

The Difficulty of Grasping the Essence of Romans

It is almost impossible today to understand Romans.

The reason is the “theology of Romans” has been separated from the unfolding story and we see everything through a secondary tradition—Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Pentecostalism.

Dispensationalism died in the 70s and 80s, and now Reformed theology needs to die as well.

Rather than grasping the essence of Paul’s arguments, presented through The Story, we approach Romans through theological systems (4–5 systems)—a set of theological terms strung together by individual verses and terms filled with 500 years of theological debates.

The Difficulty of Grasping the Essence of Romans

Today, we are going to approach grasping the essence of the argument of Romans 1:16–4:31 first through unfolding the story in which Paul frames his argument.

The Essence of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

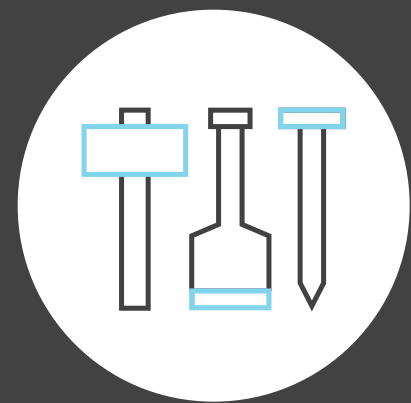
Issue: The essence of Paul's argument in 1:16–4:31

Questions:

1. What is the essence of Paul's argument in 1:16–4:31? What is the main storyline?
2. What are some of the corollary points of Paul's argument—subplots?
3. How does Paul relate the Roman churches to the story—whether Jew or Greek? What are the implications for every person?
4. Why is it the norm that we separate Romans into theological terms and approach the book by stringing together individual verses and specific terms filled with “theological meaning”?

The Early Pauline Epistles Series: 4-year project

- Leadership Series: Pauline Epistles — 1988–2004
- Mastering the Scriptures Series: Early Pauline Epistles: 2014–2018
- From Jesus to the Gospels: Kerygma 1
- Paul's Early Letters: Kerygma 2
- Great indebtedness to N. T. Wright
- Essential insights into how to establish churches in the gospel
- Designed to follow The First Principles Series

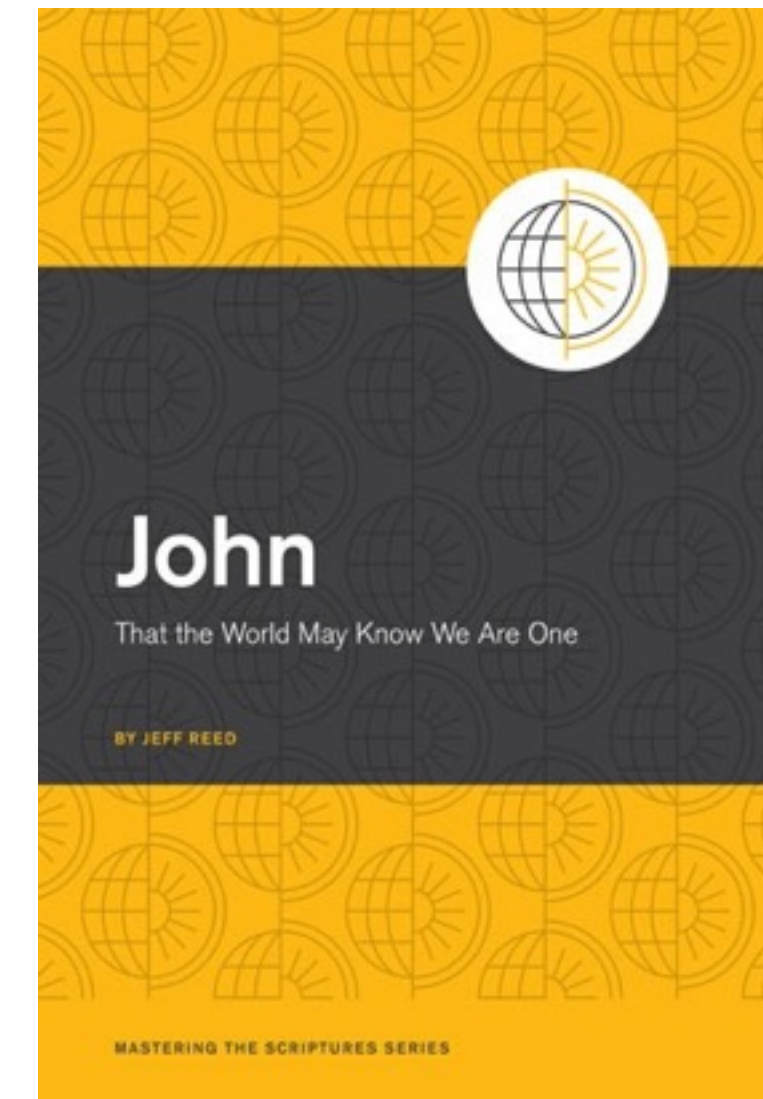
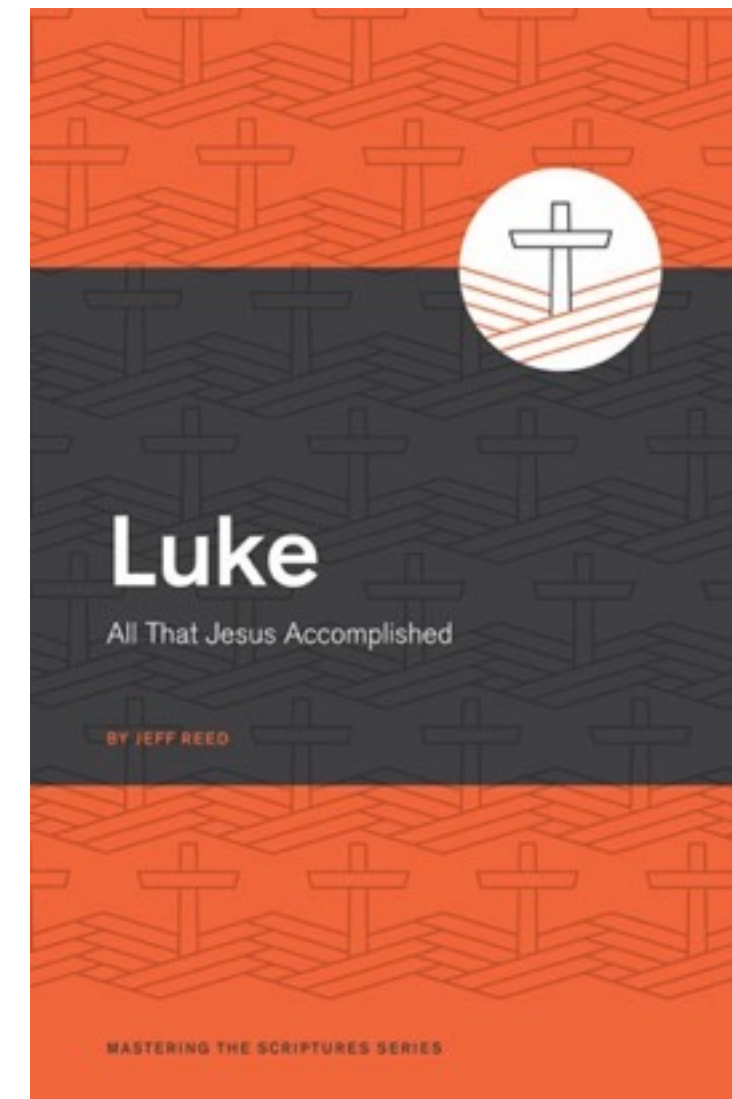
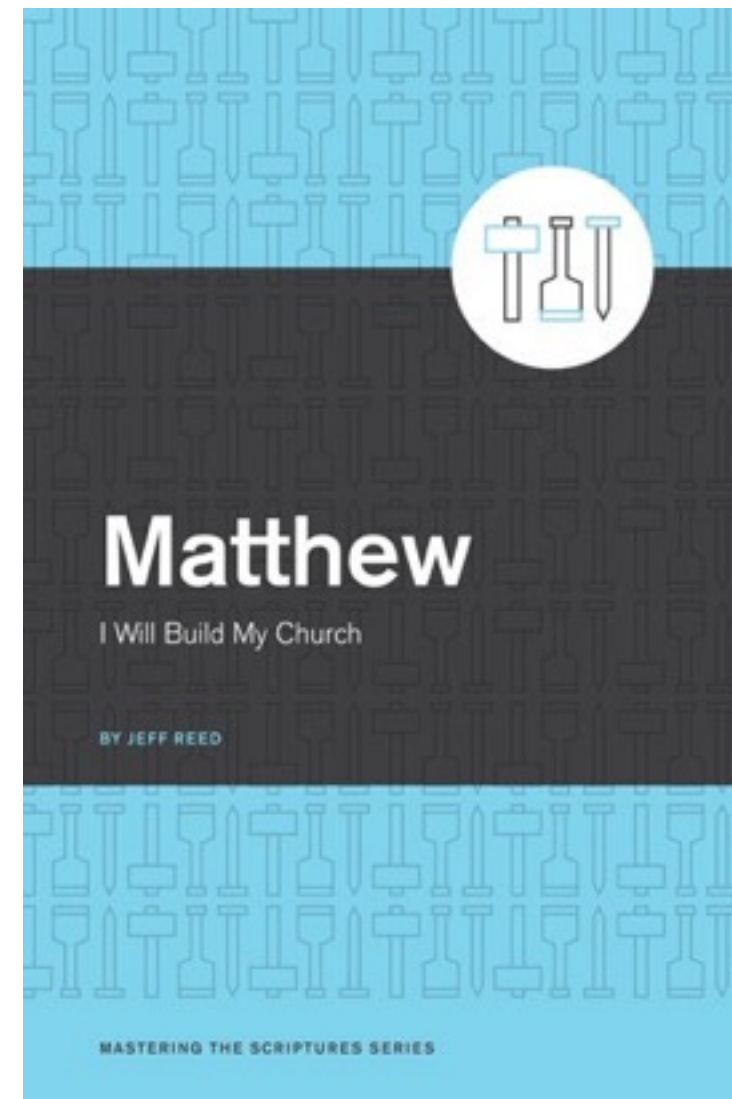
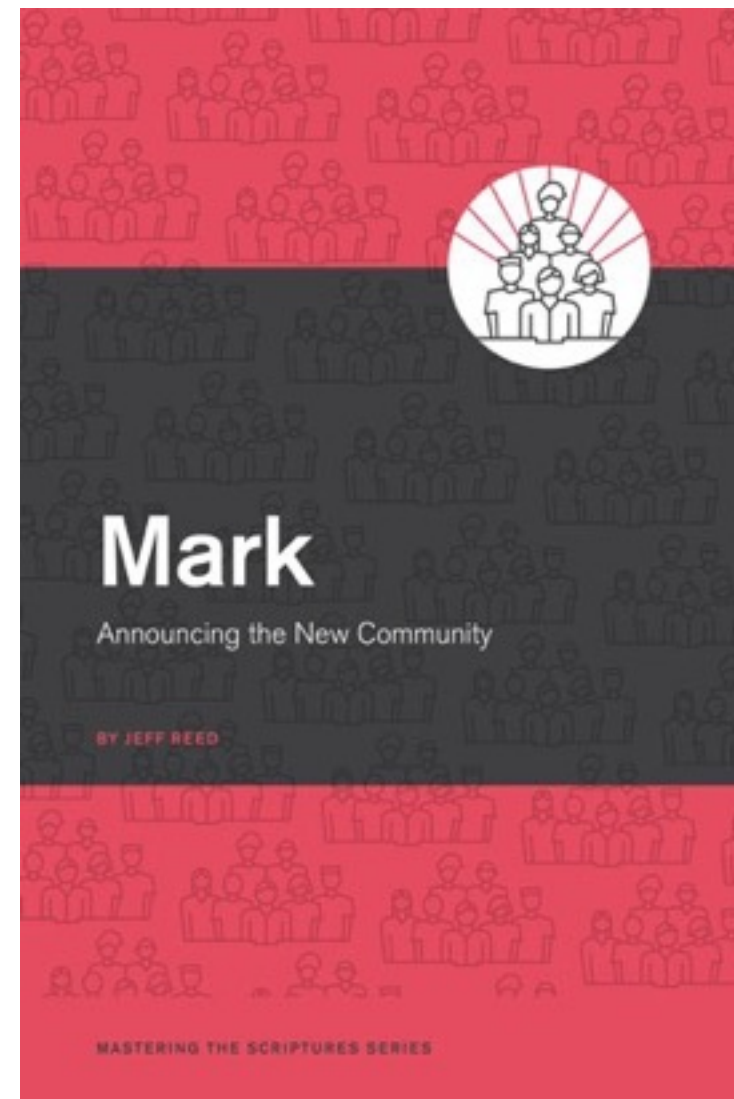
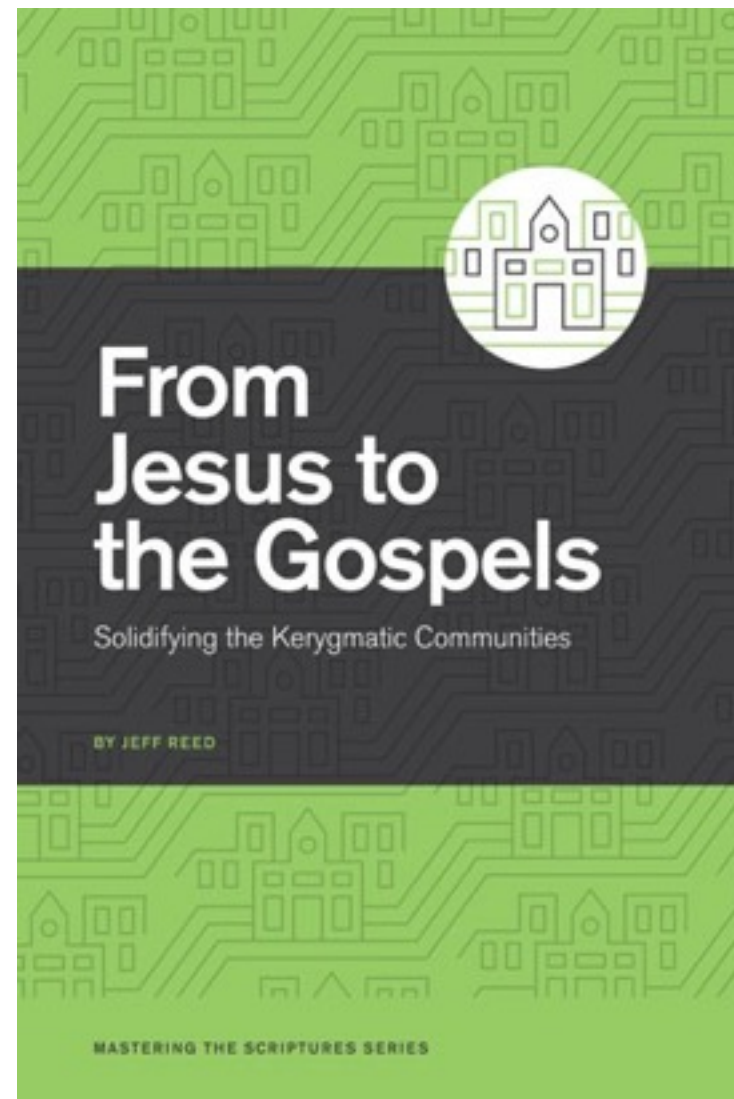


The Gospels Series

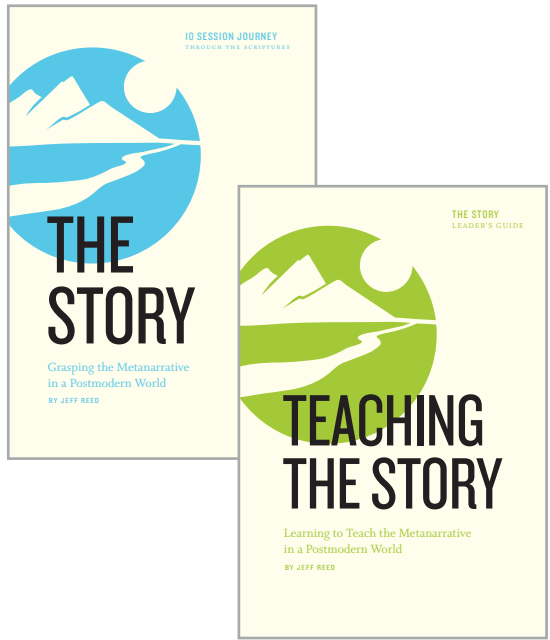
Examining the Intention of Jesus' Life and Ministry
as Witnessed by the Writers of the Four Gospels

MASTERING THE SCRIPTURES SERIES

The Gospels Series



Establishing Process—3 Years



Kerygma
Early Acts
Apostles' Teaching
6 months
Paul: 3 years “night and day”

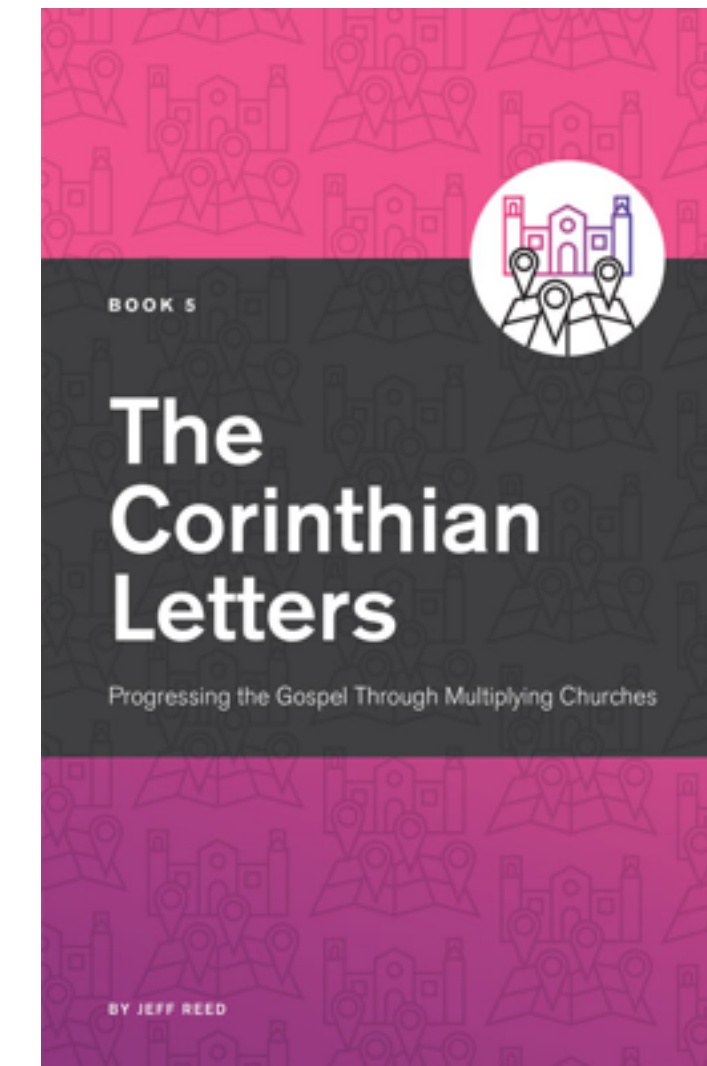
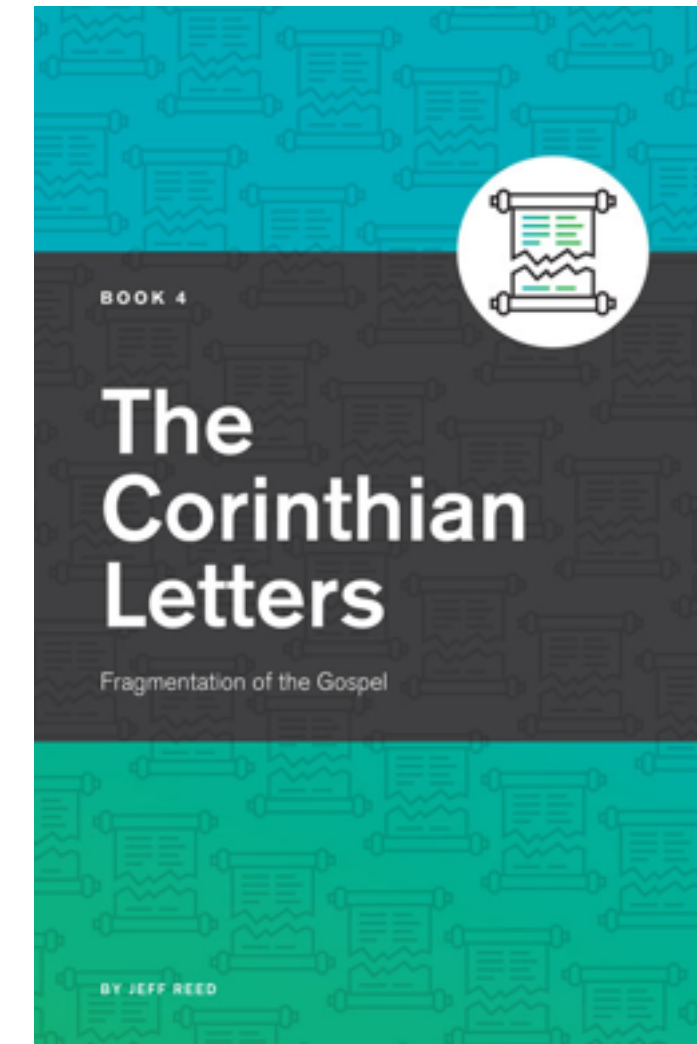
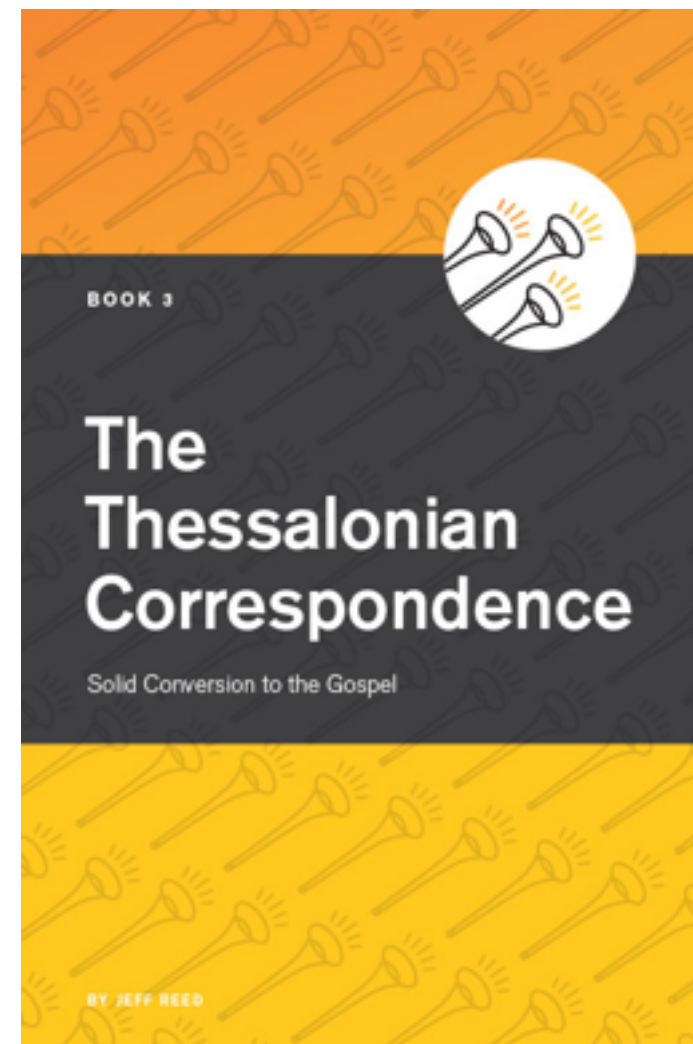
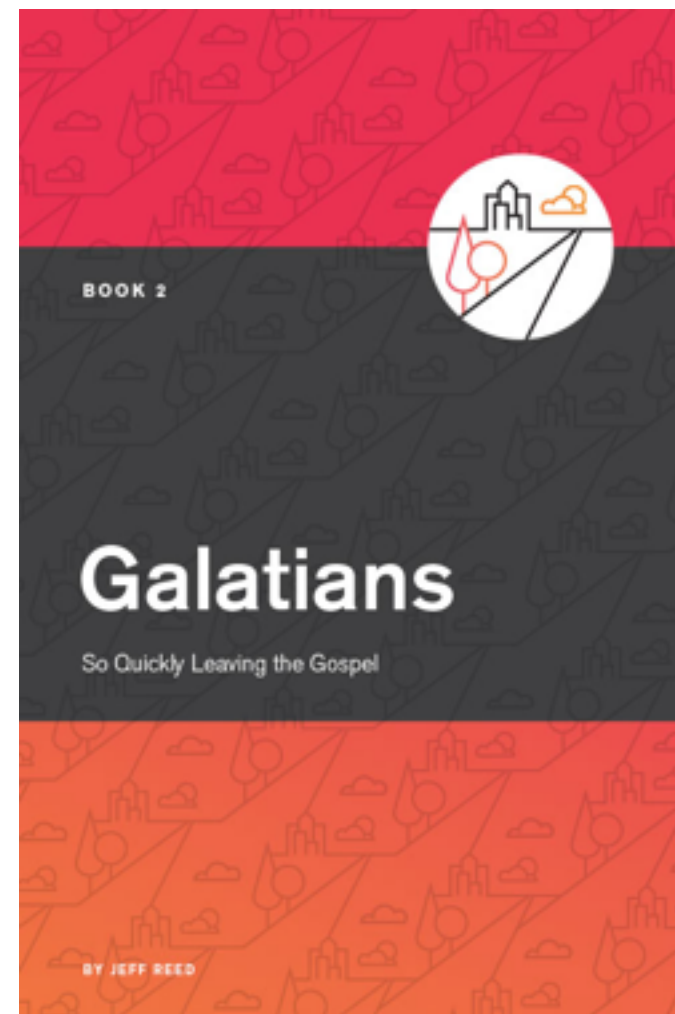
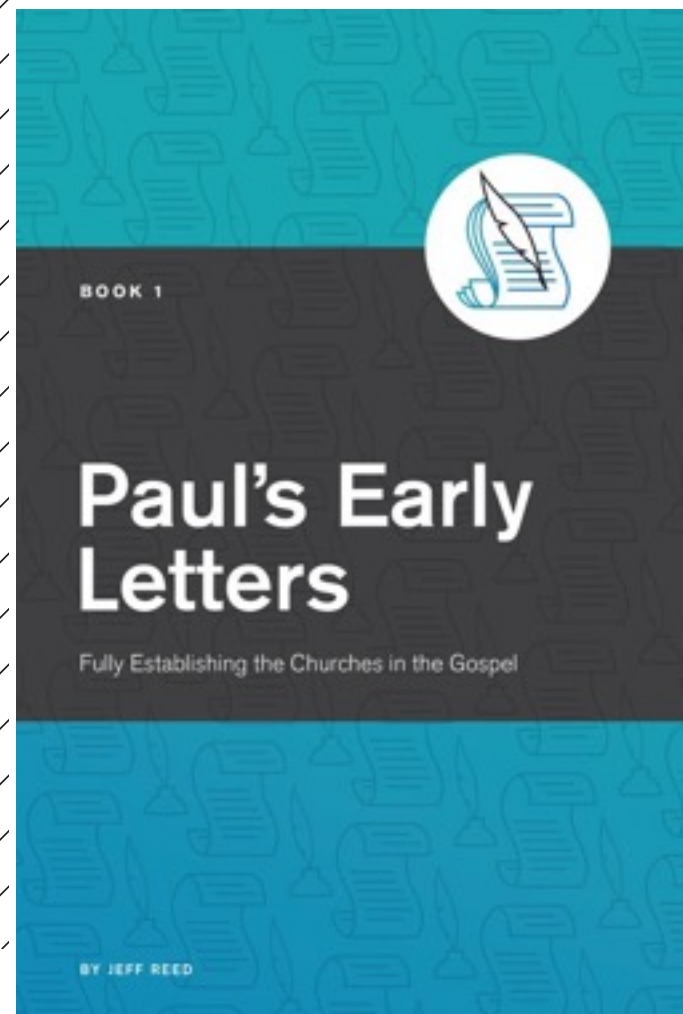


Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years



Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year

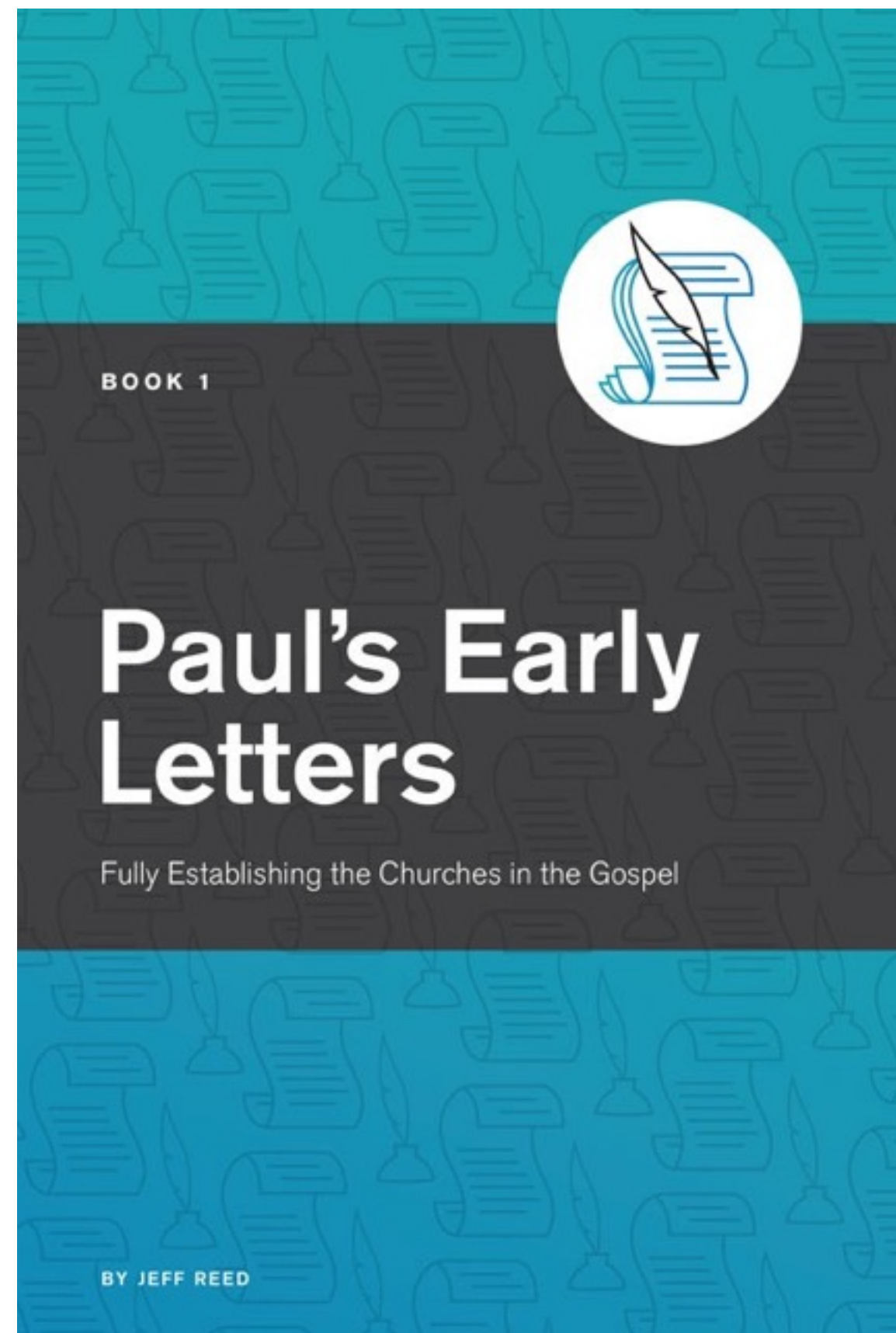
Paul's Early Letters



Uniqueness and Significance of Paul's Early Letters Series

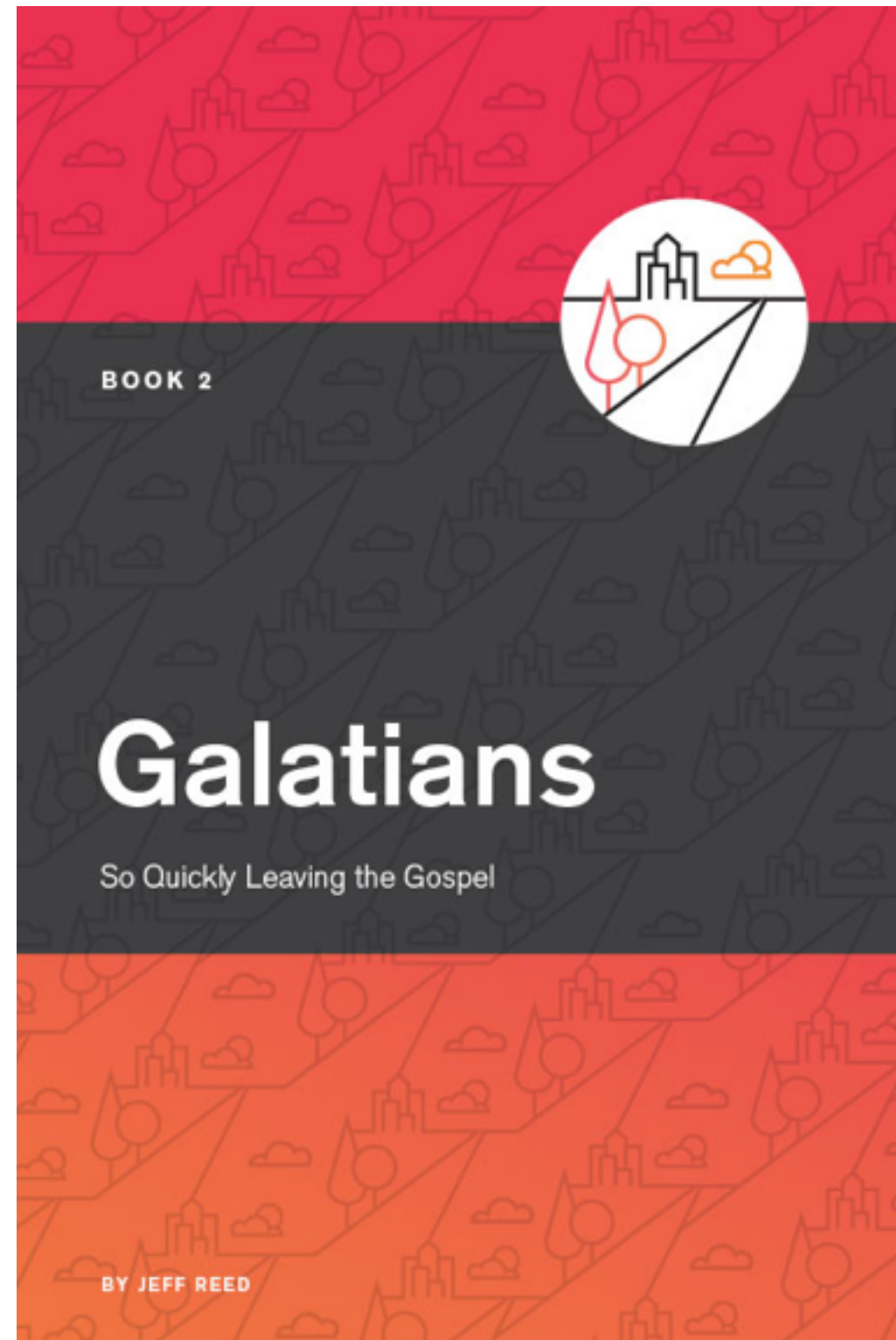
The Early Letters of Paul Series is taking 4 years to produce, but is founded on over 2 decades of Pauline leadership series courses—from 1988–2008.

- It is based on all the major writings of the massive Greco–Roman early church research of the last 50 years.
- It owes a great deal of “research debt” to the lifetime work of N. T. Wright.
- It gives a comprehensive “theology” of how Paul established churches in the gospel; it is essential to the growth of the Church of the Global South; and the understanding of Romans is almost completely absent in the Reformation “gospel” recovery.



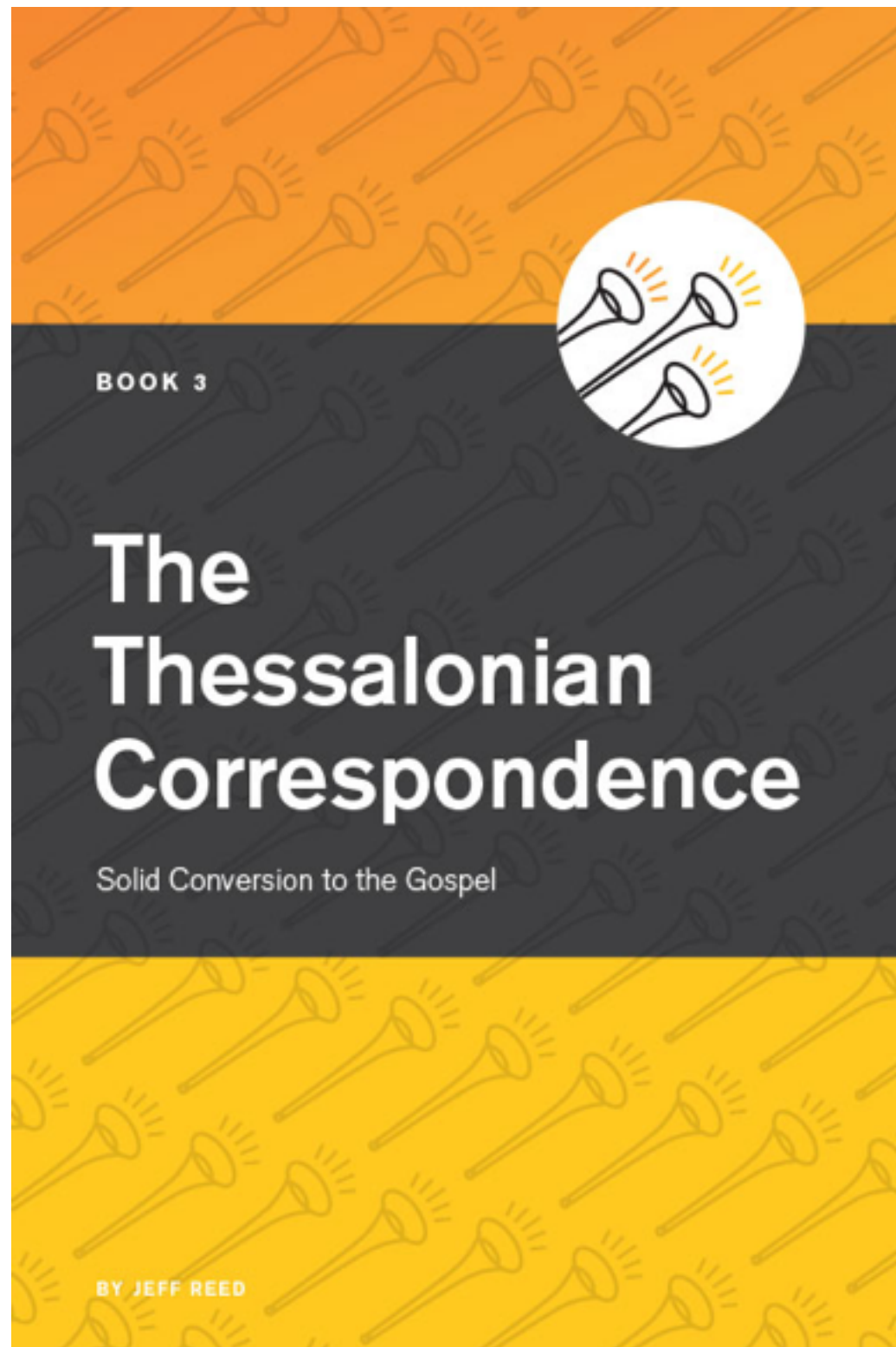
Paul's Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

The Gospels were written to stabilize the churches in the kerygma (and the didache, for that matter, if you include Luke–Acts) at a time when the Apostles were leaving the scene, the Jewish churches were in danger of going back to Judaism, and the Gentile churches needed to clearly understand their origins and Old Testament roots. They are eyewitness based accounts of the story of the proclamation of Jesus, as seen through the eyes of the Apostles who had received the clear teaching Jesus promised would come after He left.



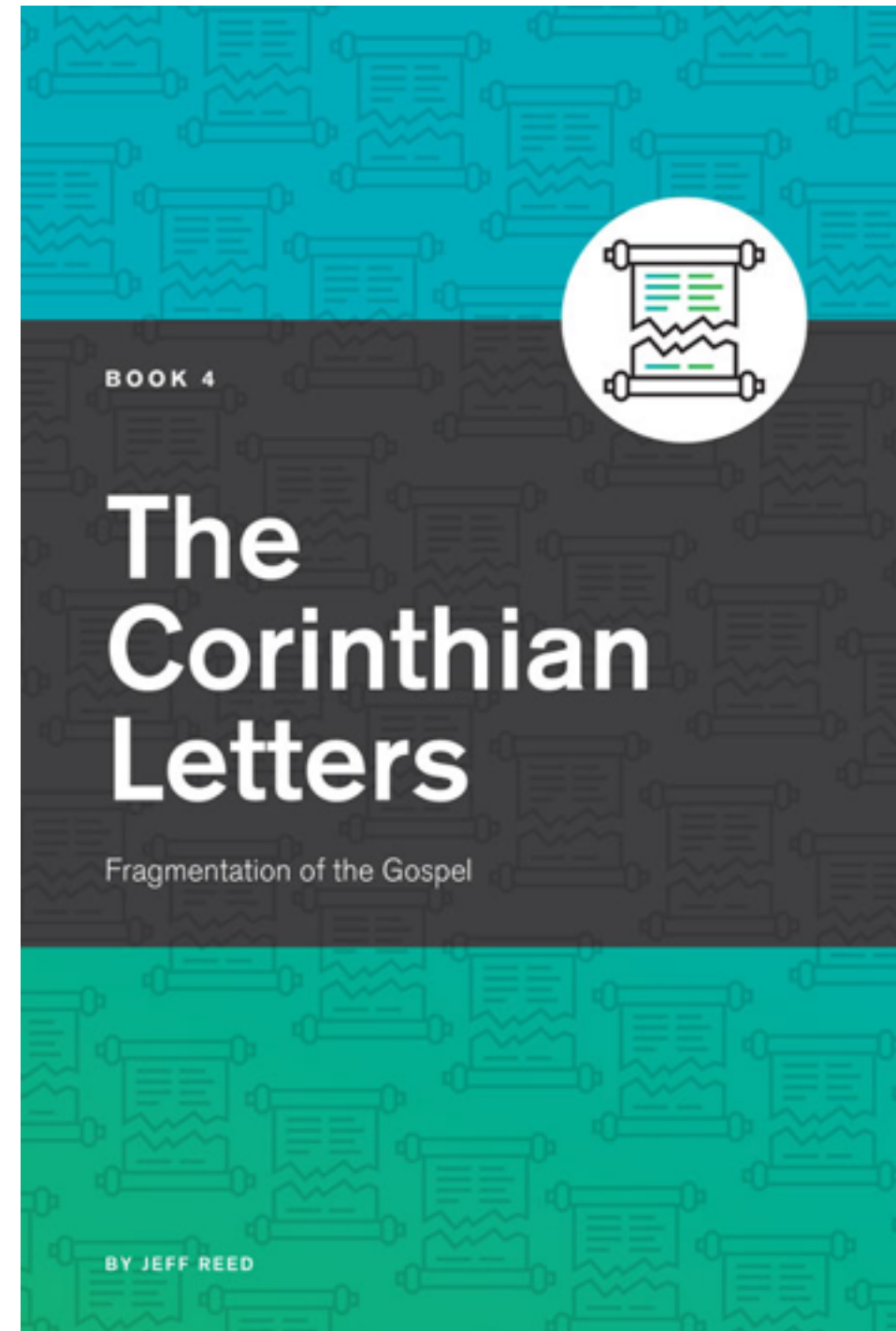
Galatians: So Quickly Leaving the Gospel

Galatians was written to correct the emerging alteration of the gospel making its way through the network of the Galatian churches, instructing and challenging them to not let one single part of the old system of the law alter the purity and power of the gospel, and helping them understand it is a new system of living, that will be ruined if they mix it with any previous law elements of the old system



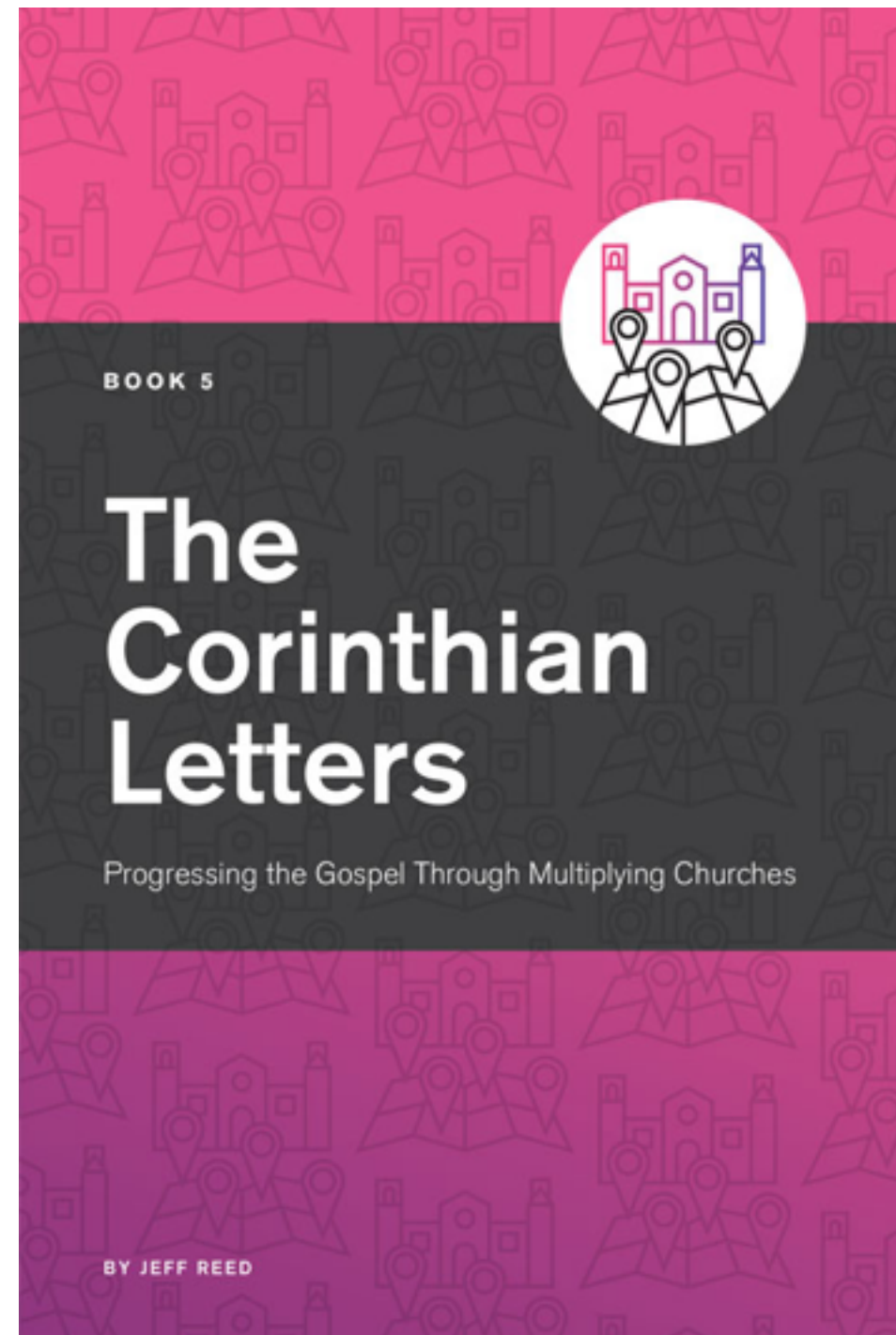
The Thessalonians Correspondence: Solid Conversion to the Gospel

The Thessalonians letters were written to solidify the conversion of the Thessalonians in the gospel they so dramatically embraced, rooting the emerging problems in the churches to a fuller understanding of the gospel and lining up with the emerging apostolic traditions that they might not be destabilized but remain strong amidst suffering and wrong teaching.



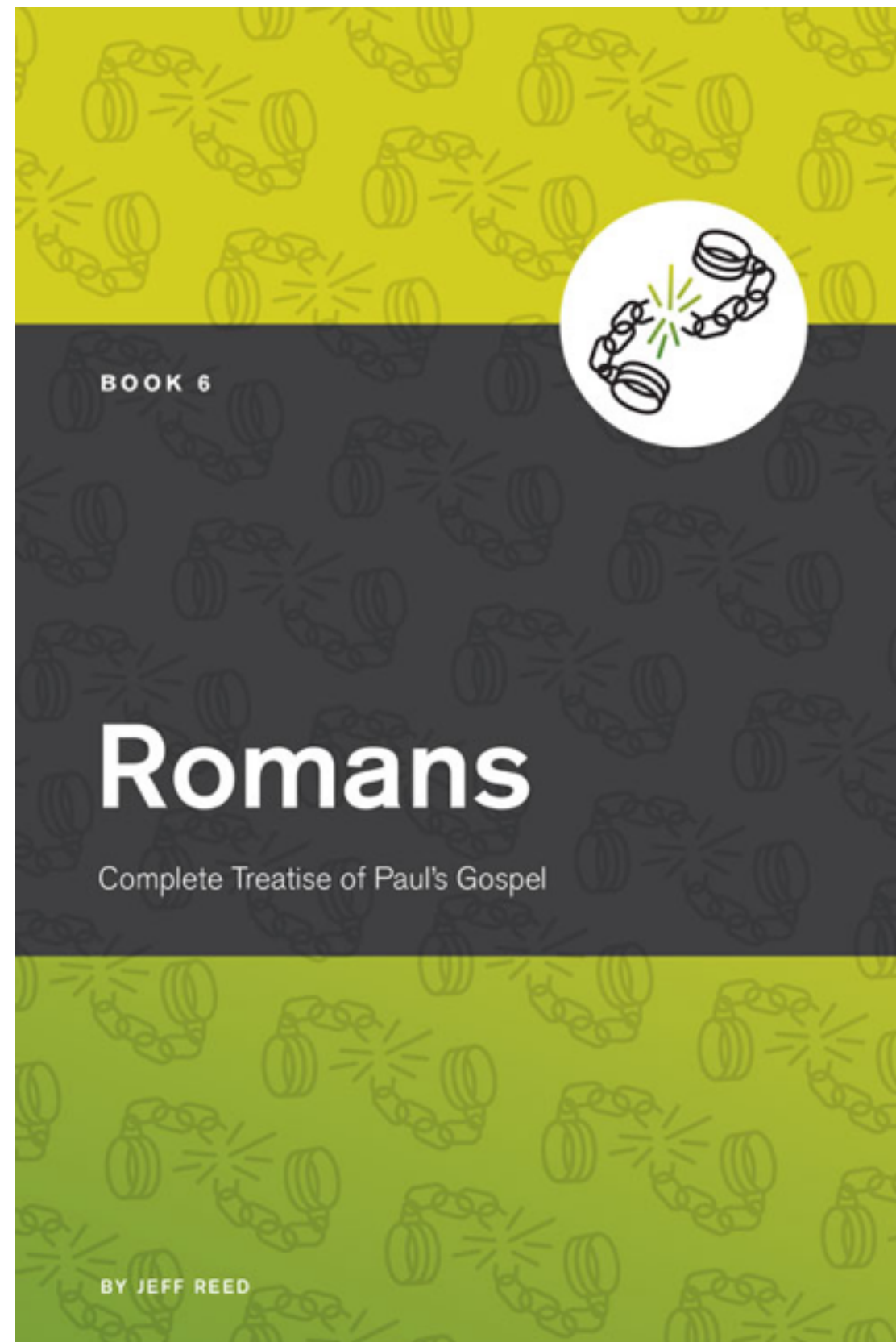
The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

First Corinthians was written to deal with internal divisions in community life and community gatherings, rooted in differing social statuses fragmenting the Corinthian churches, with the view of the Corinthian churches fully participating with him in the progress of the gospel.



The Corinthian Letters: Progressing the Gospel Through Multiplying Churches

Second Corinthians was written to defend his apostleship in the Corinthian churches—defining the ministry as conflicts without and fears within—that they might remain in his sphere of authority and therefore participate fully in the progress amongst the Gentiles, for which he was uniquely commissioned.

