

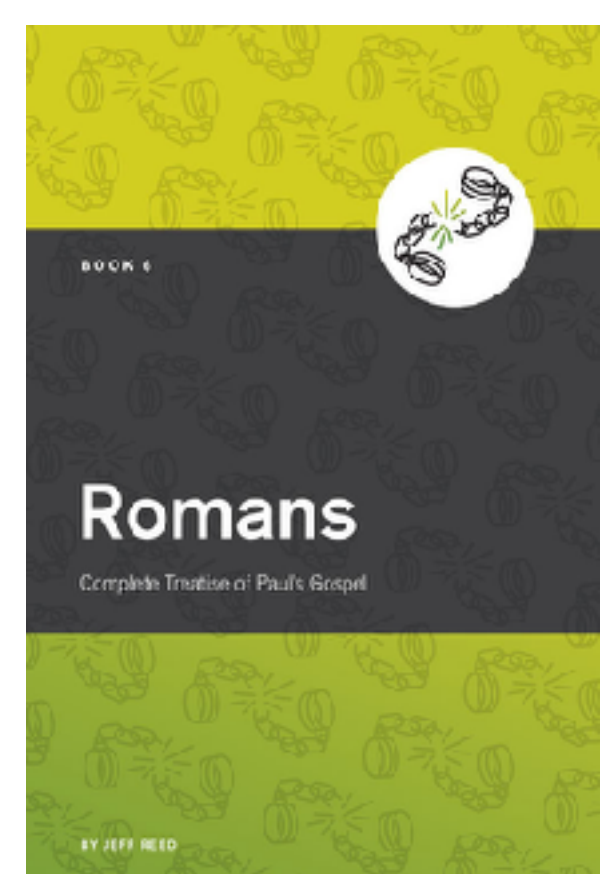
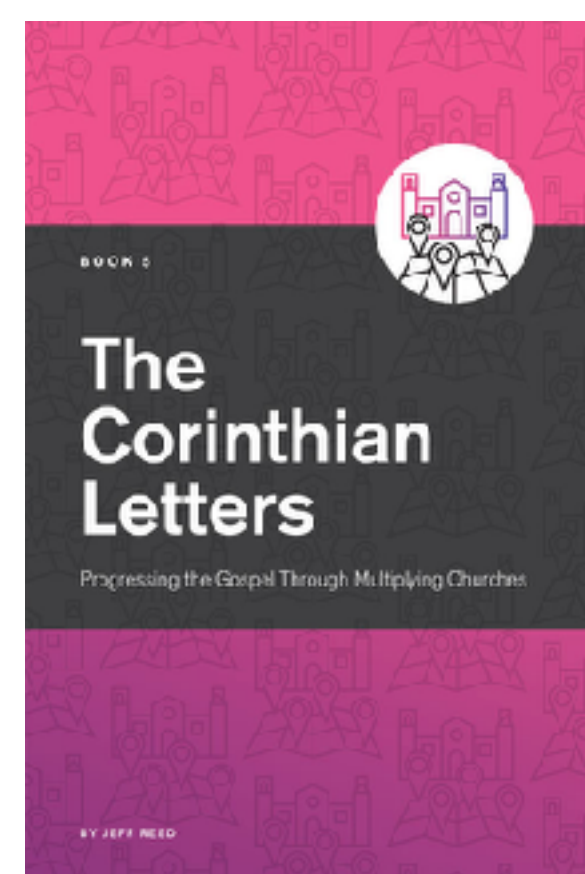
# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Issue: A Solid Conversion

Questions:

1. What was so distinct about the Thessalonians' conversion? Why was Paul so excited about it?
2. In what sense was their conversion collective? in what sense individual? in what sense ongoing?
3. How did Paul view his role in solidifying the conversion process? How was his conversion process balanced?
4. How did he stabilize their conversion process?

# Paul's Early Letters



## The Early Letters

Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Book 2: Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel

Book 3: The Thessalonian Correspondence: Conversion to the Gospel

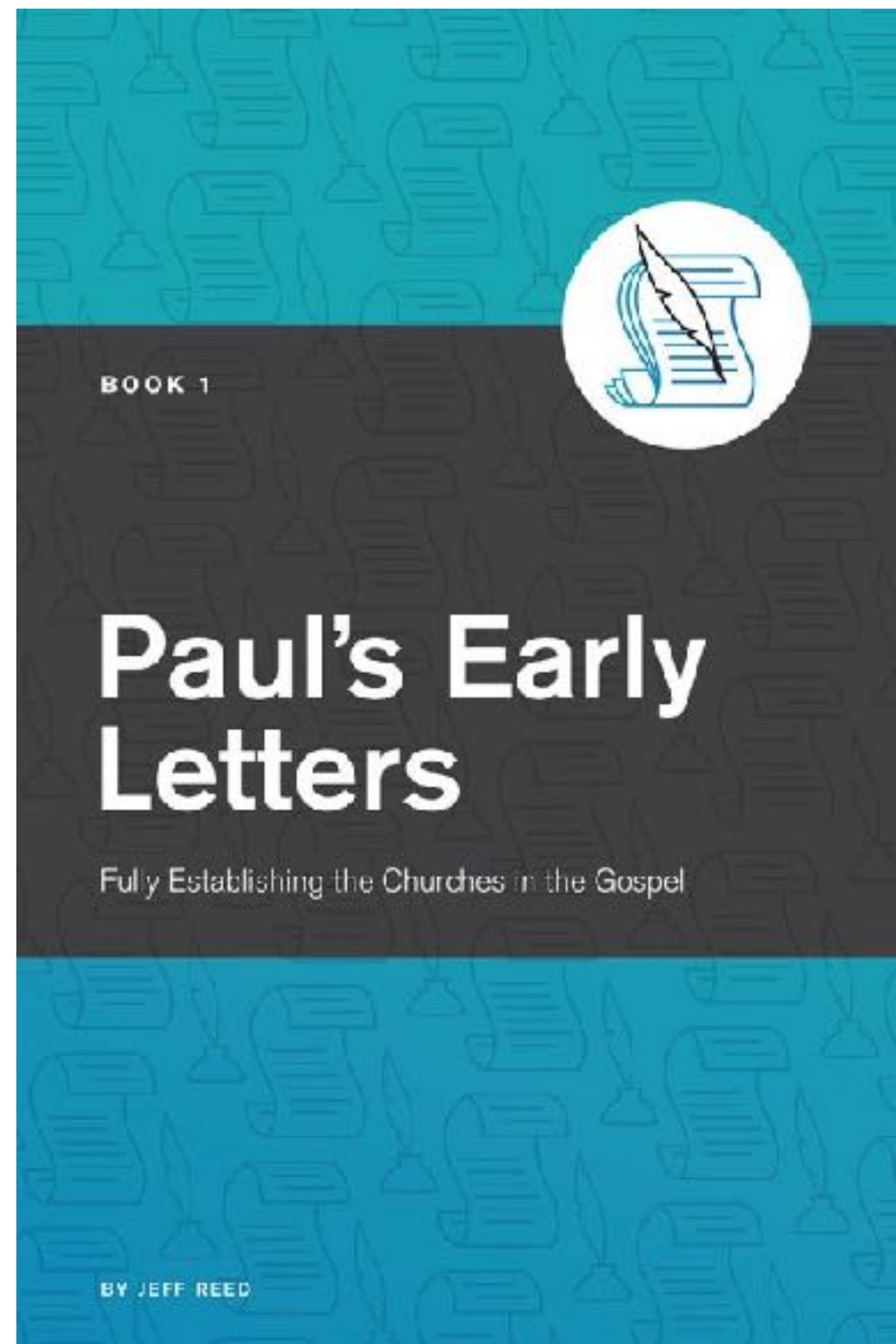
Book 4: The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

