

the
freedom
bible

CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH
VERSION

edited by
SANDIE BARTON

B BIBLE
SOCIETY

Contents

Foreword to the Contemporary English Version	vii
A Time-line of the Bible	viii
How to read the Bible	ix
About the Contemporary English Version	x

Old Testament

Genesis	1
Exodus	49
Leviticus	88
Numbers	114
Deuteronomy	150
Joshua	190
Judges	218
Ruth	246
1 Samuel	250
2 Samuel	284
1 Kings	314
2 Kings	344
1 Chronicles	375
2 Chronicles	404
Ezra	438
Nehemiah	449
Esther	465
Job	473
Psalms	504
Proverbs	595
Ecclesiastes	626
Song of Songs	635
Isaiah	642
Jeremiah	710
Lamentations	776
Ezekiel	784
Daniel	833
Hosea	849
Joel	862
Amos	867
Obadiah	877
Jonah	879
Micah	882
Nahum	889
Habakkuk	893
Zephaniah	897
Haggai	902
Zechariah	904
Malachi	915

New Testament

Matthew	1
Mark	41
Luke	66
John	107
Acts	136
Romans	172
1 Corinthians	188
2 Corinthians	203
Galatians	213
Ephesians	219
Philippians	225
Colossians	230
1 Thessalonians	235
2 Thessalonians	239
1 Timothy	242
2 Timothy	247
Titus	251
Philemon	254
Hebrews	256
James	269
1 Peter	274
2 Peter	280
1 John	284
2 John	289
3 John	290
Jude	292
Revelation	294
A mini dictionary for the Bible	315
Maps	339

The Freedom Bible central section

Introduction	2
Bible studies	10
Bible reflections	19
Testimonies	28

cried and hugged and kissed him. ³⁸They were especially sad because Paul had told them, “You will never see me again.”

Then they went with him to the ship.

Chapter 21

Paul goes to Jerusalem

¹After saying goodbye, we sailed straight to Cos. The next day we reached Rhodes and from there sailed on to Patara. ²We found a ship going to Phoenicia, so we got on board and sailed off.

³We came within sight of Cyprus and then sailed south of it on to the port of Tyre in Syria, where the ship was going to unload its cargo. ⁴We found the Lord’s followers and stayed with them for a week. The Holy Spirit had told them to warn Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵But when the week was over, we started on our way again. All the men, together with their wives and children, walked with us from the town to the seashore. We knelt on the beach and prayed. ⁶Then after saying goodbye to each other, we got into the ship, and they went back home.

⁷We sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the followers and stayed with them for a day. ⁸The next day we went to Caesarea and stayed with Philip, the preacher. He was one of the seven men who helped the apostles, ⁹and he had four unmarried* daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰We had been in Caesarea for several days, when the prophet Agabus came to us from Judea. ¹¹He took Paul’s belt, and with it he tied up his own hands and feet. Then he told us, “The Holy Spirit says that some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will tie up the man who owns this belt. They will also hand him over to the Gentiles.” ¹²After Agabus said this, we and the followers living there begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

¹³But Paul answered, “Why are you crying and breaking my heart? I am not only willing to be put in jail for the Lord Jesus. I am even willing to die for him in Jerusalem!”

¹⁴Since we could not get Paul to change his mind, we gave up and prayed, “Lord, please make us willing to do what you want.”

¹⁵Then we got ready to go to Jerusalem.

¹⁶Some of the followers from Caesarea went with us and took us to stay in the home of

Mnason. He was from Cyprus and had been a follower from the beginning.

PAUL’S ARREST IN JERUSALEM

Paul visits James

¹⁷When we arrived in Jerusalem, the Lord’s followers gladly welcomed us. ¹⁸Paul went with us to see James* the next day, and all the church leaders were present. ¹⁹Paul greeted them and told how God had used him to help the Gentiles. ²⁰Everyone who heard this praised God and said to Paul:

My friend, you can see how many tens of thousands of the Jewish people have become followers! And all of them are eager to obey the Law of Moses. ²¹But they have been told that you are teaching those who live among the Gentiles to disobey this Law. They claim that you are telling them not to circumcise their sons or to follow Jewish customs.

²²What should we do now that our people have heard that you are here? ²³Please do what we ask, because four of our men have made special promises to God. ²⁴Join with them and prepare yourself for the ceremony that goes with the promises. Pay the cost for their heads to be shaved. Then everyone will learn that the reports about you are not true. They will know that you do obey the Law of Moses.

²⁵Some while ago we told the Gentile followers what we think they should do. We instructed them not to eat anything offered to idols. They were told not to eat any meat with blood still in it or the meat of an animal that has been strangled. They were also told not to commit any terrible sexual sins.*

²⁶The next day Paul took the four men with him and got himself ready at the same time they did. Then he went into the temple and told when the final ceremony would take place and when an offering would be made for each of them.

Paul is arrested

²⁷When the period of seven days for the ceremony was almost over, some of the Jewish people from Asia saw Paul in the temple. They got a large crowd together and

* 21.18 James: See the note at 12.17. * 21.25 not to commit any terrible sexual sins; See the note at 15.20.

started attacking him. ²⁸They were shouting, “Friends, help us! This man goes around everywhere, saying bad things about our nation and about the Law of Moses and about this temple. He has even brought shame to this holy temple by bringing in Gentiles.”

