Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. And while he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. (Acts 3:1-10)

The Bible warns repeatedly of the ever-present danger of heretical false teachers. Because they claim to represent God, yet misrepresent His truth, they do great harm. Jesus described these preachers in Matthew 7:15 as "ravenous wolves" and warned that "many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many" (Matt. 24:11). Some will be exceedingly dangerous, showing "great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24).

The apostle Paul called false teachers "savage wolves" (Acts 20:29), "rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers" (Titus 1:10). He warned the Corinthians to beware of them, calling them "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13). They are those who "fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1), who "oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith" (2 Tim. 3:8).

Perhaps the most scathing denunciation of heretical preachers comes from the pen of the apostle Peter. It needs to be read in full.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and
Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; forsaking the right way they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; for a dumb donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. These are springs without water, and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Peter 2:1-21; cf. Jude 4-16)

The danger posed by such liars makes it imperative that there be a way to distinguish them from those who speak truth from God. The apostle John recognized that need for discernment when he warned believers, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

The Lord Jesus Christ recognized the responsibility for God's messengers to have His teaching accredited by His works. He said of His own ministry, "the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me" (John 10:25), and, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37-38). He challenged Philip to "believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves" (John 14:11). The works that He did corroborated the words that He said. Nicodemus recognized that when he said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2).

The Lord granted that His spokesmen in the early church, the apostles and prophets, also be accredited by miracles. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12). The writer of Hebrews added, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:3-4).
As noted in the discussion of Acts 2:43 in chapter 7, however, such miraculous accreditation is no longer necessary. We can determine who speaks for God by comparing their teaching with Scripture.

The miraculous sign gifts included the gift of healing (cf. Matt. 10:1) exercised in this passage. This is one of many healings done by the apostles (cf. Acts 2:43), selected for its impact and connection to Peter's inspired sermon. Unfortunately, there is much confusion about that gift. Many today claim to possess or have access to that gift. Their so-called healings run the gamut from psychological ploys to outright fakes to demonic activity. A biblical understanding of the apostolic healing ministry includes the following points:

First, as noted above, many alleged healings are fraudulent. Over the years, faith healers have been exposed as charlatans. Apparent healings result from mind manipulation or a kind of hypnosis, stemming from a strong belief in an authority figure. When that figure tells people they are healed, their emotions may temporarily override their physical symptoms. Such "healings," needless to say, are short-lived.

A related category of "healings" involves cures of psychosomatic illnesses. Since such imagined diseases can produce symptomatic illnesses having no physical, organic cause, their cure is not an illustration of the gift of healing. Jesus and the apostles healed those afflicted with physical ailments, such as blindness, deafness, and paralysis, and organic diseases, such as leprosy. The cure of those conditions, and others like them, however, is beyond the reach of contemporary faith healers.

Second, Satan and his demonic hosts can produce counterfeit healings. They do so not only in false religions but also under the guise of Christianity. The Lord Jesus Christ warned that "false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray" (Mark 13:22). The apostle Paul echoed that warning, relating it specifically to the coming man of sin. He described him as the "one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). Jesus warned that "many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness," (Matt. 7:22-23). God is not involved in, nor does He approve of, everything done in His name. Still less does He desire testimony from demonic sources. Our Lord refused to allow the demons to disclose His true identity (Luke 4:41), and Paul refused to allow a demon-possessed girl even to testify to the truth that he and Silas were God's servants (Acts 16:16-18).

Believers must constantly be aware of the danger of satanic deception. Paul warned the Corinthians of that when he wrote regarding some of the false teachers of his day:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

Satan is perhaps even more dangerous in his subtlety as a wolf in sheep's clothing than as a roaring lion.
Third, contrary to the teaching of many today, the early church was not a miracle-working church. Rather, they were a church with miracle-working apostles. The gift of healing in the early church was limited to the apostles and their close associates in ministry. When they disappeared, so did the gift of healing.

Fourth, in every recorded instance of the gift of healing in Acts, it is unbelievers who are healed (3:1-11; 5:15-16; 8:7; 19:11-12; 28:8). (Whether or not Aeneas [Acts 9:33-34] was a believer is difficult to determine due to the brevity of the passage. However the description of him as "a certain man," rather than a believer or disciple [cf. Acts 9:36] suggests he was an unbeliever.) That miraculous healing was an utterly uncommon occurrence in the early church is clear from the stir Peter's healing of Aeneas caused. If healings were common, what would be so sensational about one more? Yet Peter's healing of Aeneas caused all who lived in that region to turn to the Lord (Acts 9:35).

Further evidence that the gift of healing was not used on behalf of the church comes from the passages that mention sick believers. Paul did not heal Trophimus but left him sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Nor did he advise Timothy to go to the local healer for his medical problems. Instead, he told him to take wine for his illness (1 Tim. 5:23).

