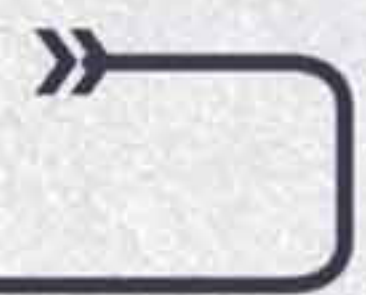


“AN OUTSTANDINGLY HELPFUL BOOK.”

—Sinclair B. Ferguson

JOURNEYS WITH JESUS

EVERY PATH



IN THE BIBLE

LEADS US

TO CHRIST

DENNIS E. JOHNSON

Foreword by Nancy Guthrie

“Dennis Johnson ably and clearly explains why and how Jesus understood that ‘all the Scriptures’ point to Christ. *Journeys with Jesus* helps us to see the proper ways in which the Old Testament is Christ-centered, and to read the Old Testament Christianly. I commend this book to readers, who will benefit from following Jesus’ approach to interpreting the Old Testament. In doing so, they will discover the many glorious ways in which the Old Testament points to Jesus as its goal.”

—**G. K. Beale**, J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament and Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“I rejoice to read Dennis Johnson’s *Journeys with Jesus: Exploring How the Whole Bible Leads Us to Christ*. Johnson’s long-term study of how the message of our Savior pervades all of Scripture combines with his preaching expertise to set our hearts on fire for the glory of the gospel in all of life. The added expertise of longtime mission educator Richard Ramsay makes this book a great resource that will enable all cultures to learn, and delight in, the grace that threads through the Bible from beginning to end.”

—**Bryan Chapell**, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois; President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary

“Dennis Johnson leads us by the hand along the desert road where the Ethiopian eunuch met Philip in the book of Acts, as he sought help in understanding the Bible’s message. Like Philip, Dr. Johnson focuses our gaze on the crucified, risen, and glorified Messiah, Jesus, as the central message of the Scriptures. In the process, he teaches us how to trace these biblical connections

with greater skill, both for our own personal benefit and so that we can better teach others.”

—**Iain M. Duguid**, Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Others have written on how the Old Testament leads to Christ. What makes *Journeys with Jesus* stand out is that it is written by a *New Testament* scholar. Some treatments present Christ as merely the solution to an Old Testament puzzle. But once the puzzle is solved, we learn little about the Savior *himself*. Strong on hermeneutical techniques, they are weak on Christ. By contrast, Dennis Johnson expounds the organic character of redemptive history with a deep appreciation for New Testament Christology. This is an essential combination and makes *Journeys with Jesus* an outstandingly helpful book.”

—**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Redemptive-historical hermeneutics has been a major topic among Reformed scholars. What it means is simply that every part of the Bible teaches Christ, and that the most important thing about every passage is what it teaches us about him. Many pastors interpret biblical texts this way in their sermons, but they don’t always explain to the congregation what they are doing. Dennis Johnson’s *Journeys with Jesus* explains the concept well. Johnson shows us how we can read the Bible ourselves in a Christ-centered way, and how this approach enriches our understanding of the Word of God.”

—**John M. Frame**, Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Hearts burned on the road to Emmaus as Christ explained the Scriptures. The same fire burns in the New Testament, written by those whose minds Jesus opened. Dennis Johnson carries the fire, and he wants you to feel it, too. Join him on the road.”

—**James M. Hamilton**, Professor of Biblical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Dennis Johnson taught me how to find Christ in all the Scriptures when I was his student. After all these years, now as a colleague, I still jump at the chance to hear his rich explorations of the greatest story ever told. Read this book and you’ll never read *the Book* the same way again.”

—**Michael S. Horton**, J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics, Westminster Seminary California

“The invitation given by Dennis Johnson to journey through the whole Bible with Jesus is challenging and exciting. Anything written by Dr. Johnson is bound to be theologically sound and intellectually stimulating. This book is more than that. It comes from the heart of a man who has walked with Jesus in his personal life as well as in his study of the Scriptures. Dennis Johnson knows Jesus and knows how to help others to know him.”

—**Rosemary Jensen**, Founder and President, Rafiki Foundation

“I know of no better guide than Dennis Johnson in helping sojourners see the beauty of Jesus in all the Scriptures. With a wonderful balance of clear explanation and compelling inspiration, this book will open up the minds and hearts of those in the pulpit and in the pew. Every Christian who longs for more wisdom and strength for their pilgrim journey needs this book

to help them see the beauty and wonder found in the person and work of Jesus.”

