

The Reoffer of the Kingdom

A Study in Acts Chapter 3

*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.*

~Acts 3:19 NKJV

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Acts Chapter 3

What did the Apostle Peter and the Apostle John know about the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Church which had been formed on the day of Pentecost? This is a difficult question. We know that precious Church truths were later revealed by the Apostle Paul in his epistles, truths which were not understood by the twelve apostles at the beginning of the Church age. Peter was the chief spokesman for the disciples, as we see in the early chapters of Acts. His name, along with the other eleven, will be enshrined forever in the precious stone foundations of the New Jerusalem representing the body of Christ. Yet, Peter was in profound ignorance of God's plan and program for His Church, the body and bride of the Lord Jesus Christ. God, in His wisdom, progressively revealed His truth to His people. On the evening before He was crucified, He told His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, **but ye cannot bear them now**" (John 16:12). There are some truths that must come later, at just the right time when God's people are able to bear them and understand them. Even in our individual lives, God waits until we are ready to receive certain truths. Not all is given at once. At the right time, when we are ready, God will make these things known to His servants.

Acts 3:1

Peter and John went up to the temple for prayer. The ninth hour (Jewish time being reckoned from sunrise) would have been 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon. This was also the time of the evening sacrifice and huge crowds would have been present, especially during festival times on the Jewish calendar. The early Christians continued to worship and pray at the temple. These Jewish believers were members of the body and bride of Christ, but the distinctive aspects of this new relationship were not yet understood. The book of Acts is a transitional book as the believers were adjusting to new truths and slowly making the necessary transition from Judaism to Biblical Christianity. The entire book of Hebrews was written to help the Jewish believers understand the new economy. In just four decades the temple would be destroyed and the Jewish people would be killed (1.1 million of them according to Josephus) and scattered. In the early chapters of Acts the great majority of believers were Jewish. As time went on Gentile believers became the clear majority. Today when a Church has a Jewish believer it is a wonderful but rare exception, since most believers have not descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

As the events of chapter three unfold, God was able to attract a huge crowd to hear Peter's highly significant message. Peter and John went together as a team. Working as a pair seemed to be an established guideline from God on how to penetrate difficult mission fields. Dr. Whitcomb had the privilege of serving for many years on two different foreign mission boards. He soon discovered that experienced missionaries find it most helpful to operate with a coworker. In some cases, this could be the missionary's wife, but sometimes it could be another man. The two would be accountable before the Lord and to one another, praying for each other and encouraging one another in the work. If one gets sick or if one comes home on furlough, the whole work does not collapse. The Lord Jesus sent out teams of two presenting the gospel of the Kingdom. On one occasion He sent out 35 gospel teams (Luke 10:1). In the great tribulation there will be 144,000 Jewish witnesses probably going forth two by two in 72,000 gospel teams, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations

prior to our Lord's return to this earth (Matt. 24:14). So also in Acts 3 Peter and John went forth together as a gospel team for the glory of Christ.

John was the disciple closest to Jesus, and Peter was the most outspoken disciple. There were times recorded in the Gospels when impetuous Peter would speak first and think later, to his own detriment and for our learning (Matt. 16:22; 17:4; 26:33; John 13:8-9). In the book of Acts, however, we see Peter's tongue controlled by the Spirit of God. He was a mighty spokesman for the truth, both at Pentecost and also here in Acts 3.

In Acts 3, as at Pentecost, Peter spoke to a vast crowd. His purpose was to proclaim the risen Christ, to remind the Jews of their great sin of rejecting and killing Him, and then to graciously reoffer to them the earthly thousand year Kingdom that had been predicted from ages past. This was the very Kingdom which John the Baptist and the Lord had announced as being "at hand" or "near" (Matt 3:2; 4:17,23). This same offer of the Kingdom was delivered by the twelve (Matt. 10:1,6-7) and by the seventy (Luke 10:1,9). The nation responded negatively by rejecting and crucifying their King. They said, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15) and "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25). Oh the tragedy of a self-cursed nation!

In light of these sad facts, many Christians today suppose that the nation Israel has been ultimately and finally rejected by God. They embrace "Replacement Theology" which teaches that God is through with Israel due to the nation's wicked unbelief, and that Israel has been replaced in God's program by the Church. However, a careful examination of Acts chapter 3 will reveal that God graciously reoffered His Kingdom to Israel, even after this nation had publically and officially rejected their Messiah and crucified Him. Many cannot understand why God would bother with these Jews any longer, but we must not forget that God made an unconditional covenant commitment with this nation. The Abrahamic covenant was given in detailed language and couched in specific terms, and repeated through the centuries. God does not intend to break His promises or disannul His covenant with the nation Israel (Rom. 11:27-29).

The same is true of God's promises today: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). The question is not whether we are worthy of such a promise. A close examination of our lives would reveal just how unworthy and undeserving we are of God's gracious provisions for time and eternity. But God is faithful to keep His Word. The same principle exposes the folly of the partial rapture view, a view which says that only worthy Christians go up at the rapture. But how many of us are really worthy? This should more accurately be called the "No Rapture View" because none of us would make it! Our participation in the rapture has nothing to do with our personal worthiness, but it has everything to do with the sovereign love, mercy, grace, wisdom and promises of a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

Acts 3:2

This man was crippled from birth; his condition was not due to an injury at some later point in his life. When Peter and John dealt with him he was more than 40 years old (Acts 4:22). He had lived four decades in this crippled condition. He had never walked in his entire life. He had to be carried by others every day. His case was hopeless. There was not a doctor on earth who could help him. According to his lot in life, he was forced to be a beggar. It was obligatory for Jews to give alms to the poor and helpless, and many of them did this religiously, some wanting to put their own

righteousness on display (Matt. 6:1-4). Today many governments have programs and benefits for disabled people, but this was not so in the days of Christ. Helpless people depended upon the mercy and compassion of others.

The eastern gate, called in the Talmud *Nicanor's*, or the *great gate*, was made of Corinthian brass and was regarded as the principal gate on account of its greater height (being 50 cubits) and width (40 cubits) and from its being more richly decorated with precious metals. It is undoubtedly the “gate of the temple which is called Beautiful” (Acts 3:2).¹

From where he lay the lame man could contemplate the beauty of that gate. It is said to have been made of Corinthian bronze wrought with such rich ornamentation that it far exceeded in value gates plated with silver and set with gold.²

The exact location of the gate called “Beautiful” is a matter of dispute among Bible scholars. However, no believing heart would dispute that what God did at this location was indeed something very beautiful and awe-inspiring.

Acts 3:3

Peter and John were about to go into Herod's temple courtyard through the gate called “Beautiful.” It was at that moment they entered into a divinely-arranged encounter with this man. The beggar saw Peter and John, asked for a handout and was hopeful that they would respond in a positive way. They stopped and he had their attention, which was an encouraging sign to him. “Alms” is something (usually money) given freely to relieve the poor or the helpless.

Acts 3:4-5

Peter and John fixed their gaze upon this man. “Look on us!” They had his undivided attention. Peter was filled with the Spirit. He knew what he was about to do. God was leading him toward the accomplishment of this miracle. The lame man was hopeful, expecting to receive something from these kind men. He was not expecting to be healed. He was probably not even expecting silver and gold, but perhaps some lesser coinage. Beggars cannot be choosers.³

¹R. K. Harrison, editor, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1263 (discussion under Herod's Temple).

²John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 66.

