

The Books in the New Testament (I): The Four Gospels & Acts of the Apostles

Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.”
(Psalm 145:13)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Jesus is the King, the tireless servant, the Son of man and the Son of God.2. Understand the kingdom of heaven in the gospel books.3. Understand that the kingdom of heaven is in the church.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is our King.2. His kingdom is everlasting.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The kingdom of God is in our hearts.2. Make God our King.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Gospels
 1. The Themes of the Gospels
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- B. Historical Book: Acts of the Apostles
 1. The Works of the Holy Spirit: Leading Us to the Kingdom
 2. The Growth of the Church: Establishing the Kingdom
 3. Witnessing: Leading Others into the Kingdom

Life Application: The Kingdom of Heaven Is In Our Hearts

1. Is God the King of My Heart?
2. Placing God as King of Our Lives Each Day

Memory Verse

Conclusion: The Gospels present Jesus from different aspects of His servitude, and together, they show us a clear picture of His true identity: He is the Son of God and the Son of Man, our sovereign who served us by giving His life so that we might enter into a place in His kingdom.

Events and Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

The New Testament, like the Old Testament, can be categorized into four different sections:

1. **GOSPEL** (*Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*): The life and teachings of Christ.
2. **HISTORICAL** (*Acts*): A historical account of the early church.
3. **LETTERS** (*Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude*): Twenty-one letters written by various apostles.
4. **PROPHECY** (*Revelation*): Prophetic revelations and visions concerning the end times.

Today, we will study the Gospels and the historical book of Acts of the Apostles.

A. The Gospels

We call the first four books of the New Testament the “Gospels,” but what is the gospel? The word, “gospel” can be translated into “good news.” Jesus came to preach the good news of God’s kingdom: He has given His life to save us all from sin, Jews and Gentiles alike (1 Cor 15:3–4).

The Gospels detail the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The teachings covered in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are very similar. These three are known as the “synoptic Gospels,” as they often use similar wording and describe the same events. The Gospel of John has content that differs from the three, but its recording of Jesus’ life is complemented by the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. By studying them together, we can gain a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ, His mission on earth, and His identity.

When Jesus Christ asked His disciples, “But who do you say that I am?”, Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this, Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, [...] for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:13–17). In the same way, “by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16), the gospel books’ writers revealed who Jesus was in terms of His work and His person. Let’s look at the themes of the four Gospels.

1. The Themes of the Gospels

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Theme:	Jesus is the Messiah; He is the King	Jesus is the tireless Servant of the Lord	Jesus is the Son of man	Jesus is the Son of God
Date Written:	From A.D. 70–100.	From A.D. 60–70.	From A.D. 50–70.	Likely A.D. 60s.

a. Matthew

This gospel begins with Christ’s genealogy from Abraham through King David, the announcement of the kingdom of heaven, and a call to repentance. Jesus came down as the long-awaited Messiah, born according to God’s promise. He is the King of the Jews, but His reign is a heavenly one. His power and authority are clear: with His death and resurrection, He has opened the gates to this kingdom so that everyone can become God’s children.

b. Mark

In Mark, Jesus descended as one who came to serve, to “give His life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). He taught us the ways we can serve God: by preaching (Mk 1:4, 14, 38) and helping the needy (Mk 6:41; 8:2). He also teaches us the rewards of serving Christ (Mk 9:41).

c. Luke

In the Gospel of Luke, He came down as the Son of Man. The gospel begins with His humble birth and boyhood – He was born fully human, to understand and share in our humanity. He also came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk 19:10), and to care for our physical and spiritual needs. Luke paid special attention to the compassion Jesus showed towards the weak, the suffering, and the outcast.

d. John

The Gospel of John records Jesus’ seven “I am” statements. He tells us that He is: “the bread of life” (6:35); “the light of the world” (8:12); “the door” (10:7, 9); “the good shepherd” (10:11); “the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6); and “the true vine” (15:1). These statements describe His identity and show how important it is for us to know that He is the Son of God. By believing, we may then have life in Jesus’ name (20:31).

Each gospel book answers the question Jesus asked His disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” They contain four distinct descriptions that portray exactly who Jesus is. Despite their distinct portrayals of the Lord, however, they collectively point to a significant teaching: the mystery of the kingdom of heaven.

2. The Kingdom of Heaven Revealed by the Gospels

A key teaching that runs throughout the gospels is the “kingdom of heaven,” or *basileia* in Greek. The term occurs 162 times in the New Testament, and the term does not refer to a location, but a ruler’s exercise of sovereign power,¹ or “the right or authority to rule over a kingdom.”² While the Old Testament workers prophesied of a kingdom to come, governed by a descendent of David (Jer 23:5), the gospels reveal the truth of it: the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual kingdom that is ruled by Christ, full of righteousness, peace, and joy (Ps 103:19; Jn 18:36; Mt 12:28; Rom 14:17). It is a new heaven and new earth, a city that is full of splendor, filled with God’s glory (Rev 21:15–27). It is a place beyond our ability to understand, imagine, or describe (1 Cor 2:9). The gospels revealed the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, but we can see its importance more clearly in Acts of the Apostles, after the Holy Spirit’s descent.

