

Grace, to you

The following is a translation of a Coptic manuscript by Wayland Jackson, AB, BD, MDiv, BS. Overlooked by earlier scholars, the manuscript, dating to the late first or early second century of the Common Era, was found in upper Egypt by Bedouins in 1948. According to academic custom, the official title is the first words of the document. Chapter and verse numbers have been assigned for use in scholarly study.

1 Grace, to you, and to Charity, and to all hear the words recorded in this book:
2 Being in the spirit on a Wednesday, I saw a vision of things which are, but are not. 3 An angel of sorts spoke to me of things visible and things invisible. 4 He was about four cubits tall; his hair was beginning to turn gray, his clothing shone like the noonday sun. He was wearing Nikes.
5 When I saw the angel, I fell to my knees. I would have fallen at his feet, but I wasn't sure how long he had been wearing the Nikes with no socks.
6 Seven rings were on his right hand. Light from his eyes was like rays you might expect from the eyes of a superhero. 7 His voice was like the sound of many rushing waters, only a little slower.
8 He commanded me: Rise. Come. Write these words about things that your eyes have never seen before.
9 Do not worry about plagiarism. Most of what I tell you to write is in the public domain, although not visible to many.
10 Write to the seven nations and to their seven rulers, arranged in order of their Gross Domestic Product, number five being California.
11 Blessed are they that hear the words of this revelation and mull over them, for the time is far gone, and we could use a lot more mulling.

2 I asked the Spirit, What is this great thing you are going to show me? 2 The Spirit said, I will show you a city on a hill which cannot be measured. Like all cities set on a hill, it has twelve foundations and is walled.
3 There are twelve gates in the walls, three on each of its four sides: east, north, south, and west, arranged alphabetically and hypothetically.
4 The Spirit said, In the event you don't understand threes and fours, sevens and twelves, go to your local library. 5 Check out a book on numerology.
6 As a start, imagine the number three. That's an exalted oration, high, lofty, with three points. Four is the mundane: earth's four corners, four directions, four winds. Three and four added together become seven and multiplied become twelve. 7 Therefore, seven and twelve are complete numbers, the exalted and the mundane in union, like in a marriage, not like the AFL/CIO.
8 I will show you many things, the Spirit said. When we have exhausted the metaphors, count the things I have shown you. Insert the number here ____.
9 Then the Spirit led me through a deep chasm. I looked up and beheld immense walls that reached to the heavens.
10 It was a great city, bigger than Chicago.

(Note: The original said Memphis, not Chicago. I changed it fearing readers might confuse Memphis Egypt with Memphis, Tennessee. Anyhow, a great city)

3 I saw twelve huge gates, actually only the three on my side of the great city; but based on what the Spirit said and simple logic, I assumed the other nine. 2 The gates I beheld looked like your average bejeweled gates, and the double doors looked as secure as the vaults at Fort Knox.
3 The Spirit said, The gates before you are ordinary, with one major exception. They are one-way gates.
4 You may enter by the gates, but, once in, I just dare you to try to find your way out. 5 Nevertheless, said the Spirit, it can be done, and it has been done by a few.
6 I beheld a few people, wandering aimlessly outside the walls.
7 Spirit, Who are these outside the wall, and what are they called? 8 They are called the Select. Unlike the Elect who live in the city, the Select live outside the wall. They are not homeless, but they are city-less. 9 They live less in the urbs and more in the sub-urbs. 10 Oh, I said, not really understanding.
11 The Spirit said, The Select, who live in sub-urbs, have found, by experiment or by accident, that the walls of the city are permeable. 12 From the outside, the walls seem to be insurmountable. From inside they are invisible.
13 People inside are not aware that they are walled in. 14 They may leave their square or leave the city at any time, but the doors only open to seekers.

15 The Select came through the doors unhindered and without injury. ¹⁶ They feel no urgency to persuade those inside the city to join them.

17 What good would it do? they ask. None, they tell themselves. ¹⁸ If their former friends are happy, what's the point? said the Spirit.

4 I said, Spirit, what will you show me first? ² First, said the Spirit, we must enter the city. ³ I said, How shall we open the great door seeing we have no key? ⁴ The Spirit said, Not to worry. The doors are not locked. However, every gate has its own entry ritual. ⁵ Come, I will show you what's behind door number one.

⁶ Door One had a steeple above it with a thousand tiny silver bells that hung in great clusters like grapes. ⁷ As we approached, the doors swung open and the bells tingled, raising peals of joy that echoed across the city.

⁸ The Spirit said, Entering the city involves a gatekeeper and water. ⁹ I get it, I said. The gatekeeper is like a butler or a tour guide—but teach me about the water.

¹⁰ The water is real, said the Spirit. You are going to get wet, very wet, or maybe only a little, but wet you will get.