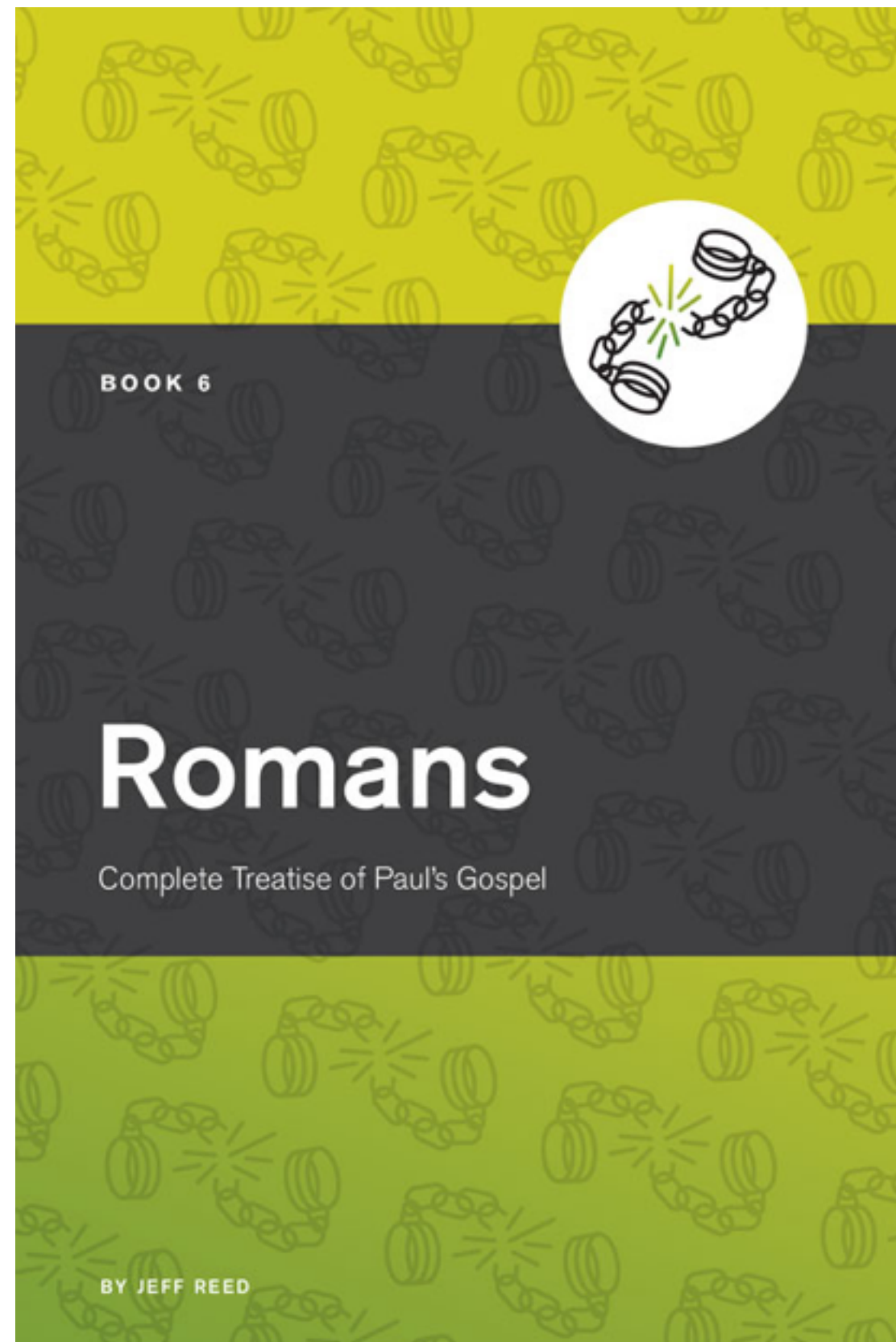


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Romans was written to fully establish the Romans in “his gospel,” which is the gospel of Jesus Christ, that they might fully participate with him in the progress of that gospel, as the key city in the Roman empire

arguing that in light of all that God has done, we need to fully dedicate ourselves to serve Him, shaping our lives and worldview around the gospel (1:16–11:36)

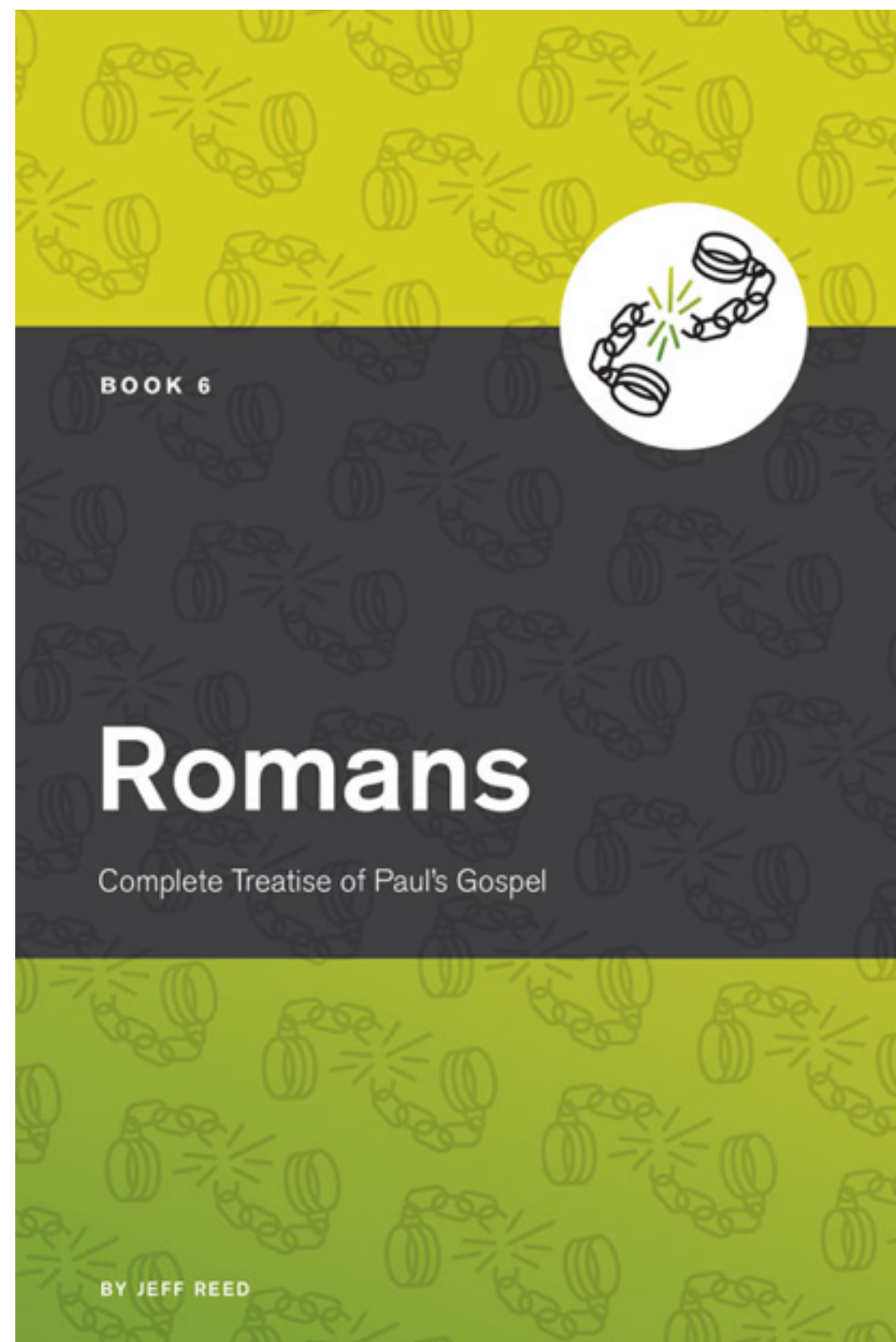
and the “pattern of teaching” (12:1–15:13), which allows the Holy Spirit to transform us and fully participate in the plan and purposes of God, both locally and with the progress of the gospel as led by apostolic leaders in our generation



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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 is needed:

- It is the final and largest letter.
- It is less occasional than the others—more of a manifesto.
- It is book-ended by sections that tell you it is a more complete treatment of the gospel than the others.
- Its context is establishing the churches in the gospel, which was the frontline of the battle.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul

Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Session 1: The Intention of Romans

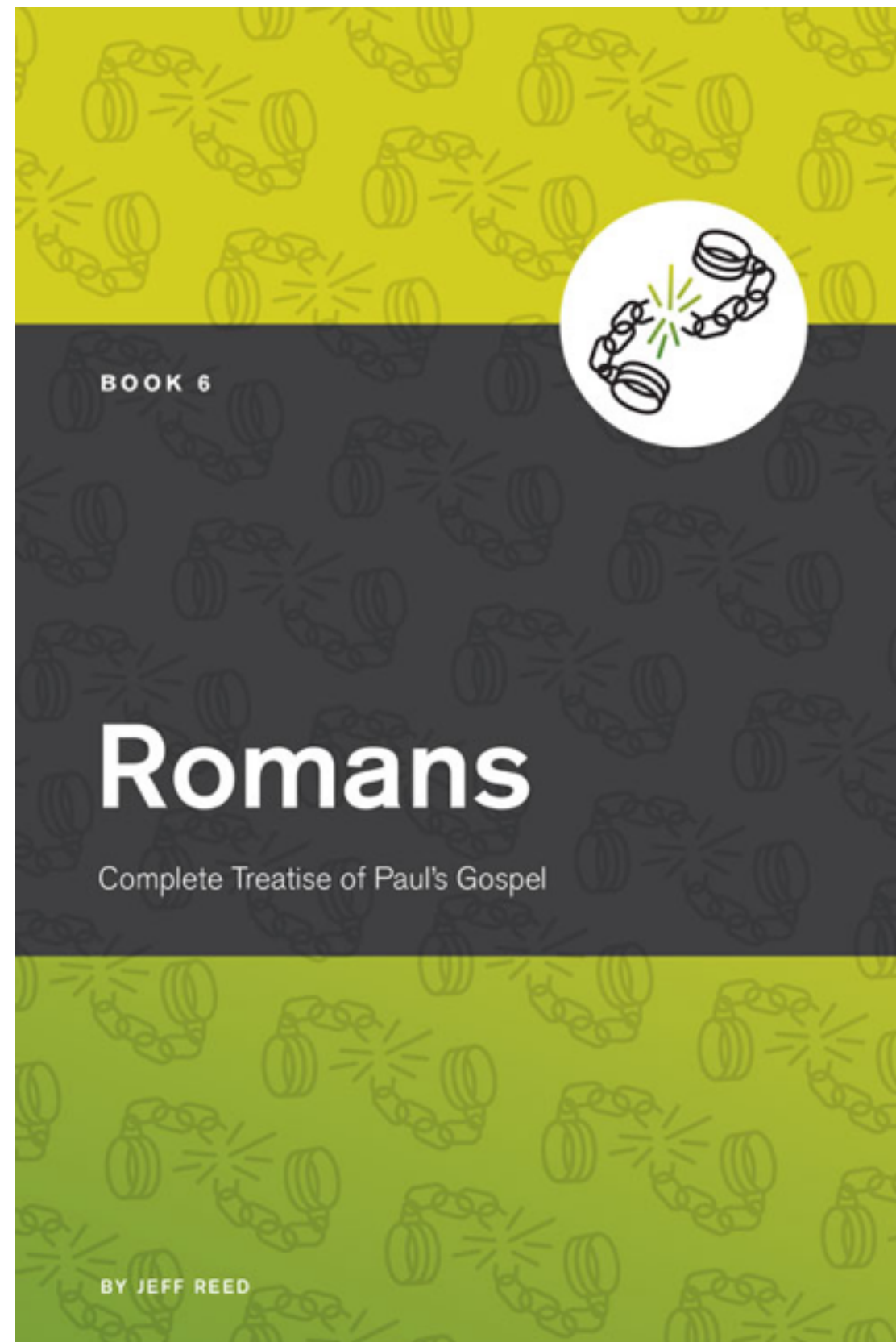
Session 2: The Gospel and The Story

Session 3: The New Gospel Worldview

Session 4: Reframing the Jewish Story

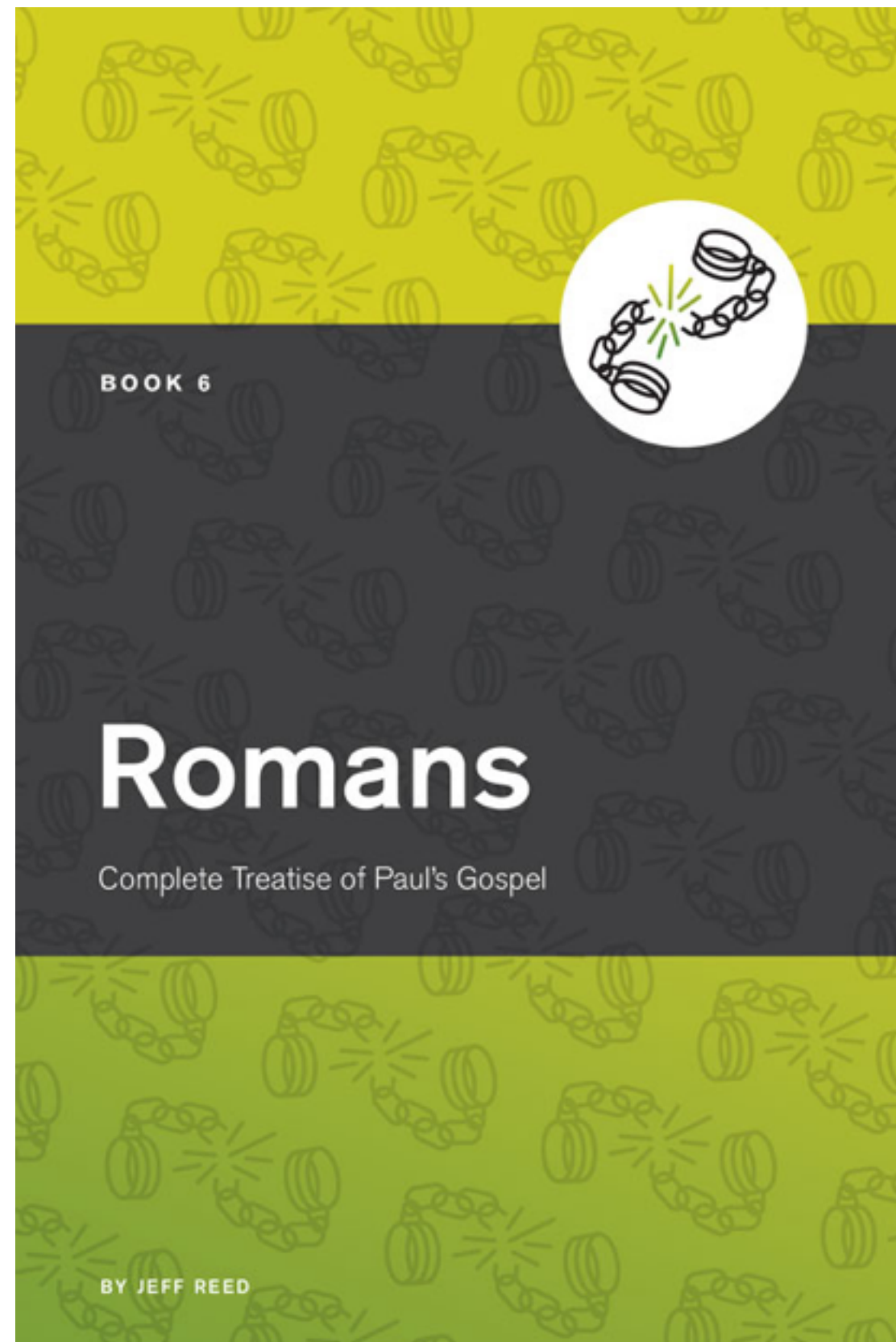
Session 5: The Gospel in Transformed Community

Session 6: Now Back to the Mission



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Paul wrote Romans to establish the Roman churches in his gospel—the gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1–15; 16:25–27). His goal was that they become strong and fully participate with him in the progress of that gospel throughout the Roman Empire (Romans 15:14–16:23).

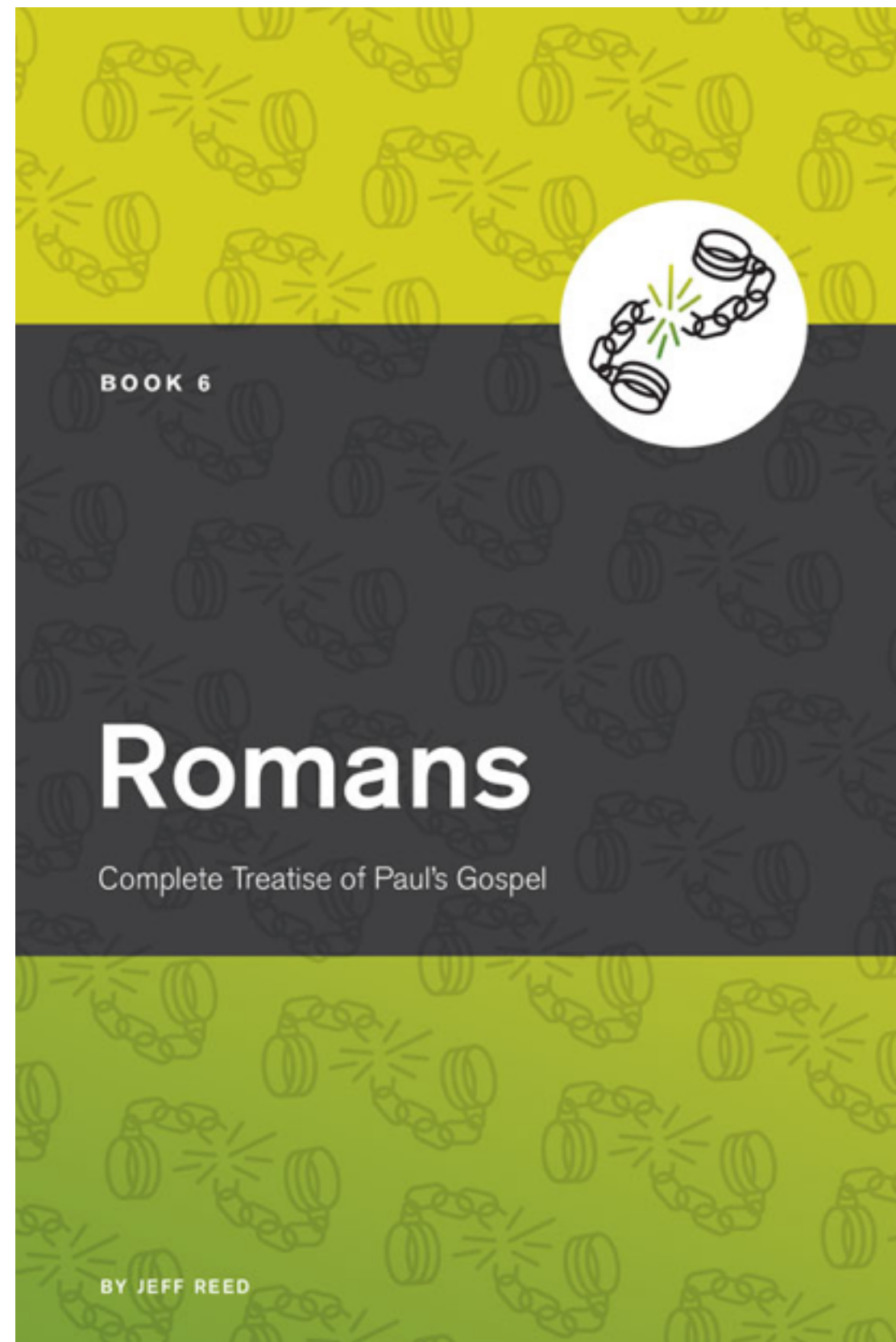


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

What does Paul mean when he says to the Romans “I have proclaimed to you my gospel, according to Jesus Christ.”

God unveiled the whole picture to him through Jesus Christ those 3 years in Arabia.

Peter and those in Jerusalem could not rethink the whole story.

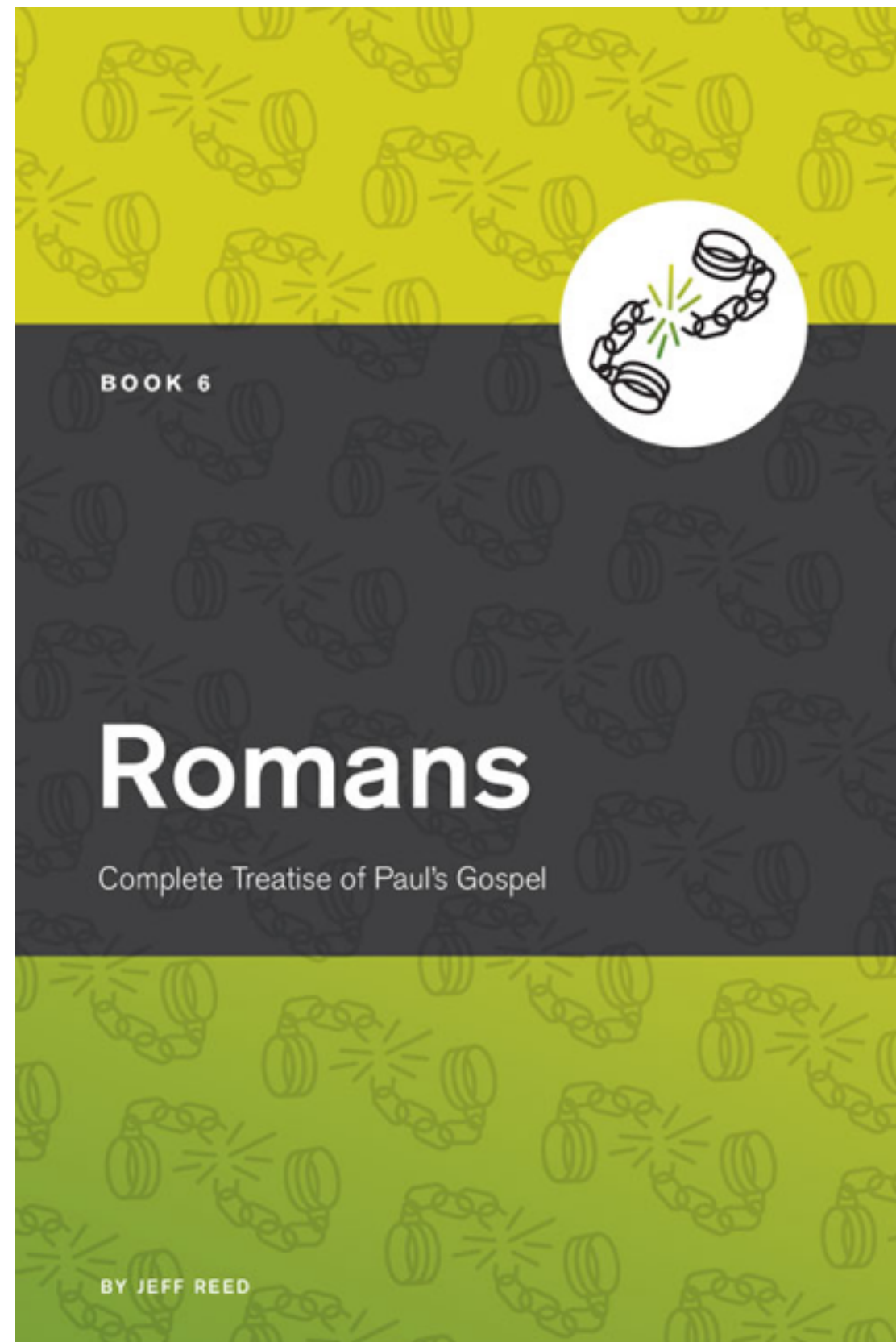


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

What did he rethink?

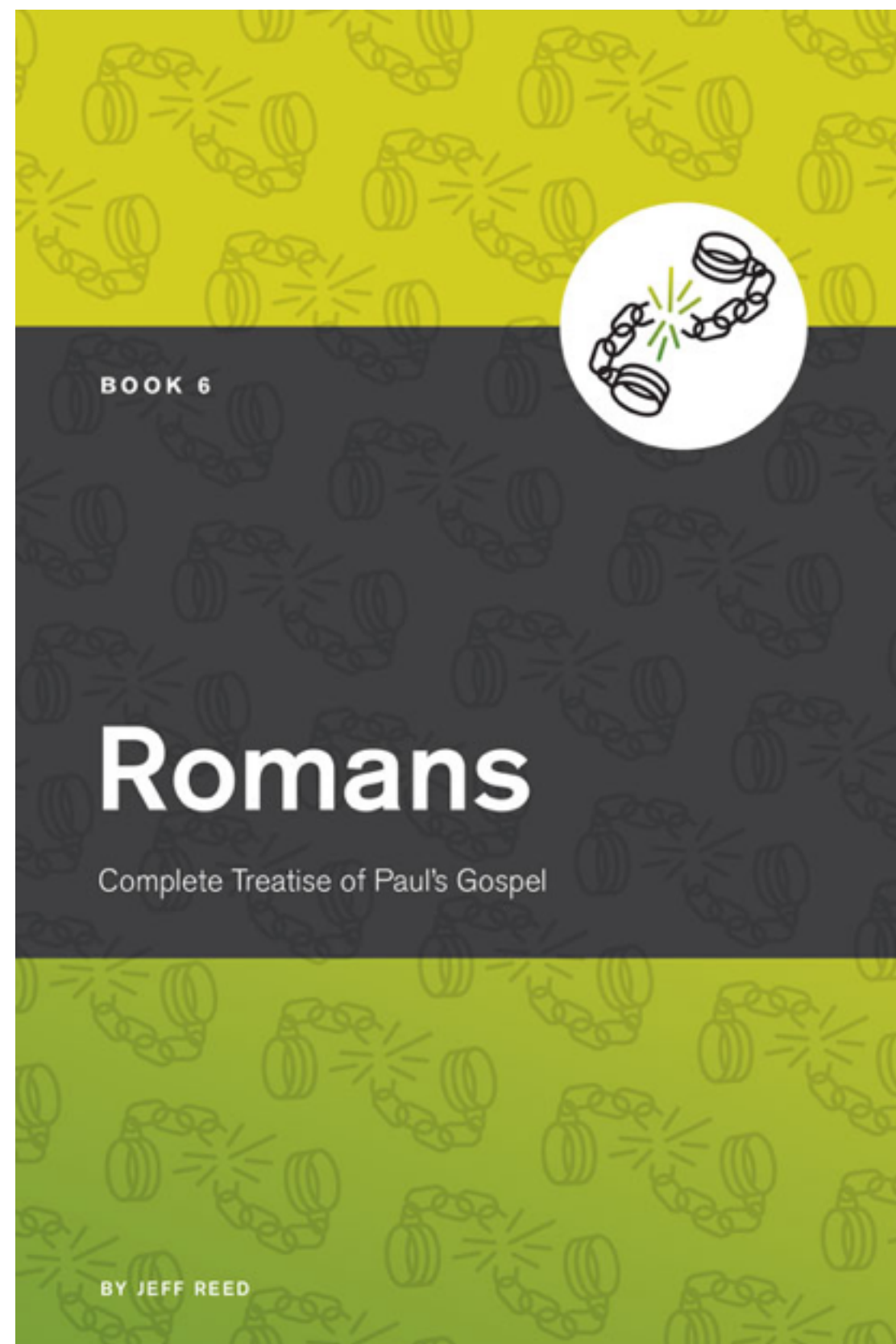
1. The Law
2. Israel
3. God's hidden plan
4. The current times
5. The future of Israel

He rethought the whole story. And he reframed the entire Law, the Prophets, and the Writings in light of the gospel—the good news.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

The following is an attempt to identify the structure of Paul's argument in Romans 1:16–15:13. Paul's argument seems to have 4 phases to it in 1:16–15:27: 1:16–4:31; 6:1–8:39 ; 9:1–11:36; and 12:1–15:13. In each phase we will identify 3–4 main points, followed by the essence of the section.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

What was his gospel?

