**PREACHING ACTS | SWBTS TDPC 2018**

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**Text-Driven Preaching:**

* “Preaching that treats a text on its own terms.” - Kyle Walker
* “Preaching that teaches people how to read their Bible.” - Paige Patterson
* “Interpreting and communicating a biblical text in a sermon that re-presents the substance, structure, and spirit of the text.” - Steven W. Smith

**Why Book-by-Book Preaching?**

* *The* ***substance*** *of Bible is about salvation found through God’s one and only Son—Jesus Christ!*
* The ***substance*** of the Bible is ordered with intentional ***structure*** (books, testaments, canon).
* The Bible’s ***substance*** and ***structure*** are packaged by literary genres that reveal the ***spirit***/tone of the text.

*Book-by-book preaching is an intentional approach to treat the text (Bible as a whole) on its own terms.*

**Preparing to Preach through a Book of the Bible|CHARTING**

1. Seeing the Big Picture
	* Authorship/Date
	* Purpose, Occasion, and Background
	* Literary Genre
	* Literary Features
	* Key Themes
	* Theology
	* Overarching message
2. Plotting a Preaching Path
	* Get to know the Text
	* Identify the natural thought units for preaching
	* Take the fingerprints of each thought unit

**CHARTING THE BOOK OF ACTS:**

1. **SEEING THE BIG PICTURE of the TEXT:**

1. **Authorship/Date:**
	* technically anonymous
	* Earliest discussions—Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons in Gaul)—attribute the book (Luke-Acts) to Luke.
	* The author was clearly a traveling companion of Paul
		+ (Luke) Col. 4:14, Philemon 24, 2 Tim. 4:11
		+ The “we” passages in Acts are critical to Lukan authorship
			- Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 27:1-28:16
	* Approximately A.D. 62 due to the book’s abrupt ending (Peter and Paul martyred in Rome (64-67 A.D.), but arguments can be made for a later date (A.D. 80-100).

1. **Purpose, Occasion, and Background:**
	* Luke 1:1-4
		+ Compile a narrative/orderly account of the things that have been accomplished
		+ So that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught
	* Acts. 1:1-5
		+ Acts is volume 2 (in the first book, O Theophilus)
		+ Acts picks up from what Jesus began to do and teach and continues with the Apostles and early church
* Tell the story of the origin and development of the church during its first few decades.
	+ Prompt us to marvel at God’s protection of His church and empowerment of it by the Holy Spirit.
	+ Communicate the courage of the early witnesses to the gospel, as well as the constant hostility the witnesses endured
	+ Reveal the expanding witness of the church in the world, fulfilling the commission of Christ by moving from Judea and Samaria to the rest of the world.
	+ Prove that Jesus is not for the Jews only but also for Gentiles
	+ *Ultimately, Acts testifies to the unstoppable expansion of the Gospel via the witness of the early church and power of the Holy Spirit.*

1. **Genre:**
	* Narrative/orderly account (story):
		+ Ecclesiastical History (apologetic historiography**)**
			- Format: Chronological History
				* The spread of the message from the time of Christ’s ascension to Paul’s final imprisonment

Focuses on the expansion of the Gospel (spread of the Word)

Luke narratives the expansion of the “Word” more than that of the institution (church).

Therefore, the story is not simply church history, but the expansion of the Christian message through *pivotal agents*.

* + - Characters:
			* Luke-Acts contains approximately 95 characters
			* Only 5 main characters—God the Father, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, Peter, and Paul
				+ Jesus is the center of attention in Luke
				+ Peter and Paul are the center of attention in Acts
			* HOWEVER, God is ultimately THE MAIN CHARACTETER responsible for the spread of the Word.

