Note on the Preposition eis in Matthew 12:41

J W. Roberts
A Note on the Preposition *eis* in Matthew 12:41

J. W. Roberts

The claim for a causal meaning of *eis* in Acts 2:38 has led to a discussion of the use of *eis* in other contexts. One of the passages for which a meaning of "because of" is claimed for the preposition is Matthew 12:41: "Because they repented at the preaching of Jonah" (*hoti metenoiesan eis to kerugma Jona*). Typical of the comments is that of Robertson in his exegesis of Acts 2:38. He says the meaning "because" is "seen in Matt. 12:41 about the preaching of Jonah . . . They repented because of (or at) the preaching of Jonah."2

The purpose of this short paper is to demonstrate that this exegesis does not represent the consensus of the standard grammars and lexicons and that it does not satisfy the idiom.

Let it be noted first that the word "preaching" is not the participle (*kerusson*) or the action noun (*kerugmos*), but is the noun *kerugma*, "the message" or "proclamation" of Jonah. The idea is not merely "because Jonah preached" but the attitude of the people toward his proclamation. The paraphrases of Moffatt and Goodspeed in their translations "when Jonah preached" is thus really wide of the mark. Winer-Moulton's listing of this passage under the classification of the "occasion" reflects the same mistake of considering the *kerugma* as the act of preaching. So also does the explanation "impulsi praedicatione Jonae" ("moved by the preaching of Jonah" JWR) of Zorell. More correct is the translation of Chas. B. Williams3 which reads "They turned to the message preached by Jonah," though "turned" is not an adequate rendering of *metanoieo*.

The use of *eis* to express the attitude or reaction of a person to something or someone is a standard lexical classification of the preposition. This is what is represented by the translation "at" the preaching of Jonah in all the standard translations. Janarris lists as one of the subdivisions of the preposition: "to denote a feeling toward, as philia, echtha eis tina; diabolas legem eis tina, eis ti."4 Janarris also points out that this same idea can be expressed by *pros*. Blass-Debrunner5 says that *eis* in Matt. 12:41 has the sense of *pros* and cites a passage in Herodotus where a king made a proclamation (*kerugma*) and the people were unwilling "at the proc-

5Blass, F., and Debrunner, A., *Grammatik des Neutestamentlichen Griechischen* (Gottingen, Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1949), Sec. 207.1.
lamation” to go contrary to its stipulation. Arndt and Gingrich’s new translation of Bauer’s lexicon⁶ cites the usage “after the verbs aporeomai, diakrinomai, kauchaomai, parrasian echo.” These verbs when followed by eis mean: “I am at a loss at,” “I hesitate at,” “I boast at,” and “I have boldness at.”⁷ This lexicon wavers between this meaning for Matt. 12:41 and the “causal” meaning of eis which is included in view of the Marcus-Mantey debate over it, but which is termed by the translators as “controversial.”

A check of Moulton and Geden’s *Concordance to the Greek Testament* reveals that this usage is quite frequent in the New Testament. The following list of expressions is parallel to the use of eis in Matthew 12:41: “I am offended at” (skandalizo eis) Matt. 18:6; “I rail at” or “blaspheme” (blasphemeo eis) Mark 3:29; “I hesitate at” (diakrinomai eis) Rom. 4:20; “I am pleased at” (eudokeo eis) 2 Pet. 1:17; “I am bold at” (tharreo eis) 2 Cor. 10:1; “I have hope at or toward” “I have my hope set on” (elpizo eis) 1 Pet. 3:5; John 5:45; (echon elpida eis) Acts 24:15; “I have boldness at entering” (eis eisodon) Heb. 10:19; “I have enmity at (toward) something or someone” (Cf. Rom. 8:7; Liddell-Scott also give this usage and say it may be interchanged with pros, e.g., A. Pr. 491); “I take thought before at something” (pronoian me poiesthe eis) Rom. 13:14; “I am rich toward something or somebody” (plouton eis).

The above list of verbs may be accompanied by another group of constructions in which the noun implying the action is followed by eis indicating the thing or person or occasion toward which the action is directed. Consider these: “Endure gainsaying at” (Heb. 12:3); “love toward a name” (Heb. 6:10); “love toward somebody” (Rom. 6:8); “devotion toward” (Rom. 12:10); “faith toward” (Acts 20:21). Notice especially “repentance toward” God (metanoian eis theon) Acts 20:21. Compare Ignatius To Smyrna, 9, ananephein kai metanoiein eis theon, “to sober up and repent toward God.”

A consultation of Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (9th Edition) not only confirms most of the above expressions as normal usage, but shows that the list could be extended indefinitely, e.g., “laugh at” (gelao eis) S. Aj. 79; “be alarmed at” (phobeo eis) S. OT, 980.


⁷The interpretation adopted by McGarvey (New Testament Commentary on Matthew and Mark) and others that the passage means that they repented so as to come under or into the teaching of Jonah is possible and has parallels. 1 Cor. 10:1 “baptized unto Moses” is sometimes cited as a parallel, Moses being understood by metonymy as standing for his teaching or instruction. This construction is not so common and does not fit the context of the construction as a whole as does the one herein adopted. Compare 2 Tim. 2:25 “repentance eis the knowledge of the truth.”

⁸This idiom is common: Cf. Isa. 51:5; Psa. 144 (145):15; Sir. 2:9; Bar. 16:1; Herodian 7; Sib. Or. 5:284; Josephus Wars, 6:99.
This idiom corresponds with our English usage. The G & C Merriam's Unabridged Dictionary under the use of "at" denoting "direction, terminal point or end" lists a subdivision "e. an object of action, effort, or emotional concern; in the direction of; towards, as to look at it; to aim at a mark, to strike, point, shout, wink, mock, laugh, be angry at one" etc. This suits the construction very well.

It is quite evident in the illustrations given from the N. T. that the meaning of eis after verbs of this type is not "because." It is true that "because" would make sense in some of the instances; but to say that some meaning would make sense is not to demonstrate that this is either an accepted meaning of the construction or that it is the meaning in the particular passage.

In the majority of the passages "because" would not even fit as the meaning. One does not "have friendship" or "enmity" because of a person, but rather "toward" a person, as these expressions mean. Mk. 3:29 does not mean "rail because" but "at" a person. 2 Cor. 10:1 does not mean "I am bold because of" but "I am bold toward" or as Goodspeed translates "bold in dealing with you." One does not "gainsay" because of a person or doctrine, but "at" or toward it.

It is admitted that the reason for the repentance of the city of Nineveh was the preaching of Jonah. But it is denied that this is what is expressed by repentance eis. If Jesus had meant to say this he would certainly have made his meaning plain by using dia with the accusative, the regular preposition to express cause.

On the basis of this study, it is quite evident that Matthew 12:41 means that the people of Nineveh reacted toward the message or proclamation of Jonah by repenting.

Personalia

Frank Van Dyke received the B.A. degree from Wabash College and the Master's from Abilene Christian college. His article in this issue is based upon his Master's Thesis.

Glenn Paden is a candidate for the Master's degree at Abilene Christian college.

Paul Rotenberry received his M. A. degree from the University of Pennsylvania, 1951. He is Assistant Professor of Bible and Greek at ACC. Now on leave to complete his doctorate at Vanderbilt U., he has done work in a number of other places including Dropsie and Chicago.

Bob R. Winter is the preacher for the church of Christ in Fredericksburg, Virginia and is a senior at Union Seminary, Richmond, Va.

Other authors whose works are included in this issue are on the board of the Restoration Quarterly. Consult the inside cover page.