³Some faith healers often blame their failures by saying that the sick person did not have enough faith. They claim that if he had believed, then he would have been healed. The lame man of Acts 3 did not believe he would be healed; he was not expecting this. The Lord healed him anyway. There were other occasions when the Lord healed everyone, whether they believed or not (Matt. 12:15; compare Acts 5:16). For a discussion as to whether this beggar had faith to be healed, see under Acts 3:16.

Acts 3:6

Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none.” Such a statement is evidence to some that Peter could not have been the first pope! Catholicism through the centuries has been known for its lavish cathedrals, with the affluent Catholic leadership prospering materially, while the common people are left to struggle in poverty. Thomas Aquinas, it is told, entered the presence of Innocent II., before whom a large sum of money was spread out. The Pope observed, “You see, the Church is no longer in that age in which she said, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’” “True, holy father,” replied Aquinas; “neither can she any longer say to the lame, ‘Rise up and walk.’” How tragic that in the name of religion men have enriched themselves at the expense of meeting the true needs of spiritually impoverished people. Not just Catholics, but Christian evangelists, well-known Christian TV preachers, and mega-church leaders are often extremely wealthy, and yet very suspect in terms of their personal integrity, motives, and honesty before God.

Peter then commanded this man to rise up and walk “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” The use of the term “Nazareth” was a reminder that the Saviour was despised and rejected of men (Isa. 53:3). “He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:23). Though not born there (as his enemies mistakenly supposed, see John 7:52), the Lord Jesus grew up in Nazareth and spent most of His years in this Galilean village. The town of Nazareth did not have a good reputation. When Philip spoke of “Jesus of Nazareth” Nathanael immediately said, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Philip, instead of debating and arguing the point, displayed a marvelous understanding of presuppositional apologetics. He simply said, “Come and see!” Come and see and you will discover the self-authentication of the true identity of this Jesus of Nazareth. God’s powerful Word by the Holy Spirit, confirmed by sign miracles and by the witness of John the Baptist, in light of the fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies—all of these pointed to who the Lord really was. Therefore, it wasn’t long before Nathanael gave this amazing profession of faith: “Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49).⁴

⁴What is presuppositional apologetics? When explaining their beliefs, Christians often feel they must first prove the Bible or prove the existence of God or help the unbeliever solve every apparent discrepancy found in the Scriptures. This approach reveals that they do not yet understand the Bible’s approach, known as presuppositional apologetics. If we start off believing the Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 18:30; Proverbs 30:5), then we use it as our axiom. An axiom (often used in logic) is a proposition that is not susceptible to proof or disproof; its truth is assumed. The Bible takes this stance, assuming God’s existence to be true and not something to be proven (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 3:14; Revelation 1:8). The battle is not over evidence but over philosophical starting points: presuppositions. As Christians, we should never put away our axiom—the Bible—when discussing truth with others. This would be like a soldier going into battle without any armor or weapons. The prophets and the apostles never tried to prove God’s existence. They started by assuming God’s existence, and they always reasoned from Scripture and simply proclaimed truth (Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19). By using the Word of God, we are actually pitting the unbeliever against God and not our own fallible thinking. Remember, the battle is the Lord’s, and it is the Holy Spirit, not us, who must do the convincing and convicting! Only He can open blind eyes.

Acts 3:7

The lame man was told by Peter, “We do not have money, but we have a Name!” At first the man may have been disappointed but seconds later he was rejoicing. Peter took him by the right hand, gave him a lift and immediately he was cured of his life-long handicap. Luke, the beloved physician, gives an amazing description of this healing miracle. Two common characteristics of divine healings were on display: 1) This miracle took place immediately and instantaneously. There was no need for any prolonged period of convalescence or recuperation. 2) The lame man did not need prolonged physical therapy, nor did he need training to learn how to walk and leap. The restoration of health was perfect and complete. He was given perfect soundness [health] in the presence of all the people (Acts 3:16). His feet and ankle bones received the strength which was lacking for over 40 years.⁵

Acts 3:8

This man not only walked, but jumped and leaped while he gave glory to God and praised Him. He was grateful to Peter but he did not praise Peter. He gave glory to God. This man had been crippled from birth. He had never learned to walk, much less leap. But in seconds God not only healed this man but gave him the physical coordination to be able to jump and leap! A remarkable miracle indeed! This man was now physically qualified to enter the temple area (see Lev. 21:18).

Those Jews looking for Messiah’s Kingdom were to expect such miracles because the prophet Isaiah had predicted that the Kingdom would be inaugurated with spectacular healings: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:5-6). John the Baptist had trouble understanding how he could be in prison if Christ were the true Messiah. The Lord Jesus pointed him to this very passage in Isaiah (Matt. 11:2-6). Here in Acts 3 Messiah-like Kingdom activities were taking place by way of Christ’s representatives, Peter and John. These activities were paving the way for a reoffer of the Kingdom to the very nation that had rejected its King.

As marvelous as this miracle was, the Lord also promised Peter and John and other believers that they would do “greater works than these” (John 14:12). People healed temporarily from physical ailments are not worthy to be compared to people who are eternally transformed by regeneration through hearing and responding to the precious self-authenticating Word of God. The gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16).

Acts 3:9-10

The effect this healing had on the crowd was spectacular. There could have been hundreds of people who witnessed this miracle. If they did not see the actual miracle, they certainly heard about it and saw the result of God’s working. For years this man was a fixture at this temple gate and a very familiar sight. People recognized him and knew him (compare Acts 3:16, “whom ye see and know”). Many had given alms for his support. When they saw him leaping and praising God “they knew that it was he” (Acts 3:10). They knew a great miracle had taken place. Every leap confirmed it. They were filled with wonder and amazement at what God had done. It was a miracle that no one could deny. And word quickly spread even to those who were not present for this spectacular

⁵An old preacher said, “The crippled beggar asked for *alms* and he got *legs*.”

healing. This miracle was publicly known “to all them that dwell in Jerusalem” and the Jewish leaders could not deny it (Acts 4:16).

The world is always astonished at the evidence of new life in Christ. Here is a man, a woman, who comes into the blessing of salvation. Suddenly all is changed. That person is missing from his old haunts. The bar, the poolroom, the racetrack know him no more. He is found instead in the company of the people of God, in the place where God’s saved ones gather to sing the praises of the Lord Jesus. He is walking new paths and praising the living God. The miracle of salvation is intended to provide astonishment.⁶

Acts 3:11

Solomon’s Porch was a portico in the outer corridor of the temple. It was the porch that was adjacent to the Court of the Gentiles on the eastern side of the temple. This was the same location where the Lord Jesus had spoken about Himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10:23). The man formerly lame came to this location leaping and praising God. The crowd ran to this same location in utter wonder. God certainly got their full attention! The miracle perfectly served to prepare the people for Peter’s powerful message that they were about to hear. The formerly crippled man was not a preacher, but God wonderfully used him to draw a large crowd.

Notice that the healed man “held” Peter and John. He was clinging to them and did not wish to be separated from them. There was a precious bond between him and the men who were used as God’s instruments. So also today there is often an amazing bond between the sinner and the person who leads him to the Lord. May every winner of souls take advantage of this close relationship by following up with the new convert by way of sound Bible instruction and diligent discipleship training. Winning a soul to Christ is not the end; it is just the beginning of a vital training process.

Acts 3:12

Peter, as at Pentecost, became the spokesman. He addressed this huge crowd of Israelites, descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, God’s chosen people (Deut. 7:6-8). Peter took no credit for what had happened. The man was not healed because of the power of Peter and John. They had no power to heal the lame. Nor was the healing due to their own personal holiness. God and God alone was responsible for this marvelous deed and Peter gave Him all the glory. God’s servants are merely His instruments and His vessels. God must do the work, and God must get all the credit. God’s man must always point to the Lord and not to self. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5).

Acts 3:13

God’s glorification of His Servant is wondrously described in Isaiah 52:13: “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled [lifted up], and be very high.”

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was also the God and Father of His Son [Servant], the Lord

⁶John Phillips, *Exploring Acts*, p. 69

Jesus Christ, the very One whom the Jews handed over to Pilate (even though Pilate made every effort to release Him).⁷ In reading Luke's account of the crucifixion we see that three times Pilate tried to release Jesus (Luke 23:4,13-22), but the Jews in their Satanic rage and hatred for Him would not allow Him to be released, but rather called for His crucifixion. The godless Roman governor knew Christ was innocent (John 18:38; 19:4; Matt. 27:19), but he caved in to the pressure of the Jewish crowd, and tried to wash his hands of the deed (Matt. 27:24). The Jewish people took full responsibility for what they did: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:25).

Acts 3:14

The enormity of the sin of the Jewish people is emphasized in this verse. They rejected the most holy and most perfect Person who ever came to this earth, and chose to release a guilty murderer instead. They **denied** the holy and righteous One and **desired** Barabbas. This is full human depravity put on display for all to see. Some day those who **denied** the holy and righteous One will bend their knee and **confess** that Jesus Christ is God to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11). However, if they failed to confess Christ in this life it will be too late for salvation.

He is called God's "holy One" in Psalm 16:10. He was the only permanently holy human who ever walked this earth. Adam and Eve were holy (set apart from sin) for a short amount of time prior to the Fall. Christ was the thrice Holy One described by Isaiah (Isaiah 6:3; John 12:41). He was the Holy One at His birth (Luke 1:35) and throughout His earthly life and ministry (Heb. 7:26). It was this Holy One that the Jewish people exchanged for a notable murderer.

He is also described as the just or the righteous One, who was condemned in the place of a guilty man deserving of death. "Christ has once suffered for sins, the righteous One for the unrighteous ones, that He might bring us to God" (2 Pet. 3:18). If any person knew that Jesus died in his place it was certainly Barabbas. He should have been and deserved to be on that center cross. He was released because Another took his place. Every person needs to see himself in the same situation: "I deserve the death penalty (Rom. 6:23), but there is One who died in my place (1 Cor. 15:3) who bore the penalty for me" (1 Peter 2:24). The name "Barabbas" means "son of the father." The true Son of the Father took his place on that center cross!⁸

Acts 3:15

Not only did the Jewish people deny Christ before Pilate, but they killed the Prince of Life. The word "Prince" means "originator, author, founder." He was the source of life (John 1:4; 5:26; 14:6; 1 John 5:11; 1 John 5:20). Every person in that crowd owed his life to Jesus Christ, the life-giving Creator. This word is used of Jesus in Hebrews 12:2 who is the "Author of our faith." How then can the Author and Prince of life be killed? The God of life cannot die. At the incarnation, He added

⁷The word "Son" in this verse (and in verse 26 and Acts 4:27) is not the common word for "Son," but it is a term that can mean either "Son" or "Servant." If the meaning here is "Servant," then it is a reminder that Jesus is the Servant of Jehovah spoken of often in Isaiah chapters 40-53. It is the same Greek word used in Isaiah in the Septuagint for the "Servant of the LORD."

⁸For more observations on Barabbas, see Special Topic #1.

a human nature to His divine nature and became the God-man for the first time in the history of the universe. God cannot die, but the God-man could die and did die for our sins. He had to assume a human body and a human nature by virgin conception in order to be able to die. Being able to die was not enough; He had to be willing to die. So the partaking of a human nature along with His dedication to the will of the Father, as well as the willful rejection of the Jews, brought about the death of the Prince of Life.⁹

Apparent defeat soon burst forth in victory, as God the Father raised up the Prince of Life from the dead, and Peter and John were witnesses of this resurrection. The enemies of Christ hated the message of the resurrection (Acts 4:2). For three short days they thought that they had gotten rid of the One they despised. However, it was impossible that the Prince of Life could have been permanently held by the grips of death (Acts 2:24).

Acts 3:16

A dead Savior did not heal this man. Faith in the name of a dead Savior is useless (compare 1 Cor. 15:17). The risen and glorified Christ was responsible for this marvelous healing. The very One they crucified was alive and well and performing miracles!

The reason for the healing of this man was found in the Name of the risen Christ and faith in that Name. Christ did it, but faith in Christ was also a factor. This presents an interpretive difficulty. Many assume that the one who exercised faith in Christ was the lame man. However, as seen in verses 3-6, this man was not expecting to be healed at all. He was not looking for a miracle; he was a beggar looking for a handout. If he were not even expecting to be healed, then how could he have exercised faith in the Name of Christ? One possibility is that he exercised faith seconds before he was healed. As soon as Peter said, "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk," then the crippled man responded in faith.

Another possibility is that at an earlier time this man believed that Jesus Christ would heal him. This man was a fixture at the temple gate, and the Lord often frequented the temple. Surely the lame man had heard of Jesus' healing miracles, perhaps even witnessed some of them. In the plan and purpose of God it was not time to heal this man yet. But perhaps this man believed that the day would come when he would be healed in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, as so many others had been.

One further possibility is that the faith mentioned in verse 16 was not the lame man's faith at all, but rather the faith of Peter, the instrument God used in this miracle. Verse 16 does not specifically tell us who it was that exercised faith. In reading verses 4 and 6 it was obvious that Peter believed that this man would be healed in the Name of Jesus Christ. Peter somehow knew that God wanted this man healed and believed it would happen. It is not unreasonable to say that it was Peter and John's faith in the Name of Christ that resulted in this wondrous event. Many understand the gift of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 as a reference to miracle-working faith or wonder-working faith. This gift is

⁹"Peter was presenting a series of paradoxes. Although Jesus was a servant, God exalted Him. He was their deliverer, yet the nation delivered Him to Pilate. They rejected the Holy and Righteous One in favor of an unholy, unjust murderer. Now he comes to the greatest paradox of all. They put to death the Prince of life, while asking for the release of one who took life" (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Commentary, Acts 1-12*, pages 109-110).

listed along with the gift of healing (v. 9) and the gift of miracle working (v. 10). It seems that Peter was given a special gift of faith to know when and where and with whom a healing or miracle should take place. This is illustrated in Acts 3 where Peter was convinced that this man would be healed in the Name of Christ. This faith did not originate with Peter, but it came to him by Jesus Christ, as verse 16 teaches.

Acts 3:17

Peter told his huge audience that when they killed the Prince of Life, they did it in ignorance, and the same was true of their leaders. But did they not know full well exactly what they were doing? And did not Christ demonstrate to them exactly who He was by His words and His works, so that they should have been without excuse? And did not the prophets predict the very things which happened (compare verse 18)? The Jew's concept of the Messiah was deficient. Most were looking for a mighty conquering King who would deliver them from the hated yoke of the Romans. Many sincerely believed that Christ was an imposter and not the true Messiah. Some may have even believed that they were doing God a service by killing Him. Their sin was great, and without doubt they were culpable, and yet the fact that they did it in ignorance suggests that God was graciously waiting to forgive them, if they should repent in view of further light.

