

**Shayla:** What is the proper role of baptism in view of Acts 2:38?

**Extended:** It isn't that I'm struggling with believing that baptism isn't necessary for salvation, but why did they word it the way they did?

**Midrash:**

**Acts 2:38 HCSB** "Repent," Peter said to them, "and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Repent.** Repentance is a natural result of belief in the Gospel (Mark 1:15). It involves turning *from* sin and *to* God. Note that many in the crowd had already experienced *nach'am* (contrition) since we see in v. 37 that they were "pierced to the heart." Peter now calls them to *shuv* (real change; the production of fruit that is consistent with repentance (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8)). When Jesus opened up the minds of the disciples so that they could truly understand the Scriptures, repentance and the forgiveness of sins was a key component of the message that He commanded us to disseminate (Luke 24:45-47). Unless the repentance takes place, our sins cannot be wiped out and seasons of refreshing are forestalled (Acts 3:19).

**Be baptized.** The internal work of repentance had already been connected with the public display of baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2-6). Matthew tells us that the converts were being baptized "as they confessed their sins" clearly separating the two in nature while connecting them in purpose. Peter however (and the author Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) adds the qualifier of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is not contrary to John the Baptist's spirit or ministry for he said,

- **Matthew 3:11 HCSB** "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to take off His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

(See also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). A surface reading of this one passage alone might give the unwary the impression that water baptism is a prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit. That impression would be false and easily dispelled by considering the many other examples the Scriptures provide. In other places:

- Conversion is described without baptism (Acts 9:35; 13:12, 48).
- Baptism doesn't necessarily guarantee the coming of the Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6).
- Sometimes the Spirit came without baptism (Acts 10:47).

So, what Peter the speaker and Luke the recorder are presenting are the natural, normal order of progression, not the absolute necessity required for salvation, else the thief on the cross, who did not receive baptism, was lied to by the Lord (Luke 23:43).

At any rate, baptism was an already accepted form of public expression of private repentance in the Hebrew community. Now, the same sign takes on new meaning due to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah. Now it is baptism into His name. It is a sign of ownership, much like the old sign associated with becoming a bond slave. Baptism is a now a way to indicate that we are bond slaves to the Messiah, an adopted, grafted part of God's chosen people.

The unifying factor that will tie all these disparate people (remember Hashem's promise to Abraham that his descendent would be a blessing to "all nations"?) is the Holy Spirit who indwells them all. The Spirit is the basic inward principle of the life of the Christian community.

**In the name of Jesus the Messiah.** This does not exclude the names of the Father or the Spirit for,

- **Matthew 28:19 HCSB** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

What Peter was doing was focusing on Jesus' identity. He pointed an accusatory finger toward those who had participated in the Lord's crucifixion (Acts 2:23, 36) and points (Acts 2:22 see "pointed out to you by God") in introduction for the sake of the many who had just arrived for Shavuot and did not know of the Messiah (Acts 2:5-11).

**Forgiveness.** The baptism was thus to serve as a public sign of the inward washing that was taking place in the hearts of many thousands that day (Acts 22:16). Paul later explains that Baptism works toward our salvation to the degree that we make a true pledge of a good conscience toward God and is worthless from a physical washing point of view (1 Peter 3:21).

**Sins.** Sin occurs whenever we turn away from God (Ezekiel 44:10) and disobey His law (Exodus 20:20). It is defying God and rebelling against His commands (Jeremiah 2:22-24, 29-37). We were made to be God's image in flesh and sin causes us to fall short of that glorious image (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-8; Romans 3:23). Whether explicitly (Genesis 6:10-12) or implicitly (Psalm 64:1-6) sin always hurts our fellow man. Sin occurs whether it is conscious (Luke 12:48) or unconscious (Psalm 19:12; 139:23-24). Sin began among humans as the first act of disobedience (Genesis 3:9) and it was conscious on Adam's part and unconscious or done in ignorance on Eve's part (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13). Both received the same consequence of spiritual death (Genesis 2:17 cp Romans 6:23) but Adam received the full weight of responsibility (Romans 5:12).

**Gift of the Holy Spirit.** Peter would refer to the Holy Spirit as a gift later when he first realized that the Gospel was to be given to Gentiles on an equal basis with Hebrews. He drew a direct correlation with this Shavuot and essentially said, "When I saw the same things happening and the same gift of the Holy Spirit I realized I'd better not get in God's way." (Acts 11:17). And who is the Giver of this gift, if it is not the Lord Jesus who said,

- **John 7:37-39 HCSB** On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me and drink! (38) The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." (39) He said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been received, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

It is important to note that with all these thousands of converts being added daily to the church, being baptized by no less than the Apostles, and receiving the Holy Spirit (according to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures – not some man) how few times the ecstatic gifts are mentioned. Not all of them – in fact very few of them – became ecstatic prophets or spoke in tongues. But I guess the modern Pentecostal (or other Charismatic) preachers are superior to Peter, James, and John. Maybe they are the "super-apostles" Paul mentions (2 Corinthians 11:5; 12:11).