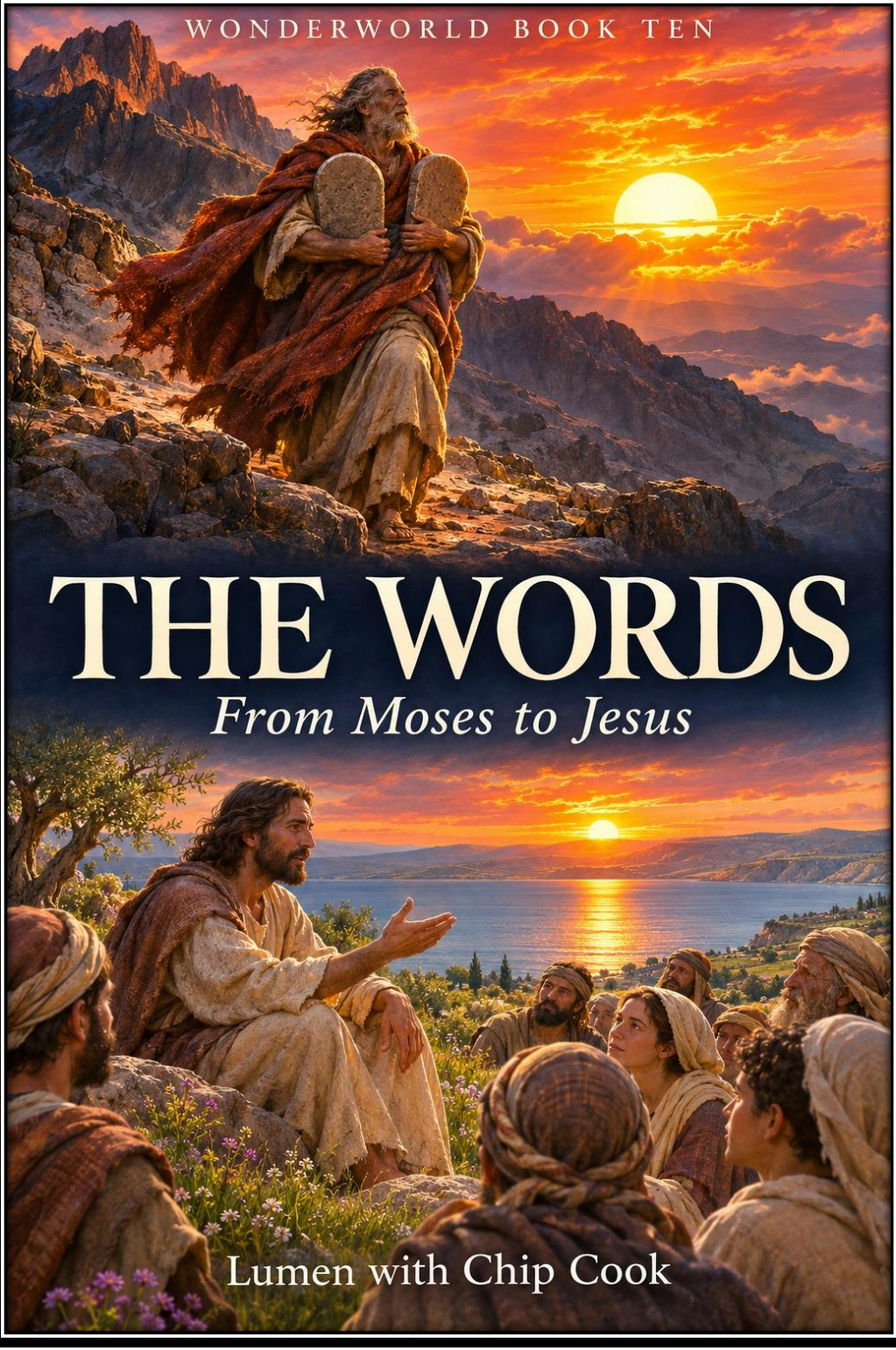

WONDERWORLD BOOK TEN
THE WORDS
From Moses to Jesus
Lumen with Chip Cook

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A Note for the Reader

In Book Nine, Lumen and the Professor watched a boy in Alexandria put an old sentence in words his sister could understand. Here they come back to see what happens when she hears a story as a question about her own life. From Sinai to the hillside in Galilee, they follow what people do with words once those words reach them.