* + - Biography:(Minor Role)
			* Luke focuses on the spread of the Word through people (Peter and Paul primarily) and events

* + - Narrative sub-genres present in Acts:
			* Adventure story (narrow escape)
			* Hero story
			* Travel story (3 missionary journeys of Paul)
			* Conversion story
			* Miracle story
			* Conflict/Controversy Story
			* Drama/Speech (32 speeches in Acts)
				+ 1. Evangelistic: Sermons or appeals to believe the Gospel
				+ 2. Deliberative: Speeches delivered at councils/meetings (Acts 15:6-21)
				+ 3. Apologetic: Explanation and/or defense of the Faith
				+ 4. Forensic/Judicial: Defenses of an accused person in a court setting[[1]](#footnote-1)

*If these speeches along with their settings are included—the total space devoted to speeches is approximately ¾ of the book!*

1. **Literary Features:**
	* Luke-Acts should be read together
	* The book follows an outward/explosive/supernatural expansion of the early church from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to “the end of the earth.” (1:8)
		+ The expansion is announced in (1:8)
		+ The expansion is confirmed along the way with “progress reports”[[2]](#footnote-2)
	* Summary Statements appear throughout Acts:
		+ 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31, 42; 11:21; 12:24; 13:48; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31
		+ The clearest summaries of the gospel’s expansion (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:4-5; 19:20) provides many scholars with “six panels”[[3]](#footnote-3) in Luke’s story:
			- 1:1-6:7: The Church in Jerusalem
			- 6:8-9:31: Judea and Samaria (cf:1:8)
			- 9:32-12:24: to Gentiles (a nongeographic category)
			- 12:25-16:5: Asia and the shift to emphasizing the Gentile Mission
			- 16:6-19:20: Urban centers in Europe (returning also to Ephesus)
			- 19:21-28:31: to Rome
	* Narrative and Speech are interwoven and connect with summary statements. (Example: Acts 2)
		+ The space allocated to speeches/sermons highlights the importance of speaking the Gospel.
	* Cyclical structure shows that though the Gospel elicits hostility, God’s work in the world through His Word cannot be stopped.
	* Acts 15 is arguably the literary center (structurally and theologically) of the book.
	* Ending:
		+ Open-ended:
			- Functions to highlight the ongoing nature of the progress of the Word.
				* Rome is not the full equivalent of “ends of the earth.”
				* Stresses the importance of unfinished business.
2. **Key Themes:**
	* The Apostles as Witnesses: Witness is THE major motif . . .
		+ 1:8; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:20, 29, 31, 33; 5:32; 6:10, 13, 14; 7:1; 6, 31, 44, 51, 57, 58; 8:4, 14; 35, 40; 9:1, 20 . . .
		+ Witness is the major theme.
	* In addition to the key theme of *Witness,* subordinate themes include:
		+ The Gospel
		+ Christology
		+ Ecclesiology
		+ The Holy Spirit
		+ Covenant and Promise
		+ Challenge and Warning to Israel
		+ Commission to the Gentiles
3. **Theology:**
	* Acts focuses on the presentation of the spread of the Word and the growth of the community. Therefore . . .
		+ Acts is not primarily interested in biographical details of the Apostles.
		+ Acts is not primarily interested in church organization or polity.
		+ Acts does not offer comprehensive coverage of church history.
		+ Acts does not provide comprehensive standardization/uniformity on all things.
			1. For example:
				1. Conversion
				2. Communal Life
				3. Frequency of the Lord’s Supper
			- “Such diversity probably means that no specific example is being set forth as *the* model Christian experience or church life . . . Nonetheless, we believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model. But the model is not so much in the specifics as in the overall picture . . . triumphant, joyful, forward-moving expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world, empowered by the Holy Spirit and resulting in changed lives and local communities, as God’s intent for the continuing church.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
	* The Place of Acts in Biblical Theology:
		+ Acts is the first chapter of God’s kingdom on earth following the incarnate life of Christ, and it inaugurates the final earthly phase of God’s kingdom.
		+ Acts looks back to the atonement of Christ.
		+ Acts shows more strongly than anything else before it that God’s way of salvation is for all the world, including Gentiles and not only Jews.
4. **Overarching message:**
	* “Luke’s largest agenda in Luke-Acts itself is to place the mission of Jesus and the church in its place in salvation history.”[[5]](#footnote-5)
	* Acts focuses on the mission of witnessing by the power of the Holy Spirit to all peoples (Acts 1:8).
	* Acts points to an unfinished mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth; by planting it in Rome, Paul has laid a solid foundation for continuing outreach and provides a model for the continuing mission of the church until Jesus returns (1:8-11). Jesus is the centerpiece and climax of history, and his apostles illustrate how Luke’s audience should continue his mission.
	* The key character in Acts is God, his activity, and his plan.
5. **PLOTTING A PATH TO NAVIGATE THE TEXT:**

