

Walking
with
Jesus
through
His Word

Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures



Dennis E. Johnson

“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 Duguid**, Professor of Old Testament, Westminster 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 Christ. 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 *Walking with Jesus through His Word* 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**, J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Experiencing Dennis Johnson’s instruction firsthand as a seminary student was an enormous privilege. But in this book he has poured his decades of research, teaching, and life into one volume that reignites our passion for Bible study. The Bible itself tells us how to read it. Professor Johnson not only believes this, but displays it on every page. For anyone wanting to see how the Bible fits together, this book is a treasure.”

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

“The invitation given by Dennis Johnson to walk 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

“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

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To Our Children:

Eric and Susanne
Christina and Julien
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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

THERE ARE MANY books about how to read and interpret the Bible. This volume stands out because it offers us a key to the way in which Jesus himself interpreted the Old Testament. Understanding how the Old Testament relates to the New is one of the most important things that Christians need to understand about the Bible. Jesus' first followers initially had a difficult time understanding how and where the Old Testament books prophesied about the Messiah. As Jesus taught them how to find him in the Scriptures, however, they began to understand the diverse ways in which the Old Testament looked forward to him. Likewise, the better we know how Jesus interpreted and applied the Old Testament, the better we can emulate his methods.

Dennis Johnson will ably and clearly explain why and how Jesus understood that "all the Scriptures" point to Christ. We may well think that naturally *Jesus* could properly see how this was so. But we ourselves might not have the confidence to find him in the Old Testament beyond the New Testament passages that cite messianic verses from the Old. Johnson's work will help us to gain that confidence. It will also aid us in not finding Jesus in the Old Testament where he is not.

Thus, this volume will help us to see the proper ways in which the Old Testament is Christ-centered. It will enable us to read the Old Testament Christianly. I eagerly commend this book to readers, who are sure to 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 and sees him as its goal.

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J. Gresham Machen Chair of New Testament and
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Westminster Theological Seminary

Acknowledgments

PLEASE DO NOT BE MISLED by the fact that there are hardly any footnotes in this book. The truth is that whatever you might find useful in these pages for your study of God’s Word I have learned from others. I have spared you a flood of footnotes to make *Walking with Jesus through His Word* more accessible and to make it feel less “academic.” (If you happen to 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 more of 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 primarily through their publications and correspondence: 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 a couple of these chapters with me. Their comments have helped to improve clarity at various points, 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.

Acknowledgments

As they have for my previous work, the editorial staff of P&R Publishing have 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, I expect, more useful to readers. Copyeditor Karen Magnuson's sharp eyes and mind caught and corrected errors; and she raised questions that astutely diagnosed obscurity and suggested remedies, resulting in greater clarity, for which every reader should join me in thanksgiving.

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 in our congregation, New Life Presbyterian Church in Escondido, California. For over a decade now, our present pastor, Ted Hamilton, has shown us how to walk with Jesus through his Word and the difference it makes in the joys and struggles of everyday life.

I am especially grateful for Jane, my beloved *‘ezer kenegdô* (“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 walk with Jesus through his Word, from Genesis through Revelation.

P A R T 1

Beginning the Journey



The Walk through the Bible That Sets Hearts Afire

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK implies an audacious claim. The claim is that the sixty-six books contained in the Christian Scriptures, the Bible, which were written by dozens of people in many different centuries, are bound together by a central theme, a single plotline, and a unique Hero, Jesus the Messiah. Admittedly, two-thirds of these Scriptures were given long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and do not even mention him by name. To be sure, these documents come in different forms: historical narratives, law codes, wisdom aphorisms, theological discourses, poems, letters, symbolic visions, and more. Still, this study seeks to persuade you that Jesus is the central figure in the outworking of God's plan for human and global and cosmic history, the divine agenda that unifies everything in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Moreover, this study proposes a way of reading Scripture that is, I believe, rooted in Scripture itself and that will equip you to appreciate more fully how the whole Bible reveals Christ and his mission of rescue and renovation.

