

What Is "For" For in Acts 2:38?

There is much controversy in the religious world over the word "for" and its meaning in Acts 2:38. Some contend that the word "for" in this text indicates a relationship to an action which is in the past, that is that baptism is "because of" remission of sins that one already possesses before baptism. Others teach that the word "for" indicates a forward looking action, that baptism is "in order to receive" the remission of sins, indicating an act which God has commanded to be submitted to prior to receiving remission of sins. Which of these is true? (Obviously they cannot both be true, for God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).) Let's see if we can study to find which God would have us to believe and teach (Acts 17:11).

Those who indicate that the word "for" looks to a past action state that it is clear from the use of the word "for" that it means a past action. For example in our language we would say a man goes to jail "for" robbing a bank. Obviously that points to a past actions. These same individuals will often look to Bible verses using the word "for" to show this assertion. For example, notice:

- Matthew 1:20 - "...fear not to take

unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

- Matthew 2:2 - "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east..."
- Matthew 2:5 - "...In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet..."

There are over 1000 occurrences of just such a usage of the word "for" in the New Testament. As a matter of fact, you can look to four verses surrounding verse 38 that are clearly referring to something "because of" – Acts 2:15, 25, 34, 39.

Now this might seem like I have just "made the case" for those who would deny the necessity of baptism, but that would overlook one little matter. The word used in each of these over 1,000 occurrences is a different word than is used in Acts 2:38! In each of the above examples the word translated as "for" is the Greek word GAR (γάρ). Strong, in his Greek Dictionary, says of this word, "A primary particle; properly assigning a reason" and even lists "because" as a synonym. In Acts 2:38 the word "for" is translated from the little Greek word EIS (εἰς). Of this word Strong says, "A primary preposition; to or into

(indicating the point reached or entered)...". When he lists the word "for" as one of the words to which EIS can be translated, he clarifies the meaning by putting in brackets after the word "for" the two words, "intent, purpose." The fact is, when God inspired Peter to give an answer to the question "What must I do" asked in verse 37, He chose to use a different word than the usual word which would indicate "because," looking to a past situation or action. Why would He change? Clearly to make a distinction as to the meaning of "for" in this verse. He could have used GAR, but he chose to use EIS. One of these words, GAR, clearly and commonly used to indicate a past action, the other, EIS, commonly used to indicate something yet future, a goal to be attained.

Another thing which might help us to understand the meaning of the word "for" in this passages is if we could find the phrase "for the remission of sins" used elsewhere and compare it's usage with that in Acts 2:38. One notable use is found in Matthew 26:28. In this verse we find the exact phrase in English and in Greek (EIS APHESIN HARMARTIAN). Here we find the statement in reference to the blood Jesus was about to "shed for many for the remission of sins." Now let me ask you – are those who teach that the phrase in Acts 2:38 refers to baptism being performed because ones

sins have already been remitted willing to be consistent and teach that Jesus was to shed his blood because the sins of mankind had already been remitted?! Of course not! They would, and rightly so, deny such emphatically. As the well known song correctly proclaims, "What can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus!" But a study of the Word of God points clearly to the fact that God uses the point of baptism as the time at which we are forgiven by the blood.

But we don't even need to stop there. What of other passages referring to salvation – are there other passages that will help us to understand the relationship God has placed between baptism and the forgiveness of sins? The answer is "Yes." Notice for example:

- Acts 22:16 – "... arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
- 1 Peter 3:21 – "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ..."

Some might ask though, "But there are so many who teach the doctrine of salvation by faith only, aren't there a wealth of passages which teach that a person is saved by 'faith only'?" Some would have you believe such, but did you know there is only one time in the

word of God that the phrase "faith only" is used? Note this passage and what it says:

"Ye see than how that by works man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

That is not exactly what you would expect from a Book that is purported to teach salvation by "faith only"! But it is clearly consistent with the teachings of Jesus: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

What is "for" for in Acts 2:38? It tells us that when we are baptized that the God of heaven has loved us and provided salvation to those who love Him and keep His commandments (John 14:15) through the precious blood His Son shed on Calvary's hill (Matthew 26:28). It is our prayer that just as those of old "gladly received His word" and "were baptized" that you will do likewise. When you have done so, you have no reason to boast in what you have done, for "when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

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by
Jack H. Williams

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