

LEADER'S GUIDE

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Coauthor of the *New York Times* Bestseller

THE ROCK, THE ROAD, AND THE RABBI



MYSTERIES OF THE MESSIAH



UNVEILING DIVINE CONNECTIONS FROM GENESIS TO TODAY

Mysteries of the Messiah Study Guide

© 2021 by Rabbi Jason Sobel

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Bible is one of my favorite mystery books. From the opening words of Genesis to the final chapter of Revelation, God's Word is filled with tantalizing clues, fascinating revelations, and an extraordinary plot. Many of the Bible's mysteries have nagged at our imaginations for centuries. There are odd characters, dysfunctional families, bloody battles, and courageous heroes, yet we find incredible wisdom within the writings. And readers ask, "Who is this mystifying protagonist called the Messiah—the Redeemer who will come to save the world?"

During the next six weeks, you and your group will investigate several mysteries that surround Jesus the Messiah. You will dig into Scripture and uncover the connections between the Old and New Testament prophecies that are essential to investigating these mysteries. As Jesus said, "Every *Torah* scholar disciplined for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure both new things and old" (Mathew 13:52). Each session will spark these connections between the old and new, resulting in an unraveling revelation that will cause your heart to burn with increased hope and overflow with blessing.

The Mysteries of the Messiah video study is designed to be experienced in a group setting such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any small-group gathering. Each session

begins with a brief welcome section and opening starter questions to get you and your group thinking about the topic. You will then watch a video teaching and jump into some directed small-group discussions. You will close each session with a time of prayer.

Each person in the group should have his or her own study guide, which includes video teaching notes, group discussion questions, and between-sessions personal studies to help you reflect on the material during the week. You are also encouraged to have a copy of *The Mysteries of the Messiah* book, as reading it alongside the study will provide you with deeper insights and make the journey more complete and meaningful. In addition, the book has many more mysteries and teaching could not be covered in the sessions.

Before you start your adventure, there are a few things to keep in mind that will help you on your journey. First, the real growth in this study will happen during your small-group time. You will have the opportunity to listen to the weekly teaching and learn from others as each person shares what God is doing in his or her life. To this end, it's important for you to attend each session, as your commitment will build trust among your other group members. If you choose to only "go through the motions," or if you refrain from participating, there is a lesser chance you will find what you're looking for during this study.

Second, small groups can offer a unique opportunity for sharing, learning, and building friendships. So I encourage you to make your small group a safe place where people feel free to share their insights, prayer requests, and even differing opinions. Each person should be able to contribute freely without the stress of judgment or criticism. One way to foster

this openness is to not attempt to “fix” people’s issues, or theology, but listen and discuss. You want to create a sense of deep community and spiritual growth.

Third, each session contains teaching related to Hebrew and Greek “by the numbers.” Most of the world’s languages separate numbers from letters, but not Hebrew and Greek. Both languages use letters—their respective alphabets—for numbers. Each letter in the Hebrew and Greek alphabets has a numeric value. Because of this, numbers can spell words and words can add up to numeric values. Numbers are a significant part of uncovering the mysteries of the Messiah, connecting the Testaments, and going deeper in your study of the Bible.

Fourth, this study references several sources from many centuries of Jewish thought. These sources will help you open up the Jewish meaning of many passages and their connection to the Messiah and New Testament. Just as Christian pastors and teachers use multiple sources to explain Scripture, we are bringing together essential sources to study the Messiah.

Finally, most of the Scripture references in this study are from the Tree of Life Version of the Bible. The Tree of Life Version speaks with a decidedly Jewish-friendly voice—a voice like many

| Hebrew Alphanumeric Chart | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Letter | Name | Value | Letter | Name | Value |
| א | Aleph | 1 | ל | Lamed | 30 |
| ב | Bet | 2 | מ | Mem | 40 |
| ג | Gimel | 3 | נ | Num | 50 |
| ד | Dalet | 4 | ס | Samekh | 60 |
| ה | Hei | 5 | ע | Ayin | 70 |
| ו | Vav | 6 | פ | Peh | 80 |
| ז | Zayin | 7 | צ | Tsadee | 90 |
| ח | Cheit | 8 | ק | Qof | 100 |
| ט | Tet | 9 | ר | Resh | 200 |
| י | Yod | 10 | ש | Shin | 300 |
| כ | Kaf | 20 | ת | Tav | 400 |