Does that mean God no longer heals? Of course not! God may choose to heal today in response to the prayers of His children, when that is consistent with His will. But that is a far cry from the miraculous, supernatural healing ability given the apostles on behalf of non-Christians. They were the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20), but they have passed from the scene. With them went the miraculous gifts that were uniquely associated with them (2 Cor. 12:12). It is an unfounded assumption without biblical support that healings should be expected as commonplace in the church. Never in all history has there been a time of such healing power as exhibited by Christ and the apostles. There is no time before or since when God manifested such prolific healing miracles. It was rare before the ministry of the Lord and the apostles and equally, if not more, rare since. (For a detailed discussion of healing, see my book Charismatic Chaos [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], and Richard Mayhue, The Healing Promise [Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1994].)

In Acts 3:1-10, the Holy Spirit selects one of the "many wonders and signs" mentioned in 2:43 as an illustration. This astounding miracle of healing a man lame from birth gathers a curious crowd and prepares them to hear Peter's sermon. It also confirms that Peter and John represent God. The record of the lame man unfolds in three events: the scene, the sign, and the sequel.

**The Scene**

*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.* (3:1-3)

The gospels and Acts reveal that Peter and John were closely associated. According to Luke 5:10, they were partners in a fishing business before their call as disciples. With John's brother James, they made
up the inner circle of the twelve (cf. Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 8:51; 9:28). Jesus entrusted them with making preparations for the Passover meal (Luke 22:8). They alone of the twelve followed Jesus to the high priest's house after His arrest (John 18:15ff.). Peter and John were the first of the disciples to visit the tomb after the resurrection (John 20:2ff.). The early chapters of Acts often find them traveling and ministering together (cf. 4:13, 19; 8:14).

The imperfect tense of the verb translated were going up suggests it was their custom to go to the temple frequently (cf. 2:46). The ninth hour, the hour of prayer would be three in the afternoon according to the Jewish reckoning, which counted the hours from sunrise. Psalm 55:17 mentions the three hours of prayer, the other two being in the morning (the third hour) and at noon (the sixth hour). The ninth hour was also the time of the evening sacrifice, when the daily temple crowds would be at their peak.

On their way into the temple, the two apostles encountered a certain man who had been lame from his mother's womb. Crippled from birth, his case was hopeless; his affliction was not one the doctors of his day could cure. The imperfect tense of the verb translated was being carried along, together with the phrase set down every day indicates it was his daily routine to beg at that location.

The gate of the temple which is called Beautiful was the perfect site to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. Beggars in Palestine favored three locations: the houses of the rich (cf. Luke 14:1-2; 16:19-21), main highways (cf. Mark 10:46), and the temple. Of the three, the temple was the best site. Not only did crowds throng the temple daily, but they also came to impress God with their piety. One way to do that was to give alms to the poor. Further, the temple treasury was where people gave their offerings to the Lord. They would therefore be in the frame of mind to give money when they came to the temple. The Beautiful Gate, inside the temple mount area on the eastern side, separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Women. Like the other gates, it was large and ornate. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, it was made of Corinthian brass, and was so large it took twenty men to close it (Wars V.V.3, VI.V.3).

The lame man was strategically placed at the gate for maximum effect, and spotting Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. He expected mercy in the form of money, little realizing he was about to receive the greater mercy of healing and salvation.

The Sign

And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!" And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping (3:4-8a)

Four aspects of this miracle are noteworthy: it was unexpected, it was done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, it was instantaneous, and it was complete.
It Was Unexpected

And Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze upon him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you:

In response to the beggar's cries for alms, Peter and John fixed their gaze upon him. Atenizō (fixed his gaze upon) is the same word used in 1:10 to describe the apostles' intense gaze at the ascending Lord. The two apostles focused their attention on the unhappy cripple, commanding him, "Look at us!" With eager anticipation, the beggar began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. He was expecting, of course, to receive money. Peter's reply, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you," was totally unexpected. The beggar no doubt wondered what these men could give him that would be more valuable than money. He was soon to find out.

Like all of God's works, this miracle was based on God's sovereign will. There were hundreds of other beggars in Jerusalem, many of them undoubtedly crippled as well. But it was this man that God sovereignly chose to receive healing. Expecting only some money to help momentarily ease his desperate situation, the beggar instead received far more than he would have ever dreamed possible.

It Was Done in the Name of Jesus Christ

In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk! (3:6b)

The beggar had little reason to believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus had not changed his plight, and He had been executed as a blasphemer. He therefore must have found Peter's use of His name perplexing. In the name of means by virtue of Christ's character, authority, and power. As noted in the discussion of Acts 2:22 in chapter 5, Jesus Christ the Nazarene was the common designation of our Lord during His earthly ministry. It describes Him as Jesus, the Messiah from Nazareth. To do something in the name of Jesus Christ is to act consistent with His will; to do what He would do if He were here, to act in His authority and with His delegated power. Peter had seen the Lord heal countless times. Now, acting on behalf of His Lord with the power delegated to him (cf. Matt. 10:1), he commands the beggar to walk.

