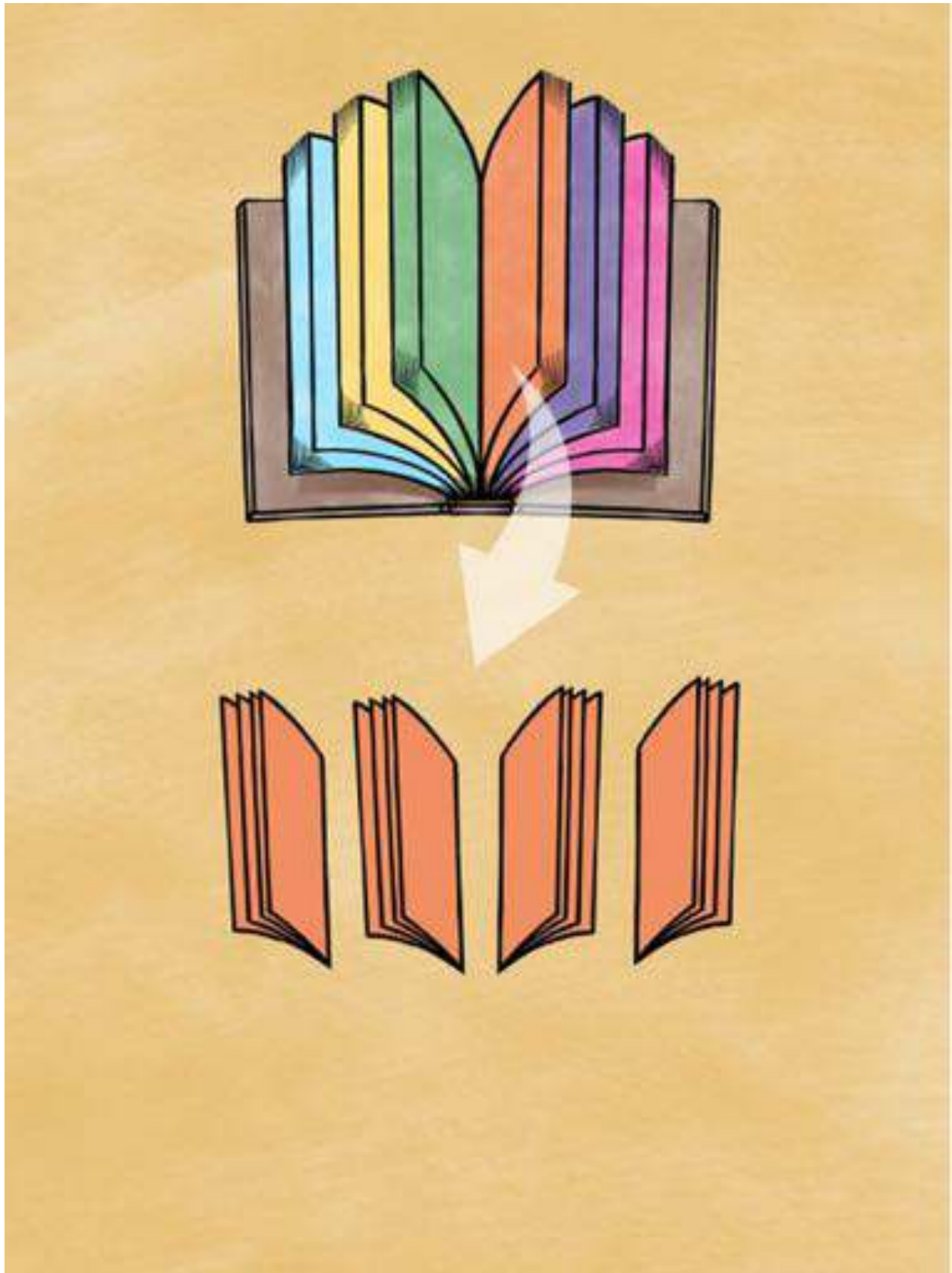




# **DEVELOPING LEADERS**

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

## **THE GOSPELS / ACTS**



# 1. The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels.

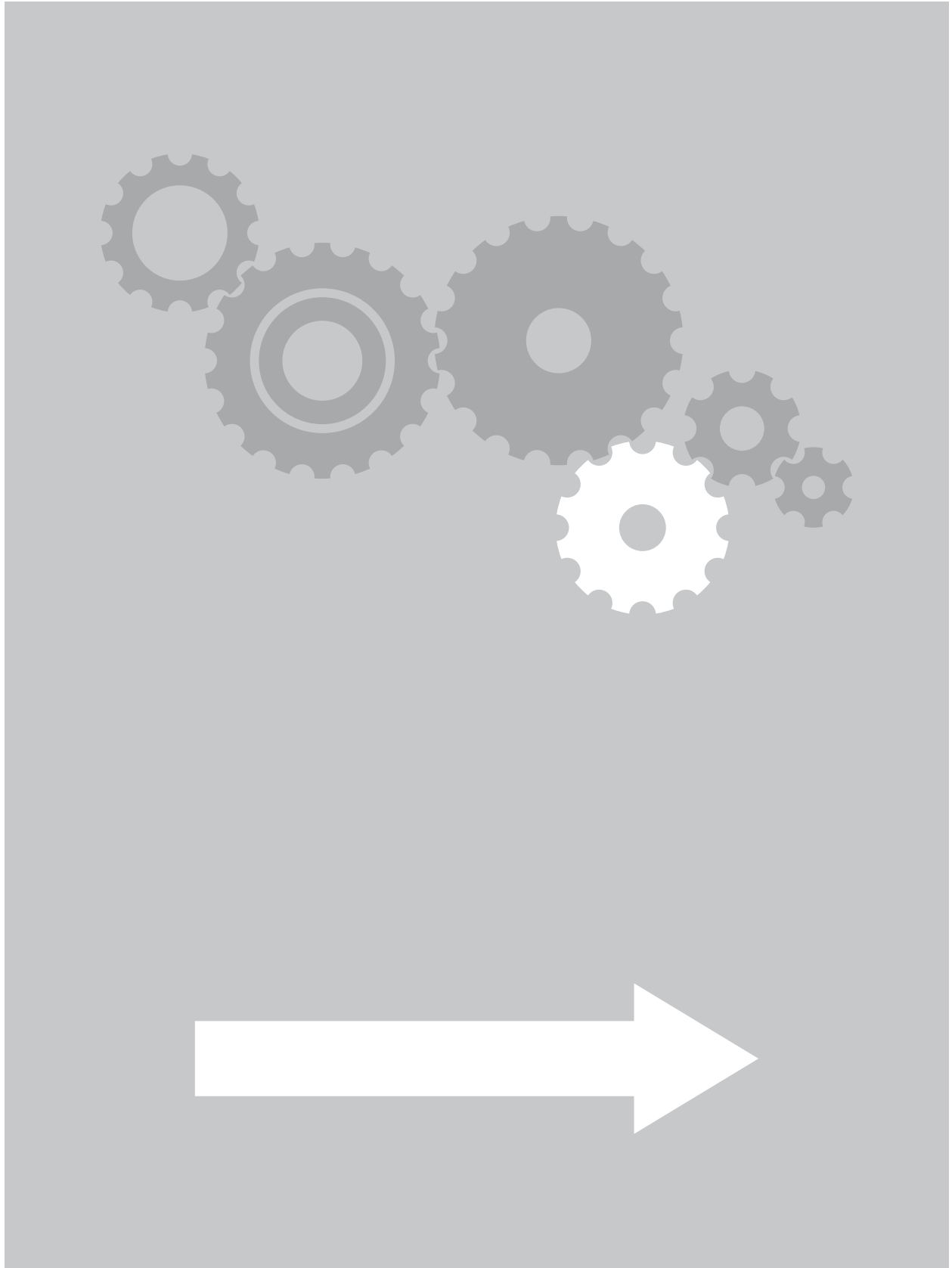
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the first four books in the New Testament. These four books are often called the “Gospels.” Sometimes, for instance, a person might say, “I am reading from the **Gospel of Mark**.” The word “Gospel” is an old English word meaning “good news.” Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels because they contain **the** good news. But what is the subject of this good news? Why should people care about this good news?

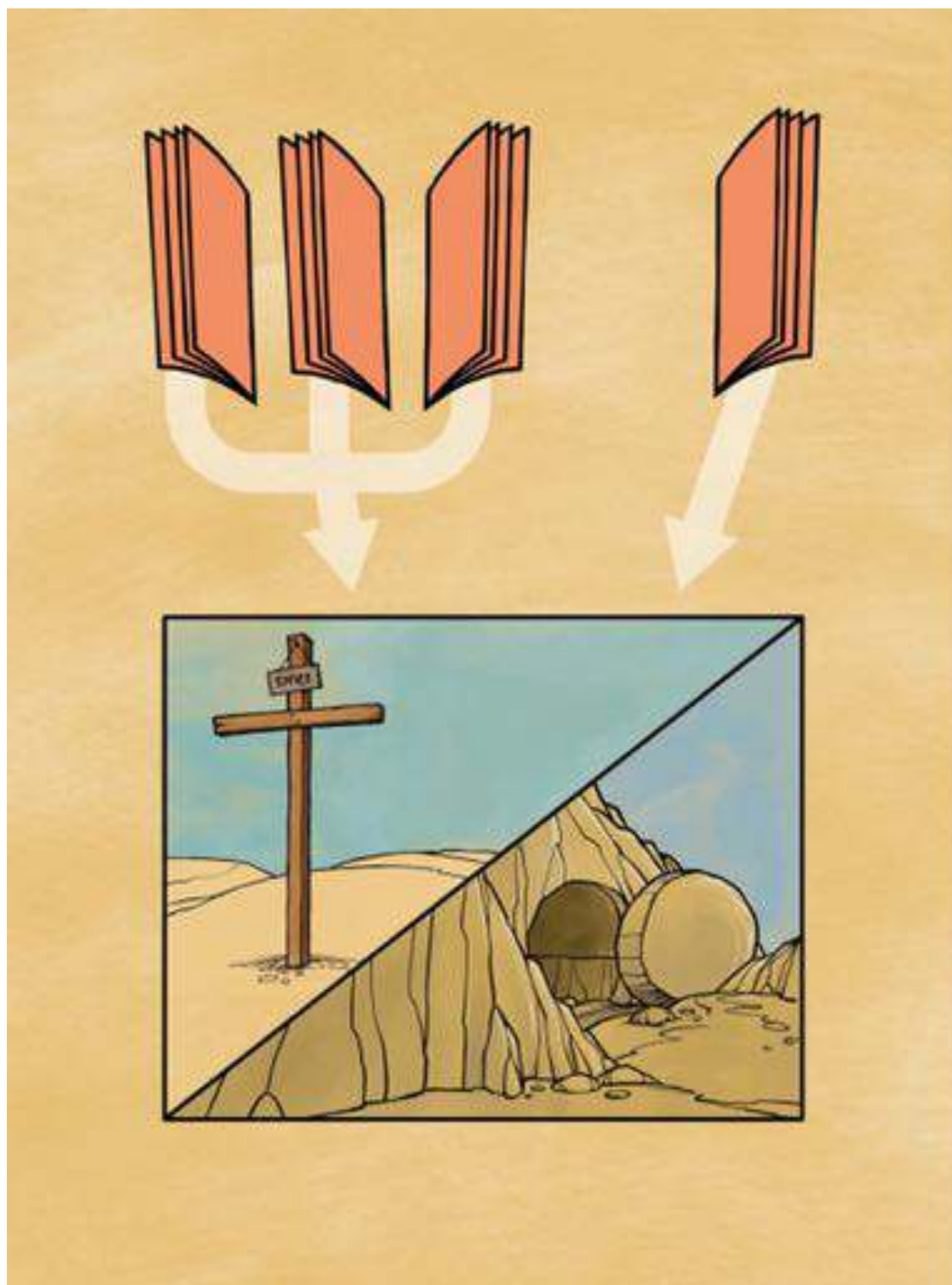
The “good news” found in these four books is all related to a man named Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is not a mythical person. He is a real man who lived during the first century. He lived a perfect life, he was killed, he was raised from the dead, and he is alive today. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John contain the story of Jesus’s birth, his perfectly obedient life, the miracles he performed, his death by crucifixion, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven. The good news is that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection have made a way for people to have their sins forgiven and to enter into the kingdom of God (see **Luke 2:10, 4:18-19, 4:43, 8:1, and John 14:6**).

A **biography** is a book that one person (or several people) writes about a different person. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all **biographies** of Jesus. Each of these books tell Jesus’s story. These four books demonstrate that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection concern all people, no matter how rich or poor they might be, no matter what country they live in, no matter what religion they or their families have believed, no matter what sins they have committed. The good news in these four books is for men and women from every tribe and nation and religion.

The reason all people need to know about the **good news** of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, is because of the very **bad news** that is facing all people living on the earth. The bad news is that all people have sinned (see **Romans 3:23**). No one is righteous (see **Romans 3:10-18**). God is holy and just. Therefore, he must punish sin. The punishment for sin is death (see **Romans 6:23**). That is bad news for everyone, because all people, with the exception of Jesus, are guilty of sin. The good news is that, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, God is offering forgiveness to all people! The Gospels tell the story of this good news (see **John 3:13-21**).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John very clearly demonstrate that Jesus never sinned. He lived a perfect life, obeying God the Father in everything he said and in everything he did. But these four books also declare that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, died on the cross because of sin. His death on the cross was not because of his own sins. Again, Jesus never sinned. Rather, he died for the sins of other people. He took the sins of other people on himself and he received the penalty they should have received. The Old Testament prophets saw this good news ahead of time and wrote about it (see **Isaiah 53:4-6**). This is very good news! Jesus died to satisfy God's wrath so that people might be forgiven (see **Isaiah 1:18 and 53:10-11**). All those who trust in the work Jesus accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection are welcomed into God's own family (see **John 14:6**).





## **2. All four Gospels tell the same story. But they tell the story in different ways.**

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar. This is why scholars sometimes call these three books the “synoptic” Gospels. The word “syn” is from the Greek and it means “with” or “together” and the word “optic” is related to vision. Thus, the word **synoptic** means something like “common vision.” The three synoptic Gospels present a common vision of Christ. That is why they are placed closely together in this illustration. However, even though they are similar, there are important differences between Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Of these three authors, only Matthew was an eyewitness of the events. Mark and Luke are describing events that were told to them by others. (It is possible Mark saw some of the events.) And all three authors chose to focus on different things. All of the choices the Gospel writers made about what to include were for a specific reason. The writers wanted the readers to see something specific about Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection. Beyond this, because Scripture is “breathed out by God” (see **2 Timothy 3:16**), we must believe that God wanted each of the Gospels to be written in the precise way it is written.

Each of the synoptic Gospels should be studied and used in preaching and teaching because each of them highlights a different aspect of Jesus’s story. For instance, Matthew and Luke both speak about Jesus’s birth. This is a very important subject to understand. However, Matthew and Luke tell the story of Jesus’s birth in different ways. The Gospel of Mark, even though it is one of the synoptic Gospels, does not speak about Jesus’s birth. Mark chose to begin his Gospel in a different way. Mark chose to start by focusing on John the Baptist. It is the joy of the preacher and of the reader to discover the riches contained in each of the synoptic Gospels.

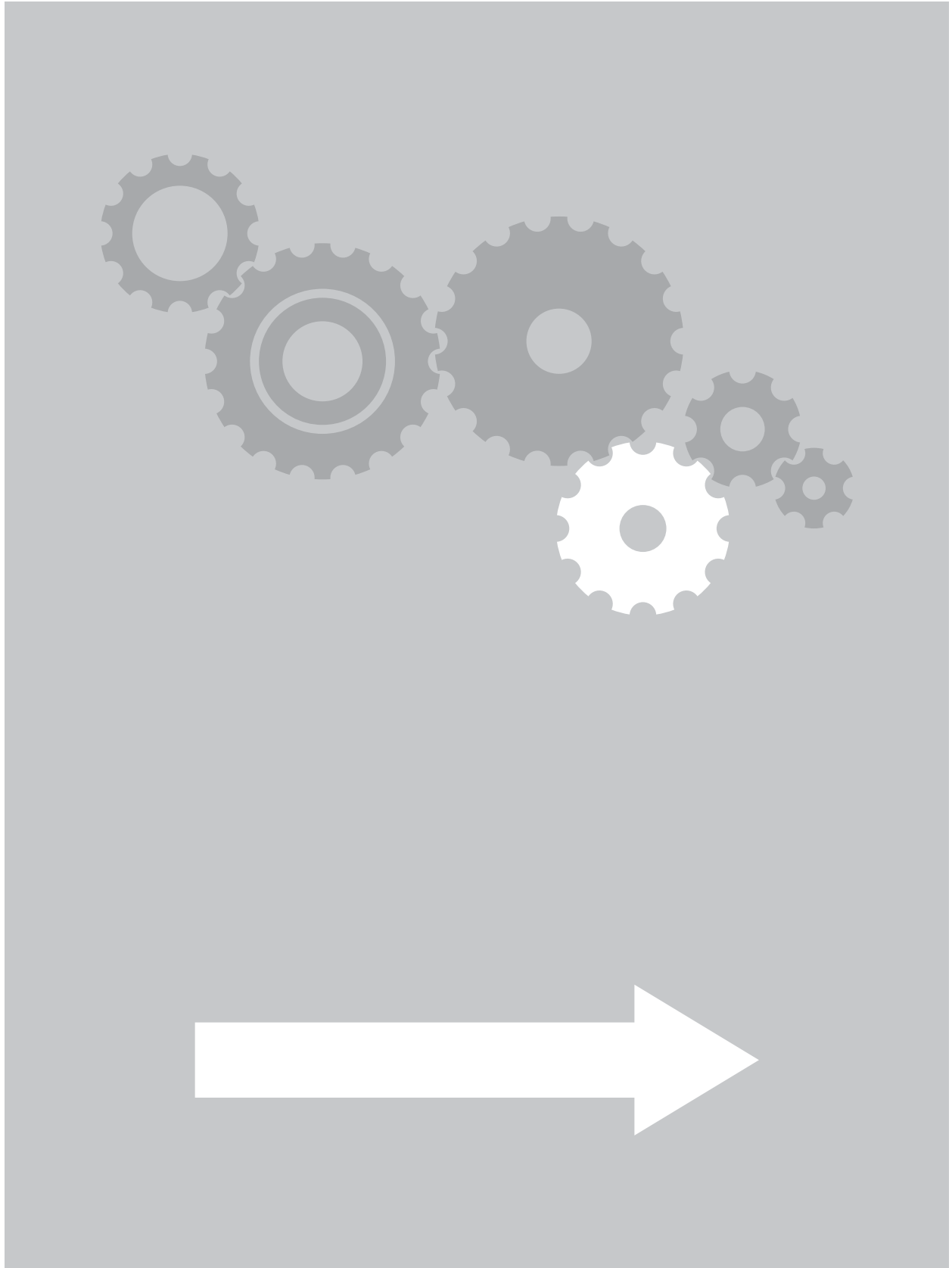
The book of John is not one of the synoptic Gospels. It is different from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in a number of ways. The synoptic Gospels include many

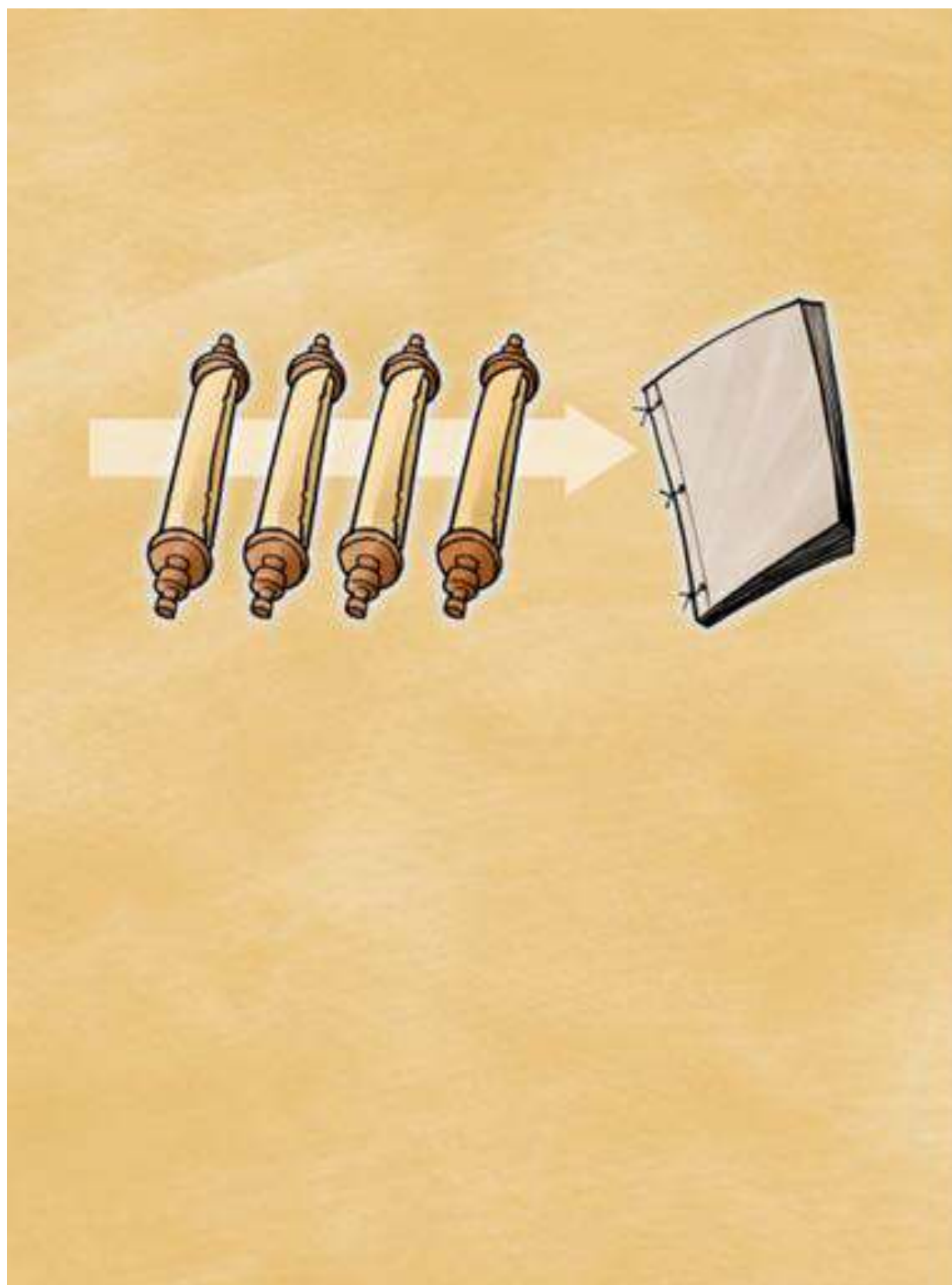
details that are not found in John. For instance, there are no parables in John. This is not because John didn't know about the parables. John was one of Jesus's 12 apostles. He knew about the parables. He heard Jesus speak them with his own ears. However, he chose to not include the parables in the story he wrote of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. John chose to include many details that are not found in any of the synoptic Gospels. For instance, the Gospel of John includes seven "I am" statements from Jesus (see **John 6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, and 15:1**). John also includes a great deal of teaching from the "upper room" (see **John 13-17**) on the night when Jesus was betrayed. This teaching is not included in the synoptic Gospels. The fact that John is different does not mean John is false or the three synoptic Gospels are false. John, like the other three Gospels, is completely true. But, by God's grace, John chose to focus on things that were not focused on in the other three Gospels.

The fact that there are four unique Gospels is a gift to all people. People are able to hear the good news of Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension from four different perspectives. All four of them are true and all four are deeply encouraging. All four Gospels are "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (see **2 Timothy 3:16-17**). All four Gospels are intended to lead people to faith (see **John 20:30-31**).

Even though the four Gospels are different, they do not contradict one another. There are no contradictions between the four Gospels. Instances where there may appear to be a contradiction may be resolved by close study.







### 3. The early church gathered the four Gospels into one book.

The Gospels were written separately. Like almost every longer work of literature from that time period, they were almost certainly written on scrolls. However, unlike other works of literature, the Gospels did not continue to be circulated as separate scrolls. At a very early date, the church gathered the four Gospels into one book and they were circulated together. The church was treating the individual Gospels as a unit.

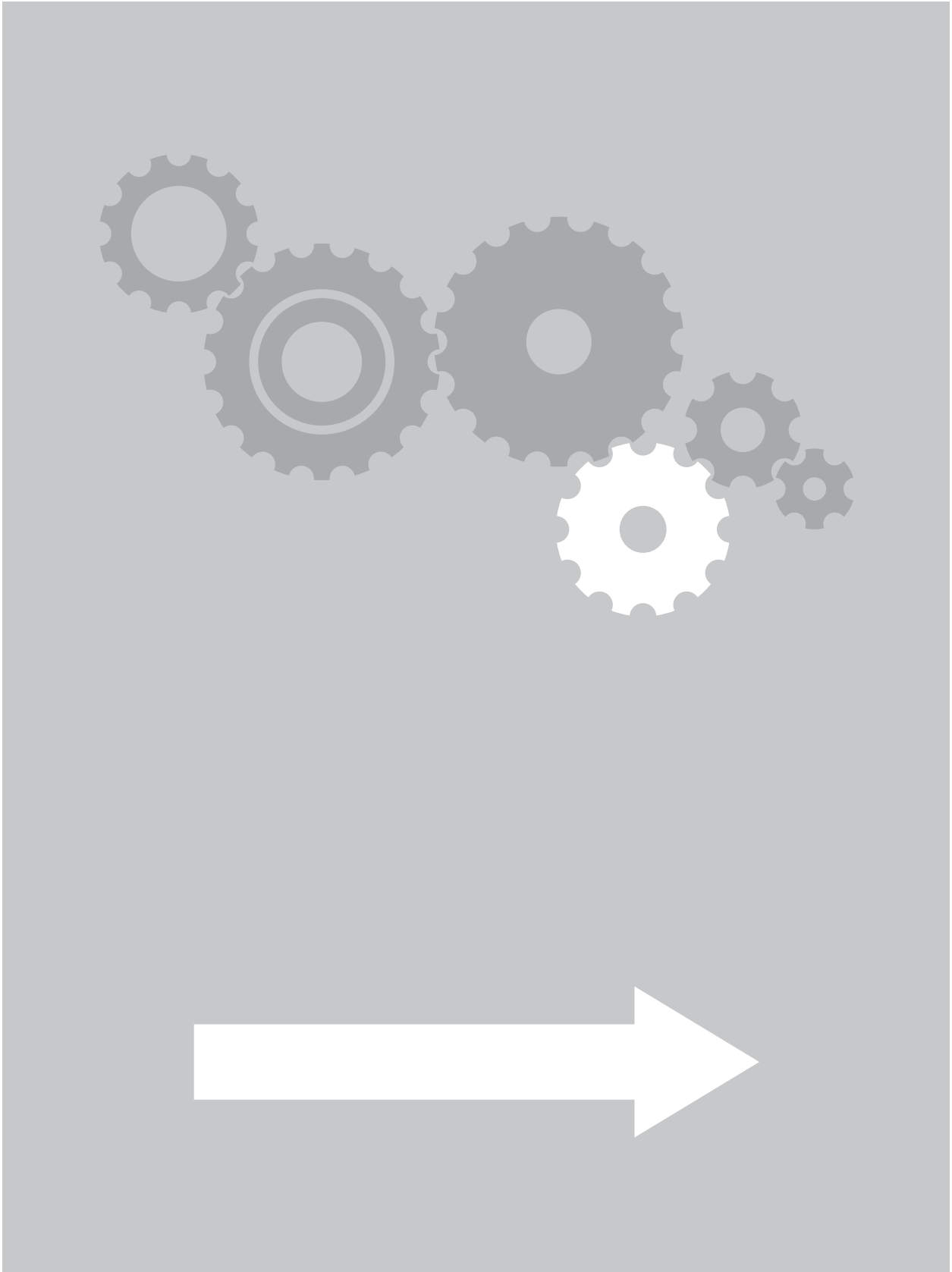
In ancient times, a book was called a **codex**. These were not commonly used until the fourth century AD. Christians, however, began heavily relying on the codex several hundred years before this. In fact, Christians were the first “group” in world history to heavily use **codices** (this is the plural of codex). Early Christians didn’t, in any of their writings, explain why they began using codices so early. They just began, from an early date, using them! Why?

