

THE GOSPELS, ACTS, EPISTLES

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ACTS TO THE GOSPELS AND THE EPISTLES

The Book of Acts forms the God-provided bridge between the gospels and the epistles, apart from which the epistles *cannot* be properly understood.

The gospels center around an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel (the kingdom offered to and rejected by Israel, with Christ then announcing that the kingdom would be *taken from Israel* and “given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” [Matt. 21:43]; and this was followed by Israel’s crucifixion of her King [Matt. 27:22ff]).

The Book of Acts centers around a reoffer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel (beginning in chapter two [vv. 3ff] by the new entity [the “nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (I Peter 2:9, 10)] called into existence immediately prior to that time to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected [1:5; 2:1, 2]).

However, the reoffer (beginning in Acts 2 and continuing for about the next three decades [33 A.D. to about 62 A.D.], seen throughout the Book of Acts) was rejected as well, with the offer ultimately being completely taken from Israel and the nation set aside (Acts 28:28).

And *the epistles*, though some were written prior to 62 A.D., center around the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to an entirely new entity, *the one new man* “in Christ,” called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected.

The expression, “the kingdom of the heavens” (literal rendering from the Greek text, found thirty-two times in Matthew’s gospel), is simply a reference to *the rule of the heavens over the earth*. As in Dan. 4:26, “the heavens do rule” — beginning with God, the supreme Ruler over all, and progressing through an orderly structure

of ruling angels (subordinate provincial rulers, with other angels possessing lesser positions of power and authority ruling under them), placed over provinces throughout the universe.

Thus, there are two spheres of rulership in God's kingdom — *heavenly* and *earthly*. And this pertains not only to God's universal kingdom as a whole but also to the various provinces in His kingdom.

This is simply the way in which God established the whole of His universal government in the beginning (e.g., Job 1:6ff; 2:1ff). He Himself rules from a place in the heavens over an ordered universe; and it is evident from the present form of the earth's government (existing in the same form which it will take yet future) that a rule of this nature — a rule from the heavens over the governed realm — is the form which God, in the beginning, used when He established the government throughout the different provinces of His kingdom as well.

As this governmental rule pertains to the province upon which we live, Satan and his angels rule from a place in the heavens over the earth; and this rule is revealed to take the form of powers in the heavens ruling through powers on the earth (Dan. 10:13-21; Luke 4:6; Eph. 2:2; 3:10; 6:12).

Again, "the heavens do rule." That's the way matters in God's ordered government throughout the universe which He created have always existed, continue to exist, and will always exist.

(Note that it was *the heavenly sphere* of the kingdom which was taken from Israel, not the earthly — the kingdom covenanted to David — which can never be taken from the nation.)

The Existing Kingdom Past, Present, and Future

Satan, in his unfallen state, at a time in eternity past, was placed over the province upon which man presently resides — over the earth (Ezek. 28:14, 15). And a great host of ruling angels were placed in subordinate positions of power and authority with him.

The day came though when Satan became dissatisfied with his appointed position and rebelled against God's supreme power and authority. He sought to "exalt" (elevate) his throne above

all the other God-appointed provincial rulers (angels ruling over other provinces elsewhere in the universe [worlds similar to the earth]) and “be like the most High” (Isa. 14:13, 14).

Because of this act, rather than elevating his throne, Satan became disqualified to rule even the province over which he had been placed. And this necessitated his subsequent removal, with another being appointed to take his place.

But God didn’t immediately act in this respect. Rather, God allowed Satan to continue holding his position, for a time.

(A principle of Biblical government necessitates that an incumbent ruler continue to hold his appointed position until his replacement is not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne and hold the sceptre — something, for example, seen in the account of Saul and David in the Books of I, II Samuel:

Saul was anointed king over Israel; but Saul disqualified himself by refusing, as God had commanded, to destroy the Amalekites and all of their possessions [I Sam. 15:1ff], though Saul continued to reign.

And Saul would continue to reign until the one whom God had chosen to replace him was not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne.

Then note that which the type, thus far, foreshadows:

Satan was anointed king over the earth; but Satan disqualified himself through seeking to extend his rule beyond his God-appointed position [Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:14, 15], though Satan continued to reign.

And Satan would continue to reign until the One Whom God had chosen to replace him was not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne.

