

# Faith, Works and the Reward

## A Discipleship Study

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## Part II

### God Gave His Word

It is in this section of our study that we will see:

- To whom God spoke in giving His Word,
- What the message was to that audience,
- What is meant by the phrase the “Kingdom of God,”
- Why God gave prophecy, and
- How each of us fits into the overall plans and purposes of God, as laid out in His eternal and complete Word.

**Isaiah 55:9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts  
than your thoughts. 10 For as the rain and the snow come  
down from heaven, And do not return there without  
watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, And  
furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 11  
So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing  
what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for  
which I sent it...”**

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### Part II — GOD GAVE HIS WORD

#### Lesson One: The Audience of the Bible

NOTES:

**II Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Paul says here that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and is *profitable* for something. According to this passage, what is Scripture profitable for?

And in thinking about *all* Scripture being profitable, this passage also reveals who can benefit from Scripture. According to v. 17, who is it?

What does Scripture allow *the man of God* to do?

Last week we did a short study on the profit that is offered by God to His children through His Word. *Profit is an accrual of benefit which has been heaped upon a foundation that has been laid down.* We saw that God *desires* His people to profit from His Word and this accrual of profit is gained through *obedience* to God. We have also seen that

- *obedience* is based upon *believing* God's Word; and

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- *believing* God's Word is based upon *hearing* His Word.

In understanding all of this, it now becomes expedient for us to know *to whom* the Bible is written.

Most people see the Bible as divided into two sections: The Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). And, most people would see the OT as having been written to the Jews, and the NT written to the Church. Many people would also think that parts of both testaments could apply to people who are not part of God's family.

So which is it? How should we view the audience of the Bible? Well, let's look at it.

### THE AUDIENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first five books of the Old Testament were not written until Moses' day, which is some 2500 years into the history of mankind. Even so, we can know that this long initial period of man's history was rich beyond imagination with *oral tradition*. The *longevity of men's lives*, as well as *the central location of the world's population* during this time insured the *accurate* passing down of God's Word orally from generation to generation. Let's consider some historical facts. From Scriptures, we can ascertain that:

- From the creation of Adam until *after* Noah's flood, the world consisted of one large land mass, with the continents not being divided until the days of Peleg – the third generation from Noah (Gen. 10:25). This could only ensure strong oral tradition.
- Noah's grandfather, Methuselah, was about 243 years old, and Noah's father was 60 when Adam died. Conceivably, either of them (or both) could have personally communicated with Adam for an eye-witness account of those early years, even in great detail given the amount of time they could have had together.
- The flood took place about 1600 years after Adam's creation. Adam lived 930 years. Noah was 600 years old when the flood happened. So Adam had only been dead for about 70 years when Noah was born.
- Even though all the patriarchs within Noah's lineage (10 generations in all) died *prior* to the flood, many of their long lives overlapped for a very long period of time. And even after the flood, Noah lived long enough that he *could have* known

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Abraham, as Noah died when Abraham was about 60 years old ó 10 years prior to his being called by God to leave his homeland.

From these facts, what about *oral tradition* can be said about God's dealings with mankind during the first 2,000+ years of man's history?

These are amazing facts! But even apart from the strong oral tradition, the fact that God chose Moses (the fourth generation from Abraham) to write the first five books of the Bible, we can know that the writings of Moses were inspired by God, and not dependent upon oral tradition. (Remember *all Scripture is inspired by God*!) So the first of God's Word to be written down was 2500 years beyond the creation of Adam. Still we can know that Moses got the facts absolutely correct, due to God's inspiration.

The Book of Genesis (Lit., the "Book of Beginnings") details these first 2500 years or so. The exact historical details that God wanted recorded, were recorded for *very* specific reasons. (Nothing written in God's Word is superfluous ó nothing! Everything written is written for a reason ó everything!) The details given about the lives of the people we read about in Genesis are specific details God used to lay out the foundation of His complete Word. It is upon this foundation that the remainder of God's Word was built.

A question is asked in **Psalms 11:3** **If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?** What do you think is implied in this statement and question?

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If a person lays the correct Scriptural foundation in his understanding of God's Word, then he can *begin* to understand the whole of Scripture correctly. The historical detail laid out at the beginning is that foundation. These details have been chosen by God for very specific reasons. This will become clearer as we continue to study.

From Adam to Enoch to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and to Jacob's twelve sons (who make up the twelve tribes of Israel), we can see the all-important flow of historical details during the 2500 years. Once Abraham comes onto the scene (Gen. 12), the historical facts laid out are facts concerning the ancestral lineage of the Jewish people. At the end of Genesis we see the twelve sons of Jacob (who was now also called 'Israel') in Egypt, prior to a new Pharaoh coming to power – a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph's family, and was the one who inflicted slavery upon Israel, as had been foretold to Abraham in Genesis chapter fifteen.

This book then is the introduction to the remainder of God's Word; and apart from a correct understanding of this book, it would be nigh to impossible to grasp God's intent throughout the remainder of God's Word, so important is this book of beginnings. Then the subsequent four books that Moses wrote (Exodus & Deuteronomy) depict the history of Israel's slavery, their exodus out of Egypt, the giving of the law, the actions of the Israelites in the wilderness, the second giving of the law to the second generation 40 years later, and finally Moses's death. All in all, from this information, to whom do you think these first five books were *originally* written?

Beyond the writings of Moses, we have God speaking to His people through Joshua, as Joshua led the second generation of the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. So, *to whom*, and *about whom* does the Book of Joshua deal?

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Then the Book of Judges depicts the ensuing 350 years or so of the Jews after Joshua's day. The Books of Ruth through Esther are historical books, depicting various aspects of the events of God's people, revealing God dealing directly with His people and their reactions to Him. So, *to whom*, and *about whom* do these books deal?

The Books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon are books of wisdom, given to Israel for the purpose of their learning to walk more closely and correctly with their God, while He taught them through the various writings. So, *to whom*, and *about whom* do these books deal?

Then the Books of the Prophets from Isaiah to Malachi, all depict God's past and future dealings with His people Israel, each book replete with warnings to them concerning blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, with a view to the end. So, *to whom*, and *about whom* do these books deal?

And so we have the complete Old Testament. With all of this it is easy to see that the OT deals solely with God's people as they relate to God and the nations around them. So, the writings within the pages of the OT were written to Israel about Israel and their relationship to the one true and living God. But, having seen all this, *we would be remiss to think that the OT has no bearing on the NT!* To miss the connection between the Old and New would be to put oneself in a place wherein no correct understanding could be gotten! (That is not an overstatement!) There cannot be a correct understanding of the NT apart from there being a correct understanding of the OT, for there is nothing introduced in the New that has not been first laid out in the Old.

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One simple way to see that this is true is to read a couple of verses which Paul wrote in I Corinthians. The context of both of these verses has to do with what Moses wrote about the Children of Israel during his day. **I Corinthians 10:6 Now these things [that which Moses wrote concerning the Children of Israel] became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted... ..11 Now all these things happened to them [the Children of Israel] as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.** According to these two verses, what must we understand concerning things written in the OT?