It Was Instantaneous

And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. (3:7)

The beggar's confusion did not last long. Seizing him by the right hand, Peter raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. The genuine gift of healing, in contrast to the alleged healings of today, resulted in immediate cures. Our Lord's healings were instantaneous (cf. Matt. 8:13; Mark 5:29; Luke 5:13; 17:14; John 5:9); there was no gradual process involved. Scripture knows nothing of "progressive healings." The beggar did not even need to be taught how to walk. He received his coordination and balance instantly.

It Was Complete
And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping (3:8a)

Peter did not have to manhandle the beggar to get him on his feet. As soon as he felt the strength surge through his feet and ankles, with a leap he stood upright and began to walk. His symptoms were completely gone. Peter and John did not have to support him as he limped along. Instead, he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping. His joy and excitement knew no bounds. Mere walking was not enough for him, he also had to leap. Like a child with a new toy he could not resist using his new-found ability.

The four characteristics of this miracle provide a checklist to screen all alleged miraculous healings. A healing that fits the true biblical pattern will stem from God's sovereign choice, it will be done to glorify Jesus Christ, it will be instantaneous, and it will be complete. Needless to say, the so-called instances of healing claimed by modern "healers" do not meet those criteria.

The Sequel

and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. And while he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. (3:8b-11)

There were three results of the miraculous healing of the lame beggar. First was joy to the beggar himself, which he expressed by praising God. The sedate, stately ritual of the evening sacrifice was suddenly shattered by his loud cries of joy and praise. It is God's desire that all His children experience joy. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11; cf. 16:24).

A second result was praise and worship toward God. Mere participation in a religious service does not in itself guarantee true worship. The most genuine worship of God likely to have taken place that day in the temple was the praise of the beggar.

Third, the miracle was a testimony to the people. The beggar's outburst of praise caused shock and amazement on the part of the crowd. All the people there in the temple saw him walking and praising God. His was a very public testimony. Recognizing him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, the crowd was filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. That a miracle had taken place was undeniable. They had seen the beggar sitting at the Beautiful Gate for many years, so everyone knew his condition. Even the Jewish leaders did not deny that a miracle had taken place. In Acts 4:16, they said, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it."

As noted in the discussion of Acts 2:22 in chapter 5, God designed miracles to act as signs to attract attention and point people to divine truth. This healing did both. It certainly drew the attention of the
crowd, who ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. And had they remembered their Old Testament, they would have known that healings were to mark the beginning of messianic times. Isaiah said of that age, "Then the lame will leap like a deer" (Isa. 35:6).

As He had for Peter's first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, God provided the introduction. Amazed at the miraculous healing of the lame man, a large crowd gathered at the portico of Solomon, the porch surrounding the Court of the Gentiles (the same location where Jesus had given the discourse on the Good Shepherd [John 10:23]). The man who had been healed stood with the apostles, clinging to Peter and John. He was living proof that a miracle had taken place. The stage was set for Peter to preach Christ.


Peter's Powerful Sermon--part 1 (Acts 3:12-18)

But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." (3:12-18)

The early preachers were supremely concerned with exalting the name of Jesus Christ. It was in that name that they baptized (Acts 2:38) and healed (Acts 3:6, 16; 4:10). Even the church's opponents recognized how central the name of Jesus was in apostolic preaching (Acts 5:40). Philip preached the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12), as did Paul (Acts 9:27). The Jerusalem council commended Barnabas and Paul as "men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26), and Paul expressed his willingness to die for that name (Acts 21:13).

The Bible refers to our Lord by many names—by some estimates more than 200. They include such familiar ones as Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13), Beloved (Eph. 1:6), Bread of Life (John 6:48), Bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16), Firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), Holy One (Acts 2:27), Immanuel (Isa. 7:14), Lamb (Rev. 5:6), Light of the world (John 8:12), Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5); Lord (John 13:13), Lord of lords (Rev. 17:14), Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8), Man of sorrows (Isa. 53:3), Mighty God (Isa. 9:6), Prince of peace (Isa. 9:6), Righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8), Root of David (Rev. 5:5), Savior (Luke 2:11), Servant (Acts 3:13), Shepherd (John 10:11), Son of God (Mark 1:1), Son of
Man (John 5:27), and Word of God (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). But of all the names of our Lord, the most common is Jesus, which appears more than 800 times in the New Testament.

By whatever name He is called, the testimony of Scripture is that Jesus Christ is the only person who can provide salvation. All spiritual blessings come through His name, including adoption as God's children (John 1:12), salvation (Acts 4:12), forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43), answered prayer (John 14:13-14), and the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). It is at His name that every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10). Believers are to do everything in His name (Col. 3:17), so that His name will be glorified (2 Thess. 1:12). Those who name His name must turn away from sin (2 Tim. 2:19).

Peter was the first to preach in the name of Jesus, and all who truly preach the gospel stand in the tradition deriving from him. On the Day of Pentecost, against the backdrop of the Spirit's coming, he preached the first sermon in the church's history. The theme of that sermon was Jesus Christ.