1. **Get to know the Text:**
	* The Book at a Glance:
		+ 28 Chapters
		+ 1,007 verses
	* Common structure pattern:
		+ Cyclic structure:
			- 1. Christian leaders arise and preach the gospel.
			- 2. Listeners are converted and added to the church.
			- 3. Opponents begin to persecute the Christian leaders.
			- 4. God intervenes to rescue the leaders or otherwise protect the church.
	* Geography and Places:
		+ Great cities of the Mediterranean region in the 1st century
		+ Symbolism:
			- Jerusalem: where the story begins – the Jewish religion from which Christianity emerged
			- Rome: where the story ends – the Gentile world to which Christianity becomes transferred as the early history of the church unfolds
		+ A simple geographic plan follows the four geographic regions explicit in Acts 1:8
			- (Ch. 1-7) Start of the Christian church in Jerusalem
			- (Ch. 8-11) Outward Expansion of the church to Judea and Samaria
			- (Ch. 12-28) Further expansion of the church throughout the Mediterranean world
	* General Outline:[[6]](#footnote-6)

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Passage**  | **Contribution to the Storyline of Acts** | **Function in the Overall Design of the Book** | **History of the Early Church** | **Leading Character** | **Key Event(s)** |
| 1:1-7:60 | Coming of the Holy Spirit to give birth to the church | Witness in Jerusalem | The church discovers its identity and receives the resources to carry it out | Peter | Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; Stephen’s martyrdom |
| 8:1-12:25 | The church expands beyond Jerusalem | Witness to Judea and Samaria  | The church reaches into the world | Peter | Peter’s vision of the Gentiles’ inclusion in the Christian Church |
| 13:1-21:26 | Paul’s missionary journeys | Witness to the end of the earth | The church becomes international presence | Paul | Paul’s conversion and call to be apostle to the Gentiles |
| 21:27-28:31 | Paul’s career as a prisoner for the gospel | Continued witness to the end of the earth | The Church reaches to the world capital  | Paul | Paul’s sea voyage to Rome |

**Major Sermons in Acts:**

**Speaker: Text: Audience:**

Peter 2:14-36 Jews in Jerusalem

Peter 3:11-26 Jews in Jerusalem

Peter 10:34-43 Cornelius’s household

Stephen 7:1-53 Jews in Jerusalem

Paul 13:16-47 Jews in Pisidian Antioch

Paul 17:22-31 Greeks in Athens

Paul 20:18-35 Church elders in Ephesus

Paul 22:1-21 Jews in Jerusalem

Paul 24:10-21 Felix and his court

Paul 26:1-29 Agrippa and his court

1. **Identify the Natural Thought Units for Preaching**

**Section I: 1:1-6:7**

1. (1:1-11) Introduction | Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit and Ascends to Heaven
2. (1:12-26) Matthias is chosen to replace Judas as the 12th Apostle
3. (2:1-41) Pentecost
4. (2:42-47) The Early Church after Pentecost
5. (3:1-4:4) Lame Man Healed | Peter Preaches and Calls for Repentance
6. (4:5-31) Peter and John Arrested, Interrogated, and Released
7. (4:32-36) The Life and Community of the Early Church
8. (5:1-11) Ananias and Saphira
9. (5:12-42) Signs and Wonders/High Priest Persecute the Apostles