—**Julius J. Kim**, Dean of Students & Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California

“Like every other Christian, I long to walk more closely and constantly with Jesus. This book helped me to refine my walk by showing me more of Jesus throughout the Bible. It was an easy and delightful read, and it’s sure to ignite many hearts.”

—**David Murray**, Professor of Old Testament, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary; Pastor, Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church

JOURNEYS WITH JESUS

EVERY PATH IN THE BIBLE
LEADS US TO CHRIST

An Abridged Edition of *Walking with Jesus through
His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures*

DENNIS E. JOHNSON

Abridged by Richard B. Ramsay



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Our Children:
Eric and Susanne
Christina and Julien
Peter and Mandi
Laurie and Daniel

And Their Children:
Jonathan, Simeon, Andrew, Gabriel,
Kellen, Zane, Logan,
Maya, Naomi, Peyton, Sophia,
Carter, Finnan, Keziah,
Iain, Claire

He commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments.
(Psalm 78:5-7)

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FOREWORD

I WAS TAKING questions in a Q&A session at a large church when a woman asked, “How can I find things in the Bible I want to read about—like how to deal with anger or fear?” I heard in her question a profound but very common misunderstanding of what the Bible is and how to approach it. She saw the Bible as a source of good advice about how to manage the difficulties of life, and she wanted to mine it for answers to her particular questions and needs. In other words, she wanted to set the agenda for what she wanted to know from God based on what she assumed she needed most to hear from God.

But that’s not what the Bible is for or how it works. While there is comfort to be found from the Bible, what we read in it is often more troubling than comforting. While there is wisdom to be found in the Bible, we also witness incredible foolishness in the people we read about in its pages. And while there are certainly answers to very real and important questions in the Bible, the more we read it, we discover that it answers questions that we didn’t even know enough to ask. It is telling us what we most need to know.

Rather than accommodating our desire for the Bible to address what we think is most important, the Bible invites us

to allow it to show us what is most important. And what is most important—from start to finish—is Christ. More relevant than what you are supposed to do is what *he* has done. More essential to who you should be is who *he* is.

But many of us simply didn't grow up learning how to read and understand the Bible this way. We are in need of retraining, in some cases a complete reorientation to how to read and understand the Bible with Christ at the center. That's exactly what Dennis Johnson provides to us in this book. He hands us tools to use on the text to help us unearth the treasure of seeing Christ. He gives us new lenses to see the picture being painted of our Redeemer, Savior, Prophet, Priest, and King in all of the Bible's historical narrative, law, poetry, discourse, and apocalypse. He helps us to hear the drumbeat of the first coming of Christ and kindles in our hearts a longing for him to come again. Best of all, he invites us on a journey with Jesus that will lead us into richer relationship and greater worship.

Nancy Guthrie
Bible teacher, author, and
host of the *Help Me Teach the Bible* podcast

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NONE OF US learns to read the Bible alone. The apostles needed Jesus to help them see in the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24). Early Christians needed the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). In every generation the church needs teachers and pastors, given by our risen Lord (Eph. 4:11). So whatever you find useful here, as you study God's Word, you can rest assured that I have learned it from others. I have spared you a flood of footnotes to make *Journeys with Jesus* more readable. (If you thrive on delving into documentation and checking sources, feel free to start with my *Him We Proclaim* and the other resources listed in "For Further Reading" at the end of this book.)

I am glad to acknowledge those through whom I have come to see how the tapestry of Scripture and the history of redemption find their focus and coherence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have taught me in person, through formal instruction and informal conversation: Derke P. Bergsma, Edmund P. Clowney, Raymond B. Dillard, Iain M. Duguid, Bryan D. Estelle, John M. Frame, Mark D. Futato, Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Robert H. Gundry, Michael S. Horton, Vern S. Poythress, and O. Palmer Robertson. Others have taught me through their

publications: G. K. Beale, Bryan Chapell, Sinclair Ferguson, R. T. France, Graeme Goldsworthy, Leonhard Goppelt, Sidney Greidanus, Meredith G. Kline, Tremper Longman III, Geerhardus Vos, and Christopher J. H. Wright. From many of these I have learned both in person and in print.

My colleagues on the faculty of Westminster Seminary California were kind enough to read and discuss parts of *Walking with Jesus through His Word*, the longer book that is abridged here. Their comments helped to improve clarity, and for those observations I am thankful. I'm even more grateful for our shared commitment across our various disciplines—biblical studies, theology, homiletics—to point students to Christ as the center of God's Word.

