

# The Early Pauline Epistles Series: 4-year project

I am convinced that most believers in our Western churches today are not fully established in the gospel.

We are now turning our attention to the book of Romans. It is the climax of Paul's early letters, all attempting to establish the new churches in his network in the gospel.

Romans is greatly misunderstood in the Western church as it is divorced from The Story. The last 500 years of the Western Church are full of endless divisions and denominational and theological controversies.

Yet it is easy to understand when reattached to The Story!

Illustrations: Randy, 2 illiterate women

# The Early Pauline Epistles Series: 4-year project

This was 4 years ago....

We have recently embarked on a journey—about a 2-year journey—on a study of Paul’s early letters.

Just as with the Gospels, we will produce a series of booklets designed to be used to fully establish churches in the gospel.

We will reach our goal, and I am confident, doing it carefully, we will see things as fresh and as powerful as we did in the Gospels, and it will be worth the trip.

# The Early Pauline Epistles Series: 4-year project

The Early Letters will play an important role in the process of establishing churches and believers in the gospel on the same foundation and in the same processes laid down by the Apostles.

And they will greatly deepen our own capacity to stabilize our churches and the movements we partner with worldwide.

# The Early Pauline Epistles Series: 4-year project

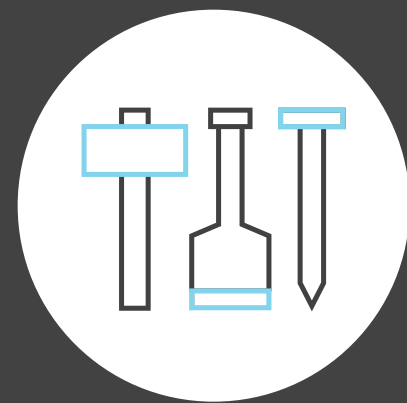
- Leadership Series: Pauline Epistles — 1988–2004
- Mastering the Scriptures Series: Early Pauline Epistles: 2014–2018
- From Jesus to the Gospels: Kerygma 1
- Paul's Early Letters: Kerygma 2
- Great indebtedness to N.T. Wright
- Essential insights into how to establish churches in the gospel
- Designed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

# The Intent of Paul's Treatise to the Roman Churches

Issue: Fully established in the gospel

Questions:

1. What does it mean to be fully established in the gospel?
2. What are some specific tests to measure whether a person is fully established in the gospel?
3. How does your worldview fundamentally change if you fully grasp the gospel as presented by Paul in Romans?
4. In what way is the gospel fundamental to the unity of churches—to being of one mind?

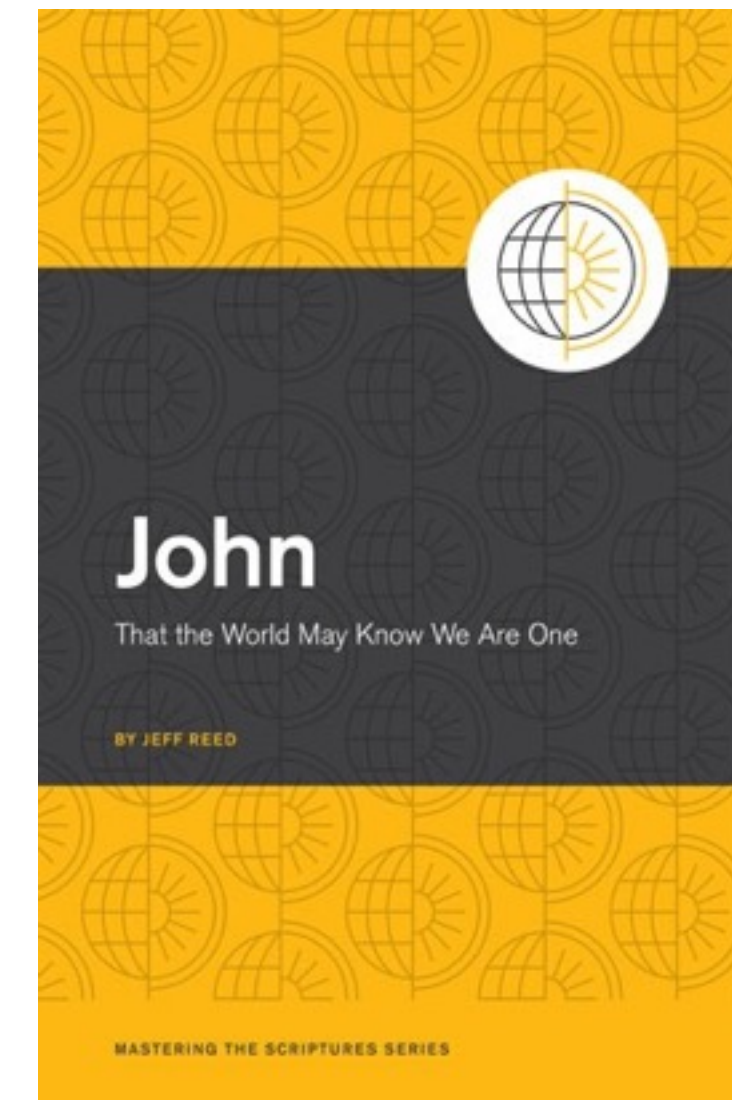
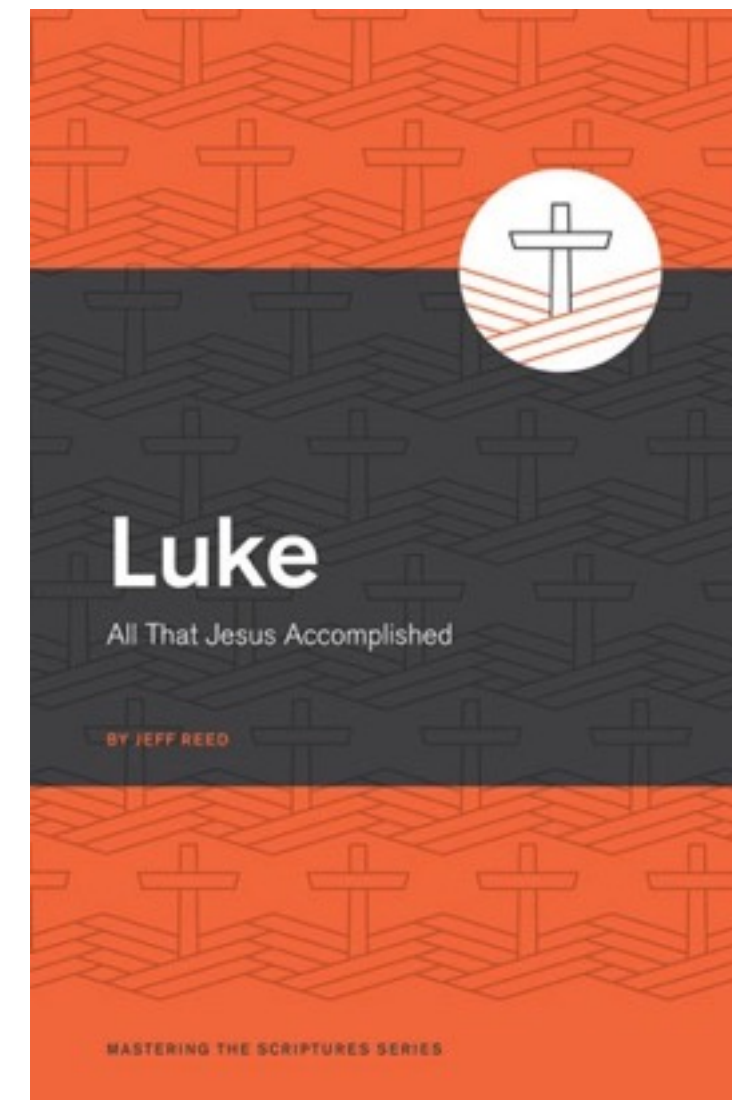
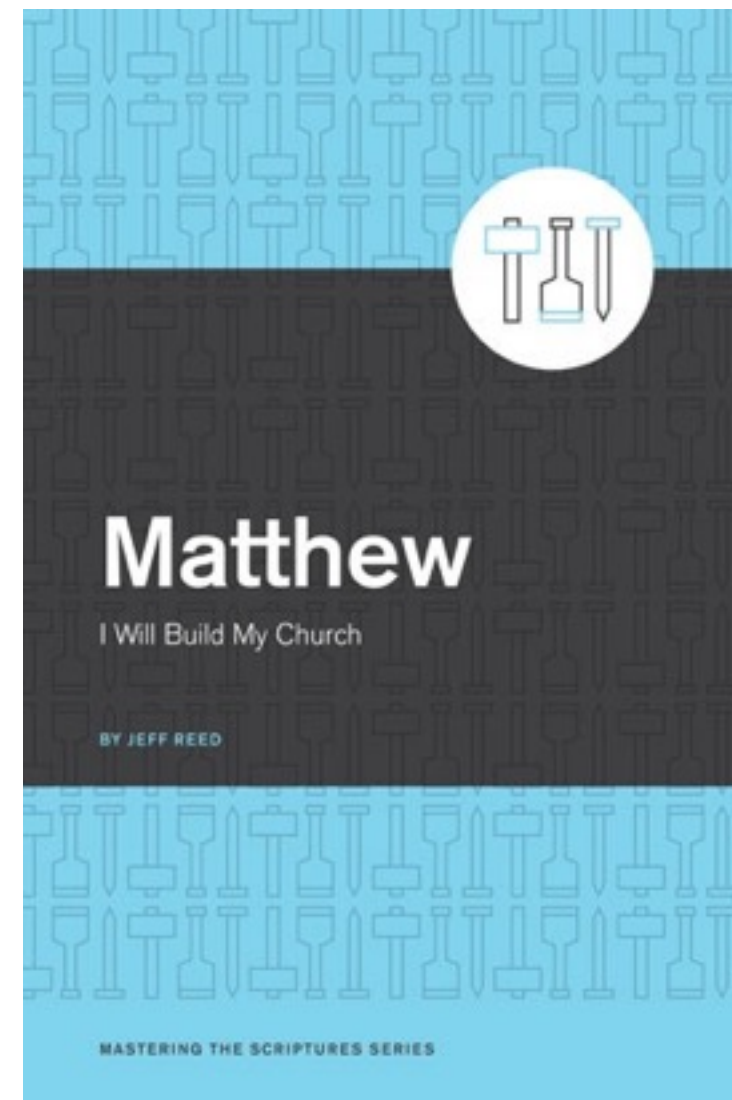
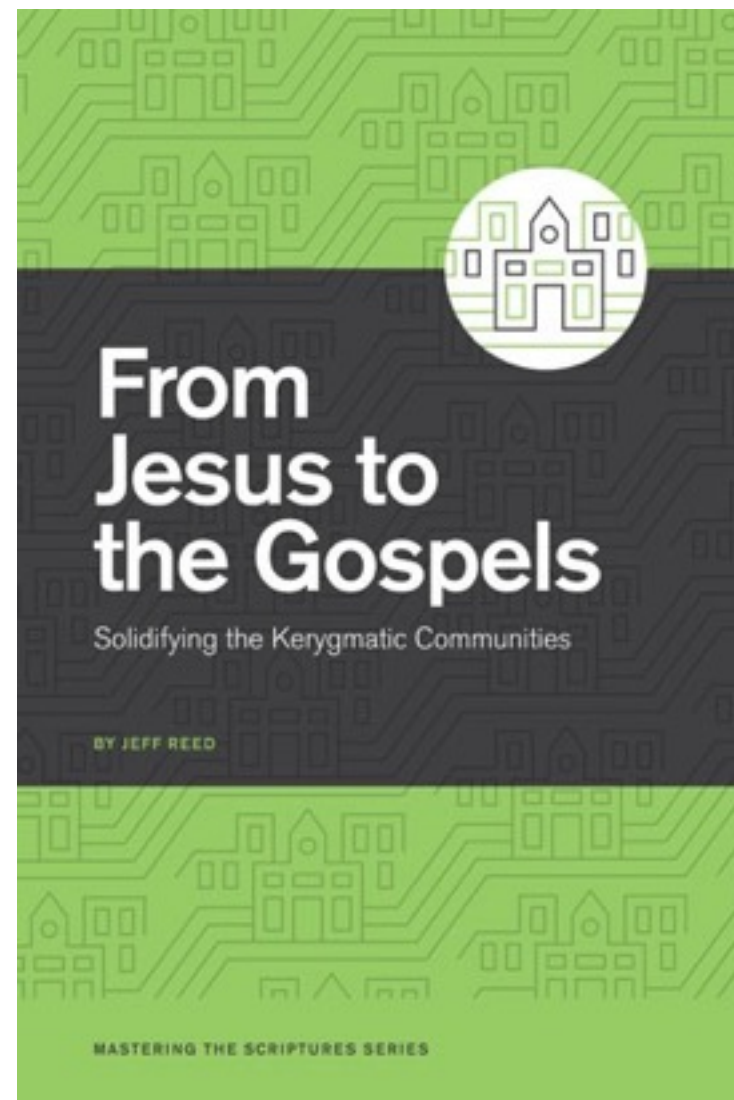


# The Gospels Series

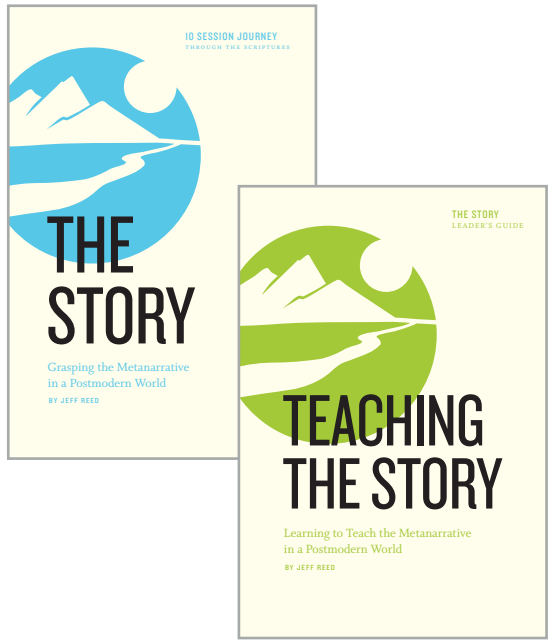
Examining the Intention of Jesus' Life and Ministry  
as Witnessed by the Writers of the Four Gospels

**MASTERING THE SCRIPTURES SERIES**

# The Gospels Series



# Establishing Process—3 Years



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



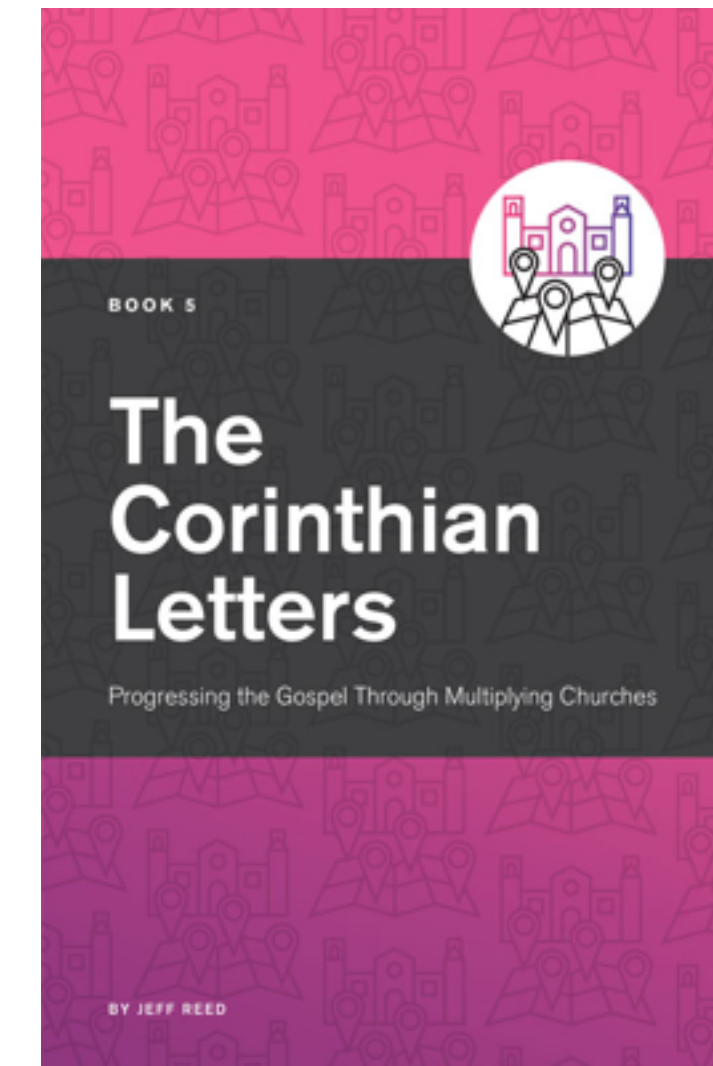
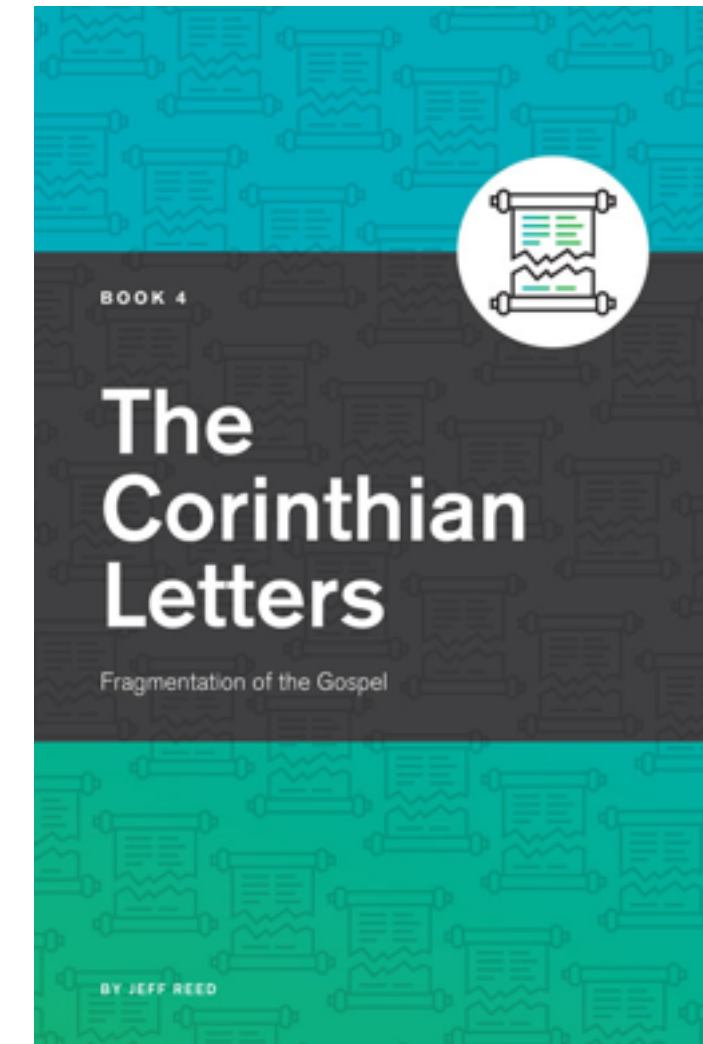
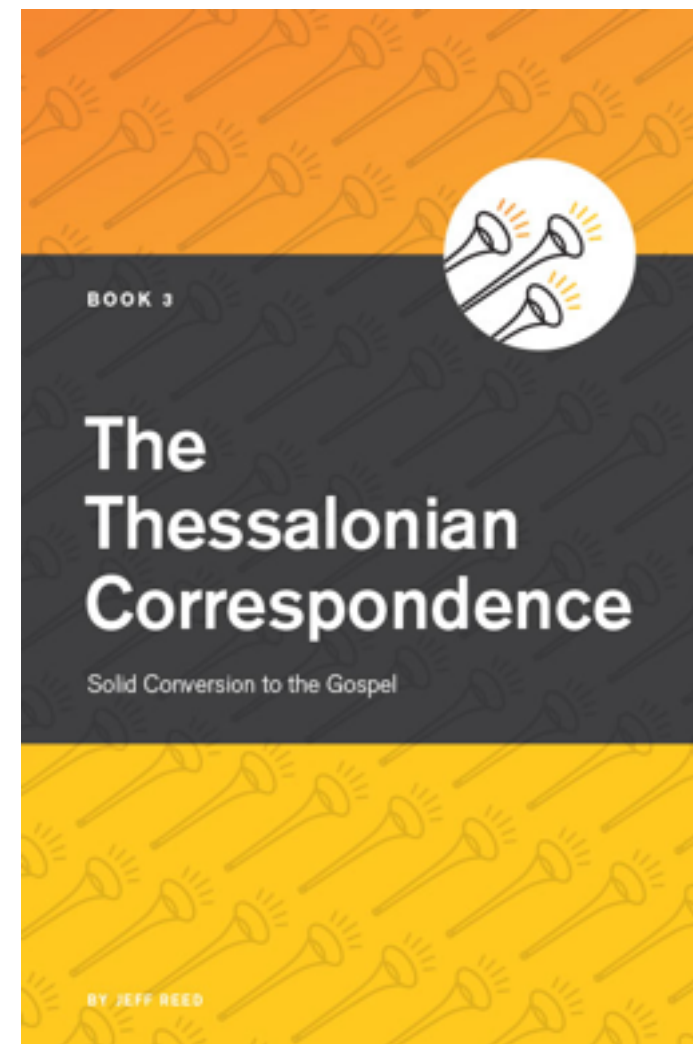
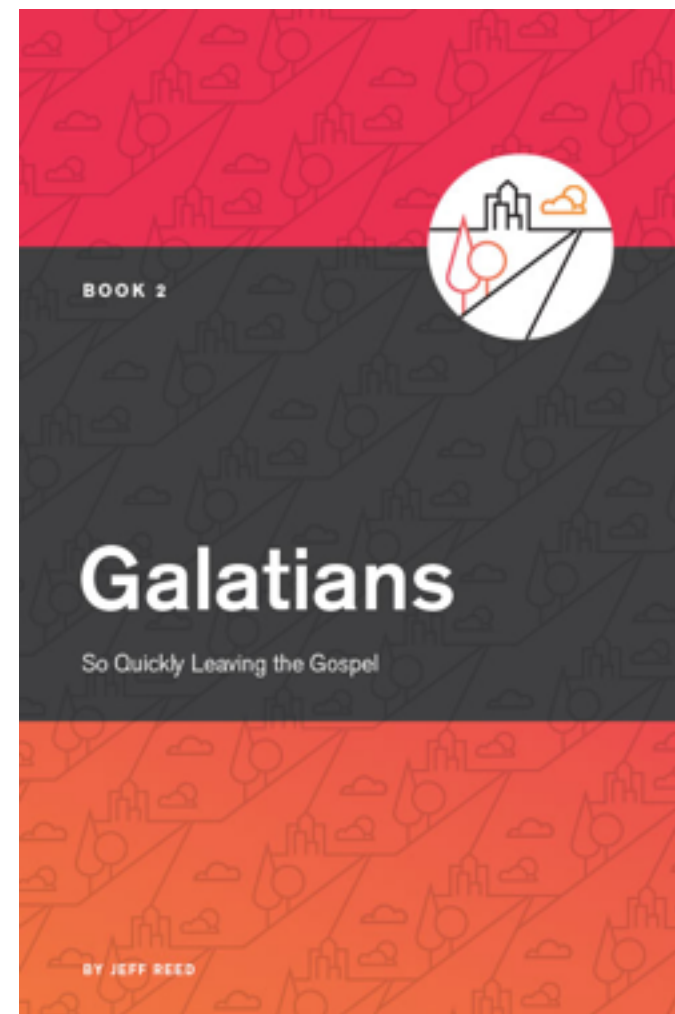
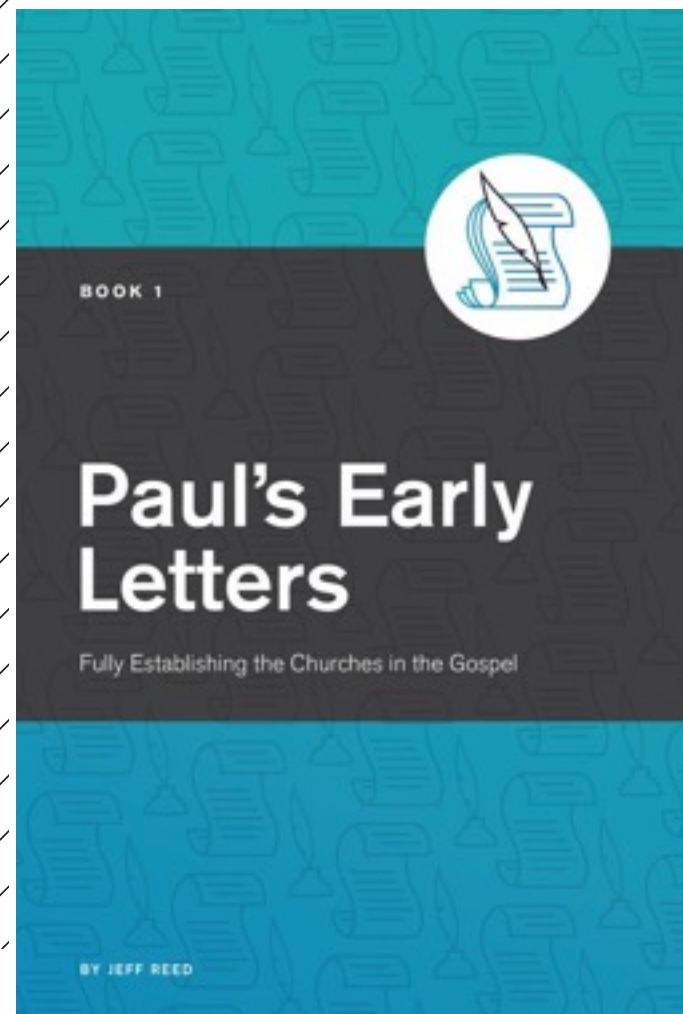
**Didache**  
**Body of Acts**  
**Theology of Paul**  
**1½ years**



**Full Kerygma**  
**After Acts**  
**Apostles' Gospels**  
**1 year**



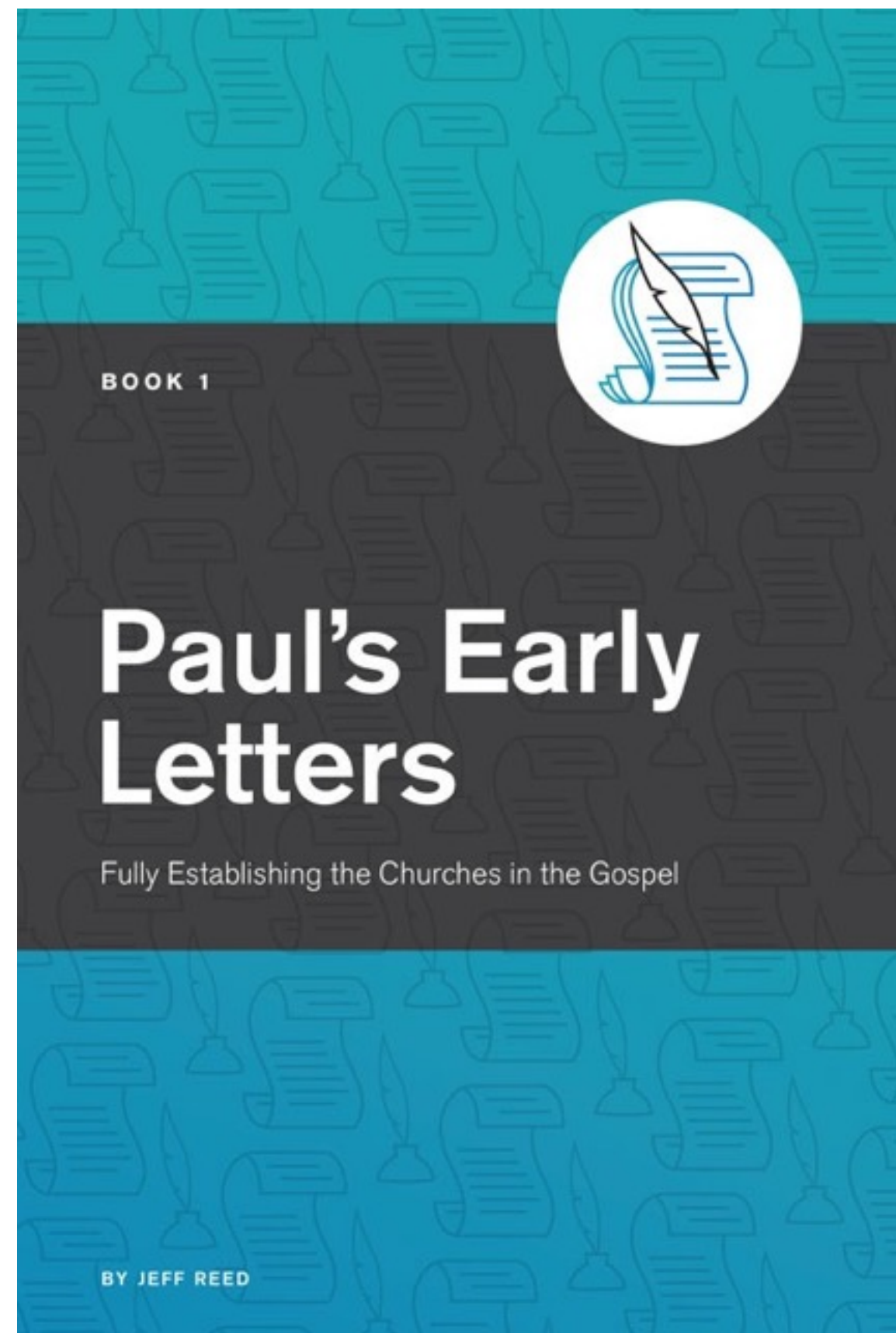
# Paul's Early Letters



# Uniqueness and Significance Paul's Early Letters Series

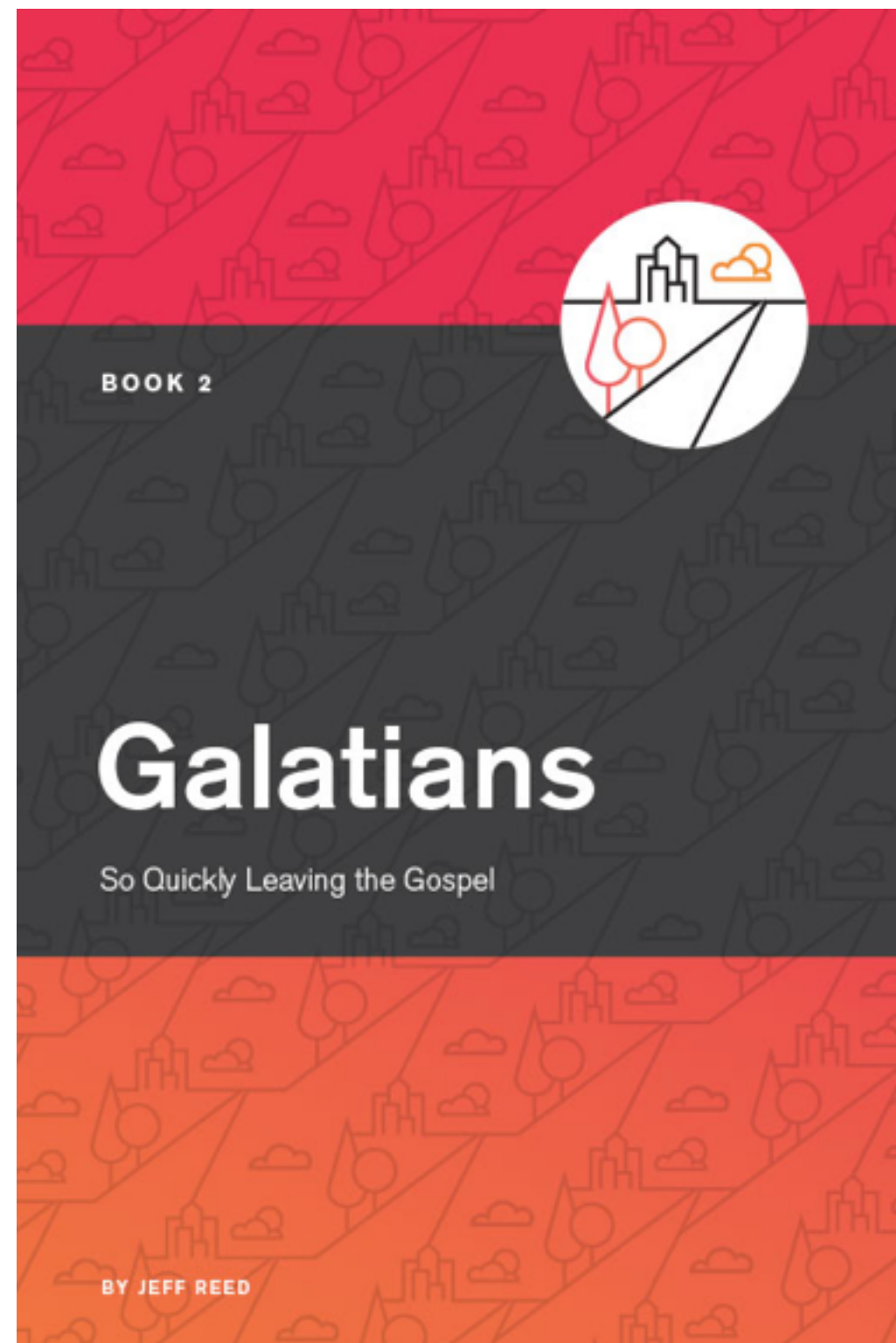
The Early Letters of Paul Series is taking 4 years to produce, but is founded on over 2 decades of Pauline leadership series courses—from 1988–2008.

- 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 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

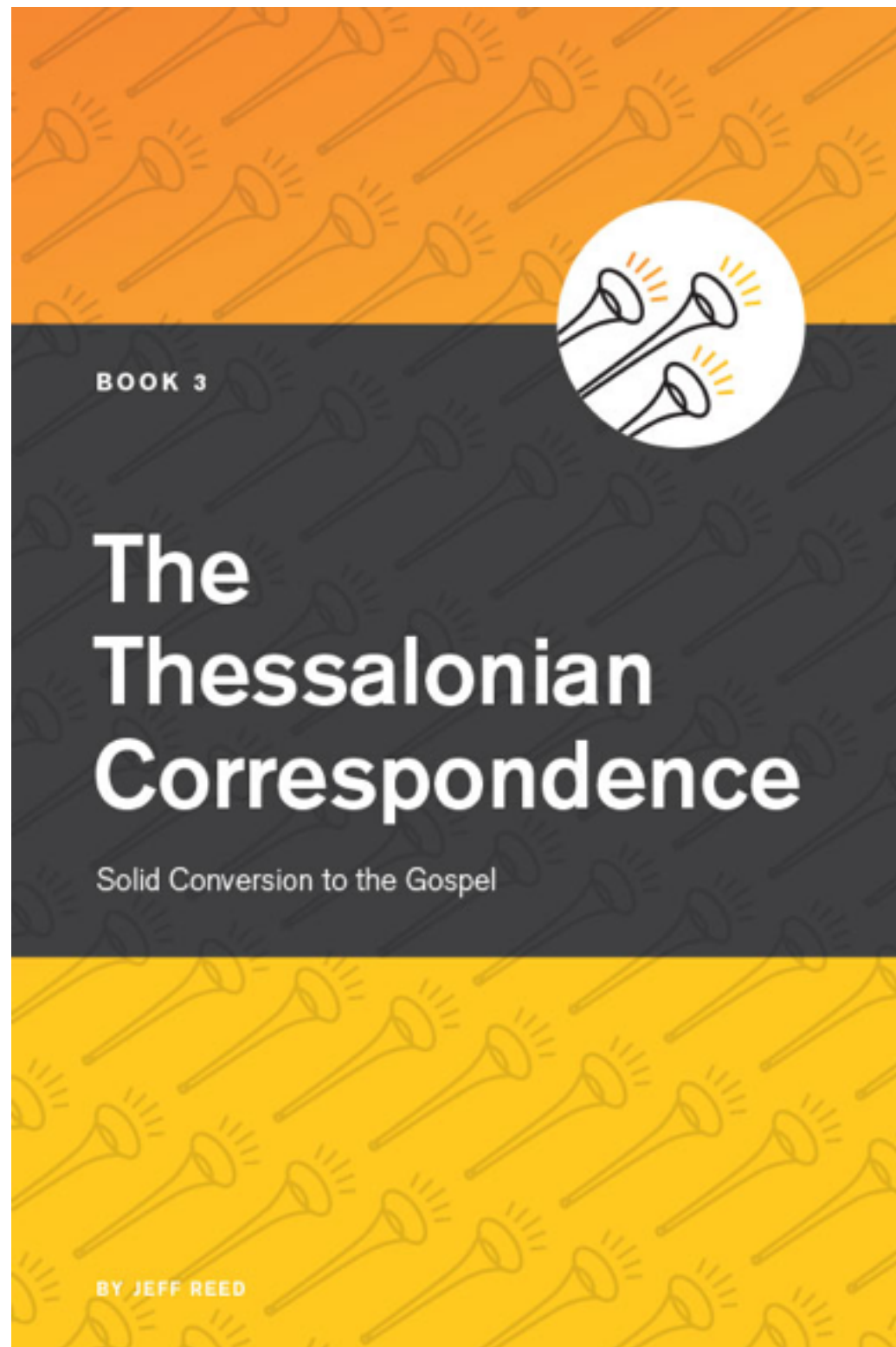
To correct the emerging alteration of the gospel making its way through the network of the Galatian churches, instructing and challenging them to not let one single part of the old system of the law alter the purity and power of the gospel

by challenging them to not alter the gospel that they had received from him one bit, but hold it exactly

by 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

by explaining the concept of walking in the sphere of the Spirit as opposed to any elements of fleshly performance

by exhorting them to respect their leaders as a protection from altering the gospel in any way

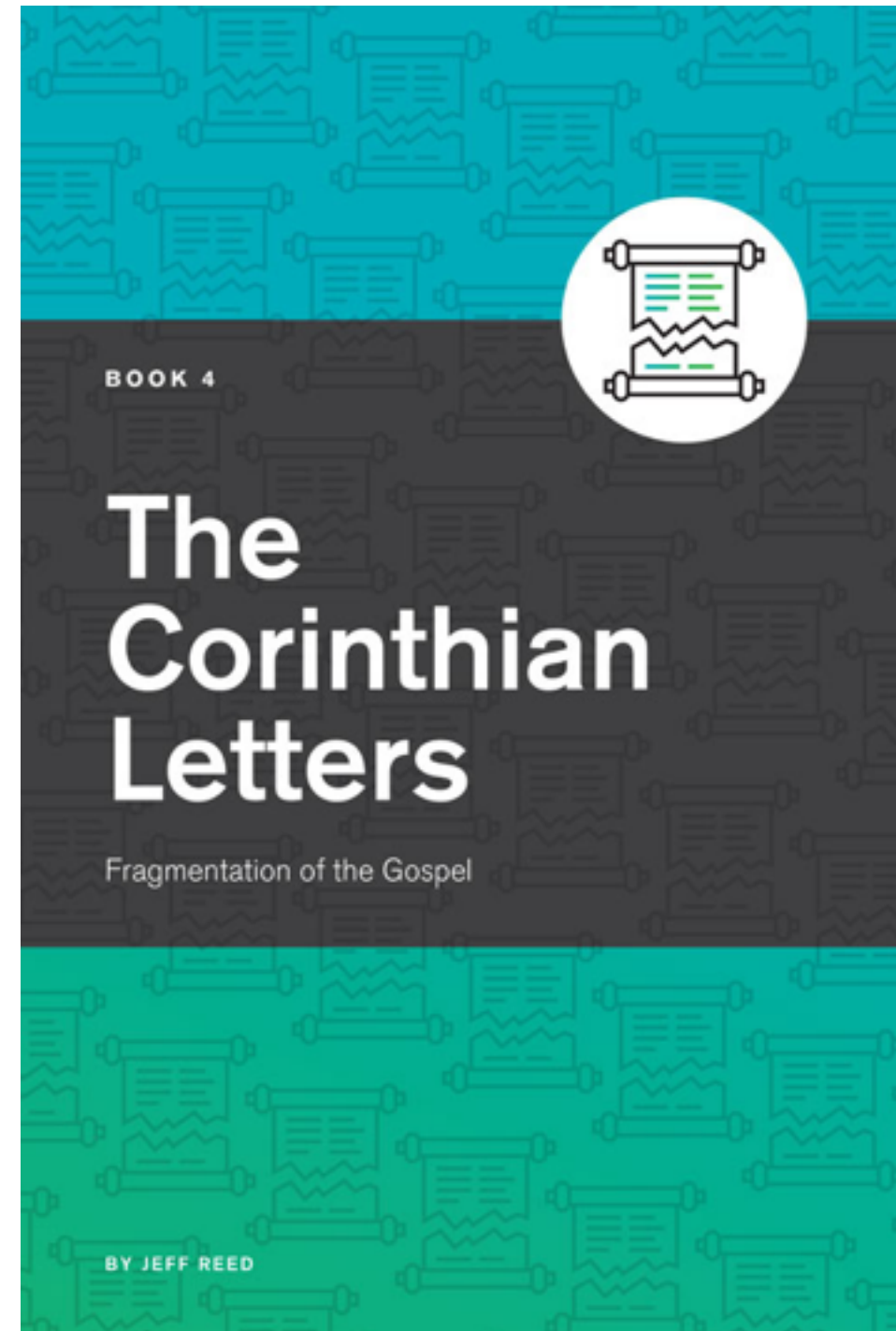


# The Thessalonians Correspondence: Solid Conversion to the Gospel

To further establish 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 traditions that they might not be unsettled, remain strong amidst suffering and wrong teaching, and grow their faith, hope, and love

by addressing the emerging problems in the Thessalonian assemblies in the first letter, which were beginning to destabilize them

by further clarifying his instruction to them of the implications of the gospel in solving the problems that began to destabilize them



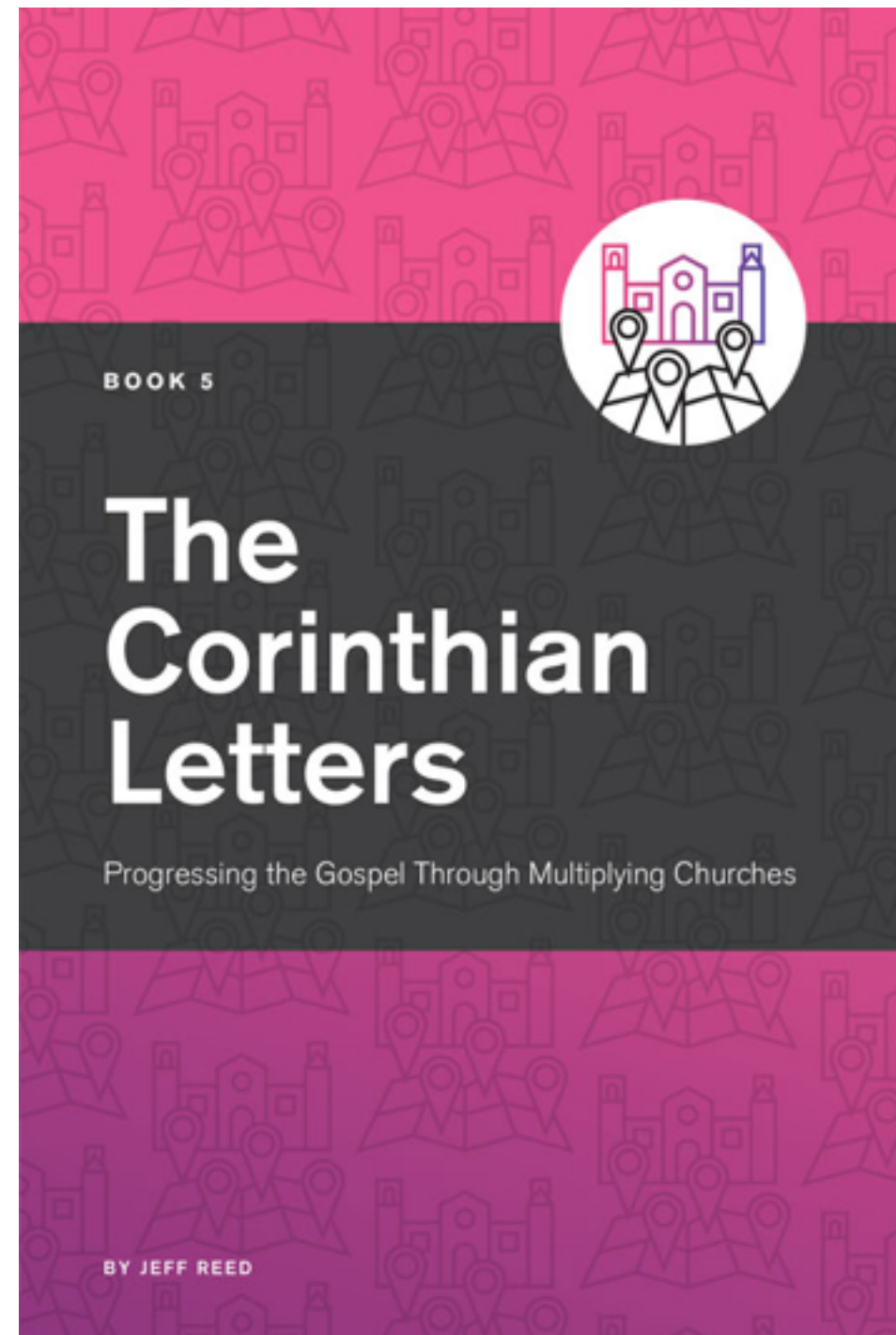
# The Corinthian Letters: Fragmentation of the Gospel

To deal with internal divisions, 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

by applying the gospel to the core divisions that developed by factions within the churches

by specifically addressing factions in both their community life and their community gatherings

by appealing to the future resurrection



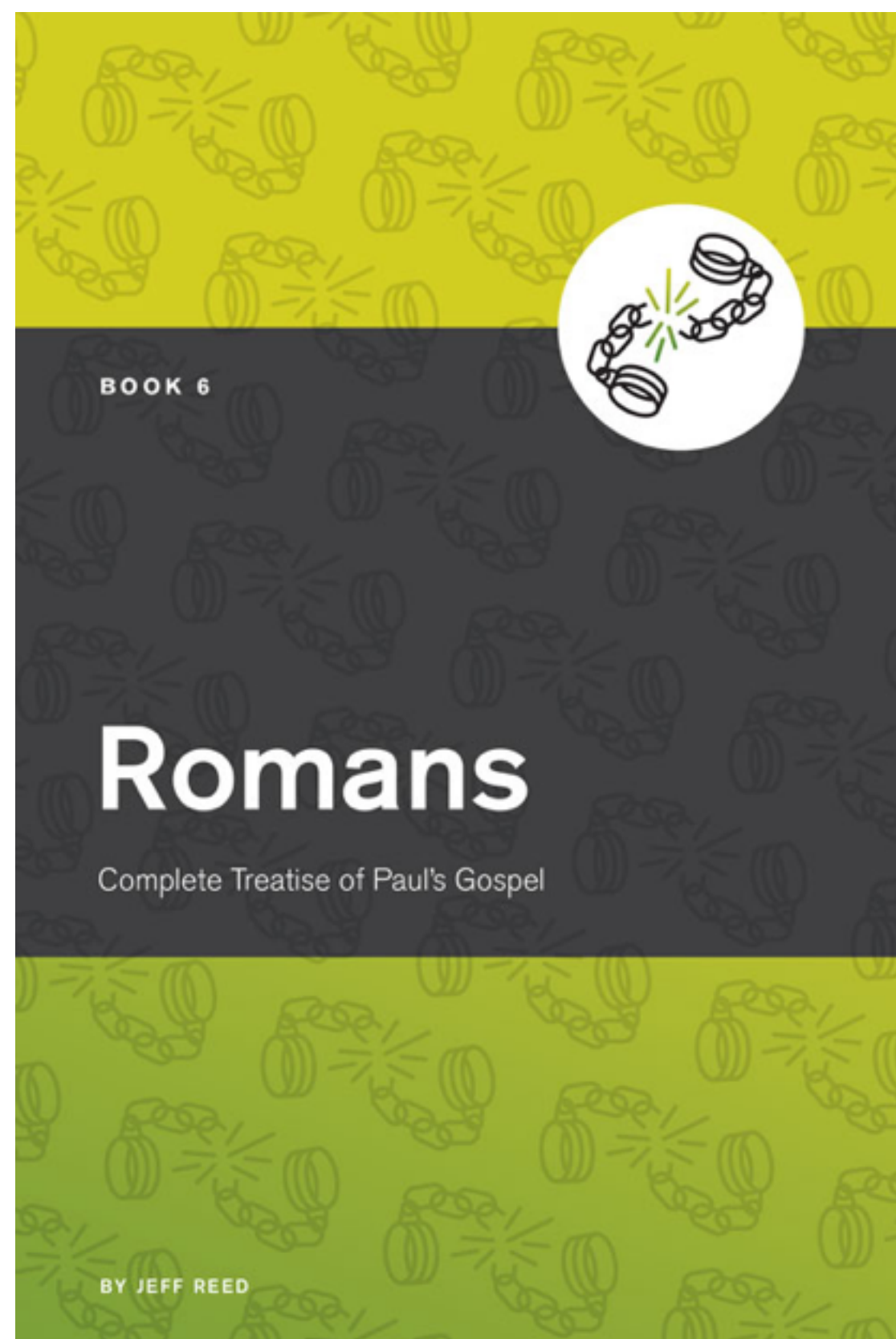
# The Corinthian Letters: Progressing the Gospel Through Multiplying Churches

To defend his apostleship in the Corinthian churches, 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

by describing his internal stress in carrying out his stewardship

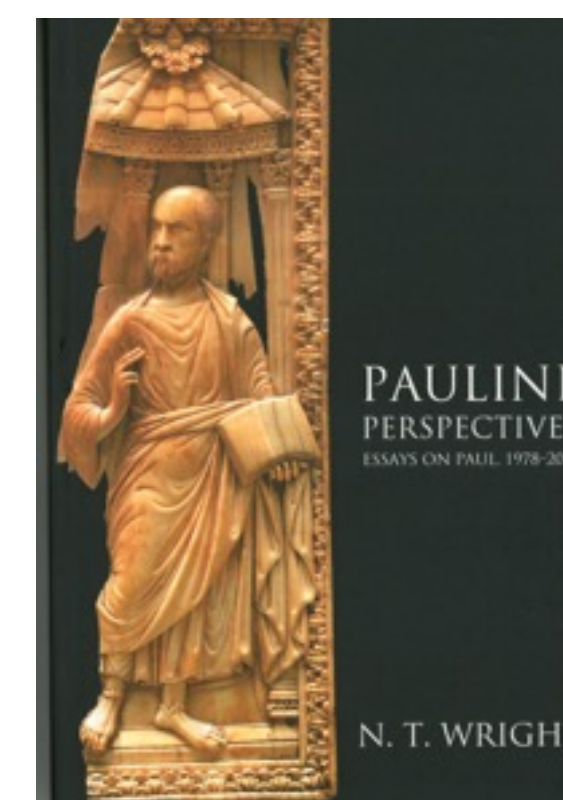
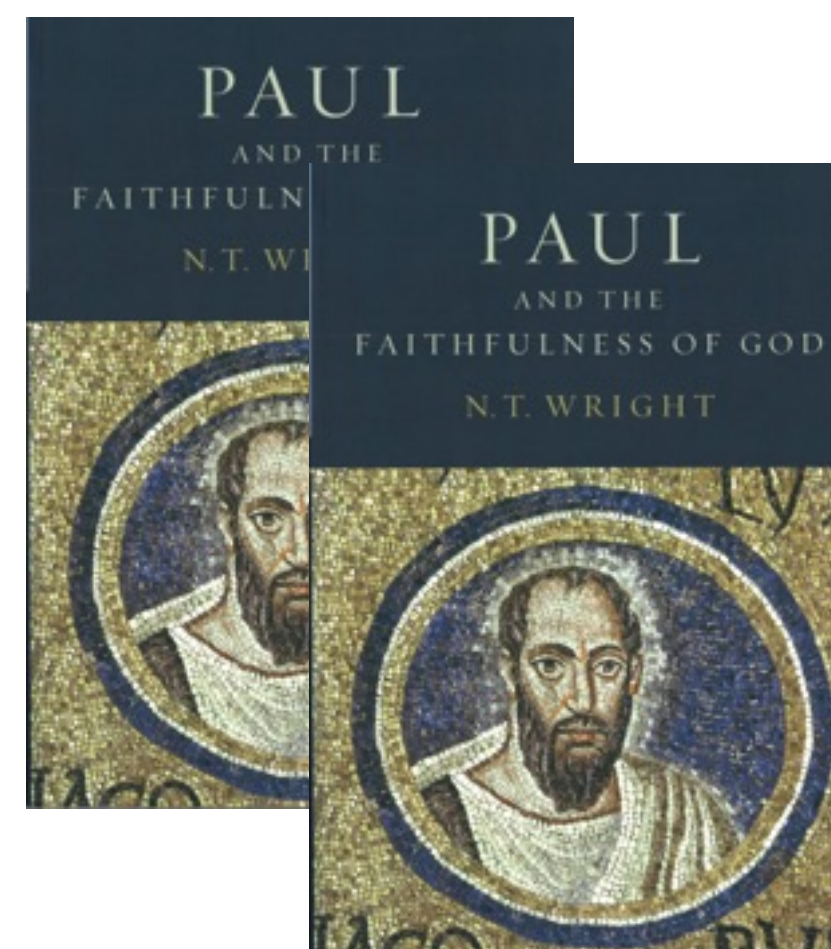
by describing the heart of the ministry of the gospel as “conflicts without and fears within” as a context for victorious progress

by defending his apostleship and seeking the Corinthians as partners in that progression