There was no excuse for the Jews. They were looking for a Messiah, but they wanted a *militant* Messiah, one who would smash the power of Rome and make Jerusalem the capital of a new world empire. They were not interested in a *meek* Messiah. What they were looking for was a *ruler*; God sent them a *Redeemer*. They wanted a *sovereign*; God sent them a *Savior*. Their Scriptures prophesied both, but they blindly overlooked such references to the Sufferer as were to be found in Psalm 22, Psalm 69, and Isaiah 53.¹⁰

Though it is hard to understand their ignorance, we must abide by very clear Scriptural statements to this effect, not only in this verse but elsewhere. While on the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Paul taught that there were hidden things which were not known, "which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:7-8). Paul knew this very well, because he was one of the ignorant ones! He gave this testimony: "Who was previously a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because **I did it ignorantly** in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13). Peter wanted to offer mercy and grace to the Jewish people who had acted in ignorance.

Only God has the ultimate measuring stick of how guilty each of us is in His sight, based on the light and opportunities that have been given to us. How thankful we should be that God is slow to anger and very patient even with people who seem to be full of guilt and without excuse! "We may think that Peter's words were surprisingly lenient to people like Caiaphas and his fellow-members of the chief-priestly families, who were so determined to have Jesus put to death. But however that may be, here is a proclamation of divine generosity, offering a free pardon to all who took part in the

¹⁰John Philipps, *Exploring Acts*, p. 75.

death of Christ, if only they realize their error, confess their sin, and turn to God in repentance.”¹¹

God’s grace shown to those who killed His Son is beautifully and personally applied by John Newton in this testimonial poem:

Alas! I knew not what I did,
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I my Lord have slain.

A second look He gave, which said:
“I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom shed;
I die, that thou mayest live.”

Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue;
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.

With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live through Him I killed.

Acts 3:18

Peter once boldly confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, but even he, at the time, had a major problem with the fact that Christ must suffer and die (Matt. 16:16,21-22). God had taught Peter many things, and Peter learned that there was a whole body of Messianic prophecies which spoke of the Messiah’s suffering and death. We think immediately of Isaiah 53 (the sin bearer), Psalm 22 (an amazing description of crucifixion), Daniel 9 (Messiah must be “cut off” and a chronology given as to when this would happen), Zechariah 12 (Israel will look on the One who was pierced) and many others. It is true that the prophets had much more to say about the Messiah’s triumphant rule and reign, and even the Lord’s disciples had been profoundly ignorant of the fact of His suffering and death and were shocked and offended when it all happened. This is illustrated by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “We trusted that He would be the One to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). The Lord Jesus had to take them on a trip through all the prophets to show them that before Christ could enter into His glory He must first suffer these things (Luke 24:26). And if His disciples stumbled over these things, how much more the unbelieving Jews of that day!

God used wicked and ignorant men to fulfill His all-wise purposes which climaxed in having His beloved Son suffer and die on the cross. The men who took part in the crucifixion (Jews, rulers, Roman soldiers, etc.) had little idea that they were fulfilling scores of prophecies given hundreds of

¹¹F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), p. 90.

years earlier! Men's wicked deeds will never thwart the accomplishment of God's plans. "Hath [God] said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). God can use the wicked acts of sinful men to fulfill His own purposes. Even the wrath of men can end up being for God's praise (Psalm 76:10).

Acts 3:19a

When the Kingdom was originally announced by John the Baptist and by Christ and by the disciples, the public delighted in the fact that "The Kingdom of heaven was at hand (near)" but they were not thrilled by the command which preceded this good news: "Repent!" Yet, consistently in our Lord's teaching, repentance was essential: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5). Peter preached repentance at Pentecost (Acts 2:38) and he did so again here at Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:19). The nation that had recently killed the Prince of Life needed to start thinking differently and have a drastic change of mind. Their distorted thinking about God and about man and about sin and about the Saviour all had to change. They needed to line up with God's thinking as found in His Word and as proclaimed by His apostles. They also needed to be converted, that is, to turn to God. They had been going in the wrong direction and needed to make a drastic about-face (compare 1 Thess. 1:9).

Sins leave a permanent stain and it is wonderful to know that God has made provision for all of our sins to be blotted out and totally forgiven (Psalm 51:9; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22). "Blotted out" means "wiped away" as ink would be wiped off a document (Col. 2:14). Notice that water baptism is not mentioned as a condition for receiving such forgiveness.¹²

Acts 3:19b-21

What would God do if the nation should repent? 1) He would send times of refreshing, or wonderful rest for His people (verse 29). 2) He would send to this earth His Son Jesus Christ who is presently in heaven awaiting His return; there can be no Kingdom without the King (verses 20-21). 3) He would restore all things in full harmony with all that the prophets had predicted about the coming Kingdom (verse 21). All these are descriptions of Christ's future Kingdom.

According to Acts 3:20, God the Father will send Jesus Christ to this earth to establish His Kingdom. This event is yet future and must await Israel's repentance. There are many Christians today who hold to a preterist view of prophecy. A preterist is one who believes that most Biblical prophecies were fulfilled **in the past**. They teach that Christ came in His Kingdom in 70 A.D., the time of the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. They believe that most prophecies regarding the Lord's second coming and Kingdom were fulfilled at that time and they will have no future fulfillment. See *Special Topic #3* at the end of this chapter entitled, *Ten Things That Must Take Place When Christ Comes in His Kingdom*, showing that the establishment of Christ's Kingdom could not have taken place in 70 A.D.

It is important to understand the complexities of the book of Acts in relation to God's two programs, one with respect to the nation Israel which in this chapter involved the reoffer of the Kingdom, and the other with respect to the Church, a called-out body of believers eventually made up of saints from

¹²See our notes on Acts 2:38.

all nations. One program would be genuinely offered but then postponed in light of Israel's rejection (climaxing with Stephen's murder in Acts 7). The other program, the Church, started obscurely, but became more and more understood as time went on. The Lord knew what He was doing from the beginning, but His people had to gradually learn these things.

The Lord predicted the future building of the Church in Matthew 16:18, and at that time Peter and the other disciples had little idea what the Lord meant. The same was true of what the Lord said about the Church in Matthew 18:17. The Lord had much that He wanted to teach the disciples about the Church but they were not able to bear these truths prior to the cross, and even for some time after the resurrection (John 16:12). Church truths, in germ form, were presented by the Saviour in the Upper Room Discourse (John chapters 13-17), but even these teachings were not fully understood by the disciples at the time.

The unveiling of the new Church program would gradually take place as these truths would be revealed in large part by the Apostle Paul. Paul taught that both Jews and Gentiles without distinction would become full-fledged members of the body and bride of Christ (Ephesians chapter 3, etc.). Later in Acts it would be revealed by James that God's new program would involve God visiting the nations to call out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14) and that this would be followed by God's Kingdom program detailed by all the prophets (Acts 15:15-16). Early on, Peter struggled with these things, as did many of his fellow disciples. It required a drastic object lesson in Acts 10 to help Peter understand a basic fact that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles. Later in his life, Peter confessed that there were many things which Paul wrote which were "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16), undoubtedly including many things that related to Church truth.

Even today a vast number of Christians are seriously confused about God's present and future programs. Many fail to make proper Biblical distinctions between God's Kingdom program for Israel which He has never abandoned, and God's Church program which is taking place today. Sadly, a large segment of Christendom today believes that God will never fulfill His Kingdom promises to Israel, but that God has replaced Israel with the Church. Others involved with Messianic Judaism, while fully embracing Christ as Messiah, nevertheless have not fully grasped what it means to be members of the body of Christ. May God help us to rightly discern what God is doing in our world today and what God has promised to do in our world tomorrow. He will never cease to be faithful to His Word!

