



Conducted by
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WHAT is meant by the phrase “when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)?

IT may be helpful to begin by quoting the above verse, and the attendant verses, from a few versions other than the King James:—

Weymouth: “Repent therefore and reform your lives, so that the record of your sins may be cancelled, and *that there may come seasons of revival* from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed beforehand for you — even Jesus. Heaven must receive Him until those times of which God has spoken from the earliest ages through the lips of His holy prophets—the times of the reconstitution of all things.”

Moffatt: “Repent then, and turn to have your sins blotted out, *so that a breathing-space may be vouchsafed you*, and that the Lord may send Jesus your long decreed Christ, who must be kept in heaven till the great period of restoration.”

Wm. Barclay: “So then repent and turn to God, if you want the record of your sins to be blotted out, *if you want to enjoy times of refreshing sent by the Lord*, and if you want Him to send the Messiah whom He has already appointed—I mean Jesus.”

Revised Version: “Repent ye therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, *so that there may come seasons of refreshing* from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus?”

New English Bible: “Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out. Then the Lord *may grant you a time of recovery* and send you the Messiah He has already appointed, that is, Jesus. He must be received into heaven until the time of universal restoration comes, of which God spoke by His holy prophets.”

The Setting

I have no doubt that much of our difficulty with Acts 3:19 begins to vanish when we look at the rendering in some of the other versions. When we realise that the phrase "*when the times of refreshing*" should be rendered, "*so that the times of refreshing*" we are well on our way to a better understanding of the verse.

Firstly, let us remind ourselves of the setting in which this statement was made. In Acts chapter 2 Peter and the other apostles are preaching the gospel, apparently for the first time. Peter convicts his hearers of their sins, especially the murder of the sinless Son of God, and calls them to repent and to follow Christ. Thousands responded to his preaching. The next recorded event in Acts (chapter 3) again concerns Peter (and John) who, on entering the temple, are confronted by the beggar lame from birth. By a most wonderful miracle of healing the lame man is restored and causes a great joyous clamour which attracts the attention of all. The people flocked to Solomons Porch to see better what was afoot and, Peter seized the opportunity of again preaching the gospel. Essentially his message was the same as in Acts 2. He convicted the Jews of their sins, especially of the killing of the innocent Christ. As before, he calls for repentance and in effect says that repentance is a firm prerequisite to, "*the coming of the times of refreshing from the Lord*" (the phrase under review).

Comparison With Acts 2:38

As we can imagine, there is a strong similarity between Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19. Because of this similarity some brethren equate "times of refreshing from the Lord;" with "the gift of the Holy Spirit." The comparison goes something akin to the following:—

"*Repent and be baptised*" Acts 2:38; "*Repent and be converted*" Acts 3:19.

"*For the remission of sins*" Acts 2:38 "*That your sins may be blotted out*" Acts 3:19

"*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" Acts 2:38; "*That the times of refreshing may come*" Acts 3:19.

This comparison is an interesting one and may have some merit, but I do not care for such a rigid definition of "the times of refreshing". One must remember that such a comparison would also have to accommodate two other promises in Acts 3:20 and 21, i.e. "the coming of Jesus Christ" and "the times of restitution of all things". Where do these appear in Acts 2:38?

Again some brethren believe that the phrase, "when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" refers to some future event. The word "when" certainly creates this impression. However, when we remember that the word is better translated "so that" (as it is in most versions) the necessity of its being a future event dissolves, and indeed the possibility of the "times of refreshing" being a reality as Peter spoke the words seems now to be obvious. Why should "the times of refreshing" refer to the future any more than "remission of sins" does?. Remission of sins is granted at repentance and baptism. Why should not times of refreshing begin then as well?

Peter went on, of course, to say that not only would times of refreshing come from the Lord, but that God would send Jesus Christ. However this promise, as far as the time of its performance is concerned, is qualified by the phrase which follows "whom the heaven must receive until...". Clearly, here, the fulfilment of the promise to send Christ will be at *His final coming*, by which time the restitution of all things will be accomplished.

Conditions Of The Fulfilment

So then, my understanding of the matter is this: in Acts 3:19-21 Peter calls upon his hearers to obey the gospel. They must repent and be baptised for the

remission of their sins (as in Acts 2:38) and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Peter pointed out (in verses 18,21 and 24) the Old Testament prophets from Samuel onwards had spoken of these days. They had foretold wondrous times in the Messianic period, in the church and kingdom of God. That period began, as we know, from Pentecost. The times of refreshing had come to the world — initially and understandably to the Jews first. John the Baptist had spent his lifetime trying to prepare the world for the coming of their King and Saviour. He had required that men repent, everywhere. Indeed, from some he called for works as proof of their repentance. Repentance and turning to God, then, are clearly vital and essential first steps in men being reconciled to God. Thus any blessings from God must of necessity be preceded by genuine repentance. To the repentant would come a blotting out of their sins and the times of refreshing from God. Later Christ Himself would come, for He must remain in heaven until the outworking of His purposes were complete — the restitution (or restoration and establishment) of all things. Peter is not saying that these promises would not come to the world unless all men repented (for indeed these promises had come to the world) but he is saying that these blessings would not be received or enjoyed by individuals unless they repented and turned to God. God's grace was available as was forgiveness of sins. Times of refreshing were likewise present. The receipt of all these blessings hinged squarely upon man's preparedness to accept them as God's requirements. God's requirements were simple — man's repentance and obedience to God's only Son. Peter's text was a powerful one — a miracle incapable of dispute.

On the employment of the word "refreshing" i.e. "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord", it is interesting to note that the word carries the meaning of "resting after some form of heated labour or running". Thus it denotes any form of refreshment and, in the present context, means rest and peace and spiritual prosperity. Jesus said, to all that labour and are heavy laden, "I will give you rest." The only other place in the New Testament where this word is used is in 2 Tim. 1:16 where it appears in the verb form, "Onesiphorus... oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain". The concept of rest and peace as characteristics of the messianic period was a common one amongst the Jews and one prophesied in the Old Testament, as in Isaiah 28:12: "To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear." The word also occurs in Ex. 8:15, where it is translated "respice" — "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respice he hardened his heart..."

It seems fairly well established, therefore, that the "times of refreshing" refer to the blessed state of the church age and the wonderful and boundless blessings to be found in Christ. With this I think the other versions quoted concur. Weymouth's description is, "seasons of revival"; Moffatt's rendering is "a breathing space may be vouchsafed you"; while the New English Bible describes the state as "a time of recovery".

Again may I say that the sending "of times of refreshing" was, according to Peter, essentially contingent upon the full repentance and obedience of all those who heard the gospel. This was true of the Jews who heard Peter's preaching, and is equally true of anyone hearing the gospel today.

I think William Barclay's rendering of the verse is particularly fine; "So then repent and turn to God, if you want the record of your sins to be blotted out, if you want to enjoy times of refreshing sent by the Lord, and if you want Him to send the Messiah whom He has already appointed — I mean Jesus".

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