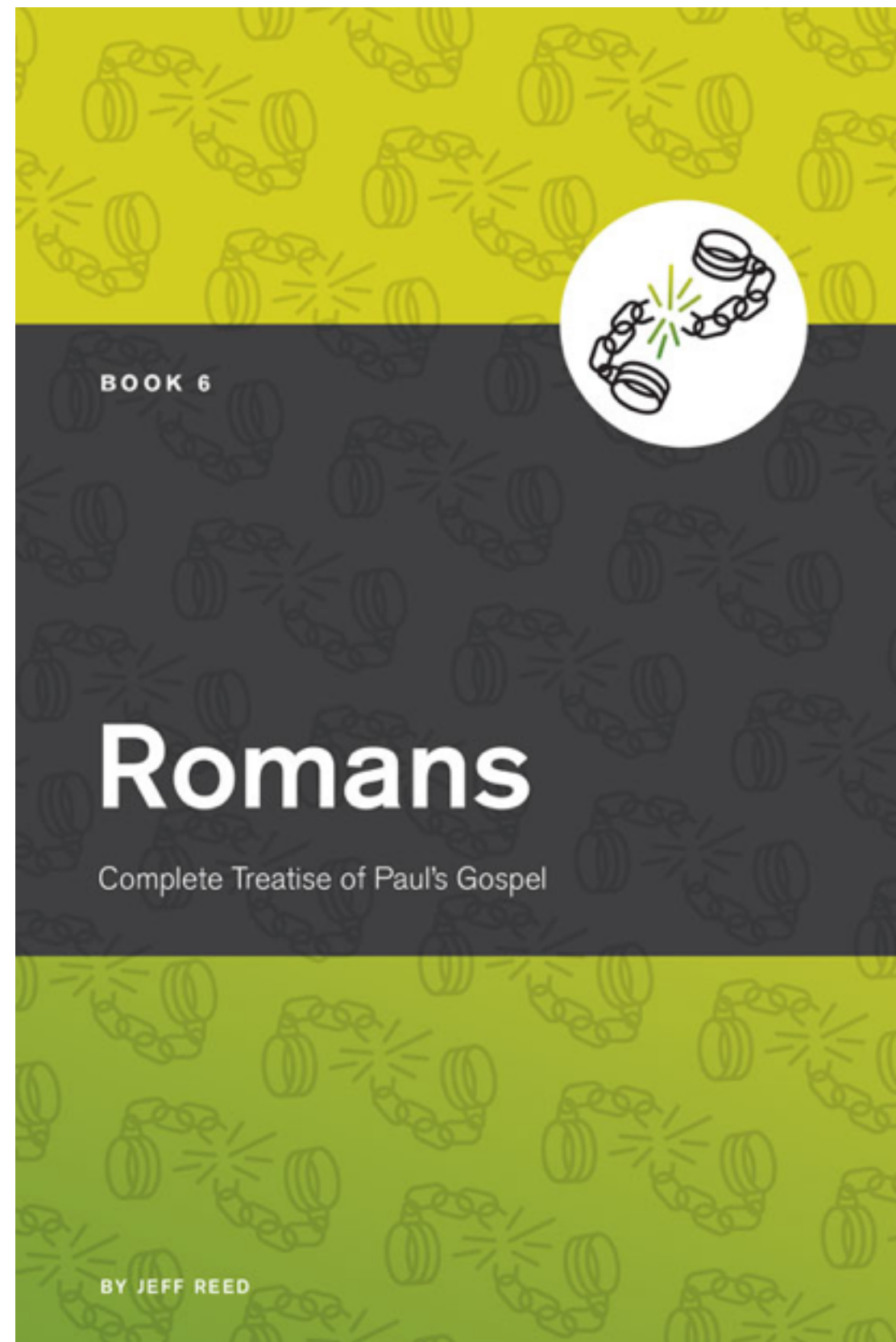
The complete picture of what was unveiled to him the 3 years in Arabia is in Romans.

Let's follow the argument through in 1:16–16:24.

What does Paul mean when he says to the Romans “I have proclaimed to you my gospel, according the Jesus Christ”?

God unveiled the whole picture to him through Jesus Christ those 3 years in Arabia.

Peter and those in Jerusalem could not rethink the whole story.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Paul's argument seems to have 4 phases to it in 1:16–15:33:

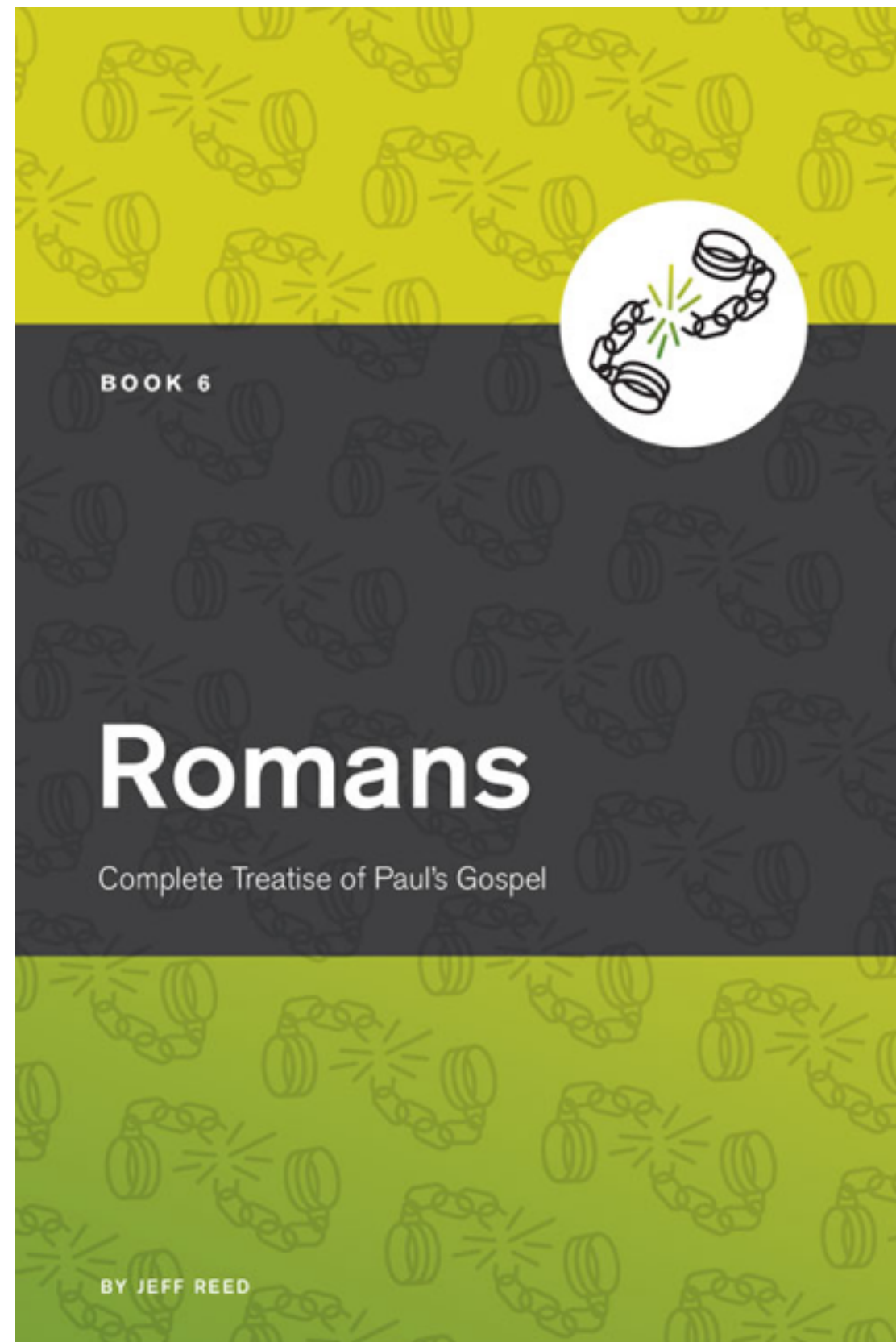
1:16–4:25

5:1–8:39

9:1–11:36

12:1–15:33

I am going to string verses together in a way you can think it through and condense it into one paragraph.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

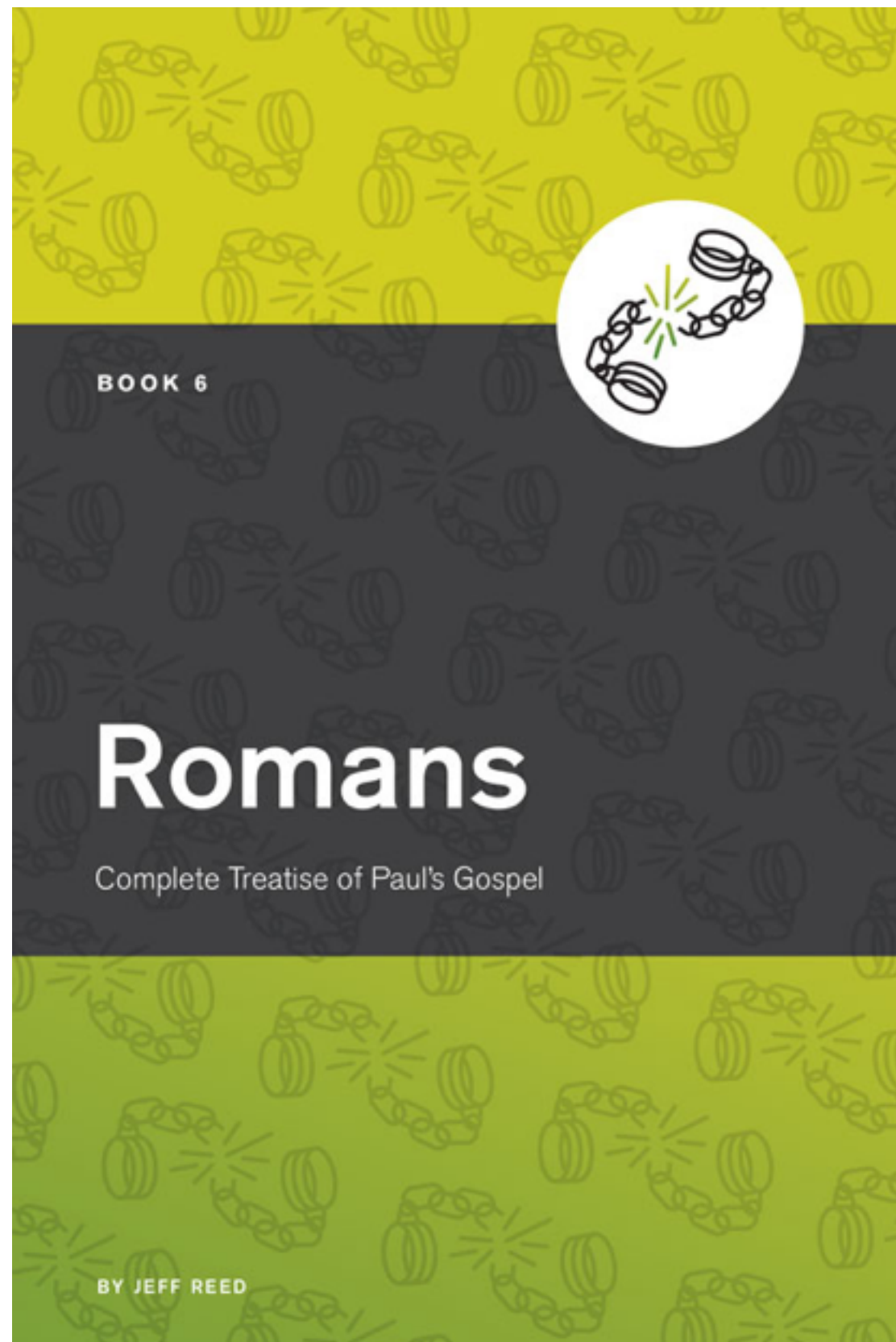
Paul's argument seems to have 4 phases to it in 1:16–15:27:

1:16–4:31 (chs. 1–5)

6:1–8:39 (chs. 6–8)

9:1–11:36 (chs. 9–11)

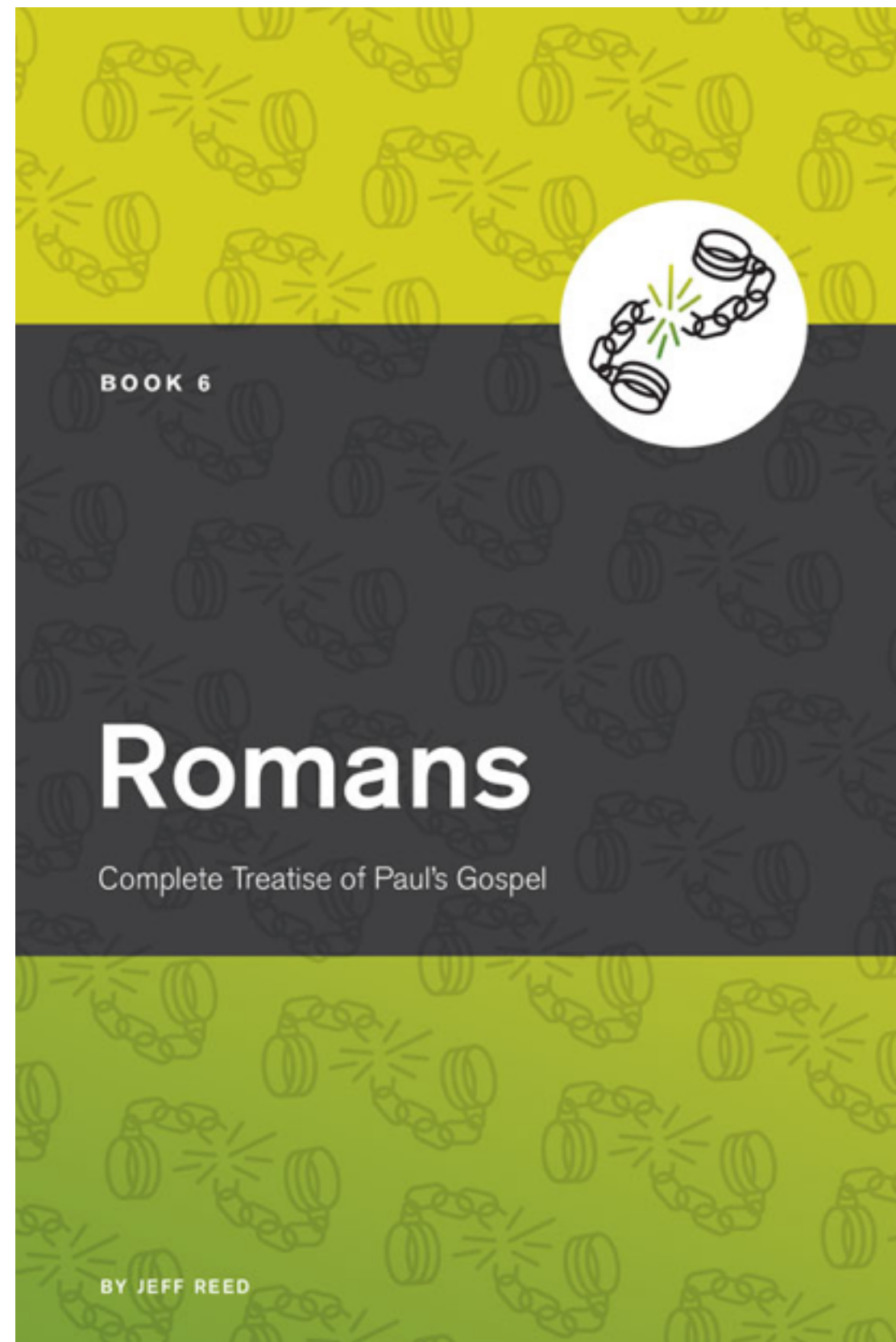
12:1–15:13 (chs. 12–15)



Romans 1:16–4:31

I have created a brief distillation of Paul's argument in the first of 4 sections in Romans: 1:16–4:31.

We will read it together. Then you will work together at your tables to summarize the main 5–7 points or to write a summary paragraph of the argument.



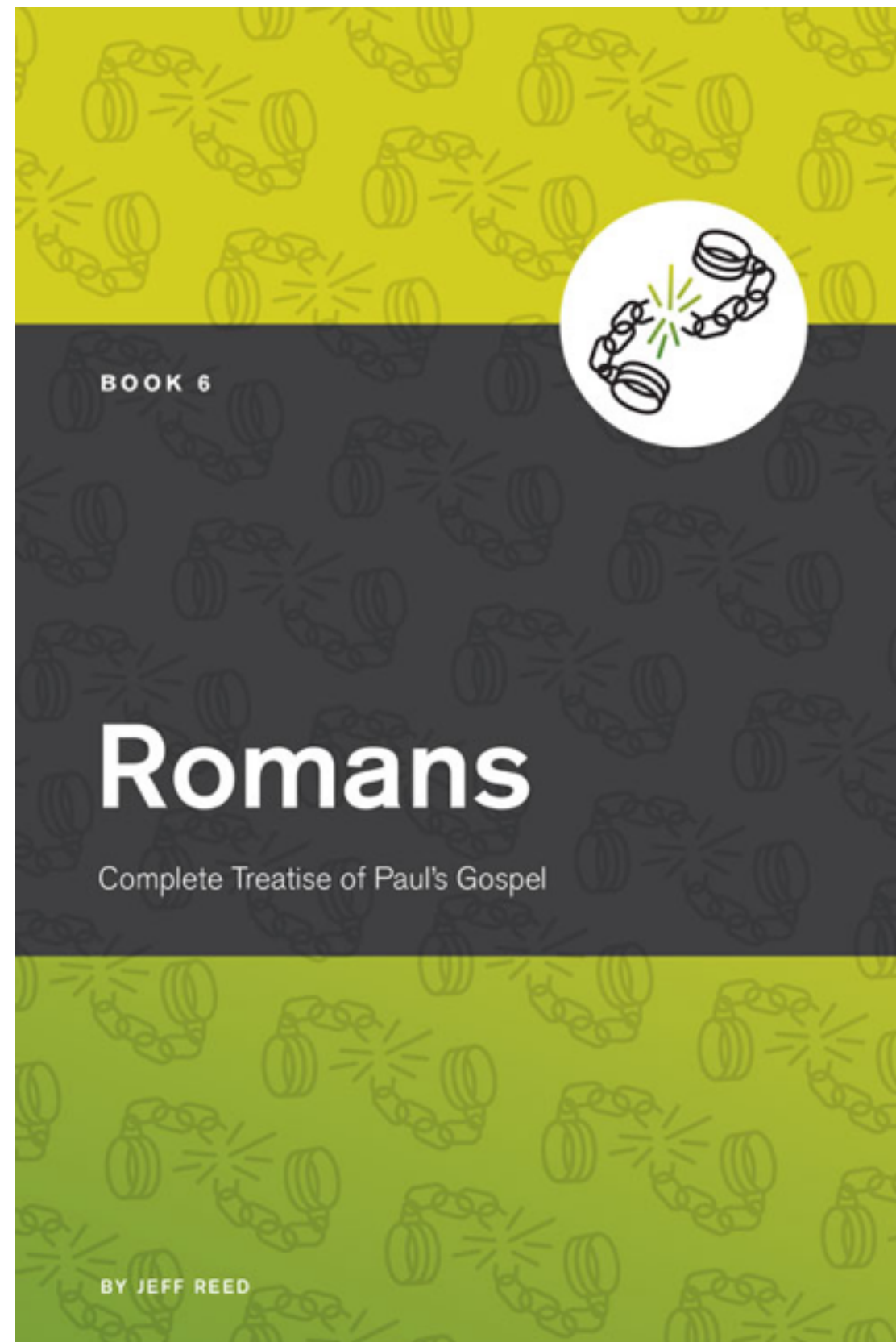
Romans 1:16–4:31

The whole argument: 97 verses

The argument in brief: 25 verses

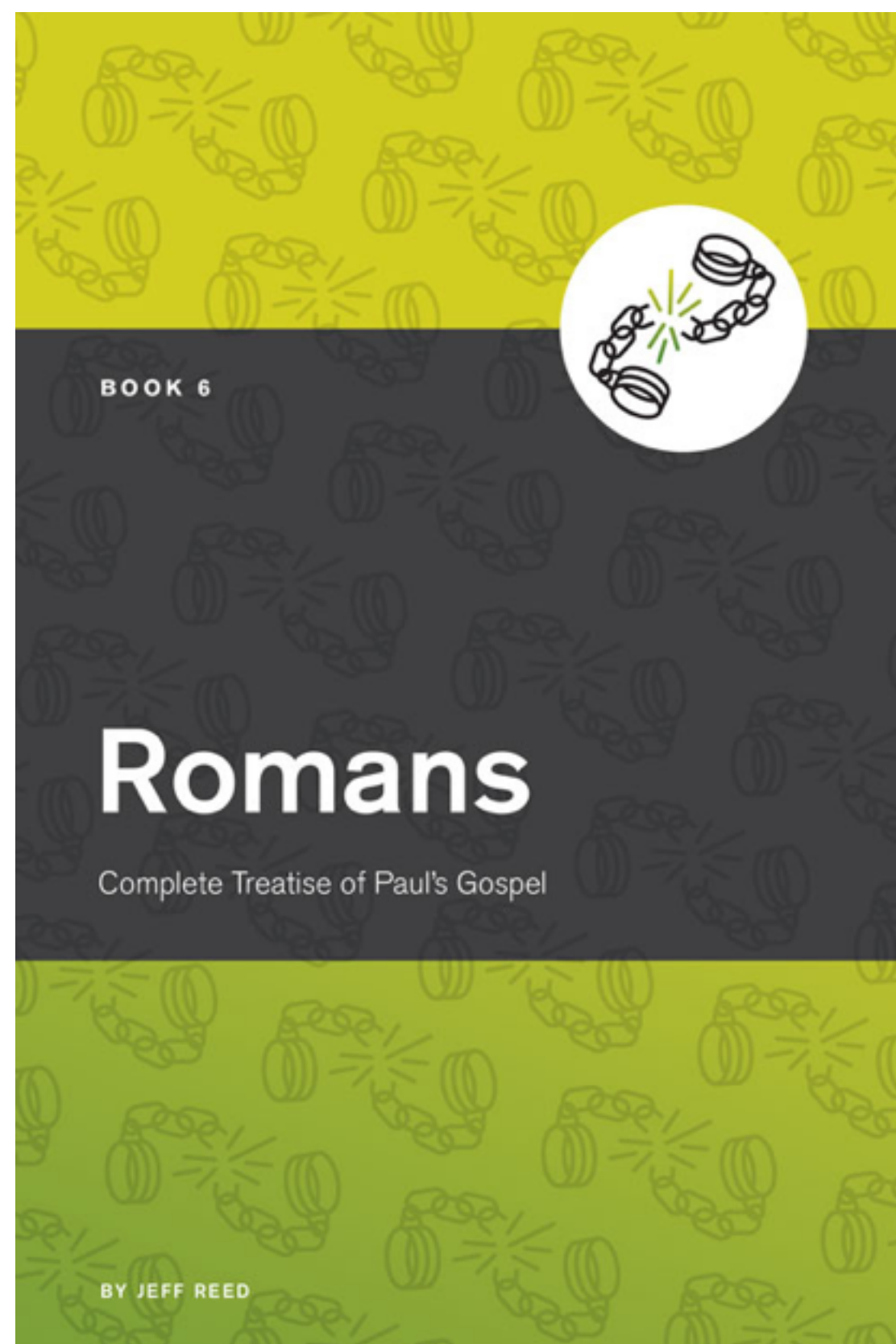
Listen as I read it (26% of his argument, in his own words).

Try to summarize it in 5–7 points, or in one paragraph.