So even though the OT Scriptures were written to the Jews (the Children of Israel), these things were also written down for us (the Church) to learn from. This must be kept in mind when studying Scripture.

### THE AUDIENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

And so we come to what we call the New Testament. If we were to consider that which we just learned about the Old, and compare it to the first four books in the New (i.e., the four gospels), we would have to see that these first four books are really a continuation of the Old, and *not* a new and separate work of God, as so many Christians believe it to be.

The NT opens with the four Gospels with each depicting different aspects of the:

- announcement of Christ's miraculous birth to God's People Israel,
- His life and ministry to Israel,
- Israel's rejection of Christ, with resulting consequences, and
- His death and resurrection.

Each of the Gospels was written by a Jewish man to the Church, which early-on was mostly made up of Jews. One purpose for writing the gospels was that of validating Jesus as their Expected One. (In the next lesson we will look at the specific message that Christ brought to Israel in these four gospels.) So, *to whom* were these books *originally* written?



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Even though it is true that the four gospels simply continue the message of God to the Children of Israel ó from the OT to the NT ó the gospels are books that are written to and for the Church as well. Many, many things contained within these four gospels have to do with the Church in fulfillment of OT prophecy. But this does not really come to light until Paul arrives on the scene in the Book of Acts, as Paul is the one chosen by God to bring His message to the Gentiles. Much more can be said here concerning the Church needing to correctly understand the gospels, but that will have to wait for another lesson. Suffice it to say that while the gospels are very Jewish in nature, the Church certainly comes into play here, even though the Church is not instituted until after the close of the events in the gospels.

The Book of Acts depicts the

- Inception of the Church at Pentecost, and the
- Actions of the Apostles as they spread the message of God to His people ó initially beginning with the Jews, then spreading to the Gentiles as Gentiles began to put faith in Jesus, thus becoming part of the new creation in Christ.

The Book of Acts is a *transitional* book between the gospels and the epistles. It is really here that, *in practice*, God's Word really begins to reach out to individuals beyond the scope of the Nation of Israel (the Jews). Beginning with the introduction of Paul in Acts chapter seven, and his conversion to Christ in chapter nine, there is a gradual shift in the message going out from the Jews in Judea and the surrounding areas, to Gentiles in an ever-growing area in the known world. The Book of Acts depicts this transition in great detail. More of this will be understood as we come to the last lesson in this part of the study.

By the end of Acts, with Israel's complete rejection of Christ and the message, the focus of the writings of God's Word moved more and more toward the *new creation in the Christ* ó the Church. In this we can see the transitional nature of the Book of Acts.

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Do you have any comments or questions about this transition?

Following the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, we have the 21 *epistles*, which are *letters written to God's People* the Church. Some letters were written to specific churches (e.g., Romans, I and II Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians), some to groups of believers not specific to a central location (Galatians, Hebrews, James, I and II Peter, I and II John, Jude), and some to individuals (I and II Timothy, Philemon, Titus, III John). With that in mind, to whom are the epistles written?

Having asked and answered that last question, please let me say this: Even though it is true that each and every epistle is written to a person or group of people who have put faith in Jesus Christ, that is *not* to say that God cannot, nor will not use what is written in His Word to bring an unsaved individual to saving faith in Christ. Faith comes by hearing God's Word, and this is true for the saved and the unsaved alike. In order for a person to come to faith, he has to hear something of God's Word. But the point we are trying to understand is that *God addresses His Word to His people* in both testaments. And this must be grasped if we are to correctly understand God's intention for His people.

Finally, the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ is the supreme completion, culmination and fulfillment of the entire written Word of God. **Revelation 19:13 ... and His name is called The Word of God.** And **John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory...** So with all of what we have considered in this lesson, and knowing this final book in Scripture is the revelation of Jesus Christ, to whom do you think this book would be written?

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### IN CONCLUSION

The importance of correctly understanding the fact that Scriptures are written to God's people for the purpose of profit being afforded them (for *teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness; with the end goal being that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*) cannot be overstated! The joy of knowing that the blessings that God promises His obedient children is inexpressible. And the gravity of the warnings to disobedient Christians is great within pages of Scripture. Obedience would never be expected of the unsaved, as they are dead spiritually, and have no understanding of spiritual things. (Eph. 2:1; 1Cor. 2:14) But God *expects* His Children to obey; and the warnings are there to explain what happens if His Children disobey. So from what you have learned already in this discipleship study, what is the outcome for a child of God who obeys His Word?

What is the outcome for a child of God who does not obey His Word?

Yes, there are stated blessings for obedience and stated warnings of curses for disobedience within and throughout God's Word. The blessings are almost beyond imagination, and the warnings are more than sobering. But please remember the blessings and the warnings have nothing to do with the security of the believer's eternal life. Rather, these have to do with an individual's inheritance in the coming kingdom of Christ, which is determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

So knowing what we have learned in these past weeks, do you think that in the end obedience *will* make a difference to you, or not? At this point in your understanding, what makes you think so?

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As we close our study this week, what have you learned in this lesson that you did not know before?

Do you have any comments or questions about all of this?

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### Part II — GOD GAVE HIS WORD

#### Lesson Two: The Good News Preached

NOTES:

**Hebrews 4:2** For indeed the gospel [Lit., good news] was preached to us as well as to them [contextually, the Children of Israel]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. There are three things told about the Children of Israel in this verse. List all three things said:

Once the Children of Israel left Egypt on the night of the Passover, they were brought to Mt. Sinai, where they were told that they had been saved for a specific purpose. This specific purpose was *the gospel* [the good news] *preached to them* (mentioned in Hebrews 4:2), God succinctly stated it here: **Exodus 19:4** ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. **5** Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. **6** And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” What did God tell them in v. 6?

But v. 5 gave them the condition to this *good news* being fulfilled for them. What was the condition?

Let’s read our opening verse in context here: **Hebrews 3:14** For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, **15** while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the

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rebellion.” 16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. 4:1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. 3 For we who have believed do enter that rest...

Because of a potential paradigm shift in our understanding of what the scope of the ògospelö is, would you mind reading this passage another TWO times through, giving it a good amount of thought? As you do this, please write out in the column next to the passage some of the things that you notice about what is being said, asking any questions that may come to mind.

As we have seen, once a person comes to saving faith in Jesus, then faith and obedience are inseparable. We have also seen that when obedience is expected, we can know that the text is dealing with things beyond our free gift. The Children of Israel had been saved on the night of Passover; and now God expected obedience from them. But because they did not believe things that God told them beyond their salvation (i.e., they did not obey what He said), they were not able to enter their proffered rest in the Promised Land. Can you see that in the large passage you just read?

And with that in mind, the Children of Israel are given to the Church as examples of what we are not to do. What does God want us to learn from them?

So now letö put some things together in our scope of understanding. In last weekö study we identified *to whom* God addressed His Word ó God speaks to His Own people in *both* testaments. With that in mind, now it is necessary to consider exactly what the message

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was/is to God's people in both testaments. To do that, let's go back to the beginning.

