

# “For The Remission Of Sins”



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“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38–39)

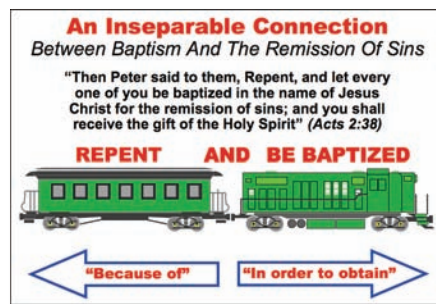
# “For Remission Of The Sins”

JUST SEVEN WEEKS AFTER CHRIST’S death on the cross the first gospel sermon this side of Calvary was preached. After Peter accused his audience of crucifying the Son of God, they cried out “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter announced the terms of Divine pardon: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). This passage makes an inseparable connection between baptism and the remission of sins. It makes the remission of sins depend upon baptism in the same sense as it is made to depend upon repentance. Through the years, many attempts have been made to negate the force of this passage.

I have never understood how Baptist preachers can make repentance a condition for salvation and then exclude baptism. They usually claim that repentance is “for” (“in order to obtain”) the remission of sins and baptism is for (“because of”) the remission of sins. However, the preposition “for” cannot express two different relationships to the two words—what it means to baptism it means to repentance. If repentance is essential to salvation, then so is baptism.

In several debates with

Baptist preachers I have illustrated this verse with a chart showing two box cars on a train track. “Repentance” is one car and “baptism” is the other. They are joined by a small coupler—the word “and.” Because these cars are joined by the coupler, whatever direction one car travels, the other has to move in the



same direction. If baptism is “because of” the remission of sins, then so is repentance. If repentance is “in order to obtain” the remission of sins, then so is baptism.

A parallel passage can be found in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Repentance occupies the same place in both passages. In Acts 3:19 “be converted” occupies the place that “be baptized” is given in Acts 2:38. They are therefore identical in act and purpose—whatever baptism is *for* in Acts 2:38, conversion is *for* in Acts 3:19.

We have all been told “If you can’t stand the heat, get

out of the kitchen.” Some commentators have apparently followed this advice when dealing with Acts 2:38.

**A. T. Robertson**, the world renowned Baptist scholar, sought to avoid the issue in his *Word Pictures In The New Testament* (Broadman Press, 1930). In Volume III, on pages 35 and 36, while commenting on the phrase “for the remission of sins,” as used in Acts 2:38, he wrote, “This phrase is the subject of endless controversy as men look at it from the standpoint of sacramental or of evangelical theology... One will decide the use here according as he believes that baptism is essential to the remission of sins or not.” But, while explaining the same phrase in Matthew 26:28, he wrote in Volume I, page 210, “This passage answers all the modern sentimentalism that finds in the teaching of Jesus only pious ethical remarks or eschatological dreamings. He had the definite conception of his death on the cross as a basis of forgiveness of sin. The purpose of the shedding of his blood of the New Covenant was precisely to remove (forgive) sins.”

Another smoke screen often used to get around Acts 2:38 is the argument that since the words “repent” and “be baptized” are different in

both person and number in the original text, the phrase “for the remission of sins” cannot refer to both verbs.

A few years ago I wrote to several prominent Greek scholars to see if the above line of reasoning was valid. The question I sent to them was as follows: “Is it grammatically possible that the phrase ‘*eis apheresin hamartion*,’ ‘for the remission of sins,’ as used in Acts 2:38, expresses the force of both verbs, ‘repent ye and be baptized each one of you,’ even though these verbs differ in both person and number?” The following men responded to my inquiry. I will give their qualifications along with their response to my question.

**Bruce Metzger** was the editor of the *Textual Commentary on The Greek New Testament*, published by the United Bible Societies. He is currently teaching at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. He wrote, “In reply to your recent inquiry may I say that, in my view, the phrase ‘*eis apheresin hamartion*’ in Acts 2:38 applies in sense to both of the preceding verbs.”

**F. W. Gingrich** was a professor of New Testament Greek at Albright College in Reading, Pennsylvania. Gingrich, along with William Arndt, published *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* in 1957. He wrote, “The difference

in person and number of ‘repent’ and ‘be baptized’ is caused by the fact that ‘repent’ is a direct address in the second person plural, while ‘be baptized’ is governed by the subject ‘every one of you’ and so is third person singular. ‘Every one of you’ is, of course, a collective noun.”

**Arthur L. Farstad** was the chairman of the New King James Executive Review Committee and general editor of the NKJV New Testament. The NKJV was translated by over 120 Greek scholars, many of whom teach in Baptist schools. He wrote, “Since the expression ‘*eis apheresin hamartion*’ is a prepositional phrase with no verbal endings or singular or plural endings. I certainly agree that grammatically it can go with both repentance and baptism. In fact, I would think that it does go with both of them.”

