

KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

THE RULE OF THE HEAVENS OVER THE EARTH

By Arlen L. Chitwood

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.” This rule *begins with God*, the supreme Ruler over all, and progresses 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.

There are two spheres of governmental power and authority in God’s kingdom — *heavenly* and *earthly*. And this pertains to both God’s universal kingdom as a whole and to the various provinces within His kingdom.

This is simply the way in which God established the whole of His government in the beginning. He Himself rules the universe from a place in the heavens; 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 governmental rule 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, in the earth’s proximity; and this rule over the earth is revealed to take the form of powers in the heavens (angels) ruling through powers on the earth (men [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 today, and will always exist.

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

Because of this act, rather than attaining to this higher position in the kingdom, Satan became disqualified to rule even the province over which he had been placed — something which would necessitate his eventual removal, with Another then occupying the throne in his stead.

But God didn’t immediately act with respect to removing Satan. Rather, God allowed Satan to continue holding his position, for a time (though an eventual end to his rule had been determined and declared).

(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 seen in the account of Saul and David in the Books of I, II Samuel].)

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).

Then the day came when God restored the ruined domain — the ruined earth — 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 being, both 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 (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 the 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 be redeemed in order that he could one day hold the sceptre in Satan’s stead (*cf.* Heb. 2:5).

The Bible is a book of *redemption*, and this redemption encompasses far more than just man’s eternal salvation 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 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).

THE PROFFERED KINGDOM IN THE GOSPELS, ACTS, 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 be 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 aware of and understood, 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, Himself, and the Twelve, "the kingdom of the heavens" was offered to Israel. Through the ministry of John, Jesus, and the Twelve, the nation of Israel was offered *the sceptre held by Satan and his angels*.

Had Israel accepted the offer, Christ would have taken the kingdom; and Israel, with the nation's Messiah, would have held the sceptre. But Israel spurned the offer, and the nation climaxed this rejection 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 (2:1ff) and terminating about thirty years later with Paul in Rome (28:28). Israel though again spurned the offer, and during this period God began His work of calling out *the one new man* "in Christ" to one day occupy the heavenly positions in the kingdom which Israel had rejected. And once Israel's rejection 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."

This 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 bringing into existence of the Church), and *the epistles* record the subsequent (the present) offer being extended to Christians.

IMPORTANCE OF THE KINGDOM UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPELS, ACTS, 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 re-

demption. 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* (cf. Deut. 6:23; Matt. 6:33; Col. 1:20-29).

(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 and the province which man was created to rule [the earth, with its heavenly sphere]*. 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 the present 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 fail to see and understand the complete Biblical scope of redemption*.

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