Readers might have several reactions to the claim on which this book is built. If you are a believer in Jesus, a follower of Jesus, you might be excited by the prospect of learning more about how to read your Bible in such a way that each text shows you more of his glory and grace. Yet you might have encountered approaches that connect the Bible's diverse pieces to Christ in ways that seem far-fetched and unpersuasive, twisting texts in ways that suggest more about the interpreter's creativity

than about the meaning and message that the Holy Spirit intended to convey. Implausible links between far-flung Bible passages and Jesus' person and mission make us justifiably cautious, even suspicious. I share your concerns, but invite you to explore a sounder way of connecting all the Scriptures—especially the Old Testament in all its diversity—to Christ, the approach that we see applied by the inspired authors of the New Testament itself. Since the Bible is God's Word, we can and must let it teach us how to read its constituent books. Let's learn from the Bible how to read the Bible.

If you are not a Christian, you might find highly dubious the claim that so many documents, produced by so many people in so many venues over so many centuries, could possibly have the sort of unity that I am affirming. But that is only one of many things about Christianity that you find hard to accept. Perhaps you question whether everything in the universe could have been created by an invisible, all-powerful, personal God. Maybe you have trouble with the Bible's insistence that what is wrong in this world is attributable, in the end, to the fact that we and our ancestors have broken this God's moral law. If these biblical teachings bother you, you probably balk at the Bible's insistence that Jesus is the only way to find peace with God (John 14:6; Acts 4:11–12). I invite you to keep an open mind about all these aspects of the Bible's teaching and to consider the possibility that they all—including the claim that the whole story finds integral unity in Jesus of Nazareth—actually fit together into a coherent view of reality and human experience. Let me go a step further and challenge you to compare your own way of making sense of life to the Bible's perspective, which has captivated millions of people over thousands of years. I believe you will find that the Bible's diagnosis of our human condition and the remedy it prescribes—Jesus' sacrificial death on behalf of others and his powerful resurrection—are both intellectually cogent and personally transforming.

In this introductory chapter, we will ask the Bible to answer two questions:

- (1) Should we expect to “walk with Jesus through his Word”—that is, throughout the whole span of the Scriptures?
- (2) If we should, why is it important for us to expect to “walk with Jesus through his Word”?

In the last chapter, we will look more fully at the second question, why it is important to link the Bible's every passage to Jesus. But you have every right to expect a preliminary answer to the "why?" question up front, before you invest your time in chapters 2 through 10. Happily, the answer to the first question will, in itself, begin to help us with the second. Why should we read the whole Bible, Old Testament as well as New, in connection with Christ? Because that is the way Jesus himself taught his closest followers to read the Bible.

As you see in the table of contents, we are using the metaphor of taking a journey from a point of origin to a destination to represent the process by which careful readers discover the routes that God's Spirit embedded in the Scripture to lead us through the diverse terrain of the Bible toward its center, the person and saving mission of Jesus the Messiah. This analogy is suggested, in part, by an illustration given by Charles Spurgeon, the great nineteenth-century preacher, which will open chapter 2. It also echoes the way in which God's Word evokes the Israelites' forty-year pilgrimage from Egypt through wilderness to the Promised Land as an illustration of believers' whole life in this world (Heb. 3–4), imagery that John Bunyan turned into one of the world's all-time best sellers, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I am suggesting that learning to trace the lines, to follow the paths, that link passages throughout the Scriptures to Jesus at the center is comparable to a traveler's task of finding the way to a desired destination. Sometimes the "navigation" is an easy matter of following clear and unmistakable road signs on highways. At other times, it will demand a more experienced explorer's skills to discern "the lay of the land" and to identify landmarks that subtly signal paths to our destination.

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. As we eavesdrop on their conversation, recorded in Luke 24, we will see that the answer to our first question must be "Yes, we should definitely expect to hear every text of Scripture as a witness that points us to Jesus Christ." And one answer to our second question ("Why is it important?") is simply: "Because that is the way Jesus taught his apostles to read the Word." As we walk alongside Cleopas and a colleague—two disillusioned, downcast disciples—and a mysterious stranger, as we overhear him lead them through a survey of Israel's ancient Scriptures, I hope you will find your heart, as they did theirs, burning with hopeful wonder.