¹¹ I asked, And what is the purpose of the water? ¹² The Spirit said, Water is a great symbol. ¹³ It is essential to sustain life. Remember to hydrate. It is useful for cleaning, both hands and laundry. It's also an extender. If you have food for twelve, but thirteen guests show up, add water.

¹⁴ Today you get the deluxe treatment, said the Spirit. ¹⁵ Suddenly, as if I were on a conveyor belt, I began to move forward. ¹⁶ I heard many machines. ¹⁷ Brushes swirled, soap splatted on me was rinsed off. ¹⁸ But at the end, no one sopped up the excess water or wiped my glasses. ¹⁹ I drip-dried as our journey continued.

5 Before me, a great city that no man can measure was laid out like a gigantic grid, with perfect squares, separated by gray streets to the right, left, and straight ahead. ² Each square held a multitude of people.

³ The Spirit said, Pulses from the center of the great city roll over the city and its inhabitants regularly.

⁴ They all feel better after a good pulse. ⁵ The pulses are pulses of affirmation. “Yes, you are right,” the pulses say. “You're superior.” “Your life has meaning.” “You're the ideal.” ⁶ But we must see other things first.

⁷ Spirit, I said, the gray roads that separate the squares look odd, but the inhabitants inside look normal. The ⁸ Spirit answered, What did you expect? In a vision, something must relate to the real world, or it will get too fantasmagorical.

⁹ I said, I see bistros around each square with people seated on sidewalks, eating, drinking, and laughing.

¹⁰ But all the patrons' backs are turned to the gray way that separates them from other squares. What's up with that?

¹¹ The backs of the people form a wall. ¹² Walls keep things out. Walls keep things in. ¹³ You can't wall someone out without walling yourself in. The bars on your neighbor's windows work both ways.

¹⁴ I asked the Spirit, Why are the gray streets almost deserted? Don't the groups have intercourse? ¹⁵ Spirit replied, Don't get cute with your little double entendres. And don't say, Look it up.

¹⁶ Behold those two trying to talk across squares. Their words are both audible and visible. ¹⁷ Notice that the words of one fly over the head of the other, and vice versa. They talk over each other's head, not to each other.

¹⁸ The Head of each block maintains that other blocks are dangerous. “Patrons in other blocks,” he tells them, “are different.” ¹⁹ They look the same on the outside, but their minds are disoriented.” ²⁰ The block Head says, “People in other squares cannot tell north from south, nor up from down,” For the most part, people in his square believe what the Block head tells them.

²¹ A few may be pushed, jump, or fall into the gray area, or be set adrift, fly, or vault into another square.

²² Those who move to a different square can look back and see the square they have left, completely unaware that they are still in a square, just a different square.

6 Let's move on, said the Spirit.
2 Inside one square, I beheld a building that reached up to the clouds. Yes, there were clouds—regular, fluffy clouds. ³ Across the building entrance was emblazoned the word: BROKERAGE.
⁴ I asked the Spirit, What's the purpose of a brokerage in the walled city? ⁵ The Spirit said, What do you think? Everything runs on money.
6 He said, Think infra-structure. Even a street of gold gets potholes. Every million years or so, a fire breaks out, and they deal with it.
7 But, I said to the Spirit, if this is heaven, what is the need of a brokerage, or money of any kind? ⁸ Heaven? said the Spirit. Who said this is heaven? This revelation is of things you see every day that are invisible to the eye.
9 The Brokerage is a re-minder that while money is not the wheel, it is the grease.¹⁰ And if you want to grease someone's wheels, green is best, depending on the kind of currency you're using.
11 I said to the Spirit, What a great mystery. In a visionary world, I would never have expected the inhabitants to use currency, green or any other color. ¹² The Spirit said, Don't be daft. The color is irrelevant. The wheels they grease are real and not real. ¹³ They are real in a pump, sucking oil from the earth, but almost completely invisible in the halls of power.

7 The facade of the next great building bore in large block letters the EDUFACE. ² What is this mystery? I asked the Spirit. ³ The Spirit said, EDUFACE is the education center. ⁴ When a person steps inside a square, the word on the building morphs into EDUCATION. But when one looks across into a neighboring square, one sees EDUFACE and knows his square is superior.
5 So, I said, are the people still learning literature, science, and the arts? ⁶ No, answered the Spirit. That would be education. EDUFACE is not a misspelling. It's education—in your face. ⁷ So, Spirit, is there education or is there not? ⁸ Loosely speaking, yes; actually, no. Indoctrination is more accurately what they do, said the Spirit.
9 Each block has its own ways, its own facts, its own prejudices, its own fears. ¹⁰ The job of EDUFACE is to perpetuate the mores of the people in its square, to inculcate their facts and prejudices, and to perpetuate their fears.
11 Once a person gets inside a square, what is done there will seem right and true to him—or to her, to be inclusive.
12 I said, That doesn't sound like any kind of education I've ever encountered. ¹³ It's all in the viewpoint, the Spirit answered.
14 So, Spirit, is the purpose of education to keep people in their squares? ¹⁵ The Spirit said, Not only to keep them in, but also to entertain them. ¹⁶ Spirit, that sounds to me like Fantasyland. ¹⁷ The Spirit corrected me, Disney en-gineers on their best day could not have imagined this walled city.

