

# THE GOSPELS, ACTS, EPISTLES

## PART I

### THE RELATIONSHIP OF ACTS TO THE GOSPELS AND THE EPISTLES

By Arlen L. Chirwood

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).

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