

The Times of Refreshing and Restitution

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Acts 3:19-21 can be a difficult passage to understand, especially when trying to understand it without really examining the surrounding context and comparing with other passages. However, when one notices that the Holy Spirit (via Peter) is actually using the same kind of language He used in many other passages, the meaning becomes clearer. Acts 3 is the second recorded sermon of Peter after Christ's ascension. Many marveled at the healing of a lame man in the temple, and Peter used the occasion to preach the Gospel, with the last words of the sermon being these (Acts 3:19-26):

(19) Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; (20) And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: (21) Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (22) For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. (23) And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. (24) Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. (25) Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. (26) Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

It is my conviction that Peter's sermon in Acts 3 is parallel to Acts 2 in many ways:

Acts 2	Acts 3
Delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God...ye have crucified	killed the Prince of life...God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled whom God hath raised from the dead;
This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses	whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses
Repent	Repent
and be baptized	and be converted
every one of you	Turning every one of you away from his iniquities
in the name of Jesus Christ	through faith in his name
for the remission of sins	that your sins may be blotted out
and ye shall receive the gift	so that times of refreshing may come
of the Holy Ghost (sent by God, Jn. 14:26; 15:26)	from the presence of the Lord (God)
for the promise is unto you... and to all that are afar off	all kindreds of the earth [shall] be blessed

In fact, a similar pattern is seen throughout the New Testament:

John 3:5	Mark 16:15-20	Acts 2:38	Acts 3:19	Acts 5:31-32	Acts 8:12-18	Acts 19:1-6	Eph. 5:26	Titus 3:5
Water	Baptism	Repent and Be Baptized	Repent and Be Converted	Repentance, Forgiveness	Baptism	Baptism	Washing of Water	Washing of Regeneration (rebirth)
Spirit	Miracles Confirming the Word	Gift of Spirit	Refreshing	Holy Ghost Given	Received the Holy Ghost	Received the Holy Ghost	Word	Renewing of the Spirit

Times of Refreshing

The Greek word translated as “refreshing” only appears in Acts 3:19, and it means “a revival” (Strong) or “a cooling, refreshing” (Thayer). Those who accepted the Truth would be “revived” or “refreshed” through the blessings that the Spirit would provide. This involved salvation (3:26) and a renewing of their minds via the Truth of the Gospel that the Spirit would reveal and confirm (see “*renewing of the Holy Ghost*” in Titus 3:5). Although this refreshing had already begun for some (Acts 2), many others had not been refreshed (or renewed), because they had not allowed the Spirit to affect them through His Word (Acts 3:19, 20; cf. 7:51, 52; Jn. 6:63; Rev. 2:7,11,17; Rom. 1:16-17, 8:1-9; 1 Cor. 12:13, etc.). Those who did gladly receive the Spirit’s Word could also receive the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which would enable the early church to reveal the saving Truth to the world and edify and comfort those who were already saved (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15-20; Acts 2:38-41; 1 Cor. 12, 14). Thus, the “*times of refreshing*” was related to the temporary and miraculous “*gift of the Holy Ghost*” in Acts 2:38 (cf. 10:45), but ultimately referred to the saving and renewing effect of God’s Word revealed by the Spirit.

Those who have been *renewed* or *refreshed* are “*new creatures*” “*in Christ*” after obeying the Spirit’s Truth in water baptism (Rom. 6:3-5). “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul elaborates further in other passages:

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:21-24).

“...*Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2). “*And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*” (Col. 3:10).

The fact that Acts 3:20 begins with “*and*” does not mean that the events of 3:19 and 3:20 will happen simultaneously. The “*and*” could mean “and here is something else that is going to happen” (but not at the same time). The NKJV and ASV 1901 translate the blessings listed in Acts 3:19, 20 as being conditioned upon the hearers’ obedience. The NKJV reads, “*be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...so that times of refreshing may come...and that He may send Jesus Christ [to return in the role of your Savior, JPH].*” The ASV reads, “...*that your sins may be blotted out, that so 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...*” The ASV reading of the last phrase seems to convey the meaning as this writer understands it—be converted...so that Jesus will be sent to be your Savior (instead of your Destroyer; cf. 3:23). Jesus was “*appointed*” to be man’s Savior: “*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*” (Jn. 3:17). If the times of refreshing and the sending of Jesus in this way were conditional upon repentance and conversion, this would reinforce the idea that the “*times of refreshing*” could be parallel to “*the gift of the*

Holy Ghost,” because the gift of the Holy Ghost would have been conditioned upon their repentance and baptism/conversion (Acts 2:38; 5:32).