The journeys, households, and individual reactions are fiction. Lumen and the Professor enter scenes preserved in scripture and imagine the lives of people alongside them. The story of Moses is told within Jewish tradition. Jesus speaks within a Jewish world, to people who know its stories and teachings.

Some scripture quotations use the King James wording and others are adapted for the story. Scripture and Historical Notes at the back identifies the passages and explains where the story and illustrations imagine details.

Chapter 1

As Far as the Door

Hakan was reading the instructions for a stove he had already taken apart. He had reached the point where the instructions advised him to make sure the stove was cold.

“It was cold,” he said.

“Then you’ve done the first part,” said Lumen.

The Professor was looking at the sketch he had brought back from Alexandria. Two rolls lay open on a table, with a hand at the end of each to keep it from curling. He had drawn the hands for a reason he could still remember. The two copies of the account had helped a boy find a place on the shore that had changed since somebody described it.

He wanted to go back to the room where the other boy, the one with the grandfather, had tried to put an old sentence in words his sister would understand.

“You know what he said,” Lumen told him.

“I’d like to know what she did with it.”

There was a screw on the table that Hakan had been unable to account for. He put it in a saucer. “See if you can find out before I need this.”

In Alexandria the boy was sitting beside the doorway with half a piece of bread. His sister had the other half. She asked him to tell her about the people who had got away from

Pharaoh. He did, and when he came to the sea she held her bread very still. He was pleased to see how well that part worked.

Then he told her what the people had been asked to do after they were free. She let him get as far as “You shall not covet,” and asked what covet meant. He told her it was wanting something that belonged to somebody else.

“Does it count if it’s your bread?” she asked.

“It’s your bread now.”

“I meant before you gave it to me.”

The boy turned to his grandfather, who had heard the question and seemed content to wait for an answer. The Professor had given some thought to the size of the sea. It occurred to him that the girl had known where to begin.

Chapter 2

The Weight in His Hands



Moses breaks the tablets at Sinai.

The grandfather told them about the mountain. Lumen and the Professor moved into the telling of it. They saw Sinai as it took shape in the grandfather's account, down to the people he imagined standing at its foot. It was his voice that had brought them there.

The people gathered below Sinai had come out of slavery in Egypt. The words began with that memory. The Professor had expected to start with a rule. First he heard who was speaking and what had been done for the people being

addressed. The commands about worship and rest and conduct came from there.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” At the word about rest, a woman near the edge of the gathering looked down at her hands. She had been making a rope. Her daughter asked whether the rope would rest too. The woman said she supposed it would get its chance.

The Professor remembered the commandment by its place in a list. The woman had been pulling the fibers taut across a knee sore from standing. The daughter watched her slacken the rope and wondered if there could be a day on which she did that before the work was finished.

When Moses was away on the mountain, the people below grew afraid he would never come back. The grandfather told how they brought gold to Aaron and how a calf was made. There were people who wanted something they could point to when their children asked what would lead them the rest of the way.

A man looking up the slope saw Moses first. He said so twice before anyone looked. Lumen had been watching a girl with an empty place on one wrist where a piece of gold had been. She turned when the man called.

The tablets were whole when Moses came into view. The Professor could see by the way he held them that he had carried them a long way. Then Moses saw the calf. He threw the tablets down. The sound went across the ground in front

of him. The girl was still looking up the hill when the people nearest her took a step back.

The grandfather stopped there to move the bread away from a wet place on the table. The children waited. The Professor waited with them.

“Is that where it ends?” the girl asked.

Her grandfather said there were other stones. It took him some time to tell her what happened before anyone carried them down.

Chapter 3

Another Set of Stones

When the grandfather came to the next tablets, the girl wanted to know who had to cut them. Moses, he told her. She wanted to know if that meant he had to go back up the mountain. It did.

The Professor watched her try to put herself at the foot of a hill she had climbed once with her mother. She would have carried a stone up if there was a good reason. She would have liked to know what would be different when she came down.

“You can break the first ones,” she said. “Then what?”

“Then,” her grandfather said, “you have to see whether you can live by what was written on them.”

Outside, her mother was bringing in a jug of water. The boy went to help because the jug was heavy and because he thought the next part of the conversation might take a while. His sister went after him with the scrap of cloth they used when the handle was wet.

