

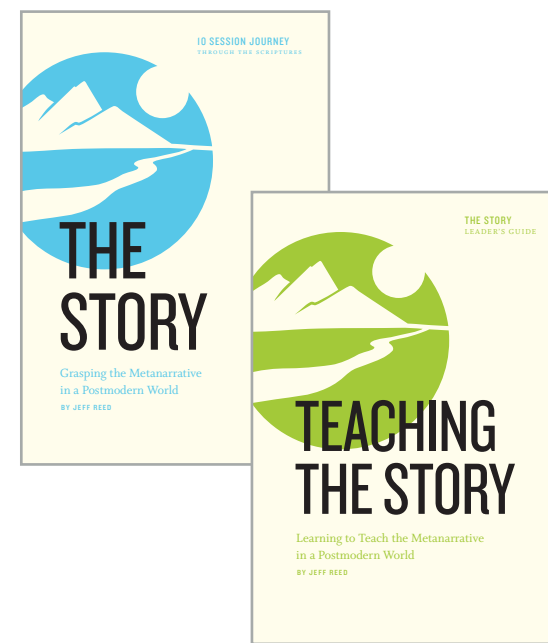
Paul's Early Letters

Issue: The Intent of Paul's Letters

Questions:

1. How do you go about determining the intent of a canonical section—a section of Scripture that is grouped together in some literary way ... or built around an author's collection?
2. What clues are there of Paul's intent in his early letters, from the context/occasion of their writings or from the letters themselves?
3. What role do you think Romans has in the collection of Paul's early letters? What is the role of Romans 16:25–27 in determining the intent of the collection?
4. Why does grasping the general intent matter?

Core Establishing Package



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

2015



Didache
Body of Acts
Theology of Paul
1½ years

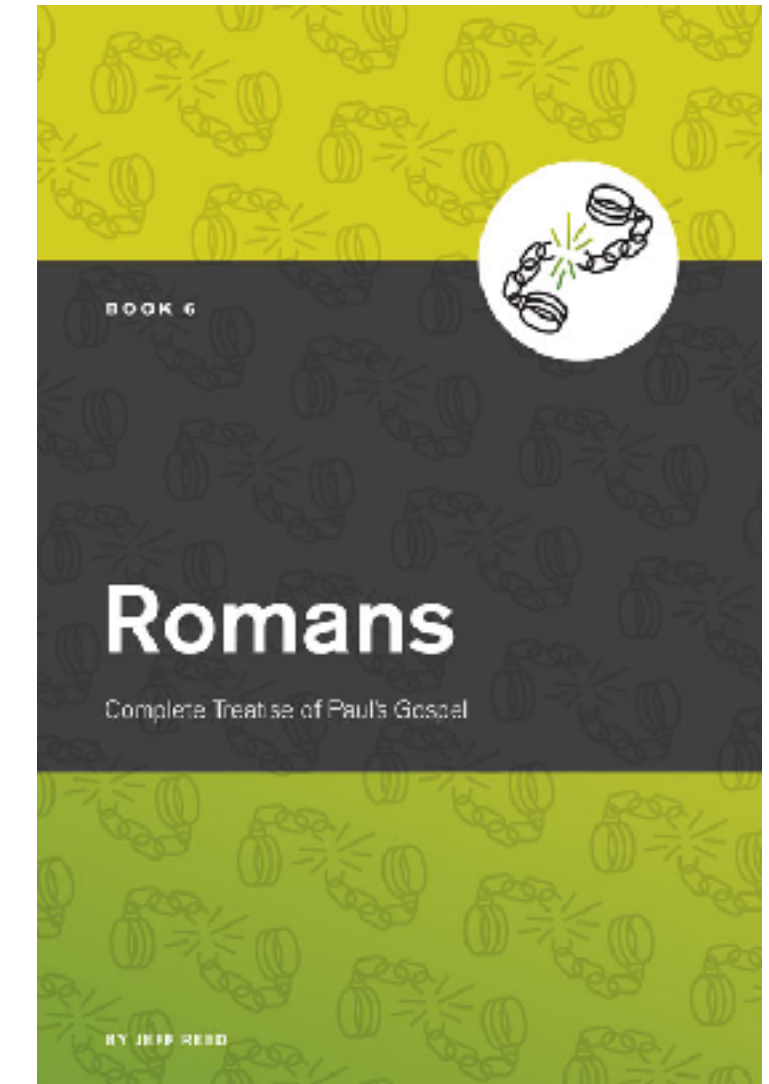
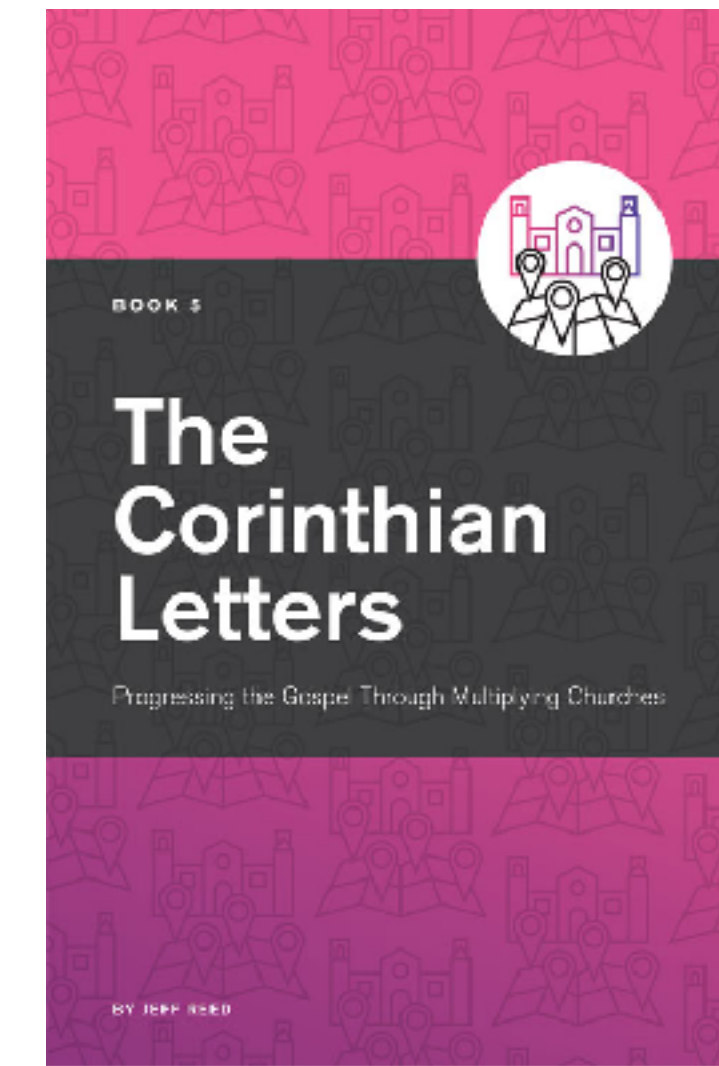
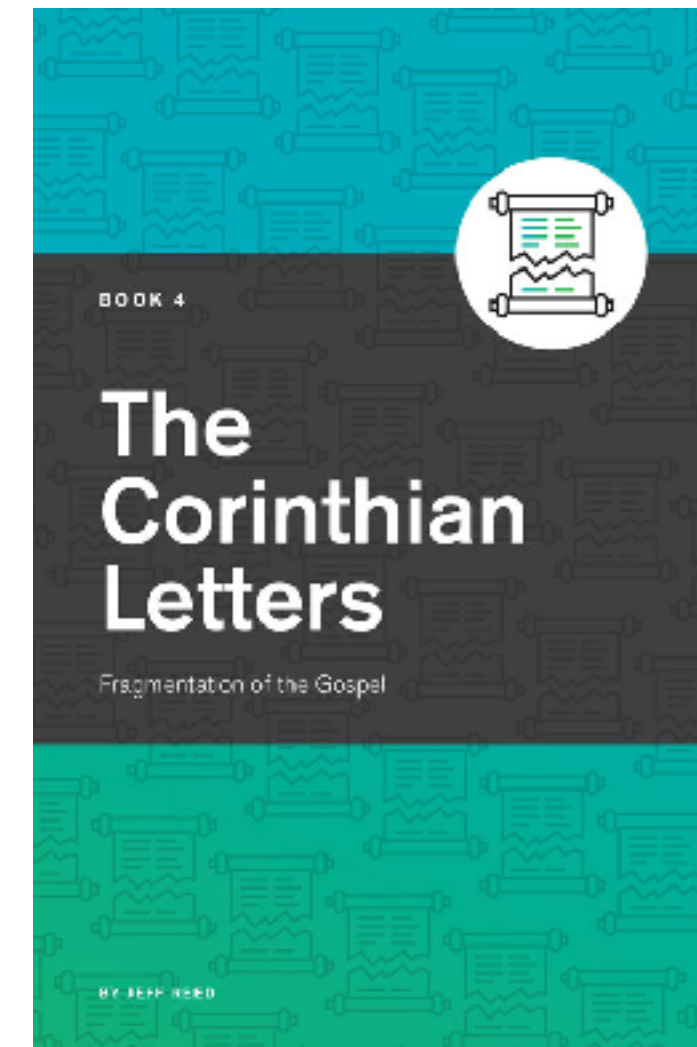
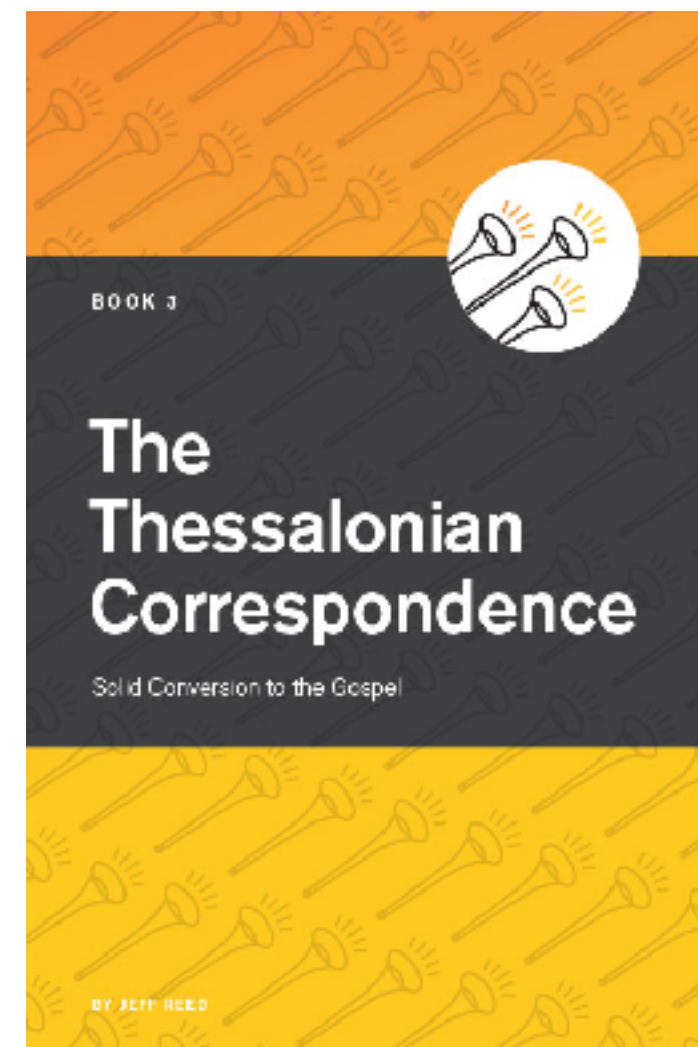
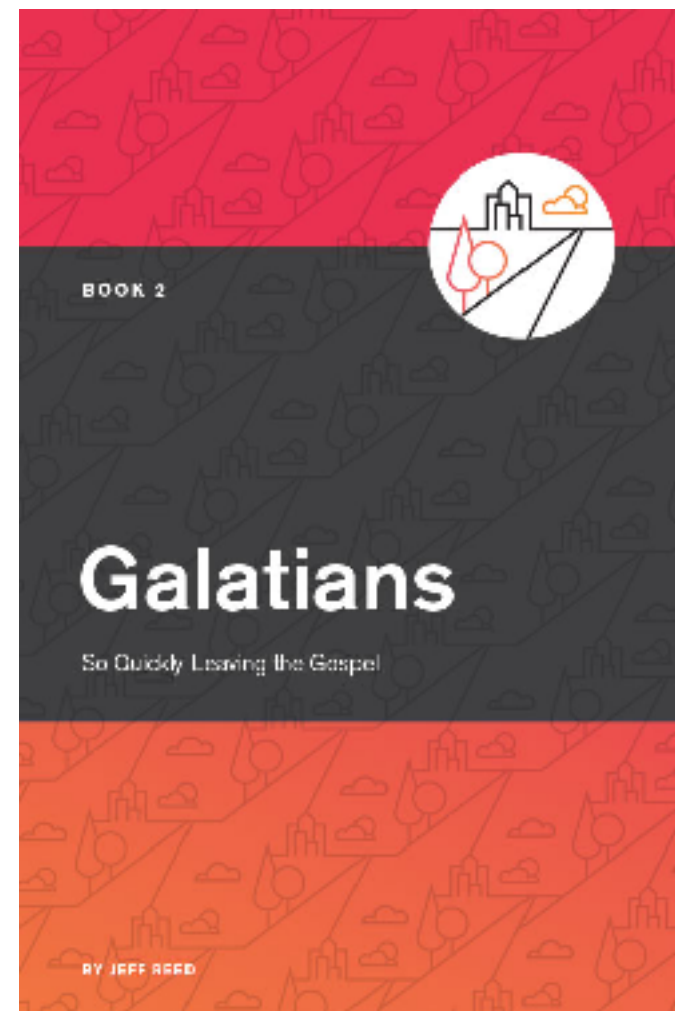
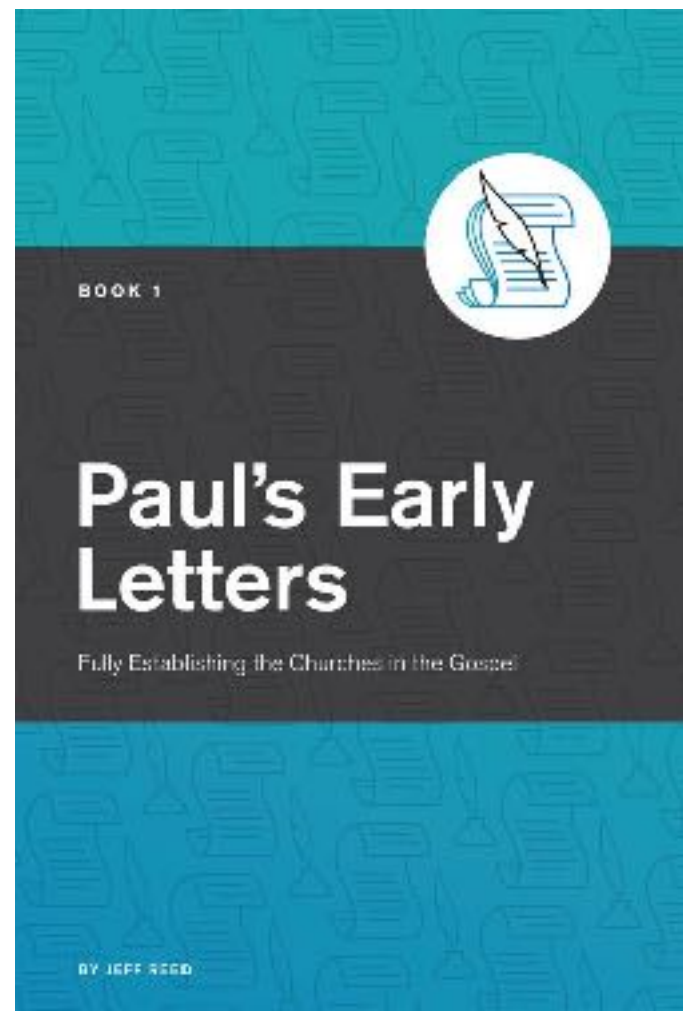
1997–2009