What is meant by the "times of refreshing" in verse 19? The term means "to make cool, to refresh," and suggests rest and relaxation. Theologically it is a term that refers to the Millennial Reign of Christ when the entire world will be at rest and refreshed by Christ's idyllic and righteous rule. Satan with his demons will be banished from earth. Only believers will enter the Kingdom; all unbelievers will be judged. Christ will institute a perfect government because He will be the perfect Ruler, and all three vital branches of government (the executive, the legislative, the judicial) will be found operating perfectly in the One who will be our Judge, our Lawgiver and our King (Isaiah 33:22). It will be a refreshing day of peace without the threat of any wars (Isa. 2:4). Even the animal Kingdom will coexist peacefully (Isa. 11:6-9). It will be times of refreshing indeed! The refreshing, however, cannot come without repentance on the part of the Jewish nation. No repentance means no refreshing, and for two thousand years there has been no refreshing.

The Church cannot bring in the Kingdom. God has made it very clear that the Kingdom cannot come until Israel as a nation repents, and this will happen one future day. The nation will repent, change

its attitude towards God, and will bless the One who comes in the Name of the Lord (Matt. 23:39). This national repentance is described in the Bible in such places as Zechariah 12:10-14, where the nation will recognize that they crucified their Messiah and will deeply mourn because of this. When Christ came to earth the first time, the nation “received Him not” (John 1:11), but when He comes the second time, the nation will embrace Him, and God will turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26). God is waiting in heaven until this national repentance takes place (Acts 3:21).

What are the “times of restitution of all things”? The word “restitution” means “to set in order again, to restore, bring back to a former condition.” This Greek word was a medical term meaning complete restoration to health.¹³ This restoration can only refer to the Kingdom, when God will restore this world to order by way of the righteous and just reign of His Son. What a remarkable restoration that will be, as the world system dominated by Satan will be restored to a world Kingdom dominated by Christ Jesus the Prince of Peace. The related verb is used in Matthew 17:11 where Jesus predicted that Elijah would come and “restore all things.” The same verb is also used when the disciples asked, “Will You restore again the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:7). The Kingdom will be brought back and restored publicly, visibly, globally and spectacularly, but it cannot happen until the nation Israel repents. The postmillennialists believe that the Church will gradually improve society, God’s laws will be implemented, the gospel will be triumphant, evil will be overcome by good, and believers will bring in the Kingdom. There is one major problem however. The Bible is clear that world conditions will get worse and worse prior to the Lord’s coming (2 Timothy 3, especially verse 13), climaxing in the great tribulation when men will shake their fists at God and refuse to repent (Rev. 9:20-21). No Biblical description of the last days gives any reason to believe that conditions will get better and better as we approach the end of the age. In fact our Lord said, “Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find [the] faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). The grammar of this question expects a negative answer. Man will never bring in the Kingdom; only God can do that. The times of refreshing must come “from the presence of the Lord.” Kingdom conditions can only be brought about by the King.

Alva J. McClain argues that there were two offers of the Kingdom made to Israel, one prior to the cross and one after Pentecost. The passage which sets this forth is found in Matthew 22:1-7 and is couched in a parable:

During His earthly ministry our Lord had specifically foretold of such a reoffer. The prediction is recorded in Matthew 22:1-7, clothed in the form of a parable of “the Kingdom of heaven,” in which a certain king makes a marriage feast for his son (vs. 2). Two calls are sent out by the king, both addressed to a special group of people who had previously been invited, “them that were bidden” (vs. 3, perfect tense), a reference to the original and abiding call of this nation through Abraham to enjoy the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom, and renewed over and over again in the Old Testament. The *first* call of the parable was issued by our Lord through His disciples (Matt. 10:1-15; Luke 10:1-9), directed exclusively to the chosen nation; and it was officially rejected (Matt. 22:3). Then there was to be a *second* call announcing that the dinner is now “prepared” and “all things are ready” (vs. 4)—certainly a reference

¹³A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, volume 3, p. 47. See also the related idea of “regeneration” (renewal) in Matthew 19:28, as the Kingdom of Christ will bring about a new birth and a new order for the entire world.

to our Lord's finished work of redemption at Calvary. Such a call could not have gone forth until after the Resurrection. But again the call is rejected, this time by actions which help to identify it in Biblical history: some Jews would turn away with contemptuous indifference, according to the parable, while others would mistreat and kill the messengers (vs. 6). This points to the post-Pentecostal offer, as described in the Book of Acts, when the officials of Israel did exactly that. During the gospel period not an official disciple of Christ was killed by the Jews, but during the period of the Acts the terrible persecution and killing of the messengers began. And there is no *third* call for this generation of Israel, but judgment falls: the King sends forth his armies, destroys the murderers, and burns their city—a parabolic prediction of the awful destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (vs. 7).¹⁴

Other Bible scholars see the parable in Luke 13:6-9 as teaching that the Kingdom will be reoffered in the book of Acts:

For three years [the Lord's public ministry] the owner of the fig tree sought fruit. Finding none, he says to the vinedresser to cut it down. But the vinedresser asks for one more year [the early chapters in Acts] to apply what was necessary to induce fruit-bearing, and if no result, then cut it down. The vinedresser points to the Holy Spirit and His testimony through Christ's servants from Acts 2-7, ending in the stoning of Stephen, a great turning point in the book of Acts.¹⁵

Some have used Acts 3:21 to try to show the impossibility of a pre-tribulation rapture. They claim that this verse teaches that Christ must remain in heaven until it is time to return to the earth as King. They also use Psalm 110:1 in a similar way: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Their argument is this: How can the rapture take place if the Lord must stay in heaven and sit at His Father's right hand until His post-tribulation coming? First, we would not expect Luke to reveal rapture truths because the rapture was a mystery made known by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (hinted at by Christ in John 14:1-3). Second, at the rapture the Lord will not leave the realm of the heavens because He will meet His Church "in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17). He will not return to the earth. Third, there are exceptions to Jesus sitting at God's right hand. In Acts 7:55 we learn that Jesus was "**standing**" to receive His martyr Stephen into glory. The rapture could be another wondrous exception as Christ receives His Bride and His Church unto Himself and brings them to the Father's house. Fourth, if the rapture does not take place until His post-tribulation coming, then all earthly saints will be glorified and there would be no saints left in natural bodies to enter the Kingdom, a problem which posttribulationists have never solved.

Acts 3:22-23

Moses was deeply revered by the Jews. In Deuteronomy chapter 18 Moses predicted that God would someday raise up a great Prophet, One who must be listened to and obeyed. Those who would reject

¹⁴Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, [BHM Books, 1974], p. 406.

¹⁵Roy A. Heubner, *Elements of Dispensational Truth, Volume 5: Parables of the Kingdom of the Heavens*, p. 81.

this future Prophet would do so at their own eternal peril. The Jews understood this Prophet to be the Messiah (John 1:21,25; 6:14; 7:40). Stephen clearly made this identification (Acts 7:37). So in Acts 3:19-23, God set forth the possibility of either a blessing or a curse. He told them the amazing Kingdom blessings they would receive if they should repent, and He told them how greatly they would be punished if they should reject the great Prophet of whom Moses spoke. He told them exactly what would happen if the Jewish people should reject, resist, deny, suppress and ignore the divinely authenticated Word of God.

