

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 3:11-26 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 3:11-26 ESV

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. 17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' 24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

STRUCTURE

- I. The miracle does not point to Peter (3:11)
- II. The miracle points to God's work in Jesus (3:12-16)
 - a. The God of their fathers glorified the "suffering servant" of Isaiah—whom they killed (3:13)
 - b. The God of their fathers raised up this Holy Giver of Life—whom they killed (3:14-15)
 - c. The God of their fathers healed the crippled man through faith in Jesus (3:14-16).
- III. In Jesus, God fulfills Scripture and demands repentance (3:17-26)
 - a. Jesus is the promised Christ, to whom they must listen (3:17-21)
 - i. God used their ignorance to fulfill prophecy about the Christ (3:17-18).
 - ii. If they listen to Christ, He will forgive and refresh them immediately (3:19-20a).
 - iii. If they listen to Christ, they will participate in the restoration of creation at His return (3:20b-21).
 - b. Jesus is the promised Prophet, to whom they must listen (3:22-23)
 - i. Jesus is the promised Prophet like Moses (3:22).
 - ii. If they don't listen to the Prophet, they will be cut off (3:22-23).
 - c. Jesus is the promised One, to whom they must listen (3:24).
 - d. Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham, to whom they must listen (3:25-26).
 - i. Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham who blesses nations (3:25).
 - ii. Jesus rose to bless nations through them, so they must listen (3:26).

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Like Peter's Pentecost sermon, this one comes in response to a miracle. Jesus is fulfilling His promise that power will come on them and they will be witnesses (Acts 1:8; cf. 3:15). The early church did not grow by many thousands because of planning committees and charismatic speakers; it grew because of power. There is no substitute.

The crowd doesn't realize the source of this power, so they all run to Peter, who deflects the praise and turns them toward Jesus. Apostolic preaching is always Christ-centered. The "name of Jesus" is mentioned three times in this

short section: in verse 6, it is the “name” of Christ over gold; in verse 16 (2x), it is the “name” of Christ over glory. As the old Pentecostal preachers used to say, too many prominent believers fall on account of “the gold, the girls, and the glory.” Here, Peter points away from gold and glory, toward Christ. If we are to keep our churches on track, we must deflect the attention from ourselves, resist the temptations of this world, and point to Christ. Always, Christ.

This is not to say that, in centering Christ, the other Persons of the Trinity are left out. God the Father is active in this section—He glorified Jesus (3:13), raised Jesus from the dead (3:15), foretold these events by the prophets (3:17, 21), and more. The Holy Spirit is unmentioned but implied (1:8; see commentary under 3:20). Apostolic preaching foregrounds Jesus as the incarnate Son who was seen and heard and touched by witnesses, while at the same time still emphasizing His triune cooperation.

There is a strong theme of fulfillment in this section, too. The word “prophet(s)” is used six times, and fulfillment language is everywhere: “foretold” (3:18); “fulfilled” (3:18); “all the things about which God by the holy prophets long ago” (3:21); “all the prophets... proclaimed these days” (3:24). Jesus is portrayed as the promised servant of Isaiah (3:13), the promised Christ (3:17-21), the promised Prophet (3:22-23), the promised One (3:24), and the promised Seed of Abraham (3:25-26). Why is there such an emphasis on fulfillment? Because Jesus’ identity as the fulfillment of the promises, by itself, demands repentance (3:19-21). If Christ only performed a miracle, that would not be enough to require repentance. Even nonbelievers can perform miracles (Deut. 13:1-5; Matt. 7:21-23). But only Christ fulfills Scripture, and those Scriptures tell us: when Christ comes—listen to Him!

If the Jews do not listen, they will be cut off from God and His people (3:22-23), and Christ will move past them to the Gentiles (3:25-26). But if the Jews do listen, the Promised One will fulfill His promises in them (3:19-21). They will enjoy the forgiveness of Christ (3:19), the refreshment of the Spirit (3:20), and the restoration of all things (3:21).

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"

—The man can walk, yet he clings to Peter and John—why? It seems that he, like the people, thinks too highly of these “healers.” Already, Luke has emphasized that it is the name of Jesus that heals the man (3:6). In the ensuing context, he reemphasizes it by saying it’s not by the apostles’ “power or piety” that this man walks (3:12).