Jesus' Sluggish Students "Before" and "After"

Before we set out from Jerusalem with Cleopas and his companion and before the stranger joins them, we should take one step back for perspective. Consider the contrast between what we see and hear in Jesus' disciples throughout the four Gospels, on the one hand, and the way they behave and speak in the book of Acts, after Jesus' resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven, on the other.

The Apostles' "Before"

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus that "the mystery of [God's] will, according to his purpose," was "set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9–10). You can't get much clearer than that: God has one plan for history. That plan finds its climax in "the fullness of time," and its unifying focus in Christ. But the Gospels show that Jesus' disciples simply did not get the point that he tried repeatedly to impress on them throughout his earthly ministry: that the whole Scriptures—the Old Testament books that had been given hundreds of years before he was born in Bethlehem—are all about one redemptive plan of God, which reached its fulfillment in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

Often, Jesus' followers could not accept his ominous prediction that what lay ahead of him was not the military victory over Rome's armies for which oppressed Israelites longed, followed by his accession to a throne, a crown, and the adulation of his adoring subjects. Rather, he bluntly predicted that he would be repudiated by Israel's leaders, tortured, and delivered over to suffer a shameful execution. After Simon Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus confirmed that God the Father had given Peter that insight. But then he went on to explain his messianic mission: "that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." Peter found this agenda unthinkable and began to correct Jesus, whereupon Jesus sharply rebuffed his loyal but misguided disciple: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Matt. 16:21–23). Again and again en route to Jerusalem, Jesus prepared his friends for the worst, reinforcing his predictions from Israel's ancient Scriptures:

See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise. (Luke 18:31–33)

This cruel mistreatment was foretold in “everything that is written . . . by the prophets”—that is, in the Old Testament Scriptures. But still, Jesus’ disciples “understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said” (Luke 18:34).

They seemed to have as much trouble accepting Jesus’ promise that he would rise from the dead as they did his dire predictions of his violent death. Even after the third day arrived and heavenly messengers sent by God announced to women that Jesus was risen, as he had said he would, the apostles dismissed the women’s report as “an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:1–11). Their confusion and despair seemed incurable.

The Apostles’ “After”

When we turn the page from the four Gospels to the book of Acts, suddenly we hear Peter and other apostles confidently connecting Old Testament Scriptures to the sufferings of Christ and his resultant resurrection glory. For forty days after his resurrection, Jesus had appeared to his apostles to give them intensive instruction about God’s kingdom (Acts 1:2–5). Then he ascended to heaven. As a result of Jesus’ teaching, in the ten-day interim between Jesus’ ascent to heaven and the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49), Peter addressed those gathered to await the Spirit’s arrival, speaking with the authority of one who had learned to read the Bible as it is meant to be read: “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas” (Acts 1:16). He went on to quote statements from the Psalms (Pss. 69:25; 109:8) that described the punishment that would befall a close confidante who presumed to betray God’s Anointed King. The traitor’s disloyalty “had” to happen—it was “necessary” (Luke 24:26)—because it was purposed by God, who had revealed this part of his divine plan by foreshadowing it in ancient psalms. In the Scriptures that Simon Peter had heard in synagogues for years, at last he was beginning to see the shape of a greater plan, the pattern into which God had woven even the sobering

reality that his beloved Messiah would be mistreated not only by open enemies but even by one near and dear to him.

A few days later, when God's Spirit came down in revitalizing presence and power, Peter again proclaimed the fulfillment of centuries-old prophetic promises in Jesus the Christ. God had promised through the prophet Joel that in the last days the Spirit would come on men and women, opening their mouths to speak God's Word. Those last days had now arrived, as Jesus poured out the Spirit from his throne at God's right hand in heaven and his people proclaimed God's mighty deeds (Acts 2:16–21, 33, quoting and interpreting Joel 2:28–32). Jesus is the Holy One whose deliverance from the grave David foresaw and foretold (Acts 2:24–33, quoting and explaining Ps. 16:8–11). Jesus is the Lord and Christ to whom the Lord has said, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool" (Acts 2:33–36, quoting and interpreting Ps. 110:1). We could go almost chapter by chapter through Acts and the same portrait would emerge in the sermons of Peter and John, in Stephen's speech in Acts 7, and finally in the most unlikely gospel preacher, the persecutor turned propagator of Christian faith, Saul/Paul of Tarsus.