of the Bible's authors themselves—to recover the authentic context of the Scriptures and biblical faith. It was produced by messianic Jewish and Christian scholars who sought to highlight the rich Hebrew roots of the Christian faith. Since this translation restores the Jewish order and numbering of the books of the Old Testament, you may find that certain verse citations are one number off compared to other translations of the Bible.

Maximum benefits for this study will come from not only commitment to your group but also your own personal study time. The individual study suggestions are there to help guide you deeper into Scripture and enhance your learning. If you miss a personal session, please don't feel you should also skip the group time. Your group is first priority, and you will still be wanted and welcome even if you haven't completed your personal work at home.

It's my hope that *Mysteries of the Messiah* will bring you insights about the Redeemer and how he can be discovered in the many connections throughout the Old and New Testaments. It's my earnest prayer that the uncovering of these mysteries will give you eye-opening moments and new ways to reflect on your life and the Messiah who came to die for you, live again for you, and give you incredible hope for a future with Him.

Baruch HaShem! Praise God!

Note: *If you are a group leader, there are additional resources provided in the back of this guide to help you lead your group members in this study.*



SESSION ONE

FINDING JESUS IN THE STORY OF CREATION

The entire Old Testament points to the coming of the Messiah in the New Testament. We find this from the very first letter and word in Genesis, which reveals that Creation itself was made through the Messiah—that he was the agent of Creation. The story of the Creation sets the foundation of the much larger story that will be revealed in Scripture, which focuses on relationship, redemption, and restoration.



WELCOME

The two disciples trudged down the road to Emmaus. The past few days had been a whirlwind of activity. It had begun when Jesus, whom they believed was the Messiah, had triumphantly entered into Jerusalem and been hailed by the crowds. But this had been quickly followed by Jesus' arrest and several trials before the Jewish and Roman authorities. Near the end of the week, he had been sentenced to death and led away to be crucified. But now, stories were circulating that Jesus' tomb was empty—that he had *risen* from the grave.

It is little wonder the two men were talking about “everything that had happened” as they walked (Luke 24:14)! But then something unexpected happened. Jesus *himself* came up and starting walking along with them, though they were kept from recognizing him. Jesus could see they were sad and asked what they had been discussing. They recounted all the horror and disappointments they had experienced in the recent days, noting that they had hoped Jesus “was the one who was going to redeem Israel” (verse 21). They ended with the report they had just received about his tomb being empty and several women seeing a vision of angels.

Jesus replied, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” (verse 26). He then spoke from the Scriptures to these men, tracking through the Old Testament prophecies to reveal what they said about the Messiah. He taught them the cohesive message of both Testaments, and “*then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him*, and He disappeared from them” (Luke 24:31, emphasis added).

Like these men, my life has been radically transformed as I have delved into the divine connections that reveal the

mysteries of the Messiah. And I have seen the lives of many others change as they have learned how the Old and New Testaments connect. When you come to understand the Jewish roots of your faith, you begin to see Jesus' life and ministry from a different perspective. It like putting on a pair of glasses and seeing things clearly for the first time—all the richness, sharpness, and clarity of details that you might have otherwise missed.

In this study, it is my hope that you, like those disciples on the road to Emmaus, will come to see the Old Testament story in a new way. It is my hope that your “eyes will be opened” as you learn how the Jewish *roots* and Gentile *shoots* connect. And it is my hope that this exploration of the mysteries of the Messiah will ignite a new love for Jesus and passion for the Bible that will bring you greater hope and transformation in your life.

SHARE

If you or any of your group members are just getting to know one another, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Before you watch the video teaching, pair up with another member (perhaps someone you don't know that well) and briefly discuss the following questions:

- What has been your experience studying the Bible? In which part of the Bible have you spent the most time?
- Do you have a favorite Old Testament character? Why is he or she your favorite?