As He did for Peter's first sermon, the Holy Spirit provided a dramatic introduction for his second one. Peter and John's healing of a man crippled from birth drew a large crowd. He stood with the apostles on Solomon's portico in the temple, a living illustration that God's power rested on them. When Peter saw that the crowd had gathered, he began his sermon. Replied is from apokrinomai, a word often used to mark the beginning of a discourse (cf. Matt. 11:25; 12:38; 17:4; 22:1; Mark 10:24; 11:14; 14:48; Luke 14:3; John 5:19; Acts 10:46). It does not necessarily refer to answering a question. Whether the crowd asked Peter questions is unknown, but their confusion and desire for an explanation of the miracle were obvious.

Before launching into his theme, Peter first asks two questions. By so doing he cleared up any confusion the crowd may have had about the source of the healing. He prefaces those questions by addressing the crowd as men of Israel, a courteous title emphasizing their identity as the covenant people (cf. v. 25). His first question, why do you marvel at this, is a mild rebuke. As the covenant people, they knew God to be a miracle-working God. Miracles had played an important role in their history. More recently, they had witnessed the miracles performed by Jesus to demonstrate that He was the Messiah, God's Son. That God should work another miracle through the apostles should come as no surprise to them.

Peter then asks them why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? They should have known that two Galilean fishermen had neither the power nor the piety to perform such a feat on their own. The crowd's dilemma was that while they acknowledged God alone as having the power to do miracles, they had denied that Jesus was God, and that His followers had divine power granted by God. So they were left with no explanation for what they had just seen.

Peter directs attention away from himself and John to Jesus Christ. He makes clear that it was His power that effected the healing (3:6).

So Peter takes as the theme of his sermon the matchless name of Jesus Christ. He presents five of the many names of our Lord, all of which have messianic implications. As he did in his first sermon, Peter presents Jesus as the Messiah, approved by God, yet rejected by the people. By so doing, he again
stresses to them that they were in the disastrous condition of being at odds with God. Peter describes his Master as Servant, Jesus, Holy and Righteous One, Prince of Life, and Christ.

**Servant**

*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant (3:13a)*

Since his message was directed mainly to Israelites, Peter chooses a familiar Jewish description of God. The depiction of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers stresses again His covenant faithfulness to Israel. This description seems to have been employed on significant occasions (cf. Ex. 3:6, 15, 16; 1 Kings 18:36; 1 Chron. 29:18; 2 Chron. 30:6; Matt. 22:32; Acts 7:32). By using it, Peter claims continuity with the Old Testament prophets, since he is declaring the same God they preached and the Messiah they promised.

Peter proclaims that the God of the covenant, the God of the patriarchs and the prophets, has glorified His servant. *Pais* (servant) is an unusual title for our Lord, appearing only here, verse 26, Acts 4:27, 30; and Matthew 12:18. It describes Jesus as God's personal representative or ambassador.

**Servant**, however, was a familiar Old Testament designation of Messiah (Isa. 42:1, 19; 49:5-7). It receives its fullest exposition in the familiar passage in Isaiah 52:13-53:12:

Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand. Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear
their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

That passage depicts Messiah as the suffering Servant, obedient even to the point of death.

Matthew identifies Jesus as the Servant of Isaiah's prophecy as in 12:18-21 he quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 and applies it to Him:

Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel, nor cry out; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A battered reed He will not break off, and a smoldering wick He will not put out, until He leads justice to victory. And in His name the Gentiles will hope.

Jesus said of Himself, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). In John 6:38 He said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." In John 8:28 He added, "I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me." John 13:1-7 gives a beautiful example of our Lord's humble service:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter."

When His suffering was over, God glorified Jesus, exalting Him to the position of honor at His right hand (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 7:26).

**Jesus**

*Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.* (3:13b)

**Jesus** is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, meaning "the Lord is salvation." As already noted, it is the most common name of our Lord in the New Testament. It was first revealed to Joseph when the angel told him, "You shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Commenting on that verse, Charles Spurgeon said,

The angel spake to Joseph the name in a dream: that name so soft and sweet that it breaks no man's rest, but rather yields a peace unrivalled, the peace of God. With such a dream Joseph's sleep was more blessed than his waking. The name has evermore this power, for, to those who know it, it unveils a glory
brighter than dreams have ever imagined. (The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. XXIV [London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1879], 518)

There have been many false views of Jesus throughout history, from noble example to political revolutionary. Yet to imagine a Jesus who was not the Savior is as foolish as to imagine a Shakespeare who was not a writer, or a Rembrandt who was not a painter. His name is Jesus not because He is our example, guide, leader, or friend, though He is all those things. His name is Jesus because He is our savior.

Instead of welcoming Him, the nation rejected Him. "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). They were looking for a political or military deliverer to throw off the hated yoke of Rome. Because they "loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19), they were not prepared to accept One Who came to confront their sin and deliver them from it.

Accordingly, the same Jesus whom God glorified they delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. Pilate was well aware that the crucifixion was a blatant injustice. He declared Jesus innocent no less than six times (Luke 23:4, 16, 22; John 18:38; 19:4, 6) and repeatedly sought to release Him (Luke 23:13-22). Even his wife recognized Jesus' innocence (Matt. 27:19). As a Roman, he came from a people with a strong tradition of justice (cf. Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-29; 25:16). To condemn a man he believed innocent went against that tradition. Yet Pilate had no choice. The Jewish leaders had him backed into a corner. They had already complained to Rome and put his position in jeopardy. Another complaint would probably have cost him his place as governor.