Full Kerygma
After Acts
Apostles' Gospels
1 year

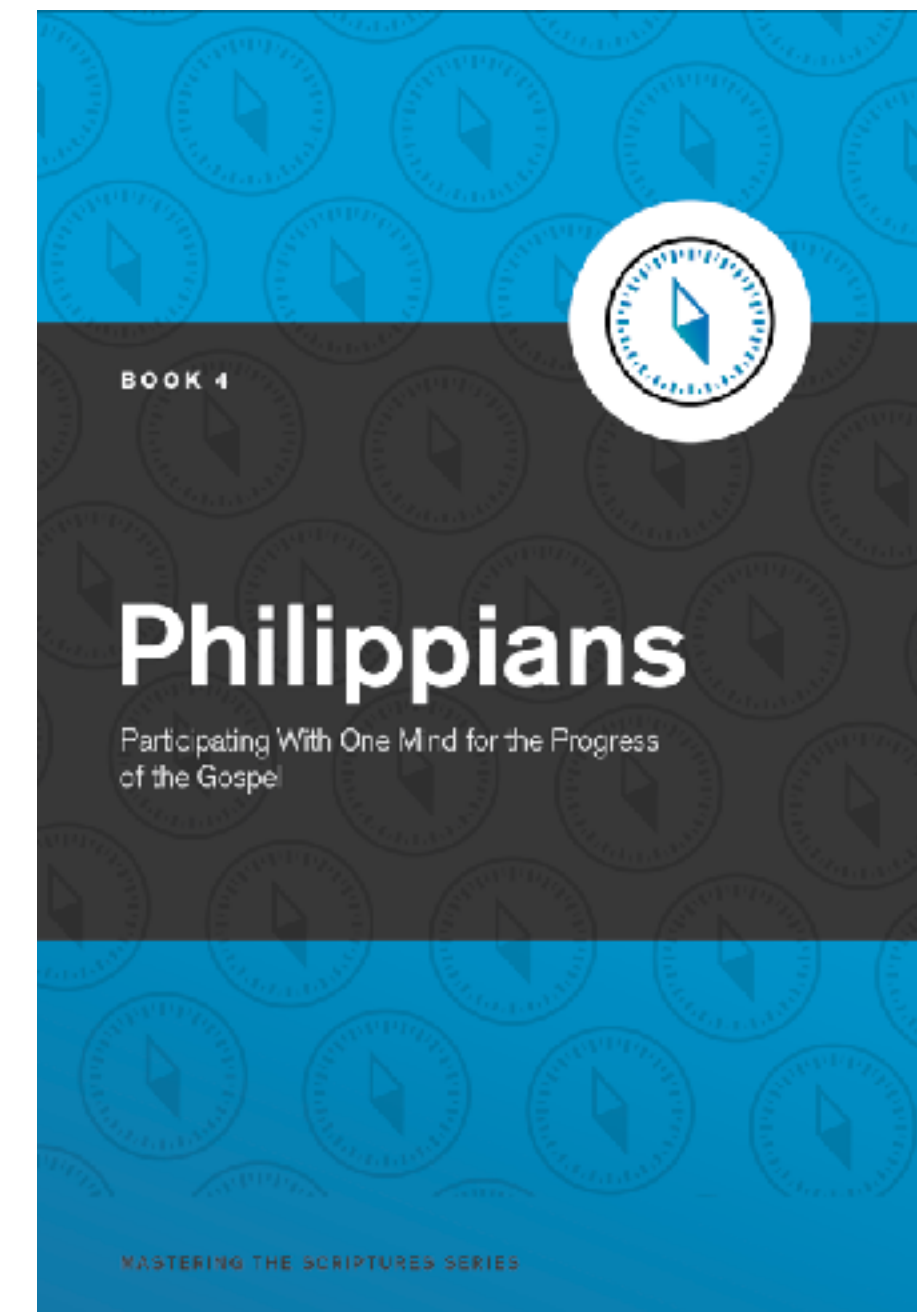
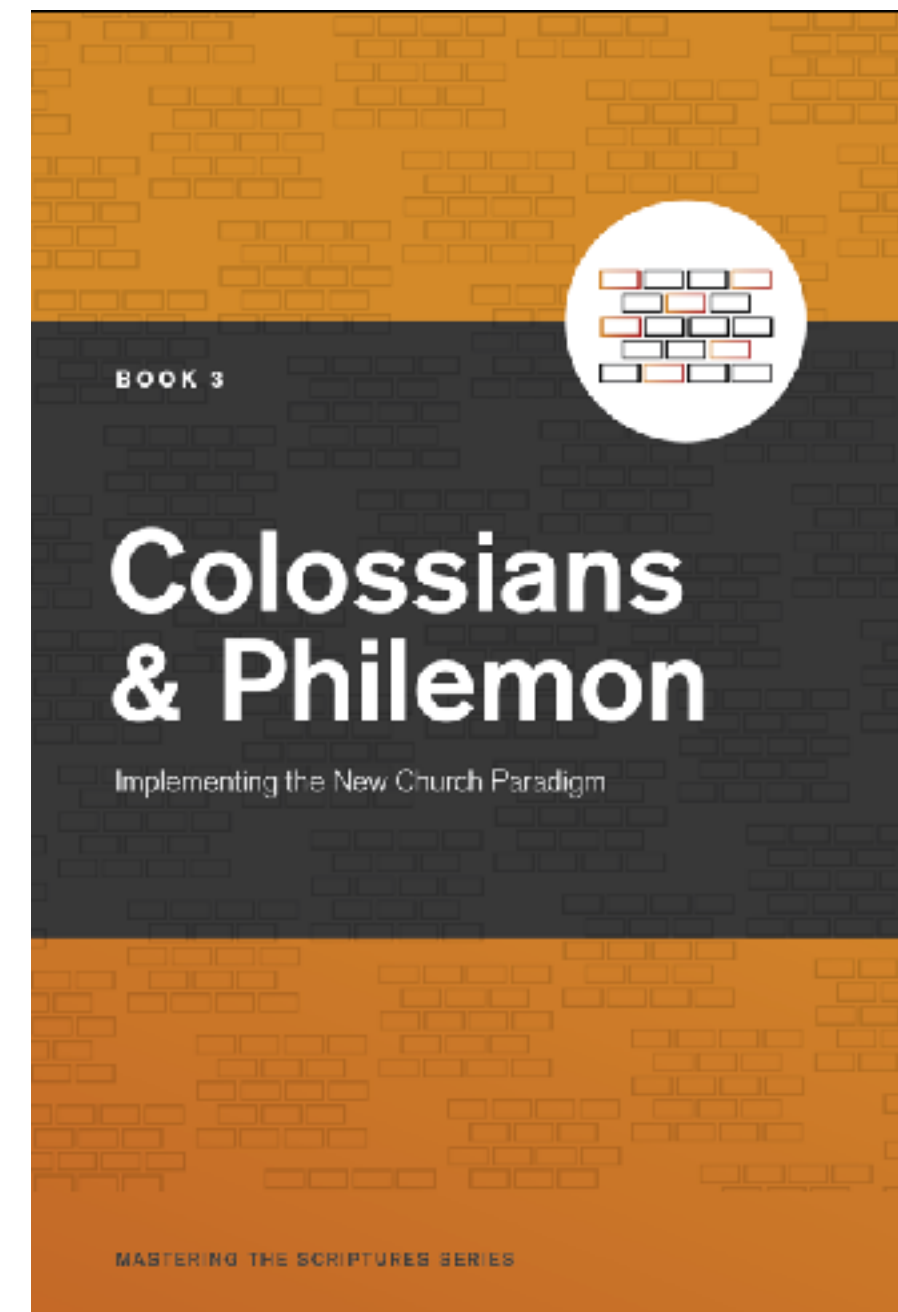
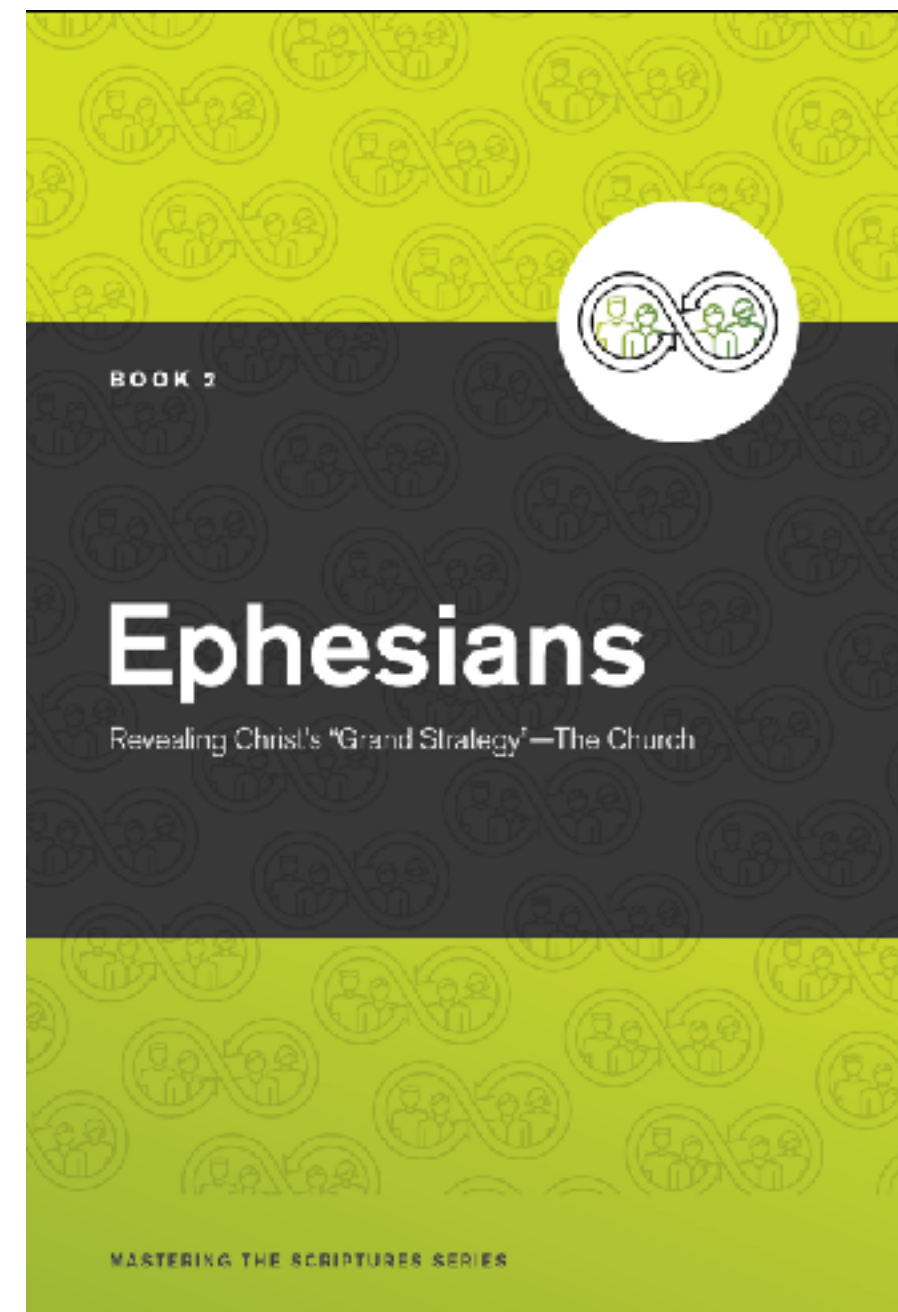
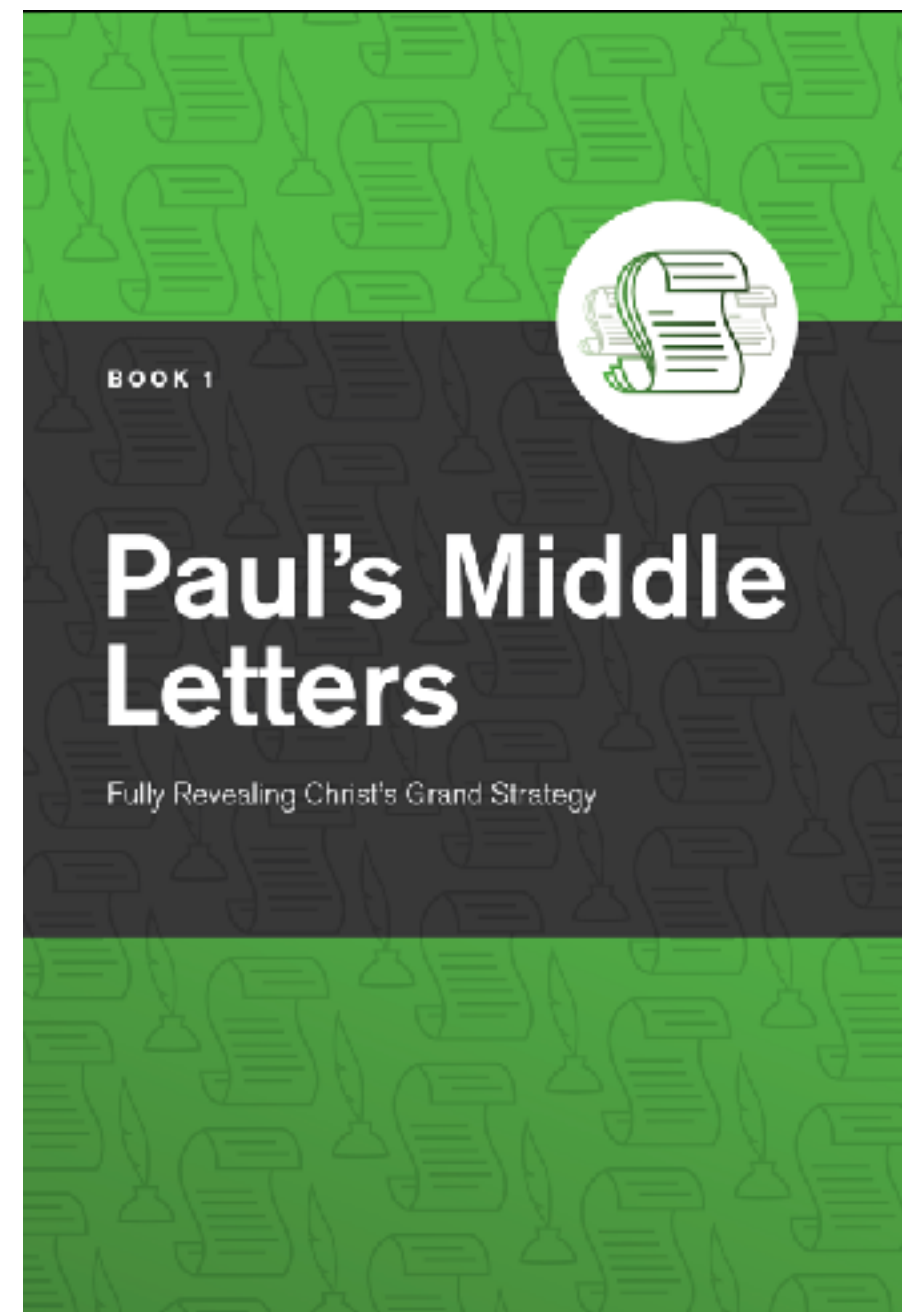
2011–2016

Paul's Early Letters



Taught 2014, 2018–March 2020

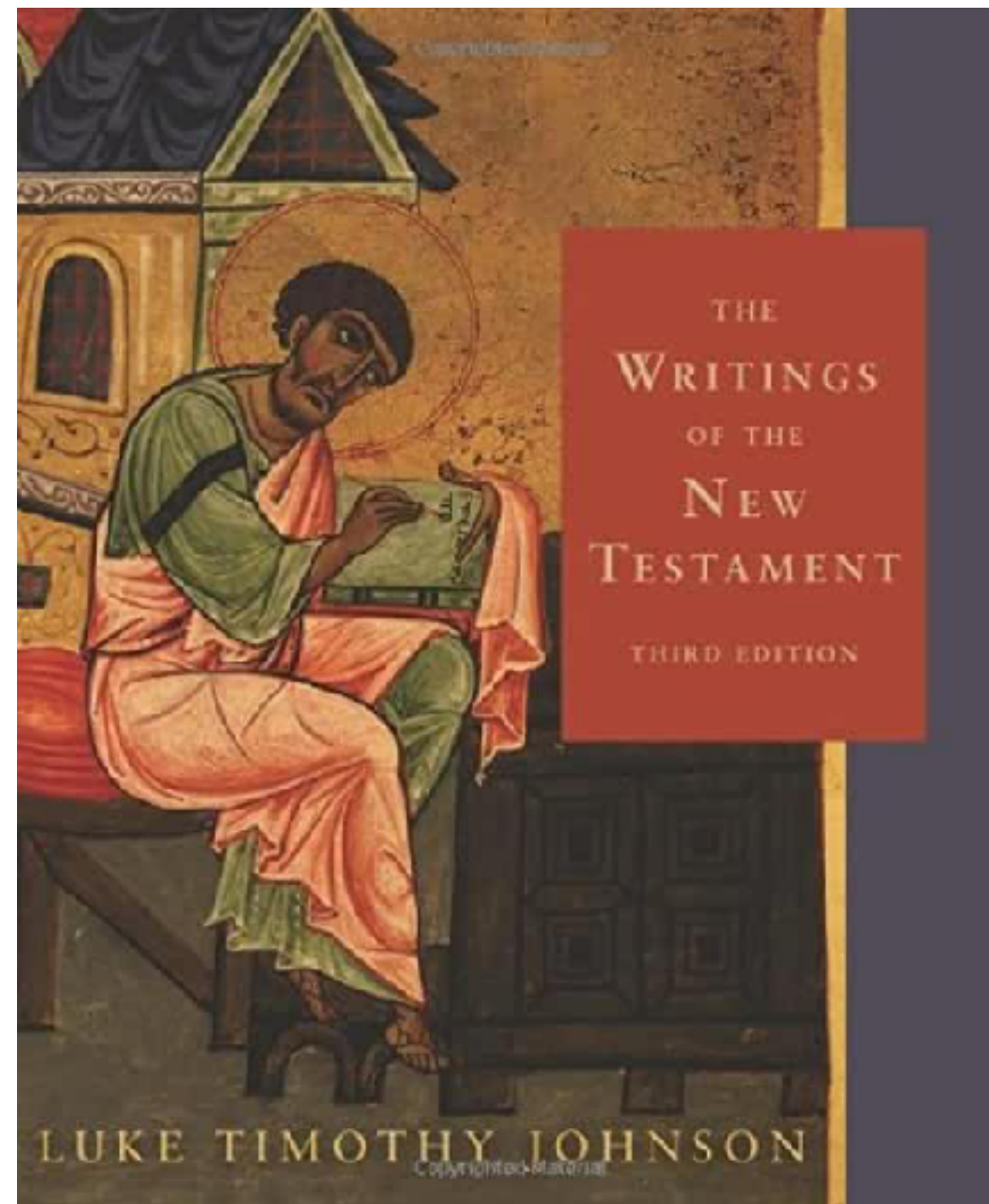
Paul's Middle Letters



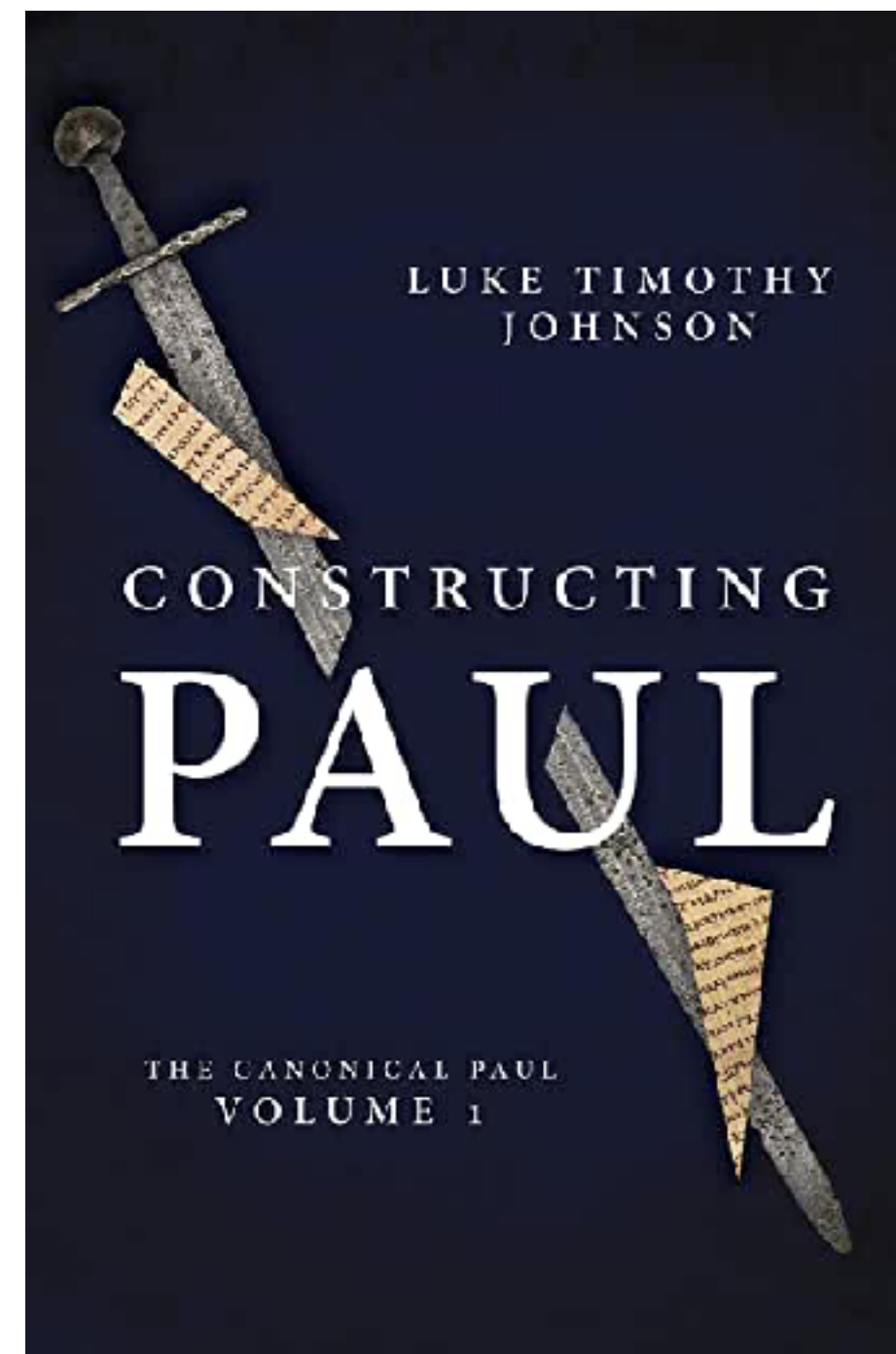
Taught 2014, 2018–March 2020

Catholic Research

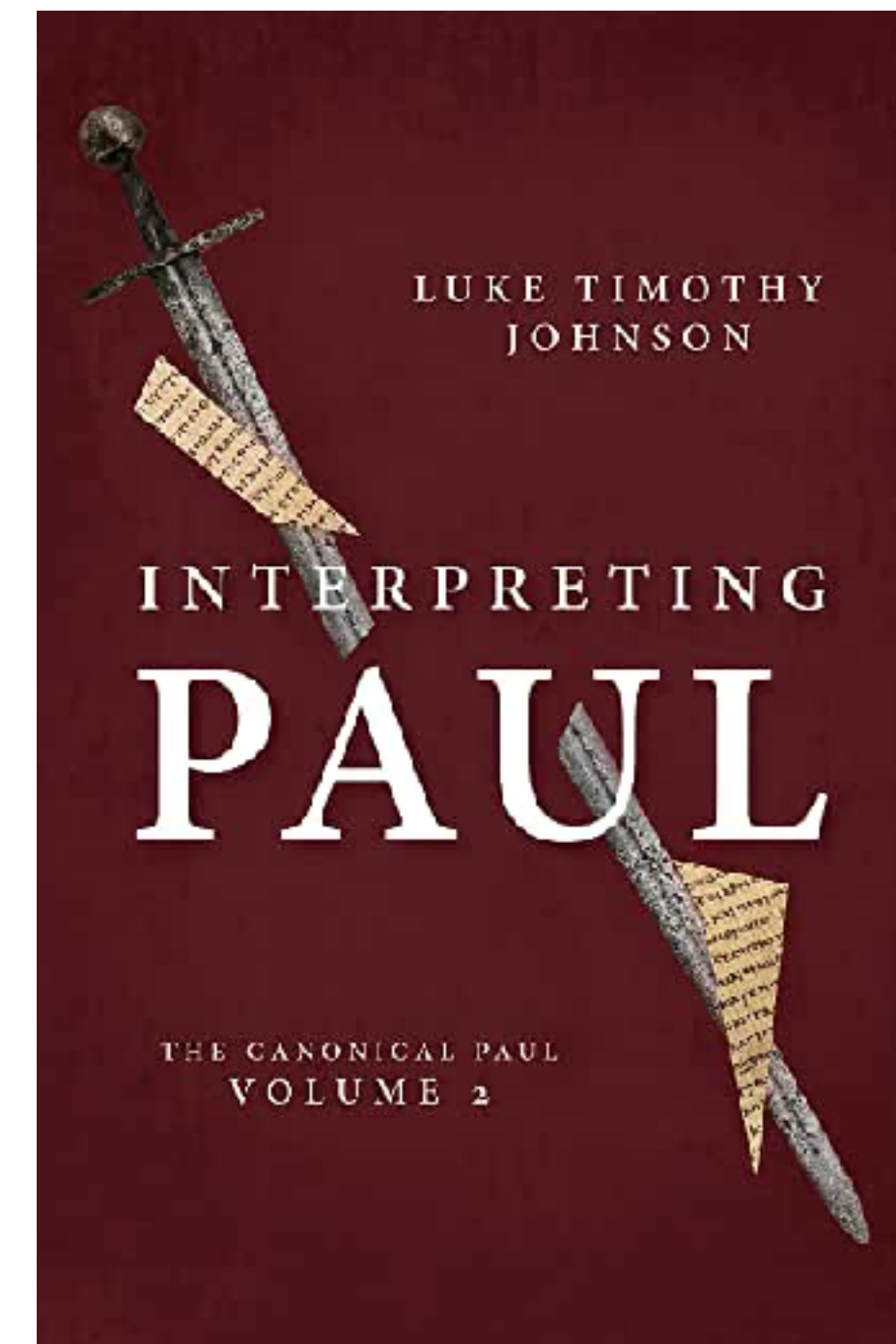
The key author is Luke Timothy Johnson, who has influenced my thinking on Paul's letters more than anyone by far. I am working through 14 of his books, but the key three are the following:



2014

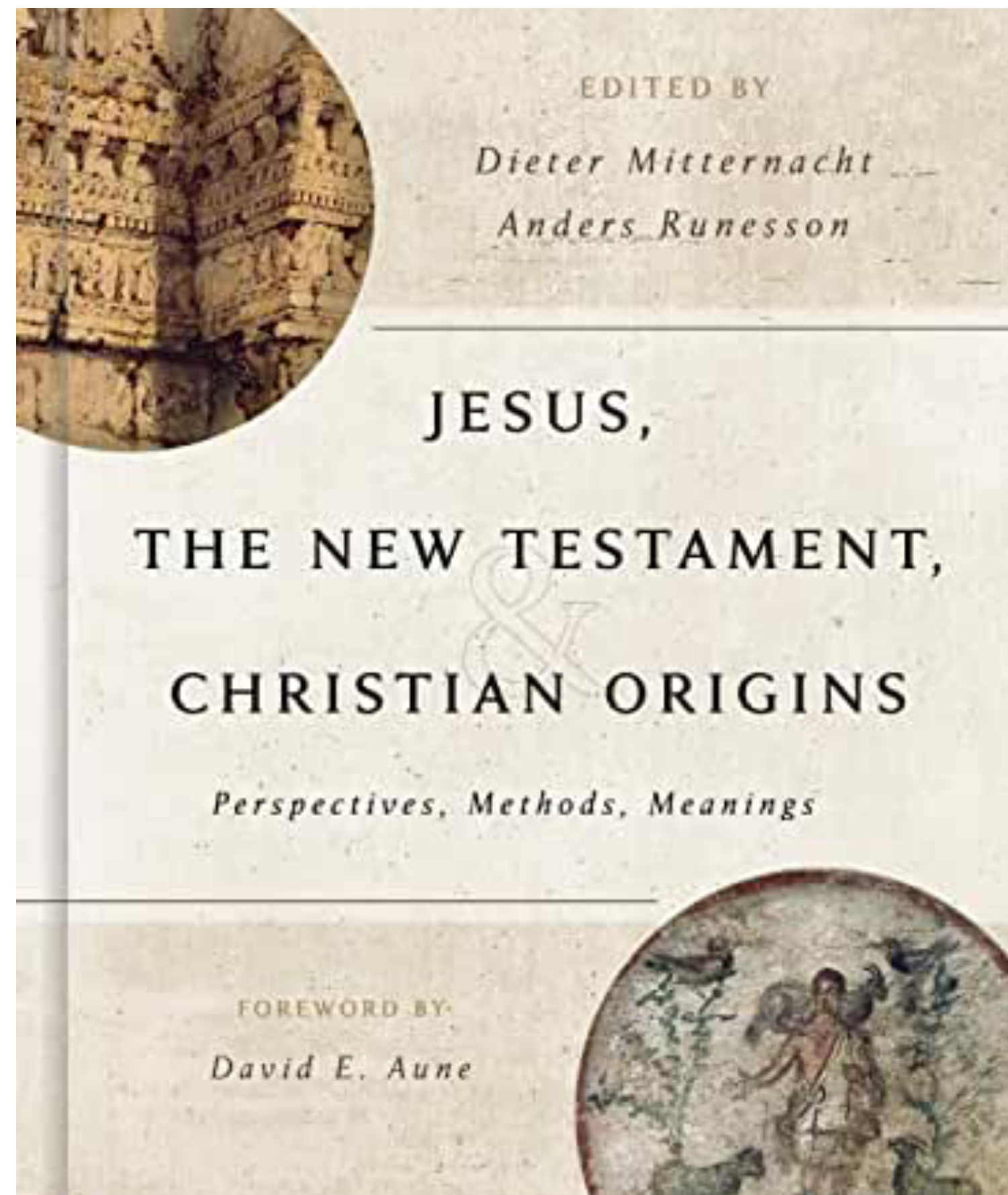


2020



2021

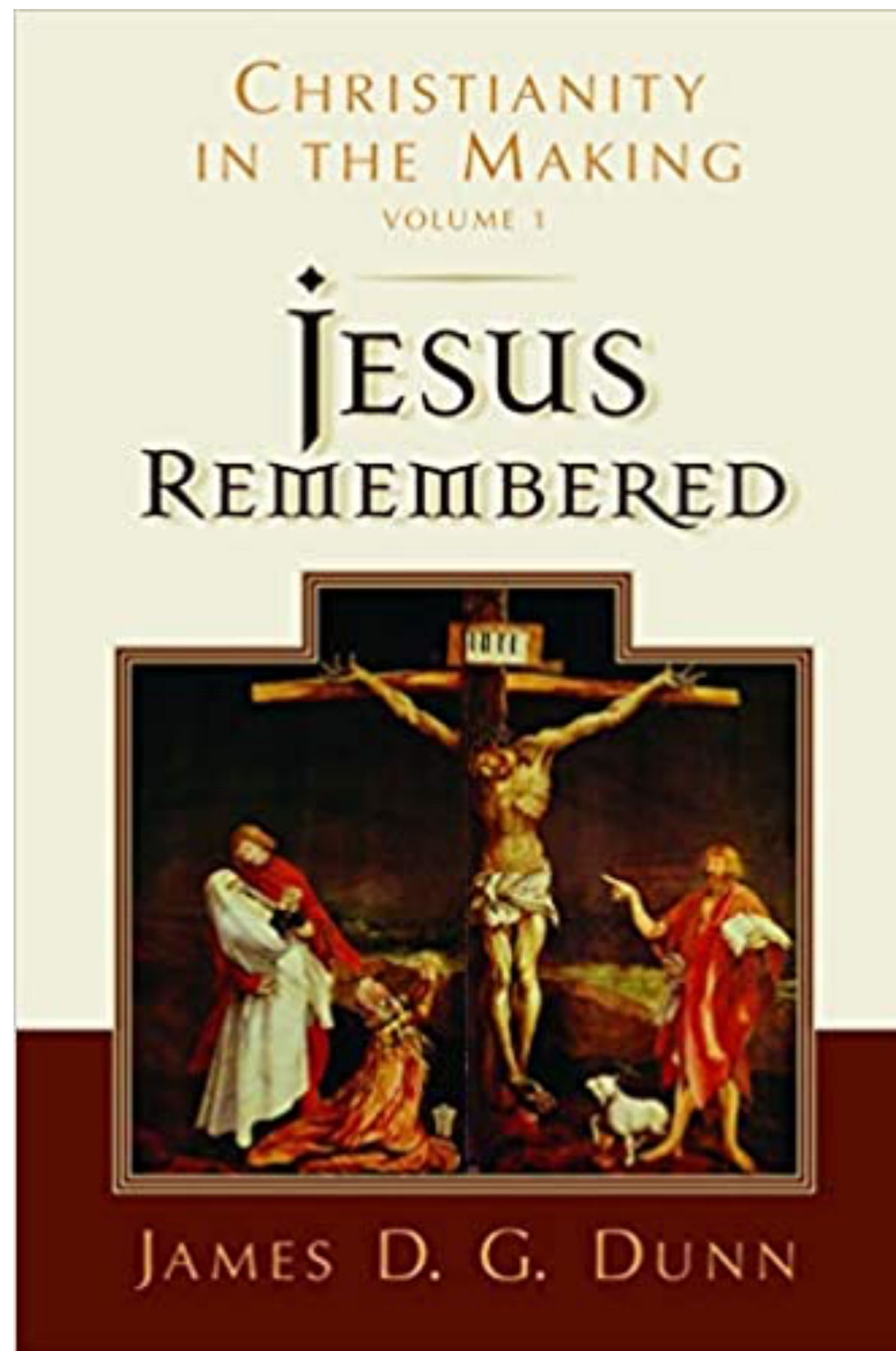
Post-Critical Greco-Roman Research



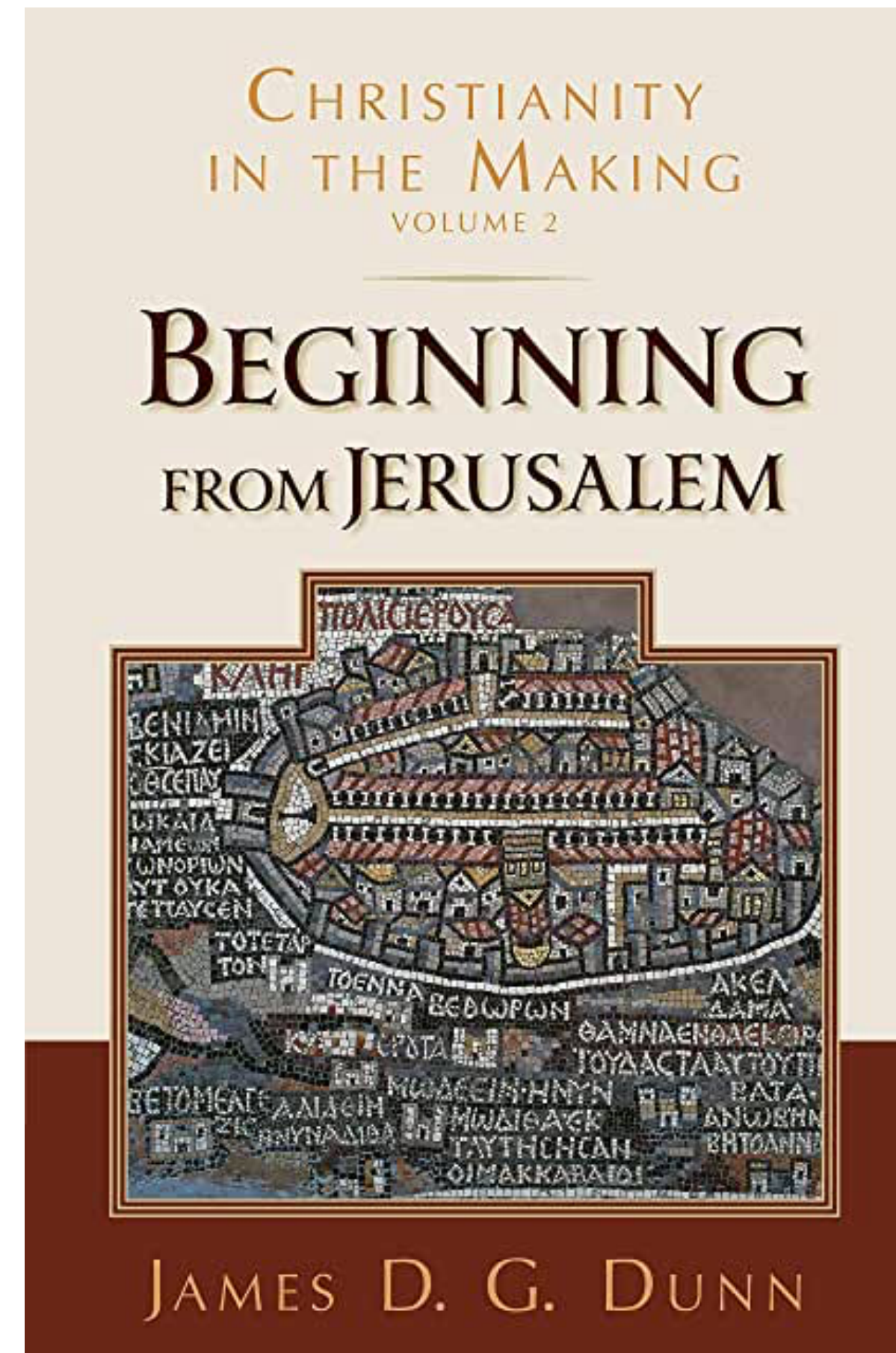
The key book is *Jesus, The New Testament, Christian Origins: Perspectives, Methods, Meanings*—a totally new kind of New Testament Introduction.