WATCH

Play the video segment for session one. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or teachings that stand out to you.

The Bible comes alive in amazing ways when we understand how Jesus is in every detail of the Scripture—in both the New Testament *and* the Old Testament.

The first letter in the book of Genesis in the Hebrew letter B, *bet*, found in the word “beginning.” The last letter of the book of Revelation is the word “amen,” which ends with the Hebrew letter *nun*. The first letter and last letter in the Bible spell the Hebrew word *BeN*, which means “Son.” From beginning to the end, the Bible points to Jesus, the *Son* of God.

We gain a deeper love, respect, and excitement for the Word of God when we see how the old and the new connect. This is what Jesus was doing on the road to Emmaus with his disciples. As he said, “Every *Torah* scholar disciplined for the kingdom of

heaven is like a master of a household who brings out of his treasure both new things and old" (Matthew 13:52).


From the very first word of the Bible, we see that Creation was made through the Messiah—that he was the agent of Creation. As John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through Him, and apart from Him nothing was made that has come into being" (John 1:1–3).

God saw that sin and sickness would come into the world. In his grace and mercy, before the foundation of the world, he had already determined that Jesus, the Messiah, was going to die for humanity's sins. This is what is being spoken of in the very first word of Genesis 1.

The first messianic prophecy in Scripture is found in Genesis 3:15. God promises to raise up a redeemer through "the seed of the woman" who will reverse the curse and restore the blessing. This is an overarching theme of the Scripture and important

for understanding Jesus' life and death. He is the seed of the woman—the second Adam.

Jesus' hands were pierced because humans stole from the tree. His feet were pierced to fulfill the promise that the heel of the messianic Seed would crush the serpent's head. His pierced side made atonement for the sin of Eve, the one taken from man's side. The crown of thorns represents Jesus taking the curse of creation on his head to reverse it and restore the blessing.



Every Hebrew word has a numerical value, and often those values reveal deeper truths about the Scriptures. We find this in the Creation account with the number 6:

6 = number of man (humans created on the sixth day)

6 = number of the physical universe (six directions)

6 = day on which man fell (in Jewish thought)

"The number six tells not only of labor, but of 'labor and sorrow,' and it specifically marks all that is 'under the sun,' all that is 'not of God.'"¹

Vav is the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It appears at the beginning of the sixth Hebrew word of Genesis 1:1, where it functions as the conjunction “and.” Vav connects “heavens” and “earth.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke the vav, the connection between heaven and earth, which again, according to Jewish tradition, happened on the sixth day (a Friday).

Jesus died on the sixth day to restore the connection (vav) so that life—abundant life—and blessing can flow back to us. Jesus came to restore the connection between heaven and earth.

The world, the flesh, and the enemy wants to make us feel that we have no value. But we have to understand that we are God’s *creation*. We were made with wisdom.

DISCUSS

Now it’s your turn. Take a few minutes in your group to discuss what you just watched. Use the following questions to jump-start your discussion, and make sure to read the

Scripture passages. Be open to receive what God is teaching you and doing in your group.

1. What part of Rabbi Jason's teaching stood out to you in this session on the mysteries of the Messiah in the story of Creation and the Fall?

2. Read John 1:1–3 and Genesis 1:1–3. What similarities do you find between these two passages? How do these connections help you see Messiah in the Genesis account? How do you feel these connections helped John's audience see Jesus?

3. Read Colossians 1:18–20. What words does the apostle Paul use to describe Jesus in these verses? How do these words and phrases connect Jesus to Creation?

4. Re-read Genesis 1:1 and 3:15. In Genesis 1:1, the Hebrew letter *vav* connects the “heavens” and the “earth.” When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke the *vav*, the connection, which resulted in a curse. But even as God was issuing this curse, He was promising a way to restore the broken connection. What was that promise?

5. Read Jeremiah 10:12, Isaiah 45:7, and Matthew 10:29–31. The story of the Fall reveals that God was at work from the start to restore humanity through the promised Messiah. He is still at work today. How does knowing that God’s work never stops affect you? How does knowing He is at work give you a sense of true *shalom* [peace]?