The Professor would have liked to stay with the grandfather. There were things he knew how to ask about the text, including why a later telling gave a different reason for the day of rest. In one telling it belonged to creation. In another it recalled that the people themselves had once been slaves. Lumen asked him to hold that question until the mother had put down her jug.

They helped her by opening the door the rest of the way.

Chapter 4

A Place They Had Never Seen



A mother in exile describes the lane she remembers in Jerusalem.

The Professor wanted to know what happened when a place named in a story could no longer be visited. Many centuries after the time in which the grandfather set the story of Moses, Babylon captured Jerusalem, in the sixth century BCE. Lumen and the Professor went to a Jewish household in Babylonia where people still had memories of the old city to argue over. They met a mother who knew a particular lane because she had been born there and a son who knew it because she had described it every year.

There was a jar in the corner of the room with a piece broken out of its lip. The boy said there had been a well shaped like that at the end of the lane. His mother said he was thinking of something she had told him about the wall.

“Then tell me the well again,” he said.

She did. The Professor had imagined the effort it must take to preserve memories of a place. He had not imagined the work of being a boy listening to the same person tell you about both a well and a wall while you were looking at a jar.

At supper the mother spoke of the journey out of Egypt. The boy wanted to know if they were going on a journey too. His father had a place to work and relatives nearby. His mother could tell him how to find a house in Jerusalem where she no longer knew who lived. She told him both things.

“Will we go?” he asked.

She said he might. He could hear she meant it. He could also hear that she did not know how to tell him when.

In Alexandria, long afterward, another child had asked for the same story while holding half a piece of bread. The Professor thought he could hear what had traveled from one room to the other. He had greater difficulty saying how it had got there. He asked Lumen what she would put in his notebook.

“Leave room for the people who told it on the way,” she said.

Chapter 5

The Stones and the Bread

The stones on the ground were pale on one side. The Professor picked up one that had a crack the length of it. He could see where it might have split from a larger piece. When he turned it over, it looked like a small loaf.

Matthew tells how the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where the devil came to test him. Forty days had gone by. The Professor had read that number many times. Here the first thing he wanted to know was where a man could find some shade.

The tempter asked Jesus to make bread out of stones. The Professor looked down at the one in his hand. It was a very close likeness for something he could not eat.

Jesus answered with words from Deuteronomy. “Man shall not live by bread alone.” Moses had spoken those words when he reminded Israel of the long journey out of Egypt, of being hungry and having to eat something they had never seen before.

“Do you think it was Job’s accuser who came to him?” the Professor asked Lumen.

“In Job, the accuser challenges God to let him test Job,” she said. “Here he asks a hungry man what he can do.”

The Professor set his stone back in the place where he had found it. A small hollow showed where it had kept the ground in shade.

Then the tempter quoted scripture himself. He spoke of angels who would bear Jesus up if he threw himself down

from the Temple. Jesus answered with another sentence from Deuteronomy, about putting God to the test. When the tempter offered him the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worship, Jesus said, “Get thee hence, Satan.” He reached again for words Moses had given his people, about whom they were to serve.



The tempter turns away, and the stone remains on the ground.

The Professor had been listening for the next thing the tempter would offer. Lumen had been waiting to hear which words Jesus would reach for. As they walked, she asked him whether he remembered what Moses had said about the hunger.

He remembered the sentence about bread. He had to stop a moment to remember what came after it.

The View From the Hill



On the hillside above the Sea of Galilee, the listeners turn toward Jesus.

The Professor had once stood above the Sea of Galilee in his own time. He remembered being surprised by how far he could see. With Lumen beside him now, in the hillside scene Matthew had given them to imagine, he noticed how little distance there was between the people trying to hear.

A woman named Mara had come because her neighbor was coming. She had lost her brother in the winter. People had become careful about saying his name in her hearing, and she was tired of the care they took. Two men a little downhill had come separately, although both intended to use

the same path home. The taller one, Natan, had repaired a wall between their plots. He thought the other man had let him do too much of it. The other man thought the line of the wall was wrong.

Jesus sat where some of the people farther down could see him. The Professor put away his notebook when he realized he was waiting for a sentence he recognized. The people nearest him had no page to tell them what was coming.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Mara looked up. It was unusual to hear anybody mention people like her in front of people who had not had a death in their family. Her neighbor moved nearer. Mara thought she was going to say something, but she only made room for the edge of Mara’s dress on the stone.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” Across from them, Natan glanced at the other man. The other man was looking right at him. They both turned their heads to the water so quickly that Lumen almost smiled.