Peter boldly confronts his hearers with the enormity of their sin in executing their Messiah. All truly biblical preaching must follow his example and render men guilty before God. That is the necessary foundation of the gospel message. Only those who see themselves as sinners will recognize their need for a Savior and comprehend the work of Jesus.

**Holy and Righteous One**

*But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, (3:14)*

To emphasize their guilt, Peter repeats the charge that they disowned Jesus, the Holy and Righteous One before Pilate. Worse, they asked for a murderer to be granted to them.

*Hagios* (Holy) means to be separated to God. Jesus is not only holy by nature but separated to God to do His will. Holy One is also a messianic title. Psalm 16:10, a messianic passage quoted by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, reads, "For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay." Speaking for the rest of the disciples, Peter said, "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69). Even the demons knew the truth that Jesus was the Holy One (Luke 4:34). Israel's guilt in rejecting Him was both monumental and inexcusable and placed them in open rebellion against God.
Dikaios (Righteous) carries the idea of being innocent of any crime. Faced with the choice between Jesus, their innocent Messiah, and the guilty murderer Barabbas, they chose the latter. "Barabbas" means "son of father," an interesting earthly contrast to Jesus, who was the "Son of the Father" in heaven. Even pagans, such as Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19) and a Roman centurion (Luke 23:47), recognized what Israel could not—that Jesus was innocent and righteous. Peter's indictment of them was devastatingly direct.

**Prince of Life**

*but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.* (3:15-17)

Peter has been 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.

**Prince of life** translates archēgos. It refers to the originator, pioneer, or beginner of something. Hebrews 2:10 uses it in the phrase "author of salvation." In Hebrews 12:2 it describes Jesus as the "author" of faith. Here Peter uses it to describe Jesus as the originator of life. That is a claim of deity for Jesus, since Psalm 36:9 describes God as the "fountain of life."

The New Testament repeatedly describes Jesus as the source of life. In the prologue to his gospel, John writes, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). In his first epistle, he adds, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). Speaking of Jesus later in that chapter John wrote "This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

Jesus also claimed to be the source of life. In John 5:26 He said, "Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself." He declared to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25), while in John 14:6 He says simply, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The preaching does not end with the death of the Prince of life, however. In true apostolic fashion, Peter adds the ringing note of the resurrection. Jesus, the Prince of life, was the one whom God raised from the dead. That was a fact to which Peter and the apostles were witnesses (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-7). Peter's audacious claim is powerful evidence for the resurrection. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, that claim would have been easy to disprove. Had the Jewish leaders been able to produce Jesus' dead body, the church would have been stillborn. But they could not and did not. The apostles' testimony was undeniable.
Peter forcefully brings home the point that the Jews were open enemies of the God they professed to love, the very One they had come to the temple to worship. The One whom God had exalted, they had delivered up, disowned, and executed.

Their guilt was enormous, but their murder was unsuccessful. Not only was Jesus alive, but the miracle was also done **on the basis of faith in His name.** The faith in view here is not that of the beggar but of Peter and John. Although occasionally the faith of the one healed is noted (cf. Acts 14:19), the New Testament gift of healing operated through the faith of the healer, rather than the one healed. To tell those who are not healed that it is because they lack the faith to be healed is another misrepresentation of the biblical nature of apostolic healing. As in verse 12, Peter, in spite of his strong faith in the risen Christ, refuses to take credit for the healing. **It is the name of Jesus,** he tells them, **which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.** The healed beggar was living proof that the nation's evaluation of Jesus was wrong.

**Verse 17** marks a transition in Peter's sermon. He first convicted them of rejecting and executing their Messiah. Then, beginning with **verse 19,** he proclaimed the necessity of repentance. In between, in verses 17-18, Peter offers them hope. By addressing them as **brethren,** he identifies with them as fellow Jews and places himself on their level, showing his love and concern for them.

Peter offers them the possibility of forgiveness because they had **acted in ignorance** (cf. Acts 13:27). He may be alluding to the Old Testament distinction between willful sins and sins done in ignorance (Num. 15:22-31). Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, saying "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Paul wrote that if the rulers had understood who Jesus was, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). Their ignorance was certainly inexcusable, since the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah was clear from the Old Testament, the words and works of Jesus, and His death and resurrection. Yet, none of them were beyond the reach of God's grace, if they would repent and turn to Christ. Even the rulers who incited the people to cry for the death of their Messiah are indicted for the less heinous motive of ignorance. There is a note of mercy in the fact that Peter focuses on the blindness and ignorance of the unregenerate (cf. 2 Cor. 4:3-4).