6. God created the world by speaking—through words. Likewise, your words create worlds. What does it mean to you to speak life over yourself and over the people around you? How could speaking life change your view of yourself and of others?

RESPOND

Briefly review the outline for the session one teaching and any notes you took. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session.

PRAY

Close by praying aloud together for a few minutes, asking God to work in each person's heart as you reflect on the content of this session. Write down any specific prayer requests from your group member in the space below so you can continue praying throughout the week.



BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

While group study is important, so is personal discovery. I've always found the more I personally dig into Scripture, the more I hear from God, the more I learn from Him, the more I feel in His presence, and the more of his Word I can apply to my life. Believe me, the time you invest in personal study between each week's session will be time well spent. As a teaching messianic Rabbi and lover of Scripture, I love to continue to dig and find other mysteries or discoveries hidden in God's Word. (As I often like to say, there's *more!*)

GOD HAD A PLAN FROM THE BEGINNING

Read Genesis 1:1. The first word in Hebrew is *bereisheet*. What's interesting is the first three letters of this word are *bet*, *resh*, and *aleph*. The second Hebrew word is *bara*, which means "God created out of nothing." The word *bara* also begins with the same first three letters: *bet*, *resh*, and *aleph*. This is another mystery, because these three letters are an illusion to the Trinity. *Bet* is the Son. *Resh* is the *Ruach* (the Holy Spirit). *Aleph* is the Abba (the Father).

Messiah was present at Creation with God and the Holy Spirit to create a world “out of nothing” . . . and they had a plan. On the first day of Creation, the earth was in an uninhabitable state of darkness and chaos. Biblically, chaos and darkness represent evil, exile, and death. God’s goodness and abundant blessing cannot be fully manifested as long as chaos is on the earth. He must bring order out of chaos so that life can flourish. So his plan involved bringing order out of the chaos. This is true for Creation, our lives, and for the church, “for God is not a God of confusion, but *shalom* [peace]” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

1. Read Genesis 1:2–5 and 26–28. What was God’s plan to start bringing order out of chaos? What was the culmination of those? What was unique about the creation of humankind?
2. Read John 1:1–3. John writes that Jesus, the Messiah, was there “in the beginning.” Why was it important for John to make people aware of this truth? Why is it important for you to know that Jesus—the Messiah—was with God at the very beginning of Creation?

3. Read Psalm 37:23 and 1 Corinthians 2:9. God has plans for each of us. In fact, from the *very beginning* he has had a plan—and he calls his plans good. He has plans for you as well—and he calls those plans are good. How have you seen God’s good plans at work in your life?

BRINGING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

God has the power to bring order out of chaos and light out of darkness. God, Messiah, and the Holy Spirit created order in the world so humanity could experience abundant blessing and life. However, when Adam and Eve sinned, disorder and chaos were no longer fully restrained. Rather, chaos and disorder became an ever-present reality that increased in strength over time as humanity, due to its fallen state, continued to reject the Lord and His ways.

The rabbis say that God created the world for the sake of the Messiah, because he saw that sin and sickness would come into the world. God, in his grace and mercy, wasn’t going to create the world if there wasn’t already a cure and an antidote in place before the curse of sin and death came into the world. In Jewish thought, God went to the Messiah and said, “I’ll only create the world if you are willing to suffer and die for the sake of redeeming my people.”

God’s blueprint, His plan, is to bring order out of the chaos caused by sin and bring redemption. And He had this idea from the *very first word* of Genesis.

4. One of the best examples of redemption is God saving Israel from Egyptian bondage. In Exodus, God redeems Israel from suffering and saves them from slavery to bring them to the Promised Land. How does God's redemption of Israel compare to the antidote provided by Jesus?

5. Read Jesus' words in Mark 10:45. To *redeem* (or *redemption*) means to purchase back something. The word always means a "ransom" or a "price paid." What was the price Jesus paid for us? How does paying this ransom clear the chaos and bring order?