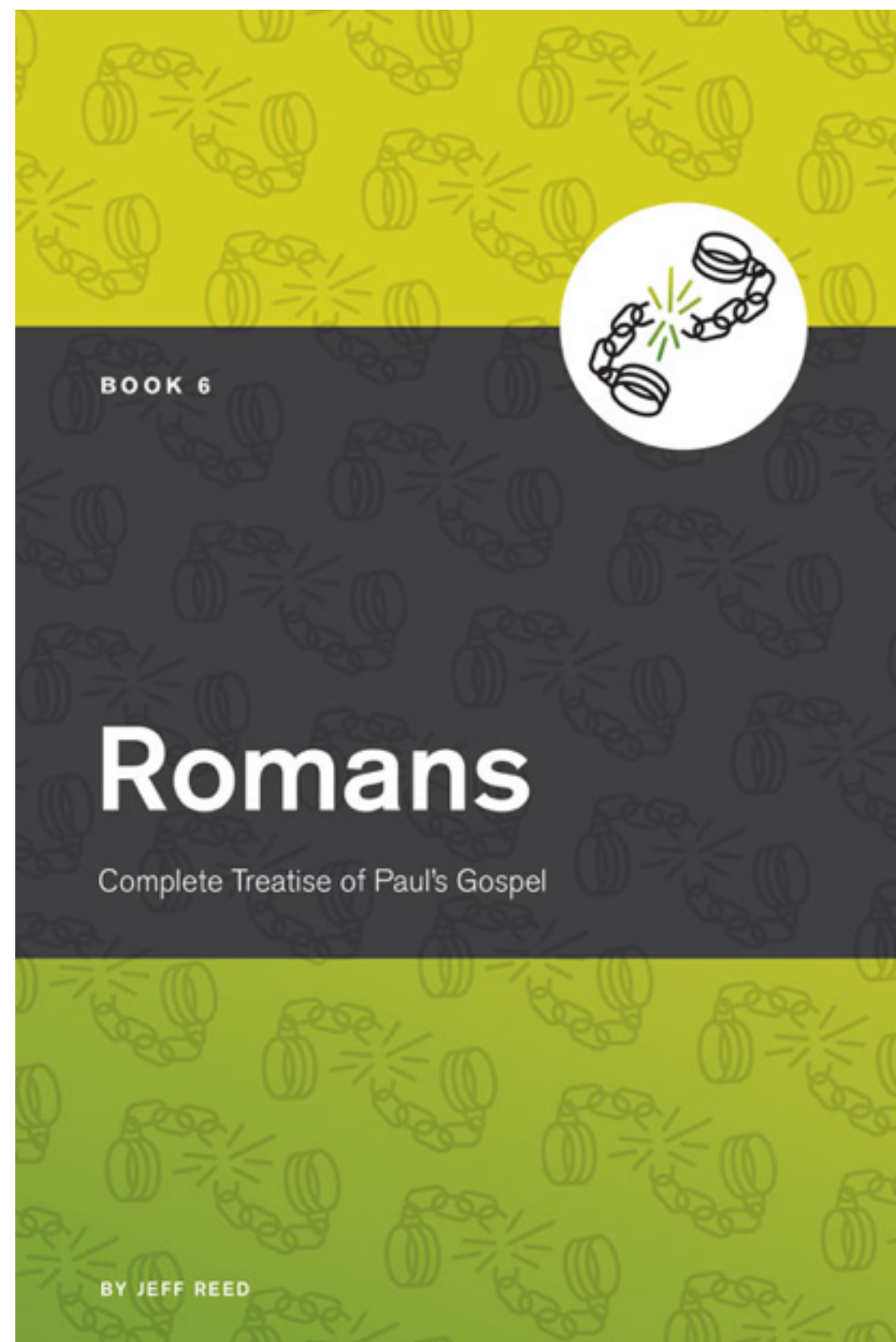
Romans 1:16–4:31

1:16 I'm not ashamed of the good news; it's God's power, bringing salvation to everyone who believes—to the Jew first, and also, equally, to the Greek. ¹⁷This is because God's covenant justice is unveiled in it, from faithfulness to faithfulness. As it says in the Bible, "the just shall live by faith." ... 2:28 The "Jew" isn't the person who appears to be one, you see. Nor is "circumcision" what it appears to be, a matter of physical flesh. ²⁹The "Jew" is the one in secret; and "circumcision" is a matter of the heart, in the spirit rather than the letter. Such a person gets "praise," not from humans, but from God....



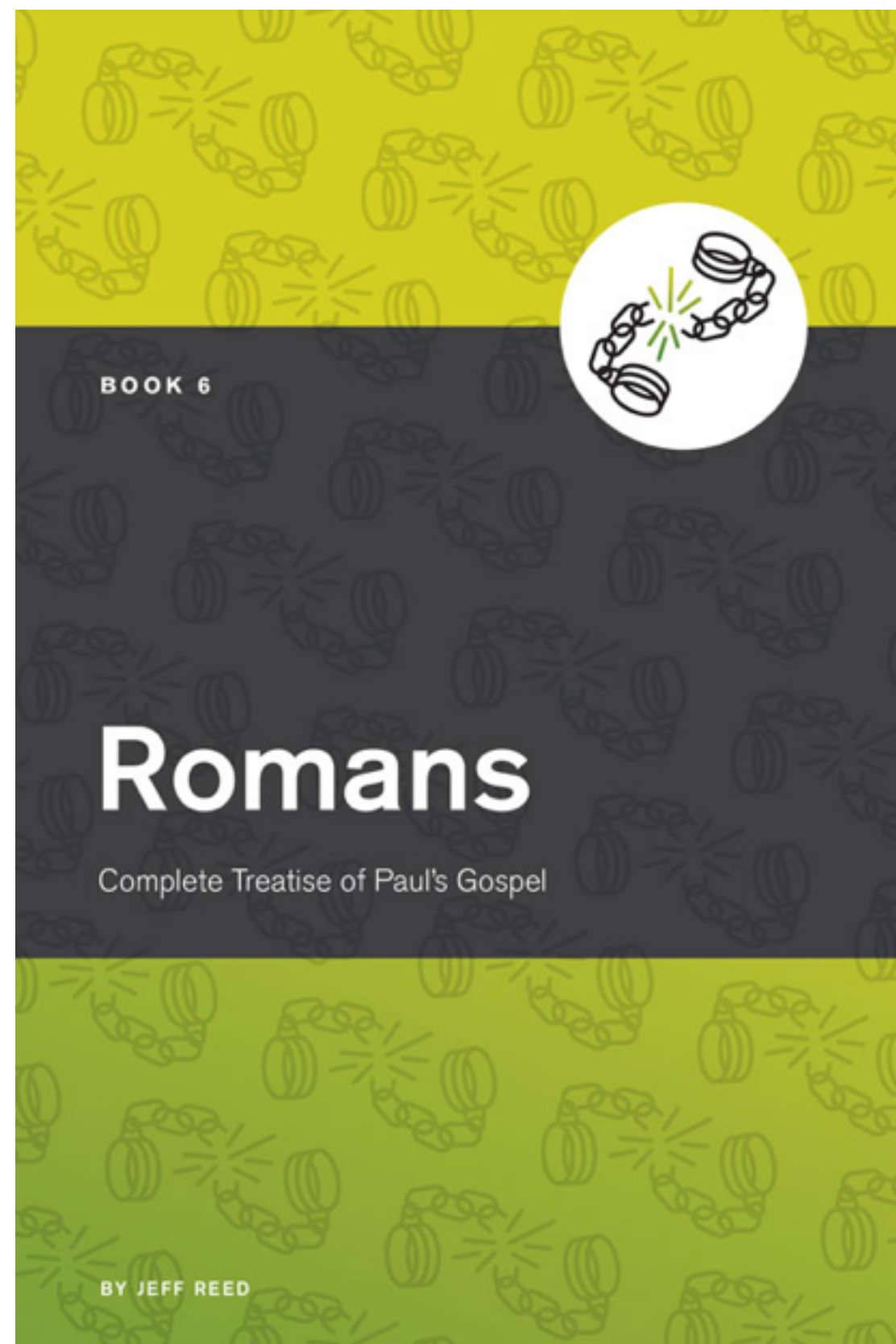
Romans 1:16–4:31

¹⁴This is how it works out. Gentiles don't possess the law as their birthright; but whenever they do what the law says, they are a law for themselves, despite not possessing the law. ¹⁵They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their conscience bears witness as well, and their thoughts will run this way and that, sometimes accusing them and sometimes excusing, ¹⁶on the day when (according to the gospel I proclaim) God judges all human secrets through King Jesus. ¹⁷But supposing you call yourself a "Jew." Supposing you rest your hope in the law. Supposing you celebrate the fact that God is your God, ¹⁸and that you know what he wants, and that by the law's instruction you can make appropriate moral distinctions. ¹⁹Supposing you believe yourself to be a guide to the blind, a light to people in darkness, ²⁰a teacher of the foolish, an instructor for children—all because, in the law, you possess the outline of knowledge and truth.



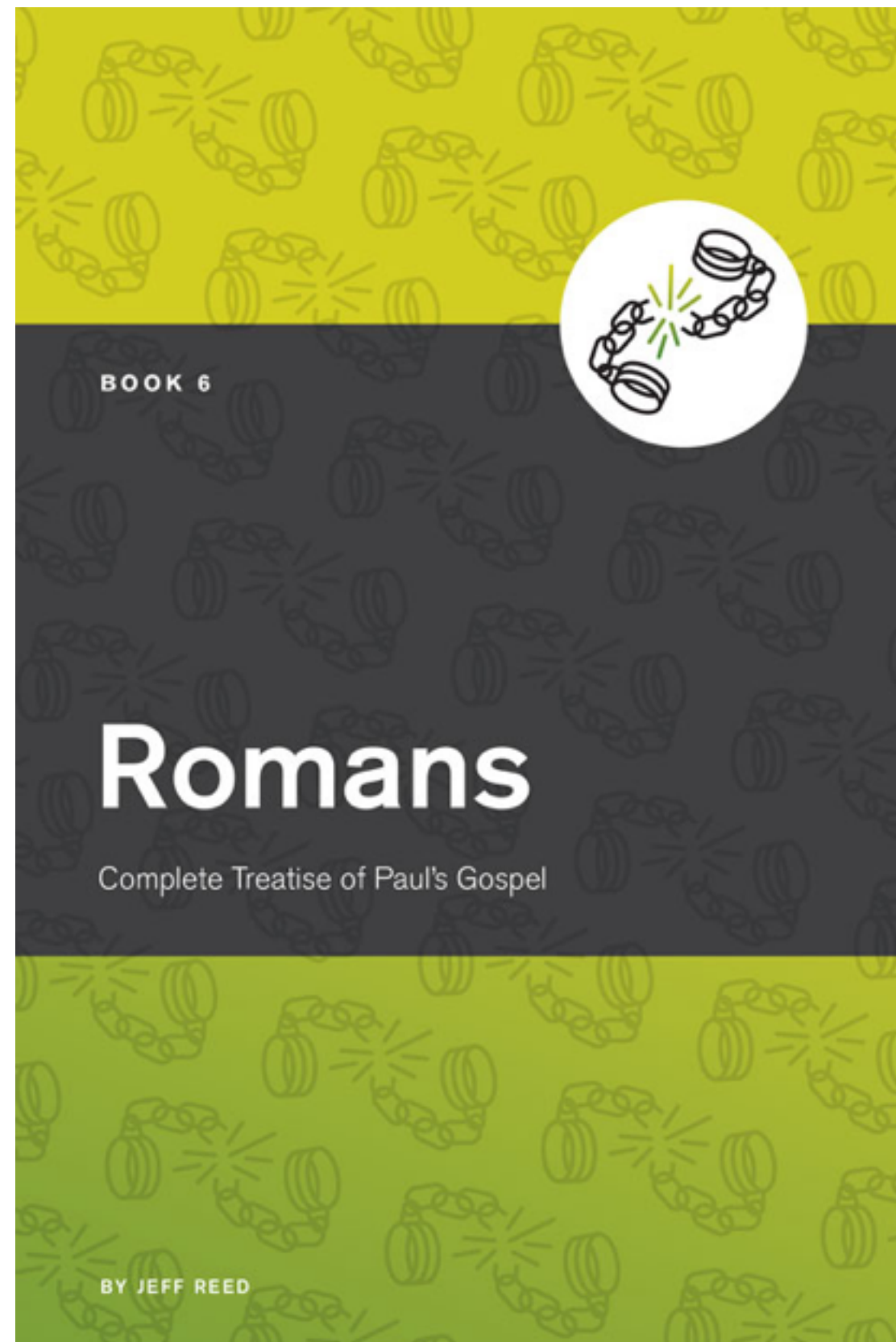
Romans 1:16–4:31

3:1 What advantage, then, does the Jew possess? What, indeed, is the point of circumcision? ²a great deal, in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with God's oracles. ³What follows from that? If some of them were unfaithful to their commission, does their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴Certainly not! ...⁹What then? Are we in fact better off? ...²⁰No mere mortal, you see, can be declared to be in the right before God on the basis of the works of the law. What you get through the law is the knowledge of sin.... God's covenant justice has been displayed. ²²God's covenant justice comes into operation through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who have faith.



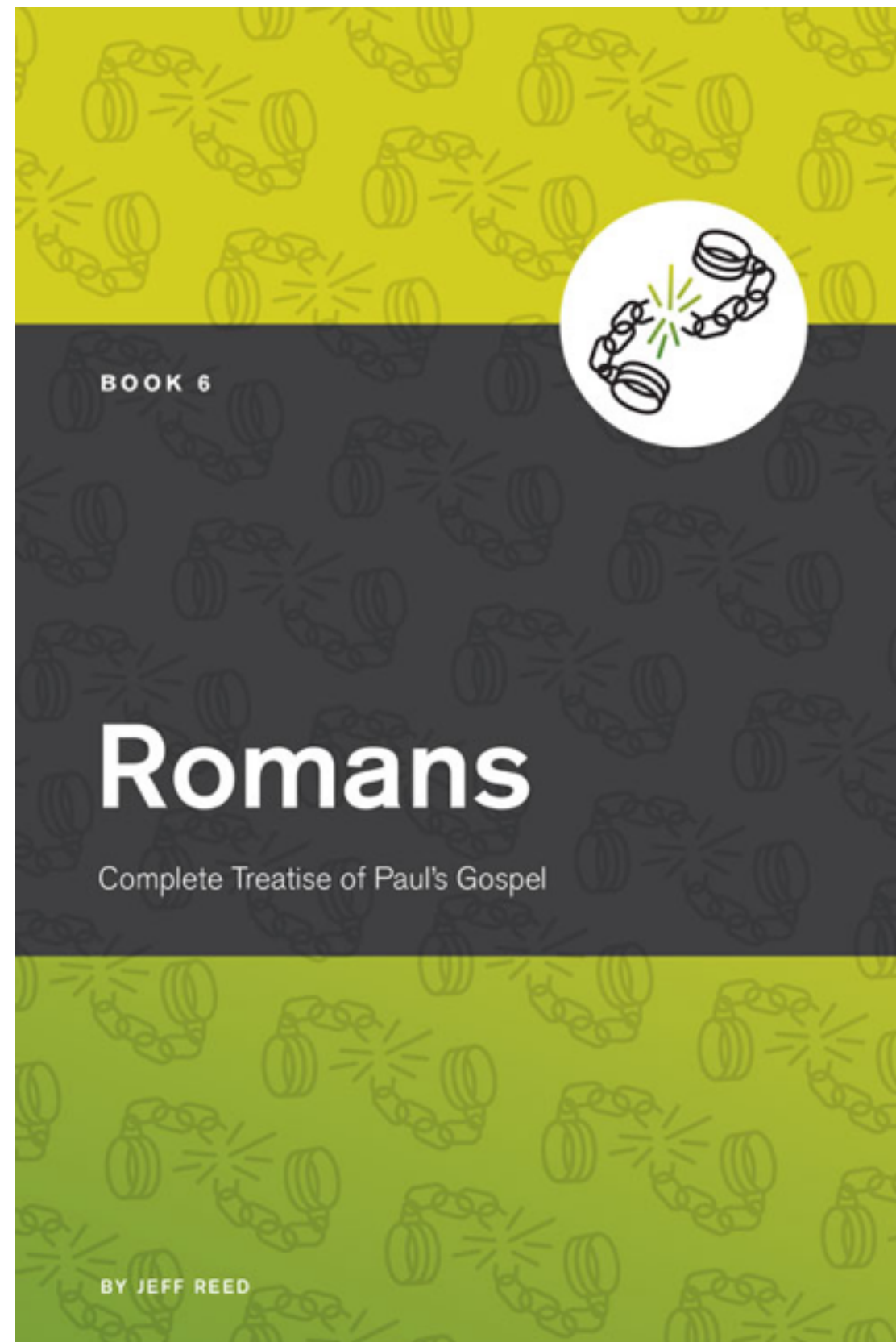
Romans 1:16–4:31

For there is no distinction: ²³all sinned, and fell short of God's glory—
²⁴and by God's grace they are freely declared to be in the right, to be members of the covenant, through the redemption which is found in the Messiah, Jesus.... ²⁶This was to demonstrate his covenant justice in the present time: that is, that he himself is in the right, and that he declares to be in the right everyone who trusts in the faithfulness of Jesus.... 4:3 So what does the Bible say? "Abraham believed God, and it was calculated in his favor, putting him in the right." ...¹¹He received circumcision as a sign and seal of the status of covenant membership, on the basis of faith, which he had when he was still uncircumcised....



Romans 1:16–4:31

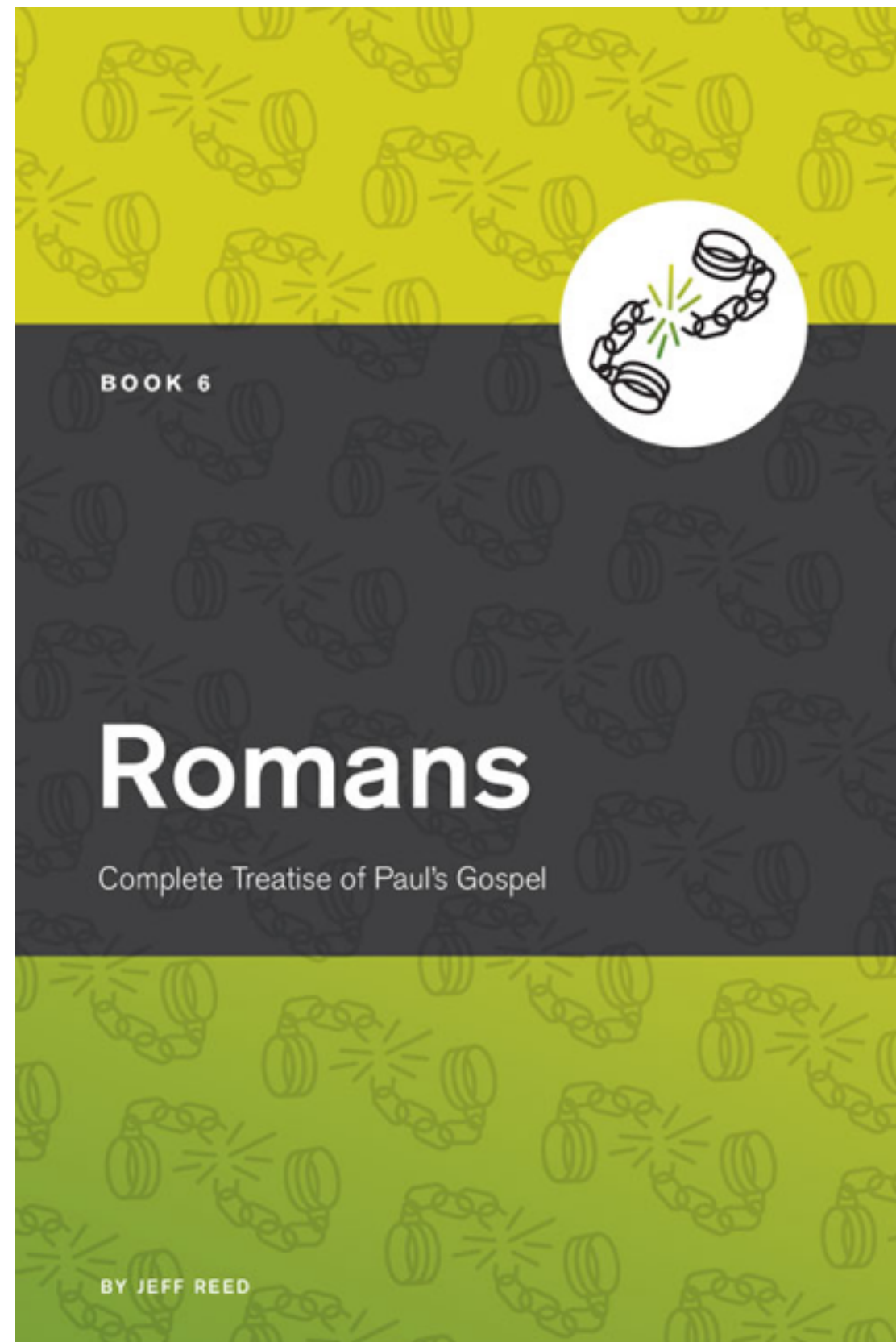
¹³The promise, you see, didn't come to Abraham or to his family through the law—the promise, that is, that he would inherit the world. It came through the covenant justice of faith.... ¹⁶That's why it's "by faith": so that it can be in accordance with grace, and so that the promise can thereby be validated for the entire family—not simply those who are from the law, but those who share the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all, ¹⁷just as the Bible says, "I have made you the father of many nations."



Romans 1:16–4:31

The essence of Paul's argument (7 main points)

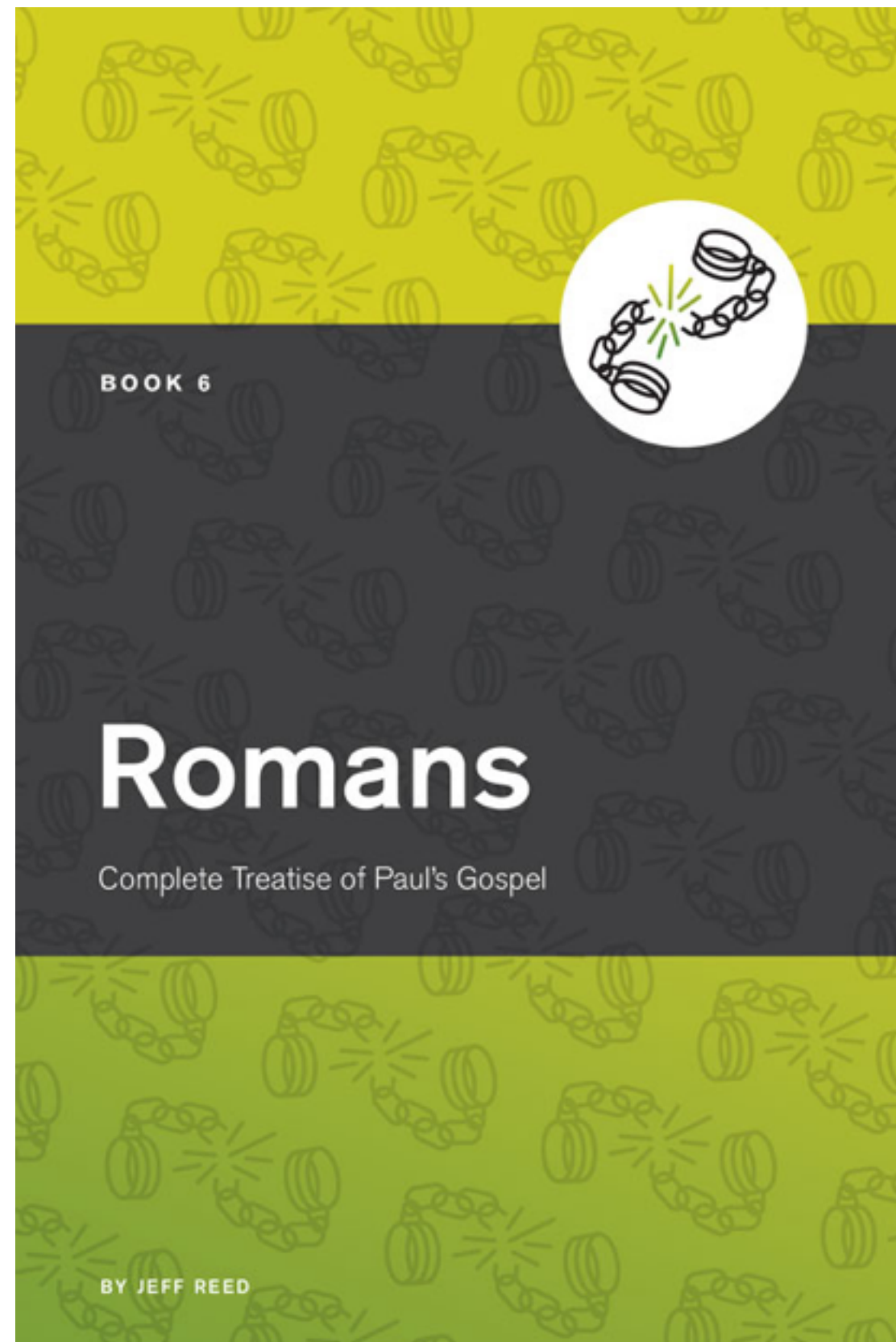
1. God has been faithful to His covenant promise to Abraham to “bless all the families of the earth” through the Lord Jesus the Messiah, that all nations might be part of his family—receiving the “status of covenant membership.”
2. Everyone is under the judgment of sin—beginning with the Gentiles: everyone has an internal compass by which they judge others and themselves (alternately defending and accusing), which will be the standard of God judging their own sin.



Romans 1:16–4:31

Additional points to Paul's argument:

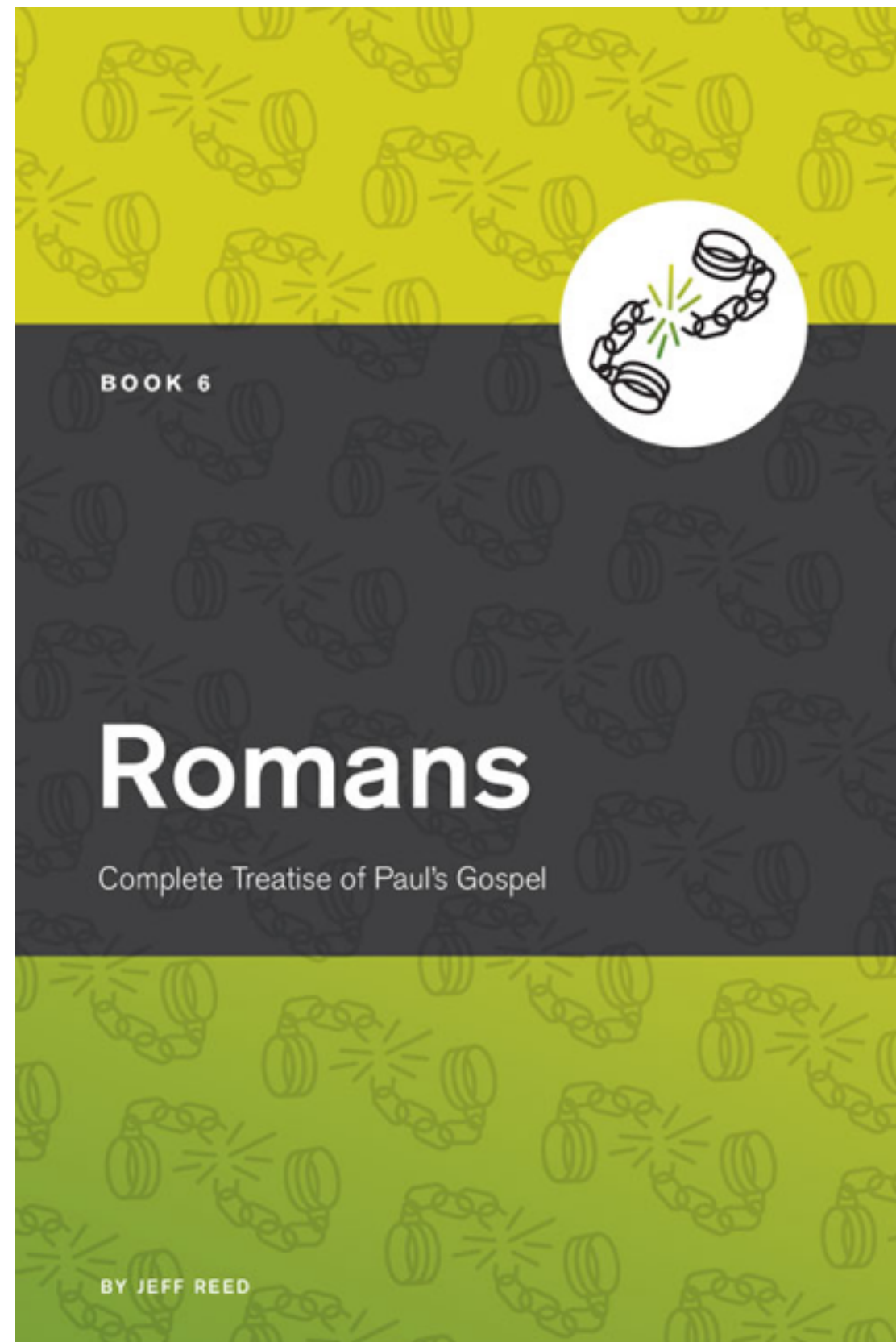
3. The Jews are also guilty of sin. But they fail to see it through the false belief that just because they are God's chosen people, are circumcised (thus in the community), and possess the "outline of God's knowledge" that they are okay, even though they do not obey it and make a mockery of God. Both will be judged by God and are under sin.
4. Abraham was forgiven of his sin (God did not calculate it to his account) because of his faith, not because he kept the law. In the same way, it is true for Gentiles who believe, since God belongs to the nations as well.