Times of Restitution

The word “*restitution*” is translated from a Greek word that only appears in Acts 3:21, meaning “restoration” (Thayer) or “reconstitution” (Strong). A.T. Robertson says, “As a technical medical term it means complete restoration to health.” Regarding the phrase “*restitution/restoration of all things*” – For the last two thousand years, the Great Physician has been restoring man back to a righteous state of “spiritual health,” reconciling man to God (Mk. 2:17; Rom. 5:10). In a sense, things can now go back to the way they were before the fall of man (spiritually), without man and God being divided by sin (Isa. 59:1, 2; Rom. 6:23). However, this process will not be completed until the end of the time of restoration, when all who will be restored have been restored, and man will finally be resurrected to immortality, going to the pure realm of Heaven, “*wherein dwelleth righteousness*” (2 Pet. 3:9-13; cf. Rom. 8:18-23; 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 21:27, etc.).

The phrase “*restitution of all things*” should not make one assume that all will be saved (Matt. 7:13, 14), that Jesus will reign on earth for a thousand years, or that God will restore the earth to some pre-fall state. Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual kingdom existing now, and it will be delivered up to God upon Christ’s return (Jn. 18:36; 1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9). The Christian’s “*one hope*” is reserved in Heaven, not on earth (Eph. 4:4; 1 Pet. 1:3, 4; cf. Matt. 6:19-21; Lk. 12:33; 18:22; Jn. 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; 3:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 4:1, 9-11, 14; 6:18-20; 11:14-16; 13:14, etc.).

A restoration can be referred to as an act in progress, or it can refer to the finished act. For example, “This beautiful painting will be touched up to the point of full restoration.” In this sentence, the on-going act of restoration was taking place until the point of full restoration. The same could be true of God’s language in Acts 3:21. The work is being done now to restore men to God, until the time of restoration is complete and finished. Many commentators understand “*until the times of the restitution of all things*” as something that is on-going now, to be finished at the return of Christ. A Biblical example of this type of language is in Acts 13:20: “*And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.*” Samuel was also a judge, so the phrase “*until Samuel the prophet*” indicates the **end** of those times, not the beginning. Likewise, the phrase “*until the times of restitution of all things*” in Acts 3:21 apparently marks the end of the period of restoration, not the beginning.

There also seems to be a connection between Acts 3 and 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the return of Christ, where Paul speaks of subduing all things to Christ. Those who are the enemies of Christ now are being subdued, converted into the followers of Christ (cf. Acts 3:19-21; Eph. 2:12; James 4:4). “*For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*” (Rom. 5:10). Compare “*the restoration of all things*” in Acts 3 to what Paul said here about “*subduing all things:*”

*But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down **all rule and all authority and power**. For he must reign, **till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death**. For he hath put **all things** under his feet. But when he saith **all things** are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put **all things** under him. And when **all things shall be subdued unto him**, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put **all things** under him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:23-28).*

Could the “*restoration of all things*” in Acts 3:21 be related to the subduing of all things to Jesus Christ, including converting sinners to Christ? Is it not also true that those who will not be subdued to Christ

are His enemies, and they will be destroyed if they refuse to be subdued? That is what is described in Acts 3:23: *“destroyed from among the people”* (cf. Mt. 12:30; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Paul said the culmination of subduing all things/enemies will be when death itself has been destroyed, upon the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. This harmonizes with Acts 3:20-21, which also refers to the return of Christ.

Regarding subduing all things, similar language is seen in many other passages. While Jesus was on earth, He said the kingdom was at hand, and He taught His disciples to pray, *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”* (Mt. 4:17; 6:10). When the kingdom would come, God’s will would be done all over the earth, because the kingdom/church would become a mountain filling the earth (Dan. 2:35, 44). Christians would go into *“the uttermost part of the earth”* preaching submission to Christ’s authority (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15, 16; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8; Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:6, 23). In Daniel 7, Daniel had prophesied of Christ, *“whom the heavens received”* just before He was given a kingdom with authority over *all things*: *“...all people, nations, and languages, should serve him...”* (Dan. 7:13, 14; cf. 7:27; 2:35, 44; Mt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-9; 2:1-47; 3:21). Daniel was just one of the many prophets who spoke of what Peter called *“these days”* of the church/kingdom and the Great Commission (Acts 3:24; cf. Isa. 2; Mic. 4; Joel 2; Hag. 2, etc.).