### AT THE BEGINNING

First off, did you know that God *explicitly* stated His reason for creating man on the very day He created him? This is an all-important bit of understanding to have *when seeking to understand God's intention for His people*. So let's consider what God says about the purpose for His creating man in the first place:

- Just *prior* to His creating man, we read: **Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."**
- Then He created man: **Genesis 1:27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**
- And then He restated His reason immediately *after* creating man: **Genesis 1:28 Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."**

According to these consecutive verses stated on the first page of Scripture, *why* did God create man?

Make a comparison of these opening verses in Scripture to what we read of God telling Israel what His purpose for them was in Exodus 19:4-6. What comparisons can you see?

The Nation of Israel would be to God a *kingdom of priests and a holy nation*. This was what Moses was to tell them. Even the name *Israel*, which God gave to Jacob and his descendants indicates this fact, as *Yisra'el* literally means *he will rule as God*. God told the nation through Moses that they were to be the *head of all the nations*,

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*and not the tail* (Deut. 28:13; 44). **Scripturally, there is a very distinct connection between the land of their inheritance and place of rulership, both of which (once in play) would be seen as their rest.** With this in mind, now go back to the large passage at the beginning of our lesson and look at the things you gleaned from it. This was the message preached throughout the Books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy), after which *God expounded more and more details of His plans and purposes for Israel* through the various authors in the remaining books of the Old Testament. Just from this cursory look at what God told Israel, overall, what do you think the good news was that was preached to God's people in the Old Testament?

With that in mind, let's read this passage: **Isa 46:9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.'** Even though Israel has been disobedient over the centuries, do you think God will bring about what He has declared for them? What makes you think so?

Now let's glimpse the

### The New Testament

**Hebrews 4:2 For indeed the gospel [Lit., good news] was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.** According to this verse, what was preached to us?



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So if the same message is preached to us that was preached to Israel throughout the OT, what would the good news be about? (You may have to briefly review the first half of this lesson.)

### THE MESSAGE IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

The initial messenger in the Gospels was John the Baptist. John's message can be found in: **Matthew 3:1** **Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** According to this verse, what was John's message?

Then, we see Jesus, the *main* Messenger in the Gospels coming with the same message as John's. **Luke 4:43** **But He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.”** According to this verse, what was the purpose for which Jesus was sent?

Can it be stated more clearly?

Then once Jesus called His disciples, we read: **Luke 9:2** **And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God...** What was the message His disciples were to proclaim?

John's message was to preach the kingdom of the heavens; Jesus' message was to preach the kingdom of the heavens; and the message with which Jesus sent out the twelve to preach was the kingdom of the heavens. This then is quite literally what was the message preached in all four gospels. If that be the case, then how would you see this message fitting together with the stated purpose of God creating man in Genesis 1:26-28?

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Then the book that follows the four gospels is the Book of Acts. This book entails the acts and movements of the apostles. This is somewhat of a unique book within Scriptures in that this book transitions the focus from Israel (seen in the gospels and the early chapters in Acts), to the Church (seen more and more progressively in the latter chapters of Acts). In so doing, this book *transitions from the gospels to the epistles*. And while it is quite easy to see that the epistles would have the Church in view (not Israel), we would have to understand that *the essence of the message of God's Word does not change*. God's Word is consistent throughout all of Scripture, just focusing on different recipients. So, if that is the case, what would be the message throughout the Book of Acts?

In two more weeks, we will be looking more closely at the transition made between the four gospels to the epistles within this informative book, the Book of Acts. If you have questions about this, you will probably find answers then.

### THE MESSAGE IN THE EPISTLES

Perhaps we could see the Apostle Paul as the main messenger in the Epistles, as he is the one God called upon to write most of the letters to the churches, and was the God-assigned apostle to the Gentiles. In essence, Paul very succinctly told the elders of Ephesus what his overall message was: **Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. 18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ...20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... ..**

**...24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more. 26 Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.**

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The context of the passage reveals that Paul preached the *ōgospel of the grace of Godō* (v. 24) to the unsaved, and then *ōwent about preaching the kingdom”* to those saved by grace through faith. In doing this, he is *innocent of the blood of all men* both the saved and the unsaved because he *did not shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God* (v. 27).

An example of Paul giving the whole purpose of God's Word can be seen in I Corinthians. There, Paul initially preached the good news of the grace of God — things concerning the death of Jesus: **I Corinthians 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.** This reveals that when Paul went to Gentiles, he first came with the message concerning the death of Jesus and nothing beyond that. Gentiles had to become eternally saved *before* he could preach the second part of the Good News! How do you see that in v. 2?

But then once Gentiles became saved (thus becoming children of God), he quoted from the OT Prophet Isaiah: **I Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”** These *ōthingsō* referred to in v. 9 are *ōthe deep things of Godō* mentioned in v. 10 *ō the things that go beyond the death of Jesus.* Can you see that?

In Paul's ministry, Paul did not stop with the message of the death of Jesus (2:1-2), he went beyond that 2:9-10)! He had been *charged by God to give the whole purpose of God* (Acts 20:27). Then later in chapter fifteen, he summed up the totality of good news he preached: **I Corinthians 15:1 “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved [Lit., are being], if you hold fast the word which I preached to you [referring to the message of the kingdom], unless you believed**

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**in vain** [i.e., unless you were saved apart from a purpose/goal].ö In order to see that this second part of the message has to do with rulership in a kingdom, we can jump down a few verses in the same chapter: Paul went on to say that not only did Jesus die, but He was raised from the dead *on the third day according to the Scriptures* (v. 4), stating the reason for His resurrection: “**For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet**” (I Cor. 15:25). How can you see both aspects of the Good News here?

### TWO REALMS OF THE KINGDOM

We have already seen that in the OT, the message to God’s people was concerning an inheritance in the Promised Land. God gave the geographical location of this *earthly* land in Genesis 15:18-21. But then we have also seen that the message preached in the gospels was *the Kingdom of the heavens*. While there is *a lot* to be learned about these two realms, suffice it to say that as the firstborn son of God, Israel, was to receive an inheritance in *both* realms ó earthly and heavenly. But in the gospels, we can easily see that Israel refused the message of the offer of the heavenly kingdom, and crucified the One making the offer. Therefore we see Jesus telling them in the Parable of the Vineyard (in final week prior to the crucifixion): **Matthew 21:43** “**Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you [Israel] and given to a nation [i.e., the *new* nation ó the Church] **bearing the fruits of it...**”**

Next week we will look at the distinctions between these two realms and more closely at what *the kingdom of God* or *the kingdom of the heavens* refers to. I hope you will find this lesson helpful to clarify many things in your understanding of Scripture.

As we close this lesson, can you/will you state in your own words what the essence of “the good news” is?

Do you have any comments or questions about this lesson?