Romans 1:16–4:31

The essence of Paul's argument (7 main points)

5. At one level, the nation of Israel is the same as everyone else, needing forgiveness of sins, which can only come through faith in the Messiah.
6. At another level, though Israel was chosen by God to be the stewards of the very oracles of God, the Law itself actually brought forward the knowledge of sin. And without faith, they are not actually “true Jews” since membership into God's covenant with them is founded on faith, not the Law.
7. Even though Israel was unfaithful to the covenant promise, failing to take God's promises to the nations, God is faithful to His covenant to the nations through the Messiah — “faithfulness to faithfulness” — the covenant to the Messiah.

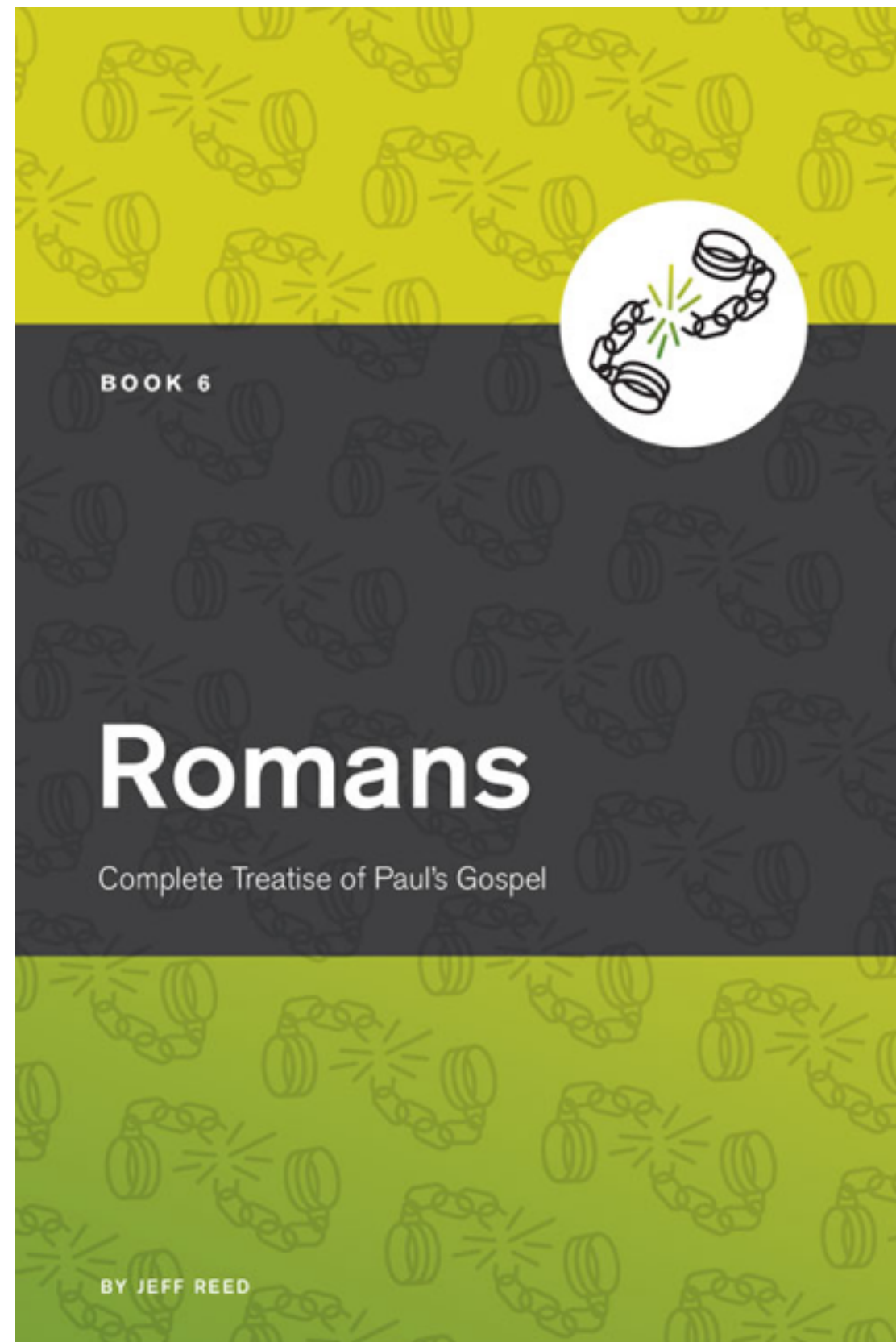


Romans 1:16–4:31

The essence of Paul's argument (one paragraph) in 1:16–4:31

The gospel is rooted in the promise of the covenant relationship of God to Abraham, received by faith, and now, through the Messiah, made available to everyone

thus validating God's faithfulness to His covenant through the faithfulness of the Messiah, that through Abraham and his family (nation) all the families (nations) of the earth would be blessed in His kingdom.



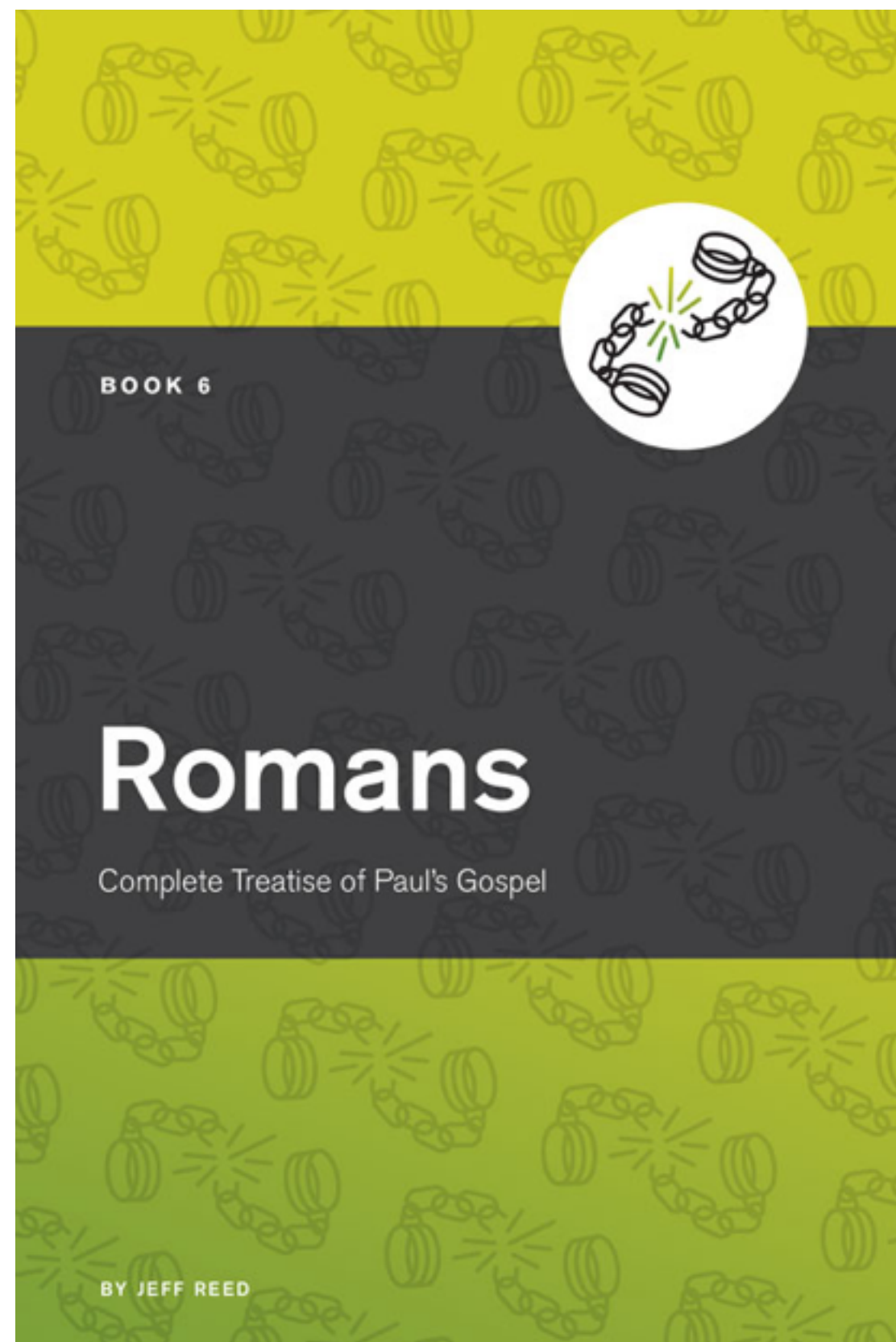
Romans 1:16–4:31

So what are we doing in this brief reading?

We are trying to get at the core of Paul's argument—at the author's intention for writing.

When we write a summary paragraph in our own words or summarize it into points, we are beginning to write what we call *biblical theology*.

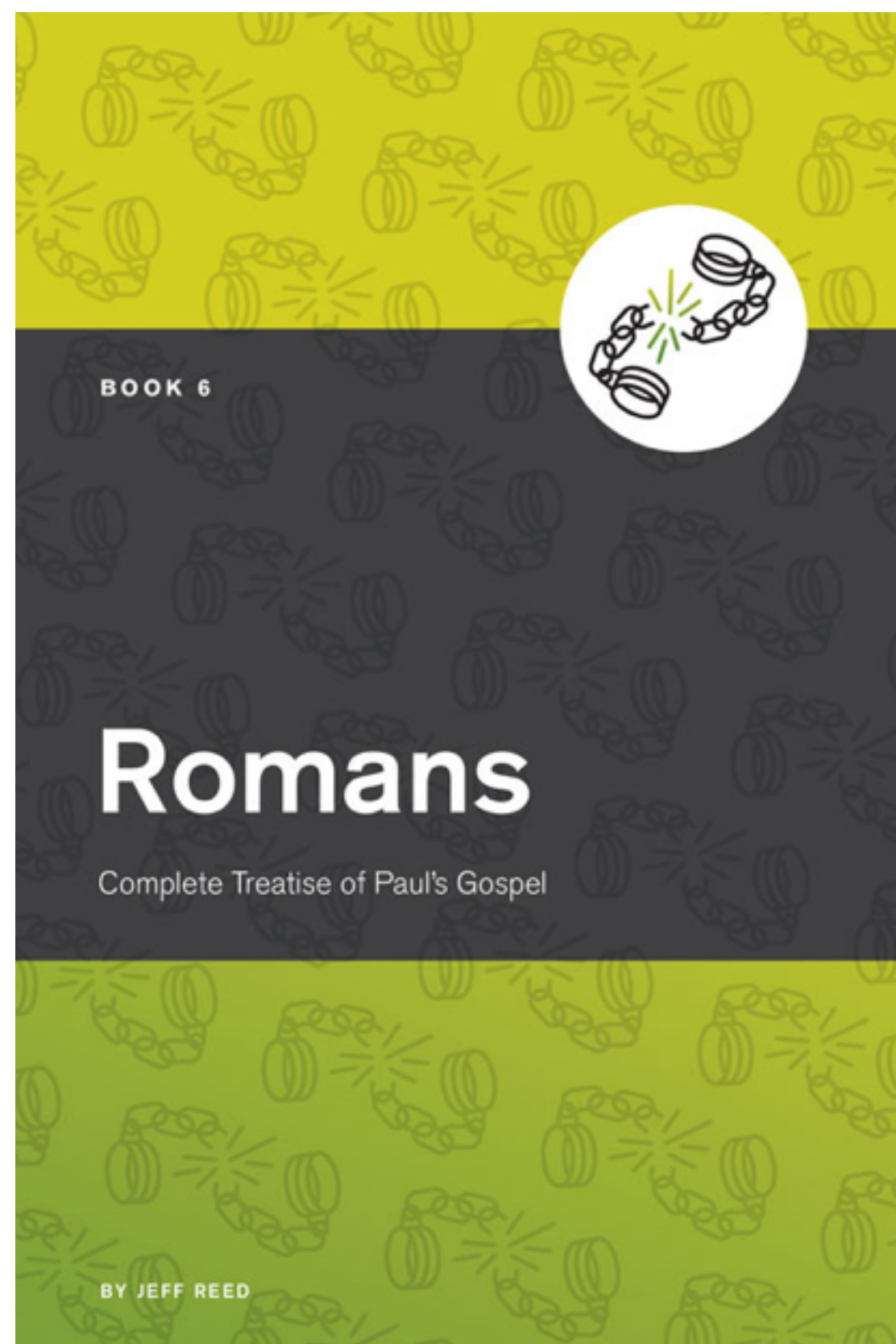
When we start applying it to our situation we are doing *theology in culture*, our culture today



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“Ultimately, the best argument for any exegesis ought to be the overall and detailed sense it makes of the letter, the coherence it achieves. Solutions that leave the letter in bits all over the exegetical floor do not have the same compelling force (as hypotheses) as does a solution that offers a clear line of thought all through, without squashing or stifling the unique and distinctive contribution of the various parts.”

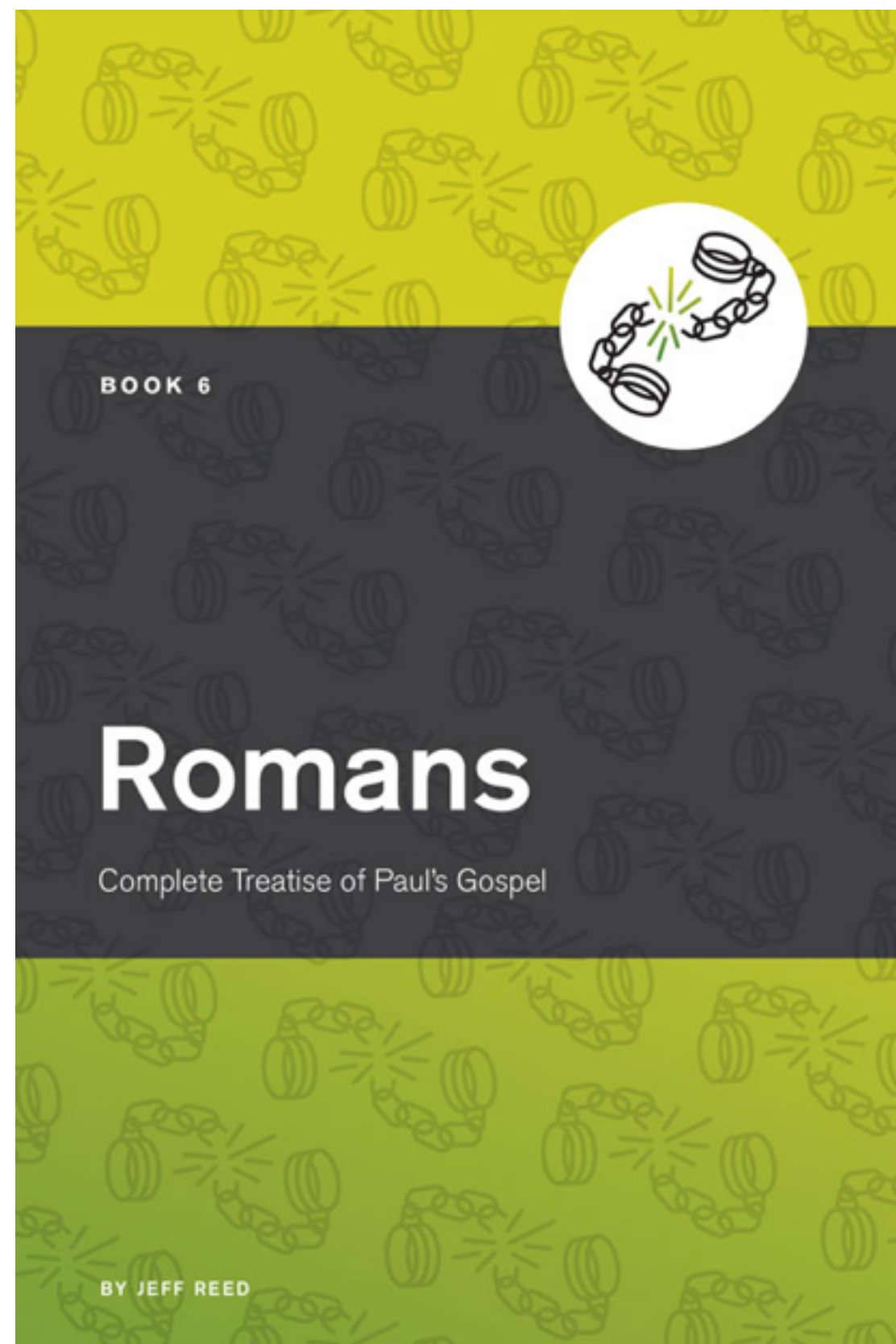
Wright, N. T. (2013-11-01). *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (p. 94). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“It is a truth insufficiently acknowledged that a sensible worldview equipped with appropriate symbolic praxis must be in want of a story.... Symbols and actions mean what they mean within a worldview, and until that worldview has been expressed in terms of its underlying story, it will not be clear what the meaning is.”

Wright, p. 456

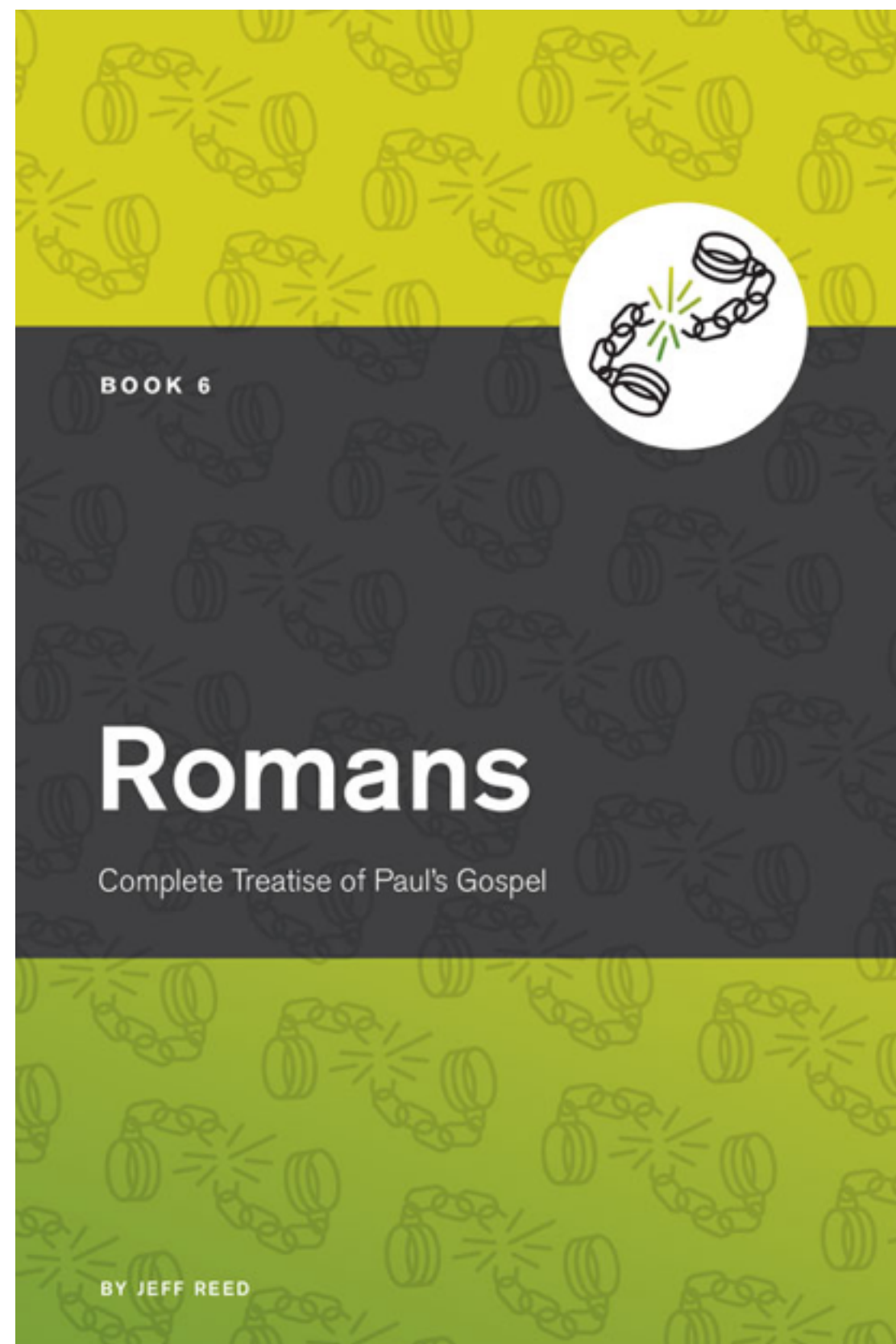


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“...we may comment that a great number of today's debates about the first two centuries of Christian history boil down to this question: Were the early Christians aware, or were they not aware, of living within a narrative that was larger than that of their own sin, salvation, or spirituality?

“This, I suggest, is the deep underlying point at which we can discern what the so-called ‘new perspective on Paul’ might really have been all about.”

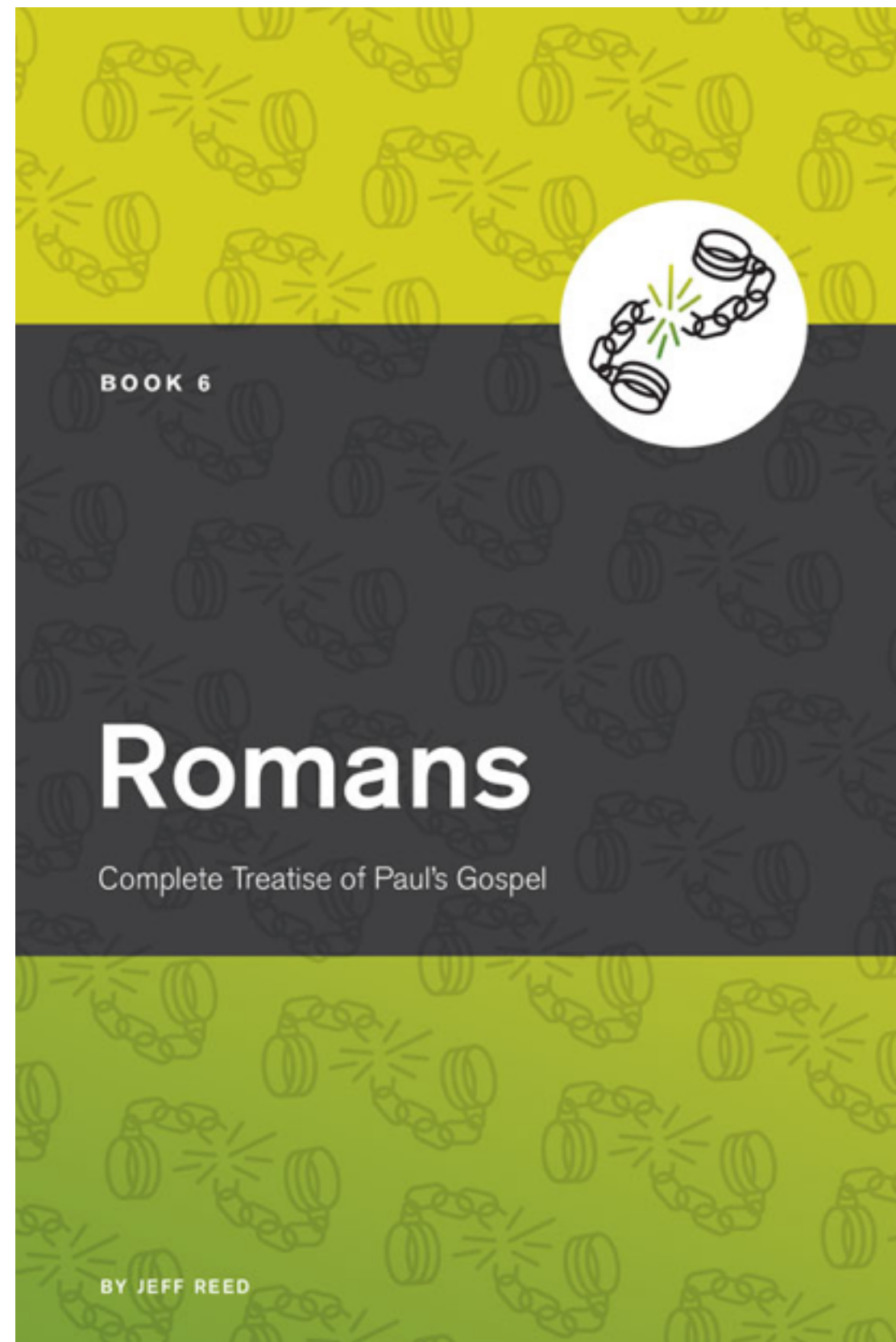
Wright p. 460



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“...I insist that it is possible in principle, and not actually difficult in practice, to discover within the larger worldview and mindset, to which we have remarkably good access, what implicit story Paul is telling, behind, above, underneath, in and through (whatever spacial metaphor you like) the particular things he says in this or that letter.”

