

THE GOSPELS, ACTS, EPISTLES

PART II

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ACTS TO THE GOSPELS AND THE EPISTLES

By Arlen L. Chirwood

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 pamphlet, "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 the 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]. 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).

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