In the type, shortly after God rejected Saul as Israel’s ruler, God had Samuel anoint David *king over Israel* [I Sam. 16:10-13]. There were then *two anointed kings in Israel*.

But David didn’t immediately ascend the throne. Rather, he eventually found himself in a place out in the hills, separated from Saul and his kingdom. And, during this time, certain faithful men joined themselves to David and remained out in the hills with him.

The day came when David was ready to ascend the throne, possessing a contingent of faithful men ready to rule with him. Then, Saul was put down, his crown was taken and given to David, and David and his faithful men moved in and took over the government.

In the antitype, after God had rejected Satan as the earth's ruler, God anointed His Son *King over the earth* [Ps. 45:6, 7, 16; Heb. 1:8, 9]. There were then, and there are today, *two anointed Kings over the earth*.

But God's Son, as David in the type, didn't immediately ascend the throne. Rather, as David, Christ finds Himself in a place of exile, separated from the kingdom. And, as in David's case, certain faithful individuals join themselves to Christ during this time, remaining in the place of exile with Him.

But the day is near at hand when *matters will continue exactly as seen in the type*. Christ, in that day, as David in his day, will be ready to ascend the throne, possessing a contingent of faithful followers to rule with Him. Then, Satan, as Saul, will be put down, his crown will be taken and given to Christ, and Christ, with His faithful followers, will move in and take over the government.)

Satan's reign though, following his rebellion against God's supreme power and authority, was quite different than it had been before that time. Two-thirds of the angels originally holding positions of power and authority over the earth with him refused to have a part in his actions. Only one-third followed Satan (Rev. 12:4), and this left him with a disrupted power structure in the government of his kingdom, completely out of line with that which God had originally established. And not only did a ruin of this nature exist in the governmental structure of his kingdom, but the physical state of his kingdom was reduced to a ruined condition as well (Gen. 1:2a).

But the day came when God restored the physical kingdom and created man to replace the incumbent ruler. The physical creation was restored over a six-day period, and man was created on the sixth day to "have dominion" — the dominion which Satan and his angels possessed (Gen. 1:2b-28).

Satan, knowing why man had been created, immediately sought a way to bring about man's disqualification. And this is what he accomplished through man's fall, an act which, for the time, prevented man from ascending the throne and allowed Satan to continue holding the sceptre.

Following man's fall, Satan and his angels ruled over a restored province, though under a curse because of man's sin (again ruined, though after a different fashion [Gen. 3:17, 18; cf. Rom. 8:19-22]).

But God, far from being finished with man at this point, had only begun to work out His plans and purposes as they pertained to man and one ruined province in His kingdom.

Redemption was to be provided in order that man, at a future point in time, could realize the purpose for his creation in the beginning. Man, a creation quite different than angels, created in the image and likeness of God, was to be redeemed; and, as God originally intended, man was to one day hold the sceptre in Satan's stead (*cf.* Heb. 2:5).

Man's Destiny, Satan's Destiny

The Bible is a book of *redemption*, and this redemption encompasses far more than just man's eternal salvation wrought through faith in God's provided Redeemer. It encompasses bringing redeemed man back into the position for which he was created. The purpose surrounding man's redemption is the same as the purpose surrounding man's creation in the beginning — "let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26-28).

And from the point of the fall in Genesis chapter three to the point of this dominion being realized by man in Revelation chapter twenty, all of God's redemptive purposes in Scripture are seen to move *toward this end*. They are all seen to move toward man one day possessing dominion over the earth, in the stead of Satan and his angels.

The "gifts and calling of God are without repentance [without a change of mind]" (Rom. 11:29). God is not going to change His mind concerning the reason He called man into existence. Man *will*, man *must*, one day hold the sceptre, *but in God's time*.

In the meantime, Satan and his angels continue to occupy the throne, continuing to rule from a place in the heavens over the earth. But the day is coming when there will be "war in heaven." Michael and his angels will fight against Satan and his angels, and Satan and his angels will be "cast out," anticipating *Man* — namely *Christ and His co-heirs* — taking the kingdom and occupying these positions, exercising power and authority over the earth (Rev. 12:4, 7-10; *cf.* Rev. 2:26, 27; 11:15; 19:11-20:6).

Four Parts of the New Testament

The New Testament can be divided into *four main sections* — the four gospels, the Book of Acts, the twenty-one epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Each section forms an integral part of the New Testament, and only through seeing the relationship of the different parts to the whole can the New Testament be properly understood.