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### Part II — God Gave His Word

#### Lesson Three: What is the Kingdom of God?

##### NOTES:

In order to clearly understand the distinctions between the *free gift of eternal life* and the *reward of the inheritance in the Kingdom*, it becomes necessary for an individual to have a good grasp on *what the kingdom of God* is. It is easy to understand that the Supreme Ruler over the entire Universe is our God; He is King over His Universal Kingdom. However, for the most part, the Bible *does not* deal with this Universal Kingdom. *The Bible deals with the kingdom that has to do with this earth and the heavens that surround this earth.* This understanding becomes more apparent as we compare Scripture with Scripture. First and foremost (because this is foundational), when God created man He created him to rule over this earth. We have already glimpsed this in previous lessons. But obviously, the revelation of God's plans and purposes for man does not stop there. Subsequent to Genesis chapter one, God gives an *abundance* of information throughout Scripture concerning the realms from which and over which man will one day rule.

Subsequent to God stating that man was created to rule over the earth, He gave a plethora of information concerning the location from which man would rule. (It is the same location from which the *current* rulers of the earth *presently* rule.) To see this, let's add some Scriptural<sup>1</sup> facts together:

- 1) After God created man & having stated His purpose, Satan (the *present* ruler of the earth) brought about the fall of man (Gen. 3).
- 2) God promised Abraham that he would have descendants as the *stars of the sky* (heavenly realm [Gen. 15:5]) and the *sands of the seashore* (earthly realm [Gen. 22:17; Ex. 32:13]).
- 3) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (heirs together of the same promises) looked forward to a heavenly city which has foundations, whose Builder and Architect is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Be sure to look up these references, and make notes in the column on the right.

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- 4) Rulership over the earth emanates from the heavens (Dan. 4:26b).
- 5) Satan and his angels *presently* rule from the heavenly realm over the earth (Eph. 6:12).
  - a) Satan and his angels are provincial rulers over the earth; he/they do not rule over the other provinces within the Universal kingdom of God.
  - b) Satan and his angels have lost their right to maintain their position of rulership indefinitely due to their rebellion against God, which took place at some point in eternity past (Ezek. 28:12-19; Isa. 14:12).
- 6) The rulership over the earth will change hands when God places Jesus upon the heavenly throne; meanwhile Jesus sits at the right hand of God waiting (*cf.*, Heb. 1:13; Ps. 8:5, 6; Ps. 110:1; Mt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; John 12:31; 16:11).

Essentially, what did you learn from the Scriptural statements of fact in the section above?

To state the matter simply, the jurisdiction over which rulership emanates is Earth; the location from which the rulership emanates is the heavens surrounding Earth.

### Angelic Rulership

In the original creation of the earth, Scripture teaches that God created angels to rule over His Universe; and specifically God created Lucifer along with a host of angels to rule over this one domain of the Universe ó Earth. The synopsis of the creation of Lucifer is found in **Ezekiel 28:12** “**Son of man** [God speaking to Ezekiel], **take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre** [speaking of Lucifer], **and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created. 14 You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain**

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of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.  
**15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.** This passage gives us a bird's eye view, so to speak, of the existence of Lucifer from his creation until his rebellion. In your own words describe Lucifer in his original creation "till iniquity was found in [him].".

The passage then goes on to relay what will become of Lucifer in the end. He was the beautiful and powerful angel whom God anointed to protect or guard the earth. However, his pride lifted him up to unrighteousness, which in the end will result in his being put down. **Ezekiel 28:16 "By the abundance of your trading You became filled with violence within, And you sinned; Therefore I cast you as a profane thing Out of the mountain of God; And I destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the fiery stones. 17a "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor...** Now describe in your own words what Lucifer did.

Now continuing in what will be Lucifer's end, we see God speaking as if in the past tense, though it has not happened in time and space as we know it. In God's economy, it is as though it has already happened as He speaks through Ezekiel here: **17b... I cast you to the ground, I laid you before kings, That they might gaze at you. 18 You defiled your sanctuaries By the multitude of your iniquities, By the iniquity of your trading; Therefore I brought fire from your midst; It devoured you, And I turned you to ashes upon the earth In the sight of all who saw you. 19 All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you; You have become a horror, And shall be no more forever."** Now describe in your own words what will happen to Lucifer yet future:

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This passage reveals that, due to this rebellion, the sanctuaries over which Lucifer ruled became profaned [*Lit.*, defiled, dissolved] (v. 18). Hence, the picture of the earth *subsequent to* its perfect creation (Gen. 1:1) became formless and void ó a desolation wherein no being could live (Gen. 1:2). Therefore, God took a 6 day period in Genesis chapter one and systematically restored the ruined creation. Then it was on the 6<sup>th</sup> day that He created man in God's image and likeness to rule in Satan's stead (Gen. 1:3-31). Then God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day (Gen. 2:1-3).

### Man's Rulership

Shortly after God created man, Satan brought about man's fall for the obvious purpose of bringing about his disqualification to rule. However, this action did not thwart God's plan, for God knew from the foundation of the world that He would send His Son to die in order to redeem man. Succinctly stated ó God created man to rule; then after being disqualified, God offered man redemption in order for him to be placed back in a position to rule. **Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him... . . .20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.** According to v. 16, what did God create in the heavens?

What did He create on the earth?

According to v. 20, what did God reconcile?

This passage reveals that not only were earthly things reconciled through the blood of Jesus on the cross, but heavenly things also. The need for *heavenly things* to be reconciled was due to Satan's rebellion in the heavens eons ago. We also know from Scripture that angels themselves would not be reconciled by Christ's death, but rather *the places* and *positions* of their authority were reconciled



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[v. 20]. We can see this in **Hebrews 2:14** **Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil... ..16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.** God's plan would not be undone, for He is the Supreme Ruler of the Universal Kingdom!

The process that would need to take place in order for man to be fully reconciled to the position of rulership is often referred to in Scripture as *salvation*! According to Scripture, God deemed it necessary for *the overall scope of salvation* to be *a process*, not just a moment-in-time event, as so many in the Church believe it to be. Since man was created a three-part being, all three parts of man – his spirit, soul and body – died the day he ate from the fruit of the forbidden tree. Therefore, all three parts of man would need to be saved in order for man to rule in the end. The free gift (i.e., our *spiritual* birth), is the moment-in-time event that *begins* the process. This has to do with man's spirit. Then the successful completion of the continuing process – the *salvation of the soul* and the *redemption of the body*, the two being inseparably linked – is to be realized at the JSOC. The free gift (our spiritual birth) is brought about by grace through faith in the work of Jesus on the cross (which we have already seen); and the salvation of the soul with the resulting redemption of the body is that facet of salvation that Paul says we are to work out in fear and trembling, as God, through the Holy Spirit works in us (Phil. 2:12, 13)<sup>2</sup>. The free gift has *eternal* ramifications; and the salvation of the soul has *millennial* ramifications. (More on that in later lessons.)