2021

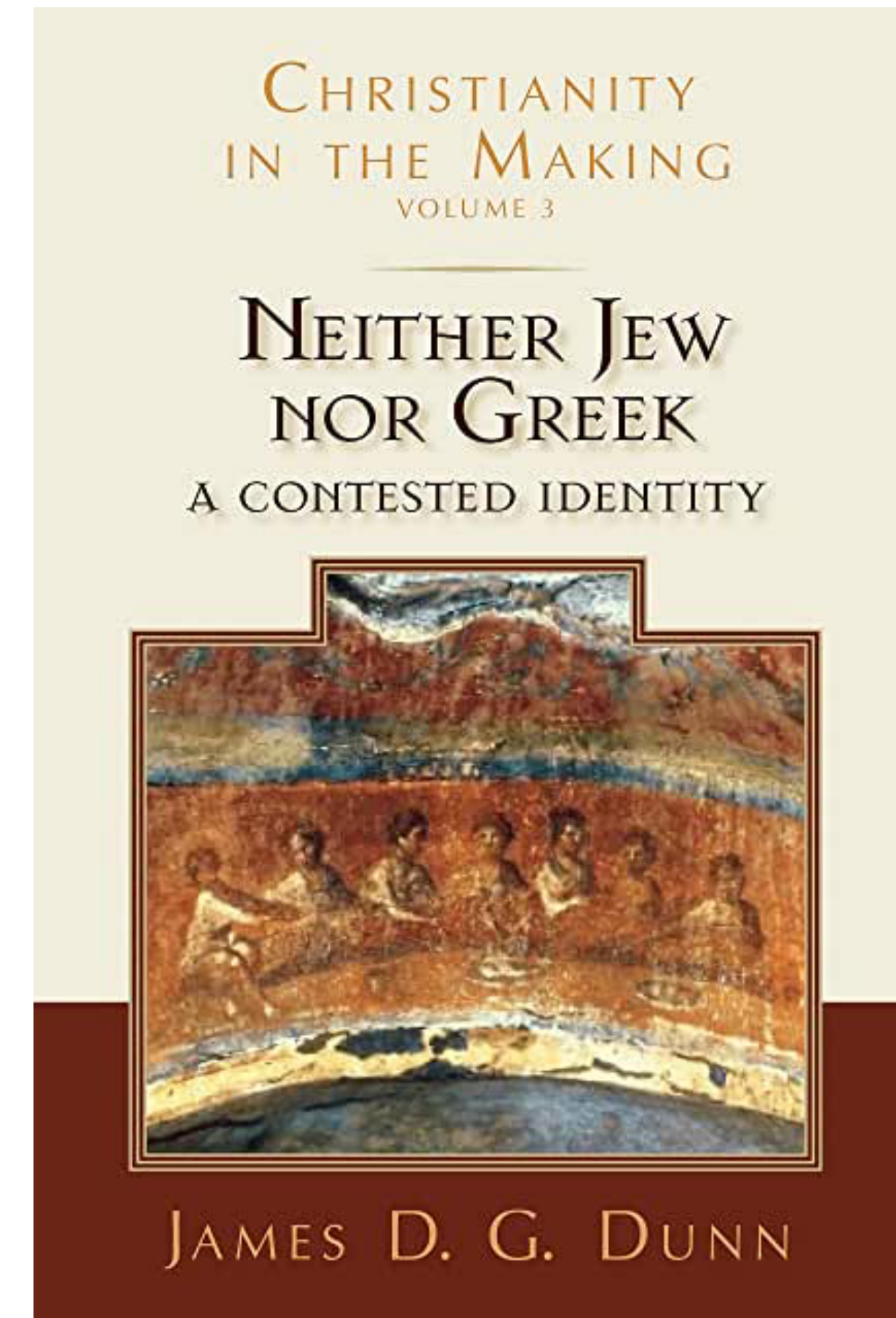
Post-Critical Greco-Roman Research



2003

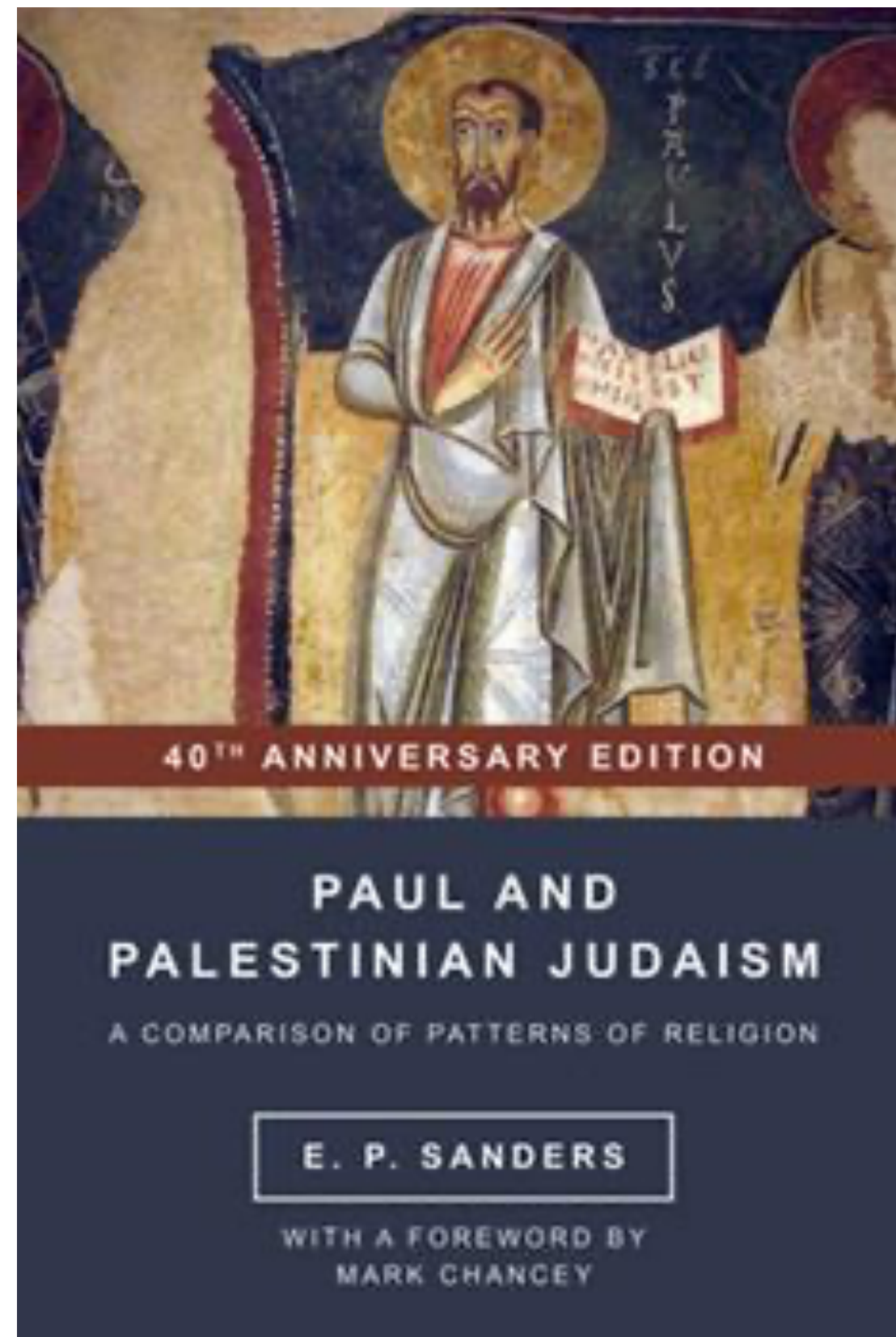


2009

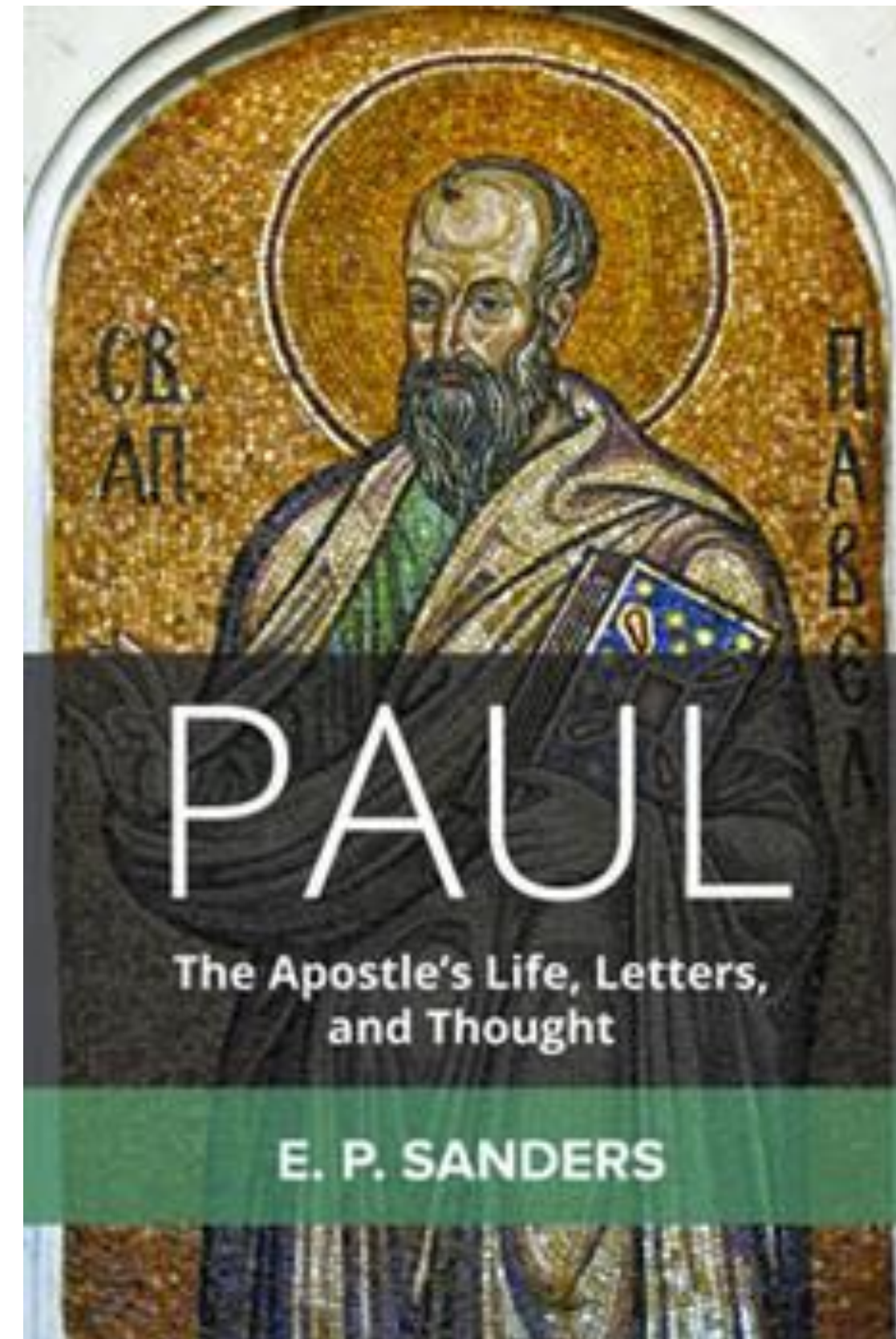


2015

Post-Critical Greco-Roman Research



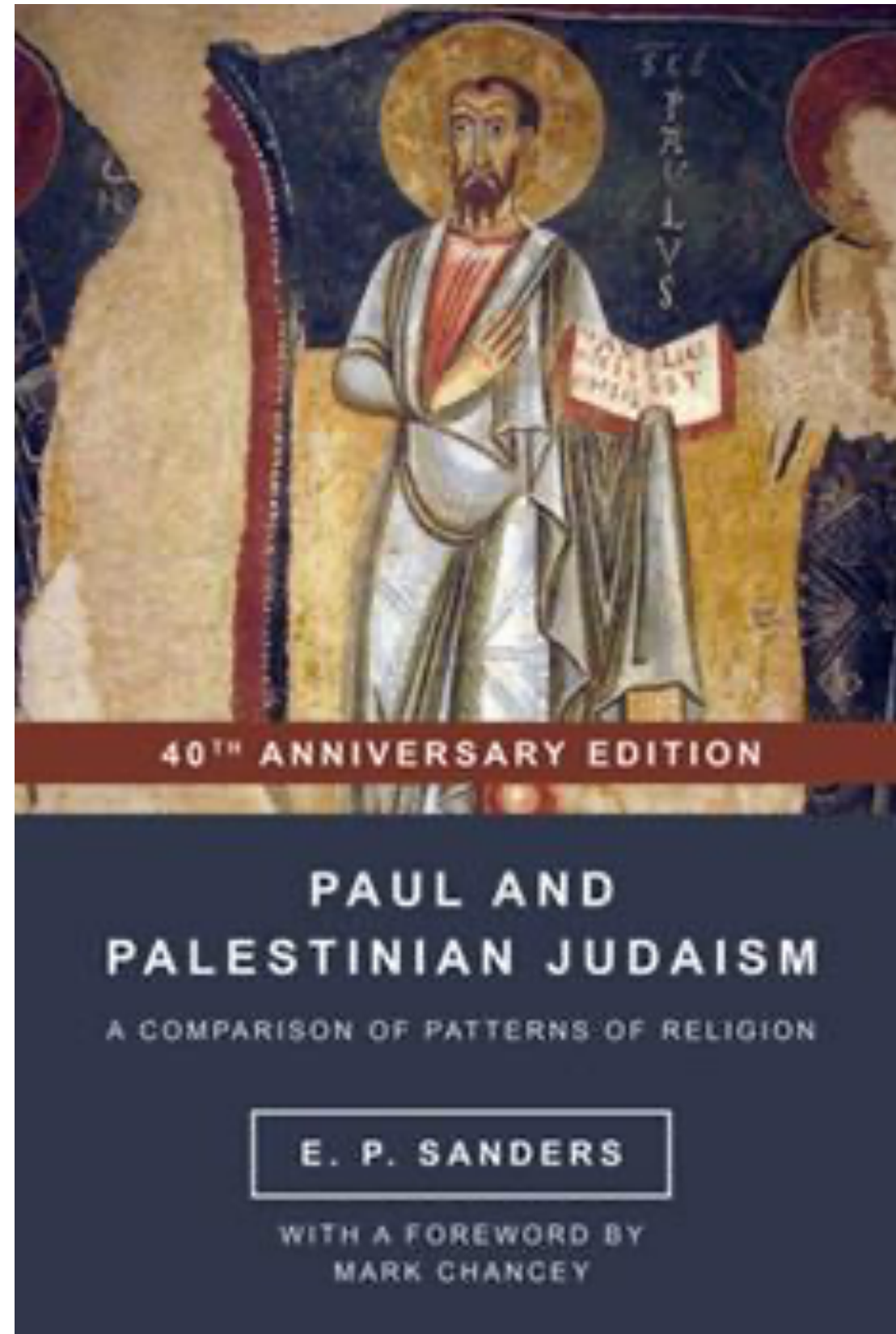
1977



Over 40 years ago, Sanders' work, some of the first, shifted the "Pauline paradigm in Western Christendom, bringing forth what is referred to as the "New Perspective on Paul."

This has paved the way for massive research, leading the way for such scholars as N.T. Wright.

Post-Critical Greco-Roman Research

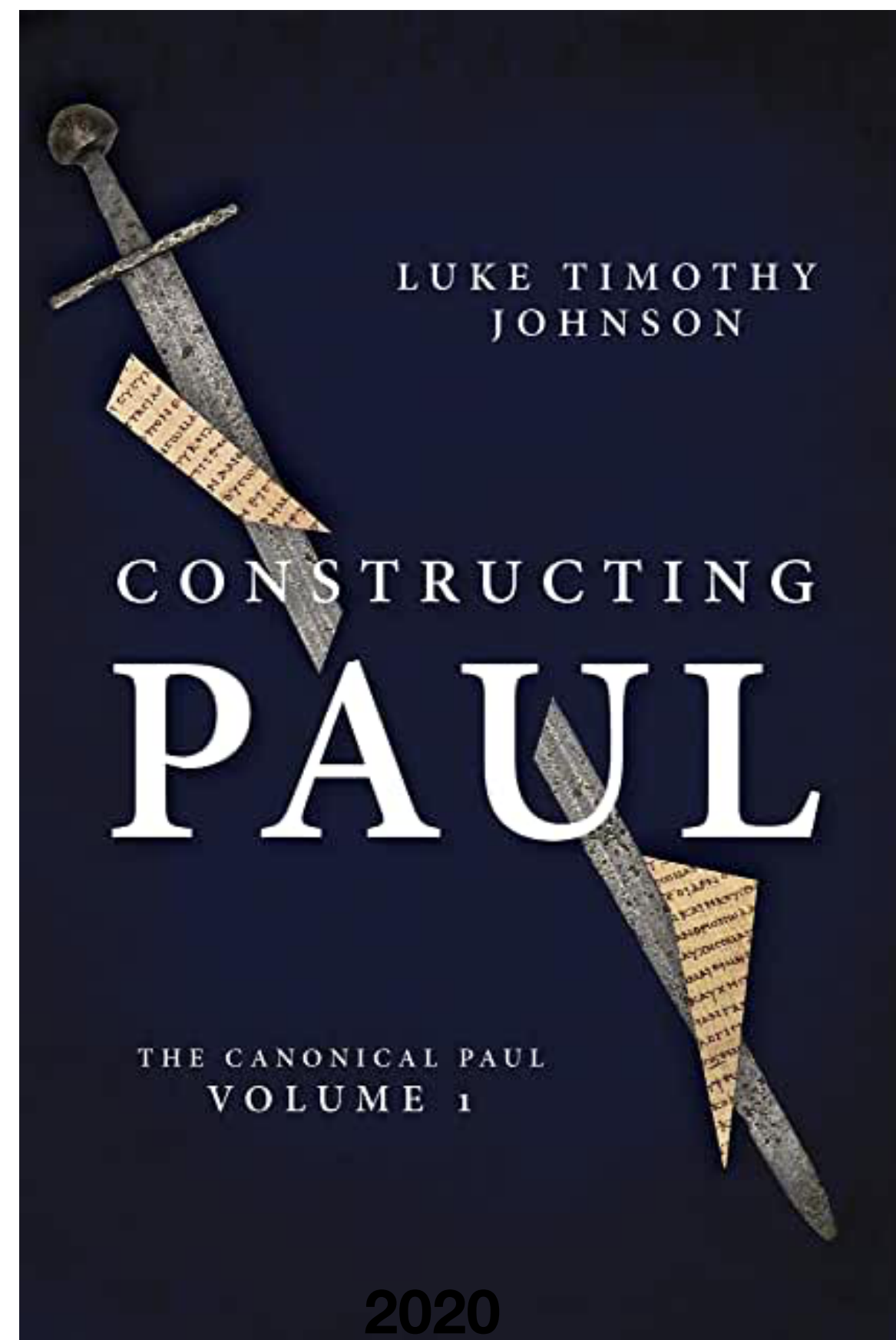


1977

“In taking the position that **Paul was a coherent, but not systematic, thinker**, we are taking the position most common among exegetes, and it needs little defence. That Paul was a thinker is readily seen in the way he tried to work out solutions to problems by re-thinking the Christian tradition. This can be seen most clearly in the Corinthian correspondence, where Paul dealt with a succession of problems. He never simply answers with a formula or with a biblical quotation, although he makes use of both.... The rigour of the conclusion, again, marks **Paul as a theological thinker with a coherent viewpoint.**”

Sanders, E. P.; *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.) p. 665.

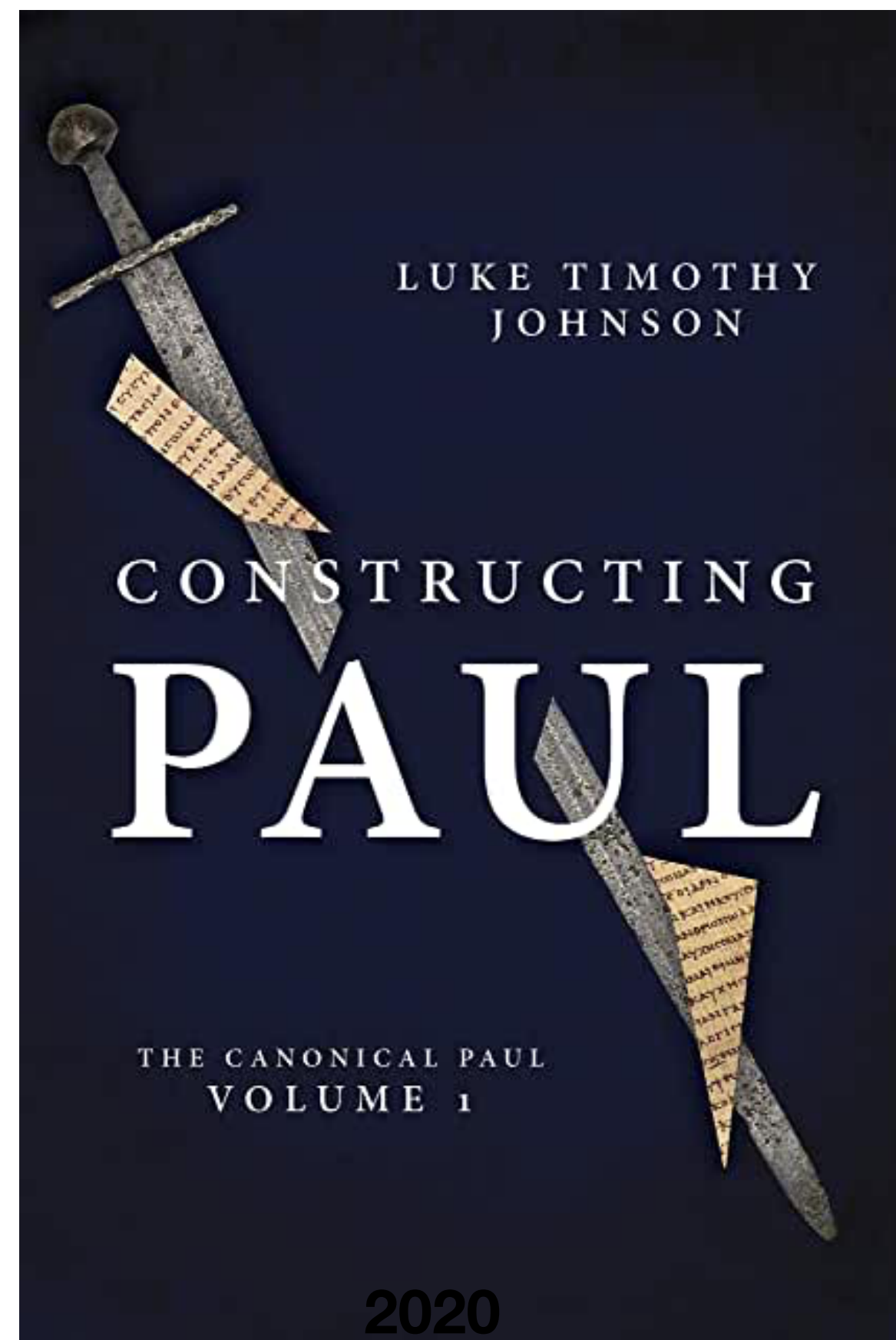
Catholic Research



2020

“And just as my approach resists reducing the Pauline corpus to a subset of letters or reducing the elements of Paul’s symbolic world to a single explanatory key, so does it resist elevating one theme within his letters to singular significance. My effort throughout will be to argue for a **polythetic rather than monothetic** approach to these compositions. I hope to provide the conditions for a fresh and vigorous engagement with each of the letters in the canonical collection, an engagement that will lead to **new discoveries** and **new questions**. I emphatically do not seek to replace such an engaged reading of the letters with a synthesis of my own that already determines what can be found in the letters and answers all questions.”

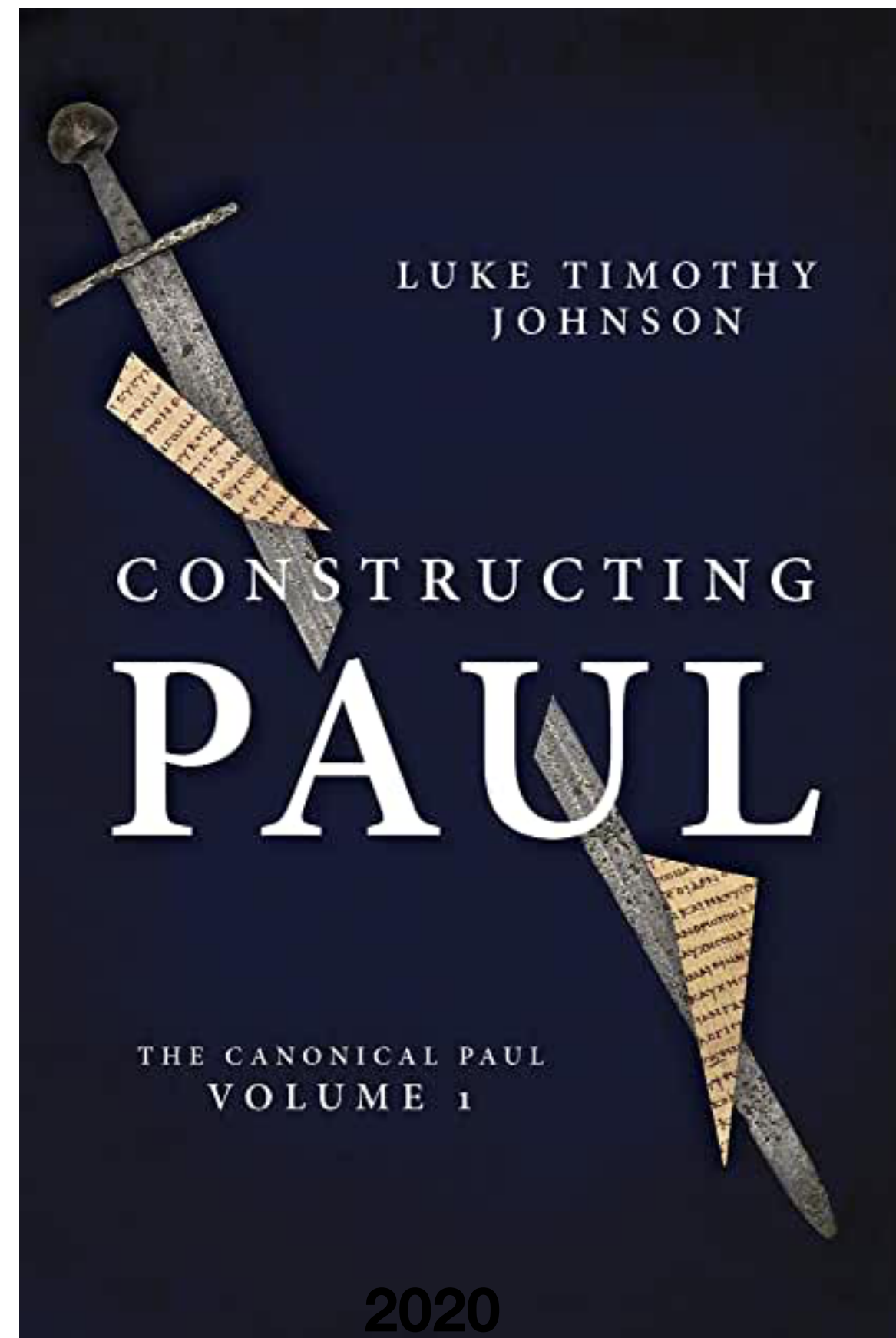
Catholic Research



2020

“An analogy can be drawn to the study of the ancient philosopher Plato. Any number of college students have been exposed in philosophy classes to something called ‘Platonism,’ which is defined in terms of certain categories (epistemology, cosmology, metaphysics, ethics, politics), and which can be compared to other philosophical schools on the same points. But the few students who decide to push past their class notes and textbook to an actual reading of the dialogues attributed to Plato discover, usually with some surprise, that it is difficult to find that synthetic ‘Platonism.’”