My hope for *Walking with Jesus through His Word* was that it would serve leaders of the global church. Yet when it was published, wise counselors observed that in translation it would likely be too long to attract many readers. One of those who offered this counsel, Richard Ramsay, did more than recommend abridgment: he did the painful work of abridging (and rearranging—and illustrating) *Walking with Jesus* by over 50 percent, for the sake of producing an accessible Spanish translation of reasonable length, which he and his wife, Angelica, are doing. More than that, Rich offered the draft of the English abridgment to me and P&R for readers of English. Thus, you now hold *Journeys with Jesus*. Rich and I were seminary classmates in the early 1970s, and we are ministers in the Presbyterian Church in America. He serves the Spanish-speaking church with the PCA's Mission to the World, first in Chile for twenty-one years and now with Third Millennium Ministries. I am glad to be working with him (across the miles) after all these years, and I am grateful for the Ramsays' efforts to make this material accessible to both Spanish and English readers. Rich also provided

the helpful illustration of the biblical “terrain” that leads to Christ, which you will repeatedly see in the following chapters.

As they always do, the editorial staff of P&R Publishing has improved this book in the process of preparing it for publication. John J. Hughes has not only managed the editorial process adroitly, but also recommended additions to the work that will make it more useful to readers. Copyeditor Karen Magnuson’s sharp eyes and mind caught and corrected errors; and she raised questions that diagnosed obscurity and suggested remedies, resulting in greater clarity, for which readers will be grateful.

I thank God that for decades my family and I have been well fed spiritually, week by week, by hearing Christ preached from all the Scriptures at New Life Presbyterian Church in Escondido, California. Our pastor, Ted Hamilton, has led us in journeys with Jesus through the vast landscape of Scripture and shown us the difference it makes in life’s everyday joys and struggles.

I am especially grateful for Jane, my beloved “helper who fits” me just right (Gen. 2:18) for over four decades. For this project, as for every previous one, she has been my first sharp-eyed reader, my insightful editor, and my constant encourager.

Finally, human words—even the best of them—fail to express the thanks that I want to offer to the triune God, who revealed himself to us and reconciled us to himself through the incarnation of the Son, Jesus the Christ, and through his redemptive achievement on our behalf. My prayer is that you will be drawn to praise him with me as we journey with Jesus through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation.

1

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

The Walk through the Bible That Sets Hearts Afire

THE TITLE OF this book implies an audacious claim: all sixty-six books in the Bible, which were written by many people over many centuries, are united by one central theme, a single plotline, and a unique Hero, Jesus the Messiah. Of course, two-thirds of these Scriptures were written long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and do not mention him by name. Moreover, these documents come in different forms: historical narratives, law codes, wisdom aphorisms, theological discourses, poems, letters, symbolic visions, and more. Nevertheless, I want to persuade you that Jesus is the central figure in the Bible because he is central to the outworking of God's plan for all of history. Moreover, this book proposes a way of reading Scripture that is rooted in Scripture itself and that will equip you to appreciate how the whole Bible reveals Christ and his mission of rescue and renovation.

We will analyze many details of biblical interpretation,

using the figure of a landscape with rivers, a lake, and mountains. We want to develop an explorer's eye to spot directional clues, so that we won't "get lost in the forest," but always keep the big picture in mind as we move toward our destination.

In this introductory chapter, we will answer the following questions:

- What does it mean to journey with Jesus through the Bible?
- Does *all of the Bible* really talk about Jesus?
- Why is it important to learn to journey with Jesus through the Bible?

All Roads Lead to London

In a sermon on 1 Peter 2:7, entitled "Christ Precious to Believers," the great nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon attributed this story to a Welsh preacher: A young preacher had preached in the presence of a respected older pastor. Afterward, he asked what the old minister thought of his sermon. The old preacher said that it was "a very poor sermon indeed."

The young man had worked a long time on the sermon and was shocked to be told that it was so poor. He asked where the problem lay: Did he not explain the text well? Yes, said the seasoned pastor, his explanation was "very good indeed." Weren't his metaphors appropriate and his arguments conclusive? They, too, were "very good as far as that goes," but still it was "a very poor sermon." Finally, the young man asked what the defect was that made his sermon so poor, and the answer came back: "*There was no Christ in it.*"

Now the young man began to defend himself, objecting, "Well, Christ was not in the text; we are not to be preaching

Christ always, we must preach what is in the text.” In response, the older pastor drew this analogy: “Don’t you know, young man, that from every town, and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London?”

“Yes,” said the young man.

