

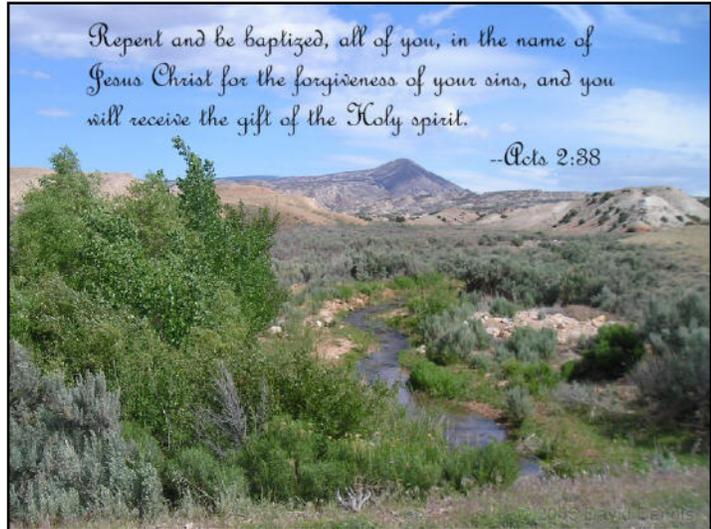
REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED

[Acts 2:38-41](#)



We are studying Peter's sermon, given to a group of Israelites in the Jewish temple on the day of Pentecost. Why were these Israelites at the Temple? They had come to the temple to worship God as prescribed in their Law. Their presence in the Holy City on the three major festivals was in obedience to the Torah as God commanded Moses:

"Three times in a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, at the Feast of Unleavened Bread and at the Feast of Weeks and at the Feast of Booths, and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. (Deuteronomy 16:16 NASB)



These men were there in obedience to God. We are told in [Acts 2:5](#) that they were ***"devout men."*** The Greek word translated "devout" (*eulabeis* you-la-base—eu) abh/v) means: *"cautious, reverencing God, pious."* They were reverent; they came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost to worship their

God. And while they were there they witnessed the promised pouring out of the Spirit of God. This gets their attention and Peter begins to preach to them. Peter's message is not one of love and tenderness. He tells them, Jesus of [Nazareth](#) was attested to by God through the miracles He did but YOU put Him to death ([Acts 2:23](#)). You killed the Messiah who God approved. Then he repeats the charge of murder:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36 NASB)

At this point they interrupt Peter's great message by crying out,

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?" (Acts 2:37 NASB)

Why did they scream out, ***"What shall we do?"*** It was because they were ***"pierced to the heart."*** The Greek word that is translated "pierced" [*Katanusso*—katanu/ssomai] is used only here in the New Testament. It means: *"to pierce thoroughly, to pierce or to penetrate with a needle or a sharp instrument like a knife. metaph. to pain the mind sharply, agitate it vehemently, especially of the emotion of sorrow."* It's a very piercing sudden grief.

What caused them to be pierced to the heart? Our text says, ***"When they heard this"*** Heard what? Peter's sermon, which was loaded with the Word of God.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NASB)

These Israelites listening to Peter's preaching were ***"pierced to the heart,"*** because Peter had demonstrated to them that Jesus was the Messiah using the Scripture. Peter was preaching God's Word—[Joel 2](#), [Psalm 16](#), [Psalm 110](#), Jesus is the Christ!

Their pierced heart came not only from the Scripture that Peter used but it also came from other Scripture that they knew, such as those that said a murder was to be put to death. They had come to realize that they had murdered the Messiah. According to the Law if you committed murder the punishment was death:

'If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. ³¹ Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. (Numbers 35:30-31 NASB)

They now see Jesus as Lord reigning in heaven and themselves as murderers —this isn't a pretty picture. We have killed the Messiah. What could be a worse sin in the entire universe than that? They feared His wrath—they were scared of His vengeance. He was alive again and He was going to make His enemies His footstool. So they scream out, ***“Brethren, what shall we do?”***