Book 5: The Corinthian Letters: Paul's Gospel Defended

Book 6: Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel



# Paul's Early Letters



Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 1: The Intent of the Early Letters

Session 2: The Galatian Problem

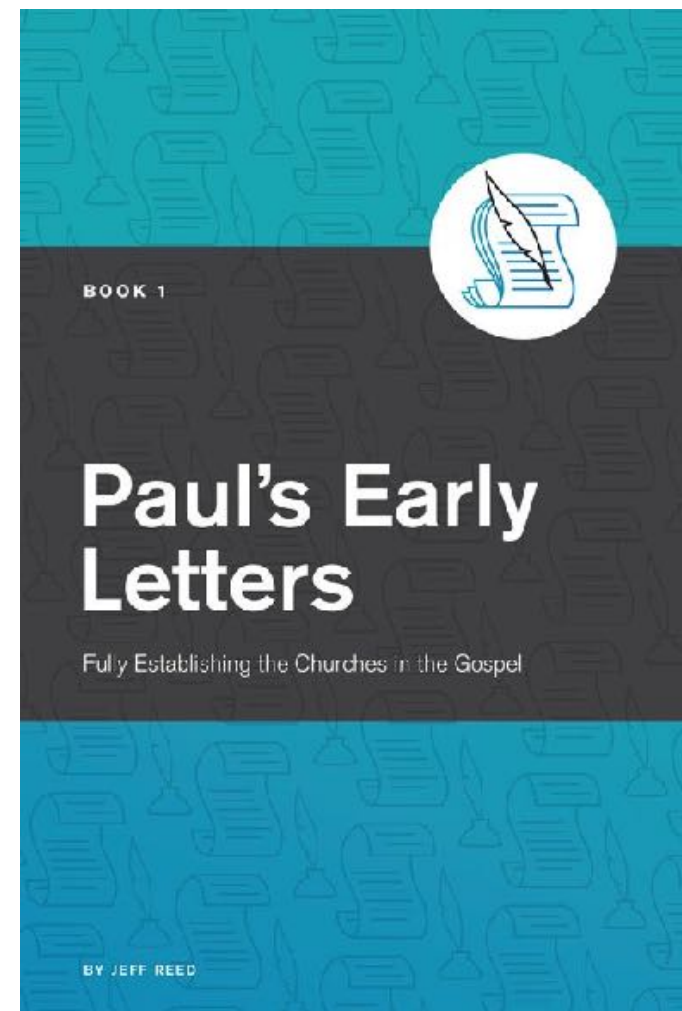
Session 3: The Thessalonians' Conversion

Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

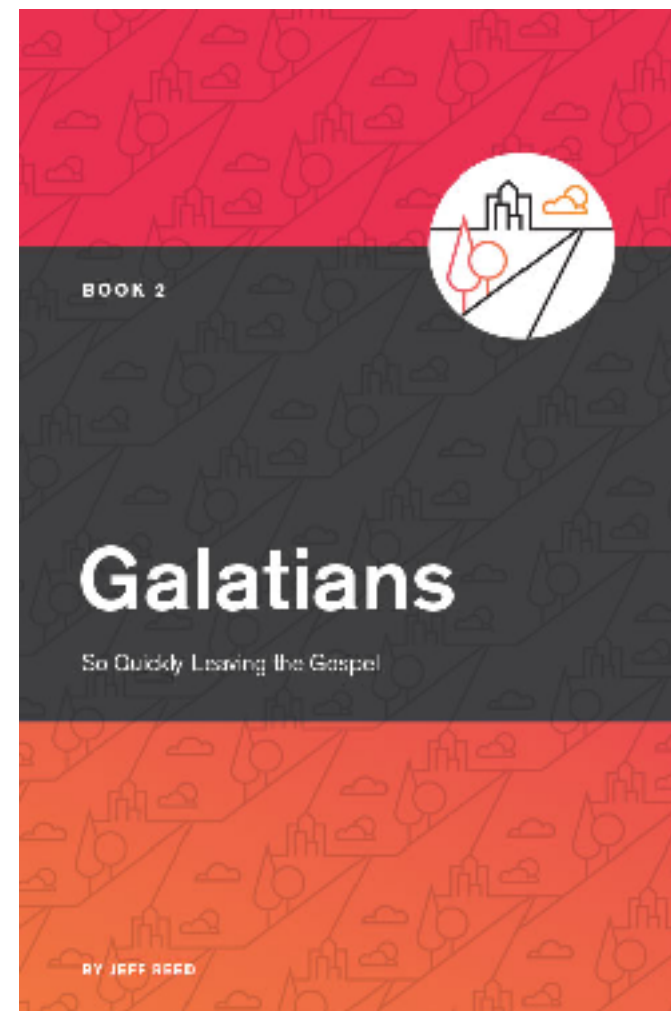
Session 5: The Roman Treatise

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry

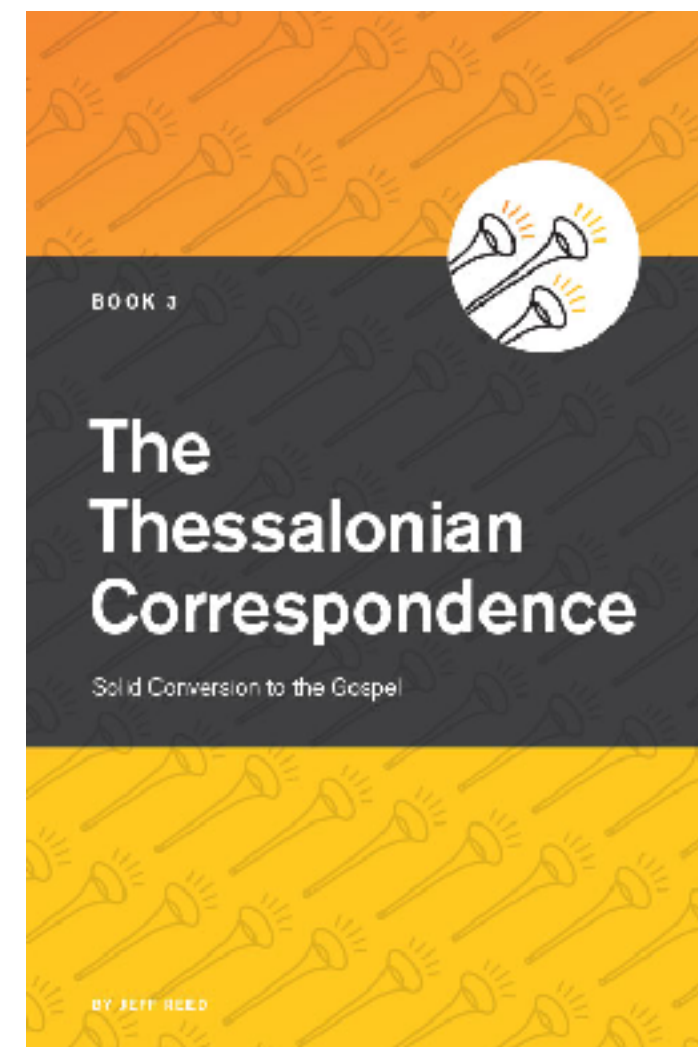
# Paul's Early Letters



49–56 AD



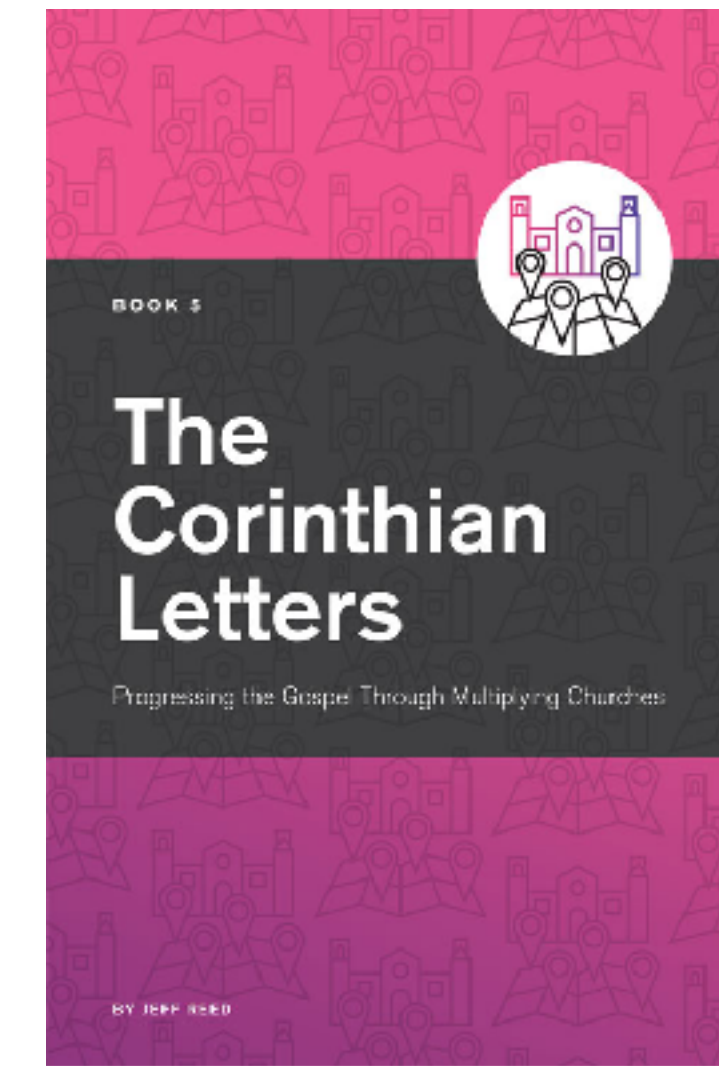
Autumn 49



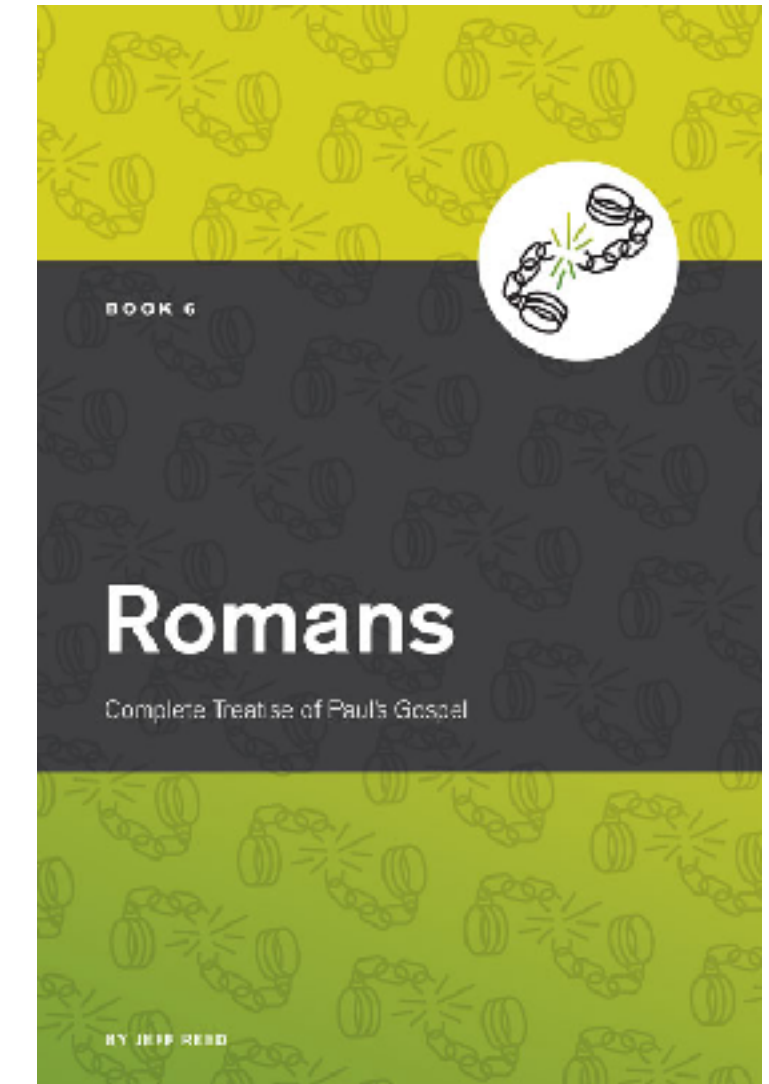
Winter/Summer 51 AD



September 53



June 56



November 56



# Paul's Letters

The battle for the gospel went from Autumn 47 AD, until the writing of Romans in the middle of November 56 AD, for 10 years.