### How the Kingdom of God Fits into the Picture

From the standpoint of how the phrases "the Kingdom of God" and "the Kingdom of the heavens" are used in Scripture, these phrases refer to one-and-the-same thing. Scripture reveals that the period of time during which this kingdom will take place is the Coming Age – a thousand-year period often referred to as *The Day of the Lord* (II Peter 3:10), that *Sabbath rest that is yet for the people of God* (Heb. 4:9). This thousand-year period will take place *following* the JSOC in the heavens, *and following* the Tribulation on the earth. It will come about when Jesus takes His rightful place on the Throne located in the heavens above the earth and will rule with His Bride over the earth (Heb. 2:5; Isaiah 66:1; Rev. 19:6-8).

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<sup>2</sup> Be sure to read this passage to see that what is written here is Scriptural.

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This is a *very* (!) brief description of *the Kingdom of God/of the heavens*. So, so much more can be said about it, and we will get to the ðmoreö in upcoming weeks.

### **In Conclusion**

The phrases ðthe Kingdom of Godö and the ðthe Kingdom of the heavens,ö as they are used in Scripture are not referring to the Universal kingdom of God, but rather to the kingdom related specifically to this earth, the rulership of which emanates from the heavens over this earth (Dan. 4:26). Presently, it is the fallen angels who exercise authority over the earth (Eph. 6:12). Nevertheless, the time for their rule is coming to an end. Soon, there will be a new order of rulers, when a portion of mankind will exercise dominion over the earth, with Jesus as the Son of Man, the Son of God as the Morning Star. It will be then that Genesis 1:26-28 will be fulfilled, as Christ alongside His Wife rules from the heavens over the earth, and the Nation Israel rules on the earth over all the other nations. What a glorious time that will be!

All said, from Scripture's standpoint, there is a *process* necessary for a saved individual to successfully complete if he is going to participate in this rulership! And *that* is what we are talking about when dealing with the full scope of salvation!

From what you have learned in this lesson, will you put into your own words what the kingdom of the heavens is?

Do you have any questions or comments about this lesson?

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Further reading on this subject can be found at  
[http://bibleone.net/print\\_tbs137.html](http://bibleone.net/print_tbs137.html)

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### Part II — God Gave His Word

#### Lesson Four: The Book of Acts, a Transition (Part 1 of 2)

##### NOTES:

For the past three weeks we have been looking at some facts about God giving His Word to His people. We have seen that the Old Testament is a series of Books written to God's people, laying out the plans and purposes that God has for His people. We have also seen that the gospels in the New Testament are actually a continuation of the Old in that the birth, life and death of the One presented in the all four gospels is the Expected One of the Old Testament. It has been stated that the birth of Jesus was so well prophesied in the OT that the Jews could have written a birth certificate for Him prior to His birth. And to show that He was the prophesied One, the Apostle John wrote this about Jesus: **John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.** What does *the Word becoming flesh* mean?

Then years later, this same apostle wrote: **Rev. 19:10b ...For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** And **13b ...His name is called The Word of God.** Explain these verses, and relate these to what John had previously written in John 1:14.

##### **The Nation of Israel**

We have glimpsed the fact that all four gospels had all to do with the Jews at the first coming of Christ. Yes, the Church is mentioned a few times in the way of Christ "building His Church," and "the Gentiles seeing a great light," but all in all, the gospels were about Jesus walking amongst His brethren in the flesh — fellow Jews, and His offer of the kingdom of the heavens to them. In the gospels, John the Baptist, Jesus, and then the Twelve summoned *the Nation of Israel to repentance* because *the Kingdom was at hand*. In other words, the King of the Coming Kingdom was in their midst. And if

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the individuals making up the Nation of Israel were going to participate in the Coming Kingdom, they needed to first repent of their wayward ways with respect to their relationship with God. In actuality, their being called to repentance was simply a continuation of the message that the prophets had brought to them throughout the previous centuries. Each and every prophet of the OT resounded the call of repentance to the nation, and yet they continued in their sinful ways and would not repent. Instead, in the end, they crucified their King.

In last week's lesson, we came to understand a little more about what the Kingdom of God/the Kingdom of the heavens is. Rulership over the earth emanates (even now) from the heavens. And though there will be a world-wide earthly kingdom during the thousand year reign of Christ, still ultimate rulership over the earth will emanate from the heavens ó in particular, from the heavenly city, Whose architect and builder is God. So at His first coming Jesus was literally offering the administration of *this* kingdom ó the heavenly one ó to the Nation of Israel. At that point in time, that was the only people group on the face of the earth to whom the offer could have been made, as they were the only descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.

The promises of God given to Abraham and his descendants can be seen in many places in both Old and New Testaments, but one place is here: **Romans 4:13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.** At the first coming of Christ, *who* was Abraham's seed?

But as we have seen, as a nation the Jews continued to spurn the offer of the kingdom. As a result, in the final week prior to His death, Jesus gave them this parable. **Matthew 21:33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent**

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his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'? 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. Here are some questions for you to consider concerning this parable:

Who is represented by the landowner?

Who is represented by the vinedressers?

Who is represented by the servants the landowner sent?

Who is represented by the son sent by the landowner?

Then according to v. 43, from whom is the Kingdom of God to be taken, and to whom will it be given?

In the margin at the right, would you write in your own words what is being taught in this parable?

### A New Nation

Now let's consider who the nation is that will produce the fruits of the kingdom. Look at these passages:

- **Romans 10:19** But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation."

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- **I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.**
- **Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.**
- **Romans 11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.**
- **Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17 Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.**

From these passages, whom do you think is the nation that will produce the fruits of the kingdom?

### **A Re-offer of the Kingdom to Israel by the Church**

Based upon some things we will see shortly in the Book of Acts, there is something that must be added to our understanding of the gospels, Acts and the epistles. We must also understand this parable which Jesus also gave: **Luke 13:6 He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ 8 But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’”**

Now let's consider these questions: Again, who is the owner of the vineyard?

Who/what is represented by the fig tree that has not produced fruit?

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What do you think the 3-year period might represent?

What does the owner want to do with the fig tree for lack of fruit production?

What solution did the keeper of the vineyard make to the owner?

And so we've seen that the offer of the kingdom of the heavens was first made to Israel, but they were not producing the fruit of it. And so Jesus withdrew the offer of this kingdom from the Jews and would give it to a new creation, a new nation, who will produce the fruit thereof. But when you put this parable into the mix, you see something new that must be considered. From this parable, it appears that God would give Israel a second chance. And that is exactly what we see in the first part of the Book of Acts.

First notice that Acts comes immediately after the four gospels, but before any of the epistles. Some epistles were written during the time period covered by Acts; some were written after Acts 28. Next week we will see why that is important to understand. But for the conclusion of this week, let's consider a few good points in the first seven chapters in Acts.

In Acts chapter one, Jesus had a 40 day post-resurrection ministry wherein He was speaking to them specifically of things concerning the kingdom of God (1:3). Just prior to His ascension, He told His disciples to wait for the promise of the Father – the Holy Spirit.