²⁹Some of them thought that Paul had brought Trophimus from Ephesus into the temple, because they had seen them together in the city.

³⁰The whole city was in an uproar, and the people turned into a mob. They grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple. Then suddenly the doors were shut. ³¹The people were about to kill Paul when the Roman army commander heard that all Jerusalem was starting to riot. ³²So he quickly took some soldiers and officers and ran to where the crowd had gathered.

As soon as the mob saw the commander and soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³The army commander went over and arrested him and had him bound with two chains. Then he tried to find out who Paul was and what he had done. ³⁴Part of the crowd shouted one thing, and part of them shouted something else. But they were making so much noise that the commander could not find out a thing. Then he ordered Paul to be taken into the fortress. ³⁵As they reached the steps, the crowd became so wild that the soldiers had to lift Paul up and carry him. ³⁶The crowd followed and kept shouting, “Kill him! Kill him!”

Paul speaks to the crowd

³⁷When Paul was about to be taken into the fortress, he asked the commander, “Can I say something to you?”

“How do you know Greek?” the commander asked. ³⁸“Aren’t you that Egyptian who started a riot not long ago and led four thousand terrorists into the desert?”

³⁹“No!” Paul replied. “I am a Jew from Tarsus, an important city in Cilicia. Please let me speak to the crowd.”

⁴⁰The commander told him he could speak, so Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the people. When they were quiet, he spoke to them in Aramaic:

Chapter 22

¹“My friends and leaders of our nation, listen as I explain what happened!” ²When the crowd heard Paul speak to them in Aramaic, they became even quieter. Then Paul said:

³I am a Jew, born and raised in the city of Tarsus in Cilicia. I was a student of Gamaliel and was taught to follow every single law of our ancestors. In fact, I was just as eager to obey God as any of you are today.

⁴I made trouble for everyone who followed the Lord’s Way,* and I even had some of them killed. I had others arrested and put in jail. I didn’t care if they were men or women. ⁵The high priest and all the council members can tell you that this is true. They even gave me letters to the Jewish leaders in Damascus, so that I could arrest people there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶One day about midday I was getting close to Damascus, when a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice asking me, “Saul, Saul, why are you so cruel to me?”

⁸“Who are you?” I answered.

The Lord replied, “I am Jesus from Nazareth! I am the one you are so cruel to.”

⁹The men who were travelling with me saw the light, but did not hear the voice.

¹⁰I asked, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

Then he told me, “Get up and go to Damascus. When you get there, you will be told what to do.” ¹¹The light had been so bright that I couldn’t see. And the other men had to lead me by the hand to Damascus.

¹²In that city there was a man named Ananias, who faithfully obeyed the Law of Moses and was well liked by all the Jewish people living there. ¹³He came to me and said, “Saul, my friend, you can now see again!”

At once I could see. ¹⁴Then Ananias told me, “The God that our ancestors worshipped has chosen you to know what he wants done. He has chosen you to see the One Who Obeys God* and to hear his voice. ¹⁵You must tell everyone what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶What are you

* 22.4 followed the Lord’s Way: See the note at 9.2. * 22.14 One Who Obeys God: See the note at 7.52.

waiting for? Get up! Be baptized, and wash away your sins by praying to the Lord.”

¹⁷After this I returned to Jerusalem and went to the temple to pray. There I had a vision ¹⁸of the Lord who said to me, “Hurry and leave Jerusalem! The people won’t listen to what you say about me.”

¹⁹I replied, “Lord, they know that in many of our meeting places I arrested and beat people who had faith in you. ²⁰Stephen was killed because he spoke for you, and I stood there and cheered them on. I even guarded the clothes of the men who murdered him.”

²¹But the Lord told me to go, and he promised to send me far away to the Gentiles.

²²The crowd listened until Paul said this. Then they started shouting, “Get rid of this man! He doesn’t deserve to live.” ²³They kept shouting. They waved their clothes around and threw dust into the air.

Paul and the Roman army commander

²⁴The Roman commander ordered Paul to be taken into the fortress and beaten with a whip. He did this to find out why the people were screaming at Paul.

²⁵While the soldiers were tying Paul up to be beaten, he asked the officer standing there, “Is it legal to beat a Roman citizen before he has been tried in court?”

²⁶When the officer heard this, he went to the commander and said, “What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen!”

²⁷The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes,” Paul answered.

²⁸The commander then said, “I paid a lot of money to become a Roman citizen.”*

But Paul replied, “I was born a Roman citizen.”

²⁹The men who were about to beat and question Paul quickly backed off. And the commander himself was frightened when he realized that he had put a Roman citizen in chains.

Paul is tried by the council

³⁰The next day the commander wanted to know the real reason why the Jewish leaders had brought charges against Paul. So he had Paul’s chains removed, and he ordered the

chief priests and the whole council to meet. Then he had Paul led in and made him stand in front of them.

Chapter 23

¹Paul looked straight at the council members and said, “My friends, to this day I have served God with a clear conscience!”