—The man clings to the apostles; the people run to the apostles; the apostles deflect. Rather than letting the people exalt them, they exalt the name of Jesus.

—Just as we saw with Peter’s sermon on Pentecost, here Peter’s sermon is occasioned by a miracle. Acts 1:8 is being fulfilled. God has given them power to be witnesses. None can deny that Jesus’s intention was to give His church miracle-working power that occasions preaching about Jesus.

—Once again, Peter leads, even though he is not alone. John was the best friend of Jesus, but Peter speaks for the apostolic band. This does not mean that he had authority over the other apostles, like some kind of pope. It simply means that God exalts leaders to speak on behalf of others.

—Even though Peter deflects his “celebrity status,” pointing back to Jesus, he still assumes leadership. Some people think that the cure for celebrity culture is to eliminate leadership hierarchy. But that is not God’s approach. The apostles maintain leadership over the people, and Peter holds a special place. The solution to celebrity culture is not eliminating opportunities for leadership, but rather humble leaders who deflect praise, centering their life and message upon Jesus.

—This makes me think of the book I just finished, *Celebrities For Jesus*, where the author seems to criticize big churches and platforms, as though the cure for celebrity culture is to starve it of opportunities for any individuals to shine. This is naïve. (To be fair, the author qualifies some of her criticisms, and the book makes some good points.) Even in the first century, the Jerusalem church was big, leaders emerged, and people placed an unhealthy hope in them.

—The Corinthian church was especially guilty of celebrity culture. See 1 Cor. 1:

- *11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*
- Paul’s solution in 1 Corinthians 1 is not to eliminate leadership or the potential celebrity—a naïve impossibility—but rather to re-focus the celebrity culture of Corinth on the Gospel. The Cross, says

Paul, eliminates boasting, for it brings us all to ground-level. It silences the wisdom-seeking Greek and sign-seeking Jew, saving the world by a foolishness that is "beneath" it, for the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength, and the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom. It's not until we bow a knee at Calvary—becoming a fool for Christ—that we can receive the salvation He offers. Once He offers it, we must ever strive to keep His Cross central. We don't become fools for Christ only to become wise and respectable afterward. We don't bow at Calvary only to rise in worldly honor. None of us stands out at the Cross—none but Christ. It is incumbent upon leaders of churches to deflect from themselves, from their own power and piety, and to always point to Christ; to know nothing else, except Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2).

—"Men of Israel": God already saved three thousand Jews on Pentecost, but salvations keep rolling in, with "the number of men" reaching "five thousand" (4:5). God really loves the Jews and wants them saved. But it cannot happen outside the name of Jesus.

—"power or piety":

- Healing doesn't happen because we are so powerful, nor does it occur because we are so pious. Certain people might have the gift of healing (1 Cor. 12), but this does not mean that they have inherent power for healing. Furthermore, God doesn't choose to use them because they are so devoted or righteous. On the contrary, He often uses people who lack piety. The Corinthians excelled in every spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:7), yet they were spiritual infants (1 Cor. 3:1).
- When we see people with a tremendous healing ministry, we should not elevate them. Sadly, this has not been the historical record of the church. Like Israel of old, we run to them in Solomon's portico; we stare at them as though they are something special. We do the same with other gifts too, like leadership and teaching. The gifts of the Spirit do not exist to exalt the gifted. They exist to exalt Christ. It is incumbent upon gifted people to defer to Christ; it is incumbent upon those blessed by others' giftedness to look to Christ.
- One might argue that it was indeed their "piety" that made this man well, for it was no coincidence that Peter and John were headed to the temple "at the hour of prayer" (3:1). Luke is our New Testament theologian of prayer. Undoubtedly, he wants us to see the connection between prayer and miracles.
- Nevertheless, we misunderstand the nature of prayer when we view it as a spiritual discipline that secures a response. Prayer manifests not human strength, but human weakness. We cry out to God in our weakness, and He flexes His arm. The weaker we understand ourselves to be, the more we pray. Put differently, the more the Gospel takes root in our soul—the Gospel of God's strength and of human weakness—the more our prayer life skyrockets.
- This miracle is not about the spiritual disciplines of Peter and John. Rather, it is about two apostles who saw their title and history with Jesus as nothing before God, so they cried to Him in desperation.

