

Acts 2:37-41

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Some of the Jews are ashamed that they put God's messiah to death. They ask Peter what to do, and he calls them to repent and be baptized in Jesus's name. Then the Holy Spirit will dwell in them too. 3000 people repent and are baptized.

Peter has just given a sermon to the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem explaining many things to them. First, that the disciples were empowered to speak in various languages to these men from all nations due to the power of the Holy Spirit from God. Second, that Jesus the Nazarene was the Christ sent by God, who the Jewish people crucified. But His death was planned by God, and now Jesus was resurrected back to life and exalted by God to sit at His right hand. Furthermore, Jesus had sent the Spirit to empower His followers. These things were prophesied by the prophet Joel and King David, that God's Spirit would work wonders through people, and that God's sent one (Messiah) would not stay dead.

Peter ends his sermon by reminding the Jewish crowd that they had called for Jesus' death. They had nailed the Lord and Messiah sent by God to a cross and crucified Him (Acts 2:23,36).

The crowd's response is one of conviction. *Now when they heard Peter's message, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"* They did not argue with Peter, or defend themselves, or deny that they had been party to Jesus' death. They were *pierced to the heart*, they felt the pain of guilt because what Peter accused them of was true. They had put Jesus to death. And this Jesus had really been sent by God after all, and now His power and message was continuing on through the disciples and the Holy Spirit. So they ask *Peter and the rest of the apostles* the best question one can ask when convicted of sin, *Brethren, what shall we do?* They wanted to know how to make it right. Earlier in Acts 2:5, it is noted that this crowd did have "reverent" men in it, despite the fact that they had crucified Jesus. They were deceived, mistaken, blinded by mob mentality and anger, when they called for Jesus's death (Matt. 27:22-26). But they had sinned nonetheless and wanted to right themselves in God's eyes. They did not want to linger in their grievous wrongdoing. They are asking Peter, "How do we fix this?"

Peter shares the good news of Jesus with them. The whole reason that Jesus had willingly and knowingly come to earth to die. The way to fix it was to fix their entire personhood, from the inside, only by what God could do for them. Peter calls the crowd to *Repent*, which means to confess that we are not right with God and to turn away from our former way of living, and turn back to God. Following repentance, Peter says that *each of you* in the crowd should *be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* To *be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ* meant to immerse one's self into water as a symbol of belonging to Christ. It was a way to show the rest of the world that the person being baptized was a follower of Christ.

Peter says that those who repent and are baptized *will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. The *Spirit* created this circumstance to begin with, attracting the crowd of Jewish pilgrims by speaking in their own languages through the remaining followers of Jesus. Now Peter, who has explained that the *Spirit* is responsible for the miracle that the crowd has witnessed, is telling the crowd that they too will *receive the Spirit*. This is because *the promise of the Spirit is for you (the crowd) and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself*.

As the gospel spreads throughout Acts, there are two distinct ways in which the apostles preach. For the Gentiles, the apostles call for their listeners to have faith in Jesus to receive the Spirit. And throughout Acts, Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon belief. But in these early chapters, the apostles call for their Jewish listeners to repent to receive the Spirit. This might be because the Jews are the chosen people. They're already elect, they already believe. But they rejected the Son of God when He came. Now they're called to repent and turn back to God.

Throughout Acts, Jews receive the Holy Spirit through repentance and the baptism in keeping with repentance, while Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit immediately upon belief.

In the next chapter, Peter will preach again, calling the nation of Israel to repentance, in hopes that it may bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth:

“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” (Acts 3:19-21).

Peter is effectively saying, "If you will repent and if Israel will repent, Jesus will return to earth and take the throne of Israel. He's just waiting for you to receive Him." This makes clear that had the nation repented of their rejection of Christ and returned to following God, “times of refreshing” would have come by “the presence of the Lord,” that God “may send Jesus,” meaning Jesus would return and be present among them, for He was “the Christ appointed” for Israel, waiting in heaven “until the period of restoration of all things.”

Here at Pentecost, Peter calls for this repentance as well.

Ultimately only some Jews repented and followed Jesus (3000 in this chapter, 5000 in the next), but not the entire nation, and not its leaders. The time of refreshing and the presence of the Lord was not received. It seems likely that the destruction of the temple in 70 AD was a definitive closing of that window of time when repentance was offered. Jesus returning to earth has not yet happened.

However, the lack of repentance from the Jewish people provided immense opportunity for Gentiles. We are currently in what the Bible refers to as the time of the Gentiles, where we are grafted onto the tree of God's chosen people, Israel, through faith in Jesus the Messiah. God's grace (favor) for Israel has extended to the entire world, for those who believe. Gentiles get to share in Israel's relationship with God, even if the nation itself has rejected Christ. The Apostle

Paul addresses this in Romans 11, “a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25-26). For now Israel has experienced this partial hardening, this stubbornness that keeps them from repentance, but ultimately it is God’s will that they shall be saved, for they are His people and His promises are irrevocable.

Peter echoes Jesus’s last command to the disciples. Jesus told them to “be [His] witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Now Peter is declaring to the crowd that the *Spirit* is for the Jews present and *far off*, for the entirety of the Jewish people spread across the world. The Spirit will come to *as many people as the Lord our God will call to Himself*; in saying this, Peter acknowledges that it is God who is calling people to reconcile to Him, God is pursuing those who are not in a right relationship with Him.

Peter continues to preach this message of repentance. He spoke earnestly and seriously about having seen Jesus risen from the dead, *with many other words he solemnly testified*. He continued to encourage the crowds to turn away from the corrupt way they were living and make themselves right with God: he *kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”* This was a warning, for if there is a need to be *saved*, it is from something. Peter was calling them to be *saved from this perverse generation*. The *perverse generation* of Jewish leaders who led the people of Israel against the Son of God, rather than embrace Him as God’s messiah. They are *perverse* in the sense that they are incorrect, crooked, corrupt. They are not in submission to God, they do not see clearly; they did not even recognize His Son when He was physically among them speaking the Word of God to them. Under their leadership, the entire generation of Jews have become *perverse*—misled and astray. Peter is calling his audience to repent, to reject the way their current *generation* is going, and to be *saved from* the negative consequences that will result in their lack of repentance. Doing so would bring the “time of refreshing” when Jesus returns to earth (Acts 3:19-21).

The crowd responds. So *then, those who had received his word*, those who believed Peter’s testimony, believed the truth of Jesus Christ, and that He resurrected and was exalted by God, and that they needed to repent of their rebellion against God—these new disciples *were baptized*.

The number of new disciples of Jesus *that day*, those *added to* the group of disciples, was *about three thousand souls*. This is an incredible increase. From 120 followers of Jesus hiding in a room in Jerusalem, to nearly 3000 new believers who witnessed the disciples speaking in their own native tongues through the power of the Holy Spirit, who heard Peter’s sermon about Jesus, and his call to repentance of sin, and responded in obedience.

Biblical Text

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40 And with many

other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.