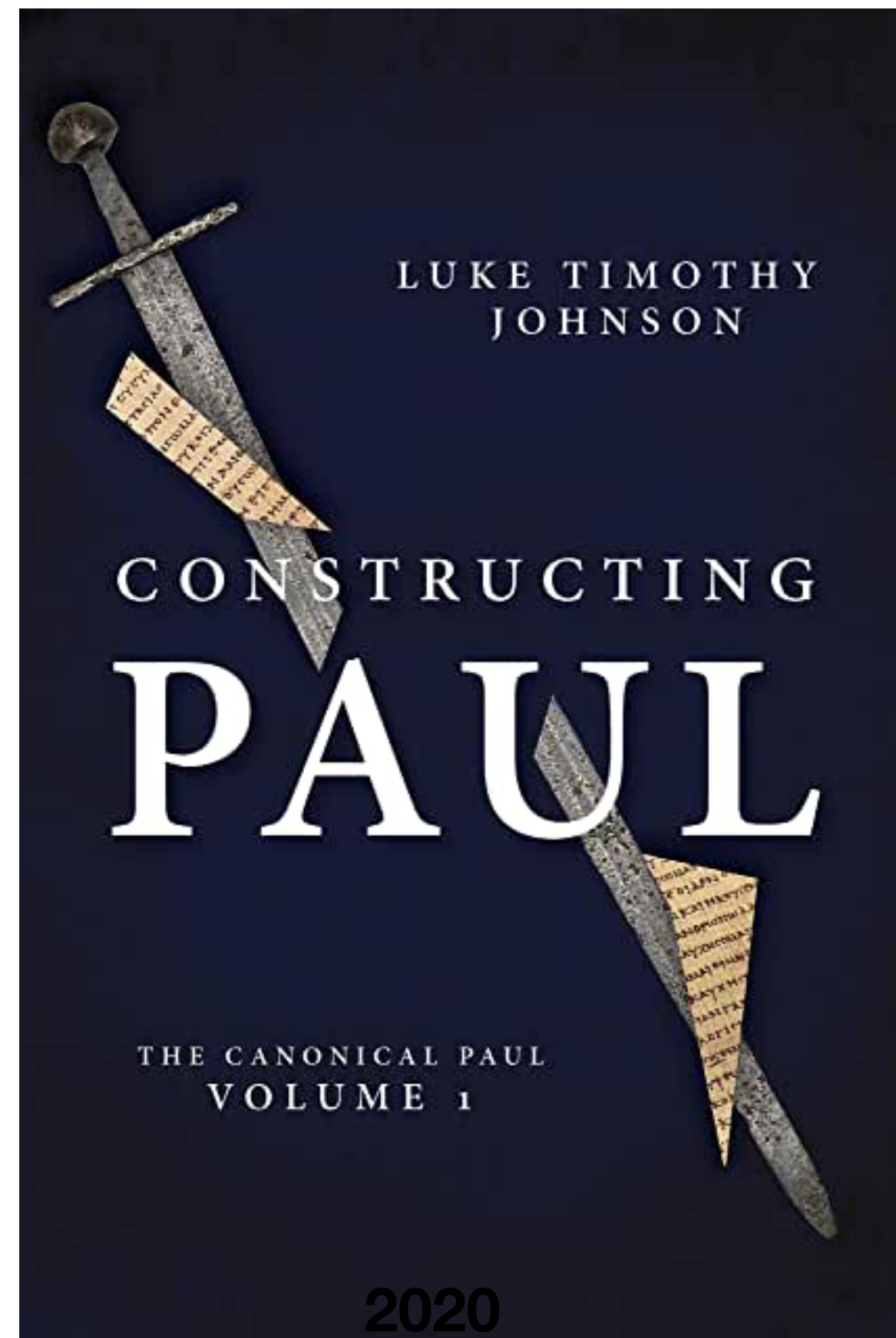
Catholic Research



2020

“They begin to realize that the ‘Plato’ they have been taught has been abstracted from certain dialogues and arranged into a logical system that is nowhere to be found as such in the dialogues themselves. More than that: when they actually begin to read the dialogues in all their particularity and complexity, they begin to discover how much exciting and challenging thought has escaped the usual categories; above all, they find that the true significance of the dialogues lies not in their containing certain doctrines but in their capacity to challenge the mind and give rise to thought.”

Catholic Research



2020

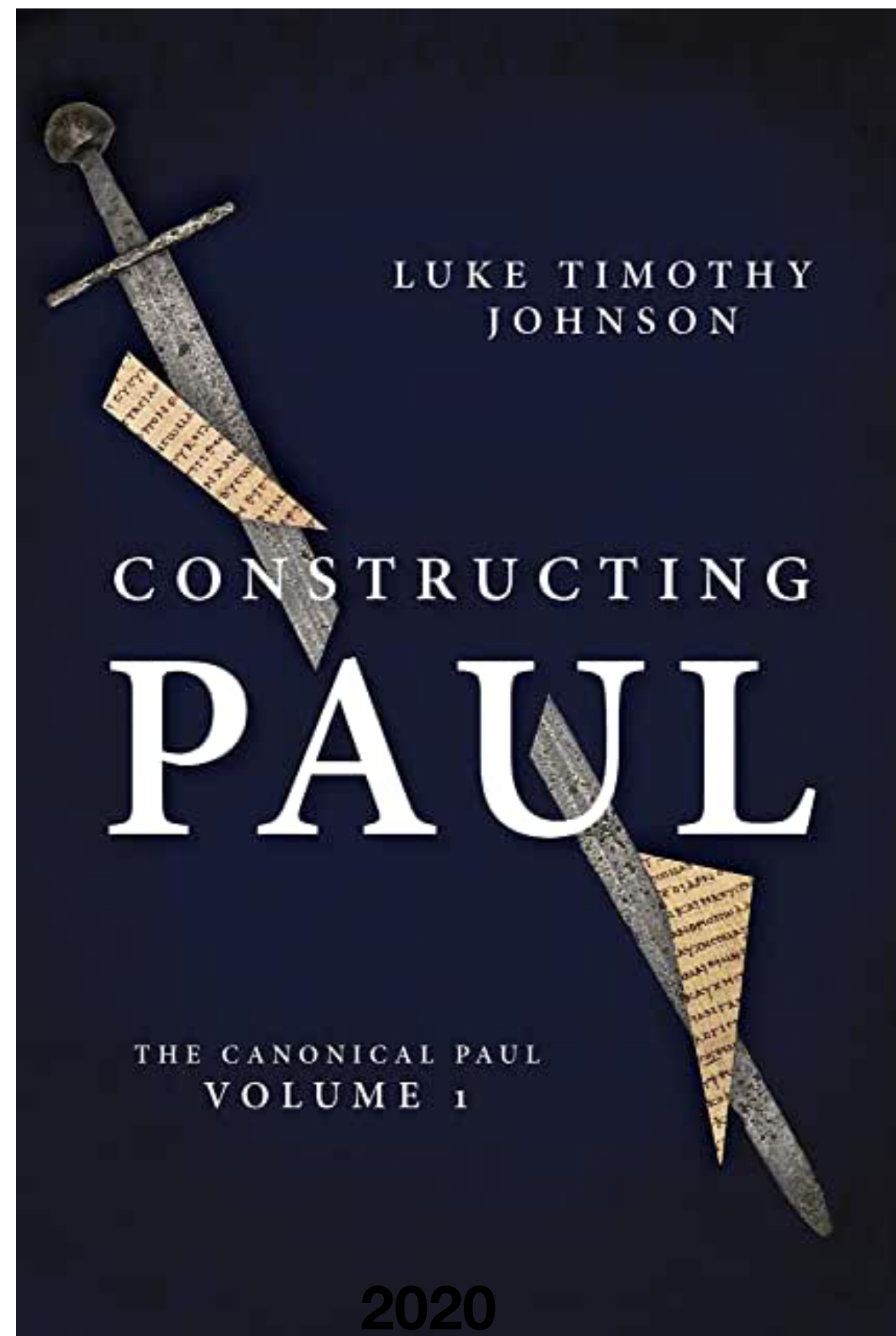
Monothetic

“Pertaining to or based on a single basic idea or principle; describing a classification that is defined by the presence of all of a set of attributes; in mathematics, a monothetic group is a topological with **a dense cyclic subgroup.**” Wikipedia

Polythetic

“(of a class of things) Having many, but not all properties in common.”

Catholic Research



2020

Monothetic

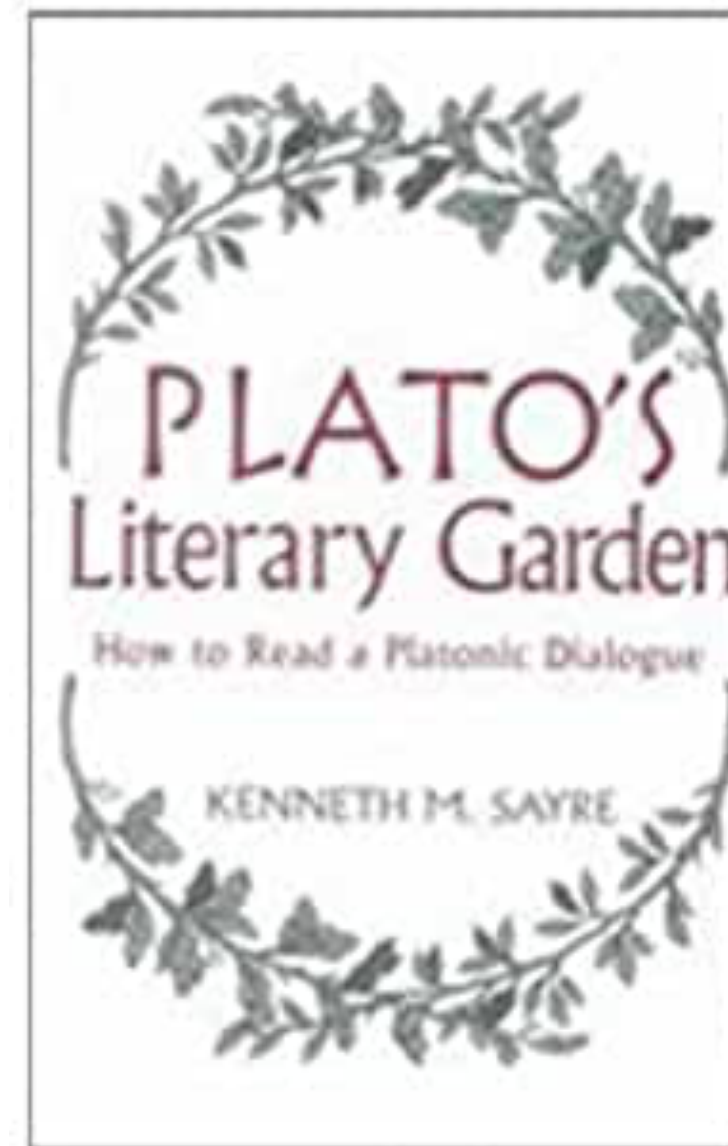
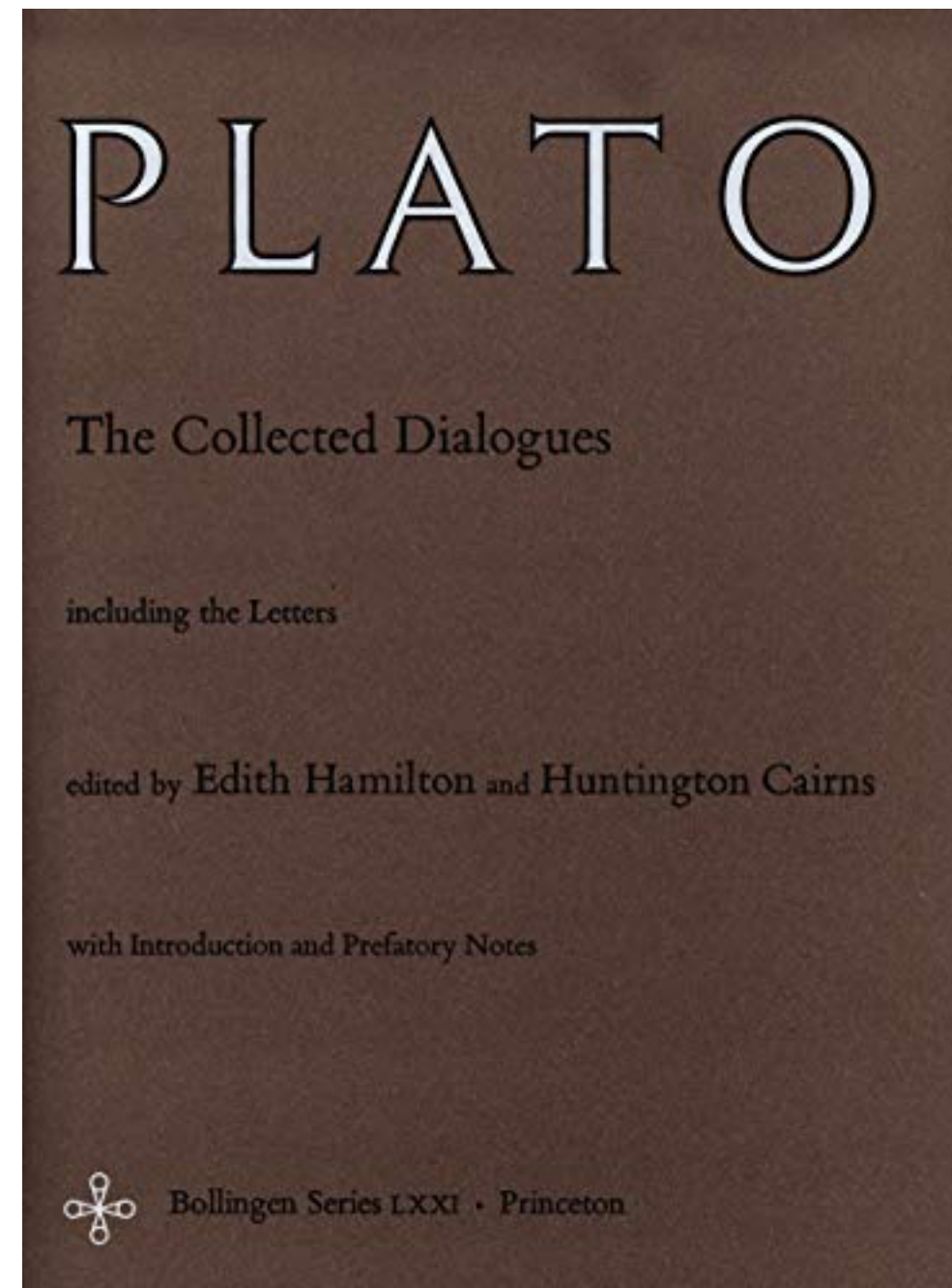
a monothetic group is a topological with a dense cyclic subgroup Wikipedia

Paul was not writing letters to lay out a set of topics, oftentimes unrelated (systematic theology).

Significance: if they are not all part of each other, then we can construct our own “mind of Christ.”

“dense cyclic subgroup” like *the Gathering* and *the Household* (family of families); without these “cyclical subgroups”

The First University



Socrates to Plato to Aristotle

Socrates — dialogues only

Plato — The Dialogues

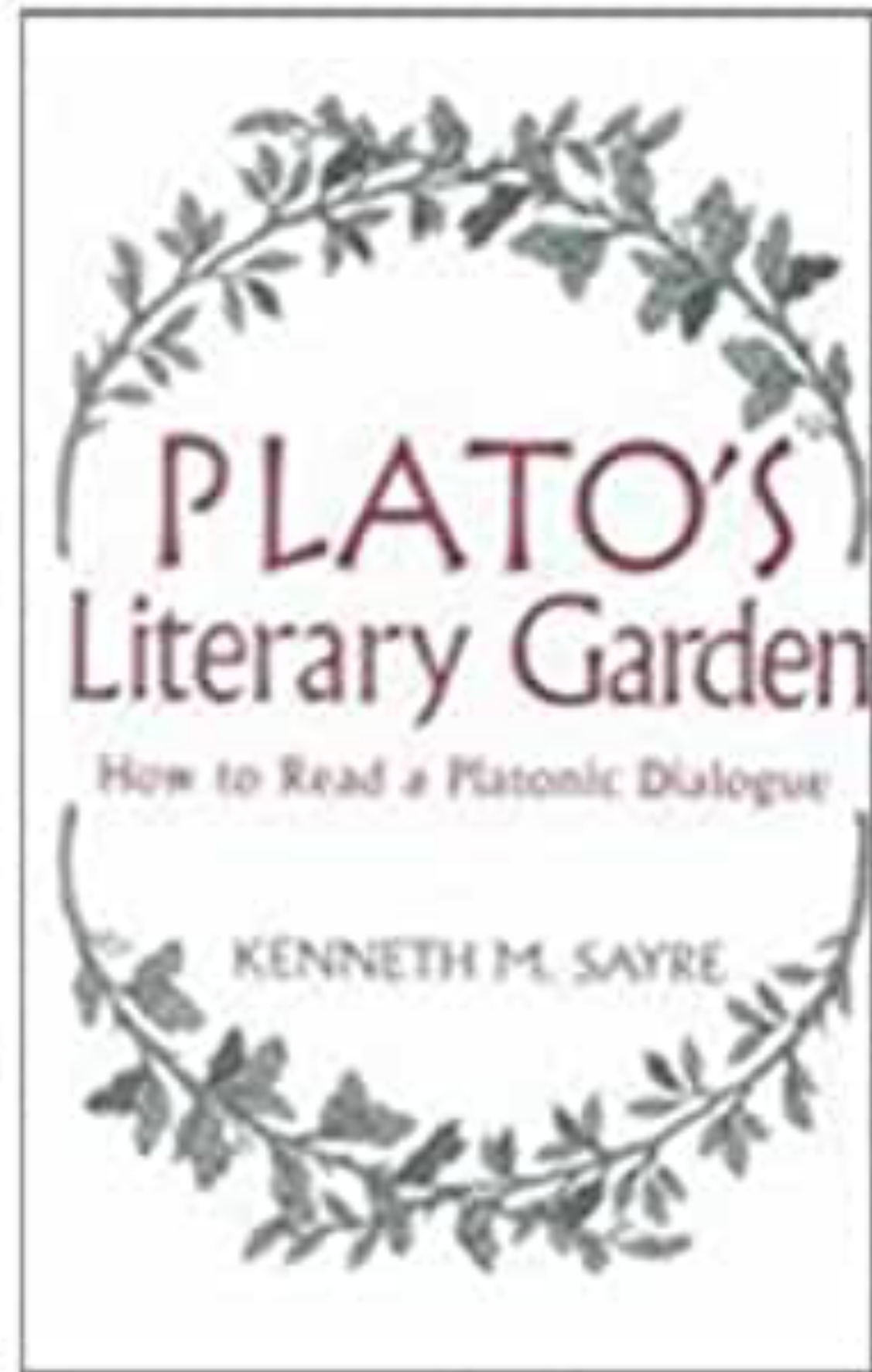
Aristotle — volumes of systematic topics

The first university

Plato's Gardens — The Academy, 390 BCE

Aristotle — The Academy, 20 years later

The First University



Process

1. Refutation and Irony: Preparing the Ground
2. Reflection and Example: Sowing the Seeds
3. Love and Philosophy: Nourishing the Growth
4. Dialect and Logos: Training the Shoots
5. The Good and the Beautiful: Reaping the Fruits

Paul's Process

Kerygma and Didache (embedded as foundation)