Paul's first confrontation with Peter: Autumn 47 AD (Gal. 2:1–10)

Peter in Antioch: Autumn 49 AD (Gal. 2:11–16)

Jerusalem Council: Autumn 49 AD

Then the early letters of Paul: Autumn 49 AD to writing Romans in 56 AD

It took Paul a decade to win that argument, which he accomplished with his Romans manifesto on the gospel.

Now on to his rather compact, full unveiling of the Church.

# Paul's Early Letters

Romans is key to understanding the entire collection of Paul's early letters to his network of churches. Several preliminary comments on the context of Romans in Paul's early letters:

1. It is the final and largest letter.
2. It is less occasional than the others—more of a manifesto.
3. It is bookended by sections that tell you it is a more complete treatment of the gospel than the others.
4. Its context is establishing the churches in the gospel, which was the front line of the battle.

# Paul's Early Letters

<sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel, the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah, in accordance with the unveiling of the mystery kept hidden for long ages <sup>26</sup> but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings, according to the command of the eternal God, for the obedience of faith among all the nations—<sup>27</sup> to the only wise God, through Jesus the Messiah, to whom be the glory to the coming ages! Amen.

Romans 16:25–27 (N. T. Wright)

# Paul's Early Letters

So Paul wants to add to their understanding of the gospel by bringing them a complete proclamation,

which will secure, clarify, or build a comprehensive defense of the gospel for them—thus establishing them completely.



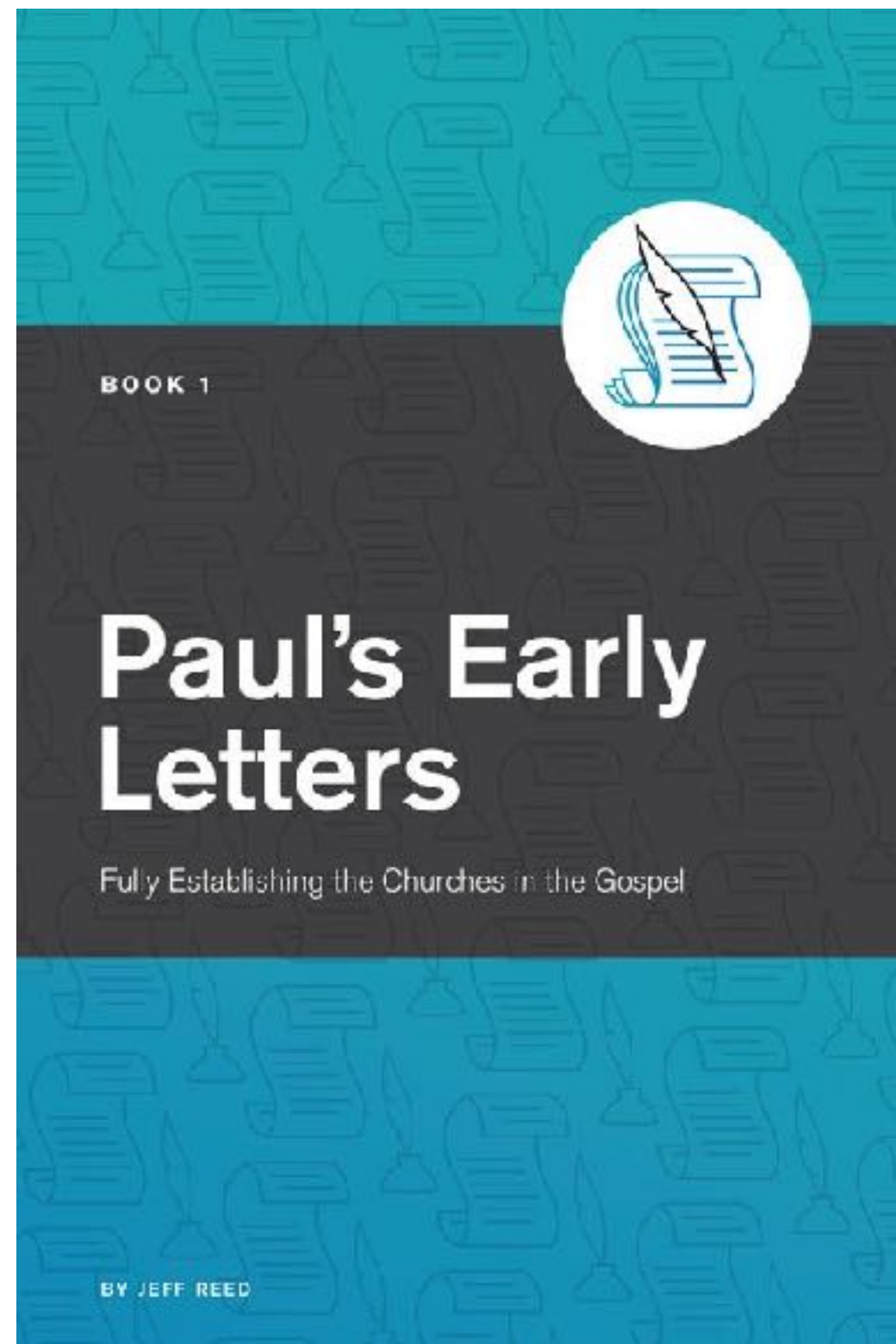
# Paul's Early Letters

Notice the term he uses—*establish*.

This is central to the occasional purpose of Paul writing the letters. This can quickly be seen in 3 ways:

1. A central purpose of his 2<sup>nd</sup> journey was to establish the young churches, Acts 15:36–16:5.
2. He sent Timothy to Thessalonica with the first letter to establish the Thessalonians.
3. He summarizes the Romans letter as having established them in the gospel.