“Ah!” said the old divine, “and so from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, ‘Now what is the road to Christ?’ and then preach a sermon, running along the road towards the great metropolis—Christ. And,” said he, “I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there be a savour of Christ in it.”¹

Often when Spurgeon’s story is retold, attention is drawn to the statement about going “over hedge and ditch” to reach Christ, whatever it takes to get there. Some who read Spurgeon’s sermons may even suspect that Spurgeon himself does his share of climbing hedges and fording ditches, overlooking a passage’s original context, in order to connect it, somehow or other, to the person and redeeming work of Jesus. When we sense that some interpreter’s clever ingenuity has “blazed the trail” from an Old Testament passage to Christ, it makes us suspicious of the suggestion that routes really exist that lead to Christ from passages written centuries before his birth.

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, “Christ Precious to Believers” (March 13, 1859), no. 242, in *The New Park Street Pulpit*, vol. 5 (1860; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 140; also available at <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0242.htm>.

Now, let me say two things in defense of Spurgeon's little parable. First, the old minister was correct to say that unless our engagement with Scripture enables us to taste the "savour"—the aroma—of the Savior, it cannot do us any real spiritual good. Since God speaks truth and defines goodness in the Bible, many people use it merely as a manual of doctrine or a guidebook for living. But our minds will remain blind to God's truth, our hearts cold to his love, and our wills resistant to his commands, unless his Holy Spirit intervenes to transform us. That transformation happens only when we encounter the astonishing good news about the undeserved mercy that God has shown toward us in his Son. So the seasoned pastor's passion to bring his hearers to Jesus at all costs is exactly right.

Second, notice the real point of the old preacher's analogy between the Bible and the English road system. Every hamlet in England, no matter how small or remote, is linked, somehow or other, to London, the capital of the kingdom. If a bewildered tourist asks directions to the great metropolis, no honest villager would ever say, "Sorry, you cannot get there from here." So also the Bible tells one coherent story that, despite all its diversity in details, is focused on one majestic Hero and directed toward the climax of one cosmic conflict. In a lifetime of ministry, the old pastor had never found a biblical text that had no connection to Jesus. We should therefore approach every text in the Bible expecting that God has actually laid out a path, a lane, an avenue, or a superhighway by which we can travel from that passage, with its unique message in its distinctive location in the history of redemption and revelation, to its fulfillment in Christ. Our challenge, then, is not to hack our way through dense forest, but to discern the routes that the Bible's Designer has already embedded in its landscape.

In other words, we need the divine Author of the Bible to

teach us how to read the Bible. The means by which he does this is the Bible itself, since it is in the pages of Scripture that God speaks infallibly, inerrantly, and most clearly. As wise pastors and theologians stated several centuries ago, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (Westminster Confession of Faith [WCF] 1.9).

On the Road to Emmaus

In this first chapter, we join a group of three travelers as they walk together the seven-mile (11 km) journey from ancient Jerusalem to a small town called Emmaus. They are Cleopas and his colleague—two heartbroken disciples—and a stranger.

It was the same day that Jesus had risen, the third day after his brutal, bloody execution by crucifixion. Some women came to the tomb in which his body had been placed in haste two days earlier. In their love and grief they planned to prepare his body for burial more adequately than they could before the Sabbath began. At the tomb, now empty, they saw angels, who announced that Jesus was risen, as he had foretold. Immediately the women carried the word to the apostles and others (Luke 24:1–12).

Cleopas and his companion had heard the women’s report, but they didn’t believe it. They left for Emmaus, and were discussing the discouraging events of the past week. Jesus had received a royal welcome as he entered David’s city just a week earlier, but had been repudiated by his people and their leaders and executed by the Roman authorities.

A stranger joined them on the road—a stranger to them, not to us, for our narrator identifies him as Jesus but comments

that “their eyes were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:16). When he asked what they had been discussing, they poured out their disillusionment and confusion. Then the stranger, who seemed so ignorant of recent events, replied:

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? (vv. 25–26)

We might expect that such a blunt rebuke from a stranger would halt the conversation, but the mysterious stranger kept right on talking:

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (v. 27)

Jesus traced their dismay to unbelief, a foolish and sluggish reluctance to trust what God had spoken through Israel’s ancient prophets. The ancient Scriptures given through Moses and the Prophets—our Old Testament—showed that God had planned all along for the Messiah to suffer a humiliating and violent death, but then to “enter into his glory”—a reversal that is explained in detail in Luke’s account of a second Bible study later that evening.

The unrecognized traveler’s explanation of Scripture set their hearts afire with hope and joy; so when they reached Emmaus, Cleopas and his companion prevailed on him to join them for supper. As he took the role of the dinner host, breaking the bread (as he had done a few evenings before, instituting the Lord’s Supper), suddenly they recognized Jesus. Then he vanished.

