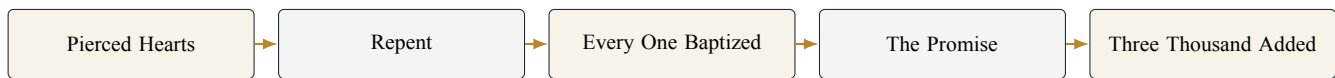


Session 9 Israel's Conviction, Peter's Answer, and the Believing Remnant

Acts: The Book That Explains Everything

Session 9 | Acts 2:37-41



Before You Read

Big idea: Peter's Israelite hearers are pierced by the charge that they crucified the One whom God made both Lord and Christ. Peter calls them collectively to repent, directs every one to be baptized, and promises the prophetic gift. Those who receive his word are baptized and added to the believing Jerusalem company.

How to use this guide: Read Acts 2:36-41 together before examining the individual verses. Peter's answer in verse 38 must be understood as the answer to the question created by verse 36.

Four expressions to keep watching

- **What shall we do?** - Conviction produces a request for

God's required response.

- **Repent** - The group must reverse its judgment concerning Jesus.
- **Every one of you** - The national call requires an individual response.
- **The promise** - Peter remains within Israel's prophetic and covenant setting.

A simple right-division reminder: Peter is speaking in Jerusalem to the house of Israel before Saul's conversion and before the revelation of the mystery through Paul. Let Peter's answer stand as given before comparing it with God's later instructions through Paul.

Acts 2:37

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

What does the passage say?

- The hearers respond to Peter's conclusion that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.
- They are pierced inwardly by the charge.
- They address Peter and the rest of the apostles.
- They ask what they should do.

Words to notice

- **When they heard this** - Their conviction follows Peter's accusation in verse 36: "whom ye have crucified."
- **Pricked in their heart** - Peter's message penetrates their thinking, desire, and will. This is more than intellectual curiosity.
- **Peter and . . . the rest of the apostles** - Peter speaks as the leading voice of the Twelve, not as a private teacher

with an independent message.

- **What shall we do?** - They recognize both guilt and responsibility, but Peter must tell them the required response.

Cross-references worth marking

- Zechariah 12:10 - Israel will look upon the One whom they pierced and mourn.
- Luke 3:10-14 - People responding to John's message also ask what they should do.
- Acts 5:30-31 - Peter again joins Israel's guilt with God's offer of repentance and forgiveness.
- Acts 7:54 - Stephen's hearers are "cut to the heart" but respond by attacking him, showing that inward pain does not always produce submission.

Do not miss

- Conviction is not itself the completed response. The hearers are pierced, but they still need Peter's answer.
- Do not answer their question with a later Pauline formula before reading what Peter tells these Israelites to do.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

What does the passage say?

- Peter commands the group to repent.
- Every one among them is to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Peter connects this response with the remission of sins.
- The responsive company is promised the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The movement of the sentence

- **Repent** is plural: “You all repent.” Peter calls the group to a changed judgment concerning Jesus.
- **Be baptized** is singular because it is joined to “**every one of you**”: “Let each one be baptized.”
- **Ye shall receive** is plural: “You all shall receive.” The promise returns to the responsive company.
- The sense is: **You all repent; let every one of you be baptized; and you all shall receive the promised gift.**

Words to notice

- **Repent** - They must accept God’s verdict that the Jesus whom Israel rejected is risen, exalted, Lord, and Christ.
- **In the name of Jesus Christ** - Baptism publicly identifies each hearer with the rejected Jesus as Israel’s Christ.
- **For the remission of sins** - “**For**” naturally points toward remission—“unto” or “with a view to”—rather than meaning that baptism occurs because remission had already happened.
- **The gift** - It is one promised gift offered to the plural company, not a separate promise worded differently for every individual.

What is “the gift of the Holy Ghost”?

Two interpretations deserve consideration:

- **The Holy Ghost is the gift.** Acts 10:44-47 can naturally be read this way: the Holy Ghost falls upon the hearers, and Peter says they have received the Holy Ghost.
- **The gift comes from the Holy Ghost.** On this reading, the Holy Spirit is the divine Giver and the gift is the promised “power from on high,” visibly expressed through such abilities as tongues and prophecy. E. W. Bullinger argues for this distinction between the Giver and His gift.

The wording permits discussion of both interpretations. The context certainly identifies the gift as the prophetic endowment promised to Israel. Acts later records different orders of baptism and reception as God’s program advances (Acts 8:12-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-6).

