The Preposition "Eis" in Acts 2:38

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For several generations God's people have conducted debates with our denominational neighbors as to the meaning of the word "for" (Greek, *eis)* in Acts 2:38. Peter commanded on that occasion: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for [unto ASV] the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The English term "for" is very flexible; it may indicate a goal that is yet not reached, e.g., "Go to the pharmacy **for** [to obtain] medicine." Or it may be used to refer to a circumstance that has transpired already, e.g., "He went to prison for [on account of] burglary."

Because of this flexibility with reference to "for," some have assumed that the **Greek** word *eis* has the same flexibility, and therefore baptism is not **to obtain** the forgiveness of one's sins; rather, it is engaged **because** of pardon received already (presumably at the point of faith). There are several things to be said in response to this ploy.

1.   Just because the English "for" has some elasticity, and thus may point to a precedent circumstance, such does not mean that the Greek preposition *eis* has similar properties.

        The Greek term eis is found about 1,750 times in the New Testament. While it has a variety of meaning shades, it **always** is prospective (forward looking), and is **never** retrospective (backward looking) in its direction.

        It is "an indicator of direction toward a goal, not as an indicator of location without direction" (Balz & Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, Vol. I, p. 398). The preposition is used with the accusative case, meaning it points to the object of verbal action. Thus *eis* generally is translated by such terms as *in, into, unto, to, toward,* etc. It is a goal-oriented term.

2.   Theologically speaking, the construction of the compound verbs - "repent and be baptized" connected with the prepositional phrase - "for the forgiveness of sins" - demonstrates that the sense of *eis* cannot possibly be "because of," thus conveying the sense, **"on account of** the forgiveness of your sins." And why is that?

        Because it would equally affirm that one is required to **repent** "because of the forgiveness of his sins. Who in the world subscribes to the notion that one repents of sin because his transgressions are forgiven already? That makes no sense at all.

3.   In Matthew 26:28 there is an identical construction of *eis,* conjoined with the terms "forgiveness of sins," just as in Acts 2:38.

In the Matthew text, as he institutes the communion supper, Jesus said: "... this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many **unto remission of sins."** Even the renowned Baptist scholar, A.T. Robertson, who attempted to twist Acts 2:38 into conformity with his personal theological agenda, was forced to surrender his position when discussing Matthew 26:28.

Of the controversial phrase he stated: "The **purpose** of the shedding of his blood of the New Covenant was precisely **to remove (forgive) sins"** *(Word Pictures in the New Testament,* Nashville: Broadman, 1930, Vol. I, p. 210; emp. WJ).

In his massive *Historical Grammar,* Robertson suggested that sometimes "grammar" has to give way to "theology" (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919, p. 389). Is that any way to treat the verbally inspired word of God? Yet that is how Robertson sought to dispose of Acts 2:38. For shame!

Conclusion

It is a sad day in the history of the church of Jesus Christ when men - formerly sound, gospel preachers - begin to deny, both by pen and via pulpit, that baptism is required "for the remission of sins." But this is occurring with frequency. Some are rising up with a desire to "debate" the proposition. Bring them on! There are well-informed, honorable men willing to accept the challenge.