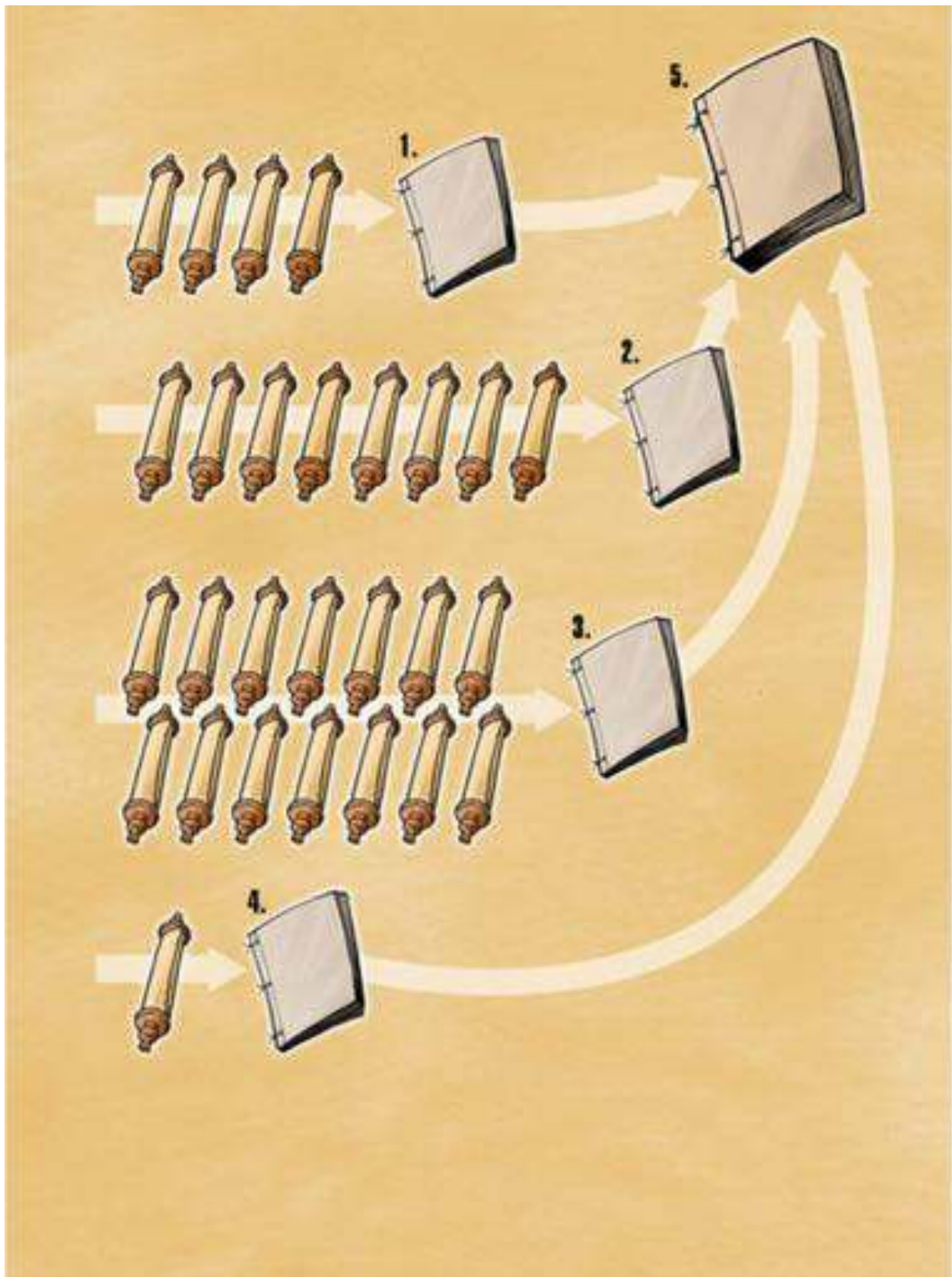
Why did Christians gather the four separate Gospels into one book? What did this say about the Gospels? The Christians did this, it appears, because the nature of the Gospels demanded this. Each of the four Gospels is an essential part of the one beautiful picture of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. The fact that the four scrolls were put into one codex demonstrates that all four Gospels are unique, yet they contain the same message. They belong together. The early church recognized this fact.

Beyond this, putting the individual scrolls into one codex allowed people to more easily study and compare the four Gospels. This would result in the creation and the building of faith (see **John 20:30-31**).

The codex had other advantages over separate scrolls. The writing on a scroll was only on one side of the scroll. In a codex, however, both sides of the sheet were written on. This allowed more material to be put into a smaller space. This means the codex was more portable than scrolls. Christians could bring the gospel collection with them.

Also, the act of putting scrolls into a codex allowed ancient Christians to “set apart” writings as Scripture. That is exactly what happened with the Gospels. They were packaged together as sacred Scripture.





## 4. The “book” of the Gospels is the first part of a larger book called the New Testament.

After their initial publication as separate scrolls, the four Gospels were gathered together and collected into one book (called a **codex**). But this “book” of the four Gospels didn’t stay alone. It was soon combined with three other “books” (called **codices**) to form the New Testament. The three other books are (1.) Acts and the “catholic” epistles, (2.) Paul’s letter collection, and (3.) Revelation. (The word “catholic”, in this context, means “universal.” This is a reference to the letters that were not part of Paul’s letter collection—James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.) The gathering of these “four separate books” into one book appears to have happened very early in the history of Christianity. As with the Gospels, the early Christians knew these books belong together.

The fact that the “book” of the Gospels is first in the New Testament means the Gospels introduce the reader to the entire New Testament. The Gospels introduce major characters in the New Testament. The Gospels introduce major themes in the New Testament. And the Gospels introduce the major story of the New Testament.

The first words in the Gospels introduce the reader to Jesus. These first words establish the direction for the entire New Testament. These first words summarize the message of the New Testament.

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. **Matthew 1:1***

These first words tell the reader that Jesus is “the Christ.” This means he is God’s anointed king. This is a major theme in the entire New Testament. These first words tell the reader that Jesus is David’s heir. This means he is the one who is being

spoken about in **2 Samuel 7:1-17**. This, also, is a major theme in the entire New Testament. And these first words tell the reader that Jesus is Abraham's heir. This means he is the one who is being spoken about in **Genesis 12:1-3**. He is the one who brings blessing to the world.

After these first words in Matthew, the reader finds story after story about Jesus. The reader learns how he was born, how he lived, what he did, what he taught, how he suffered, how he died, and that he rose from the dead. All of these things in the Gospels are critical to an understanding of the rest of the New Testament.

The Gospels also introduce the reader to Jesus's 12 apostles. This is important because the reader must trust the apostles. The apostles are connected to the Gospels and other New Testament books. If the reader cannot trust the apostles, he or she cannot trust Christ, for the information about Christ comes through the apostles. But the reader would not know important information about the apostles if he or she had not read the Gospels first. For instance, the Gospels tell the reader that Jesus purposely picked the apostles after a night of prayer. This demonstrates that Jesus selected the men God the Father wanted to be selected. And the Gospels include Jesus's words to the apostles. These words tell the reader that he or she can absolutely trust the apostles (see **John 14:25-26 and 16:12-15**).

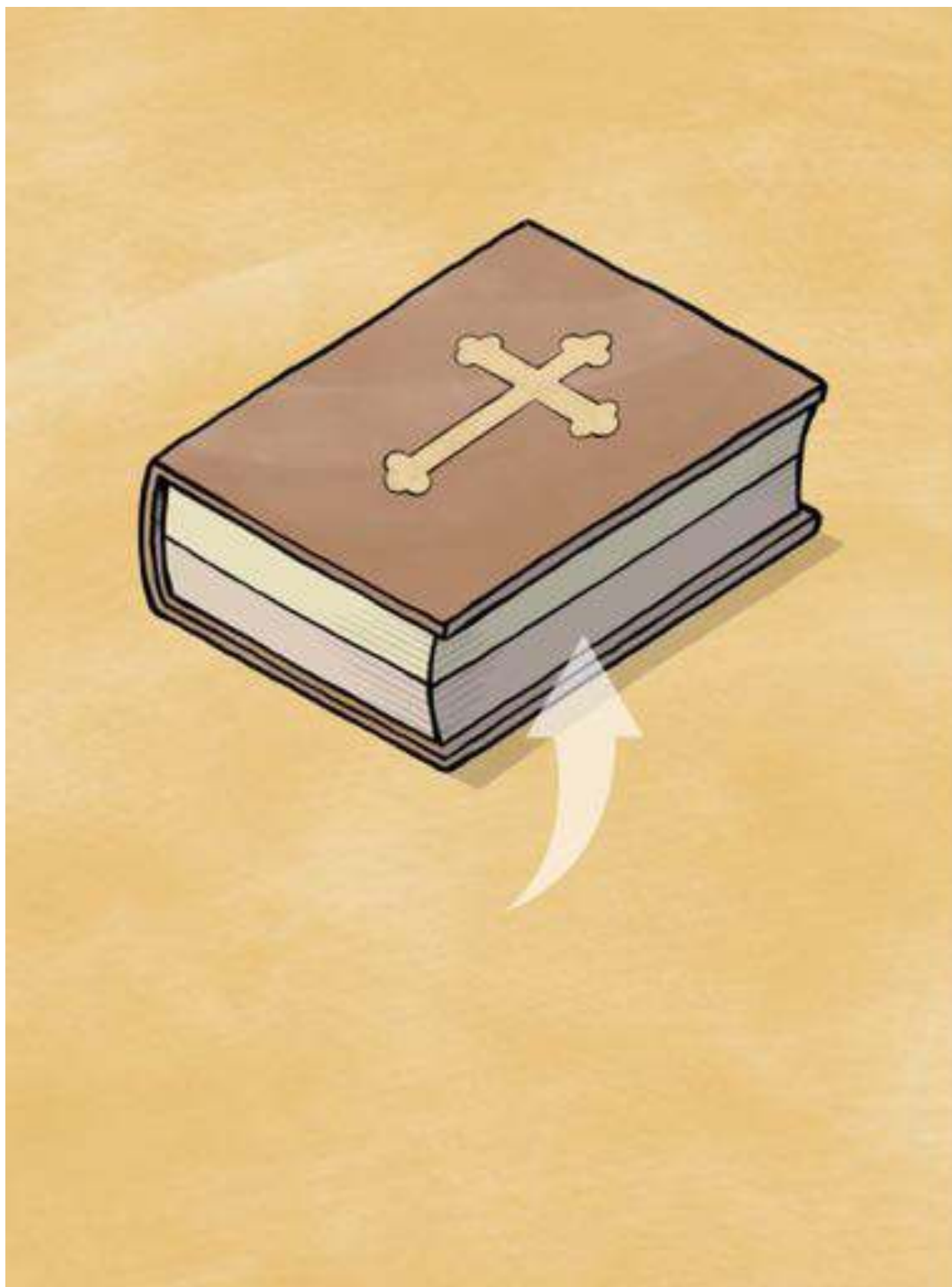
The New Testament includes a section of letters from James, Peter, John, and Jude. These people are all directly connected to Jesus's ministry when he was on earth. James and Jude were Jesus's brothers. Peter and John were two of Jesus's original apostles. The Gospels are connected to this group because they include writings from two apostles (Matthew and John). Beyond this, scholars believe the Gospel of Mark is based on Peter's teaching. Thus, after reading the Gospels, people are prepared for reading letters written by James, Peter, John, and Jude.



The Gospels also prepare the reader for the section of letters written by the apostle Paul. The Gospel of Mark prepares the reader for the “Pauline” section of letters because Mark traveled with Paul and he was a great help to him in his last years of ministry (see **2 Timothy 4:11**). The Gospel of Luke prepares the reader for the “Pauline” section of letters because Luke traveled with Paul.

Mark and Luke connect the Gospels to Paul and prepare the reader to accept Paul’s writings. These books demonstrate that Paul’s writings “belong” in the New Testament. These Gospels demonstrate that Paul’s teaching is not “opposed” to the teaching of the other apostles. There is no “division” in the New Testament.

In this way, the four Gospels prepare the reader to read and to believe the message found in the rest of the New Testament. But without the story in the Gospels, there would be no New Testament at all, for every word in the New Testament is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.



## 5. The New Testament is the second part of a two-part book.

The New Testament was never seen as an independent document which was meant to be circulated by itself. The first Christians immediately connected the “New Testament” to the ancient writings they already possessed — “Old Testament.” This wasn’t something that the church began doing after the age of the apostles. The apostles themselves purposefully connected the Old Testament and the New Testament!

Clearly, the apostles want their readers to think about the Old Testament writings when they think about Jesus. They do not present Jesus as if his actions are disconnected from everything that ever happened before them. Instead, they connect his actions to the Old Testament. Over and over, the Gospel writers declare that something promised by one of the prophets was fulfilled by Jesus (see, for instance, **Matthew 1:22, 2:15, 2:17, and 2:23**). Thus, in the Gospels, the apostles purposefully connected prophecies in the Old Testament with events taking place in the life of Jesus. Even before the New Testament was completed, the Old and New Testaments were being drawn together by the apostles.

This isn’t just true of the Gospels. Notice how Peter speaks about the apostle Paul’s letters.

*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 2*  
**Peter 3:15-16**

Peter connects Paul letters to “the other Scriptures.” The words “the other Scriptures” is a reference to the writings in the Old Testament! This means Peter considered Paul’s writings to be Scripture! Even in Peter’s day, the Old Testament Scriptures were being connected to new writings!

Additional evidence of the connection between the two sections is the fact that they both share the same name. The fact that both parts use the word “**Testament**” in their title demonstrates that they belong together.

The **New** Testament is not the replacement for the **Old** Testament. Instead, it is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Old Testament should not be thrown away. Our Lord Jesus Christ used it and Christians today should use it as well. There are many promises of God in it. These promises were not fulfilled in the time period when the Old Testament was written. God’s promises to the people of God were fulfilled in the time period when the New Testament was written. These promises are still being fulfilled!

This connection between the Old and New Testaments can also be seen in the apostle Paul’s words:

*And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers,  
this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus ... **Acts 13:32-33a***

The New Testament was written during the time period of the **New Covenant**. This is a description of the time of God’s favor which is now available because of Jesus’s death and resurrection (see **Mark 14:24-25**). The New Covenant is connected to grace (see **Hebrews 8:8-13**). The Old Testament was written during the time period of the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant is connected to works (see **Galatians 2:15-16**).

Because of sin, people were not able to be saved by keeping the Law. They needed a new and better covenant. Even during the time of the Old Covenant, the prophets were looking forward to the age of the New Covenant (see, for instance, **Jeremiah 31:31-34**).



## 6. The Gospels printed in modern Bibles are accurate translations of the original Gospels.

The most important man who has ever lived is Jesus. His life, death, and resurrection are the most important events in the history of the world. All people need Jesus, for all people have sinned and are deserving of God's judgement (see **John 3:16-18 and Romans 3:23**). People are called to carefully think about Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and to put their trust in him (see **John 20:30-31**). But for people to put their trust in Jesus, they need to know about the things Jesus did and the things Jesus said. We learn these things in the Gospels. This makes the Gospels very important.

But this leads to an important question about the Gospels. Can the reader have confidence in the words that have been written in the Gospels? How does the reader know that the Gospels we have today are the same as when they were written? Are the Gospels telling the true story of Jesus? Or were parts that were originally included in the Gospels removed? Were parts that were originally not included in the Gospels added? Is it possible powerful people in the church ever collected the writings of the Gospels and changed them in some way? It is important to answer questions like these about the Gospels, because the Gospels claim to contain the true story of the most important man who ever lived. If people are to place their faith in Jesus, they must be able to trust the words which have been written in the Gospels and which are available today.

One way to determine if the words within modern copies of Gospels are trustworthy is by comparing modern translations of the Gospels with ancient Greek manuscripts of the Gospels. Do the modern translations say the same things as the ancient manuscripts said?

But it's not enough to find just one ancient Greek manuscript and to compare modern translations to this one ancient manuscript. It would be hard to determine that this one document was truly based on the original. In order for the reader to have confidence that the modern translations truly matched what was originally written, there would need to be additional copies of the ancient manuscript which could be compared with one another. Obviously, the more ancient manuscripts that were available, the better scholars would be able to determine the words which were originally written. This would allow people to determine if the Gospel accounts written in modern Bibles accurately represent the Gospel accounts that were originally written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The easiest thing, of course, would be to find the original **autographs** of the Gospels (this is a reference to the original document written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John). However, the original **autographs** of the Gospels do not exist. This means the original manuscript written by Matthew, for instance, is not available today. This is true of every ancient work of literature. There are no autographs of any ancient works of literature. The writings of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, and Homer may only be accessed by viewing copies made some time after the original. Again, the more copies that are available, the better scholars are able to determine what the text originally said. In other words, by examining manuscripts which were made after the autographs, scholars are able to determine whether a work of literature has been transmitted accurately.

While scholars would love to examine an original autograph of any of the Gospels, it would not be a great benefit to them. It would not be a great benefit because it would be impossible to prove that it was, in fact, an original autograph. Therefore, the best thing a scholar can have is a number of different copies of the original. Many, many copies of a document is the best way to build faith in the document itself. Preferably, these copies would be found in different places and would



come from different time periods. The many different copies from many places would allow the scholar to compare the copies and to accurately determine what was originally written.

The ancient manuscripts of the Gospels which have been found provide strong evidence that the Gospels have not been changed or corrupted. Outlined below are two reasons readers of the Gospels can trust that the words printed in the Gospels today are the same words as were originally written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

**First, the large number of ancient manuscripts of the Gospels which have been found demonstrate that the Gospels have not been changed.** The Gospels are found in the New Testament. There are more ancient manuscripts containing portions of the New Testament than of any other ancient manuscript in the world. In fact, there are well over 5,000 copies of manuscripts containing portions of the Greek New Testament. The number of Ancient Greek manuscripts that have been found has actually grown in the last number of years. There are no works of literature in the entire world that can compare with this. Scholars do not question the writings of other famous works. Why, then, would anyone question the trustworthiness of a work with far more evidence?

These ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are stored in libraries all over the world today. These manuscripts have been digitally photographed. Many of these ancient manuscripts of the Gospels are available to be seen on the internet. The vast number of ancient manuscripts allows scholars to study manuscripts and to compare them.

Sometimes, people claim that at some point between the first century and today, the Gospels were changed. For instance, people sometimes claim that Jesus

didn't actually die on the cross. They claim that the original Gospels did not say that Jesus died on the cross. They claim the Gospels were changed at some point to make it appear that Jesus died.

But the ancient manuscripts definitely say that Jesus died on the cross. It is easy to prove this, because the ancient manuscripts can be studied. The large number of ancient manuscripts that are stored in libraries today prove that the Gospels were never changed. The reader can have confidence that there was no point in history when the New Testament manuscripts were gathered together, destroyed, and then republished in a "new" edition. If this had actually happened, there would be evidence of this.

**Second, the early dates of the manuscripts of the Gospels which have been found demonstrate that the Gospels have not been changed.** This means that many of the Greek manuscripts that have been found were made relatively close to the time when the Gospels were originally written. The closer the date of a copy is to the date of its original composition, the more likely it is that changes have not been introduced.

Some of the New Testament manuscripts have been dated within 100 years of the composition of the text. This is far closer than any other Greek manuscripts for any other famous work of literature.

The fact that there are so many manuscripts and that they are dated so closely to the original composition of the texts should give people great confidence in the texts themselves. This is important, because, again, people are called to believe what has been written in the text. Based on the number of ancient manuscripts available for careful study, the New Testament should be the most trusted document in the world.

By comparing modern Bibles to the ancient manuscripts, it is clear the Gospels in modern Bibles today contain the same message as the Gospels contained when they were originally written. They have not been changed.



## 7. The words in the Gospels can be trusted.

Based on the number of Greek manuscripts which have survived and on the early date of those manuscripts, it is clear the Gospels we have printed in modern Bibles today have not been changed. They are the same as the Gospels which were originally written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But do these books accurately speak about Jesus? For instance, did Matthew accurately record Jesus's words and deeds? Did he accurately write about Jesus's death and resurrection? Or did he make mistakes in his writings? The apostles, after all, were not perfect men. During Jesus's public ministry, he constantly needed to correct them. Are they trustworthy? How can the reader know if the words within the Gospels can be trusted?

The reader can have great confidence in the words found in the Gospels for a large number of reasons. Here are 9 reasons the reader can have confidence in the words in the Gospels.

**1. The reader may have confidence in the words of the Gospels because they, like all the words in the Scriptures, have been “breathed out by God.”** According to **2 Timothy 3:16**, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The Gospels are Scripture. This means they have been “breathed out by God.” Even though Matthew wrote the words found in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew did not originate with him. It was not his own private “interpretation” of Jesus's life and death. Instead, Matthew was “carried along by the Holy Spirit” to write everything he wrote (see **2 Peter 1:21**). We may be sure that Matthew's Gospel is trustworthy because God does not lie (see **Titus 1:2**).

According to the apostle Paul, the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (see **Ephesians 2:20**). By this, the apostle Paul means the teaching of

the apostles (in the New Testament) and the prophets (in the Old Testament) is a foundation the whole church stands on. The fact that Paul refers to the words of the apostles and prophets as a foundation of the church means these words can absolutely be trusted.

**2. All four of the Gospels are based on eyewitness testimony.** Matthew and John were eyewitnesses of the events described in the Gospels. The apostle John was with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. Matthew was called by Jesus a short time later. Both of them left everything to follow Jesus. They spent all of their time with him. The Gospel of Mark was not written by an eyewitness, but scholars believe Mark is based on the apostle Peter's words and memories. Thus, Mark is closely connected to an eyewitness. And the Gospel of Luke is based on Luke's interviews with eyewitnesses (see **Luke 1:1-4**). Thus, all four of the Gospels are directly connected to eyewitnesses of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Eyewitnesses are the best ones to write about Jesus's life. Writers of the New Testament speak about the importance of this eyewitness testimony in many places (see, for instance, **Acts 2:32, 3:15, 4:20, 1 Corinthians 15:6, and 2 Peter 1:16**).

The Gospels themselves provide evidence that they were written by eyewitnesses. As a rule, people who are making up details do not include specific place names about obscure places because the people making up the details do not know specific details like names. Eyewitnesses use names of obscure places because they have firsthand knowledge of events. The reason there are so many names of obscure places in the Gospels is because the apostles were actually present when the events took place.

**3. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would teach his apostles "all things" and would guide them "into all the truth" (see John 14:25-26 and 16:13).** Jesus's words mean the apostles had been perfectly taught about Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the apostles did not write anything inaccurate about Jesus or about belief in Jesus in the

Gospels. Jesus's words to the apostles in John 14 and 16 are meant to give all people absolute confidence in the teaching of the apostles. We can trust the writings of the apostles because Jesus said we can trust them. The reliability of the Gospels rests on Jesus's words!

**4. The fact that the Holy Spirit taught the apostles “all things” and led them into “all the truth” means the teaching of the apostles in the Gospels is complete.** The apostles did not leave out any details that should have been included. Based on this, the reader should not be expecting later “prophets” to have any information to add to the Gospels. Everything necessary for life and salvation was made known to the apostles. The reader may trust that the Gospels are sufficient. No other “gospels” are necessary to fill in “extra” details about Jesus.

**5. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would help the apostles remember everything he said.** Jesus's words in John 14 should give readers absolute confidence that the apostles remembered Jesus's exact words.

*“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things** and **bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.**” John 14:25-26*

**6. Two of the Gospels are connected to people who were in Jesus's “inner circle.”** There were three apostles who were allowed to go everywhere with Jesus: Peter, James, and John. James did not write a Gospel. He was killed by Herod in the early days of the church (see **Acts 12:2**). However, John did write a Gospel. He also wrote 1,2, 3 John and Revelation. Even though Peter did not write a Gospel, the Gospel of Mark is closely associated with Peter because Mark was Peter's associate and the Gospel appears to be based on Peter's memory and teachings. This means readers of

the Gospels do not need to wonder if there is “secret information” about Jesus they do not know. Readers can read the words of Jesus’s closest associates. Through Peter and John, readers have access to all the words Jesus spoke, whether those words were spoken in public, in private (to the 12 apostles), or to his very closest friends.

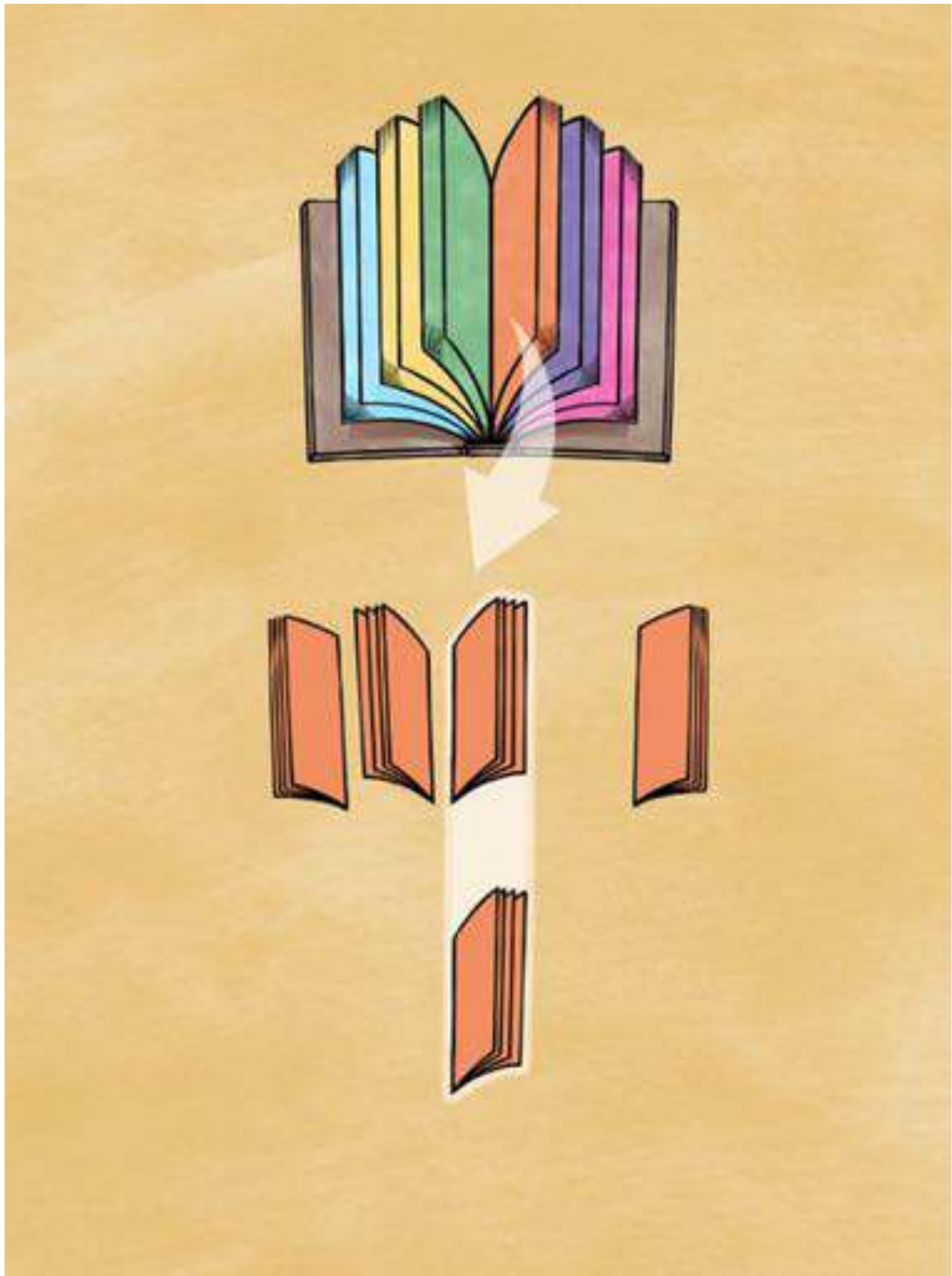
**7. The Gospels are filled with negative stories about the apostles.** The negative information about the apostles is great evidence of the accuracy of the Gospels. There are many stories in the Gospels about the apostles arguing about who was the greatest, or boasting, or doubting. The Gospels include the story of Peter denying Jesus. The Gospels also include details about the apostles falling asleep when they should have been praying and doubting the women who told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. The reader needs to remember that Matthew, Peter (in the Gospel of Mark), and John were writing bad things about themselves! Normally, if people are trying to persuade other people, they want to present themselves without flaws. This makes them appear trustworthy. The fact that the Gospels include so many negative stories about the apostles demonstrates they were not trying to fool anyone. The fact that they were not afraid to speak negatively about themselves indicates they were telling the truth about Jesus.

**8. The fact that women were the first witnesses of Jesus’s resurrection is evidence of the truth in the Gospels.** In ancient times, women were not considered to be trustworthy witnesses in a legal manner. The testimony of women could not be admitted in a trial. Thus, if the apostles were trying to deceive people about the resurrection, they would have never used women as the first witnesses to the resurrection. They would have used men. The only possible reason the apostles would have used women as the first witnesses of the resurrection would be if the events actually happened in the way they are described and the apostles were telling the truth. It is significant to note that all four Gospels include this information (see **Matthew**



**28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-18).** This is strong evidence that the Gospels are truthful.

**9. The suffering and death of the apostles demonstrates their words are true.** The fact that the apostles suffered and died for their faith should be carefully considered. It is evidence of the truthfulness of the Gospels. People will not die for something they know to be false. However, people will die for a great truth. It is significant to note that the apostles died for their faith. Peter (whose words are recorded in Mark) was crucified in Rome when Nero was the emperor. Matthew was also killed. John was punished on the island of Patmos (see **Revelation 1:9**). The fact that all of the apostles were willing to suffer and to die is strong evidence that the gospels are truthful.



## 8. The Gospel of Luke is the first part of a two-part story. The book of Acts is the second part of that story.

The Gospel of Luke was written for a man named Theophilus.

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

According to these verses, the Gospel of Luke was written to provide Theophilus with “an orderly account” concerning the things he had been taught about Jesus.

After completing this first book, Luke wrote a second book to the same man. This second book written to Theophilus is the book of Acts.