**John R. Werner** is the International Consultant in Translation to the Wycliffe Bible Translators. He was also a consultant to Friberg and Friberg with the *Analytical Greek New Testament*. From 1962 to 1972 he was professor of Greek at Trinity Christian College. He said, “Whenever two verbs are connected by *kai* ‘and’ and then followed by a modifier (such as a prepositional phrase, as in Acts 2:38), it is grammatically possible that modifier modifies either both the verbs, or only the latter one. This is be-

cause there is no punctuation in the ancient manuscripts, so we don’t know whether the author intended to pause between the first verb and the ‘and.’ It does not matter that, here in Acts 2:38, one of the verbs is second person plural (“y’all”) and the other is third-person singular (“is to”). They are both imperative, and the fact that they are joined by *kai* ‘and’ is sufficient evidence that the author may have regarded them as a single unit to which his modifier applied.”

**Barclay Newman** and **Eugene Nida** edited *The Translator’s Handbook On The Acts Of The Apostles*. This book, published by the United Bible Societies, says on page 60: “*So that your sins will be forgiven* (literally ‘into a forgiveness of your sins’) in the Greek may express either purpose or result; but the large majority of translators understand it as indicating purpose. The phrase modifies both main verbs: *turn away from your sins and be baptized.*”

The New Testament plainly teaches that accountable people have to be baptized into Christ in order to have their sins remitted. Have you been baptized for the remission of sins? “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16). 📖

—David Padfield

# FOCUS ON FAITH

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P.O. BOX 4013  
EVANSVILLE, IN 47711

June 28, 1983

F.W. Gingrich  
Albright College  
Reading, PA 19604

Dear Professor Gingrich;

I wonder if you would give me some information ---

Is it grammatically possible that the phrase 'eis aphasis hamartion,' 'for the forgiveness of sins,' as used in Acts 2:38, expresses the force of both verbs, 'repent ye and be baptized each one of you,' even though these verbs differ in both person and number?

I would be very grateful for your opinion as a scholar of New Testament Greek.

Respectfully yours,

*David A. Padfield*

David A. Padfield  
Minister

*July 4, 1983*

*Dear Rev. Padfield:*

*The difference in person and number of μετὰ νοήσας and ΒΑΠΤΙΣΘΗΣΩ is caused by the fact that μετὰ -- is direct address in the second person plural, while ΒΑΠΤΙ -- is governed by the subject ἑκαστός, and so is third person singular. ἑκ -- is, of course, a collective noun.*

*Sincerely yours,  
F. Wilbur Gingrich*



# THOMAS NELSON

Nelson Place at Elm Hill Pike, P.O. Box 141000 Nashville, Tenn., 37214-1000

6218 Prospect Avenue  
Dallas, Texas 75214

September 20, 1983

Mr. David A. Padfield  
P.O. Box 4013  
Evansville, IN 47711

Dear Brother Padfield,

Thank you for your letter received in late July. As you can imagine, as executive editor of the New King James I receive quite a bit of mail and am usually behind in answering it.

Since the expression "eis aphasin hamartion" is a prepositional phrase with no verbal endings or singular or plural endings I would certainly agree that gramatically it can go with both repentance and baptism. In fact, I would think that it does go with both of them. Exactly what is the interpretation of it is another question.

Sincerely,

*Arthur L. Farstad*  
Arthur L. Farstad

ALF/ac

P.S. I'm glad that you use the NKJV in your preaching and writing.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CN821

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

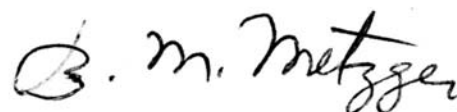
July 1, 1983

Dear Mr. Padfield,

In reply to your recent inquiry may I say that, in my view, the phrase eis apheisin hartiōn in Acts 2:38 applies in sense to both of the preceding verbs.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "B. M. Metzger". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Bruce M. Metzger



Translation Department  
International Linguistics Center  
7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road  
Dallas, TX 75236  
July 1, 1983

David A. Padfield, Minister  
Focus on Faith  
P. O. Box 4013  
Evansville, IN 47711

Dear Pastor Padfield:

Your letter of June 28 has been referred to me.

Thank you for your testimonial to the Analytical Greek New Testament, on which I consulted.

By a glad Providence, I yesterday updated my vita at the request of an administrator here. To fulfill your request that I state my qualifications, I enclose a copy. I might add that I consider my chief qualifications to be the help of the Holy Spirit, and the benefits of some 35 years of daily reading of the Greek New Testament.