In Jerusalem

They immediately returned to Jerusalem, where they found that the risen Lord Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter, as he had to them. Then, in the midst of this larger group of disciples, Jesus appeared again, demonstrated the physical reality of his risen body, and explained more fully both the breadth of Old Testament books that foretold his saving work and the details of his mission, which those ancient Scriptures revealed. He said:

“Everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus is it written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49)

What do these almost back-to-back accounts of the risen Lord’s exposition of the Scriptures teach us about the Old Testament and how to interpret it? As we reflect on the conversations in Luke 24, several truths emerge.

Jesus Connected the Whole Old Testament Canon to His Redemptive Mission

To appreciate this point, we need to understand the order of the Old Testament books as they are found in the Hebrew Scriptures, which differs somewhat from the order we find in

our English versions. Our structuring of the Old Testament is derived from the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Scriptures. In our translations, we have four divisions: (1) the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy, the “five books” of Moses); (2) the historical books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther); (3) the poetical books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs); and (4) the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). In the Hebrew canon, however, the Scriptures are grouped into three sections:

- (1) Torah (Law or Instruction) (Genesis through Deuteronomy, the books of Moses);
- (2) Prophets, which include two subdivisions: (a) “former prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings); and (b) “latter prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets);
- (3) Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles).

Now, keeping in mind the way in which first-century (and later) Jews would view the subdivisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, consider again the portions of the Old Testament that Jesus opened to teach the two disciples en route to Emmaus, and then the larger group later in Jerusalem. To the two Jesus expounded from “Moses and all the Prophets” the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27). Thus he took them through passages in the Pentateuch, in which Moses told of creation and the fall, human sin and the flood, Abraham and other patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt and pilgrimage through the desert, commandments pertaining to holiness and justice, the sanctuary and its sacrifices, and so on. Jesus also opened

to them passages that spoke of himself in “all the Prophets.” To the Jewish mind, “the Prophets” include not only the sermons and predictions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, but also the covenantal history of Israel’s life in God’s land, narrated in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

Although we do not know which specific passages Jesus expounded, Luke’s summary suggests that he might have sketched out how the whole history of Israel—the creation of the universe, the flood, the patriarchs, Moses and the exodus, the giving of the law at Sinai, wilderness wandering, the conquest of Canaan, the chaotic years of the judges, the monarchy under Saul, David, Solomon, followed by the fracturing of the kingdom, exile, and return from exile—contained glimpses of and longings for the coming of the perfect King, the ultimate Rescuer, the faithful, covenant-keeping Israel. Then Jesus moved on to the latter prophets, perhaps Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, and Malachi, through whom God promised that he would rescue unfaithful Israel, bringing into ever-clearer focus the coming Redeemer: Immanuel, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the son of David, the Branch who will make a new covenant, the Lord who will replace hearts of stone with hearts of flesh by his Spirit, God himself coming to his temple as a refiner’s fire, his way prepared by his messenger.

Later, to the larger group that included his apostles, Jesus explained “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Again he explained our Pentateuch (“Law of Moses”) and historical books and Prophets (“Prophets”); but now a third section appears: “the Psalms.” The book of Psalms is the first book in “the Writings,” the third division of the Hebrew Old Testament canon. It is probably mentioned in Luke’s summary to indicate that this whole section of the Scriptures (wisdom books, later historical narratives, etc.) was included in

the “curriculum” that Jesus taught that evening. In other words, Luke’s summary is shorthand for the whole Old Testament—“from Genesis to Malachi,” as we might say.

It is obvious that the New Testament focuses on Jesus. The Gospels tell the story of his birth, his ministry, and his death and resurrection. Acts relates the extension of the church through the preaching of the gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus bestowed at Pentecost. The Epistles explain the meaning of Jesus and his work of redemption. Finally, Revelation portrays the final victory of Jesus. But now we learn from Jesus himself that the whole Old Testament speaks of him as well.

So here we see the answer to the first question we posed at the beginning of the chapter: What does it mean to journey with Jesus through his Word? It means letting him teach us how to interpret the Bible. So it also means learning to see him in the Word. In other words, to combine the two ideas, it means asking Jesus to show us himself in the Bible.

Luke 24 also answers the second question: Does all of the Bible really talk about Jesus? Yes, indeed, we can definitely see every text of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, as a witness that points to Jesus Christ.

The Placement of These Conversations Shows Their Importance

The events recounted in Luke 24 constitute the “hinge,” the crucial turning point between Jesus’ ministry through his personal presence on earth, recorded in Luke’s Gospel, and Jesus’ ministry from heaven through his Spirit’s presence in the church, described in the book of Acts. These resurrection appearances and the teaching that Jesus offers in them are the climax of “all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the

day when he was taken up” to heaven (as Luke sums it up in Acts 1:1–2).