The Difference between the Apostles' "Before" and Their "After"

What transformed Jesus' followers from confused, cowering, intimidated, hopes-dashed, defeatist doubters into confident, joyful, hopeful, bold heralds?

Certainly the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was *one* decisive factor. At the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus predicted that the Father's promise—that is, the life-renewing Spirit of God—would soon engulf his followers in unparalleled power (Luke 24:49). The same promise reappears as we open Luke's "volume 2," the Acts of the Apostles: "wait for the promise of the Father . . . You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:4, 8). We can never overestimate the unleashing of new-creation power that Jesus brought about when he took his seat at the right hand of God the Father and then celebrated his enthronement by lavishing the great gift, the Holy Spirit of God, on the small and fragile gathering of his friends in Jerusalem.

Notice, however, that in Acts 1:15–22, *before the Holy Spirit is poured out* on the church, Peter's remarks to the waiting congregation exhibit a new confidence and hope, a new perspective on Jesus' sufferings, and a new

insight into the ancient Scriptures that Peter and his fellow Jews had heard, no doubt, many times before. Peter now echoed Jesus' assertion that "it was necessary" for the Scripture to be fulfilled, even those troubling texts that portrayed the suffering of God's faithful Servant. Judas's treachery and Jesus' death were necessary because they were intrinsic to God's plan to rescue his people and his universe. Peter now knew that these events were key elements in that plan because God had announced them—sometimes overtly and sometimes subtly—in the Old Testament Scriptures.

What made the difference in the apostles' "before" and "after," then, was not only the bestowal of God's Spirit but also a new way of reading the Bible. Who taught Peter to read the Bible this way? Luke has shown us the answer in the last chapter of his Gospel: Jesus himself!

Bible Studies with the Risen Lord Jesus

We return now to the road leading from Jerusalem to the small town of Emmaus, to eavesdrop on the first of two Bible studies that, as Luke recounts, Jesus conducted on the very day that he rose from the dead. Remember the background: It was the third day after Jesus' brutal, bloody execution by crucifixion. Some women came to the tomb in which his body had been placed in haste before the Sabbath fell at sundown two days earlier, hoping to express their love and grief by preparing his body for burial more adequately. 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). Hearing the women's report but not believing it, Cleopas and a colleague set off for Emmaus. They were discussing the heartbreaking 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 the readers, for Luke identifies him as Jesus but observes 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 an abrupt 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” (Luke 24:27). Jesus traced both their dismay over their Master’s suffering and their doubt about his resurrection 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 would be explained more fully in Luke’s narrative 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 just a few evenings before, instituting the Lord’s Supper), suddenly they recognized Jesus. Then he vanished. 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 gave an even fuller exposition both of the breadth of Old Testament books that announce his saving work and of the specifics of his mission revealed in those ancient Scriptures. 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 recorded in Luke 24, several truths emerge.

The Timing and Placement of These Conversations Show the Importance of Having Jesus Teach Us How to Interpret the Scriptures

Of the writers of the four canonical Gospels, only the author of the Third Gospel (whom early tradition identifies as Luke the physician) went on to tell the story of Jesus' words and deeds through his apostles and his church, after his ascension to heaven. Luke's second volume is known to us as the Acts of the Apostles. The events recounted in Luke 24 constitute the "hinge," the crucial transition and turning point between Jesus' ministry through his personal presence on earth, to which Luke's Gospel testifies, 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 that we hear in Acts. In Acts 1:3, we read that Jesus appeared to his apostles over forty days to prepare them for their mission as his witnesses, "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. 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 Connected the Whole Old Testament Canon to His Redemptive Mission

To appreciate this point, we need to understand that the order of the Old Testament books as they are found in the Hebrew Scriptures differs somewhat from the order to which we are accustomed in our English versions. Our structuring of the Old Testament is derived from that of 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) the “former prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings); and (b) the “latter prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets);
- (3) Writings (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes; some “historical books” such as Ruth, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles; and some that we categorize as prophetic, such as Daniel and Lamentations).

