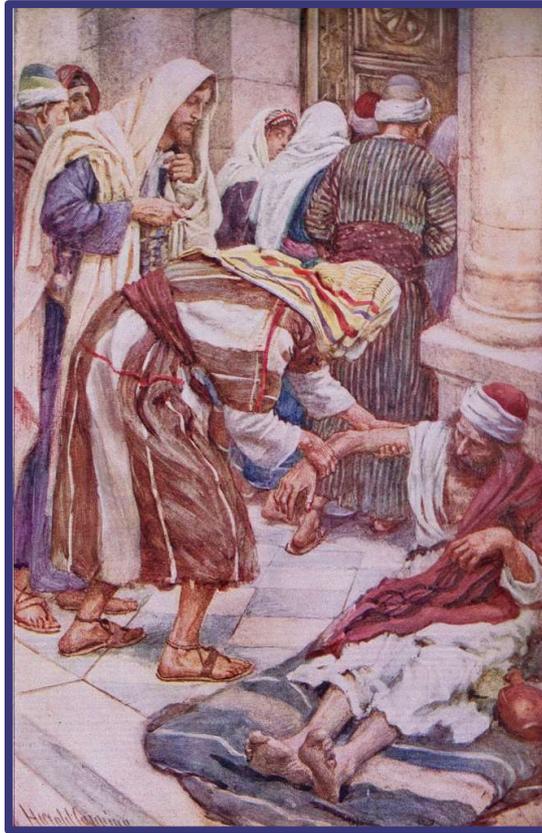


Introduction



Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate. Harold Copping.

*“Then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.
For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert .”*

Is. 35:6.

Acts 3:12-26 describes Peter’s second sermon. It took place in Solomon’s Portico and followed the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate. In this book, I try to analyse the structure of the sermon as well as offering an exegesis both of the sermon as a whole, and of certain key phrases in particular. This exegesis is based on an approach informed partly by an analysis of the structure and “logic” of Peter’s arguments and partly by other “tools” for exegesis such as intertextuality - particularly with regard to Luke-Acts and to the Old Testament passages quoted by Peter.

As mentioned in the preface, this book will offer a rather different understanding of Peter’s sermon, and of certain key phrases or expressions within it, from that encountered in almost all commentaries. This is especially true for the expression that forms the title of this book—the restoration of all things. I hope very much to persuade the reader that the approach adopted, whilst no doubt very imperfectly understood and expressed by the author, nevertheless captures some truths about the interpretation and meaning of the sermon and of a number of its key terms.

Hermeneutical Assumptions

The book is written from a conservative Evangelical viewpoint. Within this however, one of the hermeneutical assumptions I make concerns eschatology: I currently follow a “partial preterist”-type view concerning Jesus’ Olivet Discourse and other “eschatological” passages. Such passages are widely interpreted as describing events that are still to happen— perhaps at the end of history but certainly in the future from our perspective - but which I currently believe to refer primarily to Christ’s coming that occurred in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and with it the definitive end of the Old Covenant and the definitive inauguration of Christ’s Messianic New Covenant kingdom at that time. This viewpoint is excellently described, using the term “Inmillennialism”, in a series of extremely helpful articles at mikerogersad70.com as well as in Mike Roger’s book, *Inmillennialism: Redefining the Last Days*.

However, the understanding of Peter’s sermon, and in particular the view that “the times of restoration of all things” includes the time when Peter is preaching, is not actually dependent on the partial preterist eschatological viewpoint, and I believe that the interpretations and the conclusions drawn are broadly compatible with a range of eschatological views, and I attempt to interact with some of these in the course of the book, whilst at the same time attempting to interpret the sermon from a basically Inmillennialist/partial preterist perspective.

The Way this Book is Structured

I have adopted a “developmental” approach in this book: rather than presenting the final structures and exegetical conclusions as “finished products”, I have tried to build up to these from, as it were, first principles. I hope in particular that this approach will provide an insight for the reader who is not yet acquainted with the joys and pitfalls of chiastic analysis!