At the same time, these postresurrection, preascension Bible studies show the source of the apostles’ life-transforming preaching in Acts. In Acts 1:3, we read that Jesus appeared to his apostles over forty days, “speaking about the kingdom of God.” That is Luke’s shorthand for these longer summaries of Jesus’ instruction, recorded in the last chapter of his Gospel. His teaching prepared them for their mission as his witnesses (v. 8). In other words, Jesus’ instruction in biblical interpretation, provided over that intensive forty-day period, set the stage for the apostles’ preaching of Christ from the Old Testament as we find it in the pages of Acts.

Jesus Showed How Various Dimensions of His Redemptive Mission Were Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

To the downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus, Jesus said that Scripture shows that it was “necessary” for the Christ to “suffer these things” and then to enter his glory (Luke 24:26). Some years later, Peter would use the same two categories to sum up what the Spirit of Christ foretold through the Old Testament prophets: “the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11).

Within these two general categories—suffering, followed by glory—the Old Testament reveals more specific themes and events in the life and saving mission of the Christ. Jesus expounded many of these details when he appeared to the apostles and others in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44–49). He showed them that “it is written” in Moses, the Prophets, the Psalms, and the rest of the Old Testament books:

- That the Christ would suffer;
- That he would rise from the dead on the third day;
- That repentance and forgiveness would be proclaimed in his name;
- That this proclamation would go not only to Israel, but to all other nations;
- That the Holy Spirit would empower the apostles to testify; and
- That the preachers' mission would begin from Jerusalem and spread out from there.

This shows us that to journey with Jesus through the varied terrain of his Word and the eras of redemptive history is not to strum a one-stringed guitar! Of course, Jesus' cross and resurrection take center stage in the true, historical drama of God's costly rescue enterprise. But the multidimensional effects of his redemption are reflected throughout Israel's Scriptures. When we read the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ, we glimpse an astonishing display and array of wisdom, mercy, and power. We see how "the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10 *NASB*; see Eph. 3:10) radiates in all directions from the beloved eternal Son, who became the well-pleasing incarnate Son, who was rejected as the curse-bearing Son for us, and who was raised to life and now reigns in glory as the exalted Son.

We Need Jesus to Open Our Minds and Hearts

We need Jesus to open the Bible to us, and to open us up to the Bible. Luke 24 uses several words to describe the process by which Jesus disclosed the meaning of Old Testament passages. He "interpreted" to the two on the road in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (v. 27), and they recalled how he had

“opened to us the Scriptures” (v. 32). But this was not merely an intellectual communication of information.

Listen again, carefully, to Jesus’ abrupt response to his fellow travelers’ heartbroken confusion: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24:25). His reaction to their dashed hopes and downcast demeanor seems insensitive and rude.

But Jesus was not going out of his way to be offensive when he called these men foolish and slow-hearted to believe God’s Word. Rather, he was showing them and us that discovering each passage’s link to Scripture’s focal point, Christ, is not just a matter of learning a technique or following a formula, irrespective of the spiritual condition of our hearts. When we fail to see how the whole Bible focuses on Christ at its center, part of our problem—not the whole problem, but part of it—may be that our hearts are sluggish, slow, and unbelieving. Maybe we are not coming to our Bibles with the anticipation that everything between their covers is given to us by our loving Creator and Redeemer to draw our hearts more firmly to himself in confident trust, humble repentance, and grateful love. It could be that our troubling circumstances around us loom larger in our minds than the sure promises that God has spoken in his Word, as they did in the lives of Cleopas and his companion. Or maybe we are repulsed, as Simon Peter was (Matt. 16:21–23), by the pathway that Scripture lays out for the Messiah—first suffering, then glory and joy—and for those who follow the Messiah (Acts 14:22; 2 Cor. 4:17). When we have trouble seeing how the whole Bible centers on Christ, the problem may well be not in the Bible or even in our Bible-study strategies, but in ourselves.

The wonderful thing is that Jesus did not merely express frustration and rebuke over his followers’ obtuseness and resistance to Christ-centered, Scripture-secured hope. The stranger

kept on talking (whether they wanted him to or not). And as he talked, their hearts, previously chilled by disappointment and confusion, got warmer and warmer, to the ignition point: “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). Luke later describes this inner spiritual dynamic, which comes at God’s initiative rather than through our mental effort, in these simple terms: Jesus “opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (v. 45).

