

Acts 3

by John Nelson Darby

In Acts 3, Peter calls the Jews to repentance, emphasizing the significance of Christ's resurrection and the promise of His return amidst their rejection of Him.

Scripture: Acts 3:19

Topics: "The Return of Christ", "Repentance"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Acts 3, emphasizing God's remarkable ways in offering repentance to the Jews despite their rejection of Christ. He highlights Peter's powerful address to the people, reminding them of their sin in denying Jesus and the importance of repentance for the return of Christ. Darby illustrates God's patience and grace, showing that even after the crucifixion, God desires to spare the people from judgment. He contrasts the current absence of Christ's kingdom on earth with the future hope of His return, which hinges on Israel's repentance. Ultimately, Darby underscores the significance of the Holy Spirit's presence in the interim period as believers await Christ's glorious return.

Transcript

The third chapter of the Acts is remarkable in the ways of God. The declaration is not found, as in the second, of a present introduction of those who repent and confess the name of Jesus, into the blessings of the remission of sins, nor of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Peter shews, as in all his other discourses, that the death of Christ was the effect of the thoughts of God, though He was put to death by wicked hands: but rather as the accomplishment of prophecy than as the fruit of the counsels of God. The Spirit descends in virtue of the proclamation by the gospel of God's ways with Israel. The Lord, interceding on the cross for the people, had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His prayer was heard, and the judgment of God suspended in the design of presenting repentance to the people once more.

God knew well that the Jews, hard of heart, would not receive the merciful voice of the long-suffering of God; and had warned those who had ears to hear (chap. 2:40) to save themselves from this untoward generation. But He would not come to judge till everything possible had been done, and they had rejected a glorified Christ, as they had rejected a Christ come in humiliation here below. The Spirit, therefore, by the mouth of Peter, starting from the intercession of Christ, proposes repentance to the people, saying, that then Christ would return. The apostle enters more particularly into the sin of the Jews, and presents the facts with great power to their consciences.

It may seem strange that the apostle should speak of the repentance of all the people, and of sparing them, when the Christian assembly had already commenced, and he had warned them to avoid the judgment which was ready to fall on a people which had crucified the Lord of glory. But God knew well that the rulers of the people would render His grace vain; and reject the testimony of a glorified Christ, as they had put to death a Christ present in grace. He prosecuted His counsels according to His own knowledge, but He did not carry out the judgment of His government till everything possible had been done to spare man, inviting them to repentance.

Thus Abraham was told that his seed must descend into Egypt because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet accomplished (Gen. 15:16). And Jeremiah (chaps. 7-14, and in other places) does precisely what Peter does; he says clearly by his prophetic knowledge that the people and the vessels of the temple would go into Babylon: at the same time he exhorts the people to repent, and that thus doing they would be spared. And it is laid down as a principle, that when Jehovah had pronounced the condemnation of a people or of a city, if that people or that city should repent of its wickedness, He would turn away from the judgment that He had pronounced (Jer. 18:7-11). Thus, then, the apostle exhorts the people to repent, and Christ would return.

330 Going up to the temple, the apostles Peter and John had healed a man, lame from his birth, who asked alms at the gate called "Beautiful." The man goes up together with the apostles, leaping and praising God; a crowd naturally gathers, as the man was well known. Peter takes advantage of the occasion to put before the eyes of the people what had been done. It was not by his own power. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of their fathers, had raised up His servant Jesus, whom they had put to death. Horrible position! what open opposition! fatal - if grace had not been there among the people of God.

It is thus that Peter always presents the truth. They had rejected Him, and God had recognised and glorified Him. And here he enters much more particularly into their sin, more than in chapter 2. He presents the facts with great power to their consciences. They had betrayed the Lord, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to let Him go. They had denied the Holy One and the Just, had desired a murderer, and killed the Prince of Life. But God had raised Him up - once more opposition between the people and God. The name of the risen Saviour at the right hand of God had given to the cripple the perfect health in which they saw him. And here the Spirit responds in grace to the Lord's intercession; and the apostle attributes to ignorance the terrible fact of having rejected the Lord, whether on the part of the rulers or of the people.

That which had been foreordained by God was now accomplished - the sufferings of Christ announced before by their prophets; and, if they repented, Jesus would come back: God would send Him from heaven. Those times of blessing that would be fulfilled on the earth by His presence they would have; times that might come on the Lord's side, but for which the repentance of Israel was absolutely necessary, and for which it is still necessary. That always remains true. Their house, said the Lord, should be left unto them desolate, until they should say, "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah" (Matt. 23:38, quoting Psalm 118).