²Then Ananias the high priest ordered the men standing beside Paul to hit him on the mouth. ³Paul turned to the high priest and said, “You whitewashed wall! God will hit you. You sit there to judge me by the Law of Moses. But at the same time you order men to break the Law by hitting me.”

⁴The men standing beside Paul asked, “Don’t you know you are insulting God’s high priest?”

⁵Paul replied, “Oh! I didn’t know he was the high priest. The Scriptures do tell us not to speak evil about a leader of our people.”

⁶When Paul saw that some of the council members were Sadducees and others were Pharisees, he shouted, “My friends, I am a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee. I am on trial simply because I believe that the dead will be raised to life.”

⁷As soon as Paul said this, the Pharisees and the Sadducees got into a big argument, and the council members started taking sides. ⁸The Sadducees do not believe in angels or spirits or that the dead will rise to life. But the Pharisees believe in all these, ⁹and so there was a lot of shouting. Some of the teachers of the Law of Moses were Pharisees. Finally, they became angry and said, “We don’t find anything wrong with this man. Perhaps a spirit or an angel really did speak to him.”

¹⁰The argument became fierce, and the commander was afraid that Paul would be pulled apart. So he ordered the soldiers to go in and rescue Paul. Then they took him back into the fortress.

¹¹That night the Lord stood beside Paul and said, “Don’t worry! Just as you have told others about me in Jerusalem, you must also tell about me in Rome.”

A plot to kill Paul

^{12–13}The next morning more than forty Jewish men got together and vowed that they

* 22.28 *Roman citizen*: See the note at 16.37. * 23.3 *whitewashed wall*: Someone who pretends to be good, but really isn’t.

would not eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. ¹⁴ Then some of them went to the chief priests and the nation's leaders and said, "We have promised God that we would not eat a thing until we have killed Paul.

¹⁵ You and everyone in the council must go to the commander and pretend that you want to find out more about the charges against Paul. Ask for him to be brought before your court. Meanwhile, we will be waiting to kill him before he gets there."

¹⁶ When Paul's nephew heard about the plot, he went to the fortress and told Paul about it. ¹⁷ So Paul said to one of the army officers, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something to tell him."

¹⁸ The officer took him to the commander and said, "The prisoner named Paul asked me to bring this young man to you, because he has something to tell you."

¹⁹ The commander took the young man aside and asked him in private, "What do you want to tell me?"

²⁰ He answered, "Some men are planning to ask you to bring Paul down to the Jewish council tomorrow. They will claim that they want to find out more about him. ²¹ But please don't do what they say. More than forty men are going to attack Paul. They have made a vow not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. Even now they are waiting to hear what you decide."

²² The commander sent the young man away after saying to him, "Don't let anyone know that you told me this."

PAUL IS TAKEN TO CAESAREA

Paul is sent to Felix the governor

²³ The commander called in two of his officers and told them, "By nine o'clock tonight have two hundred soldiers ready to go to Caesarea. Take along seventy men on horseback and two hundred foot soldiers with spears. ²⁴ Get a horse ready for Paul and make sure that he gets safely through to Felix the governor."

²⁵ The commander wrote a letter that said:

²⁶ Greetings from Claudius Lysias to the Honourable Governor Felix:

²⁷ Some Jews grabbed this man and were about to kill him. But when I found out that he was a Roman citizen, I took some soldiers and rescued him.

²⁸ I wanted to find out what they had against him. So I brought him before their council ²⁹ and learnt that the charges concern only their religious laws. This man isn't guilty of anything for which he should die or even be put in jail.

³⁰ As soon as I learnt that there was a plot against him, I sent him to you and told their leaders to bring charges against him in your court.

³¹ The soldiers obeyed the commander's orders, and that same night they took Paul to the city of Antipatris. ³² The next day the foot soldiers returned to the fortress and let the soldiers on horseback take him the rest of the way. ³³ When they came to Caesarea, they gave the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.

³⁴ The governor read the letter. Then he asked Paul and found out that he was from Cilicia. ³⁵ The governor said, "I will listen to your case as soon as the people come to bring their charges against you." After saying this, he gave orders for Paul to be kept as a prisoner in Herod's palace.*

Chapter 24

Paul is accused in the court of Felix

¹ Five days later Ananias the high priest, together with some of their leaders and a lawyer named Tertullus, went to the governor to present their case against Paul. ² So Paul was called in, and Tertullus stated the case against him:

Honourable Felix, you have brought our people a long period of peace, and because of your concern our nation is much better off. ³ All of us are always grateful for what you have done. ⁴ I don't want to bother you, but please be patient with us and listen to me for just a few minutes.

⁵ This man has been found to be a real pest and troublemaker for Jews all over the world. He is also a leader of a group called Nazarenes. ⁶⁻⁸ When he tried to disgrace the temple, we arrested him.* If you question him, you will find out for yourself that our charges are true.

⁹ The Jewish crowd spoke up and agreed with what Tertullus had said.

Paul defends himself

¹⁰ The governor motioned for Paul to speak, and he began:

* 23.35 Herod's palace: The palace built by Herod the Great and used by the Roman governors of Palestine.