With regard to structure, we will start off with the “obvious” structural di-

vision of the sermon into the “explanation” section - in which Peter describes what has led up to the man’s physical healing and how, in the name of the risen and glorified Jesus it was possible - and the “application” section in which Peter tells his hearers of the need for repentance and of the spiritual healing and blessings (widely held to be analogous to the physical healing) that will follow such repentance. From this starting point, various sub-structures and refinements in the overall structure are presented.

As regards exegesis, I interact extensively with some of the leading commentaries on Acts, and also, again largely from first principles, present arguments for particular translations and interpretations of key passages.

The result, I hope will be a deeper appreciation of the incredible structural and logical coherence of this superb sermon and of its meaning both for Peter’s hearers and for ourselves in the context of God’s glorious plan of salvation through Christ.

My Reasons for Writing

Peter’s sermon in Acts Ch. 3 is an interesting and important topic both in its own right and as an opportunity to demonstrate the powerful role that structural analysis can play in biblical exegesis. However, beyond that, my wish to offer this exegesis of Peter’s sermon—particularly the second half of the sermon— has been aroused by two main aspects of many commentaries (as well as talks and articles) on this part of Acts.

The first of these aspects is an undoubted objective truth—namely that there is, in the commentaries, a lack of reference to the momentous events of AD 70— events within the lifetimes of many of those listening to Peter’s sermon. These events, at least from a partial preterist perspective, are a fulfillment of many of the events predicted in Jesus’ Olivet Discourse. This event—at a national level— (regardless of one’s eschatological viewpoint), is surely of relevance to the interpretation of Acts 3:23 which speaks of the “cutting off from the people” of those who will not listen to the Prophet Jesus, and also of Acts 3:25-26 in which the opening up of salvation to all the nations is promised (please see for example, Rom. 11:30).

The second aspect is more of a personal perception., and it is that many talks and commentaries on Peter’s sermon in Acts Ch. 3 often do not, in my opinion, exegete the passage, particularly the second part of the sermon, (the application section), in a way that shows Peter’s argument being developed in a logical, reasonable and consistent manner! Now I ex-

pect that many readers will say that, on the contrary, the talks and commentaries really do bring out the reasonableness, logic and consistency of Peter's sermon, and that I clearly either haven't been paying sufficient attention, or am a hyper-critical sort of person, unwilling to give credit where it is due. I hope however to give some examples later of several instances where it is the commentators themselves who recognise difficulties in accounting for the flow of Peter's sermon.

Two of my reasons for writing this book then are:

1) to present an analysis and exegesis of Peter's sermon which includes the events of AD 70—the judgement on Jerusalem and the end of the Old Covenant—as part of the background or framework for interpretation, and

2) to show how the exegesis accounts, at least to some extent, for the flow and logical coherence of Peter's argumentation in the sermon.

A Look Ahead

Before we start the work in earnest, I'd like to provide two "key points" in what lies ahead. Perhaps readers will wish to know about these before investing further effort in this book! The first point is the view presented in this book is that "the times of restoration of all things" were actually happening as Peter was speaking, (and were not reserved exclusively for a future age or time) and the second key point is that a central aspect of the restoration spoken of included the sending of Jesus to Peter's repentant hearers simultaneously with Jesus being in heaven at the Father's right hand.

Key Point No. 1

Regarding the first "key point", I will hope very much to demonstrate that "the times of the restoration of all things" mentioned in Acts 3:21, and as understood by Peter, had already arrived, and were continuing even as Peter was speaking. (This possibility is actually recognised in a small number of commentaries). This view by no means denies that, at the end of history, at the final consummation, a glorious future awaits the saints. Rather, it is the contention in this book is that *this particular expression*, as Peter uses it *on this particular occasion*, refers to something *that includes the present from Peter's perspective*. The present book is affirming "this", not denying "that"!