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. **Acts 1:1-2***

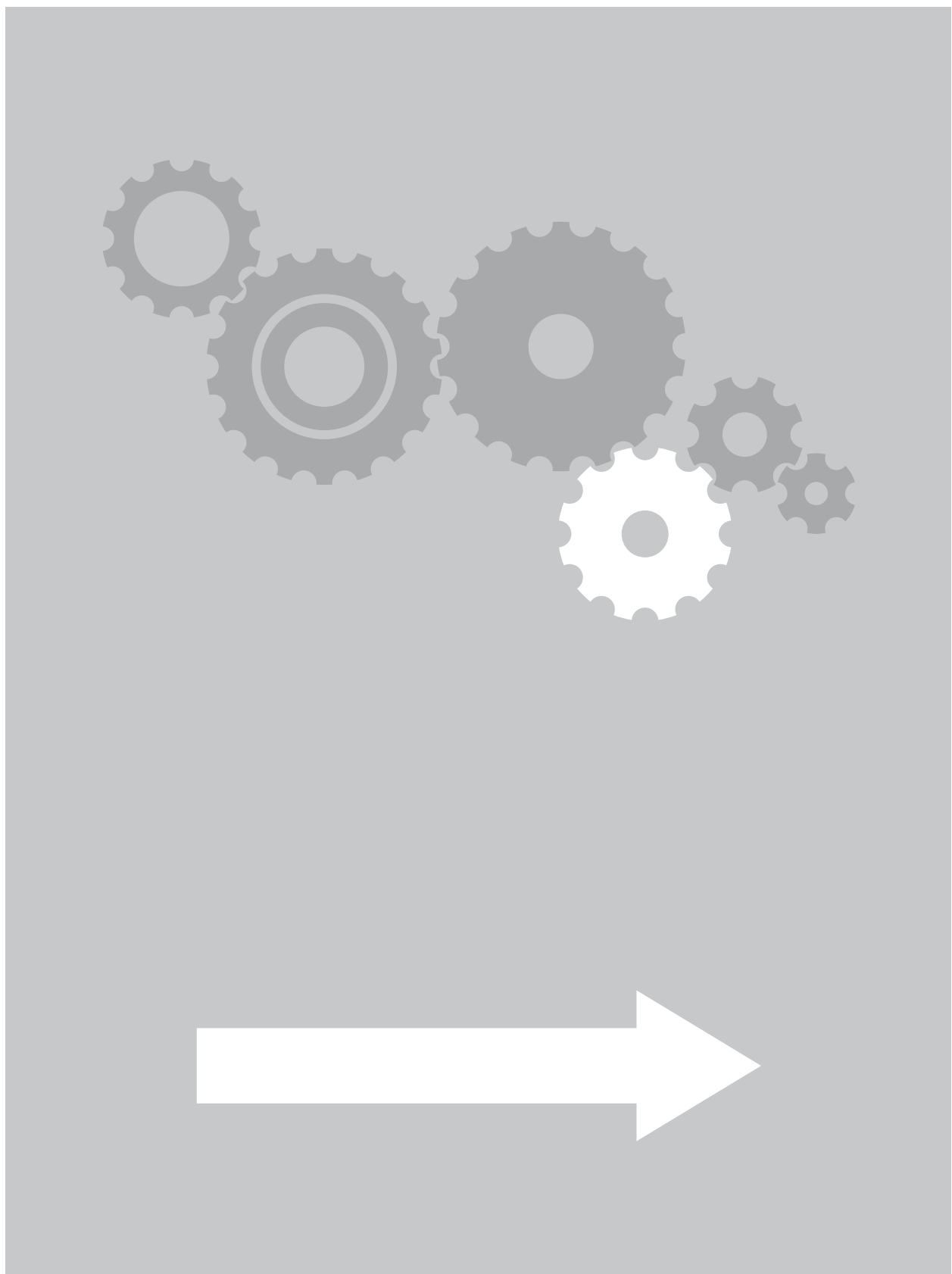
The first book (the Gospel of Luke) was about what Jesus began to do and teach until the time of his ascension to the right hand of God. The book of Acts was written because the story of Jesus did not end with his ascension into heaven. Rather,

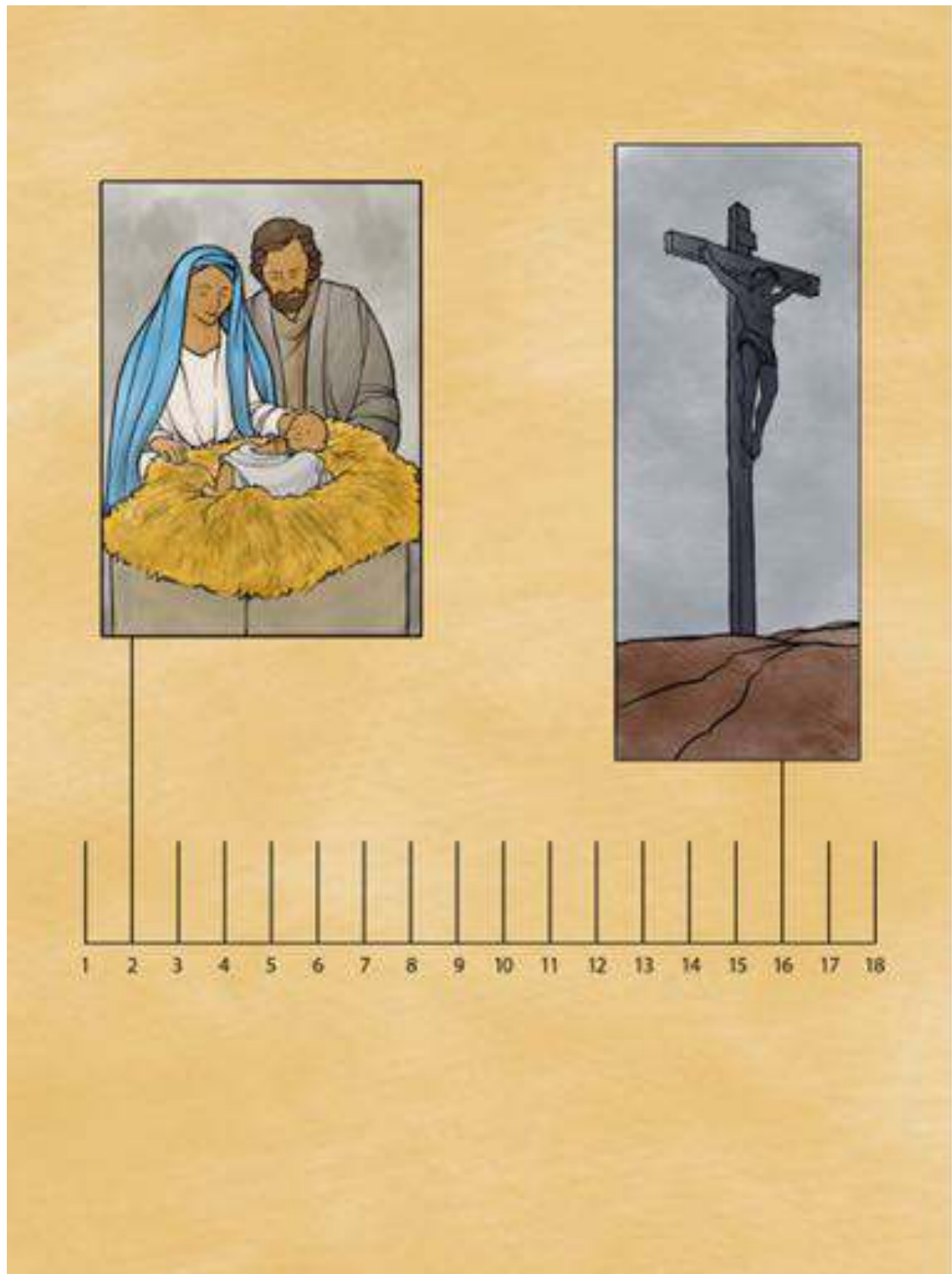
Jesus is still working on the earth. He has poured his Spirit out on those who have faith in him (see **Acts 1:8**). The church on earth has Christ's power in it. The church on earth is continuing Christ's work.

The book of Acts is a history of the church, from the time of Jesus's ascension until the imprisonment of the apostle Paul in Rome. The book of Acts is sometimes referred to as the Acts of the apostles. This is an appropriate name, because the book speaks about the deeds of the apostles. But the book of Acts doesn't just speak about the acts of the apostles. It also speaks about the acts of the churches. Of course, it is also speaking about the acts of the Holy Spirit. When we read Acts, we are reading about what the Holy Spirit was doing through the apostles and in the churches in the days following Jesus's ascension to heaven.

The book of Acts ends with the apostle Paul in prison in Rome (see **Acts 28:17-31**). The reader is not told by Luke what happens to Paul. It may appear, therefore, that the book of Acts has no ending. This is appropriate, for the church is still on earth and is still carrying out the work of Jesus by his Holy Spirit. The acts of the church have not ended. The acts of the Holy Spirit have not ended. The book of Acts wasn't intended to tell the story of Paul. Luke wrote Acts to speak about how the Holy Spirit was continuing the work of Christ. That work is still continuing today. The story that was started in the book of Acts is still happening. The Holy Spirit is still giving power to Christ's people and churches are being planted and are growing throughout the world. Miracles are still taking place every day. Jesus has kept his promise. He has not left his people.

*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. **Matthew 28:20***





## 9. A timeline of major events in the Gospels.

The Gospels do not present all of the events that took place during Jesus's life on earth. Jesus did many things which were not written in the Gospels.

*Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. **John 21:25***

The four Gospels present select events that explain the work of Christ. While the reader may want to hear more stories about Jesus's life on earth, enough has been written to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God, that he lived a perfect life, that he died on the cross, that he rose again, and that he ascended into heaven. The things that were written provide enough information so that people might put their trust in Christ.

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. **John 20:30-31***

Outlined below are major events in the gospels and the places in each gospel where they are found:

### 1. The birth of John the Baptist

Luke 1:5-80

### 2. The birth of Jesus

Matthew 1:18-2:18, Luke 1:26-2:21

### **3. Jesus is dedicated at the temple**

Luke 2:22-38

### **4. Jesus is taken to Egypt**

Matthew 2:13-15

### **5. Jesus at the temple at twelve years old**

Luke 2:41-52

### **6. The ministry of John the Baptist**

Matthew 3:1-17, Mark 1:1-11, Luke 3:1-21, John 1:1-37

### **7. Jesus's baptism**

Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34

### **8. The temptation in the wilderness**

Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13

### **9. The choosing and sending out of the twelve disciples**

Matthew 4:18-22, 10:1-42, Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-14, 3:13-21, 6:7-13, Luke 5:1-11, 5:27-28, 6:12-16, 9:1-6, John 1:35-51,

### **10. Long passages of Jesus's teaching**

Matthew 5-7, 24, Mark 13, Luke 6:20-49, 21:5-36, John 3:1-21, 6:22-59, 13-17

### **11. Jesus's parables**

Matthew 13, 18:10-14, 18:21-35, 20:1-16, 21:28-22:14, 25:1-30, Mark 4:1-34, 12:1-12, Luke 6:46-49, 8:1-18, 10:25-37, 12:13-21, 12:35-48, 13:6-9, 13:18-21, 14:7-24, 15:1-16:13, 16:19-31, 18:1-8, 19:11-27, 20:9-18, 21:29-33

### **12. The transfiguration**

Matthew 17:1-13 Mark 9:1-13, Luke 9:28-36





### **13. The last supper**

Matthew 26:17-35, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-38, John 13-17

### **14. Jesus's arrest**

Matthew 26:30-75, Mark 14:32-72, Luke 22:39-70, John 18:1-27

### **15. Jesus before Pilate**

Matthew 27:1-31, Mark 15:1-20, Luke 23:1-25, John 18:28-19:16

### **16. Jesus's crucifixion**

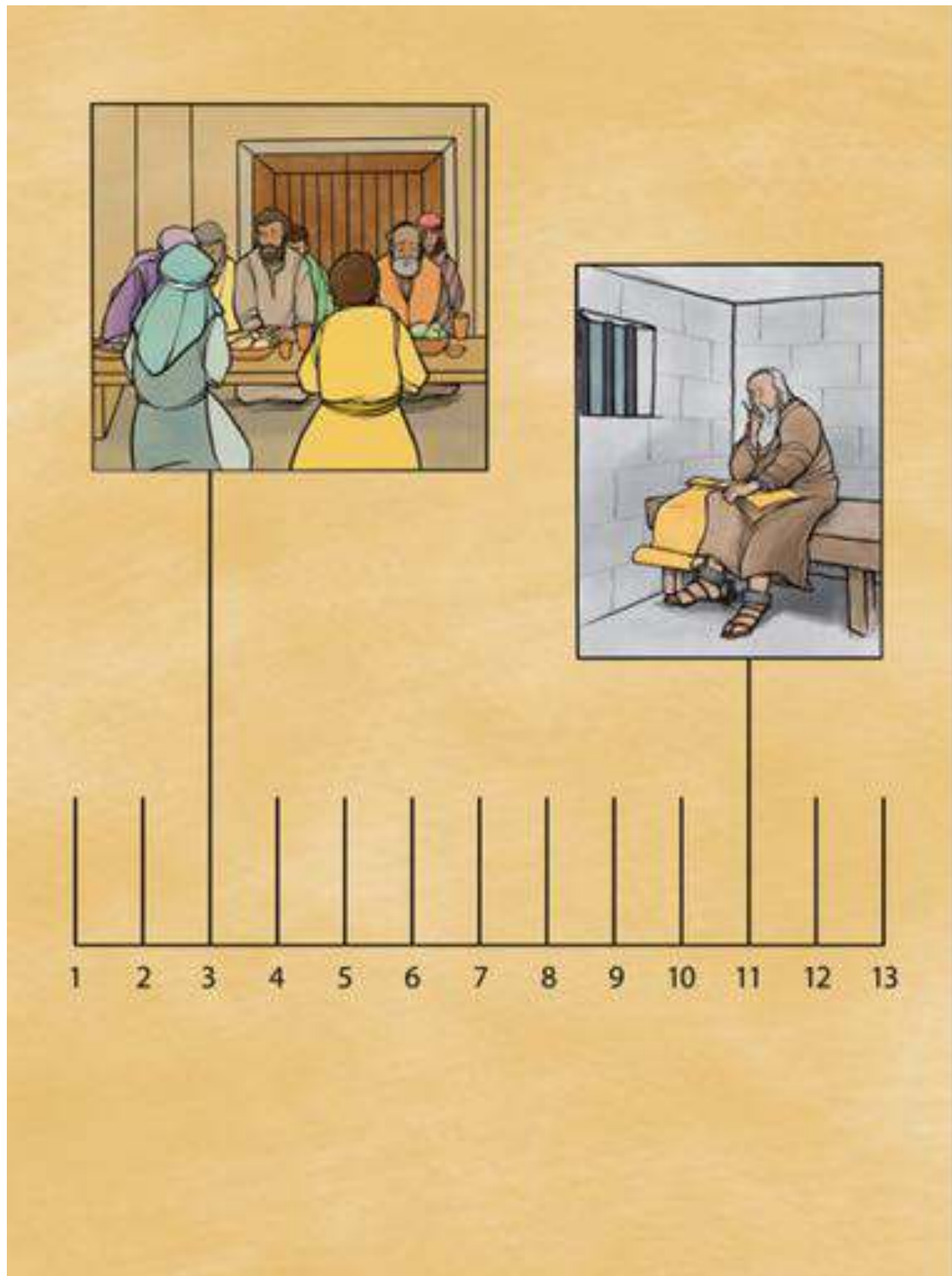
Matthew 27:32-66, Mark 15:21-47, Luke 23:26-56, John 19:16-42

### **17. Jesus's resurrection**

Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-13, Luke 24:1-49, John 20:1-29

### **18. Jesus's great commission and ascension**

Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:14-20, Luke 24:50-53



## **10. A timeline of major events in the book of Acts.**

The book of Acts does not present all of the events that took place during the time period described in the book of Acts. It presents select events that explain the start of the church and the work of the church in its earliest days.

The book of Acts presents enough events for a person to see that the church is continuing the work of Christ and for that person to join in the work. The book of Acts demonstrates that the church will suffer from persecution. The book of Acts demonstrates that the church will be helped by the Holy Spirit.

Beyond this, the book of Acts prepares the reader for the letters in the New Testament. For instance, the book of Acts demonstrates that the Holy Spirit was working through the apostle Peter and he is to be trusted. This is important, because two letters from Peter are included in the New Testament (1 and 2 Peter). In the same way, the book of Acts demonstrates that the Holy Spirit was working through the apostle John and he is to be trusted. In addition to the Gospel of John, John also wrote 1,2,3 John and Revelation. And the book of Acts demonstrates that Jesus's brother James was a true leader in the church. He, like Peter and John, is to be trusted. He wrote the book of James.

The book of Acts explains the calling of Paul and his ministry. This is important for two reasons. First, Paul especially focused on the Gentiles. Therefore, the book of Acts demonstrates that this was God's will. Second, the book of Acts the book of Acts prepares the believer for Paul's letters and helps the believer trust these letters.

Outlined below are major events in Acts and the places in Acts where they are found:

**1. Jesus's ascension**

Acts 1:6-11

**2. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit**

Acts 1:8-2:13

**3. The beginning of the church**

Acts 2

**4. Paul's conversion**

Acts 9:1-19

**5. Peter and the Gentiles**

Acts 10

**6. Paul's first missionary journey**

Acts 13-14

**7. The church council in Jerusalem**

Acts 15:1-35

**8. Paul's second missionary journey**

Acts 15:36-18:23

**9. Paul's third missionary journey**

Acts 18:23-21:16

**10. Paul arrested in Jerusalem**

Acts 21:17-23:22

### **11. Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea**

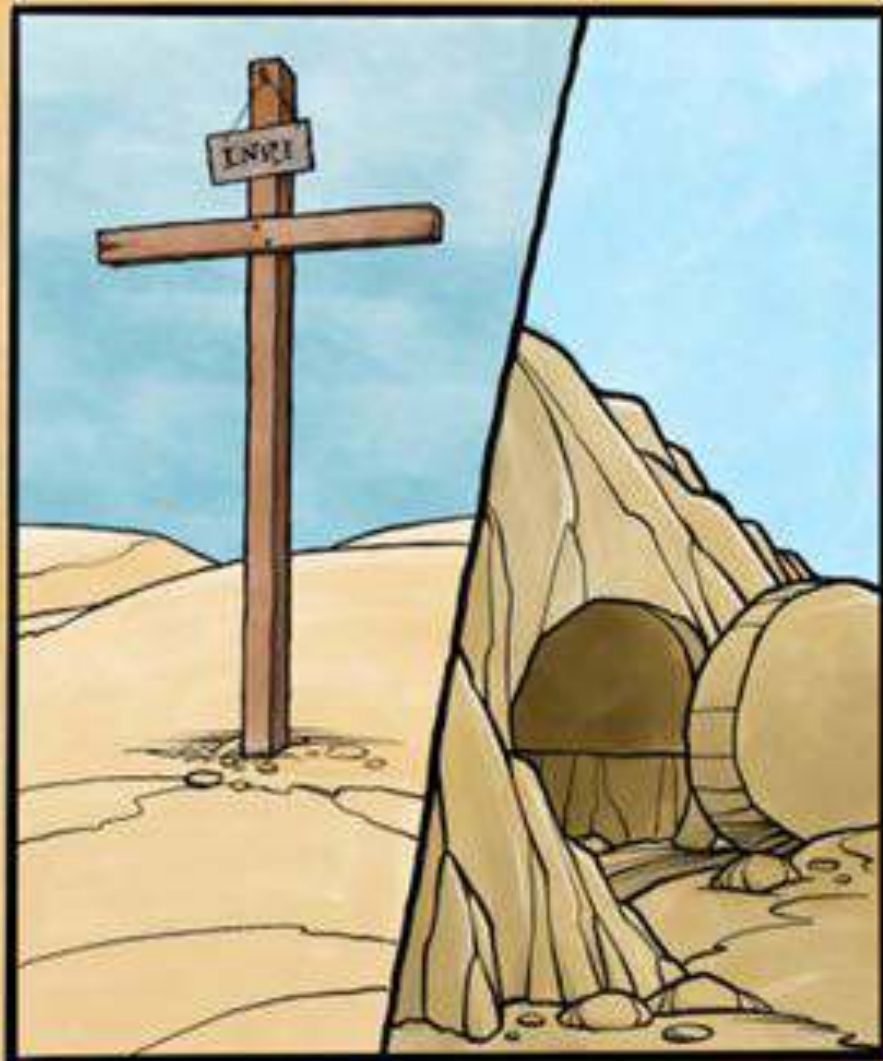
Acts 23:23-26:32

### **12. Paul's voyage to Rome**

Acts 27:1-28:16

### **13. Paul's imprisonment in Rome**

Acts 28:17-31



## 11. The central event in the Gospels and in Acts is the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus was not crucified until he was in his early 30s. This means the Gospel writers had three decades of events they could have written about. All of them would have been interesting. However, very little is written about most of Jesus's earthly life. Only two of the Gospel writers wrote about Jesus's birth (see **Matthew 1-2** and **Luke 1:1-2:39**). And only Luke records an event from Jesus's childhood (see **Luke 2:40-52**). Only four of the 89 chapters in the Gospels concern events that took place before Jesus's public ministry began around age 30. This means less than 5% of the Gospels concern events that happened before Jesus began his public ministry!

The rest of the Gospels concern the short time of Jesus's public ministry. This is the time period beginning with Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist. Jesus's public ministry was approximately three years long. The Gospel writers write about events from this entire period of time. However, in all four of the Gospels, the writers especially focus on Jesus's death and resurrection (and the events immediately before and after his death and resurrection).

Jesus's "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem took place on the Sunday before he was crucified. This day is often called Palm Sunday. The period of time beginning with Palm Sunday and ending with his resurrection and post-resurrection appearances is very short. But all four Gospels focus on these few days. Matthew 21-28 focuses on this short time period. Mark 11-16 focuses on this time period. Luke 19-24 focuses on this time period. And John 12-21 focuses on this time period. When they are added together, the four Gospels have a total of 89 chapters. Incredibly, 30 of these chapters especially focus on the time period of Jesus's death and resurrection. This means more than one out of every three chapters is from this time period!

However, the Gospels focus much more than just 1/3 of their writings on Jesus's death and resurrection. Even before Jesus's "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, the Gospels were focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ. For instance, in **Matthew 16:21**, Jesus begins teaching about his death and resurrection.

*From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." **Matthew 16:21-23** (see also Matthew 17:22-23 and 20:17-19)*

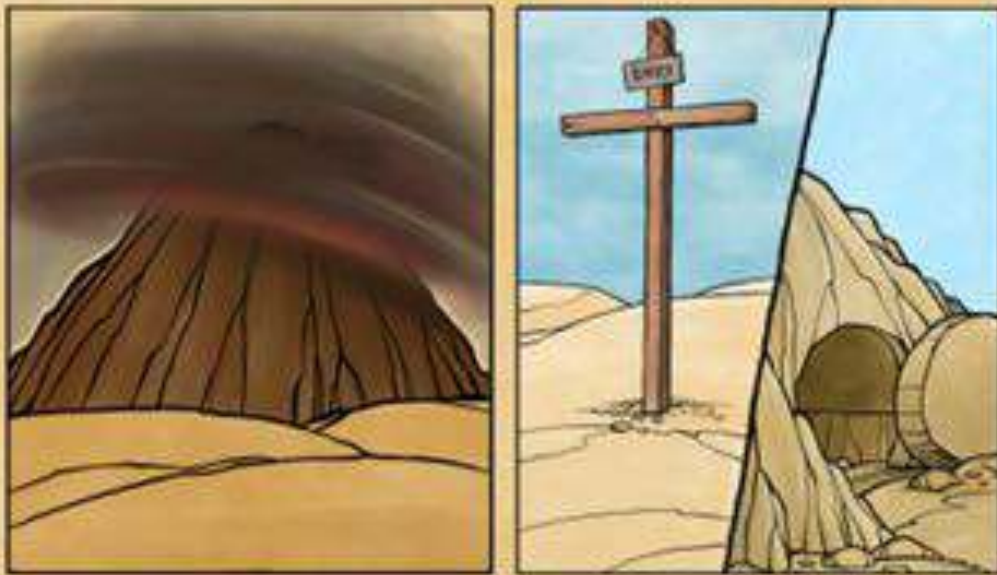
The fact is, every chapter of the Gospels is, in one way or another, pointing toward or speaking about Jesus's death and resurrection.

The overwhelming amount of material devoted to Christ's death and resurrection clearly demonstrates Jesus's death and resurrection is the most important event in the Gospels.

The focus on the death and resurrection of Christ means the Gospel writers want the Gospel readers to think about these events carefully and to make decisions in their own lives based on Christ's death and resurrection. When the Gospel writers speak about the importance of **faith** in Jesus Christ (see **John 20:30-31**), they want the readers to understand that faith in Christ must include an understanding of Jesus's death and resurrection.



And the focus on the death and resurrection of Christ means Jesus is far more than just a prophet or teacher. Even though he truly is a prophet and teacher, he is much more than a prophet and teacher. He is the risen Savior of the world.



## 12. The Gospels in the New Testament are similar to the first five books in the Old Testament. Both sections focus on the establishment of a covenant.

Compare the central event in the four Gospels with the central event in the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). They are similar. In both sections, the central event is related to the establishment of a **covenant**. This is why the two sections of the Bible are named the Old **Testament** and the New **Testament**. The word **Testament** is an old word related to the word **covenant**. It refers to a strong agreement between two parties.

The central event in the “book of Moses” is the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (see **Exodus 19-40**). This is the event leading to the establishment of what became known as the **Old Covenant**. The central event in the Gospels is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the event leading to the establishment of the **New Covenant**.

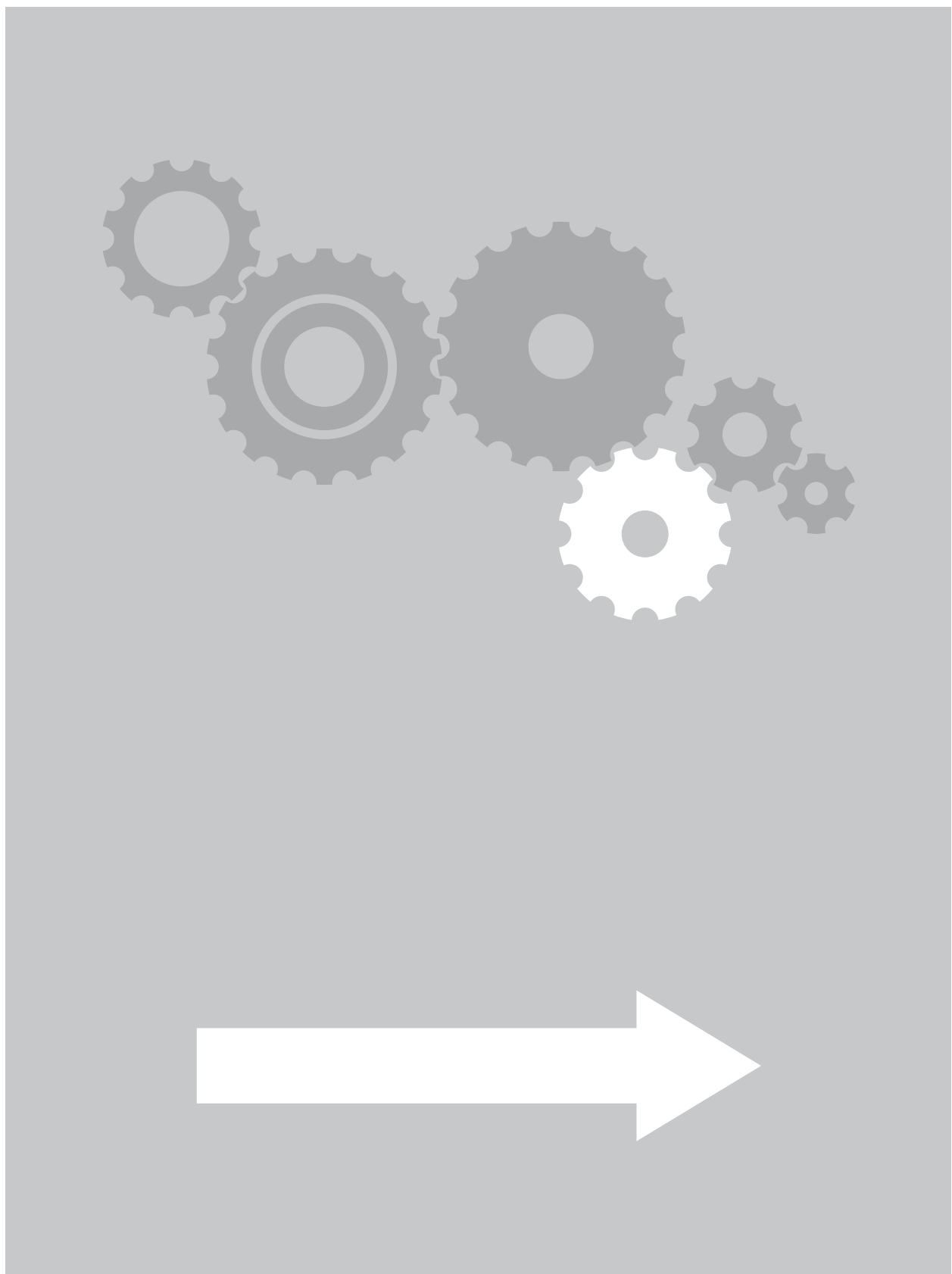
Based on many factors (i.e., the amount of space dedicated to this event, God’s words to Moses when he appeared to him at the burning bush, etc.) it is clear the author (Moses) wants the reader to see the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai as of the greatest significance. This has a central place in the **Law** because this was the time and the place when God made a covenant with his people. Here God made promises to Israel which would have brought blessing to the entire world if they had been obeyed. However, the people did not obey God’s laws. The covenant was not kept.

Based on his words in the Law, it is clear Moses knew that the people of Israel would not keep the covenant. Moses clearly wants his readers to look beyond the covenant at Mount Sinai to something new which God would do in the future. Moses

knew that the covenant made at Mount Sinai would not be effective because the hearts of the people were hard. Moses, like the prophets after him, was waiting for a new and better covenant.

Later writings in the Old Testament look backward to the establishment of the covenant at Mount Sinai or they look forward to the establishment of a new covenant in the future. The New Testament writings are, in ways, similar to this. The sections in the New Testament after the Gospels look backward to the establishment of the covenant based on the death and resurrection of Christ.

There are many other connections between the first section in the Old Testament (the Law) and the first section in the New Testament (the Gospels). For instance, the first section of the Old Testament is related to creation. The first section of the New Testament is also related to creation—the new creation that began with the death and resurrection of Christ. The first section is connected to Adam—the first “king” and “priest” of God’s creation. He was driven from his inheritance. The second section is connected to a “new” Adam—Jesus. As the true Son of God, he is the true and eternal King and Priest. He has entered into his inheritance and has brought a host of people with him!





## 13. The Gospels and Acts are meant to lead a person to faith in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of John ends with words which are absolutely unique in the Gospels. They are unique because these words are addressed to the reader. It is as if John turns and looks at the person reading his Gospel and begins speaking directly to the reader. There is no other place in the Gospels like this.

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but **these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** John 20:30-31*

Again, this is the only place in all of the Gospels where the reader is directly addressed. This means John's words, every one of them, were chosen to lead you to faith. This is the reason the Gospel of John was "breathed out by God" (see **2 Timothy 3:16**). This book was written to you. It was intended to lead you to faith.

But the book of John is the last Gospel. And these words appear near the end of John's Gospel. This means these words which are directed to the reader are the conclusion to all the Gospels. All of the Gospels, not just John, were written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

To receive eternal life, a person must believe that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God." The word Christ is a Greek word meaning **anointed**. It is a reference to the King whom God has anointed to rule over everything in heaven and on earth. The Gospels were written so that **you** might believe that Jesus is God's anointed King (see **Psalms 2:6**). He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The Gospels were written so that you might believe that he has been given authority over everything, including you.

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* **Matthew 28:18**

The words “Son of God” are a reference to Jesus being God’s true Son (see **2 Samuel 7:14, Psalm 2:7, and Matthew 3:17**). In the same way a son resembles his father, Jesus is the perfect image of God. And he perfectly fulfills his Father’s will. The first “son of God” was Adam. He did not do this. Jesus, however, is the eternal Son of God (see **Philippians 2:5-11**).