I know that you have judged the people of our nation for many years, and I am glad to defend myself in your court.

¹¹It was no more than twelve days ago that I went to worship in Jerusalem. You can find this out easily enough. ¹²Never once did the Jews find me arguing with anyone in the temple. I didn't cause trouble in the Jewish meeting places or in the city itself. ¹³There is no way that they can prove these charges that they are now bringing against me.

¹⁴I admit that their leaders think that the Lord's Way* which I follow is based on wrong beliefs. But I still worship the same God that my ancestors worshipped. And I believe everything written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets.* ¹⁵I am just as sure as these people are that God will raise from death everyone who is good or evil.

¹⁶And because I am sure, I try my best to have a clear conscience in whatever I do for God or for people.

¹⁷After being away for several years, I returned here to bring gifts for the poor people of my nation and to offer sacrifices.

¹⁸This is what I was doing when I was found going through a ceremony in the temple. I wasn't with a crowd, and there was no uproar.

¹⁹Some Jews from Asia were there at that time, and if they have anything to say against me, they should be here now.

²⁰Or ask the ones who are here. They can tell you that they didn't find me guilty of anything when I was tried by their own council. ²¹The only charge they can bring against me is what I shouted out in court, when I said, "I am on trial today because I believe that the dead will be raised to life!"

²²Felix knew a lot about the Lord's Way.* But he brought the trial to an end and said, "I will make my decision after Lysias the commander arrives." ²³He then ordered the army officer to keep Paul under guard, but not to lock him up or to stop his friends from helping him.

Paul is kept under guard

²⁴Several days later Felix and his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, went to the place

where Paul was kept under guard. They sent for Paul and listened while he spoke to them about having faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵But Felix was frightened when Paul started talking to them about doing right, about self-control, and about the coming judgment. So he said to Paul, "That's enough for now. You may go. But when I have time I will send for you." ²⁶After this, Felix often sent for Paul and talked with him, because he hoped that Paul would offer him a bribe.

²⁷Two years later Porcius Festus became governor in place of Felix. But since Felix wanted to do the Jewish leaders a favour, he kept Paul in jail.

Chapter 25

Paul asks to be tried by the Roman Emperor

¹Three days after Festus had become governor, he went from Caesarea to Jerusalem. ²There the chief priests and some Jewish leaders told him about their charges against Paul. They also asked Festus ³if he would be willing to bring Paul to Jerusalem. They begged him to do this because they were planning to attack and kill Paul on the way. ⁴But Festus told them, "Paul will be kept in Caesarea, and I am soon going there myself. ⁵If he has done anything wrong, let your leaders go with me and bring charges against him there."

⁶Festus stayed in Jerusalem for eight or ten more days before going to Caesarea. Then the next day he took his place as judge and had Paul brought into court. ⁷As soon as Paul came in, the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem crowded around him and said he was guilty of many serious crimes. But they could not prove anything. ⁸Then Paul spoke in his own defence, "I have not broken the Law of my people. And I have not done anything against either the temple or the Emperor."

⁹Festus wanted to please the leaders. So he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried by me on these charges?"

¹⁰Paul replied, "I am on trial in the Emperor's court, and that's where I should be tried. You know very well that I have not done anything to harm the Jewish nation.

* 24.14 the Lord's Way: See the note at 9.2. * 24.14 Law of Moses ... the Prophets: The Jewish Scriptures, that is, the Old Testament. * 24.22 the Lord's Way: See the note at 9.2.

¹¹If I had done something deserving death, I would not ask to escape the death penalty. But I am not guilty of any of these crimes, and no one has the right to hand me over to these people. I now ask to be tried by the Emperor himself.”

¹²After Festus had talked this over with members of his council, he told Paul, “You have asked to be tried by the Emperor, and to the Emperor you will go!”

Paul speaks to Agrippa and Bernice

¹³A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to visit Festus.

¹⁴They had been there for several days, when Festus told the king about the charges against Paul. He said:

Felix left a man here in jail, ¹⁵and when I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders came and asked me to find him guilty. ¹⁶I told them that it isn't the Roman custom to hand a man over to people who are bringing charges against him. He must first have the chance to meet them face to face and to defend himself against their charges.

¹⁷So when they came here with me, I wasted no time. On the very next day I took my place on the judge's bench and ordered him to be brought in. ¹⁸But when the men stood up to make their charges against him, they did not accuse him of any of the crimes that I thought they would.

¹⁹Instead, they argued with him about some of their beliefs and about a dead man named Jesus, who Paul said was alive.

²⁰Since I did not know how to find out the truth about all this, I asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and be put on trial there. ²¹But Paul asked to be kept in jail until the Emperor could decide his case. So I ordered him to be kept here until I could send him to the Emperor.

²²Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I would also like to hear what this man has to say.”

Festus answered, “You can hear him tomorrow.”

²³The next day Agrippa and Bernice made a big show as they came into the meeting room. High ranking army officers and leading citizens of the town were also there. Festus then ordered Paul to be brought in ²⁴and said:

King Agrippa and other guests, look at this man! Every Jew from Jerusalem and Caesarea has come to me, demanding for

him to be put to death. ²⁵I have not found him guilty of any crime deserving death. But because he has asked to be judged by the Emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome.