So here is the first key to our seeing Christ in the entire Bible: We need him to open our minds, to ignite our hearts, to take away the foolishness and sluggishness and unbelief and low expectations with which we approach his holy written Word. Since we need Jesus to do this for us, one indispensable key to journeying with Jesus through the Bible is to *pray*, to ask the Lord to open our minds and shine his light brightly into our hearts (Eph. 1:15–19). Left to yourself, you will not “get” what God intends to show you of his Son in his Word by your own research and analysis and ingenuity. Pray that as you read the Word, his Spirit will remove the veil of misunderstanding that keeps you from seeing Jesus’ ever-increasing glory (2 Cor. 3:14–18). Ask “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’” to shine with increasing radiance “in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

Now we can answer the third question from the beginning of the chapter: Why is it important to learn to journey with Jesus through his Word? First, Jesus taught his apostles to read the Word at a pivotal historical moment, between his sufferings on earth and his glories in heaven. Like them and through their writings, we must learn to read the Bible as Christ taught them to read it. Second, when Jesus opens the Scriptures and opens our minds and hearts, we discover the rich beauty, the varied

dimensions, of his manifold grace. Third, seeing Jesus' glory in the Bible transforms us from the inside out, to reflect his own truth and love (2 Cor. 3:18).

Another Road, Another Heart Set Afire

Let us consider one more account recorded by Luke. It is about another Bible study conducted on another journey. In this case, it was not Jesus in person who explained the Scriptures, but his servant Philip. Yet it was the Spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, who illumined both Philip and an African leader who was puzzling over a passage from the Old Testament prophets. The conversation recorded in Acts 8:26–35 gives us a taste of how the Christ-centered way of reading Scripture that Jesus taught his apostles was passed along to another generation of Christians.

The Philip in this passage is not one of the twelve apostles, but rather one of seven men chosen by the early church to care for the material needs of widows (Acts 6:1–7). When his colleague Stephen was martyred for his bold witness about Jesus, Philip and others were scattered by persecution away from Jerusalem. He ended up in the territory once occupied by the Philistines, along the Mediterranean coast.

In God's flawless planning, Philip encountered an African governmental dignitary, a eunuch who served as the secretary of the treasury for the queen of Ethiopia (the ancient Nubian kingdom located in what is now Sudan). In another divine "coincidence," the Ethiopian was reading a scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah. In an age long before the printing press, such a long scroll, copied by hand, was an expensive treasure. For a foreign dignitary to invest both the effort to travel and the expense to obtain this document shows that he had a ravenous hunger to know the true and living God, the God of Israel. This is even more

remarkable because his physical condition of being a eunuch had excluded him from entering the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Ethiopia (Nubia) was ruled by a dynasty of queens, who had male officials castrated to prevent sexual misconduct. Yet the surgery that qualified him to wield power in Ethiopia disqualified him from entering the courts of the Lord (see Deut. 23:1).

As he returned in his private coach, the eunuch was reading aloud the song of the Suffering Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. Philip, traveling on foot, overheard him and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). With humility born of puzzlement, the eunuch replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (v. 31). The Greek word translated "guides" evokes the image of one who leads another along a road, as a blind person needs a sighted person to be his guide (Matt. 15:14).

Philip did not rebuke him. Instead, he started from the Scripture that God had arranged for that very rendezvous, and he told the Ethiopian treasurer the good news about Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When they came to water, the Ethiopian asked to receive baptism, that outward sign of the washing away of sin's defilement through faith in the Suffering Servant-Messiah. From there he went home to the queen's court full of joy, and Nubia became one of the earliest Christian communities in Africa.

I suspect that as his coach rumbled south after his baptism, the eunuch continued reading Isaiah's prophecy, but now with new eyes. If he did, he soon came to chapter 56, where he found the prediction of a coming day when God would welcome both foreigners and eunuchs into his sanctuary, to worship in the midst of the Lord's holy assembly (vv. 3-7). We know that this text was dear to Jesus, who appealed to it to explain his outrage at the greedy, commercial desecration of the temple's courts, obstructing the temple's true purpose (Mark 11:17). Through

Isaiah, the Lord had said of Gentile foreigners, “These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; . . . for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa. 56:7). Surely this African leader, previously excluded as both a foreigner and a eunuch but now welcomed by God’s grace in Jesus, was a firstfruit fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy!

The Ethiopian needed a guide, someone to lead him by the hand, as it were, through the pages of the Scriptures and to point out the landmarks and the road signs that God had installed over the centuries to keep his people facing forward, moving toward the coming of their true King and supreme Rescuer, Jesus the Messiah.

How Can We Learn to Read the Bible from Jesus?

The Ethiopian did not personally attend Jesus’ forty-day crash course in biblical interpretation. Yet he did hear Jesus open the Scriptures, through Philip, who in turn had heard Peter and John and other apostles. In a similar way, we, too, can learn from the apostles’ forty days of intensive Bible study with Jesus by paying attention to the way that they and the other inspired New Testament writers read the wide spectrum of Old Testament passages in light of their fulfillment in Jesus.