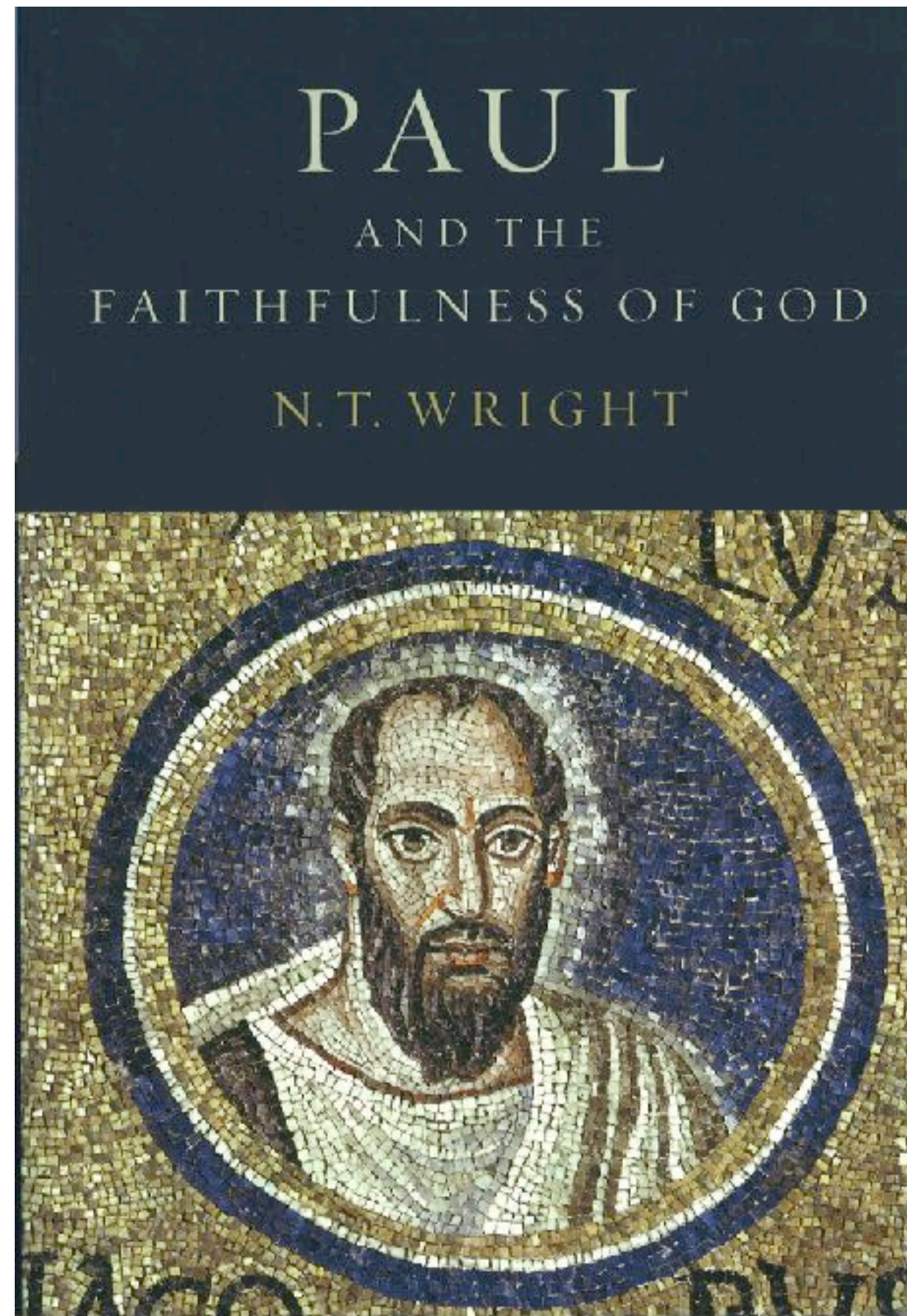
Dialogues

Progressing the Gospel

Establishing Churches and Believers

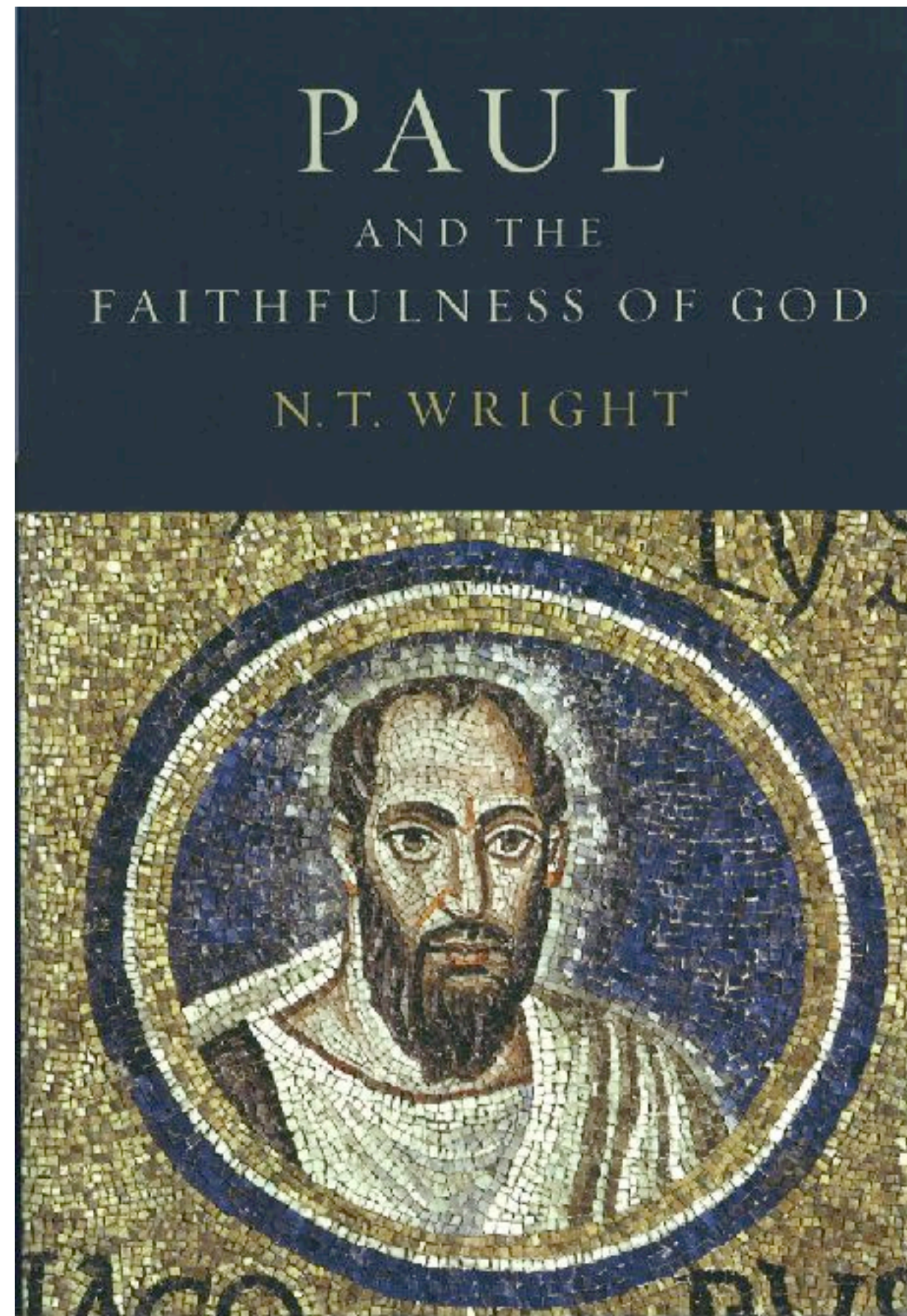
Training Leaders

New Perspective on Paul



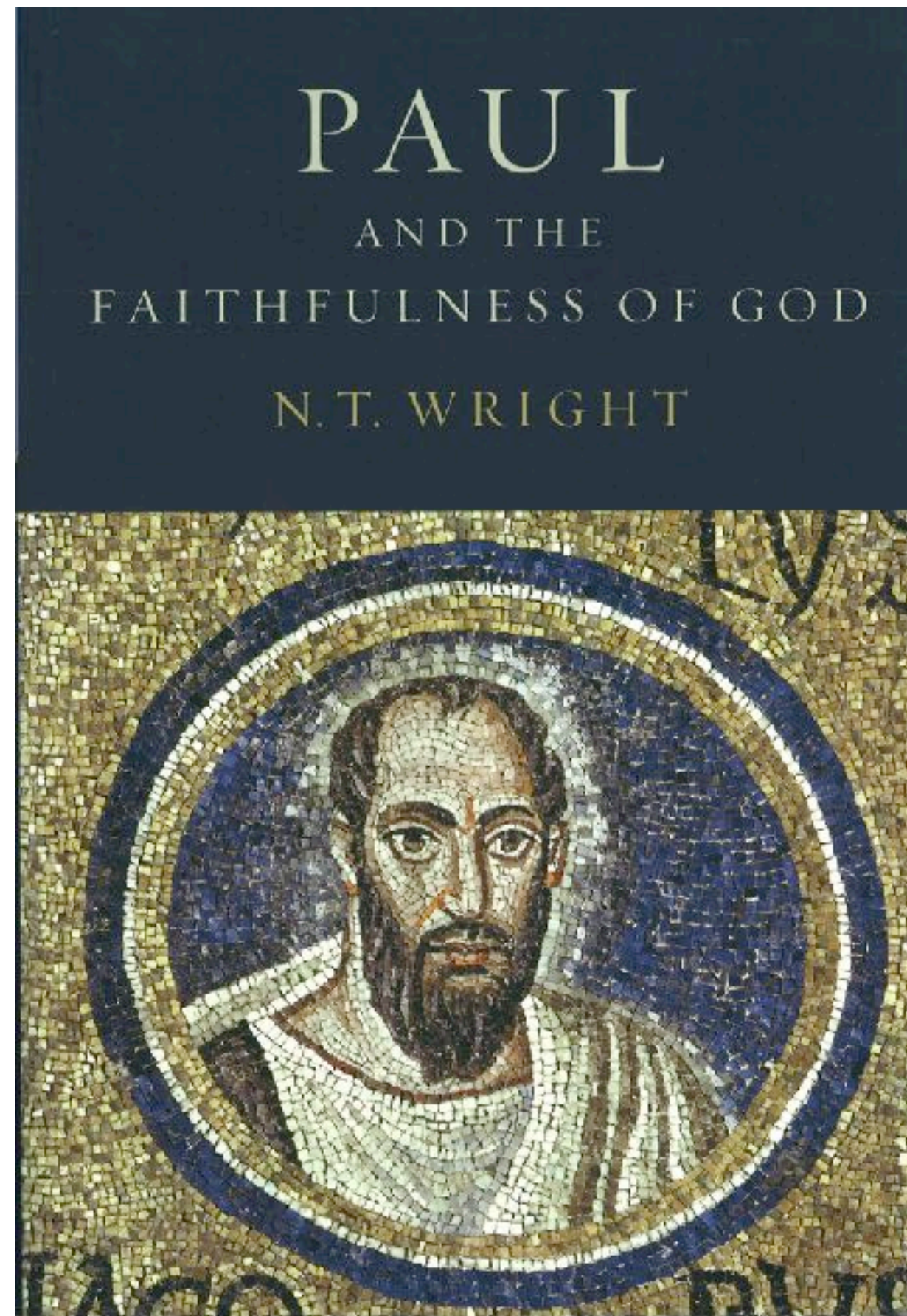
“I take it as axiomatic, on the contrary, that Paul deliberately laid out whole arguments, not just bits and pieces, miscellaneous topoi which just happen to turn up in these irrelevant “contingent” contexts like oddly shaped pearls on an irrelevant string. In any case, the point is that a thematic analysis of Paul’s theological topics in themselves, and in their mutual interrelation, ought to enhance our appreciation of the flow of thought in his letters and their component parts, while also demonstrating **coherence** among themselves.”

New Perspective on Paul



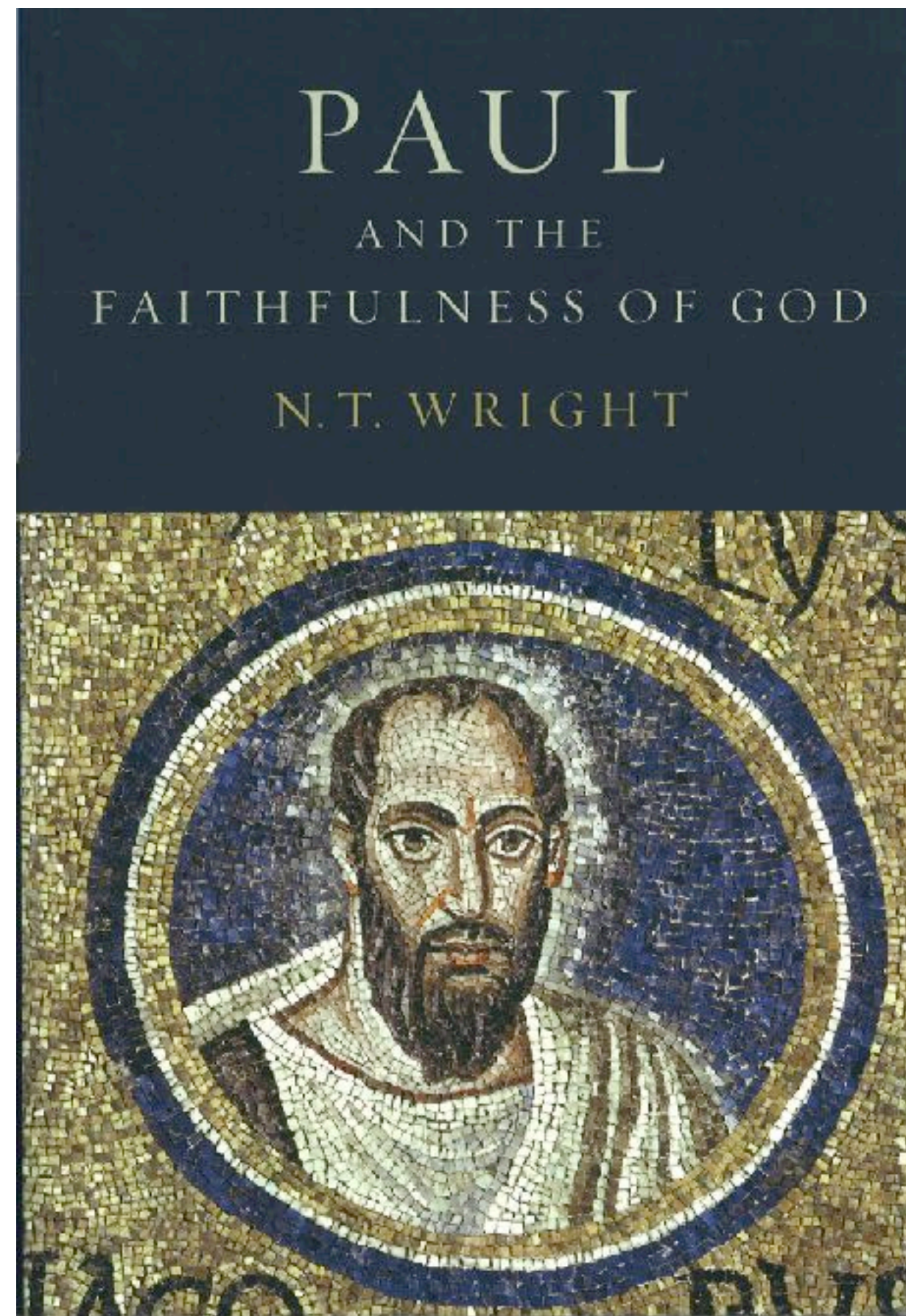
“So when people say, as they often do, that Paul ‘**was not a systematic theologian,**’ **meaning** that ‘Paul didn’t write a medieval Summa Theologica or a book that corresponds to Calvin’s Institutes,’ we will want to say: Fair enough. So far as we know, he didn’t. But the statement is often taken to mean that Paul was therefore just a jumbled, rambling sort of thinker, who would grab odd ideas out of the assortment of junk in his mental cupboard and throw them roughly in the direction of the problems presented to him by his beloved and frustrating *ekklēsiai*.”

New Perspective on Paul



“And that is simply nonsense. The more time we spend in the careful reading of Paul, and in the study of his worldview, his theology and his aims and intentions, the more he **emerges as a deeply coherent thinker**. His main themes may well not fit the boxes constructed by later Christian dogmatics of whatever type. They generate their own categories, precisely as they are transforming the ancient Jewish ones, which are often sadly neglected in later Christian dogmatics. They emerge, whole and entire, thought through with a rigour which those who criticize Paul today (and those who claim to follow him, too!) would do well to match.” p. 568

New Perspective on Paul



“What is more, the reason **Paul was ‘doing theology’** was not that he happened to have the kind of brain that delighted in playing with and rearranging large, complex abstract ideas. He was doing theology because the life of God’s people depended on it, depended on his doing it initially for them, then as soon as possible with them, and then on them being able to go on doing it for themselves. All Paul’s theology is thus pastoral theology, not in the sense of an unsystematic therapeutic model which concentrates on meeting the felt needs of the ‘client’, but in the sense that the shepherd needs to feed the flock with clean food and water, and keep a sharp eye out for wolves. pp. 568–569

Paul's Letters

Foundational to entire New Testament

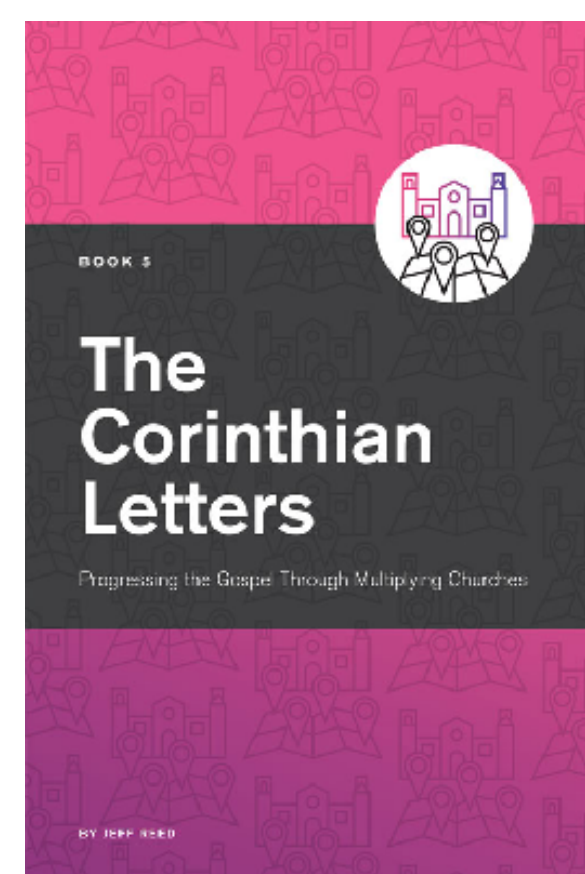
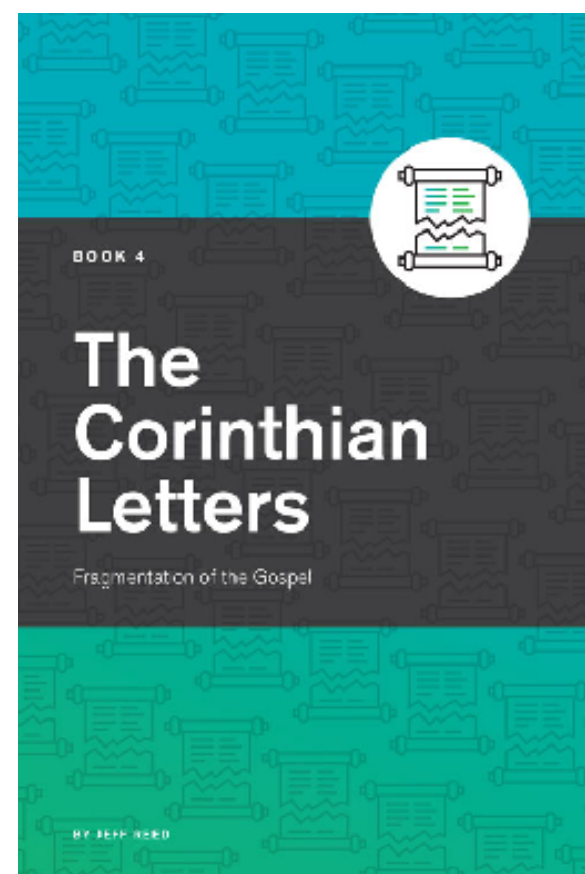
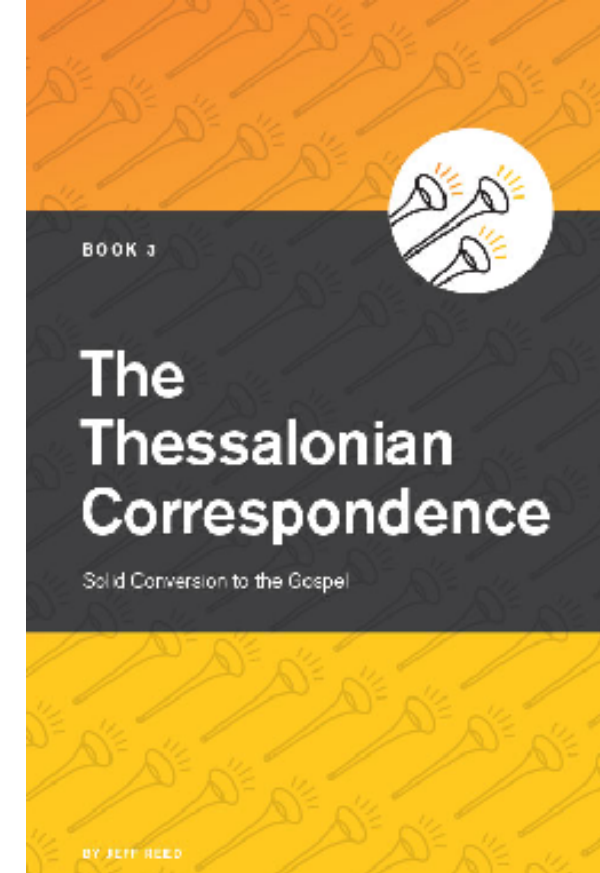
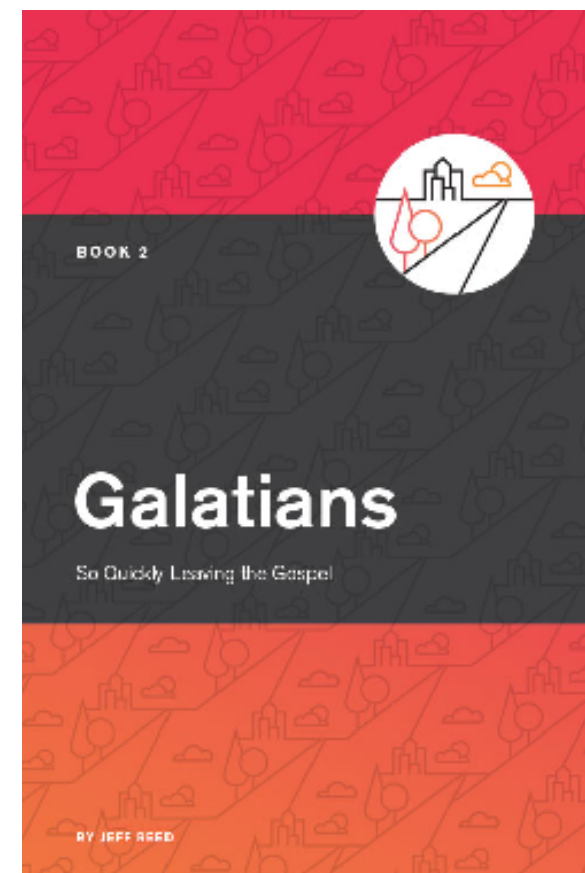
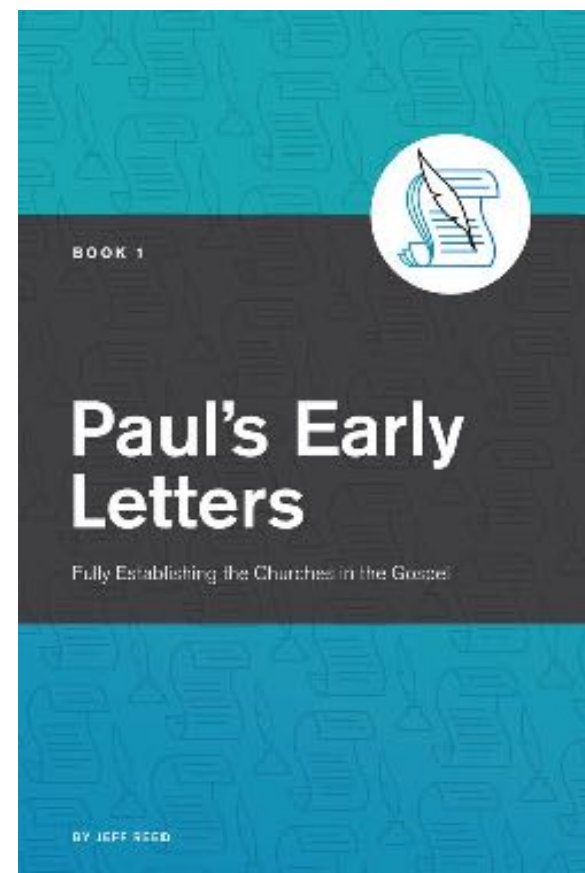
- Written before all other letters and Gospels
- Not a set of systematic theology topics, which fragment
- In fact his *collection of letters* is a *topoi* in that they are a series of topics that always are integrated with any given topics in his letters.
- We have to get our minds around the entire Pauline corpus.
- If we do, we are on our way to possessing the mind of Christ and developing the ability to think creatively, as Paul did, in our cultural situations (hermeneutically-trained judgment, theology in community).
- New insights, new questions
- NextGen and 3rdGen leaders visit this, every new series.