Now, in answer to your question whether, in Acts 2:38, the phrase "for forgiving of your sins" could grammatically depend upon both "Repent, y'all" and "each one of you is to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ:"

Whenever two verbs are connected by kai 'and' and then followed by a modifier (such as a prepositional phrase, as in Acts 2:38), it is grammatically possible that modifier modifies either both the verbs, or only the latter one. This is because there is no punctuation in the ancient manuscripts, so we don't know whether the author intended to pause between the first verb and the 'and'.

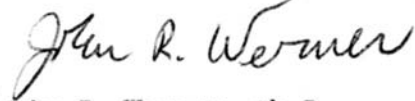
It does not matter that, here in Acts 2:38, one of the verbs is second-person plural ("y'all") and the other is third-person singular ("is to"). They are both imperative, and the fact that they are joined by kai 'and' is sufficient evidence that the author may have regarded them as a single unit to which his modifier applied.

(When grammar leaves us with two or more possibilities, we look for the nearest evidence of which the author intended. In this instance the same preacher is reported in the very next episode as saying "So repent and turn back for the wiping away of your sins" (3:19). So we infer that in 2:38, too, he meant that

repentance, as well as identification with Jesus Christ, was for the forgiving of sins.)

We of Wycliffe Bible Translators, whom God has called to do the exacting scholarly work necessary to translate His Word into every language, appreciate you pastors who feed God's sheep and help them become involved with their Lord in His work. If He has led you to any young people whom He has talented in language and who are open to His possible calling into missionary service, tell them about us, won't you?

Your fellowservant,



John R. Werner, Ph.D.  
International Consultant  
in Translation

enc: vita



John R. Werner

July 1, 1983

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John C. Werner b. 4/15/64  
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Palmyra High School, Palmyra, NJ	1943-47	
Drexel Inst. of Tech., Phila., PA	47-48	
Shelton College, NYC, NY	48-51	BA
Faith Theol. Seminary, Phila., PA	51-54	BD
U. of Pennsylvania, Phila., PA	54-62	MA, PhD
Amer. Sch. of Class. Stud., Athens, Greece	57-58	
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International Consultant in Translation to Wycliffe Bible Translators, 1975-  
Research, writing, editing, augmenting library & articles file, . . .

Translation Workshops:

Paramaribo, Suriname, 1982  
Lomalinda, Colombia, 1981  
Ukarumpa, Papua New Guinea, 1980  
Mitla, Mexico, 1979  
Porto Velho & Belém, Brazil, 1978

Language Survey, Greece, 1981

Organizing Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Camp Hill-Mechanicsburg,  
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Professor of Greek, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL, 1962-72

Vis. Prof. of Greek & Latin, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, 1965-66

Vis. Instr. in Greek, Covenant College & Seminary, St. Louis, MO, spr62

Instructor in Greek, U. of Pittsburgh, PA, 1960-61

Teacher of Latin, American Community Schools, Athens, Greece, 1958-59

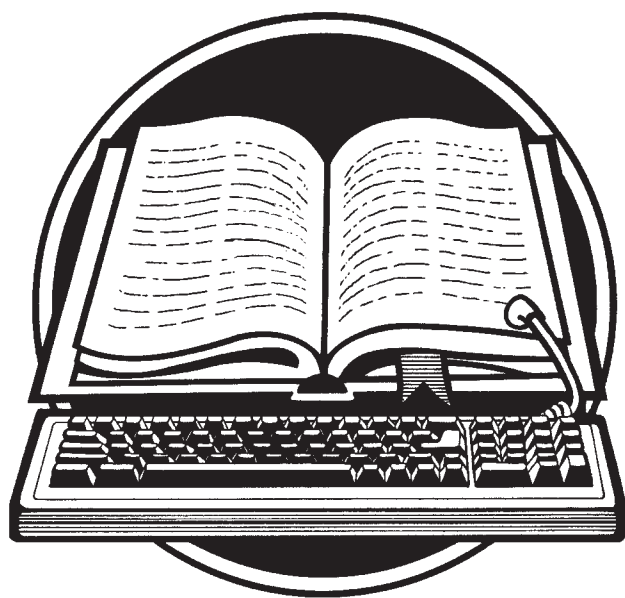
Instructor in Greek, Faith Theol. Seminary, Phila., PA, 1954-55

Reference: Dr. Mildred Larson, International Linguistics Center,  
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Diss.: Religion in Attic Middle Comedy

GREEK: A PROGRAMED PRIMER. Phillipsburg, NJ, Presbyterian & Reformed  
Publ. Co., 1979

Consultant to Friberg & Friberg, ANALYTICAL GREEK NEW TESTAMENT.  
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