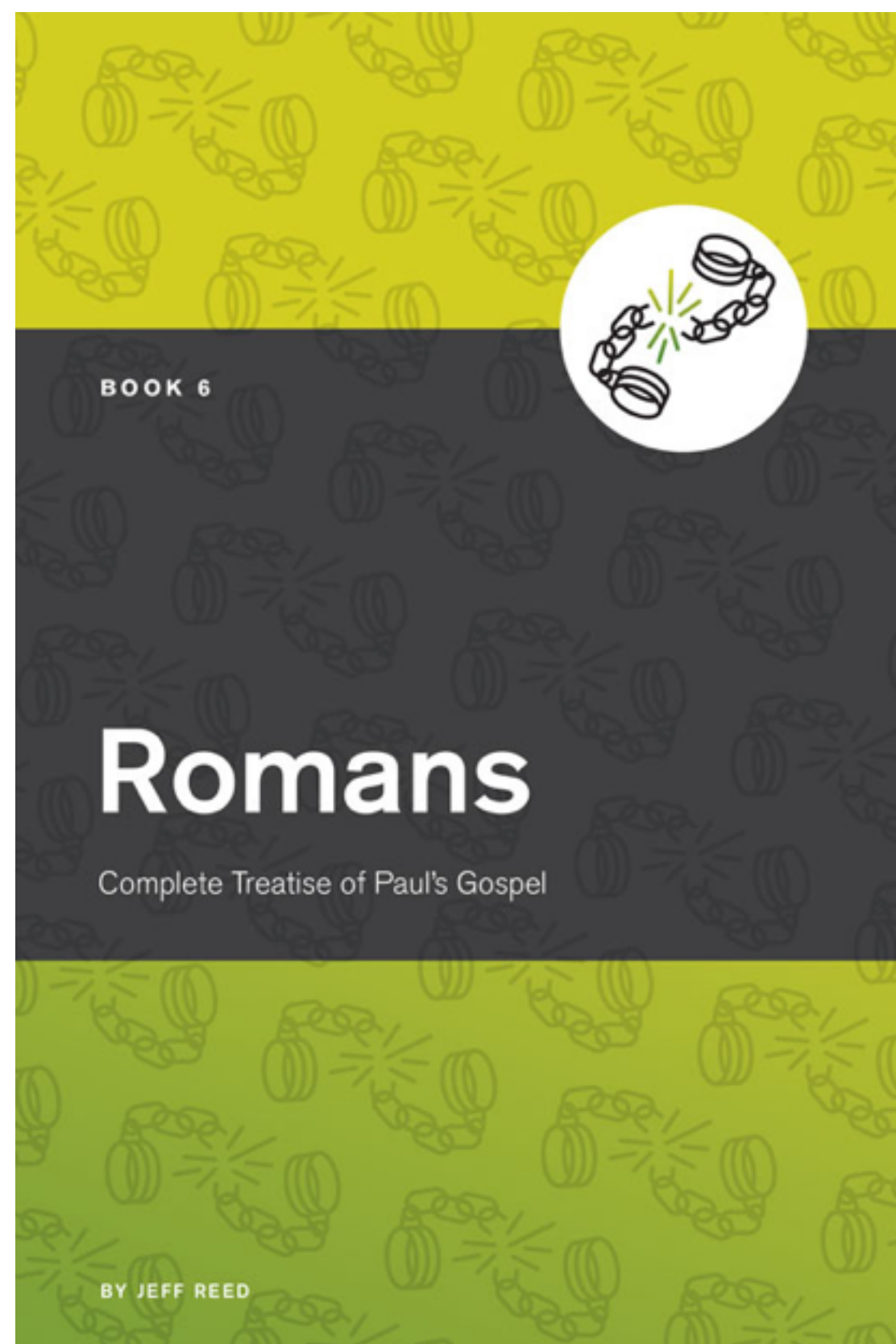


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

In his groundbreaking work on Paul, a “tour-de-force” of Pauline theology, N. T. Wright, lays a foundation for understanding Paul and how to approach building an intention statement of Paul's early letters.



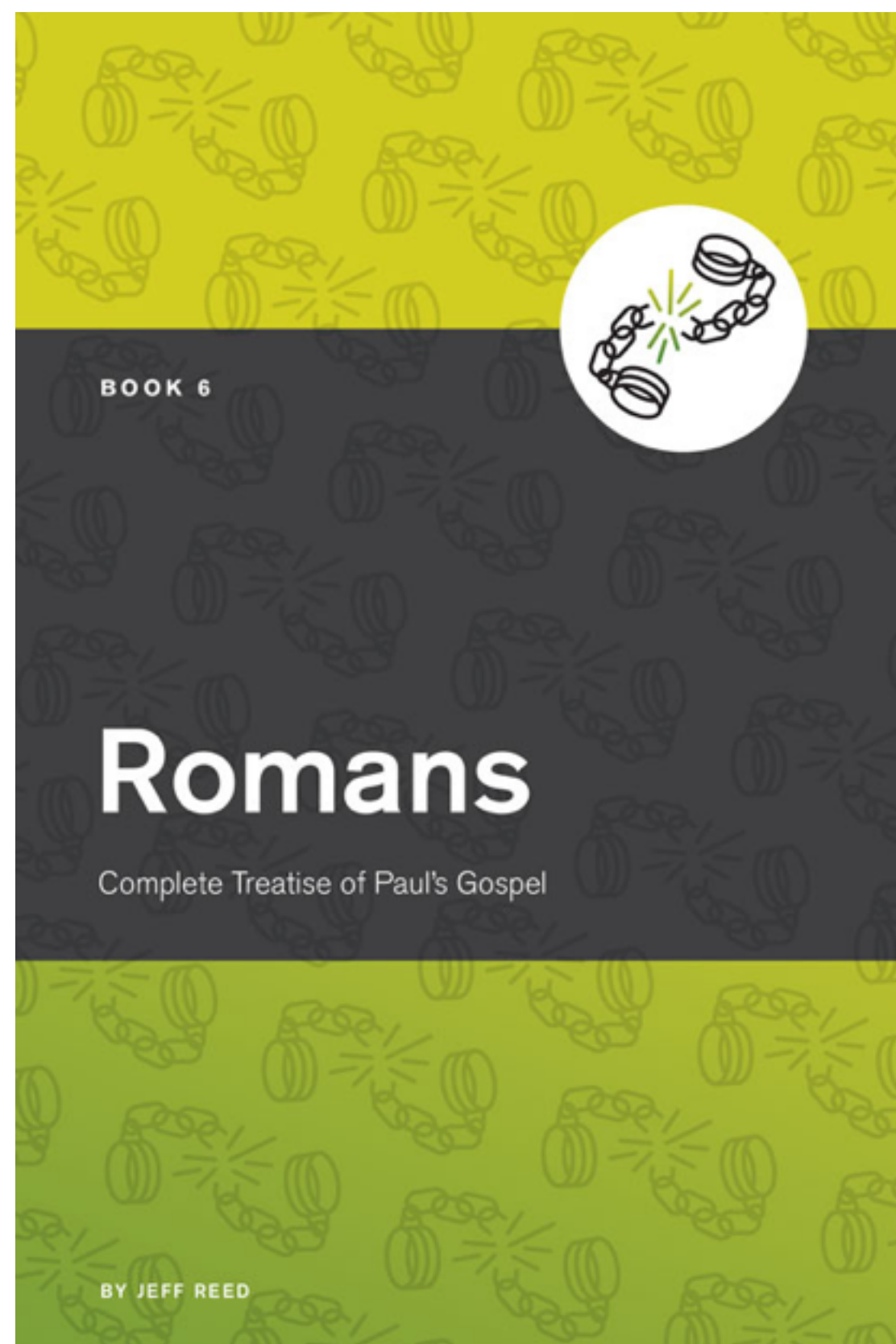




## Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“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.”

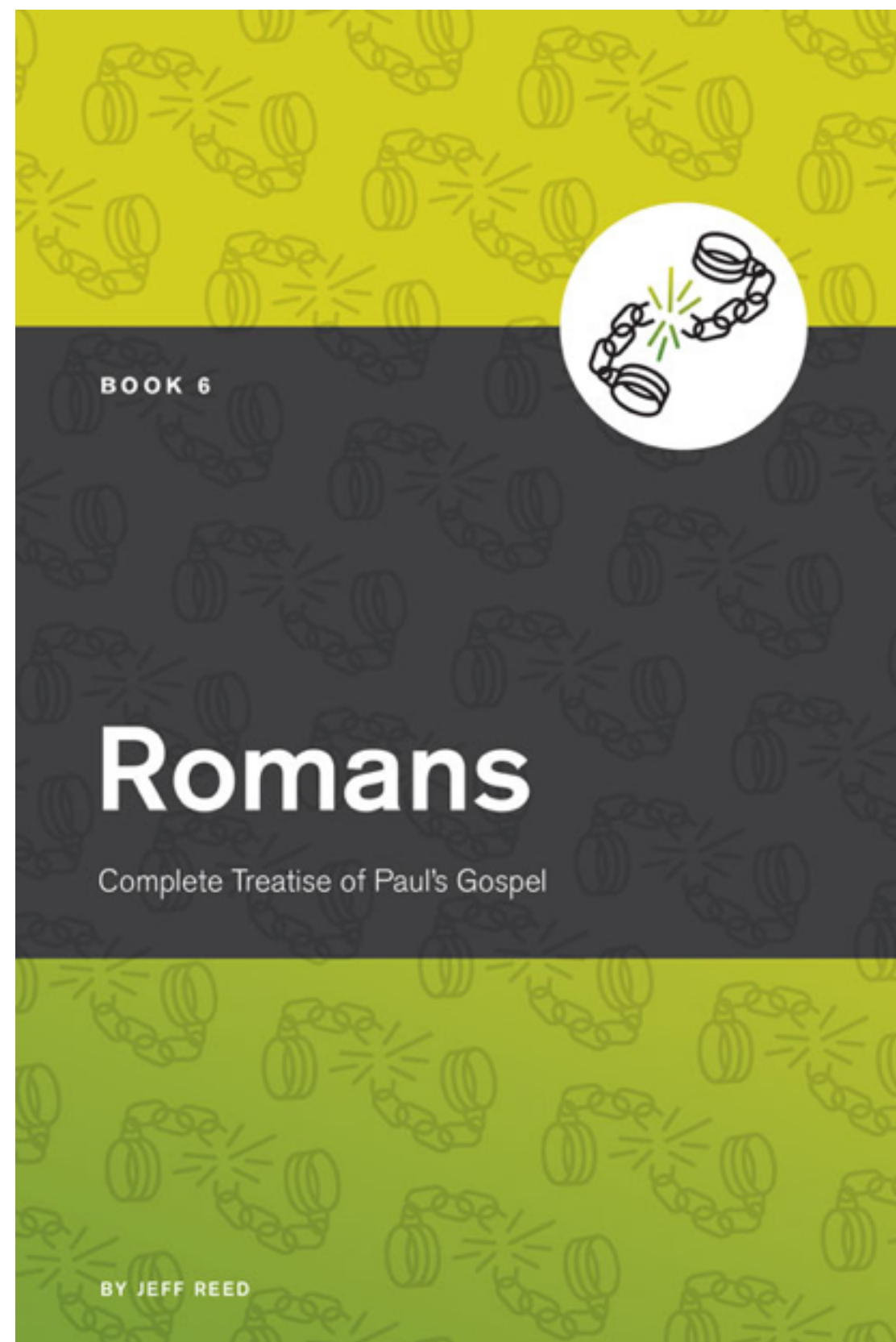
Wright, N. T. (2013-11-01). Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013 (p. 94). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.



## 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 nor be clear what the meaning is.

Wright, p. 456

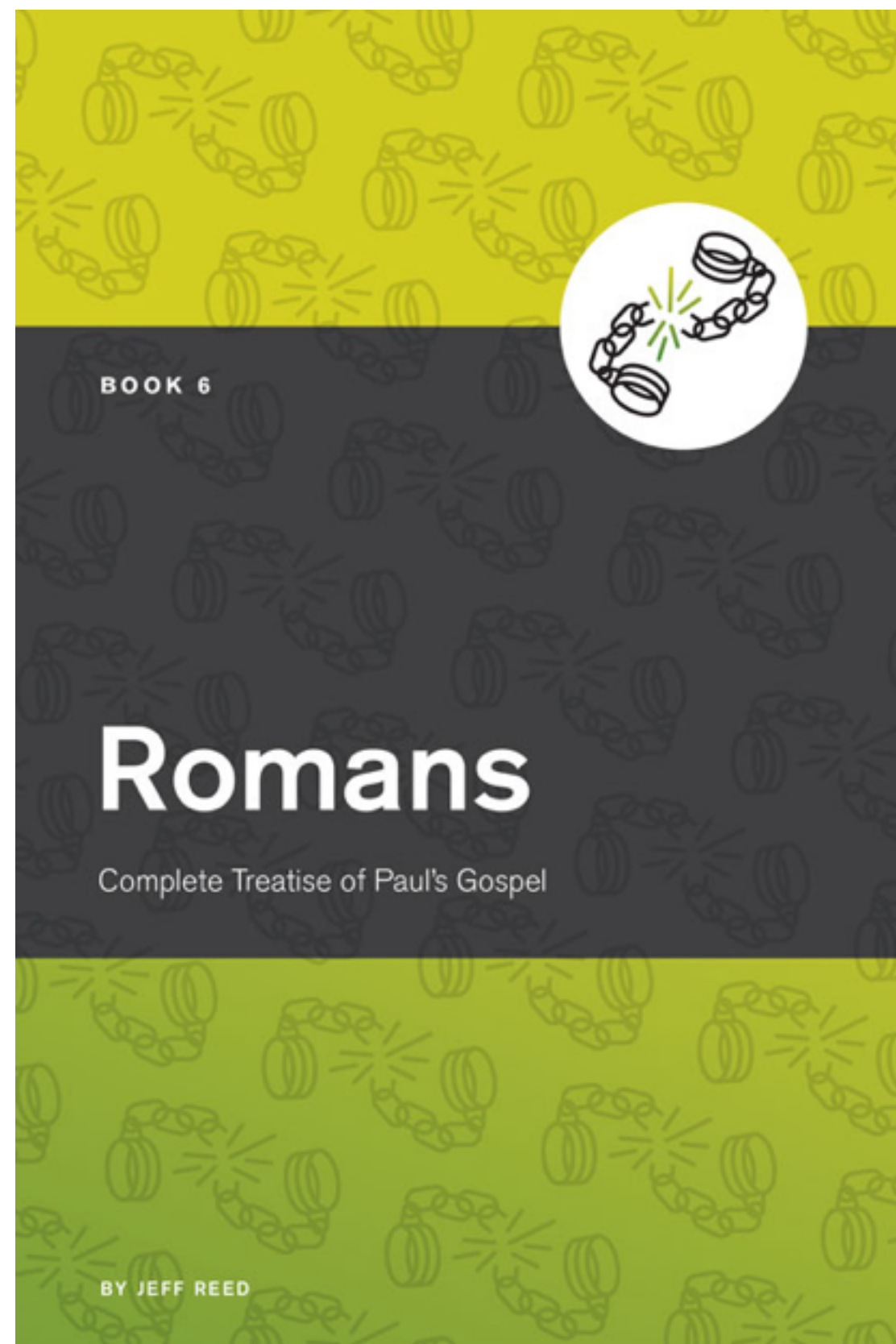


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

“...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.”