Now, keeping in mind the way in which first-century (and later) Jews would view the subdivisions of the Hebrew Scriptures, look again at the portions of the Old Testament that Jesus used to teach the two disciples en route to Emmaus, and then the larger group of his followers later in Jerusalem. To the two, we read, 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” would include not only the sermons and predictions of prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, but also the covenantal history of Israel’s life in God’s land, narrated in the books of 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 for these two disciples 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, to the conquest of Canaan, chaotic years of the judges, the monarchy under Saul, David, Solomon, to the subsequent fracturing of the kingdom, exile, and return from exile—contained glimpses of and longings for the arrival of the perfect King, the ultimate Rescuer, the faithful, covenant-keeping Israel. Then Jesus moved on to the latter prophets, such as Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, and Malachi, who expressed God’s promise that he would bring salvation even to unfaithful Israel, offering increasingly specific profiles and predictions of the coming Rescuer and

Redeemer: Immanuel, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, the son of David, the Branch who will make a new covenant between God and his wayward people, the Lord who will replace his people's hearts of stone with hearts of flesh by his life-giving Spirit, Israel's God himself coming to his temple as a refiner's fire, preceded by the messenger who prepares the way for the Lord, and so on.

Later, to the larger group that included his apostles and other followers, Jesus explained "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Again we should think of our Pentateuch ("Law of Moses") and historical books and Prophets ("Prophets"); but now a third section appears: "the Psalms." The book of Psalms—the 150 poems of praise, thanksgiving, lament, and instruction composed by David and others for use in Israel's worship—is the first book in "the Writings," the third division of the Hebrew Old Testament canon. It is probably mentioned here in Luke's summary to indicate that this whole section of the Scriptures (other wisdom books, 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.

Jesus Showed How Various Dimensions of His Redemptive Mission Were Forecast and 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 rather general categories—suffering, followed by glory—are many more specific themes and events in the life and saving mission of the Christ to which the ancient Scriptures testify. Luke shows that 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 God's Word (the Scriptures given through Moses, the prophets, and other inspired authors):

- 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 preachers' mission would begin from Jerusalem.

In fact, there is good reason to add at least two more items to this list:

- That the apostles would be witnesses, testifying to the truth of Christ's works and words;
- That the apostles would be "clothed with power from on high," in fulfillment of "the promise of my Father"—the promised outpouring of God's Spirit, as we have seen.

In the prophecy of Isaiah, the Lord called his people to be his witnesses, testifying that he alone is God and Savior (Isa. 43:9–12; 44:6–8); and he promised to pour out his Spirit to empower them for this task (44:3–5). The book of Acts shows both of these prophetic promises coming to fulfillment in the Spirit's descent at Pentecost and the apostles' resultant boldness as witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:4, 8; 2:1–11, 32–33; 3:15; 5:30–32; etc.).

This shows us that to walk with Jesus through the varied terrain of his Word and the diverse eras of God's redemptive history is not to strum a one-stringed guitar! To be sure, Jesus' cross and resurrection take center stage in the true, historical drama of God's great and costly rescue adventure. But just as Jesus traveled the breadth of the Bible—Law, Prophets, Writings—to show his friends its disclosure of his person and saving mission, he showed them the fullness of blessing that would flow from his sacrificial death and resurrection triumph. The multidimensional effects of his accomplishment of redemption are reflected throughout Israel's Scriptures. We are rebellious and guilty, needing repentance and forgiveness. Both are found in Jesus' name, through faith in him. The human race is a beautiful rainbow of many nationalities and ethnic groups, yet our sinful pride and suspicion turn our diversity into a breeding ground for division and conflict. Israel's Scriptures forecast the fulfillment of God's ancient promise to Abraham, to bring blessing and unity to "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3), in a glorious reconciliation effected by Christ. Through Isaiah, the Lord enlisted his people as his witnesses, but they (and we all) suffered from spiritual blindness and

deafness (Isa. 42:18–20). Yet Jesus showed that the Scriptures anticipated a new company of witnesses, renewed and empowered by God’s promised Spirit. When we read the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ, we begin to 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 others, and who now lives and rules in glory as the exalted Son and who dwells with his people by his Spirit.

