

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #7

### Acts 2:37-38

This section of Acts is one of the most amazing historical events in the history of the Church. The Apostle Peter had just carefully expounded two major O.T. passages (Joel 2; Psalm 16), and connected them to the coming Holy Spirit and to Jesus Christ. There were no bands playing, there was no choir singing, there was no entertainment; there was just the pure preaching of doctrinal truth from the Word of God, and that preaching had the power of the Holy Spirit behind it and the results were dramatic.

There are many public speakers who spend years studying the methodology of manipulating an audience. In most public speaking courses or homiletics courses for ministers, that point is stressed. Learn as much as you can about your audience and then go to work on tailoring your speech or message so you can touch their hearts. It is not uncommon in a church service to hear of a minister who asks people to bow their heads and with music playing softly tries to manipulate an audience into raising their hands or walking an aisle.

The Apostle Peter did not do that at all. He simply stood up (Acts 2:14) and set forth the truth of the Word of God; and when he was done, he did not ask for people to raise their hands or come forward. He did not ask people to bow their heads while an organ was playing so he could try to generate a response. He simply set forth clear theological truth from the Scriptures, and when he was done over 3000 people were moved by the Holy Spirit to respond. What we see here is amazing:

**THROUGH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, IT WAS THE PREACHING OF GOD'S WORD THAT CAUSED MANY PEOPLE TO BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHICH LED THEM TO HAVING TOTALLY TRANSFORMED LIVES.**

Now all of the responses of the people you will see in this section were due to Peter expounding God's Word. God's Spirit empowered Peter; and when he preached, there were responses that were amazing. This is a dream-come-true series of responses. There are two amazing responses we want to observe here:

**AMAZING RESPONSE #1** – The response of the crowd to Peter's sermon. **2:37**

Keep in mind that Peter had just given a very serious doctrinal exposition of truth pertaining to the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. He ended his sermon by telling his audience that they were responsible for killing Jesus Christ. **Verse 37** opens with the words "when they heard this." Faith comes by hearing truth. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). After hearing the Word of God, there were two reactions:

**Reaction #1** - The people were pierced in their hearts. **2:37a**

The word “pierce” (κατανυσσω) is very rare. The word means that their hearts were violently pricked and stunned (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 237). Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said they were “stabbed” in their hearts. The verb is an aorist passive, which means they were the recipients of the heart-stabbing conviction of God. As they were listening to the Word of God, they became the passive recipients of the conviction of the Holy Spirit this very moment in time.

The passive voice indicates that God authorized the action of piercing the hearts of those who would be saved. In other words, God used His Word to convict His elect so He could save His elect. Peter had already told them that whoever would call upon the name of the Lord would be saved (Acts 2:21); what God did here was pierce the hearts of those who would call upon the name of the Lord to be saved.

Now Peter had just expounded powerful Christological truth that Jesus Christ was the God-Savior-Messiah who had been crucified by these very Jews, but had been raised up by God because the whole plan was predetermined by Him.

The Holy Spirit used Peter’s presentation of truth to bring this crowd under deep conviction. Peter’s sermon cut deep into their hearts. God made it cut deep into their hearts. Preaching God’s Word is not designed to tickle ears but to cut open hearts.

Have you ever had God’s Word rip into your soul like this? Have you ever been in a Service when the Holy Spirit has stabbed you in your heart? You respond to that conviction and you are heading to great things in life.

**Reaction #2** - The people asked the apostles what they should do. **2:37b**

In most of our churches today, when a message ends, it is the minister who gives some sort of invitation. Not here. Here the crowd gave the invitation. Peter just preached the truth and they gave their own invitation - “What shall we do?”

It is interesting how these Jewish people respond - they name “Peter,” they identify him and the others as “apostles,” and they call them “men-brothers.” The conviction of the Holy Spirit always works in recognizing and respecting those who communicate truth.

When you have a true conviction of the Holy Spirit at work, there will be an overwhelming sense that one is guilty and sinful and one needs to do something to get out of that condition. When the real convicting power of God is at work, a sinner will realize that he has broken God’s law so many times he should be dead. But saving conviction will prick the heart to want to be in a right relationship with God.