The New Testament repeatedly reminds the reader of subduing all things to Christ, *restoring* order: *“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church”* (Eph. 1:22). *“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled”* (Col. 1:20-21). *“Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him”* (Heb. 2:8). As the writer of Hebrews stated, the process has already begun, but will be completed later. This harmonizes with the idea that the restitution of all things is in process now and will be finished upon Christ’s return from Heaven (Acts 3:21). *“For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself”* (Php. 3:20-21, ASV 1901).

The restitution of Acts 3:21 is something the prophets had spoken about from the beginning of the world (Acts 3:21), and the phrase *“these days”* in 3:24 indicates it was something currently in progress. The prophets had consistently prophesied of the coming Savior who would overcome death and bear the iniquities of men, restoring them to God (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 22:1-18; 49:10; Psa. 16:10; 22:16-18; 111:9; Isa. 53; 59:1, 2; Jer. 31:31-34; Zech. 13:1; cf. Acts 2:23-31; 4:24; 7:52, etc.). Acts 3:18 said that all the prophets foretold Jesus’ suffering/death. Connect 3:18 with 3:21 and remember that Christ is *“restoring”* men to God today through His death (Rom. 5:10; 1 Tim. 2:5, 6; 1 Pet. 3:18).

Note also what Zacharias said in Luke 1, which applies to the Christian age, not some future age yet to come:

As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life (Lk. 1:70-75).

When defining the restitution of Acts 3:21, note that 3:22-26 does not even hint at the idea of a renovated earth while elaborating on what 3:21 means. It focuses on an example of what one of the

prophets (Moses) had said about Christ's first coming and His teachings. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself, and Acts 3:22-26 illuminates 3:21.

Acts 3:22 begins with "For," because the subsequent verses are elaborating on 3:21. The Gospel of Christ is going to be spread (3:22, 23) until the times of restitution of all things is finished, then those who have rejected the words of Christ will be destroyed (Judgment Day; Jn. 12:48; 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). Acts 3:22, 23 can be divided into past, present, and future applications, as this table demonstrates:

Past	Present	Future
<p><i>"A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up" (cf. 3:26 – "God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you")</i></p>	<p><i>"Hear that Prophet" (cf. "these days," 3:24)</i></p>	<p><i>"Every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from the people" (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).</i></p>

Acts 3:24 reveals that the context is mainly focusing on the present, not some distant time in the future ("these days"). Someone may argue that "these days" could refer to allegedly future days Peter has been referencing, but the surrounding context indicates a predominantly "Christian age" application (3:21-26). Again, Acts 3:22-26 is a great commentary on 3:19-21 and should be closely considered. The restoration/subduing of all things will be complete when the righteous are resurrected to eternal life to live in holiness with God forever (1 Cor. 15:23-28; Php. 3:21, etc.).

Conclusion

After considering the evidence above, the following explanation of Acts 3:19-21 can be given: *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).* This is parallel to Acts 2:38, with the times of refreshing referring to the work of the Holy Ghost. *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20, 21).* If you will obey Jesus Christ, He will be sent to be your Savior when He returns upon the completion of penitent sinners being restored to God.

Although this is a difficult passage, it seems most reasonable to believe that the Holy Ghost was teaching through Peter the same general truths He was teaching in Acts 2. One of the promised blessings was only for a limited period of time (e.g., miraculous power from the Holy Ghost to reveal and confirm God's Word; Zech. 13:1-3; Mk. 16:16-20; 1 Cor. 13:8-12; Eph. 4:8-15; Heb. 2:3, 4); however, Christians today can still be refreshed and renewed in the spirit of our minds through the Word of God. Most important of all, if we are converted and faithful, Jesus Christ will be sent to be our Redeemer instead of our Condemner.

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Last modified March 31, 2020