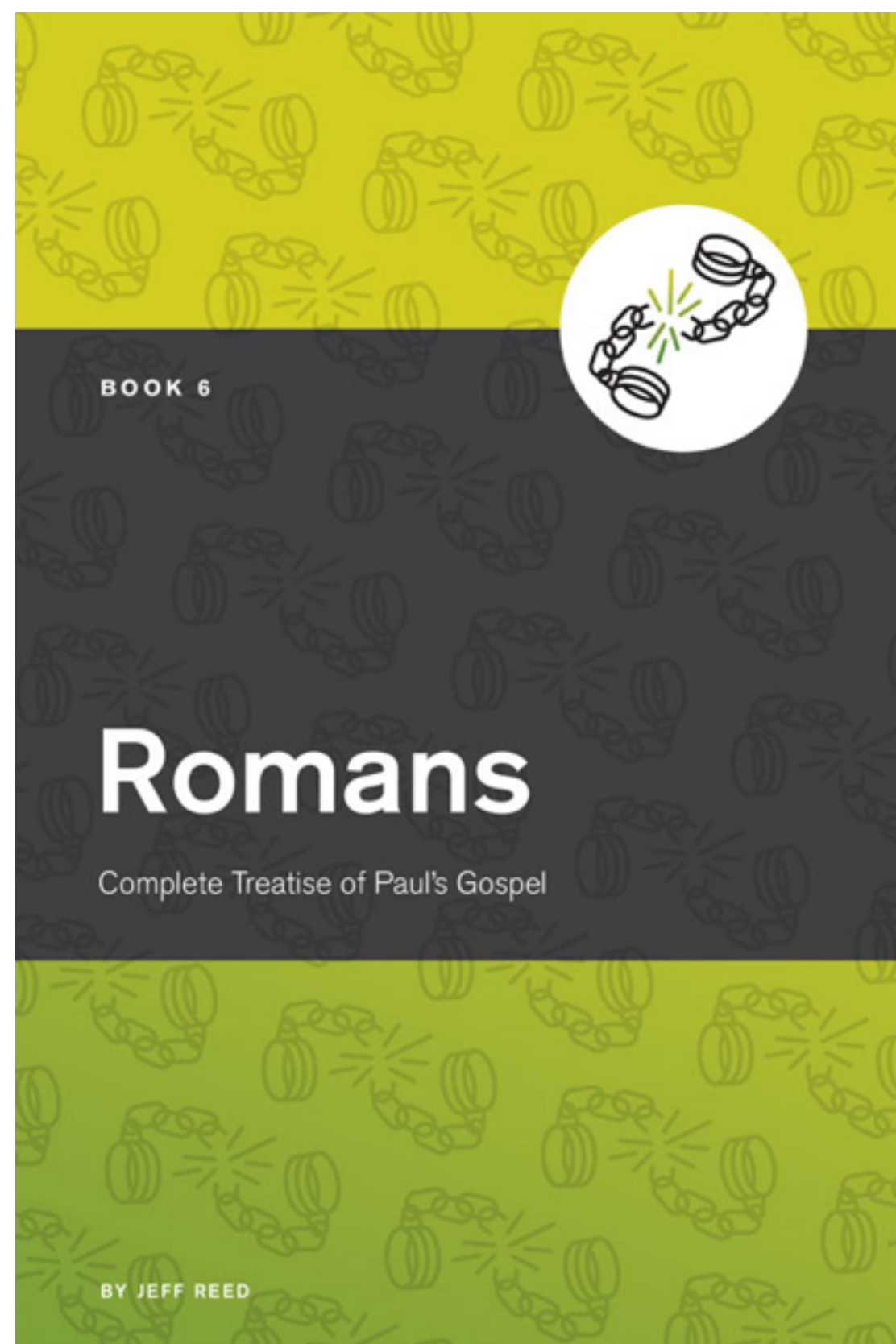
Wright p. 466



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“And so we return to the texts themselves, to argue a coherent and careful case for the comprehensible, and indeed comprehensive, narrative, and then, within that, for a set of coherently comprehensibly interlocking narratives, that form an inalienable part of Paul's own mindset.”

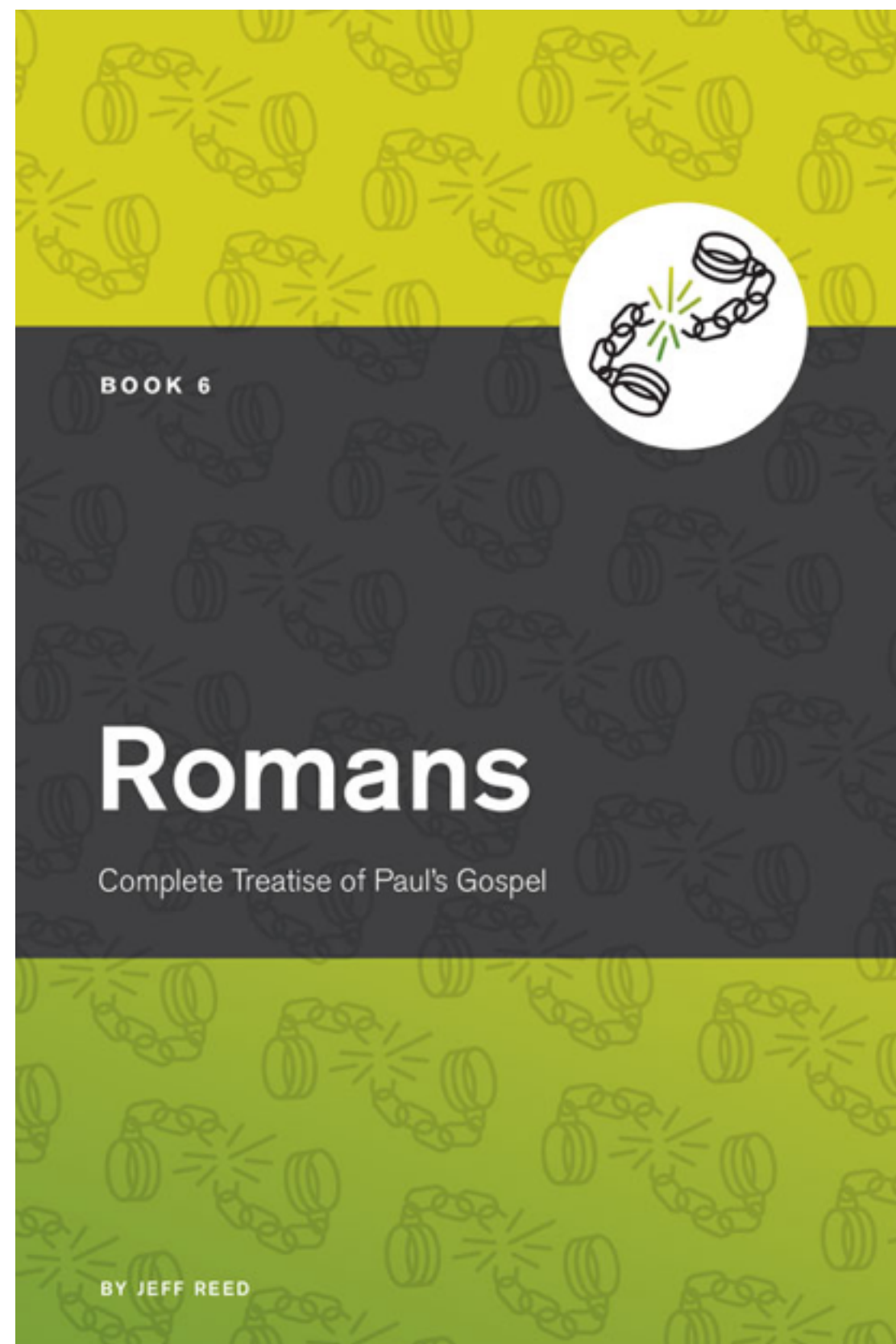
Wright p. 468



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“There are, after all, several “stories” which are commonly thus detected within the implicit worldview of the Apostle Paul.... Others have suggested three or four or five, that dominate Paul’s understanding: a threefold account might highlight the story of Israel, the story of Christ and Paul’s own story (including that of his followers); all these plus a larger one about the world might be a fourfold set: we could turn this into five by separating out the story of Paul himself from the various stories of other believers both before and after him.”

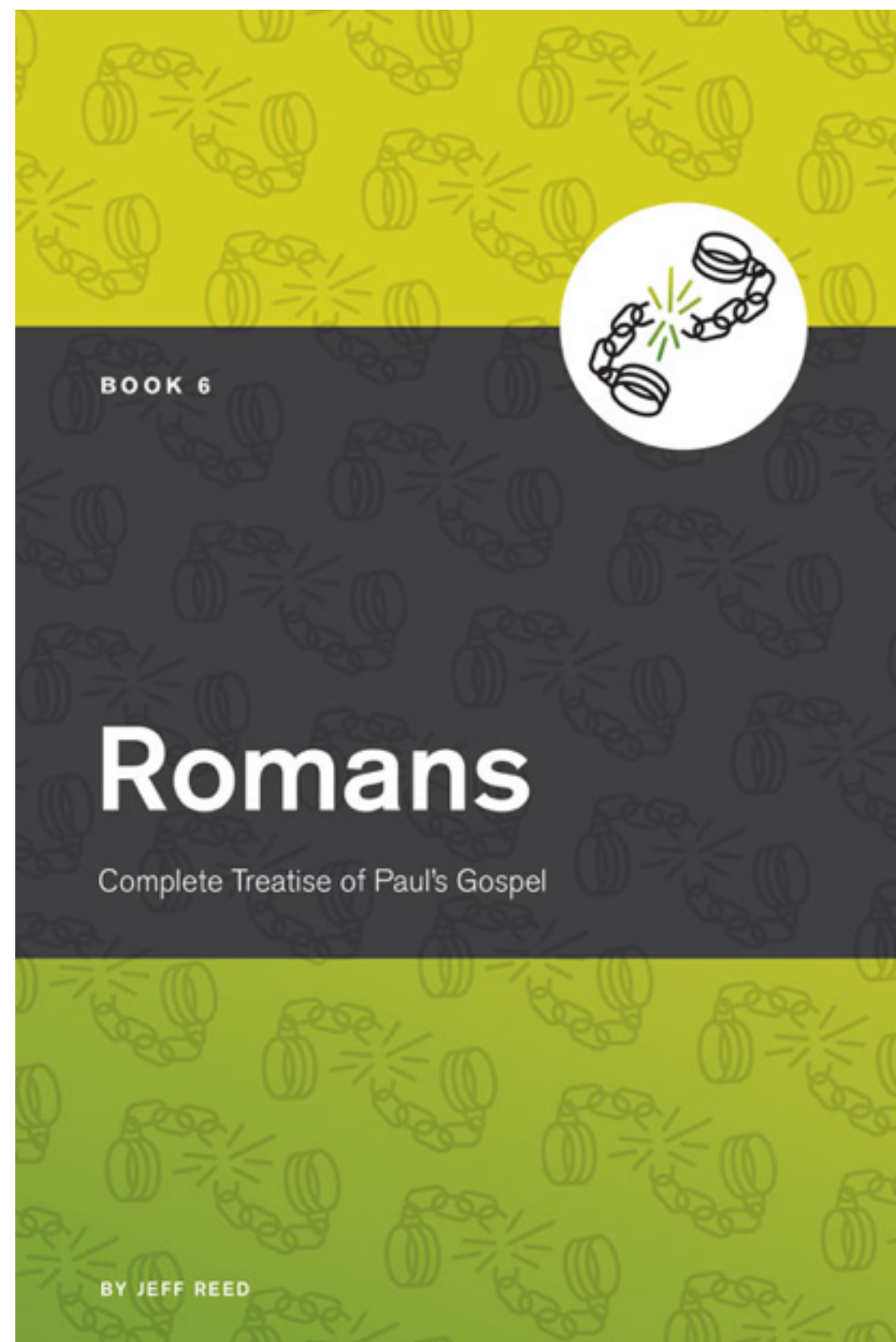
Wright p. 474



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“I shall now suggest that these various stories do actually have a coherent interlocking shape, nesting within one another like subplots in a play (I said like not in exactly the same way). And, if anything more important, I shall begin to show (the rest of the book will continue this demonstration) that looking at Paul's worldview with the aid of narrative analysis sheds a positive flood of light ... on passage after passage of tricky exegesis, and problem after problem in the theological coherence of the letters.”

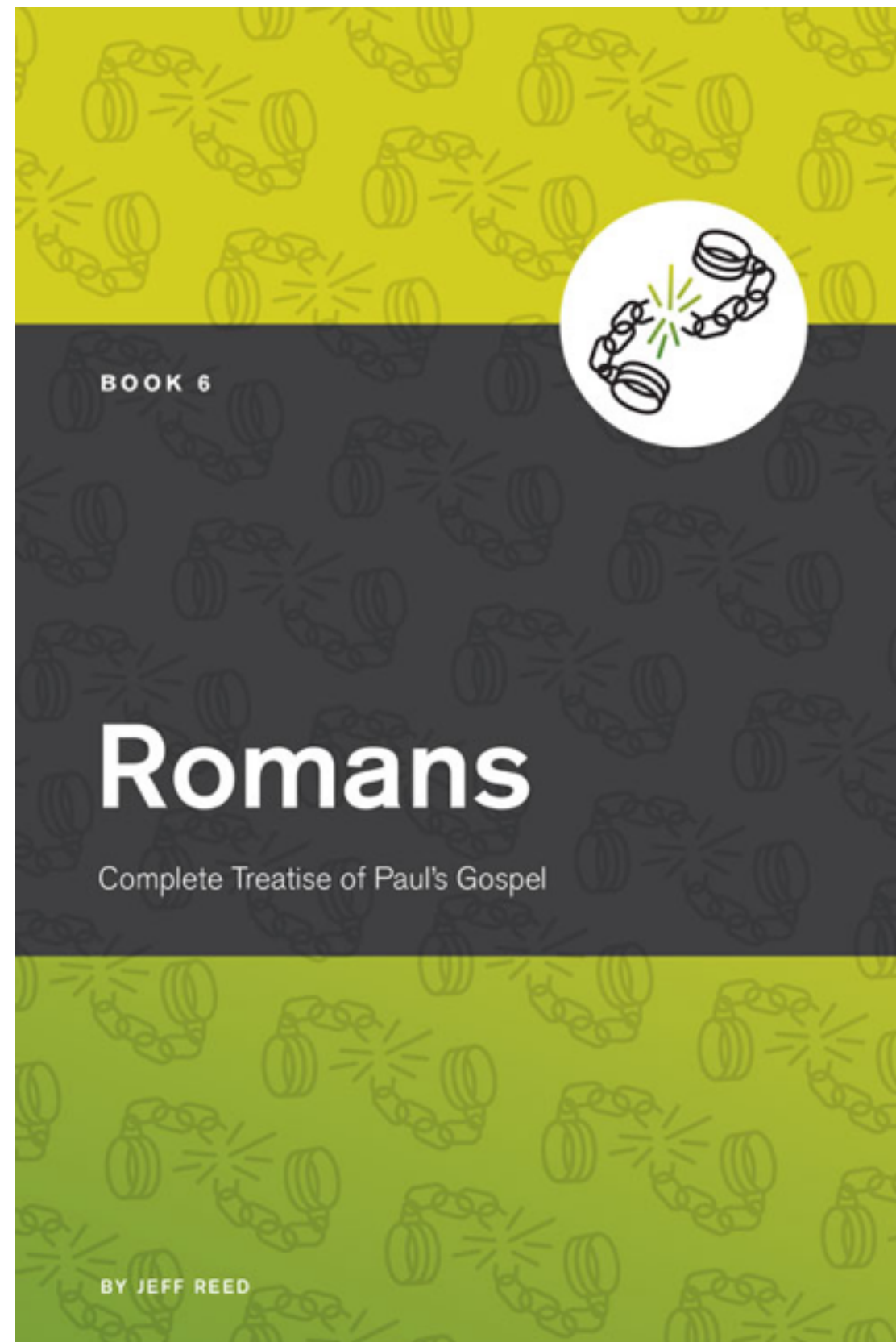
Wright p. 474



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

²⁵Now 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 ²⁶but 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— ²⁷to 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)

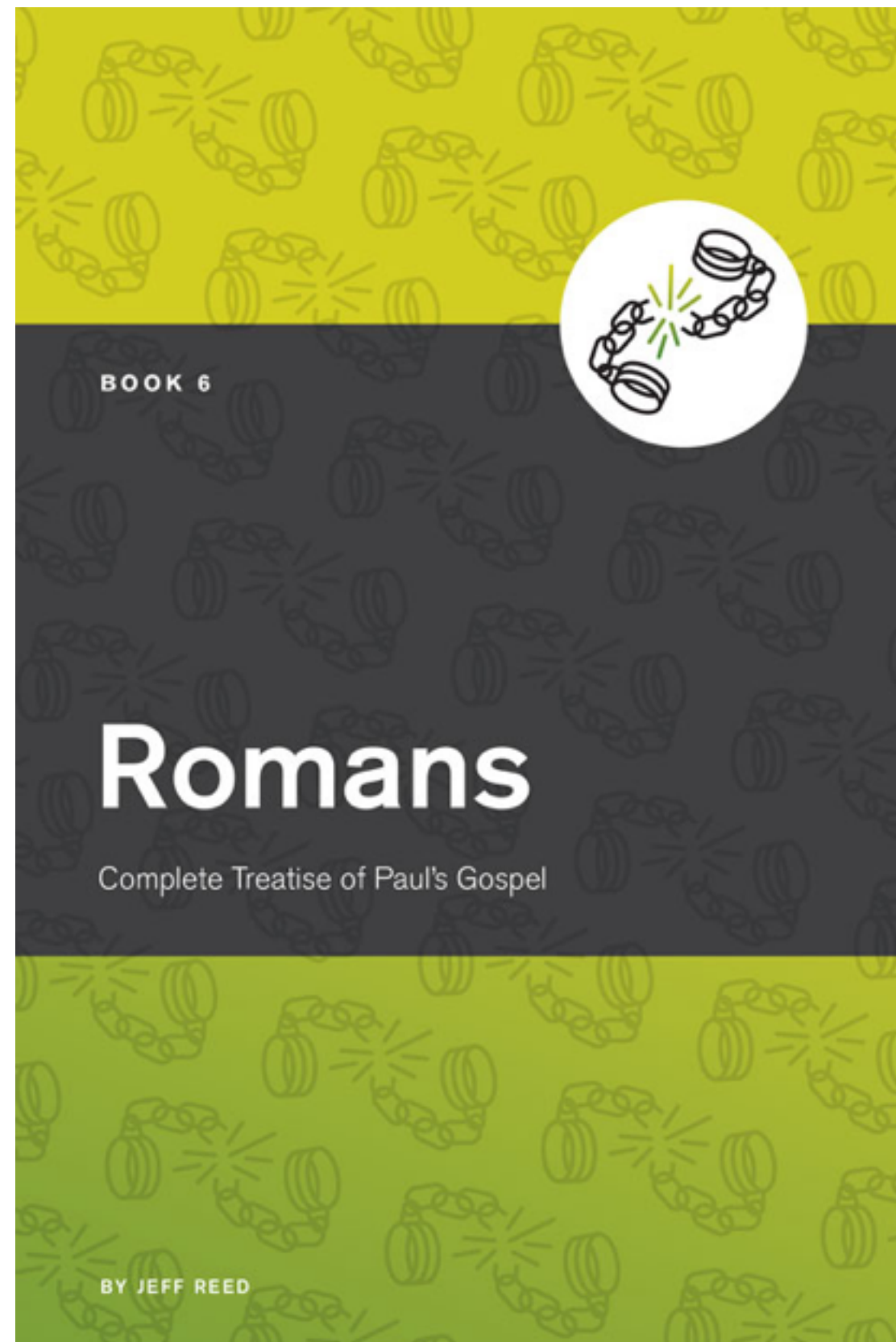


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

What does Paul mean when he says to the Romans “I have proclaimed to you my gospel, according to Jesus Christ.”

God unveiled the whole picture to him through Jesus Christ those 3 years in Arabia.

Peter and those in Jerusalem could not rethink the whole story.

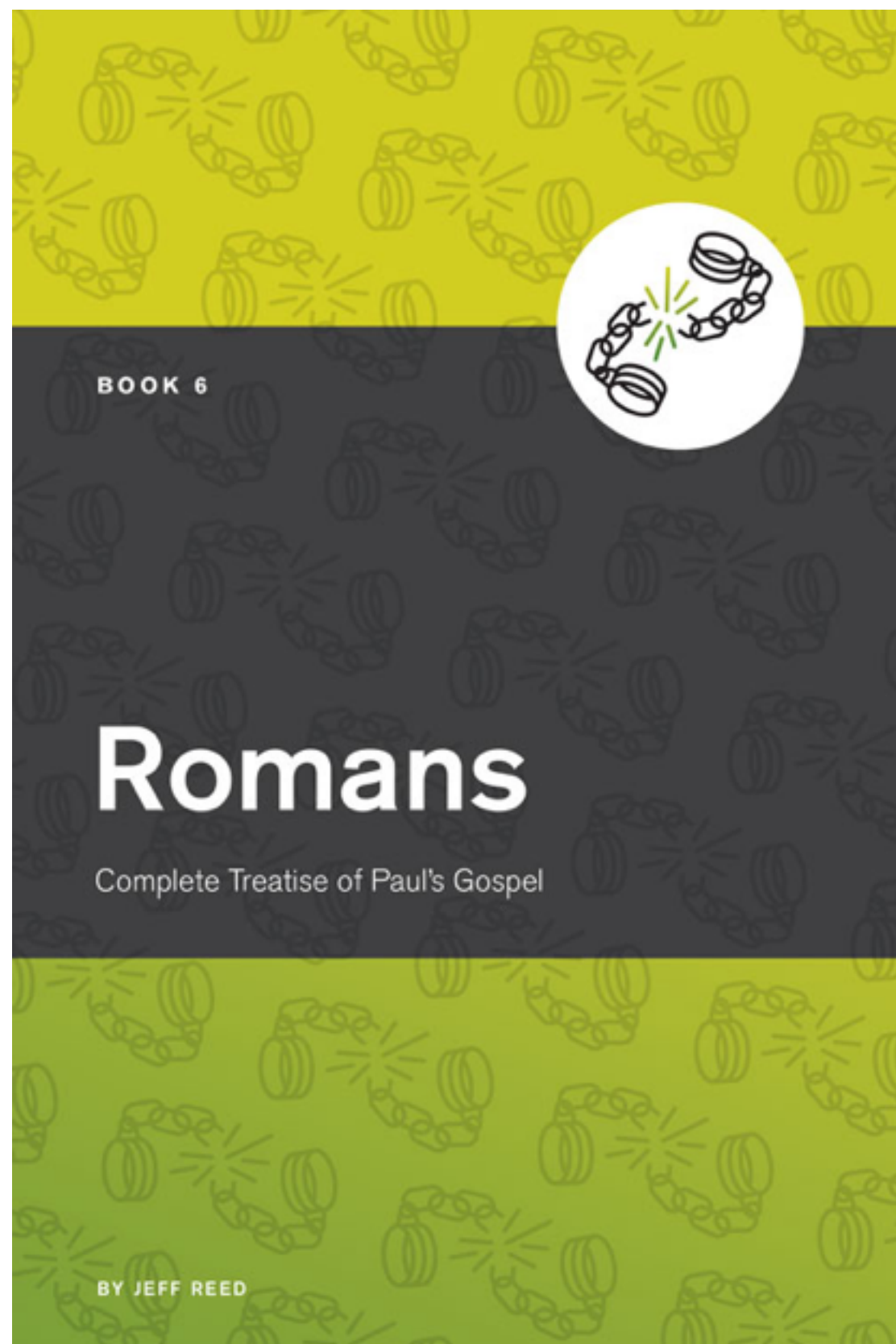


Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

It involves 5–6 interlocking stories:

1. The fall of Adam—the creation story
2. The Law
3. Israel
4. God's hidden plan
5. The current times
6. The future of Israel

He rethought the whole story. And he reframed the entire Law, the Prophets, and the Writings in light of the gospel—the good news.

