

Acts

Bible Study

Peter's Converts

Acts 2:38—43

Peter had just given his first sermon to the people of Israel. He was not addressing Gentiles because they were still not in view within God's Prophetic program which concerned only Israel. Peter was operating according to what Paul calls the *times past*, which was before the Mystery doctrine had been revealed to the Paul and given to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11—12). Peter was still preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, as was preached first by John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). In accordance with the Gospel of the Kingdom, and conforming to the instructions of Jesus, Peter was calling for Israel to turn to their Messiah and be baptized. Baptism was a necessary part of the Gospel Peter preached, as shown in Luke 7:29—30. Those who refused water baptism were refusing the council of God, thus condemning themselves to eternal damnation.

Along with repentance and baptism came the Holy Spirit. Notice the order of events. First, change their minds about Jesus (the Messiah) (repent). Second, become baptized, and finally, the Holy Spirit would come to them, as on the day of Pentecost. Most fundamental believers realize that baptism does not save us in this age, and therefore they reinterpret Peter's instructions to conform with Paul's doctrine. They do this by saying we need to repent to receive the Holy Spirit, and then we need to be baptized as an demonstration of what happened to us spiritually. They twist the clear meaning of Peter's declaration in order to fit in with the Mystery doctrine preached by Paul. Those who adhere to the church beginning at Acts 2 need to do this to conform to what they already believe. They preserve their belief system at the expense of what Scripture teaches.

When Scripture is rightly divided (separating the 13 books penned by Paul as written to the Church, the Body of Christ, from the books written to Israel), it becomes clear that Peter's sermon does not need to be reinterpreted through the eyes of Paul. Israel, absolutely needed to repent of rejecting their Messiah, they needed to be baptized according to the Mosaic Law for purification and identification, and then they would then receive the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit baptism

Most people understand that the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost is the same thing as what we experience today when a person becomes saved. They understand this to be baptism of the Holy Spirit and do not see a distinction between being baptized into the Holy Spirit and being baptized by the Holy Spirit. This can be clearly understood simply by examining with what (or with whom) people are being identified with at their baptism.

Since baptism is about identification, we can look to those being baptized to see with whom they are most closely identified. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Israel (Isaiah 32:15; Joel 2:28—29; Acts 10:45), it was a baptism that was promised to come by John the Baptist (Luke 3:16). When they were baptized, they were fully identified with the Holy Spirit, and thus exhibited the gifts of the Holy Spirit including speaking in tongues and prophesying. They were identified with the Holy Spirit because they had been baptized INTO the Holy Spirit by Jesus Christ (John 1:33).

In contrast to being baptized INTO the Holy Spirit, is the act of being baptized BY the Holy Spirit into Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Again, with baptism being an identification, since it is obvious that we do not display the gifts of the Holy Spirit when we are saved, but instead we become identified with Jesus Christ.

Specifically, we have died, we have been buried and we have been resurrected in Christ (Romans 6:3—4). Unlike Israel, we are not identified with the Spirit because we simply have not been baptized with the Spirit.

Promise to Israel (verse 39)

Peter is addressing only Israel when he speaks of the promise of the Holy Spirit coming. There are many Old Testament passages that promise the coming of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26—27; Zechariah 12:10). When he speaks of those who are far off, most believe he is taking about the Gentiles. This just does not fit in with the context, or with the Old Testament promises. Peter is addressing only the Jewish nation, emphasizing Old Testament promises given to Israel. Those who are far off are Israelites who have been scattered and will eventually be regathered. We see this in Isaiah 57 with the promise to those who will inherit the land (verse 13) and that God will regather them who are far off (verse 19). Also Ezekiel 11:16 speaks of those in Israel who have been scattered far off among the Gentiles who will eventually be brought back to the land of promise. This is the group to which Peter reiterates God's promise in Acts 2. They were standing right at the edge of them being regathered and united and brought into the Millennial Kingdom. This is what they were looking forward when they repented and were baptized.

Souls added (verse 41)

This is usually understood to mean that these people were added to the newly formed church, the 120 in the upper room, when the Holy Spirit was poured out. This actually goes back to a group that was formed earlier, the Hebrew church that we see active in Matthew 18. This church is the assembly of the Little Flock of believers who are given the promise of being the group who will inherit the Kingdom that will be set up at the Second Coming (Luke 12:32).

The problem often encountered, when trying to show people how God deals differently with Israel and the Church, the Body of Christ, is in trying to convince them that the word *church* is not always referring to believers in this Age of Grace. A church is nothing more than an assembly, whether the assembly of Israelites (Acts 7:38), or an assembly of protestors (Acts 19:32), or an assembly of believers (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Those who repented and were baptized, became members of the Little Flock of Jewish believers, not members of the Church, the Body of Christ. They were added to those who were meeting in Matthew 18.

Our purpose? (verse 42)

Many take Acts 2:42 as outlining the purpose for the existence of today's church. They say we are to be continuing in the teaching of the Apostles, to be fellowshiping, breaking bread and praying. A study of what the Apostles were teaching should lead one to question why we are to study them, and what they were teaching. They were teaching only the doctrine of the coming Kingdom, not the Gospel of Grace. They were under the Mosaic Law and were told to follow the Law by Jesus (Matthew 23:2), and they were told to sell all their possessions (Acts 2:45; Luke 12:33).

These are not things that we are to follow in this Dispensation of Grace. Paul says we are not under Law (Romans 6:14). We are not looking forward to ruling on this earth (Philippians 3:20). We are not to sell all we have and live communally (2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8). By rightly dividing, we understand that Peter is speaking only to Israel concerning the Millennial Kingdom.

Signs and wonders (verse 43)

Signs and wonders are another clue that Peter's message is different from Paul's, and that Israel is being treated differently than today's Church. Signs and wonders are always connected to Israel and were very closely connected to the Gospel of the Kingdom. All through Jesus' ministry we see Him (and His Disciples) demonstrating signs and wonders to point people to Jesus as their Messiah (John 20:30; Matthew 24:3). Signs have faded away, as God's dealing with Israel diminished after their fall (Romans 11:11). This is what Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 12:8 and evidenced by his inability to heal at the end of his life (Philippians 2:26; 2 Timothy 4:20).

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