—Stott: "The most remarkable feature of Peter's second sermon, like his first, is its Christ-centeredness. He directed the crowd's attention away from both the healed man and the apostles to the Christ whom people disowned by killing him but God vindicated by raising him, and whose name, having been taken hold of by faith, was strong enough to heal the man completely."

—Stott: "...in his testimony to Jesus Peter attributed to him a cluster of significant titles. He began by calling him 'Jesus Christ of Nazareth' (6), but went on to style him God's 'servant' (13), who first suffered and then was glorified in fulfillment of Isaiah 52:13ff (cf. 4:18 and 26; 4:27, 30). Next he was 'the Holy and Righteous One' (14) and 'the author [or pioneer] of life' (15), while in the concluding part of the sermon Peter called him the 'prophet' foretold by Moses (22)... Servant and Christ, Holy One and source of life, Prophet... these titles speak of the uniqueness of Jesus in his sufferings and glory, his character and mission, his revelation and redemption. All this is summed up in his 'name' and helps to explain its saving power."

13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

—"The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers":

- Peter addresses a Jewish audience—"Men of Israel"—by appealing to their common heritage. We must know our audience when we share the Gospel.
- This is the first of many "identifiers" in Peter's sermon, for the person of Jesus. First, Jesus is the God of their fathers. He is Jewish. Peter will return to the Abrahamic theme later in the sermon.

—"has glorified his servant Jesus":

- This verse reminds us of the Servant Songs in Isaiah. These songs point us toward a mysterious servant who atones for Israel's sins, yet simultaneously identifies with Israel.
 - The language Peter uses identifies Jesus with the Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13: "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted..." The song continues by showing how this exalted servant must first be "marred, beyond human semblance" (52:14) in order to "sprinkle many nations" (52:15) with His atoning blood. Before the servant is exalted, He must first be rejected (53:1-8), despite sinning not (53:9). This rejection was all part of God's plan (53:10)—that "out of the anguish of his soul... he shall bear their iniquities... [and make] intercession for the transgressors" (53:11-12).
 - Isaiah 52:13 is the only verse in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) in which "servant" and "glorify" are combined. Peter is definitely alluding to this verse by his word selection.
 - Jesus was glorified through His resurrection/ascension to the Father's right hand.
- "whom you delivered over and denied... you denied... asked for a murderer... killed the Author of life":
- Peter's ultimate goal is to motivate their repentance, but before that, he must convince them they are sinners. This would have been awkward. One moment, they are running to Peter like he's a god; the next, he is calling them murderers.
 - It strikes me how thoroughly Peter presses home their sinfulness. This is not a feel-good, ear-tickling sermon. He uses five active verbs to prove they are responsible for placing Jesus on the Cross. Yes—like Isaiah 53:10 says—the crucifixion was part of God's plan. But wicked men still bore the fault. God's sovereignty never cancels human responsibility.
 - Peter heightens their culpability, not only by the multiplication of verbs, but also by his elaborate description:
 - Pilate decided to release Jesus, but they decided to convict Him (3:13).
 - They chose a murderer over the Righteous and Holy One (3:14).
 - They killed the author of life (3:15).
 - In short, they were not just wicked; they were utterly wicked. They had the opportunity to reconsider when even a murderous pagan—Pilate—backed out. But they pressed for this. Worse, in their condemnation of the innocent, they released a wicked murderer and became one themselves. And if that wasn't enough, the One they killed was the author of life. This is worse than murdering a biological parent; it is murdering the giver of all life.
 - O, how bold Peter's Spirit-filled sermon is! How far he is from tickling the ears! If we want to see the sort of results Peter sees, we much preach sin and hellfire. It's not just modern sensibilities that make these sorts of sermons (and conversations) awkward. They always have been. Ever since Lot tried to convince his wicked sons-in-law to abandon town, the world has tuned out the message of wrath. But we can't let their rebellion and rejection prevent us from opening our mouths. God's elect will indeed be saved, and our words are the means of saving them.

—"whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses."