**Christ**

*But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets,*  
*that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (3:18)*

Peter reassures his hearers that their rejection and execution of the Messiah had not thwarted God's plan. The crucifixion, so unthinkable to them as happening to the true Messiah, did not at all alter God's program, nor did it disqualify Jesus as the Messiah. **God had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets that His Christ should suffer,** and those prophecies had now been **fulfilled.** The Old Testament foresaw Christ's death in such passages as Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and Zechariah 12:10. Even the nation's rejection of Him had been predicted (Isa. 53:3). God used their evil intentions to fulfill His own purposes (cf. Acts 2:23; Gen. 50:20).

Peter portrays our Lord as Servant, Jesus (Savior), Holy and Righteous One, Prince of Life, and Christ (Messiah; John 1:41; 4:25). He convicts his hearers of disowning, denying, and executing Him. They
must have been wondering, as did the crowd on the Day of Pentecost, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). In the second part of his sermon, Peter gives them the answer. His sermon is a classic example of how to present the gospel. Before the good news of salvation in Christ must come the bad news that men are sinners.


**Peter's Powerful Sermon--part 2 (Acts 3:19-26)**

Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, "The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (3:19-26)

Throughout redemptive history, God's spokesmen have called sinners to repentance. God told Jeremiah to say to rebellious Israel, "Thus says the Lord, 'Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away and not repent? Why then has this people, Jerusalem, turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return" (Jer. 8:4-5). He commanded Ezekiel, "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations"'" (Ezek. 14:6). Second Kings 17:13 summarizes the sad history of God's dealings with Israel in the Old Testament: "Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah, through all His prophets and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets.'" The primary ministry of the prophets was to bring Israel to repentance. Yet the nation refused to heed them, and suffered the terrible consequences of destruction and captivity.

Nor did the message change in the New Testament. Matthew 3:1-2 relates that "John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" According to Matthew 4:17, "From that time [of John the Baptist's imprisonment] Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

Repentance was also the command of apostolic preaching. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter commanded his hearers to "repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Paul characterized his ministry in Ephesus as one of "solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts...
In his defense before Agrippa he said, "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:19-20).

As he draws his sermon to a conclusion, Peter continues in that tradition and calls his hearers to repentance. They needed to repent, for they had rejected their Messiah and were in rebellion against God. In the first part of his sermon, Peter convicted them of their guilt. He now offers them hope, reassuring them that it is not too late to repent. If they do so, they will receive the promised covenant blessings.

Repentance is a key New Testament term. The literal meaning of μετανοεῖν (repent) is "to change one's mind or purpose." Repentance involves far more than a mere intellectual decision. It is a change of mind that issues in a change of behavior. Peter's use of ἐπιστρέφειν (return), a word used frequently in the New Testament to speak of sinners turning to God (Luke 1:16-17; Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20; 2 Cor. 3:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25), reinforces that meaning.

In the parable of the two sons, the Lord Jesus Christ gave an illustration of true repentance:

But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, "Son, go work today in the vineyard." And he answered and said, "I will, sir"; and he did not go. And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, "I will not"; yet he afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, "The latter." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you." (Matt. 21:28-31)

Note that the second son not only changed his mind but also followed that decision with a change in his behavior. John the Baptist demanded that anyone claiming to have repented validate such a confession with the evidence of a changed life (Matt. 3:6-8). That is the nature of true repentance.

God's design for men is that they repent (Acts 17:30). To accomplish that purpose, He uses at least four prompters. First, the knowledge of God's revealed truth should cause men to repent. In Matthew 11:21-24, Jesus sharply rebuked the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for refusing to repent:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.

Luke 16:30-31 illustrates the sufficiency of the Word to cause repentance: "But [the rich man in Hades] said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'"

The apostle John defined his purpose in writing his gospel in these words: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may
have life in His name" (John 20:30-31). God has given men all the evidence they need to arrive at the proper conclusion about Jesus Christ. Those who refuse to repent are without excuse.

Second, God uses sorrow for sin to lead men to repentance. In 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Paul wrote,

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Sorrow or regret for sin, however, must not be confused with genuine repentance. Judas "felt remorse" over his betrayal of Jesus, yet never repented. It is possible to have sorrow for sin without repentance, just as it is possible to have knowledge without repentance.

Third, God's goodness and kindness are to motivate men to repentance. In Romans 2:4, Paul rebukes Israel for missing that point: "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" God, in common grace, blesses men with good things to enjoy. Jesus said in Matthew 5:45 that "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This common grace should lead people to penitence.

A final motivation to repentance is fear of final judgment. The apostle Paul warned the pagan Athenians that "having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). The sobering reality of coming judgment should cause any rational person to repent and turn to God for forgiveness. There is no other way of escape.

In the first part of his sermon Peter gave his hearers abundant evidence that Israel had reached the wrong conclusion about Jesus Christ. Then he called on them to repent and reverse their verdict concerning Jesus Christ and place their faith in Him. To help persuade them, he gives them promised results if they repent: God will forgive their sin, the kingdom will come, Messiah will return, judgment will be avoided, and blessing will be realized.