What does their crying out, ***“What shall we do?”*** tell us? In this exclamation there is a confession that they *believe* what Peter has preached to them; and Luke's declaration that they were pierced to the heart shows that they felt intensely the power of the facts which they now believed. Since Peter began to speak, therefore, a change has taken place both in their convictions and their feelings. They are convinced that Jesus is the Christ. They believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, which according to John is what brings eternal life:

but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31 NASB)

They now had faith. They believed:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17 NASB)

They now believed that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God, and they believed that they were guilty of killing Him so they cry out, ***“What shall we do?”*** Peter responded:

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NASB)

This is the first message ever preached in the Church and is a pattern of all Apostolic preaching. So does verse 38 give us the conditions of eternal life? Is this how we are to be saved? Absolutely not! As I have just said, these people had already believed. As people who now believe that Jesus is the Christ they ask, ***“What shall we do?”*** To which Peter responds, ***“Repent.”***

One of the principles of hermeneutics is to ***determine carefully the meaning of words***. Whatever else the Bible is, it is a book which communicates information verbally. That means that it is filled with words. Thoughts are expressed through relationships of those words. The better understanding we have of the individual words used in biblical statements, the better we will be able to understand the total message of Scripture. Accurate communication and clear understanding are difficult when words are used imprecisely or ambiguously. Misuses of words and misunderstanding go hand in hand.

What is Repentance?

So to be clear on what Peter is saying we must understand what repent means.

The Greek word that Peter uses in our text for repent is the verb [*metanoeo*](#) [met-an-o-eh'-o—metanoellw]. This word, along with the noun [*metanoia*](#) [me-tan'-oy-ah—meta/noia] (repentance), are the main words used in the Greek New Testament for repentance.

Hermeneutics uses two basic methods by which words are defined:

1. Etymology — which is the science of word derivations.
2. Usage — which is how the author uses a word.

Which of these two always takes precedence? Usage. Why? Because words can change their meaning over time.

Originally, these Greek words [metanoeo](#) [met-an-o-eh'-o] and [metanoia](#) [me-tan'-oy-ah], meant: “*to change one's mind.*” That is the etymology of the word. But the standard Greek-English dictionary does not list any New Testament passage where the meaning “to change one's mind” actually occurs. Repentance is used most often in Scripture to mean: “*turn from sin to God.*” We see this in:

I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced. (2 Corinthians 12:21 NASB)

When you repent, **you turn from sin to God.** We also see this in:

if they take thought in the land where they have been taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly';⁴⁸ if they return to Thee with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive, and pray to Thee toward their land which Thou hast given to their fathers, the city which Thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for Thy name; (1 Kings 8:47-48 NASB)

Here we see that repentance is returning to God. Ezekiel says that it is turning away from sin:

Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations." (Ezekiel 14:6 NASB) "

Repentance—turning from our sin to God—requires that we realize we have disobeyed God. Believers, we all have times in our lives when we need to repent, to turn from sin back to God. This should be obvious. Repentance is something that should be ongoing in our lives. Repentance—turning from sin—is a prelude to practical holiness.

Repentance and Salvation:

Now let me ask you a very important, very controversial question, “*Is repentance necessary for salvation? Or to use our definition, do you have to turn from sin to be saved?*” How many of you have turned from all sin? How many of you live a sinless life? How many of you are saved? So you are saved, but have not turned from all sin? Then you must not believe that repentance is necessary for salvation.

One commentator wrote this, “*One of the most spiritual destructive mindsets among Christians is that grace is so free and unconditional to sinners that repentance is not necessary. I would go as far as to say that any Gospel that does not clearly proclaim repentance is a false gospel worthy of condemnation.*”

It's a destructive mindset to believe that grace is free and unconditional? If it is not free and unconditional, then it's not grace! The word "grace" means: "free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment." Human merit plays no part in man's salvation. Notice how Paul expresses this:

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; (Romans 3:24 NASB)

The word "justified" means: "*made righteous*". The Greek word used here for, "gift" is [dorean](#) [dwrea/n]. It means:

“gratuitously, without a cause, freely.” The word **"grace"** means: *"free and unmerited"* *"Gift by his grace"*—the expression is redoubled to show that all is of God and that nothing in this act of justification belongs to, or proceeds from man.