- They killed the author of life, but they couldn't keep Him down. Death was limited by sin, which Jesus paid for, with "money" still left over. There wasn't enough death in the universe to overcome the life that is in Jesus.
- Jesus called them to be "witnesses" to His resurrection (1:8), which means they testified to what they saw and heard and experienced. Peter quotes from many Old Testament books, but he also appeals to personal observation. The two work in tandem. Faithful Gospel-preaching should appeal both to Scripture and to the testimony of the apostles who saw the risen Jesus.

—"holy and righteous one": God is often called "the holy One of Israel" in the OT (2 Ki. 19:22; Ps. 71:22; etc.). He is also called the "righteous one" (Pr. 21:12; Isa. 24:16; etc.). To assign these titles to Jesus is to claim His deity.

—"author of life":

- To kill the author of life seems an impossibility—and it is—for Christ rises.
- This title for Jesus, like others in this section, proclaims the deity of Jesus.

—Schreiner: "A glorification (resurrection-ascension) inclusion exists in the speech with vv. 13 and 26, thus connecting the raising of the lame man with Christ's resurrection."

16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

—"name": this word is used multiple times in the context of this healing narrative.

- [Act 3:6, 16 ESV] 6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the **name** of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" ... 16 And his **name**—by faith in his **name**—

has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

- [Act 4:7, 10, 17-18, 30 ESV] 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what **name** did you do this?" ... 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the **name** of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ... 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this **name**." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the **name** of Jesus. ... 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the **name** of your holy servant Jesus."
- Putting these verses together: Peter and John do not offer money but rather healing in the "name" of Jesus (3:6); Peter let's the people know that this healing came not by his own agency, but by faith in the "name" of Jesus (3:10); the religious leaders arrest the disciples and charge them not to speak any more in the "name" of Jesus (3:17-18); the apostles pray, in response to persecution, for God to heal more people in the "name" of Jesus (4:30).
- The "name" of a person, biblically, is more than a label. It represents all that the person is and stands for. It includes reputation, character, and nature. Every adjective we might use to describe Jesus could be subsumed under His "name". Jesus's name is His very Person; His essence.
- Thompson: "The 'name of Jesus', therefore is perhaps best understood in this context not simply as 'Jesus' nor even the titles 'Lord and Christ'... but the active presence of Jesus in the fullness of his character as the means of receiving God's blessings."
- Some people suggest that being "Christ-centered" and "charismatic" stand in opposition. The latter conjures up images of rolling on the ground, tongue-speaking hysteria, and sign-seeking chaos; the former, of orderly, biblical, preaching and liturgy. This narrative, like others throughout Acts, decimates the apparent antithesis. The gifts of the Spirit are by nature Christ-centered, for they are Christ, operating by the Holy Spirit. To communicate it with Trinitarian language: God the Father "glorified his servant Jesus" by healing the man (3:13); Jesus Himself healed the man (3:16); the Holy Spirit healed the man (1:8).

—"whom you see and know": Peter appeals to the undeniable facts of the miracle. They know this man. Any explanation of what happened must deal with the facts. Peter's explanation is that the Triune God did this. There is no other explanation.

—"made this man strong": This miracle was not gradual, but immediate and complete. Sometimes cessationists criticize modern miracles because they are often more gradual. Sometimes they are immediate, however. Furthermore, some healings in the Bible are gradual (cf. Mk. 8:22-25). Finally, it is no argument against modern miracles that sometimes they are gradual because they are miracles nonetheless. I'm thinking of Ann Roberts, who was healed at a Jack Deere conference. She was immediately healed of blindness, and she also immediately stood up from the wheelchair that had been her mode of transport for the past eight years. After taking a few steps, however, she sat back down. Her legs had so atrophied that she had to rebuild the muscle—but—she could walk for the first time. Gradually, she regained full strength, and Jack maintained contact with her for years afterward. Is this not a miracle because it was gradual? Then how would one explain the healing of blindness? Or her first steps? Skeptics are not experts in explaining things; they are experts at explaining them away.