**God Will Forgive Their Sin**

*that your sins may be wiped away, (3:19b)*

Peter's words no doubt reminded the crowd of David's cry in Psalm 51:9, "Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities." The legalism of first-century Judaism, like any works-righteousness system, could not bring about forgiveness. It served only to "weigh men down with burdens hard to bear" (Luke 11:46). The glorious truth is that God has graciously provided for men what they could never obtain on their own. In Isaiah 43:25 God says, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins," while in Isaiah 44:22 He adds, "I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud, and your sins like a heavy mist" (cf. Num. 14:18; Pss. 65:3; 85:2; 86:5; 130:3-4).
There is only one way to receive God's forgiveness—through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Peter boldly proclaimed to the Sanhedrin that "[Jesus] is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). It is "through His name [that] everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). "In Him," Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14). In Ephesians 4:32 he added, "God in Christ... has forgiven you." The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ accomplished what the Levitical system was unable to, since "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

*Exaleipho* (wiped away) pictures the wiping of ink off a document (cf. Col. 2:14). Unlike modern ink, ink in the ancient world had no acid content. Consequently, it did not bite into the papyrus or vellum used for documents. Instead, it remained on the surface where it could easily be wiped away by a damp sponge. God does far more than merely cross out believers' sins, He wipes them away completely. They are gone beyond the possibility of review or recall. Even their horrible sin of rejecting and executing their Messiah was not indelible and could be wiped away.

Those who place their faith in Christ are united with Him in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4-5). Consequently, God has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). As a result there is eternally "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

Forgiveness produces joy and relief from guilt. Horatio Spafford expressed that reality beautifully in his classic hymn "It Is Well with My Soul." In it he penned the following familiar words:

My sin, O, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin not in part but the whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Those words find their echo in every redeemed heart.

**The Kingdom Will Come**

*in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;* (3:19c)

Repentance would not only bring the individual blessing of forgiveness of sin, but ultimately collective blessing also. The phrase *times of refreshing* refers to the millennial kingdom. For generations, Israel had waited anxiously for that kingdom. They longed to see Messiah reign personally on the earth and to have their enemies vanquished. The prophets had spoken of a glorious period of rest for the people who had known little peace over the centuries. Tragically, when the King came to offer that kingdom, they rejected Him. And, as Peter points out, it is impossible to have the kingdom without accepting the King.
Kairos (times) points to a fixed, set, or predetermined time. Jesus used it in Acts 1:7 to answer the disciples' query about the restoration of the kingdom. He told them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." God's sovereign determination of the time of the kingdom encompasses Israel's repentance. It is only when "all Israel [is] saved" that "the Deliverer will come from Zion" (Rom. 11:26).

The kingdom will be a time of much needed refreshing for Israel. Ezekiel said it would be a time of "showers of blessing" (34:26). Isaiah saw the kingdom as a time when God "will pour water on him that is thirsty" (44:3 KJV). Joel 2 gives a description of the coming of the kingdom, even referring to it as a time of satisfaction (2:26). No people in history have been so ill-treated as the Jewish people. Over the centuries they have endured invasions, deportations, persecutions, and pogroms. All that has culminated in our century in the insane attempt of the Nazis to exterminate them altogether. Although they are back in their own land, their enemies give them no rest. The rest offered by God in the kingdom will fulfill their hearts' desire.

The kingdom will be a golden age of blessing for Israel (and believing Gentiles), surpassing even the time of David and Solomon's reigns. Isaiah 11:6-10 describes the peaceful rest of the kingdom in these familiar words:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.

Isaiah 35:1-10 adds,

The wilderness and the desert will be glad, and the Arabah will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come, but He will save you." Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah. And the scorched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, its resting place, grass becomes reeds and rushes. And a highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it. No lion will be there, nor will any vicious beast go up on it; these will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return, and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

The kingdom will not come about through human efforts, but will come from the presence of the Lord. He will bring it to pass according to His own sovereign will. Revelation 5 presents the scene in
heaven when the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, takes the title deed to the universe. The unfolding of that scroll (chapters 6-19) describes His method of retaking of what is rightfully His from the usurper, culminating in the coming of the kingdom (Rev. 20:4-6).

Peter thus placed the responsibility for the delay in the coming of the kingdom squarely on their shoulders. It was their lack of repentance that, humanly speaking, postponed the kingdom. God, through Peter, gave them the opportunity to repent of that sin. Sadly, though a few individuals responded, the nation as a whole continued to spurn God's gracious offer. There was nothing left for them except the fulfillment of the Lord's sorrowful prophecy of Luke 19:41-44:

And when He approached, He saw the city [Jerusalem] and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation."

The first devastating divine judgment for Israel's rejection fell upon them in A.D. 70 when the Romans sacked Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and killed more than one million Jews.

Peter's hearers paid a fearful price in time and eternity for their rejection of God's repeated calls for repentance. But "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (Rom. 11:2). The kingdom, though delayed at least two thousand years, will yet come when Israel is converted. Zechariah 12:10-13:1; 14:1ff prophesy the day of salvation for the Jews and the subsequent coming of the King and His kingdom.