Bible Studies with Jesus before His Death

From the fact that Jesus’ approach to the Old Testament in Luke 24 seemed so foreign to his followers, we might be tempted to think that those conversations were exceptions to the rule, anomalies from the way in which Jesus had previously interpreted the Bible. In fact, as we survey Jesus’ teaching earlier in his ministry, we see that the Bible studies summarized in Luke 24 do not stand alone. The four Gospels provide ample evidence that throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus saw the whole Old Testament as pointing to himself, as anticipating and promising his coming as the long-awaited Redeemer of God’s people.

In other words, even before his death and resurrection, Jesus taught people to read the ancient Scriptures in connection with himself and his messianic mission. In John 5:46–47, for example, he told the experts in the law of Moses and honored tradition, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”

Or consider the Scripture with which Jesus clinched his announcement that Israel’s leaders were like evil tenant farmers, plotting to get rid of him, the beloved Son of the Owner of the vineyard that is Israel (an allusion to Isaiah 5): “He looked directly at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?”’” (Luke 20:17). He was quoting Psalm 118:22, a statement that, as its context in the psalm shows, is not about evaluating building materials, but rather concerns the Lord’s selection and exaltation of his righteous Champion, the One “who comes in the name of the LORD” (Ps. 118:26), just as David the anointed had done against the Philistine Goliath (1 Sam. 17:45). This psalm had been echoed by the crowds that welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem just

a few days before (Luke 19:38), although it was Jesus who called attention to its motif of rejection by Israel's experts and leaders.

Later that same week, Jesus would dine in one last supper with his closest disciples. After soberly announcing that they would abandon him and one would deny him repeatedly that very night, he assured them that their failure and his suffering were all part of the Father's plan, revealed in his Word. Quoting Isaiah 53:12, he said: "I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37).

To these and other passages in which Jesus explicitly quotes Old Testament passages that were coming to fulfillment in his mission, we could add the almost countless echoes and allusions to Old Testament texts and themes that recur repeatedly in Jesus' description of himself and his mission:

- "Destroy this *temple*, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19, referring to the sanctuary that was the center of Israel's worship).
- "I am the *bread of life*, that comes down from the Father" (John 6:35, alluding to the manna that sustained Israel in the wilderness [Ex. 16:4; Ps. 78:24]).
- "I am the *light of the world*," better than the pillar of fire that lit Israel's camp in the wilderness (John 8:12, alluding to the light-giving pillar of fire that was remembered at the Feast of Booths [John 7:2; see Ex. 14:19–20; 40:38]).
- "I am the *good shepherd*" (John 10:11, alluding to Ezek. 34).

The list could go on and on, and the following chapters will explore these and many other passages in which Jesus and the inspired authors of the New Testament show the many ways in which the Old Testament pointed ahead to the Christ.

How Can We Learn to Read the Bible from Jesus?

Don't you envy Cleopas and his traveling companion, and Peter and Andrew and James and John and Thaddeus and the rest? Don't you wish you could have eavesdropped on Jesus' Bible expositions on the road or in the upper room? To which Old Testament texts did he take his listeners? How did he trace the right routes, draw the correct lines, to connect those ancient Scriptures with himself as the Great Fulfiller and with the current

events that they had experienced and would experience in the coming weeks and months and years? If only Matthew's "lecture notes" from that Easter evening and the forty days that followed had survived, so that we could see the passages in Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms for which Jesus gave them the interpretive key to unlock their meaning—himself!

Then again, even without transcripts or audio recordings, perhaps we do have access to those historic studies in Scripture that Jesus conducted. After all, as we glimpsed earlier and will see more fully in later chapters, 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 among the texts that Jesus interpreted over the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension were those to which the apostolic preachers turned as they bore witness 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.