—"faith... faith":

- Peter repeats this twice. Like the name of Jesus, faith in the name of Jesus is an emphasis of this section. Faith in Jesus and faith in His name are equivalents.
- It does not seem that he's talking about the faith of the beggar, who didn't even ask or expect to be healed. Sometimes God heals in response to the faith of those being prayed for; sometimes He responds to the faith of those praying.
- The key is that He responds to faith. "Faith healers" have abused this, teaching that faith is something like psychological certainty. But there is no certainty on this side of heaven (1 Cor. 13:8-12); only confidence. Faith is confidence in God's goodness, wisdom, or power. God expects us to be expectant; confident; but not certain. We can't be certain about healing because we are not God. God sometimes chooses not to heal for sovereign purposes.
- Soon, Peter will call on the crowd to "repent" (3:19), which presupposes the "faith" of 3:16. You can't repent toward a Christ you don't believe in.
- Throughout these narratives, faith, repentance, and baptism together formulate the call to conversion. Faith takes the supremacy, for salvation occurs when we believe (cf. 10:44-48; 11:15-18). Nevertheless, the early church could not have fathomed conversion that did not entail all three

elements. A "Christian" who believes but has never repented is not a Christian. A Christian who refuses baptism, even when afforded the opportunity, is likely (certainly?) not a Christian.

—"perfect health":

- This language is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to depict "unblemished" lambs used for sacrifice (Isa. 1:6; Zech. 11:16). Luke seems to reinforce that this outsider, formerly "blemished" and unable to enter the temple courts, has become an insider.
- This communicates one thing to us—mostly Gentiles—who would have been outsiders to the Jewish temple and Mosaic law. Now by Jesus's name we are welcomed into the Beautiful Gate! The way back into the Temple is opened again for us!
- It communicates another thing, however, to the supposed insiders. The religious leaders will soon command the apostles not to preach in the "name" of Jesus. The church that began meeting in the temple (2:46) will soon be pushed out. The persecution episodes of Acts 3 and 5 will climax in Acts 6-7, where Stephen is criticized for speaking "words against this holy place and the law" (6:14), and where Stephen responds by promoting One greater than the temple (7:48-50). It leads to His death and a "great persecution against the church in Jerusalem" (8:1). From there, the church is scattered—and spreads.
- To summarize, the outsiders are welcomed in, but temple-insiders are hostile. A new age has dawned, and they've failed to recognize it. No longer will God's name be located or sought in a man-made structure; Jesus has become the temple made without human hands. He has become the "place" fit for God's Spirit to dwell. The church that is "in Him" becomes that temple. Outsiders are welcomed in God's house, but insiders are rejected. They rejected their Christ.

17 "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.

—They "acted in ignorance" in that they thought they were running God's errands; instead, they were crucifying His Son.

—Their ignorance does not absolve guilt, however. In the forthcoming verses, they still must repent, that their sins may be blotted out (3:19).

—After first explaining the miracle as being caused by the Christ they murdered (3:11-16), Peter shifts to explain the name—the Person—of Christ. He is the fulfillment of prophecy. Specifically, Jesus's suffering fulfills prophecy.

—"all the prophets":

- While "faith" and the "name" of Jesus are major themes of this section, so are the prophets. Here are the examples in this sermon:
 - 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the **prophets**, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.
 - 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy **prophets** long ago.
 - 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a **prophet** like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that **prophet** shall be destroyed from the people.'
 - 24 And all the **prophets** who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.
 - 25 You are the sons of the **prophets** and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'
- What do we learn from these repeated references to prophets?
 - The prophets foretold Christ's suffering (3:18).
 - The prophets foretold Christ's restoration of all things (3:21).
 - The prophets (in this case, Moses) foretold that a prophet would arise, to whom all the others pointed, and to whom they must listen (3:21-22).
 - The prophets foretold the days in which they live (3:24).
 - The prophets warned their descendants to heed Christ in these days (3:25).
- Peter is ramming home that the prophets they believed in and the laws they sought to obey all pointed to Christ. If they continue listening to their religious leaders and not Christ, they will be on the outside. But if they listen to Christ, they will be on the inside. As "sons of the prophets," such obedience will not be rebellion—as the religious leaders would have them think—but faithfulness.

—Schreiner: "The Pentecost sermon spent more time on Jesus's exaltation. This one begins with exaltation, but Peter spends more time on the reality of Jesus's suffering."