331 When Israel repents, the Lord will come, and they will own that He whom they had rejected was the Lord Himself; and they will be full of sorrow and shame, but be pardoned and liberated; and all the blessings, of which the prophets have spoken, shall be fulfilled. Meanwhile heaven held Jesus hid from the eyes of men. But Peter presents this repentance to the Jews, and the present return besides.

But before he could finish his discourse, the rulers of the Jews arrive, take possession of the apostles, and throw them into prison. Jesus glorified is refused, as completely as Jesus in humiliation. All is finished for Israel, with respect to its responsibility - the marvellous patience of God, and the grace that had made intercession for the beloved people on the cross. Nothing more could be done: it only remained to carry out the judgment of a people who would not have grace. Such is the history alas! of the natural man.

Let us mark this, that here the Holy Ghost is not offered, as in the discourse of the preceding chapter, which began the new order of the ways of God; but he speaks of the return of Christ Himself to accomplish all that the prophets had said. The presence of the Holy Ghost distinguishes the time between the first and the second coming of Jesus - the present interval. I do not say that the Spirit will not be poured out after the second coming; but the coming and presence of Jesus distinguished that period, and His absence the present, as moreover the presence of another Comforter instead of Him. And this reveals to us a Christ glorified in the heavens, makes Him the object of a living faith, unites us to Him, makes us understand that we are children of God, joint-heirs with Christ, that we are in Him and He in us, and makes us members of His body, while we wait for Him to take us to Himself. The love of God, too, is shed abroad in our hearts.

Although Peter never speaks of the rapture of the saints to be with Jesus, yet we may turn to 1 Peter 1:11-13, where we find the testimony of the prophets, that of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, and the accomplishment of the promises to happen on the appearing of Jesus - the three things which appear here. It is not a question of gathering believers to Christ, nor of the coming of the Holy Ghost. We find ourselves entirely on Jewish ground. And God, having first raised up His servant Jesus, had sent Him to bless them, that is, down here in the world; and as they would not receive Him, repentance was offered them. But the rulers interposed, resisting the Holy Ghost, just as they had refused Christ on the earth, thus sealing their own judgment. The final sentence will be found in the history of Stephen.

332 Another truth is introduced here, which is not wanting in importance in the ways of God; though it may not be equal in importance to the moral state of men which led them to reject the Lord come in grace. After this moment the throne and the government of God cannot be found on the earth. The providence of God watches over all; not even a little bird falls to the ground without His hand. But this throne does not exist on the earth, and will no more exist till the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, establishes it, till He comes to whom it belongs. The throne of God, between the cherubim, was taken away from Jerusalem when the Jews were led captive into Babylon; but a little remnant of the Jews was brought back to Jerusalem, in order to present to them again their true King, the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth. But they would not receive Him. Thenceforward the kingdom of God is changed to the kingdom of heaven; the King is in heaven, and the kingdom is like the grain of wheat, which, once sown, springs and grows, without man's hand being applied to it (Mark 4:26). Christ works; without His grace nothing would be done; but He does not appear. He sits on the throne of God, and has not taken His own throne; He will take it when He returns.

Thrones are perfectly established by God; the Christian recognises fully the authority of princes and governors as ordinances of God, and submits to them. But it is not the immediate kingdom of God. From the captivity of Babylon till the coming of Christ are the "times of the Gentiles"; and God gathers the joint-heirs of Christ, who are not of this world, as He was not. They are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; they will reign with Him in glory, joint-heirs by grace of the inheritance of God.

222 There are two great subjects in the Bible, after personal salvation; the divine government of the world with the Jews as centre, under Christ; and the sovereign grace that has given those who are content to suffer with Him the same glory that Christ enjoys as Man, predestinated to be conformed to the image of

His Son, that He may be the first-born among many brethren. Already we enjoy the same relationship with His God and Father. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Already children and heirs here below, when Christ comes we shall rejoice with heavenly joy with Him, and we shall reign with Him.

The Jews, and with them the Gentiles on the earth, will enjoy the peace and blessings resulting from the reign of Christ. Chapter 2, though it does not go any farther than to the presence of the Spirit here below, speaks of the first and heavenly position; chapter 3 of the second. The word of God in chapter 2 brings forth its fruit in gathering souls for God's assembly, and for heavenly glory. In chapter 3 the call to repentance is refused on the authority of the people; and the Lord sits at the right hand of God in heaven till His enemies are made His footstool.

And the work of God goes on here below. The reign of Christ on the earth is deferred because of the unbelief of the Jews; and the presence of the Spirit, Christ being in heaven, to gather together the heavenly citizens, and to put them into a new, eternal, and heavenly relationship with God - this is the foundation of the history recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The following chapters unfold the progress of the work, its difficulties and their causes. "Unto you first God, having raised up his Son [servant] Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

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