

Acts 2:38

Introduction.

1. One of the more important and controversial verses of the Bible is Acts 2:38.
2. As Peter was addressing the Jewish multitude on the day of Pentecost, they were “pierced to the heart” by his inspired message.
3. He convinced them they had crucified the Son of God by the hands of godless men. (Acts 2:33).
4. This was a crime of crimes, and one that required godly sorrow and genuine repentance to have any hope of forgiveness.
5. Those who are committed this heinous crime did not feel like they were in a state of grace and forgiveness, but desperately wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved from God’s wrath and to have salvation.
6. Many now believed Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
7. They had godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10), but according to Peter it had not yet led to repentance. (Acts 2:38).
8. Luke records these words.

ACT 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

ACT 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

9. The Jews clearly understood the command of Peter, and Luke tells us that 3,000 people were baptized on that day. (Acts 2:41).

ACT 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day **about three thousand souls**.

10. This study will seek to determine what Peter commanded in this verse, and will show that one must repent and be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins.

What Peter Taught By The Command Of Acts 2:38

1. Many hold this verse teaches the essentiality of baptism “for the forgiveness of sins.” See Mk. 16:16; Acts 22:16.
2. Others hold this verse teaches just the opposite, and contend one is forgiven before baptism.
3. Some are forced to contend, on the basis of their interpretation of Acts 2:38, that one is forgiven before repentance and baptism.
 - a. “Repent and be baptized” are joined by the conjunction “and.”

- b. If baptism is because forgiveness had already occurred, then repentance would be because forgiveness had occurred.
 - c. Peter affirms both repentance and baptism precede forgiveness of sins.
4. It is imperative that one carefully examine this verse and other related verses.
 5. Nothing is more important than forgiveness of sins and doing what God requires to be forgiven.

Acts 2:38 - It contains three clauses.

1. First Clause:

- a. "ye" subject, second person plural number.
- b. "Repent" – verb, second person plural number, aorist imperative active voice.

2. Second Clause:

- a. "every one of you" – subject, third person singular number.
- b. "be baptized" – verb, third person singular number, aorist passive imperative voice.
- c. "unto the remission of your sins" – modifying phrase

3. Third Clause:

- a. "ye" – subject, second person plural number.
- b. "shall receive" – verb, second person plural number, future, indicative voice.
- c. "the gift of the Holy Spirit" – direct object of verb.

The Above In Plain English

Repent ye [plural], and be baptized every one [singular] of you [plural] in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your [plural] sins; and ye [plural] shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38, ASV).

Meaning Of The Preposition "Eis"

1. Much of the controversy, regarding this verse, is in regard to the Greek preposition "eis" [ace].
2. The vast majority of Greek Lexicons define this word to have a prospective, forward-looking meaning “into, unto, to, for, in order to.”
 - a. **Thayer’s Greek Lexicon** defines it to mean in Acts 2:38, “to obtain the forgiveness of sins.”
 - b. **Arndt & Gingrich Greek Lexicon** defines it to mean in Acts 2:38 “so that sins might be forgiven.” p. 228, f.
 - c. The **Good News Bible** renders Acts 2:38 like this.

Act 2:38 Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, **so that** your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit.