6. The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7, "In Him [Yeshua] we have redemption through His blood—the removal of trespasses—in keeping with the richness of His grace." How does Jesus' redemption bring us out of darkness? What are the results of his redemption?

WHAT HIS PLAN MEANS FOR YOU

Read Colossians 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. In this session, you learned how Messiah was part of Creation and how God has an individual plan for each of us that includes freeing us from chaos and exile through Jesus' redemptive act on the cross. God created the world, and when he did, he already had a plan in place to free us from the evil and sin that lead us to disorder and chaos. His plan was Jesus, who was with him from the beginning.

7. How would you describe chaos? In what ways do chaos and disorder keep you from God's full blessing in your life?

8. How does the Creation story help you to clearly see the power, knowledge, and wisdom of the Creator God and His redemptive plan with Jesus?

9. Read John 14:27. Jesus brings order out of chaos. Managing and bringing order out of chaos may seem daunting, whatever your circumstances may be. How can Jesus help you to walk and live in His *shalom*—his peace?

10. Read Psalm 119:105. One of the critical components of overcoming chaos in your life and restoring order is God's Word. We need the wisdom, power, and light of God's Word to help us overcome the potentially damaging spiritual, emotional, and relational harm caused by the chaos in our lives. What could you set aside so that you have time to study God's Word?

11. Read Proverbs 2:6, 3:13, and 5:1. What do you need to start removing some of the chaos and disorder from your life?

For Next Week: In the next session, you will explore the mysteries of the Messiah as told in the stories of the Jewish patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These men were critical to the history of the Jewish people, so it is important for you to know them and understand their connection to the Messiah. Before your group gathers, read chapters 2–3 in *Mysteries of the Messiah*. Also take a few minutes to acquaint or reacquaint yourself with these three important men and their families by reviewing Genesis 11–12, 17, 21–22, and 25.

Note

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture: Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode (Bible Warehouse) Ltd., 1921), 102.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Thank you for your willingness to lead your group through this study. What you have chosen to do is valuable and will make a great difference in the lives of others. Small groups are important in God's work. As Howard Snyder wrote, "Virtually every major movement of spiritual renewal in the Christian church has been accompanied by a return to the small group and the proliferation of such groups in private homes for Bible study, prayer and discussion of the faith."¹ Small groups provide tremendous opportunities for intimate fellowship among believers in Christ, prayer, and learning that leads to spiritual growth.

Mysteries of the Messiah is a six-session study built around video content and small-group interaction. As the group leader, your role is not to answer all the questions or reteach the content—the video, book, and study guide will do most of that work. Your job is to guide the experience and cultivate your small group into a kind of teaching community. This will make it a place for members to process, question, and reflect on what they are learning.

Before your first meeting, make sure everyone in the group gets a copy of the study guide. This will keep everyone on the same page and help the process run more smoothly. If some group members are unable to purchase the guide, arrange it so that people can share the resource with other group members. Giving everyone access to all the material will position this study to be as rewarding an experience as possible. Everyone should feel free to write in his or her study guide and bring it to the group every week.

SETTING UP THE GROUP

You will need to determine with your group how long you want to meet each week so you can plan your time accordingly. Generally, most groups like to meet for either ninety minutes or two hours, so you could use one of the following schedules:

| SECTION | 90 MINUTES | 120 MINUTES |
|---|------------|-------------|
| WELCOME (members arrive and get settled) | 10 minutes | 15 minutes |
| SHARE (discuss one or more of the opening questions for the session) | 15 minutes | 20 minutes |
| WATCH (watch the teaching material together and take notes) | 25 minutes | 25 minutes |
| DISCUSS (discuss the Bible study questions you selected ahead of time) | 30 minutes | 45 minutes |
| RESPOND / PRAY (reflect on the message, pray together as a group, and dismiss) | 10 minutes | 15 minutes |

As group leader, you will want to create an environment that encourages sharing and learning. A church sanctuary or formal classroom may not be as ideal as a living room, as those locations can feel formal and less intimate. No matter what setting you choose, provide enough comfortable seating for everyone, and, if possible, arrange the seats in a semicircle so everyone can see the video teaching easily. This will make transition between the video and group conversation more efficient and natural.