Before we leave Luke 24, however, we should learn from Jesus two lessons about how to attune our hearts to hear in the ancient Scriptures given to Israel the Holy Spirit's testimony about the coming Rescuer. Two appearances of the word *opened* in verses 32 and 45 show what we need from Jesus, if we want to grow in our sensitivity to how the Bible in all its variety keeps pointing us, from countless angles, to its one and only Hero: We need Jesus to open our minds and hearts, and we need him to open the Scriptures.

We Need Jesus to Open Our Minds and Hearts

Returning to the road to Emmaus, let us 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 at best and rude at worst.

But Jesus was not going out of his way to be offensive or insulting when he called these men foolish and slow-hearted to believe God's Word through his prophets. Rather, by those labels Jesus 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, of mastering principles and practices that yield a desired outcome, whatever the spiritual condition of the interpreter who processes the biblical text. Jesus' rebuke implied that when we fail to see how the whole Bible finds its integrating unity in Christ at the center, part of our problem—not the whole problem, as we will see, but part of it—could be that our hearts are sluggish, slow, and unbelieving. It could be that we are not coming to our Bibles with the anticipation and expectation that everything between these covers is given to us by our loving Creator and Redeemer to draw our hearts more firmly to himself in confident trust, humble repentance, grateful love. It could be that disastrous 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. It could be that we are repulsed 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), as Simon Peter found that route unthinkable and intolerable (Matt. 16:21–23). When we have trouble seeing how the whole Bible centers on Christ, the problem may well be not in the Bible or in our Bible-study strategies, but in us.

Jesus had been telling his disciples for weeks, perhaps months, what was going to happen when they got to Jerusalem. Not only had he been preparing them for the bad news—his rejection and gruesome execution—but he had also been telling them the good news of his resurrection. Yet when what Jesus had told them would happen *did actually happen*, they were first shattered by his death and then dubious about the reports of his resurrection. These men were not in the same spiritual state of outright rebellion as the Jewish leaders whom Jesus confronted in John 5. Those leaders, despite their boasts about being Moses' heirs and defenders, had resisted Jesus tooth and nail because they had never really believed Moses and his prophecies about the Messiah. By contrast, in Luke 24 we are reading about Jesus' friends and followers, not his enemies. Nonetheless, these weak believers deserved Jesus' rebuke. So do we, when we do not trust deeply what God has said in his Word—not believing “down deep enough” to have that faith transform our feelings and perceptions about the all-too-visible circumstances around us.

The wonderful thing is that Jesus did not merely express frustration and rebuke over his followers' obtuseness and resistance to God-centered, Scripture-secured hope. He 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 intellectual 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 walking with Jesus through the pages of Scripture is simply this: Pray! Face the sobering fact that, left to yourself, you will not "get" what God designs 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)—in fact, that "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,'" will 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).

We Need Jesus to Open the Scriptures

Not only do we need Jesus to open our minds and hearts, but we also need Jesus to open the Scriptures to us. Luke 24 uses several words to describe the process by which Jesus disclosed the real meaning of Old Testament passages. We read that he "*interpreted*" to the two on the road in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (v. 27), and that they recalled how he had "*opened to us the Scriptures*" (v. 32). When he opened the minds of the larger group that evening, they were able to "*understand the Scriptures*" (v. 45). In this way, Luke quietly shows that we not only need God's Spirit to give us the grace to repent of our unbelief and spiritual sluggishness, but also need Jesus to teach us how to read the Bible, to show us a sound method of interpreting God's written Word that honors its origin and its authors (given by God through human authors controlled by his

Spirit), its unity (revealing consistent truth and a single redemptive plan), its variety (constituted of many books given over many centuries), and its purpose (to lead to God's glory and our salvation). In the following chapters, we will explore more deeply the strategy for reading Scripture that Jesus, the Author and Subject of Scripture, taught his church through his apostles.

Another Road, Another Heart Set Afire

Let us consider one more account recorded by Luke, which also concerns a Bible study conducted on the road. 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 the seven men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to care for the material needs of widows. When his colleague Stephen was martyred for being a bold and effective witness for Jesus, Philip and many others were scattered by persecution away from Jerusalem. So he ended up in the territory once occupied by the Philistines, toward 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 (probably not the modern state, but the 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, would have been an expensive treasure. For a foreign dignitary to invest both the time and 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 any sexual misconduct; but the surgery that qualified him to wield power in Ethiopia disqualified him from entering the courts of the Lord (see Deut. 23:1).