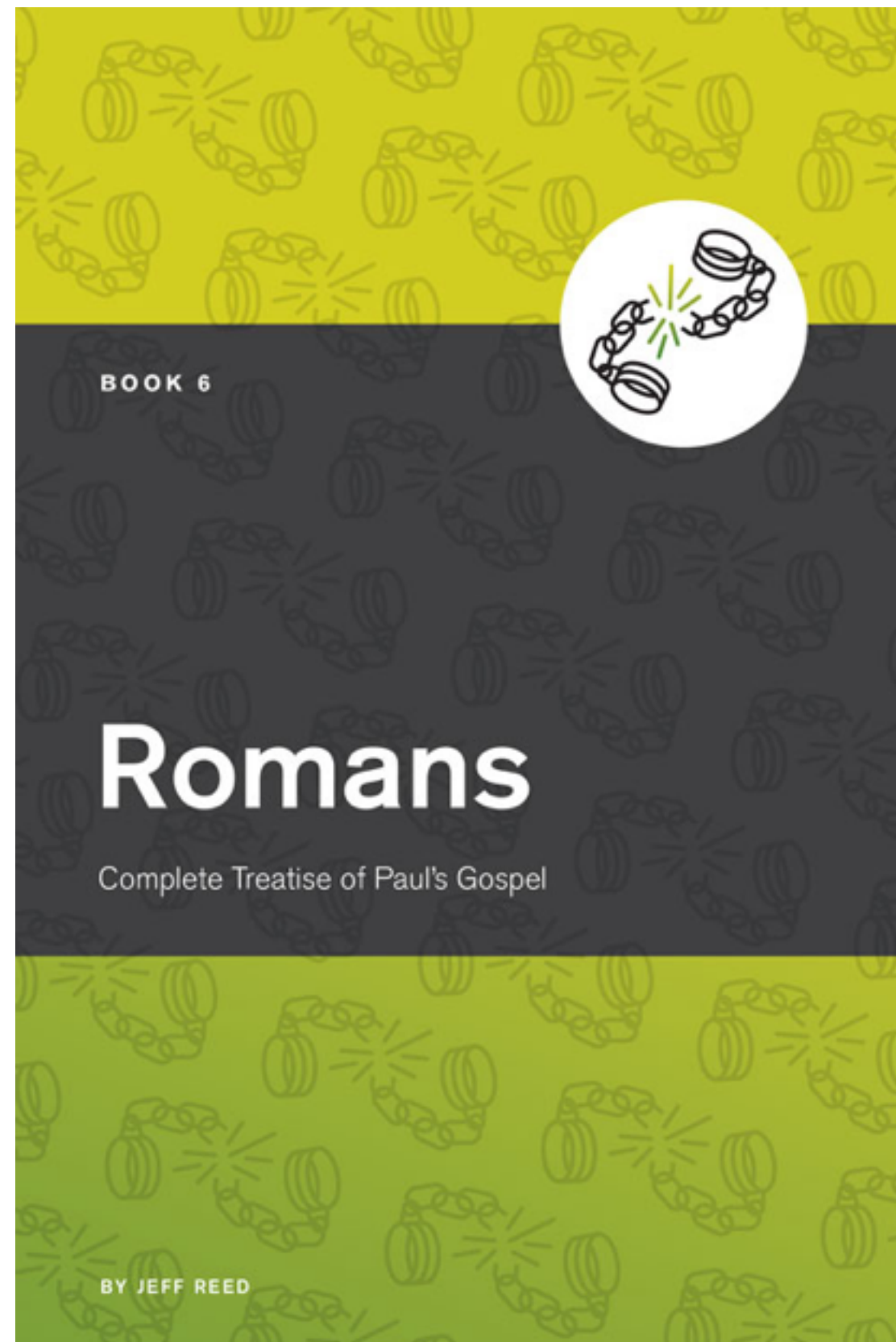
Wright p. 460



# 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.”

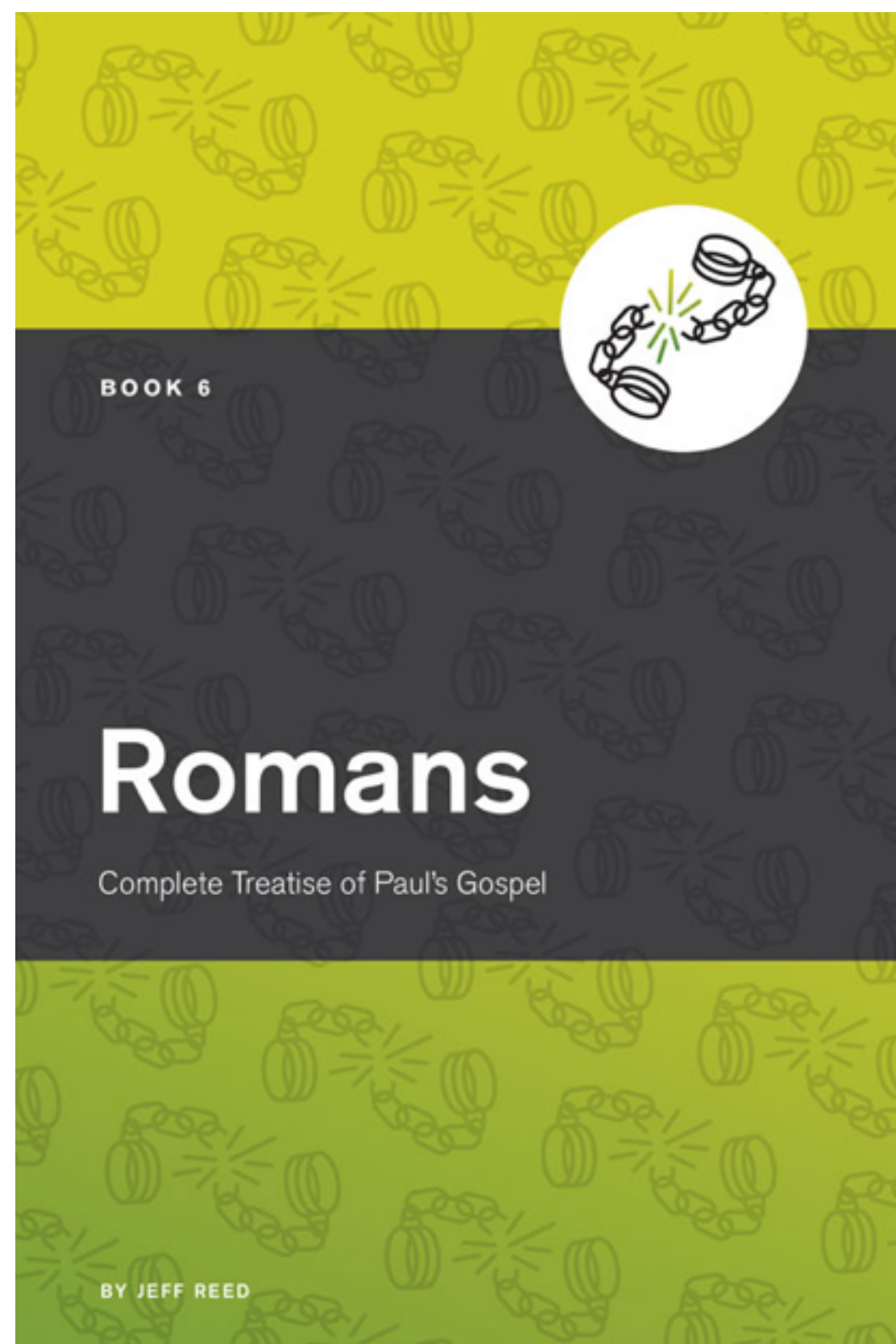
Wright p. 466



# 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.”

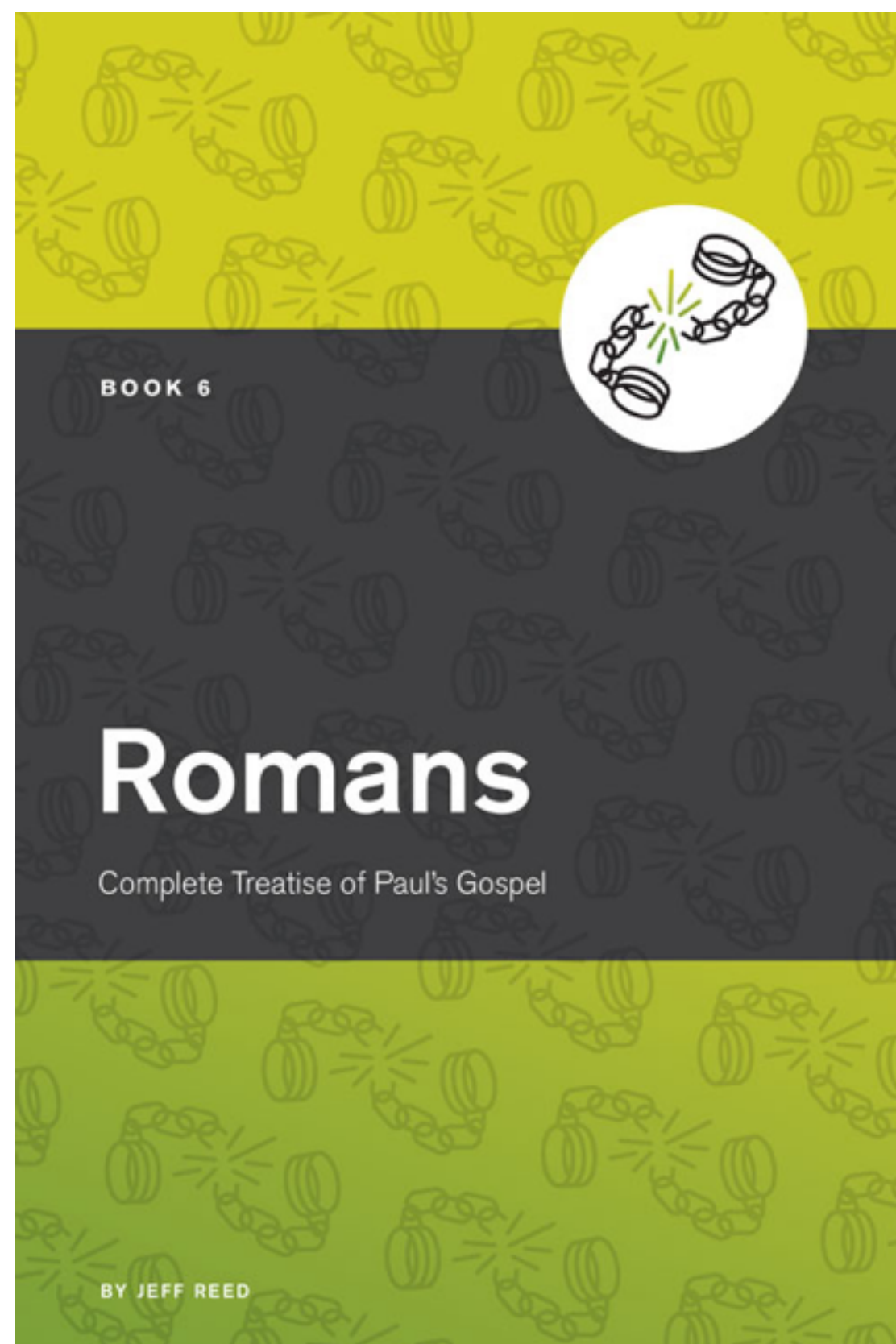
Wright p. 468



## 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.”

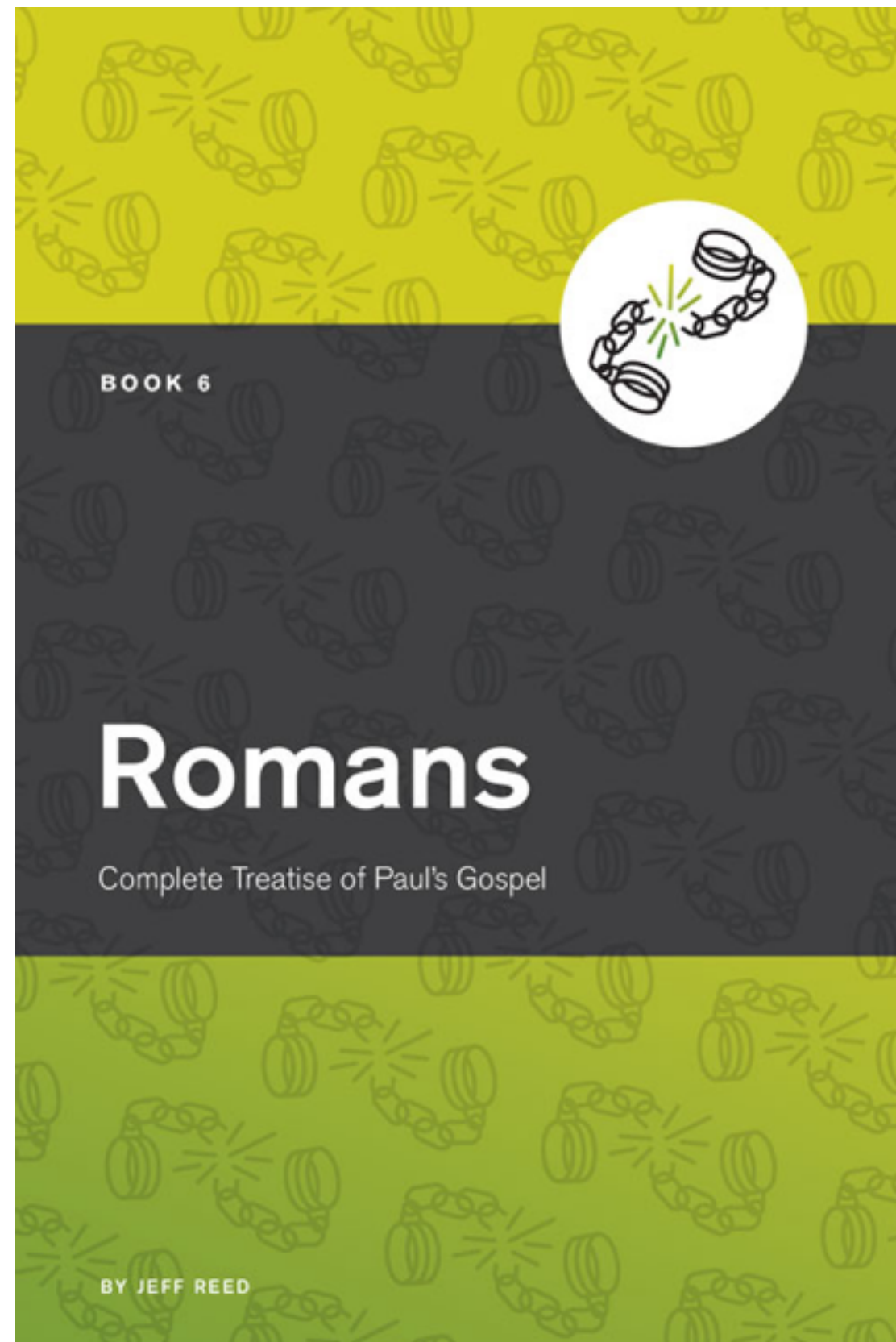
Wright p. 474



## 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



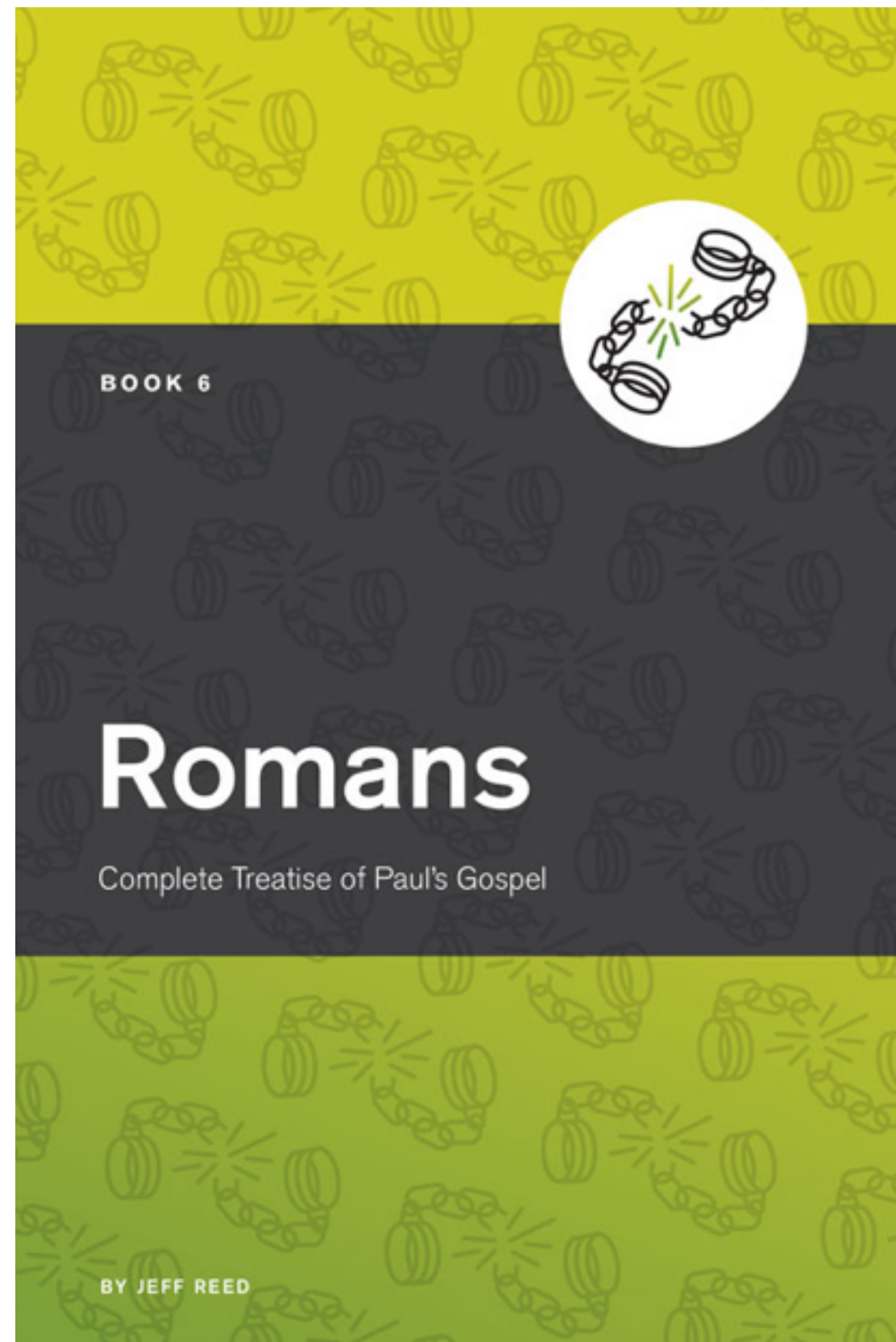
# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Now let's turn to Romans, probably Paul's greatest letter, in which his whole theology of the gospel unfolds.

This probably was what he was thinking through the three years in the wilderness—his whole framework had to be rethought.

The last 3 verses of Romans gives us the picture of what Paul was trying to accomplish in his letter.

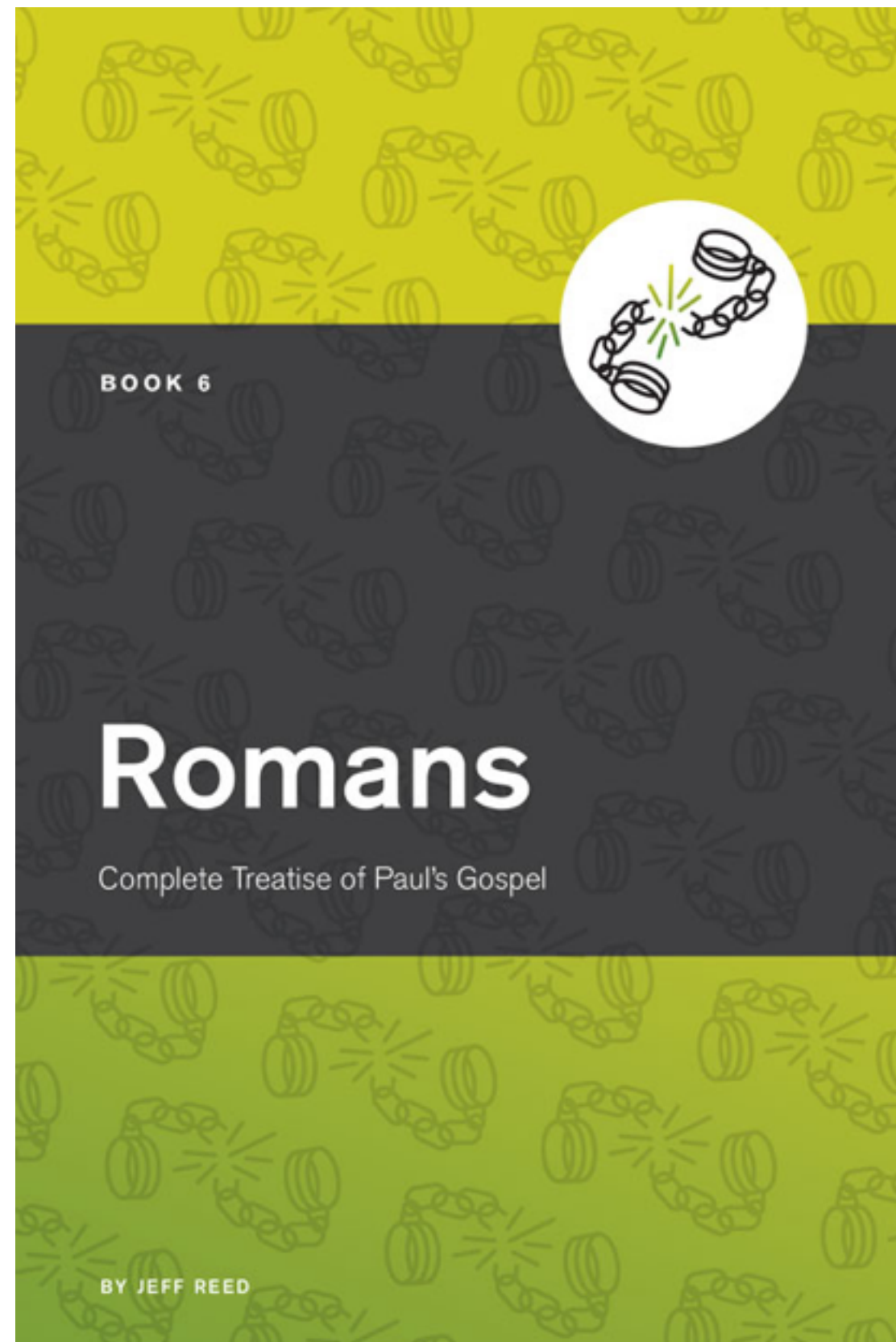




# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

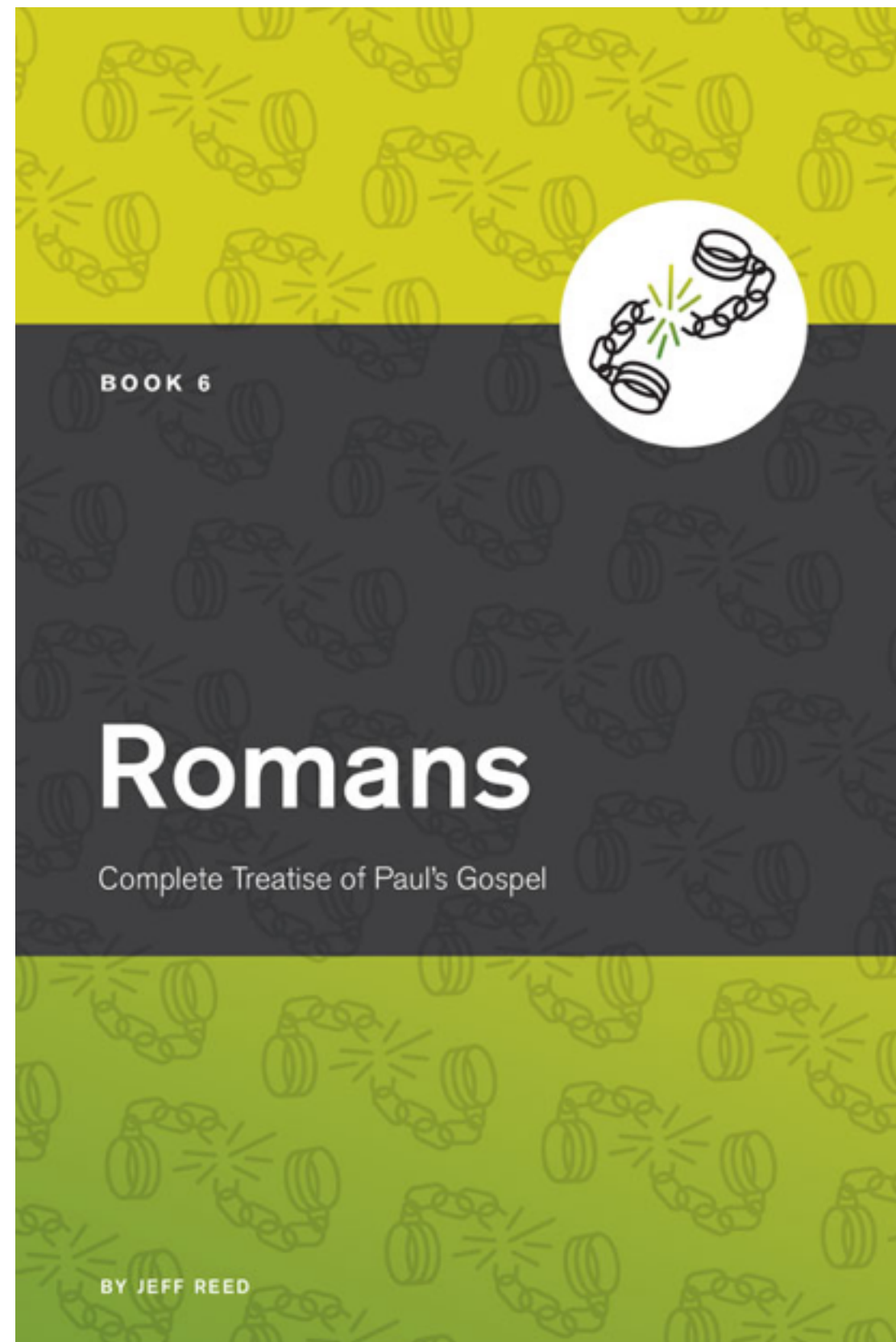
Romans is key to understanding the entire collection of Paul's early letters to his network of churches. Several preliminary comments on the context of Romans in Paul's early letters is needed:

- 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's Gospel

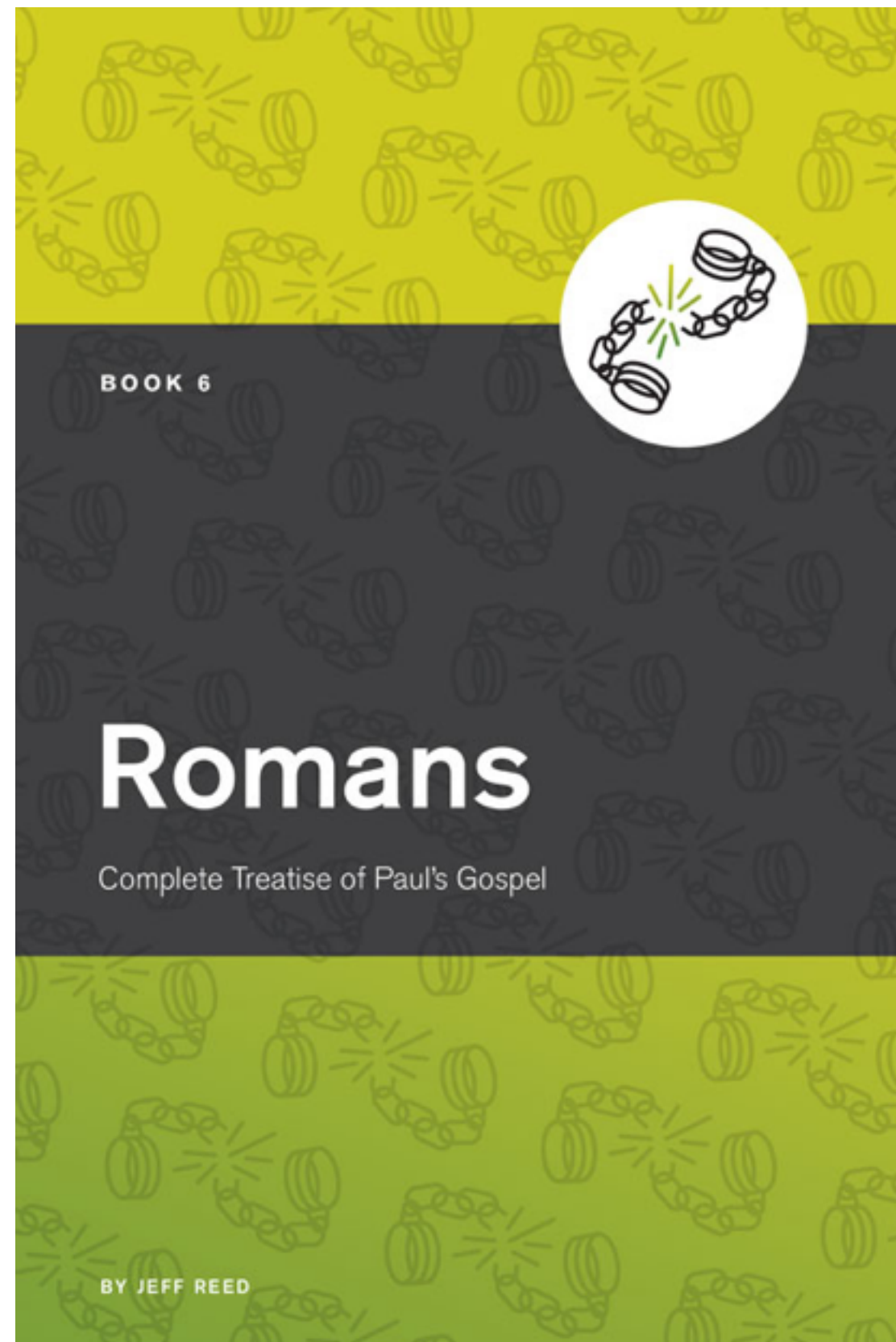
In trying to discover the intent of Paul's early letters, we will begin by focusing on Romans—the last of the letters. There are three major passages that introduce the letter, and one that ends it. They give us the key to understanding the intent of Romans and unlock the underlying intent of the collection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



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>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, <sup>6</sup>including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

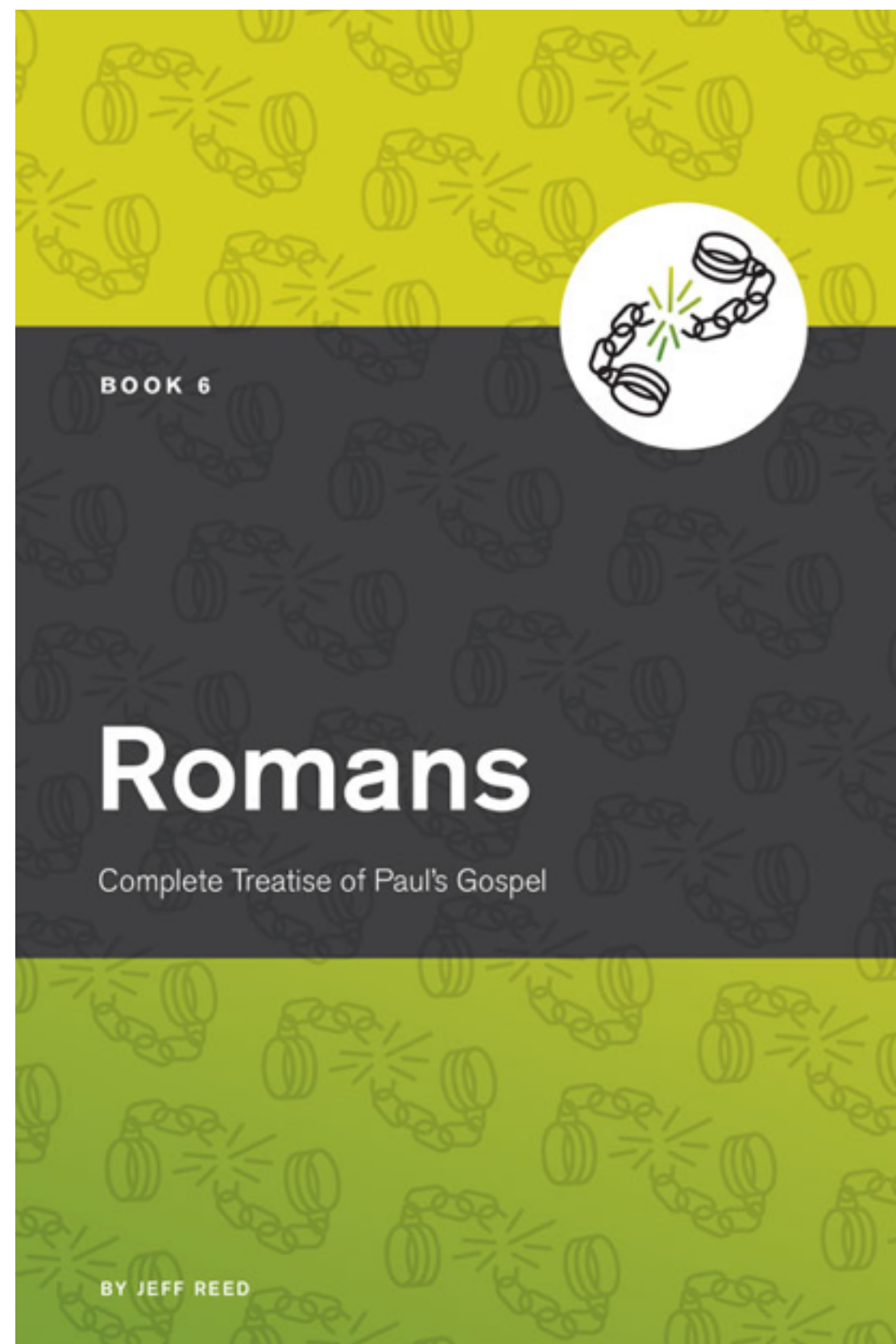
Romans 1:1–6



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

He rehearses the “Gospel formulaic” statement first articulated by Peter in his 5 sermons,

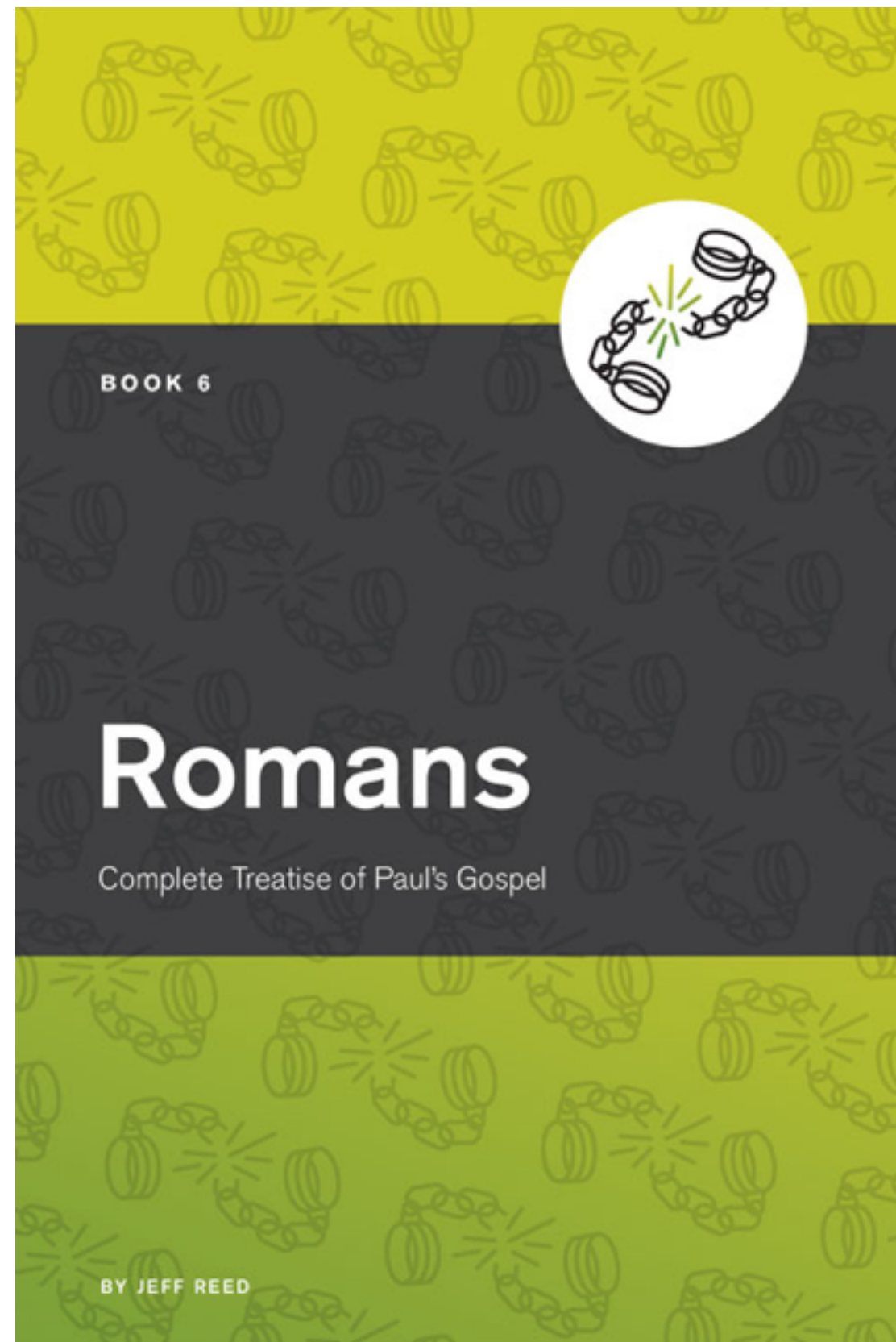
then handed down to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6, and clarified in a debate with Peter in Galatians 2.