# Paul's Early Letters



We will validate this in sessions 2–5, when we will look at each of these early letters:

The Galatian letter

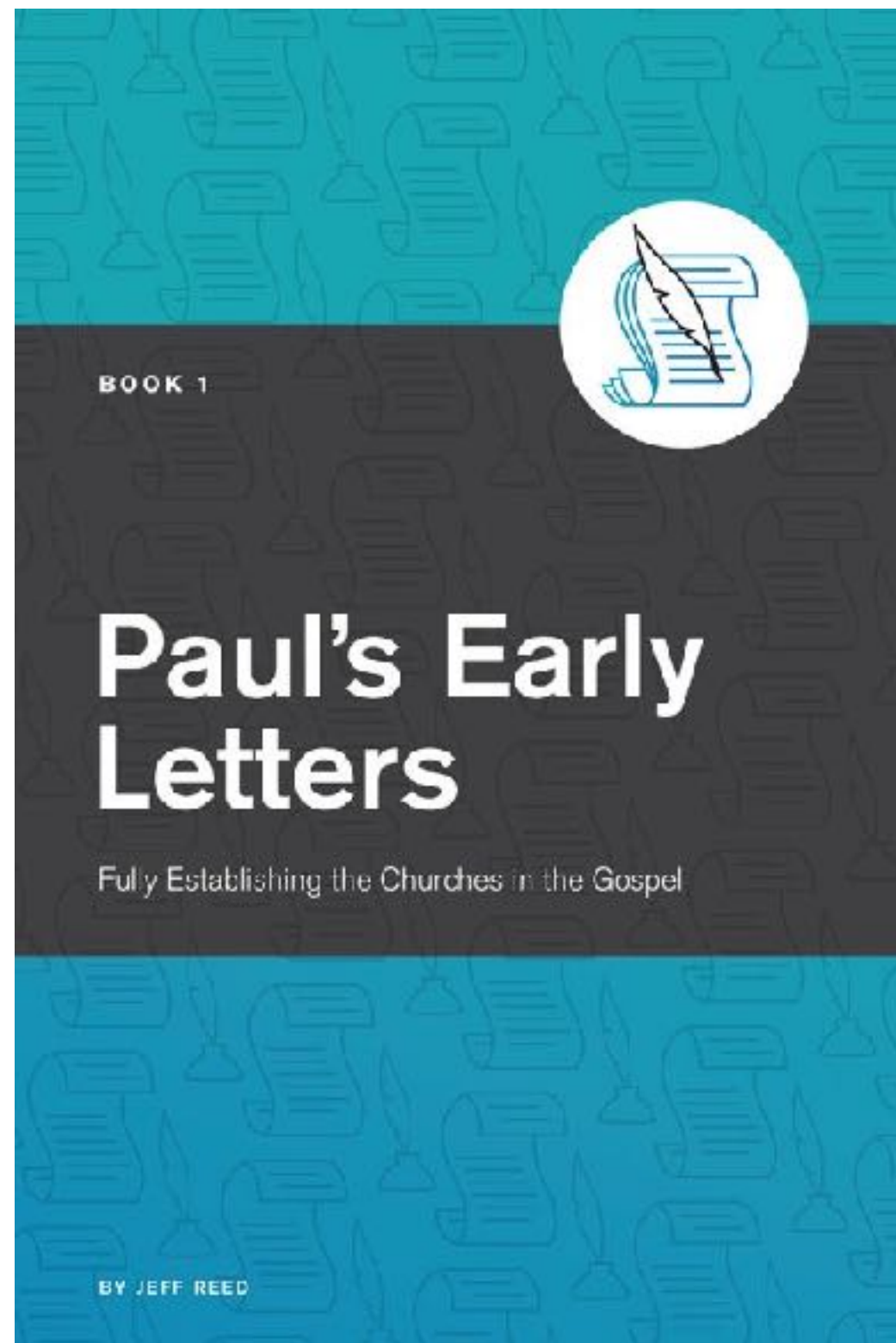
The Thessalonian correspondence

The Corinthian correspondence

The letter to the Romans

But for now, let's do a quick glance at each of Paul's correspondence to the churches in Galatia, to the churches in Thessalonica, to the Corinthian churches, and to the Roman churches.

# Paul's Early Letters



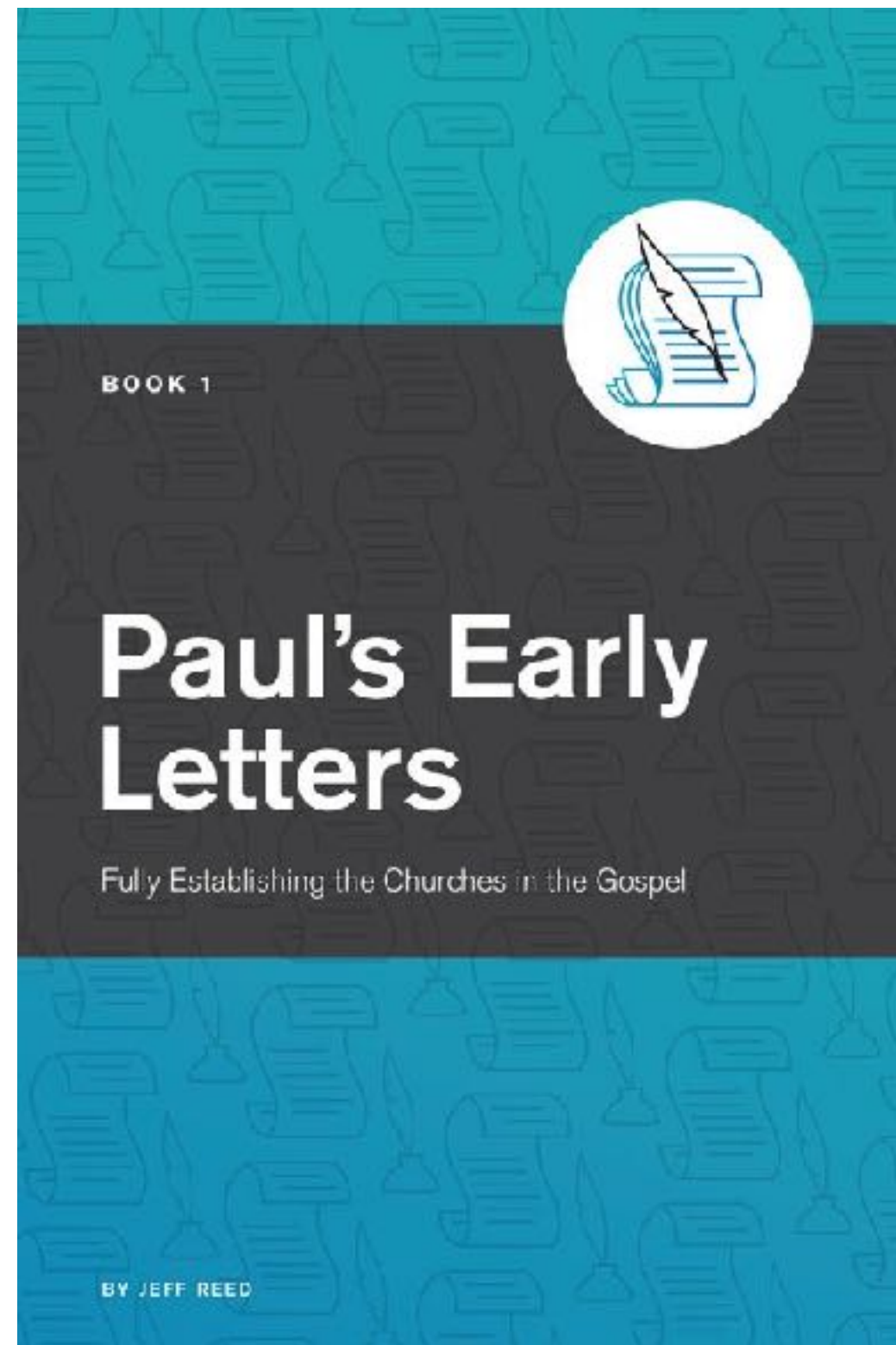
Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

## Session 2: The Galatian Problem

In Galatians, they left the gospel for another. Here Paul makes a case by confronting Peter, who actually formed the “kerygmatic formulae,” and roots the gospel in the Old Testament law, showing how this all fits in the original plan of God.