Paul's Letters, Catholic Epistles

Teaching the Next 5 years (Crow's nest)_

- Tight, 30–40 minutes
- No intro or conclusion
- Michael and I, introduction
- Michael and I, conclusion
- Very different style
- Core video for global partners
- Designed to discuss in churches
- Next 9 months: over 100 leaders, mostly in this room, must become solid as we start these 5 years.

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

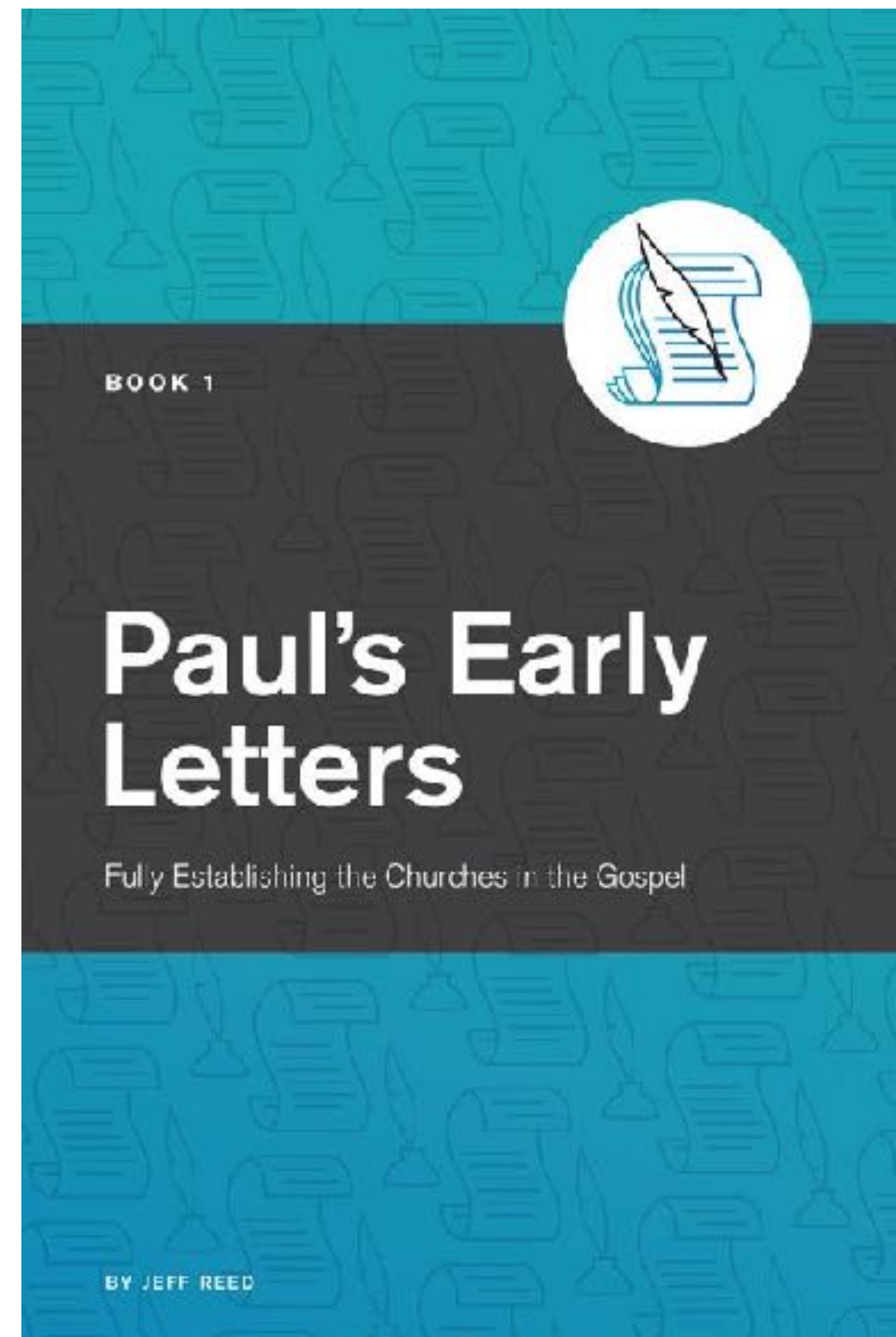
Book 3: The Thessalonians Correspondence: Conversion to the Gospel

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 Early Letters

Session 2: The Galatian Problem

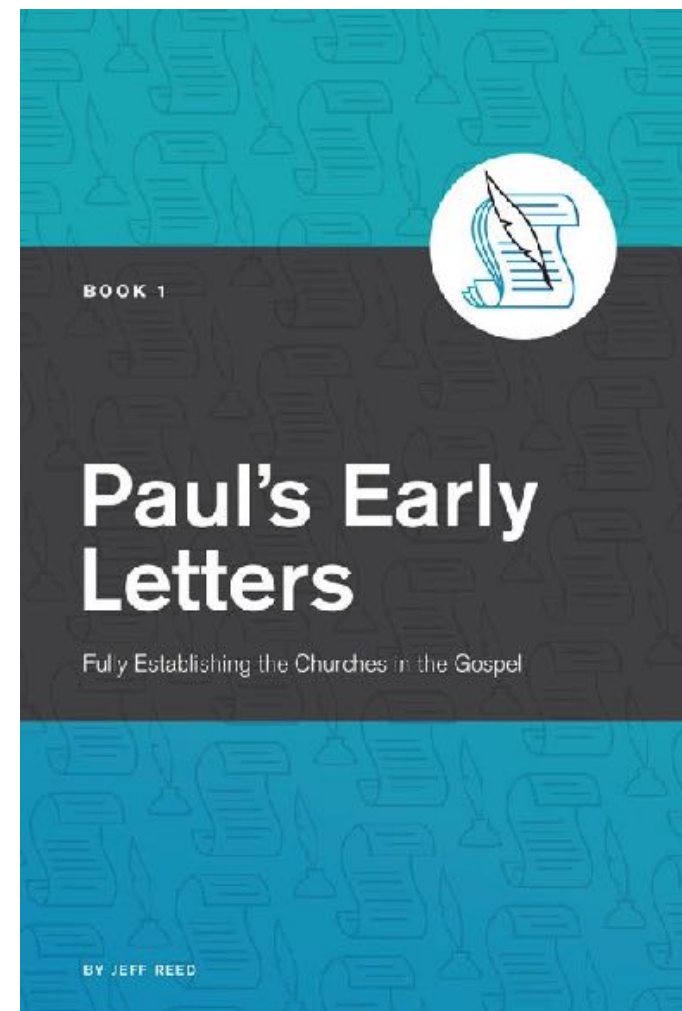
Session 3: The Thessalonians' Conversion

Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

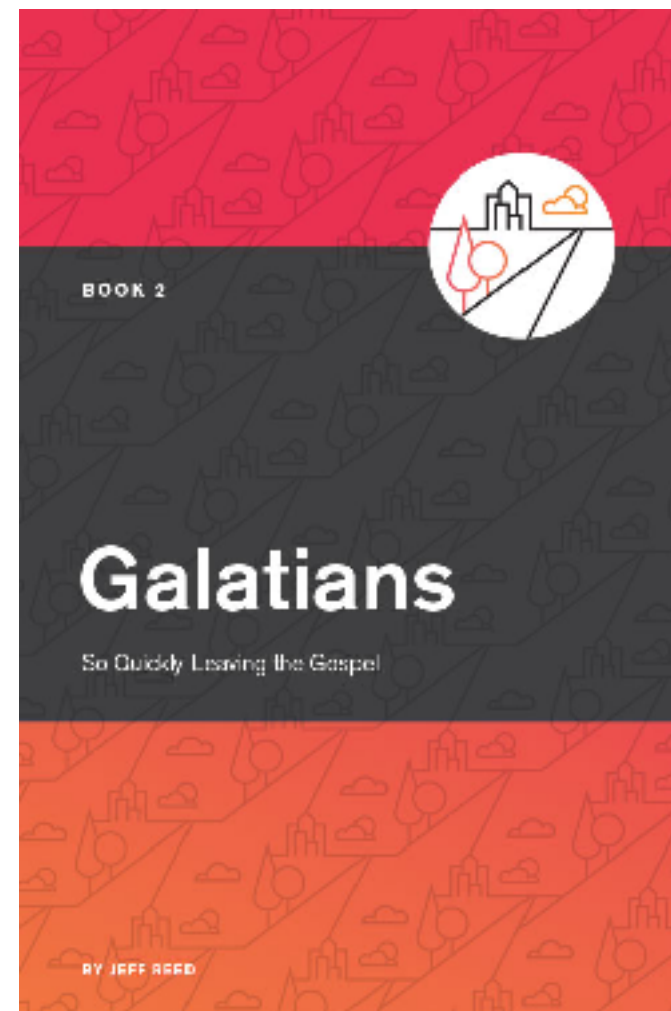
Session 5: The Roman Treatise

Session 6: Use in Life and Ministry

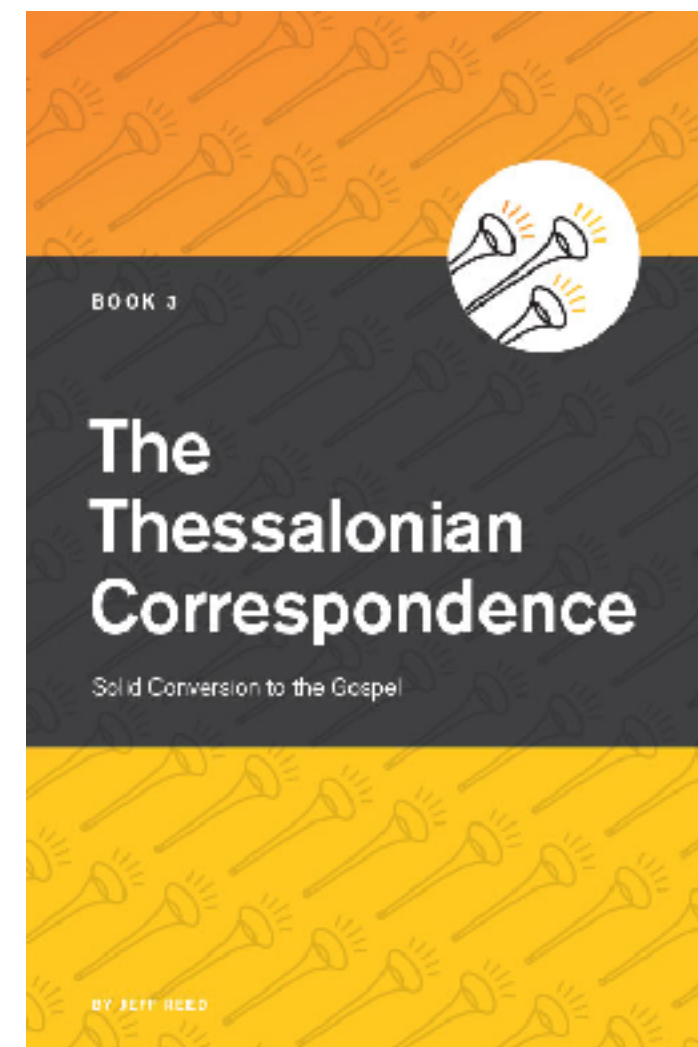
Paul's Early Letters



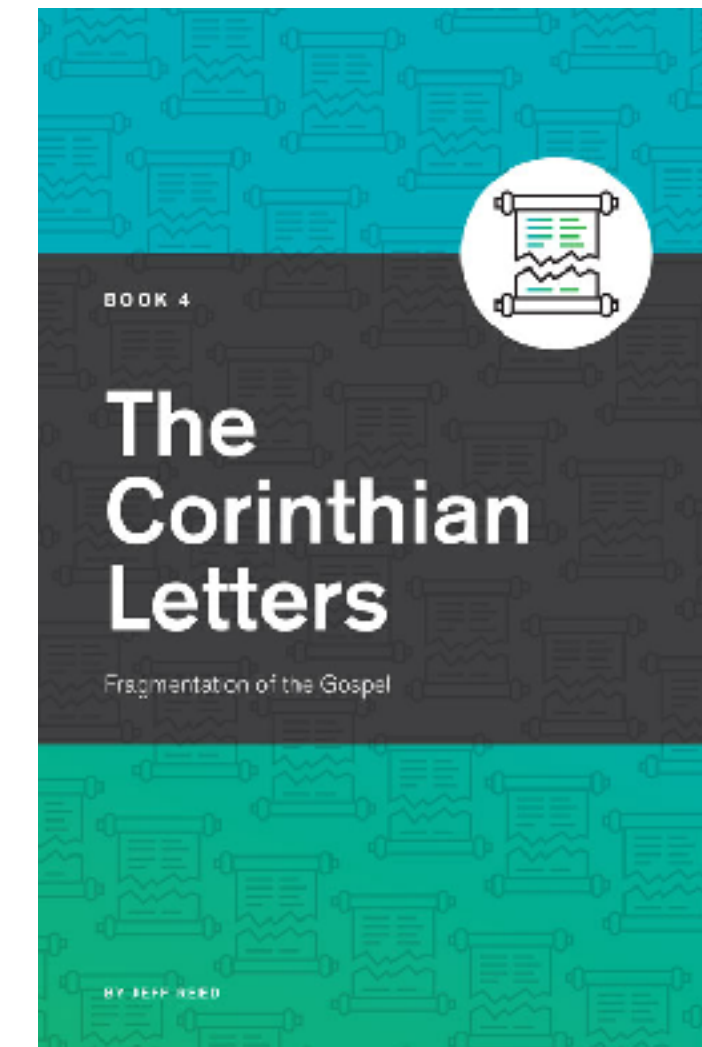
49–56 AD



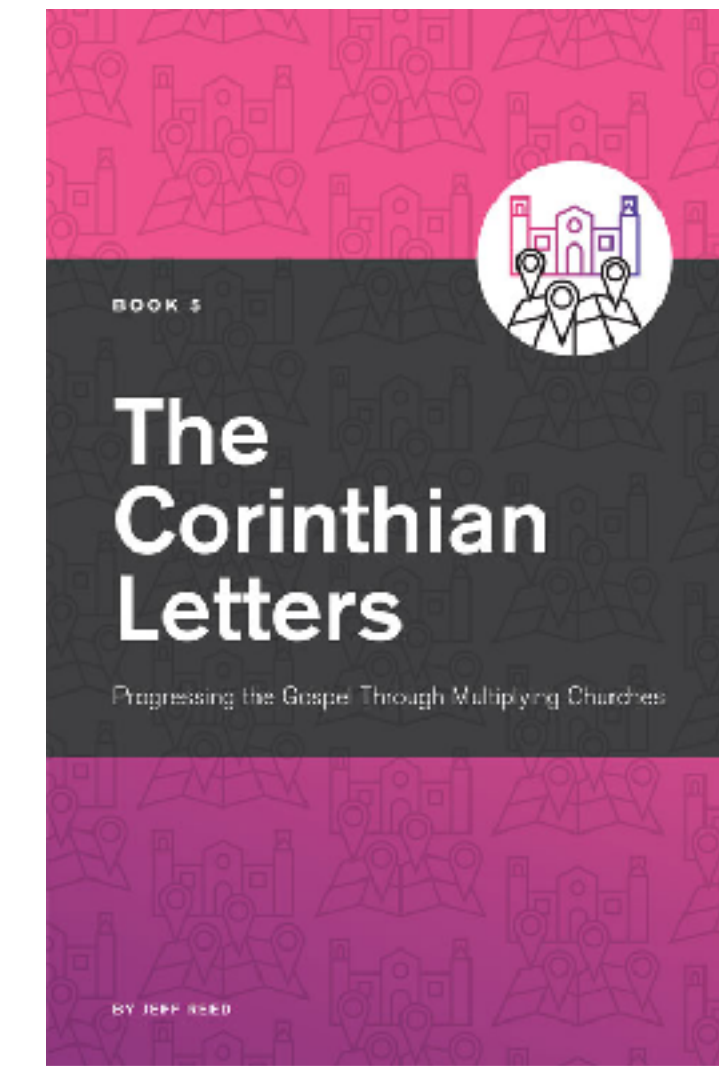
Autumn 49



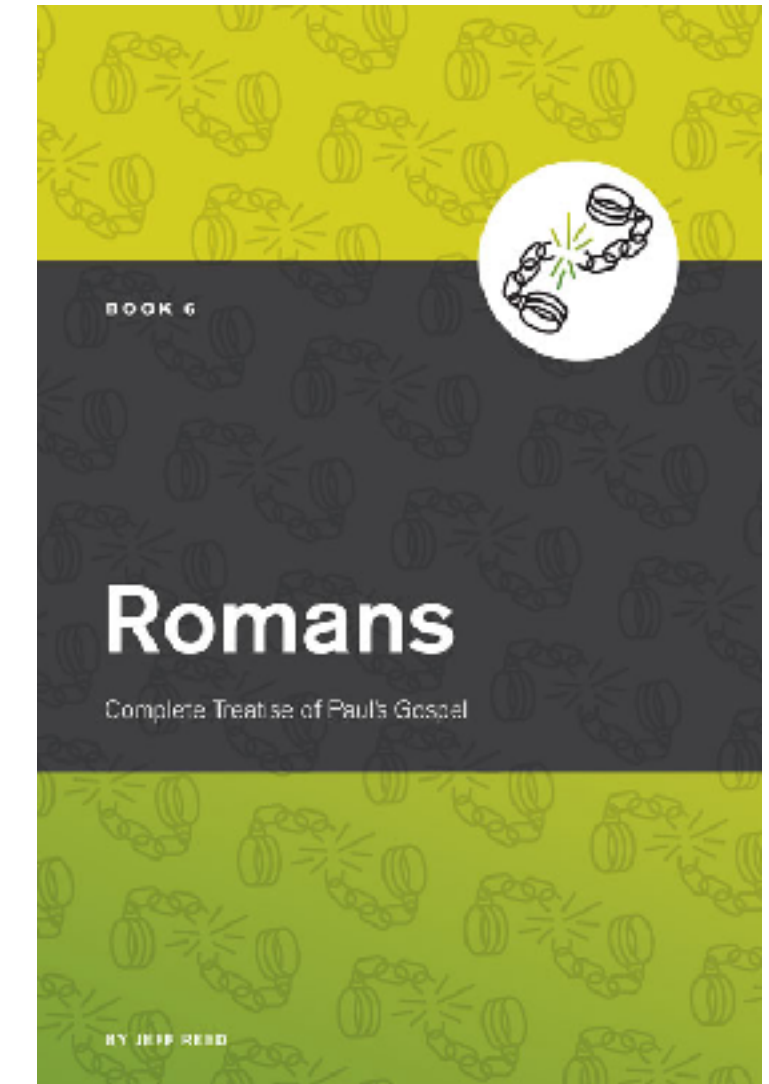
Winter/Summer 51 AD



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—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 completed 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

In trying to discover this intent, we will begin by looking at Paul's early letters, focusing on Romans—the last of the letters. There are three major passages: two that introduce the letter and one that ends it. They give us the key to understanding the intent of Romans and unlocking the underlying intent of the collection of the early letters. The first passage is Romans 1:1–6.