Based on John’s conclusion, it is clear the four-part “book of the Gospels” is much more than a book of history. It is a sermon calling people to faith. The book of the Gospels demands a response from its readers. Either they will believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, or they will continue in disbelief.

The book of Acts is also calling people to faith. However, it does this in a different way from the Gospels. Luke does not speak directly to his readers in the book of Acts. In the beginning of the book, he says that he is writing for a person named Theophilus (see **Acts 1:1**). However, everything that is said to Theophilus is intended to lead all of Luke’s readers to faith.

When Luke records sermons from the apostles in the book of Acts, he is writing to his readers. He wants them to respond to the sermons. For instance, when Peter is preaching to the people on the day of Pentecost, Luke wants his readers to listen to Peter’s words and to respond to them.

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



*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?” 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. 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.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. **Acts 2:36-41***

Luke is far more than a historian. He is a preacher, calling people to faith. His words to Theophilus are actually words to all people. Luke uses Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 to call his readers to faith. He does the same thing throughout the book of Acts. He’s preaching sermons from Peter, Stephen, and Paul. He uses different stories. All of them are intended to speak directly to the reader, calling him or her to faith (see, for instance, **Acts 4:5-12, 8:4-8, 9:1-18** and many, many other passages).

The Gospels and Acts, like the rest of Scripture, were “breathed out by God.” They were intended to make the reader “wise for salvation” in Christ (see **2 Timothy 3:14-16**).



## 14. The prophets in the Old Testament were writing about the things described in the Gospels and Acts.

The New Testament announces the arrival of the New Covenant. This means Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were declaring that the age of the New Covenant had come. However, this does not mean that the New Covenant was a new idea that was first introduced in the New Testament. The New Covenant is described in many different ways in the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophets knew all about the coming of the Christ. They knew about the grace that was to come to the people of God. They knew about Christ's sufferings and the glories that would follow after his sufferings. Consider, for instance, how the apostle Peter describes the writings of the prophets in the Old Testament.

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. **1 Peter 1:10-12***

The Old Testament prophets frequently wrote about the Christ, even though they lived before the time of the events they were describing. They were excited about the time when, because of the coming of Christ, the kingdom of God would come "in power."

For instance, in **Acts 2:17-21**, Peter quotes from **Joel 2:28-32**. Just a few verses later (in **Acts 2:25-28**), Peter quotes from **Psalms 16:8-11**. Just a few verses later (in **Acts 2:34-35**), Peter quotes from **Psalms 110:1**.

Peter's "heavy" use of the Old Testament is not surprising because the Old Testament prophets knew about the Christ and wrote about him. Consider, for instance, how Peter describes David:

*"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, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption."* **Acts 2:30-31**

David is not the only prophet who "foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ." According to **Luke 24:25-27, 24:44-47, and Acts 3:17-26** all of the prophets were speaking about the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

Since the prophets knew about the coming of the Christ and wrote about him, it is not surprising that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John frequently quote from the Old Testament prophets. Sometimes, they do not directly quote the prophets, but **allude** to something which was written by the prophets. This means they refer to something without quoting it exactly. This means on almost every page of the Gospels and Acts, something from the Old Testament is being referred to.

The good news for the reader is that careful reading of the Gospels and Acts will lead to an understanding of the Old Testament as well! Preachers using the Gospels and Acts will greatly help the people of God if they help them see the connections that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are making with the Old Testament. For instance, a preacher or teacher going through Acts 2 will want to take the people to **Joel 2, Psalms**

**16, and Psalm 110** to see how the Old Testament prophets were speaking about the Christ. In this way, careful study of the Gospels and Acts builds the reader's **biblical theology** (this is a reference to a person's understanding of the story being told in the Bible).



## 15. The importance of John the Baptist.

The Gospels proclaim the good news that has come to all people because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is, obviously, the most important person in the Gospels. However, there are other important people in the Gospels. John the Baptist is one of the most important.

Even before Luke writes about Jesus's birth, he writes about John's birth (see **Luke 1:5-25**). Luke wants his readers to know about John the Baptist's birth because John is Jesus's forerunner. The angel Gabriel tells John's father that John will "make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (see **Luke 1:17**).

John the Baptist was a prophet. In many ways, John's ministry was similar to the ministry of the Old Testament prophets. Like the Old Testament prophets, all of John's hopes were on the coming of the Christ. Like the Old Testament prophets, John knew that the coming of the kingdom of heaven depended on the coming of the Christ. But while the Old Testament prophets hoped in the coming of the Christ and wrote about the Christ, they didn't know who he was because he hadn't come yet. As the following verses in 1 Peter make clear, the prophets knew about the Christ and prophesied about the Christ, but they didn't know his name or the time when he would appear.

*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who*



*preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven,  
things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12*

John the Baptist is different from the Old Testament prophets because he was the transition between the old age when people were waiting for the Christ to come and the new age when the Christ had already come. John is the bridge between these two time periods (see **Matthew 11:7-19** and **Luke 7:24-35**).

John the Baptist prepared the people living in Jesus's day to meet the Christ. He did this by calling them to confess their sins and to be baptized (see **Acts 19:3-5** for an explanation of the difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism).

But John did more than just prepare the hearts of the people to meet the Christ. He also had the honor of introducing the Christ to Israel. No one listening to John the Baptist (or reading his words in the Gospels) should have been confused about the identity of the Christ. John told them (and us) exactly who the Christ was. The Christ is Jesus of Nazareth. Beyond this, John "revealed" details about the Christ to the people. He revealed facts about the Christ the people needed to hear. And he told the people exactly what the Christ would do. People today need to hear these words as well.

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me. 'I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'" And John bore witness: 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend*



*and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” John 1:29-34*

In these verses, John reveals that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” This is an amazing statement that should have made people leave everything to follow Jesus. John let them know that the man standing before them would be the sacrifice that would pay the penalty for sin so that people could be freed from their slavery to sin and live in right relation with God!

But that is not all that John reveals. He also declares Jesus “was before me” (see also **John 1:15**). This is another amazing revelation. In terms of their earthly age, John was actually older than Jesus. How, then, could he say that Jesus “was before me”? John is able to say this because Jesus is God. He is from eternity (see **John 1:1**)! John’s words should cause all people hearing them to worship Jesus!

John also reveals the fact that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit. John goes on to say that Jesus would anoint others with the Holy Spirit. This is connected to the promises made in the Old Testament that in the last days God would pour out his Spirit “on all flesh” (see **Joel 2:28-29**). Again, these revelations should have made people leave everything to follow Jesus!

Finally, John declares that Jesus is the ***Son of God***. These words let people know that Jesus is a new “Adam.” Adam was the first “son of God.” But he did not reflect God’s image. Jesus is the true Son of God. Beyond this, the words “Son of God” let people know that Jesus is the one who fulfills God’s promises to David in **2 Samuel 7:1-17** (see also **Psalms 2:8**). Again, people should have, when they heard John’s words, left everything to joyfully follow Jesus.

John's words about Jesus were for the people of Israel living during his time. Some of the people listened. Some of the people refused to listen (see **Luke 7:29-30**). But John's words are also for people today. All people in all ages must listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying through John the Baptist. John is calling all people to leave their sin and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Something unusual about John is the fact that the Gospels focus on his clothing and on his food.

*Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **Matthew 3:4***

Normally, the Gospel writers do not focus on things like a person's clothing or on what they eat. They only focus on things like clothing when those things have special significance. John's clothing is of great significance. John's clothing is important because he was dressed like the prophet Elijah (see **2 Kings 1:8**). In other words, when people saw John, they were supposed to think about Elijah. This is important because of an Old Testament prophecy saying that "Elijah" would come before the "day of the Lord."

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." **Malachi 4:5-6***

John the Baptist is the "Elijah" who fulfilled this prophecy! This is exactly what Jesus said in **Matthew 17:12-13**. See also the angel Gabriel's words in **Luke 1:17**. Because "Elijah" has come, this means that, in Christ, "the great and awesome day of the LORD" has come! People need to decide whether they will, through Christ, enter the

kingdom of God or whether, like the Pharisees when they heard John, they will reject John's words about the Christ.

The Gospels focus on John's food, because he was eating like someone living in the wilderness. This was a sign to the people of their condition without the Christ. Christ is the one who brings God's people out of the wilderness and into God's good place (see **John 10:1-18 and 14:6**). Jesus is the one who feeds God's people (see **John 6**).

There are two other significant prophecies in the Old Testament about John the Baptist. These passages should be studied carefully, for they not only speak about John the Baptist, they also speak about the work of Jesus.

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,*

*and cry to her*

*that her warfare is ended,*

*that her iniquity is pardoned,*

*that she has received from the LORD's hand*

*double for all her sins.*

*A voice cries:*

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;*

*make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be lifted up,*

*and every mountain and hill be made low;*

*the uneven ground shall become level,*

*and the rough places a plain.*

*And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,*

*and all flesh shall see it together,*

*for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” Isaiah 40:1-5*

*“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.  
And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the  
messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming,  
says the LORD of hosts.” Malachi 3:1*

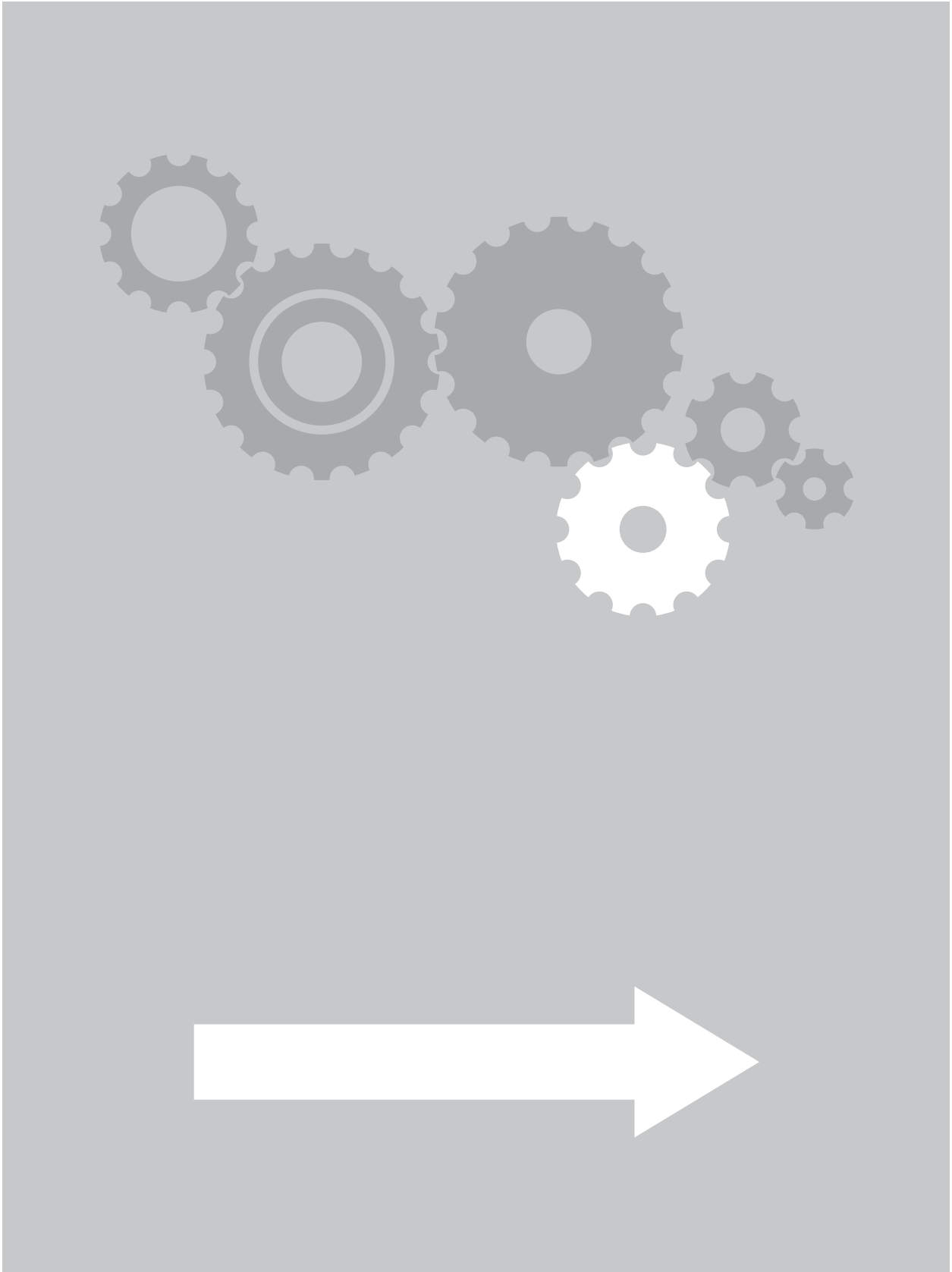
The ministry of John the Baptist in the Gospel is a direct connection between these (and other) Old Testament passages and the New Testament. John’s words allow people to know, with great certainty, that Jesus is the one who fulfills these Old Testament passages.

John is important because he is God’s official “voice” declaring the coming of the Christ. People in Jesus’s day were to trust John’s words. In the same way, people today should trust John’s words. People today should believe John’s testimony that Jesus is the Christ.

*And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the  
strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have  
baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

**Mark 1:7-8**







## 16. The importance of Jesus's perfect life.

Jesus is 100% God. This is clearly proclaimed throughout the Old Testament and New Testament. However, Jesus is not just God. He is also 100% human. This means Jesus lived his life on earth as a real man. Even though he was conceived by a virgin, this does not change the fact that he actually did “put on flesh.” He was born like other human children, he needed his mother, he needed to eat and sleep, he grew like other children grow, and he learned like other children learn (see **Luke 2:52**). But while Jesus is like other humans in these ways, he is unlike other humans because he never sinned (see **Hebrews 2:10-18 and 4:15**).

The Gospels focus a great deal of attention on the death of Jesus. This is important, for Christ's death is essential to salvation. If this event did not happen, people could not be saved. Christ's death was necessary in order for people to receive forgiveness of sins and salvation. His death was the “payment” required to satisfy God's wrath so that he might give eternal life to his people (see **Romans 3:23**). As the author of Hebrews said, “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins” (**Hebrews 9:22**).

However, Christ's suffering and death was not all that is needed for the salvation of God's people. Christ's life of obedience was also required. If Christ did not live a perfect life, people could not be saved.

Scholars sometimes refer to Christ's suffering and death as his **passive obedience**. They refer to Christ's life of obedience as his **active obedience**. In Christ's active obedience, God's demands of perfect law keeping by his people are met. In Christ's passive obedience, the payment for sin is met. Both “aspects” of Christ's obedience are essential to salvation.

In order to see the significance of Christ's active obedience, it is helpful to consider Adam, the first man. Adam was God's "son" (see **Luke 3:38**). He was created in God's image (see **Genesis 1:26-28**). In the same way that a son resembles his father, Adam was to reflect God. He was to reflect God's glorious being and character in thought, in word, and in deed. He was, as some scholars have described it, God's "image bearer." Adam was to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Adam's love for God would be evident in Adam's obedience to God (see **John 15:10-14**). And Adam was to be the first of a whole group of people who would obey God from their hearts. Adam was to "be fruitful and multiply." This means Adam and his offspring were to bring God's image into all the earth.

Adam was created to have dominion over the earth. Thus, he was a king. However, he was not a king with ultimate authority. He was to remember that his authority came from God, the true King. Therefore, Adam's word was not supreme. God's word was to rule over Adam (see **Genesis 2:16-17**).

Based on God's words in Genesis 1 and 2, it is clear Adam was the representative of all people. Thus, his actions were counted as the actions of all people. If he were to disobey, this would mean the people, as a whole, would also be counted as disobedient (see **Romans 5:12**).

Adam, as God's son, failed. He did not submit to God's law, but chose, instead, to obey Satan's words (see **Genesis 3:1-7**). Because of this, Adam was not allowed to stay in the place God created for him. Adam's actions impacted all who were related to him. When Adam and Eve left the garden, all people who would follow after them were also forced to live outside of the garden.

But, because of God's grace, this was not the end of the story. God brought another "son" into the world. The nation of Israel was counted as God's son (see



**Exodus 4:22-23**). God brought this son out of Egypt (see **Hosea 11:1**) so he could bring them to a land “flowing with milk and honey” (see **Exodus 3:8**). This place was like the garden in Eden.

Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (see **Exodus 19:6**). They, like the first son of God (Adam), were to exercise dominion and bring God and people together. This new “son” of God was to be the means by which God’s image would be spread to all the world. But Israel also failed. They, like Adam, were “tested” by God’s word and they, like Adam, rebelled against God’s word. This was demonstrated in the 40 years in the wilderness.

But God had mercy on the people of Israel and, after the 40 years in the wilderness, he allowed a new generation of Israelites to cross into his good place. Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land. God’s word again tested his “son.” He commanded Israel not to take any of the gold or silver from Jericho (see **Joshua 6:18-19**). Like the fruit on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden in Eden, the gold and silver in Jericho belonged to God alone. However, like Adam, and like the Israelites before Mt. Sinai, Israel would not obey God. The sin of one man impacted the entire nation. The entire nation was counted as guilty because of the sin of one man (see **Joshua 7:10-12**). Over and over, God called his people to repentance, but they would not obey him for long (see, for example, **Judges 21:25**). Eventually, like Adam and Eve before them, Israel was driven out of God’s good place.

But, because of God’s grace, this was not the end of the story. God brought another “Son” out of Egypt (see **Hosea 11:1** and **Matthew 2:15**). God himself declared that Jesus is his true Son (see **Matthew 3:17** and **17:1-5**). Would this Son obey? Would he be fruitful and multiply? Or would he be like Adam and Israel before him?

This Son did obey, because Jesus is not like Adam and he is not like Israel. He never sinned. He perfectly obeyed God the father in every way. This obedience has led to life for people who were born sinners (see **Romans 5:10**)!

Jesus is a new “Adam” and a new “Israel.” In fact, the New Testament refers to him as the “last Adam” (see **1 Corinthians 15:45-49**). This means there will not be another “Adam” after Jesus. As the true Son of God, Jesus did (and continues to do) what Adam and Israel could not do. He perfectly fulfills God’s plans and purposes for mankind. He allows people to bear God’s image and to be fruitful and multiply (see **John 15:1-11**).

As the last Adam, Jesus’s actions relate to all those who are connected to him. This is why Jesus’s **active obedience** is so important. Jesus’s righteous actions during his life on earth fulfill God’s plans for mankind and they are counted to all who, through faith, are connected to Christ. Christ’s life of “active obedience” means that God’s plan for people has been fulfilled “in him.” God’s people can rest from their own works, knowing Jesus has completed the good work required by God. He has, as God’s Son, fulfilled the Law. This means those who are in Christ can live in the joy of knowing the Law has been fulfilled in Christ (see **Matthew 5:17**).

In the same way that people who read the story of Adam feel great sorrow because of his rebellion and all the evil that has come to them from it, Christians should read the Gospels and rejoice at Christ’s obedience and all the good that has come to them from it. Christ’s actions directly connect to the life of the Christian!

His virgin birth is, like the formation of the first Adam, a miracle from God. God brought Adam into the world as the beginning of creation. God brought Jesus into the world as the beginning of a **new creation**.

*Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. just as we have borne the image of their man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. **1 Corinthians***

**15:45-49**

From the beginning of his earthly life, Jesus obeyed God. He truly lived as the Son of God. There is only one story in the Gospels from Jesus’s youth, but it is very significant. This is the story of Jesus in the temple when he was 12 years old (see **Luke 2:41-51**). This story demonstrates Jesus’s active obedience to God even as a child. Even at this young age, Jesus was actively pursuing knowledge of God and was positioning himself in God’s “place” (the temple). Even at this age, Jesus knew God was his Father (see **Luke 2:49** and **2 Samuel 7:14**). Even at this age, he was trying to please God.

As he grew, the Gospels clearly demonstrate Jesus never sinned. He was *above reproach*. His parents fulfilled the law regarding circumcision at eight days (see **Luke 2:21**). They presented him at the temple at 40 days. He didn’t need these things to be pure. He already was pure. These things were done because he was, as the representative of the people, perfectly walking out the life of sonship required in the Law. Jesus was perfectly obedient to his parents (see **Luke 2:51**). And as he grew into manhood, his obedience to all of God’s commandments became evident to all who knew him. He loved God perfectly and he loved his neighbor perfectly. This is why the Scriptures say he “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (see **Luke 2:52**). Readers of the Gospels and people who have faith in Jesus should

rejoice when they read about the obedience of their representative (see **Galatians 4:4-5**)! Because the Christian is “in Christ”, his obedience is counted as our obedience!

Jesus’s first public act as a grown man is very significant. He was baptized by John the Baptist. John thought that Jesus did not need to be baptized (see **Matthew 3:13-15**). John’s baptism was “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (see **Luke 3:3**). Jesus never sinned; therefore, Jesus did not need to be baptized for his own sins. However, even though he never sinned, he was, as the “last Adam”, the representative of the people of God. As the representative of God’s people, he acknowledged the sins of God’s people. Based on this action, it is clear Jesus, unlike the first Adam, hated sin and its effects. He will not hide sin or cherish sin in his heart. Instead, it is the mission of the last Adam to bring sin into the light so that people might walk in right relationship with God.

Beyond this, Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan signified that a **second exodus** of God’s people had begun. In the same way the Israelites crossed through the Red Sea in the first exodus and Joshua led the next generation of people through the Jordan in a “mini-exodus”, Jesus passed through the Jordan in a second exodus. He, like a new Moses and a new Joshua, would lead God’s people through the water’s of judgment to God’s good place.

Jesus was baptized in order “to fulfill all righteousness” (see **Matthew 3:15**). This means Jesus’s baptism was a necessary step if the righteousness God requires of his people was to be met. Jesus was, at this early stage of his ministry, demonstrating that his actions were connected to the sins of the people and that he was taking their burdens upon himself. His actions, all of them, were very significant.

After his baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and God spoke the following words: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (see **Matthew**

**3:17**). Readers of the Gospels should rejoice at Jesus's anointing and in God's words. These were signs from heaven that God was with this man! And God is still with this man! He is alive and is seated at the right hand of God now. Those who are identified with Christ by faith also are counted as God's sons and daughters.

After his baptism, Jesus was tempted by Satan. The importance of this event may be seen by the fact that all three of the synoptic Gospels describe Jesus's temptation (see **Matthew 4:1-17, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13**). Jesus, as the perfect Son of God, did not follow Satan or rebel against God. Instead, by his use of God's word, he demonstrated he knows God's laws, he loves God's laws, and he will not place anything, even his own appetite, above pleasing God. But Jesus didn't just resist Satan for himself alone. He did so as the representative of his people! This means all of Christ's people have, because of Christ's rejection of Satan, resisted Satan's temptations. Those who are in Christ have, because they are in Christ, not bowed the knee to Satan and have not chosen the kingdoms of this world. They have been delivered from his grasp and have come into God's kingdom (see **Ephesians 2:1-10**).

As the perfect Son of God, Jesus never acted on his own. He relied on God in everything he said and in everything he did (see **John 4:34, 5:19, 5:30, 8:29**). This is evident in Jesus's regular prayers (see **Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28-29, 22:31-32**). See also **Psalms 40:8**.

Reading the Gospels should give joy and confidence to the people of God. When we read about Christ's joyful obedience, we are reading about our covenant representative perfectly obeying! He has made it possible for God's people to walk in joyful fellowship with him. We do this because of Christ's faithfulness (see **Matthew 5:17 and Galatians 2:20**).



## 17. The reader should imitate Christ.

Scholars sometimes refer to Christ's suffering and death as his **passive obedience**. They refer to Christ's life of obedience as his **active obedience**. In Christ's active obedience, God's demands of perfect law keeping by his people are met. In Christ's passive obedience, the payment for the sin of God's people is fully met. Both "aspects" of Christ's obedience are essential to salvation.

However, even though Christ has, through his life, death, and resurrection, done everything required in order for a person to receive eternal life, this does not mean that God's people can live in any way they want. God's people must walk as Jesus walked. Good works do not save a person (see **Romans 3:20**). However, good works are proof that a person has been saved (see **Ephesians 2:10**). If there are no good works, it is evidence that a person does not know God.

Fortunately, God has given his people great help. The Holy Spirit lives inside of believers and is constantly providing strong help (see **John 14:15-17**). Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father and is constantly interceding for believers (see **Romans 8:34**). Beyond this, God the Father is working in the believer's life as well. He is like a gardener making adjustments to a person's life so that he or she might "bear more fruit" (see **John 15:1-2**). In addition to all of this help, God has given us his word. In God's word, the believer has been given many examples to follow.

This is one of the greatest benefits of the Gospels. The Gospels let the believer "walk with Jesus" and see how he lived so that we might imitate Jesus. In this way, the Gospels are a "**means of grace**." In other words, the Gospels are a way God brings grace to his people so they might imitate Christ.

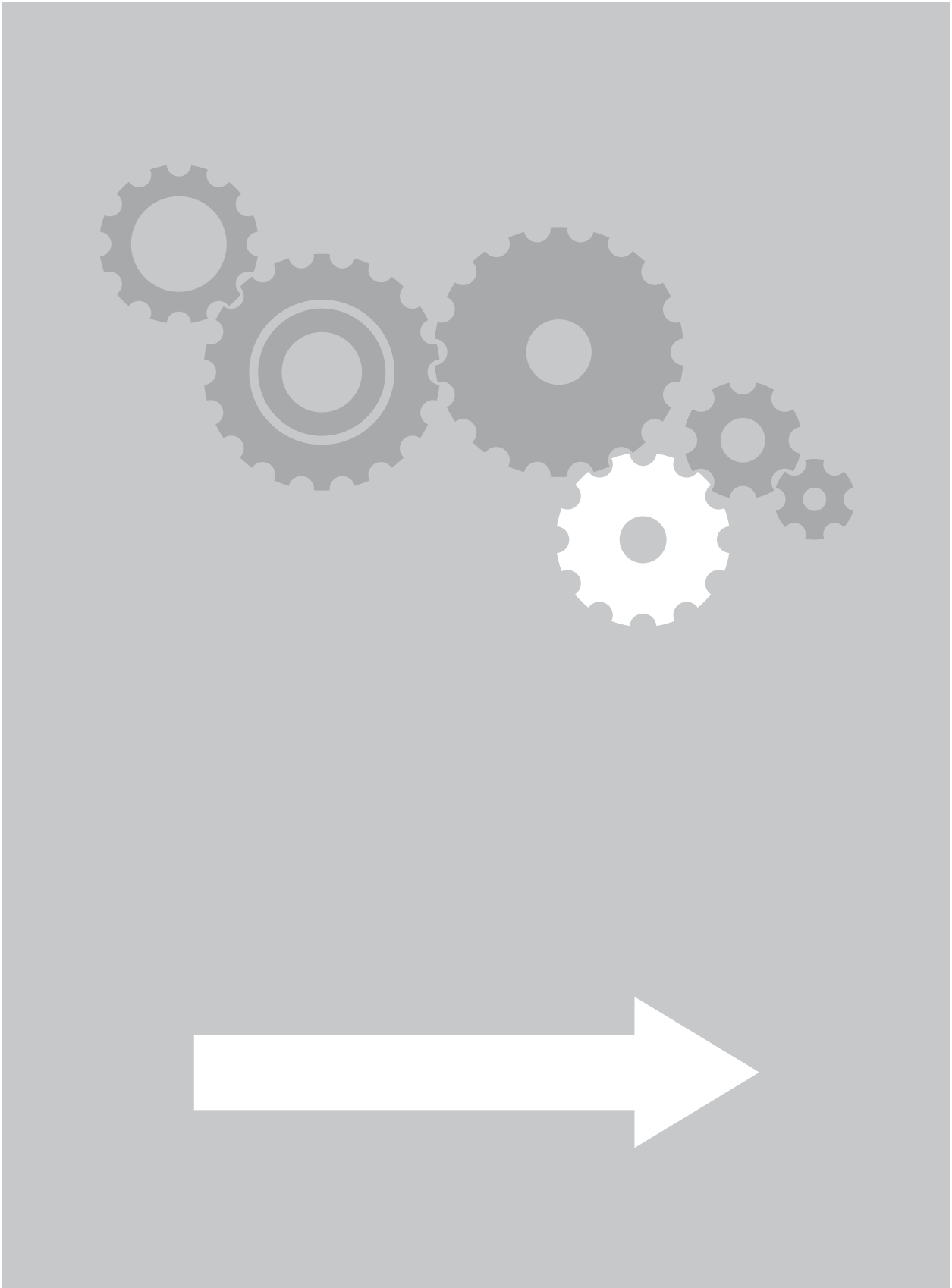
Consider, for instance, Jesus's words to the apostles after he washed their feet on the night of the Last Supper:

*"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."* **John 13:14-15**

Jesus is the perfect "Son of God." Jesus provides people with an example that should be imitated (see **John 8:12**). He demonstrates how a godly man or woman should worship, pray, talk, work, treat children, rest, suffer, travel, etc. As the perfect Son of God, he shows us how a person should act in any and every circumstance.

There are many verses in the New Testament speaking about the importance of imitating other believers (see, for instance, **Romans 4:11-12, Philippians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, 1 Timothy 4:12, Hebrews 13:7, James 5:10-11, 1 Peter 5:3, and 3 John 11**). Surely, this is one of the most important uses of the Gospels. We use them so we can carefully watch the perfect Son of God as he lived his life and we can, then, imitate his steps.







## 18. The reader should carefully consider Jesus's miracles.

Jesus's miracles are signs that he is the Christ. People need to respond to these signs.

Jesus performed many miracles. These miracles are recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. According to **John 20:30-31**, the Gospel writers did not record all of the miracles Jesus worked. They carefully selected the miracles included in the Gospels. All of them were included for a purpose. They were included to prove that Jesus is the Christ and to lead a person to faith in Christ.

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. **John 20:30-31***

The book of John refers to Jesus's miracles as **signs** (see **John 2:11, 18, 23, 3:2, 4:48, 54, 6:2, 14, 26, 30, 7:31, 9:16, 10:41, 11:47, 12:18, 12:37, and 20:30-31**). This word helps people understand the purpose of the miracles in the Gospels. A sign is not an end in itself. Signs always draw attention to something else. For instance, if a sign has the word "hospital" written on it, it is intended to draw attention to a real hospital. The sign is not the hospital. The sign is not the place where sick people are healed. The sign does not perform surgery or prescribe medicine. Instead, the sign is a tool intended to draw attention to the hospital. Sick people use the sign to help them find the hospital. That's exactly how the miraculous signs work in the Gospels. They are pointing to something else. Each one of them is included in the Gospels to lead people to Christ.

