

The Book Of Acts: Verse-By-Verse

Acts 2:38-39

As we have seen, Peter has taken passages from Joel and Psalms to show that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. Now he reaches the critical point of the message.

Verses 37-38: “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

- **Cut To The Heart: v. 37**

They were “cut to the heart”. The Greek word used for “cut to the heart” is only found here in the New Testament. It means to pierce or to penetrate with a sharp tool. It also carries the idea of a sudden motion.

These people were suddenly, dramatically, stabbed in the heart by what Peter told them. It wasn't just that Peter's sermon was a dynamic speech. No, something else is happening.

The same God who organized these events to take place on the Day of Pentecost has empowered Peter to preach the gospel.

The same Holy Spirit is wielding the knife that is cutting Peter's hearers to the heart. See: John 16:8: “And he, when he comes, will convict the world of sin.”

Peter's logic is inescapable: If Jesus of Nazareth was sent to be their Messiah, their guilt was pronounced. If he was their only source of salvation, what remained of it for them?

- **Repent and be Baptized:**

The crowd asked, "What are we to do, brothers?" Peter's immediate and straightforward reply: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The order of events: First, they are to repent. Now, in the immediate context, Peter is not just speaking of repenting of their life-sins. God had sent his Son, and they had rejected Him. What must they now do? They must repent ... meaning they must have a complete change of mind about Jesus. See: Acts 2:22-23

For these Jews and Gentile proselytes, the first repentance is not of their life-sins. It's an about face concerning Jesus. They must believe what they formerly had not believed: That Jesus Christ was indeed God's Son and the Messiah. This is the only starting place for them.

To become a Christian is to be confronted with Lordship of Christ. We must be vested in the belief that Jesus is God's Son. We must be vested in the belief that Jesus died for our sins. We must be vested in the belief that Jesus rose from the dead and is the Living God. See: Romans 10:8-10

What good does it do for us to repent of our sins if we do not embrace Christ as our Messiah, our Redeemer, and our Savior?

- **The Importance of Baptism:**

Peter says they are to repent and be baptized. Like all New Testament sacraments or rites, baptism is deeply rooted in Old Testament history. A passage from a "One For Israel" article:

The Jewish laws which had been passed down orally from generation to generation had several things to say about the need for ritual washing, and the most desirable places to do it. There are six different options suggested that satisfy the requirements, starting with pits or cisterns of standing water as acceptable but least desirable, moving up to pits that are refreshed by rainwater as slightly more desirable, then the custom-built ritual bath, or "mikveh" with 40 se'ahs (300 liters) or more of water, then fountains, then flowing waters.

But “living waters” (as found in natural lakes and rivers)... were considered to be the best possible situation.

Ceremonial washing goes all the way back to Exodus 30:17-21

“The Lord said to Moses: “Make a large bronze bowl and a bronze stand for it. Then put them between the altar for sacrifice and the sacred tent, so the priests can wash their hands and feet before entering the tent or offering a sacrifice on the altar. Each priest in every generation must wash himself in this way, or else he will die right there.” – Exodus 30:17-21

The priests had to be ritually clean to serve at the Tabernacle (and later the Temple). In addition, any Israelite who became ritually unclean was required to restore this by bathing their whole body in fresh, ritually clean water.

Temple Washings:

The rules of Temple worship stated that everyone had to be immersed in a ritual bath (called a mikveh) before entering the Temple. Archaeologists also believe that the pools of Siloam and Bethsaida could have been used for ritual bathing in the Second Temple period for those visiting Jerusalem for the high holy days.

The requirements for Gentiles to become Jewish proselytes included 1. Circumcision for male converts. 2. A self-baptism witnessed by Jewish people. 3. Sacrificial offerings.

When Gentile converts went into the waters of the mikvah, they symbolized leaving their pagan lives —symbolically dying to them. As they exited the mikvah they symbolized an entirely new identity. In essence, they were reborn.

- **The New Testament “Mikvah”:**

Baptism or mikvah is as old as Judaism itself. How did it become a New Testament rite? The answer lies with Jesus. As our forerunner, Jesus submitted to baptism by John. He set the example for us. When

John protested, Jesus told him it was necessary to “fulfil righteousness.”
– John 3:15

The Great Commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” – Matthew 28:18-20

Baptism became the event through which both Jewish and Gentile believers expressed Christ’s Lordship and individual rebirth.

- Example: Philip and the Ethiopian Official:

Acts 8:36: “As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”.

- **Repentance AND Baptism: Acts 2:38-39**

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Peter’s call for repentance and baptism is not entirely new. What is new is the historical context. In Mark 1:4 we read, “And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

John’s baptism was a preparation for the Messiah. Peter’s call for repentance and baptism was a call to a change of heart about Jesus and a commitment to be his follower.

Two other distinct features of the rite of adult water baptism: 1. It is administered “in the name of Jesus Christ”. 2. It is associated with what Peter promised would be “the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

As such, we have two of several baptisms connected to the Acts 2 events. Baptism in water becomes an external symbol of repentance and a new life, while baptism in the Spirit is an inward work.

Next time, we will look at Peter's statement about "receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit."