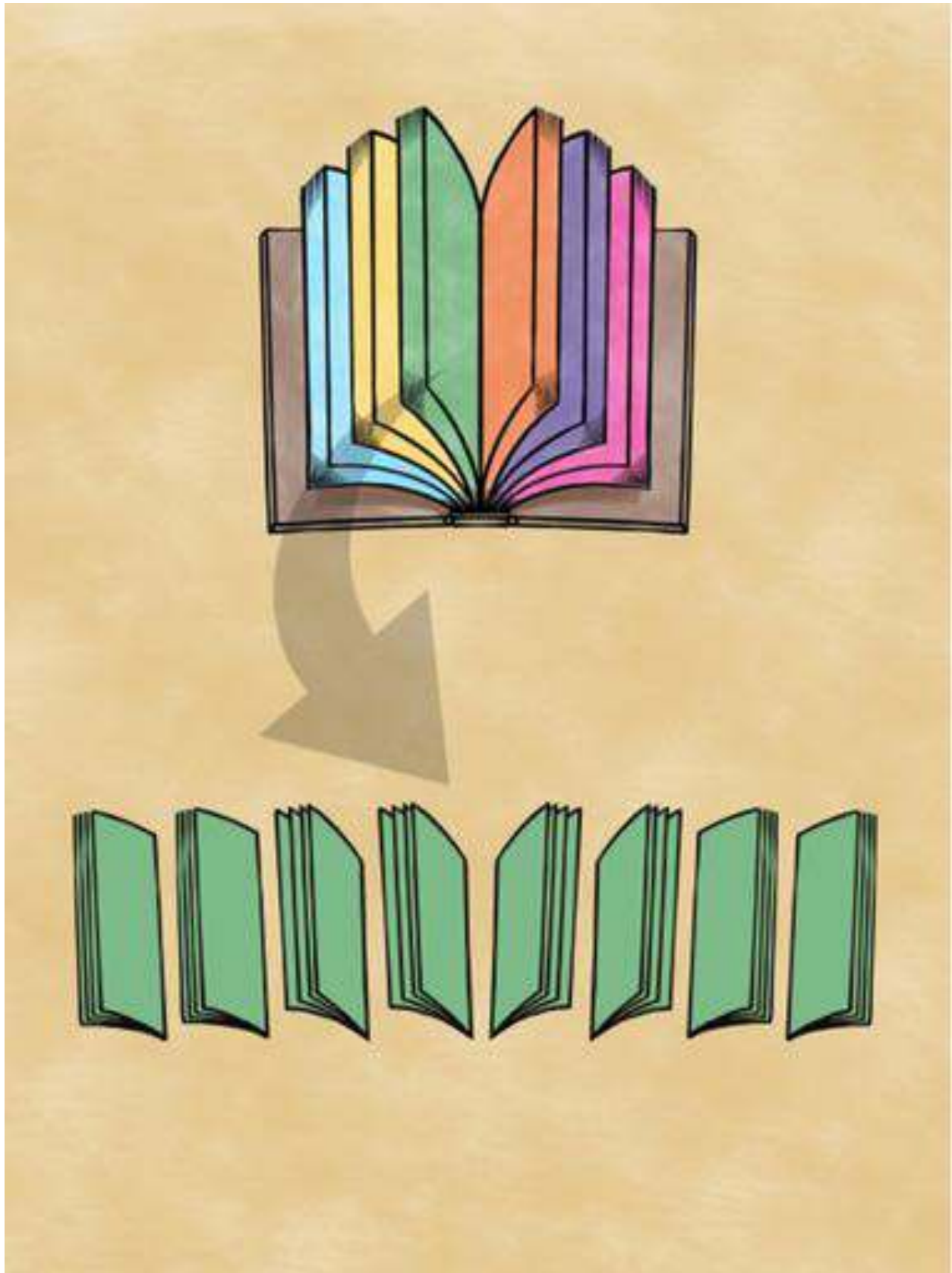


DEVELOPING LEADERS

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE WRITINGS



1. What are the Writings?

The Writings is a collection of books found in the Old Testament. There are three collections of books in the Old Testament. The three collections are named the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. In Hebrew Bibles, the Writings appear after the Law and the Prophets.

The Old Testament is not divided into three separate collections of books in modern Bibles. However, it is evident that Jesus himself recognized these three separate collections of books within the Old Testament and he used material from all three collections of books in his teaching (see **Luke 24:44-45**).

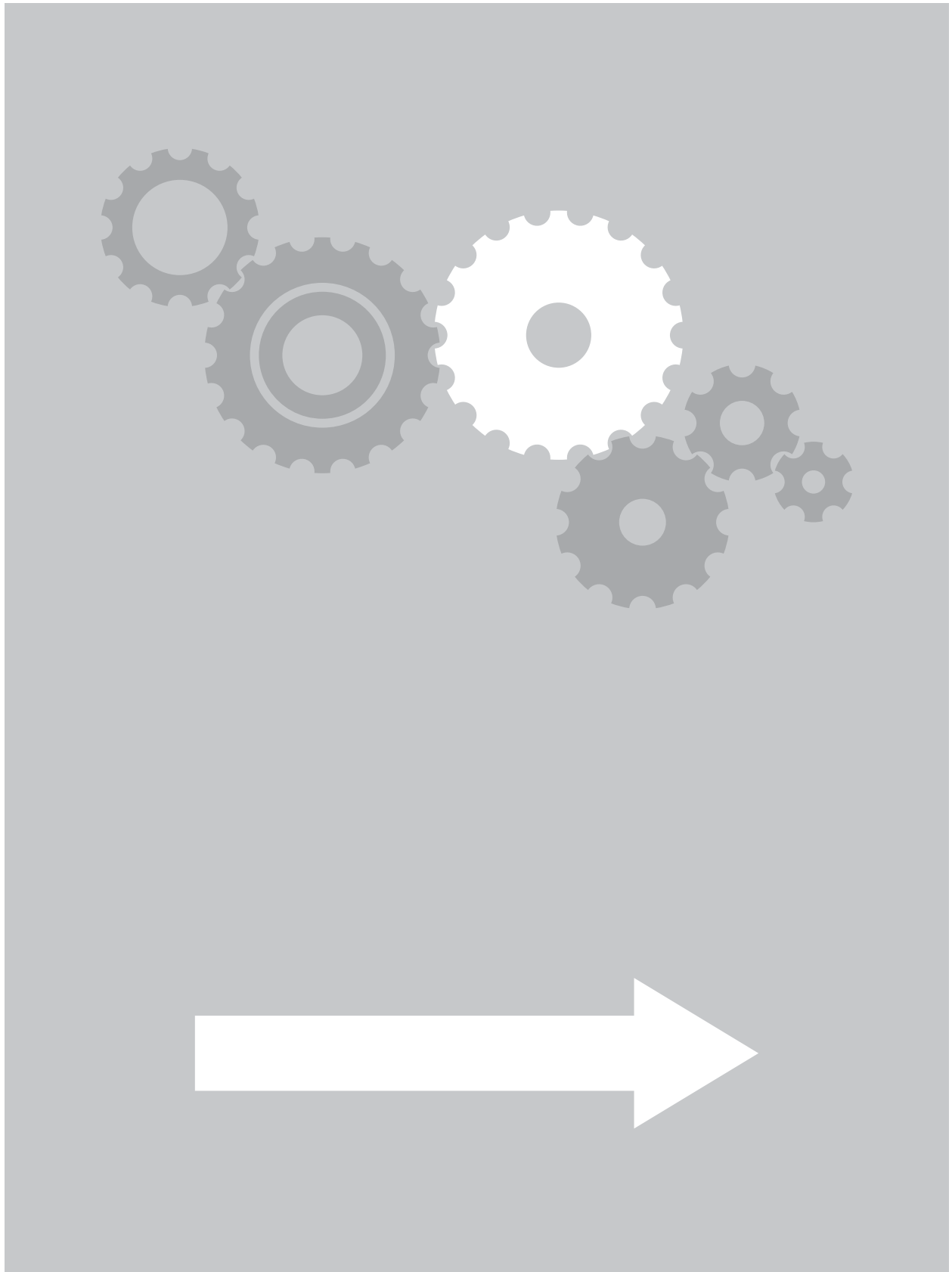
The Apostle Paul also recognized different collections of books in the Old Testament. Like Jesus, he used these different collections in his preaching and teaching (see **Acts 28:23**).

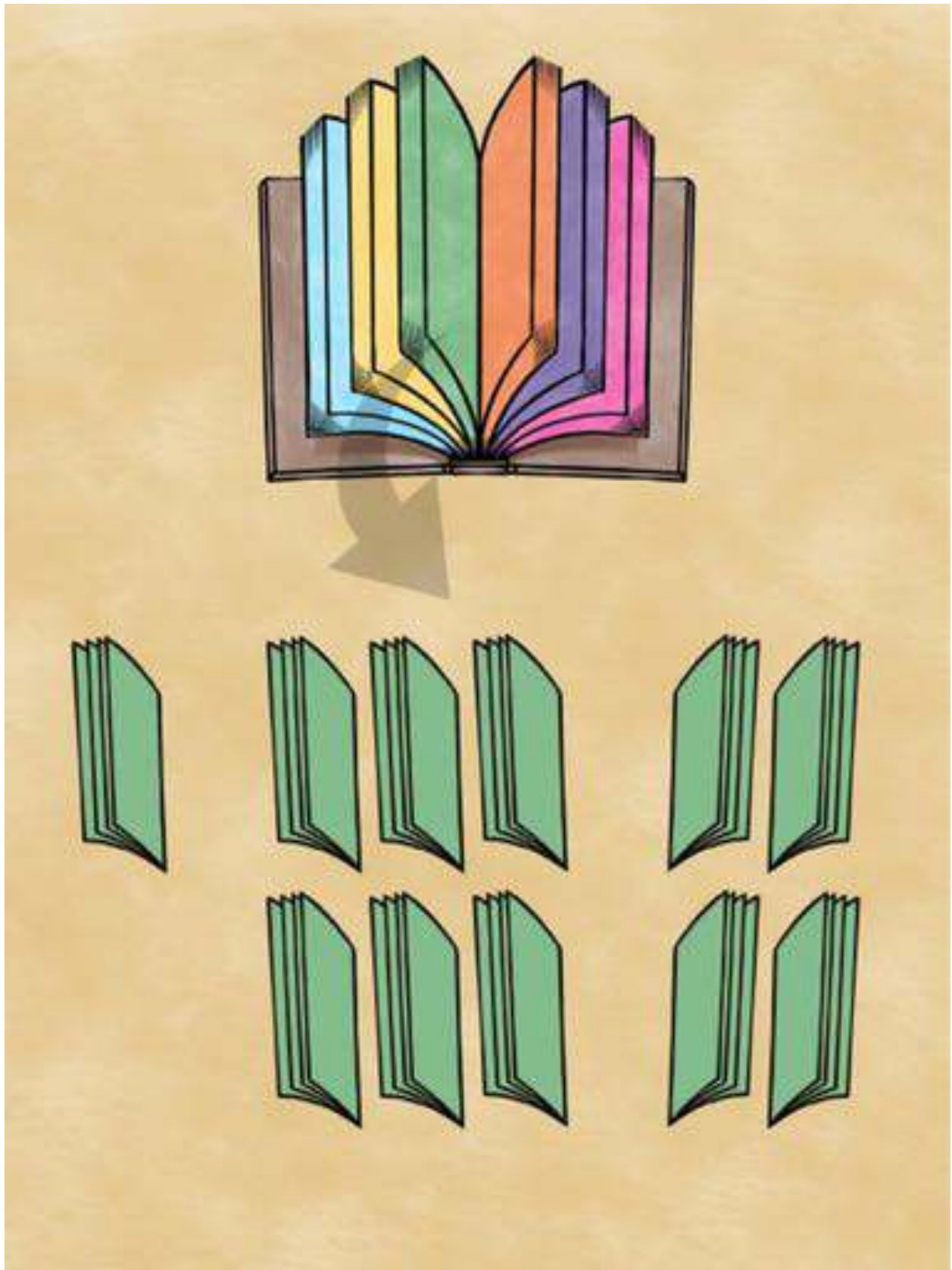
The books in the Law are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books were all written by Moses. These books are far more than ancient history. These books speak of Christ and of the gospel event (see **John 5:45-47**). The books in the Law are different from all other books in the Bible because they are first. These books never quote or allude to other books of the Bible. However, the books in the Law are frequently quoted or alluded to by other books in the Bible.

The books in the Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1-2 Samuel was originally one book), Kings (1-2 Kings was originally one book), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and “the Twelve.” The Twelve are sometimes referred to as the “minor prophets” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). These books also speak of Christ and of the gospel event (see **Acts 3:17-26** and **1 Peter 1:10-12**).

The Writings is the third collection of books in the Old Testament. The exact order in which the books in this section are arranged is different in different ancient lists. However, the most ancient list arranged them in the following way: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered to be one book), and Chronicles (1-2 Chronicles was originally one book). These books, like the Law and the Prophets, also speak of Christ and of the gospel event (see, again, **1 Peter 1:10-12**).





2. How are the Writings arranged?

The Writings appear after the Prophets. This means the first book of the Writings (Ruth) appears immediately after the last book in the Prophets (Malachi).

The books in the Writings are arranged in different ways in different ancient lists. However, the most ancient list arranges the books in the following way: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra and Nehemiah were originally considered to be one book), and Chronicles (1-2 Chronicles was originally one book).

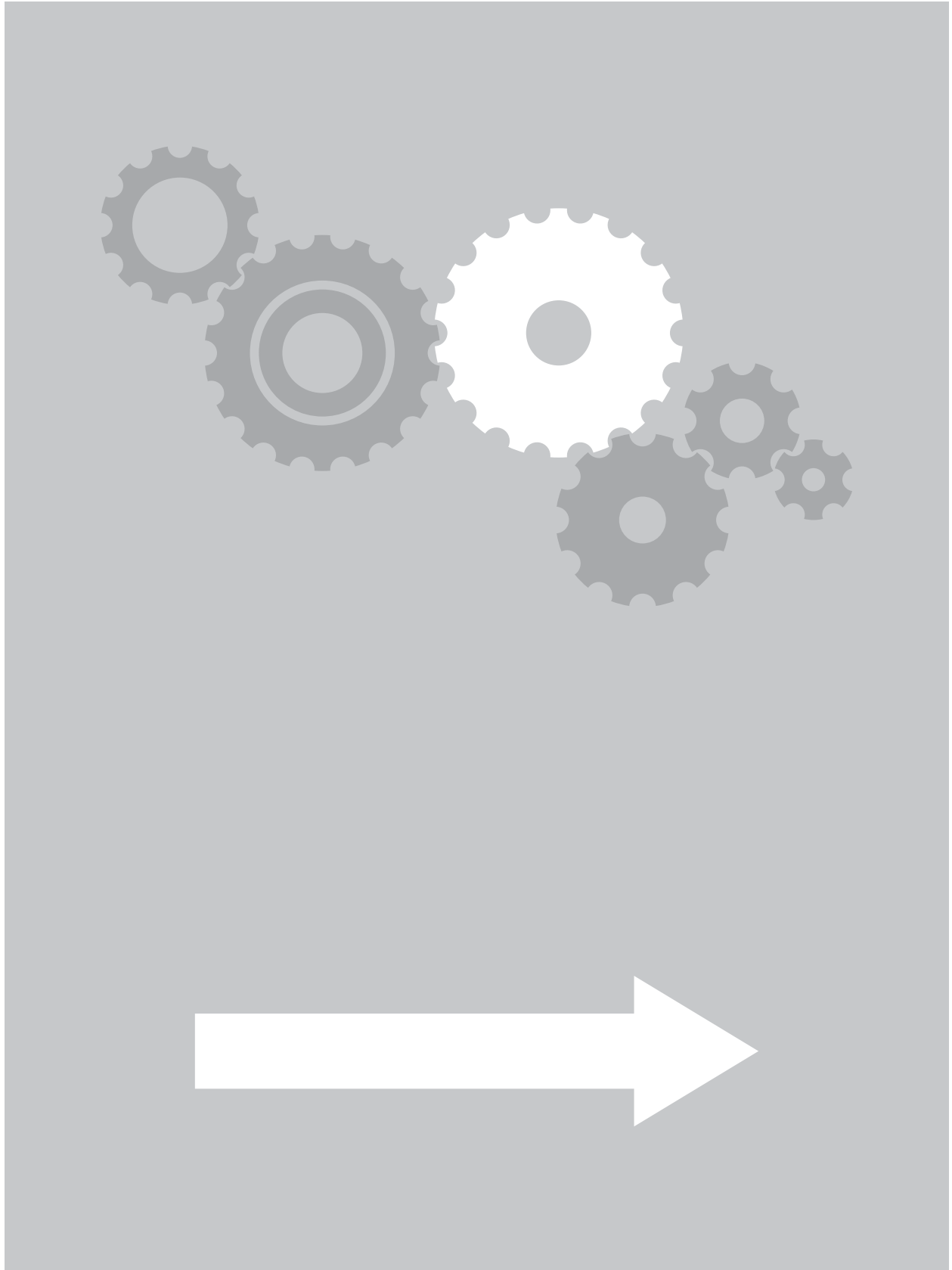
The books within the Writings may be broken down into two sections. There are books of poetry. These books are all placed together. And there are books of narrative. These books are also placed together. There are six books in the poetry section of the Writings. These books are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. There are four books in the narrative section of the Writings. These books are Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

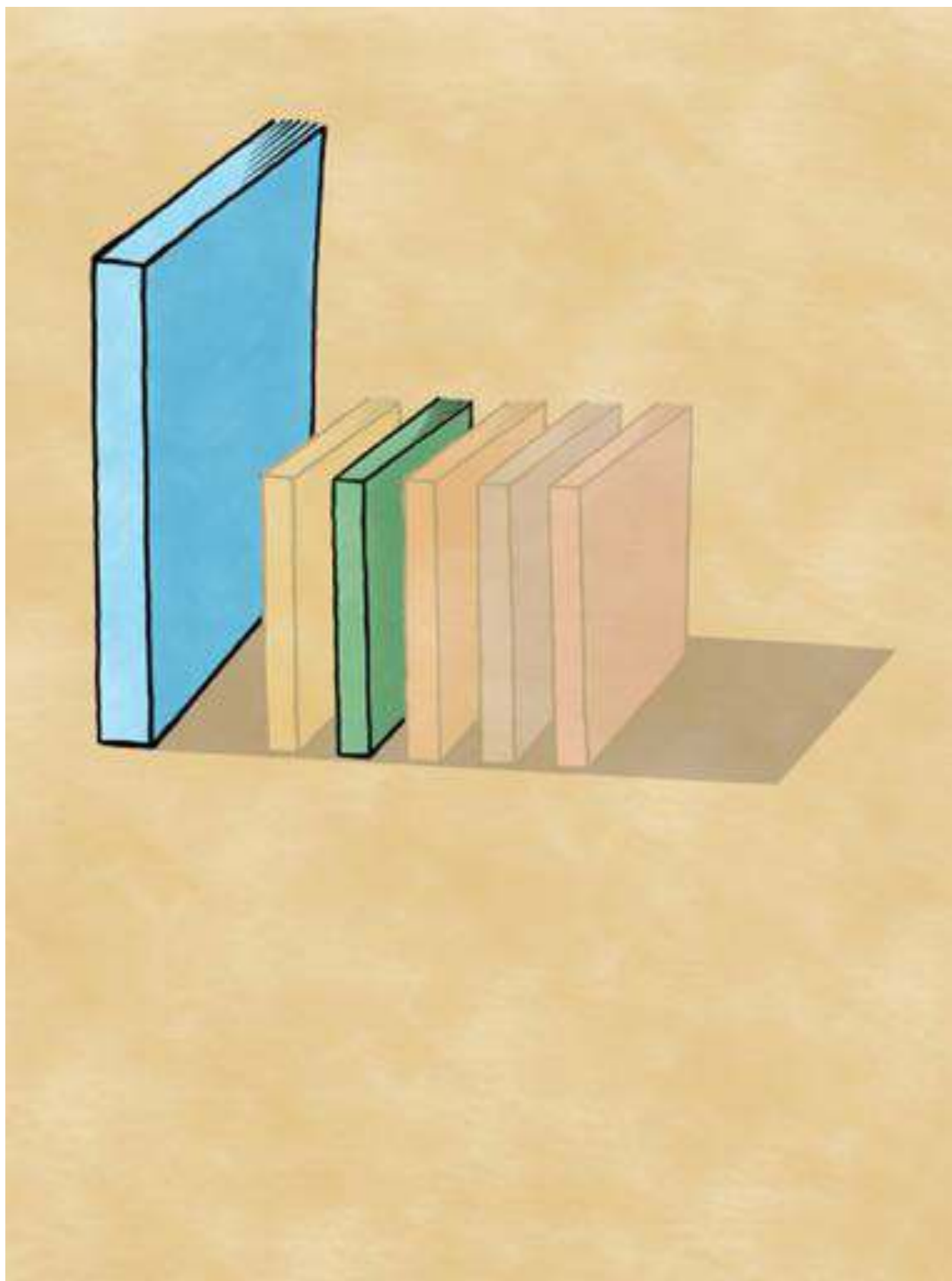
The only book in the Writings that seems out of place is the book of Ruth. Ruth is a book of narrative, however, it is not placed with the books of narrative. Instead, it is placed before the books of poetry. Ruth is the first book in the Writings. Why does this particular book appear first? It is likely Ruth appears first because the editor (or editors) who arranged the Old Testament into its final form recognized that Ruth was the perfect introduction to the Writings.

The book of Chronicles is the last book in the Writings. But it is more than just the last book in the Writings. Since the Writings is the final collection of books within the Old Testament, Chronicles is also the last book in the Old Testament. It is likely

Chronicles appears last because the editor who arranged the Old Testament into its final form recognized that Chronicles was the perfect ending to the Old Testament.

Chronicles does more than just end the Old Testament. It also serves as an introduction to the New Testament. The book of Chronicles naturally leads to the book of Matthew.





3. How are the Writings different from the Law?

The Law is an introduction to the rest of the Old Testament and to the entire Bible itself. The Law introduces the reader to God, the most important character in the Bible. The Law introduces the reader to people and explains why they were created. The Law introduces the reader to the story being told by the Bible. The Law introduces the reader to the importance of God's place, the importance of God's word, the problem of sin, and to God's solution for sin.

The Writings do not do any of these things. **They are not introductory texts.** For example, the Writings do not introduce the reader to God. Instead, the Writings continue to describe God. They continue the progress that was started in the Law. The Writings do not introduce the reader to the story being told in the Bible. Instead, the Writings continue the story that was introduced in the Law. And the Writings do not introduce the reader to people, to the problem of sin, and to God's solution for sin. Instead, the Writings continue to describe people, the problem of sin, and God's solution for sin. Thus, the Writings are not introductory. They are **progressive** in nature.

The Writings are also **celebratory** in nature. Even though the Law is celebratory in certain places (consider, for instance, the poem of victory in **Exodus 15**), the Writings are celebratory in many, many places. For instance, the Psalms regularly celebrate God's anointed King (the Christ), God's creation, God's care for his people, God's word, God's righteous character, God's perfect judgment, and God's help. All of these subjects were introduced in the Law. But they are especially celebrated in the Writings. Proverbs celebrates wisdom. Proverbs celebrates the gift of a godly wife. It is, in this sense, a celebration of a subject that was introduced in Genesis 2. Song of Solomon is a celebration of marriage and intimacy. These themes are spoken of in

Song of Solomon in ways that go far beyond the introduction of both of these themes in Genesis 2.

A major difference between the Law and the Writings is the fact that the books within the Law never quote any of the books within the Writings. Beyond this, the books within the Law never allude to any of the books within the Writings. This means the books in the Law do not directly or indirectly refer to any of the books in the Writings.

However, the books within the Writings frequently quote verses or parts of verses from the Law. Beyond this, the authors in the Writings frequently allude to things which are found within the Law.

Based on their repeated use of the Law, it is clear the authors of the books within the Writings assume that their readers have read the Law. Many, many of the poems and stories in the Writings only make sense if the reader has read the Law.

It may be helpful to compare the Law to a very deep well of water. The Writings (and all of the other sections of Scripture) regularly travel to this well (i.e., the Law) and draw water from this well. The Law, however, never draws water from the Writings (or from the other sections of Scripture).

Another example may be of a shadow. The Law casts a very large shadow on the Writings (and on the rest of the Bible). This means the preacher or teacher needs to know the message of the Law very well in order to understand the Writings. If the preacher or teacher does not understand the message of the Law, he or she will not be able to explain the shadow which is cast by it upon the Writings.

Another major difference between the Law and the Writings is the location of God's people which is being focused upon. The Law ends with Israel about to enter into the Promised Land. The people have been part of an **exodus**. Moses warns the people that because of disobedience, they would not stay in the land for long. They surely would worship idols and would be driven from the land (see **Deuteronomy 4:25-31**).

This exile from the Promised Land happened during the time described in the Prophets. But God's promise in Deuteronomy 4 wasn't just about exile. He also promised to bring his people back to his place. This is a reference to a **second exodus**. The people in the Writings are, for the most part, waiting for that second exodus. They are not settled in their final resting place yet. They are living in exile (for example, Esther and Daniel), or are struggling to return to God's place (for example, Ezra-Nehemiah). Many of the books are about living righteously during times of affliction (for example, Job and Lamentations). Thus, the Writings are for people waiting for the full restoration of God's people to their place.

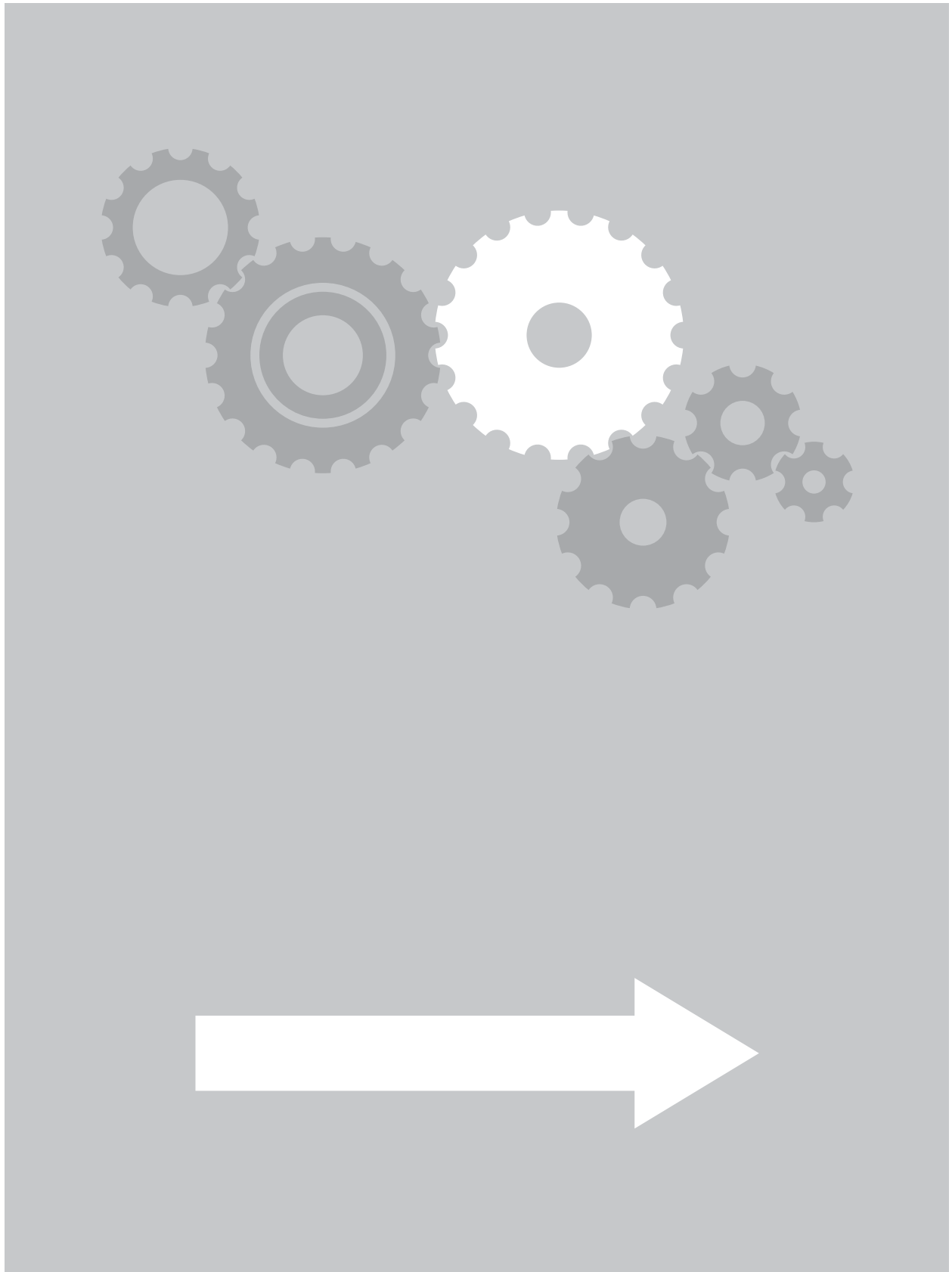
The Writings end with Israel having re-entered the Promised Land after a long period of exile. But even though the people of God have re-entered the Promised Land, it is clear the promises God made to Abraham (see **Genesis 12:1-3**) have not been fulfilled. The second temple is less glorious than the first temple. It is small. Beyond this, the people have not become obedient. As Ezra-Nehemiah makes clear, the people are still disobedient. Their hearts have not yet been "circumcised" (see **Deuteronomy 30:6**). Thus, the Writings end with the reader still waiting for God's true dwelling place to be established and for God's people to begin walking in obedience.

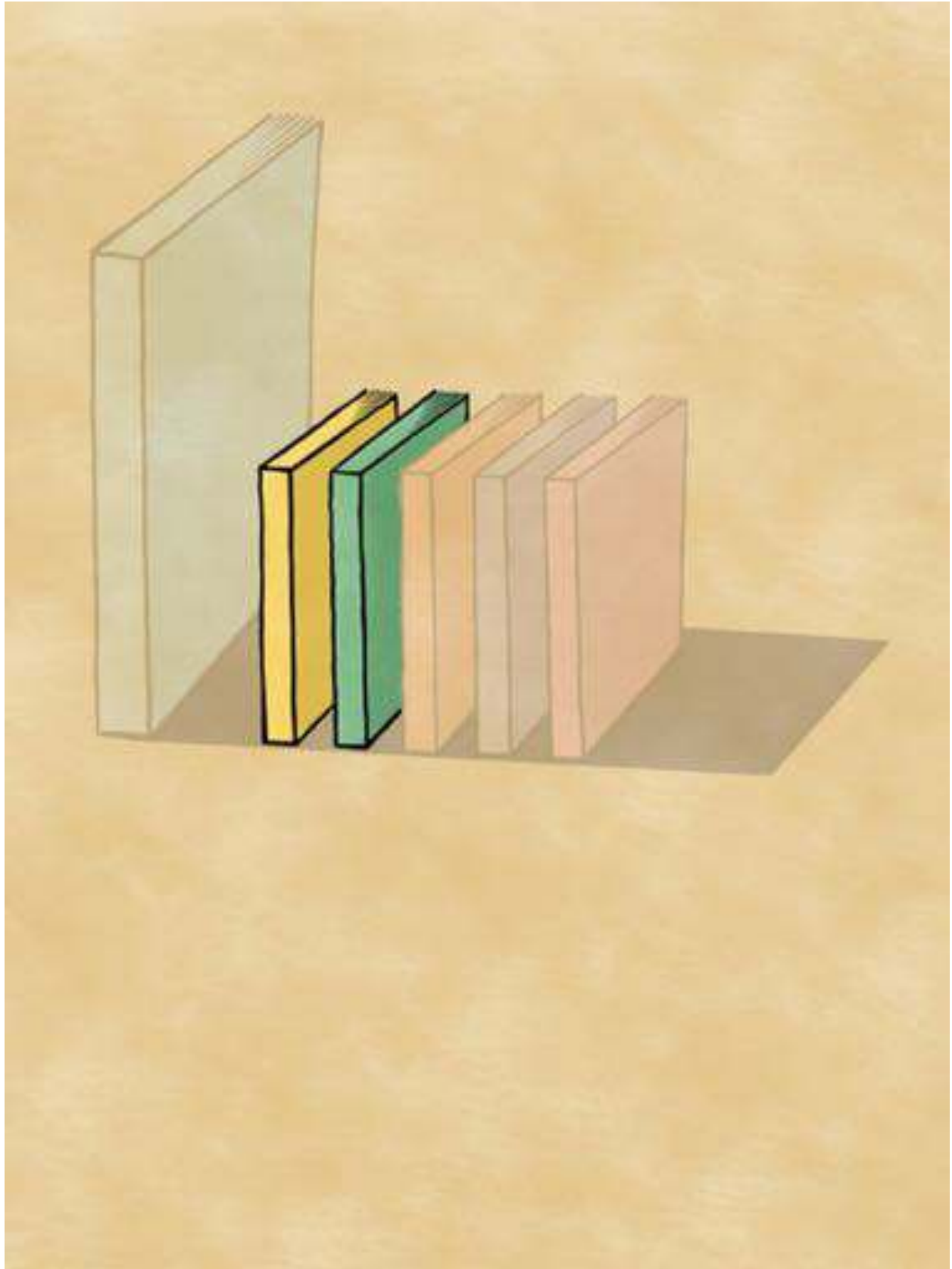
That is why the last words in the book of Chronicles are so important. Chronicles is the last book in the Writings. Thus, the last words in Chronicles are the

last words in the Writings and, at the same time, the last words in the Old Testament. The last words in the Writings are a proclamation from King Cyrus regarding the building of a house for God:

“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 36:23**

Chronicles ends with a commandment for the temple to be built. Who will fulfill Cyrus’s words? Who is the man who will go up and build God’s house (his temple)? Ultimately, Cyrus’s words are fulfilled by Jesus. He is the one who builds the “house” for God (see **John 2:18-22** and **Ephesians 2:19-22**). He is the one who does what the first Adam could not do. He brings God’s people back to God’s place and leads them in worship.





4. How are the Writings similar to the Prophets?

The Prophets and the Writings are similar to one another in several ways. Some of these ways are outlined below.

First, both sections, like all Scripture, speak of Christ and the gospel event (see **Luke 24:25-27, 24:44-47, and 1 Peter 1:10-12**).

Second, both sections are both part of God's inspired word and everything written in them will come to pass (see **John 10:35**).

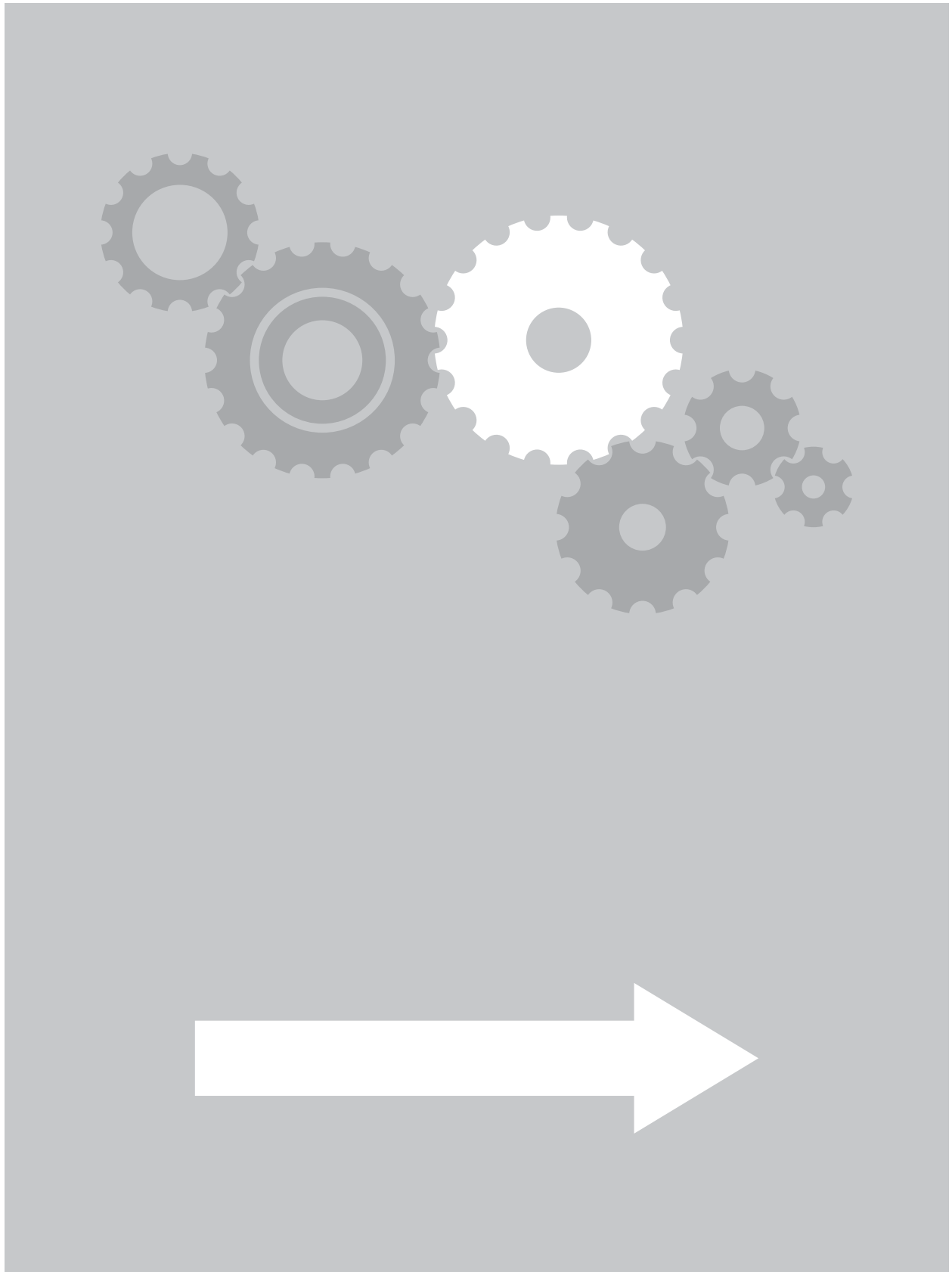
Third, both sections are intended to be used by the church. Both the Prophets and the Writings are "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (**2 Timothy 3:16**). These sections of the Old Testament are gifts from God and are intended to be used by the church in training men and women of God so they might grow to maturity (see **2 Timothy 3:17**).

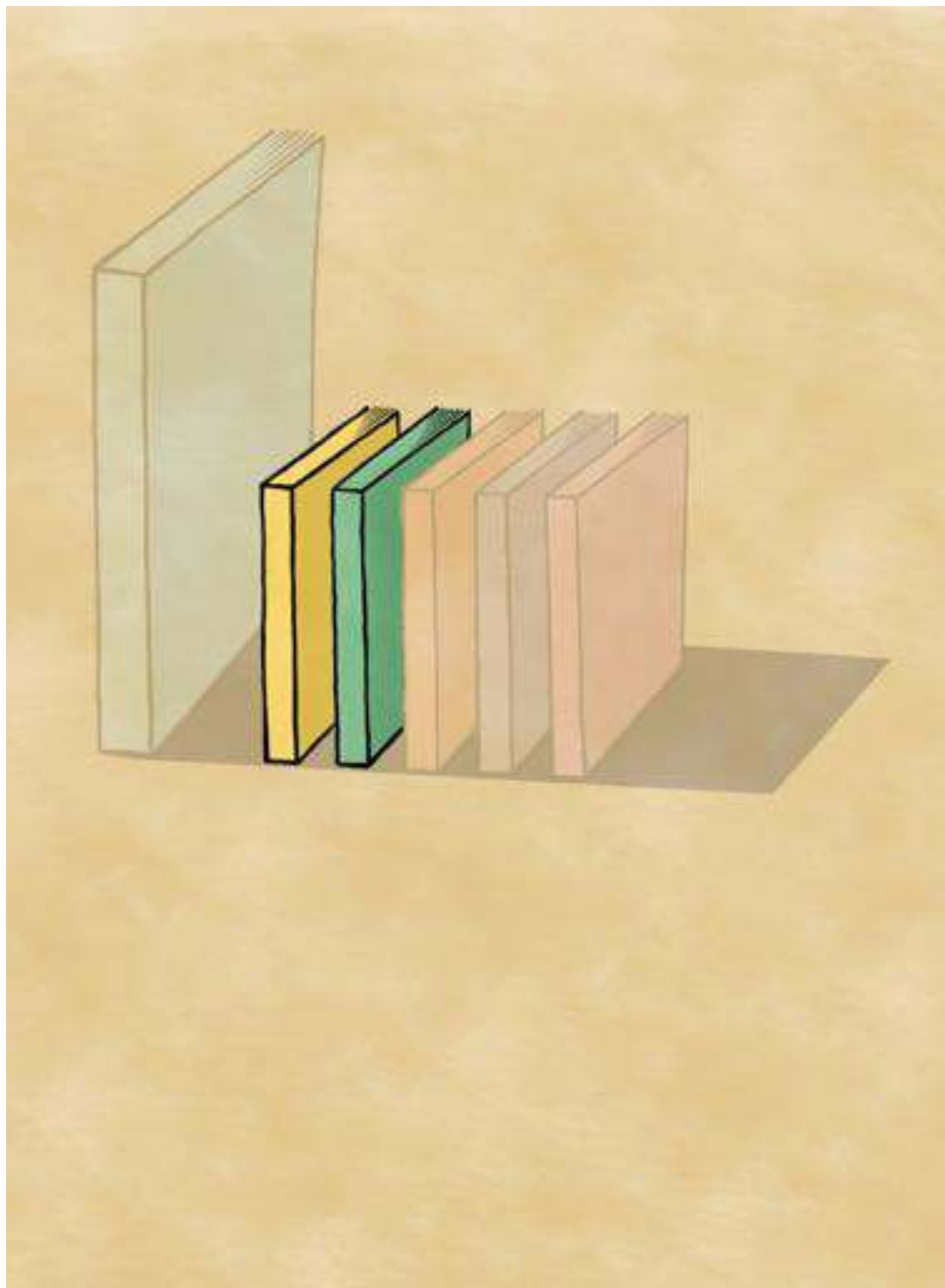
Fourth, books from within the Prophets and the Writings are quoted frequently in the New Testament. Jesus and the Apostles frequently use material from both sections. In fact, the Old Testament book that is most quoted or alluded to in the New Testament is the Psalms. This is from the Writings. The Old Testament book that is the second most quoted or alluded to in the New Testament is Isaiah. This is from the Prophets.

Fifth, the Prophets and the Writings both include narrative books and poetic books. Within both the Prophets and the Writings, the narrative books are placed together and the poetic books are placed together. The narrative books in the Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The narrative books in the Writings are Daniel,

Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The poetic books in the Prophets are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve. The poetic books in the Writings are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations.







5. How are the Writings different from the Prophets?

While there are many similarities between the Writings and the Prophets, there are also many important differences. Outlined below are a few of the differences between the Writings and the Prophets.

They are different in **placement** within the Old Testament canon (canon is the word used to describe the accepted list of books in the Bible). The Prophets are the middle section of the Old Testament. They appear before the Writings. It appears the editor(s) who arranged the Old Testament wanted the message of the Prophets to precede the message of the Writings. In other words, it is beneficial to have read the Prophets before reading the Writings. It is beneficial to have the message of the Prophets in mind before reading the Writings. This does not mean the Writings cannot be read on their own. It does mean, however, that there is great benefit to reading the Prophets first. The message in the Prophets provides the reader with the context necessary to understand the message that is found in the Writings.

For instance, if a person reads the Psalms before reading all of the Prophets (which include Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve), he or she will more likely put emphasis on King David as the central character of the Psalms. This will lead to a person thinking the Psalms are “about” David. However, when a person reads the Psalms after having read all of the Prophets (including Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve), he or she will probably not see King David as the central character of the Psalms. Rather, the reader will understand that the Writings are not looking backward in time to David. They are looking forward to David’s coming heir—the Christ! The one reading the Psalms after reading all of the Prophets is far more likely to see the Christ as the central character of the Psalms. This is the correct reading of the Psalms. These are his songs.

It is important to note that the Writings are the conclusion of the Old Testament. This is intentional. They, not the Prophets, serve as a hopeful bridge to the New Testament. The last words in Chronicles leave the reader waiting for the one who will build the true temple. That person has come. His name is Jesus.

They are different in **tone**. The Prophets, because they are speaking to and about disobedient people, are more negative. The Writings, because they are speaking to and about obedient people, are more positive.

This does not mean that the Prophets have only negative sections. This is not the case. There are many beautiful sections in the Prophets speaking of the glories of Christ and of his kingdom and of the restoration of God's people to God's place. And there are many obedient followers of God spoken of in the Prophets. However, the overall tone of the Prophets is negative.

And this does not mean that the Writings are entirely positive. There are many sections in which people are disobeying God. The overall tone, however, of the Writings is positive.

They are different in **location**. The Prophets, for the most part, are filled with stories about the people of God when they were living in the Promised Land. These books describe the time period leading up to the tragic event when Israel was driven from the land because of idolatry (see **Deuteronomy 4:15-26** and **29:16-28**). Many of the books in the Writings focus on people who are living in exile and who are forced to live in faith outside of God's good place while they wait for God to bring them back to his good place (see **Deuteronomy 4:27-31** and **30:1-10**).

They are different in **purpose**. The Prophets were telling the story of Israel, for the most part, while it was walking in sin. The Prophets include many calls for repentance. The Writings are telling the story of God's people in exile. The Writings are, for the most part, not a call for repentance. Rather, they are a call for the saints to persevere and believe in God's promises as they wait for them to be fulfilled.

The poetry in the Writings (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations) seems intended to help people live faithfully in the difficult days before the glorious day when God's promises are completely fulfilled. These poems provide great help for God's people in every area of life. For instance, the poetic books within the Writings provide great comfort and encouragement during times of extreme suffering (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations). The poetic books provide guidance for God's people who are married (Proverbs and Song of Solomon). And the poetic books provide help for people so they might walk in wisdom in an oftentimes confusing world (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes).

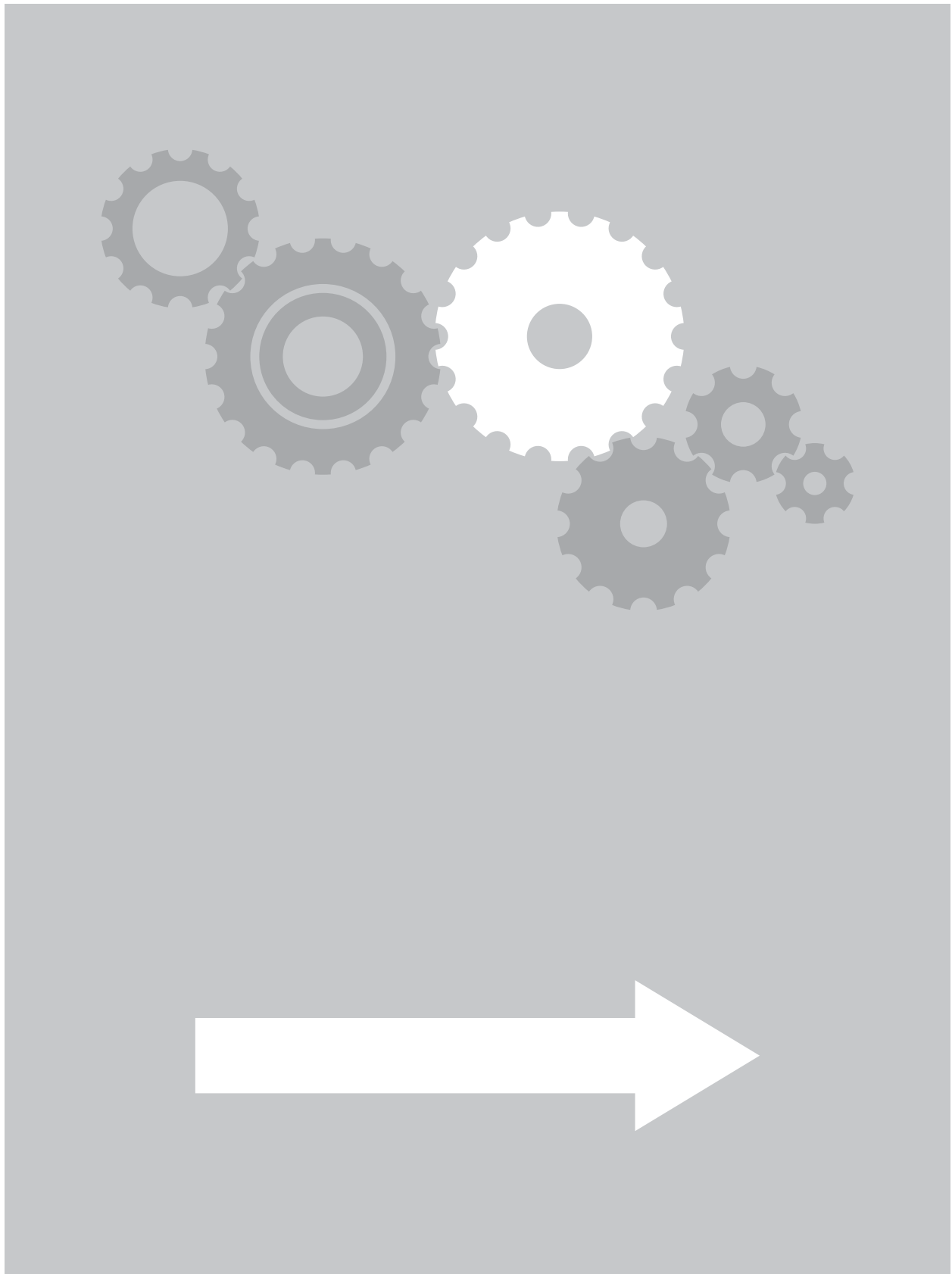
They are different in regard to the **one who was reigning over the people of God** during the time when they lived. The people in the Prophets were, for most of the time period described in the Prophets, living under a king who was supposed to be leading God's people to obedience. Some of these kings were obedient to Yahweh. Most of these kings were disobedient.

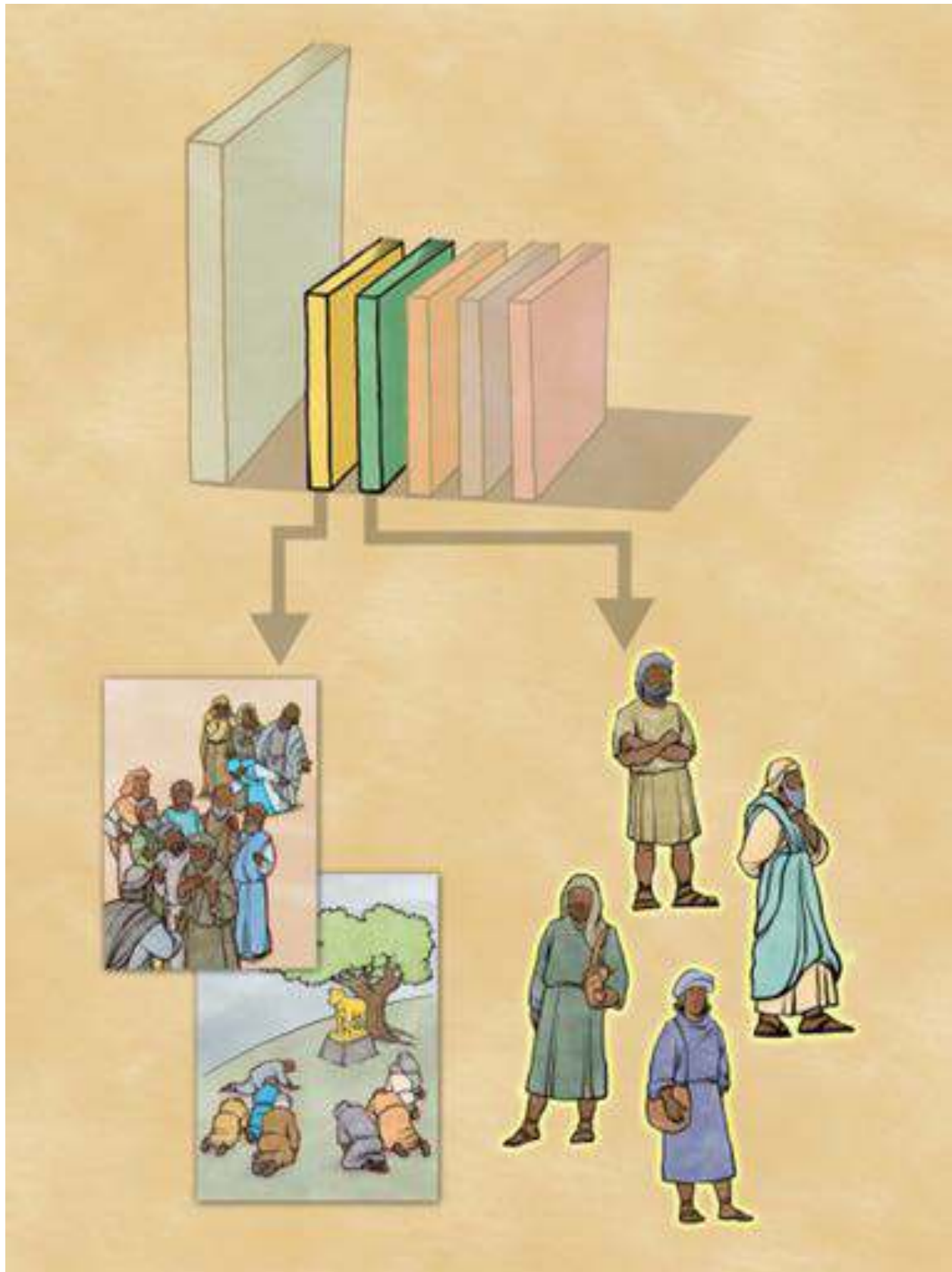
However, the main characters described in the narrative books of the Writings do not have a king of Judah or a king of Israel reigning over them. Some of the people in the Writings have a foreign king ruling over them (Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Mordecai, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah). But these people were, like all of God's people, waiting for God's anointed King—the Christ. Believers today are no longer waiting for God's anointed King to come. He has come. His name is Jesus, and all authority in

heaven and earth has been given to him (see **Matthew 28:18-20**). He is, right now, “the Son of God in power” (**Romans 1:4**).

Thus, God’s people today are different from the people of God described during the time of the Prophets. God’s people are also different from the people described during the time of the Writings. God’s people currently have an obedient King reigning over them. God’s people are not waiting for him to be given authority. He has been given all authority.

However, like the people in the Writings, God’s people are still waiting. God’s people today are waiting for their King—the Lord Jesus—to come again. Until that day, the people of God will suffer.





6. The people described in the Writings are characterized by faith.

The Prophets and the Writings are different in regard to the **nature of the people** described within the narrative portions of each section. While there are certainly faithful people in the Prophets, there are many, many people who are walking in only partial obedience or in complete disobedience. The authors of the Prophets carefully describe the flaws even of obedient followers of Yahweh. Consider, for instance, how David's faithfulness and unfaithfulness are described.

The main characters in the Writings, on the other hand, are consistently portrayed as faithful. Carefully consider the major characters in the Writings and how they are described. Major characters in the Writings are Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Job, Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Mordecai, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah. All of these characters are portrayed as faithful and obedient. Partial obedience is not seen in any of these people. They are portrayed as faithful followers of Yahweh.

Surely, one of the purposes of the Writings is to provide God's people today with faithful examples to follow. These books demonstrate how young men (Daniel and his three friends), young women (Ruth and Esther), older men (Boaz, Job, Mordecai, Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Ezra, and Nehemiah), and older women (Naomi) are to live in faith even during times of great affliction.



7. What is the story being told in the Writings?

The story of God's people in the Writings is, in many ways, the opposite of the story of God's people in the Prophets.

Here is a review of the tragic story being told in the Prophets:

The book of Moses ends with Israel about to enter into the Promised Land. The reader is hoping that Israel will walk in obedience to Yahweh. However, a close reading of the book of Moses would have prepared the reader for Israel's sad history of false worship and disobedience. Moses had prophesied that Israel would disobey and would not stay in the land (see **Deuteronomy 4:15-28**). As the reader reads the Prophets, he or she is able to watch Moses's prophecy come to pass in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. From the very beginning, Israel refuses to walk in obedience to Yahweh (see **Joshua 7**). Even though Yahweh delivers Israel again and again, Israel walks in disobedience again and again. Israel worships false gods. Yahweh sends prophets to call Israel to repentance. Israel refuses to listen. Eventually, just as Moses had prophesied, Israel was driven from the land. In the same way God's first son (Adam) was driven from God's good place (the garden in Eden), God's "son" Israel was no longer able to stay in God's place.

A metaphor commonly used in the Old Testament of Israel is of a vine (see **Psalms 80:8-18, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, 5:10, 6:9, and 8:13**). Yahweh is compared to a gardener. He planted his vine (Israel) in land he had prepared (see **Isaiah 5:2**). For a brief time, it appeared the vine was growing (see **I Kings 4:25**). However, the vine produced bad fruit (see **Isaiah 5:2** and **Hosea 10:1**). Eventually, the vine was ripped out of the soil and the land sat empty (**Psalms 80:8-14**). This is, sadly,

the history of Israel in God's good place. Jesus' parables in **Matthew 21:33-46**, **Mark 12:1-9**, **Luke 13:6-9**, and **20:9-18** are all intended to remind the people of this sad story.

The Writings is, in many ways, a re-telling of the story of the land and of the vine. This time, however, the story does not focus on the disobedience and fruitlessness of God's people. Instead, the focus is on the obedience and fruitfulness of God's people as they wait for God to bring them back to God's place.

The first book in the Writings is Ruth. The story being told in this book is the perfect introduction to the Writings. This book focuses on an Israelite (Naomi) who has left the land and gone to live in a foreign land. This foreign land was not a place of fruitfulness for Naomi. Naomi's sons married foreign wives. Naomi's sons had no children. And her husband and two sons died in exile. However, Naomi didn't die in the land of her exile. Instead, by God's grace she returned to God's good place. The book of Ruth ends with a marriage and with fruitfulness. Naomi sees godly offspring. This first book in the Writings provides the reader with the context for reading all of the books in the Writings.

These books are written for people who, like Naomi, are living in exile but are on a journey to God's good place. There is an emphasis in the Writings on the need for the people of God to endure suffering as they wait for God's final deliverance to God's good place. Thus, even as God's people live in exile, God continually demonstrates his faithfulness by delivering them (see, for example, Job, Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Mordecai, and Esther).

God has prepared a place for his people. We are, as God's people, to hunger for that place, even as we live outside of that place. This is a theme of the Writings. See,

for instance, the Psalms of ascent (**Psalms 120-134**). These are all Psalms celebrating the journey to God's place to worship. See also the book of Lamentations. These poems describe God's good place and demonstrate that God's people should be longing to live there. From the very beginning, the Writings are telling the story of God's people reentering God's good place with a chance at a fresh start.

The story of God's "vine" does not end in the Writings. The New Testament continues the story of God's fruitful people. The story begins with Jesus. He is, like Israel, compared to a vine (see **John 15**). He is the "true vine." Unlike Israel, Jesus always bears good fruit (see **Psalms 1:3**). All those who are in him also bear good fruit (see **Galatians 5:22-23**).



8. Why is poetry so common in the Writings?

The message found in the Bible is often presented to the reader in the form of poetry. Poetry can be difficult to read, because it is not ordinary speech. However, it is important to learn how to read biblical poetry. It is important for the preacher to learn how to preach from passages of biblical poetry. Poetry is a great gift to the reader and to the preacher or teacher. Like music, poetry has a way of speaking to the heart and of stirring the emotions.

Next to narrative (the term for the type of writing used in storytelling), poetry is the most common form of writing in the Old Testament. And it is the most common form of writing within the Writings. It is very difficult to understand and to rightly preach from the Writings without an understanding of biblical poetry. Within the Writings, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations all feature a great deal of poetry. Thus, it is important for the preacher to be able to recognize, understand, and use biblical poetry.

The reader can learn to easily recognize the poetry in the Bible because biblical poetry uses unique words and patterns of words. The poetry found in the Old Testament does not, for the most part, rhyme. Instead, the poetry in the Bible is written in a verse form called parallelism. Parallelism is a structure in which one line says something, and the line immediately following it repeats the idea from the first line, and, by using different words, usually strengthens the idea in some way.

Another way to think of parallelism is as an echo. The second line is, in ways, an echo of the first line. In a “normal” echo, when a person yells something, the responding echo uses exactly the same words. In biblical poetry, however, the echo

does not use the same words. Even though they are similar, the second line is different from the first line. It is usually a little stronger in some way.

Here is an example of biblical poetry from one of the Psalms. Notice how the second line repeats the ideas found in the first line, but uses stronger words to do it:

*O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath! Psalm 38:1*

Like two train tracks lying parallel to one another, the second line in 38:1 is parallel to the first line. This can be seen in the words that are used. They are clearly like each other. The word “rebuke” in the first line is like the word “discipline” in the second line. But notice the word “discipline” is stronger than the word “rebuke.” In the same way that the word “discipline” in line two of Psalm 38:1 is parallel to “rebuke” in line one, the word “wrath” in line two is parallel to the word “anger” in line one. However, as is expected in parallelism, the word “wrath,” while parallel to the word “anger,” is also stronger than “anger.”

Consider another example of parallelism from **Proverbs 6:16**:

*There are six things the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him.*

Notice how the number referred to in the second line (“seven”) is one greater than the number in the first line (“six”). This way of using numbers is typical in parallelism. The second number is greater than the first. Notice, also, the progression

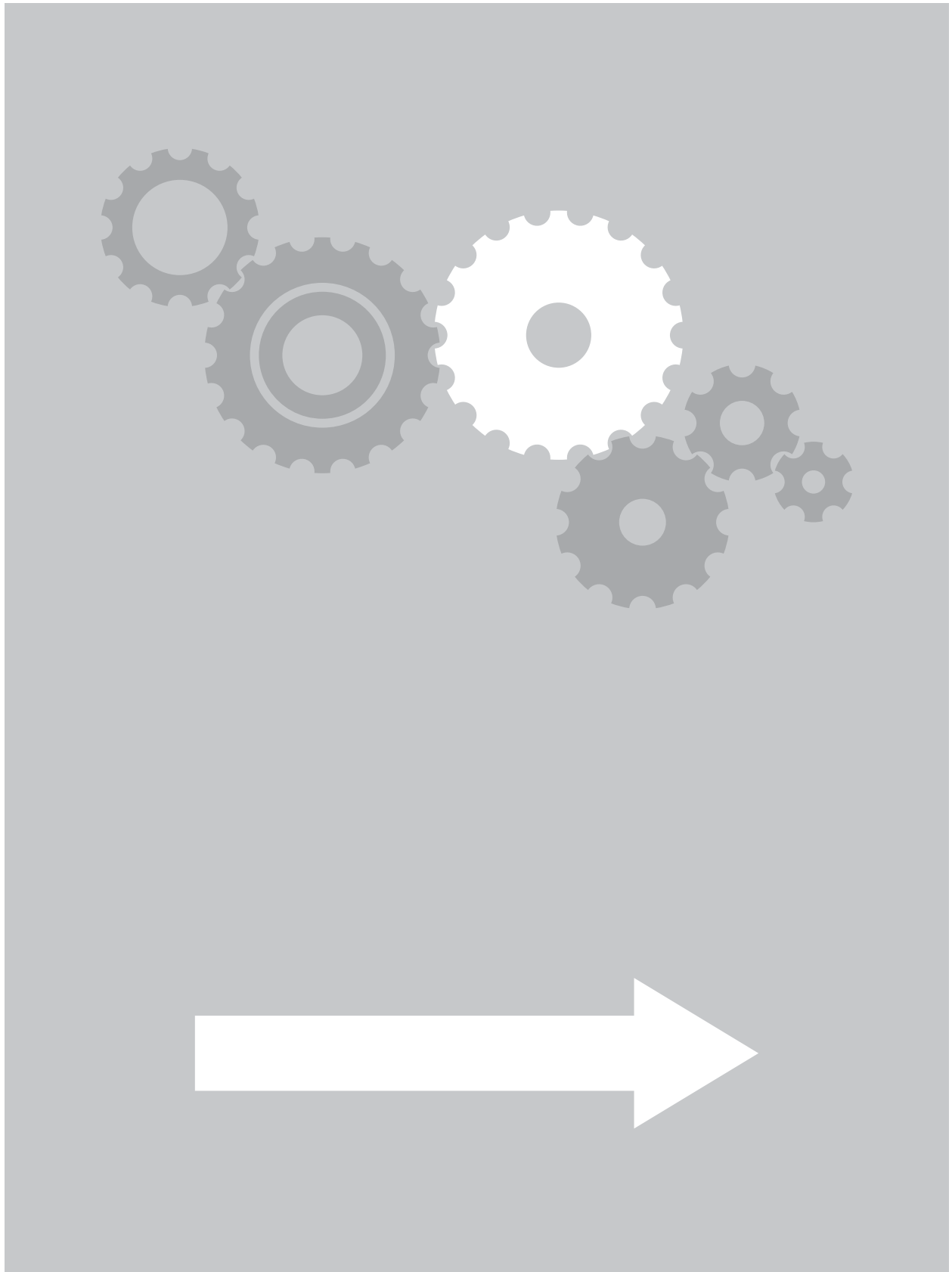
between something Yahweh “hates” and something that is an “abomination” to him. The second statement is stronger.

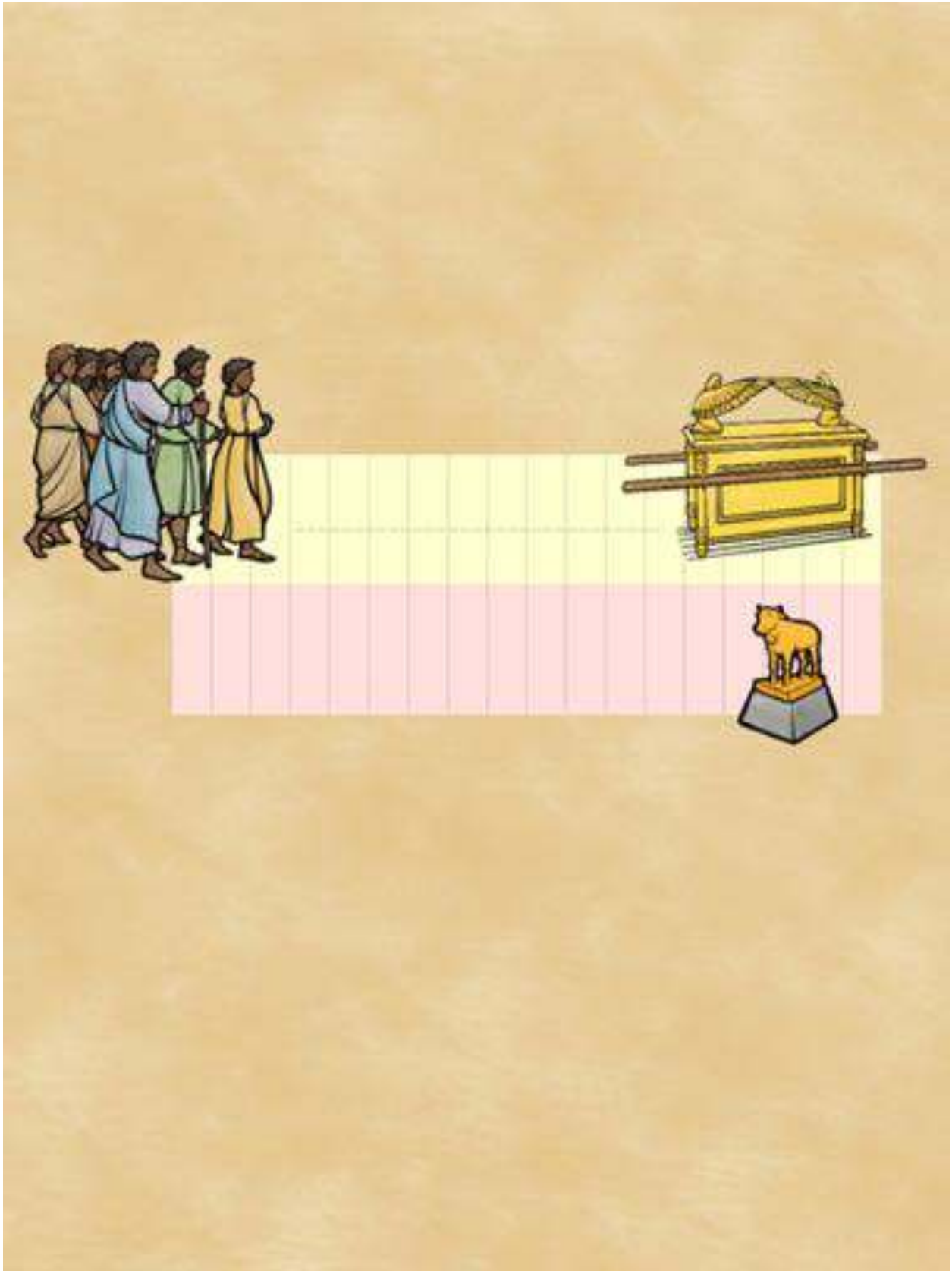
Again, poetry is the most common type of literature in the Writings. Why is so much of the message in the Writings presented to the reader in the form of poetry? There are probably several answers to this question. Here are five reasons:

1. Poetry is like music or artwork. Poetry, like music or artwork, speaks the language of the heart. This is one of the reasons why the Psalms have been the most used portion of Scripture for thousands of years.
2. Poetry expresses love, joy, hope, and beauty in a way other types of literature simply cannot express. This is especially important given the fact that love, joy, hope, and beauty are major themes in the Writings.
3. The type of “heart” language used in poetry is particularly important when people are suffering. Endurance during times of suffering is a major theme in the Writings, therefore poetry is a natural choice for the Writings. The poems are a gift for those who are suffering.
4. The constant repetition that is part of parallelism is particularly well-suited to emphasizing a point. The main points in a poem are said and re-said with stronger and stronger words.
5. The words of biblical poetry are easier to memorize than narrative portions of the Bible. At a time when most people could not read, the message of the Writings came in a form that the people could repeat and remember. Even in places where people can read, it is important for people to memorize the words of Scripture. Given that it is

easier to memorize poetry than other forms of literature, it may be that God would want his people to especially memorize poetic portions.







9. The main characters in the Writings are very different from most of the people living during the time of the Prophets. The main characters in the Writings are obedient to Yahweh even during times of great testing.

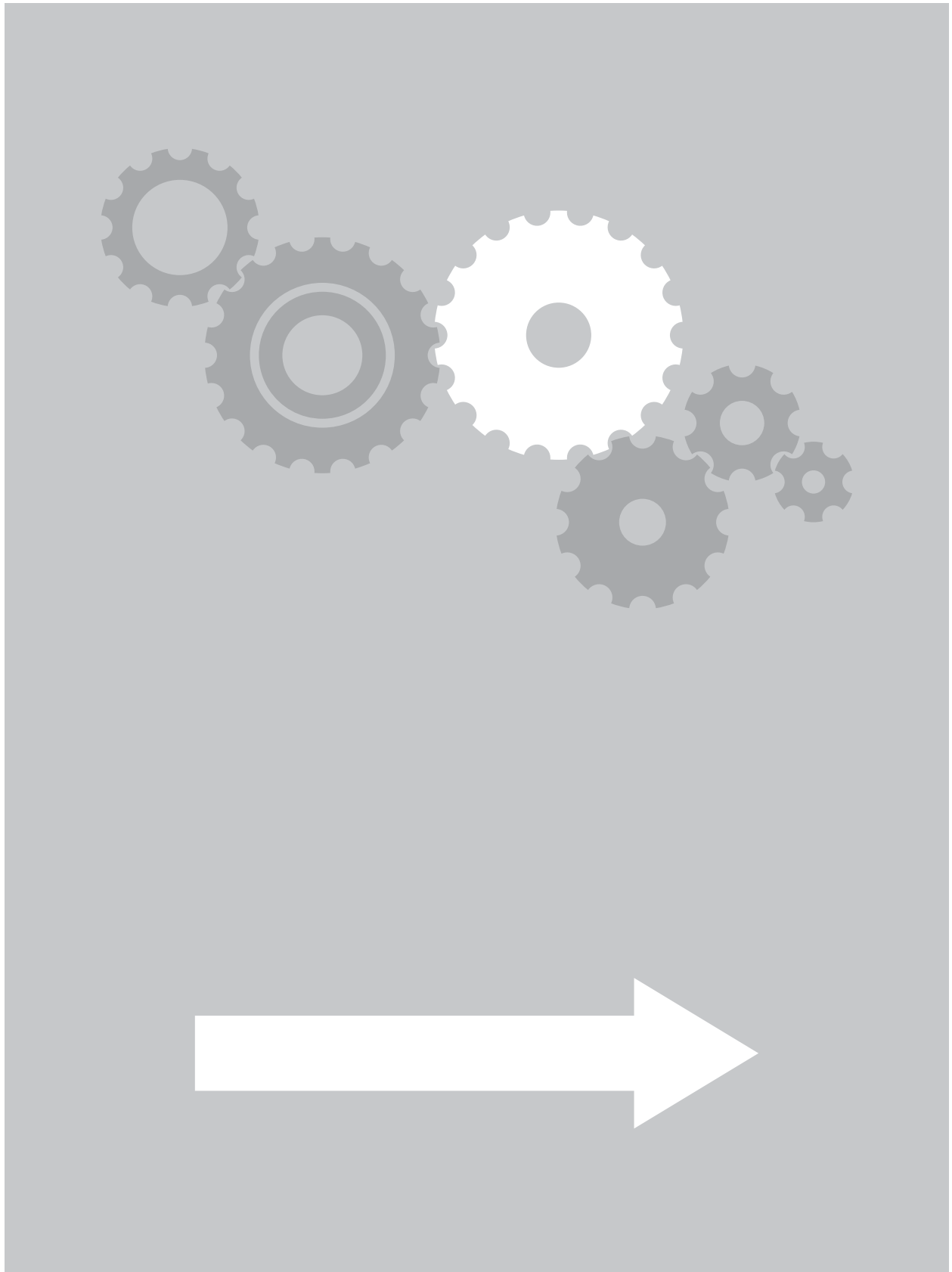
The main characters described in the narrative books in the Writings are obedient to God and his commands. Job, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Mordecai, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah are all portrayed as faithful followers of Yahweh. They provide Christians today with examples to follow. It is significant that neither "major" nor "minor" sins are charged to any of these people.

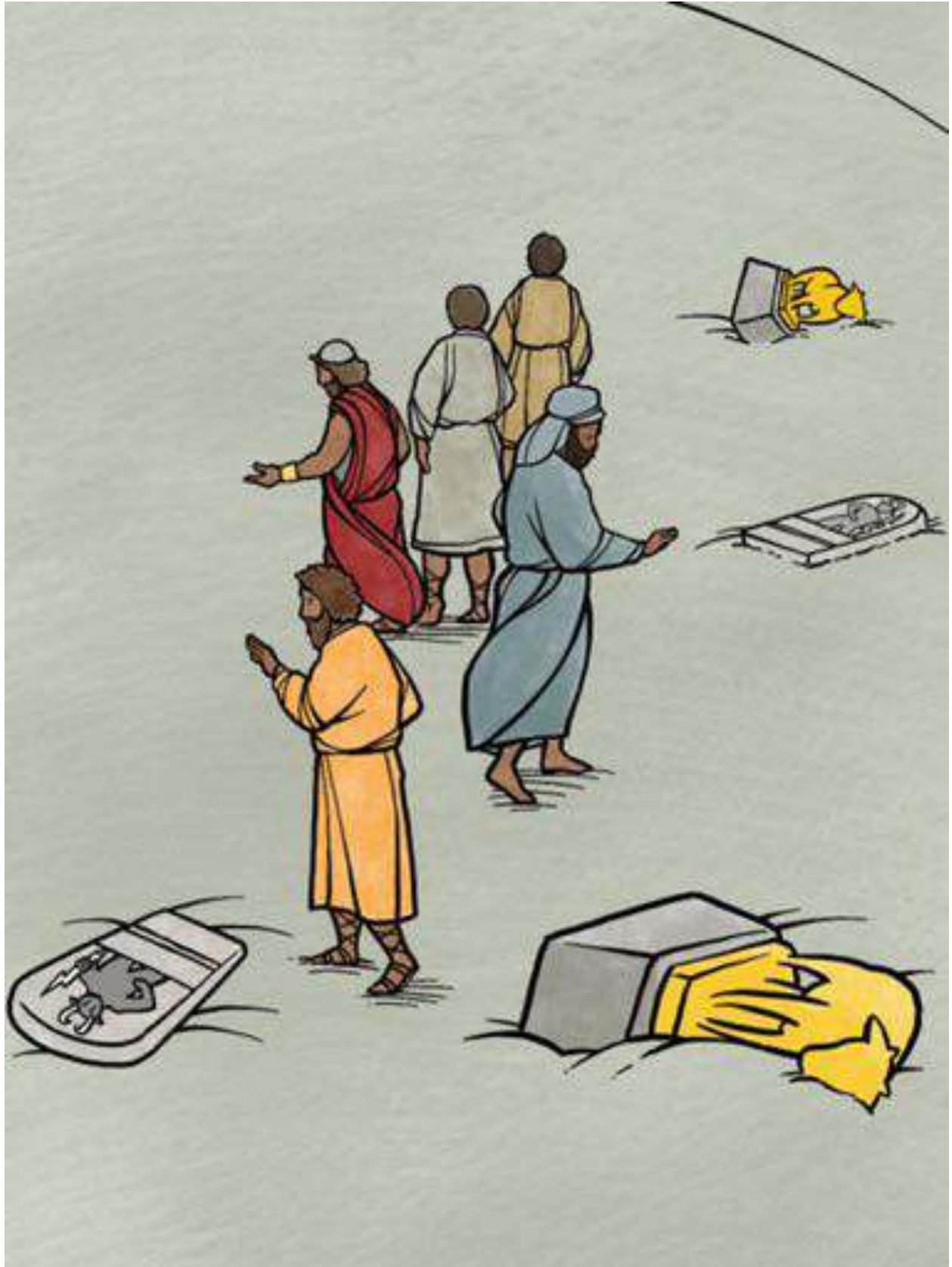
But it is not just the main characters in the narrative portions that should be imitated because of their faith and obedience. The poet speaking in the poetry sections of the Writings is also portrayed as an obedient Israelite. The poet in Lamentations is an example of how an obedient Israelite grieves. The poet in Song of Solomon is an example of how an obedient Israelite thinks about marriage. And the poet in each of the Psalms provides God's people with an example of how a godly person thinks or acts in any circumstance.

The obedience of the main characters during the time of the Writings is very different from the disobedience of the majority of people described during the time of the Prophets. During the time of the Prophets, Israel would walk in disobedience for a period of time, then partially repent, then walk again in disobedience, then partially repent again. Israel's constant falling away demonstrated that the people of Israel needed a change in heart if they were to obey God.

Why are the people described during the time of the Writings obedient? The preacher or teacher needs to think carefully about the answer to this question. People are obedient because God has helped them to become obedient.

It is interesting that none of the major characters in the Writings have an Israelite king over them. All of the people in the Writings are looking forward to the true King to reign over God's people. That true King is Christ.





10. The main characters in the Writings do not worship idols.

In **Deuteronomy 4:15-28**, Moses prophesied that a time was coming when Israel would be driven out of God's good land because of its idolatry. That is exactly what happened. Even though, because of God's grace, some of the people in Israel did not worship idols (see, for example, **1 Kings 19:18**), most of the people described in the Prophets worshipped idols. Because of this sin, the people of Israel and the people of Judah were driven from the land. The Prophets describe Israel's idolatry, the call from the prophets that Israel must repent, Israel's refusal to repent, and, because of this, Israel's exile from the land.

The main characters described in the narrative books of the Writings (see Daniel, Esther, and Ezra-Nehemiah) are not idol worshippers. By God's grace, they are not worshipping false gods. However, they are not able to worship the true God as fully as they would like, either. That is because during most of this time period, there is no temple, there is no high priest, and there is no king to lead them.

The people in the Writings are living in the time period described in **Hosea 3:4**:

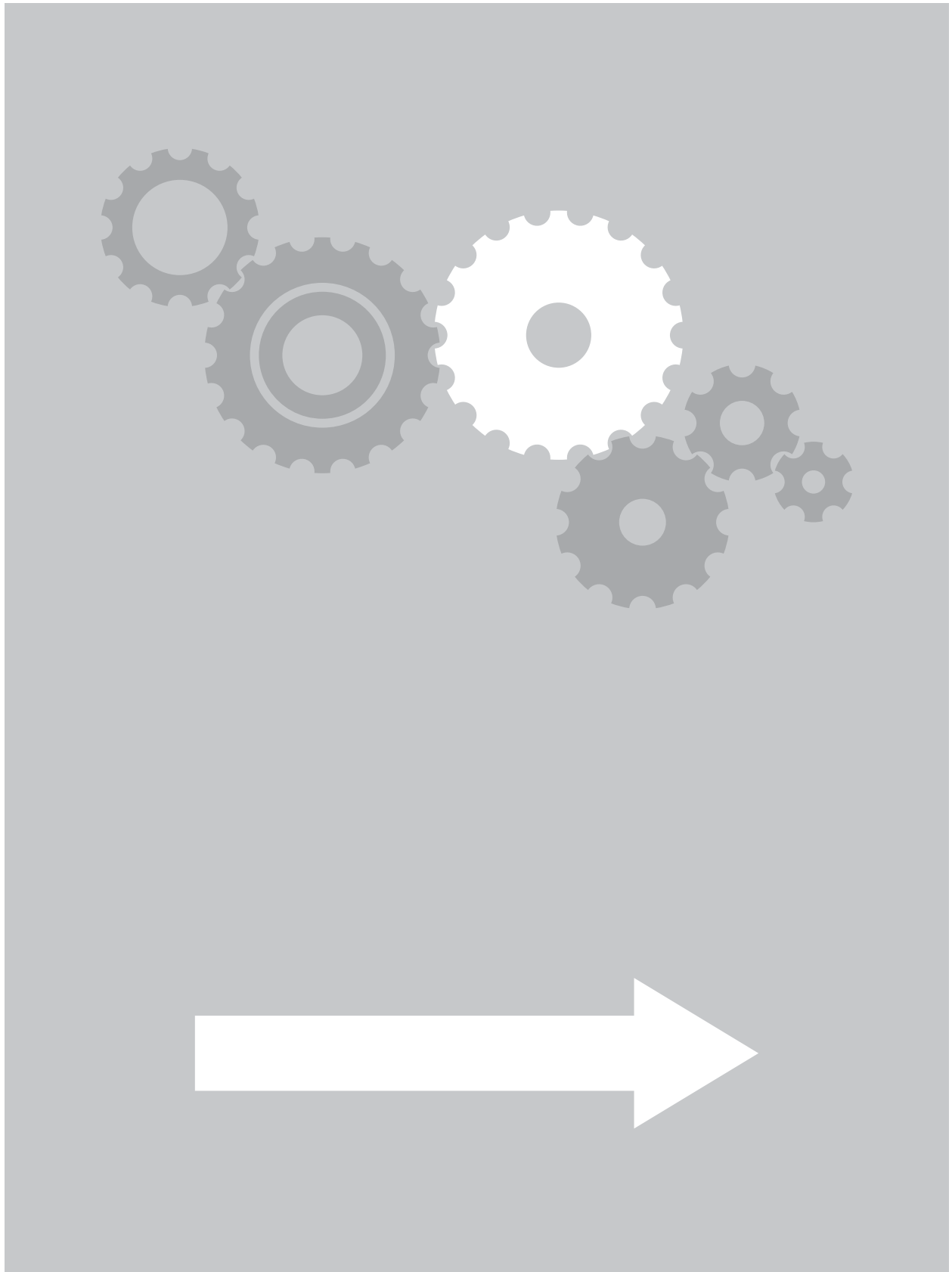
*For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince,
without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods.*

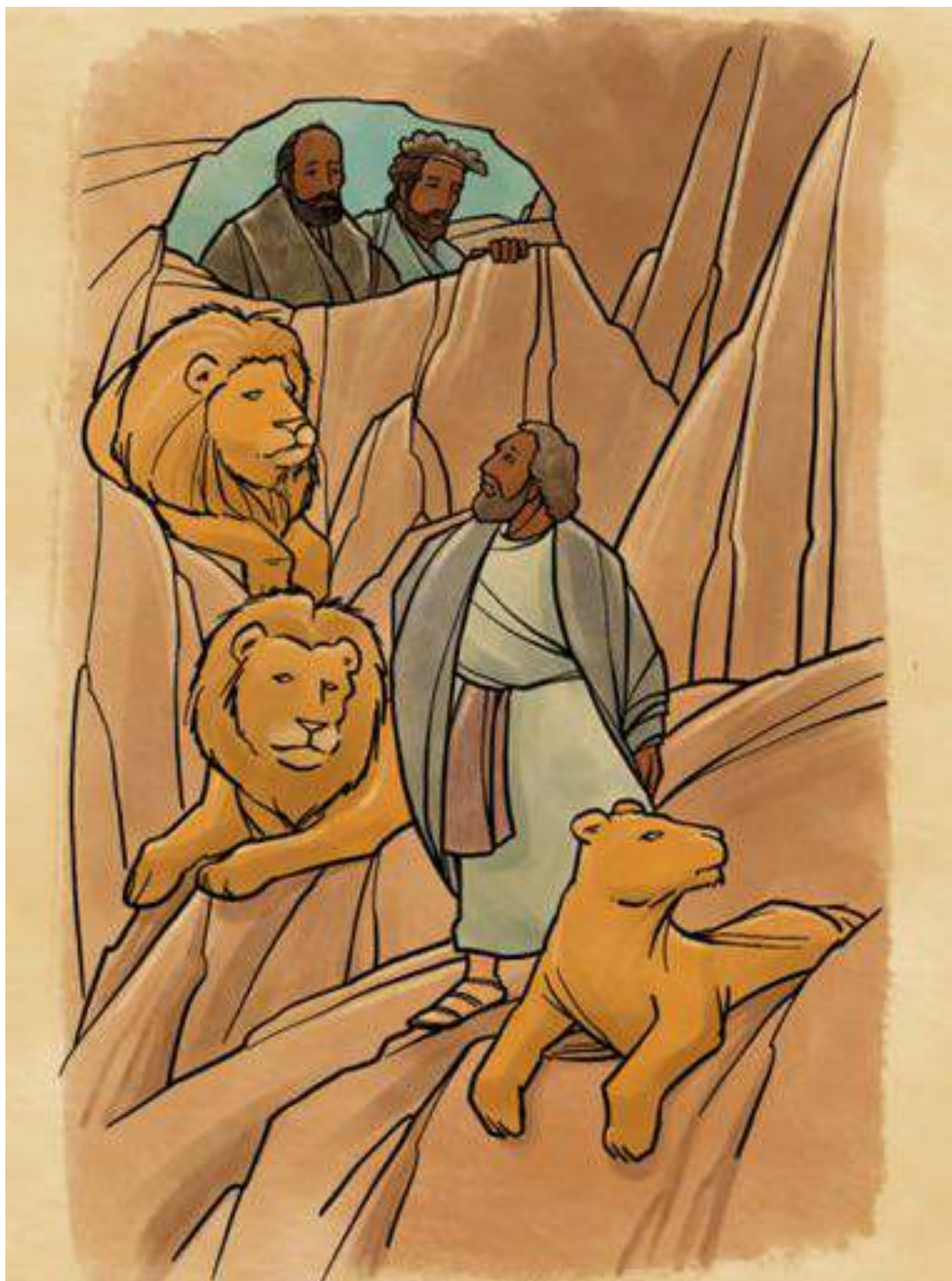
Even though they were not worshipping false gods, the people during the time of the Writings were waiting. They were waiting for God to graciously allow his true temple to be built. They were waiting for God to place a righteous King over them.

The people of God today are no longer waiting for a temple and for their King. The time period described in **Hosea 3:5** has come!

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

The “latter days” spoken of in this verse have come! The Lord Jesus Christ, the true son of David, has taken his seat on the throne. God’s people, because they are “in Abraham”, have “come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness.” Regarding all believers being children of Abraham and, thus, “children of Israel” and rightful heirs to all of these promises, see **Romans 2:28-29**, **Galatians 3:7-9, 14**, and **29**.



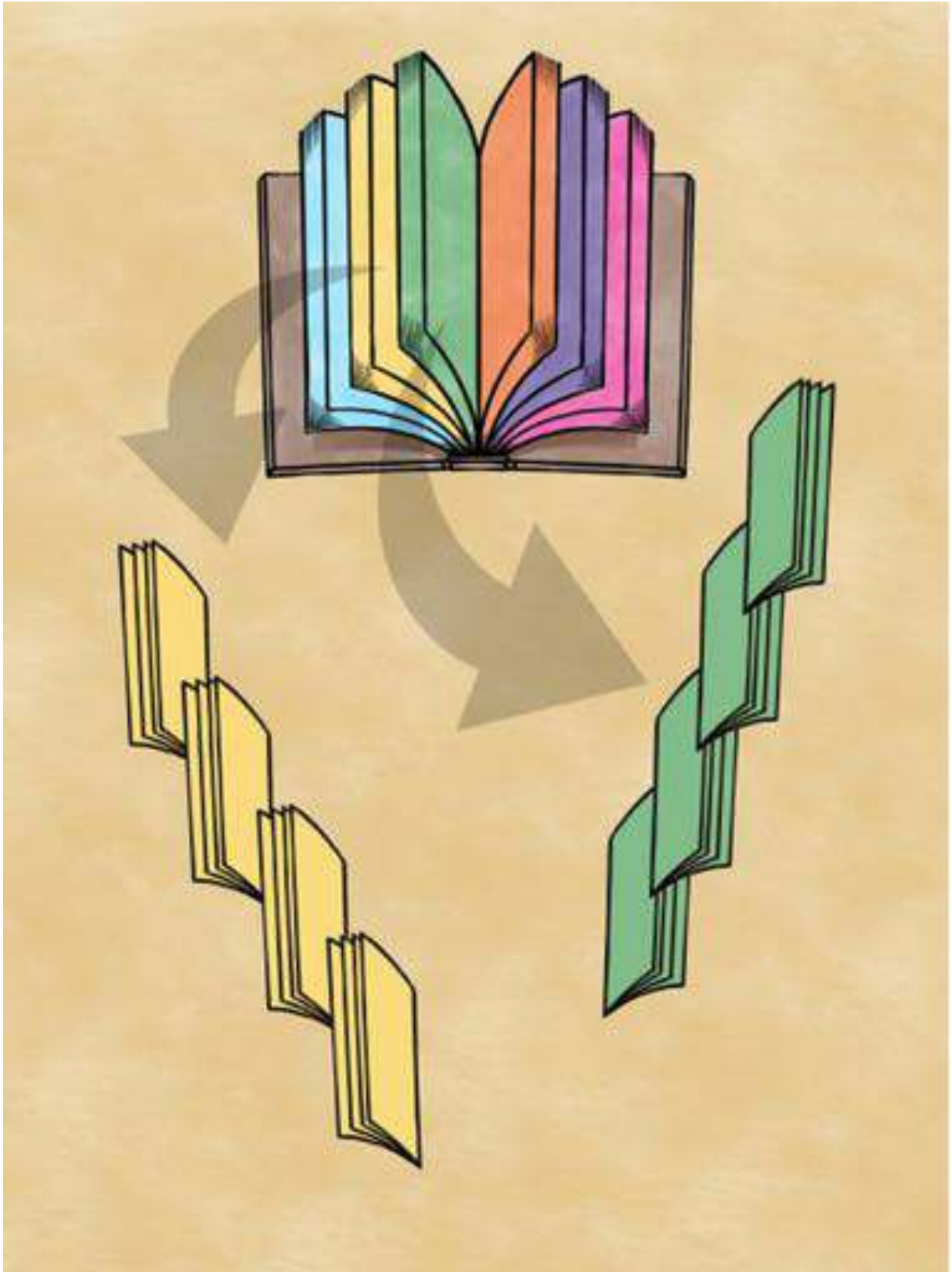


11. The main characters are examples of godly perseverance while suffering.

The main characters in the narrative section of the Writings provide an example of godly perseverance in the midst of great suffering. Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Mordecai, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah all suffered greatly. This is evidence that God does not always grant his people a peaceful life and prosperity on this earth. But the fact that these people persevered in faith is evidence that God does give his people strength to endure every trial they will face.

But the main characters in the narrative section of the Writings are not the only people suffering in the Writings. Suffering is a major theme in Ruth, the introductory book. Naomi and Ruth suffer greatly. The authors of many of the Psalms are clearly suffering. Job suffers terrible trials. The writer of Lamentations is suffering. The suffering of God's people is clearly a major theme in the Writings. But the people aren't just suffering. They are continuing in faith even while they are suffering.

God's people today will, like the people described in the Writings, suffer greatly. But God will deliver his people from every evil. God's people must, like the people in the Writings, persevere, so that when they have passed the test they might inherit eternal life. The fact that Jesus has come and has died and rose again does not mean there is no more suffering for the people of God. There are many passages telling the people of God that they must endure suffering. See, for instance, **2 Timothy 3:12, 4:5, Hebrews 10:32-39, 12:2-3, 12:7, 13:12-14, James 1:2, and 1 Peter 2:19-23.**



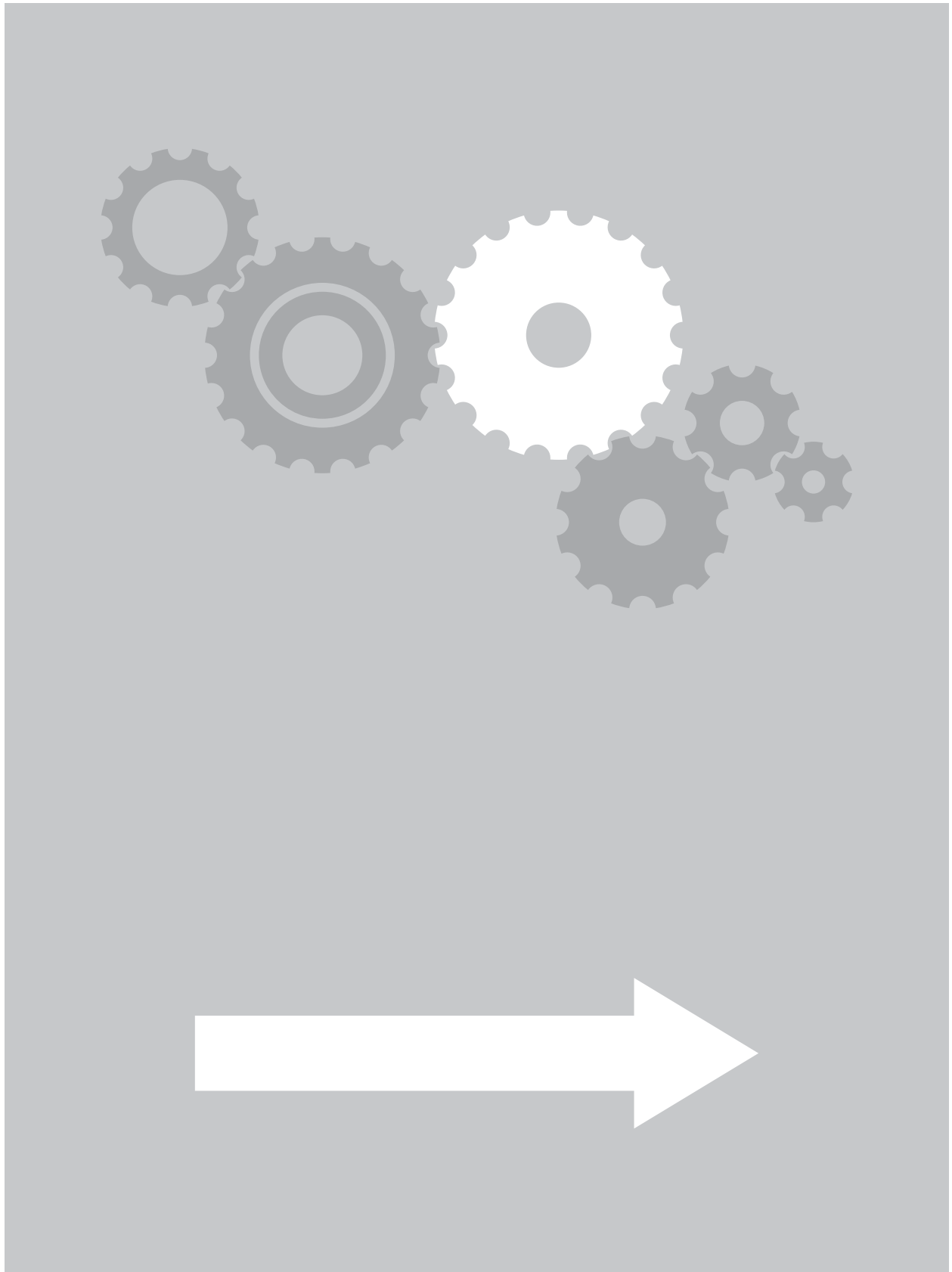
12. The Writings are filled with hope.

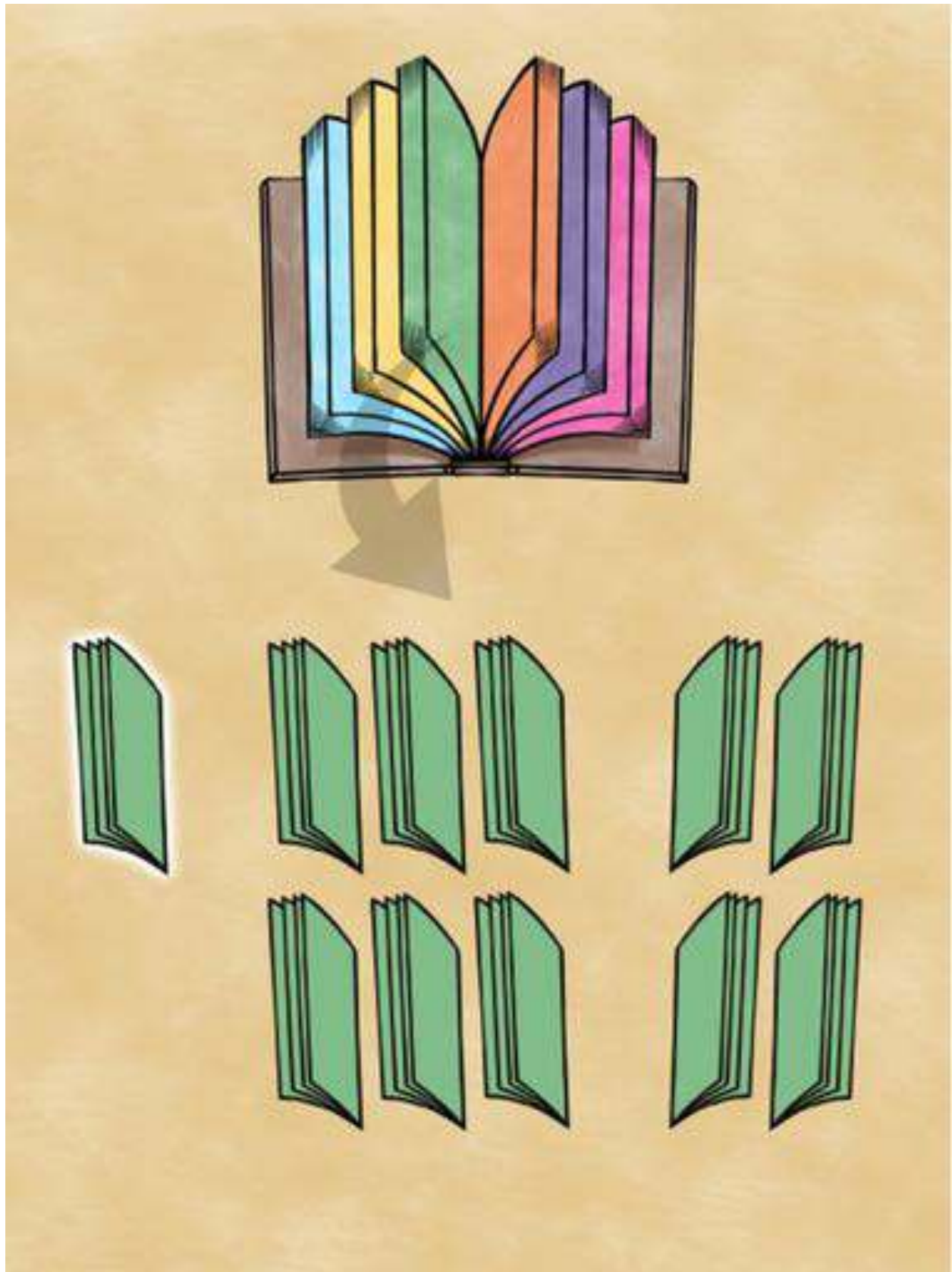
The Prophets describe a terrible time of disobedience in the history of the people of God. Even the last books in the Prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), which describe a time when the people of Israel were no longer living in foreign lands, do not present the people as gladly walking in obedience to Yahweh. Even though the people had returned from exile and were now living in the Promised Land, they still did not care about the things of God (see, for instance, **Haggai 1:1-11**, **Zechariah 1:2-6**, and **Malachi 1:1-2:17**). Even though they were not worshipping Baal, they were not truly worshipping Yahweh.

But even during times of disobedience, there was always a group of people that loved Yahweh. And these people are the main characters in the Writings. This group of godly people is sometimes called the **remnant**. The Writings are filled with hope for the godly remnant. They demonstrate that faithfulness to Yahweh is possible even when God's people are living in exile. The Writings provide hope and help for God's true people. The Writings provide encouragement for people who are waiting for God's anointed King (the Christ) and who are suffering in exile.

Believers today are living in a period of time that is very different from the people living during the time when the Writings were written. The King has come! The Temple is being built (see **Ephesians 2:19-22**). The Holy Spirit lives inside of believers and is providing constant help and encouragement in every situation (see **John 14:15-17**). And believers today have the entire Bible with both the Old and New Testament. However, believers today are still living outside of God's good place. We have already received life, however we have not yet received our entire inheritance. This is why **James 1:1** and **1 Peter 1:1** describe believers as if they are living in "exile." The Writings are filled with hope for believers today. They demonstrate that God cares

about his people living in exile and it is possible to be faithful in very difficult situations. In fact, all believers will be persecuted (see **Matthew 5:10-12**, **2 Timothy 3:12**, and **Revelation 12**). Believers must not deny their Lord. The Writings are one of the “means” God has given to his people so they might not deny him when they are enduring persecution.





13. Ruth is the perfect introduction to the Writings.

Ruth is the first book in the Writings. Therefore, it has a special place in the Old Testament **canon** (the canon is the authoritative list of biblical books). Ruth serves as the reader's introduction to all of the books in the Writings. This means it sets the tone for the rest of the Writings and it prepares the reader for major themes in the Writings.

It is not known who wrote the book of Ruth or when the book was written. It is known, however, when the events described in Ruth took place. The events described in the book of Ruth took place “In the days when the judges ruled” (**Ruth 1:1**). This means the events in Ruth happened during the time period recorded in the book of Judges. That explains why, in modern Bibles, the book of Ruth is placed immediately after Judges. However, Ruth is very different from the book of Judges and clearly has a different purpose. Its purpose seems to be similar to the purpose of the other books in the Writings. That is probably why Ruth was placed in the Writings and not in the Prophets.

The differences between Judges and Ruth are easy to see. Even though there are a few faithful people in the book of Judges, for the most part, Judges focuses on the disobedience and faithlessness of the people. The people, for the most part, do not want to follow God. Ruth, however, focuses on the obedience and faithfulness of its main characters. In Judges, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (**Judges 21:25**). In Ruth, the main characters are careful to do what is right in God's eyes. In Judges, God seems to be distant from most of the people. In Ruth, it seems God is very near to the people. Evidence of God's good hand at work is seen in all of the events that take place.

As a book of narrative, the reader would expect to find Ruth with the other books of narrative in the Writings. In other words, it would be natural for Ruth to be placed with Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. However, Ruth is not placed with the other books of narrative in the Writings. In fact, all of the books of poetry in the Writings (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations) are located between Ruth and the other books of narrative in the Writings. Ruth has been purposely set apart from the other “stories” in the Writings. It seems likely Ruth was set apart because the editor(s) who arranged the final order of the biblical books thought Ruth would be the perfect introduction to the rest of the Writings.

One of the major themes in the Writings seems to be **faithfulness**. The Writings emphasize the faithfulness of God to his covenant promises. The Writings emphasize the faithfulness of God to preserve his suffering people. The Writings emphasize the faithfulness of God’s people as they continue trusting in God even as they are suffering and waiting for full and final deliverance. And the Writings emphasize the faithfulness of God to, at the proper time, deliver his faithful people from their suffering and to bring them to a place of rest. The story in the book of Ruth emphasizes all of these things. The story in Ruth perfectly prepares the reader for the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness of his suffering people which is seen in the rest of the books in the Writings.

The book of Ruth does not begin in an encouraging way. In fact, **Ruth 1:1-5** seems as if it belongs in the book of Judges. There is a famine in Israel (1:1). Famines in the good land “flowing with milk and honey” which God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should not be seen as random events. Rather, this famine should be seen as a demonstration that God was not pleased with his people because of their disobedience and idolatry (see **Deuteronomy 28:15-24**). Because of the famine,

Naomi's husband led the family out of the Promised Land to the land of Moab. This demonstrated his lack of trust in God. He died in the land of Moab. Naomi's two sons then married foreign wives who were not followers of the God of Israel. After their marriages, neither of the women married to Naomi's sons had children. This means barrenness, not fruitfulness, was normal in Naomi's family. Finally, Naomi's two sons died. All of these events seem to be very much like the book of Judges. It appears God has abandoned Naomi. Naomi's husband has died. Her sons have died. It seems as if all hope for her has died. That is why she changes her name from Naomi to Mara (see **Ruth 1:20**). Life has become "bitter" for her.

While the book is named "Ruth", the main character in the book of Ruth is not Ruth. The main character is Naomi. This is evident for a number of reasons. The book begins and ends with an emphasis on Naomi (see **4:14-17**). Beyond this, the text throughout the book is constantly reminding the reader that Naomi is the main character. For instance, at the end of the book, the women in Bethlehem celebrate the birth of Ruth's son in the following way: "A son has been born **to Naomi**."

The theme of the book isn't Naomi's departure from the land of Israel and of the death and fruitlessness in her life. Exile and death and fruitlessness are the important **background** to this story. However, the story in Ruth is about Naomi's return to the land of Israel and of God's faithfulness to her. God causes Naomi to be fruitful and to multiply (see **Genesis 1:26-28**) even though she has no reason for hope. It is significant to note that Naomi's fruitfulness is connected to the birth of a **redeemer** (**Ruth 4:14**).

The story being told in the book of Ruth is, essentially, the story of the people of God at the time of the Writings. Naomi is like Israel during this time. Israel had, like Naomi, gone into exile. The people of God were, like Naomi, living in a foreign place. They had experienced death and tragedy and they were not bearing fruit. But God, in

his mercy, would bring them back to his place. Israel would, like Naomi (and like the Israelites of old), experience an exodus from the land of their exile. Israel would, again, become fruitful and the redeemer would be born (the Lord Jesus!). This redeemer would, like Naomi's grandson, be a "restorer of life" to the people of God.

Thus, even though Ruth is a true story, it is also a picture of a much larger story. God's people are, like Naomi, coming to him in a "second exodus." Ruth is a demonstration that God does not forget his people or his plans. He is able to bring his people back to himself and to make them fruitful. He does this through the birth of the redeemer Jesus.

Ruth is filled with great encouragement for many different audiences:

- The book should have brought encouragement to the Jews who were part of the exile. It demonstrated that God still loves those who have been forced from his land and he delights to bring them back to his good place. The careful reader of the Old Testament should see that the story being told in Ruth wasn't new. Moses had spoken about Israel's return from exile in **Deuteronomy 4:29-31** and **30:1-10**.
- The book should bring great encouragement to Christians today who are, like the Jews in the exile, living outside of God's good place. Believers today are described as "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (**James 1:1**) and "elect exiles of the dispersion" (**1 Peter 1:1**). This means Christians today are not yet in their final place of "rest." The book of Ruth demonstrates that God has been faithful to his people in the past and he has demonstrated his ability to bring his people back to his good place and to bring them rest. When God's people today are wondering if God can fulfill his promises to his people, they can find great encouragement in Ruth.

- The book should bring encouragement that the great marriage between Christ and his people will take place. The marriage between Ruth and Boaz is a shadow of the marriage to be celebrated between Christ and his people. The fact that God was working behind the scenes to ensure the marriage between Ruth and Boaz would take place is evidence that he is working behind the scenes to ensure that the marriage ceremony between Christ and the church will take place (see **Revelation 19:6-10**).

- The book should have been encouraging to people who were waiting for the Christ. And it should be encouraging to people who live after the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Ruth demonstrates that God was working many unseen miracles long before the Christ was born. The book emphasizes the birth of David (see **Ruth 4:17** and **22**), because God had promised that one of David's sons would sit on the throne forever (see **2 Samuel 7:1-17**). David's heir (the Christ) is a major theme in the Writings. It is appropriate that the first book in the Writings introduces the reader to this theme.

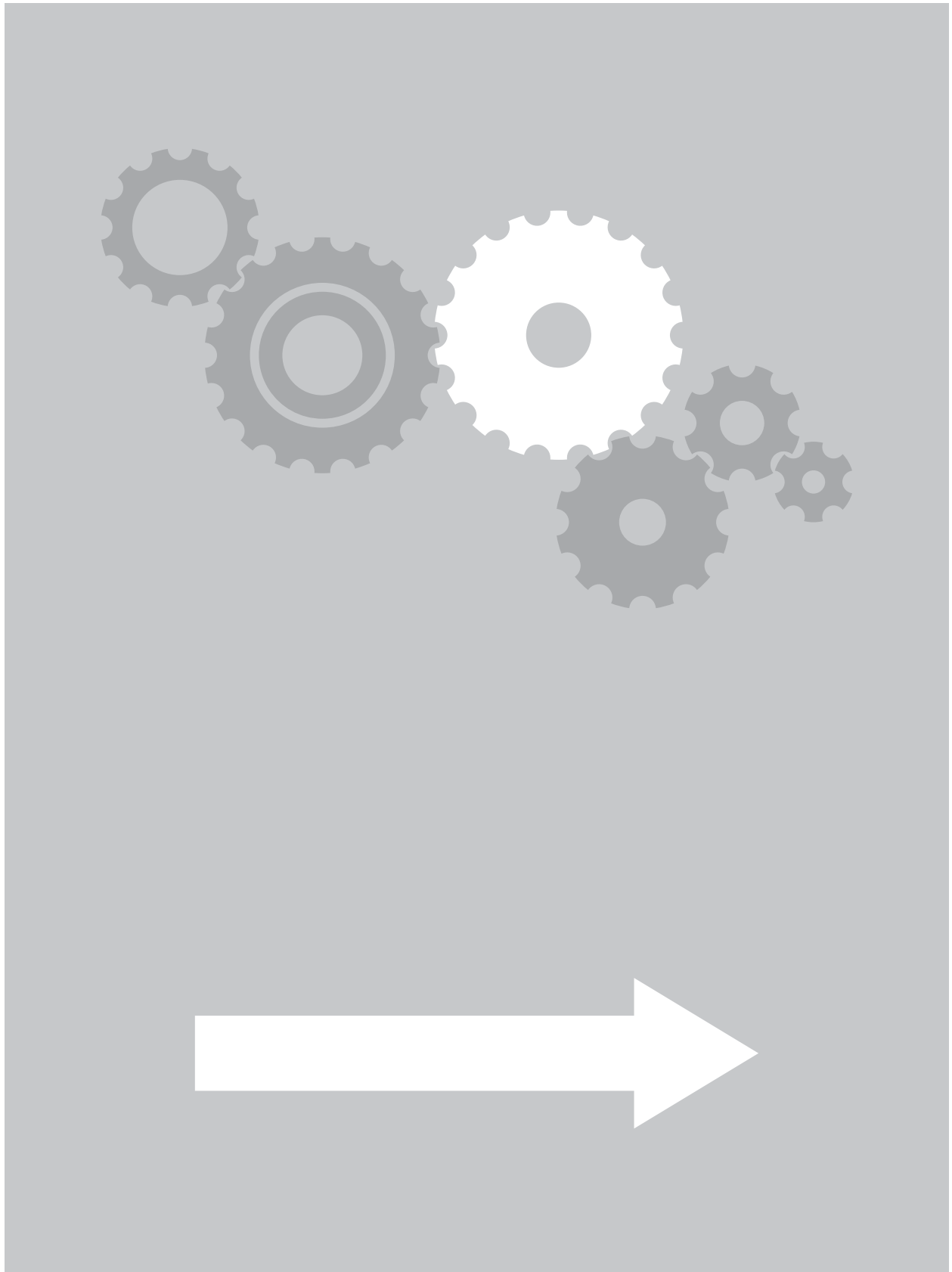
- This book highlights the fact that God accepts people from every nation who do his will. Ruth should be deeply encouraging to Gentiles. The fact that Ruth is a Moabite—a people with a very questionable past (see **Genesis 19:30-38**)—demonstrates that God accepts people from all places and circumstances. God welcomes Gentiles (like Ruth) and is pleased to “cover them with his wings” so they might find “refuge” (see **Ruth 2:12**).

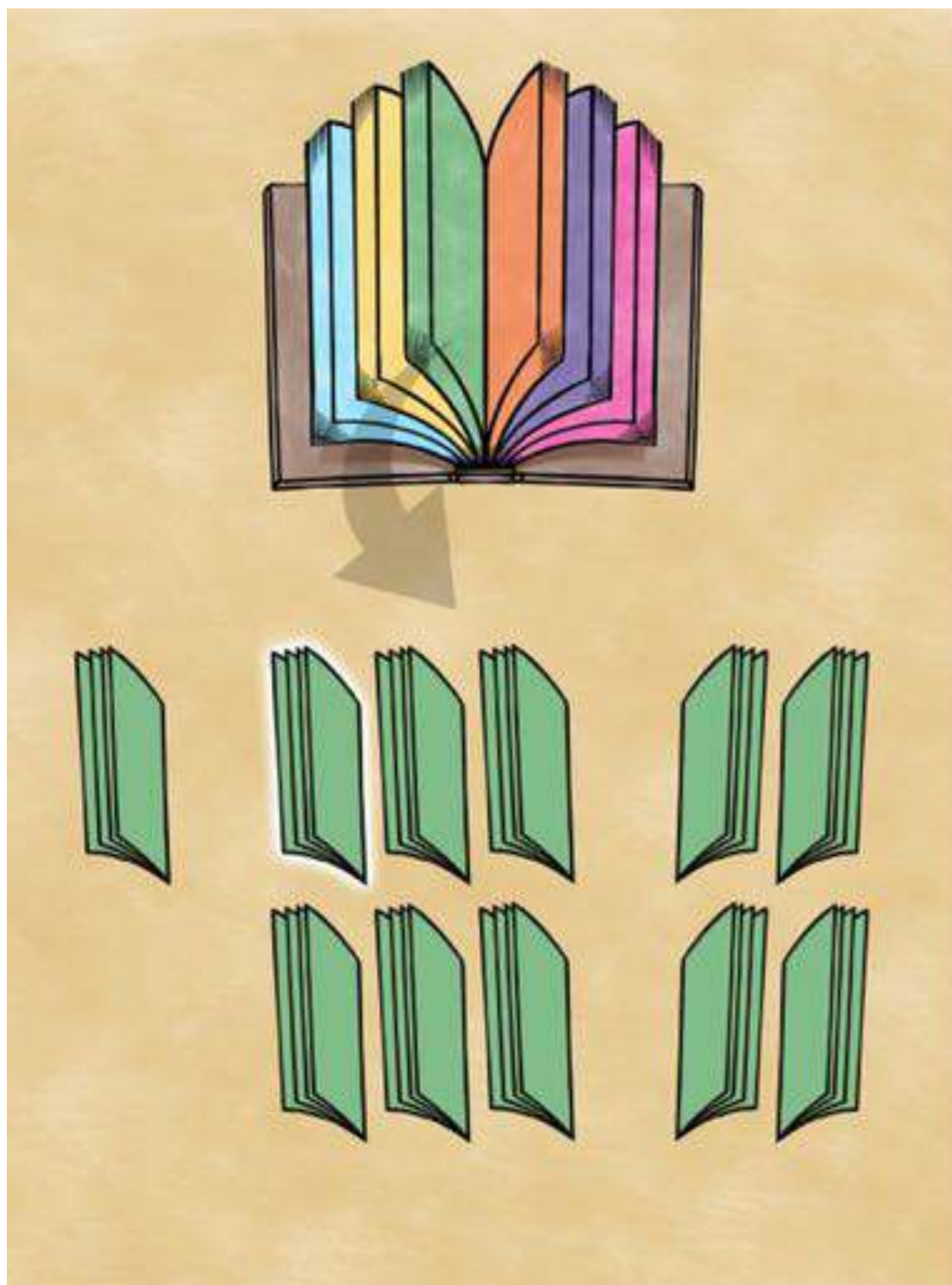
- The book is encouraging to widows and foreigners. It shows people who have no “place” or “covering” in this world that God has not forgotten them and they have a place within his plan. He is pleased to give “refuge” to all who come to be covered under his “wings” (see **Ruth 2:12**). Today, the church is one of the ways God provides covering for widows, orphans, and foreigners (see **James 1:27**).

- Ruth encourages readers to persevere in this present season of exile. Like Naomi, all of God's people must be brought by God in an exodus back to God's place. Even though the book of Ruth happened during the time of the Judges, it should be seen as preparing people living in the present exile (see **1 Peter 1:1** and **James 1:1**) for their journey to the New Jerusalem (see **Revelation 21:1-22:5**).

- The main characters in Ruth were faithful to God in difficult circumstances. Thus, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz provide readers with examples to imitate.

An exact date for the events in Ruth is not known, however it must have been between 1380 and 1050 BC. It is important to remember that the characters in Ruth are real. They are not myths. This is an important fact, because the Lord Jesus was descended from Ruth (see **Matthew 1:5**). If we believe Jesus is real, we must also believe that his ancestors are real.





14. The Psalms are the song book and the prayer book of the people of God.

Psalms is part of the Writings. However, because the book of Psalms is so large, sometimes the Writings themselves are called “the Psalms” (see, for instance, how the Writings are referred to in **Luke 24:44**). This is because Psalms is, by a large margin, the largest book in the Writings.

This is a book of deep sorrow and of great joy. It is for times of intense suffering and joyful celebration. It is intended to bring comfort in times of despair and hope in times of deepest darkness. It is a celebration of our God and Father and of the Christ. That is why this book has been the song book and prayer book of the people of God for thousands of years. It was the song book and prayer book of the people who lived before the coming of Christ (they were looking forward to his reign), and it is the song book and prayer book of the people who are living after the coming of the Christ (they are looking backward to the victory he won by his life, death, and resurrection). All of the people of God for all time are united by the songs and prayers in the Psalms!

There are many important things to keep in mind regarding the Psalms. Outlined below are a few of these things.

- The book of Psalms is the song book and prayer book of the people of God. This was true before Jesus 'birth, life, death, and resurrection. It is also true today. The songs and prayers in this book connect the people of God from all ages. It is still to be used by the church (see **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16**). The fact that the Psalms are meant to be used by the people of God as they worship together is demonstrated by the many musical instructions found within the book.

- **The book of Psalms is a book of theology.** The book of Psalms is the most quoted book in the New Testament. Jesus and the Apostles taught theology from this book. They celebrated the reign of the Christ from this book. They did this because the Psalms—all of them—are connected, in some way, to the Christ, the gospel event, and the people of the Christ.

The Apostles did not use the Psalms to teach history lessons about David and his reign. David was not the main character in the Psalms. He knew that he was writing about the Christ. He knew he was writing some of the songs that would be part of the eternal song book for the people of the Christ.

The Psalms teach readers how to think about God, his Anointed King (called the “Messiah” or the “Christ”), the people of God, the enemies of God, the world, sin, the Scriptures, and the judgment to come. The major theme in the Psalms is the Christ. Every single psalm, in some way, involves the Christ.

- **Preaching and teaching from the Psalms is different from teaching from an Old Testament narrative, the gospels, or from an epistle.** The Apostles frequently used the Psalms in their preaching and teaching. It is a great help for the preacher or teacher today to carefully read the words of the Apostles and to learn how to use the Psalms in preaching and teaching.

- **An editor (or editors) arranged the Psalms in a particular order.** There are 150 individual Psalms in the book of Psalms. These Psalms are not arranged in chronological order. If they were, the psalm written by Moses would not have been placed in Book 4. It would have been placed at the beginning of Book 1! Instead, Moses’s psalm is the 90th Psalm! Thus, Psalm 1 is intentionally placed first in the Psalter and Psalm 150 is intentionally placed last. The editor did not indicate why the

Psalms are arranged as they are. The reader needs to, by close reading, determine how the Psalms are connected.

The order of the Psalms demonstrates the plan of God and the ultimate victory of the Christ. Psalms begins by portraying a struggle between good and evil (see **Psalm 1-2**). Evil is predominant. Psalms ends with praise. There is no evil seen in **Psalm 150**. In the beginning portions of Psalms, there are more laments. In the concluding books, there are more Psalms of praise.

While many of the Psalms were written during a time period when there was a king upon the throne in Israel, the final editor of the Psalms arranged the Psalms during a time period when there was no longer a king on the throne in Israel. Yet, the Psalms celebrate the rule of the Anointed King. Therefore, the organization of the Psalter demonstrates the great faith of the editor in God's plans for God's people. The editor was trusting in a King who was to come even though he could not see him!

- **The Psalms are quoted by the prophets.** There are several quotations from the Psalms or references to the Psalms in the Prophets (see, for instance, **Jeremiah 17:7-8**, **Ezekiel 47:12**, and **Zechariah 9:10**). This means that at least some of the prophets had access to the Psalms. They were carefully studying the things that were written in the Psalms when they wrote their books. This should not be surprising. This is exactly what Peter said the prophets were doing when they wrote the Scriptures (see **1 Peter 1:10-12**)!

It is significant that "the Prophets" is placed before the book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible. This is evidence that the final editor of the Hebrew Bible wanted the reader to read the Psalms with the teaching of "the Prophets" firmly in mind.

- **The Psalms are broken into five "books": book 1 (1-41), book 2 (42-72), book 3 (73-89), book 4 (90-106), and book 5 (107-150).** The group of five books, as with the order of the individual Psalms, reflects the work of an editor. It is likely that the five books of the Psalms are meant to reflect the five books of the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Evidence that the Psalms are reflecting the five books of the Law may also be seen in the way the Psalms quote particular portions from the Law, applying the words in the Law to the Christ and the gospel event.

The first four books of the Psalms all end with a benediction (see Psalm 41:13, 72:18-20, 89:52, and 106:48). The benedictions were probably written by the editor who arranged the Psalms in their final order. They demonstrate the deep faith of the editor. The fifth book does not end with a blessing like the first four books. The fact that book five ends in a different manner, however, does not mean that book five ends without a benediction. The last five chapters of book five all end with the same words, "Praise the LORD!" These chapters seem to be deliberately placed together as the fitting conclusion to book five and to the entire book of Psalms. Based on the message of the Psalms, which is the story of the Christ, God's people are to "Praise the Lord!"

- **The Psalms are poems.** Poetry is one type of literature found within the Bible. Epistles (like Romans or 1 Peter) and narratives (like 1 Samuel or Esther) are two other types of literature found within the Bible. Each type of literature is a gift from God. Each type of literature has its own purpose.

The poetry in the Bible is written in a verse form called parallelism. This form is used throughout the Old Testament. Parallelism is a structure in which one clause says something, and the clause immediately following it echoes and (usually) intensifies the first clause in some way.

Poetry is emotionally powerful. Like a song, poetry uses words and patterns of words in ways that are intended to move the heart. This means that much of a poem's power is in the way it makes the reader feel.

Poetry also differs from other types of literature in the Bible because poetry is memorable. The words and patterns of words are intended to make memorization easy. This is why the Psalms have been the most memorized portion of God's word for thousands of years.

- **The Psalms are poems set within a large narrative (story).** Even though the book of Psalms includes no narratives (stories), the reader needs to constantly remember that the book of Psalms is surrounded by the much larger narrative that is told throughout all of God's word. The large narrative that the Psalms are set within is the story of the Christ coming to save his people so that they might live in God's kingdom and worship him. Evidence of this larger narrative is found throughout the Psalter. Therefore, all of the poems in the Psalms are connected to a larger story. None of them stand alone.

- **Poets use "concrete" words.** Concrete words are words that are connected to real things that you can see, touch, taste, hear, or smell. Poets use concrete words even when they are writing about ideas that are not concrete. For instance, in **Psalms 135:4**, the psalmist says that he can, "bend a bow of bronze." A bow of bronze is a real thing that can be held in one's hand. However, the poet does not mean that he can actually shoot a bow made out of bronze. In fact, he is not writing about real weapons of war at

all. Rather, “bow of bronze” is a concrete way of describing the great strength God has given to him so that his enemies might not triumph over him.

- **Some of the Psalms are arranged in alphabetical order** (in the Hebrew). This is the case in **Psalm 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111-112, and 119**. Psalms arranged in this way seem to be emphasizing completeness. For instance, Psalm 119 celebrates God’s word in a complete way (“from A to Z”). The alphabetical order will not be evident when the Psalms are translated into another language (like English).

- **The Psalms were originally written in Hebrew**. Because the Psalms were written in an ancient language, scholars are not certain about the meaning of a few words. Quite often, the words scholars struggle to understand are musical instructions. For instance, scholars are not certain about the meaning of the instruction *Selah*. It is not necessary to understand Hebrew in order to understand the meaning of the Psalms.

- **Many of the Psalms include superscriptions**. A superscription refers to the words that appear before the actual words of the poetry in the Psalm (i.e., “A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON” or “TO THE CHOIRMASTER: FOR THE FLUTES. A PSALM OF DAVID”). These superscriptions should be carefully considered and they should be used in preaching and teaching because they are in the editions of the Bible that we have. There are no ancient manuscripts that do not have these superscriptions. They are intended to help the reader. The superscriptions were in the editions of the Psalms that were read by the Apostles. However, the Apostles never use the superscriptions in such a way that the superscription determines the meaning of the Psalm. The reader should carefully consider how the New Testament writers do and do not use the superscriptions. Many superscriptions include musical

instructions of some kind. These instructions remind the people of God today that the Psalms are intended to be used in corporate worship.

- **The main subject of many of the Psalms is “the Christ.”** The Psalms were written over a period of many hundreds of years. During this time, many kings reigned. However, the Psalms do not focus on MANY different kings. They focus on ONE particular King. The identity of this one King is first announced in Psalm 2. He is the Anointed of the Lord—the Christ.

This does not mean that the Christ is the only subject of the Psalms. And it does not mean that every Psalm is about the Christ and the gospel event in the same way. It does, however, mean that an understanding of the Christ and the gospel event should influence how every Psalm is seen. Evidence that the Christ is the main subject of the Psalms is found throughout the New Testament. See, for instance, **Luke 24:44, John 5:46, Acts 3:18-24, and 1 Peter 1:10-12.**

No one Psalm completely describes the Christ. While Psalm 2 introduces the Christ and teaches a great deal about him, it is not complete. Other Psalms add a great deal of information about the Christ. Thus, the reader is to build his or her “theology of the Christ” from Psalm to Psalm. The reader is not to “reinvent the King” in every Psalm. For instance, what is learned about the King in Psalm 2 should be remembered when the reader reads Psalm 3. The very different descriptions of the Christ are sometimes difficult to reconcile. It is the joy of the reader and the obligation of the preacher to reconcile these very different descriptions of the King.

- **The Psalms include a great deal of variety.** Like a concert with many types of music, the book of Psalms includes many different types of Psalms. The different Psalms present the Christ, his people, and the gospel event from many angles.

- **Readers should carefully consider how the Apostles quote the Psalms.** The Apostles are trustworthy guides to the meaning of the Old Testament. By his words to the Apostles in the Upper Room, it is clear that Jesus Christ wants his followers to know that the teaching of the Apostles recorded in the Scriptures is true and reliable (see **John 14:26** and **John 16:12-15**). Jesus and the Apostles clearly read the Psalms in a messianic way. The reader should carefully consider how Jesus and the Apostles refer to the book of Psalms. All of the Psalms which they do quote they relate to Jesus Christ, or his people, or the enemies of God, or the gospel event. There are NO EXAMPLES of the Apostles interpreting a Psalm that is non-Messianic and non-gospel oriented. The Apostles NEVER say that a Psalm's final meaning concerns the events that were taking place in Israel during the time period when that particular Psalm was written.

Outlined below are direct quotations from the Psalms that are found in the gospels. It is significant to note that all of the Psalms quoted below relate to Jesus Christ, or his people, or the enemies of God, or the gospel event.

Matthew: Matthew 4:6 (see Psalm 91:11-12), Matthew 7:23 (see Psalm 6:8), Matthew 13:32 (see Psalm 104:12), Matthew 13:35 (see Psalm 78:2), Matthew 16:27 (see Psalm 62:12), Matthew 21:9 (see Psalm 118:25-26 and Psalm 148:1), Matthew 21:16 (see Psalm 8:2), Matthew 21:42 (see Psalm 118:22-23), Matthew 22:44 (Psalm 110:1), Matthew 23:39 (see Psalm 118:26), Matthew 26:38 (see Psalm 42:5- 6), Matthew 27:35 (see Psalm 22:18), Matthew 27:46 (see Psalm 22:1).

Mark: Mark 4:32 (see Psalm 104:12), Mark 11:9 (see Psalm 118:25- 26), Mark 11:10 (see Psalm 148:1), Mark 12:10 (see Psalm 118:22- 23), Mark 12:36 (Psalm 110:1), Mark 14:34 (see Psalm 42:5-6), Mark 15:24 (see Psalm 22:18), Mark 15:34 (see Psalm 22:1).

Luke: Luke 4:10-11 (see Psalm 91:11-12), Luke 13:19 (see Psalm 104:12), Luke 13:27 (see Psalm 6:8), Luke 13:35 (see Psalm 118:26), Luke 19:38 (see Psalm 118:26), Luke 20:17 (Psalm 118:22), Luke 20:42 (Psalm 110:1), Luke 23:34 (see Psalm 22:18), Luke 23:46 (see Psalm 31:5).

John: John 2:17 (see Psalm 69:9), John 6:31 (see Psalm 105:40), John 10:34 (see Psalm 82:6), John 12:13 (see Psalm 118:25-26), John 15:25 (see Psalm 35:19), John 19:24 (see Psalm 22:18), John 19:36 (see Psalm 34:20).

- **The Apostles do not quote every Psalm.** This does not mean that readers today cannot use, interpret, or preach from these Psalms. The reader should know that the Apostles would have used every Psalm to preach the gospel and to celebrate the Christ and his people.

- **When the Apostles quote one part of a Psalm, they want the reader to think about the entire Psalm.** When the Apostles quote a Psalm, they are expecting the reader to read the entire Psalm and to carefully study that Psalm in context. For instance, in **Matthew 27**, the Apostle Matthew repeatedly refers to **Psalm 22**. He wants the reader to go to Psalm 22 and to study the entire Psalm carefully, not just the few verses he refers to. He is sending a signal to his readers that the entire Psalm pertains to the events taking place at the crucifixion.

- **David, the author of many of the Psalms, knew that he was writing about the Christ.** David was a prophet (**Acts 2:30**). According to the Apostle Peter, all of the

prophets were foretelling the days of the Christ and the gospel event (see **Acts 3:18-24** and **Acts 10:43**). According to Peter, the prophets knew that their words would be a great help to people who were yet to come (see **1 Peter 1:10-12**). This means that David, as a prophet, knew that he was writing about the Christ and he knew that his words would be a help to a people who came after him (see also **Acts 2:29-36**). According to Jesus, David knew there was, in addition to God, another king who was over him. That is why he starts Psalm 110 with the words, “The LORD says to my Lord” (see **Psalm 110:1** and **Mark 12:35-37**). These verses demonstrate that David knew that there was a king who was greater than he was. All of the Psalms should be read in this light.

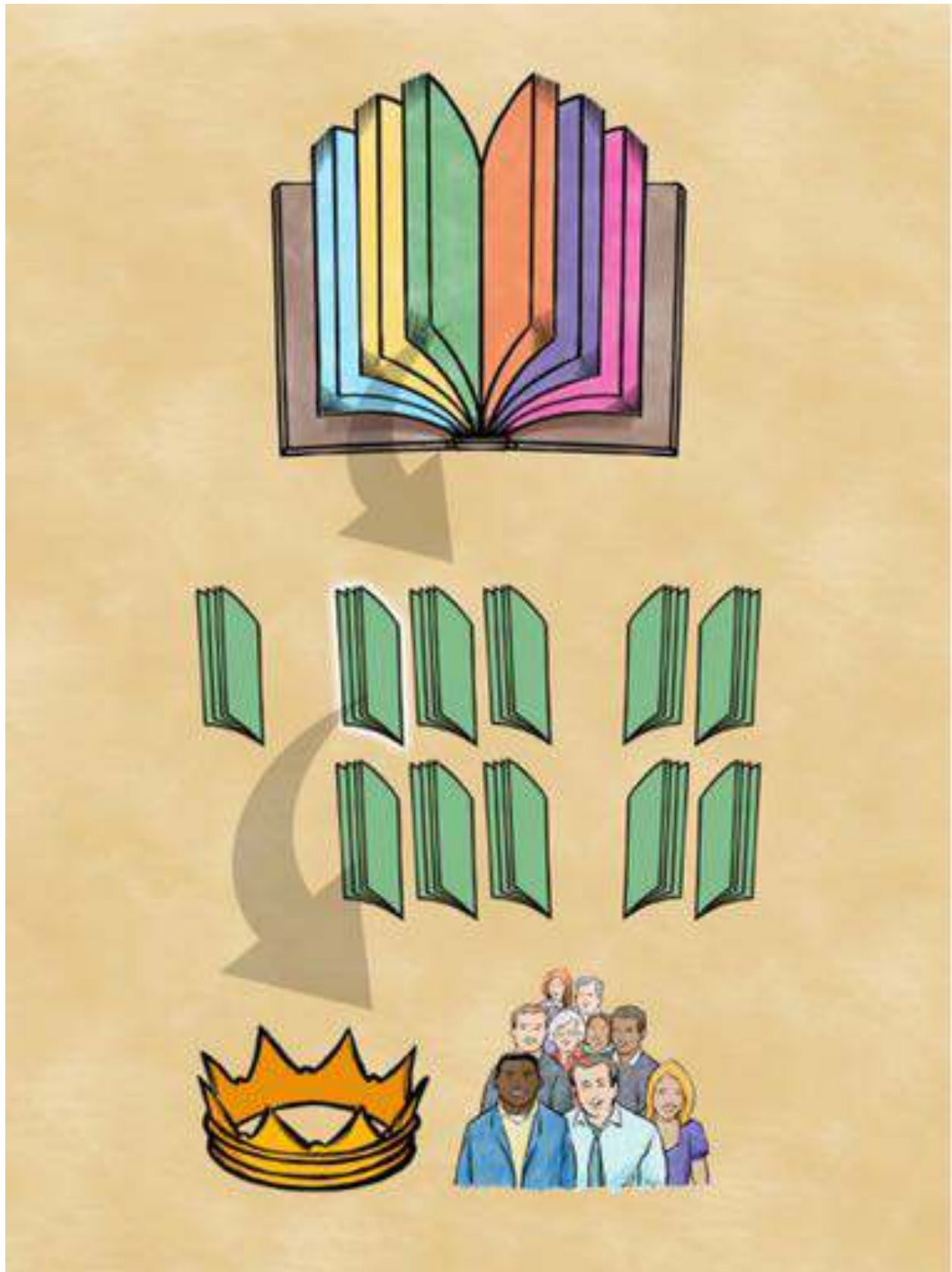
- **The Psalms focus a great deal of attention on the enemies of God and on the enemies of the Christ.** This begins with the very first verse in the Psalms. The focus on the enemies of God’s people is not just in the text of the Psalms. It may also be seen in the superscriptions appearing before many Psalms. For example, the superscription before Psalm 3 reads, “A PSALM OF DAVID. WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON.”

- **The suffering of the Christ is a major theme in the Psalms.** At least 30 of the first 41 Psalms in book 1 of the Psalms (Psalms 1-41) detail the suffering of one man (the Anointed King) and his cries for deliverance. Christians need to be reminded of Christ’s sufferings and to see how he responded to them for at least two reasons. First, Christ’s suffering and death purchased forgiveness and life for all of God’s people. His sufferings should lead to thankfulness, worship, and praise. Second, Christians have been called to share in the sufferings of Christ. Thus, constant reminders of Christ’s

sufferings are necessary so that Christians do not think something strange is happening to them when they suffer (see **1 Peter 4:12-17**).

- **The “main character” in the Psalms is to be imitated.** The person speaking in the Psalms demonstrates how a godly man or woman is to live, suffer, pray, worship, trust God, and repent.

- **The Christ is the worship leader of God’s people.** This aspect of Christ’s ministry is often overlooked because of his role as our Sacrifice, Savior, King, and Priest. The Psalms clearly demonstrate that the Christ delights in worshipping God and in leading the people of God in worship, whether that worship is seen in lament, in trust, in thanksgiving, or in praise. Thus, the Psalms should be seen as a demonstration of Jesus’ love for God the Father and of his great desire to see all of God’s people worship God in spirit and in truth in every circumstance of life (see **John 4:23-24**). The Psalms teach us how Jesus would, if he were on earth with the church today, lead his people in worship.



15. There are two ways to read many of the Psalms.

There are 150 individual Psalms in the book of Psalms. The individual Psalms are not all alike. There are many different types of Psalms. Some are prayers of thanksgiving. Some are prayers of complaint. Some are Psalms of deep sorrow (these are called Psalms of lament). Some are the prayers of a person who is suffering greatly at the hands of his enemies. Some aren't prayers at all. They are descriptions of the life and actions of a person.

It is important to understand that the person who is praying, complaining, suffering, and worshipping in the individual Psalms is a person of great faith in God. And the person whose life and actions are being described is a person of great faith in God. Thus, the "main character" in the Psalms is someone who should be imitated.

Who is this faith-filled follower of God being focused upon in the Psalms? For instance, who is the "blessed man" in Psalm 1? Or who is the person who is suffering at the hands of sinners in Psalm 3? Who is the person who is looking to God as his shepherd in Psalm 23? In all three of these Psalms, and many, many others, there are two answers to this question.

1. The faith-filled follower of God being focused upon in the Psalms is the Christ.

Consider, for example, Psalm 1. This Psalm is about a "blessed man" who never does evil and who meditates on God's law "day and night." This person is perfectly fruitful. Who is this perfect person? Christians would agree that the Lord Jesus is the only one who perfectly matches the description of the "blessed man" in Psalm 1. Jesus is the "blessed man" who meditates on the law of Yahweh day and night. Jesus never sinned. He never gave in to wicked people, not even once. And Jesus is like the tree of

life. He is perfectly fruitful. Everything he does prospers. Jesus is the perfect man who has been blessed by God and is walking in the full power of that blessing. He understands why he is on earth and he is doing only what is right. Christ is, therefore, the first answer to the question “Who is the faith-filled follower of God being focused upon in the Psalms?”

But the authors of the Psalms don’t want us just to think about the Christ as the main subject when we read the Psalms. That is not the only way the Psalms can be read. There is a second way the Psalms should be read.

2. The faith-filled follower of God being focused upon in the Psalms is the individual Christian.

Believers in the Lord Jesus, because they are “in Christ”, truly can say that the Psalms are speaking about themselves. Consider, again, Psalm 1. For thousands of years, believers have read the words in Psalm 1 and have applied them to themselves. The believer in Christ, whether male or female, strives to resist evil people and to delight in God’s law “day and night.” The believer in Christ, whether male or female, is “blessed” by God and “fruitful.” The believer in Christ will be able to “stand in the judgment.” This is, again, because the believer is “in Christ.”

The Christian can, because he or she is “in Christ”, truly identify with the main character of many of the Psalms. Again, this explains why the people of God have, for thousands of years, read the Psalms with themselves as the subject. Christians have been identified with Christ. His life is the life of the Christian. The Apostle Paul explains this in **Romans 6:1-11**, **Ephesians 2:4-6**, **Colossians 3:1-4** and many other places. Because the Christian is “in Christ”, the things that are true of him may also be truly spoken of the Christian.

Therefore, because of the gospel event, the Apostles take things that uniquely apply to the Christ and apply them to those who are “in Christ.” This means that Psalms that are uniquely about the Christ can be used in reference to the saints. For instance, in Psalm 2, the Christ is referred to as God’s “Son.” Psalm 2 is quoted many times in reference to Christ alone. It is a Psalm that is about him.

However, Psalm 2 is also quoted in reference to the saints. Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, Jesus is not the only “son of God.” He has brought many “sons to glory” (see **Hebrews 2:10** and **Romans 8:14**). This is why later writers are able to take verses that apply to the Christ in Psalm 2 and apply them to the saints. For instance, **Psalm 2:9** uniquely applies to the Christ. It is quoted, in reference to Jesus, in **Revelation 12:5** and **Revelation 19:15**. However, in **Revelation 2:26-27**, this verse is applied to the saints! **Psalm 2:7** is another verse that clearly pertains to the Christ. Yet it is used by the Apostle John in **Revelation 21:7** in reference to the saints. Again, because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the believer truly is identified with Christ. That is why the Psalms can be used in regard to Christ and in regard to those who have faith in Christ.

It is typical for people to read the Psalms in only one of these two ways. For instance, people often think that David is the main character in the Psalms. Christ is only focused on, they may teach, in a few Psalms. This is not how the Apostles use the Psalms. They repeatedly use the Psalms in reference to Christ. It is true that David is a main character in the Psalms. However, he is a main character only because he is “in Christ.” He is one of the saints, that is why the Psalms can be applied to him. We must not ignore Christ as a main character in the Psalms. And we must not ignore the saints

as a main character in the Psalms. Both are true! It is important for believers, and especially preachers and teachers, to learn how to use the Psalms with both of these “subjects” in focus.

Consider, for example, how the preacher or teacher might use Psalm 1. The preacher may focus on Jesus as the “blessed man.” The preacher may celebrate Jesus’ life, focusing on the fact that he is the only man who has never sinned and he is the only man who has perfectly meditated on God’s law day and night. The preacher may focus on Christ’s fruitfulness, focusing on him as the fruitful tree planted by rivers of water. But the preacher may, just as truly, use Psalm 1 to focus on those who are believers in the Lord Jesus. The preacher may call believers to turn from evil and to meditate on God’s law day and night. The preacher might speak about the fruitfulness of those who are “in Christ.”

Consider, also, how the preacher might use Psalm 3. This psalm is about an innocent person who is suffering. This person calls on God to save him. God responds to this innocent person’s prayers and “sustains” him. The person praying knows that God will destroy all his enemies. He will bring judgment on the wicked. The preacher might consider all of these things and focus on the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He, more than any person who ever lived, suffered at the hands of evil people. He called on God to deliver him and he was saved from his enemies.

But the preacher may use this same Psalm to speak about the people of Christ. All those who are in Christ will suffer persecution (see **2 Timothy 3:12**). In the same way God sustained Christ when he “slept” (this may be a reference to his death!), he will also sustain all those who are “in him.” He will keep them when they, like Christ, “fall asleep.” This is certainly a reference to God keeping his saints as they lay down at night even during troubling times. God is able to sustain his people in the darkest times. It may also be a poetic reference to God keeping his saints in death (see, for

instance, how Stephen's death is described in **Acts 7:60**). The preacher and teacher must be able to teach and encourage believers from this psalm.

Who is the "son of man" in **Psalms 8**? The preacher must declare that he is the Christ. This is clearly taught in the New Testament. But that is not the only way to read the Psalm. The preacher must also know, and proclaim, that the "son of man" is also the people of God! It is important for those in the church to see this. It reminds those in the church of their important role in God's universe! Both aspects of this Psalm may be seen in **Hebrews 2:1-13**.

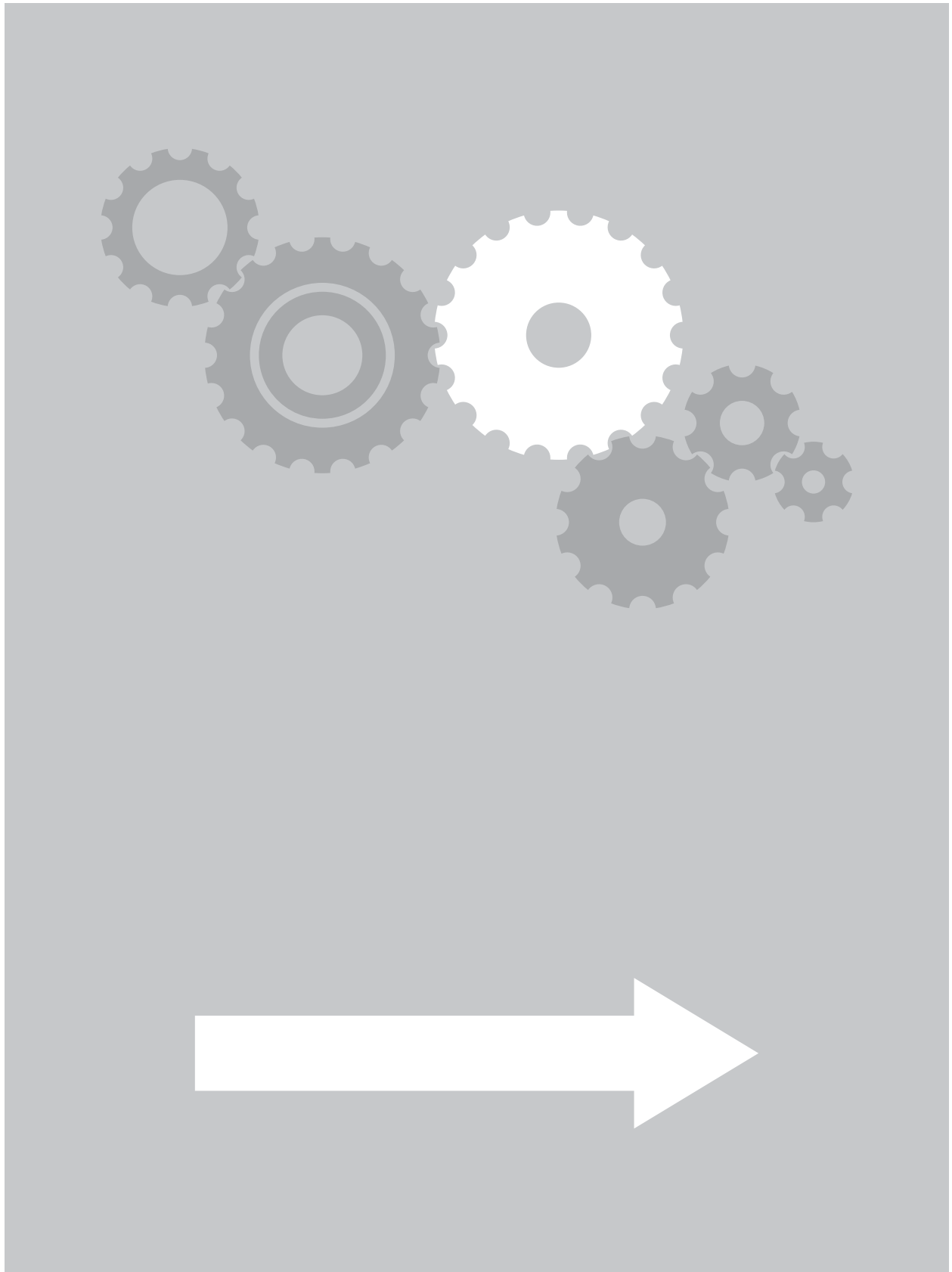
The preacher may focus on the fact that Christ is the one speaking in **Psalms 23**. But the preacher may focus on the fact that Psalm 23 is about those who are "in Christ."

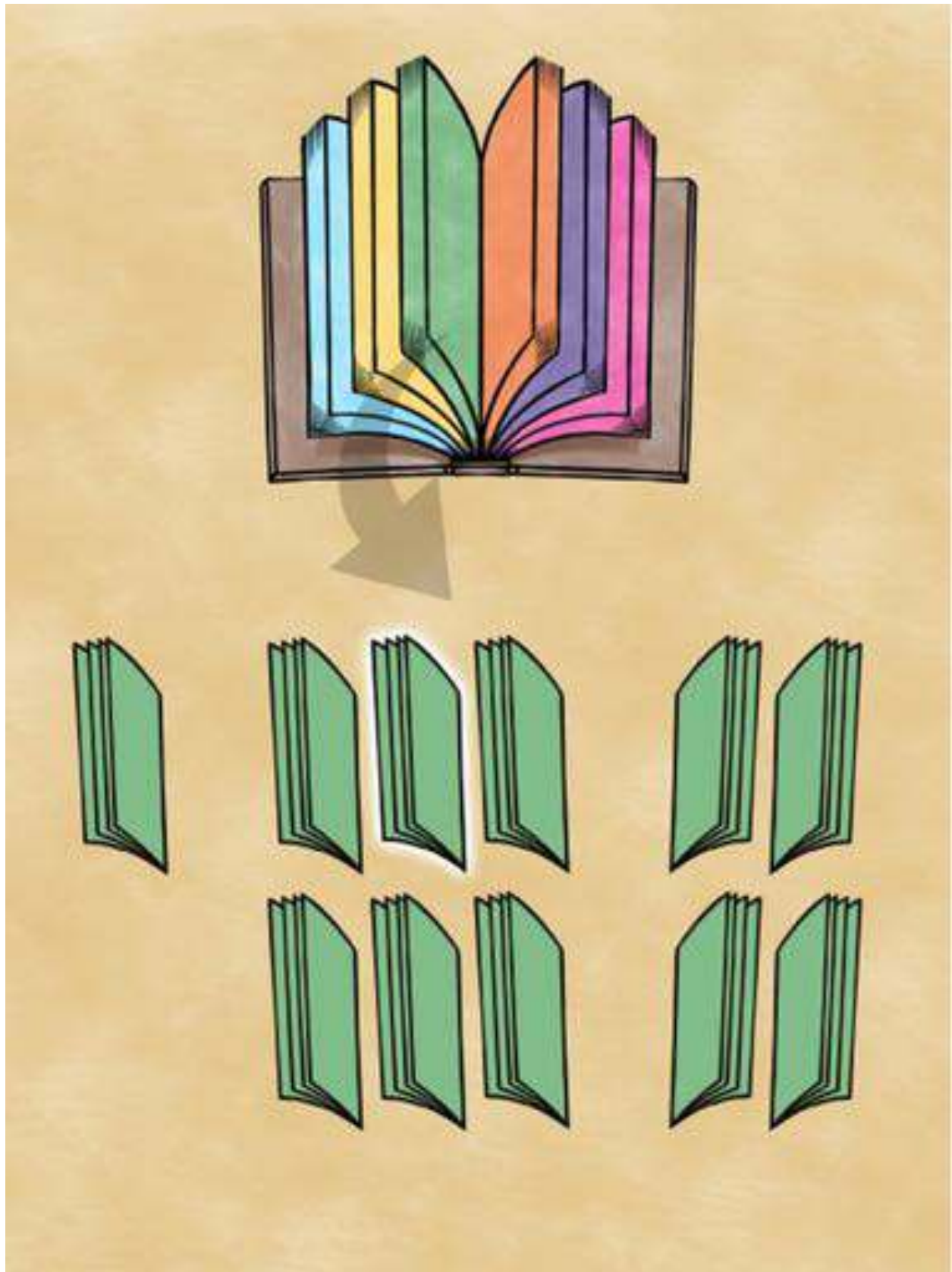
Why would the Psalms be written in this way? Why would they focus on Christ and, at the same time, the people of the Christ? There are many answers to this question.

By focusing on the Christ, the Psalms remind the believers of Christ's life and death. They allow us to "feel" his suffering. They remind us of his humanity. We see how he prayed when he was persecuted. We are reminded of his righteousness. By focusing on Christ, believers are given a perfect "example" to follow. Beyond this, by focusing on the Christ, these Psalms allow us to rejoice in the fact that God delivered him. We are hearing the story of our salvation! Reading the Psalms in this way helps the followers of God today focus upon Christ and to celebrate his deeds and fruitfulness.

At the same time, by focusing on the people who are in Christ, the Psalms are reminding us that we will suffer. They are reminding us that we must pray. They are reminding us that we will, at times, face doubt, and we must fight doubt and turn in faith to God. They are reminding us to look to God for our salvation.







16. Job teaches God's people wisdom about God and his wisdom.

While all of the books in the Old Testament are filled with wisdom and are “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (see **2 Timothy 3:15**), there are five books that have been especially connected to wisdom in the Old Testament. The five “wisdom” books are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. All five of these books are located together in the Writings. Each of these books teach the reader about wisdom for life in this present age. Each book teaches about wisdom from a different perspective.

The wisdom taught in these five wisdom books is a gracious gift from God. The wisdom books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are “means of grace” by which God helps his people. These books provide wisdom for God's people so that they might live well before God during this present age of suffering and evil.

All five books of wisdom focus on something different which God's people need to know in order to live wisely in this present age. What is the wisdom being taught in the book of Job? It is important to note that the author of Job doesn't **tell** the reader what the wisdom is which is being taught. In other words, the author never says anything like, “The wisdom being taught in Job is that people need to think about God in this particular way.” The author never says, “The wisdom being taught in Job is that people need to act in this particular way.” Rather than telling the reader what the wisdom is, the author **shows** the reader what the wisdom is.

The author **shows** the reader the true wisdom being taught in Job by letting the reader “listen” to different people talk about God and his actions. The reader “listens”

to Job speaking about God and his actions. The reader listens to three of Job's friends speaking about God and his actions. The reader listen to Job's wife speaking about God and his actions. And the reader listen to a young man named Elihu speak about God and his actions. In all of these conversations, people are speaking about God and why he does the things he does. These people are also telling Job what he should do.

But God, the one about whom everyone is talking, is silent. The reader "listens" to God's words in Job 1 and 2. These first two chapters let the reader know that the people speaking throughout the book of Job are all lacking in knowledge. They simply do not know why things are happening. God knows. However, God is silent from Job 3-37. The book does not focus on what God is doing or thinking during all of this time. Instead, the reader "listens" to other people talk about God and about the things Job should be doing. Even though Job's friends speak many true things, they are speaking from incomplete knowledge. They are not God and they do not know all things. None of them why God is allowing Job to suffer. Thus, the wisdom of man is found in Job 3-37. It is sometimes helpful, but it is always incomplete. People simply do not know the same things God knows. If he chooses to hide his purposes from people, they will never truly know why anything happens.

Finally, after many, many different speeches from different people (all in the form of poetry), God speaks for himself (see Job 38-41). But God's words in Job 38-41 are surprising. He doesn't answer any of the questions Job has about God. Instead, he begins asking questions to Job!

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

Dress for action like a man;

I will question you, and you make it know to me."

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Tell me, if you have understanding.” Job 38:1-4

In these verses, God never explains why Job is suffering. In fact, at least in the book of Job, Job is never told why he is suffering. God never tells him that he is allowing Satan to test him in order to demonstrate God’s greatness and the reality of Job’s love for God. The reader knows the reason why, but Job is not told this information. Apparently, God does not think it is important for Job to know this information. He does not need this information in order to live on the earth in a godly manner.

But if Job doesn’t need information about his suffering, what does he need? He needs true knowledge about the greatness of God, the wisdom of God, the creativity of God, and the control God has over all things. He also needs true knowledge about his own weakness, his own lack of power, and his own lack of knowledge. God knows all about Job. He knows him thoroughly (see **Psalms 139:1-4**), however Job needs to learn that he does not know all about God. God is far above Job. Job is taught this wisdom by God in Job 38-41.

As Job listens to God, he gains wisdom. Job summarizes the lessons he is learning in **Job 42:2-6**. This is the wisdom Job learned from his experiences. He summarizes the lessons he learned in the following way:

***“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.***

Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’

*Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.*

Hear, and I will speak;

*I will question you, and you make it known to me. '
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."*

Job learns that he is, in comparison to God, "without knowledge." He learns that God can do everything and that no one can hinder his purposes. Job learned that, in comparison to God, he is nothing.

How does the wisdom in the book of Job about God and his greatness apply to people today? The book of Job teaches people of faith that they, like Job, are different from God. God's people, like Job, need to know that he knows all and is above all. The Christian needs to know and rejoice in the "wisdom" of Job. The Christian needs to know there will be circumstances when he or she does not know what is happening or why it is happening. There are things which God does not need to tell his people. This was true of Job. He did not know why God was allowing him to suffer. God allowed him to suffer for a specific reason (this reason was explained to the reader in Job 1 and 2), however God did not need to explain to him why he was doing this. Thus, part of wisdom is knowing that there are things which we will not know about God and God's actions. We need to be able to "rest" in this knowledge.

Moses speaks about God's "secret things" in the following way:

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." **Deuteronomy 29:29**

As Christians today, we must know that there will be things in our lives that we do not understand. During these times, we should remember the wisdom of Job.

*"I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.'
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."*

In addition to the teaching of wisdom found in Job, there are other ways the book of Job can and should be used by Christians.

1. This book should be used to remind believers of the suffering and deliverance of Christ. Thinking about the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ should lead to praise and honor of Jesus. Job is clearly a **type** of Christ. He is presented as a king-like figure. He is also a priestly figure. He is a righteous man who, like a priest, makes daily intercession for his children. Job suffers, but it is important to note that he is not suffering because of his sin. He is suffering because God, for his own purposes, has allowed him to suffer. God allows Job to suffer, knowing he will pass the test. God delivers him and, after his deliverance, gives him more than he had before. After his deliverance, Job functions as a priest. He makes intercession for his friends so that

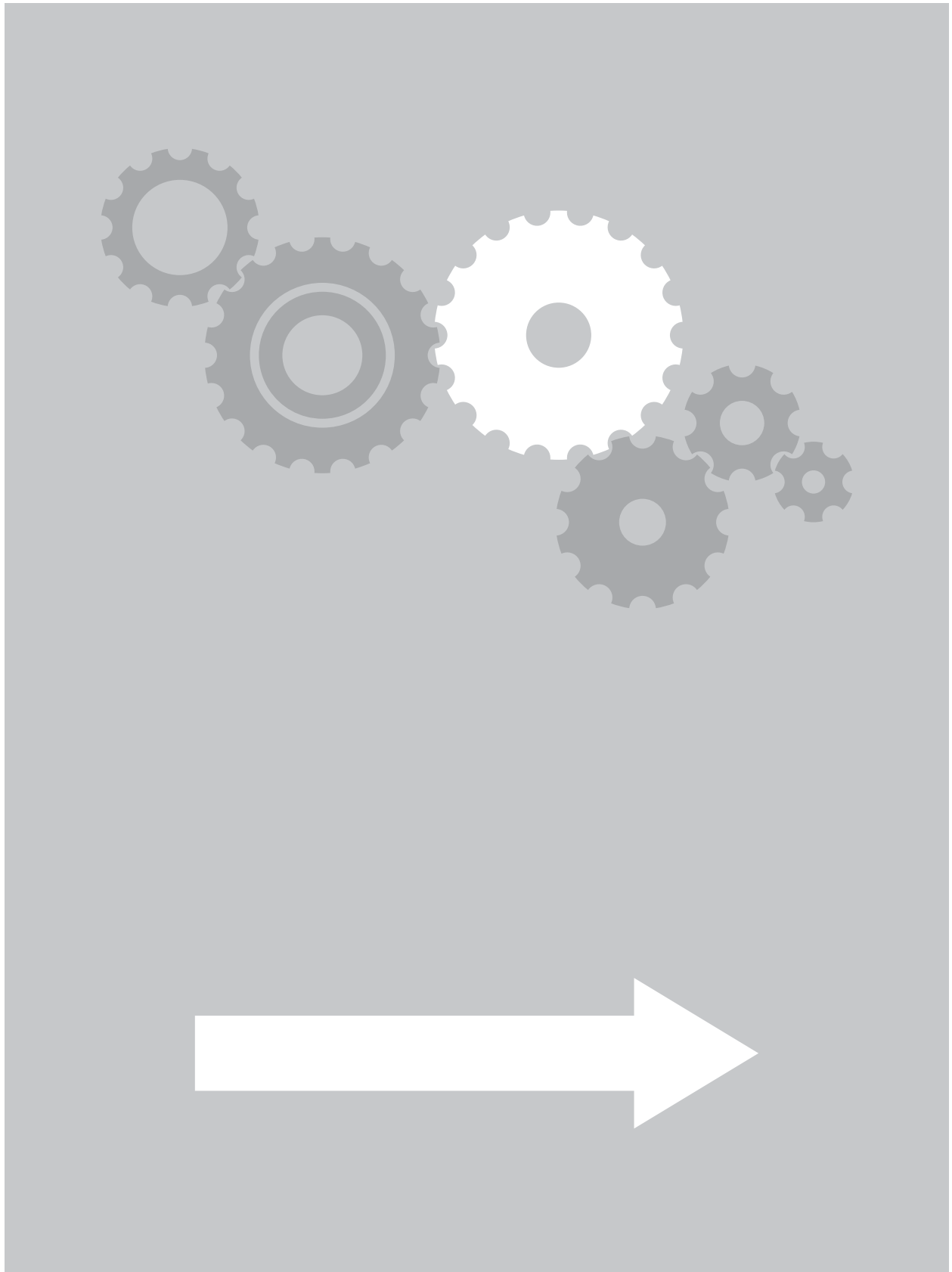
they might live. If Job didn't do this, they would have died. In all of these ways, Job is like Christ. His life is a small "shadow" of Christ's life. There is great value in considering how Job is like Christ. Preachers truly may preach the gospel through the book of Job.

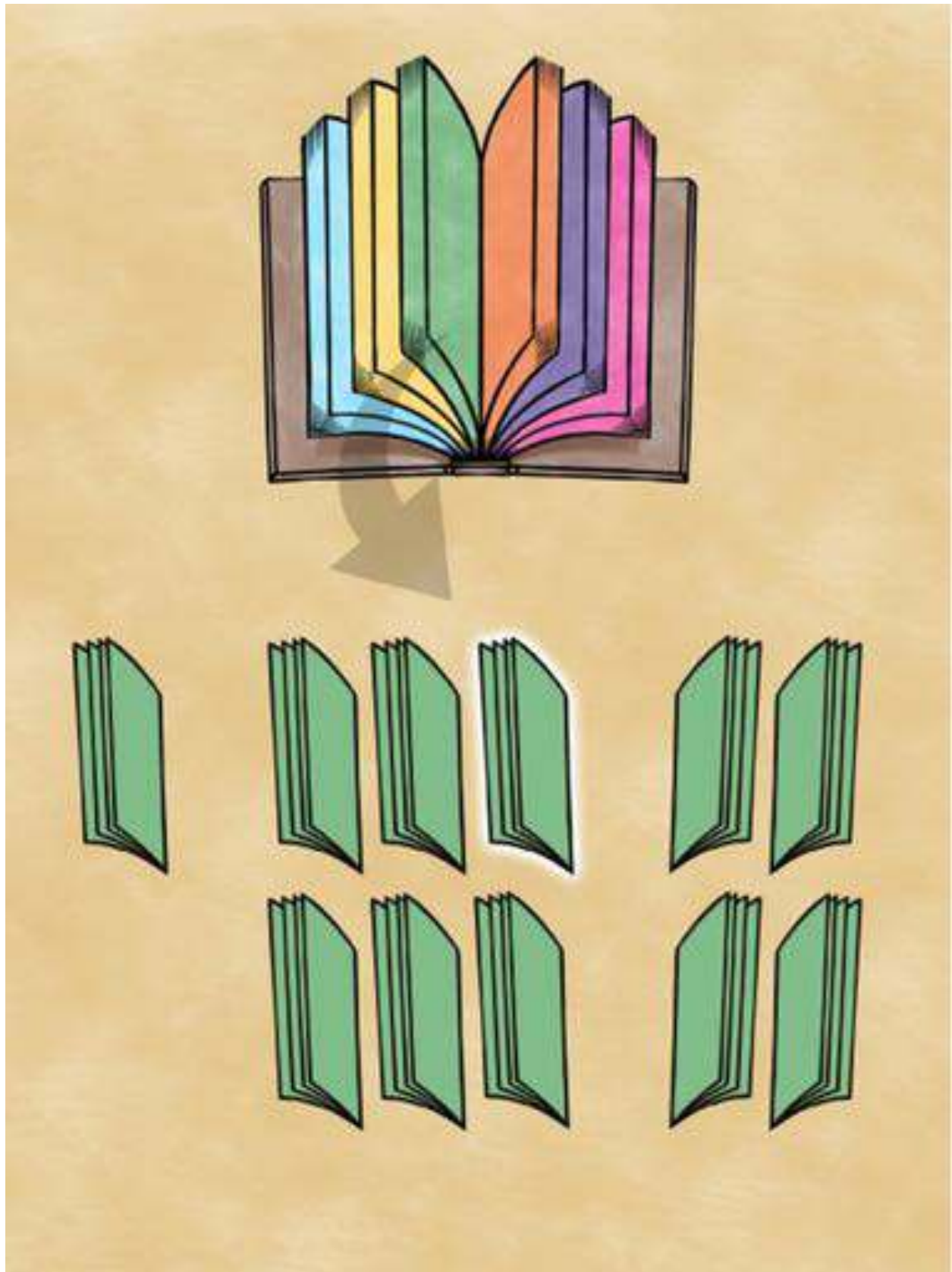
2. Because Christians are "in Christ", Job is also a "type" of the believer. Christians will suffer in this world at the hands of Satan even though they are, because of Christ, righteous. Christians need to endure to the end. They will, like Job, receive great reward for their perseverance. Christians are, like Job, "kings and priests" (see **Revelation 1:6**). Thus, Job is like the believer. Job's life, therefore, provides believers with an example they should follow (see **James 5:11**). He was "steadfast" even when he was suffering. Believers should imitate Job's perseverance in suffering.

3. Job's three friends and Job's wife provide believers with an example not to follow! We must be careful how we speak about God and how we encourage others to act. We must make sure that the words we are saying, particularly about God, are correct (see **Job 42:7**). We must not lead people in "false" wisdom.

4. Satan is powerful. This is clearly seen in Job. However, the book of Job encourages believers that Satan is under God's authority and can do nothing unless God has permitted it. This should bring great encouragement to the saints, for God is kind and loving.

5. The book of Job teaches there is great reward for the saints who endure. Only those who "conquer" will receive the inheritance which has been promised to the saints (see Revelation 2:7, 2:10-11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5-6, 3:12-13, and 3:21-22).





17. Proverbs teaches God's people wisdom to avoid the wrong "way" and to live the right "way."

While all of the books in the Old Testament are filled with wisdom and are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (see **2 Timothy 3:15**), there are five books that have been especially connected to wisdom in the Old Testament. The five "wisdom" books are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. All five of these books are located together in the Writings. Each of these books focus on a different aspect of wisdom which is needed by God's people.

The wisdom taught in these five wisdom books is a gracious gift from God. The wisdom books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are "means of grace" by which God helps his people live holy and productive lives during this present age of suffering and evil.

There is a significant difference between the second book of wisdom (Job), and the third book of wisdom (Proverbs). As was noted earlier, the author of Job doesn't **tell** the reader the wisdom being taught in the book. Instead, the author **shows** the reader the wisdom being taught. He does this through many, many poems. The reader needs to read the poems and Job's final words to determine the wisdom being taught in Job.

However, the author of Proverbs does tell the reader the wisdom which is being taught. At the very beginning of the book, the author clearly says the book is intended to teach wisdom to those who read it.

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

*To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles. **Proverbs 1:1-6***

After these first six verses announcing the purpose of the book, the author begins teaching wisdom. He begins by declaring that the “fear of Yahweh” is the beginning of knowledge.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction. **Proverbs 1:7***

By putting these words about the fear of Yahweh first, the author clearly demonstrates that merely learning wise rules for wisdom and attempting to live by those rules is not enough to be a truly wise person. A wise person fears God. That is the starting place of all wisdom.

To fear Yahweh means a wise person knows who God is, thinks about God, loves God, has faith in God, and does what God says. If a person does not fear God, that person can never truly be called wise.

The fear of Yahweh is not merely spoken of at the beginning of Proverbs. The fear of Yahweh is a major theme throughout the book of Proverbs. The fear of Yahweh is spoken of in **Proverbs 1:29, 3:7, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:26-27, 15:16, 15:33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17, and 29:25**. This, again, is proof that the wise sayings within Proverbs are for people of faith.

The main “body” of Proverbs begins with instructions from a father and mother to their son.

*Hear, my **son**, your **father's** instruction,
and forsake not your **mother's** teaching,
for they are a graceful garland for your head
and pendants for your neck. **Proverbs 1:8-9***

Solomon is the author of most of the book of Proverbs, therefore, these are the words of the king and queen to a royal son growing up in the royal household. This is an important concept for readers to grasp. This book outlines the right way for the “sons of the king” to live. This focus on parents teaching the royal son is also seen at the end of Proverbs. In the last chapter, there is more evidence that this book is advice from royal parents to the royal children. **Proverbs 31:1-9** records an “oracle” that had been taught to a king named Lemuel by his mother.

*What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb?
What are you doing, son of my vows? **Proverbs 31:2***

King Lemuel’s mother is telling her royal son to think about his actions. She is reminding him that his actions matter. He is a king.

*It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to take strong drink,
lest they drink and forget what has been decreed
and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Proverbs 31:4-5*

Lemuel's mother goes on to remind Lemuel that he, as the king, has an important task to fulfill.

*Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9*

Followers of Christ today need to remember that they are, because they are “in Christ”, truly royal sons and daughters (see **1 Peter 2:5** and **Revelation 1:6**). They truly may be called, both men and women, by the royal name “sons of God.”

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Romans 8:14

Thus, the wisdom given in the book of Proverbs is for “royal children” with a royal purpose. In the same way Solomon's son needed to listen to the words of his father and mother, and King Lemuel needed to listen to the words of his mother, so believers need to listen to the words from our Heavenly Father which are found in the book of Proverbs.

There are many topics focused upon in the book of Proverbs. Here are a few of the areas especially focused on in Proverbs:

- a person's relationship with money
- marriage
- truthfulness
- sexual purity
- anger
- self-control
- laziness
- the need to work hard
- the need to avoid evil
- the importance of choosing wise friends

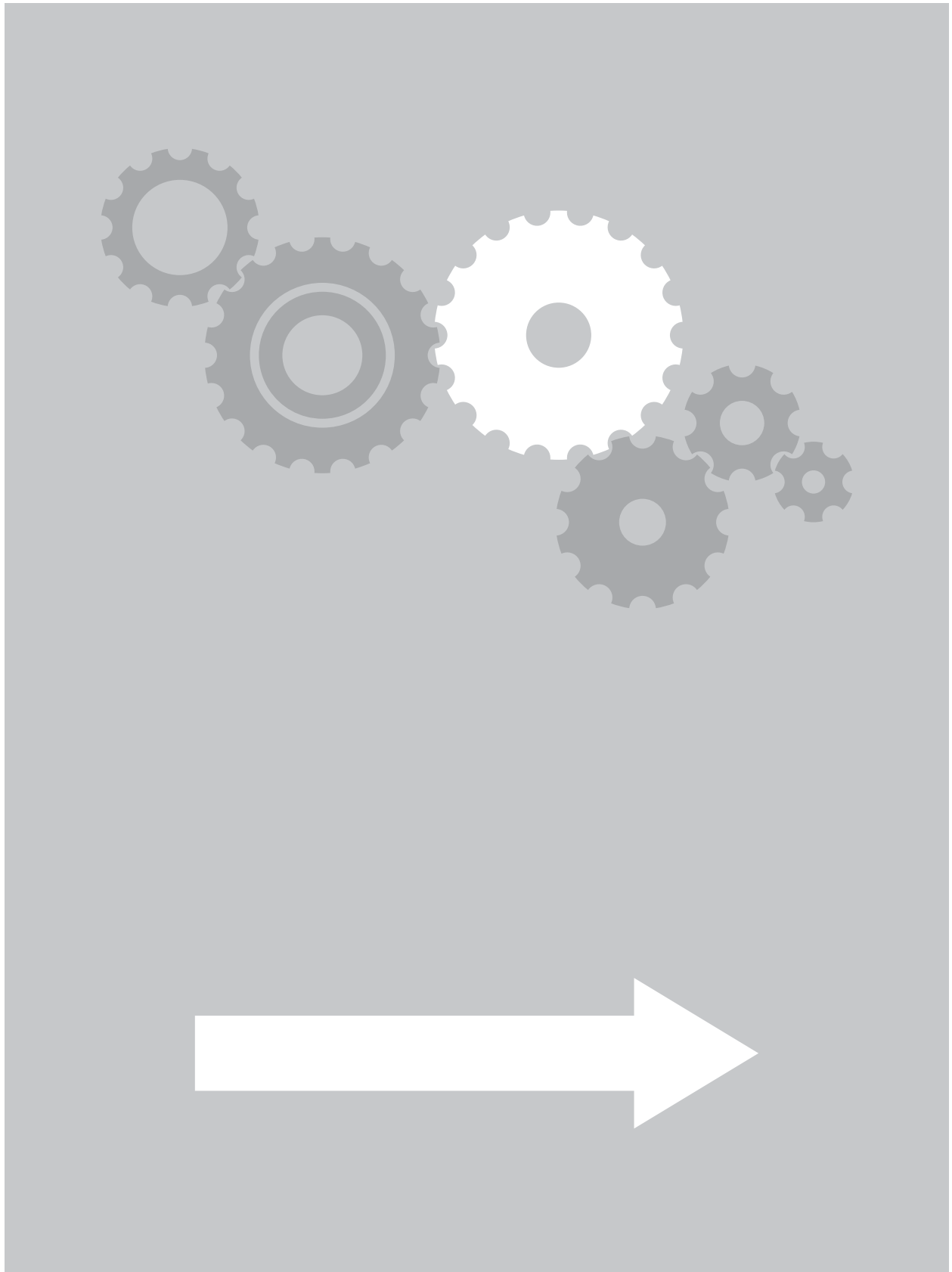
All of these, and many more topics, are focused upon in Proverbs. The wise Christian will read these words and use them as instruments to help him or her walk wisely. Christians must not live as fools.

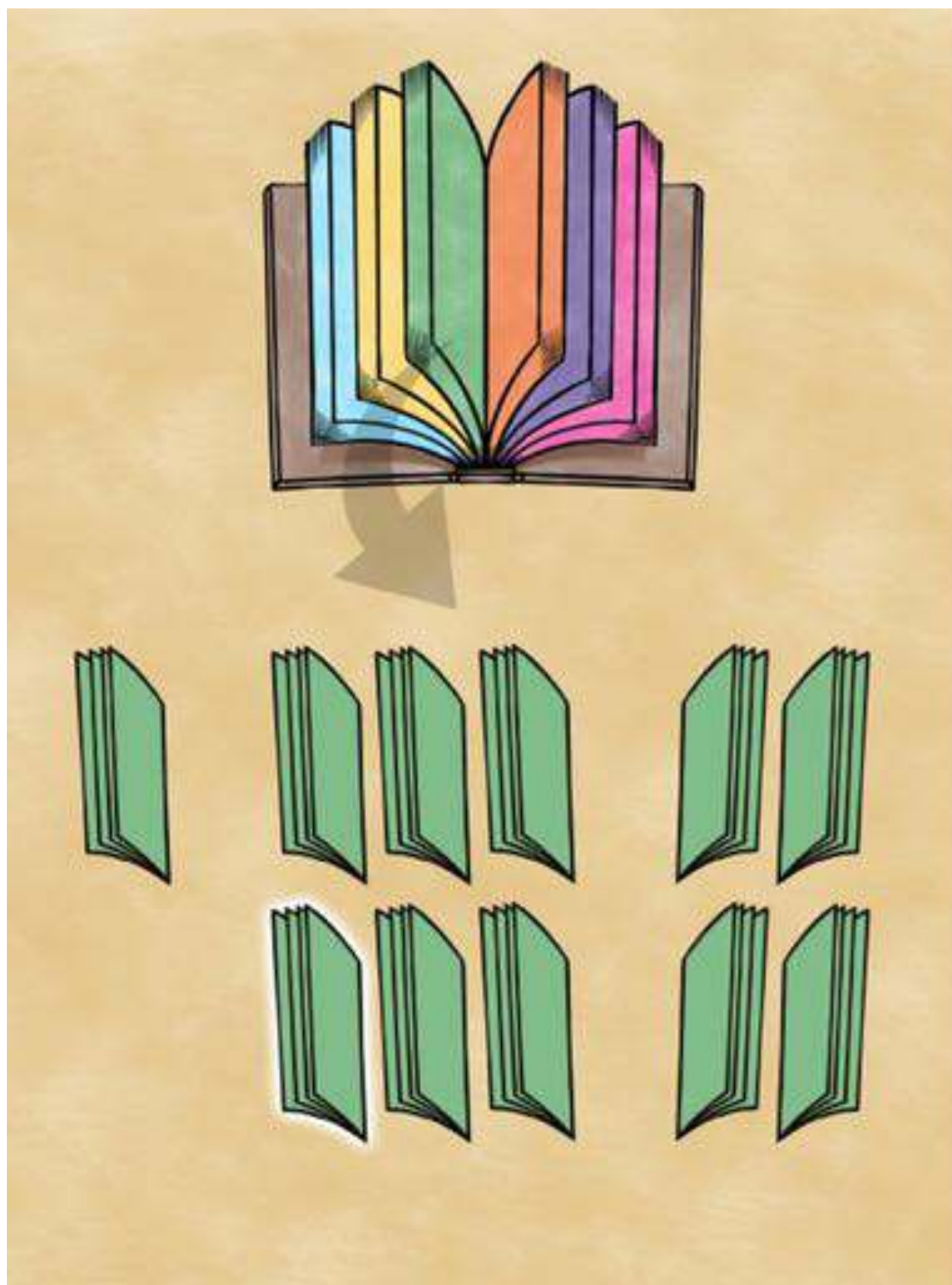
Two different “ways” are spoken of in the book of Proverbs. There is the “way of the righteous” and the “way of the wicked.” This means the “pathway” or “road” of the righteous. It is the spiritual direction a person's life is headed. The book is intended to help the followers of God avoid the “way of the wicked” and walk in the “way of the righteous.” Clear evidence that God cares about a person's actions may be found in the abundance of verses about the “ways” of a man or woman. See **Proverbs 1:15, 1:19, 1:31, 2:8, 2:12-15, 2:20, 3:6, 3:17, 3:23, 3:31, 4:11, 4:14, 4:19, 4:26, 5:6, 5:8, 5:21, 6:6, 6:23, 7:25, 7:27, 8:2, 8:13, 8:20, 8:32, 9:6, 9:15, 10:9, 10:29, 11:5, 11:20, 12:15, 12:26, 13:6, 13:15, 14:2, 14:8, 14:12, 14:14, 15:9-10, 15:19, 16:2, 16:7, 16:9, 16:17, 16:25, 16:29, 17:23, 19:2-3, 19:16, 20:24, 21:2, 21:8, 21:16, 21:29, 22:5-6, 22:25, 23:19, 23:26, 25:26, 28:6, 28:10, 28:18, 29:27, 30:19-20, 31:3, and 31:27.**

While there are several authors of the words in Proverbs, the book of Proverbs is especially connected with Solomon. This is appropriate, because Solomon was described as the “wisest” man who ever lived (see **1 Kings 3:12, 4:31, 5:7**, and **2 Chronicles 2:12**). Solomon is a “type” of Christ. His great wisdom is a picture of Christ’s even greater wisdom. And Christ, unlike Solomon, never changed his “ways” and began walking like a fool. Jesus has perfectly kept the wisdom in this book. He is the ultimate wise son. He is the embodiment of all that is written in the book. It should bring great joy for the people of God to live under the rule of their wise King!

Proverbs ends with a poem about “an excellent wife” (see **Proverbs 31:10-31**). The fact that this is at the very end of the book seems to point to the fact that the “reward” for a royal son who walks in wisdom is a godly bride of noble character and great worth. This is true of Christ. He is the perfect wise man. He walked in obedience all of his life. His “ways” were always perfect. Therefore, Jesus has been rewarded with “an excellent wife” above all other possible wives—the church (see **Ephesians 5:22-33**)! There is great value in the preacher or teacher considering how Christ is the ultimate “wise son.” There is great value in the preacher or teacher considering how the church is like the “noble wife” in Proverbs 31.

Proverbs is an Old Testament book. However, Christians must not treat it as if it only for Old Testament saints. Proverbs has great value for Christians today. The New Testament calls Christians to ask God for wisdom (**Colossians 1:9** and **James 1:5**). Christians are commanded to “be wise” (see **Ephesians 5:15-17** and **Colossians 4:5**). Proverbs is one of the ways God helps his people walk in wisdom.





18. Ecclesiastes is a sermon about life on this earth during this present age.

While all of the books in the Old Testament are filled with wisdom and are “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (see **2 Timothy 3:15**), there are five books that have been especially connected to wisdom in the Old Testament. The five “wisdom” books are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and, Song of Solomon. All five of these books are located together in the Writings. Each of these books teach the reader about wisdom for life in this present age from a different perspective.

The wisdom taught in these five wisdom books is a gracious gift from God. The wisdom books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are “means of grace” by which God helps his people live holy and productive lives during this present age of suffering and evil.

There are significant differences between all five books of wisdom. Ecclesiastes differs from the other books because it is a long sermon being preached by a preacher about one particular subject.

The name Ecclesiastes means “the Preacher.” This title helps readers understand how they are to read Ecclesiastes. They are to read Ecclesiastes in the same way they would listen to a sermon. Ecclesiastes is a sermon about life on this earth during this present age. The Preacher uses his own life experiences throughout his sermon. While the Preacher is not named in the book, it is most likely the Preacher is Solomon.

In the same way a preacher will have one main theme in a sermon, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes has one main theme. The Preacher's theme is first announced in **Ecclesiastes 1:2** (see also **12:8**):

*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity. **Ecclesiastes 1:2***

The Preacher's theme is the "vanity" of life. Vanity seems to be a reference to the confusing nature, the seeming meaninglessness, the futility, and the brevity of life. The Preacher is not talking about life as God intended it be before sin entered the world. He is talking about life in this cursed world "under the sun."

The word translated "vanity" in the ESV means "vapor" or "breath" in the Hebrew. "Vapor" and "breath" is a perfect description of the nature of life on this earth. Like a puff of smoke, which is impossible to grab with the hand, life cannot be controlled by any person, no matter how strong, wise, talented, or wealthy that person might be. And, like a puff of smoke, all things on this earth are here for a little while and then they are gone. Nothing on this earth is permanent. All, whether good or bad, disappears and, seemingly, is remembered no more.

In Hebrew, the word which is translated "vanity" (in the ESV) is spelled the same as the name of Adam's second son "Abel." This means the ancient Hebrews reading about "vanity" in Ecclesiastes would have been reminded of Abel's life. Abel's short life is a picture of the "vanity" of life in this age. His life was so brief it seemed like a puff of smoke or a gust of wind. Abel's life appeared to have no lasting effect. From an earthly perspective, his righteousness was of no value. He was killed by a wicked man. There are no records of any of Abel's words. He built no great monuments. Nothing from Abel's life, it appears, lasted. His life was, in this sense, vanity. It appears to have had

absolutely no meaning. Of course, Christians know that Abel's life was not "vanity." They know that his words and deeds did have lasting effect, even though they appeared to be "vanity."

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. Hebrews 11:4

But the Preacher, even though he is clearly a man of faith, does not focus, primarily, on faith. He also does not speak about the age to come. Instead, he focuses on the nature of things on this earth during this present time period. He wants his readers to see that all things on earth are "vanity." None of them, on their own, are solid and permanent. From this perspective, all seems meaningless. The world and its greatness is passing away like a puff of smoke.

God did not, of course, create life to be "vanity." The fact that life is "vanity" is a result of the **Fall** (this is a name Christians use to refer to the original sin of Adam and its results). People were created to be fruitful and to multiply (see **Genesis 1:26-28**). Instead, their hard work seems to disappear like a cloud or puff of smoke. The earth lies under a curse. Everything dies. Things do not function as they should function. Things, like smoke in the wind, scatter quickly. Because of the curse, all appears to be vanity. If our focus is on this earth alone and building a lasting foundation, all truly is vanity.

People learn about the vanity of life by experience. For instance, a child may say, "Father, the rice has been planted. We are finished with our labors!" The child says

this because he does not know about the vanity of life “under the sun.” A wise father may say, “It will need to be planted again. Our labors will never be finished.”

The same child may say, “The rice has been planted. We will have a good harvest!” The wise father may say, “We might have a good harvest. But the harvest might fail. There is no guarantee of a successful harvest”

This is the vanity of life in this cursed world. Nothing is permanent. Nothing is guaranteed. Everything, no matter how great it may appear to be, is like smoke in the wind.

Jesus was teaching the same idea in his “Sermon on the Mount.”

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal ...” **Matthew 6:19**

The Apostle Paul spoke in the same way. He declared if there is no resurrection of the dead, then all truly is vanity.

If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” **1 Corinthians 15:32**

But, for the Christian, all is not vanity. The Christian knows that life has meaning. The author of Ecclesiastes knows this as well. The Preacher’s goal is to help the people of God think correctly about life in this present age. If all of their hope is in this age, they will lose everything, for nothing is lasting on this earth.

This is why Jesus called his followers to lay up their treasures in heaven.

“... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” **Matthew 6:20-21**

The book of Ecclesiastes is wisdom for the people of God. It stands as a reminder not to put our hope on what is, ultimately, vanity.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. **1 John 2:15-17**

How is the book of Ecclesiastes organized?

The book of Ecclesiastes begins with a **prologue (1:1)** and it ends with an **epilogue (12:9-14)**. A prologue is a literary term for the words that appear before the beginning of a work of literature. These words are part of the work of literature, but, at the same time, they stand apart from the piece of literature itself. They prepare the reader for what is to follow. Here is the prologue for Ecclesiastes. It may not seem important. That is incorrect. Based on the words in the prologue, it is very, very important.

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Ecclesiastes 1:1

By these words the author is declaring that he is the Davidic king connected to the Davidic covenant (see **2 Samuel 7:1-17**). This frames how the reader should approach Ecclesiastes. These words are God's wisdom for God's people from God's anointed king.

The prologue connects the words in Ecclesiastes to Solomon (see also **1:12** and **2:1-11**). Solomon was David's son. Solomon is a "type" of Christ. This means his wisdom, which was beyond all other kings, is a small picture of the wisdom of Jesus Christ, the true "son of David."

An epilogue is a literary term for the words that appear after the conclusion of a work of literature. These words, like the prologue, are part of the work of literature, but, at the same time, they are not part of the piece of literature itself. They, like the prologue, stand apart. They summarize, for the reader, what has been said. They ensure the reader has not missed the main message. Here is the epilogue:

Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring

every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

The epilogue of Ecclesiastes emphasizes the “words of the wise” are “like goads.” In the same way a farmer may prod an ox with a sharp stick in order for it to move, the words of the wise move God’s people in the right way. God’s people must not look for guidance from other places. They need to trust their Shepherd who is leading them.

The epilogue ends with the Preacher’s instructions for life during this age: “Fear God and keep his commandments.” The preacher then explains why God’s people need to do these two things: God is the judge and he “will bring every deed into judgment.”

In between the prologue and epilogue is the sermon. The sermon proves that life on this earth is “vanity.” Throughout the sermon, the Preacher speaks about his close study of life during this present age. He speaks about things he did and things he tried in order to find something that was not vanity. He never found such a thing. The Preacher speaks about all of his experiences “under the sun” to prove to his readers that “all is vanity.” The king speaks of the “unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with” (1:13). Everything, according to the Preacher, is “striving after wind” (1:14).

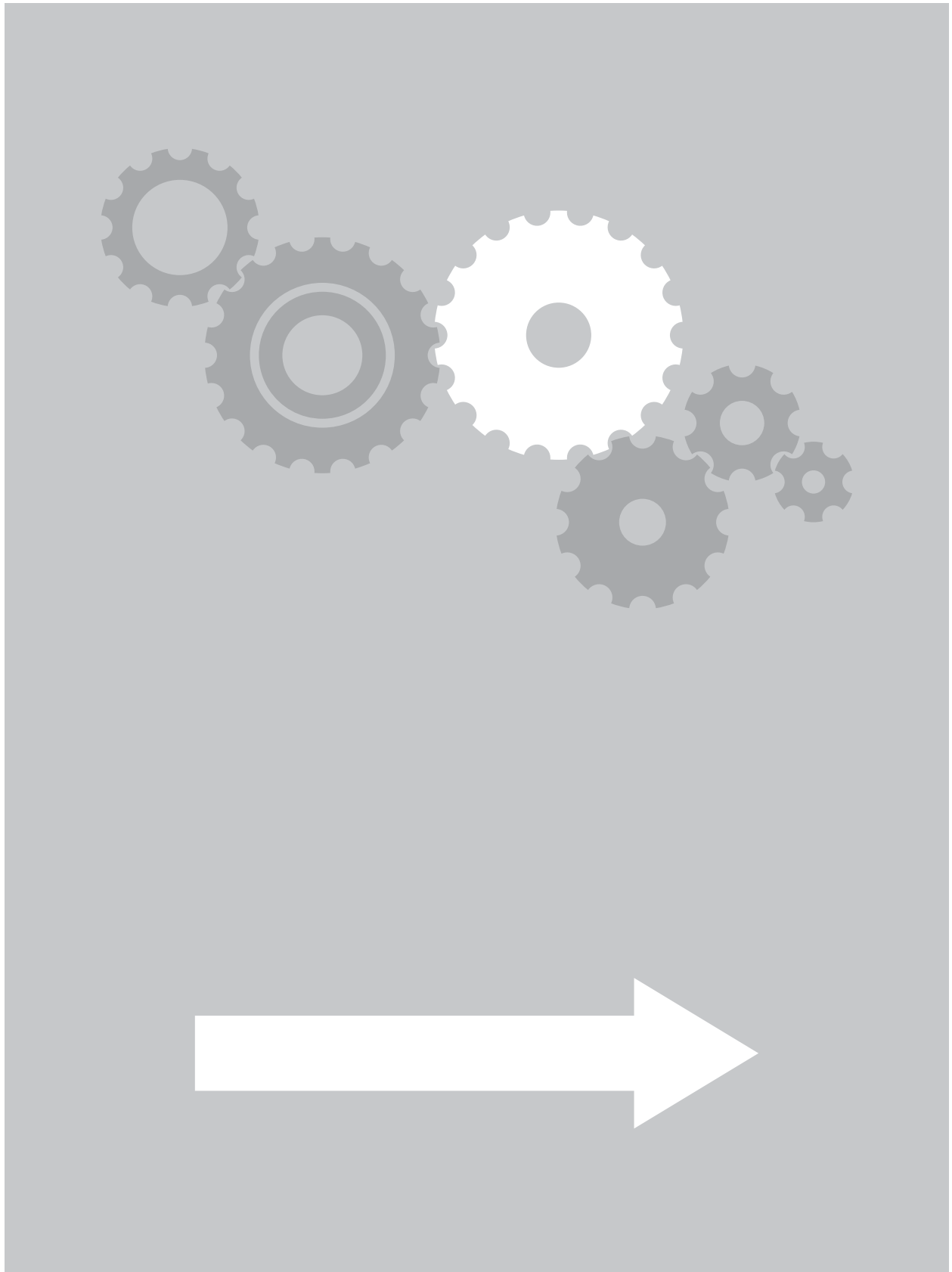
The king pursued wisdom, but this did not satisfy (1:16-17). He also pursued “madness and folly” (1:17). He pursued learning, wine, building projects, planting, the acquisition of slaves, flocks and herds, the accumulation of wealth, and sexual pleasures. The Preacher, from his own experience, learned that all of these things are vanity. None of these things solve the problem of the vanity that is “under the sun.”

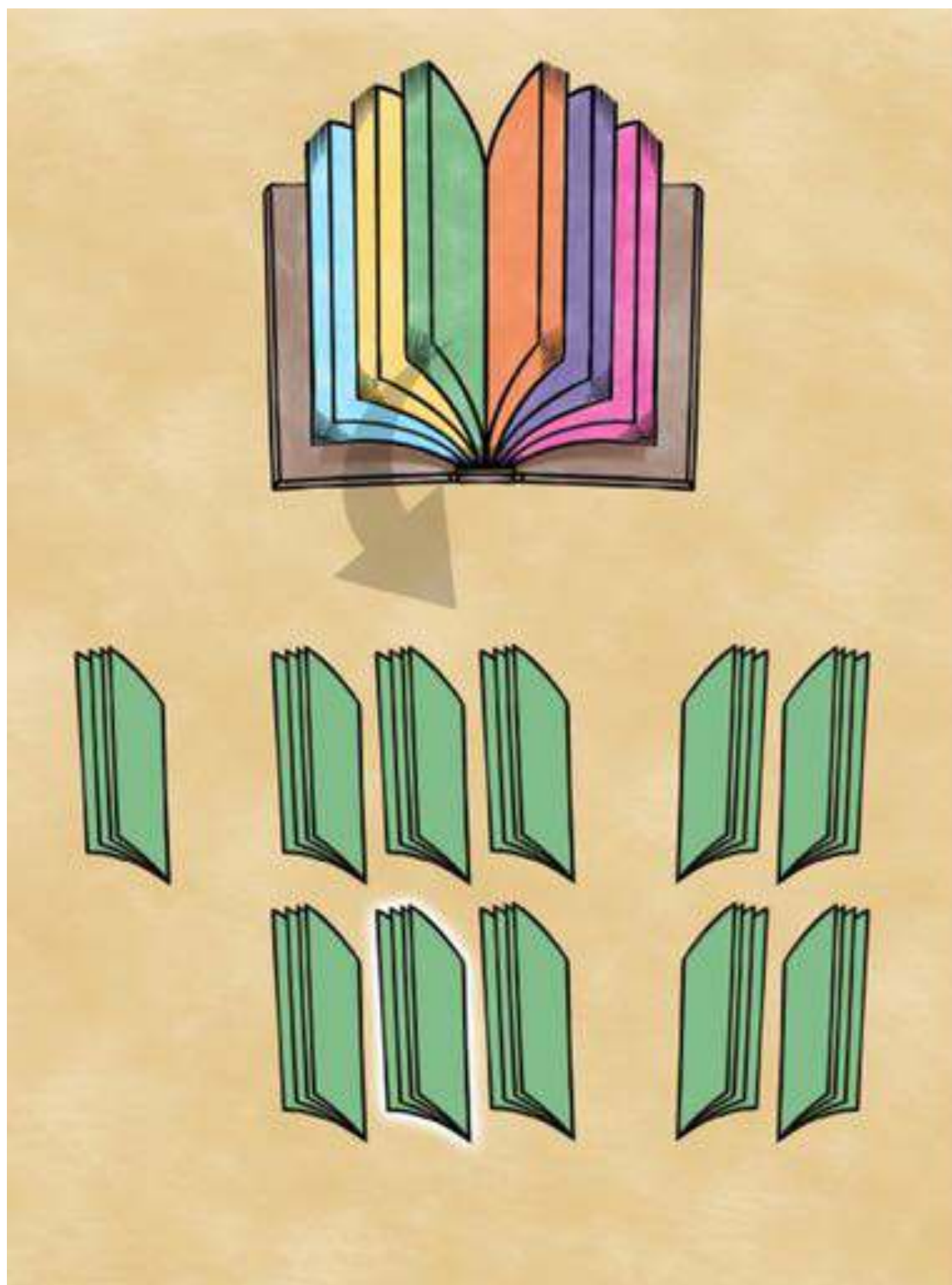
The Preacher does more than tell his story. He also presents his conclusions. These conclusions are found throughout the book. The Preacher tells the people hearing his sermon how they should live during this present age “under the sun.”

A major theme in Ecclesiastes is the nature of life “under the sun” (see **1:3, 1:9, 1:14, 2:11, 2:17-20, 3:16, 4:1, 4:3, 4:7, 4:15, 5:13, 5:18, 6:1, 6:12, 8:9, 8:15, 8:17, 9:3, 9:6, 9:9, 9:11, 9:13, and 10:5**). The phrase “under the sun” is a reference to life in this present “cursed” age. This is a reference to the time period after “the Fall” (Adam’s sin) and before Christ’s second coming when there will be no more curse.

Christians readers of Ecclesiastes know that life will not always be “under the sun.” In other words, a day is coming when there will be no more curse. In fact, Christians should remember that there will be no need for the sun in the age to come (see **Revelation 21:23**). Life, at that point, will not be “under the sun.” It will be under the true light of God’s glory. People will walk by the “lamp”, the Son of God. Life, at that point, will not be vanity, for there will be no more curse. Until that day, however, Christians need wisdom to live in this age. Ecclesiastes provides part of that wisdom. It is an ox goad, pointing Christians in the right direction (see **Ecclesiastes 12:11**).

Based on **Ecclesiastes 1:1, 1:12, and 2:1-12**, Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes. This also explains why Ecclesiastes is positioned between Proverbs and Song of Solomon in the Writings. All three books connected to Solomon are placed together. Based on the experiences Solomon describes in Ecclesiastes, this sermon was probably written late in his life. This sermon demonstrates Solomon repented after his years of sin. He does not want his readers to do as he has done. He encourages his readers to fear God and to enjoy the gifts he has given to people (see **2:24-25, 3:11-14, 5:1-7, 5:18-20, 7:13-14, 8:12, 8:15-9:1, 9:9-10, and 12:13-14**).





19. Song of Solomon celebrates the ultimate love story.

While all of the books in the Old Testament are filled with wisdom and are “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (see **2 Timothy 3:15**), there are five books that have been especially connected to wisdom in the Old Testament. The five “wisdom” books are Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon is also referred to as the Song of Songs. All five of these books are located together in the Writings. Each of these books teach the reader about wisdom for life in this present age from a different perspective.

The wisdom taught in these five wisdom books is a gracious gift from God. The wisdom books of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are “means of grace” by which God helps his people live holy and productive lives during this present age of suffering and evil.

There are significant differences between all five books of wisdom. Song of Solomon differs from the other books because it focuses on the love between a man and a woman.

Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) is, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, connected to Solomon. The book was probably written by Solomon late in his life (see **Song of Solomon 1:1**). Like Ecclesiastes, this book is evidence that Solomon repented at the end of his life and came to truly understand the sinful manner in which he had lived. His books represent true wisdom which he had actually come to embrace. Evidence that Solomon repented late in his life seems to be found in **2 Chronicles 9:22-31**. The **Chronicler** (this is the name scholars use to identify the author of Chronicles) does not speak of Solomon’s sins. Instead, he writes as if Solomon was

right with Yahweh. The Chronicler, in this sense, does not “pass judgment” on Solomon and allow that judgment to be his “last word” regarding Solomon. This may be evidence that Solomon had already “judged himself” and repented for his sins. This may have been one reason, perhaps, the Chronicler felt no need to refer to Solomon’s sins.

Song of Solomon, therefore, appears to be the words of Solomon as he writes about love and marriage. However, this book is not an **autobiography**. It is not a story of his romance with a young maiden. Based on how Solomon is described in **1 Kings 11**, Solomon could not have been writing about his own romance with a maiden. After all, Solomon loved many women and took many wives and concubines (see **1 Kings 11:1-8**).

The love in this book is not like the “love” Solomon had for other woman. The love in the Song of Solomon is pure and worthy of praise. It is a picture of the love Adam and Eve had for one another in **Genesis 2** and should have continued to have for one another in **Genesis 3** and beyond. Therefore, it appears Solomon is not writing about his own love. He is writing about the love he saw between a shepherd boy and a girl who was from the shepherd boy’s home region.

Scholars differ on the number of main characters in the Song of Solomon. The following is one possible way to read the story.

There appear to be four main “characters” in the Song of Solomon. The first character, is a young maiden referred to as the Shulammite. She is good and pure. She is a representation of what Eve should have been like. The second character is a young shepherd. He is good and pure. He seems to be a representation of what Adam should have been like. The third character is actually a group of people. These people are

watching this romance unfold and making comments about the events taking place. And the fourth character is Solomon himself. Solomon is not the “hero” in these poems. He is, instead, an obstacle to the relationship between the Shulammite maiden and the young shepherd. Beyond this, the fact that Solomon is a character in these poems serves to draw attention to the good virtues of the shepherd and the Shulammite maiden. In other words, Solomon’s known lack of faithfulness and integrity serves to highlight the faithfulness and integrity of the shepherd and of the Shulammite maiden. Solomon’s love of many women serves to highlight the single-minded devotion of the shepherd to the Shulammite maiden.

The Shulammite maiden would have been just one more woman to Solomon. In the same way that Solomon had desired hundreds of women, Solomon desires to have the Shulammite woman. In fact, it appears she has been placed in his harem, being prepared for marriage. However, the Shulammite does not desire Solomon. She has given her heart to a young shepherd.

Even though this “Song” is described as “the Song of Solomon”, it is not certain that “the Song of Solomon” was actually meant to be sung. It is certainly longer than most songs. Beyond this, unlike many of the Psalms which include musical instructions, there are no musical instructions in the Song. This, then, appears to be a poem about love. The poem is so beautiful, it has been called “the Song of Songs.” This means it is “the Song above all other songs” or “the very greatest of Songs.” The same Hebrew construction is used in other places in the Bible. The Most Holy Place in the temple is referred to as “the Holy of Holies.” And Jesus is described as “the King of kings.”

*The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s. **Song of Solomon 1:1***

What makes this “Song” so beautiful? It is beautiful because it celebrates the love between a man and a woman. However, the reason this book is in the canon is not just to celebrate romance and earthly marriage. It is included in the canon because it uses earthly marriage to draw attention to the ultimate marriage—the marriage between Christ and the church.

Again, there appear to be four main characters in the Song of Songs: a young Shulammite maiden, a young shepherd, a group of people, and king Solomon.

The Shulammite woman could have been intimate with the earthly king (Solomon). She would have been given great wealth and honor. However, Shulammite chooses the poor shepherd boy over the king because she sees something of great worth in the shepherd boy and she truly loves him. The woman suffers because of her choice. It would have been far easier for her to be intimate with the king.

This is significant because the Song of Solomon is, ultimately, a picture of the “marriage” between Christ and the church. The church, like the Shulammite woman, could be married to the world. That is what everyone would expect her to do. In the same way that Solomon would have offered riches and honor to the Shulammite, the world offers temporary riches and honor to the church. But the Shulammite did not choose Solomon. And the church does not choose the world. Instead, the church chooses an “unknown” shepherd. The church will not be intimate with the world. She saves her intimacy for the shepherd. This is the ultimate story being celebrated in the Song of Songs.

There are many connections between the Song of Solomon and **Genesis 2** and **3**. Genesis 2 and 3 were both written before the Song of Solomon. Therefore, these two chapters do not “borrow” any language from the Song of Solomon. However, the Song of Solomon “borrows” a great deal of language from Genesis 2 and 3. It is likely

Solomon borrows words and ideas from Genesis 2 and 3 because he wants his readers to see the connections he is making to Genesis. The Song of Solomon, just like Genesis 2, makes references to plants and fruit and rivers and precious stones. Because of these connections, it seems likely the shepherd and the Shulammite woman in the Song of Solomon are intended to remind the reader of Adam and Eve.

But the Song of Songs is not simply retelling the story of Adam and Eve in the form of a poem. Instead, this is a new “version” of the Adam and Eve story. In this “version” of the Adam and Eve story, the man and the woman do not give in to sin. They do not begin operating independently from one another. They trust one another, treasure their relationship, and both of them fulfill their duties.

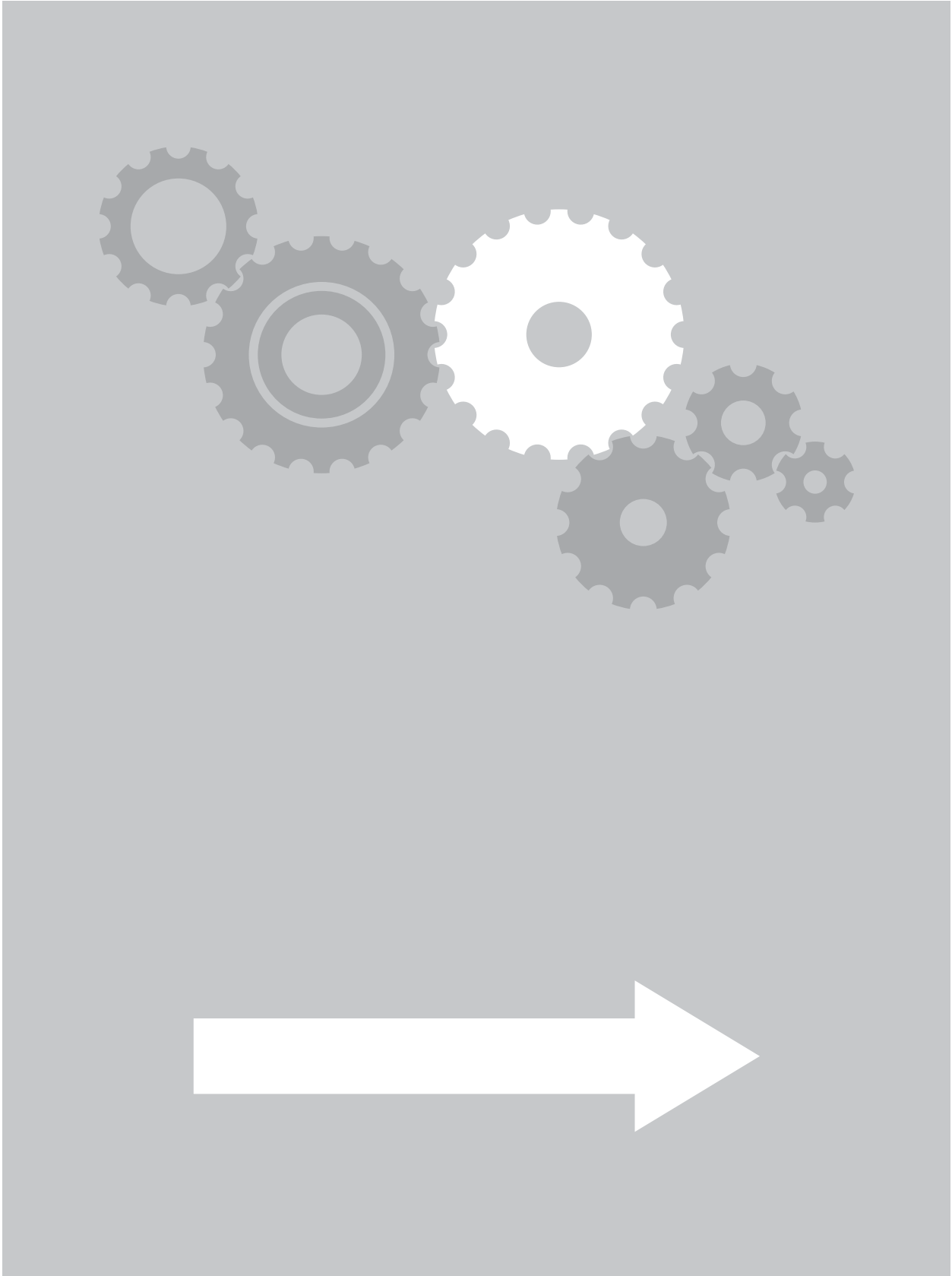
How should the wise preacher or teacher use the Song of Solomon?

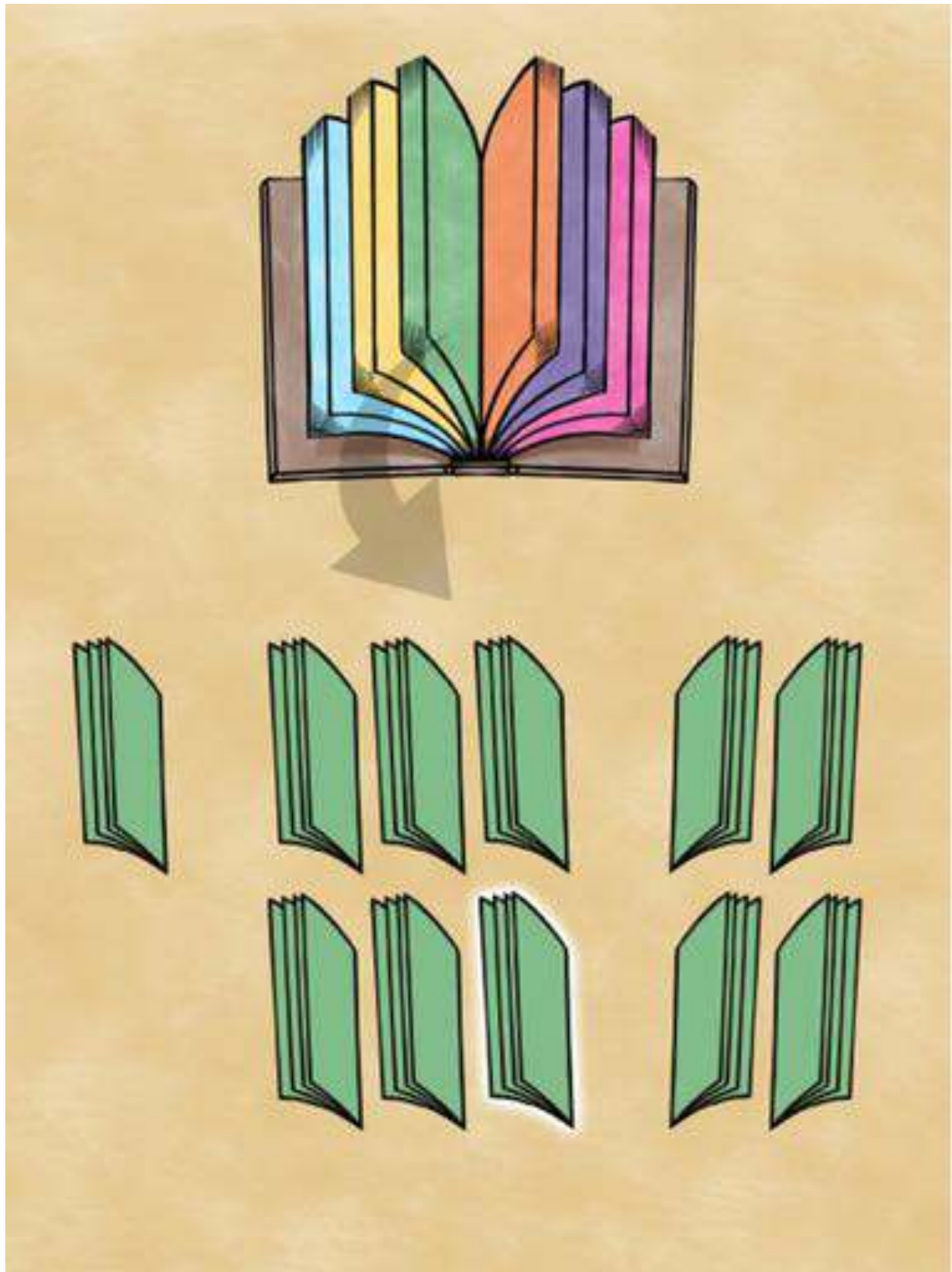
1. The Song of Solomon is a celebration of human marriage. The fact that this Song is in the Canon demonstrates that marriage is a subject of the greatest importance. This Song demonstrates that marriage between a man and a woman is good and should be treasured. This was true before **the Fall** (the Fall is a term scholars use to refer to the sin of Adam and its results). It is also true after the Fall.
2. The Song of Solomon is a demonstration of the healthy relationship that is to be normal between a man and a woman. The man treasures the woman and the woman honors the man. The deepest desire of the man is for the woman and the deepest desire of the woman is for the man. Neither person is oppressed in this relationship.
3. The Song of Solomon celebrates sexual relations between a husband and wife. The Song demonstrates that sex is one of God’s good gifts to married people. This gift was given to a husband and a wife and it is intended to be pleasing to both the man and the woman

4. The Song of Solomon is a celebration of God as Creator. He purposefully created people as male and female. He created marriage. Therefore, all of the pleasure in marriage is a celebration of God's goodness and creativity.

5. The Song of Solomon is a picture of the true relationship between Christ and the church. It is very natural for Christians to quickly move from words about human marriage to words about Christ and the church. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul does when he speaks about marriage in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. He begins talking about marriage. However, human marriage leads him to speak about the "marriage" between Christ and the church. The Song of Solomon pictures how Christ loves the church and longs for the church and fights for the church. The Song of Solomon celebrates the beauty and strength and submissiveness of the church for her King. She does not commit adultery with the world.

6. The Song of Solomon is important because it relates to the Christian's understanding of last things (the study of last things is sometimes referred to as **eschatology**). The story being told in the Song of Solomon is the story of marriage—human marriage and the marriage between Christ and the church. Earthly marriages are temporary. Death brings an end to all earthly marriages. However, the marriage between Christ and the church is eternal. The Shulammite was waiting for her marriage to the shepherd. She suffered as she waited for that day. Christians are waiting for the day when a far greater marriage ceremony will be conducted. Christians are suffering because of the long delay until the marriage celebration. Regarding the marriage of Christ and the church see **Revelation 19:6-9**.





20. Lamentations is about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Grief is a human emotion that did not exist before the **Fall** (the Fall is a term scholars use to refer to the sin of Adam and its results). However, because of Adam's sin, all people have experienced grief. Grief is the outpouring of the most intense sorrow because something very important to us has been lost, changed, taken away, destroyed, or died.

The fact that grief exists means that laments also exist. A **lament** is the artistic expression of grief. Laments, like grief, did not exist before the Fall. They will not exist, at least in the same way, after the second coming of Christ. (After the second coming of Christ, laments will serve as reminders of the victory Christ has won for his people!) Usually laments take the form of a poem or song. Laments are filled with the most intense, heart-felt sorrow. They are carefully crafted to help people feel the author's inner anguish and pain.

That is exactly why the book of Lamentations was written. It was written as an expression of the author's grief regarding the destruction of Jerusalem. The reader is allowed to feel the author's pain. But this is not just an artistic expression of one person's grief. Lamentations is an artistic expression of Israel's grief. This is a **corporate** lament (this means it is shared by all of God's people).

The first word in Lamentations is "How." In fact, Lamentations 1, 2, and 4 all begin with "how."

How lonely sits the city

*that was full of people! **Lamentations 1:1***

How the Lord in his anger

*has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud! **Lamentations 2:1***

How the gold has grown dim,

*how the pure gold is changed! **Lamentations 4:1***

The Hebrew word for “how”, when transliterated into the letters of the English alphabet, is spelled “Eicha.” This explains why Jews sometimes refer to Lamentations as the “scroll of Eicha” (“the scroll of how”).

There are five poems in Lamentations. The five poems clearly all belong together because they are structured in a similar pattern. The poems in the book were written in response to the utter destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Babylon in 586 BC.

The laments in Lamentations are traditionally read by modern day Jews on the ninth of Ab. This is a Jewish day of fasting which takes place in July. Lamentations is read in remembrance of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC (to the Babylonians), in remembrance of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD (to the Romans), and in remembrance of other disasters that have come upon the Jewish people (like the Holocaust in the 20th century).

Traditionally, Lamentations has been connected to the prophet Jeremiah. That is one reason why, in modern English Bibles, the book of Lamentations is placed immediately after Jeremiah. The Septuagint (sometimes referred to as the LXX) even names Jeremiah as the author in **Lamentations 1:1**. Jeremiah certainly could have been the author. He experienced a great deal of pain during the years of his ministry. He watched the destruction of Jerusalem. And Jeremiah was very familiar with

laments. He “uttered a lament for King Josiah” when Josiah died (see **2 Chronicles 35:25**). And he called the people to “lament” because of the destruction coming upon Jerusalem (see **Jeremiah 4:8, 6:26, 7:29, 9:20, and 49:3**). This demonstrates Jeremiah could have written Lamentations. However, it is not certain Jeremiah was the author.

No matter which prophet wrote Lamentations, it is clear the author loves God, has faith in God’s goodness (see **Lamentations 3:22-24**), loves God’s place, and longs to see God’s people restored to that place.

The author is a gifted poet. Each of the five poems have been carefully arranged. In fact, the first four chapters are written in an **acrostic pattern**. In this particular pattern, the first word of the poem starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each new “verse” in the poem begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Therefore, it is not surprising that chapters 1, 2, and 4 each have 22 verses. Each of these three poems start the pattern over. For instance, **Lamentations 2:1** begins with the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. **Lamentations 2:22** begins with the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet.

Poems written in an acrostic pattern send a message to the reader. The message seems to be a message of **completeness**. People send a message by using all of the letters of the alphabet in other languages as well. For example, in English, the first letter of the alphabet is A. The last letter of the alphabet is Z. If a man wanted to learn everything about a particular subject, he might say, “Teach me everything, from A to Z.” This seems to be what these poems in Lamentations are doing. They are expressions of the full grief of the people of Israel. They are expressions of the total destruction of Jerusalem. The place where God’s people could rest in security has been utterly demolished. Jerusalem, and the temple within Jerusalem, were no more.

The author does not blame God for Jerusalem's destruction. He acknowledges that Israel has sinned and deserves all of the wrath that was poured out on it.

*Jerusalem sinned grievously;
therefore she became filthy;
All who honored her despise her,
for they have seen her nakedness;
She herself groans
and turns her face away.*

*Her uncleanness was in her skirts;
she took no thought of her future;
Therefore her fall is terrible;
she has no comforter.
"O LORD, behold my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!"* **Lamentations 1:8-9**

But careful readers will notice that Lamentations 3 is different from Lamentations 1, 2, and 4. It is also an acrostic poem using the letters in the Hebrew alphabet. However, chapter 3 has 66 verses. In this particular chapter, instead of changing letters at the beginning of every verse (like Lamentations 1, 2, and 4), the change to the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet takes place at the beginning of every third verse. This "heightened pattern" puts special emphasis on chapter 3. Beyond this, Lamentations 3 does not, like Lamentations 1, 2, and 4, begin with the word "how" (Eicha).

What is unique about Lamentations 3? It is important to note that in this chapter, the author isn't focused on God's wrath coming against the city. Rather, he is focused

on how God's wrath has come against him personally. The first verse isn't about the city. It is about "the man who has seen affliction."

*I am the man who has seen affliction
under the rod of his wrath;
He has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;
surely against me he turns his hand
again and again the whole day long. Lamentations 3:1*

This chapter, like many of the Psalms, is a picture of one man suffering alone. This man cries out to God and is delivered by him.

*"You have taken up my cause, O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.
You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD;
judge my cause.
You have seen all their vengeance,
all their plots against me.*

*"You have heard their taunts, O LORD;
all their plots against me.
The lips and thoughts of my assailants
are against me all the day long.
Behold their sitting and their rising;
I am the object of their taunts." Lamentations 3:58-63*

For those who have read the Psalms, this type of poetry should be very clear. Whenever we read of one innocent person suffering alone, we should think of the Christ. While these particular words in Lamentations are not quoted by the Apostles, the Apostles do quote poetry like this from the Psalms, and they apply these poems to the Christ. If Lamentations is like the Psalms, this means the key portion of Lamentations is drawing attention to the suffering and to the deliverance of the Christ.

But why is the suffering and deliverance **of the Christ** in the middle of a book about the destruction **of Jerusalem**? The answer may be seen throughout the Bible! The perceptive reader should understand, by this point, that the suffering and deliverance of the Christ is the key to the creation of God's people and to the establishment of a safe place for God's people! Without his suffering and deliverance, there will be no "new" Jerusalem.

Lamentations concludes with a prayer in chapter 5. This chapter is not written in an acrostic pattern. The author does not say why he has changed the pattern here. It is clear the author did not forget about the pattern. The chapter is carefully arranged and is clearly intended to remind the reader of the Hebrew alphabet. This is evident because there are 22 verses in Lamentations 5. Again, there are also 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. There are also 22 letters in Lamentations 1, 2, and 4. Clearly, Lamentations 5 fits with the other chapters in Lamentations. But it is also different. Why did the author decide not to use the letters in the Hebrew alphabet here? Perhaps it is because he wants his readers to keep praying.

The previous chapters, remember, emphasized completeness. This seems to be a mark of this type of acrostic. Because they start with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and end with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, they emphasize a complete message.

This prayer, however, is not complete. The saints are to continue praying for the establishment of Jerusalem. This may be why the author does not use the acrostic pattern here. The saints are to keep praying. The prayers of the saints about the establishment of the New Jerusalem must continue.

There is great value in careful meditation on the poems in Lamentations. Here are five benefits of close study of this book:

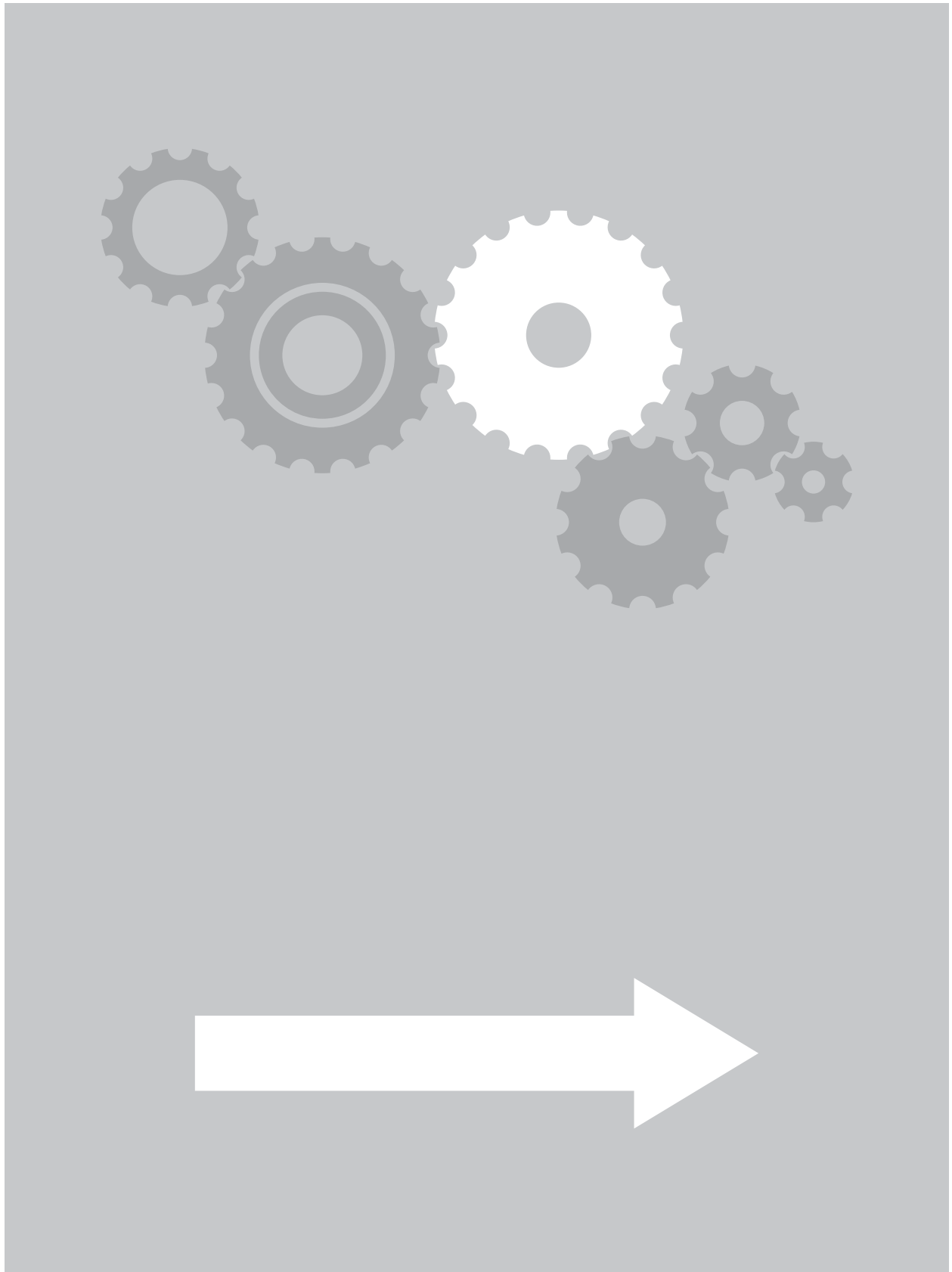
- 1. This book reminds Christians of the seriousness of sin and of the truthfulness of God's word.** God punished Israel for its sin of idolatry (see **Lamentations 1:5**). Previously, he warned the people he would do this if they worshipped idols (see **Deuteronomy 4:15-28**). Lamentations demonstrates that God always keeps his word. People today must know that God does not change.
- 2. This book reminds Christians that this world is not their home. They should love and treasure the Jerusalem that is above.** The author's deep love of Jerusalem is easy to see in the poetry. His life is ruined if Jerusalem is ruined. But believers today often do not think about their true city. A deep love of the New Jerusalem and a longing to finally go home should be in every believer today (see **Psalms 137:6** and **Galatians 4:26**). Christians today are waiting for the "New Jerusalem." In fact, because the New Jerusalem is the "eternal city of God", we should love and treasure the New Jerusalem even more than the people loved the original Jerusalem during the time of Lamentations. This is a major theme in Bible (see **Hebrews 11:9-16, 12:22-24**, and **Revelation 21:1-22:5**). The book of Lamentations can be used to increase our love for the New Jerusalem.
- 3. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is a small picture of the killing of Christ.** Thus, the intense grief that the author was feeling after the destruction of

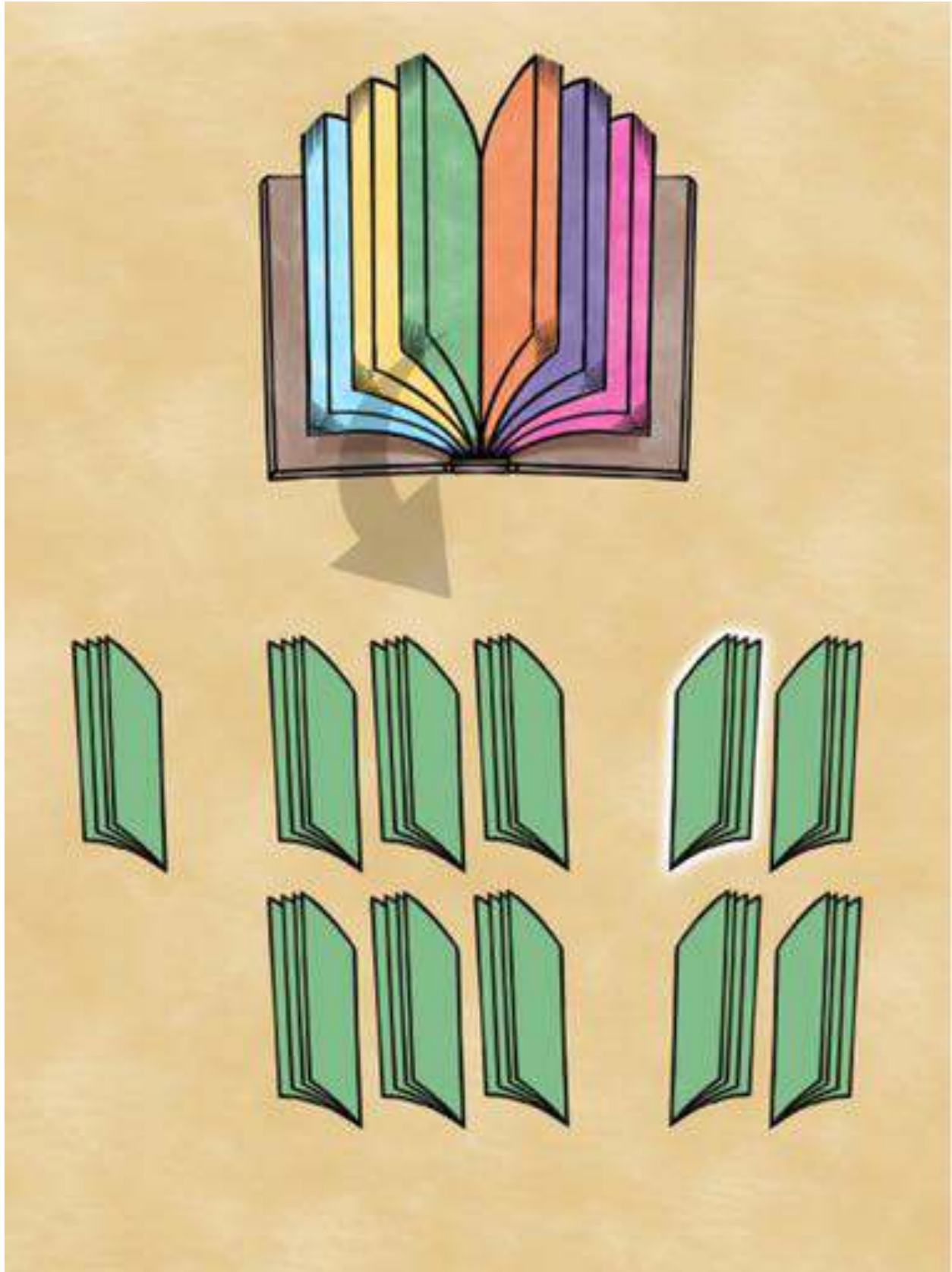
Jerusalem was being felt by Jesus' followers when Jesus died. That is why words used in Lamentations (see **2:15**) are also used during the time of Christ's crucifixion (see **Mark 15:29**). Mark wants his readers to read Lamentations with Christ's crucifixion in mind!

4. The laments in this book should lead to thankfulness by God's people. It may sound strange, but deep lament can lead to deep joy and thankfulness. Truly "feeling" the pain being felt by the author should increase the gratitude believers today feel. Jerusalem is not forever destroyed! God has heard the prayers voiced in Lamentations 5 (and many other places). There is a city with foundations for all of God's people!

5. This book reminds us of the full victory coming at the second coming of Christ. Jesus Christ came to take away all sorrow and grief. However, until the second coming of Christ, grief will be part of life. This book of laments reminds us of the coming day when there will be no more laments. On that day, even laments will be turned to songs of joyful remembrance of Christ's victory.

*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. **Revelation 21:4***





21. Daniel provides hope for faithful people living in a foreign land.

Even though Daniel is a prophet, the book of Daniel is not located in the section of the Old Testament called the Prophets. Instead, Daniel is located in the Writings. Why is Daniel in the Writings? One of the reasons Daniel is located in the Writings because Daniel provides hope for God's faithful people who are living in exile. This aspect of Daniel is very similar to the message found in the book of Esther.

The book of Daniel is the first book in the "narrative" part of the Writings. There are four books in this part of the Writings: Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra-Nehemiah was originally one book), and Chronicles (Chronicles was originally one book).

The first three books in this part of the Writings are arranged chronologically. This means Daniel is first because the events recorded in Daniel happened first. Esther is second because the events recorded in Esther happened next. And Ezra-Nehemiah is third because the events recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah happened last. Chronicles is last for a different reason. It is a summary of the story being told in the Old Testament. Beyond this, Chronicles provides a "bridge" to the New Testament.

The book of Daniel, like Esther, takes place completely outside of the land of Israel. Both of these books prove that it is possible to live as a faithful follower of God outside of God's good place. Even in a "foreign" land, God's people should expect to receive help and favor from the Lord. This applies to every believer on earth today. We are aliens and strangers living "in the dispersion" (see **James 1:1** and **1 Peter 1:1**).

During their period of exile from the land, the Jewish people lived under Babylonian rule for a time period. The events recorded in Daniel 1-5 took place in Babylon. Babylon was, at this time, the most powerful kingdom in the world. However, late in Daniel's life, Babylon was conquered by Persia. The events recorded in Daniel 6 took place when Persia was ruling over the people of God. Persia became the most powerful kingdom in the world. The visions recorded in Daniel 7 and 8 were given to Daniel when Babylon was ruling over God's people. The visions recorded in Daniel 9-12 appeared by Daniel when Persia was ruling over God's people. A lesson for God's people from Daniel is earthly kingdoms rise and fall. The kingdom of God, however, endures forever.

The book of Daniel may be divided into two parts. Each part is six chapters. The first six chapters of Daniel are narrative. This means these chapters (1-6) are filled with stories. The second six chapters of Daniel (7-12) are descriptions and explanations of visions that Daniel was given.

The book of Daniel can be confusing to readers because of the drastic change in style between chapters 1-6 and 7-12. The first part of Daniel, since it is filled with stories, is much easier to understand than the second part of Daniel. But readers need to carefully study both parts of Daniel. Fortunately, it is not necessary to understand every aspect of the visions in chapters 7-12 in order to understand the main point of the book.

The stories in the first half of Daniel are important for many reasons. Here are a few of them:

- The stories in Daniel 1-6 prove that God cares for his people even when they live in a foreign land. He will provide help for them.
- The stories in Daniel 1-6 demonstrate the need for God's people to pray.

- The stories prove that it is possible for God's people to remain faithful to him even when they are commanded to disobey him. These stories do not guarantee God's people will always be delivered. These stories demonstrate, however, that God will always be with his people, even if they are going through the worst trials. Ultimately, even if God's people are killed, they will be delivered by God because the victory of Christ is over all things. Even death.
- The stories in Daniel 1-6 provide examples of faithfulness and perseverance that God's people today need to imitate.
- The stories in Daniel 1-6 prove that God is over mighty kings and world empires. These stories emphasize that God is the one who raises up kings and he is the one who removes kings. No powers exist that are over God. God's people must remember that heaven rules over all.
- The stories in Daniel 1-6 prove that God has a plan for history. Evil will not always prevail. God's kingdom will eventually rule over all. Believers are, in this respect, like Daniel. They are living in a foreign land and are waiting to return to their true home.

King Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2 is very significant. It is a vision of a giant statue made of precious metals. The statue represents different earthly kingdoms. The statue is eventually smashed by a rock which had been cut out of a mountain. The dust from the statue blows away and cannot be found anywhere. The rock is not smashed. Instead, it grows and fills the earth.

The main point of this vision is that all earthly kingdoms, no matter how powerful they may appear to be, will fall. Different human kingdoms will rise and fall. Eventually, however, all human kingdoms will be destroyed by a kingdom that is "not from this world." This vision proves that the kingdom of God will prevail over every other kingdom. The most important thing in this vision is the rock that smashed the statue. It, like the precious metals, is a kingdom. Unlike the other kingdoms, however, the rock takes over the whole world. Careful readers will recognize, based on other things that

have been said about the nature of the Christ and his kingdom, that this rock must be a symbol of the Christ and his kingdom. It is not necessary to know all of the world kingdoms being represented in the statue. It is necessary, however, to know that the rock smashing the statue is Christ and his people!

This vision should bring great encouragement to the people of God. The people of God will not live under foreign powers forever. Even if they are suffering, believers may be encouraged that their suffering is temporary.

Beyond this, this vision should serve as a warning to world powers. They need to recognize that their “rule” is temporary. They will lose their power. They ought to repent and walk humbly before God.

As some scholars have noted, this vision in Daniel 2 seems to be from a human perspective. After all, it was seen by Nebuchadnezzar. That is why the world powers are represented by precious metals. The statue, to Nebuchadnezzar, must have seemed precious.

This vision is virtually repeated in Daniel 7. However, in Daniel 7, the vision is given to Daniel, not to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel sees the world kingdoms from a heavenly perspective. They are not precious to him. They are beastly.

The world powers in this vision are not represented by precious metals and they are not beautiful. Instead, they are represented by various beasts. The vision emphasizes that earthly kingdoms ruling over God’s people are not precious and beautiful (like precious metals). Instead, they are beastly. In the same way that beasts use their teeth and claws to grind and rip and crush things, the beasts (kingdoms) grind and rip and crush people who have been created in the image of God.

In Daniel 2, a stone destroyed the statue. In Daniel 7, the “son of man” conquers the beasts. Who is this “son of man”? Readers of the New Testament know that it is Jesus. This is one reason why Jesus’ favorite name for himself is the “son of man.” However, as the second half of Daniel 7 makes clear, the “son of man” isn’t Jesus alone. It is also all who are in him. That is why the second half of Daniel 7 pictures the people of God receiving the kingdom.

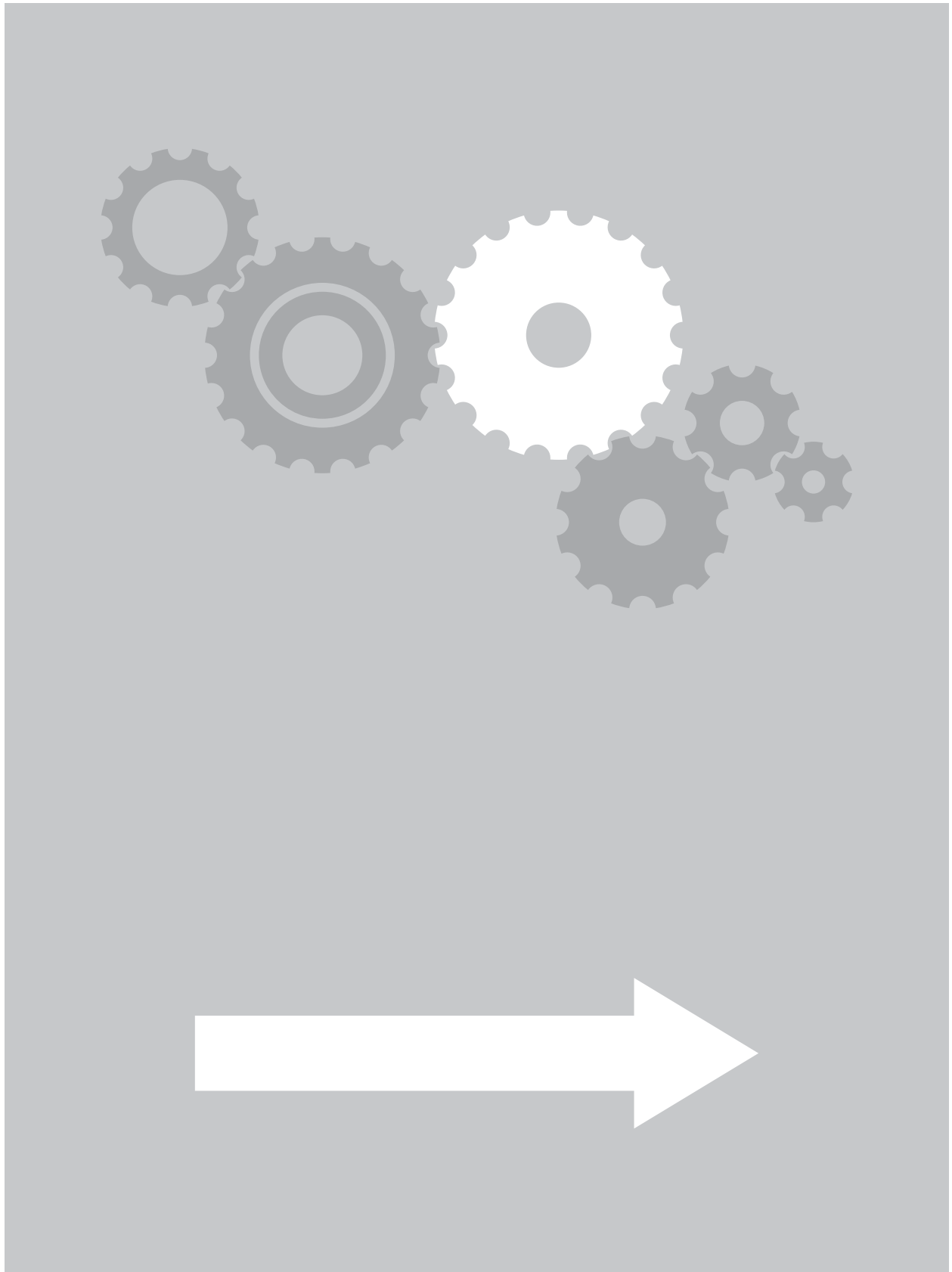
Even though the first half of Daniel and the second half of Daniel are different, it is important to see that they are connected. The fact that Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 are very similar proves this. Both parts of Daniel are about God’s plan for his people. Both parts demonstrate that God is over kings and kingdoms and he cares for his people. Both parts demonstrate that the saints need to persevere to the end. A day is coming when God alone will reign over all things.

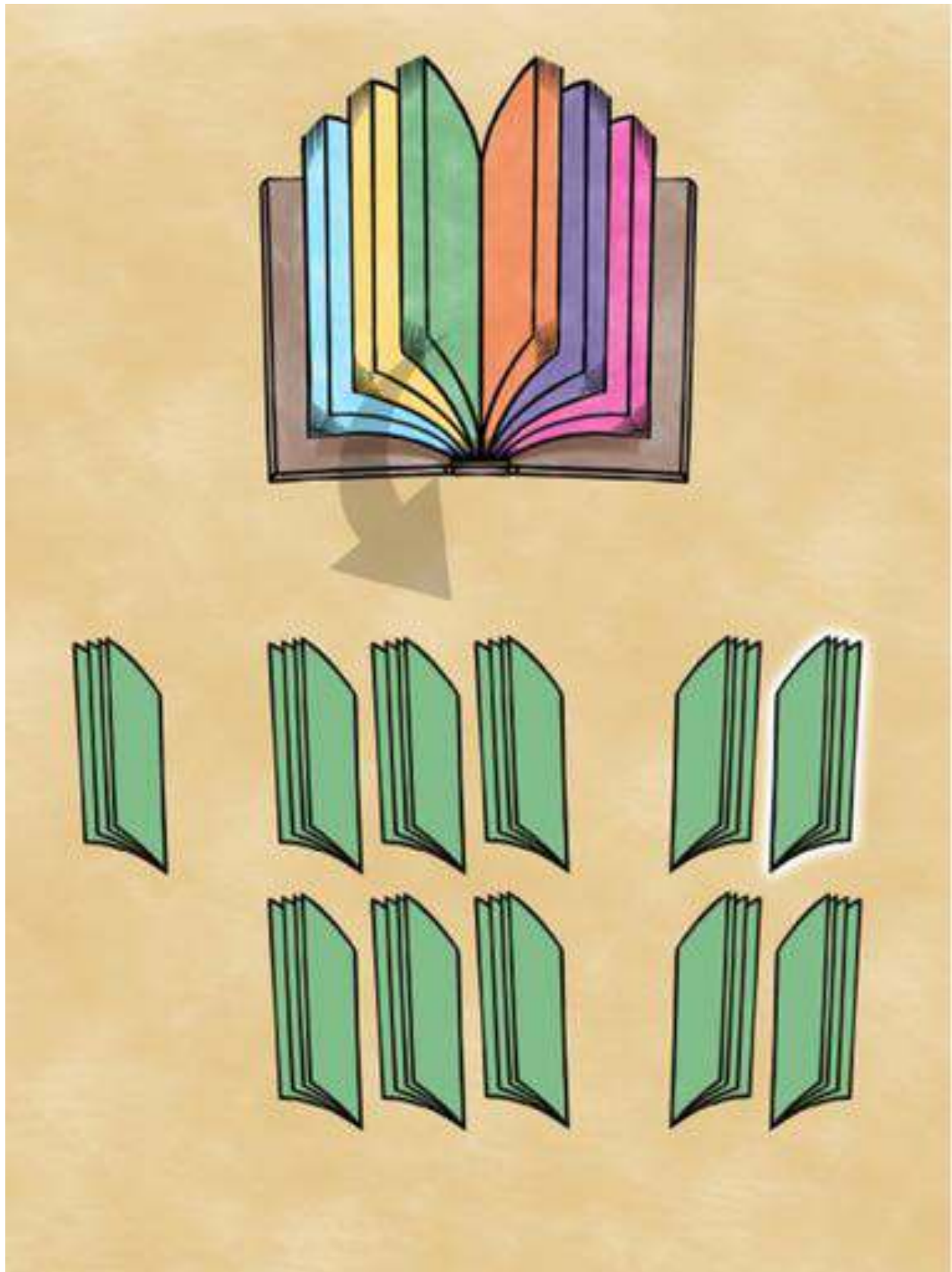
There are other visions in Daniel 8-12. These, again, are more difficult to understand than the stories in Daniel 1-6. That is because the visions are written in a style which is sometimes called “Apocalyptic Literature.” This is a type of literature that often uses strange symbols and creatures and numbers and events.

Jesus, Paul, and the Apostle John all use Daniel in their teaching regarding last things. The book of Revelation, in particular, includes frequent references to Daniel. Thus, an understanding of Daniel will lead to a greater understanding of difficult passages in the New Testament. However, the book will lead to far more than better understanding. It will produce perseverance in those who have meditated on its message. It will produce hope in those who study the stories and visions. And it will produce courage to patiently endure suffering.

The last chapter in Daniel warns God’s people that they will need to endure great trouble. However, “those who are wise” will be saved.

“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” **Daniel 12:1-3**





22. Esther encourages God's people that God is always working. He is doing this even when they cannot "see" what he is doing.

The book of Esther describes events that took place when the Jewish people were living in exile. In their exile from the land, the Jewish people lived under two different kingdoms. The Babylonians ruled over the people of God for a time period and the Persians ruled over the people of God for a time period.

Many of the events in the book of Daniel took place in Babylon. However, late in Daniel's life, Babylon was conquered by Persia. The events leading up to Babylon being conquered by Persia are described in Daniel 5. The events recorded in Daniel 6 took place when Persia was ruling over the people of God.

The events recorded in the book of Esther all took place when Persia was ruling over the people of God. This put the people of God in great danger. The people in Persia did not recognize the God of Israel and did not understand that the people of God needed to be saved in order for the whole world to be saved. They did not recognize that the people of God were the people through whom the Savior would come (see **Genesis 12:1-3**). There were some in Persia who wanted to destroy God's people. This would have ended all hope for the world, for, again, blessing for the world comes through God's people.

The book of Esther never mentions the name of God. This has caused some people to wonder whether the book of Esther should be part of the Bible. People have wondered if the author knows about God and follows him. However, it is clear the author does love God and he does know God. The author has great faith in God's power. The author chooses not to use the name of God because he wants readers to

think very hard about the way God works in the world. Even though it sounds strange, the author does not mention God's name because he wants to draw more attention to God and his ways of working and saving his people!

Why doesn't the author use the name of God in Esther? During the time of Esther, the Jewish people were living in a "foreign" country. They were living under the authority of a foreign king. They were living in a place that did not recognize the God of Israel. The book of Esther demonstrates that God is actively working to save his people even when they live under "foreign" powers and in places where other "gods" are worshipped. This should bring great comfort to the people of God.

The perceptive reader should note that there are many "coincidences" in the book of Esther. Things seem to happen at just the right time. These "coincidences" happen over and over again. If these "coincidences" didn't happen, the people of God would have been destroyed! This would, again, bring tragedy to the whole world! Consider the following "coincidences":

- Mordecai happens to overhear people plotting to murder the king (see **Esther 2:19-23**). By his actions he ends the threat against the king. This event was "recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king" (see **Esther 2:23**).
- The queen of Persia happens to be removed from her throne. Esther becomes queen at just the right time when the people of God were in grave danger of destruction. At this time, the people of God desperately needed a person with the ability to speak to the king on their behalf (see **Esther 4:13-14**).
- Haman, the enemy of the Jewish people, makes a plan to kill Mordecai (see **Esther 5:9-14**). However, on the exact same night when he plans to kill Mordecai, the king can

not sleep. He asks for “the chronicles” to be read to him. He is reminded about Mordecai’s great deed (see **Esther 6:1-3**). Mordecai, again, is the man Haman wants to kill!

- At this exact moment when the king is thinking about how to honor Mordecai, the enemy of God’s people, Haman, enters the outer court. The king asks Haman how he should honor “the man whom the kings delights to honor” (see **Esther 6:6**). Haman thinks the king is talking about Haman! But he is actually talking about Mordecai. Haman is forced to honor Mordecai. This saved Mordecai’s life (see **Esther 6:10-11**).

None of these “coincidences” mention the name of God. However, it is clear God is the one causing all of them to happen! People of faith who are reading this story are able to see God working “behind the scenes.”

Today, all of God’s people on earth are in a similar situation to Esther. All of us live under the authority of “foreign” rulers and governments. We live in places where other “gods” are worshipped. Sometimes, there are people like Haman wanting to destroy God’s people. The people of God are in great danger! How will the church survive in a situation like this? It will survive because God is working “behind the scenes” to help his people. Miracles are happening every day that are ensuring God’s people are able to work and to survive.

This does not guarantee that God’s people will never suffer. However, if and when they do suffer, God’s people know that God has permitted this suffering to take place. Esther proves God is able to deliver his people even when very strong enemies want to destroy them.

Clearly, a major theme in this book is that God is able to save his people and he is actively working in the background, even now, to do this.

It is helpful for readers to recognize that there are several “types” in the book of Esther.

Mordecai is a “type” of Christ. We come to know Christ better as we read about Mordecai and his actions, for his life and ministry to the people of God is a small picture of the life and ministry of Christ. While the book is named Esther, the author’s words point to the fact that Mordecai is the most important character in the book of Esther. This is clear because the author focuses on Mordecai at the beginning of the book. He also focuses on him at the end of the book. Mordecai, like Christ, never gives in to evil. In the same way Christ refuses to bow before Satan, Mordecai refuses to bow before Haman when he is tempted. Mordecai saves God’s people from destruction. Christ saves his people far greater destruction. He rises from shame to become “second in rank” in the kingdom. Christ, like Mordecai, is under another King (God the Father). (Joseph, who is also a type of Christ, also rose to become second in command—see **Genesis 41:37-45**!) Christ, like Mordecai (and Joseph), is always working for the good of God’s people. Christ, like Mordecai, does not wrongly exalt himself over the people. Instead, he considers his people to be his “brothers” (see **Hebrews 2:11-18**).

For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

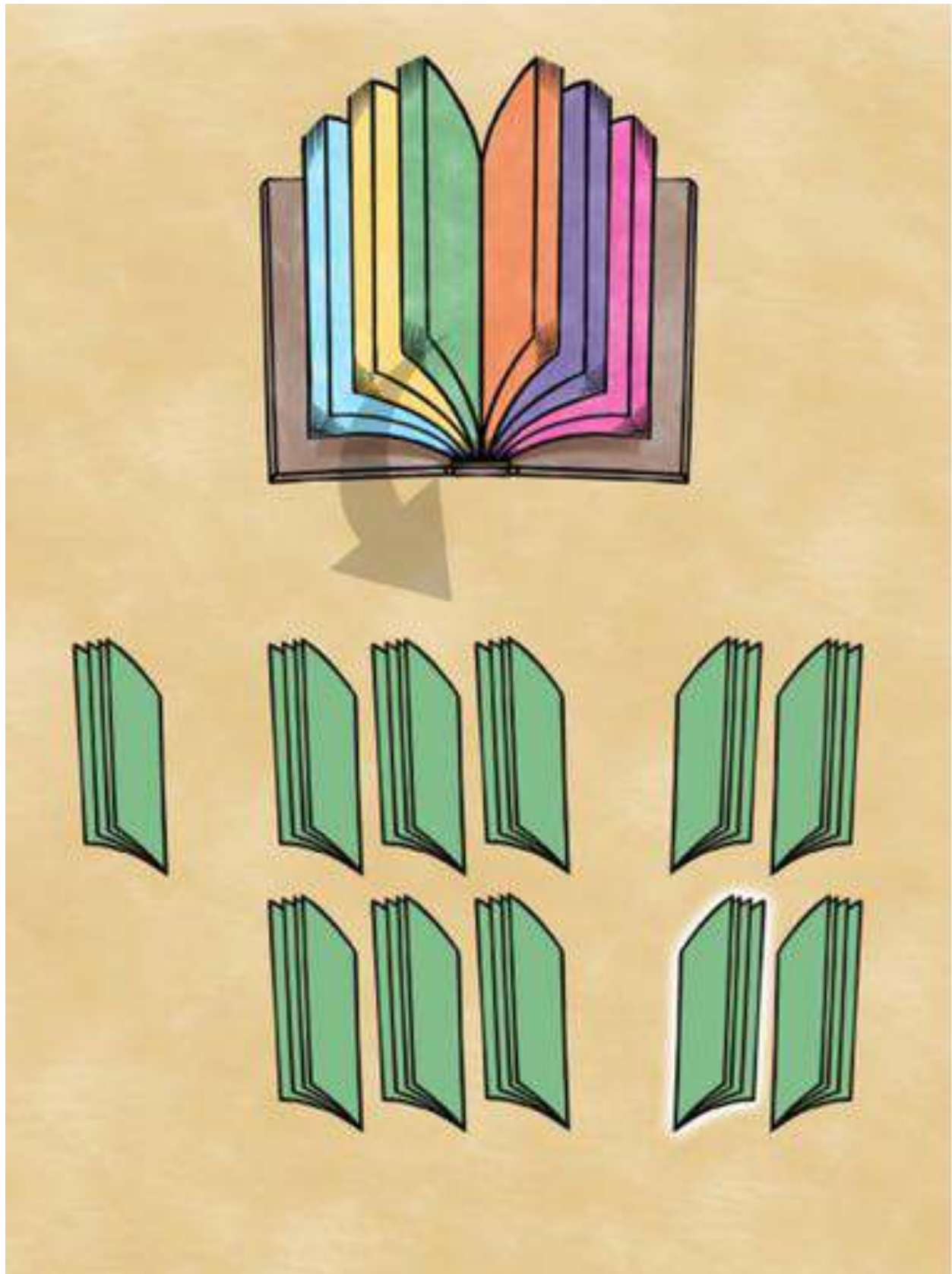
Esther 10:3

It is significant to note that Mordecai is presented as righteous in all of his actions. He is suffering unjustly at the hands of Haman. This is a picture of Christ's sufferings. Of course, a major difference between Mordecai and Jesus is that Jesus actually dies for his people!

Haman is a "type" of all the enemies of God's people. The book of Esther reminds Christians that there are many enemies of the gospel. The fact that Haman is destroyed should bring great encouragement to God's people. All of God's enemies will eventually be destroyed.

Esther is a "type" of all Christians. We must, like Esther, understand that our lives are not our own. God is putting us in the places and positions where he thinks we need to be. Like Esther, we need to risk our lives for God's purposes and for the people of God (see **Esther 4:12-16**). This "risking" could extend to losing our lives.

Finally, the book of Esther draws attention to the past, to the present, and to the future. Esther causes the people of God to rejoice in the great victories he has won for his people in the past. This book builds the faith we need as we look for his help in the present. And it gives hope that we will be fully delivered in the future.



23. Ezra-Nehemiah demonstrate God has not forgotten his people or his place.

In modern Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah are two books. They are located next to each other. In modern Bibles, Ezra and Nehemiah appear after 1 and 2 Chronicles and before the book of Esther. In the ancient Hebrew arrangement of the texts, however, Ezra-Nehemiah are one book. They are located after the book of Esther and before the book of Chronicles.

Ezra-Nehemiah focus on the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. These books focus on the grace of God which was poured out on Ezra, Nehemiah, and other leaders as they led God's people in the work of rebuilding the temple and Jerusalem. These books focus on the grace of God that was poured out on the Jewish people as they struggled to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But even though God's grace was poured out on the leaders and on the people, this was still a time of great difficulty.

These books focus on the difficulties and suffering experienced by the people of God as they struggled to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. These books also focus on the sinfulness of the people. While the people are not worshipping Baal in Ezra-Nehemiah, it is clear they still are struggling to obey God's laws. These books demonstrate that a deeper work is needed in order to create a people fully obedient to God. That deeper work in the hearts of God's people is described in the New Covenant (see **Ezekiel 36:24-27**). This "deeper work in the hearts of God's people" was made possible by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus. In the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit makes obedience possible (see **John 14:15-17**).

The temple that was rebuilt at the time of Ezra-Nehemiah is referred to as the second temple. The first temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Scholars sometimes refer to the time period when this second temple was standing as the **Second Temple Period**. The Second Temple Period lasted from 516 BC to 70 AD. This second temple was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans.

Christians do not need to wonder if there will be a “Third Temple Period” and, after that, a “Fourth Temple Period.” There will be no “Third Temple Period.” That is because the true temple, the temple with Jesus as the Cornerstone, has been built and is, right now, being built. All of the previous “temple” (the tabernacle, the first temple (built by Solomon), and the second temple) were shadows of this true temple. This true temple is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (**Ephesians 2:20-21**). This temple—the true temple—is now the place where people come to worship and to find hope, healing, forgiveness, community, and rest.

Here is how the building of the second temple is described in Ezra:

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD,

*“For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”*

*And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted with a great shout, and the sound was heard far away. **Ezra 3:10-13***

While many of the people were rejoicing at the building of this temple, it is significant that some of the people wept when they saw this temple. They wept because they had seen the first temple built by Solomon, and this “second” temple did not have the glory of the first temple.

The fact that some of the people were weeping because of the less glorious nature of this temple is significant. After all, God’s temple should not be growing less glorious. The less glorious nature of this second temple highlights its temporary nature. The less glorious nature of this second temple prepares readers for the coming of another temple of far greater glory.

This second temple, was, indeed, replaced with another temple. That temple is Christ and the church (see **John 2:18-22**). At the moment of Jesus’ death, the curtain in this second temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (see **Luke 23:44-46**). The curtain being torn in two signifies the end of the second temple period (see **John 4:19-26**). This was no longer the “place” where people came to find forgiveness, healing, and hope. This second temple has been replaced by the new perfect and final temple (see **Ephesians 2:19-22** and **Revelation 3:12**).

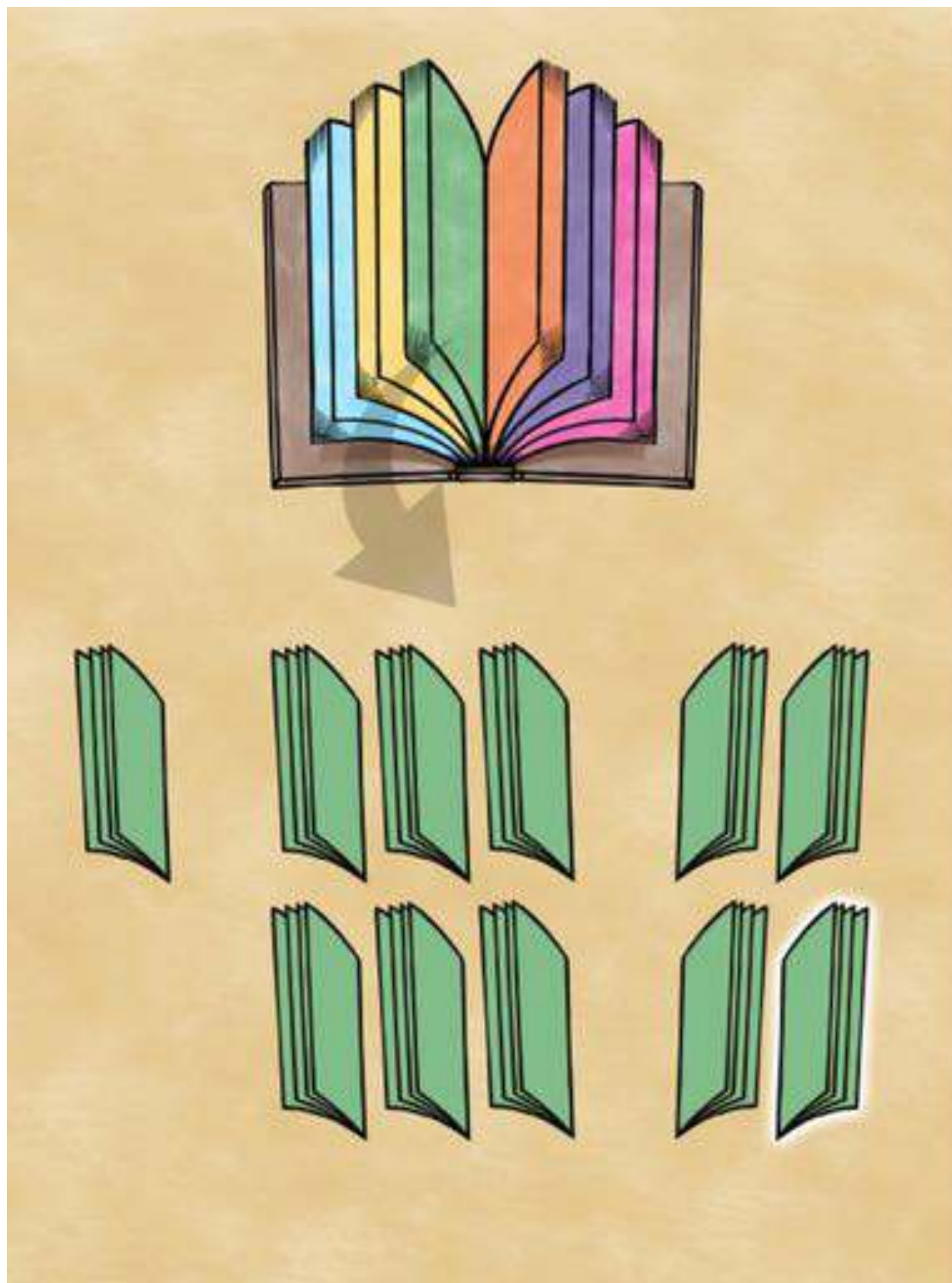
Ezra-Nehemiah also focus on the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This, like the rebuilding of the temple, was not as glorious as the “first” Jerusalem had been. Ezra-Nehemiah demonstrates that Jerusalem is precious. However, Christians today do not put their hope in an earthly city. Christians today, like the saints from all ages, are waiting for a city with strong foundations which can never be destroyed. This city is referred to as the “New Jerusalem.” This is a major theme in Bible (see **Psalm 137:6**, **Galatians 4:26**, **Hebrews 11:9-16**, **12:22-24**, and **Revelation 21:1-22:5**).

All three of the things focused on in Ezra-Nehemiah (the temple, the city, and the people) are also described in Revelation. In Revelation, however, the temple is glorious, the city is safe and magnificent, and the people are perfectly happy and obedient. Ezra-Nehemiah prepares the readers for this glorious time.

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his

servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. Revelation 21:22-22:5



24. Chronicles is focused on the building of the true temple by a Davidic king.

In modern Bibles, 1 and 2 Chronicles are two books. In ancient Hebrew texts, 1 and 2 Chronicles are one book.

Chronicles may seem similar, in places, to 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. This similarity is further accented because of the book's placement after Samuel and Kings in modern Bibles. However, Chronicles is very different from Samuel and Kings.

For instance, the Chronicler (this is the name scholars use to refer to the author of Chronicles) begins the book with a genealogy starting with Adam. This demonstrates the story being told in Chronicles is intended to include God's entire plan from the beginning of the earth.

The Chronicler is selective in the story he is telling. Consider, for instance, the first verse in 1 Chronicles.

Adam, Seth, Enosh ... **1 Chronicles 1:1**

Obviously, this is not a complete genealogy. It skips Abel. It also skips the line of Cain. This is very significant. The Chronicler is telling the story of the line of people descended from Seth.

Beyond this, the Chronicler does not refer to David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead, he merely lists Solomon as one of the sons born to David in Jerusalem (see **1 Chronicles 14:4**). He does not describe the sinful circumstances leading up to Solomon's birth. Why did a careful historian like the Chronicler not mention David's

sin? Beyond this, the Chronicler does not refer to Solomon's sins. Instead, the Chronicler writes in such a way that a reader would not know Solomon had committed great sin against God.

Why does the author do this? Is he being untruthful? He is not being untruthful. Instead, he is being very careful in the way he tells the story. The Chronicler is able to "ignore" David's sin with Bathsheba because his goal is not to give all of David's history. Beyond this, David repented for his sin. There is no need to repeat it in Chronicles. The reader of the Bible already knows all about this sin, for the book of Samuel was written before Chronicles.

However, it is extremely important to notice the Chronicler greatly highlights one of David's sins (see **1 Chronicles 21**). He focuses on a census David took. Why does the author focus on this particular sin and ignore David's murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba? He does this, it appears, because the punishment for this particular sin was stopped at the place where the future temple would be built!

*Then David said, "Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel." **1 Chronicles 22:1***

The fact that the Chronicler focuses on this particular sin demonstrates, again, that he is writing a book about the building of the temple by the Davidic king.

The Chronicler also "ignores" Solomon's sins. He does this because he is not giving a complete history of Solomon. He is focusing on Solomon as the temple builder. Beyond this, there is a great deal of evidence that Solomon had repented of his sin. The books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon all serve as evidence

that Solomon was a man who had repented from his sin late in his life. There was no need to bring his many sins before the people again.

The Chronicler is particularly focused on telling the story of the temple. From **1 Chronicles 22** until **2 Chronicles 7**, the focus is on the preparations and the building of the temple.

It is important to notice that the kings listed after Solomon are all from Judah. This is very different from 2 Kings. The Chronicler does not describe the kings who were ruling in the northern kingdom of Israel. This demonstrates that the Chronicler is telling the story of the Davidic king and the story of the temple built by the Davidic king. The stories of these two things are connected, and the Chronicler wants his readers to see them together.

The Chronicler focuses on the Davidic king and on the temple built by the Davidic king because of the promise made to David in **1 Chronicles 17:1-15** (see also **2 Samuel 7:1-17**).

As the Chronicler describes other kings of Judah, he particularly focuses on how the kings related to the temple or restored the temple or restored worship in the temple.

The book ends with a call from King Cyrus of Persia for a man to go up and build a temple for God.

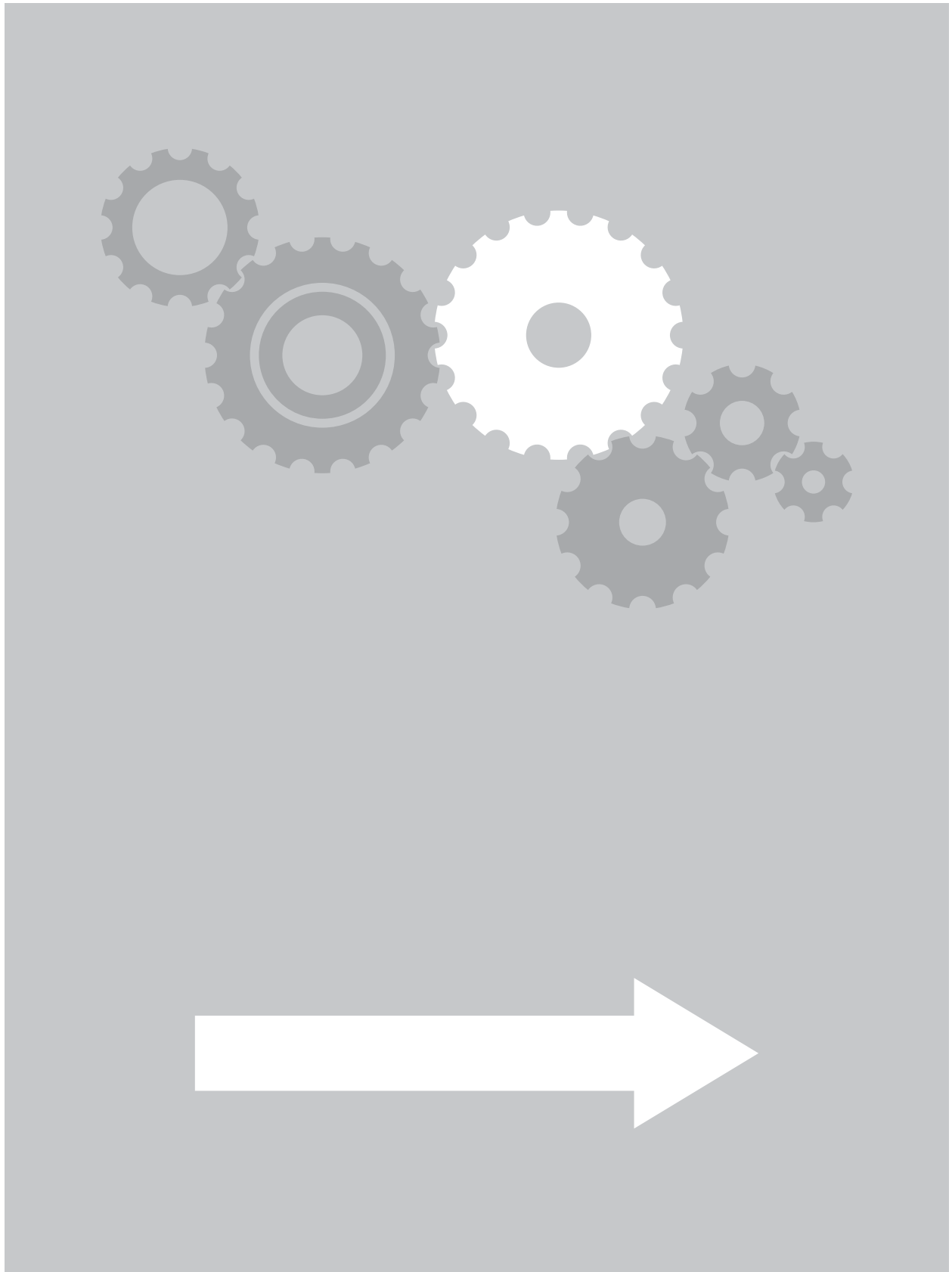
Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his

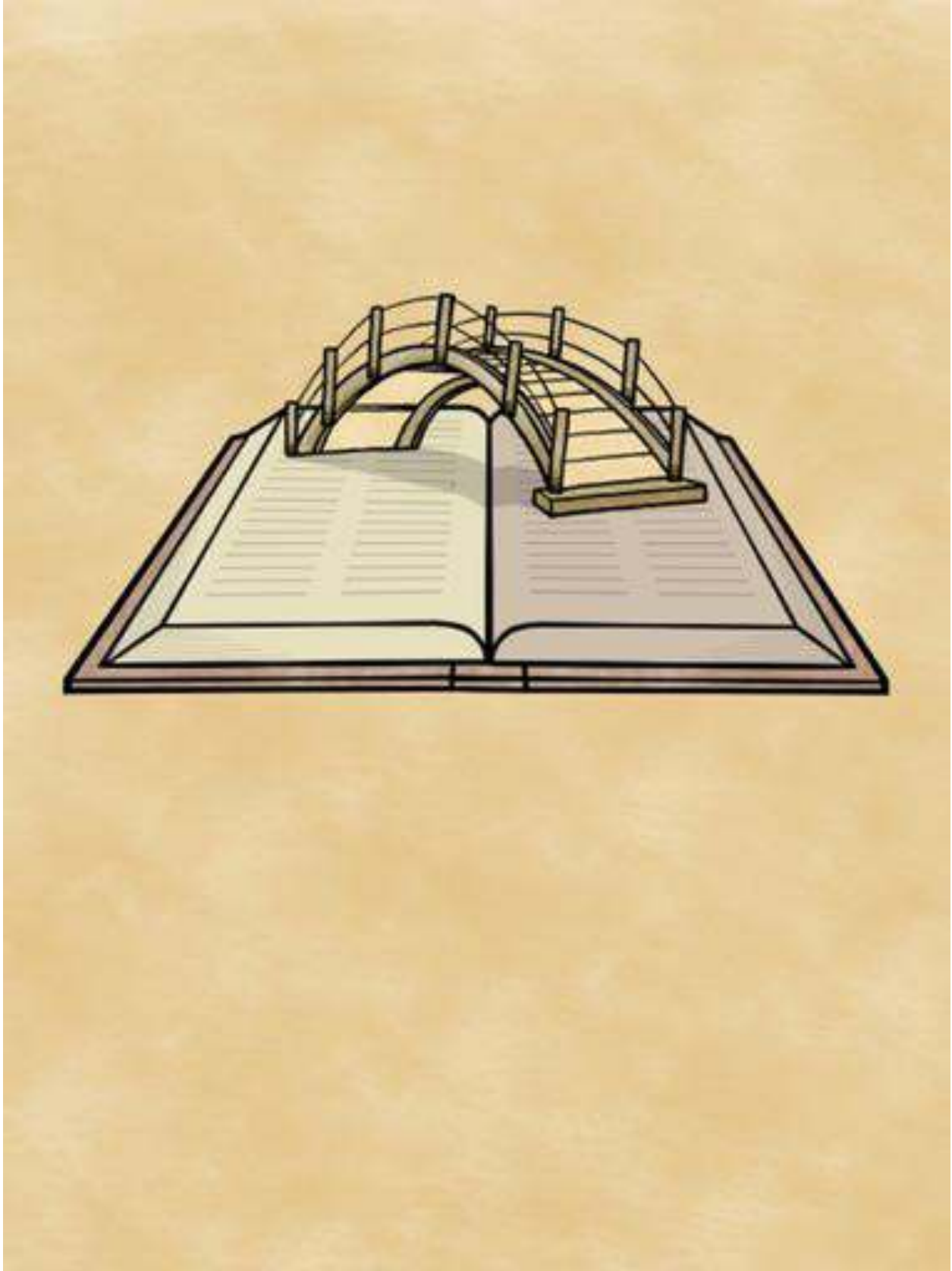
kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’” **2 Chronicles 36:22-23**

The end of Chronicles is evidence, again, of the Chronicler’s main concern. He is focused on the temple. He knows that David’s line is connected to the building of the temple, therefore, it is likely he understands that the man who will build this “house” for God will be a new king in the line of David. He is correct. Jesus is that man!

By beginning with Adam, the Chronicler demonstrates that this temple is for all people. And by focusing, then, on Seth, the Chronicler demonstrates that he knows the promise regarding the “offspring” in **Genesis 3:15**.

The Chronicler is a careful historian. However, he cannot complete the story he has begun telling. The story of the forever temple and of the Davidic king who will build this temple is incomplete in Chronicles because the work of God was not completed during Old Testament times.





25. Chronicles is a bridge to Jesus and to the story being told in the New Testament.

In modern English Bibles, the book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. This is appropriate, because Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. The book of Malachi prepares readers for a new prophet. Malachi describes this coming prophet as “Elijah the prophet.”

“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**

According to Jesus, John the Baptist is the “Elijah” who was being prophesied in this verse (see **Matthew 11:13-14**). Thus, Malachi’s reference to “Elijah” is a “bridge” between the Old Testament and Jesus.

However, in the Hebrew Bible, the last book is not Malachi. The last book in the Hebrew Bible is Chronicles. This book, also, naturally leads the reader into the New Testament. It leads the reader into the New Testament because Chronicles is not finished. It ends with a proclamation from Cyrus, the king of Persia. But the reader is not told, at least within Chronicles, who is the one that will fulfill this proclamation.

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**

Who is the special man who is able to do this? The question, again, is not answered in Chronicles. Cyrus declares that God will be “with” the one who goes up to build his house. Based on the rest of Chronicles, it is clear this person will be a Davidic king. But what king will that be? What is his name?

This unanswered question may seem strange, because, for those who have been reading the Writings in order, they know that a temple has already been built in Jerusalem! The building of the temple was one of the main subjects of Ezra-Nehemiah. But if that is the case, why does the entire Old Testament end with this unanswered question about the building of a temple?

The Old Testament ends this way because Chronicles is not talking about the building of the small temple that was built in Ezra-Nehemiah. Rather, this is a reference to the building of the true and final temple. Who is the one who is able to build *that house*? The answer to this question is not found in the Old Testament. We do not know the temple builder’s name. We know he is a Davidic king, but who is he? (According to **1 Peter 1:10-12**, the prophets were asking this same question!)

The answer to this question is found in the first verse of the New Testament.

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

Jesus Christ is the answer to the question. He is the one who will build the temple. God is “with” him.

It is significant that Cyrus’s words at the end of Chronicles are very similar to Jesus’ words at the end of Matthew.

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**

The “great commission” is a command to build the temple. This is why Jesus says he is “with” those who are doing this great work. God is “with” Christ as he builds the temple (see **2 Chronicles 36:23**), and Christ is “with” his people as they, with him, continue building this everlasting and ever-expanding “place” of worship!

