2:1-13 Since the time of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9), the nations of the earth were divided by language, unable to come together as a result of their rebellion against God. In God’s Old Testament redemptive acts, he singled out the Jewish nation to mediate his blessing to the world, and therefore the good news of God’s grace was communicated only in the Hebrew language. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, however, the curse of Babel begins to unravel. No longer is the gospel confined to Hebrew; it is available directly to all nations and all languages. The restored order of God’s kingdom begins to break into the dark and confused world of sin. This gives us hope today. The gospel triumphs in a world still groaning under the curse of sin (Rom. 8:22). One day Christ’s reign will be fully realized, and the effects of sin will fall away completely.

The experience of the Spirit at Pentecost fulfills John the Baptist’s prophecy of the one (Jesus) who would baptize in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; cf. Acts 1:5). The coming

1 Or brothers and sisters. The plural Greek word adelphoi (translated “brothers”) refers to siblings in a family. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, adelphoi may refer either to men or to both men and women who are siblings (brothers and sisters) in God’s family, the church; also verse 15. 2 Or swelling up
entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested 1 on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—"we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 10 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 11 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

17 †“And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

1 Or And tongues as of fire appeared to them, distributed among them, and rested 2 That is, 9 A.M. 3 Greek bond servants; twice in this verse of the Spirit at Pentecost has a specific purpose in redemptive history: to show that God's salvation is now flowing out to people from every nation, tribe, and language. This is repeated in the three outpourings of the Spirit that follow in Acts 8, 10–11, and 19. Luke's focus in Acts 2 is on the fulfillment of prophecy, not on paradigms for personal experience. Luke is introducing the expanding gospel ministry of the Holy Spirit as the gospel is beginning to spread.

The story in Acts is also our story, because we are participating in God's story. The descent of the Spirit on these apostles is really the birth story of all who are in Christ. While we think of our lives in terms of our own births, upbringing, education, families, line of work, and so on, there is another story that has been happening parallel to these events—actually, it has woven its way through all of these things. And this interwoven story begins here with the descent of the Holy Spirit who fills these believers. If this had never happened, if God had not looked on Christ's work on the cross and said “It is good,” raised him from the dead, and set him at his right side to pour out his Spirit on his people, then we would still be dead in our sins. We would still be without the spiritual life of the new birth, lost and without hope.

2:14–41 Peter begins his famous Pentecost sermon with an extensive reference to the Old Testament, a citation from the prophet Joel, who predicted that God's Spirit would be poured out in the last days, before the final judgment (the “day of the Lord”). According to Peter, the last days have begun. This “new religion” is actually the continuation of what God has been doing through Israel all along. Better yet, God made promises years ago that these “last days” would come, and at Pentecost God is demonstrating that he is faithful and powerful to keep his promises. As he promised, God is pouring out his Spirit on all flesh—men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile. God is mercifully and joyfully calling all people to salvation.

In Peter's first sermon, the essence of gospel proclamation is clear: Jesus is Lord (v. 36); he is the fulfillment of God's promise for an eternal Davidic kingdom (vv. 29–36). This simple statement of Christ's lordship poses a fundamental challenge both to the Jews (with their strict monotheism) and to the Romans (with their religious-political system founded on the supremacy of Caesar as Lord).
The resurrection is also one of the core elements throughout the gospel presentations in Acts. Peter quotes from Psalm 16:8-11 to show that the resurrection was God's intention all along. Thus, the crucifixion of Christ was necessarily part of God's plan, and he followed it by raising Jesus from the dead. Peter shows that this gospel plan is all promised in Scripture. God's grace breaks through the walls of the worst of human rebellion.

Just as Jesus promised that the gospel would spread to the end of the earth, Peter proclaims that, "the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off" (Acts 2:39). The gospel is for immediate hearers and their covenant children but is not confined by ethnic or geographical boundaries. And it is universal in scope: "far off" is not just geographical. By his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has reconciled to himself all of us who were formerly "far off" from God and one another (Eph. 2:17-19). No one is so far removed that God cannot redeem them.