- 1) The translation "so that" is not a literal translation, but it clearly conveys the meaning of "eis."
 - 2) "eis" denotes the purpose of repentance and baptism. It was "so that" they would receive the forgiveness of sins.
 - 3) It avoid the confusion that the word "for" often presents.
3. Some have tried to make "eis" [ace] to mean "on account of, because of"
- a. The English word "for" can have a forward look or a backward look. The English "for" is not a precise word, and can be confusing whether it is to be understood with a forward look or backward look. One must depend on the context.
 - 1) The man went to prison **for** [because of, on account of] of stealing.
 - 2) The man was tired **for** [because of, on account of] a lack of sleep.
 - 3) The man called the fire department, **for** [because] his house was burning
 - 4) **It can also have a forward look**, "I went to the bank **for** money" or "I went to the grocery store **for** milk."
 - b. It is argued it has the meaning of "because of" in Acts 2:38.
 - c. It is affirmed that one is baptized because his sins have already been forgiven, that is, salvation has already occurred.
 - d. If this be true, Peter was also saying that one is to repent because his/her sins have already been forgiven.
 - e. It shall later be shown that "eis" [ace] does not always exactly correspond to the English word "for."
 - f. We shall also show that the Holy Spirit would have used "dia" [**dee** ah] that meant "on account of, because of" if Peter was teaching one is to repent and baptized "because of, on account of" forgiveness of sins occurring before repentance and baptism.
4. It is repugnant and very unscriptural to make "eis"[ace] mean "on account of, because of" in this verse.
- a. Where in the Bible does God tell men to repent because they have already been forgiven?
 - b. Repentance in the Bible always precedes forgiveness. (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; Acts 17:30, 31).
 - c. Jesus instructed His disciples to preach repentance **for** [to receive] the remission of sins. (Lk. 24:47).

LUK 24:47 and that repentance **for** [eis] forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to [eis] all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

An Examination Of "Eis" In Other passages

1. This word occurs 1750 times in the New Testament and is a word that always looks forward, and not backwards.

- a. It is translated in a variety of ways such as "unto, to, for, into, in order to."
- b. It is sometimes translated "at, in face of" (Matt. 12:41), but this is not its exact meaning.
- c. It is sometimes translated "regarding" in the NIV. (Rom. 4:20).

2. Jesus used this word in Matthew 26:28.

MAT 26:28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many **for** [eis] forgiveness of sins.

- a. "Eis" certainly does not mean "because of" in this verse.
- b. Jesus would then be saying His blood was to be "poured out" because their sins had already been forgiven.
 - 1) This would make the death of Christ unnecessary.
 - 2) Why die to save man if they are already saved?
- c. Most who seek to make "eis" mean "because of" reject that meaning in this context because it does not match their theology in regard to Christ's vicarious death.
- d. They fail to understand that baptism is an action of faith, and not an action of merit.
- e. It is because of faith that one denies himself for Jesus, repents, confesses the Lord and is baptized.
- f. Denial of self, faith, repentance, confession, baptism do not earn salvation, but all are necessary for salvation. (Matt. 16:24; Jn. 8:24; Lk. 13:3, 5; Matt. 10:32, 33; Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

3. Jesus used the forward-looking "eis" in Luke 5:32.

LUK 5:32 "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to [eis] repentance."

- a. Jesus did not come because men had already repented and received forgiveness.
- b. He came to call "sinners to repentance."

4. This word is also used in reference to the baptism of John.

- a. John's baptism was a "**baptism of repentance.**" (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4).

MAR 1:4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a **baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins.

LUK 3:3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a **baptism of repentance** for the forgiveness of sins;

ACT 13:24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a **baptism of repentance** to all the people of Israel.

ACT 19:4 And Paul said, "John baptized **with the baptism of repentance**, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."

- b. The meaning is John required repentance before one could be baptized. (Matt. 3:6-11).

MAT 3:6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

MAT 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

MAT 3:8 "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance;

MAT 3:9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

MAT 3:10 "And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

MAT 3:11 "As for me, I baptize you with water for [eis] repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

c. John's baptism was "for [eis] the forgiveness of sins." See NIV

1) The word "for" in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 come from the word "eis" [ace].

2) John required that one repent and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins.

3) The baptism of John was from heaven. (Matt. 21:25-27).

4) It is strongly implied, but not explicitly stated that the disciples of Jesus were baptizing for the same reason as John and his disciples. (Jn. 4:1,2). They were not preaching different messages with different requirements.

5) It is implied that the disciples of Jesus had personally done what they required others to do and what all who were coming to God were doing.

6) One must assume the disciples did what other penitent believers were doing. They too were sinners in need of God's forgiveness. They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

7) Though Jesus had no sin (Heb. 4:15), He submitted to John's baptism to manifest He was the Son of God. (Jn. 1:30-34).