Messiah Will Return

_and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (3:20-21)_

As already noted, it is a truism that there can be no kingdom without the King. Peter told the crowd that if they would reverse the verdict of Passover evening, God would send Jesus, the Christ appointed for them. Our Lord expressed that truth in Matthew 23:39 when He said to the unbelieving city of Jerusalem, "From now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" He will not return until after repentant Israel acknowledges Him as their Messiah (Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:10-14:9).

Some may have wondered why, if Jesus were the Messiah, He did not remain and set up His kingdom. In reply, Peter reiterates the truth that in God's sovereign timetable the millennial kingdom follows the nation's repentance. Until that time, Jesus will remain in heaven.

The period of restoration of all things is another name for the future earthly reign of Christ, the millennial kingdom. It is reminiscent of our Lord's description of the kingdom as the "regeneration" (Matt. 19:28). It is then that the apostles' question in Acts 1:6 will be answered (cf. Mark 9:12). The
kingdom will be marked by peace, joy, holiness, the revelation of God's glory, comfort, justice, knowledge of the Lord, health, prosperity, and freedom from oppression. The universe will be dramatically altered in its physical form (Joel 2:30, 31; 3:14-16; Rev. 16:1-21) as the curse on man and his world is reversed.

The truths Peter proclaimed were not new; God had spoken of them by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. The Old Testament prophets spoke repeatedly of Messiah's earthly kingdom. Joel 2:25 even refers to it as a time of restoration. That God spoke through the prophets proves their teachings were not human speculation but divine revelation (cf. 2 Peter 1:21). No clearer biblical statement of the inspiration of Old Testament Scripture can be found.

Judgment Will Be Avoided

*Moses said, "The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people." And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.* (3:22-24)

As an example of a prophet through whom God spoke, Peter cites Moses—Israel's first and greatest prophet. In Deuteronomy 18:15, quoted here by Peter, Moses spoke of the coming Messiah: The Lord God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you. The prophet like Moses was generally regarded by the Jews as the Messiah (cf. John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40). Commenting on Deuteronomy 18 the Midrash Rabbath said,

As was the former redeemer so shall the latter redeemer be. While of the former it is said (Ex. 4:20)
"And Moses took his wife and his sons and set them upon an ass," so of the latter: for it says (Zech. 9:9) "He is lowly and riding on an ass." And while the former redeemer brought down manna (Ex. 16:4)
"Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you," so the latter redeemer shall bring down manna.

Moses also warned of the consequences of rejecting the Messiah. In Deuteronomy 18:19, also quoted by Peter, Moses cautioned, And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. Rejection of the Messiah would result in loss of the covenant blessings. That was the perilous condition in which Peter's hearers found themselves. Those who persist in rejecting Jesus Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, will forfeit God's promised blessings. They will be utterly destroyed from among the people—killed and damned.

Not only Moses, but also all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. That Samuel was a prophet is clear from 1 Samuel 3:20: "And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord." While he made no recorded prophecy of the Messiah, "Samuel was the prophet who anointed David as king and spoke of the establishment of his kingdom (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28; 16:13; 28:17), and the promises made to David found their highest fulfillment in Jesus" (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 93). Second Samuel 7:10ff is the record of the great promise of God to David concerning Messiah and His eternal kingdom.
But Peter's audience was carrying on a sad tradition of their ancestors—refusing to heed their prophets. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

Jesus fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies, leaving the nation without excuse. To the unbelieving Jews Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me" (John 5:39). Luke 24:25-27 records His rebuke of two of His followers: "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Israel's problem was moral, not intellectual; they lacked repentance, not information.

**Blessing Will Be Realized**

*It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (3:25-26)*

Peter closes on a hopeful note. In spite of their sin of rejecting the Messiah, they were still the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant. The apostle Paul expressed that truth in Romans 9:3-5:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

They were heirs of all the promised covenant blessings—more so than any other generation, since in their lifetime Messiah had come. God's covenant with Abraham found its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. He is the seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed. That blessing was still available. The leaders had made their choice when they killed Jesus. These people now faced theirs.

Because of God's grace, mercy, and love for Israel, He did not permanently reject them even when they rejected His Son (Rom. 11:2). It was for them first that God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless them. By preaching the gospel to the Jewish people first, Peter and the apostles were obeying the mandate of their Lord. In Luke 24:47, He told them that "repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." In His last conversation with them before His ascension, He repeated that command: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Even Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, acknowledged that the gospel was "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

All the rich blessings of salvation and all the covenant promises were available. Peter's hearers could only obtain them, however, by turning from their wicked ways. Repentance was the key that unlocked
everything. Peter had clearly shown that the claims of Jesus were consistent with Old Testament prophecy, so that it was a compelling case for his hearers to respond in repentance and belief. Tragically, most of Peter's audience refused to repent. Like their fathers before them, they hardened their hearts and failed to enter God's rest (Heb. 3:8; 4:3). As a result, within the lifetime of many in the audience the nation would be destroyed. And those who refused to turn from their sins would find themselves "cast out into the outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12), where they will "pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9).

Such a fate awaits all those in every age and place who refuse to repent and receive God's gracious offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.