

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 3

3:1

In the *Mishnah* (the written record of the oral tradition that was passed on between generations of priests during the second temple period), we are told that three daily times of prayer were held at the temple in Jerusalem: *shacharit*—“morning,” *minchah*—“afternoon,” and *ma’ariv*—“evening” (*Berakhot 26a*). This practice was not commanded in Torah. But the *Gemara* (the commentary on the *Mishnah*) tells us that it began after the destruction of the first temple, during the Babylonian captivity when they could not perform sacrifices, so they prayed at the same time when the sacrifices would have occurred (*Berakhot 26b*). This timing continued during the second temple period and beyond until today.

Earlier, in 2:15, the disciples were present in the temple at the third hour of the day (9:00 a.m.), which was the time of the morning sacrifice and prayer. Now, in 3:1, Peter and John went to the temple to pray at the ninth hour” (3:00 p.m.), which corresponds to the time of the afternoon sacrifice and prayer. These practices are noteworthy because the two most influential leaders of the new Messianic community were continuing to worship in the common manner of the Jewish culture. That reality communicates two important principles:

1. Instead of the Jewish way of worship being repudiated by later Church leaders like Constantine and Eusebius, who branded virtually any Jewish cultural practice as being Judaizing and sinful, clearly the disciples validated the continuation of the Jewish way of worship.
2. Because there was no specific commandment involved, this is also an indication that God allows cultural practices as long as they are consistent with His revelation in Scripture. So that calls for caution against being dogmatic and restrictive in the way we worship God.

3:2-10

The healing of the lame beggar is significant because of the manner in which it was conducted. Peter did not hesitate to command the man to get up and walk in the name of Yeshua. He could exercise that degree of faith because, in Matthew 10:1, when Yeshua sent the disciples forth to proclaim the kingdom of heaven, He gave them authority to heal every kind of disease and sickness. So, Peter was just doing what Yeshua had told him to do.

This passage does not teach, however, that this ability necessarily applies to all believers. Yeshua specifically summoned the 12 disciples and gave them the authority to carry out these tasks. There is no evidence in the text of this ability being given in a general way to all believers. So, care must be taken in determining whether the context of a passage allows for a general application of a theological principle or a specific application to the stated subjects.

Once he was healed, the man responded just as virtually anyone would—walking, leaping and praising God. The other people at the temple then reacted in wonder and amazement because they had seen the man regularly begging at the gate.

3:11-26

The rest of this chapter is a record of Peter’s second sermon. Remember, his first sermon in

chapter 2 was an explanation of what the people had witnessed on the day of Shavuot/Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in an enduring manner, accompanied by profound manifestations of His presence. At that time, Peter explained the prophetic reality behind the miraculous event.

This time, his sermon explains the spiritual reality behind the miracle of the beggar's healing. Peter begins his message in verse 13 with the phrase, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers."

His use of this particular expression is no coincidence. During the second temple period the primary prayer recited at the time of *minchah*/afternoon service was called "The Prayer," which later became known as the Amidah (*Mishnah Sotah 7:1*). It began with a petition to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, just as Peter does here.

But Peter does not state the second element of the Amidah, which is an acknowledgment of God's power in healing the sick and the resurrection of the dead. Since his audience just verbalized those words moments earlier, as they always did at that time of day, they would have known very well what the next line was. And that means Peter was employing a *remez*—a hint that was a very common teaching technique in those days (also frequently employed by Yeshua). The idea behind a *remez* is that by intentionally leaving out a familiar statement, the audience would have to take ownership over the content, rather than it just being stated by someone else. Here, Peter is connecting the content of his sermon to the Amidah prayer and recent miraculous events—the healing of the sickness of the man in this chapter and the resurrection of Yeshua a couple of months earlier. That is confirmed in v. 15 where Peter refers to Yeshua being raised from the dead. By linking both of these events to the Amidah and its affirmation of God's power, the undeniable reality of the man's healing then validates the reality of Yeshua's resurrection. And that masterful communication method gives great credence to the rest of Peter's sermon.