8) The word "eis" [ace] is used in Matthew 3:11 with a forward motion [as it always is], that is, they were baptized into, unto a mind set of repentance [a changed life] that began before baptism and continued after baptism. John emphasized they were to live a changed life manifesting their repentance. Matthew 3:11 stressed the subsequent life to those coming to God without ignoring the importance of the repentance that led to baptism.

8) The change was not to be a temporary change.

d. Many have attempted to use Matthew 12:41 to prove "eis" means "because of, on account of" and has a backward meaning.

MAT 12:41 "The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented **at** [eis] the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

1) The New American Bible translates "eis" with the word "at". See also NIV & Marshall.

2) Some translations render "eis" with the backward meaning of "because, because of."

3) These translations makes good sense, but they are not exactly what is being taught.

4) "Literally it means "into [eis] the preaching of Jonah." The idea is "into what Jonah demanded." It was

necessary that they not only repent while Jonah was there, but also after he left Nineveh. A temporary repentance would be of no value. Their change should not stop when Jonah left Nineveh.

5. Others have used Luke 5:13,14 to prove “eis” [ace] has a backward meaning.

LUK 5:13 And He stretched out His hand, and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." And immediately the leprosy left him.

LUK 5:14 And He ordered him to tell no one, "But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for [peri] your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, **for** [eis] a testimony to them."

- a. Some want to say “eis” means the former leper was to make an offering because of his cleansing, but is not exactly what Jesus was teaching.
- b. There is a big problem with this interpretation.
- c. The Greek does not have “eis” [ace], but it has “peri” [peh ree] meaning “about, concerning.” See Marshall
- d. “Eis” [ace] is used in the expression “for [eis] a testimony to them.” (Lk. 5:14b).
- e. It was necessary for a healed leper to offer a sacrifice to get the approval of the priest to re-enter the population of Israel. (Lev. 14:2-5).
- f. Lepers were forbidden to have contact with the people, and had to cry out “Unclean, unclean.” (Lev. 13:45).

6. Others have tried to use Romans 4:20 to make “eis” have a backward meaning.

ROM 4:20 yet, with respect to [eis] the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

- a. This verse does not have a backward meaning of “on account of” as some interpreter’s have charged.
- b. “eis” is prospective pointing forward.
- c. Abraham looked “unto the promise of God.” He believed it would be fulfilled.
- d. He never doubted or wavered in unbelief, but looked forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise. (Gen. 12:3; 22:16).

7. Others have tried to use Matthew 10:41, 42 to have a causal meaning.

MAT 10:41 "He who receives a prophet in [eis] the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in [eis] the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

MAT 10:42 "And whoever in [eis] the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward."

- a. “Name” means, “authority, in view of who he is.”
- b. “eis” [ace] is usually understood in the sense of “because of” by many translators.
- c. If this were the intended meaning, the word for that was “dia” [dee ah] meaning “on account of, because of.” Jesus chose to use “eis” in these verses.

d. Understanding “eis” in the sense of “because of” gets the general meaning of the verses, but it is not the precise meaning.

e. A more precise meaning is this in view of the word “eis.”

1) “Prophet” -The word “eis” has the idea of “into” referring to “the name” [the authority] of a prophet. One should not only receive a prophet because he was a prophet, but even more important one should submit his life to the teaching of the prophet who was God’s spokesman. Receiving “a prophet” was to treat him as “a prophet” and hearken to his inspired message.

2) “disciple” - The word “eis” again has the idea of “into” referring to the conduct of a “disciple.” The true “disciple” [one devoted to the Lord] is always looking for opportunities to help others, and when he helps others in even a small way will be blessed by God. He is a forward-looking person and helps others as he as opportunity. (Gal. 6:9,10). No act of kindness is too small. God misses nothing.

8. “eis” [ace] never has a causal meaning as some have attempted to translate it. (Acts 3:19; Rom. 10:10; Heb.10:39; Acts 11:18; 2 Cor. 7:10; Matt. 26:28).

ACT 3:19 "Repent therefore and return, that [eis] your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; Lit “for [eis] your sins being blotted out.” Repentance precedes forgiveness.

ROM 10:10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in [eis] righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in [eis] salvation. The believing heart leadsto salvation just as confession leads to salvation.