8 I said to the Spirit, Is it true? Each square is a world of its own? Its inhabitants do not question its values or ethics and view all other squares as somehow in-ferior? ³ The Spirit said, Yes. The people of each square think they are the Elect. ⁴ They do not question themselves or their own lives.
5 The major fear in every square of the walled city is fear of self. Second like unto that is fear of someone who is different. ⁶ The people are taught, and they believe, that the gray areas that separate them are fraught with uncertain-ty and danger, and they are not entirely wrong.
7 Oh, I said, 'gray areas' is a metaphor. ⁸ Correct, but not a very good one if it must be explained.
9 Is there more you want to show me?

9 The Spirit said, The city set on a hill is ruled by a great one, not visible to the eyes. But he's there, or she is, or whatever. I cannot say for sure. ² I said, Do you mean like the Wizard of Oz, a great one whose voice is heard but whose countenance no one has ever looked upon?
³ The Spirit said, Don't be simple. Everyone has seen the Great One in the Wizard of Oz if you've ever watched Turner Classic Movies. It's all a trick.

4 I said to the Spirit, Then, is God the ruler over the great walled city? ⁵ No, said the Spirit. The ruler is called the Nameless One, or One with a Thousand Names.

6 Doesn't that make him, her, or it, God? I asked. ⁷ You can call her, him, or it, God, if you wish. That doesn't make it God, just as you can call this place heaven, but that doesn't make it heaven. For all I know, it's hell.

8 Hell? I said. How can that be? The people seem happy. The chatter is endless. The squares seem lively.

9 Staying in one square, never venturing into gray areas, hearing the same message day after day is like eating the same food at every meal, said the Spirit. ¹⁰ Eating butter fudge chocolate brownies for a million days, even with a tall glass of cold milk, is anaesthetizing.

11 In their hearts, they know there is more. ¹² More what? I asked the Spirit. ¹³ More dessert, more of everything. Baklava, lemon meringue pie. A better menu. Freedom.

14 Spirit, I said, are the people like mountain climbers who reach a peak every day, then look ahead to discover only another horizon? ¹⁵ Cliché alert! said the Spirit. Let's just stick with the walled city.

10 Spirit, I don't see any birds. Why is that? ² I don't know. I like birds. I didn't decorate the place.

³ Does that mean we cannot get a bird's-eye view of the city? ⁴ Of course not. You don't have to stand in a tunnel to have tunnel vision.

5 Then, we soared to great heights, but not too high, because I get airsick. ⁶ I saw people sitting in a gigantic circle inside one square. No one spoke or moved.

7 Spirit, I said, Who's in that square? Are they calm, or are they dead?

⁸ Those are Quakers. They are dreaming of a world where thunder makes no sound. ⁹ You know their motto: In case of emergency, please be quiet.

10 And Spirit, the square over there is completely surrounded by shades.

¹¹ The Spirit said, Correct. No one can see in or out. They're nudists. Shades keep outsiders from viewing all that flesh, and they protect insiders from the looks of horror and amuse-ment on faces looking in.

12 I see a busy square, Spirit, people marching around, holding signs. A few have megaphones.

¹³ Those, said the Spirit, are protesters. Leaders are the ones holding megaphones. Some-thing is always wrong, and they always feel a need to fix it. ¹⁴ They protest climate change, high taxes, clowns, the right to bear arms, government meddling.

15 See? said the Spirit. One protester has a sign protesting protesters. ¹⁶ It's a serious business. No one smiles, and no one fools around.

17 I said, A barber would have a field day in that square. Every man has a beard. ¹⁸ A barber would be out of business in that square, said the Spirit. Those are Sikhs. They never cut their hair. Something about their religion. ¹⁹ The Sikh square has a door on each side, just like the Golden Temple.

20 I see a square with polka dots on the floor and people going from one dot to another. Who are they? I asked. ²¹ They're historians. Each dot is a verifiable fact. They spend their days trying to connect the dots. ²²

They resemble the ancients who drew pictures by connecting stars in the sky, you know, a fish, a hunter, a big dipper. They saw the stars but lacked depth perception. ²³ His-tory buffs create pictures of a past that never was and never will be.