²⁶I have to write some facts about this man to the Emperor. So I have brought him before all of you, but especially before you, King Agrippa. After we have talked about his case, I will then have something to write. ²⁷It makes no sense to send a prisoner to the Emperor without stating the charges against him.

Chapter 26

Paul's defence before Agrippa

¹Agrippa told Paul, “You may now speak for yourself.”

Paul stretched out his hand and said:

²King Agrippa, I am glad for this chance to defend myself before you today on all these charges that my own people have brought against me. ³You know a lot about our religious customs and the beliefs that divide us. So I ask you to listen patiently to me.

⁴⁻⁵All the Jews have known me since I was a child. They know what kind of life I have lived in my own country and in Jerusalem. And if they were willing, they could tell you that I was a Pharisee, a member of a group that is stricter than any other. ⁶Now I am on trial because I believe the promise God made to our people long ago.

⁷Day and night our twelve tribes have earnestly served God, waiting for his promised blessings. King Agrippa, because of this hope, the Jewish leaders have brought charges against me. ⁸Why should any of you doubt that God raises the dead to life?

⁹I once thought that I should do everything I could to oppose Jesus from Nazareth. ¹⁰I did this first in Jerusalem, and with the authority of the chief priests I put many of God's people in jail. I even voted for them to be killed. ¹¹I often had them punished in our meeting places, and I tried to make them give up their faith. In fact, I was so angry with them, that I went looking for them in foreign cities.

¹²King Agrippa, one day I was on my way to Damascus with the authority and permission of the chief priests. ¹³About

of creation, celebrations and feasting, or the joy of human love as told in Song of Songs (e.g. 2.10–13).

Free to know God

Then, of course, how could we miss out the all-important central theme of how God enables us to be released from the crushing burden of sin and guilt? We can trace this thread from the laws and temple rituals in the Old Testament, through God's forgiveness repeatedly offered, and supremely through to the death and resurrection of Jesus that finally frees us even from death itself. We are set free to know God and to love and worship him just as we were originally created to do (e.g. Hebrews 9.15).

The responsibility of freedom

Gradually we start to understand in a new way that the Christian life of freedom is far different from just doing what we like. Both Paul and Peter reminded members of the early church to use their freedom not just for their own ends, but to serve one another with love. You can read more about this on pages 16 and 26. So we have been set free for a purpose, and this Bible helps us to understand how that can give us a deeply satisfying and fulfilling life, and above all one that is pleasing to God. We see examples of people being released into new ways of serving God, like when the disciples left their fishing nets to follow Jesus, and of using their God-given strength and freedom to care for the weak and needy.

Free to explore

So you'll find much more in this Bible

than a few obvious verses about freedom: you might have to scratch your head over some of them before you work out what they have to tell you. Best of all, as you read, you might well find that God has things to say to you about freedom that we haven't even thought of, and if you want to you can add those highlights yourself – feel free!

What to do if you get lost

Some of the verses we've highlighted will be easier to understand than others. If you come across something that doesn't speak to you about freedom, here are some tips to help you figure it out:

- Ask yourself if the verse is part of a longer story: read the parts that come before and after it to see if the context helps.
- Make use of the chapter headings and footnotes: they are there to help you get your bearings.
- Phone a friend: talking it over with another person can really help, even if they don't understand it either.
- Pray about it, asking God to reveal something fresh.
- Leave it and move on to another passage: something that doesn't seem to mean much today may suddenly make sense next time you see it.

Sandie Barton is editor of *The Freedom Bible* and an ordained minister in the Church of England

what highlighting can do for you and what it can't

How do you find your way into reading a big book like the Bible? It's full of wonderful stuff, but if you're new to it, it can look a bit daunting. I remember my own first attempt to begin at the beginning and read to the end. I'm afraid I soon got stuck – but all I really needed was a bit of help to find my way around. That's why we believe that a highlighted Bible like this is a great way to get started if you want to explore the big picture. It gives you a way in to seeing how certain themes come out in different ways across the whole majestic sweep of it, without getting bogged down in some of the hard-to-grasp detail.

What's wrong with a highlighted Bible?

Well, we'd be the first to admit that highlighting isn't perfect, and it certainly isn't the only way you should read the Bible. The book in your hands is full of multi-layered meanings that are often too subtle to be brought out just by running a coloured pen over a few verses. We don't want you to get the impression that

we think the verses we've highlighted are somehow better or more important than the many that we haven't. As with so many things in life, it's sometimes in reading between the lines (or in this case, between the highlighted lines) that you'll get to understand more fully what's going on. *The Freedom Bible* is really a bit like a key to a treasure chest – a humble device that can open up the way to riches that will amaze and delight you.

How we chose the verses

You'll notice quite soon if you start to flick through the pages of *The Freedom Bible* that there are entire pages, even one or two whole books, with no highlights at all. That doesn't mean that those pages don't contain any verses relevant to the theme of freedom, far from it. But in picking out the 3,500 verses we did, we were very choosy. First we listed all kinds of aspects of freedom. Then for each aspect we selected passages that had something to say even when taken out of context. That approach meant that some great passages with lots to say about freedom weren't highlighted at all. Here are a few

examples of the things you might miss if you only read the highlights.

