

Acts 2: 'Repent and be baptised' – what must first be known?

How did the apostle Peter lead people to Jesus? Significantly, were there any pre-requisites?

Acts 2 is where we hear the amazing story of the Pentecost fire and move of Holy Spirit.

Most Christian churches celebrated Pentecost two weeks ago on the 11th May, however it is my understanding that the biblical calculations place Pentecost, also called Shavout; or the Feast of Weeks; or the Feast of Harvest, and even the Day of Firstfruits on June 15 2008 which is the 49th day¹ (7 Sabbaths – see Lev 23:15-16) from the waving of the Omer on the day after the weekly Sabbath of Passover. The 50th day from the Saturday Sabbath of Passover – Pentecost means 50th day².

The Jews and proselytes (converted Gentiles) that were gathered there that day in Jerusalem, had come to Jerusalem because of Shavout (Pentecost). This is clearly indicated in Acts 2: ⁵ *Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven*. It may appear that those who gathered around Peter and the disciples were not only followers of Judaism but other interested parties as well. The Acts 2:10–11 passage which reads in part “... *both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God.*” may appear to imply this in the way it is phrased, but I believe the exclusiveness indicated in verse 5 is made clear by what follows.

When Peter addresses them he immediately starts speaking of the prophecies of Joel – he does not need to introduce this book of the TaNaK (OT). If some of these people listening were non-proselytized Gentiles, much of what he spoke would have needed quantifying and clarification. As ALL his listeners were devout followers of the God of Jacob, he could 'cut to the chase', that is, he could get straight to the point.

The listeners were zealous – that is, they knew their scriptures, the TaNaK, and were trying to be obedient to the injunction to observe the Feast of Harvest. The injunction regarding this particular Feast (detailed in Ex 23; Lev 23 & Numbers 28), was to visit the temple in Jerusalem to make sacrifices through which they praised and thanked God for the produce of the ground which they had been harvesting over the preceding weeks.

They also looked for a prophet, a Messiah (writings from the Qumran or Dead Sea Scrolls also indicate that the nation was expecting the Messiah in the years immediately before and during the time of Jesus).

¹ The number 49 seems to be a very special number in God's perspective – it signifies completeness – just like the completeness of the Bible which it appears should really be 49 books – see Appendix

² See my article on the Passover Lamb at <http://charismacomputers.com.au> for an explanation of why the correct date this year is June 15.

After Peter spoke many of them now accepted that Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah that they had been looking and waiting for; so they turned from their sin of having rejected him; and were immediately baptised into the name of Yeshua and then they demonstrated their new found understanding in actions and obedience.

So to recap, the fire of Holy Spirit has been seen and the disciples are speaking in the languages of all the Jewish visitors, etc when Peter gets up to speak:

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified (collectively speaking of all Israel's culpability, which therefore included Peter's listeners) and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death,...

34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord God said to my Master the Messiah, "Sit at my right hand Until I make your enemies a stool for resting your feet." "All Israel, then, know this: There's no longer room for doubt—God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross." (quoting Ps 110:1 the most alluded OT verse in the NT – this should signify how significant it is.) Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (The Message).

Note that these men (and quite likely some woman as well), were 'cut to the heart'. Because they already knew the One God of Israel and now through the amazing events of this hour and the words of Peter, they were convicted of the truth that Yeshua was the Messiah they had waited and hoped for since Moses foretold of him in Deuteronomy 18. They now repented; they sought their Father's forgiveness and their Messiah's forgiveness; they determined to change their path; to follow their Messiah's teachings and the teachings of his disciples or apostles.

Thus, I think a very important point to note here is the pre-condition of these men before they accepted Yeshua as the Messiah. That precondition was a strong and practically evident knowledge of their God, the God of Abraham.

When we today have altar calls and ask men and women to give their lives to Messiah Jesus, to repent and be baptized, do we first give them a solid grounding in the God of Israel? It would seem not. Perhaps this is why so many then fall away or get deluded by so many false teachings such as Trinitarianism and some of the extreme Pentecostal practices.

What do you think?

Is there a need, along with the thirst for God, for a basic or even detailed knowledge of the God of Israel. Clearly, when Yeshua and the disciples preached to the Jews this knowledge of God was present.

Was this pre-condition there or what was done differently when reaching out to the Gentiles?

It is informative to look at a few examples that have been recorded for us. The example of the Roman Cornelius is very clear as we are told that Cornelius was a devout man who feared God with all his household. Clearly, Cornelius had the grounding, the pre-conditional knowledge required. God even took the trouble to dramatically convince Peter of this.

We see in Paul's ministry amongst the countries he visited that he generally visited and preached in the synagogues where, as we read in Acts 14:1 he spoke to both Jew and Greek (gentile). Given that these synagogues regularly taught about Moses, we can be confident that any Gentiles hearing Paul in the synagogues did have a reasonable grounding in the God of Israel.

It is also evident that when Paul and Barnabas performed miraculous acts of healing they were listened to in the public arena, but this often led to either false accusations about their deity or to their being stoned (for example in Lystra – see Acts 14).

We also read that in Acts 14:27 that the 'door of faith' was being opened to the Gentiles. Unless we can find some very clear and unequivocal evidence elsewhere, it does then seem reasonable that some significant prior understanding and love for God³ is necessary before an individual can recognize their need for the Messiah as their Saviour and Master.

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³ the mere act of a Gentile attending a synagogue suggests some desire to know God.

Appendix: The 49 Books of the Bible:

Flavius Josephus *“For we [the Jews] have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing and contradicting one another, but only 22 books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine”* (Against Apion, Book I, Section VIII).

How was the OT divided up then into 22 rather than the 39 we have today?

- **The Law of Moses:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. = **5 books**
- **The Former Prophets:** Joshua-Judges (combined into one) and Samuel-Kings (combined into one) = **2 books**
- **The Latter Prophets:**
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel = **3 books**
and “The Twelve” prophets —Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.= **1 book**

The Psalms, is also known as the Writings, and is divided into three parts:

- **The Former Poetic Books:** Psalms, Proverbs and Job. = **3 books**
- **The Megilloth or Festival Books:** Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther. = **5 books**
- **The Latter Restoration Books:** Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (combined into one) and Chronicles (combined into one). = **3 books**

This original order is chronological.

The Messianic Writings (NT)

- **Gospels and Acts:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts. = **5 books** (The History/Centre)
- **General Epistles:** James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John and Jude. = **7 books**
- **Letters to Specific Churches from Paul:** Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians and II Thessalonians. = **9 books**
- **General Letter of Hebrews** = **1 book**
- **Pastoral Letters of Paul:** I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. = **4 books**
- **Other Writings of John:** Revelation. = **1 book**

Thus, we have 22 books in the OT; 5 in the centre of all history and 22 in the NT giving 49 books in total in the Holy Scriptures, a number for completeness!