Jesus's miracles are described as signs because the focus is not to stay on the miracles. The miracles are intended to draw attention to the fact that Jesus is the anointed King promised in the Old Testament. When people see a sign in the Gospels, they are to look beyond the sign to the thing that is greater than the sign—the Christ. The sign is intended to lead people to the Christ. People must not stop at the sign. They must see the sign and go to the thing to which it is pointing. The goal of the signs, each one of them, is to lead people to Christ and the eternal life that comes through faith in him!

Notice how the Gospel writers describe the miracles. They do not just speak of a mighty work and focus on the mighty work itself. They speak about how people responded to Jesus's mighty work. The Gospel writers focus on what people did after the sign was done.

The first “sign” in the book of John is the changing of water to wine at a wedding (see **John 2:1-11**). It is important to see how John concludes this section about the first sign.

*This, the first of his **signs**, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples **believed** in him. **John 2:11***

According to John, when Jesus turned the water into wine, he “manifested his glory.” This means this sign was primarily about Jesus's identity. This miracle was a display of Jesus's **glory**. This miracle was a sign that Jesus is filled with glory! The signs are often connected to things which were said by the prophets in the Old Testament. For instance, when Jesus turned the water into wine, it should have reminded the people of the Old Testament prophecies that speak about the last days when “the mountains shall drip sweet wine” (see **Joel 3:17-18**). When Jesus came, the mountains were not dripping with wine. Instead, even at wedding feasts, there was no

wine! But when Jesus came, he turned water into wine. This miracle in Cana was a small sign that Jesus is the one who will cause all of the promises of the last days to become reality. He is the one who causes sick people to become well, unclean people to be clean, deaf people to hear again, blind people to see again, and dead people to come to life again. By performing one sign of his great power, Jesus was demonstrating that he is the one who fulfills all of the promises in the Old Testament!

What did the disciples do when they saw this sign? Notice the end of **John 2:11**: “And his disciples **believed** in him.” John’s main concern isn’t the sign itself. His concern is about the people who saw the sign and about the one the sign is pointing to—Jesus! John wants his readers to see that the sign led other people (the disciples) to faith. John wants his readers to follow the example of the disciples and to also put their faith in Jesus.

The next sign referred to in the book of John is found in **2:18-22**. This sign, also, is connected to faith.

*So the Jews said to him, ‘What **sign** do you show us for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they **believed** the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. **John 2:18-22***

In these verses, the Jews (this is how John refers to Jewish authorities) ask for a **sign**. The “sign” Jesus gives them is found in his words “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” This is a reference to Jesus’s death and resurrection.

According to Jesus, his death and resurrection is a **sign** of his authority. According to Jesus, this “sign” is proof that he had authority to do what he was doing in the temple. Notice, as with the sign when Jesus turned the water into wine, John connects the sign with belief. When Jesus “was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they **believed**.” What about you? Jesus’s resurrection is a sign of his authority over all things. Do you recognize this?

The miracles, every one of them, are signs which are intended to lead people to faith in Jesus. However, it is possible to see a sign and to miss its message. The Jewish leaders did not receive the sign Jesus gave in **John 2:18-22**. They refused to believe in the message being given by the sign. To reject the signs God graciously gives is a great sin.

The third reference to signs in the book of John is in **John 2:23**.

*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many **believed** in his name when they saw the **signs** that he was doing.*

Again, notice the connection between **signs** and **belief** in Christ (see also **John 4:53**). The **reader** should carefully consider each sign in the Gospels and put his or her trust in Jesus. The **wise preacher or teacher** will use the signs to talk about the Christ and to call people to faith in him.

But reading the signs in the New Testament does more than build faith in Christ. It also helps the reader understand the things written in the Old Testament. This is because the signs are connected to things that were first spoken about in the Old Testament. For instance, when Jesus fed the 5,000 (see **John 6**), the people recognized this was a **sign** that Jesus was “the Prophet who is to come into the world” (see **John 6:14**). They said this because Jesus, like Moses, was connected with the

giving of bread to the people. The people at the feeding of the 5,000 correctly connected this sign to a promise first spoken by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy:

*“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen ...”* **Deuteronomy 18:15**

But even though the people knew that Jesus was the Prophet Moses promised in **Deuteronomy 18:15**, they did not put their faith in Christ. In fact, many of them saw the sign and no longer followed Jesus! They refused to believe.

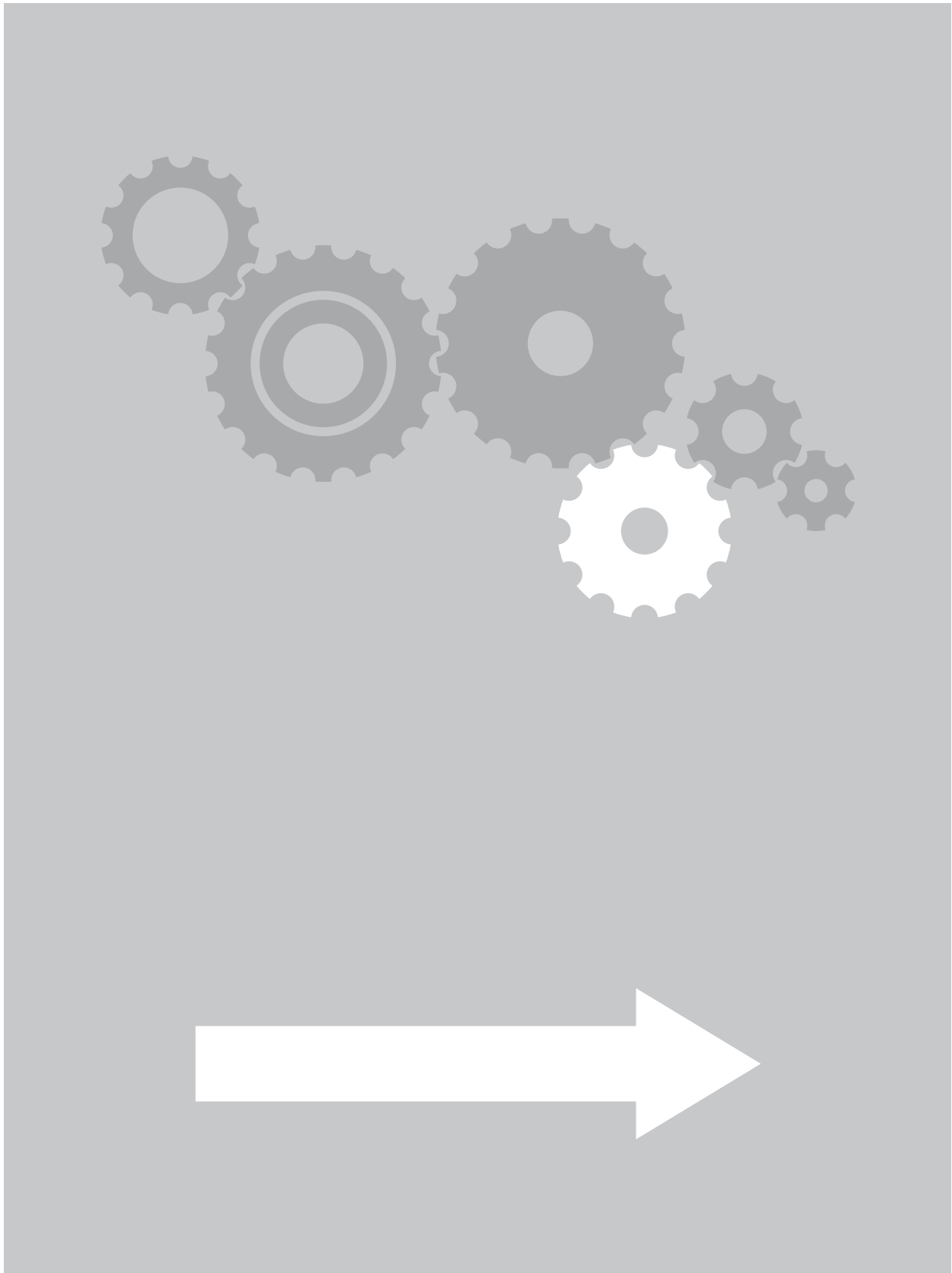
It is important for people reading the signs today to connect the signs to their own lives. Consider, for example, the following signs:

- When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the reader should connect this sign to his or her own life (see **John 11**). The reader, like Lazarus, will one day die. This sign demonstrates Jesus is the one who has the power to give life to the dead.
- When Jesus healed the man born blind (see **John 9**), the reader should connect this to his or her own life. The reader, like the blind man, has a problem with his or her vision. We can't see what God wants us to see. We are “spiritually blind.” Jesus is the one with the power to help people see clearly. Beyond this, in the Old Testament, there are promises that the blind will see in the “day of the LORD.” The miracles demonstrate that Jesus is the one who was promised in the Old Testament. Readers today should see the sign and trust in Christ for their own spiritual vision.
- When Jesus healed the woman who was “unclean”, the reader should connect this to his or her own life (see **Mark 5:25-34**). The reader, like the woman, is unclean. Jesus is the one with the power to cleanse people.

- When Jesus cast out demons, the reader should connect this to his or her own life. Jesus is the one with the power to set people free from the power of the devil (see **Acts 10:38**).









## 19. The reader should carefully consider Jesus's teaching.

Jesus's teaching demonstrates he is the Christ.

The Gospel writers do not just focus on Jesus's mighty **works**. They also focus on his powerful **words**. Both of these things are important. The stories of Jesus's deeds in the Gospels and Acts allow people to "see" Jesus's mighty works. The careful quotations of Jesus's words in the Gospels and Acts allow people to "hear" his words. Both of these things are a **blessing** from heaven.

*"But **blessed** are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."* **Matthew 13:16-17** (see also Luke 10:24)

It is important to understand the Gospels and Acts do not include everything Jesus ever said or taught (see **John 20:30-31 and 21:25**). This means Jesus's words and teaching which are included in the Gospels and Acts have been included for a reason. God's people need to hear every word Jesus spoke and everything he ever taught.

The Gospels were not written when Jesus was on earth. They were written years after his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Sometimes, people wonder if the apostles remembered Jesus's words accurately. Is it possible they did not remember Jesus's words accurately? Is it possible they changed Jesus's words to say things Jesus never intended to say? The reader can have great confidence that the apostles perfectly remembered Jesus's words. Jesus himself promised that the Holy Spirit would help the apostles remember everything he ever said.

*“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”* **John 14:25-26**

Like the rest of Scripture, Jesus’s teaching in the Gospels and Acts has been “breathed out by God” (see **2 Timothy 3:16**). This means the sayings of Jesus which are recorded in the Gospels and Acts are the exact ones God wanted to be written down.

Jesus’s words and teaching in the Gospels and Acts helps the readers in many ways. Outlined below are a few of the ways Jesus’s teaching helps the reader.

First, Jesus shows people how a godly man or woman ought to think and to speak. Remember, Jesus is the **Last Adam**. He is the first person in a new creation (see **2 Corinthians 5:17**). He does what the first Adam didn’t do. He perfectly reflects God’s image (see **Genesis 1:26-28**). Jesus’s words should be imitated by God’s people.

Second, Jesus frequently refers to the Old Testament. By his words, he is teaching God’s people how they should think about the overall message of the Old Testament. For instance, in **Luke 24:25-27** and **24:44-47** Jesus declares that he is the great subject of the entire Old Testament.

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* **Luke 24:27**



Jesus has a particular way of understanding Old Testament stories. The reader needs to know that Jesus's understanding of these stories is the correct understanding of them. The reader can follow Jesus as a trustworthy guide.

Third, Jesus's words teach people how to think about the kingdom of God. Jesus's parables, in particular, focus on what the kingdom of God is like. His parables help people understand "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (see **Matthew 13:11**).

Fourth, Jesus's words teach people how they are to think about life on this earth. Jesus tells his followers how they are to think about money, persecution, worry, authorities, the church, sin, marriage, divorce, and many other subjects.

Fifth, Jesus's words teach God's people how they are to relate to one another. The apostles were constantly arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus teaches his followers that they must humble themselves and become like children.

Jesus's words are a gift to people and they should be treasured. The people of God living before Jesus's birth longed to hear the things Jesus said. We have the privilege of having access to his words. We must pay close attention to them and learn to love them.

*"For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." **Matthew 13:17***



## 20. The reader should carefully consider Jesus's death.

Scholars sometimes refer to Jesus's life of obedience to God the Father as his **active obedience**. The Gospels demonstrate Jesus perfectly obeyed the Father in everything he ever said and did. Christ's perfect obedience doesn't just belong to Christ. It is also counted to all those who have faith in Christ. This means God's demands of perfect law keeping by his people are met because of one man's obedience. Jesus stands in the place of all of God's people. His perfect obedience is counted as the perfect obedience of all those who place their faith in him (see **Matthew 5:17**).

However, Christ's active obedience is not, by itself, sufficient for people to receive salvation. The reason Christ's active obedience is not sufficient for salvation by itself is all people (apart from Jesus Christ) have sinned (see **Romans 3:9-18, 3:23, and Ephesians 2:1-3**). God is righteous. Therefore, he cannot ignore the sin of his people. He would be an unjust God if he did this. Because he is just, he cannot pretend sin does not exist. If he ignored sin, he would be endorsing sin. For God to count people as righteous, the penalty for sin must be paid. That penalty is not small. The penalty for sin is death (see **Romans 6:23**). That is why Jesus died. He died to satisfy the wrath of God and pay the price for the sins of his people.

Scholars sometimes refer to Jesus's suffering and death as his **passive obedience**. In Christ's passive obedience, the payment for sin is fully met so that people might be forgiven and stand before God as his holy children.

Jesus is just one man. However, he died as a substitute for all of God's people. He took the sins of God's people on himself (see **2 Corinthians 5:21**). When Jesus died, he did not die for his own sins. Instead, he died for the sins of all God's people.



Jesus offered his body as the perfect sacrifice that forever satisfies God's wrath so God's people might be forgiven (see **Hebrews 10:5-18**). For all those who trust in Jesus, there never needs to be another sacrifice for sin. His death paid the penalty for all the sin of God's people (see **Isaiah 1:18**).

Both words in the title **passive obedience** are significant. The word **passive** emphasizes the fact these things were done to Jesus. He didn't actively cause his suffering and death. He committed no sin that led to his suffering or death. Like a lamb being led to its death, Christ passively received them (see **Isaiah 53:7-8**). The word **obedience** emphasizes Jesus died in obedience to God the Father's will (see **John 14:31**). God wanted Jesus to die because he wants all people to be saved. This is good news for all people (see **Luke 2:10**)!

From the beginning of the Gospels to the end, there is a focus on the fact that Jesus came to earth in order to die. Careful readers will notice how often the Gospel writers write about Jesus's death. For instance, before Jesus was born, an angel of the Lord told Joseph that Jesus would "save his people from their sins" (see **Matthew 1:21**). Matthew wants his readers to hear what the angel said to Joseph. John the Baptist said Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (see **John 1:29**). Lambs in Old Testament times served as substitutes for the people. The people would lay their hands on the head of the lamb and symbolically place their sins on the lamb. The lamb would then die instead of the people. Of course, a lamb cannot take away the sin of a person (see **Hebrews 10:4**). This is why these sacrifices needed to be repeated over and over again. The lamb was a temporary substitute until a better sacrifice would come. That better sacrifice is Jesus. Jesus is not a lamb. He is a man. This is why he could bear the sins of people as a substitute. He took the sins of God's people on himself. He "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (**Hebrews 10:12**). This is why John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."



In the Gospels, Jesus frequently tells his apostles he is going to die (for instance, see **Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32, and 10:32-34**). The apostles did not understand this at that time. Jesus's words about his death are important. They demonstrate he knew he was going to die. Every time the reader reads about Jesus's death, it should reinforce the importance of this event. Every time the reader reads about Jesus's death, it should move him or her to thank God for sending his Son as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

All four Gospels carefully describe Jesus's death. These descriptions are important, because they give all people evidence that God's Son Jesus truly died on the cross. This evidence should lead to place their faith in the Lord Jesus.

But all four Gospels testify that Jesus died on the cross (see **Mark 15:33-47**). He did not merely faint. If he merely fainted, he could not be the Savior of the world. In order to take away the sin of the world, Jesus needed to die (see **1 Peter 3:18**).

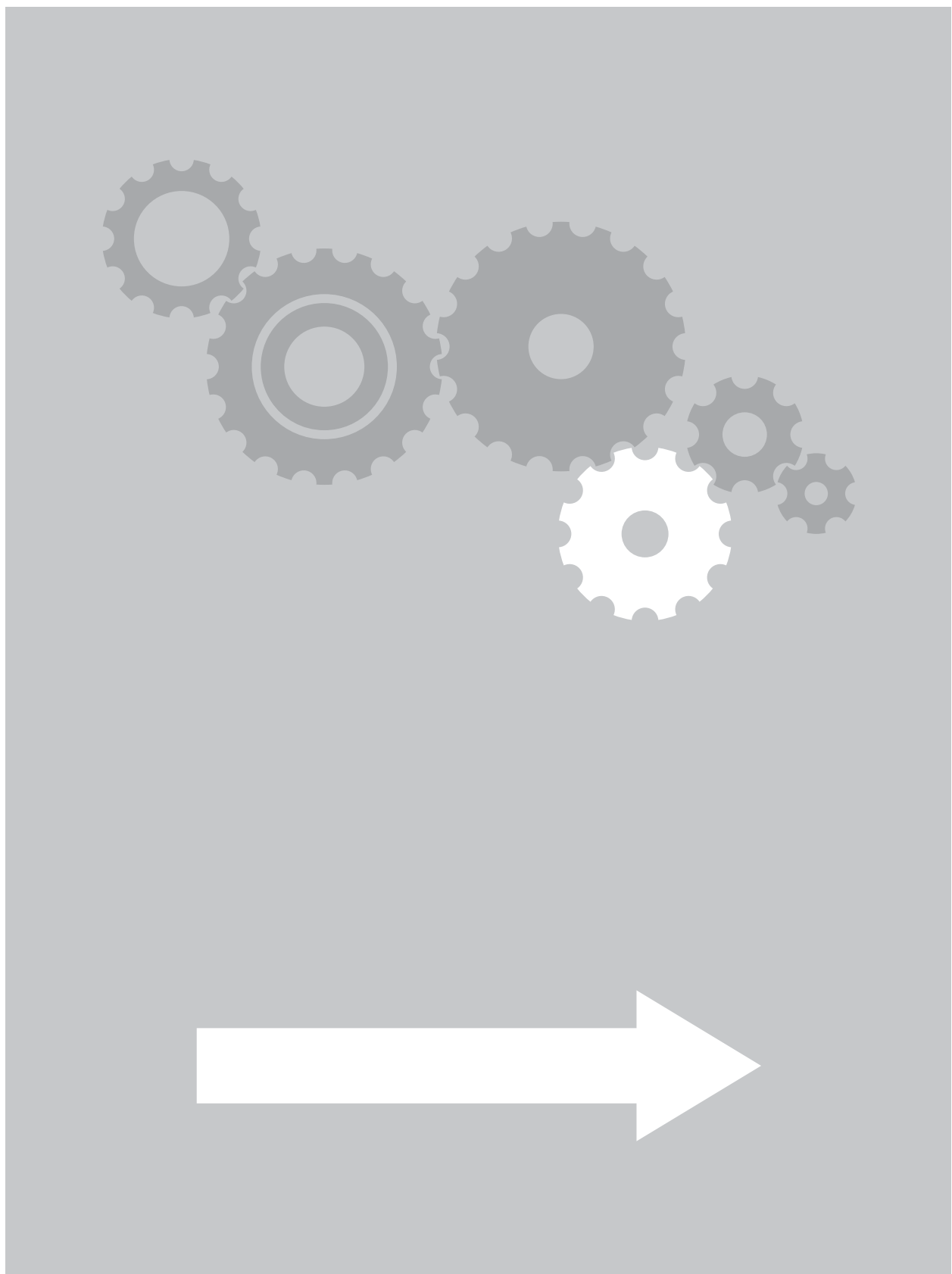
The Gospels prove that another man (like Barabbas) did not die in place of Jesus. God did not send a substitute to die instead of Jesus. Jesus himself died. Jesus bore people's sins as their substitute. That is why he came to earth. He did not need someone to die as a substitute for him. Why would God send someone to be a substitute for Jesus when Jesus is the substitute for people?

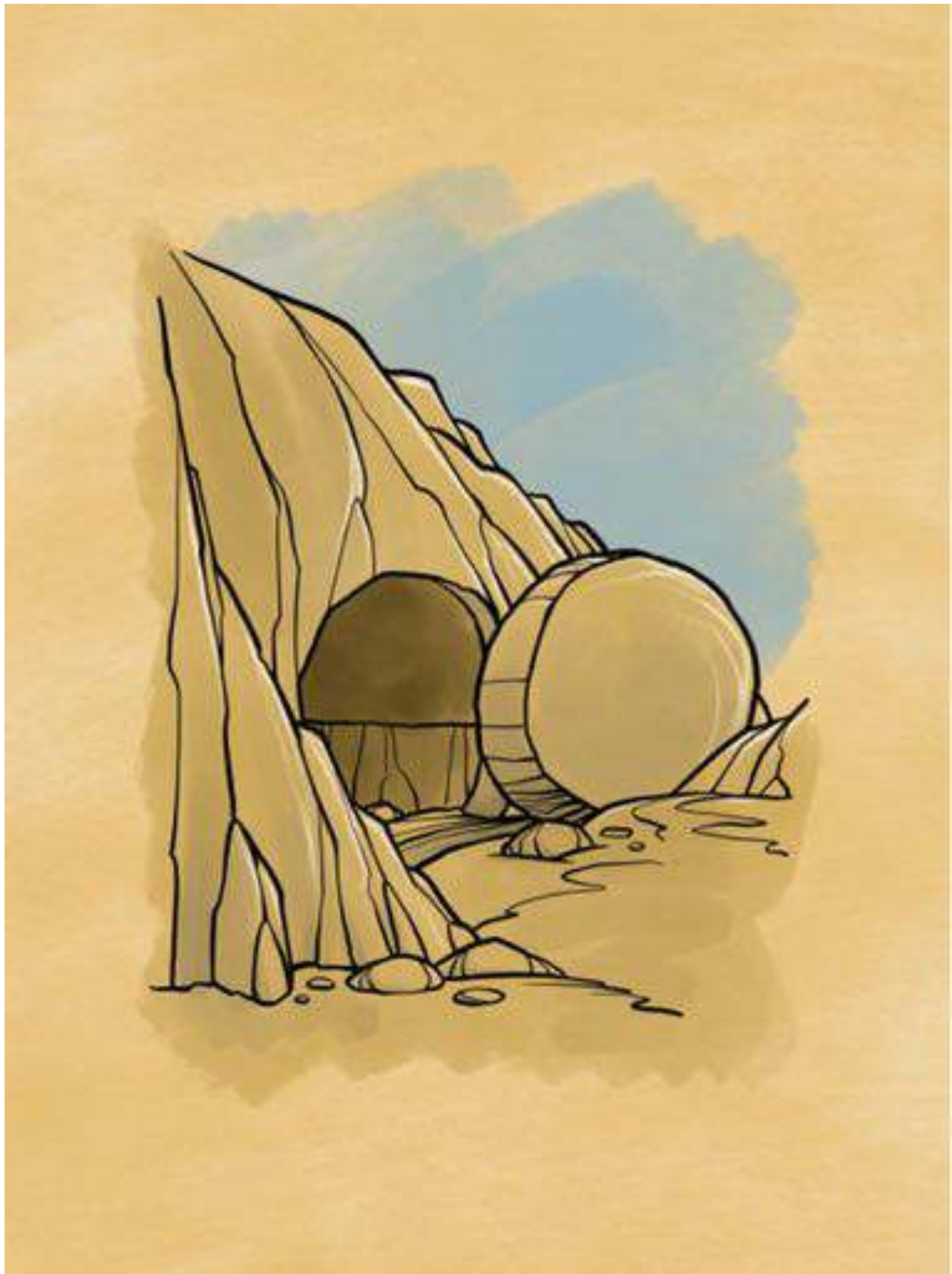
All of the words Jesus spoke during his suffering, trial, and while he was on the cross are significant. Readers need to pay close attention to the words Jesus spoke at this time. For instance, immediately before Jesus died, he cried "It is finished" (see **John 19:30**). The words "It is finished" means Jesus knew he had, by his suffering on the cross, paid the price for the sin of God's people. He had satisfied the wrath of God. When people wonder whether their sins have been paid for, they only need to

remember the words “It is finished”! God’s people can place great confidence in Jesus’s death.

The Bible declares that God is love (see **1 John 4:7-12**). Sometimes, people think a loving God would not send his Son to die. This is not a correct way of thinking. The cross is proof that God is a God of love. The cross is a display of God’s love for the world (see **John 3:16-18, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-10, and 1 John 4:9-10**). The cross is a display of Jesus’s love of his Father (see **John 14:31**). And the cross is a display of God the Father’s love for Jesus. If God had kept Jesus from the cross, he would have kept him from glory. Instead, God demonstrated his love for Christ by sending him to the cross (see **John 17:1 and 17:26**). This was the way in which all things would be united in Christ (see **Ephesians 1:10**). God the Father never removed his love from his Son, even when Jesus died on the cross (see **2 Samuel 7:15**).







## 21. The reader should carefully consider Jesus's resurrection.

All four Gospels clearly declare that Jesus died on the cross. People have been given all the evidence necessary in order to believe that Jesus died as he said he would die. All four Gospels clearly speak of his burial. This is additional evidence that Jesus actually died. But Jesus did not stay dead, and he did not stay in the grave. All four Gospels speak of Jesus's resurrection (see **Matthew 28:1-15, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:1-12, and John 20:1-18**). The book of Acts also gives strong evidence that Jesus rose from the dead (see **Acts 1:3, 2:22-32, and 10:39-41**). The fact that the apostles were killed because of their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus is additional evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead. People will not give their lives up for something they know to be false. The apostles were willing to give their lives up because they knew the resurrection was true. They had seen Jesus. They knew he had risen from the dead. Jesus is, right now, alive. All Christians believe this. You cannot be a Christian if you do not believe Jesus was raised from the dead (see **Romans 10:9-10**).

All of the different accounts of Jesus's resurrection in the Gospels and Acts are grace from God. Each one is intended to lead people to faith in Christ. Additional evidence of the resurrection is found throughout the rest of the New Testament (see, for instance, **1 Corinthians 15:3-6**). These accounts "are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (see **John 20:31**).

Jesus's victory over death was not a surprise to him. He went to the cross in faith, knowing he would rise on the third day. He told his apostles that he would die and be raised from the dead on the third day (see, for instance, **Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32, and 10:32-34**). Jesus knew his victory over death would become the victory of all of his

people over death. His resurrection was the key to all of God's people being raised (see **Hosea 6:1-3**).

**Jesus's resurrection proves God accepted Jesus's sacrifice for sin.** The fact that Jesus is able to live free from condemnation means the sins he took upon himself have been forgiven. Jesus's freedom from condemnation is freedom of condemnation for every Christian, because Jesus took the sins of God's people on himself (see **Romans 8:1-4**). If Jesus had stayed in the grave, it would demonstrate that God did not accept Jesus's sacrifice for sin (see **1 Corinthians 15:17**). God's people would still be in their sins. But Jesus has been raised. This means his sacrifice was accepted by God and forgiveness of sins has been freely given to all those who trust in him.

**Jesus's resurrection proves God's people do not need to fear facing God's wrath in the future.** Instead, God's people are able to face the future in hope and freedom. People are not born in right relationship with God. Because of sin, all people are born as "children of wrath" (see **Ephesians 2:1-3**). But the people of God have been delivered from God's wrath because Jesus took God's wrath upon himself when he died on the cross. Because of Christ's sacrifice, Christians have been saved from God's wrath and can boldly and joyfully look forward to meeting God in the future.

**Jesus's resurrection proves "death no longer has dominion" over the Christian (see Romans 6:9).** Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, all Christians can live in faith that they, too, will be raised from the dead. This means Christians can live their lives without fear of death. Christians can boldly obey God in every circumstance, knowing that even if they die, God will give them life (see **Matthew 10:28, Luke 12:4, and Revelation 2:10**). Jesus is the "firstfruits" of the resurrection (see **1 Corinthians 15:12-22**). He was the first one to experience the new life granted to God's people because of Christ's death on the cross. The word "firstfruits" helps the believer understand Jesus's resurrection. In the same way the first mango being picked

from a mango tree is proof of a great future harvest of mangos from that tree, Jesus's resurrected body is evidence that many more people will be raised from the dead (see **1 Corinthians 15:35-58**). Christians do not need to fear death. Christians know that they, like their Lord, will be raised from the dead. Jesus's resurrection is evidence of their future resurrection.

**Jesus's resurrection means he is, right now, ruling as King over all things.**

When Jesus rose from the dead he was declared to be "the Son of God in power" (see **Romans 1:4**). This is why Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (see **Matthew 28:18**).

**Jesus's resurrection is evidence of the age to come.** Jesus is alive and will never die again. He can no longer die. The curse has no hold over Jesus. Because God's people are "in Christ", his resurrection to new life is their resurrection to new life. Even though God's people have not tasted all of the benefits of new life yet, they already, because of their union with Christ, are experiencing the "fruit" of the new age (see **2 Corinthians 5:17** and **Galatians 5:22-23**).

**Jesus's resurrection is proof that Satan was defeated by Christ (see Hebrews 2:10-18).** Even though Satan is still roaming this earth, his power has been broken. Jesus has set people free from Satan's control so they might walk in the power of the new age (see **Acts 10:38** and **Ephesians 2:1-10**).

**Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of a brand new people walking in resurrection power.** Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers. His resurrection created an entire people (see **Hosea 6:1-3**). That power is being seen in people even now!