Freedom in the heart of darkness – the book of Job

If you're not familiar with this book of the Bible, you can find a helpful summary of the storyline on page 473. However, before I get on to that, let me take you back to page 2 of *The Freedom Bible*, to the very first passage we highlighted. You might be forgiven for thinking that's a bit of a strange start: what has the account of just-before-creation got to do with freedom? But contained within those verses is the thought that in the act of creation God brought something beautiful, light and free out of an emptiness that was dark, frightening and chaotic, and that's why we included it.

Now back to Job: imagine a man whose ordered and peaceful world appears to disintegrate around him. We are plunged into a world of terror and bleak despair as Job questions his very existence. You could almost say it was like creation back-to-front. The superficial answers offered by Job's friends (sometimes called "Job's comforters") are no help to him, and with searing honesty he lays bare his agony as we read.

Here's the exciting part – when God finally responds to Job's questioning, it's all in terms of how he created the world. In other words (to cut a 42-chapter story short) Job is right to go on trusting God amidst the chaos of his suffering, because even when everything seems out of control, still our creator God is the one who can bring order, peace and beauty out of dark, disordered emptiness.

That's a real message of freedom, and has so much to say to us when we find ourselves trapped in difficult circumstances in our own lives; but it's written in such epic terms and in such glorious poetry that highlighting a few verses really doesn't do it justice. You have to look at the bigger picture to see where it fits in.

Freedom from our weaknesses – Samson's story

Chapters 13 to 16 of the book of Judges tell the story of Samson. This is the kind of vivid tale that lends itself to a retelling for children, and so some of us might be familiar from Sunday School days with the part where Delilah tricked Samson into letting her cut his long hair so he lost his superhuman strength.

However, it would be a mistake to think that that's all there is to the story. The background is that God's people were in need of rescue from an enemy that had dominated them for 40 years. God announced that Samson would be the one to begin to set them free, and that he was to be set apart for God as a Nazirite – an elite order dedicated to God through special vows. You can read about all the vows he would have made in Numbers chapter 6, but one of them involved never cutting his hair.

Despite Samson's great physical strength he had some major character flaws, not least a preference for the wrong kind of woman. Repeatedly, we see this weak point exploited by his enemies, until finally it results in his capture. In a dramatic and tragic final scene Samson regains his strength and, freeing himself

of the shame of having allowed Delilah to manipulate him into breaking his vows, he defeats his enemies at last – but only at the cost of his own life.

There is much to take away from this story about valuing and guarding our freedom, and of understanding the damage that seemingly insignificant transgressions can do to it. We can even catch an echo of our own redemption through Jesus in the way that Samson gave his life to defeat the enemy. But here again, no individual verses fully draw out these deeper truths, you just have to read the whole thing.

Freedom to worship – Stephen speaks out

Moving to the New Testament, chapters 6 and 7 of Acts describe the ministry, arrest and trial of Stephen, one of the leaders of the early church. In a long speech before the high priest, Stephen recounts the history of God's people. Within the speech we have highlighted some references to times when God rescued his people from slavery, because they do make sense on their own.

On the other hand there is another kind of freedom behind what Stephen is saying, which simply can't be brought out in the highlighting. To understand that, you have to go deeper: you need to know that when God's people were wandering in the desert, God went with them wherever they were as a thick cloud by day and a flaming fire by night. Later on they made a special tent where they used to meet with him, but still he moved around with them. Eventually, when they were living in one place and

had a time of peace, God's people built a Temple instead, and for the first time they started to think of God as being located there, instead of travelling with them. The Temple became so central to their understanding of worship, that if anyone said anything against the Temple, it was treated as blasphemy.

In his speech, Stephen shows how the priests are effectively trying to limit God, and are also trying to limit how people worship him. By telling them this, Stephen made the religious leaders so angry that he was executed on the spot. Even today there are those who will try to limit the freedom of Christian worshippers. The glorious truth is that wherever we find ourselves in this life we are spiritually free to know God and worship him face to face. All the more important, then, that we recognise what the Bible has to say about these truths, and value our freedom to worship.

Breathe deep and enjoy the view!

Clearly the Bible speaks of many aspects of freedom that you simply won't find ready-highlighted here. Instead they are waiting to be discovered like breathtaking mountain-top views as you take your time to explore, to contemplate and to enjoy. In the meantime we hope that the passages we have highlighted will act as beacons for you as you start out on this journey of discovery.

Sandie Barton is editor of *The Freedom Bible* and an ordained minister in the Church of England.

bible study inner freedom

Exodus 16.1–3

¹On the fifteenth day of the second month after the Israelites had escaped from Egypt, they left Elim and started through the western edge of the Sinai Desert in the direction of Mount Sinai. ²There in the desert they started complaining to Moses and Aaron, ³“We wish the Lord had killed us in Egypt. When we lived there, we could at least sit down and eat all the bread and meat we wanted. But you have brought us out here into this desert, where we are going to starve.”

Exodus 16.1–3

What stops you being free ... really free?