In Acts chapter two, we see that on the Day of Pentecost, the Church was instituted, and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon His disciples. For our purposes as we glimpse the Book of Acts, it is important to note Peter's specific message which he gave to the men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem in vv. 14-36. Specifically in vv. 22-36, Peter accuses Israel of crucifying the One attested to by the OT that He was the Lord and Christ. Again, Peter was calling Israel to repent, not only from their sins, but also now from crucifying the Messiah.

Then in Acts chapter three, another opportunity came for Peter to preach to the men of Israel (v. 12) about their rejection of the Christ and the fact that they killed the Prince of Life (v.15). In this

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message, he says: **Acts 3:17** “Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers. **18** But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. **19** Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, **20** and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, **21** whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Please pay particular notice to vv. 19-21. Peter uses a couple of interesting descriptions of the coming age: *times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord* and *times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*. What do you think Peter means by the use of these phrases?

Can you see that the offer of the kingdom was still open to Israel? Only now, since the Church had been instituted, the offering was being made by Peter as the head of the Church to Israel.

As we look at chapters three through five, we can see in each of these three chapters, Peter uses every opportunity he gets to remind the leaders of Israel what they have done, and calls them to repentance (3:13-15; 4:10-12; 5:29-31). The reason for his reminder is not to condemn them, but rather to give them opportunity to repent so that the Lord could come back, in which the times of refreshing could come. But lo! They would not.

Finally we see in chapters six and seven a man named Stephen coming on the scene. We will pick up here next week. For now, state in your own words what you have learned from this lesson.

Do you have any questions?



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### **Part II — God Gave His Word**

#### **Lesson Five: The Book of Acts, a Transition (Part 2 of 2)**

NOTES:

Last week we began to look at the transitory nature of the Book of Acts. We saw that Acts is the book which sits between the gospels and the epistles, and opens with a brief description of Jesus' 40-day post-resurrection ministry, and His ascension into glory (Acts 1). Ten days later, on the Day of Pentecost, the Church was instituted (Acts 2). Of course at this point the very early Church was made of solely of Jews who had believed in Jesus as their Messiah.

Although Jesus had withdrawn His offer of the heavenly kingdom from the Jews in the week leading up to His death (Mt. 21:33-44), we saw last week that there was another parable which opened up the opportunity for the Jews to have a second chance at the offer (Luke 13:6-9), only now God would use the newly instituted Church to make the re-offer of the heavenly kingdom to Israel. This period of the re-offer to Israel is covered throughout the Book of Acts from about 33AD through 62AD.

Peter was the one to begin the reoffer on the very day of the Feast of Pentecost. Within the first five chapters in the Book of Acts, we witness Peter giving the men and leaders of the Nation no less than four opportunities to repent from their sins and from crucifying the Holy One of Israel. We ended last week's study with Stephen appearing on the scene. This is where we will pick up.

Two different places in Acts chapter six we see a powerful description of Stephen. Verse 5 says he was a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit," and v. 8 says he was "full of faith and power." As a result of the way in which he represented the Lord, the Jews sought to bring him down, bringing him before the Council having secretly induced a number of people to give false witnesses against him. Then at the beginning of chapter seven, the council asked him if the things said about him were true. Rather than defending himself,

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Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gives a *powerful* message to the Jewish leadership. At first glance, it may appear that his message was a simple history lesson of their ancestral lineage. But their heightened reaction to what he said would indicate that they saw more than a mere lesson in their history. Stephen opened his message by reminding them of the promises God had given to Abraham, their father and his descendants. Their history from that point reveals God taking steps to bring those promises to fruition. Then he recalled to them that their fathers had time and time again acted contrary to God and to the individuals God had sent to them for their good ó notably Joseph (the favored son of Jacob) and Moses. Towards both historical figures, their fathers had acted contrary to God. Stephen used the historical details in these stories to show the leadership of the Jews that they had in fact acted in the same way as their fathers as he levels this accusation against them: **Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”** What did Stephen say of the leadership of the Jews?

This was yet another call to the leadership of the Nation to come to repentance. But again, they would not repent as it says that *they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth* (v. 54). The text goes on to say: **Acts 7:55 But he [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.** Think for a moment! With this powerful call to repentance, why do you think God allowed Stephen to have insight into what was taking place in heaven at that very moment? What do you think it meant?

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Whew! There is a lot here! So powerful was this message that at the end, God showed Stephen *Jesus standing up* as if to come again *if the Nation would simply repent!* But instead of repenting, they rushed upon Stephen (the messenger God had sent to call them once again to repentance) and took him out of the city and stoned him to death, having *laid their clothes at the feet of young man named Saul*. God's timing here is *meticulous!* (And wouldn't it be so?) If they had repented, the Father would have sent the Son back for the times of refreshing that Peter had already told them about (the reason for Stephen seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father). But as their hearts were becoming more and more hardened to the message of repentance, as evidence by their response, God introduces Saul of Tarsus – a man who later became known as Paul.

Initially, Saul (who was also called Paul) was a great persecutor of the newly established Church. He was a – Hebrews of the Hebrews, – a Pharisee himself (Phil. 3:5), whom, as we will see in a moment, God chose to take the message of the Kingdom to the Gentiles. But here, Saul gave his consent to the stoning of Stephen. This moment became a real turning point for the Jews.

Up to this point, the Church had been fully made up of Jews who had repented and turned to Christ, and had been located solely in Jerusalem, with Peter as the head. But now, with the stoning of Stephen, and with Saul coming onto the scene, there was a great persecution of the Church, which scattered the Church into out-lying regions of Judea. This scattering was used by God to spread His message to areas beyond Jerusalem (Acts 8). In this, Saul had become so zealous to persecute the Church that he went far and wide to bring Christians (repentant and converted Jews) from these out-lying regions back to Jerusalem in order to punish and imprison them. It was on one of these trips that the now-glorified Jesus Christ spoke to Saul (Acts 9). Jesus showed him that it was He Whom Saul was persecuting.

For our purposes in our study, we will not go into too much detail here, but we can know that this was literally a life-changing experience for Saul. It was just after this that the Lord said of Saul: **Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him [Ananias], “Go, for he [Saul] is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”** To whom was the Lord going to send Saul?

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So let's review all of this for a moment. From what you have just read, will you summarize the chronology of the major events as they have been recorded in the Acts 1-7?

Apparently it was immediately after the events in Acts 9, that the Lord took Saul away to Arabia for a three year period in order to teach him: **Galatians 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.**

The Word of the Lord continued to spread. In Acts 10, we see what may be the first Gentile being converted in about 40 AD. God had given Peter a heavenly vision, revealing to him that God was opening the way for Gentiles to come to the faith. Immediately thereafter, Peter had opportunity to preach to the Gentiles with many becoming saved. When Peter went back to Jerusalem, the believing Jews had heard that Peter had fellow-shipped with Gentiles and asked him about it. So Peter recounted the whole story for them in Acts 11:1-18, at the end of which they all rejoiced that God was extending His grace to Gentiles as well.