B. Historical Book: Acts of the Apostles

Following the four Gospels, we find another book written by Luke, this time beginning with the resurrected Jesus, and His instructions regarding the Holy Spirit. We know that Acts of the Apostles was completed after the end of Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 61–63), as Luke ended his account with Paul awaiting his trial there. While there are many teachings, we can find three

¹ *Britannica*, s.v. “kingdom of God,” accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kingdom-of-God>

² *Blue Letter Bible*, s.v. “βασιλεία”, accessed June 21, 2022, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G932&t=KJV>

overarching themes in the book: The works of the Holy Spirit and the power of God; the growth of the church; and witnessing for Christ.

1. The Works of the Holy Spirit: Leading Us to the Kingdom

This book is referred to as "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," as it outlines the Spirit's work in establishing the church. Immediately after His descent, the church grew from a mere 120 members to over 3,000, and it continued to grow, eventually reaching the Gentiles. The book also clearly shows the work of the Spirit within the disciples. While Jesus was on earth, they were spiritually weak and had a poor understanding of God's word. With the power of the Holy Spirit, they transformed into spirit-filled, faithful, and profitable workers for the kingdom of heaven. The mystery of the kingdom that was revealed in the gospels was put into practice in Acts. Through it, we can see more clearly the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5). We are born into sin, meaning we are spiritually dead from birth. But when we receive water baptism for the remission of sins, we are spiritually reborn (Jn 1:13). Receiving the Holy Spirit is a part of this process of rebirth. Like the disciples' transformation on the Day of Pentecost, only with the Holy Spirit will we be able to "walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12). From Acts, we can see that to enter into this calling, we must submit to the works of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Growth of the Church: Establishing the Kingdom

Acts of the Apostles tells us in detail how the church in apostolic times grew by the power and work of the Holy Spirit. These details teach us all the factors involved in the church's growth – the teachings of the apostles, fellowship, prayers, and the practice of godly love (Acts 2:40–47). The apostles' dedication and submission to the Holy Spirit serve as an excellent example for workers today, while records of opposition educate us about the schemes of the devil and how he disrupts the work of God. The apostles' response to these oppositions shows us the importance of being filled and led by the Holy Spirit, and how to guard our hearts from falling into Satan's schemes.

Through all of these details remains one central purpose: the establishment of Christ in the hearts of His followers, and the growth of the church that leads believers to the kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, one had to be circumcised to become a part of God's nation (Gen 17:9–14). In the New Testament, we need to believe, repent, and be baptized in Jesus' name to become part of the kingdom (Jn 3:5; Gal 3:27; Col 1:12–14). But from the numerous examples in Acts, we can see that we also need to work to establish God's kingdom on this earth by teaching each other, praying for each other, and standing strong against any opposition.

3. Witnessing: Leading Others into the Kingdom

Acts of the Apostles teaches us how to witness for Christ effectively with the power of the Holy Spirit. There are many examples that illustrate how to preach the baptism of Christ, the remission of sins, and prayer for the Holy Spirit. As Jesus Christ commanded, His apostles became witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). They served as an important example of how we can also bring others to Christ, and of how God has given us the authority to lead mankind into the kingdom of heaven.

The Holy Spirit established the church on earth, and today, the same church is the path through which we can enter the kingdom of heaven. The church is a sanctified group of people who have been given the authority to judge (1 Cor 6:1–3) and to forgive or retain the sins of any (Jn 20:23). We would still be living in darkness if the church were never established on earth, and without the church, we are unable to enter the path to salvation.

While the Gospels revealed to us the mystery of the kingdom of God, Acts taught us about the kingdom's relationship to the Holy Spirit. By submitting to the works of the Holy Spirit, we can walk worthy of God's calling, establishing His kingdom in our hearts and in His church, of which Christ is the head. Through this establishment, as Acts has taught us, we can then lead others onto the path to salvation. It is important for us to always remember that God has given us the responsibility to preach the gospel, while also devoting ourselves to the building and perfecting of its members in order to fulfill our mission of bringing others into the kingdom of heaven.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What are the themes of the Gospels?** Jesus is the Messiah, the King, the tireless servant, the Son of man, and the Son of God.
- 2. In addition to portraying Jesus' identity, what significant teaching do the Gospels reveal?** The mystery of the kingdom of heaven.
- 3. What is the kingdom of heaven as revealed by the Gospels?** It is a spiritual kingdom that is ruled by Christ, full of righteousness, peace, and joy.
- 4. What are the main, overarching themes of Acts?** The power and the works of the Holy Spirit; the establishment and the growth of the church; witnessing for Christ.
- 5. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of heaven?** By submitting to the works of the Holy Spirit, we can walk worthy of God's calling, establishing His kingdom in our hearts and in His church, of which Christ is the head. Through this, we can then lead others to the path to salvation.

Life Application

The Kingdom of Heaven Is In Our Hearts

When the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus when the kingdom of God would arrive, He answered, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:20–21). The kingdom of God is already here – it begins when we regard God as the King of our heart. When we conform to His will by obeying His commands and live a life that is pleasing to Him, His kingdom lives within us.