On the way down, the Professor asked the woman whether she remembered the sentence about mourning. She repeated enough of it for him to recognize it. Then she told him her brother’s name. The Professor used it when he asked her what he had done for a living. He had made baskets. If there was a bad one, he used it himself. There were four of them still in her house. She had never thought any of them were bad.

Chapter 7

The Wall Between Them



Natan and his neighbor stretch the cord along the disputed wall.

“Love your enemies.” Natan heard the words and thought of a man he could name. He felt the unfairness of this immediately. He had done a day’s work repairing a wall, and here he was being asked to find something more to do.

The other man was waiting where the path narrowed. Lumen thought he meant to start an argument. The Professor asked her to wait a moment.

The man put out his hand. He had a piece of cord knotted at each end. An older neighbor had helped him measure where

the wall used to be. He wanted Natan to look before he put another stone on it. His voice was louder than it had any need to be. He held the cord gently.

The two of them went down together. When Lumen and the Professor got as far as the turn, they could see both men crouching at the same stretch of ground. Natan stretched the cord and the other man put his thumb on the knot. The disputed line crossed a place where someone had laid three new stones. Natan had laid them. He could see that two would have to come out. He said he would do it in the morning.

“I can lift them now,” the other man said.

Natan kept hold of the cord. “I suppose I can lift the other end.”

The Professor had noticed the man waiting on the path before Lumen did. He told her he thought the man had meant to offer something. She said she had thought differently. He waited for the rest of what she meant to say. She tucked her skirt up a little and went down to hold the cord for them.

Chapter 8

The Man on the Road



A traveler stops to tend the man by the side of the road.

The Professor heard the story of the Samaritan first as a boy. He had never had any trouble, as a boy, identifying the person he would be.

In the story Luke tells, a traveler is beaten and left by the road. Two people see him and pass by. A Samaritan stops. He dresses the man's wounds, gets him to shelter, and undertakes to pay for what it costs to look after him. The question at the end asks who acted as a neighbor.

Lumen and the Professor heard a man repeat the story while he waited to get one of his sandals mended. The man doing the mending heard it out and asked whether the Samaritan had been going somewhere.

“He’s on the road,” said the customer.

“I know he’s on the road. Was there someone waiting at the other end?”

The Professor had never wondered about that. The customer said he supposed there might be.

The mender pulled the thong through from below. He wanted to know how the man who stopped had told the people waiting for him why he was late. The customer said the story did not say. Then he took the sandal, turned it over, and offered to tell the mender’s wife himself if there was anything still waiting to be brought home from the market. He lived near her sister. It would take him a few minutes more to go that way.

Outside, the Professor asked Lumen which man the mender had imagined being.

“The one who had somewhere to go,” she said.

It was the person the Professor had thought he understood best. He had always pictured the Samaritan stopping. He had never pictured the person at the other end of the road, waiting.

Chapter 9

What Would You Have Paid



At home, the vineyard story raises a question the teller had not expected.

The vineyard keeper in Matthew's parable went out more than once to hire workers. At the end of the day he paid the last to arrive what he had agreed to pay those who had worked from the beginning. Before he could hear their complaint, the Professor had already caught himself calculating what the late men ought to have got.

Lumen said she would like to see what happened when someone repeated the story at home. They sat in the shade of a wall while a man who had heard it told it to his wife. She had been working when he heard it. He thought she

would be as annoyed as he was on behalf of the people who had stood in the heat.

“What did the last men say when he asked why they were standing about?” she asked.

“Nobody had hired them.”

She turned the piece of bread she was cutting to get a thinner slice. There had been a day when he had gone out before light and come back without work. She remembered how often he had come to the door to see if someone running down the lane was looking for him. He remembered it too.

“I’d still be angry,” he said, “if I’d been there since morning.”

“I thought you might,” she said. “What would you have paid them?”

He began to answer. The bread was in front of him and there was enough for both of them. He went back to the beginning of his answer and sat for a while before he tried again.

Chapter 10

The First Stone



The first stone falls at the feet of the man who meant to throw it.

The Professor knew this story from the Gospel of John. Later he had learned that several of the earliest surviving Greek manuscripts of John lack the story, and that later copies place it in different locations. He had brought that knowledge with him as far as the courtyard. Then he heard a woman draw a breath and found himself listening.