# Paul's Early Letters

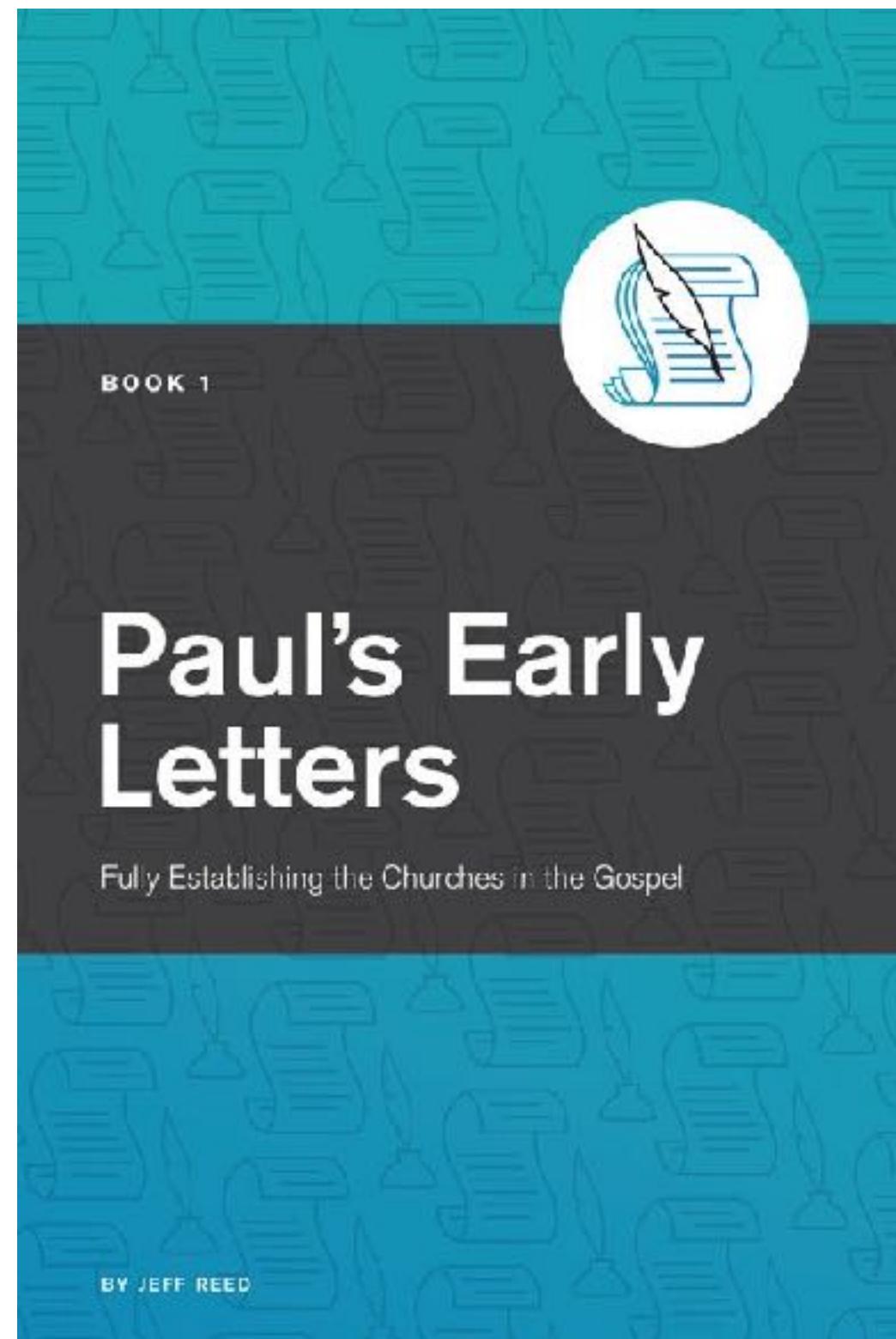


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 3: The Thessalonians' Conversion

In the Thessalonian letters, building on their solid conversion to this gospel, Paul challenges them to become fully established in it.