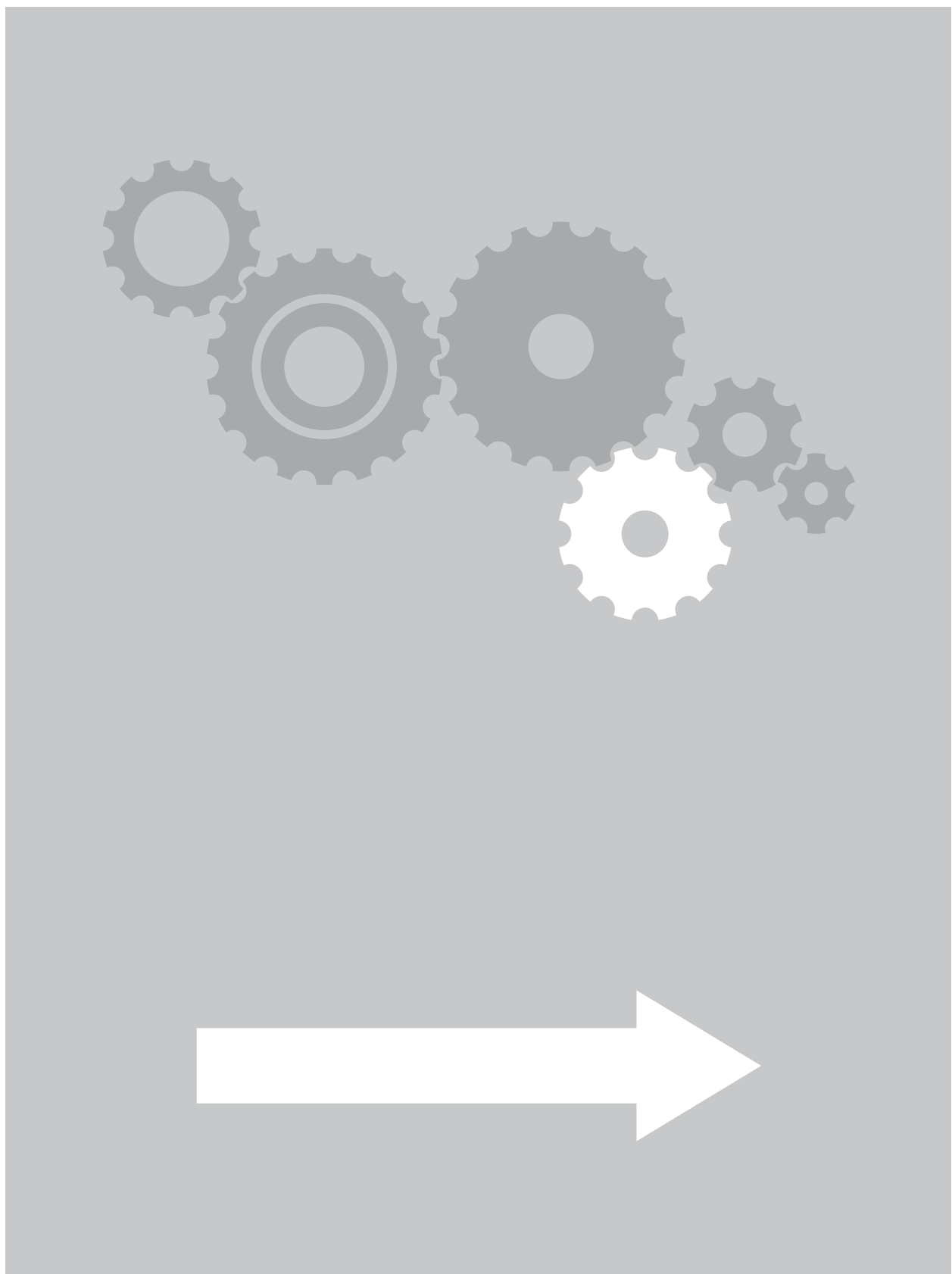
**Jesus's resurrection means God's people are beginning to do what the first Adam never did.** God's people are being fruitful and multiplying (see **Genesis 1:26-28 and John 15:1-11**). The age of the first Adam is coming to an end. The age of the Last Adam has begun! It is an age of great fruitfulness (see **Galatians 5:22-23**)!

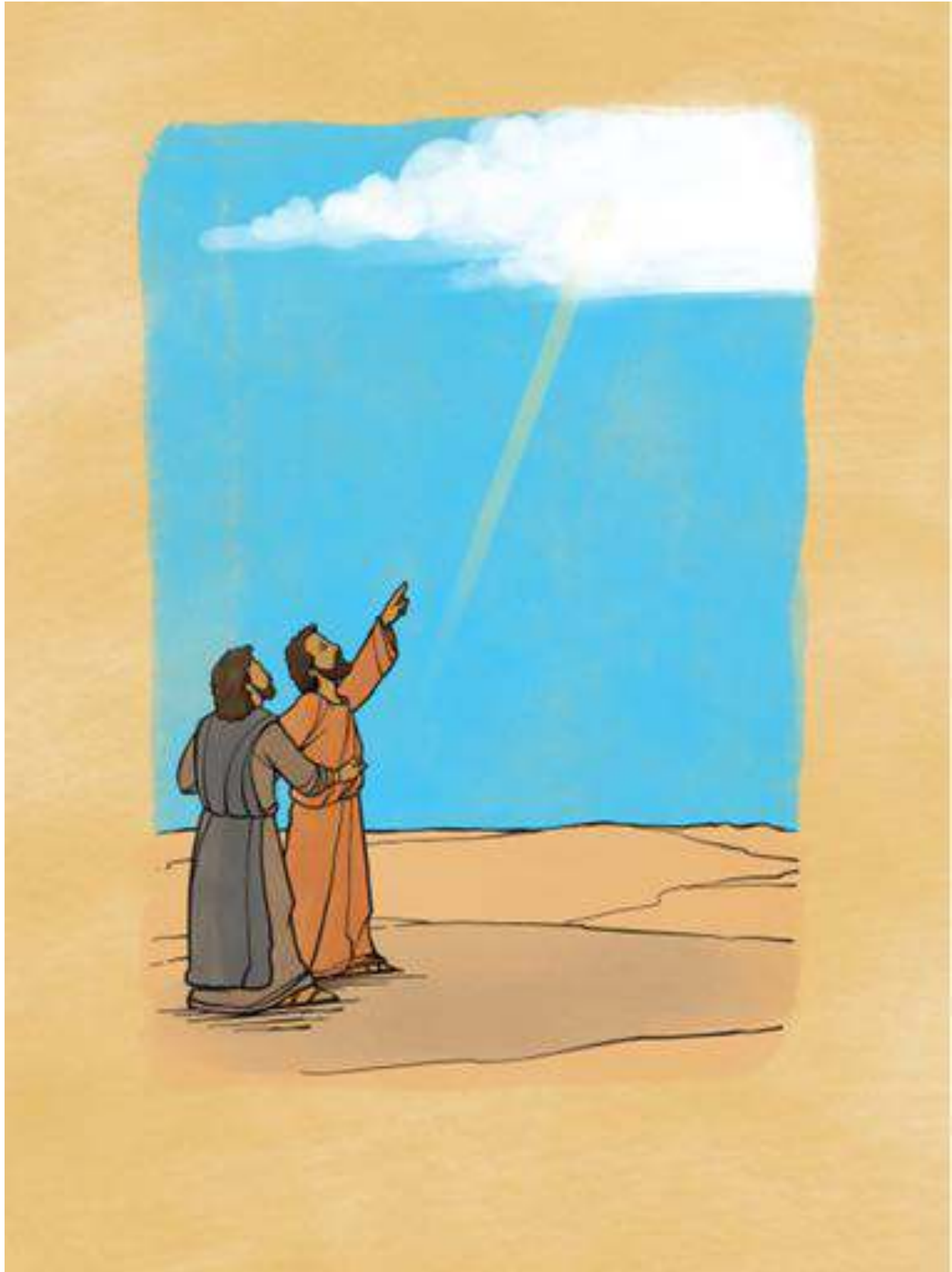
Jesus's resurrection should be celebrated by all people on earth. Christ's living body is a sure sign of the new life Christ brings to all who trust in him.

*Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." **John 20:27-29***









## 22. The reader should carefully consider Jesus's ascension.

The Gospels and Acts record a few of the things Jesus said and did after he rose from the dead. Jesus appeared to many people after his resurrection and spoke many things to them over a period of 40 days (see **Acts 1:3**). He spoke about the kingdom of God. It would seem things would be far better for the church if Jesus had stayed with his people on earth. But Jesus did not stay on earth. Instead, the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven (see **Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-53, John 14:28, Acts 1:6-11, Ephesians 4:8-16, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Peter 3:21-22, and Revelation 12:1-6**). This is where Jesus is today. Jesus is, at this very moment, seated at the right hand of God the Father.

This means Jesus is not physically present with his people who are on earth. Did Jesus leave his people as orphans? Jesus did not abandon the people of God. He said it was better for God's people if he went away.

*“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”* **John 16:7**

Jesus has not stopped working on behalf of his people. He is continuing his work of redemption as he sits at the right hand of God the Father.

**As he said in John 16:7, one of the major things Jesus has done for his people in his ascension is sending his Holy Spirit.** Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to live inside of his people and to give them help at every time and in every circumstance. The Holy Spirit helps believers obey Christ (see **John 14:15-17**). He gives believers power so they are able to be Christ's witnesses (see **Acts 1:8**). He gives believers gifts so they

might bring grace to the church (see **1 Corinthians 12:1-11**). He helps believers even when they do not know how to pray (see **Romans 8:26-27**). As a man, Jesus could not be in all locations at all times. However, the Holy Spirit is always with all believers. In this way, Christ is able to be with his people always (see **Matthew 28:20**). The Holy Spirit provides constant assurance to God's people that they are saved. He "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (see **Ephesians 1:14**).

**But this is not the only benefit of Jesus's ascension into heaven. Jesus is, as King over all things, now building his church (see Matthew 16:18).** He is sending gifts to his people. This includes giving people as gifts to help the church (see **Ephesians 4:8-16**). Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers are gifts for the church from the ascended Christ. The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation demonstrate that Jesus knows each of the churches and he is giving them what they need so they might walk in a manner pleasing to God the Father (see **Revelation 2 and 3**). Jesus describes himself as the one who "walks among the seven golden lamp stands" (see **Revelation 2:1**). This is symbolic of Christ walking in the midst of all his churches. This should give great comfort to his local churches!

**Jesus is not only ruling as King over all things, he is also serving his people as their high priest!** The Bible teaches that Jesus is, at this very moment, interceding for believers (see **Romans 8:34**). He has gone into God's presence "as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (see **Hebrews 6:20**). As a faithful high priest, Jesus is continually bringing the many benefits of his death and resurrection to the members of his church. Jesus knows how to help his people when they sin and when they are tempted (see **Hebrews 2:14-18**). He supplies the grace needed to overcome all temptation.

He has not left his people as orphans. Instead, he is "with his people always" (see **Matthew 28:20**). He pleads with the Father as an advocate for the church. He

brings needed grace to all his people every day. God's people can confidently do his work, knowing grace will be given at the right time. And because Jesus will never die again, believers can have great confidence that he will forever serve as their high priest (see **Hebrews 7:23-25**). His constant high priestly ministry will continue until the end of the age. This gives God's people great hope no matter what circumstance they might be in. The ascended Jesus was Stephen's comfort when Stephen was killed (see **Acts 7:59-60**). This is an example for every follower of God. Our great high priest is carefully watching over all those under his care, even in their death.

When Jesus went to the cross, he took the sins of his people upon himself. He was, in this sense, representing all of his people. His death to sin was their death to sin. In the same way, Christ represents all his people in his priestly ministry. They have, in this sense, gone with Christ before God the Father.

**But he is not just over the church. As the one who has been given all authority, he is ruling over all things in heaven and on earth (see Matthew 28:18).** Jesus will reign in this place until every enemy is under his feet (see **Psalm 110:1, Acts 2:33-35, and 1 Corinthians 15:25-26**). Thus, Christ's ascension is proof that every last enemy of God will be defeated. This should bring great comfort to God's people as they suffer on this earth. Christ's ascension is a guarantee that all is being made right.

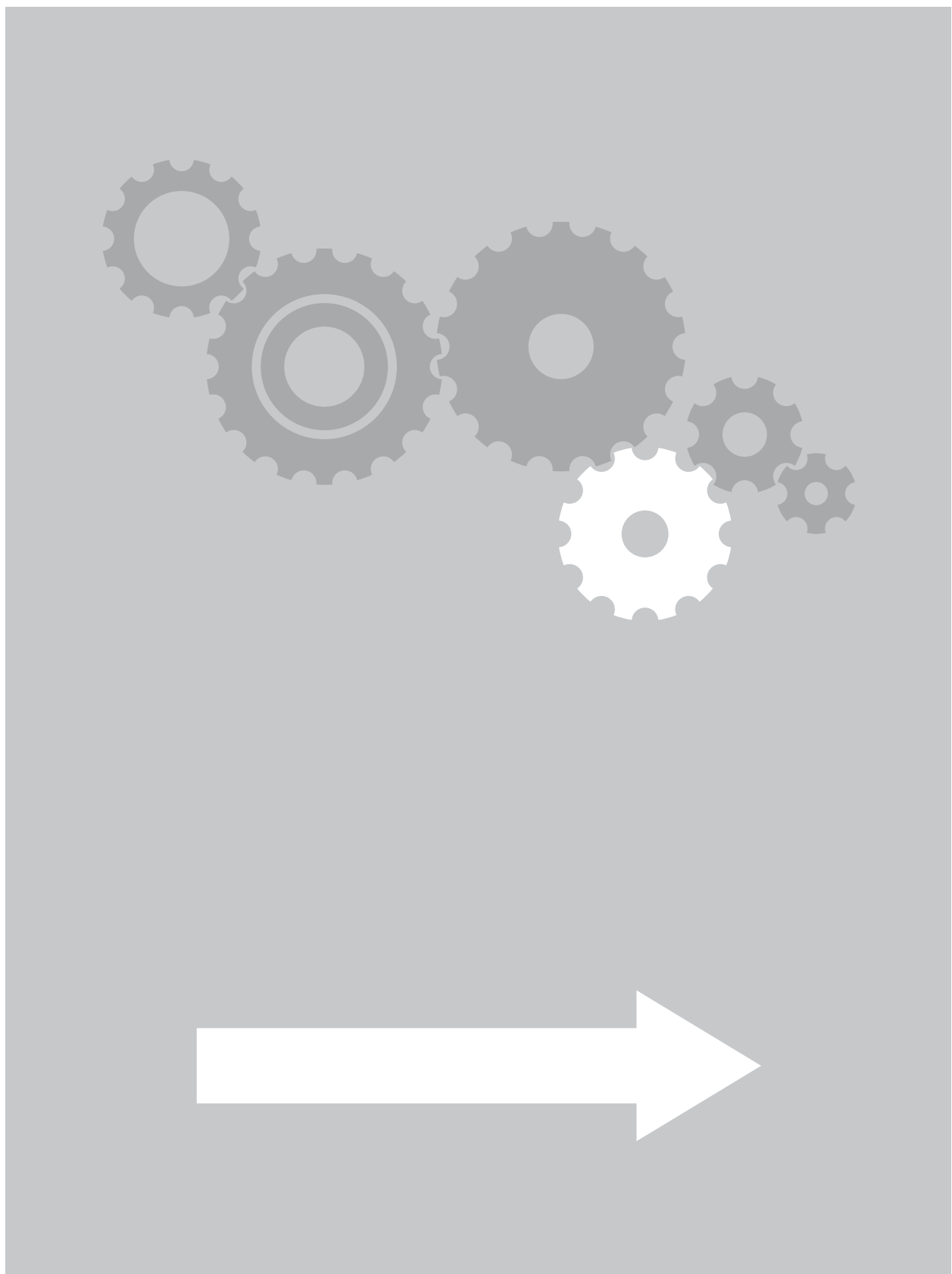
Jesus is God. But he is also man. He forever will live in a resurrected human body. The fact of his ascension as a human in a glorified body to the throne of God demonstrates new-creation humans have a place before God. He is our guarantee that we will also be accepted into God's presence.

The ascension of Christ signifies a completion of one part of redemption. Christ's death has been completed. This once-for-all sacrifice is done. It cannot be undone by any forces that may wish to oppose Christ. At this time, Christ is working

out in the church the many implications of his death and resurrection. He is constantly pouring out grace upon his people. When he ascended, Christ entered into a new phase of redemption. He is ruling over the world, helping his people, and defeating his enemies. This should give great confidence to the people of God (see **Romans 8:38-39**).

The ascension reminds Christians on earth that we, like our Lord, will one day go to the Father. We must never forget this fact. As the apostle Paul reminds us, we are to “seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (see **Colossians 3:1-4**).









## 23. The reader should carefully consider the birth and growth of the church.

The word **church** only appears two times in the four Gospels (see **Matthew 16:18 and 18:17**). Clearly, the church is not the focus of the Gospels. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the focus of the Gospels. However, the word church appears 19 times in the book of Acts. This demonstrates the importance of the church in the plan of God. It also demonstrates that Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension marked the beginning of the church.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the work he had been doing on the earth did not stop. The church began doing the same things he had done. The fruitfulness of the church should not surprise people who have read the Gospels. Carefully consider the following verses:

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."* **John 14:12-14**

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* **John 15:5**

Based on verses like these, readers of the Gospels would expect a gathering of Christians to accomplish great things for Christ and his kingdom. This is exactly what happens in local churches. Great things are accomplished for Christ's kingdom.

Local churches do not build themselves by their own power. They do not accomplish great things because of their intelligence or skill or wealth. Instead, they accomplish great things because Jesus himself is building the church (see **Matthew 16:18**).

As the book of Acts makes clear, churches will experience great opposition. In the same way Satan hated the work of Jesus, he hates the work of the church. This is why Jesus's words in **Matthew 16:18** are so encouraging. Jesus said "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." This means that even though the church is in conflict with forces of evil, it will not be defeated by Satan and his forces. The church will stand victorious.

Luke is the author of the book of Acts. This is the introduction to Acts:

*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach ...* **Acts 1:1**

The "first book" referred to in Acts 1:1 is a reference to Luke's first book (the Gospel of Luke). According to Luke, that book was about "all that Jesus **began** to do and teach." This means the book of Acts is about what Jesus **continued** to do and teach through his people!

While a good deal of the focus in the book of Acts is on work of the apostles, one of Luke's primary interests is in the birth and the growth of the church and on the help the Holy Spirit gave to the churches. This makes sense, because Jesus is building his church. The apostles are vitally important, but they are servants of the Lord Jesus and of the churches.

Notice how Luke describes the birth and the growth of the church in the book of Acts. He carefully describes how the number of Jesus's followers is increasing. This is evidence that Jesus's promises to his followers were being fulfilled.

*In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) ... **Acts 1:15***

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. **Acts 2:41***

*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. **Acts 2:47***

(This verse is very significant, because it teaches that the Lord is the one who was increasing the size of the church! This is why we must pray and ask for his help. He is the Lord of the harvest!)

*And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women ... **Acts 5:14***

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number ... **Acts 6:1***

*And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. **Acts 6:7***

In Acts 8, Luke describes a great persecution against the church.

*And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **Acts 8:1***

This persecution did not stop the growth of the church. Instead, it forced the church to grow even further. This is evidence that the gates of hell were not prevailing against the church!

*Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. **Acts 8:4***

At this point, Luke begins describing the growth of the church in other areas.

*Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John ... **Acts 8:14***

*Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. **Acts 8:25***

*But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. **Acts 8:40***

*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. **Acts 9:31***

*And all the resident of Lydia and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. **Acts 9:35***

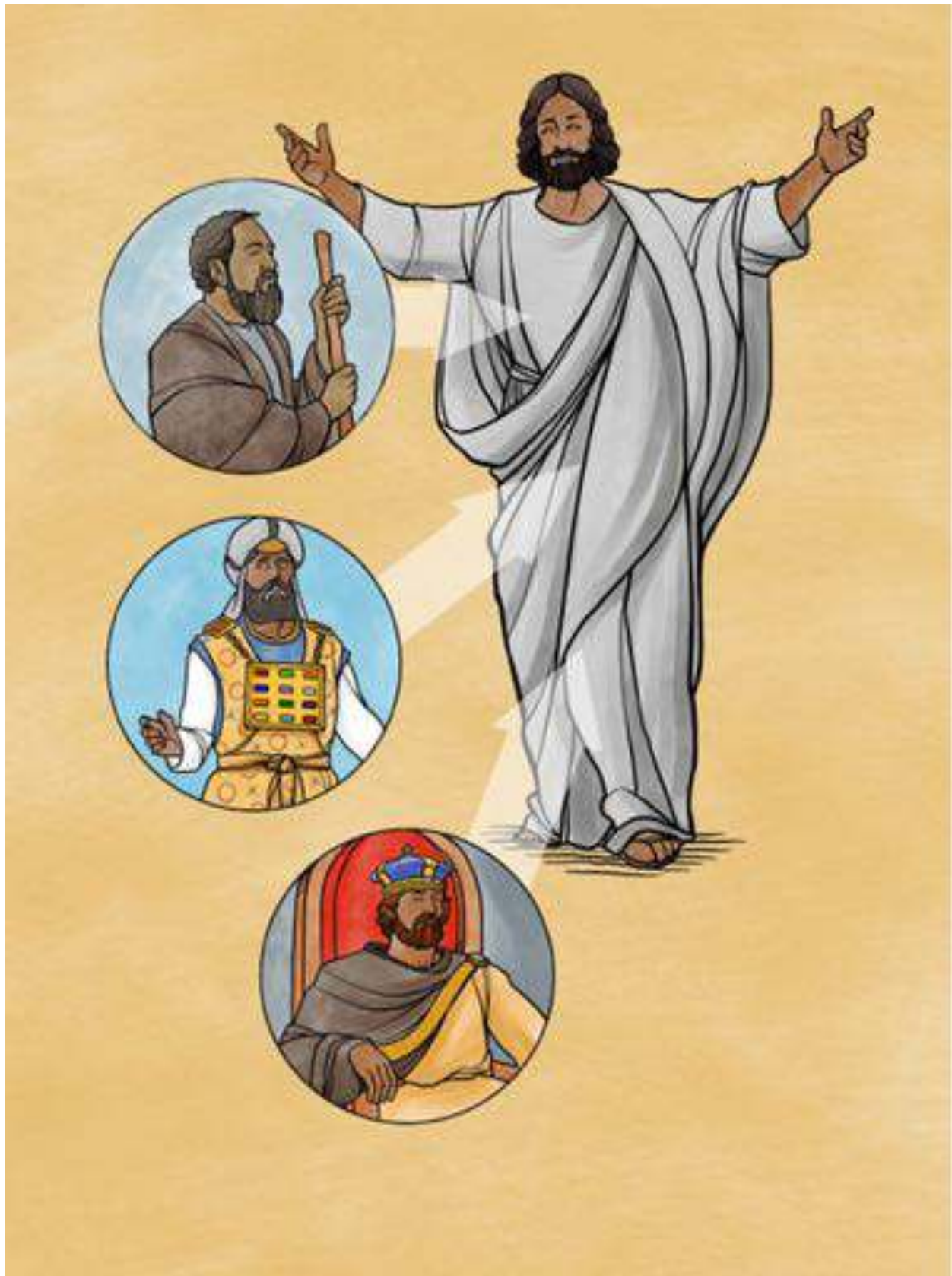
*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Acts 9:42*

Luke's focus on the growth of the church continues throughout the book of Acts. It may appear that the apostle Paul is Luke's primary interest in the last half of the book. But this is not Luke's primary interest. His interest is in the growth of the church. Paul was bringing the Gospel throughout the known world, that is one reason the book focuses so much attention on him. The book ends with the apostle Paul in prison in Rome. The reader is not told whether Paul is released from prison. But the story of the apostle Paul is not Luke's main interest. Consider how he ends the book:

*He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. Acts 28:30-31*

Luke wants his readers to know that even though Paul was in prison, the word of God was continuing to spread. The reader should assume that the church was growing in the places where the word of God was being preached.

The sudden appearance of the church at the beginning of the book of Acts and the amazing growth of the church described throughout the book of Acts is evidence of the reality of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. The church is still growing throughout the earth. People are still being added to the number of believers. In this way, the story which began in the book of Acts is still being written.



## 24. Jesus is the ultimate prophet, priest, and king.

The four Gospels clearly present Jesus as the fulfillment of each of the three major “offices” introduced in the Old Testament. This means he is, in himself, everything God’s people need. He is the perfect prophet, priest, and king. He is the one all three offices in the Old Testament point toward.

**As the ultimate Prophet, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.** In this very important prophecy, Moses tells the Israelites that God would, in the future, “raise up for you a prophet like me.” Moses tells the people they must listen to this prophet.

*“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.’”*

### **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**

At the time Moses spoke these words, the prophet described in these verses had not yet come. Moses’ words were preparing the people so they would properly receive the prophet when he did come. The prophet described in these verses is very important. In fact, he is more important than every other prophet because “it is **to him**

you shall listen.” This prophet would speak God’s words to the people. If the people did not listen, they would be judged.

Clearly, it would be important for people to recognize this prophet. How would they recognize him? These verses in Deuteronomy provide many clues.

- **These verses indicate God was going “raise up” this prophet.** This is exactly what happened when God raised Jesus from the dead.

- **These verses indicate this prophet would be like Moses.** Moses doesn’t explain what this means in this verse, but the reader only needs to think about Moses carefully to figure out what this might mean. Moses was different from other prophets because he knew God face to face (see **Exodus 34:10**). Therefore, a prophet “like Moses” would also know God face to face. Beyond this, God worked mighty signs and wonders before the eyes of all the world through Moses. This means the prophet to come would also work signs and wonders before the eyes of all the world (see **Exodus 34:11**).

- **Moses was connected to the cutting of the covenant between God and the people.** This means the prophet to come would also be connected to the cutting of a covenant between God and the people.

- **Moses was Israel’s teacher.** The prophet to come would also be known as Israel’s teacher.

While Moses wrote the book of Deuteronomy, he did not write the final chapter. Someone who lived much later—a final editor of the book—wrote the final chapter long after the death of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy ends with this final editor of the book declaring that **the prophet** had not yet come.



*And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. **Deuteronomy 34:10-12***

Even though great prophets arose in Israel and in Judah during the time period described in the Old Testament, none of them were the prophet described in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**. The Old Testament time period ended and the people of God were still waiting for **the prophet**.

But then Jesus came! He fulfills everything described in Deuteronomy 18. **God raised him up** when he raised him from the dead. **He is like Moses** because he sees God face to face (see **John 1:18**). He is like Moses because he worked mighty miracles in the sight of all the people. He is like Moses because he is associated with the cutting of a covenant (the new covenant). And he is like Moses because he is considered to be the teacher of God's people.

When the people living in the first century saw the works of Jesus and heard the words of Jesus, they wondered whether he was the prophet Moses was speaking about.

*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" **John 6:14***

*When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." **John 7:40***

In Acts 3, the apostle Peter confirms that Jesus is the Prophet Moses was speaking about.

*“But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 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.*

*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. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people. ‘And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”*

**Acts 3:18-26** (see also Stephen’s words in Acts 7:37)

Peter’s words prove that Jesus is the Prophet described in **Deuteronomy 18**. As the Prophet who has been raised up by God, all people are required to listen to Jesus. This is further confirmed by God’s own words recorded in **Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, and Luke 9:35**. See also Jesus’s words in **John 18:37**. God has put his words into Jesus’s mouth. We are not like the people living during the times described in the Old Testament who were anxiously waiting for the Prophet. He has come. He perfectly hears and speaks God’s words. We must listen to him.

**But Jesus is more than just the ultimate Prophet. He is also the ultimate Priest. As the ultimate Priest, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Psalm 110:**

*The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
“You are a priest forever  
after the order of Melchizedek.”* **Psalm 110:4**

In the Old Testament, a great deal is written about a group of people called **priests**. These people were called by God to serve as **mediators** between God and people (see **Exodus 28:1-5, 28:41, 29:44**).

There was a special priest called the **high priest**. Moses’s brother Aaron was the first high priest. Because of his special calling, Aaron was able to go into God’s presence (in the earthly tabernacle) and represent the people before God. He offered gifts to God and sacrifices for sins. Without Aaron’s high priestly ministry, God’s people would not have access to God.

*For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*

**Hebrews 5:1**

The high priestly ministry of Aaron was necessary. But it was not perfect. Aaron had many weaknesses. And all of the high priests in the Old Testament time period had these same weaknesses. Their ministry was important, but it was not perfect.

Outlined below are weaknesses in Aaron and in his ministry:

- **Aaron was a sinner.** Therefore, he himself needed forgiveness for his sins. Because of sin, Aaron needed to offer sacrifices for his own sins. Because of sin, Aaron was not able to come into God's presence at all times.

*He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

**Hebrews 5:2-4**

- **The sacrifices Aaron offered for sin were imperfect.** Aaron offered bulls, lambs, and goats as offerings for sin. These animals served as substitutes for the sins of the people. However, the blood of bulls and goats cannot actually take away sin of people. To actually take away sin a better sacrifice was necessary. However, Aaron could not offer a better sacrifice. He could only offer the sacrifices prescribed by God. At that time, there was no better sacrifice for Aaron to offer.

*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

**Hebrews 10:4**

- **The sacrifices Aaron offered needed to be repeated on a yearly basis.** The sacrifices Aaron offered did not lead to perfection in the people (or in Aaron). This is why they needed to be repeated on a yearly basis (see **Hebrews 9:25**). This is one reason there were no chairs in the tabernacle. There were no chairs because the work of the priests was never done.

*And every priest **stands** daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **Hebrews 10:11***

- **Aaron's priesthood was not permanent.** Aaron, like all of the high priests in the Old Testament time period, died. This means his high priestly ministry was temporary. Because of death, the priestly ministry was always in danger of ceasing.

*The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office ...* **Hebrews 7:23**

- **Aaron served in the earthly tabernacle.** The earthly tabernacle was a copy of the far great heavenly tabernacle in God's presence (see **Hebrews 9:1**).

- **Aaron became high priest based on requirements in the Law.** Thus, he did not become priest because of his perfection.

Even though Aaron's priestly ministry was necessary, it was not sufficient. It was a temporary solution for God's people until the time of the New Covenant. For God's people to be able to fully and freely relate to God, there was a need for a better high priest to come serving in a better tabernacle under a better covenant. That is why Jesus came.