Another writer said, *“Without repentance, there is no salvation. It is important to know all about repentance. We need to know what repentance is so that we may not be mistaken. It is important to know what repentance is so that it might be brought about in our own lives. Repentance is one thing that man does which affects heaven. All must turn from a life of sin to a life of righteousness if they wish to be saved.”*

So he views repentance as a turning from sin to God which must be done in order to be saved. Who in here has turned from *all* sin to a life of righteousness? I hope you understand that this is a serious issue. When talking about eternal life, we don't want to be mistaken about how to receive it. Do we? I sure don't! I think that some of the confusion comes because of texts like Acts 2:38 where repentance and baptism seem to be necessary in order to be saved.

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NASB)

Who is Peter speaking to in this passage? Jews. God's chosen people—those He had entered into a covenant relationship with at Sinai:

who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, (Romans 9:4 NASB)

Throughout the Old Covenant God had a covenant relationship with Israel. So when Peter begins to preach, He is calling the Jews to turn from their sin and return to God. It is my understanding that repentance is only for those who are in covenant with God, which would be true Israel. Only those in covenant with God can turn back to God.

I don't believe that repentance is part of the gospel message. The four Gospels and Acts present a united front. There is but **one** condition of eternal salvation: *faith alone in Christ alone*. The following references from John's Gospel are clear on this point:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NASB)

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. (John 6:47 NASB)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, (John 11:25 NASB)

The [Synoptics](#) (Matthew, Mark and Luke) also present faith as the one and only condition.

Do you know what book of the Bible is written primarily to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ? It is the Gospel of John! John states his purpose in:

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31 NASB)

“These have been written”—this refers to all that John wrote. Why did he write them? *“...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

Now think with me, John wrote his gospel specifically to bring people to eternal life. Yet in the Gospel of John,

“repentance” is never mentioned. If repentance is necessary for salvation, John left out a necessary ingredient to salvation. But the fact that John didn’t mention repentance speaks volumes. He didn’t mention it, because it isn’t necessary for salvation. You cannot turn from sin to God until you are saved.

The hermeneutical principle called [“the analogy of faith”](#) suggests that we can best understand unclear passages of Scripture by allowing related clear passages to shed light on them. This principle suggests that one should understand the occasional references to the Gospel in the Synoptics, in light of the Gospel of John and not vice versa. John’s Gospel clearly says that the sole condition of salvation is faith in Christ.

And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31 NASB)

In direct answer to the question, *“What must I do to be saved?”* Luke reports Paul’s sole condition: ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”***

If turning from sin, was a condition of salvation, my first question would be, *“How much sin do I have to turn from? Which sins do I have to turn from?”* Are those good questions to ask? You bet they are. What would the answer be? You really can’t give one, because if you say you must turn from all sin, who would be saved? Nobody!

This subject is important because it affects our assurance. Many teachers today, attach assurance to our lifestyle. They teach an assurance that is based on works, conduct, and lifestyle, and makes the basis of our assurance of our salvation subjective—based upon our experiences. I do not believe in a subjective assurance. I believe that assurance is objective. It comes from the pages of the Word of God, not from your experiences.

[Epistemology](#) is the origins and nature of knowledge—how do you know you know? How do you know that you’re saved? Is your assurance based upon the things that you do or don’t do? Should the Mormons have assurance of their salvation? They live a holy life.

John Calvin wrote, *“From one’s work conscience feels more fear and consternation than assurance.”* [Institutes of the Christian Religion](#), book 3, 14, 20. John Calvin taught that assurance was of the essence of faith.

If good works are the basis of assurance, then the believer’s eyes are distracted from the sufficiency of Christ and His work to meet his eternal need. His eyes are focused on himself. If I seek assurance through examining my good works, one of two things must necessarily result:

1. I will minimize the depth of my sinfulness;
2. I will see my deep sinfulness as hopelessly contrary to any conviction that I am saved.

Repentance brings fellowship, not salvation.