2:42-47 The Holy Spirit brings forth a devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, community, and prayer. Notice also the unity of mind and heart of these first believers. In what way these first Christians "had all things in common" (v. 44) is difficult to discern, since they retained their own property (cp. 5:4). What is clear is that when God is present by his Spirit, there is unity and mutual care. The Holy Spirit desires to work in us both individually and collectively. He brings forth love, joy, peace,

28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

29 "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus 'God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.' 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 35 'The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”'

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him 'both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, 'what shall we do?"
38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

40 And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” 41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The Fellowship of the Believers

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The Lame Beggar Healed

3 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at the ninth hour. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And he leaping up stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the

1 Or fear 2 That is, 3 p.m.

The Spirit’s ministry also brings forth conversions and numerical growth, as we see that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The Spirit produces not only inward spiritual growth but also expansion and growth of the church (though we recognize in later chapters of Acts that these may come in stages and are not always without challenge, persecution, or seeming delay). Gospel-fueled, Spirit-empowered growth is a repeated theme that runs throughout the rest of Acts, as we see that “more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (5:14) and “the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily” (16:5; see also 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20). The Spirit continues to testify through the church to the grace of God in Jesus, bringing about growth in love and in numbers. The grace of God is fruitful and effective, and we see God taking the initiative to spread his grace to ever-expanding numbers of people—even in the face of virulent hostility.

3:1–10 The first three chapters of Acts form a triad, focused on the Spirit and the empowerment for witnessing to the name of Jesus that the Spirit will bring. Chapter 1 was waiting for the Spirit, chapter 2 marked the coming of the Spirit, and now chapter 3 shows the apostles being empowered with the Spirit (on being “filled” with the Holy Spirit, cf. 2:4; 4:8; 4:31).

The power of God’s salvation not only creates generosity but also drives concern for the weak and afflicted, as seen in Peter and John’s interaction with this beggar. He is not just a statistic to them but a person. There is no wealth required to be a channel for God’s grace to transform this man’s body and heart. While Peter and John have no money, neither does the beggar; he has nothing whatsoever to offer in exchange for healing, but that is no hindrance to the grace of Christ, who extends his power of healing to one who has no right or ability to claim it.

temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus’ has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

17 “And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that ‘his Christ would suffer,’ he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’ 24 And ‘all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers,

1 Or child; also verse 26 2 Greek him

3:11–26 The power of Jesus Christ creates such amazement that it requires an explanation. This mirrors Jesus’ own pattern, as he often followed miraculous healings with periods of teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God. The miracles in Scripture should be seen not so much as models that we should seek to repeat but as evidences of divine authority for God’s special messengers.

As people marvel at the power of the apostles, Peter immediately renounces praise and redirects their gaze to Jesus Christ: everything is about Jesus, whom God has glorified (v. 13) by raising him from the dead. Peter insists that this miraculous healing is the work of the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob whom his fellow Jews were on their way to worship. Even though they have failed to honor God’s Messiah and are filled with sin that deserves judgment, God nevertheless continues to call them back to rest in him.

Jesus is “the Holy and Righteous One” (v. 14). In Isaiah 53:11 the “servant” of the Lord, a messianic title, is called the “righteous one,” and this is picked up later in Acts as well (cf. Acts 7:52; 22:14). Jesus is also the “Author of life” (3:15), and yet his own people have rejected him and killed him.

That the Christ would suffer and die was a surprise for most of the Jews, and a significant stumbling block to their believing in Jesus as the promised Messiah (1 Cor. 1:23). But Peter points out that the suffering of the Messiah was foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:18). Isaiah spoke of the Messiah as one who “was pierced for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5). David foreshadowed the suffering of the Messiah in a psalm that Jesus quoted on the cross: “They have pierced my hands and feet . . . they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps. 22:16, 18; cf. Matt. 27:35, 46). God tends to work triumph through the paradoxical means of weakness. The suffering of Christ is not the finale, but a necessary prelude to his glorification (cf. Phil. 2:6–11).

Moses spoke of the promised Messiah as one who would be “a prophet like me” (Deut. 18:15, 18; cf. Acts 3:22). Jesus is a better and truer Moses, like him in many ways, but excelling him in others (Heb. 3:1–6). Like Moses, Jesus in his infancy must be rescued from a king who kills hundreds of infants in an attempt to find him (Matt.
Introduction to James

Author, Date, and Recipients
This letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Gal. 1:19) and leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15). It was probably written about A.D. 40–45 to Jewish Christians living outside Palestine who were suffering persecution and living in poverty.

The Gospel in James
James is a beloved epistle, eminently practical and full of vivid exhortations to godly living. The author presents profound counsel on numerous essentials: trials, poverty, riches, justice, speech, worldliness, and prayer. His clarity and prophetic urgency call readers to action, but his assessment of our failures is almost too penetrating, as it exposes our inability to perform what he commands—driving us to the ever-present refuge of the gospel. Yet at the same time James stirs us to action, to the obedience that is a hallmark not of bare external conformity but of living faith: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (1:22).

Since James demands what readers cannot render, we struggle to resolve the tension between those demands and our inability to attain them. We might expect James to discuss justification here, but he never mentions that or the cross, resurrection, or atonement. Indeed, the absence of these elements has prompted some to doubt the canonicity of James. Further, while he uses Jesus’ name twice (1:1; 2:1), both are passing references, not expositions of his life and saving work.

With 59 commands in 108 verses, James declares King Jesus’ royal law (2:8). He insists that obedience is a prime mark of true religion: “Whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (2:10; cf. 3:1; 4:17). The hasty reader could therefore miss the gospel in James. If James merely commands, his clarity is a burden and his commands ultimately condemn.

We will begin to understand the gospel intentions of the book by noting that James 1:26–27 structures the book when he declares that “anyone [who] thinks he is religious” will show it in three ways. He will “bridle his tongue,” watch over “orphans and widows in their affliction,” and keep himself “unstained” by the world. Remarkably, James next demonstrates that everyone fails to meet these standards. We must control the tongue, yet no one can tame the tongue (3:8). We must care for the needy—orphans and widows—yet we’re willing to wish them well and do nothing (2:15–17). We must avoid the pollution of the world, yet our envy and quarrels prove our worldliness (4:1–4).

If no one has true religion, then all are liable to judgment. Still, James says “mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:13; 5:11). The climax of the epistle,
James 4:6, explains how mercy triumphs. No one controls the tongue, cares for the needy, or stays unstained, but God “gives more grace. Therefore it says ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Here “it” means all Scripture, which attests to God’s grace for the humble. James reinforces the lesson in 4:10, commanding, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” That is the gospel according to James: No one is obedient, no one consistently demonstrates true religion. Therefore, the Father who gives good gifts (1:5, 17) gives the supreme gift of saving grace to the humble.

Further, the wisdom to understand such grace is from above (1:17–18), as God grants needed understanding generously and without reproach to whomever asks (1:5). We therefore understand that, though none can meet God’s requirements, he grants the wisdom needed to navigate this world and the next to all who simply have faith to ask his aid (1:6)—this is undeniable grace.

Outline

I. Greeting (1:1)
   II. The Testing of Faith (1:2–18)
   III. Hearing and Doing the Word (1:19–27)
   IV. The Sin of Favoritism (2:1–13)
   V. Faith without Works Is Dead (2:14–26)
   VI. The Sin of Dissension in the Community (3:1–4:12)
   VII. The Sins of the Wealthy (4:13–5:12)
   VIII. The Prayer of Faith (5:13–18)
   IX. Concluding Admonition (5:19–20)
The Letter of James

Greeting

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

Testing of Your Faith

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

3 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

4 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

5 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

6 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 7 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

8 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

9 The provisions of the gospel are not based on human distinctions or accomplishments. God blesses the man who perseveres in trials, and he promises to crown that man with life, the resurrection life we receive through faith in Jesus (v. 12).

10 God intends trials to strengthen us, but some say trials tempt them to sin, and blame God for it. But temptation only entices us when we desire the sin (vv. 13–15). God wants to give gifts; his chief gift is new birth by “the word of truth” — that is, the gospel (v. 18; cf. Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5–6).

Since humanity is prone to anger and proliferating moral filth, our hope lies with Jesus' teachings through inspired Scripture. He is our only true refuge and strength.
He.ting and Doing the Word

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no bearer who but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

The Sin of Partiality

2 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 4 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 5 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

6 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 7 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 8 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 9 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 10 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 11 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.
Faith Without Works Is Dead

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Taming the Tongue

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, 3 he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 4 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as we will. 5 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 6 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and

1 Or benefit. 2 Or wheel of birth. 3 Greek Gehenna.

2:14–26 James explores the nature of saving faith. There is a “faith” that cannot save. Such faith has kind words but no deeds, no aid for the naked and hungry. It is “dead” because it rests in ideas, not in a life dependent upon and reflective of Jesus (vv. 14–17). Orthodox theology “apart from works is useless” (v. 20). Demons prove this, since they hold to orthodox ideas about God yet live in terror since they don’t trust him (v. 19).

Abraham’s faith did work “when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar,” and his “faith was completed by his works” (vv. 20–22). When James says Abraham was “justified by works” (v. 21) he means that his claim to believe was vindicated or validated, not that he earned his salvation. He knows that “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (v. 23). But again, faith proves itself real by works. We are not saved by our works, but faithful works flow from saving faith.

Rahab, a Gentile and a prostitute, contrasts with Abraham in every way except that her deeds also proved her faith. She claimed that she feared God and she called him Lord, and she proved it when she risked her life to hide Israel’s spies (vv. 25–26).