We are not told whether he had learned of his outcast status during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem or had known of it before he set out from his homeland in Africa. In any case, as he returned in his private coach, he was reading aloud the song of the Suffering and Exalted 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).

Christian readers might marvel that the Ethiopian had trouble discerning whether Isaiah was describing his own experience of shameful suffering leading to vindication, or the trajectory of another individual, a Suffering Servant who was yet to come, from the prophet’s perspective. We might have trouble connecting Israel’s wilderness itinerary in Numbers 33, for example, with the messianic mission of Jesus; but in our believing eyes (thanks to other New Testament passages, e.g., Matt. 8:17; Luke 22:37; 1 Peter 2:22) the route from Isaiah 53 to Christ’s cross looks like a superhighway that no one could miss (though it does not look this way in many eyes even today). Yet the Ethiopian asks, “How can I, unless someone *guides* me?” The Greek word, *hodēgeō*, evokes the image of one who leads another along a road, as a blind person needs one who has sight to be his guide (Matt. 15:14).

Philip did not rebuke him, “O foolish one and slow of heart to believe all that the prophet has spoken!” No, patiently he started from that Scripture, prepared for that very rendezvous by the Sovereign God, and he told him 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 (or anywhere else outside Palestine).

I suspect (don’t you?) 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 prophecy 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 forward toward the coming of their true King and supreme Rescuer, Jesus the Messiah. Did he personally attend Jesus' forty-day crash course in biblical interpretation? No, not in person. Yet he did hear Jesus open the Scriptures, through Philip, who in turn had heard Peter and John and other apostles. We, too, can eavesdrop on 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.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

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 “bound together by a 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. What is the significance of the fact that in Acts 1:16—even *before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost*—the apostle Peter was interpreting the Psalms as fulfilled in Jesus' suffering? From whom did Peter learn to read the Bible in that way?
3. Which sections of the Old Testament did Jesus explain to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? To the larger group of disciples in Jerusalem later in Luke 24?
4. What books are included in “the Prophets”? What books should probably be inferred in the reference to “the Psalms” (Luke 24:44)? What do these terms show about the breadth of the Old Testament in which Jesus showed his disciples “the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27)?
5. In Luke 24:44–49, what events and truths about Christ were “written” in the Old Testament Scriptures? Can you identify one or more Old Testament passages that reveal each of these events and truths? (If not, don't be discouraged: you will meet them in chapters 2 through 10!)
6. In which passages from the account of Jesus' ministry *before* his death and resurrection did he teach explicitly that portions of the Old Testa-

ment, or specific Old Testament texts, were now being fulfilled in him and his mission?

7. What Old Testament institutions and events are alluded to in some of the symbolic ways that Jesus referred to himself (e.g., “bread of life”)?
8. As you compare the Old Testament foreshadows with Christ and his redemptive fulfillment, how does each Old Testament passage enrich the meaning and vividness of the New Testament’s revelation of Jesus? How does the New Testament fulfillment in Christ reveal the richer significance of the Old Testament texts?
9. How can the book of Acts help to satisfy our curiosity about which Old Testament passages Jesus may have explained to his followers during the forty-day interim between his resurrection and his ascension?
10. How do Jesus’ two acts of “opening” (the Scriptures, Luke 24:32; “their minds,” v. 45) show us what we will need if we are to learn to read the Bible as the apostles learned to read it? 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?

Charles Spurgeon once said that just as every road in England leads to London, so every text in Scripture contains a path to Christ. But there's still a chance of going the wrong way, blazing misleading trails where none previously existed. How can we be sure that we're reading our road map correctly?

Dennis Johnson shows us that there are established routes we can trust. Guiding us along the network of trails in the Old and New Testaments, he points to the signs and markers that help us to identify roads to Christ. He surveys the Bible's sweeping story that makes up the lay of the land and explores different landmarks—the central motifs in Scripture that give us our bearings as we seek out Jesus.

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