HEB 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back to [eis] destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Shrinking back would lead to destruction. This was forward-looking.

ACT 11:18 And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to [eis] life." Repentance, not repentance alone, was necessary to have life with God.

2CO 7:10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to [eis] salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. Godly sorrow produced repentance and that led to salvation.

MAT 26:28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for [eis] forgiveness of sins. Jesus shed His blood that we might be saved - not because we were already saved.

Essentiality Of Repentance And Baptism

1. The Bible teaches repentance is essential for salvation. (Lk. 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18;17:30, 31; 20:21; Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9).
2. The Bible teaches that baptism [immersion in water] is essential for salvation. (The noun “baptism” comes from the verb “baptizo” [bahp **tid** zoh] meaning to “dip, submerge, immerse.”
 - a. Jesus commanded it. (Matt. 28:19, 20).
 - b. Jesus insisted that it is necessary for salvation. (Mk. 16:16).
 - c. Jesus taught one cannot enter the kingdom of God without the new birth of water and Spirit. (Jn. 3:3, 5).
 - d. Peter taught it was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:38).

e. Paul was baptized to have his sins washed away. (Acts 22:16). His repentance is implied by his actions recorded in Acts 9. (Acts 9:8, 9).

f. Paul taught those being baptized into Christ have “put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:26, 27).

GAL 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

GAL 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

g. He taught we are saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit. (Tit. 3:5).

h. Peter taught baptism is necessary for salvation. (1 Pet. 3:21).

1PE 3:21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-- not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-- through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

i. Paul taught baptism marks the beginning of the new life. (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:12).

j. Those converted, as recorded in the book of Acts, were baptized.

Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41).	Simon and the Samaritans (Acts 8:12, 13).	Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:48).
Paul (Acts 9:18; 22:16).	The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:35-39).	Lydia and her family (Acts 16:15).
Jailor and his family (Acts 16:33).	Those at Corinth (Acts 18:8).	Those at Ephesus (Acts 19:5).

Conclusion.

1. It is plain that both repentance and baptism are necessary for salvation.
2. The true believer will turn from his sins and be baptized for the remission of sins.
3. Many do not want to accept this conclusion, but this is clearly what the Bible teaches.
4. The Pharisees who rejected John’s baptism rejected the purpose of God for themselves (Lk. 7:30), and those who reject the baptism of the Great Commission are also rejecting the purpose of God for themselves.
5. Some translators to avoid confusion of the English word “for” have rendered “eis” [ace] “so that” in Acts 2:38.
6. This makes it clear that repentance and baptism must precede the forgiveness of sins.
7. The conversion of Paul makes this conclusion sure. (Acts 22:16).
 - a. Though he believed and had repented, he still to be baptized.
 - b. It was not because his sins had been already forgiven, but it was to wash away his sins.

Additional Comments

1. Jesus and the apostles knew the difference between “eis” [ace] and “dia” [dee ah]. They used exactly the right word or words to set forth the truth of God.

2. They used “eis” to denote something that was forward-looking, and “dia” [dee ah] to mean “because of, on account of.” It is not a retrospective word.
3. Some have mistaken the “for” in some verses for “eis.”
 - a. In Matthew 25:8 the NRSV uses the word “for,” but it comes from the word “hoti” [hah tee] that means “that, because.”

MAT 25:8 The foolish said to the wise, ' Give us some of your oil, **for** [hoti] our lamps are going out.'

- b. Revelation 16:10 has the word “for,” but it is from the Greek “ek” meaning “from, out of.”

“and they gnawed their tongues for [ek] pain”
 - c. The word “for” means “because of” in these verses, but the Greek word “ace” is not used in these verses.
4. Even if one could hypothetically prove, in one or more instances, that “eis” means “because of, on account of,” it would not change its predominant meaning in the New Testament.
5. The meaning of “because of” in Acts 2:38, as admitted by some who deny the essentiality of baptism, makes forgiveness precede repentance and baptism and makes the death of Jesus vain.
6. Jesus did not need to die for our sins if men can be saved in their sins without repentance.

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