Acts 3:24-26

The Jewish people had so much light. They had Moses, the lawgiver, and his remarkable promise of a great Prophet who would be God's ultimate communicator of divine truth. They had Samuel, one of the first prophets (1 Sam. 3:20), and all the prophets who followed him, so many of whom spoke of the Messiah and the Kingdom that He would inaugurate. "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). With great light comes great accountability. The Jews of Christ's day were entrusted with the message of the prophets, and some of them could recite the prophecies from memory (compare Matt. 2:4-6). They did not lack information; they lacked faith. Their problem was not intellectual; it was moral. They needed to turn to God in genuine repentance. If any people should have embraced the Messiah, they should have. As children of Abraham, they were promised blessing based on the covenant God made with Abraham.¹⁶ This blessing would be fulfilled in Abraham's seed, even in that one Seed which is Christ (Gal. 3:14-16). God would bless all the kindreds and families of the earth (Gen. 12:3), but He would begin by blessing His people Israel. It was unto Israel **first** that God raised up His Son Jesus to bless them by liberating them from their iniquities (Acts 3:26; Isa. 53:6). In spite of what Israel had done to Christ, God's gracious gospel went to the Jews first, God's beloved yet obstinate people (Rom. 1:16; compare also Acts 13:46). William Newell explains the divine order in gospel proclamation:

To the Jew first and also to the Greek—The Jew had the Law. They had the temple, with its divinely prescribed worship. Heretofore, if a Gentile were to be saved, let him become a proselyte and come to Jerusalem to worship as did the Ethiopian eunuch. Christ came "to His own things" (John 1:11), to Jerusalem, to His Father's house (literally, "the things of My Father"). The apostles were to be witnesses—beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). The Holy Spirit fell upon the hundred and twenty at Jerusalem. Upon the persecution that arose in Jerusalem from Stephen, the disciples "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles," but Jerusalem was the gospel's first center, then Antioch in Syria, whence Paul and Barnabas, afterwards Paul and Silas, went forth. Afterwards, the center of God's operations was Ephesus, the capital of proconsular Asia, where after being rejected by the Jews in many cities, Paul separates the disciples, and all distinction between Jew and Greek in the assemblies of the saints

¹⁶In spite of Israel's horrendous sin against their own Messiah, God did not reject His chosen nation. Peter told them, "You are the children...of the covenant." He didn't say, "You were the children of the covenant" but "You are!" Despite their terrible sin, the Abrahamic covenant was still in effect. This strikes a great blow to Replacement Theology which teaches that because Israel rejected the Messiah, they forever forfeited the promises that God had given to them.

is gone. Then he goes to Jerusalem to be finally and officially rejected—killed, if it were possible. God waits two years at Caesarea for Jewish repentance: there is none, but the direct opposite. Then the apostle, having been driven into the hands of the Romans by the Jews goes to Rome, the world’s center, only to have the Jews reject his teaching (Acts 28). Thereupon it is announced: “Be it known therefore unto you, that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles: they will also hear.”

Therefore, in expressing “to the Jew first,” Paul is not at all prescribing an order of presentation of the gospel throughout this dispensation. He is simply recognizing the fact that to the Jew, who had the Law and Divine privileges, the gospel offer had first been presented, and then to the Gentile. As Paul says in Ephesians “And He came and preached peace to you that were far off [the Gentile], and peace to them that were nigh [the Jews]” (Eph. 2:17). We might just as sensibly claim that Ephesians 2:17 gives Gentiles priority because they are mentioned first—“you that were afar” over the Jews who were mentioned last—“them, that were nigh.”

To claim that the gospel must be preached first to the Jew throughout this dispensation, is utterly to deny God’s Word that there is now no distinction between Jew and Greek either as to the fact of sin (Rom. 3:22) or the availability of salvation (Rom. 10:12). Paul’s words in Galatians 4:8-20 are wholly meaningless if the Jews still have a special place.

The meaning of the word “first” (*proton*) is seen in verse 8 of our chapter: “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all.” That is, thanksgiving to God was the first thing Paul wrote to the Romans in this Epistle. Then he proceeds to other things. It is an order of sequence; just as the gospel came “first” to the Jew and then to Greek, and now, since the “no difference” fact, is proclaimed to all indiscriminately, Jews and Greeks.¹⁷

Two amazing offers of the Kingdom were made to the nation Israel, one before the cross and one after Pentecost as seen here in Acts chapter 3. Tragically, Israel rejected both offers.¹⁸ Thankfully there has been a small remnant of Jewish people who have turned to Christ and who have received him as their Savior down through these centuries. Israel today as a nation is blind and hardened by unbelief. Praise God that their blindness is not a total blindness, but only a partial blindness, because there are Jewish believers today who can see quite well (Rom. 11:25)! May God give us a burden to reach our Jewish friends today with the gospel of the grace of God. And may we plant the seed of the Word in their hearts. It may not bear fruit today, but perhaps in the future tribulation, during that “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), the seed sown might bear fruit as many in the nation will finally turn to Christ and be delivered.

¹⁷William R. Newell, *Romans Verse by Verse* [Moody Press, 1950], pages 21-22.

¹⁸For a very helpful article on the reoffer of the kingdom, see *Acts 3:19-26—The Times of Refreshing and of the Restoration of All Things* by Roy A. Heubner, taken from Chapter 4.4 of *Elements of Dispensational Truth*, Vol. 1, and available at <http://www.presenttruthpublishers.com/pdf.html>.

*But you denied
the Holy One
and the Just,
and asked for
a murderer to
be granted to you,
and killed the
Prince of life,
whom God raised
from the dead, of which we are witnesses.*

~Acts
3:14-15
NKJV



The Barabbas Theory of the Atonement

By C. I. Scofield¹⁹

Barabbas was condemned to die. No one has ever questioned the justice of his sentence. He was a rebel against the law, a robber and a murderer. And now the outraged law had laid strong hands on him, and he lay bound, under sentence of death. He was not under probation, but under doom. He was not awaiting trial, but execution. Just before him, as his only prospect, was the awful death of crucifixion. He knew what that meant: long hours of unspeakable agony, the hands and feet torn by great spikes, the wrist and shoulder joints dislocated by the dragging down of the body, each quivering nerve a separate torture through tension, a burning, unquenchable thirst, and, all around, a jeering, taunting mob. All the horizon of his life is narrowed to that. The only question is, when?

Even this begins to be answered. The jailers prepare three crosses. Ah! he well knows the three sockets cut in the hard rock out there in the Place of the Skull. Is one of these crosses for him? The very thought gives him a sense of suffocation, and of something clutching at his heart. Then he is told: yes, he is to suffer in the morning. Two malefactors are to die with him, but he, as the greater criminal, is to have the place of eminence, is to have the middle cross.

Then the night falls. But it is a disturbed night. Even in the prison it is perceived that something unusual is occurring. Confused noises, outcries, the tramping of feet, penetrate the thick walls. Barabbas dumbly wonders what it all means. Perhaps it is another insurrection such as that he, poor fool, raised against the majestic, inflexible Law. But the night wears on, and at last it is daylight—the light of his last day! And now he hears footsteps, the key grinds in the lock, his prison door swings open, but, just as he is summoning all his brute's fortitude for the ordeal which awaits him, he hears the joyful words: "Go free! Go free! Barabbas; another takes your place; another is to die between the two malefactors."