When they were convicted, they wanted to do something about it. These people were about to see God do some amazing things, and the starting point is that they responded to the conviction of the Spirit of God. There was no time-gap between the presentation of the Word - the conviction of the Spirit - and the response of the people.

If the Holy Spirit brings you under conviction and you respond to it, you will see God do some amazing things with you and for you from that very moment.

R. C. Sproul says that he loves to use this text as an apologist. He says he has on occasion spent hours trying to answer philosophical objections to the Gospel. He says finally he will say, let me ask you a question. What do you do with your guilt? He says there is not a person who can look him in the eye and say “I don’t have any guilt” (*Acts*, p. 63). Our guilt is measured by the Word of God, not by our feelings. Again Sproul says, just imagine being on trial for armed robbery and the judge says, “What is your defense?” and you say “I don’t feel guilty” (*Ibid*, p. 63). That judge would view you as a fool.

We never want to make our guilt determined by how we may or may not feel; it is determined by the Word of God. This crowd was under guilty conviction brought about by God’s Word and they cried out, “What shall we do?”

## **AMAZING RESPONSE #2 – The response of Peter to the crowd. 2:38-39**

Peter is asked by a great throng of people what they must do to be saved. There are three actions specifically stated by the Apostle Peter:

### **Action #1 - Each person needs to repent. 2:38a**

The verb “repent” (μετανοήσατε) is plural and is aimed at all people, and it is a word that means there needs to be a specific point in time (aorist tense) when a Jew changes his mind or thinking concerning Jesus Christ and His saving, Messianic work. **They need to repent; that is, they needed to change their thinking and minds about the One they crucified.** They needed to change their thinking about the fact that Jesus Christ is Savior, Messiah, and God, and He is the only One who can actually give the righteousness needed to save a nation or individual from sin.

Now this word “repent” is not the same as the grace Gospel word “believe,” which is the key word of the Grace Age (*Acts* 8:37; 10:43; 13:38-39; 16:31). Lewis Sperry Chafer observed there are approximately 150 passages in the New Testament that teach that to be saved one must believe, and none of these passages uses the word “repent” (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 376). In the Gospel of John and in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, which is a complete analysis of Grace Age salvation, the main thrust is that to be saved one must believe in Jesus Christ, for we are justified by faith. The idea of “repentance” then is closely related to the idea of believing and not some separate act.

**To believe in Jesus Christ for salvation means that a sinner must change his thinking (repent) about what it is that will make him right with God and take him to heaven.** In other words, these Jewish people, who had killed Jesus Christ, needed to change their thinking about what will make them right with God. The Jews had rejected Him as Savior and Messiah and Peter says you need to repent; that is, change your thinking about Him right now.

I don’t care who you are or how good you think you are or how religious you may be; you will not be forgiven of your sins until you change your mind about the fact that only Jesus Christ can save you from your sins.

**Action #2** - Each person needs to be baptized . **2:38b**

Now the first question that would be very logical to ask when we read this verse is, just exactly what baptism is Peter referring to here? He doesn't exactly say. Is he referring to some form of ritual water baptism, or is he referring to the real Spirit baptism?

In the New Testament there are fourteen different kinds of baptisms - some include water and some don't:

- 1) Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11) - future reference to Pentecost (Acts 2).
- 2) Christ baptizing with fire (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16) - future reference to Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and Christ's Second Coming flaming fire judgment (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).
- 3) Holy Spirit baptizing a believer into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13).
- 4) Holy Spirit baptizing a believer into the cross-work of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:11-13).
- 5) Christ's baptism into all of His sufferings connected to His cross-work (Luke 12:50).
- 6) Noah's ark typological baptism which pictures Spirit baptism that saves us (I Peter 3:20-21).
- 7) Mosaic baptism of the children of Israel in the cloud and sea (I Corinthians 10:2).
- 8) Corinthian cultish water baptism called baptism for the dead (I Corinthians 15:29).
- 9) Jewish law "washings" (literally baptisms) involved in O.T. law rituals (Hebrews 9:9-10).
- 10) Jewish baptism or washings (literally baptisms) invented by men (Mark 7:1-7).
- 11) John's Jordan river baptism that was designed to introduce Jesus Christ to Israel (John 1:31), which was designed to cause the nation Israel to admit they needed to repent and needed the forgiveness of sins to inherit her Kingdom (Luke 3:3).
- 12) Christ's baptism in the Jordan which was designed to fulfill all righteousness of the O.T. law and publicly introduce Christ as Messiah and King to Israel (Matthew 3:13-15; John 1:31).
- 13) Pentecostal baptism in **Acts 2:38** which is aimed at Israel (2:14, 22) in view the fact that they had crucified Jesus Christ, who was her God and Messiah.
- 14) Believer's water baptism which was practiced in at least one N.T. church (I Corinthians 1:14-17).

Now it seems to me that a very important question to resolve is just exactly what baptism is it to which Peter is referring? Harry Bultema wrote, the book of Acts is the "bulwark for water baptizers" (*The Bible and Baptism*, p. 71). Dr. Chuck Swindoll said, "This verse has been the basis for many teachings that don't fit well with the whole of Scripture. Those teachings have caused both tensions and divisions among Christians" (*Acts*, Vol. 1, p. 24). But is he actually referring to water baptism, and if so, which one? When it comes to **Acts 2:38**, there have been four main views:

**(View #1)** - Some believe this text refers to a ritual water baptism that you must have to be saved.

The term for this view is "baptismal regeneration." Catholic churches, Church of Christ, some Lutheran, Methodists, Reformed, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches teach this. They teach that in order to be saved one must be baptized in water.

S. Lewis Johnson told an old story of a great drought out in west Texas that was so bad that it changed the dynamics of water baptism. The Baptists went to sprinkling; the Methodists were using a damp rag; and the Presbyterians were handing out rain checks (*Acts 2:37-40*, p. 7). Lack of water had put them in a baptismal dilemma.

We may quickly dismiss this as being the correct interpretation for several reasons:

- 1) Because Peter just said whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (*Acts 2:21*).
- 2) Later in Acts, both Peter and Paul will tell people that the way to be saved from sins is by believing on Jesus Christ, not by being baptized (*Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 16:31*).
- 3) The great leaders of the early Church did not teach this - Polycarp, Clement of Rome, Ignatius all taught that believing on Jesus Christ saved, not water baptism.
- 4) As Paul developed N.T. doctrine, which he received directly from Jesus Christ, he was very clear to point out that one is saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by any works. In fact, on the subject of baptism he said he was not sent to baptize but to preach Christ (I Cor. 1:17).

We immediately reject the fact that today one must be baptized in water to be saved.

**(View #2)** - Some believe this text refers to present day believer's water baptism which happens after salvation.

This would not seem to be the case because the chronology of the baptism is specifically presented before the reception of the Holy Spirit, and this baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ and not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**(View #3)** - Some believe this text refers to a Kingdom Gospel water baptism like that of John's baptism.

John's baptism was not Christian baptism. His baptism was a baptism of repentance in which Jewish people confessed their sins and publicly acknowledged their need of a King/Savior who could give them the righteousness they needed to enter their Kingdom (*Matthew 3:6-7, 8*). Luke actually spoke of this baptism in his Gospel - (*Luke 3:3*).

This "remission of sins" baptism existed from the time of John the Baptist until the Pentecost baptism of the Spirit. **These Jews to whom Peter was preaching had refused to be baptized by John.** To this point they had rejected the fact that Jesus Christ was in fact the Messiah.

This would explain the reason why the baptism was in the name of "Jesus Christ" (Messiah rather than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). So the Jews, who had rejected John's baptism, would need to backtrack and be baptized, admitting that Jesus was the Messiah and the King who could give Israel her Kingdom. This would explain the chronology - baptism first and then the reception of the Holy Spirit.