(6:1-7) Growing Pains | Deacons

**Section II: 6:8-9:31**

1. (6:8-7:60) Stoning of Stephen | Resisting the Holy Spirit
2. (8:1-25) The Witnesses Scatter | Samaria
3. (8:26-40) Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch
4. (9:1-31) The Conversion of Paul

**Section III: 9:32-12:24**

1. (9:32-43) Two Miracles Performed by Peter
2. (10:1-48) Peter’s Conversion To God’s Mission | Holy Spirit Given to Gentiles
3. (11:19-30) The Church at Antioch
4. (12:1-24) Peter’s Rescue | Peter is late for Prayer

**Section IV: 12:25-16:5**

1. (12:25-13:1-52 ) Paul’s first missionary journey | Part I
2. (14:1-28) Paul’s First Missionary Journey | Part II
3. (15:1-35) The Jerusalem Council
4. (15:36-16:5) Paul’s Second Missionary Journey | Part I

**Section V: 16:6-19:20**

1. (16:6-40) Macedonia | Slave Girl and Prison
2. (17:1-15) Paul proclaims Christ in Thessalonica and Berea
3. (17:16-34) Paul’s Address to the Areopagus
4. (18:1-22) Conclusion of Paul’s 2nd Missionary Journey
5. (18:23-28 ) Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey | Part I
6. (19:1-20) Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey | Part II

**Section VI: 19:21-28:31**

1. (19:21-41) Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey | Part III: The Riot at Ephesus
2. (20:1-12) Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey | Part IV: Eutychus Raised to Life at Troas
3. (20:13-38) Paul’s 3rd Missionary Journey | Part V: Paul Meets Ephesian Elders
4. (21:1-14) The People Plead with Paul not to go to Jerusalem
5. (21:15-22:29) Paul’s Arrest and Defense in Jerusalem
6. (22:30-23:35) Paul on trial before the Chief Priests and The Council
7. (24:1-27) | Paul on Trial before Felix
8. (25:1-26:32 ) Paul’s Defense Before King Agrippa
9. (27:1-44) Paul’s Journey to Rome | Part I
10. (28:1-15) Paul’s Journey to Rome | Part II
11. (28:16-31) Paul in Rome
12. **Take the Fingerprints of Each Thought Unit:**

**EXAMPLE: Sermon 1: Acts 1:1-14**

1. **Locate the Passage:**

Acts 1:1-14 serves as the introduction to Luke’s second volume. It also details the book’s initial event.

This unit can be broken down into three paragraphs (v. 1-5) (v 6-11) (v. 12-14). These three scenes form a narrative unit with initial situation, rising tension/climax, and conclusion. However, each scene could be treated individually for in three separate sermons.

1. **Genre:**

Narrative (historical monograph)

1. **Determine the structure of the passage:**

This unit is composed of three scenes:

Scene 1: (v. 1-5)

Scene 2: (v. 6-11)

Scene 3: (v. 12-14)

1. **Exegete the Passage:**

**Scene 1: (v. 1-5)**

This paragraph introduces Acts as a whole and provides the situation for the books’ first narrative unit. First, it is critical to realize this is volume two of a two-volume work (Luke-Acts). Luke acknowledges he is continuing what he started for Theophilus in (v. 1). Theophilus is an unknown character, but be sure to reference Luke 1 as it literarily applies to Acts as well. In Luke 1 we see that this two-volume narrative/orderly account was written for Theophilus so that he “may have certainty concerning the things” he has “been taught” (Luke 1:4). Such context on why Luke composed Luke-Acts provides preachers guidance on how to apply the book of Acts even in the 21st century.