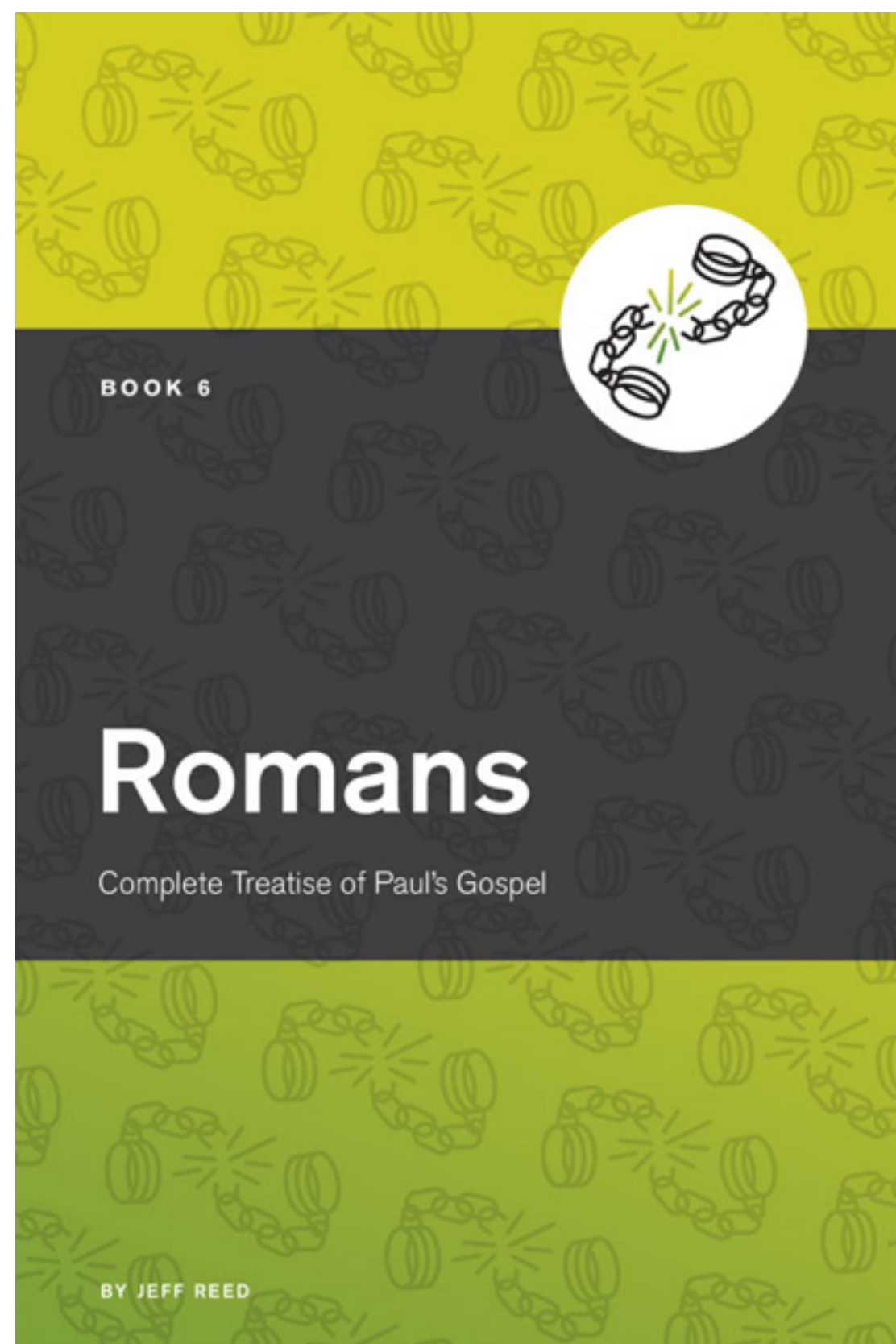


The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Issue: The significance of Paul's argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Questions:

1. What is the significance of Paul's argument for our churches today? for us as individual Christians?
2. What is the value of understanding the whole argument before looking at smaller sections and individual terms?
3. What problems might arise from learning individual verses and studying the individual words devoid of the whole argument and the context of The Story.
4. Why is it the norm that we separate Romans into theological terms and approach the book from stringing together individual verses and specific terms filled with "theological meaning"?



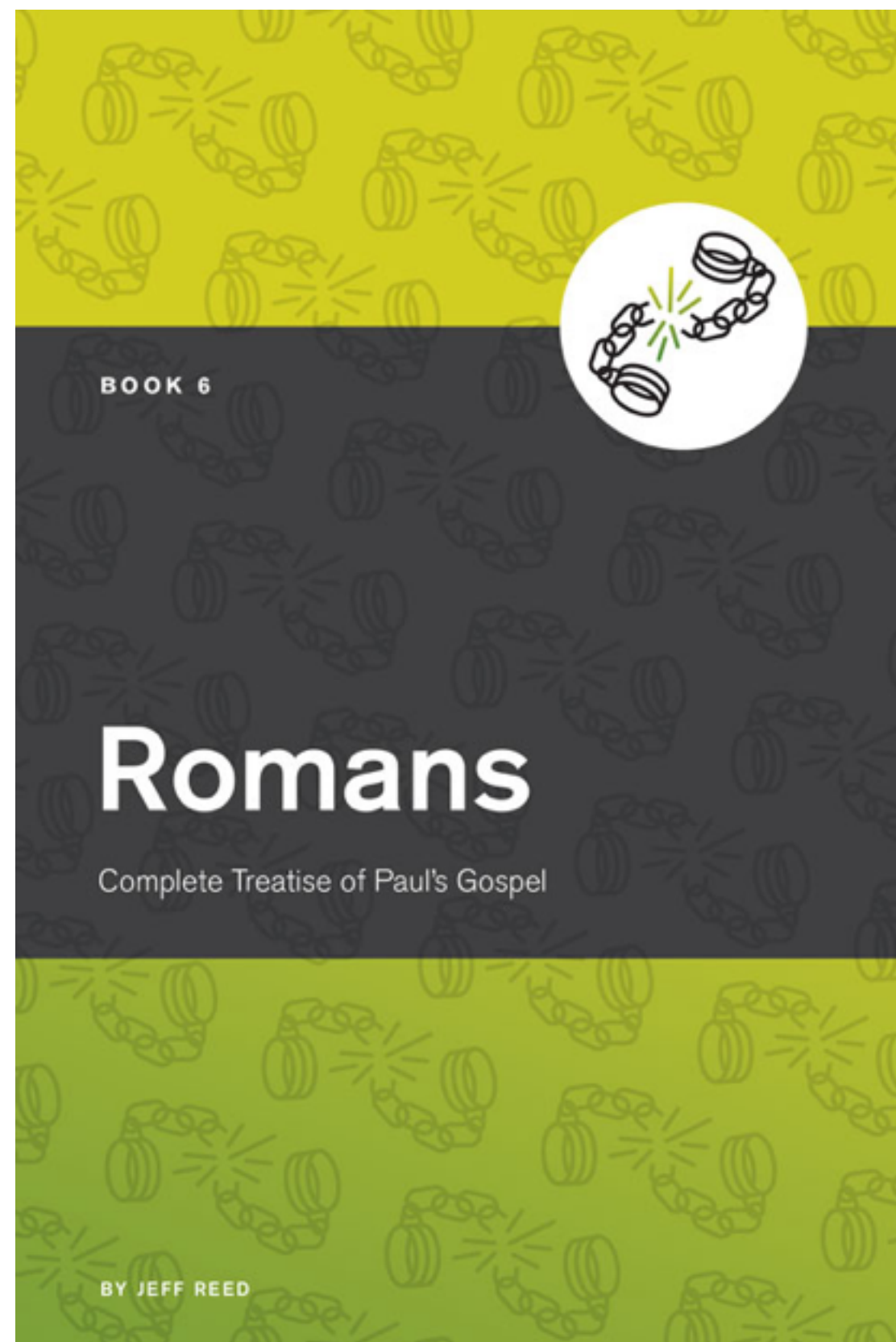
The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Most of you this morning had a hard time describing the essence of the argument of Paul in Romans 1:16–4:31.

Most of us learned individual verses. And many of us were raised in a theological or denominational system in which we learned theological terms filled with meaning from hundreds of years of debate.

This means we cannot possibly grasp the power of the argument, let alone grasp the gospel at an integrated whole.

Confidence is eroded.

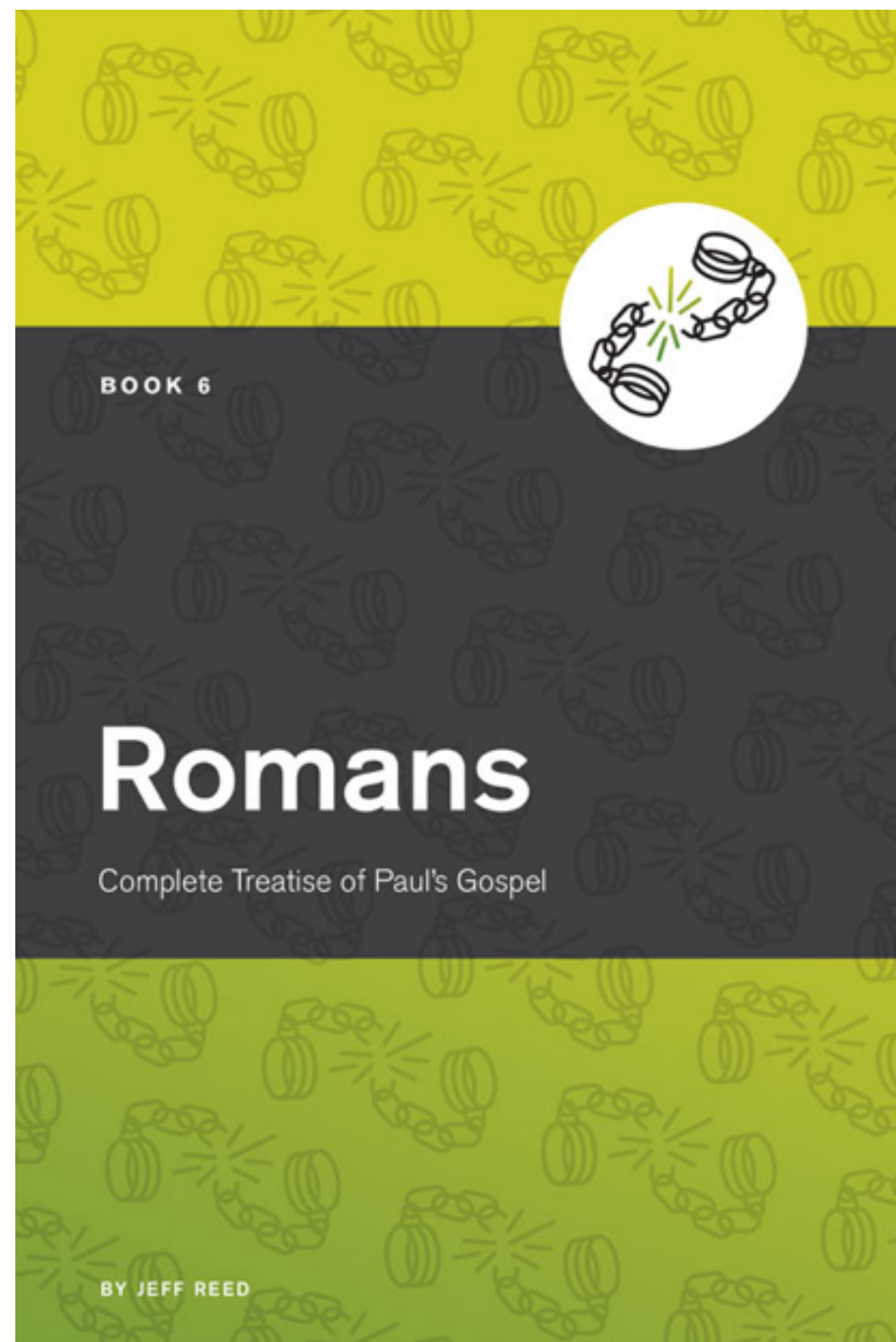


The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Just like dispensationalism was shattered in the 70s and 80s, so we need to do the same with Reformed Theology.

N. T. Wright is doing that. I think that is why he is publically, and in publications, attacked so relentlessly by well known, popular reformed theologians today.

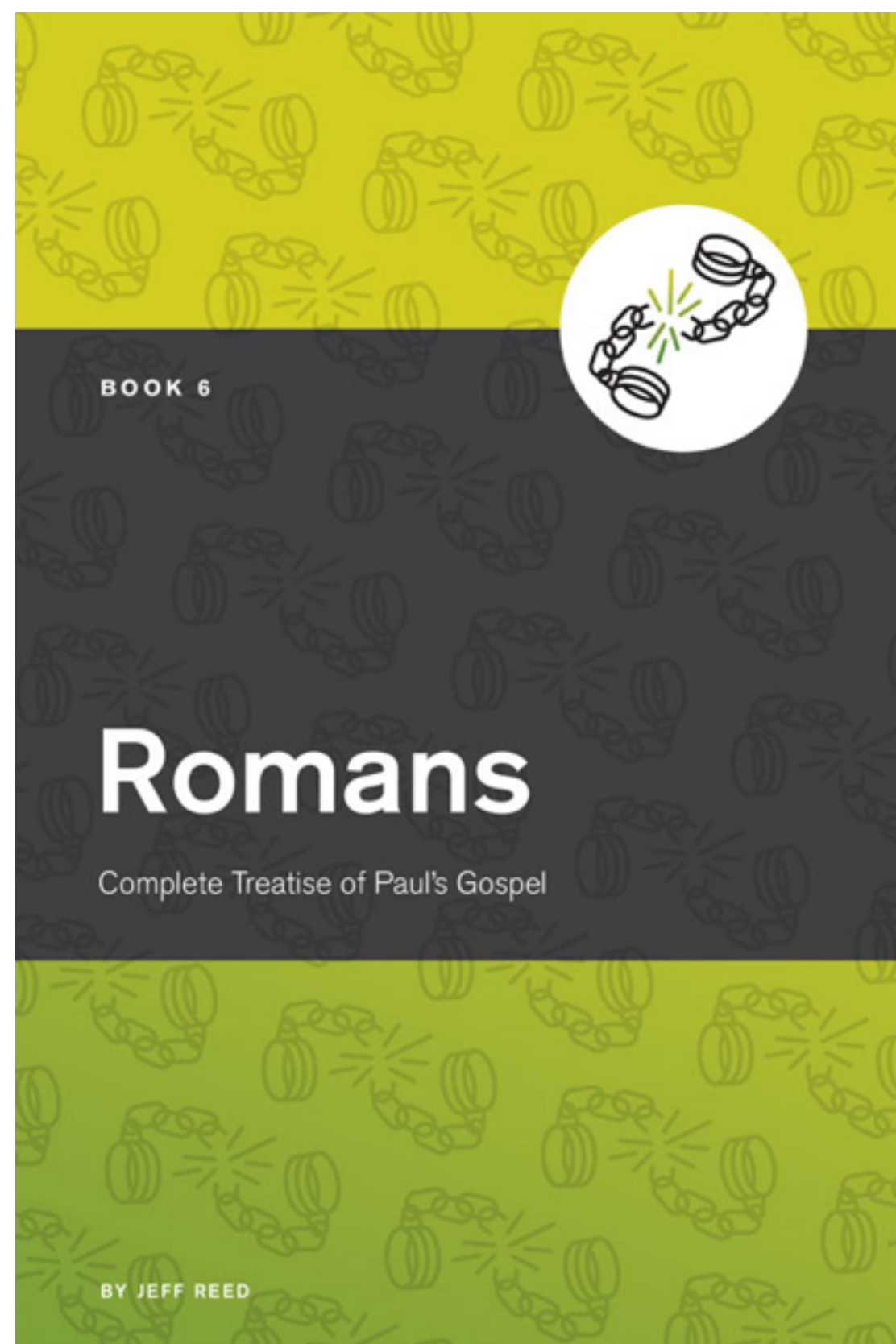
The foundations of that deconstruction are Kaiser and Johnson.



The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

My recent reflections

- Wycliffe Associates, David Reeves, and rethinking translation—responding to paper
- Testimony of translators in recent trip with Randy Kennedy
- Meeting with orality network in Delhi with Kennedy
- Reflections back on Kaiser's "hermeneutical revolution" (and Elliott Johnson)
- Reading N. T. Wright's translation in one sitting



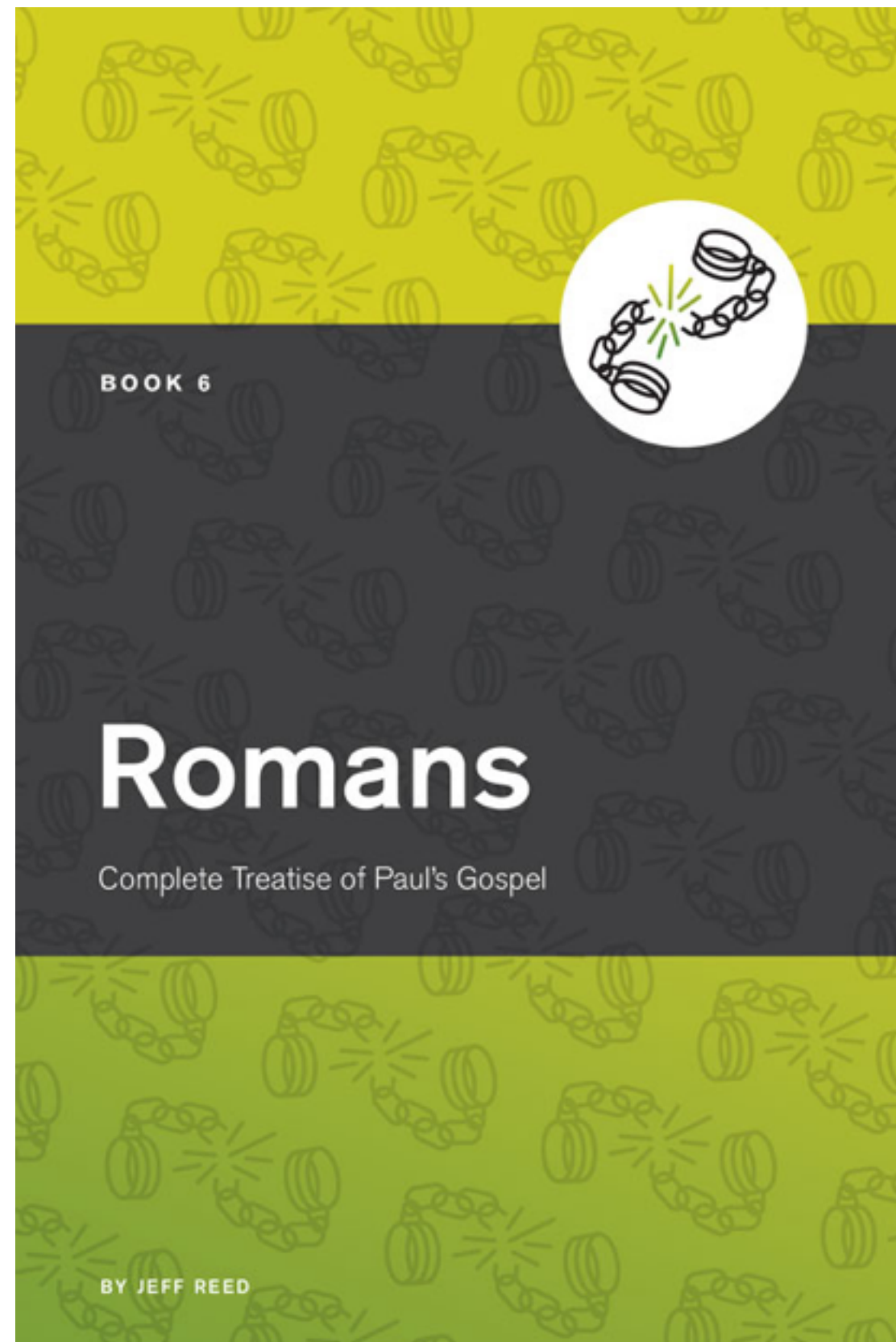
The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Implications

We cannot lay solid foundations in believers without this revelation.

We will not be fully established in Paul's gospel, which was revealed to him by Jesus himself.

We cannot successfully live as citizens of the inaugurated, growing kingdom nor understand the centrality of the community of God in reshaping the agenda and purpose of our lives, without this revelation.



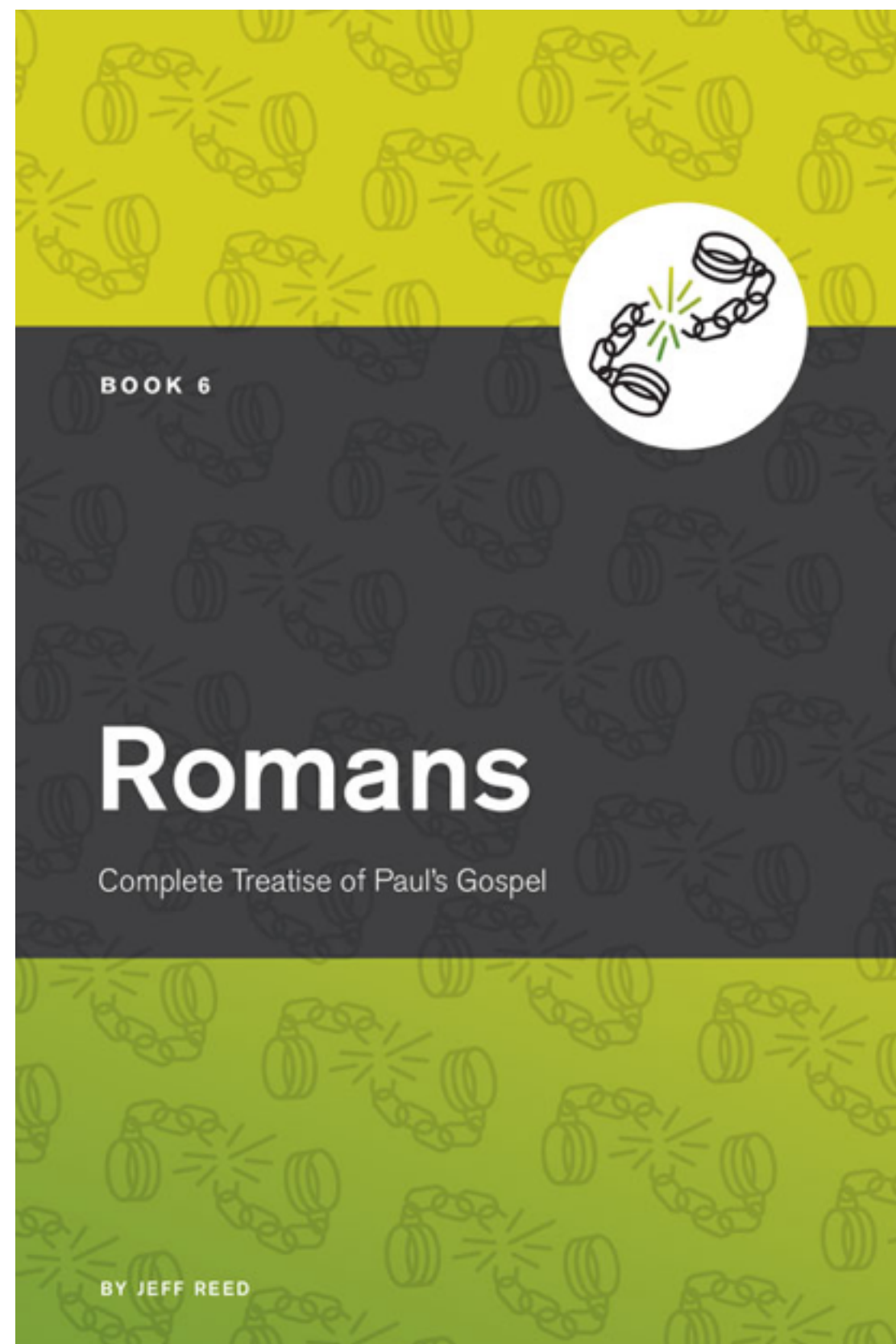
The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Implications

We cannot integrate the gospel into the plan and purpose for our lives and our churches.

We cannot become one minded around the mission of our churches.

We cannot “come alive” in the Spirit with a truncated gospel.



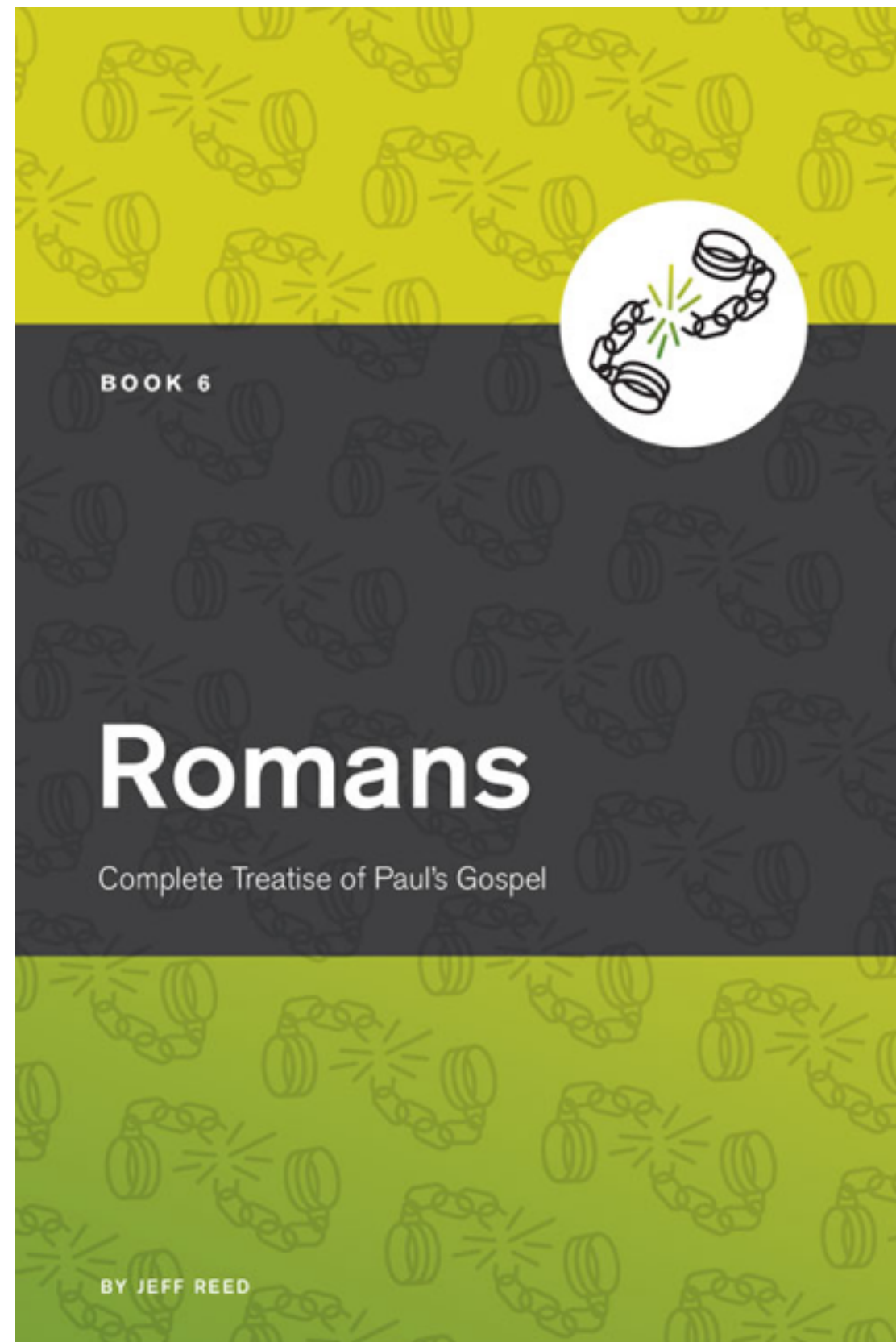
The Significance of Paul's Argument in Romans 1:16–4:31

Next week

Read the next major section of Romans: Romans 5:1–8:39.

Distill the argument down to a few verses.

Then identify his main points, or write a summary paragraph.



Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul

Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Session 1: The Intention of Romans

Session 2: The Gospel and The Story

Session 3: The New Gospel Worldview

Session 4: Reframing the Jewish Story

Session 5: The Gospel as Transformed Community

Session 6: Now Back to the Mission