19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

—"Repent therefore, and turn back":

- Because Jesus is the Christ to whom every prophet pointed, the proper response is to repent. This is where life with Jesus begins. We don't gradually reform our behavior in hopes of winning Him over. No, we "repent... and turn back."
- To "repent" and "turn back" are two ways of saying the same thing. To "repent" literally means "to change your mind." This "change" requires a turning—an about-face of the heart. These former Christ-killers must turn in their hearts and become Christ-adorers.
- "that your sins may be blotted out":
 - Some in the "Free Grace" movement teach that "faith alone saves" (amen to that!), but that "repentance" is extra. But faith without repentance is not faith, and repentance without faith is not repentance. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin, as we see in Acts 20:21: "...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance** toward God and of **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ."
 - Our sins will not be blotted out unless we offer God both faith and repentance.
 - This is a considerable promise. These people were not just white-lie-tellers. They were not just annoying neighbors who play loud music and keep you awake. These people were Christ-killers! Christ's first response is not to judge them, but to offer them forgiveness.
 - The language of "blotted out" focuses on more than forgiveness; it is erasure. God will not only forgo judging us for sin; He will remove our sin.
 - If Christ will do this for those who tortured Him to death, how much more will He offer us the grace of sins "blotted out"!!
 - Schnabel: "The verb [blotted out] means 'to cause to disappear by wiping away, erasing... to remove so as to leave no trace, remove, destroy obliterate... The LXX uses the verb in Gen. 7:4, 23 for the action of God, who wiped out every living thing from the face of the earth.'"
 - Stott (quoting Barclay): "Ancient writing was upon papyrus, and the ink used had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus as modern ink does; it simply lay upon the top of it. To erase the writing a man might take a wet sponge and simply wipe it away."—that's what it means for our sins to be blotted out. God takes His sponge and removes every trace.

—God promises to do four things if we repent: (1) our sins "may be blotted out"; (2) "times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"; (3) "He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus"; and (4) we get to enjoy Christ's "restoring [of] all things." Let us explore the meaning of each:

- Our sins "may be blotted out"—see above.
- "times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord":
 - This implicitly references the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We know in part because the Holy Spirit is called the "Comforter," and because the churches grew "in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:31). This is just what the Holy Spirit does. He comforts and refreshes.
 - We also know this because of the parallel in Acts 2:38, where they are told, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit..." Notice: in 3:19-20, they are told to repent for forgiveness and refreshing; in 2:38, they are told to repent and be baptized for forgiveness and the Spirit. Implicitly, the Spirit does the refreshing.
 - Believers should expect a "refreshing" from the Holy Spirit. This word is only used once (here) in the NT. In the OT, it is used in Ex. 8:15 to depict the respite/relief, experienced by Egypt after the plague of frogs. The "refreshing" we receive is a "breather" of sorts, like when you're doing ab crunches and you break to let the burn dissipate. The Holy Spirit helps the burn of life dissipate through His ministry of relief.
 - Schnabel: "The noun translated as 'refreshing' is defined as 'experience relief from obligation or trouble' and can be translated as 'breathing space, relaxation, relief.'"
 - Those who repent (and keep repenting) enjoy the Spirit's ministry. Those who refuse to repent obtain no relief.
 - "from the presence of the Lord": probably this refers to Jesus.
 - Schreiner: "The history of the word [refreshing/relief] implies a cooling off that comes from a cool breeze or drink of water, and it is connected to Sabbath rest (Heb. 3:7-4:13)."

- “He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus”:
 - This could refer to Christ coming, spiritually, to minister to them. Some take it this way, but the interpretation is unlikely. This would be redundant, since Peter has already promised them the Holy Spirit, who is called elsewhere the Spirit of Christ (Acts 16; Rom. 8).
 - Most understand this to mean, correctly, that if they repent, God will send Christ in the form of His Second Coming. Jesus is coming, regardless of whether these individuals repent. If they do repent, however, they will enjoy Christ’s “appointed” ministry of restoration (the last point).
- We get to enjoy Christ’s “restoring [of] all things.”
 - A cognate of this Greek word for “restoring” appears in 1:6, where the disciples asked, “Lord, will you at this time *restore* the kingdom to Israel?”
 - By this point, Peter has gleaned that the promised restoration will not occur until Jesus returns. “Heaven must receive [Him] UNTIL the time for restoring all things...” (3:21).
 - We learned from Acts 1:6–8 that Jesus’s delayed return was in order that the Gospel might extend from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. Or, as Peter says elsewhere, “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise [of returning] as some count slowness, but is patient toward you not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*” (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus is waiting for the world to repent.
 - In association with this repentance, Jesus will restore “all things.” The disciples looked for the restoration of Israel (1:6), but God promised to restore “all things”! Peter is likely referring to the new heavens and new earth, where the whole creation will be set free from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8). In fact, in Peter’s second epistle, right after telling us that Christ’s return awaits the repentance of God’s elect, he then tells us that we are waiting for a new heaven and new earth (2 Pet. 3:13).
 - Schreiner: “Cosmic reconciliation and the restoration of Israel coalesce (Amos 9:11–12; Isa. 65:17; 66:22–23)... The lame man’s healing foreshadows what is to come. It is a peek into the future.”