Acts 1:1-5 also delineates the content of Luke vs. Acts. Luke narrates Jesus’ ministry until the day he ascended to heaven. Luke (volume 1) was all about Jesus. Acts (volume 2) will pick up where Jesus ascended. Luke is quick to mention that before Jesus departed he gave commands to his disciples – the apostles. This, alongside the mention of the Holy Spirit, foreshadows much of Acts – what the disciples are to do and how they will do it.

Jesus gave commands before he ascended planting the seed that much work is yet to be done. Equal in significance though is what Luke says next, Jesus also presented himself alive to his disciples before he left. The point is the confirmation that Jesus is ALIVE and that God’s plan of salvation is fully on track. The big picture to keep in mind is the kingdom of God and its progression. Hence, the reason Jesus kept speaking about it as he appeared to them over the course of 40 days.

In light of these two things, the commands Jesus gave and the fact that Jesus is alive, (v. 4-5) detail Jesus’ instructions for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit whom Jesus will send and who will empower the disciples for their mission. Theologically, the reality of the Trinity is clear in these verses. Literarily, one will notice the promise references John the Baptist. Jesus is reminding them of what they already heard from him and what John the Baptist had himself foretold (Luke 3:16).

At the end of this first scene, two things are clear. First, the kingdom of God and God’s plan of salvation are progressing just as God had planned. Second, this new era in God’s Kingdom, the church age, is completely dependent on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit indwelling and empowering Jesus’s followers. Nothing is going to happen without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in this new era. In fact, one of the most fundamental mistakes a believer can make in this new era is assuming they can do the will of God without walking in complete dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

***\*Preaching Tip****:* Before finishing scene one, be sure to highlight the anticipation of the disciples as they stayed in Jerusalem and waited for the Holy Spirit. This anticipation creates the tension needed to keep the audience hanging on for what comes next.

**Scene 2: (v. 6-11)**

These verses describe the last gathering of the disciples with Jesus before he ascends to heaven before their eyes. Luke covers this same scene at the end of his Gospel (Luke 24:50). However, certain details of the scene in Luke 24 are omitted, while other details are included in Acts. Luke now focuses on a portion of the conversation when the disciples ask a question. “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6).

Preachers and commentators have often smeared the disciples for asking such a question. Yet, it is hard it imagine a more natural question. Remember, Jesus has been speaking to them about the kingdom. Furthermore, remember the context of Luke-Acts. In Luke 1, John the Baptist is introduced as someone who will prepare God’s people for the Lord (Luke 1:17). In Luke 2 Gabriel tells Mary that her son, Jesus, will be given the throne of David and he will rule the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end (Luke 2:31-33). No wonder two of Jesus’s disciples on the road to Emmaus admit, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Yet, Jesus’s death apparently dashed that hope, at least temporarily. This is why Luke in Acts 1 is quick to confirm that Jesus “presented himself alive.” Moreover, the disciples knew the Old Testament promises concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were part of the promise of a new covenant, which did include the restoration of Israel (Jeremiah 31). Why wouldn’t the disciples ask such a question?

Notice that Jesus does not rebuke their question; rather he reorients their thinking with his answer. The Greek text asserts the contrast as if to convey - they asked on the one hand, but on the other, Jesus answered. The disciples ask about something they know will happen, they just do not know when it will happen. Jesus’s answer mildly corrects their thinking on kingdom timing. Most critically, Jesus informs them of what matters now and what will matter until he returns.

First, the disciples are going to receive power when they receive the Holy Spirit. Second, once they are filled with the Spirit and have his enabling power, they will be Jesus’s witnesses locally, regionally, and globally. Acts 1:8 is the essence of the entire book. It is the message and general outline of Acts (Acts 1-8: Jerusalem) (Acts 9-12: Judea and Samaria) (Acts 13-28: End of the Earth) in one sentence. The enabling power of the Spirit and the kingdom purpose of “witness” permeate the rest of Luke’s account. Luke laid the groundwork for such a clear, concise commission at the end of volume 1 (Luke 24). After eating broiled fish with the disciples, Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures and clarified things one more time. He said the Christ would suffer, die, rise from the dead, “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48). At the end of his first volume, Luke presents Jesus teaching this information. Yet, in Acts 1 Luke records Jesus’ mic drop. Don’t worry, Jesus says, about when I will restore the kingdom to Israel. You only worry about being and doing what I have commissioned you to be and do.