There are two immediate objections to this. The first objection is that Peter speaks of the times of restoration of *all things*: this is surely a universal, final cosmic restoration of all things—*all things*!! This would indeed seem to be an insurmountable problem were it not for the fact that Jesus uses an almost identical expression to refer to the ministry of John the Baptist! Here is the relevant passage in Matthew’s Gospel:

“And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.

But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.”

Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”

(Matthew 17:10-13)

The meaning of expression, “. . . will restore all things” in v. 11 is clearly bound by its immediate and wider context. It is related to the prophecy in Mal. 4:6 where the “restoring” (the same Greek word is used in the Septuagint of Mal. 4:6 as in Matt. 17:11) is the restoring of the hearts of the fathers to the sons and vice versa, and a similar view is expressed in Luke 1:17 where it is prophesied that John the Baptist will “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go forth before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous”. The restoring here refers to a restoring of *relationships* between men, and between men and God, during the ministry of John the Baptist. It therefore seems that we cannot automatically assume that the “restoration of all things” when it occurs in Acts 3:21 *must* refer exclusively to final cosmic events at the consummation of history when all of creation will be renewed, (and interestingly, we note a number of references to fathers and sons in Peter’s sermon also).

On the other hand, we must not miss or downplay the cosmic significance of the New Covenant and its manifestation in the lives of believers! After all, Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, (he is) a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new”. Paul is referring to Christians now, and he speaks about *all things*!!

The second immediate objection is that we read in Acts 3:21 Peter’s statement that Jesus must be received by heaven until the times of restoration

of all things—and so it is reasonably argued that these times *must* be in the future—certainly from Peter’s perspective: they surely *cannot* include the time when Peter is speaking!

But is the word “until” a correct translation of the corresponding Greek word *achri*? I contend that the correct translation should be “during” and not “until”. If true, that makes an enormous difference to the time period being referred to! I defend this translation in the section entitled, ‘“Until” or “During” in Acts 3:21?’ in Chapter 21. Please refer to this if you would like to investigate this important topic now before proceeding any further!

Key Point No. 2

The second “key point” is the view that Jesus can be simultaneously present in heaven and amongst Peter’s repentant hearers on earth. This appears to be in contrast to the view, often given in the commentaries, that Jesus cannot be sent to Peter’s repentant hearers *now* (Acts 3:20) because Jesus is *now* in heaven (at the time Peter is speaking) and there He must remain until the consummation. Thus it is held by many commentators that this “sending” will occur at the Second Coming, at the end of history. For example, F. F. Bruce, commenting on Acts 3:20-21 says,

“But in the general context of Acts, Peter’s words mean this: the gospel blessings destined to flow from Jesus’ death and resurrection must spread throughout the world; then, and not till then, will he return from the right hand of power.”

And Darrell Bock likewise sees the sending of Jesus in Peter’s sermon as referring to the Second Coming. Speaking about the Greek word *hopos*, (meaning “so that” and therefore indicating purpose) in Acts 3:19-20 (where we read, “Repent . . . so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and He may send . . . Jesus Christ”), D. Bock comments,

“This purpose links to what forgiveness and what the times of refreshing lead to, the ultimate return of Jesus”.

But why cannot the sending of Jesus to men and His being present with them occur simultaneously with His presence in heaven? Jesus is God, He is the Second Person of the Trinity and He is both omnipotent and omnipresent.

Well, we actually know that this is indeed the case! Just as Yahweh, I AM,

was in heaven and simultaneously present with His people in the wilderness (e.g. Ex. 33:14) and in the tabernacle and temple (e.g. Ex. 40:34) so, in an even more personal way, Jesus is present with us whilst simultaneously reigning in Heaven.

For example, in Matthew 28:20, Jesus, prior to his ascension, says to the eleven disciples, “I am with you always, to the end of the age”. And in John 3:13, using the Received Text (not NA27), Jesus, speaking to Nicodemus, says

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

There are many other verses and a number of approaches we might make with regard to these two important topics, but I hope that this has been sufficient to encourage you that it may be worthwhile to continue with the present book!

Well, with that brief introduction, let's begin!