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish <sup>15</sup>—hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

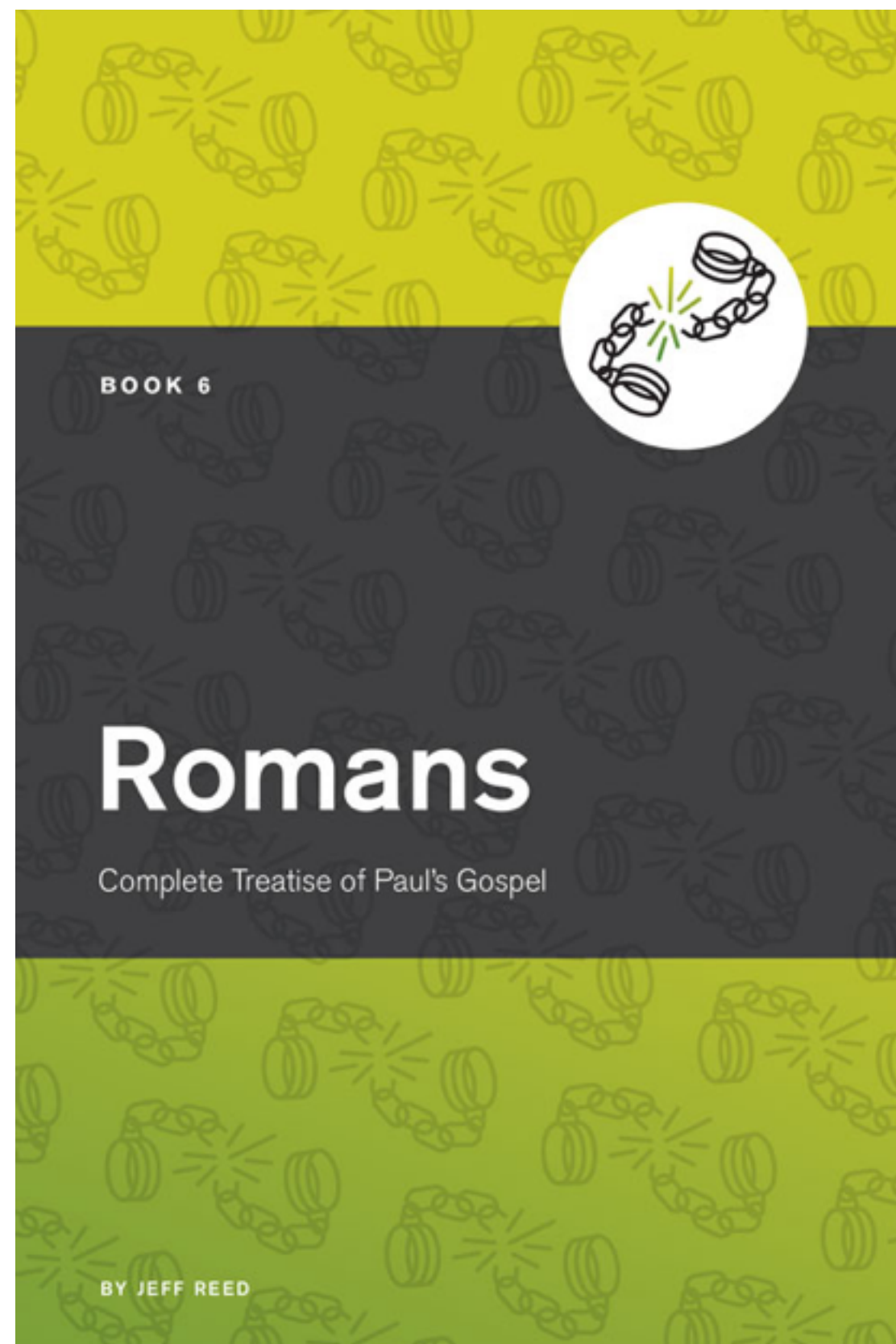
Romans 1:13–15



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

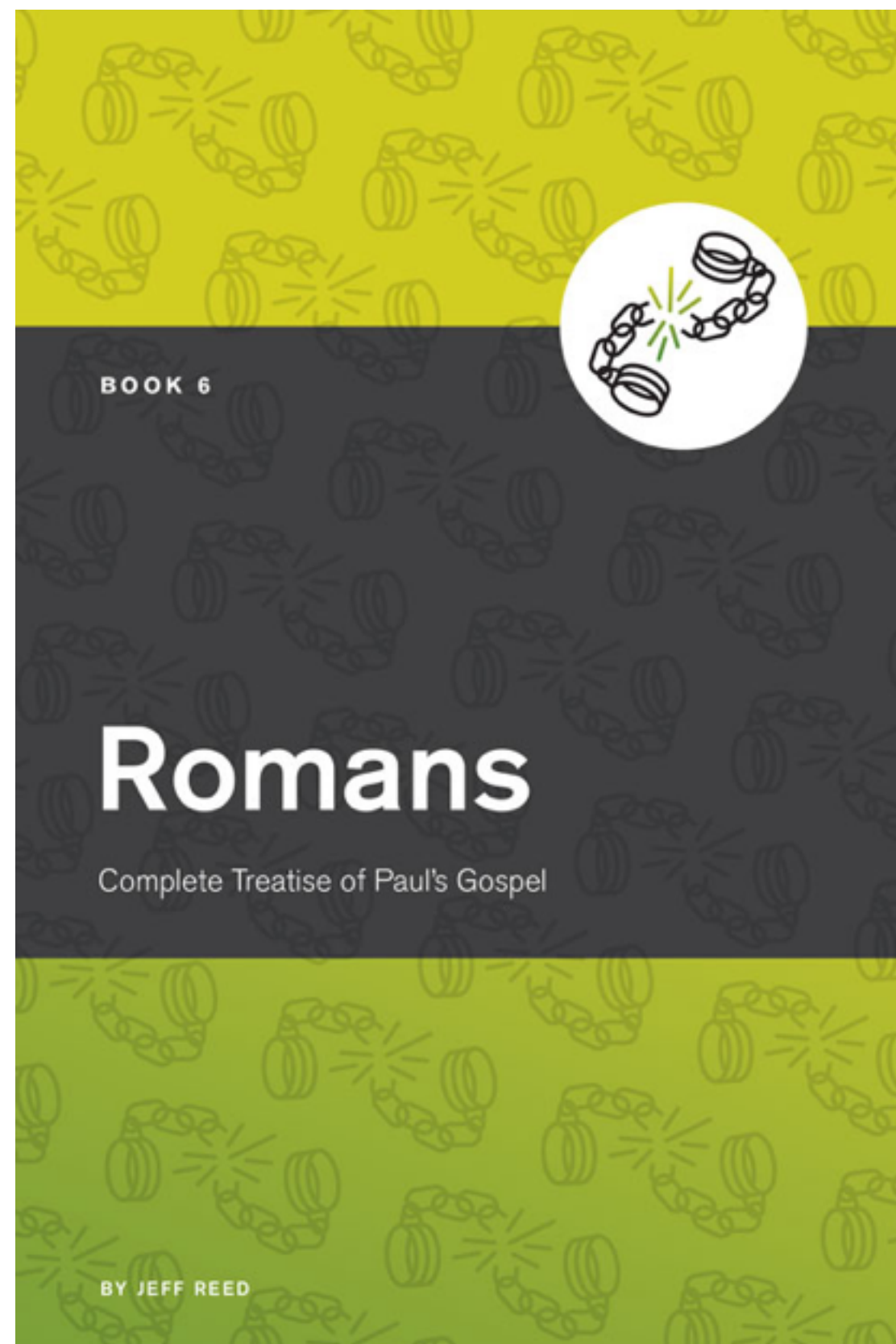
which will secure, clarify, or build a comprehensive defense of the gospel for them, thus establishing them completely



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

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

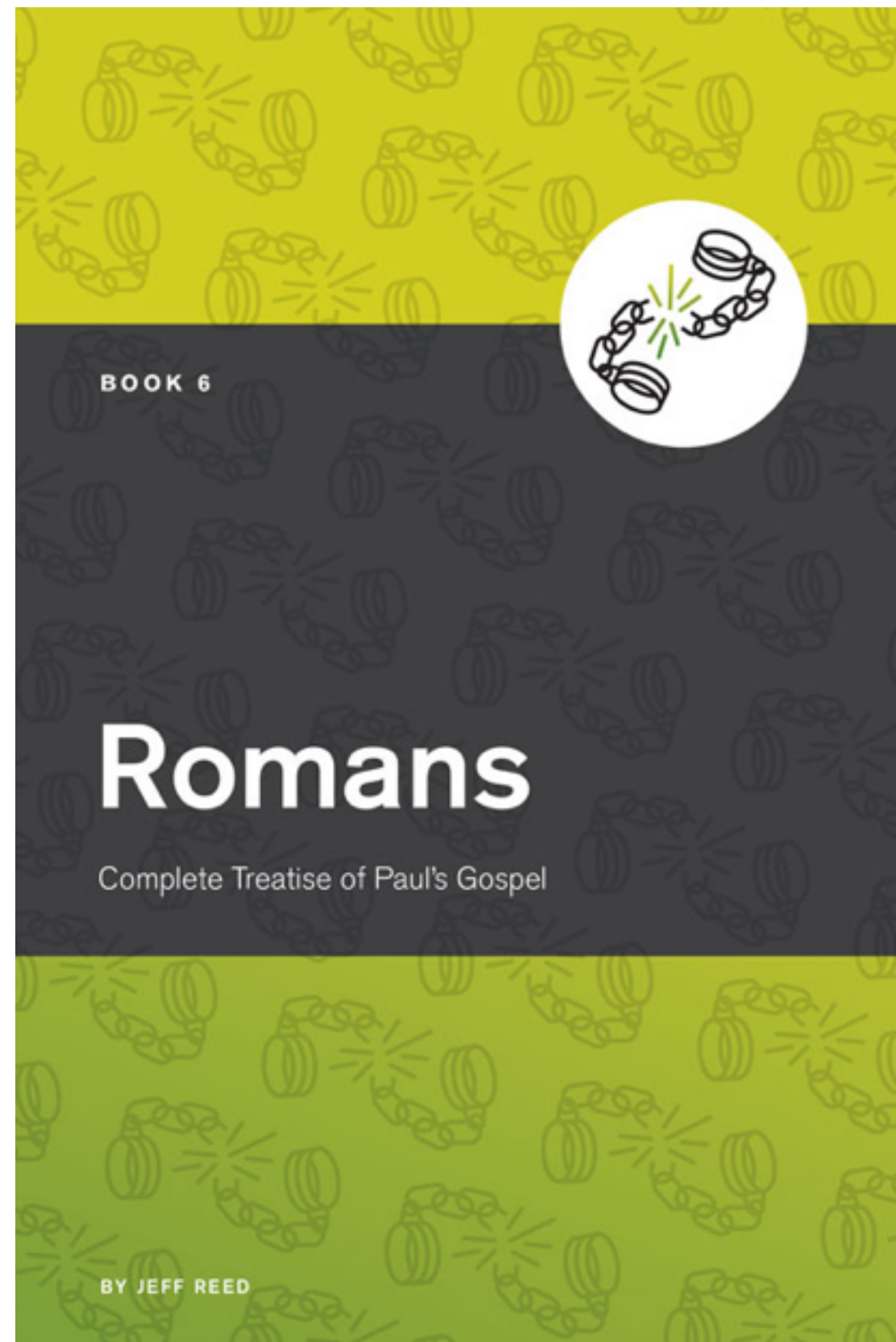


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

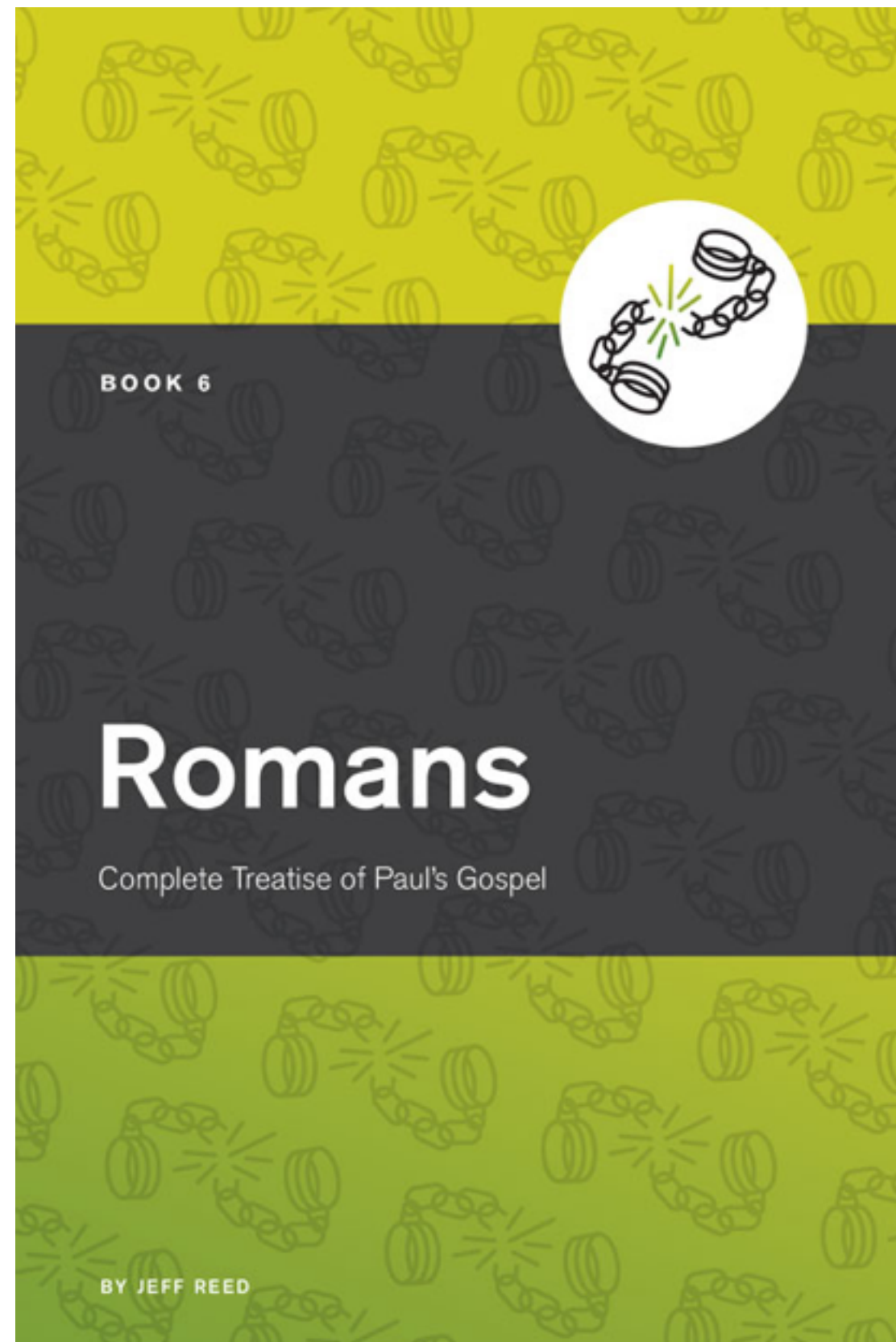
Romans 16:25–27 (N. T. Wright)





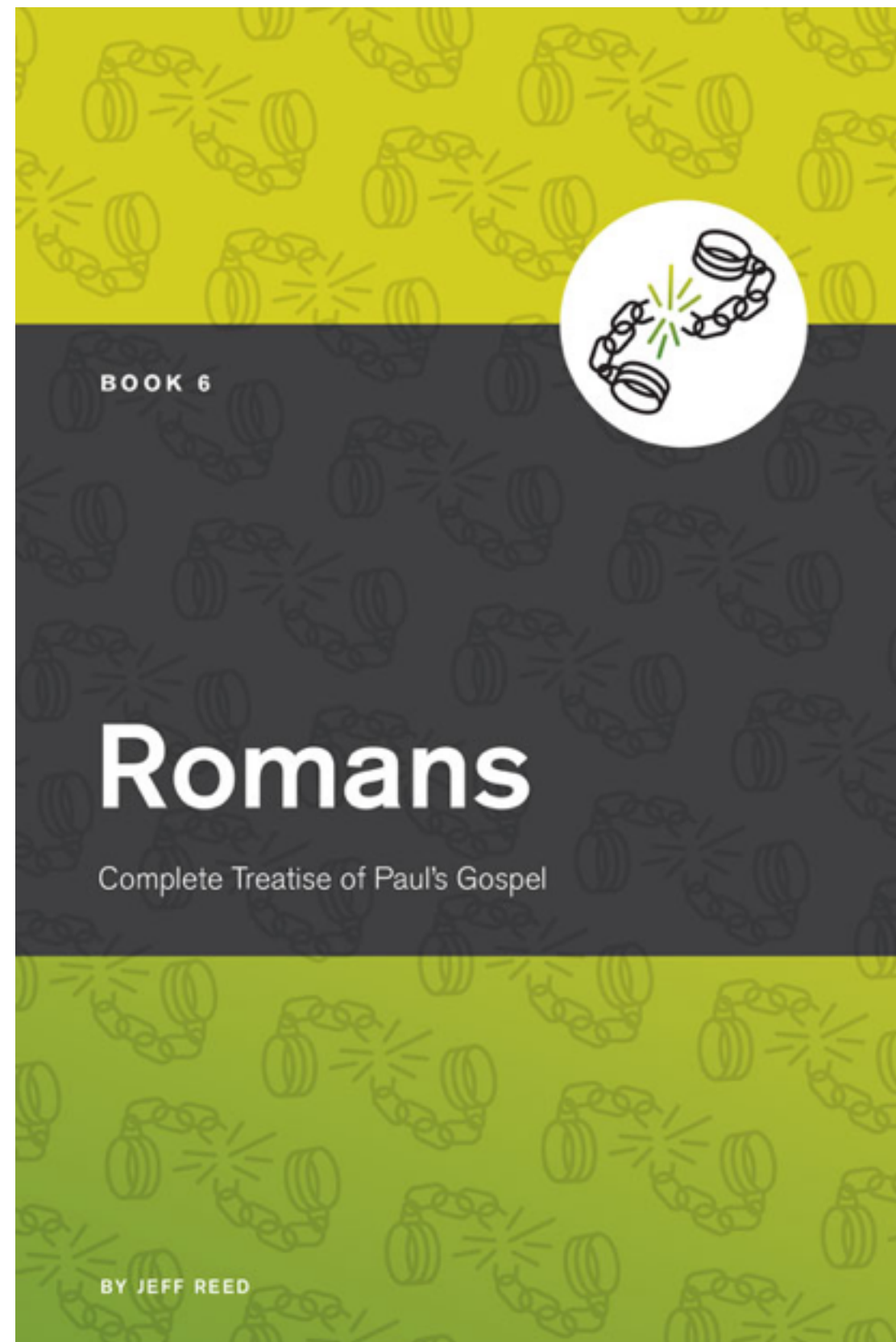
# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

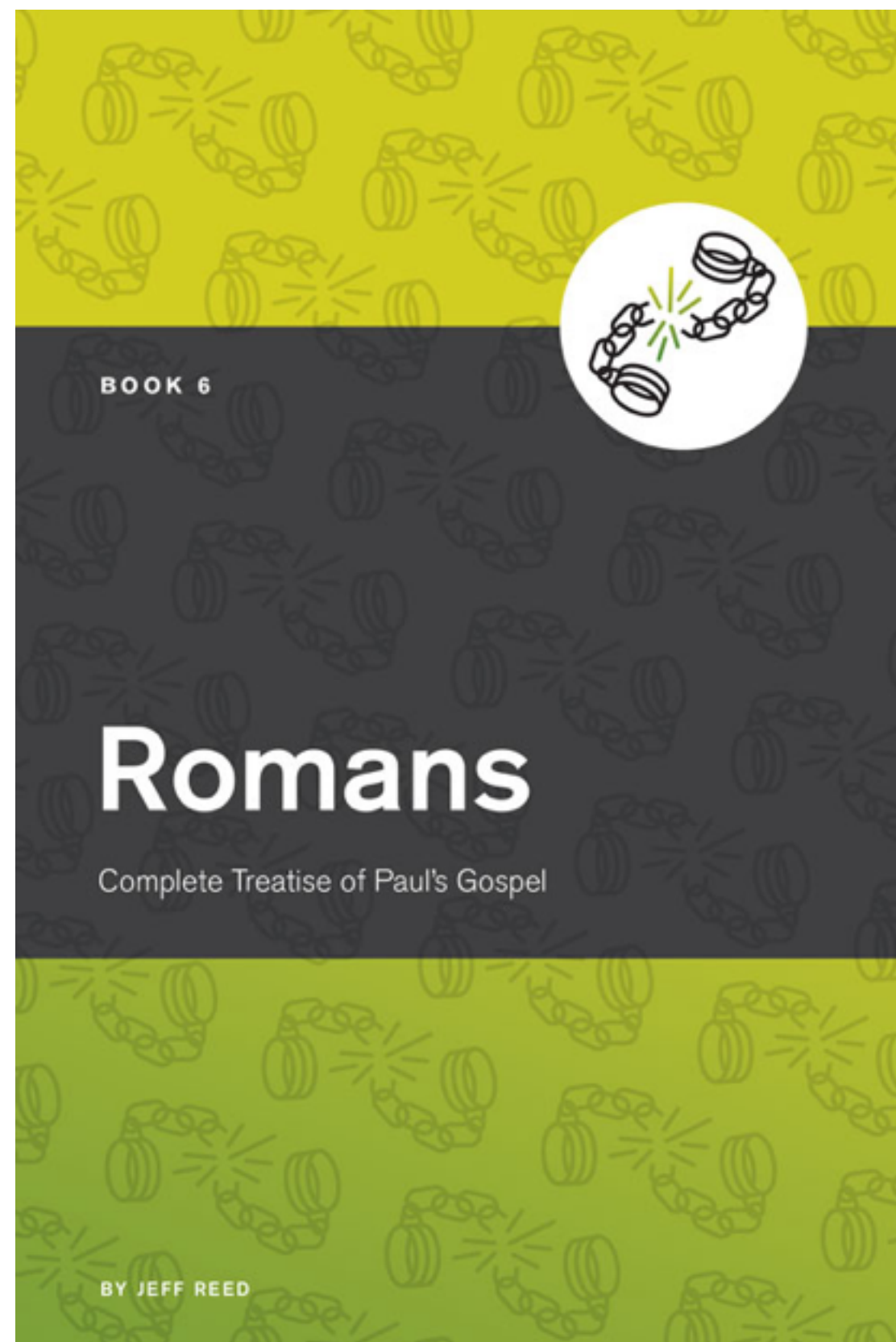
The following is an attempt to identify the structure of Paul's argument in Romans 1:16–15:13. Paul's argument seems to have 4 phases to it in 1:16–15:27: 1:16–5:21; 6:1–8:39 ; 9:1–11:36; and 12:1–15:13. In each phase we will identify 3–4 main points, followed by the essence of the section.



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

How in the world can Paul call this “his gospel”? Why is it his and not Peter's or the other Jewish leaders of the church around Peter?

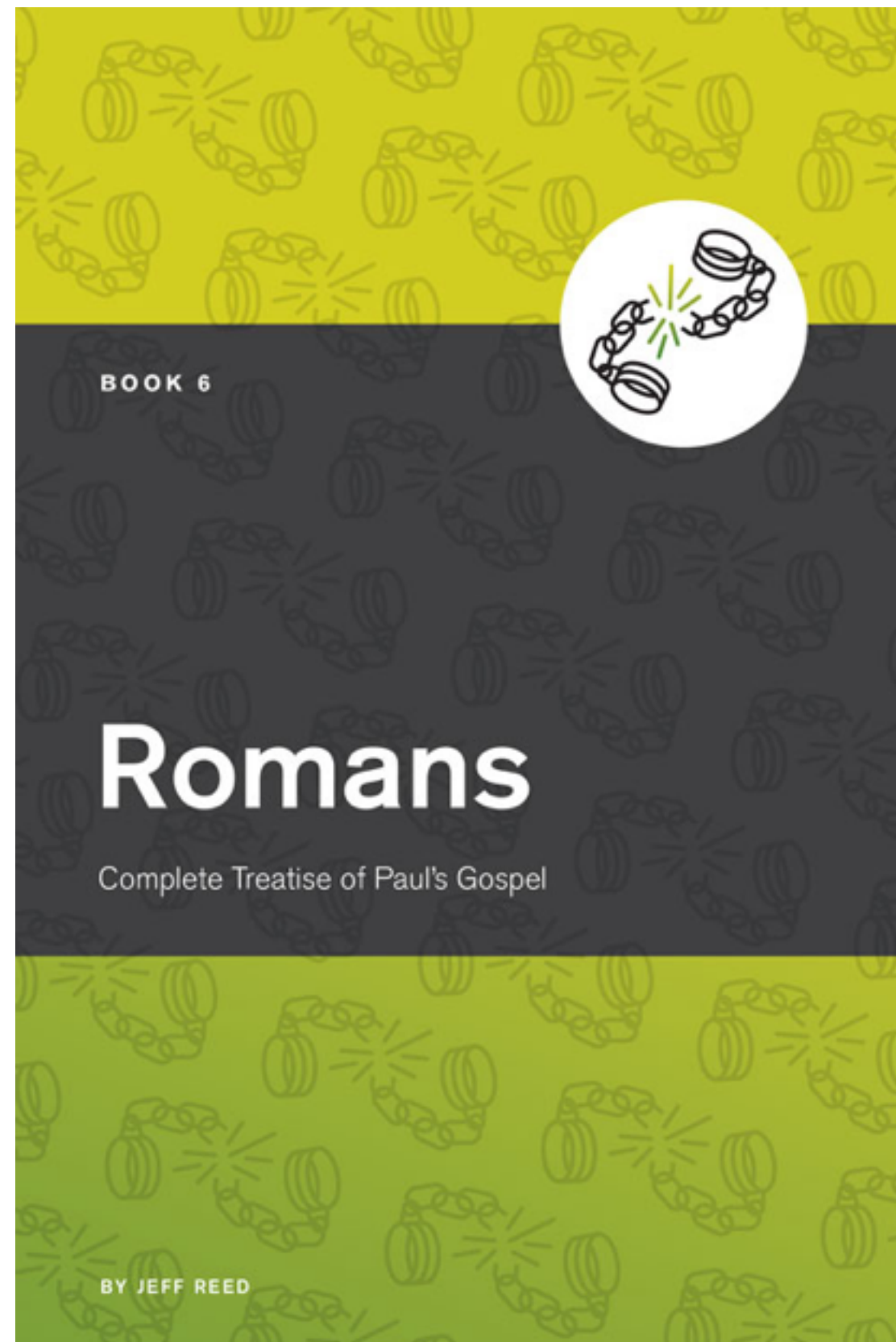
Let's look more deeply into his story in Galatians.



## Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

<sup>11</sup>You see, brothers and sisters, let me make it clear to you: the gospel announced by me is not a mere human invention. <sup>12</sup>I didn't receive it from human beings, nor was I taught it; it came through an unveiling of Jesus the Messiah. <sup>13</sup>You heard, didn't you, the way I behaved when I was still within "Judaism." I persecuted the church of God violently, and ravaged it. <sup>14</sup>I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age and people; I was extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. <sup>15</sup>But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup>to unveil his son in me, so that I might announce the good news about him among the nations — immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood. <sup>17</sup>Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. No, I went away to Arabia, and afterward returned to Damascus. <sup>18</sup>Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to speak with Cephas. I stayed with him for two weeks.

Galatians 1:11–18



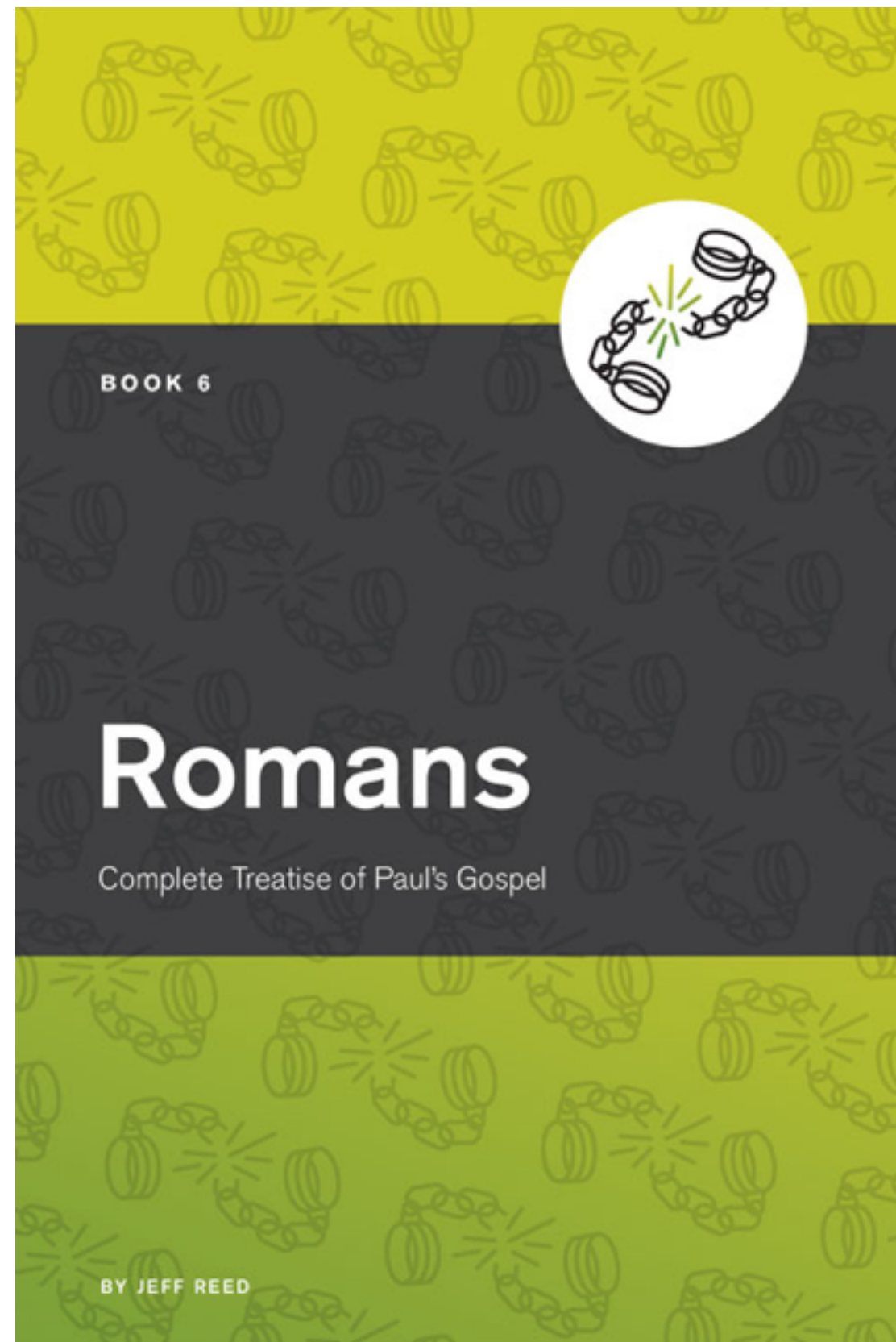
# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

What is Paul's point in telling his story of going away for 3 years? What was he doing?

He was rethinking everything. It took him three years. What came out of it? His gospel. Not Peter's. Not the other Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

Where did he get it? The whole picture was revealed to him by Jesus.

He did not receive it through human beings. He was not taught it.

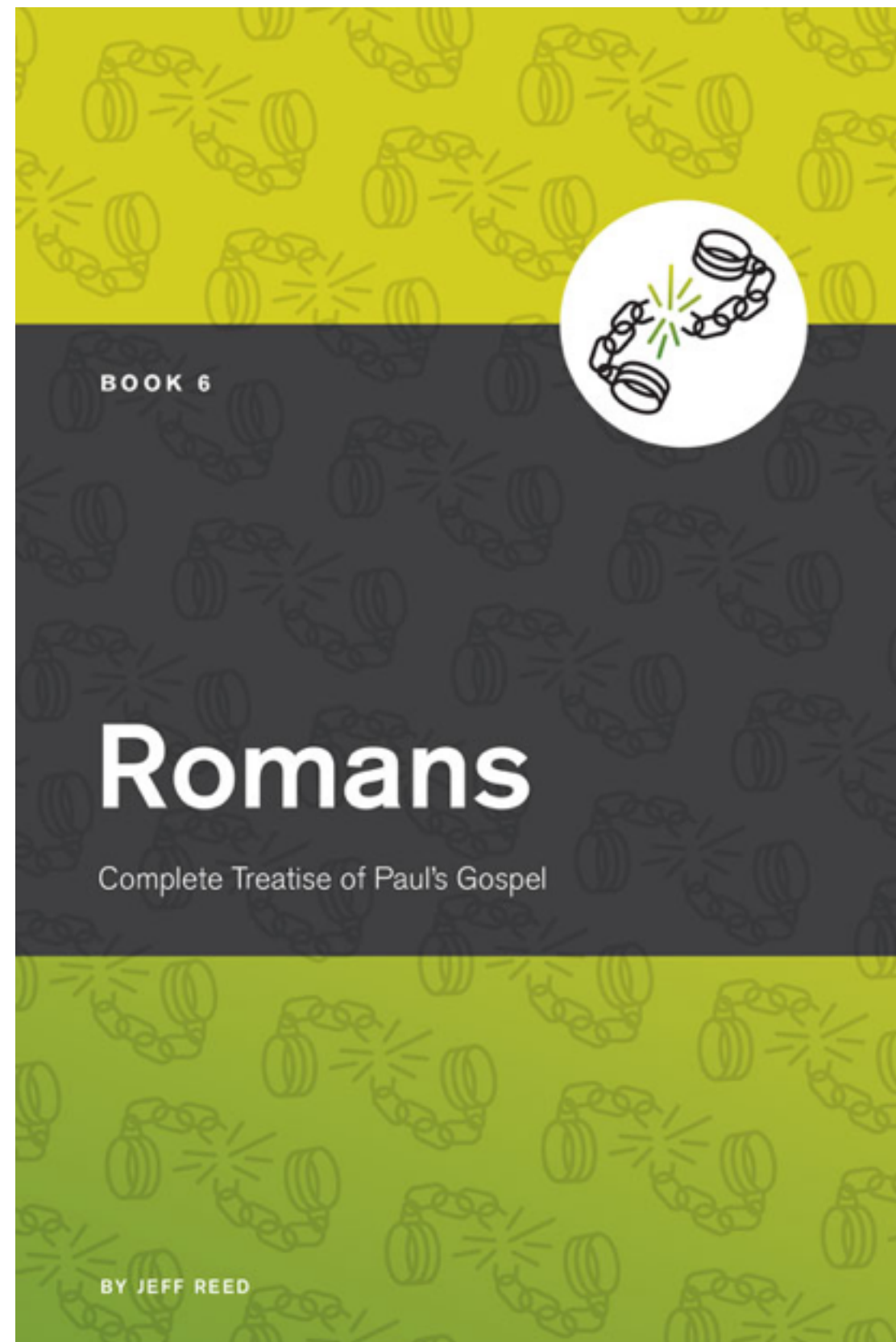


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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.

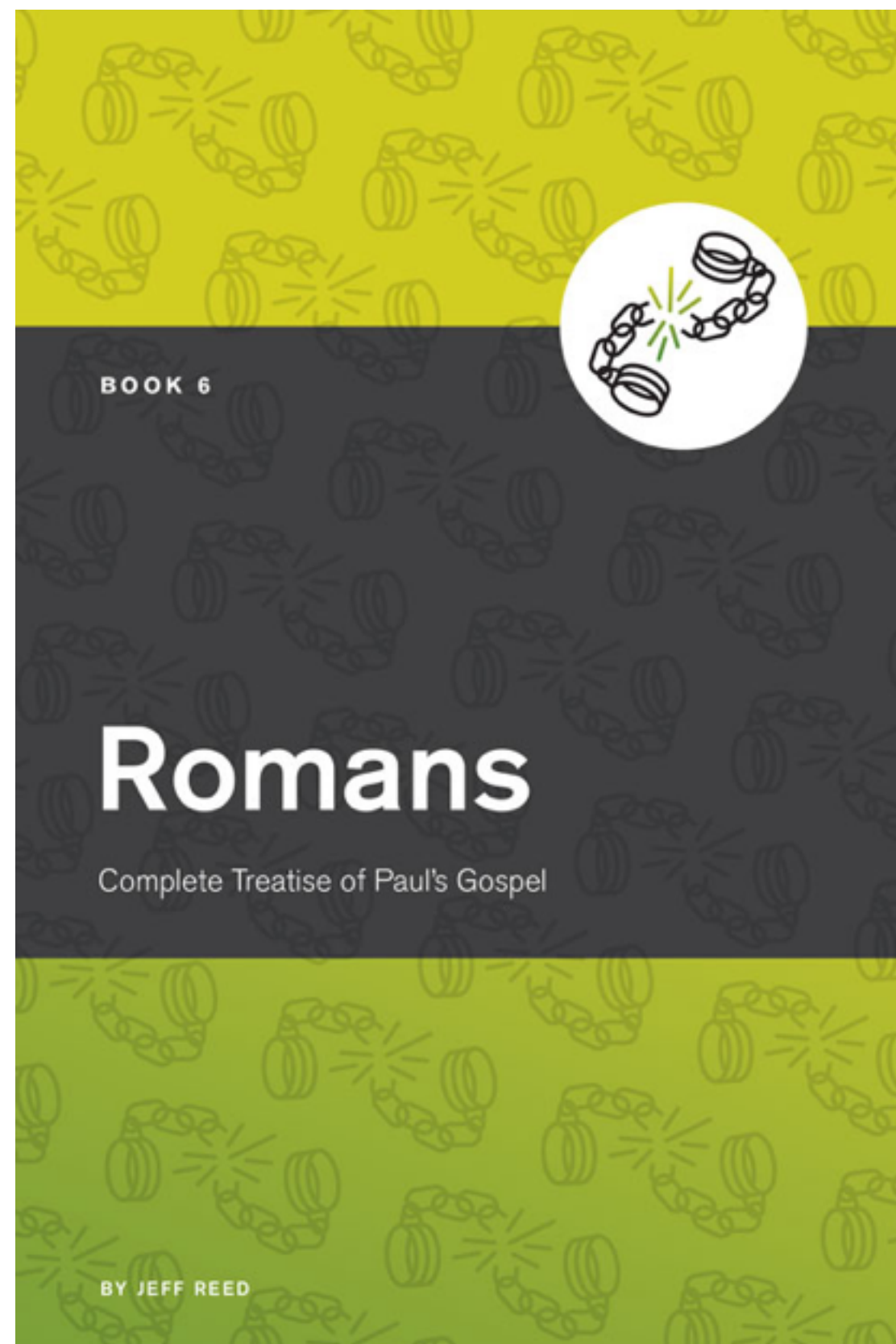


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

What was his gospel?

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

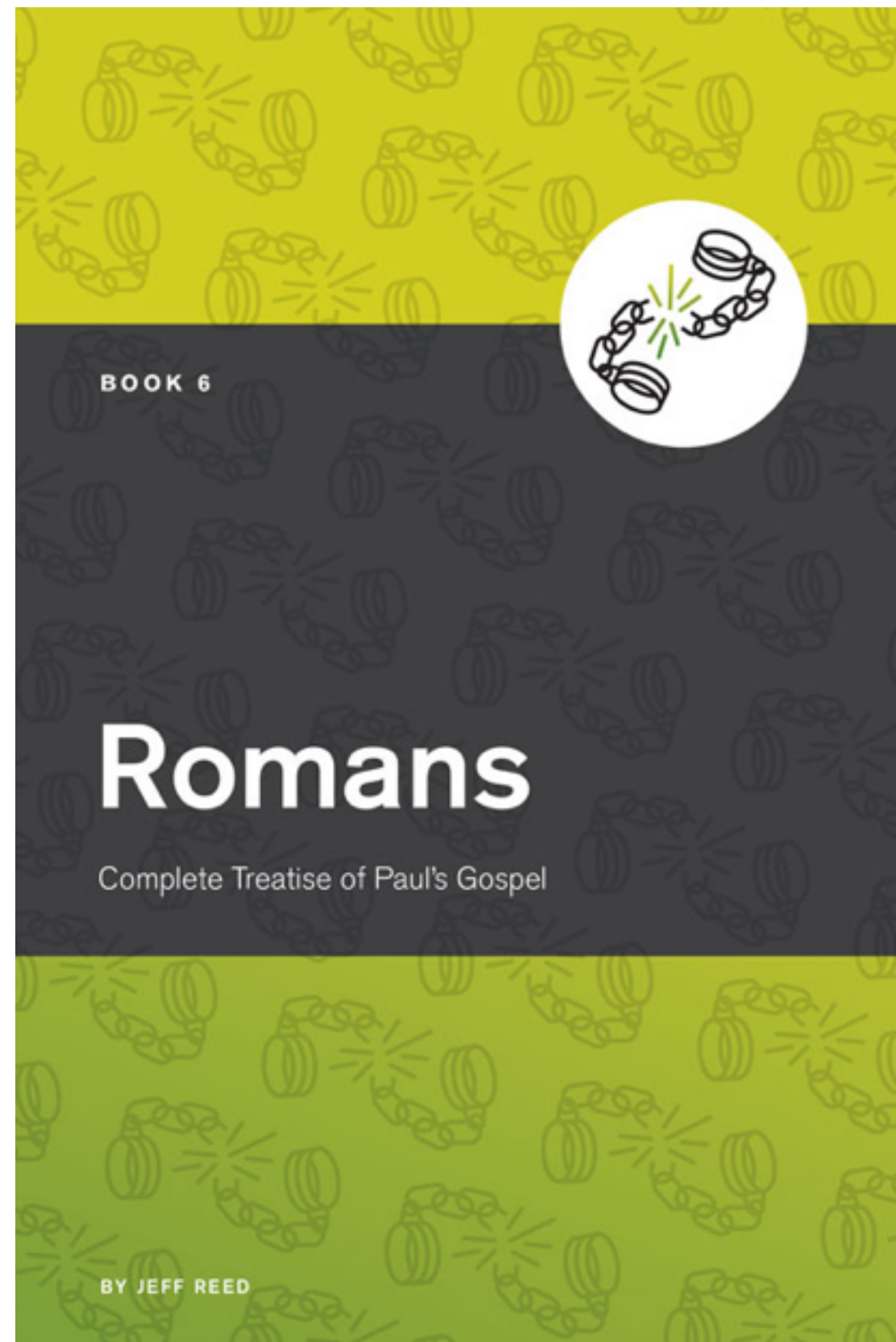
Let's follow the argument through in 1:16–16:24.

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:

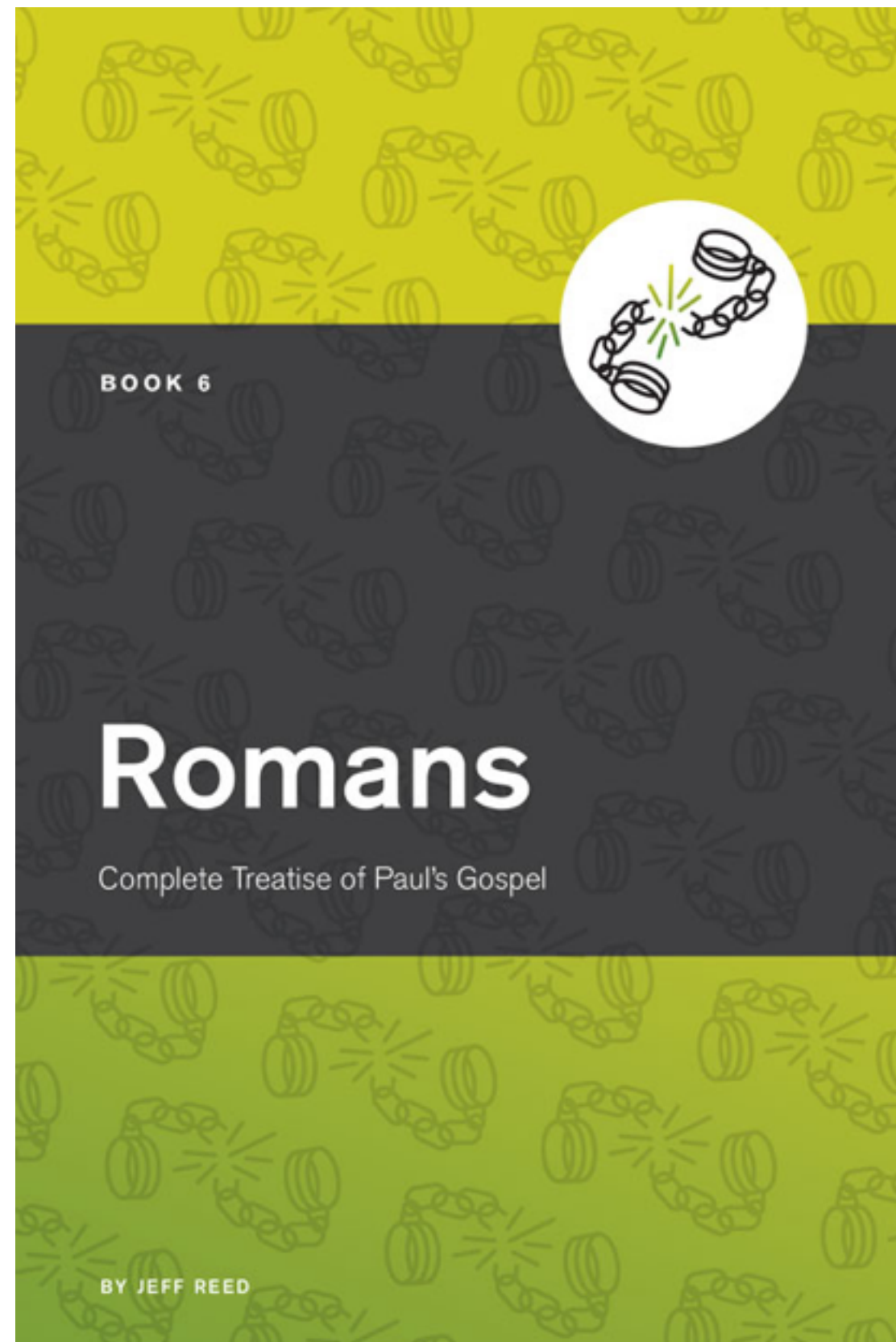
1:16–5:21 (chs. 1–5)

6:1–8:39 (chs. 6–8)

9:1–11:36 (chs. 9–11)

12:1–15:33 (chs. 12–15)

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

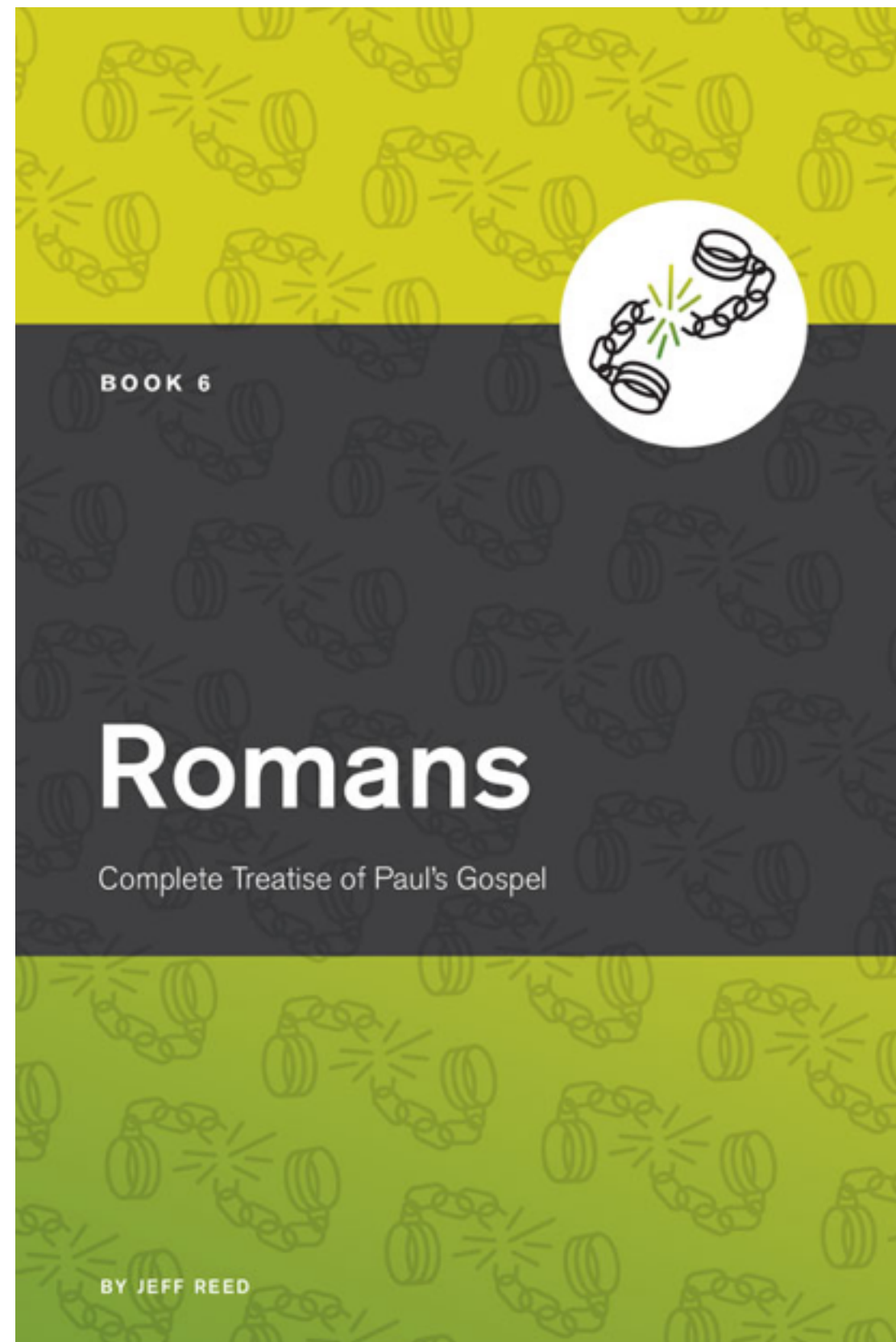
Paul's argument seems to have 4 phases to it in 1:16–15:27:

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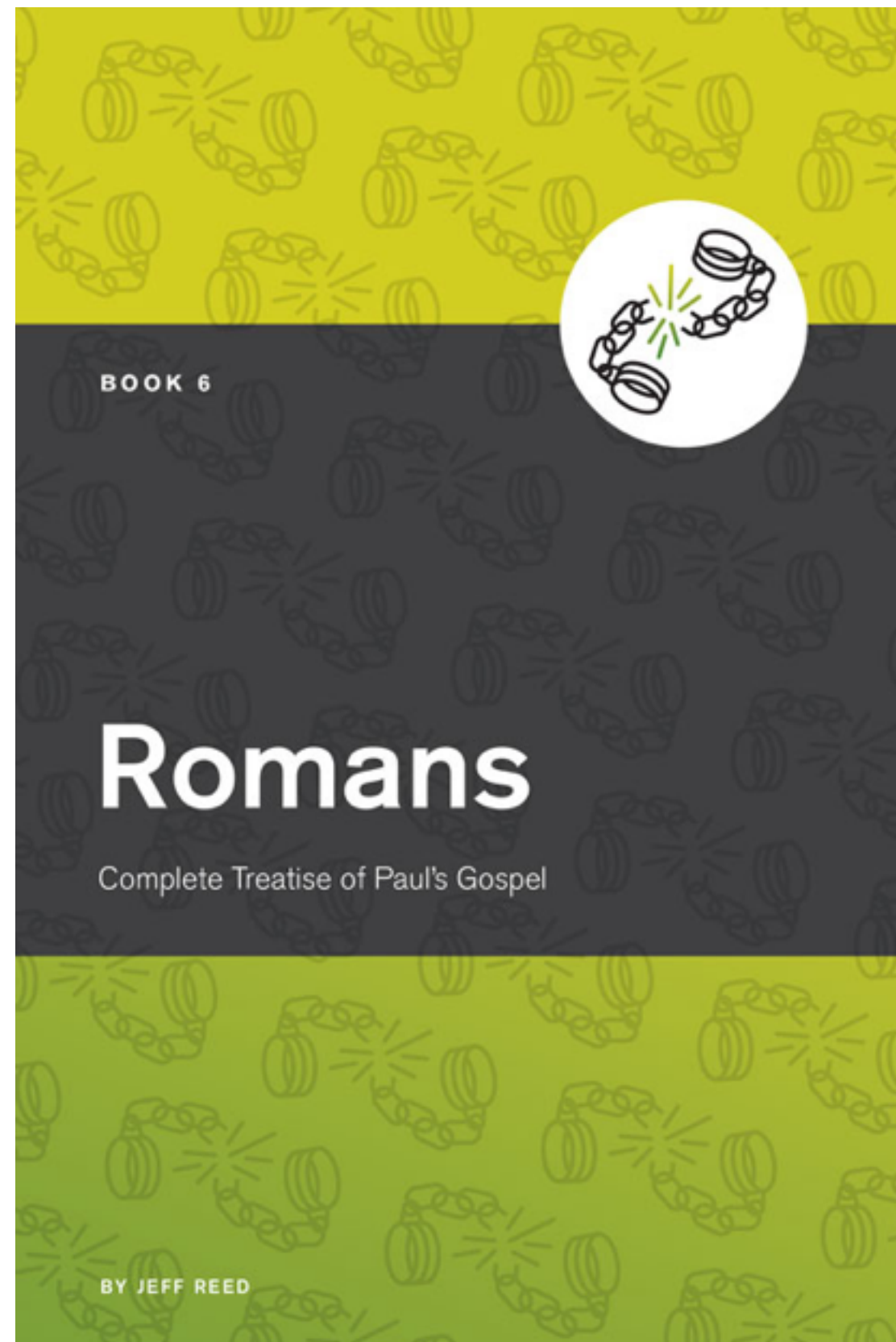


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

The essence of Paul's argument (one paragraph) in 1:16–5:21

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: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

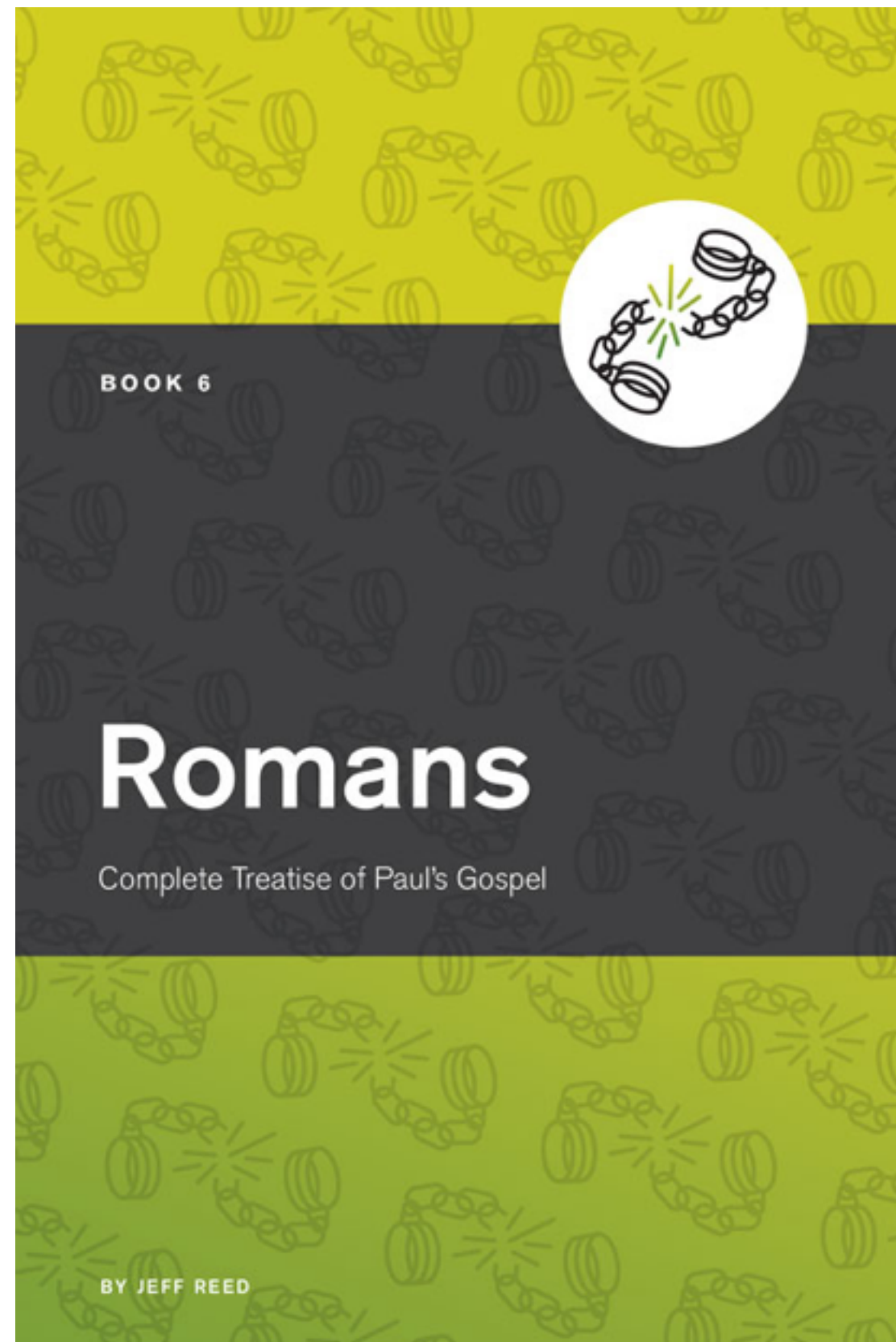
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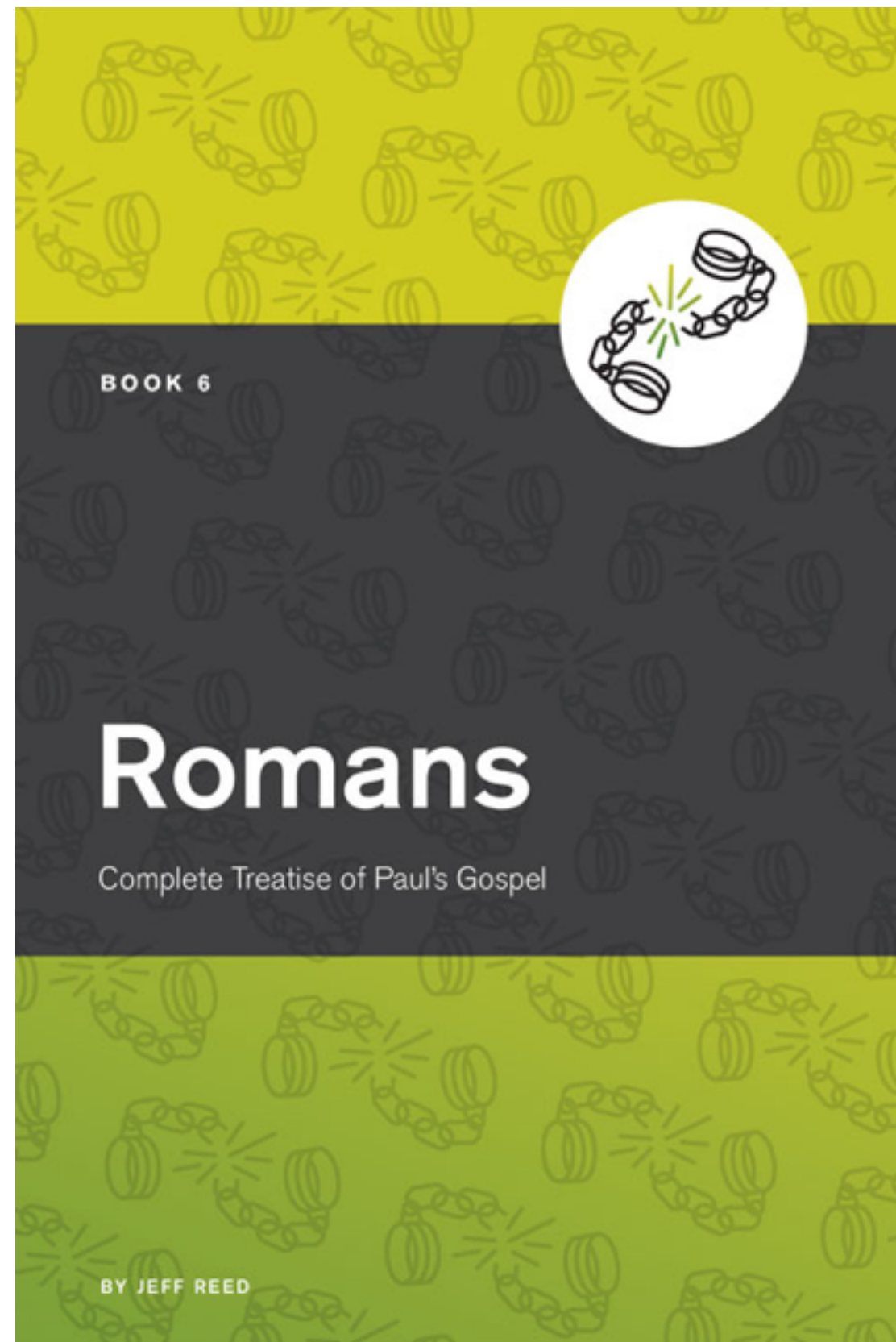


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

The essence of Paul's argument (one paragraph) in 6:1–8:39

As a result of believing in the Messiah, we are part of His new family and indebted to serving His covenant purposes

and as we bring our minds in line with the pattern of the Messiah's teaching delivered to the churches (as Paul is working it out in Romans), God, through His Spirit, will work those purposes out in our lives in a supernatural way.



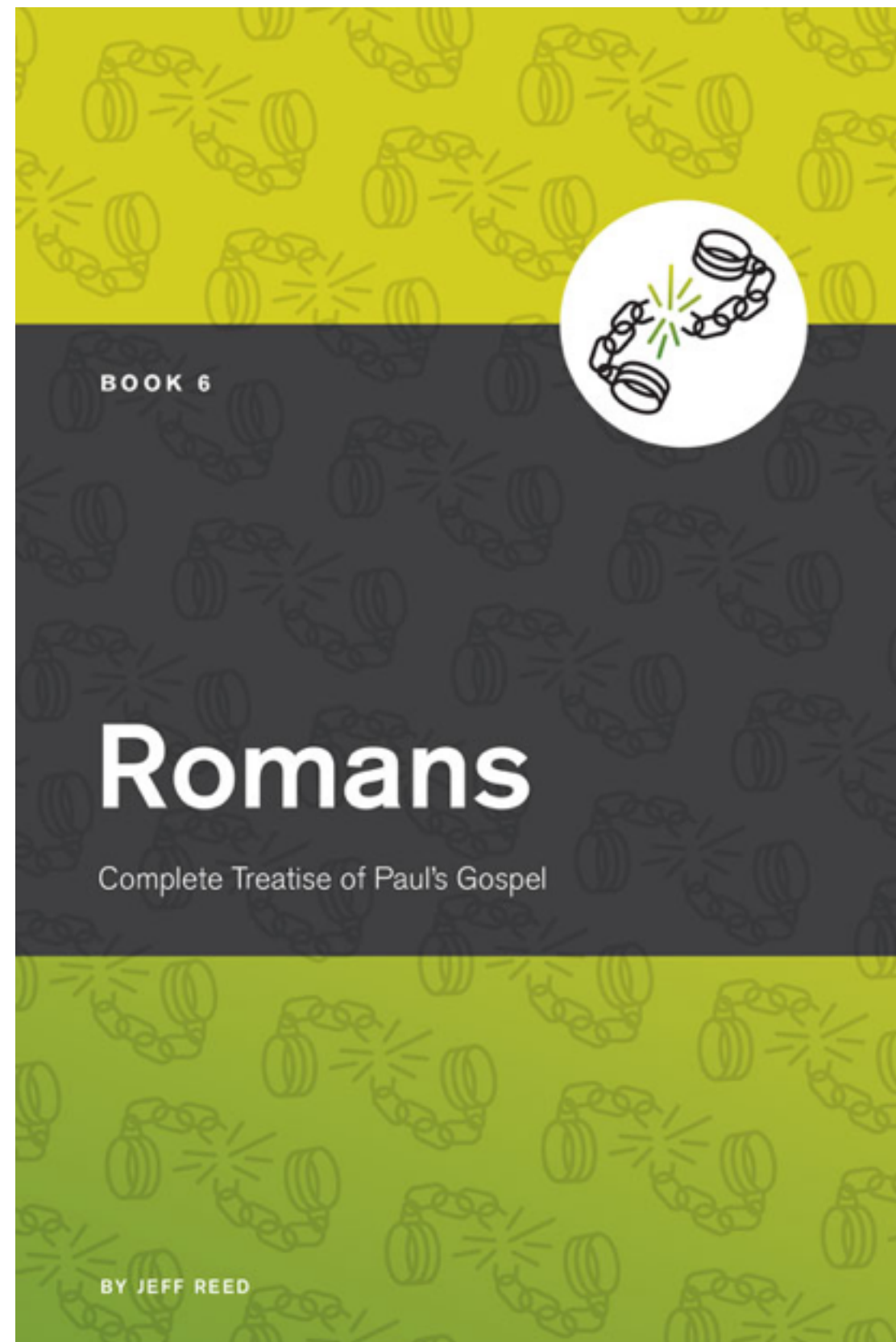
# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Romans 12:1–2 sets the whole argument in a context that we must keep clear in our minds, to set the intention of his whole argument in 1:16–11:36.

This is his intention:

In light of God's mercies (by faith in the Messiah, we are now part of this new family)

- make a solid commitment to this new life
- renew our minds (bring our minds in line with God's)
- allowing the Spirit to work out God's specific will in our lives



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

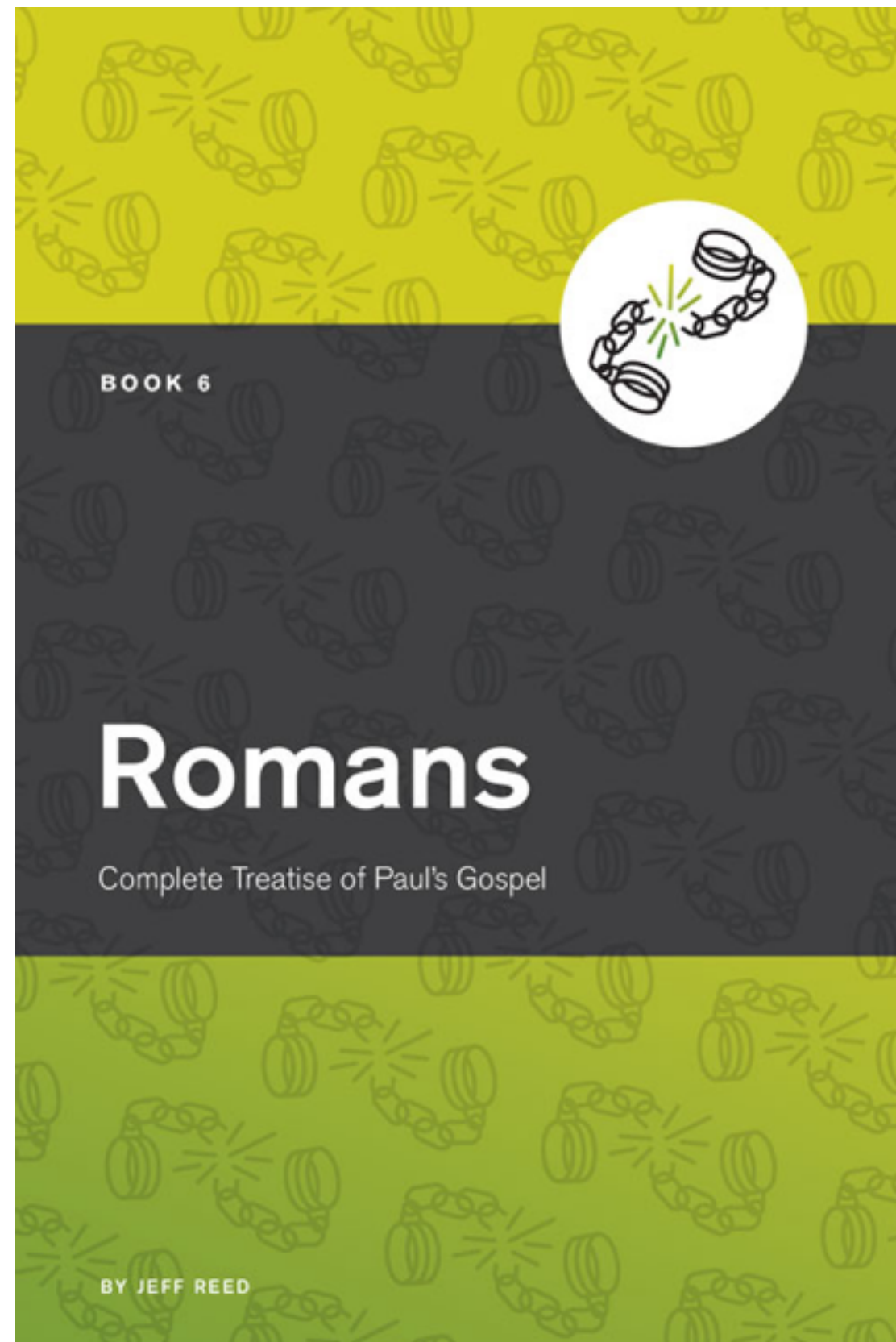
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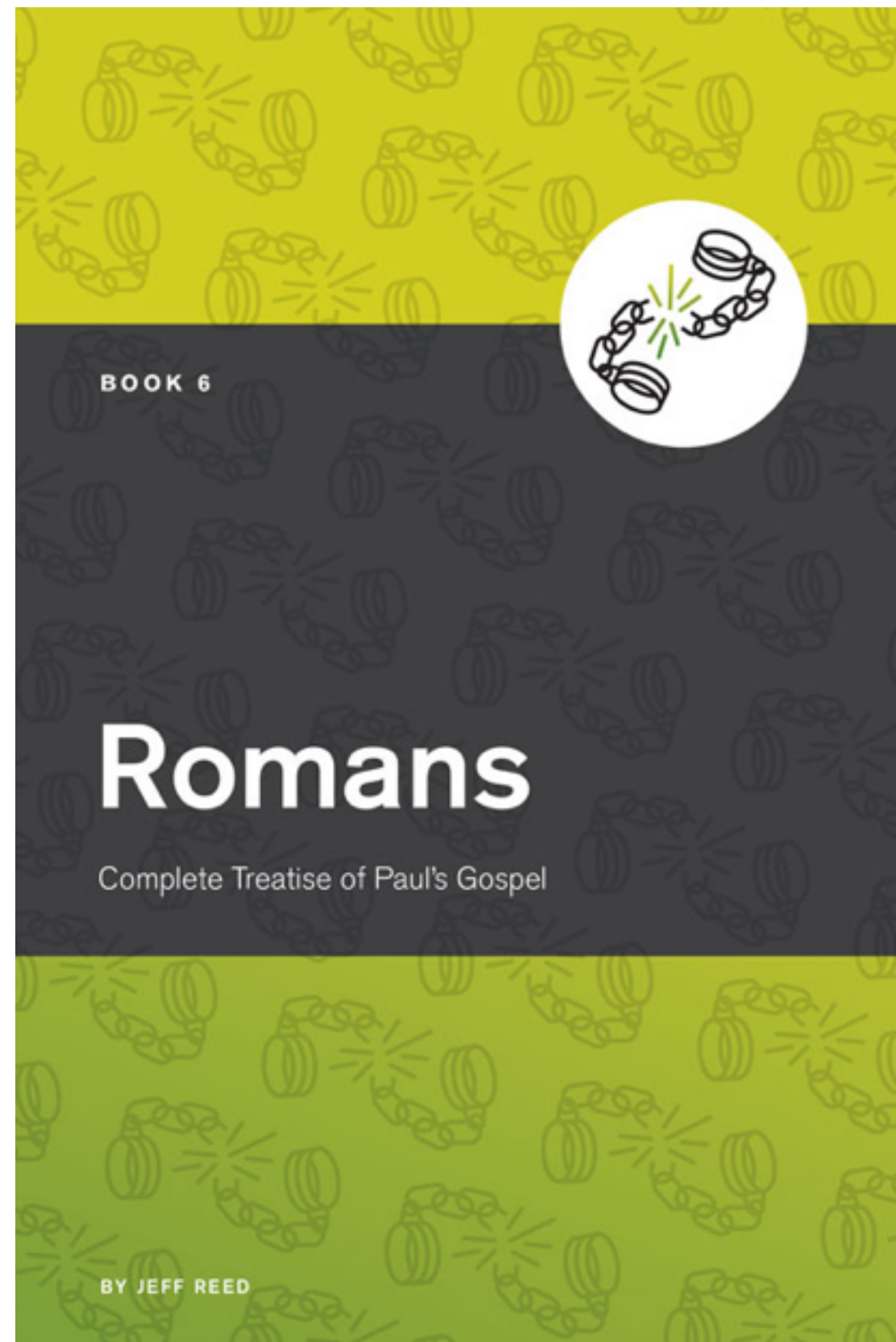
# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

The essence of Paul's argument (one paragraph) in 9:1–11:26:

Israel misinterpreted the nature and purpose of being God's chosen people, replacing the promise with the law and, as a result, are now partially hardened until the gospel is fully proclaimed to the nations,

but God's covenant promises are irrevocable, and when the gospel has fully permeated the nations, that hardening will be lifted, and the nation of Israel as a whole will be saved—a hugely increased remnant.





# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

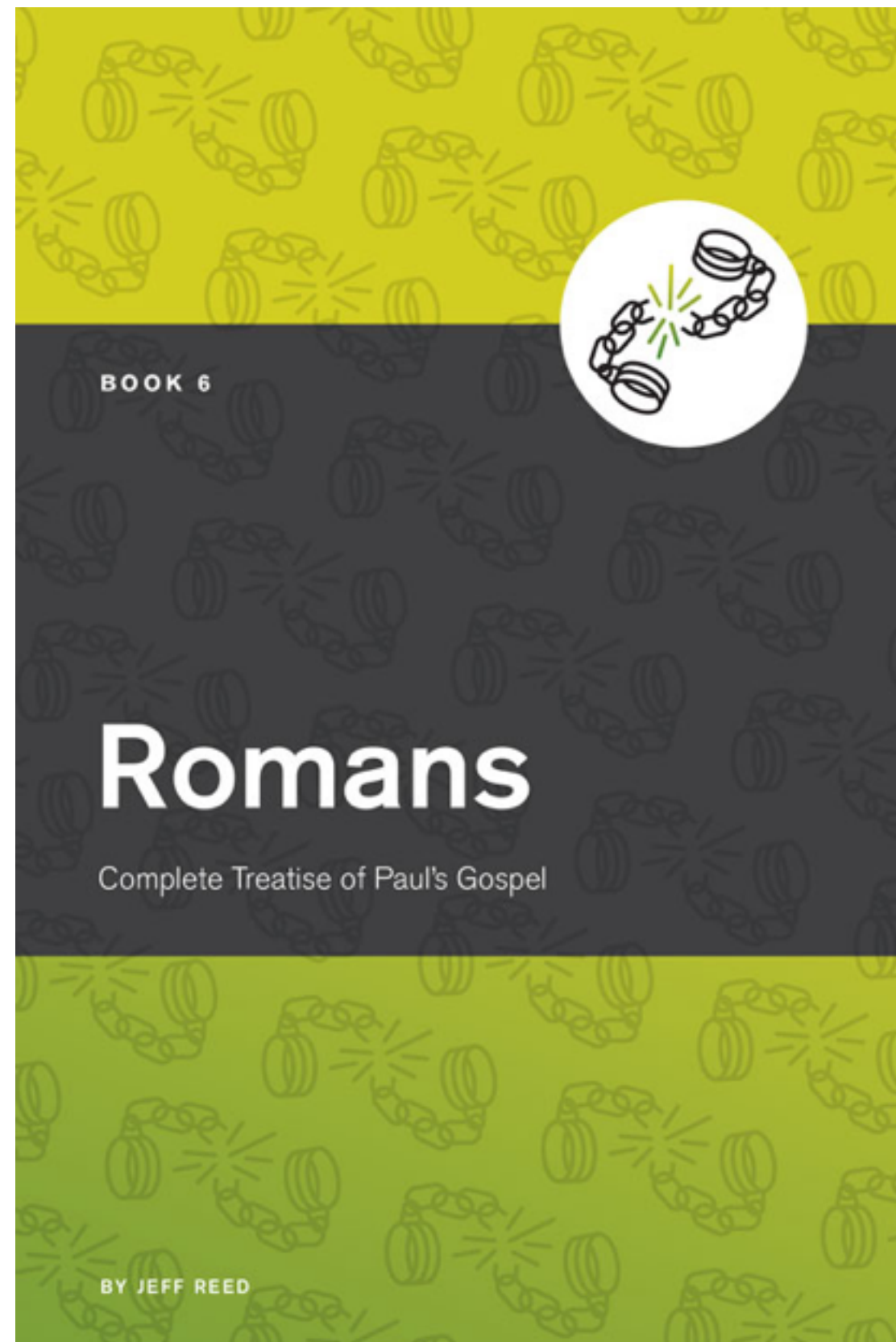
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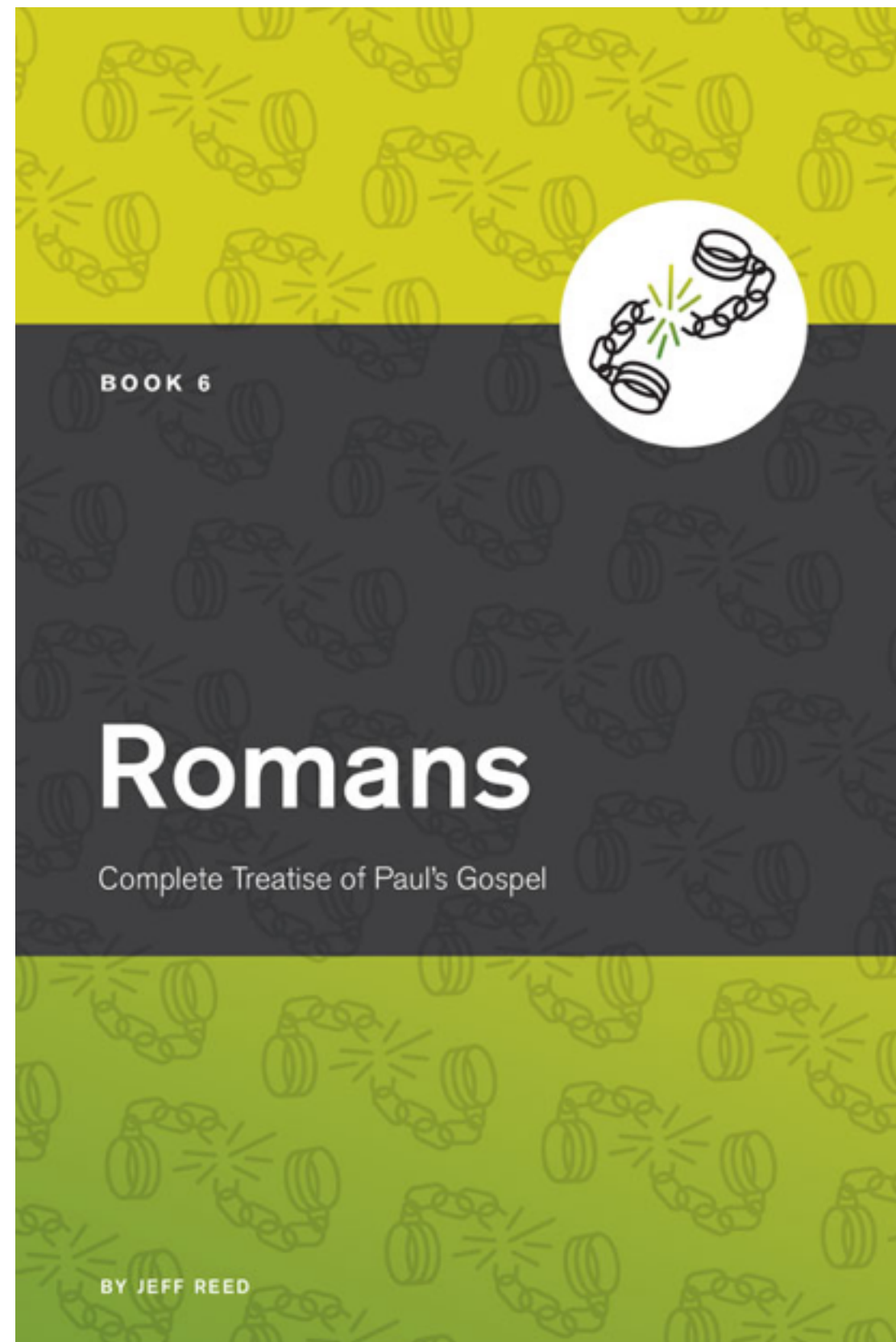


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

The essence of Paul's argument (one paragraph) in 12:1–15:13

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.