—Putting this all together, then, Peter is establishing the “already-not yet” eschatology of the New Testament. *Already*, we who repent receive the Christ’s forgiving ministry and the Spirit’s refreshing ministry—each as a downpayment of heaven on earth. But this downpayment testifies of a full payment, which is *not yet*. That full payment—our inheritance in Christ—is that Jesus will return and restore all things.

—The “times of refreshing” (3:20) and “time of restoring” are related, in that the former begins God’s “new creation” work and the latter completes it.

—When Jesus restores creation, it will resemble our present world, only in its ideal state. The most beautiful parts of the planet—Everest, Bora Bora, Yosemite—these are just shadows of what they will one day be. Today, we experience creation on her deathbed, wasting away with Stage 4 Cancer. Then, we will enjoy her as God intended, where the “destroyers” have been destroyed (Rev. 11:18) and earth becomes heavenly.

22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'

—Verse 22 is a quote from Deut. 18:15–20. Some say verse 23 is a quote from Leviticus 23:29.

- [Deu 18:15–20 ESV] 15 “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— 16 just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ 17 And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.’
- [Lev 23:29 ESV] 29 For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.

—On Deuteronomy 18, the context was that Israel had complained about God’s frightening presence at Sinai being too much for them. Consequently, they asked for a representative to go before them and relay God’s words. That representative was Moses. Moses was unlike any other prophet. Numbers 11 says that with ordinary prophets, God speaks to them in riddles and mysteries, but with Moses, He speaks face to face. Deuteronomy ends by saying that a prophet like Moses had never arisen. Thus, Israel waited for “the

Prophet" who would come and tell them what Yahweh was saying. Like Moses, this Prophet would be a hear from God directly and clearly; like Moses, He would be a covenant mediator; unlike Moses, he would be the Son of God.

—Why does Peter quote Deuteronomy 18? There are many other passages he could have chosen, which Christ fulfilled. But Deuteronomy 18 specifically focuses on Christ as Prophet, to whom they must listen. What is Christ saying, that they must listen to? "Repent, therefore, and turn back..." (Acts 3:19).

—That is profound. Peter is the one preaching, but it is Christ the Prophet, preaching through him. This is the "forthtelling" dimension of prophecy. Preaching the Gospel is not meant to be sheepish persuasion, as though we are unwilling salesmen, peddling a product we don't believe in. No, preaching the Gospel is to be bold proclamation that all men everywhere must repent. When we do this, Christ the Prophet speaks through us.

—Again, then, Jesus's ministry in the first century was just the beginning. He "began to do and teach" in His earthly ministry; He continues from heaven, through His Spirit-empowered church.

—Practically, this makes me think of Andy Stanley, the megachurch pastor in Atlanta. He says we can't proclaim God's law to unbelievers because they're not "in the family." He even went so far as to apologize for Christians who placed false expectations on them. On one hand, I get what he's saying. We should not be surprised that worldly people act like the world. On the other hand, it's not us, but God, who holds the world accountable for keeping His law, considers them sinners, and demands their repentance. Our role as the church is to show them they are lawbreakers and point them to the only One who kept the law, Jesus Christ.

—If this is a mixing of quotes—between Leviticus and Deuteronomy—why would Peter mix them? The Deuteronomy passage says, of the person who doesn't listen to the Prophet: "I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:19). The Leviticus passage would bring some clarity: God will "require it of him"—judge him—by cutting him off. He would not belong to the people of God. He would be eternally outside.

