

Acts 22: 16, an Examination

The biblical subject of salvation or the removal of sins is an urgent study for all men because all have sinned (Rom. 3: 23). Alas, some of the key verses pertaining to the removal of sins such as Acts 2: 38 and Acts 22: 16 are approached with great bias. Let us now approach Acts 22: 16 with a resolve to understand it and practice it. Acts 22: 16 reads as follows:

"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Anterior to an exegesis of Acts 22: 16, let us be aware of the prompting circumstances and particulars. Acts 22 contains the first of five of Paul's self-defense speeches relative to the charges brought against him in Jerusalem (see Acts 21: 28-40). Paul addresses the Jews (Sanhedrin) in Acts 22 and tells them of his experience on the Damascus road (vs. 1-9, this happened when Paul was known as "Saul," the Jew persecuting Christians). Paul explained that the Lord in the miraculous vision had told him, "...go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do" (vs. 10). The preacher Ananias, Paul reports, came to him and explains to Paul the work the Lord has in store for Paul (vs. 14, 15, cp. 26: 14-18). However, before Paul could perform such a work, he himself had to be right with God or have his sins removed. Hence, our study verse, verse 16. Let us now break down Acts 22: 16 and notice the words, phrases, and clauses that comprise its teaching.

"...and now..." (kai non). Ananias' imparted information to Saul about how he was to be "his (Jesus', dm) witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" I am sure amazed Saul or Paul, especially in view of the present life of Saul as persecutor of Christians (vs. 3-5). The "and" (kai) shows the continuation and development of thought with the statement of verse 16 and that which has preceded and the "now" (non) focuses on the present ("and" or the copulative conjunction kai will later join the essential "...be baptized and wash away they sins..."). Often, past circumstances emphatically and urgently impact the present. Paul's commission and apostleship would fall into place, but he must first address the issue of his own sins.

"...why tarriest thou?..." (ti melleis). We are not sure as to all the possible particulars that might be involved in "why tarriest thou?" The Greek mello normally carries with it the meaning of "about to do something." Based on the original account, it does not appear that Saul is waiting after having received information as to what to do to be saved (Acts 9: 18). The grammar involved in mello in Acts 22: 16 seems to even more indicate that immediate performance in response to received information is lacking (melleis is 2 person, singular, present tense, and indicative mood, suggesting, "why do you keep on tarrying?," The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 262). At any rate, immediate action is called for in the circumstances (compare Acts 16: 33).

Too many people tarry and wait and thus miss out on many opportunities in this life. The scriptures tell us that, "...now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6: 2). When people persist in waiting, a hardened heart is likely to develop (cp. Heb. 3: 13).

"...arise..." (anastas, 2 person, singular, masculine, participle, aorist 2, The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 25). Anastas is literally translated, "arising." "Arising" instead of simply "arise" (without the consideration of the participle form of the verb) seems to be more emphatic. Allow me to inject, that if baptism can be simply sprinkling or pouring as opposed to immersion, why would Paul even have to stand up, Ananias could have just sprinkled or poured some water on Saul's head? (Baptism is immersion, Col. 2: 12, Rom. 6.)

It would appear from the original account of Saul turning to Jesus that he was praying upon the arrival of Ananias (Acts 9: 11). Hence, Saul would have been doing precisely what some religions teach to do: "Pray through for salvation." Instead of telling Saul to continue to pray, Ananias instructs Saul to, "arise."

"...be baptized..." (baptisai, 2 person, singular, aorist 1, imperative mood, and middle voice, Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 65). The second person is the usual posture of a verb when one is the recipient of what is being said. The aorist 1 and imperative mood indicate that Saul was commanded to be baptized. The middle voice is technical and hard to convey in English grammar. Ray Summer wrote thus regarding the middle voice: "This voice depicts the subject as participating in the action, either directly or indirectly, and yet the action is also upon the subject itself" (Essentials of New Testament Greek, pg. 48). The Holy Spirit appears to have used the middle voice in the case of Acts 22: 16 to show the activity of the one thus addressed; whereas, the Spirit simply supplied the passive voice (subject as acted upon) in the case of Acts 2: 38. Water baptism is something that is done to one; however, the person receiving the action is also active (middle voice of the verb).

"...wash away thy sins..." (apolousai tas hamartias sou). Water baptism that is preceded by belief, repentance, and confession of Jesus' deity is "for the remission of sins" (eis aphenin ton hamarton humon, Acts 2: 38). The "wash away thy sins" is in keeping with baptism being a washing, spiritually speaking (I Cor. 6: 11). In I Corinthians 6: 11, Paul mentions a number of specific sins such as "fornicators," "homosexuality," and "drunkards" and then uses three words to describe their changed and forgiven condition: "washed," "sanctified," and "justified" (I Cor. 6: 9-11). These three words describe the same saved state. Just as sanctification and justification are essential to salvation, so also is baptism ("washed," cp. Heb. 12: 14; Rom. 5: 1). Again, this "washing" is not physical but it is the "answer of a good conscience toward God" (I Pet. 3: 21, the one thus baptized has a good conscience in that they have obeyed, cp. Heb. 5: 8, 9).

Man often cannot understand the connection between wash away thy sins pertaining to water baptism and Jesus' blood being, "...shed for many for the remission of sins" (eis aphenin hmartion, Matt. 26: 28). Hence, they seek to find ways to deny the obvious teaching of Acts 22: 16. Others who have embraced the theology of "salvation by faith only" view baptism as a meritorious work, which would be condemned (Eph. 2: 8, 9). Allow me to quote the famous Baptist grammarian A. T. Robertson on Acts 22: 16:

"...It is possible, as in Acts 2: 38, to take these words as teaching baptismal remission or salvation by means of baptism, but to do so is in my opinion a complete subversion of Paul's vivid and picturesque language. As in Romans 6: 4-6 where baptism is the picture of death, burial, and resurrection, so here baptism pictures the change that had already taken place when Paul surrendered

to Jesus on the way (Acts 22: 10). Baptism here pictures the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ" (Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 3, pg. 392).