Also, try to get to the meeting site early so that you can greet participants as they arrive. Simple refreshments create a

welcoming atmosphere and can be a wonderful addition to a group study evening. Try to take food and pet allergies into account to make your guests as comfortable as possible. You may also want to consider offering childcare to couples with children who want to attend. Finally, be sure your media technology is working properly. Managing these details up front will make the rest of your group experience flow smoothly and provide a welcoming space in which to engage the content of *Mysteries of the Messiah*.

STARTING THE GROUP TIME

Once everyone has arrived, it's time to begin the group. Here are some simple tips to make your group time healthy, enjoyable, and effective.

First, begin the meeting with a short prayer and remind the group members to put their phones on silent. This is a way to make sure you can all be present with one another and with God. Next, give each person a few minutes to respond to the questions in the “Share” section. This won't require as much time in session one, but beginning in session two, people might need more time to share their insights from their personal studies. Usually, you won't answer the discussion questions yourself, but you can go first with the “Share” questions, answering briefly and with a reasonable amount of transparency.

At the end of session one, invite the group members to complete the between-sessions personal studies for that week and read the corresponding chapters in *Mysteries of the Messiah* for the next group session. Let them know it is not

a problem if they can't get to some of the between-sessions activities some weeks. It will still be beneficial for them to hear from the other participants and learn about what they discovered.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION TIME

Now that the group is engaged, watch the video together and then respond with some directed small-group discussion. Encourage all the members to participate in the discussion. As the discussion progresses, you may want to follow up with comments such as, "Tell me more about that," or, "Why did you answer that way?" This will allow the group participants to deepen their reflections and invite meaningful sharing in a nonthreatening way.

Note that you have been given multiple questions to use in each session, and you do not have to use them all or even follow them in order. Feel free to pick and choose questions based on either the needs of your group or how the conversation is flowing. Also, don't be afraid of silence. Offering a question and allowing up to thirty seconds of silence is okay. It allows people space to think about how they want to respond and also gives them time to do so.

As group leader, you are the boundary keeper for your group. Do not let anyone (yourself included) dominate the group time. Keep an eye out for group members who might be tempted to "attack" folks they disagree with or try to "fix" those having struggles. These kinds of behaviors can derail a group's momentum, so they need to be steered in a different direction. Model active listening and encourage everyone in

your group to do the same. This will make your group time a safe space and create a positive community.

The group discussion leads to a closing time of response and reflection. Encourage the members to take a few moments to review what they have learned, as this will help them cement the big ideas in their minds. Conclude by praying together as a group.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Leading a group study can be a rewarding experience for you and your group members—but that doesn't mean there won't be challenges. Certain members may feel uncomfortable discussing topics that they consider personal and might be afraid of being called on. Some members might have disagreements on specific issues. To help prevent these scenarios, consider the following ground rules:

- If someone has a question that may seem off topic, suggest that it is discussed at another time, or ask the group if they are okay with addressing that topic.
- If someone asks a question you don't know the answer to, confess that you don't know and move on. If you feel comfortable, invite other group members to give their opinions or share their comments based on personal experience.
- If you feel like a couple of people are talking much more than others, direct questions to people who

may not have shared yet. You could even ask the more dominating members to help draw out the quiet ones.

- When there is a disagreement, encourage the group members to process the matter in love. Invite members from opposing sides to evaluate their opinions and consider the ideas of the other members. Lead the group through Scripture that addresses the topic, and look for common ground.

When issues arise, encourage your group to follow these words from Scripture: “Love one another” (John 13:34), “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in *shalom* [peace] with all people” (Romans 12:18), “Whatever is true . . . honorable . . . just . . . lovely . . . if there is any virtue and if there is anything worth of praise—dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8), and, “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19). This will make your group time more rewarding and beneficial for everyone who attends.

Thank you again for your willingness to lead your group. May God reward your efforts and dedication, equip you to guide your group in the weeks ahead, and make your time together in *Mysteries of the Messiah* fruitful for his kingdom.

Note

1. Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 164.