This short passage is about the people of God and their response to freedom. You might also want to read Exodus 12.31–42 and 14.13–31 to give you a sense of what happened immediately before this short story.

Each of us will answer the question about what stops us being free in a

God's freedom has to be received as well as offered.

different way. For some of us our job – or lack of one – stops us from being free, for others it is our financial situation or our family and friends or our health. Exodus 16.1–3, however, suggests that there is more to our lack of freedom than merely external forces. Sometimes it is ourselves and the way in which we view the world which prevents us from being really free.

The good old days

The “Exodus” of God’s people from Egypt across the Red Sea is one of the greatest of all of God’s acts of liberation. The people fled slavery and certain death at the hands of the Egyptians in search of freedom and the promise of their own land to live in. They had yearned and prayed for God’s help for years and at last God answered their prayer.

“²³After the death of the king of Egypt, the Israelites still complained because they were forced to be slaves. They cried out for help, ²⁴and God heard their loud cries. He did not forget the promise he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, ²⁵and because he knew what was happening to his people, he felt sorry for them” (Exodus 2.23–25).

But, once free, they immediately began

to grumble and to look back to the “good old days” when they were slaves but had enough to eat; if only, they said, we could be slaves again. At least then we would not be hungry.

It is a fascinating feature of our human nature that so often we grumble about the present and look back to the past with rose-tinted spectacles. You would think that the Israelites would find it hard to look back on slavery with nostalgia, but here they do it and seem to wish that they were back there again.

This is not something to feel guilty about – we all do it – but it is something to resist because it limits the freedom that God yearns to give us.

Captive to habit

Although the Israelites were free externally, they were still enslaved internally; God had freed their bodies but their minds were still in captivity back in Egypt. Exodus 16.1–3 illustrates powerfully that God’s freedom has to be received as well as offered. The Israelites had to learn to live up to the freedom that was on offer to them; standing on the very brink of the greatest freedom they might ever encounter, their instinct was to look backwards. So often we do the same. God offers us freedom in all aspects of our lives but we hesitate, pulled back by our inner uncertainties, fears and worries, so that we remain as captive as we ever were.

One of the vital lessons that we need to learn in our walk with God is to receive fully the freedom God gives us and not to limit it by our own inner habits and anxieties.

Embracing unpredictability

Of course, what the Israelites came to realise is that the cost of freedom is uncertainty. When the Israelites were slaves their lives were wretched and despairing but predictable. They were

One of the vital lessons that we need to learn in our walk with God is to receive fully the freedom God gives us and not to limit it by our own inner habits and anxieties

forced to labour for someone else and to suffer unendurable hardship but, as they observed in Exodus 16.3, at least they knew where their next meal would come from. Once free, their lives became suddenly and uncontrollably unpredictable. They had no guarantees any more, not even about what they might eat next.

This is a characteristic of the freedom of God. If we accept the freedom that God offers us, then our lives can flourish and grow in ways beyond our imagination. However, this freedom is unpredictable and we can never tell in advance where it might take us or what impact it might have on our lives. Accepting God’s freedom involves also accepting that we no longer control the shape our lives might take.

Stepping out

God yearns to set us free from all those

things that hold us captive and yet this involves us being prepared to step out beyond the boundaries of our lives, to leave behind the certainties which restrict us but which also make us feel safe. God opens the door but the question that each one of us must face

True freedom comes from within and involves living fully and confidently the lives that God created us to live.

is whether we have both the inner resources and the confidence in God to step through it and be truly free.

True freedom comes from within and involves living fully and confidently the lives that God created us to live. True

freedom involves stepping beyond the inner restraints that constrain us and embracing the glorious future that God holds out to us. In Exodus 16.1–3 the people of God were offered the greatest freedom imaginable but then found that they were simply not ready to grasp it. It took 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for them to grow into their freedom and even then they wasted a lot of time looking backwards.

The challenge to each one of us is whether the same is true for us too. God summons us into freedom but sometimes the greatest obstacle to that freedom is ourselves.

Paula Gooder is a freelance writer and lecturer in New Testament Studies; her aim is to help people to discover a passion for reading the Bible.

bible study the freedom jesus brings

Luke 4.15–21

¹⁵He taught in the Jewish meeting places, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, ¹⁷he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read, ¹⁸“The Lord’s Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, ¹⁹and to say, ‘This is the year the Lord has chosen.’” ²⁰Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus. ²¹Then Jesus said to them, “What you have just heard me read has come true today.”

Luke 4.15–21

Have you ever wondered what Jesus himself thought he had come to do?

This passage in Luke 4.15–21 is a description of Jesus’ first sermon in a synagogue in Nazareth (you might also find it interesting to read the whole passage from Isaiah that is quoted here in this story – you can find it at

Isaiah 61.1–8).

It could take many hours to answer the question of what Jesus thought he had come to do, because his gift to us is so great. However, this passage in Luke stands out from all the rest because, in it, Jesus seems to be quite specific. It was right at the start of his ministry that he went into a synagogue, read a passage of Scripture (Isaiah 61.1–2) and then explained that this prophecy had been fulfilled.