# Paul's Early Letters

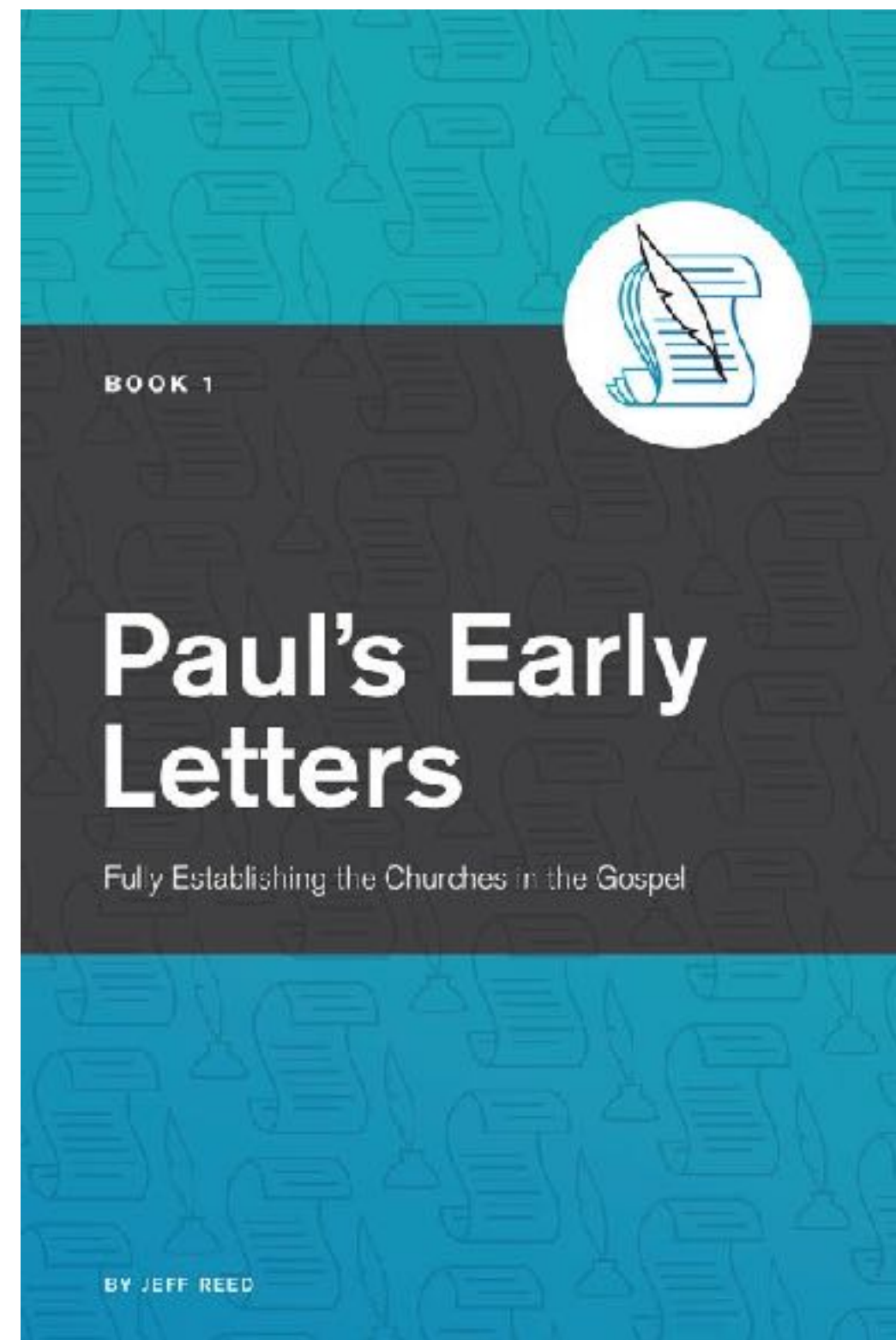


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

## Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul relates the gospel to all the divisions in the Corinthian church, defending the gospel as the same one preached by all the apostolic leaders. It is affirmed in statement form in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6. He defends his apostleship in 2 Corinthians, opening the understanding of new covenant ministry.

# Paul's Early Letters



Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

## Session 5: The Roman Treatise

Finally, Paul provides a complete treatise of the gospel to the Romans, introducing the letter with the kerygmatic statement to firmly establish the Roman churches in that gospel, thus fully convincing those who may be confused, by providing the complete gospel.



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Issue: A Solid Conversion

Questions:

1. What was so distinct about the Thessalonians' conversion? Why was Paul so excited about it?
2. In what sense was their conversion collective? in what sense individual? in what sense ongoing?
3. How did Paul view his role in solidifying the conversion process? How was his conversion process balanced?
4. How did he stabilize their conversion process?

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

So let's look at the Thessalonians conversion.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>4</sup> Dear family, beloved by God, we know that God has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel didn't come to you in word only, but in power, and in the holy spirit, and in great assurance. You know what sort of people we became for your sake, when we were among you. <sup>6</sup> And you learned how to copy us—and the Lord! When you received the word, you had a lot to suffer, but you also had the holy spirit's joy. <sup>7</sup> As a result, you became a model for all the believers in both Macedonia and Achaëa. <sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord has resonated out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaëa; your faith in God has gone out to people everywhere. This means that we haven't had to say anything. <sup>9</sup> They themselves tell the story of the kind of welcome we had from you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the coming fury.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–10 (N. T. Wright)



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

We can see several things about the Thessalonians' conversion right from this beginning section of Paul's letter.

1. The gospel was delivered correctly and with full conviction by Paul.
2. The Thessalonians boldly proclaimed it with a public cost to them.
3. They embraced the kerygma fully, turning from their old belief system, and embracing an entirely different future hope.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

A simple sign of their genuine conversion was a rejecting of their old belief system and boldly proclaiming it to others.

Bold proclamation to others was a sign of them fully embracing the proclamation.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Why was Paul so excited about their conversion?



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Paul was excited because he was genuine. He was progressing the gospel, establishing communities of new believers, and seeing their lives change.

Also, he was excited about the fact that they were spreading the gospel spontaneously right from the time they embraced the gospel. They were models for the other churches.

Notice a few key phrases.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

A few key phrases:

“you have become a model for all of the believers in Macedonia and Achaea”

“the Word of the Lord has resonated out from you”

“we haven't had to say anything”

This is spontaneous expansion!

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

What was Paul's view of their conversion?

How did he follow up on their conversion?



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

He knew they would need continual help in the process they had begun.

He saw them as his children, having just begun the conversion process, they would need careful nurturing.

Let's look later in the letters at how he viewed them.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>8</sup> We were so devoted to you that we gladly intended to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own lives, because you became so dear to us. <sup>9</sup> My dear family, you will recall our hard toil, our labor. We worked night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you while we announced to you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup> You are witnesses, and so is God, of our holy, upright, and blameless behavior toward you believers. <sup>11</sup> You know how, like a father to his own children, <sup>12</sup> we encouraged each of you, and strengthened you, and made it clear to you that you should behave in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:8–12 (N. T. Wright)

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Two new insights emerge:

1. The conversion process took place over a period of time—night and day while he supported himself—it was not a one time event.
2. They needed ongoing nurturing—both the type a mother would give (nurturing) and a father would give (exhorting, imploring).



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Without this ongoing help, their conversion to this new faith—way of life—would not last.

It took time to announce the gospel fully and to shape their lives around this new faith.

This shows that the conversion to this new faith and their establishing process were intertwined, or you might say overlapped.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

One more note.

<sup>13</sup> “So, therefore, we thank God constantly that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of a mere human being but—as it really is!—the word of God which is at work in you believers.”

1 Thessalonians 2:13 (N. T. Wright)

So their reception of this proclamation—this gospel, this kerygma—was not a manmade message, but the word of God, thus establishing a new authority base for their lives.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

This letter came about 6 months after the initial phase of announcing the gospel to them and establishing them in this faith, which was the purpose of the letter.

Note his intention of the letter in 3:1.



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>1</sup> So, when it got to the point that we couldn't bear it any longer, Silvanus and I decided to remain in Athens by ourselves, <sup>2</sup> and we sent Timothy—our brother, and God's fellow worker in the gospel of the Messiah—so that he could strengthen you and bring comfort to your faith, <sup>3</sup> so that you wouldn't be pulled off course by these sufferings.... <sup>10</sup> praying with even more fervor than you can imagine, night and day, that we may see you face to face and may put into proper order anything that is lacking in your faith?

1 Thessalonians 3:1–3, 10

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

So the letter was to establish them in their new faith.

“to put into proper order anything that is lacking in your faith”

In essence, Paul merges the conversion and establishing process.

