

Peter's First Sermon (part 3)

Acts 2:14—38

There is a lot happening on this special day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out onto Israel by Jesus Christ. Scripture is being fulfilled, and many are joining the Little Flock of believers. At this point, there are no Gentiles to be seen. Peter is preaching what he learned from Jesus, which was a continuation of the good news of the Kingdom. This good news is the beginnings of the fulfillment of the promises made in the Old Testament concerning Israel's prophetic program.

Peter is speaking to two groups of people, those from Judea (the southern two tribes) and those from Israel (the northern 10 tribes). While many Jews are from those two areas, there are many others in attendance who have traveled hundreds of miles from locations all over the Roman Empire. Again, this is a Jewish festival, attended by Jews who are addressed exclusively by Peter. Gentiles are completely excluded because they will be reached out to after Israel accepts their Messiah. The order was to Jerusalem first, then Judea, Samaria and then the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:6). Israel will not be able to complete their mission to reach the Gentiles until after they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Messiah. This fulfillment, of the so-called great commission (Matthew 28:19), is a command to believing Israel to reach out to the whole world with the message that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.

Joel 2 prophecy

Since Peter bases these things occurring upon the book of Joel, it will help to study what Joel says in order to put these Pentecostal events into perspective. The book was written specifically to Judah (the southern two tribes) to warn them of the coming destruction at the hands of Babylon. Like most prophetic books, there is both a near and far prophetic element to their writings. Joel was written to warn Israel to turn to God before He sends destruction to them at the hand of Babylon. It is also looking ahead to the time of the Tribulation, and is warning Israel to repent before this great Day of the Lord comes upon them (Joel 2:12—13). Peter is using Joel for his platform to announce the coming of destruction upon Israel and the safety that will be theirs if they repent and are baptized.

This promise of safety, blessing and restoration is given in Joel 2:18—27. Along with these blessings is the promise of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28—29). Peter, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, says that these events were now being fulfilled, just as Joel had predicted. However, the complete fulfillment will not occur until the Second Coming (Joel 2:30—32). They were getting a foretaste of the full blessings to come at the Second Coming.

Peter finishes his sermon by quoting Joel 2:32, that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He then points out that the Lord is the Christ and that their salvation is dependent upon Him (Acts 2:22—24, 36). It is the Lord who will come in judgement upon Israel and upon the world, and it is Christ who comes with salvation. This salvation is available to anyone who repents and is baptized (Acts 2:38).

Repent and be baptized

What exactly did Peter mean when he told the men of Israel to repent and be baptized? Relating these events to the book of Joel makes it obvious that Peter had salvation from God's judgment in mind. Israel will be judged when God's wrath is poured out during the Tribulation. It will be a time of purification, removing unbelievers from Israel (Zechariah 13:7—9; Ezekiel 20:34—38; 22:18—22; Isaiah 48:10). Those who want to survive the wrath of God will need to become a part of the Little Flock, the remnant of believers within Israel. According to Peter in Acts 2:38, the only way to become a member of this remnant is to repent and be baptized.

Repentance

Many people understand repentance as feeling sorry for your sins. This misuse of the word is perpetuated by many evangelists who use an emotional plea for people to “accept Jesus into your heart.” To repent means to turn. With that understanding, most would interpret Peter to be saying we need to turn away from our sins. In context, Peter was telling Israel to repent from killing Jesus and accept Him as their Messiah. It was not, as many believe, a general admonition to turn from their sins.

Baptism

After repenting, they needed baptism, which is nothing more than identification. When they were baptized, they identified themselves with the remnant believers of Israel, the ones who will be brought safely through the coming Tribulation. This message of repentance and baptism is the same as preached by John the Baptist (Mark 1:4). Contrary to what fundamental Baptist churches teach, baptism was absolutely necessary while the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached (Luke 7:29—30).

29 And all the people that heard *him*, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. **30** But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.

Notice that those who rejected being baptized also rejected the counsel of God, meaning they rejected the word of God. Those who say the church began at Pentecost find it necessary to include baptism in their doctrine. However, they also understand baptism does not save in this Dispensation of Grace. To make the two dispensations come together, they twist what Peter says about water baptism.

Forgiveness

Repentance and baptism will also assure them that their sins will be forgiven. Most people run to Paul’s writings to explain what forgiveness is and how we are now forgiven of all sins because of Jesus Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (Ephesians 1:7). However, this passage concerns Israel under the Prophetic program, not the church under the Mystery program. We are assured that our sins have been forgiven, but believing Israel is assured that their sins will be forgiven. Our salvation is a present reality while their salvation is a future event. We are saved, they will be saved.

This is why Paul says in Romans 11:25—27 that all Israel’s sins will be forgiven and they will be saved, after the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. Their redemption is in the future, after the Rapture. This agrees with Jeremiah 31:31—34 that speaks of a New Covenant with Israel. Part of that covenant is that they will have God’s Law placed in their hearts and be given the ability to perfectly obey the Law. It is at that time that God will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more (see Ezekiel 16:60—63). This happens after the Tribulation at the Second Coming before going into the Millennial Kingdom.

This, I believe, helps to explain why the iniquity of the fathers is passed on to the children (Exodus 34:7). Although they had their sins covered (Psalm 85:2), these sins would not be completely and eternally dealt with until the Second Coming when God will cleanse them from all filthiness (Ezekiel 36:25; 37:23).

Going back to Peter’s answer to the question, “What shall we do?” we can see that Peter demanded that they need to repent of putting their Messiah to death (remember that Jesus Christ asked the Father to forgive them since they had killed Him in ignorance—Acts 3:17). Repentance, in this case, was a reversal of what they thought of Jesus Christ. They also needed to be water baptized to be identified with the Little Flock of believers. Contrary to popular opinion, doing these things did not lead to immediate forgiveness of their sins, but put them into the remnant of Israelite believers who will have their sins forgiven at the Second Coming of Christ.

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