

Study Sheet: Why “Eis” in Acts 2:38 Is Forward-Looking

Not a Retrospective Reference to the Cross



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Key Verse

Acts 2:38 (KJV): "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **“for” the remission of sins**, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

The Central Issue

Question: Does the Greek preposition **εἰς (eis)** in Acts 2:38 mean:

- **"For the purpose of"** (forward-looking) → baptism leads to remission
- **"Because of"** (retrospective) → baptism acknowledges already forgiven sins

Answer: The grammatical and contextual evidence overwhelmingly supports the forward-looking interpretation.

Part 1: Greek Grammar Evidence

Definition of Εἰς (Eis)

- **Occurrence:** Over 1,700 times in the New Testament
- **Basic meaning:** Motion toward, into, or for a purpose/result
- **Lexicon definitions:**
 - **BDAG:** "to, into, toward, for (indicating purpose or result)"
 - **Thayer's:** "into, unto, to, towards, for, among"
 - **Strong's (#1519):** "to or into (indicating the point reached or entered)"

Critical Point

No respected lexicon defines εἰς as "because of"

- Words that mean "because of": διὰ (dia) with accusative, ἐκ (ek)
 - εἰς consistently indicates direction toward a goal or result
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Part 2: Biblical Usage Parallels

Primary Parallel: Matthew 26:28

Jesus' words: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed **for (εἰς)** many **for the remission of sins.**"

Identical Greek phrase: εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (eis aphesin hamartion)

Question: Did Jesus shed His blood:

- ☒ **Because sins were already forgiven?**
- ☐ **So that sins might be forgiven?**

Conclusion: If εἰς means "for the purpose of" in Matthew 26:28, it must mean the same in Acts 2:38.

Other Supporting Verses

- **Romans 10:10:** "confession is made **unto** (εἰς) salvation"
- **Galatians 3:27:** "baptized **into** (εἰς) Christ"
- **1 Peter 3:21:** "baptism... the answer of a good conscience **toward** (εἰς) God"

Pattern: εἰς consistently points to outcomes or results, not retrospective acknowledgments.

Part 3: Contextual Evidence from Acts 2

The Audience's State

- **Verse 37:** "pricked in their heart" and asked "**What shall we do?**"
- **Status:** Convicted of sin, NOT already saved
- **Need:** Solution to their spiritual condition

Peter's Response (v. 38)

Structure: Command → Result

- **Commands:** Repent + Be baptized
- **Results:** Remission of sins + Receive Holy Spirit

Logic: If sins were already forgiven, why would Peter give commands leading to remission?

Pattern Throughout Acts

- **Acts 8:36:** Ethiopian eunuch asks "What doth hinder me to be baptized?"
- **Acts 9:18:** Paul baptized immediately after conversion
- **Acts 22:16:** "be baptized, and **wash away thy sins**"

Consistency: Baptism is consistently part of the salvation process, not a post-salvation symbol.

Part 4: Theological Implications

Covenant Entry Point

- **Old Covenant:** Circumcision marked entry (Genesis 17:10)
- **New Covenant:** Baptism marks entry into Christ

- **Logic:** Would God establish a covenant entry point that symbolizes something already completed before entry?

Union with Christ

Romans 6:3-5: Baptism signifies:

- United with Christ in His death
- Buried with Him
- Raised to walk in newness of life

Colossians 2:12: "buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him"

Obedience vs. Works

- **Not meritorious works:** Baptism is obedience to divine command
- **Parallel:** Repentance and confession are also required obedience
- **Principle:** Grace is accessed by faith, and faith obeys (Hebrews 5:9)

Part 5: Refuting the "Because Of" Argument

English Idiom Problem

- **English usage:** "arrested **for** stealing" = "because of"
- **Greek precision:** εἰς never means "because of" in NT usage
- **Error:** Imposing English idiom on Greek grammar

Attempted Counter-Examples

Matthew 12:41: "Ninevites repented **eis** the preaching of Jonah"

- **Misunderstanding:** εἰς here means "in response to" or "as a result of"
- **Still forward-moving:** Action prompted by prior message
- **Not analogous:** Different grammatical structure than Acts 2:38

No Valid Examples

Fact: There is no instance in the entire New Testament where εἰς undeniably means "because of."

Part 6: Summary of Evidence

Grammatical Evidence

- ☒ εἰς always points forward to goal/result
- ☒ Never means "because of" in lexicons
- ☒ Consistent usage throughout NT

Scriptural Evidence

- ☒ Identical phrase in Matthew 26:28 (Christ's blood)
- ☒ Parallel constructions point forward
- ☒ Acts context supports forward-looking interpretation

Contextual Evidence

- ☒ Audience was convicted, not saved
- ☒ Peter answered "What shall we do?"
- ☒ Baptism consistently connected with entering Christ

Theological Evidence

- ☒ Consistent with covenant entry pattern
- ☒ Aligns with biblical obedience principle
- ☒ Supports Acts' presentation of salvation process

Conclusion

The attempt to redefine εἰς in Acts 2:38 as "because of" is:

- **Linguistically dishonest** (contradicts all lexicons)
- **Contextually forced** (ignores Acts 2 context)
- **Doctrinally dangerous** (undermines apostolic teaching)

The clear meaning: Baptism in Jesus' name is instrumental in receiving the remission of sins, not merely symbolic of sins already forgiven.

Acts 2:41: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Application: The early church understood εἰς correctly and obeyed. We must do no less.

Study Questions

1. How does the identical Greek phrase in Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38 support the forward-looking interpretation?
 2. What was the spiritual condition of Peter's audience in Acts 2:37, and how does this context affect the interpretation of verse 38?
 3. Why is it significant that no Greek lexicon defines εἰς as "because of"?
 4. How does the pattern of covenant entry (circumcision → baptism) support the instrumental view of baptism?
 5. What role does obedience play in accessing God's grace, and how does this relate to the baptism debate?
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