Consider the following verses outlining the better high priestly ministry of Jesus:

*Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession ...* **Hebrews 3:1**

*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our*

weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Hebrews 4:14-15**

*For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

*So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,*

*“You are my Son,*

*today I have begotten you”;*

*as he says also in another place,*

*“You are a priest forever,*

*after the order of Melchizedek.” **Hebrews 5:1-6***

*For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all*



*when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. **Hebrews 7:26-28***

*Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven ... **Hebrews 8:1***

*For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. **Hebrews 8:3***

*But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ... **Hebrews 9:11***

The perfect high priest has come! He serves as high priest because of his perfect life and because of God's oath. He offered a perfect sacrifice once for all time. He now **sits** at the right hand of God. This is a sign that his work of offering a sacrifice for sin is complete. He serves in the tabernacle of heaven. He perfectly intercedes for God's people all the time. And God's people do not need to worry about his priesthood ending. He will never die again. God guaranteed with an oath that he would be priest forever. Therefore, his people can have great confidence in their high priest.

**But Jesus is more than just the ultimate Prophet and ultimate Priest. He is also the ultimate King. As the ultimate King, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy made to David found in 2 Samuel 7:1-17.**

From the beginning of the Bible, it is clear God wants a godly king to lead the world. Beyond this, it is clear the world needs a godly king to lead them. Because of

sin, the world does not desire a godly king in authority over them. However, the people of God are not like this. The people of God desire a godly king to reign over them. The people of God know that when there is no godly king over God's people, they do not do what is right. Instead, they will do what is right in their own eyes. The book of Judges was written, in part, to show what happens when God's people do not have a godly king over them (see **Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25**).

Even though the word “king” is not used in relation to the first Adam, it is clear Adam was created to be a king. God gave him **dominion** over all things on earth (see **Genesis 1:26-28**). This does not mean Adam could do whatever he wanted. Adam was to be a king under another King—God himself. God's word was always to rule over Adam (see **Genesis 2:16-17**). As king, Adam should have obeyed God in all he said and did. But Adam did not submit to God's rule. Because of this, he did not rule as a wise king. He did not bring God's enemy Satan under dominion. Instead, he tolerated Satan's lies. Because of Adam's disobedient and cowardly manner of ruling, Satan was allowed to roam freely and to exercise a measure of authority on earth (see **Ephesians 2:1-3**). Adam should have exercised dominion over Satan. Instead, he chose to obey him.

In spite of Adam's failure to rule, God graciously promised he would bring another deliverer to his people. This deliverer would crush Satan (see **Genesis 3:15**). The Old Testament is filled with promises about this coming King who would deliver God's people from their enemies and lead God's people into holiness, peace, worship, safety, joy, and fruitfulness.

This coming king was sometimes called “the Messiah” or “the Christ.” Both of these words mean “anointed.” God's people were waiting for the king whom God would anoint.



Outlined below are two significant Old Testament passages about the coming Christ (see also **Psalms 2** and **Psalms 110**).

**Genesis 49:8-12** teaches the coming king was to come from the tribe of Judah. These verses declare that the obedience of all the nations belongs to this coming king.

**2 Samuel 7:1-17** contains a major promise. (This is sometimes called the Davidic Covenant.) This promise was that one of David's sons would sit on the throne forever, that this son of David would build the temple, and that God would be with this son and would never remove his love from him. Furthermore, this passage includes the stunning promise that this son of David would be a son to God and God would be a father to him. Jesus is called the "son of David" (see **Matthew 1:1**) because he is descended from David and is heir to the throne that David sat on. Jesus is the one who builds the true temple.

While there were some good kings in Israel and Judah during the Old Testament time period (i.e., David, Hezekiah, and Josiah), all of the kings had weaknesses. None of them could deliver God's people from their very worst enemies. They could not deliver God's people from their sins and from Satan. They could not deliver God's people from death. The Old Testament ended and the Christ had not yet come. But the people of God were waiting for him in faith.

The Gospels begin by declaring, in the very first verse, that Jesus is the Christ.

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. **Matthew 1:1***

As the Christ, Jesus was anointed to save his people from the enemies earlier kings could not defeat. Jesus set his people free from sin and Satan.

*“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”* **Matthew 1:21**

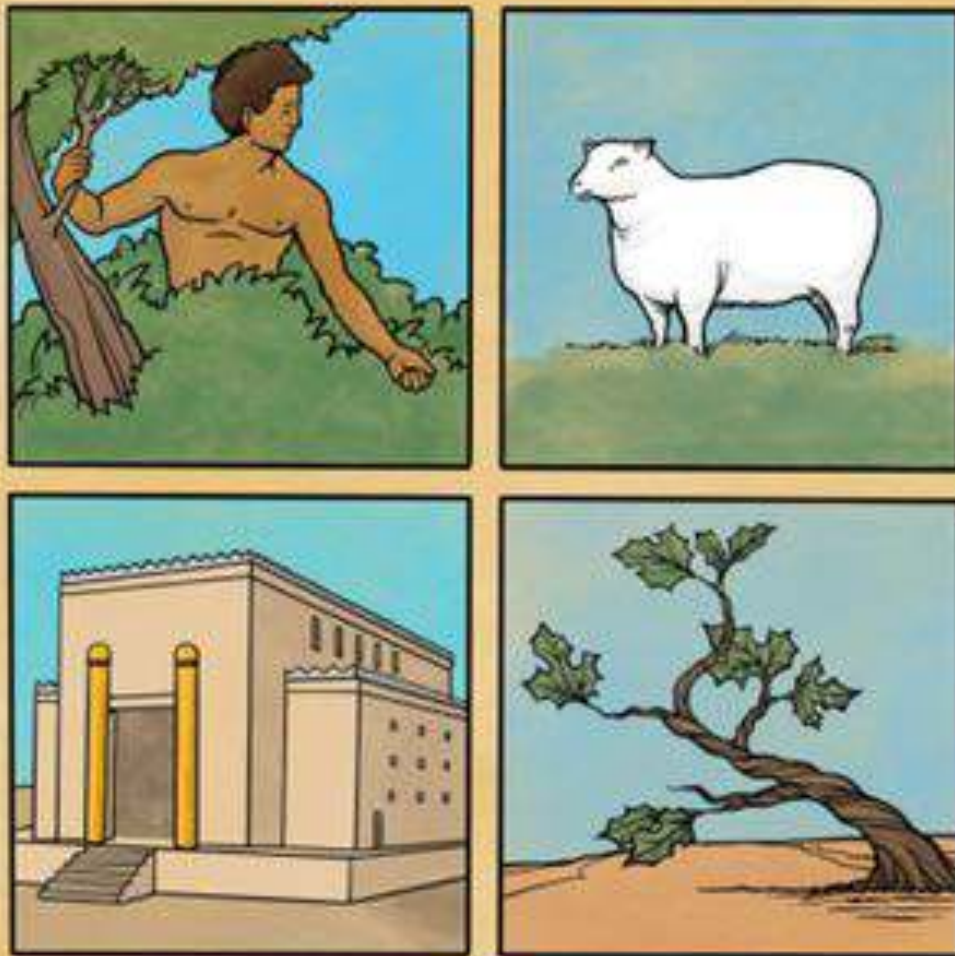
Jesus’s miracles were signs that he was the Christ (see **John 20:30-31**). In their sermons and in their letters, the apostles demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ by “attaching” the title Christ to the name Jesus. Thus, they call Jesus “Jesus Christ” (see **Acts 2:38 and 3:6**) or “Christ Jesus” (see **Acts 24:24 and Romans 2:16**). By using Jesus’s name in this way, the apostles were declaring that the Christ had been found. People no longer need to wonder who God’s anointed King might be. The apostles authoritatively declared that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. He is ruling in power right now (see **Romans 1:4**).

Jesus is called the King of kings and the Lord of lords (see **Revelation 17:14 and 19:16**). This means he is greater than every other ruler. This is true whether these rulers recognize his rule or not. It is true for kings and rulers in the past and it is true for kings and rulers in the present.

As King over all things, Jesus has authority to command his people. He has this authority today. God’s people must obey.

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* **Matthew 28:18-20**

While the words “prophet”, “priest”, and “king” are not used in Genesis 1 and 2, it is clear the first Adam was to be a prophet, a priest, and a king. Because of sin, he did not fulfill any of these roles. The Lord Jesus, the last Adam, does what the first Adam never did. As the perfect prophet, he perfectly hears and perfectly proclaims God’s word. As the perfect priest, he is constantly serving in God’s presence for his people. And as the perfect king, he perfectly rules over all. Every enemy is being made a footstool for his feet. Because of his work, God’s people are also prophets, priests, and kings.



## 25. Jesus is the fulfillment of many of the “types” introduced in the Old Testament.

A shadow is a representation of something else. A shadow of a person looks a little like that person. A shadow of a tree looks a little like that tree. They are not the same thing, but they resemble one another. In the same way, there are many things in the Old Testament which are like “shadows” of the Christ. They are like Christ in many ways, but they are not the same as Christ. They are small pictures of him and of his ministry. These things are called “types.” Jesus is the “antitype.” This means he is the real thing the types are all pointing toward. It is encouraging to consider the many different ways Jesus fulfills the types introduced in the Old Testament. Here are just a few of the types in the Old Testament and explanations of how Jesus is the perfect antitype. There are many more examples than the ones listed here.

**Jesus is the Lamb of God (see John 1:29).** In Old Testament times, lambs were offered when the people sinned. They were a substitute given so that the people did not have to die. Of course, the blood of lambs cannot take the sin of people away (see **Hebrews 10:4**). For that to take place, a better sacrifice needed to come. Jesus is the true lamb of God. He takes away the sin of the world (see **Hebrews 9:11-14**).

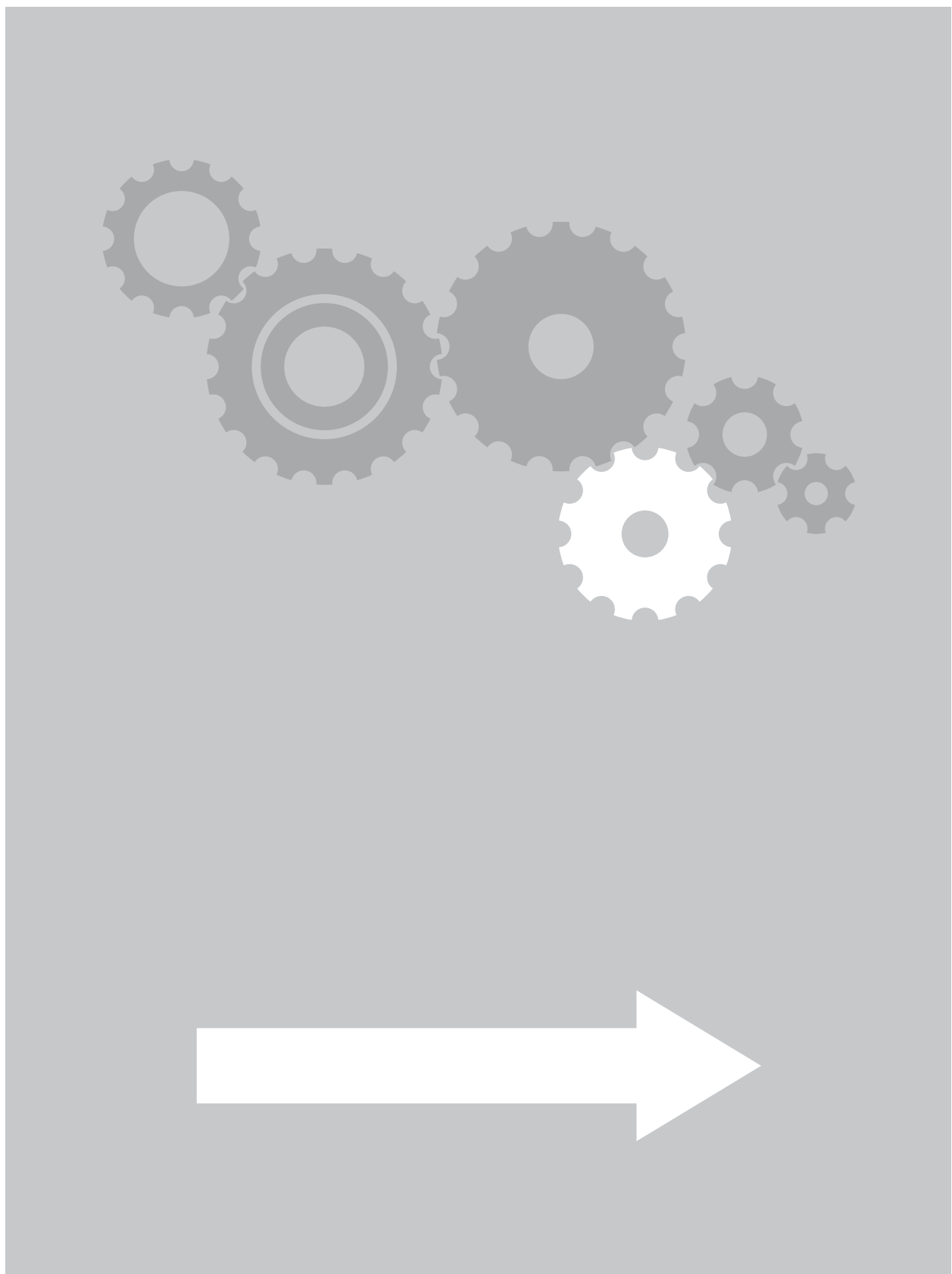
**Jesus is the true vine (see John 15:1-11).** In Old Testament times, Israel was referred to as a vine. Israel was supposed to bear fruit for God. Instead, it turned to idols and bore bad fruit. Jesus does what Israel never did. He bears good fruit. All those who are in him bear good fruit (see **Galatians 5:22-23**).

**Jesus is the cornerstone of the true temple (see Ephesians 2:19-22).** In Old Testament times, people came to the temple to find forgiveness and fellowship with God. Today, people come to Christ and the church to find forgiveness and fellowship with God.

**Jesus is the sabbath (see Hebrews 3-4).** The “rest” people experienced from their work on the sabbath day is a picture of the rest people experience from their own works as they come to Jesus. People find true rest in him.

**Jesus is the last Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:12-49).** Adam was a small reflection of Jesus. He was God’s first prophet, priest, and king. He was the “firstborn” over all creation. However, Adam never fulfilled his calling. The Lord Jesus fulfills everything he was ever asked to do.

**Jesus is the bread of life (see John 6:22-59).** In Old Testament times, manna sustained the people of God. Today, people find their life in Jesus (see **John 6:35**).







## 26. Jesus is fully God and, at the same time, fully man.

Who is Jesus? This is the most important question any person can ever ask, because the answer is the key to eternal life. In order to receive eternal life, people must put their trust in Jesus. In order to trust Jesus, people must know who he is and what he has done.

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”* **John 3:16-18**

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* **John 20:30-31**

The Gospels and Acts clearly demonstrate that Jesus is not like any other person who has ever lived. He is absolutely unique. Jesus should not be compared with other famous people who have lived, because Jesus is not like any other famous people.

Here are a few ways Jesus is different from any other person who has ever lived:

- Jesus is the only person who was born of a virgin (see **Matthew 1:18-21**).
- Jesus is the only person who was born without sin.

- Jesus is the only person who never committed sin.
- Jesus is the only person who never followed the devil (see **Matthew 4:1-11**).
- Jesus is the only person who ever heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (see **Matthew 3:17**).
- Jesus is the only person with the power and authority to take the sins of others on himself and to save other people from their sins (see **Matthew 1:21**).
- Jesus is the only person who “gives life to whom he will” (see **John 5:21**).
- Jesus is the only person with the power and the authority to “execute judgment” (see **John 5:27**).
- Jesus is the only person who is, at the same time, both God and human.

One of the names given to Jesus in the Bible is **Immanuel**. This is a Hebrew name meaning “God with us” (see **Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14**). This is a perfect description of Jesus. He is 100% God. However, he is also 100% man. Jesus is not one-half God and one-half human. This name means Jesus is God living with people. He has not stayed distant from people. Instead, he “put on flesh.”

Sometimes, people argue that the **deity of Christ** is an invention of the apostles. The argument is that they invented the fact that Jesus is God. This is not the case. Jesus himself said that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all the truth (see **John 14:25-26 and 16:13-15**). This means the apostles did not, in any of their teaching, teach error.

The fact is, the teaching that Jesus is God caused trouble for Jesus and for the apostles. They were persecuted for this teaching. If Jesus and the apostles wanted their lives to be easier, they would not have taught that Jesus is God. The reason they taught this fact is because it is true. It would have been a lie to deny the fact that Jesus is God.

Sometimes, people argue that the Gospels were changed to teach this truth. This is not true. There is no evidence the Gospels were changed in this way. There are hundreds and hundreds of manuscripts from many time periods and many locations teaching this same truth about Jesus's deity. Based on the evidence from the manuscripts of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, the deity of Christ was a fact that was taught from the very beginning.

But the deity of Christ is not just spoken about in the New Testament. The deity of the Christ is a fact spoken about in the Old Testament as well (see, for example, **Isaiah 9:6 and Psalm 45:6-7**). Thus, both the apostles (in the New Testament) and the prophets (in the Old Testament) speak about the deity of the Christ.

### **The Gospels and Acts clearly declare and clearly demonstrate that Jesus is God.**

- Jesus is called by the name "Immanuel." This name means "God with us" (see **Matthew 1:23**).
- Jesus uses the name "I am" in reference to himself (see **John 8:58**). This is the name God used in the Old Testament to refer to himself (see **Exodus 3:13-14**). The Jewish leaders clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. This is why they tried to stone him (see **John 8:59**).
- Jesus declared "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (see **John 5:17**). By calling God his own Father, the Jews understood Jesus to be saying he was equal with God (see **John 5:18**).
- Jesus said people should honor the Son "just as they honor the Father" (see **John 5:23**). This means Jesus and the Father should be honored in the same way. This is a clear declaration from Jesus that he is God.
- By using the name "I am" in reference to himself, Jesus was claiming to be eternal (see **John 8:58**). Only God is eternal. Therefore, Jesus is God.

- Jesus declared “I and the Father are one” (see **John 10:30**). The Jewish leaders knew he was claiming to be God (see **John 10:33**). Once again, they wanted to stone him.
- Jesus forgives sin (see **Matthew 9:1-8** and **Mark 2:1-12**). Only God is able to forgive sins.
- Jesus has authority over the wind and the waves. These are signs that he has power over all the forces of nature.
- Jesus healed the blind. **Psalms 146:8** declares that Yahweh heals the blind. Therefore, Jesus must be God.
- Jesus declares that he is able to speak with God the Father (see **Matthew 10:32-33**).
- Jesus baptizes people with the Holy Spirit (see **Matthew 3:11**). According to **Joel 2:28**, God is the one who pours out his Spirit on people. This means Jesus is God.
- Jesus makes statements that only can be used by God.
- Jesus frequently receives worship from people (see **Matthew 2:11, 14:33, 28:9, 28:17, and John 9:38**). If this was wrong, Jesus would have stopped the people from doing this. He never stops them from worshiping him. Beyond this, the Gospel writers never say that this is wrong. Instead, they write about other people worshiping Jesus because they want their readers to also worship Christ. The Old Testament declares that only God may be worshiped. It is right to worship Jesus because Jesus is God. In fact, God the Father commands the angels to worship Jesus (see **Hebrews 1:6**).
- The apostles clearly teach that Jesus is God (see **John 1:1, 1:18, 3:31**).
- The Jewish leaders declared Jesus was making himself equal with God (see **John 5:18**).
- The apostle Thomas calls Jesus “My Lord and my God” (see **John 20:28**). Jesus did not rebuke him. Instead, he indicates that Thomas now believes. This means belief includes an understanding that Jesus is God (see **John 20:29**).

In addition to this evidence from the Gospels, many verses in the rest of the New Testament proclaim that Jesus is God. The proclamation that Jesus is God happens in many different ways. See, for instance, **Romans 9:5** and **Hebrews 1:6-8**.

Again, the deity of the Christ is a fact spoken about in the Old Testament as well (see, for example, **Isaiah 9:6** and **Psalms 45:6-7**). Thus, both the apostles and the prophets speak about the deity of the Christ.

**At the incarnation (the time when Jesus was born as a man), Jesus did not cease being God. Rather, he “put on flesh” and became a man so that he might bring people into right relationship with God.**

As God and, at the same time, as man, Jesus fulfills the requirements of salvation from both God’s side and from man’s side. He is, as Paul describes him in **1 Timothy 2:5**, “one mediator between God and men.”

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ...* **1 Timothy 2:5**

**The Gospels and Acts clearly demonstrate that Jesus is a man.**

*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

**Hebrews 2:14-18**

*For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:21-23*

The Gospels give great evidence of Jesus's humanity. Here is some of the evidence:

- He was born of a woman.
- Jesus had human ancestors (see **Acts 13:23**).
- "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (see **Luke 2:52**). This is strong evidence of Jesus's humanity. If Jesus were merely God, he could not grow in wisdom or favor with God. God is perfect. Therefore he does not grow in wisdom or stature. If he did, this would demonstrate weakness in him. However, Jesus did grow in these things. This demonstrates his humanity.
- There were certain things which, as a human, Jesus could not do (see **Mark 7:24**).
- Jesus could grow weary (see **John 4:6**).
- The apostles call Jesus a man (see, for instance, **Acts 2:22**).
- Jesus bore the sins of people as a man (see **1 Corinthians 15:21**).
- Jesus died (see **Acts 4:10 and Hebrews 9:22**).
- Jesus is described as the firstborn of many brothers. If he was not a man, he could not be the firstborn. He also could not be described as having many brothers.

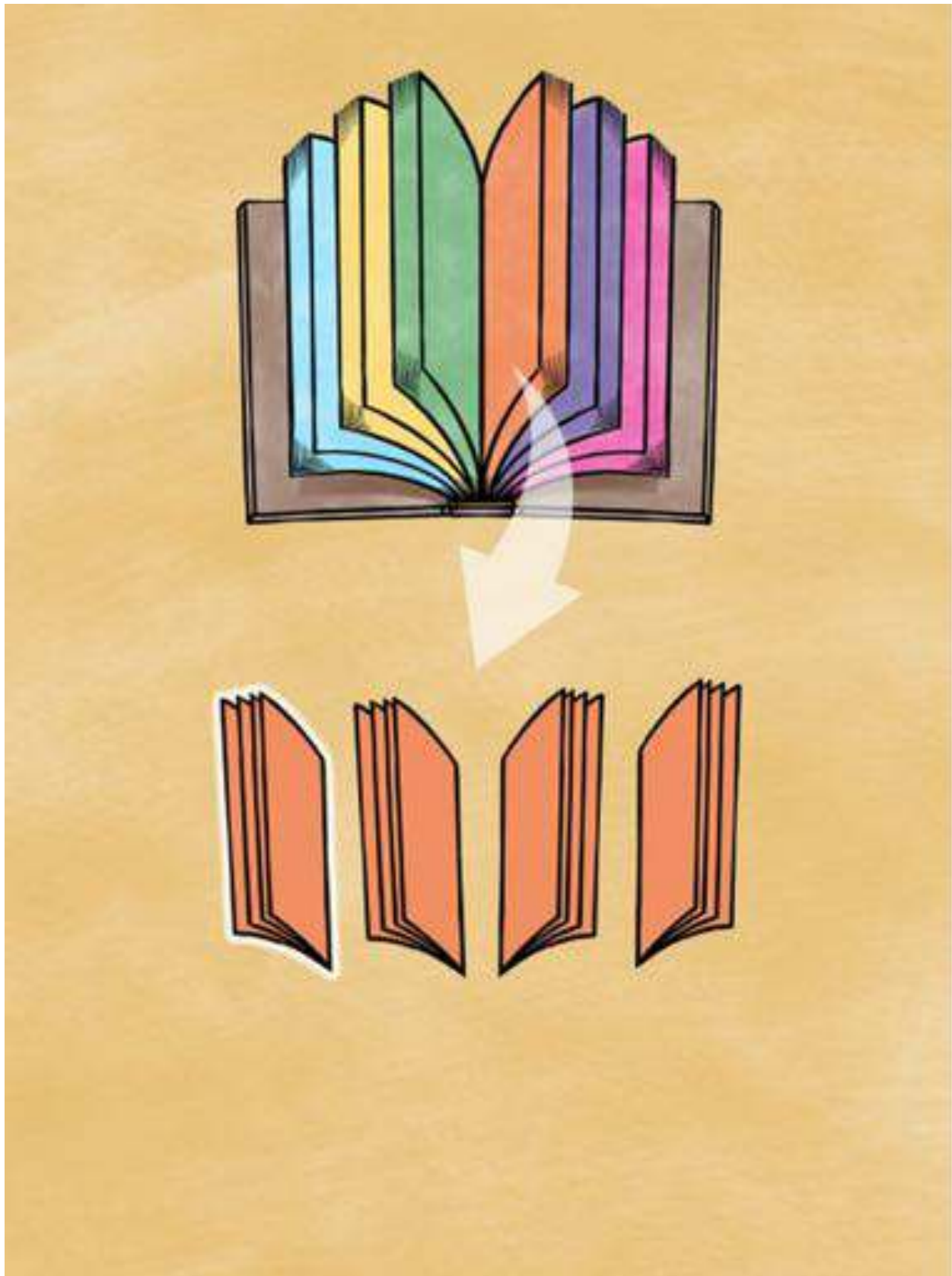
Many other passages in the New Testament declare Jesus is a man (see, for instance, **Romans 5:15 and 1 Timothy 2:5**).

As a man, Jesus bore the sins of humans. As a man, he is able to serve as high priest for humans. As a man, he is able to encourage his brothers and sisters. As a man, he is able to fulfill God's purposes for mankind (see **Genesis 1:26-28**).

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

**Philippians 2:5-11** (see also 2 Corinthians 8:9)







## 27. The Gospel of Matthew begins the New Testament.

Matthew is the first Gospel. The reader is not told why Matthew is first in the four-part “book of the Gospel.” There are probably many reasons why Matthew is first. One reason may be the fact that Matthew was written by an apostle. This is a signal that the Gospels are an apostolic work. Even though two of the Gospels were not written by apostles (Mark and Luke), the first and the last Gospels were written by apostles. This demonstrates the entire work is to be seen as apostolic in nature (see **John 14:25-26 and 16:12-15**).

Another reason Matthew is first is that it naturally connects to the book Chronicles, the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament (1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book). The two parts of the Bible are meant to go together. This means the “seam” connecting the two parts of the Bible is very important. Chronicles and Matthew are the seam connecting the Old Testament and New Testament. These two books naturally fit together. Chronicles begins with a genealogy. This genealogy pays special attention to Abraham and to David. Matthew also begins with a genealogy. In the very first verse, Matthew emphasizes Jesus Christ is “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (see **Matthew 1:1**). Matthew then focuses his attention on King David. This is also a major theme in Chronicles.

The genealogy in Chronicles is incomplete because the Messiah had not come yet. Therefore, Matthew fills in details that the writer of Chronicles (scholars refer to this man as the Chronicler) did not know.

When they are put together, these two books tell the story of the Christ and of the temple. Consider how Chronicles ends and how Matthew begins. Chronicles ends with a call for the person whom God is with to “go up” and build the temple.

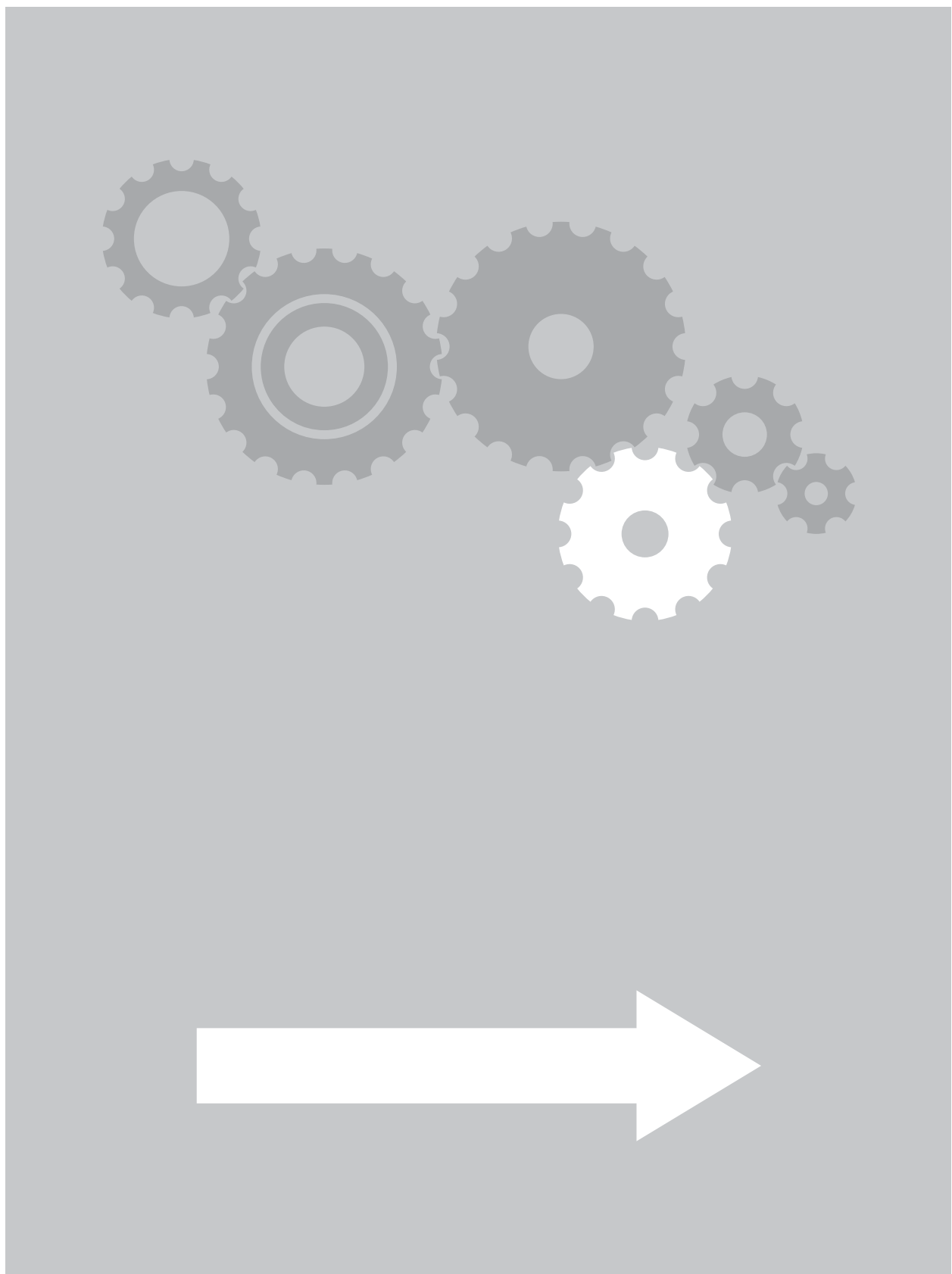
*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"* **2 Chronicles 36:22-23**

The very next words in the Bible (**Matthew 1:1**) introduce Jesus. He is the person who "goes up" and builds the temple. He does this because God is "with him."