Then, viewing matters surrounding the first five books beginning the New Testament from a more specific perspective, the Book of Acts, in a respect, forms *a fifth gospel*.

And Acts, in a sequential arrangement of these opening five books, should follow Luke's gospel, not John's gospel. Acts picks up exactly where Luke left off in his gospel — with Christ's post-resurrection ministry and His ascension, with Luke adding more details as he begins Acts.

And, effecting the preceding, John's gospel actually belongs at the beginning of the New Testament, followed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. John's gospel, the only non-synoptic gospel, is *the one gospel that not only begins exactly the same way Genesis begins but continues with the same subject matter as well*.

Rearranging the gospels in this manner would allow each Testament *to begin and progress from this beginning point exactly the same way*.

(For more information on the preceding, refer to the author's article, "Genesis and John.")

If the first five books in the New Testament were arranged in the preceding manner, one would not only have *a Pentateuch beginning both Testaments but a parallel beginning for both and a much better transition from the Old Testament to the New and from the gospels through Acts into the epistles, allowing one to better understand the transitional progression of the offer of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel to Christians*.

In the preceding respect, the New Testament is simply *a continuation, unveiling, and outworking* of that which was previously

revealed in the Old Testament. Accordingly, the New cannot be properly understood apart from the Old. The Old will help explain and shed additional light upon that which is being opened up in the New; and, in a corresponding respect, the New, as well, will help open up and explain numerous things in the Old. The two Testaments are *inseparably connected* in this respect.

Scripture, beginning in Genesis and concluding in Revelation, forms a *divinely given interrelated and interdependent progressive unveiling of God's plans and purposes*. And no part of this revelation — however large or however small — can stand alone. *The whole* of the revelation must stand together, as a unit.

Thus, beginning in the Book of Acts and continuing into the epistles and on into the Book of Revelation necessitates continually going back to the gospels, and behind that to various parts of the whole of the Old Testament. Placing the Book of Acts within *its contextual setting* — in relation to both that which precedes and that which follows — is the only possible way that it can be properly understood.

The Book of Acts records a continuation of events from the gospel accounts, occupying a place immediately following the four gospels on the one hand and a place leading into the twenty-one epistles on the other. And this book provides that which man *must know* in order to properly understand the progression of God's plans and purposes as they move from the gospels into the epistles, reaching their climax in the Book of Revelation.

The Proffered Kingdom In the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles

When John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples appeared to Israel with the message, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand" (*cf.* Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), there could have been no mistake concerning exactly what was meant. There was no kingdom connected with the heavens and the earth outside of the one which God had established in the beginning, the one over which a disqualified provincial angel ruled.

The expression, "the kingdom of the heavens," could only

be a reference to *the kingdom ruled by Satan and his angels from a heavenly sphere, a kingdom to one day be ruled by Christ and His co-heirs from the same heavenly sphere*. And the various things about this kingdom are things which the Jewish people should have been fully aware of, for the structure of the kingdom as it exists throughout Man's Day and will exist at a future time is a clearly revealed subject of Old Testament revelation.

This subject was introduced by Moses in Genesis. Moses spoke of that day when the seed of Abraham would exercise power and authority over the earth from two spheres — *heavenly and earthly* (Gen. 22:17, 18); and this power and authority, according to Moses, would be realized in that future day when God's Son exercises the Melchizedek priesthood (Gen. 14:18-22; cf. Ps. 110:1-4; Heb. 5-7).

And, as previously shown, the form in which this kingdom exists throughout Man's Day (and will exist in that coming day when Christ and His co-heirs take the kingdom) is revealed in Daniel chapter ten (vv. 13-21).

At Christ's first coming, through the ministry of John, Christ Himself, the Twelve, and the Seventy, "the kingdom of the heavens" was proffered to Israel. Through the ministry of these individuals, the nation of Israel was offered *the sceptre held by Satan and his angels*.

Had Israel accepted this offer, Christ would have taken the kingdom; and Israel, with the nation's Messiah, would have held the sceptre. But Israel refused the offer, and the nation climaxed this refusal by crucifying the central person making the offer — Messiah Himself.