I believe that repentance is only for those in covenant relationship with God. Which would mean Israelites—those under the Old and New Covenant. Only those in covenant relationship with God can turn from sin to God. In the letters to the seven churches, in Revelation, the Lord continually calls believers (those in covenant relationship) to repent:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:19-20 NASB)

“Behold I stand at the door and knock.” What does this mean? There are two primary explanations:

1. **Salvation**—Christ is calling unbelievers to salvation; He is begging them to let him in their heart.

2. **Fellowship**—Christ is calling believers back into fellowship with Himself. Their pride has caused them to lose fellowship.

The first view is not correct; Revelation 3:20 is not a salvation verse. The Bible teaches that the Lord opens the heart so that a person can receive the Gospel:

And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14 NASB)

Our God is sovereign in every arena, including salvation. Christ is not a weak and helpless deity who begs men to let Him in their heart; He is the sovereign God of the universe who controls all things.

Revelation 3:19 says, *“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent.”* The word “discipline” is the Greek *paideuo*, which means: *“to train a child, to educate, practice discipline, correct.”* Every use of *paideuo* in reference to God in the New Testament refers to **believers**. God only chastens His Children.

After God's warning that He will chasten, He urges the Laodicean's to repent. The word “repent” is the Greek word *metanoeo* [me-tan-o-eh'-o]. It is a call to separate from sin and enter back into harmony with God. **Repentance results in restored fellowship.** The Lord promises that if the Laodiceans repent, He will **“dine with”** them. The word “dine” is from the Greek word *deipneo* [dipe-neh'-o], which means: *“take the principal (or evening) meal.”* *Deipneo* is the Greek term for the evening meal at the end of the day when family and friends would gather around the table together. This term is also used in the New Testament for the Lord's Supper. It pictures fellowship, communion. **Revelation 3:20 is an invitation for the Laodiceans to repent so that they may fellowship with the Lord.** Their fellowship was broken by their lukewarmness and pride.

Repentance is not a single act, but a lifestyle choice. It is a continuous evaluation that I make as I compare my life to God's word and seek to conform my life to the standards of Christ. Martin Luther had it right when he said that every day is a day of repentance.

Baptism

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NASB)

Some groups teach, based on this verse, that water baptism is the essential means by which God forgives sin. This passage is one that is used by ritualists to defend the baptismal regeneration viewpoint that to be saved you've got to be baptized. They teach that faith is not enough to gain forgiveness. You must be baptized with water before you can be forgiven. Is that what this verse is teaching?

Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

Is baptism necessary for the forgiveness of sin? At first reading of the text, it does seem to indicate that. There's a little Greek preposition that is translated “for” that can also be—and often is—translated **“because of”** or “on behalf of.” So the Greek text could actually be translated, *“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins.”* Therefore, baptism would not be a *means* of forgiveness; it would be the public declaration *of* the forgiveness of sins. The Greek word can go either way.

We use the word "for" in the same way. If I say that a criminal is going to prison FOR his crimes, I do not mean that he is going to prison in order to receive his crimes.

The Roman Catholic Church views baptism as a means of saving grace. Rome believes that the act of baptism in

water actually conveys or passes on grace to the person baptized. What this means is that when a person is baptized, it brings about a transformation in their life, that transformation is spiritual death to spiritual life. So for the Church of Rome, faith has no part in ones salvation; so we could say that to the Church of Rome, or to Catholics to be baptized is to be saved.

This is why it's so important that a Catholic priest baptizes infants. If the infant is baptized near birth, their entrance into heaven is unhindered; however if they are not baptized, they can in no way gain entrance to heaven. Instead they go to limbo, which is a place of natural happiness, but it is short of heaven, because God is not there. Listen to page 1213 from the [Catechism of the Roman Church](#): *“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door to which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the church and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.”*

This is an unbiblical view. The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB)

The Bible explicitly states that we are saved by faith and not by any work of man or ceremony performed by man. The New Testament passages stress that salvation is only through faith apart from works. Yes, baptism is often linked closely to conversion in the New Testament, but it is never required for conversion to Christ.

The primary meaning of the word “baptize” is: *“to immerse or dip.”* But there is more than one meaning for the word baptize. In any language there may be a literal and a metaphorical meaning of the word. The word “baptize” used metaphorically means a change of **identity**. It means **identification** with or united to. In water baptism, you are publicly identifying yourself with Jesus Christ. To be baptized means that you are telling everybody, “I belong to Him. I follow Him. I am one of His.”