- It's possible that the scholars are wrong, and Peter is not mixing the passages. Perhaps Peter is merely elaborating on Deuteronomy 18 by offering his own commentary.
- What seems more likely to me is that Peter is elaborating on Christ's significance by referring to Leviticus 23. The quote comes from a verse about socially cutting off someone who refuses to afflict themselves with fasting and repentance on the day of atonement ("28 And you shall not do any work on that very day, for it is a Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God. 29 For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.") In context, Peter has been talking about Christ as prophet (Acts 3:22-23a) and Christ as the suffering servant who atones for sin (3:13-15). Peter's speech mixes the quotes because Christ fulfills both Scriptures. Not only is He the Prophet; He is also our atoning sacrifice. In Him, the Day of Atonement has arrived, and we must "afflict" ourselves by repenting of sins, lest we be cut off.

—Schnabel (quoting Marshall): "Continued membership in the people of God is dependent on a positive response to the Messiah."

24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

—Peter continues with a prophetic theme in verse 24. All the prophets have proclaimed these days. What days? The days in which Christ, our greater Prophet—the one to whom all the others pointed—fulfilled God's promises and made them available to all who listen. Implicitly, all who listen to the prophets will listen to the Prophet.

—This is why it's relevant that they are "sons of the prophets and of the covenant." To break with Christ was to break with their own heritage. In the past, a faithful Jew would have worshiped Yahweh over the gods of the nations. Now, that's still true, but Yahweh is Christ (cf. Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32). Christ has become the new fork in the road. Faithful Jews can't claim to worship Yahweh while ignoring Jesus of Nazareth.

—"saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"

- Why does Peter say this in a speech to the Jews? The "Abraham" part makes sense, for they are "sons... of the covenant" with Abraham, which ultimately became the Jewish nation. But Peter focuses on the portion of the Abrahamic promise related to the nations. Not the part related to their Jewishness.
- The next verse explains why.

26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

—The reason Peter quoted this portion of the Abrahamic promise—the part about blessing coming to Gentiles—even though they were Jews and not Gentiles, is this: urgency. God sent His word first to the Jews, to honor his covenant with them. But if they don't repent, they'll miss their time of visitation. See Luke 19:43-44: "For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the **time of your visitation.**"

—The Jews had a brief window of grace, where if they responded, times of refreshing would come. God would restore them spiritually. And He would save them from the devastation Jesus warned against in Luke 19:44. Peter warns them urgently to repent, lest they miss their window. Jesus came to them first, but the day of salvation would pass them by if they refused to repent.

—Paul seems to suggest (by my interpretation) that at the end of the age, the window of grace will re-open, en masse, for the Jews (Rom. 11).

—The blessing promised to Abraham was intended to flow through the Jews to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). As sons of the prophets and of the covenant, God came to them first.

—There is no blessing outside of repentance. God would bless them by turning them from their wickedness—not by blessing them in their wickedness. Does this suggest salvation by works? Must we clean up our lives in order to be blessed? Absolutely not. Peter says if we repent, our sins will be blotted out. God is the One who does the blotting out. For that matter, He is the one who turns us from our wickedness.

—Peter's exhortation emphasizes man's responsibility to turn from sin (3:19); his teaching emphasizes God's sovereignty in turning man from sin (3:26). Both of these are true, without contradiction. God sovereignly turns our hearts from sin to Him; we must choose to turn our hearts from sin to Him. God's choice is first. It is primary. But our choice is not fiction. It is real, and it matters.

—In regard to God's sovereign initiative, Eckhard Schnabel shares this: "God's initiative is a major theme in Peter's speech: God has glorified his servant Jesus (v. 13); he raised Jesus from the dead (v. 15); he fulfilled his promises in the death of Jesus, the Messiah (v. 18); he has sent times of refreshing (v. 20a-b); he sent the Messiah (v. 20c); he spoke about the time of restoration (v. 21); he raised up a prophet like Moses (v. 22); he made a covenant with their ancestors (v. 25a-c) he will bless the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham (v. 25e-f); he raised Jesus his Servant and sent them to the Jewish people (v. 26)."

—Stott: "This comprehensive testimony to Jesus as rejected by human beings but vindicated by God, as the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecy, as demanding repentance and promising blessing, and as the author and giver of life, physically to the healed man and spiritually to those who believe, aroused the anger and antagonism of the authorities. The devil cannot endure the exaltation of Jesus Christ."