It is in this time-frame that we can see a very progressive yet distinct change in focus. Prior to the stoning of Stephen, the focus of ministry was solely towards the Jews. But with their continual rejection of the message of the kingdom, as evidenced by the stoning of Stephen, the focus began to move more and more towards the Gentiles. And with this shift, the focus began to be more and more on Paul's ministry rather than on Peter's ministry. In fact, after Acts 12, Peter's name is only mentioned one additional time in the Book of Acts (Acts 15:7). In Acts 13, we clearly see God sending Saul (now to be known as Paul) and Barnabas out to minister amongst the Gentiles. So now the book begins to trace the movements of Paul as he went from city to city. The remainder of the book then

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covers about a 22-year period or so (from about 40 AD to about 62 AD), wherein the book closes in Acts 28.

For our purposes in our study, there are several things we will need to take note of here. During the time covered by Acts, when Paul entered any city or area, he would always go to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles. This was his mode of operation. In going to the Jews, he would present Jesus as the One prophesied of in the whole OT Scriptures. (Remember that it was during this period that the NT was only beginning to be written.) In speaking with the Jews, Paul would use OT Scriptures to show them that Jesus was the Messiah, and that He came offering the heavenly kingdom to them, and would relate the acceptance of this offer to a facet of salvation. Then when the Jews rejected Paul's message, Paul would turn to the Gentiles, giving them the whole council of God's Word. Acts 13:14-52 is an excellent example of this. Please stop for a moment and read this portion of Scripture. Then very briefly summarize what you read here:

This scenario happened time and time again. But let's pause for a moment and realize something here. It is necessary to understand that this offer of the kingdom *can only be made to saved people* ó to people who had already received eternal life through faith. When Paul went to the Jews making the offer (or the re-offer in this case), he was going to a generation of Jewish people who had already believed in the provision God had made for them *prior* to Christ's death ó the paschal lambs at Passover. So, with the Jews, Paul could *begin with* the offer of the kingdom. But when Paul went to Gentiles, he couldn't begin with the offer of the kingdom, he had to begin with showing them that Jesus was their Passover Lamb, Who died for their sins. (See Acts 16:27-32 for an example of this.) Then once the Gentiles believed on Jesus, he would teach them about the Coming Kingdom of Christ. Again, this happened time and time again.

Then to help us *further* understand these things, we must see that in the overall message of God, the Scriptures refer to both of these facets as *salvation*. We would need to see that one part of this full scope of salvation has to do with an individual's *spiritual* birth (i.e., the free gift by grace through faith), and the other part has to do with

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the salvation of the soul and the redemption of the body (the working out our salvation in fear and trembling [Phil. 2:12]). As noted in a prior lesson, one's spiritual birth takes place at an instant in time at the moment of faith in God's provision; the salvation of the soul (with the resulting redemption of the body), however, is a process that takes place over time and is either realized or not realized at the JSOC. And *both* facets of this is referred to in Scripture as *salvation*. (Honestly, when these distinctions are understood, it allows an individual to more fully understand God's Word.)

And so with these things in mind, we can jump to the end of the Book of Acts and realize how the re-offer of the kingdom was finally withdrawn *totally* from Israel *as a nation*, until a time yet future. The Jews continued to spurn the offer of the kingdom for these ensuing years up to 62AD. Here we see Paul in Rome, making what appears to be his final plea to the Jews there: **Acts 28:23 So when they had appointed him a day, many [Jews] came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."' 28 Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!**" Then a few years later in 70AD, Jerusalem was sacked and burned by Rome under the command of Titus, the son of the Emperor.

Some of the epistles were written during the period covered by the Book of Acts. So knowing that the re-offer of the kingdom was made to Israel during this time, how do you think that might change the way in which you read the various epistles?

Do you have any questions or comments about this lesson?

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### Part II — God Gave His Word

#### Lesson Six: The Epistles

#### NOTES:

In this section of our study, we have been considering how God gave His Word. We have seen that the OT is *unfolded* in the New, with the New really being a continuation of the Old. The NT opens with the four gospels, wherein *the kingdom of the heavens* was offered to Israel. But they rejected the offer, and in the final week of Christ's public ministry to Israel, the kingdom was withdrawn from the Nation, being told that it would now be offered to a nation producing the fruits of it.

In the past two lessons we have seen that there was a *reoffer* of the kingdom to Israel in the Book of Acts. It is in this book where we have seen that the Church was instituted on the Day of Pentecost (being made up solely of Jews at that time), and that the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel would now *be made by the Church*. As Acts progressed we saw the continual rejection of the offer of the kingdom by the Jews the focus of ministry gradually shifted from Israel to the Gentiles who would put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who would hear and receive the Word of the Kingdom. With this ministry shift, we also saw the focus shifted away from Peter as the main character in Acts to Paul, as Paul was to be the one to take the message of Christ and His kingdom to the Gentiles. Finally, in 62 AD the reoffer which had been presented to the Jews for nearly 30 years was entirely shut down, bringing us to the end of the Book of Acts.

#### THE EPISTLES

As one begins to study any of the epistles, he/she would have to realize that the main subject of the epistles is no different than the main subject of the entirety of God's Word. So before we begin, let's consider what the main message in God's Word is to His people. What is it?

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And with that in mind then, what do you think the main focus of the epistles might be?

The central theme of the epistles would be no different than the central theme of the OT, which would be no different than the central theme of the gospels and the Book of Acts! It would all be one and the same. The only difference would be the recipients! The epistles are *letters written to the Church*; letters that contain the offer of the kingdom to His people ó the ðone new man in Christö (Eph. 2:15). None of the epistles is written to an un-saved people group, not even one! And while there may be passages that might lead an un-saved person to understand what it takes to become saved, each and every epistle is written for the edification and growth of *the new man in Christ*. Considering this then, would that change your reading and studying an epistle? If so, how?

So, as we would endeavor to study and understand any epistle, there are a couple other factors that would also need to be understood in order to understand what you are reading and studying in a particular epistle. First, we need to realize that *nothing* is superfluous in Scripture. That is *nothing* is added without reason, without a purpose. Remember that God has inspired *all* parts of Scripture, whether large or small, for a purpose: **II Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.** According to v. 16, what is the purpose for God inspiring all Scripture?

And according to v. 17, what can be accomplished through the doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness?



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Second, we must see that each part of every part of Scripture fits into a context. It cannot be overstated how important knowing and understanding *context* is. That is to say that if you are endeavoring to understand a verse or a passage or a book, seek to understand the context of that verse or passage or book. Know that any and all verses fit into a larger passage; and that passage fits into a chapter; and that chapter fits into a book; and that book fits into the Bible. And the Bible *begins* at a certain point, and *ends* at a certain point, and *all points* in between the beginning and the end operate within *that* framework<sup>3</sup>. Nothing in Scripture exists in a vacuum. Nothing! It all relates to God's purpose!

We have seen over and over again what God's purpose has been for man since the beginning. What is it?

Now consider what Jesus said about the new nation when He mentioned it in **Matthew 21:43** [saying] **"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."** According to this verse, what would Jesus expect from the Church that He did not get from Israel?