As Barabbas emerged into the free, glorious sunshine, the crowd was already surging out toward the Place of the Skull. And then, if not before, the desire must have arisen to know who had been condemned to die in his place. One can easily imagine how Barabbas followed the throng, striving eagerly to see the Man who was to die for him. Perhaps it was not until the sound of the hammer driving the nails had ceased, and the cross—Barabbas' cross—had been upreared, bearing its awful burden, that Barabbas saw the Sufferer. We may well believe that, moved by a strange, irresistible drawing (John 12:32), Barabbas pressed his way through the howling mob until he stood looking up into the face of Jesus.

Barabbas knew Him, of course. His substitute in agony there was the new Teacher out of Galilee, the Man who spake as never man spake, the Man whose life had been absolutely without sin. Adam sinned, and Abraham and Moses, and all the prophets, but not this Man. And, besides, He healed even leprosy by a touch or a word. One day when the crowd got hungry He manufactured enough food for five thousand men, not to mention women and children, out of five loaves and a few small fishes. Because of these, and like things, Barabbas perhaps really was convinced that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. But he had not become His disciple because he loved sin.

¹⁹From a tract entitled *Barabbas' Theory of the Atonement*, published by the Fundamental Evangelistic Association, by C. I. Scofield.

However that may have been, it is easy to see that Barabbas had no need to be a theologian to form a good working theory of the atonement.

First, he knew that he was a guilty wretch, under the righteous condemnation of the law (Luke 23:25). And in both these respects Barabbas was a representative of all men (Rom. 3:10-20, 23; Gal. 3:10).

Secondly, Barabbas knew that the Sufferer before him had done no sin (John 8:46; John 19:4; 1 Peter 2:22).

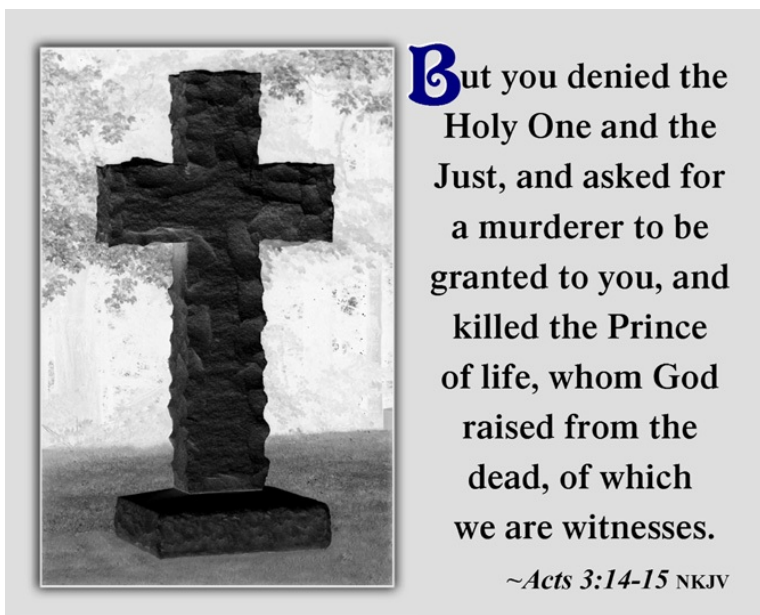
Thirdly, he knew that Jesus was, for him, a true substitute. He was verily and actually dying in his place and stead; an innocent and holy being bearing the very penalty which the law had justly decreed to him, Barabbas. Whoever, in the coming ages, might question whether Christ's death was vicarious and substitutional, he could never question it (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:22-24; 3:18; Isa. 53:5-6).

Fourthly, he knew that he had done nothing whatever to merit the marvelous interposition of that substitutional death. Whatever may have been back of it, it reached him as an act of pure grace (Psalm 69:19-20; Eph. 2:4-9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 2:11; Rom. 4:4-5).

Fifthly, he knew that Christ's death for him was perfectly efficacious. There was, therefore, nothing for him to add to it. Just because Christ was dying, he was living. The only question before Pilate was whether Christ should die or Barabbas. When it was decided that Christ should die, Barabbas was set free. His assurance was complete the instant that his Substitute said, "It is finished," and gave up the spirit (John 19:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Rom. 5:19; 1 John 1:7; Col. 1:20; Heb. 10:10,14).

John McNeill, the great Scotch preacher, well says:

My brethren, let me commend to you Barabbas' theory of the atonement. It is a good theory to preach on, pray on, sing on, die on. Do you know any other theory that will stand these tests?



Special Topic #2
The Official Reoffer of the Messiah and His Kingdom
By Alva J. McClain²⁰

The record of this important event is found in the third chapter of Acts, which furnishes the key to much contained in the entire book. Peter and John had gone to the Jewish temple for the regular hour of prayer (vs. 1). At the gate they were importuned for alms by a man lame from birth. In response, Peter commanded the man “in the name of Jesus Christ” to stand up and walk (vs. 6), and instantly he was wholly healed of his infirmity. It was a great *public* miracle, for the man was well known; even the rulers of Israel had to admit that “a notable miracle” had been done (Acts 4:15-16). The immediate result was the drawing of a great audience to the temple to see the healed man who was walking, leaping, and praising God (Acts 3:8-11). Like the gift of tongues on Pentecost, this miracle provided the audience and the pulpit for a divine proclamation to the people of Israel. As before, the address is delivered by Peter. It begins at verse 12 and extends to the end of the chapter.

a. What Peter says is directed to the *nation of Israel*, whom he addresses as “Ye men of Israel” (Acts 3:12), and “brethren” (vs. 17). His message comes from “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers” (vs. 13); and in closing he reminds them that they “are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers” (vs. 25).

b. Peter ascribes the power of the miracle to the God of Israel who thus “hath glorified His Servant Jesus” (Acts 3:13, ASV), an identification of Jesus with the great kingly Servant of Isaiah 40-53. He is also “the Holy One” and the “Just” One (vs. 14); the “Prince [author] of life” (vs. 15); the predicted “prophet” who would be “like unto” Moses (vs. 22).

c. This divine Messiah, sent to Israel, they had denied and killed; but God raised Him from the dead (Acts 3:13-15). Now Peter, speaking as the accredited messenger of God, tells the guilty nation that their denial and crucifixion of Messiah has not put them beyond the pale of mercy; nor has their sin lost for them another opportunity to receive the Kingdom. For their terrible crime was not only foreseen by the prophets, but God had actually overruled it for good, so that now their “sins may be blotted out” (vs. 17-19).

d. But Israel must meet the spiritual and moral demands which in every age are attached to the enjoyment of the blessings of the Mediatorial Kingdom. Just as in the record of that Kingdom of Old Testament history, and in the predictions of Old Testament prophecy, and in the announcements made by the Baptist and our Lord Himself—so now once more the demand comes to the chosen nation: They must “repent” and “turn again” (Acts 3:19, lit.). For the great social, economic, and political blessings of the Kingdom rest upon a spiritual foundation.

e. If Israel will meet these spiritual conditions, certain important things will follow: First, the terrible sins of this people can be blotted out. Second, they will enjoy “times of refreshing” from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). Third, God will send Jesus, the Messianic King, who has been “appointed” for them (vs. 20, ASV), and whose present session in heaven is only temporary (vs. 21). Fourth, the second coming of Christ will bring “the times of restitution of all things” which have been the main subject of all divine prophecy (vs. 21). It is highly significant that in the word “restitution” we have the noun form of a related Greek verb used by the disciples when they asked Christ when He would “*restore*” the Kingdom to Israel (1:6). Thus, Peter is saying that the *restoration* of “all things” connected

²⁰Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* [BHM Books, 1974], pages 403-406.