11 Spirit, there's a square shaking like gelatin. ² Everyone has sideburns, gyrating hips, and a microphone. ³ Those, said the Spirit, are Elvis impersonators.

⁴ Spirit, I see one square absolutely full of smoke. Let me guess who's in that one. ⁵ Spirit said, be my guesser. Ha, ha.

6 Those must be pot smokers, I said. They couldn't find a door if they wanted to. They can't even find a wall, can they?

7 Spirit said, They're not looking for a wall or a door. They're looking for a chair.

8 Spirit, that square reminds me of an old TV ad in which apes tossed suitcases around their cage to test them. Can it be? ⁹ It can, he said. ¹⁰ Baggage handlers throw suitcases and bags, bouncing them off the walls, stomping on them. ¹¹ Some of them rummage through the bags, Spirit said.

but they would never question the importance of the heart as an organ.²⁰ Or, a religious group might argue about the best way to baptize, but it would never ask, Should we worship at all?

21 You see, said the Spirit, because all of them are *all* right—all of them are wrong. No one owns truth, not even God.

14 Spirit, what is at the center of the city? If it is not like the Wizard of Oz, then what is it like, and who dwells there?² The Spirit moved us north, or was it west, toward the center.³ Was it like California? I wondered.

4 The sound of mighty waters grew to an unspeakable roar.⁵ Yes, I thought. This must be California.⁶ No, said the Spirit, it's not California.

7 And don't get close to the center.⁸ Those who do may be drawn into a hole.⁹ It resembles a black hole, but it could be any color.¹⁰ The point is this: once you start down the pike, there is no escape, no returning.

¹¹ You will never be heard from or thought of again. So, don't get too near.

12 The main thing to remember is the noise. The center is full of noisy noise.¹³ You'll not find a Quaker within a mile.

14 The Spirit added, This would be a good place to use one of my favorite words: cacophony. Look it up.

15 I am puzzled, Spirit.² Can you explain why I saw no jail or prison in any of the squares?³ Because each square is itself a jail, said the Spirit. The people are all prisoners of their own environment. A way out only *seems* to be a way out.⁴ The beings who have escaped and think they are superior have not gone much further than the sub-urbs.

5 Spirit, I notice the glaring absence of oriental or Near Eastern references. Why is that?⁶ That, said the Spirit, is because I am a Western spirit. In a way, I too am in a square. I have spent my life with my back turned to the East.⁷ At times, I feel like a madman in a straitjacket of Westernism.

8 I said, Spirit, given all the commonalities, the city still doesn't make sense. Where is the pattern? What unifies it? Where is the plot?⁹ The Spirit said, Those elements are all missing because this is life. Life is messy, not like a story, which is logical and orderly, with great dialog and sharply drawn characters.¹⁰ Life doesn't make sense, said the Spirit. It never has. Never will.¹¹ If you want to go to a place that makes sense, go to the bank. Ha, ha, ha—a little Spirit humor.

16 Spirit, what gems of wisdom can I write that you have not yet revealed to me?² The Spirit said, I apologize. I am all out of gems.³ Surely, Spirit, there must be something. We've come so far.⁴ And learned so little, said the Spirit. All right, he said, I'll give it a try.

5 No one knows, he said.⁶ No one knows—what? I asked.⁷ No one knows much compared to what there is to know. Everyone is smart compared to when he or she was born, but overall, none of us knows much.⁸ What can we learn from that? I asked.⁹ He said, That 'none' takes a singular verb.

10 Sorry, Spirit, that won't cut it. That's not enough.¹¹ Spirit said, How about this? Even though we are *all* wrong, it's okay for everyone to think he or she is all right.

12 But Spirit, what if someone who thinks they're all right wants another to adopt his or her brand of 'all right?'¹³ The Spirit said, I'm embarrassed to answer in this way, but that's life.

14 I will offer an observation, although observations are not my favorite things:¹⁵ Every moment in a person's life is unique. Therefore, there can be no rule that always applies.

16 Spirit, I feel like a dog chasing its tail. Does life go in circles?¹⁷ I don't do geometry, said the Spirit. I'll take a pass on that.

18 Then the Spirit brightened and said, How about this for a takeaway? Offer \$5 to anyone who has read this to the end. Make it worthwhile to a few at least.¹⁹ I said, I've only got \$65. If thirteen people read this and ask for the \$5, I will be flat broke.²⁰ Spirit said, Trust me. You're not going to run out of money.

21 It's my turn to ask a question, said the Spirit. The degrees of the translator listed at the beginning of this work, I understand all of them except the last one, BS.²² You're kidding. You really don't know what BS is? Spirit, you're hopeless and I am sleepy and bone tired.

23 Instead of writing down all you have shown me, I think I'll just wait for the movie.
24 You disappoint me, said the Spirit.
25 That's life, I said.