- v. 16 – Peter declares that it was the man's faith in the name of Yeshua that led to his healing. This raises the question of whether there is a difference between having faith in Yeshua and faith in His name. In Hebraic thought, your name represented everything about you, from your personality to your reputation. This is manifested throughout the Bible in which the names of various characters reflect their character. So it was just a Hebraic way of saying that the man had faith in the person of Yeshua, and should not be thought in terms of something mystical about the name, like a charm or a force that can be utilized.
- v. 17 – Peter acknowledges that the people "acted in ignorance." The Greek term, *agnoia* means "not to know."
- v. 18 – shows that it was God's plan for Messiah to suffer (to the point of death). Thus the people acted in ignorance or did not know that God's plan of redemption was being carried out, and they were just the means for doing so. That serves as a reminder that God uses us for His purposes, but we may be ignorant of that happening.
- v. 19 – This verse shows that even the most serious sins, including killing the Son of God, can be wiped away through repentance and faith in Yeshua. That serves as a reminder to us that we cannot think of ourselves as being too sinful for God to forgive.

The KJV uses the phrase, "repent and be converted." That does not imply changing your religion, like converting from being a Jew to a Christian, as many people claim. The Greek phrasing here literally means "think differently and therefore turn around." That is

an important understanding for us to have, for there are many people out there today who have an incorrect understanding of the Hebraic/Greek concept of conversion. It does not refer to a new religion, but changing your thinking and actions in whatever culture you belong. In those days, there was no Christianity as we know it today. Believers in Yeshua continued to worship and be considered as Jews. Today, that same option exists in the Messianic way of life and worship. And just as it was true in that day in Acts 3, today it is available for ethnic Jews and Gentiles alike. One does not stop being an ethnic Jew or Gentile when believing in Yeshua. You just think and act differently than before.

Peter concludes his sermon by showing how the prophets foretold about Yeshua. Verse 22 is a quotation from Deuteronomy 18:18. How is Yeshua like Moses?

- Both of them spoke directly with the Father and on behalf of the Father.
- Both of them established commandments.
- Both of them were mediators for the people.
- Both of them led people to a place of blessing—Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land and Yeshua leads people to the promise of an eternal dwelling place.

That doesn't describe any other prophet who was merely a conduit of a message from God. So, because of the uniqueness of these two persons, verse 18 has to be understood as a reference to a single prophet unlike all others, which the greater context of Scripture shows to be Yeshua. In other words, if you keep this thought in your mind, it will be clear—Deuteronomy 18:18 is only about Messiah, as Peter shows in Acts 3:22.

Now, in order to grasp the contrast in this passage in Deuteronomy fully, we have to look at the little bits of the text, namely the use of the definite article (the), the indefinite article (a), and where no article is given in the Hebrew.

The Hebrew begins with the phrase—“*Navi aqim lahem.*” Literally that reads, “Prophet I will raise to you.” Most English translations supply the indefinite article (a), making it “A prophet.” But we don't supply the indefinite article when it comes to Messiah or God. Usually we just say Messiah, not a Messiah, just as we say God, not a God, or Lord, not a Lord. So, this term is also best understood without the indefinite article, especially since it is not even in the Hebrew, and it is not in the Greek of Acts 3:22 (ἐνα, the indefinite article is the missing).

So just read it like it is in the original languages—“Prophet I will raise to you” where Prophet is a title. We do that with the title of Messiah. We don't refer to Him as a Messiah; it's just Messiah. The same is true here with the title of Prophet.

In contrast, Deuteronomy 18:20 begins with the phrase “*Ha-navi asher yazid*”—literally, “The prophet who acts presumptuously/proudly.” Here, the Hebrew definite article (*ha*) is used in a generic sense, which implies the word “any.” Any prophet who presumes to speak for Adonai, but is actually not getting his message from Adonai, is a false prophet worthy of death. And that is manifested by his prophecy not coming to pass.

This illustrates the importance of the details in Scripture. So the way that the article is used or not used in this passage, shows that there is one very special Prophet whom we know to be Yeshua and we are called to listen to Him. In contrast, we are to have nothing to do with any generic prophet whose message is not perfect.

vv. 25-26 – Peter calls his Jewish audience, “sons of the prophets and of the (Abrahamic) covenant.” It has been traditionally claimed in Judaism that possession of that covenant by virtue of birth is sufficient for securing a place in the World to Come (i.e., see how Nicodemus expressed that sentiment in John 3). But this passage teaches that people still have to turn from their wicked ways, and earlier in v. 16 we are given the affirmation of the necessity of faith in Yeshua (notice also in John 3 that Yeshua declared to Nicodemus that he had to be “born again,” meaning a spiritual birth in addition to a physical birth).