Paul's Early Letters

1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ

Romans 1:1–6

Paul's Early Letters

Paul rehearses the “gospel formulaic” statement first articulated by Peter in his 5 sermons

then handed down to Paul— 1 Corinthians 15:1–6—and clarified in a debate with Peter in Galatians 2.

Paul's Early Letters

¹³ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish ¹⁵ —hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Romans 1:13–15

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 to them—thus establishing them completely.

Paul's Early Letters

²⁵ 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 ²⁶ 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—²⁷ 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

Paul now states his purpose directly: he wants to establish them in his gospel—in the complete treatise.

And he notes that it is the same gospel as delivered by Christ. This book is what Jesus was all about—what He was radically transforming and setting in motion.

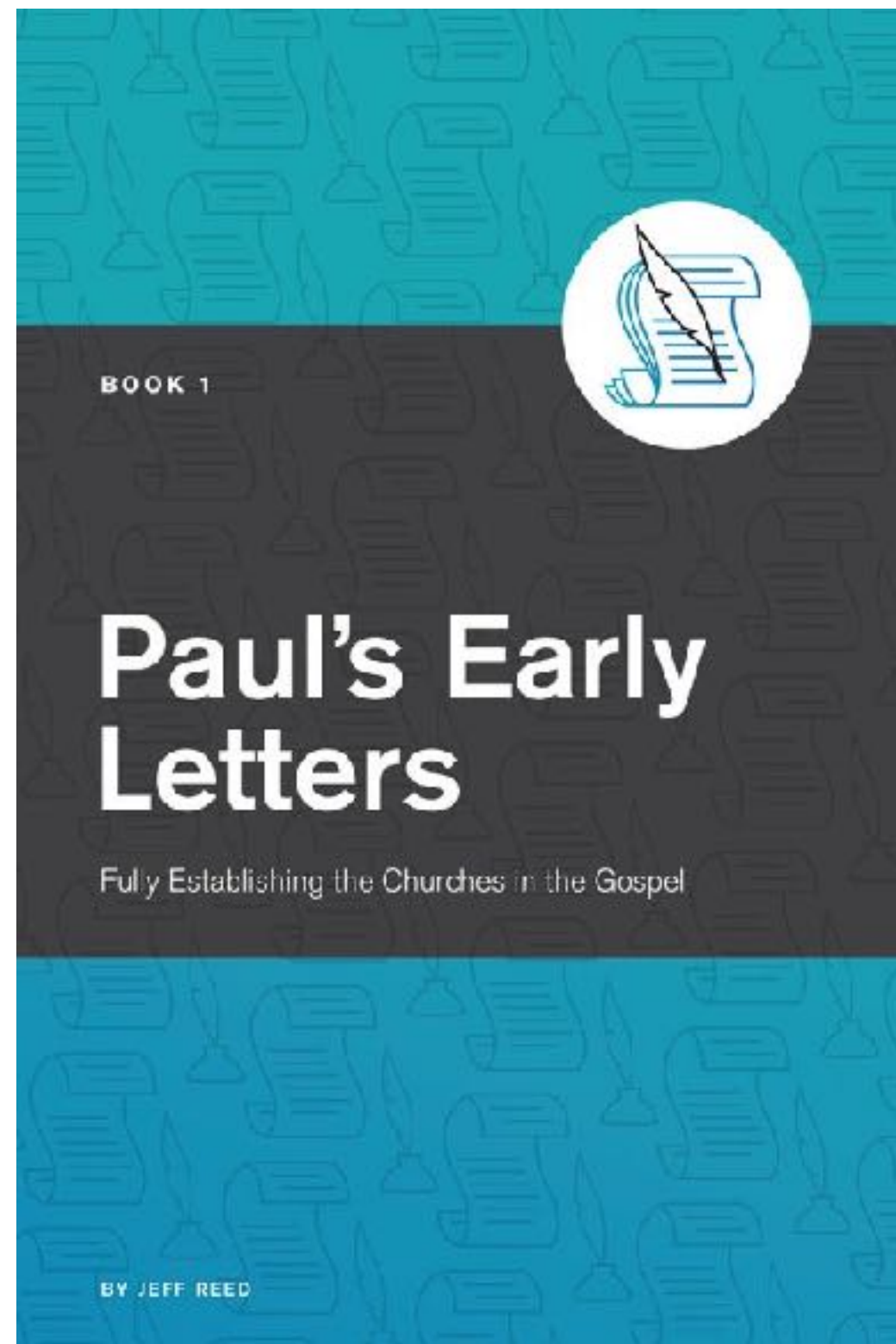
Paul's Early Letters

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 2nd 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 where we will look at each correspondence of these early letters:

The Galatian letter

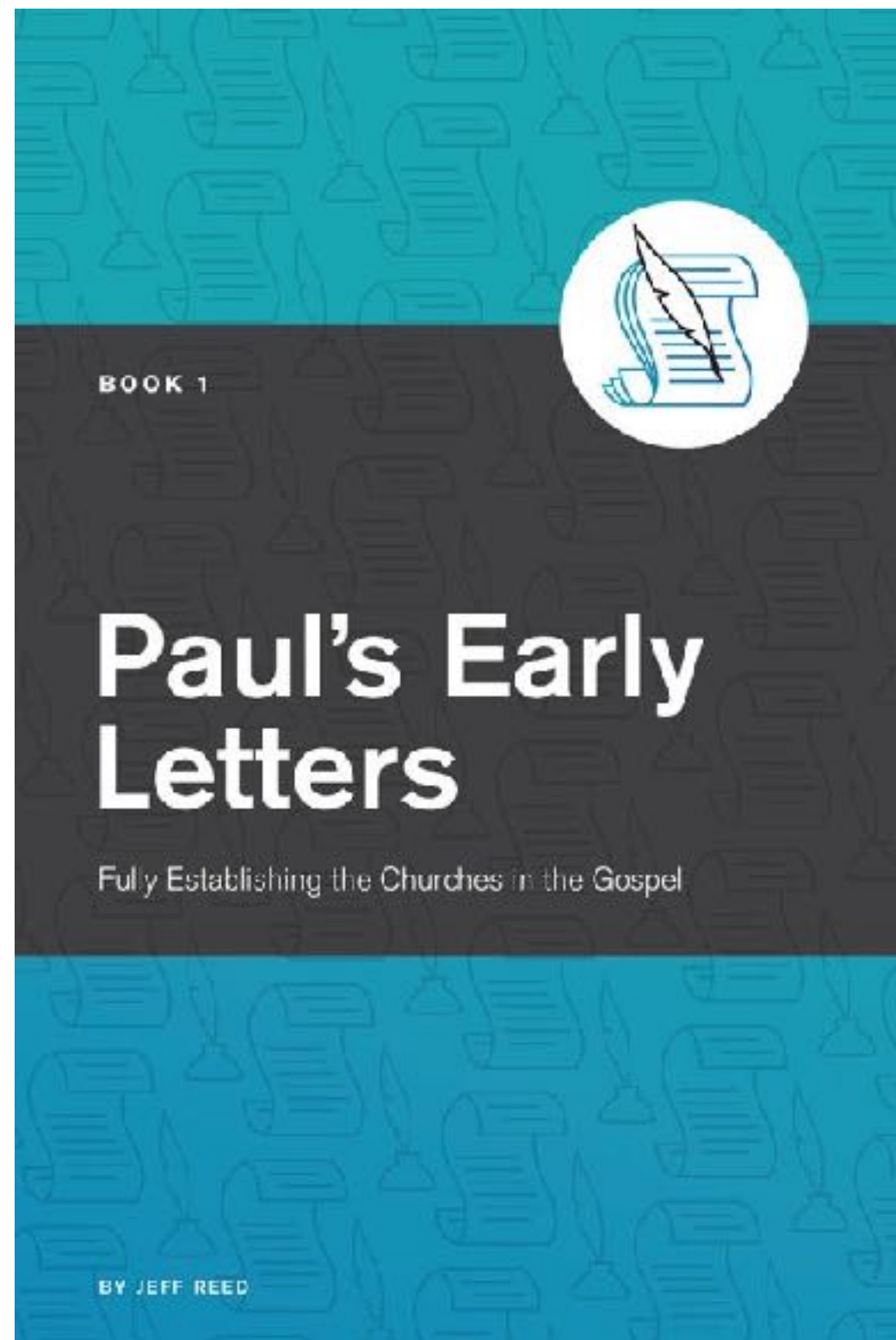
The Thessalonian correspondence

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, in Thessalonica, to the Corinthian churches, and to the Roman churches.

Paul's Early Letters

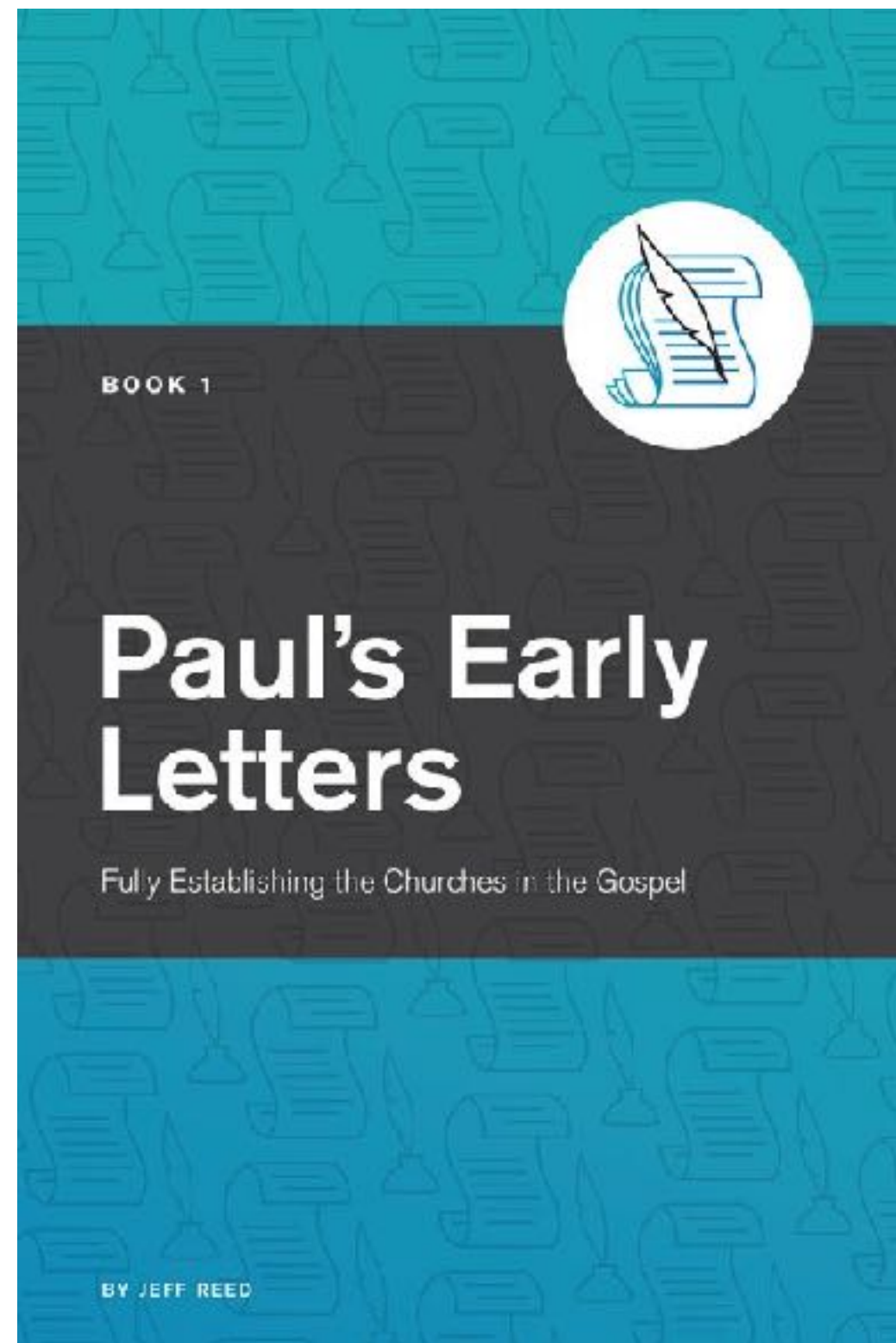


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

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

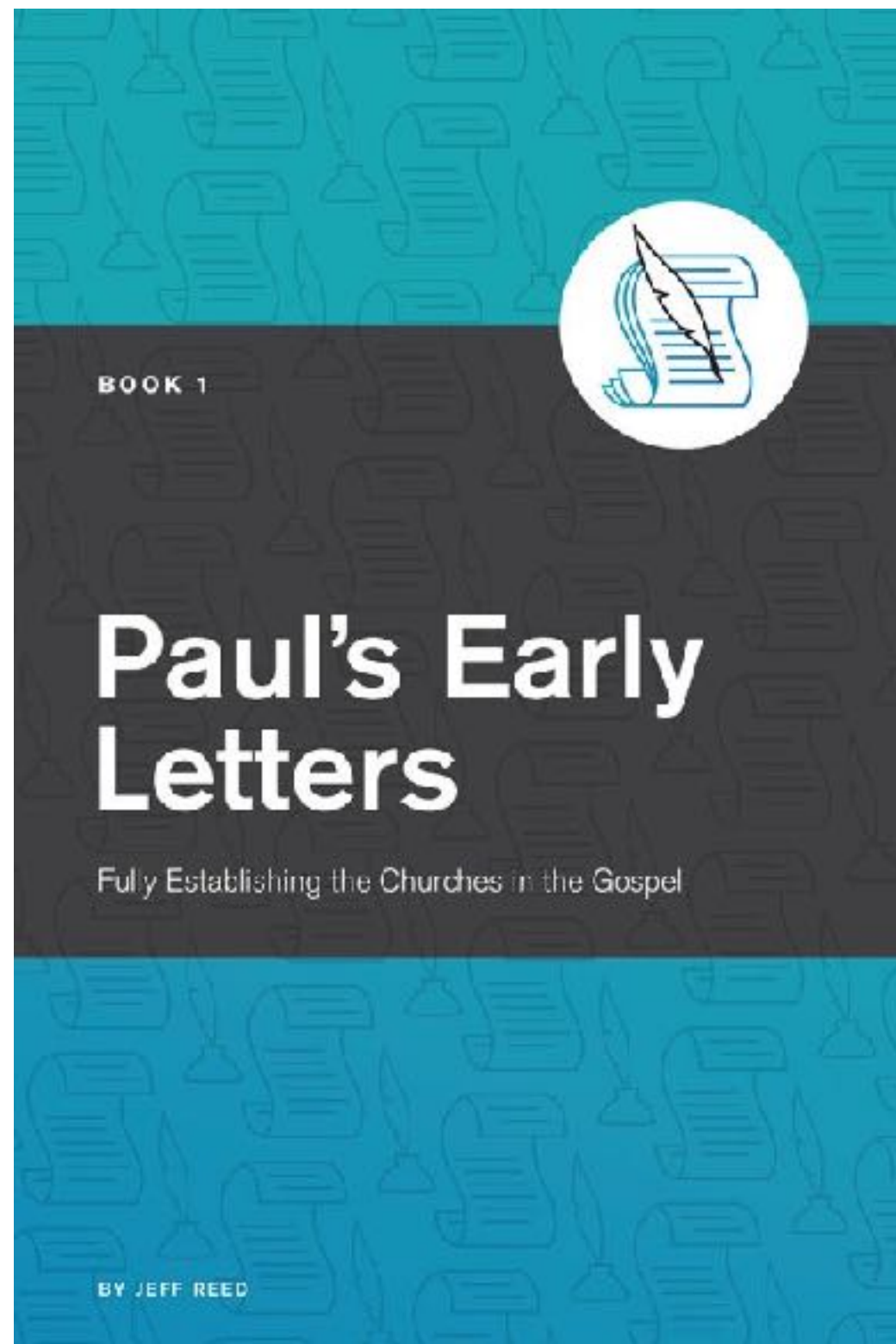


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

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

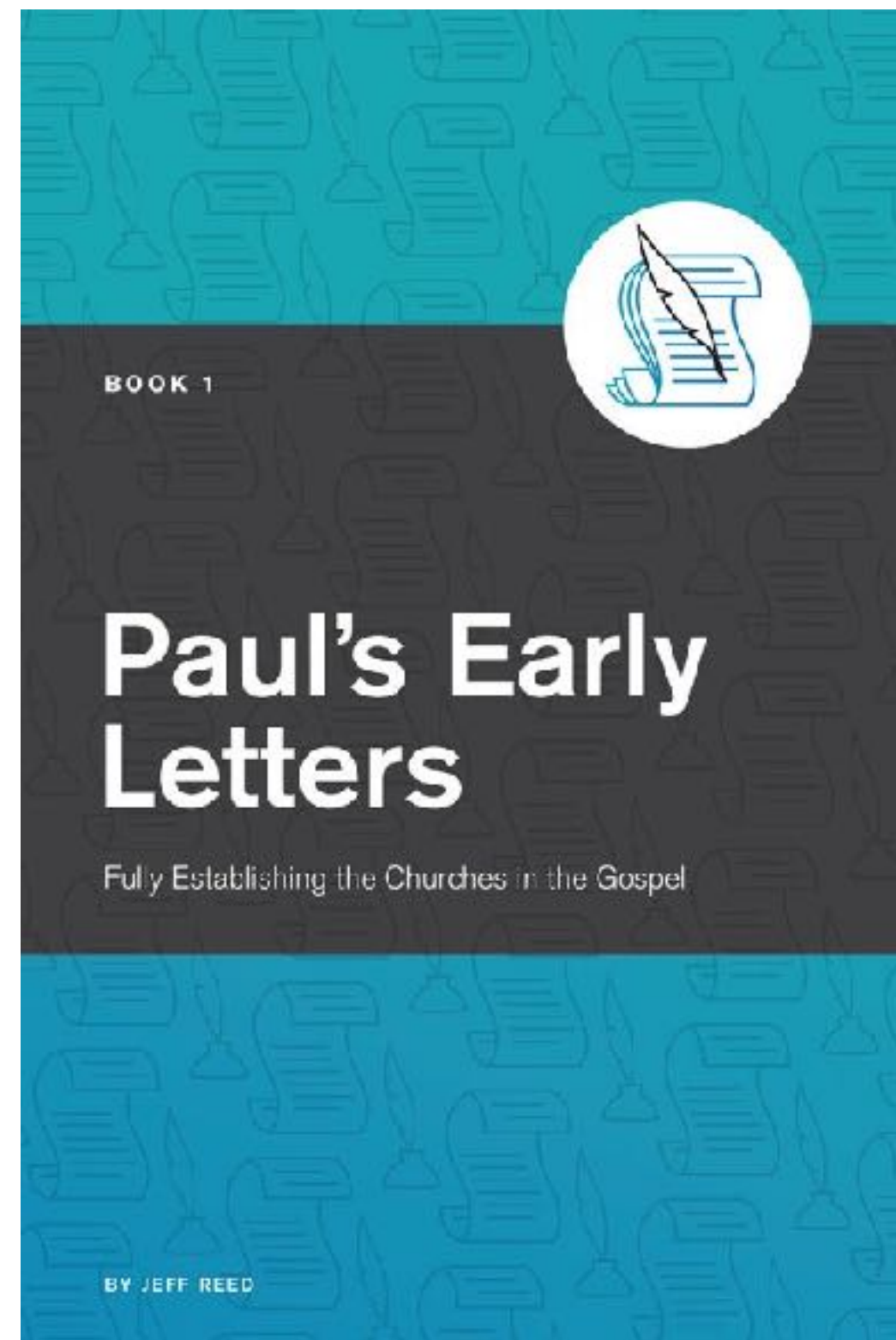


Book 1: The Early Letters: Fully Establishing the Churches in the Gospel

Session 4: The Corinthian Schisms

In the Corinthians correspondence, Paul relates the gospel to all the divisions in the Corinthians 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. And 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, with the view of firmly establishing the Roman churches in that gospel, thus fully convincing those who may be confused of the complete gospel.

Paul's Early Letters

Why do you need to understand this in depth?

1. The early letters are tools for establishing the churches fully in the gospel.
2. Leaders need this to fully establish and guard the churches.
3. There is power in everyone knowing these letters with confidence and being able to use them.

Paul's Early Letters

Issue: The Intent of Paul's Letters

Questions:

1. How do you go about determining the intent of a canonical section—a section of Scripture that is grouped together in some literary way ... or built around an author's collection?
2. What clues are there of Paul's intent in his early letters, from the context/occasion of their writings or from the letters themselves?
3. What role do you think Romans has in the collection of Paul's early letters? What is the role of Romans 16:25–27 in determining the intent of the collection?
4. Why does grasping the general intent matter?