**(View #4)** - Some believe this text refers to Spirit baptism and not to any water baptism.

David Thomas in the 1800s said "some think that the reference is not to baptism by water ..." (*Acts*, p. 38). There are certain indicators in the text that would enable one to build a strong case for the fact that this is not talking about a water baptism here but Spirit baptism:

- 1) The immediate context of this mention of baptism is in reference to the question of what one must do to be saved, and the only baptism that does actually save is Spirit baptism.
- 2) The whole context of this baptism in Acts 2 is Spirit baptism, not John's water baptism. Kenneth Gangel, who takes the position that this refers to water baptism, says, "The context shows baptism here refers to water, not the Holy Spirit" (*Acts*, p. 30). It seems to me that just the opposite is true; for any analysis of baptism based on the context of Acts 2 must be Spirit baptism, not water baptism. The baptism fresh in Peter's mind would be Spirit baptism for he develops this very point (Acts 2:15-17). I find it hard to believe that Peter, coming fresh off his own Spirit baptism, would bring up the subject of water baptism. And if he did, it would be in the context of John's baptism.
- 3) The baptism is some baptism "upon" the name of Jesus Christ, not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 4) The baptism referred to here is definitely connected to the personal "forgiveness of sins" and Peter will make it clear later that this only comes by faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43).
- 5) The verb "baptized" is passive not active, indicating the person would be the recipient of the baptism and not responsible for the action in any way.
- 6) We have no evidence that any of the apostles, after receiving the Holy Spirit, were baptized in water (Acts 2:1-13).
- 7) These apostles are in Jerusalem and there are not a bunch of baptismal tanks there or even great access to water. Although, Kent Hughes cites A. T. Robertson in saying that he thought numerous water pools around Jerusalem would be able to accommodate these people (*Acts*, p. 46).
- 8) The preposition "in" (be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ), is *epi* (ἐπὶ) and the noun "name" is in the dative case. The better translation is "upon" not "in." So this baptism being referred to here is contingent **upon** believing **upon** Jesus Christ.

Dr. Chafer says the baptism being discussed here may not be ritual water baptism, but real Spirit baptism (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 383-384).

Now the "baptism" that is mentioned here is a baptism "for the forgiveness of sins" (εἰς ἀφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν). Daniel Wallace, in his exegetical syntax of the Greek New Testament, concludes that, based on what Peter will say later concerning the conversion of a Gentile Cornelius, that this has reference to both the real baptism of the Holy Spirit and the ritual water baptism that symbolizes one has been baptized by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:14-18; 10:44-48). In other words, once one believes on Jesus Christ, he receives the forgiveness of sins and the Spirit of God and then pictures this via water baptism (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 369-371).

I believe Peter is thinking of John's baptism - repent - be baptized - receive Spirit. That is what he knew. Later he would learn the importance of Spirit baptism (Acts 11:14-18) and the proper sequence of a believer's baptism (Acts 10:44-48). It is interesting to observe that in his last discussion of Spirit baptism, he does not mention water baptism (Acts 11:14-18) nor does he mention it at Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7-11).

**Action #3** - Each person needs to receive the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 10:44-48, when Peter was taking the message from the Jews to the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles in the same way it had fallen on the Jews in Jerusalem. Peter had been preaching a “believe” on Jesus Christ Gospel (10:43) in that any who will believe on Him will receive the forgiveness of sins. After they had received the Holy Spirit, they were baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48).

Today, the reception of the Holy Spirit occurs at the moment one believes (I Corinthians 12:13). It is in harmony with repentance, belief, and forgiveness of sins. Any who will believe on Jesus Christ will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

All you must do to be saved is to believe on Jesus Christ and bow your head before God, not before us, and call upon Him to be your Savior. He is the only Redeemer, Justifier, Lord, and Judge. Acknowledge to God that you are a sinner, and you know you are guilty in His sight, and that you are believing on Jesus Christ and His sacrificial work on that cross to save you. The moment you do that, you will receive the same Holy Spirit that you see right here in this book of Acts.