Jesus’ manifesto

Many people take this to be Jesus’ manifesto, telling what would shape his ministry for the rest of his life. Not only does this seem to be the case because it happened at the outset of his visible work on earth (just after his baptism and the story of his temptation in the wilderness

In all aspects of our lives we can make decisions which can enhance or detract from other people’s freedom.

testimony freedom from captivity

Jesus answered "I have explained the secrets about the kingdom of heaven to you."

Matthew 13:11

Despite all my doubts, lying there in that hospital bed, I knew something was different. I felt a freedom that I had never known before.

Gram Seed lay dying in a Middlesbrough hospital, a violent drunk who had served time in many prisons. Three years of living on a bench had taken its toll. He'd collapsed with hypothermia, pneumonia and septicaemia. His condition had deteriorated so much that the doctors sought permission from his mother to switch off his life-support machine.

"I'd become the tramp that nobody sees," Gram recalls. "I was from a broken family living in a rough part of town. A life of crime allowed me to be both rich and powerful but inside I was hurting, insecure and angry.

"After the confinement of prison walls I sought the freedom of the open air and made a public bench my home. I was drinking heavily to ease the pain of rejection. At one point I became so desperate I wanted to end my life, so I slashed my wrists. The police took me to hospital but I was soon back on my bench.

"One Friday night some lads walked up to me and told me that Jesus loved me. I chased them away, but everywhere I went that week I kept bumping into them. It

wasn't long after that that I collapsed and was put on the life-support machine at James Cook Hospital.

"While I was in a coma I had a vision. I saw myself cleansed and healed from my violent past and I really believed it was from God. The Christian lads had missed me on the bench and found out that I was in a coma in hospital, so they visited me and asked my mam if they could pray for me. She agreed so they put their hands on me and said: 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, give this man LIFE!'

"That evening I opened my eyes for the first time in six days. They came back later and told me of God's love for me and that Jesus came and died for people like me. Despite all my doubts, lying there in that hospital bed, I knew something was different. I felt a freedom that I had never known before.

"I later began to realise that this freedom was only possible because of the grace and mercy given to me through the cross of Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness that releases us from bondage. The two lads continued to visit me in hospital every day for two months, reading the Bible to me. When I got out I gave my life to the Lord.

"After becoming a Christian I started talking to all the kids on the estates to tell them there was a better way of life. Stealing and taking drugs is not the way to go. I wanted them to know Jesus the way I had got to know him. I began visiting some of my friends in prison and going out on to the streets. In God's amazing providence I now head up Sowing Seeds Ministries which aims to help ex-offenders, just like me, not only to find a

better way of life but to realise that true freedom can only come through the love of a saviour, and that saviour is my Lord and friend Jesus Christ.

"God's love and grace reach down to you, no matter where you are or what you've done. Every time I walk past that bench I thank God that he knew my address and sent someone to tell me about Jesus."

Gram Seed is the founder of Sowing Seeds Ministries and author of *One Step Beyond* and *It Must be Love*.

testimony freedom from the past

The iron bars, the concrete, the prison walls – they didn't limit my freedom. I experienced freedom on the inside – in my spirit and my mind.

"I was in my village and I killed a man.

"You see, this man was a witch doctor and he poisoned my daughter. When she died, I felt like my heart had broken – I was so upset and so angry. I couldn't believe it and I knew I had to do something about it.

"So, early the next morning, I went and killed the witch doctor. I was so upset I wasn't thinking straight at the time – I just did what came naturally. When I realised what I had done, I ran from the scene. I went straight to the police station and told them my story. They gave me 18 years.

"When I was in prison there was a pastor who came in and preached to us. He told us the story of Nicodemus and how Jesus had said he had to be born again. When I heard him speaking, I realised that I was not born again and that my life needed changing. So I decided to give my life to God.

"When I came to God, my spirit and my thinking began to change. I realised that my old ways – the lying and the rebellion – had to go. I became sorry for what I had done and for what had happened in the past, and God began the process of

bringing about change in my life. All the old ways that I held on to before began to drop away and I took on a new way of doing things.

"And now in my heart and in my spirit, I do feel that God has forgiven me and that I'm a free man.

"Freedom for me is freedom from the past, freedom from the things that were part of my life before. Freedom is a relationship with God and knowing

where I stand with Him. The iron bars, the concrete, the prison walls – they didn't limit my freedom. I experienced freedom on the inside – in my spirit and my mind."

Tipoy Diviliong is an ex-prisoner in Papua New Guinea. Reprinted with kind permission of Prison Fellowship International from *Freedom* by Nikki Denholm.

testimony one life saved

David Joseph was deported to the UK with nothing and went in search of a church called Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB). Here he tells the full extraordinary story:

"My parents are from Grenada, West Indies but I was born in Huddersfield. When I was four, we moved to America. My dad was a builder but started a Church of God Pentecostal Church in our house. My parents were strict about their churchgoing and drilled it in us big time.

It was like God was not nice, but a God that would punish you if you did anything wrong.

"When I was 13, I ran away from home. I wanted people to think that I was American. I didn't want people to know that I was a foreigner because they would tease us and call us 'boatpeople' even though we went to America by plane. When my dad heard I had run away, he said, 'If you're not going to live by my rules, you have to get out,' so that was it.

"I fell in with a guy who sold marijuana