James does not suggest, then, that faith plus works equals justification. He agrees with Paul that faith alone justifies. But he knows there is a so-called “faith” that is dangerous because it deludes but does not justify. He contrasts that with the faith that does justify—a living faith that by its very nature reflects the One on whom our faith rests, delighting to love others in concrete ways.

3:1–12 James indicts human sinfulness again, beginning with teachers. They know more, but like everyone, they stumble, notably in speech. Thus teachers, a verbose tribe, are most liable to judgment. If humans can control great horses and ships with small bits and rudder, we should be able to control our tiny tongues. Its power to bless or curse, to start fires, makes mastery essential, but “no human . . . can tame the tongue” (v. 8).
has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Wisdom from Above

13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 17But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. 18And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Warning Against Worldliness

4What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world makes him an enemy of God? 5Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? 6But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” 7Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. 9Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded. 10Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 11Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Boasting About Tomorrow

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Warning to the Rich

Come now, you rich, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Patience in Suffering

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Chapter 5

James says this gospel-driven humility will be manifest in us as we turn from our prideful sins. First, heeding James’s question, “Who are you to judge your neighbor?” we will leave judgment to the Judge—the Judge who can also save (4:11–12). Second, we will stop making grandiose plans. We will confess that God is sovereign, that we by comparison are like a mist, that all achievement depends on God’s will and favor (4:13–16). Third, those who are rich will stop oppressing the poor (5:1–6; see note).

5:1–6 James has been addressing “brothers” (e.g., 4:11; 5:7, 9, 11), but in these verses he warns “you rich” that judgment is coming, for they have oppressed their laborers (5:4) and have “fattened” themselves in “a day of slaughter” (5:5). The counterintuitive reversal of this passage, here applied to money, picks up a whole-Bible theme. From Genesis to Revelation we see God inverting the world’s natural standards of significance and strength (see also 1:9–10).

The supreme instance of this is the gospel itself, in which self-divesting contrition rather than self-resource accomplishment brings divine favor and power flowing into one’s life. This can be true ultimately only because Jesus Christ, the one truly strong and significant human who ever lived, allowed himself to be made weak and pitiable on behalf of pitiable sinners.

5:7–12 For now, believers must be patient through suffering and trial, “for the coming of the Lord” is near (v. 8). The Judge will soon deal with the impenitent, but we long for that day, since God is “compassionate and merciful” (v. 11). This great grace of an ultimate vindicating rescue from our difficulties keeps us from grumbling, judgmentalism, and capitulation to evil.
“no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

The Prayer of Faith

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

1 Or The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power

5:13–20 James exhorts us to praise the Lord for every blessing and petition him in every sorrow. In serious illness, we confess our sins and call the elders. He promises that, “the prayer of faith will save” the sick “and the Lord will raise him up” (probably an intentional double meaning, using resurrection language in reference to healing). That may happen in this life or in the next (v. 15). Elders are “righteous” men with powerful prayers.

James teaches us to doubt our righteousness, but the Lord grants and imputes righteousness by faith. So James cites Elijah, a prophet who prayed effectively even though he had “a nature like ours,” stumbling as we do (vv. 17–18). James concludes pastorally, with a call to restore “anyone” who “wanders from the truth” (v. 19). From a human perspective, we “save” such a person’s “soul from death,” but from God’s perspective we participate in the work of Christ, who covers sin and defeats it (v. 20).
The gospel's expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing since the beginning. Luke consistently grounds salvation in the ancient sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–14) and the suffering and resurrection of Jesus (Ps. 22:1–19). In the book of Acts, the ancient promise of salvation is fulfilled; the Holy Spirit, who creates such a distinctive community that others are drawn to it, is summarized as “the word of his grace” (20:32), believers are said to have received “the word of God through this grace” (14:21), and the church is described as “Church of the living God, established by the Lord and built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Acts 2:47). The preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection is central in Acts. The Lord's promise of the coming of the Spirit is fulfilled when the apostles' teaching and the singing of songs, Acts 2:42. The Spirit produces not only inward spiritual growth but also expansion and gospel-oriented growth. Luke's intention is for his Gospel and Acts to be read together, for both are part of the same story of redemptive mission. The book of Acts is the sequel to Luke's Gospel. The Gospel-fueled, Spirit-empowered growth is a repeated theme that runs throughout the book. It is through this grace that people are able to respond with faith. The first three chapters of Acts form a triad, focused on the Spirit and the church after Christ's resurrection. The power of God's salvation not only creates generosity but also drives concern about the lost. Luke consistently portrays the church as a community of faith, brokenness, and forgiveness.
The ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

– The Apostle Paul