with the Kingdom, as described so fully by the Old Testament prophets, will arrive at the second advent of Messiah. And the nation of Israel must understand that, while the exact time of this grand event is unrevealed, its arrival at this particular stage of history is morally conditioned upon the repentance of the nation. Once more, therefore, an appalling responsibility was laid upon the shoulders of Israel. Although their adverse action in the face of this divine offer was fully known to God, still we dare not deny that the moral option was genuine, and that Israel had once again under God its opportunity to determine the immediate course of human history.

f. The reference to Moses in Acts 3:22-24 confirms the meaning and reality of the offer to Israel. Jesus is set forth here as the anti-typical realization of Moses' well-known prediction of the Messianic "prophet . . . like unto me" (vss. 22-23). Now among all the prophets of Old Testament history, Moses occupied an absolutely unique position. He was the first mediatorial ruler in the historical Kingdom of God on earth. Through Moses that Kingdom was established at Sinai, and its laws were given. And, unlike other prophets, the authority of Moses in his mediatorial rulership was almost absolute, as Korah and his fellow rebels found to their dismay. Even Moses, however, was subject to human frailty and mistakes. But since the Messianic Prophet will be perfect, His authority will be unqualified: Those who refuse to hear Him will be destroyed from among the people. All the prophets agree as to the nature of His authority in the coming "days" of the Kingdom (vs. 24): He will rule the world with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9).

g. The address of Peter concludes by reminding the nation of Israel that by descent they are the primary objects of the prophetic utterances, and also of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant which, as we have seen, are regal in character. Therefore, as the original offer of the Kingdom by the King was made to Israel "first" during the "days of his flesh," so now again, having been raised from the dead, He is offered "first" to the chosen nation for the purpose of turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:25-26). There is no other path to regal blessing.

Reflecting now upon the total content of Acts 3, it is hard to imagine how words could have made any plainer the historical reality of this reoffer of the King and His Kingdom to the nation of Israel. Some have objected that nowhere in the chapter does the term "Kingdom" (*basileia*) occur. But this is a pedantic argument. Surely, we should be able to recognize an idea when set forth in different semantic frames. And in Acts 3:19-21 we have something better than a term: actually, a *definition* of the Kingdom. As to *content*, it will bring "the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." As to *time*, it will come when God "shall send Jesus Christ" back from His present session in "heaven." And as to its *conditionality*, its coming is contingent upon the repentance and conversion of Israel.²¹

²¹There are some respected dispensationalists who do not see a bona fide reoffer of the Kingdom in Acts chapter 3. Instead of Peter reoffering the Kingdom, they understand him to be setting forth the terms the nation must meet before the promised Davidic Kingdom will be inaugurated. According to this view, Peter was laying out the conditions that the nation must satisfy in order for the Kingdom to become an eventual future reality. For a full discussion of the issues involved, see Andrew M. Woods, *The Coming Kingdom* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016), pages 66-76, and J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God's Kingdom and Covenant Promises Throughout History* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), pages 274-76. Both views see Acts 3:19,21 as descriptive of the millennial Kingdom; both recognize that national Israel of Peter's day rejected Christ; both understand that national repentance is required by the nation Israel prior to the future establishment of the Kingdom.

Ten Things That Must Take Place When Christ Comes in His Kingdom

According to Acts 3:20, God the Father will send Jesus Christ to this earth to establish His Kingdom. This event is yet future and must await Israel's repentance. There are many Christians today who hold to a preterist view of prophecy. A preterist is one who believes that most Biblical prophecies were fulfilled in the past. They teach that Christ came in His Kingdom in 70 A.D., the time of the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. They believe that most prophecies regarding the Lord's second coming and Kingdom were fulfilled at that time and they will have no future fulfillment.

We would agree with preterists that the Lord judged His nation Israel severely in 70 A.D., as He allowed the Romans to be His instrument of judgment. However, He did not "come in His kingdom" at that time (compare Matthew 16:28). No kingdom was established in 70 A.D. When Christ comes in His kingdom there are at least ten things that must take place at or around that time. Consider the following:

1. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, He will return to earth and be seen by every eye (Matthew 24:25-30 and Revelation 1:7).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. In 70 A.D. Christ was not seen by anyone.

2. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, the Jewish people will be regathered from every country on earth and brought into their promised land (Matthew 24:31; Jeremiah 16:14-15; Isaiah 43:5-7; Jeremiah 23:7-8; Jeremiah 31:7-10; Ezekiel 11:14-18; Ezekiel 36:24).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. Instead of being regathered, the Jews were killed and scattered.

3. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, there will be no wars on earth (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3; Psalm 46:9; Zech. 9:10).

This did not take place in 70 A.D because 70 A.D. was a time of fierce warfare carried out by the powerful Roman army. It was not a time of peace.

4. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, the Kingdom will be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6) and the Messiah will sit on the throne of David which will be located in Jerusalem (Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 17:25; 23:5-6; 33:15; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11-15; Luke 1:32-33).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple destroyed and no King from the line of David was reigning on the throne!

5. When Christ comes in His Kingdom it will be a time of great deliverance and great blessing for the Jewish people (Jeremiah 30:7-9; Ezekiel 34:25-31).

This did not take place in 70 A.D., which was a time of great judgment upon the Jewish people who decades earlier had rejected and crucified their Messiah (although some Jews did believe on Him).

6. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, God's sanctuary (His temple) will be in the midst of His people (Ezekiel 37:26-28; Ezekiel 40:5-43:27).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. because it was then that the Jewish temple was destroyed, resulting in the Jews having no temple at all.

7. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, there will be a priesthood operating in the temple and animal sacrifices will be offered (Ezekiel 44:1-46:24).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. When the Romans destroyed the temple they put an end to a functioning priesthood and they put an end to animal sacrifices.

8. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, "the Jews will possess and settle in all of the promised land, and it will again be subdivided into the twelve tribal divisions. But these tribal divisions will be different than those described in the book of Joshua" (Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footprints of the Messiah*, p. 328). The description of the location of all of the 12 tribes during the Kingdom is set forth in Ezekiel 47:13-48:29. Seven tribes will be situated to the north of the temple (Ezekiel 48:1-7) and five tribes will be situated to the south of the temple (Ezekiel 48:23-29).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem the surviving Jews were scattered throughout the world. In the 20th century a small remnant returned to the land of Israel and a Jewish state was established.

9. When Christ comes in His Kingdom, there will be a message of good news that will be declared to Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:7-10). This message will consist of the following elements: 1) The good news of peace; 2) The good news that Messiah will reign in Zion; 3) The good news that God has comforted His people; 4) The good news that God has redeemed Jerusalem.

This did not take place in 70 A.D. In 70 A.D. there was only bad news for the Jewish people. It was the bad news of judgment and destruction and ruin and death, not the good news of comfort and peace.

10. When Christ comes in His Kingdom there will be joy and gladness (Isaiah chapter 35). This joy and gladness will result from the following conditions: 1) the desert will become fertile (verses 1-2, 6-7); 2) Messiah will come to deliver Israel (verses 3-4); 3) Those who are lame or blind or deaf will be healed (verses 5-6); 4) Wild vicious animals will no longer be a problem (v. 9); 5) It will be a time of great rejoicing (v. 10).

This did not take place in 70 A.D. In 70 A.D. the Jews who were fortunate enough to survive the Roman invasion did not have joy and gladness, but rather sorrow and sighing (compare Isaiah 35:10).

—George Zeller, December 2017