With that in mind, what do you think the focus of any and all the epistles would be?

Relate the answer to this question to the answers of the questions asked and answered of II Timothy 3:16, 17 above. What correlation do you see?

The correct answers to these questions will go a long way in giving more clarity to correctly understanding the epistles. Can you see that?

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it should be mentioned here that the ORDER of the books in Scripture is not that important when considering the context of a book within the overall scope of Scripture. The line-up has been changed by man throughout the centuries.

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### Epistles Written During the Reoffer of the Kingdom

Then there are a couple more things that need to be considered when studying the epistles ó one is *the timeframe in which a particular epistle was written*. Any epistle that was written during the period covered in the Book of Acts, or even shortly after the close of Acts, would be written to a Church that would have had many Jewish believers within ó Jews who would have to reconsider what their view had been concerning the OT Law, as well as God opening the way of salvation to the Gentiles through Christ.

Here is a list of the epistles written *before* Acts 28 (when the reoffer to the Nation of Israel was still open):

James wrote:	James	45-48 AD
Paul wrote:	I Thessalonians	52AD
	II Thessalonians	53AD
	I Corinthians	57AD
	Galatians	57AD
	II Corinthians	58AD
	Romans	58AD

Romans and Galatians have been somewhat notoriously difficult to understand because both of these books have so much about OT Law within them. Christians might wonder what the Law has to do with the Church. Also I Corinthians has also been somewhat difficult due to things written therein that deal with some of the spiritual gifts ó particularly the gifts which include miraculous signs (e.g., the gift of tongues and healings). Christians might wonder if that would still be for today or not.

Now, as far as the Law is concerned, we can understand *why* there is so much in Romans and Galatians about the OT Law, as Paul was revealing to the Jews making up part of the new man in Christ the fact that the OT Law had been *fulfilled in Christ Jesus*, and the mindset of the Jews needed to reflect this. Paul was also showing the Jews that it has always been God's plan to allow Gentiles to become part of the household of God (*cf.*, Is.9:2; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3; Lk.2:30-32). This was being fulfilled right before their very eyes. And though portions of these epistles were written to believing Jews helping them to understand these things, these epistles are also very beneficial to the Church today as they show us what the OT had to say about the Coming Redeemer/Messiah and how Jesus fulfilled the entire Law. Even now, it is a very good thing for us to have

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these epistles to study so that we, too, might grasp the significance as to how and why God gave the Law in the first place, showing us that the Law was a tutor to bring individuals to Christ; the Law was *a copy and shadow of the good things to come* (cf., Heb. 8:5). We can learn more about the work of Jesus through an understanding of the Law and what it pointed to. Also, concerning the Gentiles, even now we would need to understand how Gentiles are grafted in to the commonwealth of Israel, through faith in the Christ. Apart from studying the OT, we wouldn't know what it means that we have been grafted into the Promises.

Then too, there is the issue of the miraculous signs being performed *during this period of the reoffer*. The need for these signs being performed during this time can be seen in what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Church at Corinth. I Corinthians was written to a church (made up of both Jew and Gentile) in turmoil, wherein he said in **1 Corinthians 1:22 For Jews request [*Lit., require*] a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom...** And then in **I Corinthians 14:22 Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers...** Miraculous signs have *always* had to do with *the Nation of Israel in conjunction with the Kingdom*, as shown here in what Paul so succinctly states. Paul states that *it is the Jew who requires a sign*. Even during Jesus public ministry with Israel prior to His death, many miraculous signs were performed in Israel so as to validate Christ as their King. *Miraculous signs were necessary for Israel to believe*. But Greeks (i.e., for Gentiles) do not need a sign to validate the offer of the kingdom. We also see here that the gift of tongues is for *unbelieving Jews* – eternally saved Jews who did not yet believe that Christ was their Messiah ó Jews who require a miraculous sign to prove the validity of the offer made to them so that they might believe in both Christ as Messiah *and* in the offer. This can hardly be stated any more clearly! And though these things were written during the period covered in the Book of Acts, even now, we would have to understand that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit ó specifically gifts that involve miraculous signs ó were present during the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel, in order to provoke unbelieving Jews to belief in Christ. But once the reoffer was completely withdrawn from Israel, there was no more need for the miraculous signs, and the performing of these things ceased. (These miraculous signs will come back into the picture during the Tribulation when Israel and kingdom are back in view.)

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As with *all* of the epistles, Romans, Galatians and I Corinthians should never be seen as having been written to unsaved individuals telling them how they can receive their free gift of salvation. No! As with *all* of the epistles, these books should be seen as having been written to saved people, explaining how God's people should understand the things concerning the coming kingdom, and in knowing these things how they are to live with that kingdom in mind. Romans, Galatians and I Corinthians are three of the seven epistles written during a time when Israel was still in view in respect to the reoffer of the kingdom, and a very Jewish audience was still in view. And these epistles would reflect that!

So in knowing and understanding these things, what would change in your reading and studying of a particular epistle?

### **Epistles Written After the Close of the Reoffer**

Then early in 62 AD, Paul arrives in Rome as a prisoner, and shortly thereafter the re-offer of the Kingdom to the Jews is withdrawn (Acts 28:16-31). Here is a list of the epistles written *after* Acts 28 (after the reoffer of the kingdom was closed to Israel as a Nation):

Paul wrote:	Ephesians	62AD
	Philippians	62AD
	Colossians	62AD
	Philemon	62AD
Peter wrote:	I Peter	63 AD
Anonymous:	Hebrews	63AD
Paul wrote:	I Timothy	63AD
	Titus	63AD
Peter wrote:	II Peter	65AD
Paul wrote:	II Timothy	66AD
Jude wrote:	Jude	75AD
John wrote:	I, II, III John	90AD
	Revelation	97AD

On this side of Acts 28, the remaining epistles were written *without* the reoffer of the kingdom to Israel in view. And the further one

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gets away from 62AD, the number of Jews being added to the Church decreased greatly. With this being the case, there was no longer a need to deal with the Law and the miraculous signs. Hence, less and less is said about either. (Plus what needed to be explained to the Church-at-large about these things had already been taught in the epistles written during the period covered in the reoffer, so there was nothing else to be said.)

So now, let's look at an example of an epistle where Paul's main focus is on Gentiles correctly understanding things concerning the kingdom and their potential rolls therein. We can see from our list above that shortly after Acts 28, Paul wrote a letter to the Church at Ephesus. Previous to writing it, he had spent up to three years ministering to the churches in and around Ephesus. Paul writes: **Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – we are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.** Whom does Paul address here?

**13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.** In your own words, explain what Paul is saying:

Who are the *two He made into one*? From what you understand now, explain what he meant.

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**17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. 19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...** Specifically, who were far off and who were near v. 17?

Who are now fellow-citizens and members of the household of God (v. 19)?

While many more things can be said about the epistles, for our purposes in this study, we will leave it here.

Does this all make more sense to you now? As a result of understanding these things in this lesson, how will you read and study the epistles now?

Do you have any questions or comments about this lesson?