And Peter said to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NASB)

“And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”— I think that the “gift” of the Spirit and the “promise” which is spoken of in the next verse refer not to receiving the Holy Spirit but refer to the promise of and the gift given by the Spirit which is; [resurrection life](#).

“For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.” (Acts 2:39 NASB)

The **promise** that he refers to here is that of resurrection life for Israel. The Holy Spirit’s ministry was very closely linked with a resurrection of the dead, so that God’s promises to Israel might be fulfilled. [Ezekiel 37](#) is a fascinating text, for it not only speaks of God putting His Spirit in His people so that they would live (verse 14), but this is said immediately after the promise that the “dead bones” of the “whole house of Israel” would be raised. Thus, the ministry of the Spirit in Israel is closely linked with the resurrection of dead Israelites.

The extension of this promise ***“for all who are afar off,”*** echo the prophets ([Isaiah 33:13](#); [57:19](#); [Ezekiel 11:6](#); [Joel 3:8](#); [Micah 4:7](#); [Zechariah 6:15](#))—of the Jews scattered around the world. But is not limited to the *Jews* as is made clear by the additional words, ***“as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.”*** It included even the Gentiles:

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Ephesians 2:13 NASB)

The Scriptures make it clear that the **ONLY** people who come to Christ are those that God calls to Himself. Grace is

not only free it is irresistible:

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44 NASB)

Some have tried to interpret the word "draw" here as "call or invite." But this is not what the word "draw" means. The Greek word translated "draw" is [helkuo](#), which means: "to drag." It is used eight times in the New Testament. To understand what it means, let's look at a few of its uses.

Simon Peter therefore having a sword, drew [helkuo] it, and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. (John 18:10 NASB)

Now, did Peter invite or call his sword to come out? No! He grabbed it, and pulled it out.

But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged [helkuo] them into the market place before the authorities, (Acts 16:19 NASB)

But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag [helkuo] you into court? (James 2:6 NASB)

The usage of this word makes it very clear that [helkuo](#) means: "to draw by irresistible superiority." So, John is saying that no one comes to Christ unless the Father irresistibly draws them.

Back to Acts. This message of Peters is only about three minutes long. And some of you might be thinking, "Wouldn't it be nice if all the sermons were that short." You need to notice:

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Acts 2:40 NASB)

Luke had now concluded his report of Peter's discourse, but informs us that he has given only an epitome of it. ***"And with many other words..."*** Peter had a lot more to say than what is recorded here. He probably preached for hours.

Peter kept on exhorting them to ***"Be saved from this perverse generation."*** This is Second Exodus terminology. The First Testament labeled the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness a "perverse generation" ([Deuteronomy 32:5](#); [Psalm 78:8](#)). Peter's use of this phrase intensifies the call to repentance. The "wilderness generation" experienced the judgment of God when it did not repent. So will those of the present generation if they do not answer God's call and turn to Him in repentance.

Peter thus saw the present generation of Jews as also "lost in the wilderness" and missing out on what God had promised.

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41 NASB)

What is the significance here of "three thousand" souls? This again is Second Exodus language signifying that this Pentecost is the [Anti-type](#). On the first Pentecost, the Law was given; 3,000 people died for worshiping the golden calf, signifying the covenant of the law that brought death:

So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. (Exodus 32:28 NASB)

On the first [New Covenant](#) Pentecost day, the Spirit was given; 3,000 people received life and were added to the Church of Jesus Christ signifying the covenant of the Spirit brought life. Paul taught this in:

who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ⁸ how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? (2 Corinthians 3:6-8 NASB)

The promised New Covenant had arrived, the promises that God made to Israel were being fulfilled:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³ "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33 NASB)

Pentecost was a fulfillment of this promise, the New Covenant had arrived and life was given to all who believed. The Church was born and was inheriting Israel's promises.

Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, expecting something special from God, but not expecting anything like this. Many in this crowd would eventually travel far from Jerusalem, back to their homes, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them. You do the same!

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