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* **Matthew 1:1**

Matthew was a tax collector (see **Matthew 9:9 and 10:3**). As a tax collector, Matthew was probably shunned by the people because he worked for the Roman government. He would have been considered a great sinner by the people. Jesus accepted him, demonstrating the fact that people from every background are welcome in God's kingdom. This may be another reason Matthew is first. It demonstrates the Gospels are for sinners.

A unique element found in Matthew alone is the long "sermon" from Jesus entitled "the Sermon on the Mount." This is found in Matthew 5-7.





## 28. Mark is the shortest Gospel.

Mark is the second Gospel. The reader is not told why Mark is second in the four-part “book of the Gospel.” It may be that Mark is second because of Mark’s connections with the apostle Peter and with the apostle Paul.

Mark traveled with Paul and served him late in his life. He is endorsed by Paul in **2 Timothy 4:11**. For readers of the Gospels, Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 4:11 serve as an endorsement of the book of Mark.

Mark also served with Peter (see **1 Peter 5:13**). Peter was so close to Mark he refers to him as “my son.”

Peter is especially connected to ministry to the Jews. Paul is especially connected to ministry to the Gentiles. Mark demonstrates that the four Gospels are for all people. They are for the Jews and they are for the Gentiles.

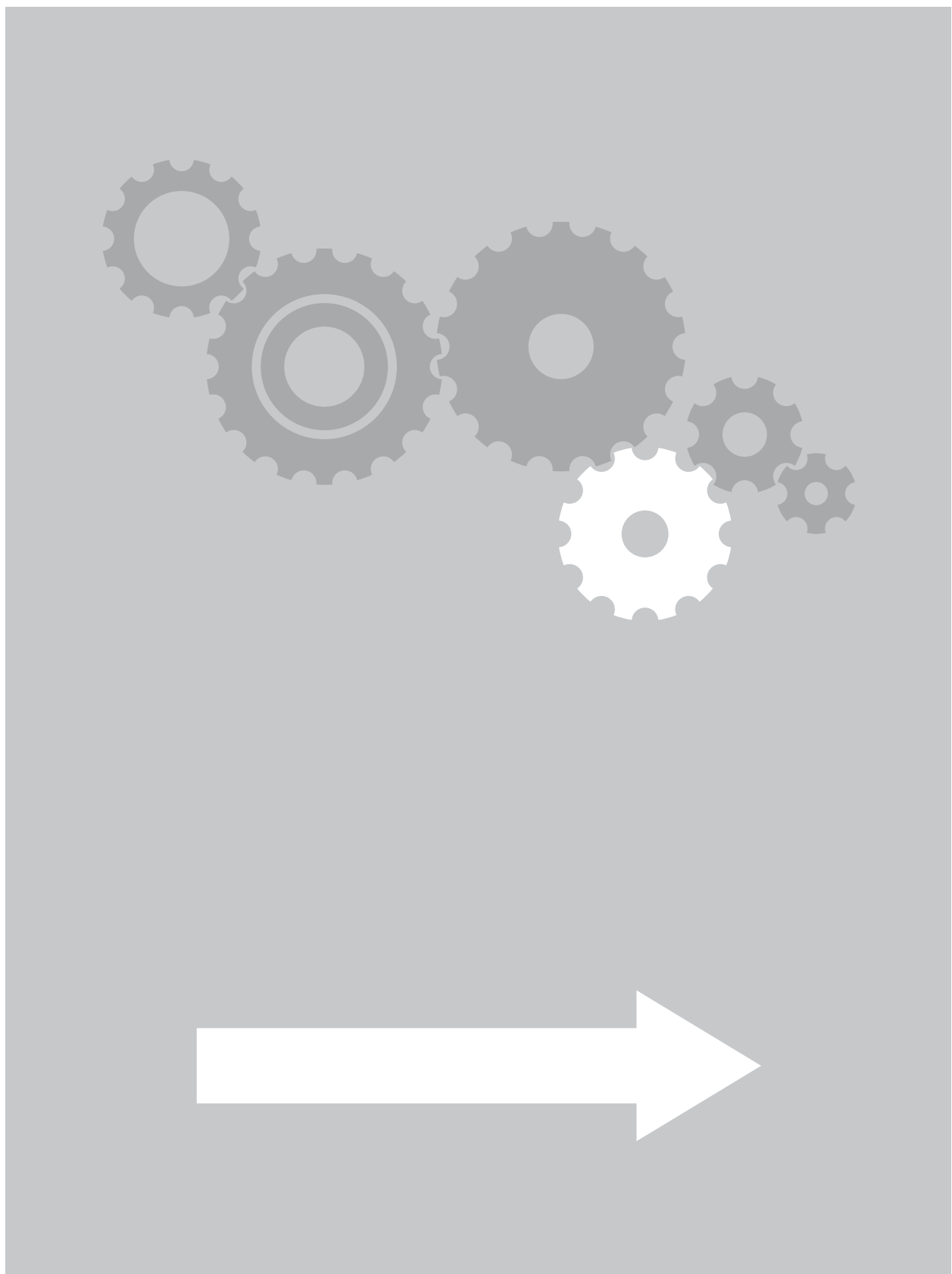
Mark is the shortest Gospel. While it is one of the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), there is a good deal of information found in the other synoptic Gospels that is not found in Mark. For instance, Mark does not describe the birth of Jesus. Mark tells the reader that Jesus was tempted. But he does not mention the specific temptations of Jesus (see **Mark 1:12-13**).

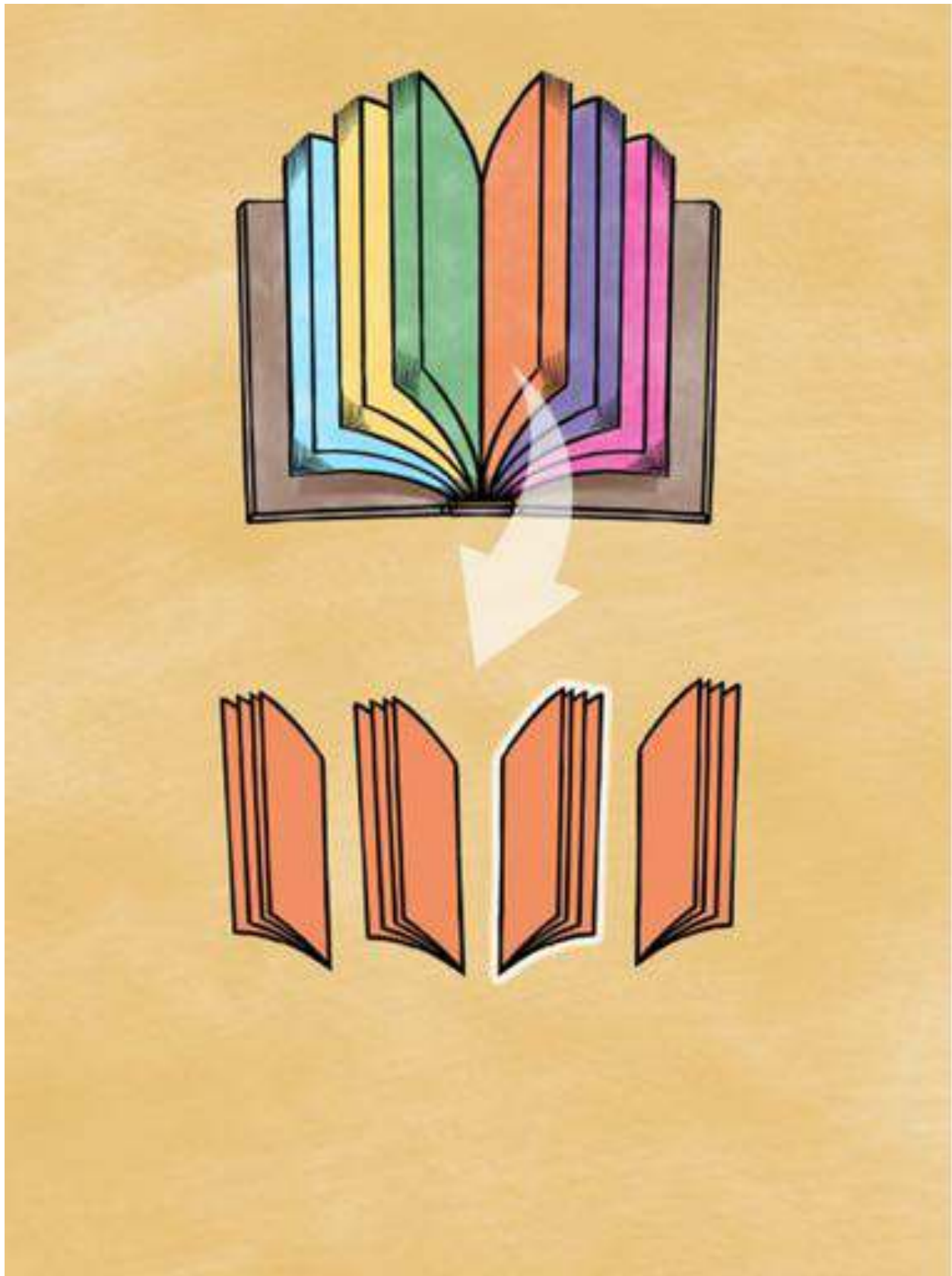
Mark’s name is not mentioned in any of the Gospels. It is mentioned in the book of Acts (see **Acts 12:12, 12:25, and 15:37-41**). He was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10-13). The fact that Mark’s mother owned a house in Jerusalem that, at least on one occasion, was used by the church is significant (**Acts 12:12**). This means Mark was an eyewitness of the earliest events in the church.

A favorite word used by Mark is the word “immediately.” Mark uses this word 36 times. Mark uses this word, it appears, to demonstrate that the kingdom of God was forcefully advancing when Christ came. When Christ came, everything changed. Mark wants his readers to see the forceful impact of Christ’s coming and he wants his readers to forcefully place their faith in Christ.

The ending of Mark is in question. This means many scholars believe **Mark 16:9-20** is not original. The ending does not appear in many of the earliest Greek manuscripts.









## 29. Luke is the longest Gospel.

Luke was intentionally put third in the four-part “book of the Gospel.” The reader is not told why Luke is third. Luke is the longest Gospel. It is also the longest book in the New Testament. Luke is the first part of a two-part book. Thus, Luke and Acts go together. Luke describes the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and focuses on the birth and growth of the church.

The book of Luke is naturally identified with Paul, because Luke traveled with Paul (see **Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, and 27:1-28:16, Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 23-24**). This is significant because this connects the Gospels with Paul. Since Luke traveled with Paul, he clearly did not oppose his theology or think it was dangerous. Therefore, the book of Luke serves as an endorsement of Paul’s letters.

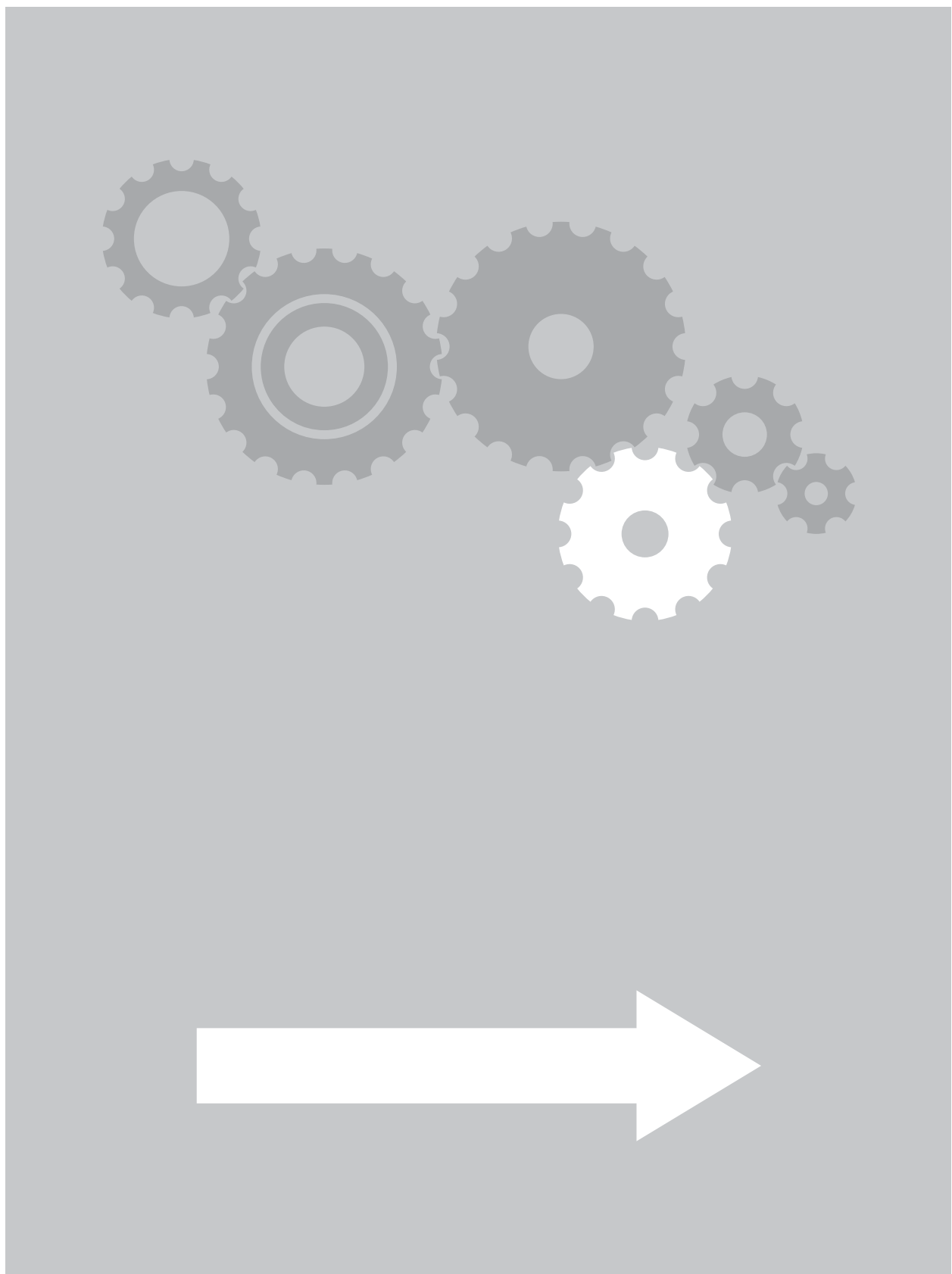
Unlike Matthew and John, Luke was not an eyewitness of the events described in Luke (see **Luke 1:1-2**). He wrote this book (and Acts) to a man named Theophilus (see **Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1-2**).

Luke is one of the three synoptic Gospels. He includes information that is not found in the other synoptic Gospels or in John. For instance, consider the following information found in Luke:

- Luke refers to the birth of John the Baptist.
- He includes Mary’s poem of praise to God before the birth of Jesus (see **Luke 1:46-55**). (Scholars sometimes refer to this as the Magnificat.)
- He includes Zechariah’s prophecy in **Luke 1:68-79**. Mary’s poem and Zechariah’s prophecy are connected to many Old Testament passages.

- Luke refers to the census (**Luke 2:1-7**), the shepherds and angels (**Luke 2:8-21**), and Jesus's presentation at the temple (**Luke 2:22-38**).
- Luke speaks about an event when Jesus was 12 years old (see **Luke 2:41-51**). This is the only Gospel that describes anything from time between Jesus's birth and his adult years. Why did Luke include this story? It appears Luke includes this because the story emphasizes Jesus's perfect love of God and love of God's word from the time he was a boy. Readers can see that from the time of Jesus's boyhood he is growing into the kind of man who could serve as king over God's people (like the king described in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**).
- Luke is the only Gospel that explicitly refers to the ascension of Jesus. (The Ascension is mentioned in Mark 16; however, scholars are uncertain whether these verses are original.)

Luke is the author of 1/3 of the New Testament. By God's grace, he contributed 52 chapters to our understanding of Christ and the early church. However, Luke's writings may go beyond Luke and Acts. Some scholars believe the book of Hebrews was written by Luke. There are many stylistic connections between Luke, Acts, and Hebrews. If Luke was the author of Hebrews, this would add further to the percentage of books written by Luke. All of these books are a gift from God.





## 30. John is different from the other three Gospels.

The book of John is the fourth book in the four-part “book of the Gospel.” The book of John was intentionally placed last. The book of John, like Matthew, is connected to one of Jesus’s 12 apostles. This is important, because these two “bookends” demonstrate that the Gospels are an apostolic work.

John was a fisherman. He and his older brother James were fishing with their father when Jesus called them. He is also one of Jesus’s “inner circle” of apostles. The members of this “inner circle” were Peter, James, and John. The fact that John is one of the three apostles in this group means John was allowed to go places other apostles were not allowed to go. This gave him a unique perspective. For instance, he went places the apostle Matthew didn’t go. He saw things the apostle Matthew didn’t see. The fact that John saw these things and then wrote a Gospel about them is a gift from God. We are able to hear from one of Jesus’s closest friends and associates.

The Gospel of John is very different from the first three Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as synoptic Gospels because they are so similar. The Gospel of John is very different from them.

Here are some of the unique features of the book of John:

- John does not begin with Jesus’s birth. Instead, John begins with a reference to the beginning of creation (see **John 1:1-5**)! It is evident John has been reflecting on **Genesis 1** and its connections to the Lord Jesus.
- John is the only Gospel to include the “I am” statements of Jesus. There are seven “I am” statements in the book (see **John 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, and 15:1**). The fact that there are seven “I am” statements is almost certainly intentional. This probably connects the “I am” statements to the seven days of creation.

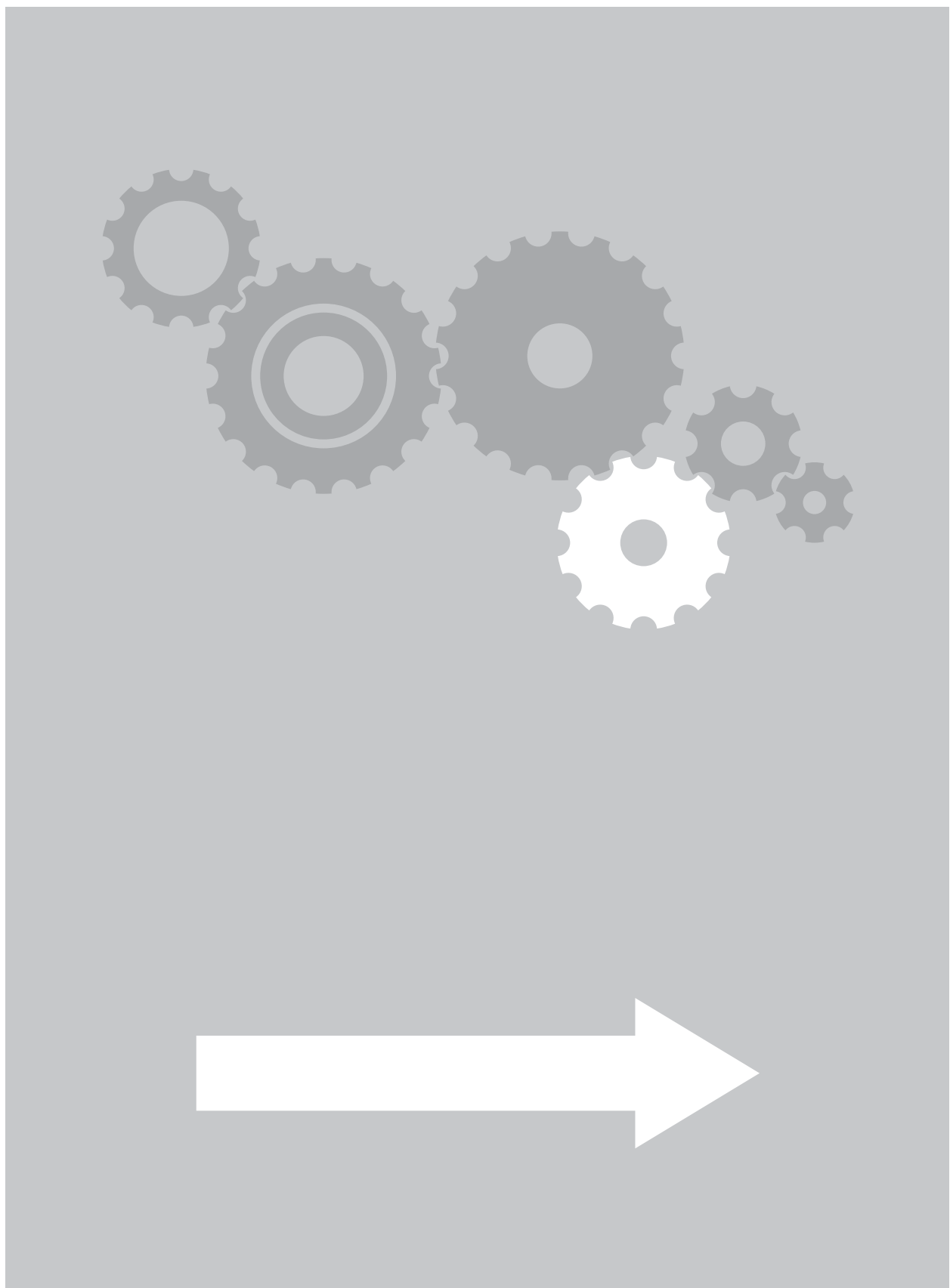
- John is the only Gospel to include the cleansing of the temple before Jesus's public ministry (see **John 2:13-22**).
- John is the only Gospel to include the wedding at Cana in Galilee (see **John 2:1-12**).
- John is the only Gospel to include Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus (see **John 3:1-15**).
- John is the only Gospel to include Jesus's conversation with the woman at the well (see **John 4**).
- John is the only Gospel to include the Upper Room discourse (see **John 13-17**).
- John is the only Gospel to include the washing of the apostles' feet (see **John 13**).
- John is the only Gospel to include Jesus's high priestly prayer (see **John 17**).
- John is the only Gospel to include the story of Jesus and Peter after Jesus's resurrection (see **John 21**).

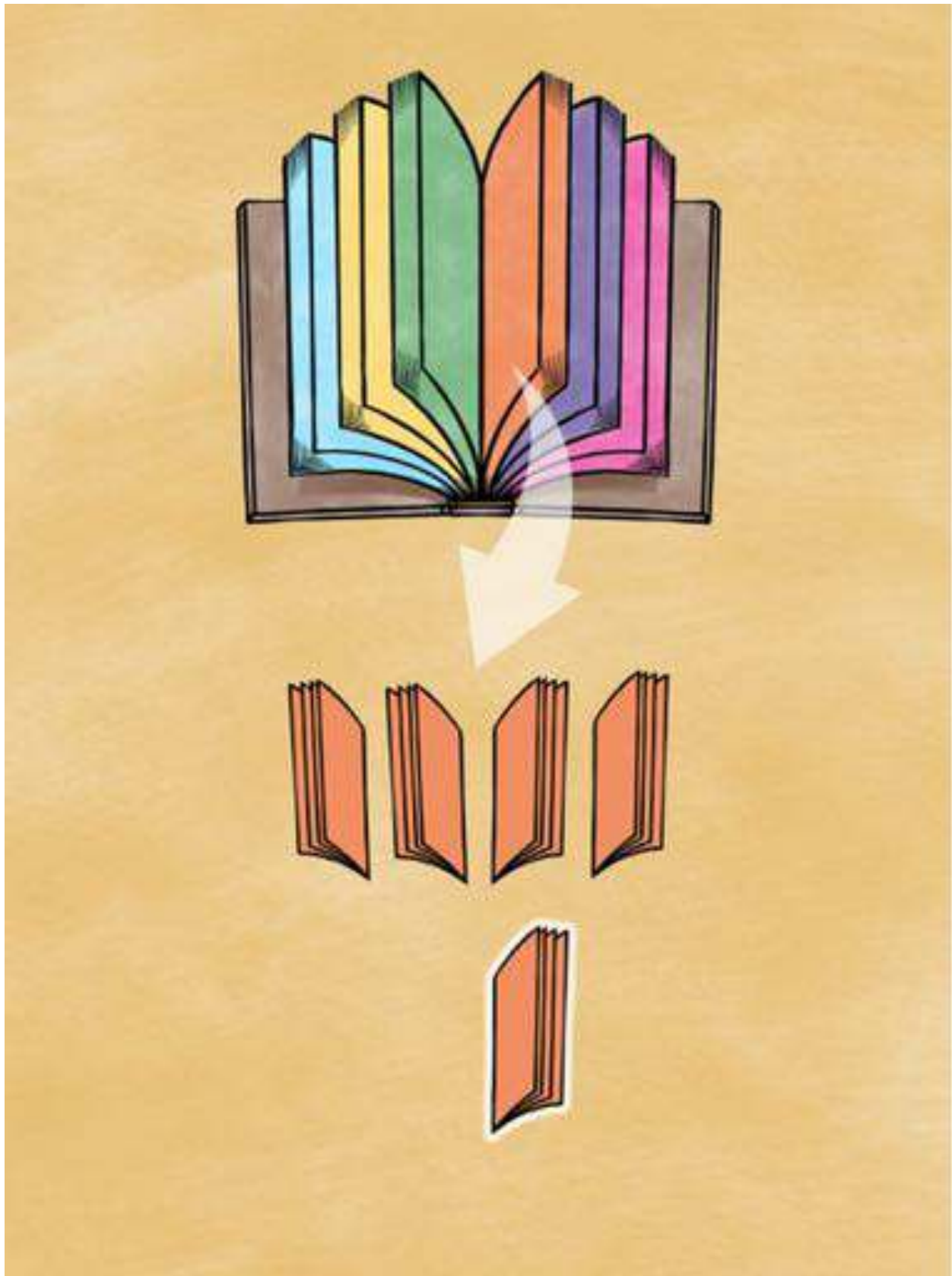
There are many connections between John and 1 John. Also, the book of Revelation has many similarities to the book of John.

In a statement near the end of his book, John tells his readers that he wrote his book so that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ.

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. **John 20:30-31***

The fact that this verse appears near the end of John means it also appears near the end of the four-part book of the Gospel. This explains, at least in part, why the book of John is the last book in the book of the Gospel. These verses tell the reader that the goal of the four-part book of the Gospel is to lead people to faith.







## 31. Acts tells the story of the early church.

The book of Acts is not part of the four-part book of the Gospel. But while Acts is not part of this four-part book, it is definitely connected to it. The last event spoken about in the four-part book of the Gospel is the ascension of Jesus (see **Luke 24:50-53**). Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and focuses on the events that took place among the people of God in the first decades after the ascension of Jesus.

Another thing connecting Acts with the four-part book of the Gospel is the fact that Acts is the second book in Luke's two-book collection (Luke and Acts). Luke was writing to a man named Theophilus. It is clear Luke wanted Theophilus to read both books in this collection. Thus, because of its connection to Luke, the book of Acts is permanently linked to the four-part book of the Gospel.

The early parts of Acts tell the story of Jesus's ascension and the first days of the church. These chapters provide the reader with the information necessary to move from a focus on Jesus and his apostles to a focus on the church. After the book of Acts, the reader of the New Testament find many letters written to churches and to individuals who were connected to churches. Acts prepares readers for these letters.

In some ways, Acts may be considered a two-part book. The first part of the book is especially connected to the ministry of the original apostles of Christ and to the church in Jerusalem. Even though the apostle Paul is introduced in these first chapters, he is not the focus. The apostle Peter, the apostle John, and James the brother of Jesus are all major figures in the first part of Acts. It is significant that Peter, John, and James all wrote books in the New Testament. This means the early chapters in the book of Acts prepare readers to accept the letters that were written by Peter, James, and John. In fact, in many early manuscripts, Acts is placed next to James, 1-2 Peter,

1-3 John, and Jude. (Acts prepares readers to accept the book of Jude because Jude, like James, is Jesus's brother.)

But the second part of the book is especially focused on the apostle Paul and his journeys to the churches located outside of Israel. The focus on Paul in the second half of the book prepares readers to accept the letter collection written by the apostle Paul. This means the book of Acts helps readers accept and understand Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. (Scholars are not certain who wrote the book of Hebrews, however, in the earliest days it was connected to Paul's letter collection.)

By focusing on the original apostles and on Paul, the book of Acts demonstrates that there is no ongoing conflict between the original apostles and Paul. This means the book of Acts demonstrates there is no conflict between the "general" epistles and Paul's letter collection. Acts 15 demonstrates, very clearly, that the church is unified and Paul was not teaching something strange. After reading Acts, the reader should not see any discrepancy between these two groups of letters.

The book of Acts introduces major characters that appear later in the New Testament. Paul is one of the most important people introduced in Acts. Beyond this, Timothy and Titus are introduced in the book of Acts. Readers get to know Luke from the book of Acts.

But the book of Acts does more than just introduce individuals. It also introduces the reader to churches. These churches appear in letters in the rest of the New Testament. The book of Acts allows the reader to find out more about the churches in Rome, Philippi, Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Galatia. This prepares the reader for letters going to these churches. It also prepares readers for the letters to the churches in Revelation.

To some people, it may appear that the book of Acts does not have an ending. At the end of the book, the apostle Paul is in prison in Rome. The reader does not find out what happened to him. This, also, prepares the reader for the rest of the New Testament. Later letters help the reader find out more about the things that happened to Paul after this imprisonment. But the reader needs to remember that Luke was not writing about Paul's history. Luke was writing about the things Jesus was continuing to do after his resurrection (see **Acts 1:1**). By "leaving" Paul in prison, the reader is left wondering what will happen next. The story isn't ended in Acts because the story of the Holy Spirit's work in the churches has not ended. The work of the church is continuing even today. Acts demonstrates that Jesus kept his promise. He did pour out his Holy Spirit on his people. He is still keeping his promise.