Man's intellect and reasoning ability must be exercised in any profitable study of the scriptures. However, we must not allow our own reason to exclude what is expressly taught in God's word (see addendum). Regarding "washing" (baptism), please consider what Paul himself later wrote in treating the subject of salvation from both the negative and the affirmative:

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3: 5).

It must be conceded that scriptural baptism is a work. However, like belief, baptism is a "work of God" (cp. Jn. 6: 29). Baptism "makes disciples" and thus places one into a saved relationship with the Godhead (Matt. 28: 19). It appears that scholar Robertson in his comments on Acts 22: 16 fails to realize that baptism is not presented in the scriptures as isolated and detached from Jesus' blood and only symbolically "pictures the washing away of sins by the blood of Christ." Since Jesus' blood is shed for "the remission of sins" and scriptural baptism is said to be "for the remission of sins," we must conclude that it is in the act of baptism that Jesus' sin remitting blood is spiritually contacted (Matt. 26: 28; Acts 22: 16, 2: 38). Hence, one does not have remission of sins prior to contacting Jesus' blood in baptism. No, the scriptures do not teach water salvation in the sense of the water saving a person. As seen, Jesus' blood saves (Heb. 8; 9). Nonetheless, baptism is the means of this salvation in that it places the sinner (not saved) in position of benefiting from Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom. 6; I Pet. 3: 21). Indeed, a change has already occurred in the life of the candidate for baptism. Belief has created trust and acceptance, repentance has effected dramatic change, and confessing Jesus' deity has declared allegiance to Christ, but the person does not officially change their relationship to God from unsaved to saved until their sins have been forgiven and this forgiveness culminates in water baptism, the washing away of sins.

"...calling on the name of the Lord" (epikalesamenos to onoma autou). The word "calling" (epikalesamenos) is nominative case, singular in number, masculine in gender, participle, aorist 1 in tense, and middle voice (The Analytical Greek Lexicon, pg. 157). The participle form (the "ing") shows ongoing action and a relationship to baptism and the middle voice indicates that this is something the subject (Saul or Paul) is doing to benefit himself.

"Calling on the name of the Lord" in Acts 22: 16 is not a reference to prayer. Imagine, Saul is "on his knees" in prayer when Ananias comes in and tells him to arise or get up and be baptized to wash away his sins, now that Saul is standing, Ananias tells him to return to prayer. This is especially interesting in view of the usual denominational spin on "calling on the name of the Lord" is how Saul obtained the washing away of his sins and not baptism. Consider this typical quotation from a Web site that denies water baptism:

"Note: This verse does not say (and now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, washing away thy sins, and call upon the name of the lord). The calling on the Lord is what washes away your sins, not baptism. This call is confession of sins not calling on the Lord for salvation. The call to the Lord for salvation, Saul had already done. This took place in verse 10."

The above is commonly said even in view of the clear and undeniable reference to the "washing away sins" action involved in the water of baptism. What does it mean to "call on the name of the Lord?" First, "calling on the name of the Lord" is important. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," wrote Paul about eighteen years after his own salvation in Acts 9, to which Acts 22: 16 alludes (Rom. 10: 13). Paul is quoting Joel's prophecy found in Joel 2: 32 and also quoted and applied by Peter in Acts 2. What was Peter's application? Peter shows that "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized..." (Acts 2: 41). Peter had just explained in answer to their question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" that baptism preceded by repentance is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2: 37, 38). Calling on his name, then, involves his authority and power to save, it entails doing what God has said to do (compare Acts 2: 21, 14-47, Lk. 6: 46, Acts 3: 22, 23, cp. 4: 7, 12). The "name of the Lord" contains the wonderful concept of Jesus' ability, authority, and endowments. To call on this name, therefore, is an act of accessing Jesus' power to save, as seen in Acts 2. "Calling on the name of the Lord" in Acts 22: 16 is incapable of being viewed detached from "arise, and be baptized" (the participle form connects it). When one humbly submits to baptism, one is in effect "calling on the name of the Lord." Even if it could be showed that the grammar means calling on his name is the source of the washing away of sins, we still have baptism involved because it is part of doing the Lord's will (Mk. 16: 16).

In closing our study of Acts 22: 16, what Saul or Paul was told to do, "And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord," is in keeping with what all lost people did in the first century to be saved (Acts 2: 37-41; 16: 30-34; 18: 8). As you review our study, you should be impressed that we started with a general consideration, worked our way into examining the very words, grammar, and syntax of Acts 22: 16, and then we backed out by again considering the general and both the immediate and remote contexts. To attempt to remove baptism washing away sins from Acts 22: 16 is the apex of irresponsible biblical exegesis and irreverence (Rev. 22: 18, 19, Gal. 1: 6-9). (For a similar study, click on "[Acts 2: 38, an Analysis.](#)")

Addendum: Some have endeavored to argue that water baptism is not part of the gospel message by misusing I Corinthians 1: 14-17. Paul had not been sent to "only" baptize (he had been sent to baptize, Matt. 28: 18ff., Mk. 16: 15, 16). Paul was glad that he had not personally baptized more of the Corinthians in view of their abuse of baptism, rallying around men. Also, it is worthy of note that some contend that the fact Ananias called Saul "brother Saul" before Saul's baptism proves Saul was already saved prior to baptism (Acts 22: 13). However, "brother" is often used in a Jewish sense without any intended reference to "Christians" (Acts 22: 1).