Now he completes the picture of the conversion process.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>12</sup> This, my dear family, is the request we make of you. Take note of those who work among you and exercise leadership over you in the Lord, those who give you instruction. <sup>13</sup> Give them the highest possible rank of love because of their work. Live at peace among yourselves. <sup>14</sup> And, my dear family, we beg you to warn those who step out of line. Console the downcast; help the weak; be warm-hearted and patient toward everybody.

1 Thessalonians 5:12–14 (N. T. Wright)

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

So the picture is now complete:

1. He transferred the process of continuing to establish them in their conversion to the local leaders of their new community.
2. There was an order to their faith, and individuals would need different kinds of individualized help to complete the conversion process.



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Now let's put the complete conversion picture together.

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

A complete conversion process looks like this:

1. An initial solid response, in which the gospel is fully embraced, takes several weeks of exposure to the Word of God; this full embracing results in those receiving the gospel beginning to proclaim it themselves.
2. It must immediately be followed up by careful nurturing and exhorting.
3. It is then followed up in the context of a new community by leaders who know the Word—a balance of modality (local leaders) and sodality (apostolic leaders).

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

What is the result of a solid, well nurtured conversion process?

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>3</sup> We owe God a constant debt of gratitude concerning you, my dear family. It is only right and proper. Your faith is growing marvelously, and the love which every single one of you has for each other is multiplying.

<sup>4</sup> As a result, we ourselves can tell all the churches of God how proud we are of you—of your patience and loyalty in all your troubles, and in all the sufferings you are going through. <sup>5</sup> All this is a clear sign of the just judgment of God, to make you thoroughly worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering— <sup>6</sup> since it is just, on God's part, to pay back with suffering those who inflict suffering on you, <sup>7</sup> and to give you, with us, respite from your sufferings.

2 Thessalonians 1:3–7 (N. T. Wright)



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

<sup>11</sup> To that end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his call, and may complete every plan he has to do you good, and every work of faith in power, <sup>12</sup> so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah.

2 Thessalonians 1:11–12 (N. T. Wright)

# The Thessalonians' Conversion

What is the result of a solid, well nurtured process?

“your faith is growing marvelously” (I love that phrase)

Suffering is part of it.

Problems are part of it.

But their faith is growing marvelously.

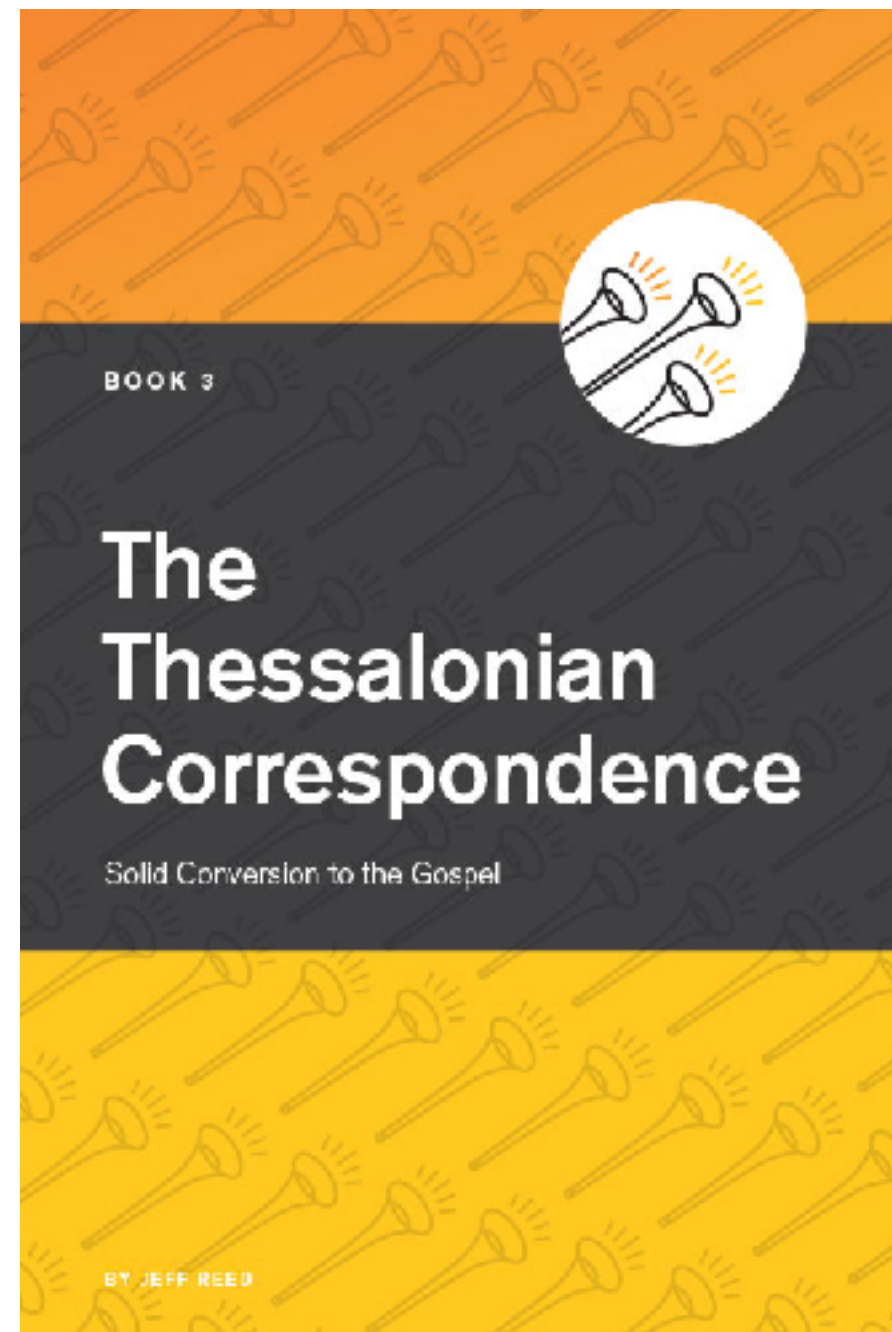
# The Thessalonians' Conversion

Issue: A Solid Conversion Process

## Questions

1. What are the marks of a solid conversion process? How can we tell if someone has fully embraced the gospel?
2. What problems might there be if someone embraces the gospel as an individual without collective elements to it— independent of a church community or movement context?
3. What is needed early on to solidify that conversion? What kind of help do people need following their conversion?
4. What is likely to happen to those without this kind of help?

# Paul's Early Letters



Book : Paul's Early Letters: The Thessalonians' Conversion

Session 1: Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians

Session 2: Their Dramatic Conversion

Session 3: Three Emerging Problems—Letter 1

Session 4: Further Clarification—Letter 2

Session 5: Solidifying Their Conversion

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry



# The Thessalonians' Conversion

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