

Acts 1

1. Who wrote acts, and to whom did he write it? What was the “former book” he wrote before Acts? (1:1)
2. What were some of the “many convincing proofs” that Jesus gave that he was alive after his resurrection? (1:3-4)
3. How did Jesus instruct the apostles after his resurrection, and what was one of his main teachings? (1:1-3) How does Jesus instruct us today?

Kingdom of God, the sovereignty, reign, or rule of God. The term ‘Kingdom of God’ occurs only in the NT, but similar expressions are found in the OT.

OT Background: Numerous biblical traditions hail God as King of Israel (e.g., Deut. 33:5; Judg. 8:23; Isa. 43:15). The author of the books of Chronicles refers to the Davidic throne as God’s kingdom (1 Chron. 17:14; 28:5; 29:11). Various Psalms also acclaim God as the one who reigns over all nations (e.g., Pss. 22:28; 47:2, 7-8). The ‘Enthronement Psalms’ (93; 95-99) emphasize his present sovereignty over all creation, as well as his future coming to judge the earth (96:13; 98:9; cf. Psalm 94).

The prophets likewise saw God as ruler over nations. He would devastate foreign nations for violating the covenant of brotherhood (Amos 1:3-2:3), but he would also punish Israel and Judah for breaking covenant (Amos 2:4-3:2; Isa. 10:1-11). God also would use another nation to restore Israel (Isa. 45:1-13); then, Israel would become ‘a light to the nations,’ that God’s redeeming rule might reach to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6).

Many of the prophets looked for the ‘day’ when God would not only restore the fortunes of his people Israel and Judah but also establish an everlasting era of peace, justice, and mercy. Then, Israel and Judah would again become one kingdom (Jer. 30:3; Ezek. 37:15-22), ruled, perhaps, by a descendant of David (Isa. 9:7; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 37:24-26). There would be a new covenant between God and his people (Hos. 2:16-20; Jer. 31:31-34), and peace would obtain not only among all nations (Isa. 2:2-4; 19:19-25) but throughout the whole creation, among all living things (Hos. 2:18; Isa. 11:6-9; 65:17-25). Such hopes, however, were not fulfilled during the biblical period.

Even before the Exile (ca. 586-538 B.C.), a king of Judah called on God to reassert his sovereignty over the kingdoms of the earth (2 Kings 19:15-19). Jeremiah (e.g., chaps. 1-11) and Eze-

kiel (e.g., chaps. 12-16) viewed the Exile as God's punishment of his people for forsaking him and his covenant; near its end, Second Isaiah (Isa. 40-55) sought to comfort the exiles by assuring them that their time of punishment was over since they had received double for their sins (Isa. 40:2). Yet, for centuries afterward, foreign nations continued to dominate the Jewish people and their homeland. No longer was it clear that God ruled the kingdoms of the earth. Prophets and others promised and longed for the future coming of God's kingdom or rule on earth (e.g., Dan. 2:44; 4:17; cf. 7:27; Obad. 21; Hag. 2:20-23; Zech. 14:9; Tob. 13).

In the NT period, Jews and the emerging Christian communities lived under Roman rule. Moreover, NT writings attest to Satan's present rule on earth. In the temptation scene, the devil declares that he has authority over 'all the kingdoms of the world' (Luke 4:5-6). Satan's minions, the demons, still afflict humankind. Paul understood that the world was subjugated to Satan or evil powers (1 Cor. 2:8; 15:24-27; 2 Cor. 4:4), while the Fourth Gospel considers Satan 'the ruler of this world' (John 12:31; 14:30). The most explicit expression of this understanding is in 1 John 5:19: 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one.' The author of Revelation identified the evil ruler of the present age as Rome (chaps. 13; 17-18), linked, perhaps, with Satan, who was to continue his reign of terror on earth a while longer (chaps. 12; 20).

In the NT: The great majority of references to the Kingdom of God in the NT are in the first three Gospels. Here, the basic message of Jesus (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15) and his disciples (Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:9, 11) was that the Kingdom of God had come near. Jesus taught his followers to pray for its coming (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2). When it came, God's will would be done on earth (Matt. 6:10). Only those who, in the meantime, lived in accordance with God's will might hope to enter it (Matt. 5:3-10; 7:21-23). (Matthew's Gospel frequently uses the term 'Kingdom of Heaven,' while Mark and Luke always use 'Kingdom of God.' 'Heaven' in these instances is a circumlocution—a way of referring to God without using his name, which Jews and Jewish Christians believed too holy to pronounce or even write. Thus, 'Kingdom of Heaven' and 'Kingdom of God' are identical in meaning. We do not know which expression Jesus himself may have used.) According to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God and the Son of man would come within the lifetime of some who heard him (Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27; Matt. 24:32-36; Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33), and, at the Last Supper, he vowed not to drink wine again until he did so in the coming kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Nevertheless, many interpreters read certain of the parables (e.g., Mark 4:30-32; Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20-21) and other sayings (e.g., Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20; Luke 17:20-21) to mean that Jesus believed the Kingdom of God was already present in some way: in his person, as the one who would be Messiah in the coming kingdom, in his power to exorcise demons, or perhaps, in the response of faith by those who repented and changed their lives.

The Kingdom of God was a central topic of apostolic preaching in Acts (e.g., 8:12; 19:8) and is mentioned frequently in Paul's Letters. Paul writes of inheriting the Kingdom of God in the future (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21), but also hints that it might somehow be present in the life of Christian communities (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20). Those 'in Christ' are already new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), yet both Christians still alive and those who will have died when Christ comes must then be transformed, since 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:42-54). Like the Jesus of John's Gospel who promised believers eternal life in the heavenly mansions (John 14:1-3), Paul looked for the new life of the transformed in a heavenly commonwealth (Phil. 3:20-21). The author of Revelation looked for the establishment of God's kingdom both in heaven and on earth (11:15; 12:10), albeit a new heaven and a new earth (21:1). In the end, new Jerusalem would come down from heaven (Rev. 21:2, 10), and God and the Lamb would 'reign for ever and ever' (22:5). All this, the writer promised his contemporaries, would take place soon, 'for the time is near' (22:6-7, 10, 12).

It is noteworthy that the term 'Kingdom of God' is almost totally absent from the Gospel of John, occurring only in 3:3, 5; apparently, the author reinterpreted the concept in terms of his own interest in 'eternal life.'

4. Why did Jesus tell the apostles to stay in Jerusalem? (1:4-5) What would happen to them, and what would they do after it? (1:8) Has this happened to you, and are you doing what they did?

5. How long was Jesus with the apostles after his resurrection, and how did he leave them? (1:3,9,12) How would you have felt as Jesus left you?

6. How will Jesus return to earth? (1:10-11) How does this make you feel? Is it important for us to know when? (1:7) What is important for us to know concerning the time period when Jesus will return? (See Luke 21:8, 34-36)

7. After Jesus left them, what did the apostles and other early believers do? (1:13-14) How much of this do you do?

8. Who were among the early believers? (1:13-14) What does this tell us?

9. Between the time Jesus ascended to heaven and Pentecost, how many Christians were there? (1:15) Why is this number significant?
10. What is one important reason given in Acts 1 why Judas betrayed Jesus? (1:16-20) What does this tell us about the Bible, and, in turn, the place it should have in our life?
11. What did the apostles do since Judas was gone? (1:21-26) Do you think this was correct or not?
12. What are the qualifications for an apostle that are given in this chapter? What is the chief purpose of an apostle? (1:21-22,25)