1. Is God the King of My Heart?

We need to understand the importance of having God as King in our lives. Ask yourself daily: "Is God the King of my heart? Is He the King I long for? How can I place God as the King of my heart in my daily life? Let's read the following testimony from a church member and see if you can relate to the writer's struggles to put God as King.

When I was in high school, I craved recognition. I ended up living for admiration from my school and church friends. I performed for the sake of validation. This was a mask that I wore most of the time. My heart felt hard at church, and instead of looking to serve, I wanted others to praise me for what I did. I served out of routine, and ran on empty, spiritually. Outwardly, I was A+, but

inwardly, I was dry, and only served because I wanted people to praise and affirm me. I had forgotten to tap into God's presence and make God the King of my life.

God knew my pain and confusion as a teenager. During a spring spiritual convocation, after listening to a sermon, I began to ache for the knowledge of who I really was. I poured my heart out to God and confessed to Him that all I did was a performance, acted out for the sake of my looks. I was worried and upset about many things, but really, "few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better" (Lk 10:42 NIV).

I realized I had made myself the king, I had been looking for approval, gratification, and security from others, but I never once asked God to be my King. I was consumed by the display I was showing to others. But a divided kingdom cannot stand (Mt 12:25). So, at the end of that spiritual convocation, I pledged my allegiance to my King Jesus Christ. First, I repented of making myself king. The moment I did that, I felt a supernatural warmth, an invitation from God. I immediately knew that He alone can satisfy the longing of the heart, and He alone is the only source of true joy (Ps 16:11). Thank God for turning my heart and affection back to Him. I have now committed myself to drawing close to Him and hearing His word! As a result, I now have security, intimacy, and closeness with the King of my heart.

– Anonymous

Discussion

- What was the writer struggling with?
- How did he/she overcome the struggle and realize God is King?
- Is God the King of your heart?
- What other things could take God's place as king of our hearts?

2. Placing God as King of Our Lives Each Day

God is sovereign over all things. He is a loving, perfect, and righteous King who longs to instruct and guide our lives to be effective witnesses. He wants to teach us how to produce lasting fruit. But despite all that He gives us, we often forget who our King is. Therefore, our priority is to put Him first. If we learn who He is and how to listen to Him, He will shape our identity and direct our lives in every way possible. When we give ourselves to Him fully and follow His commands, we will experience life to the fullest. He is the only one who can give us a future and a purpose that glorifies His name!

The following are some practical life applications that will help you to place God on the throne in your life:

a. First things first! Pray in the morning.

"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." (Mk 1:35)

b. Meditate on God's word day and night. Read it, and deepen your understanding!

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Josh 1:8)

c. Apply God's commands! Learn to stop and choose obedience to God in both word and deed.

"You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess." (Deut 5:33)

Memory Verse

“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.”
(Psalm 145:13)

Meaning

1. Everything on this earth around us will pass away, but as citizens of God’s kingdom, we have a precious hope for our future: to dwell in His everlasting kingdom.
2. While on earth, Jesus Christ was considered by many to be a prophet. But God gave His disciples an understanding of who He truly is: Christ, the Son of the living God. He rules and reigns with absolute authority and sovereignty, and His dominion abides by His principles and values.
3. God’s kingdom is an everlasting one that begins within us. When we accept and believe in Him, our hearts are under His authority, and we are able to walk worthy of God who has called us into His glory.

Conclusion

The Gospels present Jesus from different aspects of His servitude, and together, they show us a clear picture of His true identity: He is the Son of God and the Son of man, our sovereign who served us by giving His life so that we might enter into a place in His kingdom. The importance of this kingdom is made clear in the numerous times it is mentioned throughout the New Testament. But this “kingdom” is not simply some far-off place. It refers to God’s authority over our own hearts, and the kingdom that He has established in us when we are obedient to His will and accept Him as our sovereign.

Lesson 8 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What makes the kingdom of heaven different from earth?
It is an everlasting kingdom that begins within us. It is also under the rule of Jesus Christ, who has absolute authority and sovereignty, and whose dominion abides by His principles and values.
2. What is the kingdom of heaven as revealed by the Gospels?
It is a spiritual kingdom that is ruled by Christ, full of righteousness, peace, and joy.
3. What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of heaven?
Receiving the Holy Spirit is part of the process of our spiritual rebirth. Like the disciples' transformation on the Day of Pentecost, only with the Holy Spirit will we be able to "walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."
4. What can we learn from the details of the church's growth in Acts?
These details teach us all of the factors involved in the church's growth. The apostles' dedication and submission to the Holy Spirit serve as an excellent example for workers today, while records of opposition educated us about the schemes of the devil, and how he disrupts the work of God.
5. In what way is the kingdom of God in our hearts?
It begins when we regard God as the King of our heart. When we conform to His will by obeying His commands and live a life that is pleasing to Him, His kingdom lives within us.
6. What can you change in your life to make God the King of your life each day?
Personal answers.