Then, the Book of Acts details a reoffer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel — beginning on the day of Pentecost (2:3ff) and terminating about thirty years later with Paul in Rome (28:28). Israel though again refused, and during this period God began His work of forming *the one new man* "in Christ," with those *called out of this new man* to one day occupy the heavenly positions in the kingdom which Israel had spurned.

And once Israel's refusal in the reoffer of the kingdom reached a terminal point in God's eyes, He set the nation aside and, with respect to the kingdom of the heavens, turned His attention completely toward the new entity, *the new creation* "in Christ."

(The reoffer of the kingdom to Israel could continue *only as long as a saved generation of Jews remained on the scene* [the generation alive on both sides of Calvary; *ref.*, the author's article, "Salvation in Scripture, O.T., N.T."]. Thus, *once this generation of Jews began to pass off the scene, the reoffer of the kingdom could no longer continue.*

The reoffer of the kingdom, in this respect, continued from 33 A.D. until about 62 A.D. Then, the reoffer, of necessity, ended.)

This complete, overall picture of the offer of the kingdom of the heavens — whether to Israel (the offer and the reoffer), or to *the one new man* "in Christ" — is how the gospels lead into Acts and how Acts leads into the epistles, with Acts forming a bridge between the gospels and the epistles. As stated at the beginning, *the gospels* record the original offer of this kingdom to Israel, *the Book of Acts* records the reoffer of this kingdom to Israel (as well as recording the inception of and a beginning offer of the kingdom to the Church), and *the epistles* record the continued offer (present offer) extended to Christians.

All these things form the central subject matter which must be grasped in order to properly understand the flow of events as they begin in the gospels (continuing from the O.T.) and flow through Acts into the epistles.

Importance of Understanding the Kingdom In the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles

There can be no such thing as properly understanding the gospels, Acts, or the epistles apart from "the kingdom" being seen as *central*. Christ's death on Calvary, effecting man's redemption, has to do with *the kingdom*. Christ Himself, while enduring the sufferings surrounding Calvary, looked beyond these sufferings to the glory which lay out ahead (Heb. 12:1, 2; *cf.* Luke 24:26).

The coming kingdom, the Messianic Era, the time during which Christ and His co-heirs will exercise power and authority over the earth for 1,000 years, was that upon which Christ focused His attention while paying the price for man's redemption. And it is *this same kingdom* upon which He has instructed redeemed man — in the midst of trials, testings, and sufferings — to focus his attention as well (I Peter 2:21; *cf.* Gen. 19:17).

Man's redemption is inseparably connected with the coming kingdom of Christ. And though man's redemption is *eternal* in duration and connected with *a continuing regality* in the eternal ages beyond the Messianic era, *this is not where Scripture places the emphasis*. The central focus in Scripture pertaining to man's present redemption and future rule *centers on the 1,000-year Messianic Era*.

(Regality exercised by man beyond the Messianic Era will extend out into the heavens beyond the new earth [Rev. 22:1-5]. This is a realm extending far beyond the present kingdom of the heavens ruled by Satan and his angels, out where Satan sought to extend his rule at a time in eternity past.

Scripture though centers around *man, the present earth, and the present kingdom*. Scripture centers around man occupying the present kingdom of the heavens ruled by Satan and his angels, with Christ and His co-heirs taking 1,000 years to bring order out of disorder [I Cor. 15:22-28].

The eternal ages lying beyond are mentioned in Scripture only to an extent which will allow man to understand where God is going to carry matters once order has been restored in the government of one ruined province in His universe.)

Thus, the central purpose presented in Scripture surrounding man's redemption is *that man might ultimately occupy the position for which he was created — to rule and to reign over this earth*. This is something which cannot be overemphasized. And to speak of man's redemption apart from the purpose surrounding man's creation, which resulted in his fall, necessitating his redemption, is to not see the complete Biblical scope of redemption at all.

As one moves through the gospels into Acts and into the epistles, the focus is kept exactly where it is seen moving throughout the whole of Scripture — *out ahead on that coming Sabbath rest awaiting the people of God, the coming Messianic Era*. And viewing matters in the gospels, in Acts, and on into the epistles from a Scriptural framework of this nature is the only possible way that they can be properly understood.

Interpretation must be both *textual* and *contextual*, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This is the only way that a person can go beyond "man's wisdom," see that "which the Holy Spirit teacheth," and, resultingly, come into an understanding of "the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:9-13).