With the commissioned clearly communicated, Jesus departs. Literally, the Greek text communicates the idea that God took him up (passive participle). The disciples are transfixed. It is a shock and awe moment – much like the empty tomb moment the women experienced in Luke 24 when two angels also appeared to provide some much needed heavenly commentary. Ironically, they too ask a question that is more than it appears on the surface. Their question is rhetorical, of course, but it serves to reinforce the idea that until Jesus returns the disciples are not to be idly watching the sky. They have a job to do! And as they do it, they can be absolutely assured that as they saw Jesus go, he will one day return.

***\*Preaching Tip:***Scene 2 can be broken down into two parts (v. 6-8) and (v. 9-11). Part one (v. 6-8) is the center and climax of this first narrative unit (v. 1-14). The sermon should crescendo at Acts 1:8. The commission is what Luke highlights, not the ascension. The ascension is recorded in such a way that it reinforces the mission the disciples have been given.

**Scene 3: (v. 12-14)**

Many commentators pair (v. 12-14) with the choice of Judas’ successor in (v. 15-26). However, (v. 12-14) fit more naturally as the concluding scene to the book’s initial narrative unit. These verses provide temporary closure to the climax conveyed in (v. 6-11). Furthermore, the time of (v. 12-14) immediately follows (v. 11). Acts 1:15, however, keeps us in the same period, but after an unidentified number of days have passed which introduces a subsequent narrative event.

As expected, the disciples return to Jerusalem and wait. What is interesting in how Luke intentionally describes the nature of their waiting in the summary sentence of (v. 14). The disciples where devoting themselves in a unified fashion to prayer. They were gathered. They were unified. They prioritized prayer as the center of their corporate worship. Such a summary establishes a pattern for the soon-to-be-born church in Acts, and should also help set the pattern for the 21st century church gathering for worship.

1. **Let the structure of the Text Drive the Sermon:**

**Outline:**

Scene I: God’s Plan is Confirmed and Made Possible by the Holy Spirit (v. 1-5)

Scene II: God’s Plan Calls the Church to One Mission - *Witness* to Jesus locally, regionally, and globally (v. 6-11)

Scene III: God’s Plan Creates a Pattern for the Church – *Worship* by Gathering, Uniting, & Praying (v. 12-14)

**Main Idea:**

*God’s plan of salvation calls the church be witnesses for Jesus by the power of the Spirit to the ends of the earth.*

***\*Preaching Tip:*** *Remember narrative scenes develop inductively. Therefore, develop each scene and save your “points” or “summary statements” for the end of each scene. Once the entire narrative concludes – communicate your main idea, which brings it all together.*

**GENERAL TIPS FOR PREACHING ACTS**

1. (Interpretation) Read the book all the way through in one sitting.
2. (Communication) Harness the thrill of the story’s adventure!
3. (Communication) Relive the speeches . . . slow down and re-experience the message communicated.
4. (Communication) Utilize the text to appeal to the senses.
5. (Explanation) Highlight God’s protection, supernatural provision, and empowerment.
6. (Application) Remember the point is to believe the message and join the mission!
7. (Application) Inspire confidence in the Word and courage to speak it.

**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

Bock, Darrell L. *Acts:* BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.

Bock, Darrell L. *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

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1. Leland Ryken, *Literary Introductions to the Books of the Bible* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2015), 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I. Howard Marshall, and David Peterson, eds., *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 574. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 113-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Keener, *Acts,* 438. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ryken, *Literary Introductions to the Books of the Bible,* 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)