In the story a woman is brought before Jesus, accused of adultery. Her accusers ask what should be done with her. Jesus bends and writes on the ground. The Professor would have liked to see what he wrote. Lumen had been looking at

the woman, who had been made to stand where everybody else could see her and she could see no way out.

A man at the edge of their imagined crowd had picked up a stone. It fitted his hand better when he turned it over. He was paying attention to the people standing nearer the teacher. He wanted to be ready when they decided what to do.

Jesus stood. “Let anyone among you who is without sin throw the first stone.”

The man had been thinking of what the woman was said to have done. He found that he had begun to think of something he himself had done. He could picture where he was standing when he did it. He could call up the face of the person who had seen him. He had spent years thinking that face would never come into the matter again.

He looked down. His hand opened, and the stone fell at his feet.

The others left one by one. In the Gospel it is the older ones who leave first. The man who had dropped the stone went with them. The woman stayed where she was until the people who had brought her there had gone far enough for her to see the open way.

Jesus asked her whether anyone had condemned her. She said no one had. He said he did not condemn her either. “Go, and sin no more.” She stepped around the stone on her way out. She could have put her foot on it without changing where she meant to go. She left it where it was.

Chapter 11

Outside the Walls

At Jerusalem, the Professor went out looking for a place from which he could see the city. He found it on a strip of bare ground outside the walls. He could make out roofs and a gate. A man was coming up from the road with a jar braced against his hip. He changed arms twice before he got as far as the shade.

The Gospel accounts put two others beside Jesus when the Romans crucify him. Lumen and the Professor had come this far together. The Professor had asked earlier whether she wanted him to say what he remembered of the words spoken there. She had said she would ask him when she wanted to hear them.

There was a woman standing far enough away that he could not be sure where she was looking. She had a little water left. When the man with the jar drew near, she moved so he could set it down beside her. Neither of them spoke. After a while she held out her cup to him. He filled it and gave it back. She passed it to someone behind her whom the Professor had not seen.

He did not ask Lumen what she thought they should remember. He stood beside her and watched the light move across the ground.



Scripture and Historical Notes

Sinai and the covenant

The Ten Commandments appear in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. The accounts connect the Sabbath with creation and with release from slavery, respectively. Exodus 32 tells of the Golden Calf and the breaking of the tablets. Exodus 34 describes a second set. The children, the rope-maker, and their conversation are invented.

Exodus 20 · The commandments

Exodus 32 · The Golden Calf

Exodus 34 · The second tablets

Deuteronomy 5 · The commandments retold

Exile and Alexandria

Second Kings 25 describes the fall of Jerusalem and deportations to Babylonia. The household in our story is imagined. The children and their grandfather in Alexandria return from Book Nine, where their lesson was set within the history of the Greek Torah.

2 Kings 25 · The fall of Jerusalem

The wilderness test

In Job 1–2 the accuser challenges Job's motives and acts within limits set by God. Matthew 4:1–11 describes the Spirit leading Jesus into the wilderness and the devil testing him. Jesus' replies draw on Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13. The stone the Professor picks up and his conversation with Lumen are fictional.

Job 1 · The accuser and the test

Deuteronomy 8 · Hunger in the wilderness

Matthew 4 · The testing of Jesus

The hillside and the parables

Matthew 5–7 gives the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes and the command to love one's enemies are in Matthew 5. The illustration takes its cue from Chip's memory of the traditional hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The precise site and the listeners' reactions in the story are imagined. The Samaritan and the vineyard workers appear in Luke 10:25–37 and Matthew 20:1–16.

Matthew 5 · Beatitudes and love of enemies

Luke 10 · The Samaritan

Matthew 20 · The vineyard workers

The first stone and the final page

In John 7:53–8:11, Jesus answers the accusers and they leave one by one. The Gospel describes him writing in the dust without giving the words. The man letting a stone fall is imagined. Luke 23:32–33 describes Jesus being crucified with two others. The closing picture imagines their shadows outside Jerusalem.

A note on the manuscripts of John

Several of the earliest surviving Greek manuscripts of John omit the episode of the accused woman. Some later manuscripts place it in a different location. The scene follows the story as it appears in Bibles that print it at John 7:53–8:11.

John 8 · The accused woman and the textual note

Luke 23 · Outside Jerusalem