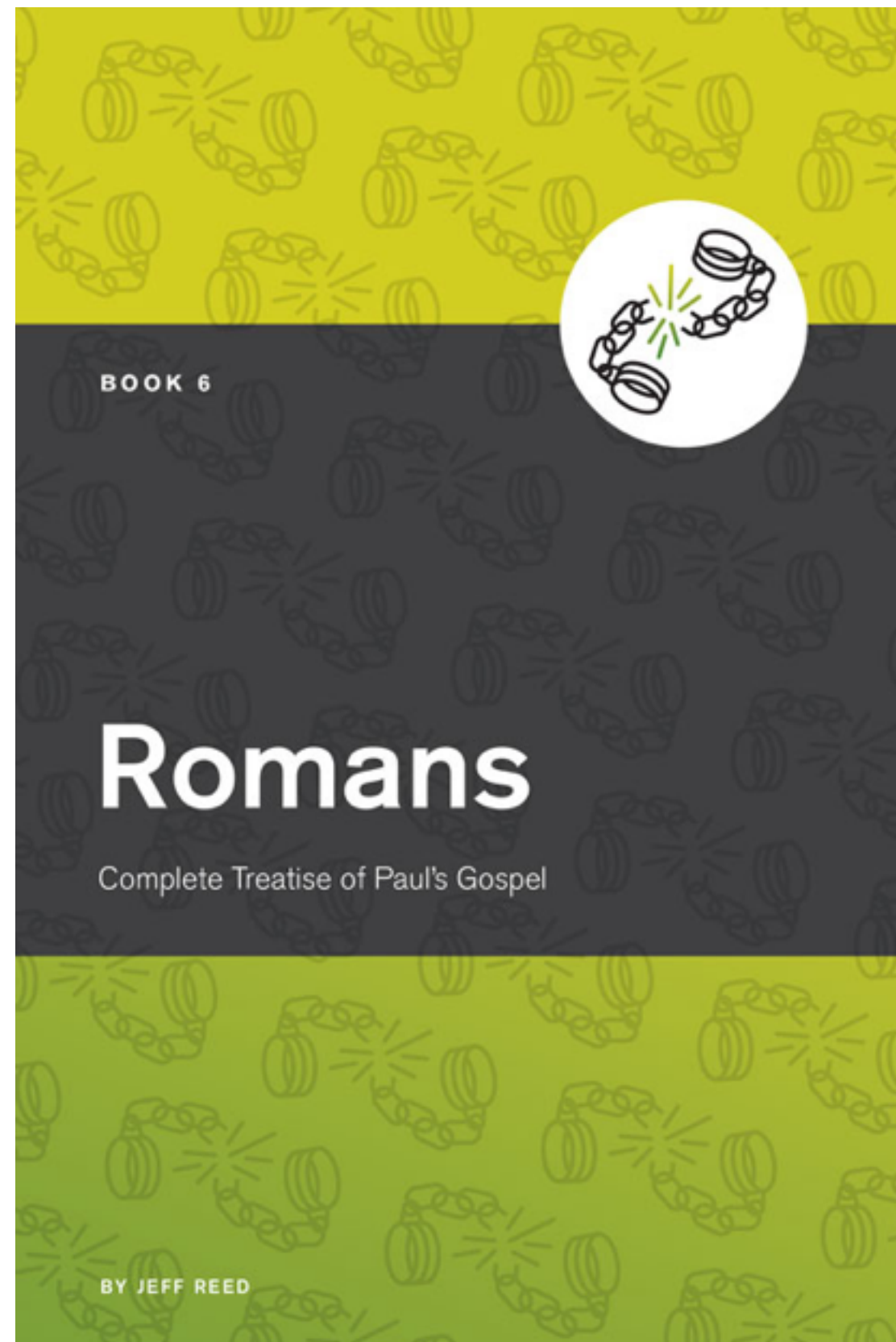


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

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

by arguing that 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.

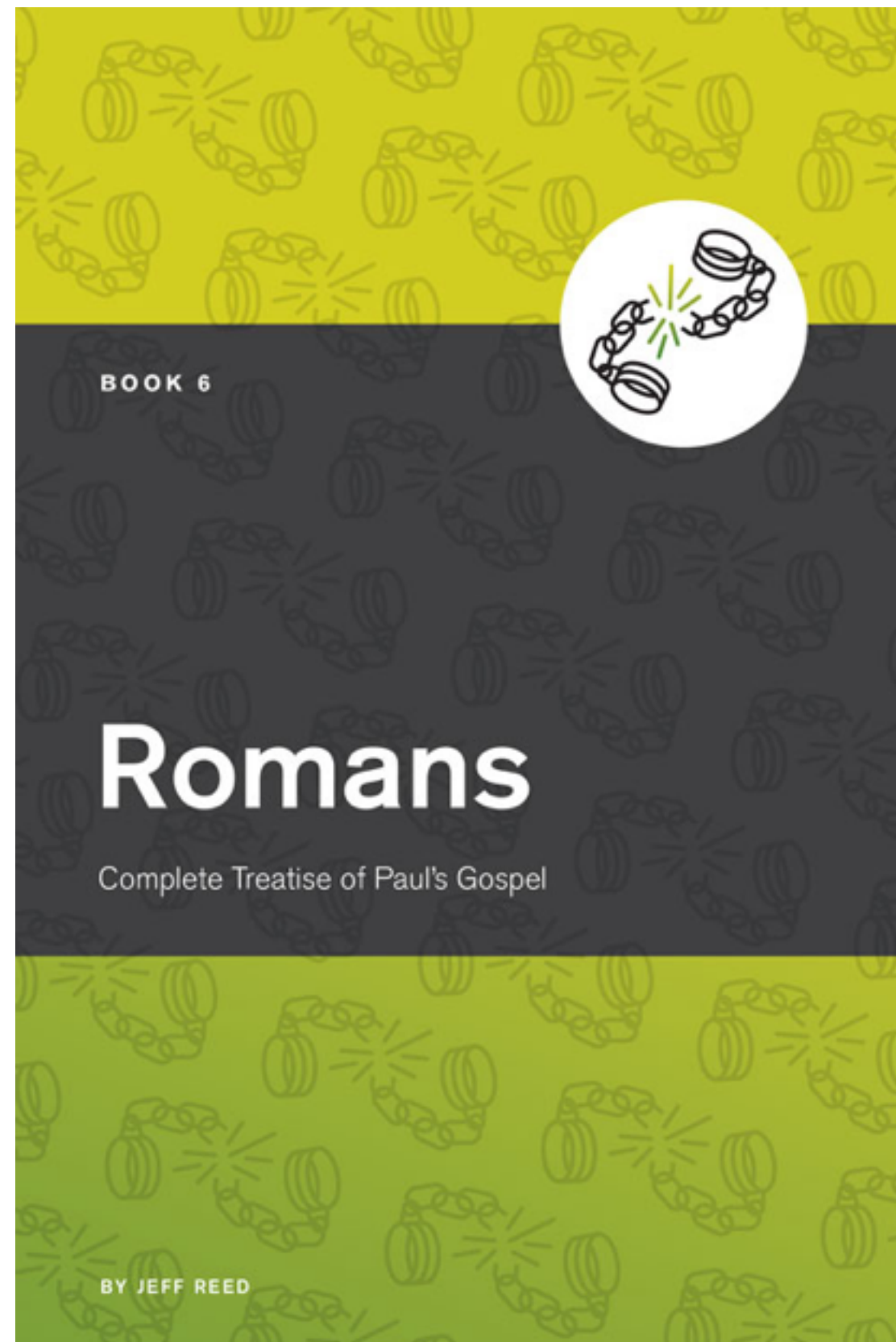


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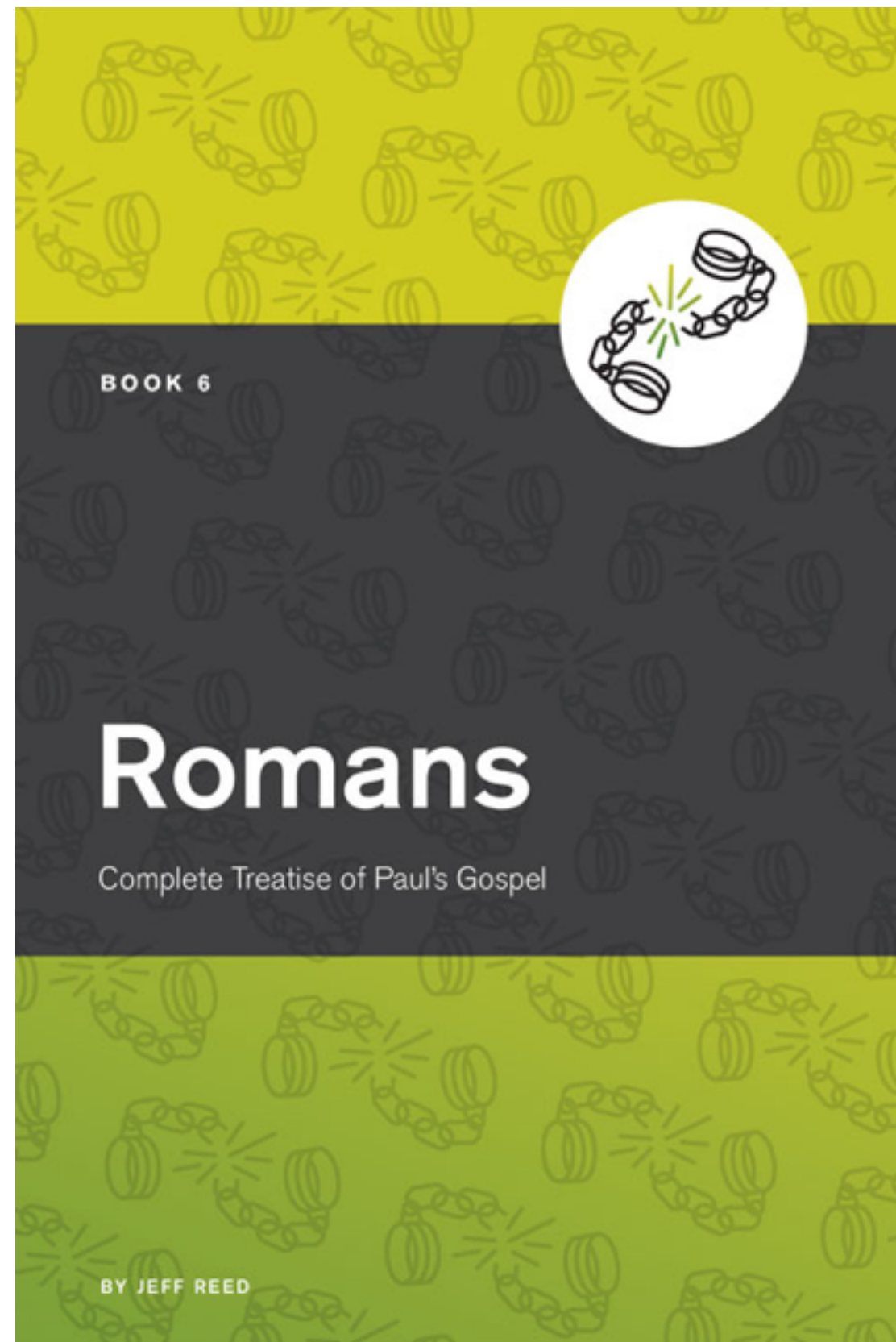


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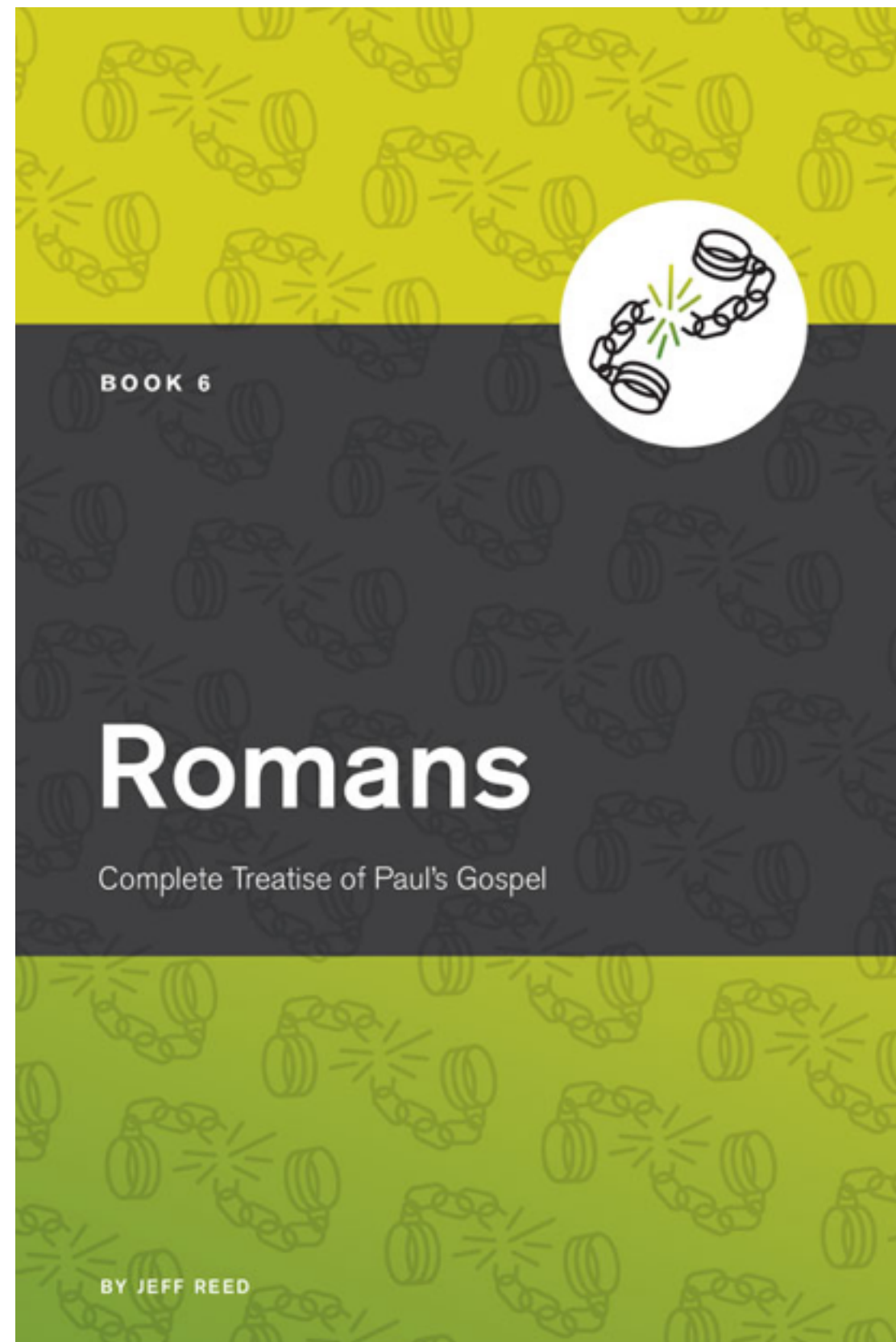


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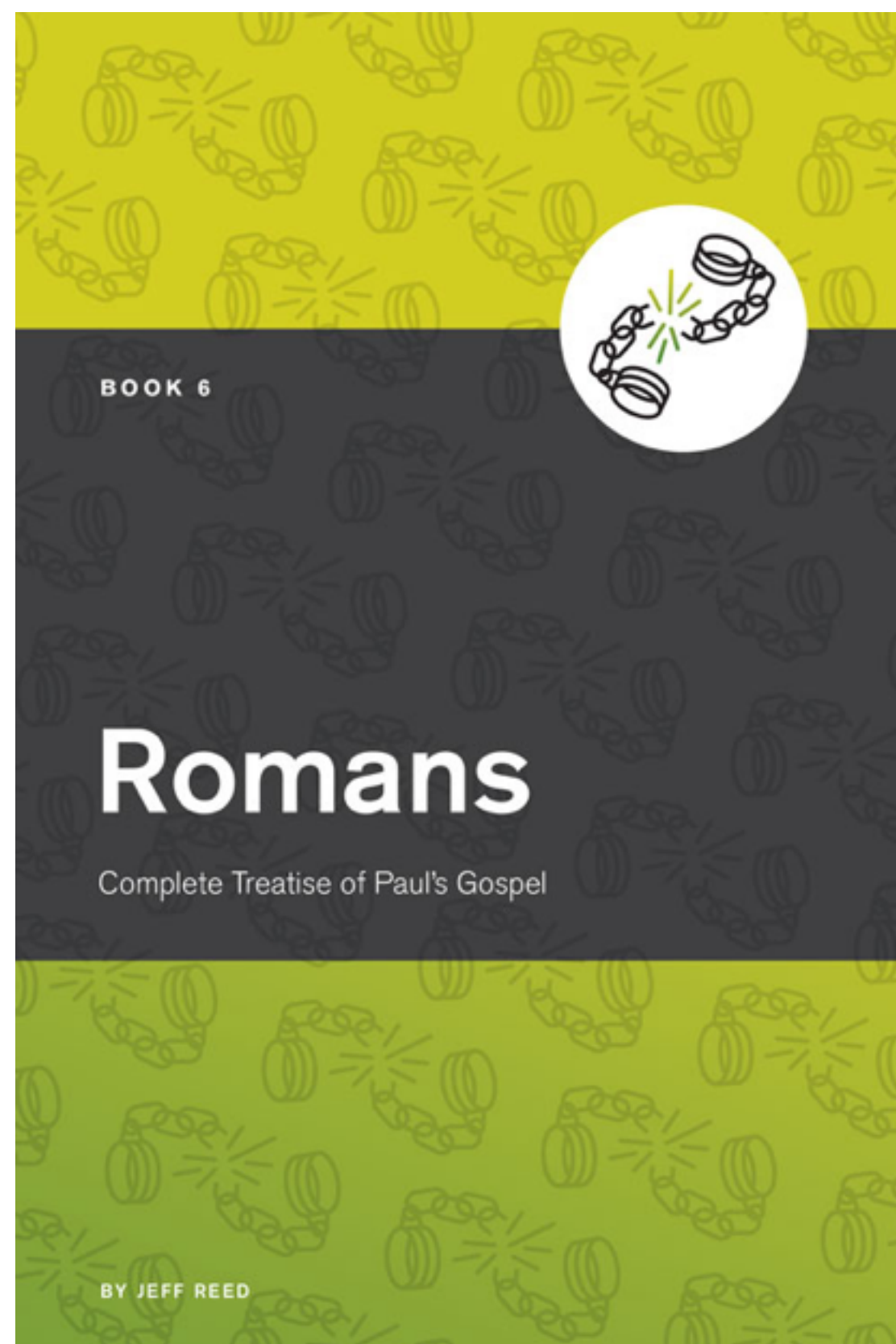


# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

Issue: Becoming fully established in the gospel

Questions:

1. What might be the consequences of not being fully established in the gospel as Paul unveiled it?
2. Why is it so important that key churches in an apostolic network be fully established in the gospel?
3. How could a faulty foundation on the gospel affect a whole movement of churches?
4. How does the gospel affect our whole worldview? And our effectiveness in culture?



# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

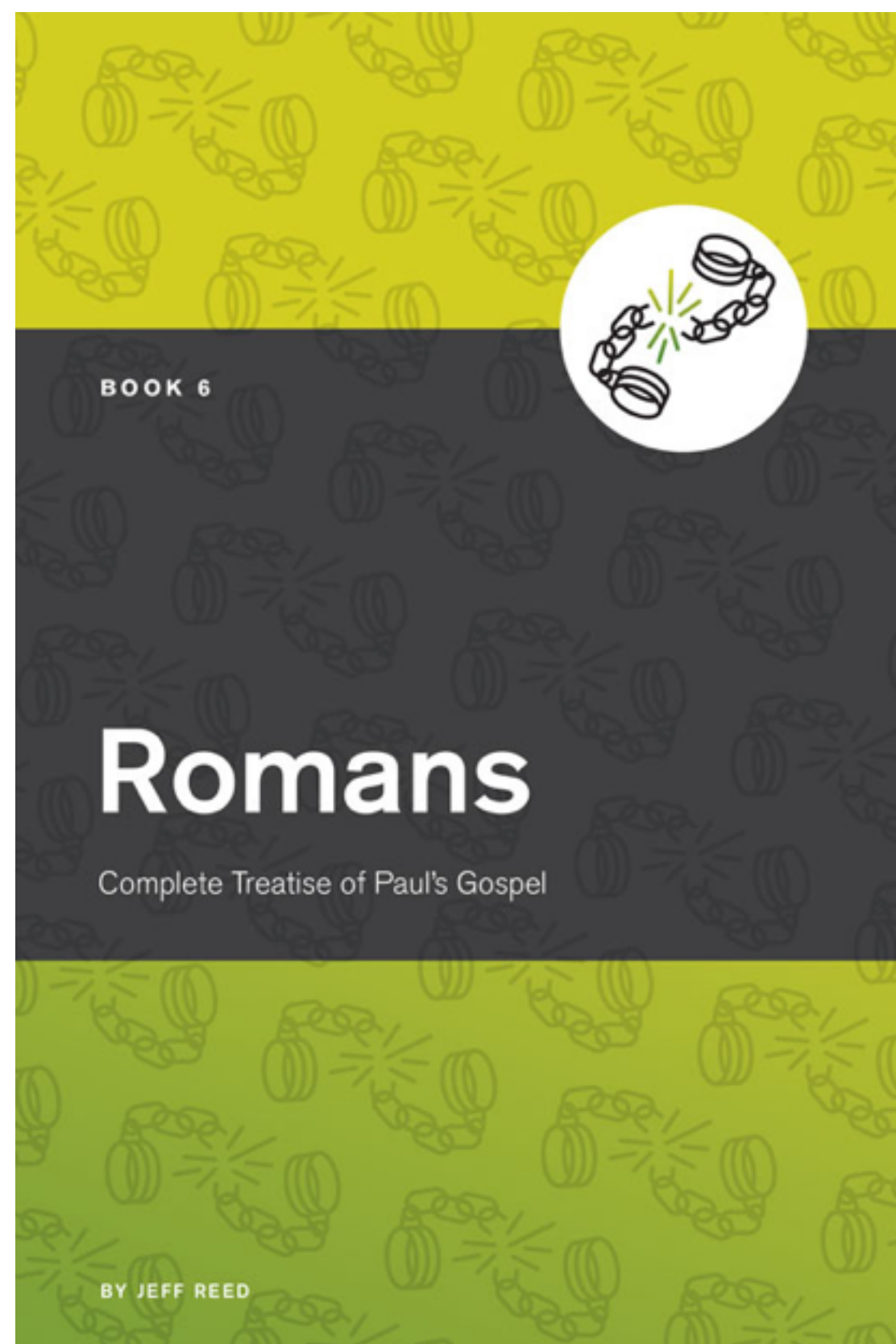
The implications of this are enormous.

If we do not understand the whole picture that he works us through in Romans, then we are not fully established in the gospel.

Back to my original statement:

I am convinced that most believers in our Western churches today are not fully established in the gospel.





# Romans: Complete Treatise of Paul's Gospel

A faulty understanding of the gospel in the West has led to endless denominations and the decline of Christianity in the West.

A faulty understanding of the gospel has led to a Church in the Global South that has little impact on culture. (Uganda)

A faulty understanding of the gospel leads to syncretism in animistic Hindu and Buddhist cultures in the Global South.

Yet it is so simple that the illiterate can grasp it if they learn the gospel in the context of The Story.