We don’t need to envy Cleopas and his traveling companion, or Peter, Andrew, James, and John. In a sense, we also have access to those historic studies in Scripture that Jesus conducted. After all, the sermons of Peter and others in the book of Acts exhibit not only a new confidence (replacing the old discouragement) but also a new insight into Scripture and God’s redemptive plan revealed in the Word. It is not too far

a stretch to infer that the texts that Jesus interpreted over the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension included those to which the apostolic preachers turned as they testified to the facts and the significance of his death and his resurrection: Joel 2, Psalm 16, and Psalm 110 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2); Isaiah 52–53, Deuteronomy 18, and Genesis 12 in Solomon’s Portico (Acts 3); and so on. Moreover, the same Spirit of Christ who predicted the sufferings of Christ through the Old Testament prophets (1 Peter 1:11) later inspired the apostolic authors of the New Testament (1 Cor. 2:10–13; 2 Cor. 3:5–11; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2:13).

We have reason to read the whole New Testament as the commentary given to us by Jesus, our risen Lord, to help us grasp the message of the Old Testament as it leads us to him.

In that spirit, get in step with Jesus, and journey with him through the Bible.

Conclusion

As Cleopas and his friend journeyed with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, their Master led them through ancient Scriptures, tracing their “geography” and showing the routes that led the Christ (and his people) from suffering into glory. Later, traveling the road to Gaza, Philip guided an African dignitary along the same path from the words of the prophet Isaiah: God’s well-pleasing Servant, pierced for others’ offenses, has healed us by his wounds and been exalted to glory. His name is Jesus.

Cleopas saw the risen Christ and heard his voice; the Ethiopian did not. But God’s Holy Spirit ignited the same flame of faith and joy in the hearts of both, as they discovered that God’s words spoken centuries earlier find their focus and fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Today, through the direction that Christ’s Spirit

has provided through the inspired authors of the New Testament, we, too, can discover how the whole Bible leads us to Christ. As we do, we will find our sluggish, slow-to-believe hearts set ablaze with wonder and love for our Redeemer.

Review Questions

1. Explain the analogy used by the old preacher in Spurgeon's illustration to show that the whole Bible speaks of Jesus.
2. What did Jesus explain to the disciples on the way to Emmaus when he opened the Scriptures to them?
3. What does it mean to journey with Jesus through his Word?
4. How do we know that the whole Bible speaks of Jesus, according to what we learned from the passages in Luke 24? Explain the meaning of the terms "Moses," "the Prophets," and "the Psalms" in that context.
5. From the change of heart experienced by the disciples on the road to Emmaus, what have you learned about the importance of journeying with Jesus through his Word?
6. According to Luke 24:44–49, what events and truths about Jesus are written in the Old Testament?
7. What did Philip teach the Ethiopian eunuch, according to the account in Acts 8?

Questions for Reflection

1. From what you know of the Old Testament, for which books or types of Old Testament literature is the claim hardest to support that they are "united by one central

theme, a single plotline, and a unique Hero, Jesus the Messiah”? Why is this “audacious claim” so hard to believe for those parts of the Bible?

2. Why is it not enough simply to learn an interpretive technique or “key” to “open the Scriptures”? Why must we also have our minds opened, our hearts set afire, by the risen Christ? How does this happen today? What should we do to seek this opening of our minds?
3. How do you prepare to study the Scriptures?
4. Have you ever felt that your heart was “burning” as you read the Bible? How could you experience that more often?
5. What is the significance of the fact that in Acts 1:16, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the apostle Peter interpreted the Psalms as fulfilled in the suffering of Jesus? How did Peter learn to read the Bible that way?

Exercises

As we progress through the book, we will apply the lessons of each chapter to the study of a few Bible passages, one from the Old Testament Law, one from an Old Testament historical narrative, one from the poetical books, one from the Prophets, and one from the New Testament. This will help you learn to journey with Jesus through the Bible. (In the last chapter, as our journey approaches our destination, you will make your own choice of a biblical text and apply what you have learned by tracing the route that connects it to Christ.) In this chapter, you will begin by simply noting a few thoughts regarding the following passages. What do you think they might teach us about Jesus?

- Leviticus 25:8–10 (The Year of Jubilee)
- 1 Samuel 17:38–54 (David and Goliath)
- Psalm 1 (Like a tree by the streams of water)
- Jeremiah 1:4–10 (The call of Jeremiah)
- Romans 1:16–17 (The righteous shall live by faith)