Cross-references worth marking

- Luke 24:47 - Repentance and remission of sins were to be preached beginning at Jerusalem.
- Acts 3:19-21 - Peter again calls Israel to repent in connection with blotting out sins and the promised times of refreshing.
- Acts 8:12-17 - Baptized Samaritans receive the Holy Ghost through apostolic hands.
- Acts 10:44-48 - Cornelius’s household receives the Holy Ghost before water baptism.
- Acts 22:16 - Saul is told to arise, be baptized, wash away his sins, and call upon the Lord’s name.

Do not miss

- Peter does not describe baptism as a casual symbol detached from the stated matter of remission.
- Do not rewrite “**for the remission of sins**” as “because your sins have already been remitted.”
- Do not impose this early-Acts order unchanged upon the later Pauline revelation of justification apart from works. Respect both passages by preserving their audiences and places in revelation.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

What does the passage say?

- The promise belongs first to Peter's present hearers.
- It extends to their children.
- It reaches those who are afar off.
- Its reach includes as many as the Lord their God shall call.

Words to notice

- **For** - Verse 39 explains why Peter can offer the gift in verse 38.
- **The promise** - This most immediately means the promised Holy Ghost within the larger prophecy Peter has quoted from Joel.
- **Unto you, and to your children** - This is covenantal and generational language addressed to Israel.
- **Afar off** - Old Testament language can describe Israelites dispersed far from Jerusalem (Daniel 9:7; Isaiah 57:19). Peter has not yet experienced the uncircumcised Gentile event of Acts 10.
- **The Lord our God** - Peter speaks of Israel's covenant

God to an Israelite audience.

Cross-references worth marking

- Joel 2:28-32 - The prophetic promise Peter has quoted.
- Daniel 9:7 - Scattered Israelites are described as being far off.
- Isaiah 44:3 - God promises His Spirit upon Israel's seed and blessing upon their offspring.
- Isaiah 57:19 - God promises peace to the far and the near.
- Acts 3:25-26 - Peter again places Israel and the children of the prophets first in the offered blessing.

Do not miss

- Do not assume "**afar off**" must mean uncircumcised Gentiles. Its identity should be established from Peter's setting and biblical usage.
- Do not isolate "**as many as the Lord our God shall call**" as a proof text for Calvinistic individual election. Here the call belongs to Israel, Israel's children, and those at a distance within Israel's prophetic horizon.
- This verse is not yet an exposition of God's later calling of the body of Christ through Paul's gospel. Carrying the phrase directly into the Pauline dispensation as a universal formula for irresistible calling is not sound exegesis of Acts 2:39.

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

What does the passage say?

- Peter spoke many additional words that Luke does not record.
- Peter both testified and exhorted.
- He called the hearers to be saved from a particular generation.
- That generation is described as untoward.

Words to notice

- **Many other words** - Luke gives a truthful summary rather than every sentence Peter spoke. We should not invent doctrines from the omitted words.
- **Testify** - Peter solemnly bears witness to the truth.
- **Exhort** - He urgently appeals for the hearers to act upon

that truth.

- **Save yourselves** - The Greek command is passive: "be saved" or "let yourselves be rescued." The KJV expresses their responsibility to accept God's provided escape; it does not say they become their own saviors.
- **Untoward** - Crooked, perverse, or turned away from the proper course.
- **This . . . generation** - "Generation" does not always mean Israel, but Peter's audience and wording identify the contemporary generation of Israel that rejected Messiah.

Cross-references worth marking

- Deuteronomy 32:5 - Moses calls Israel "a perverse and crooked generation."
- Psalm 78:8 - Israel is warned not to become a stubborn and rebellious generation.
- Matthew 12:39-45 - Jesus condemns the unbelieving generation that demanded a sign.

- Matthew 23:29-36 - Jesus announces judgment upon the contemporary generation of Israel.
- Philippians 2:15 - Paul later applies “crooked and perverse” language to the corrupt world surrounding believers.

Do not miss

- **“Generation”** is not a technical synonym for Israel. The

Israelite reference comes from Peter’s audience, the accusation of verse 36, and the echo of Deuteronomy 32.

- Salvation here includes rescue out of the Messiah-rejecting generation upon which judgment hangs.
- Human responsibility and divine rescue are not opposites: Peter commands them to receive the rescue God provides.

Acts 2:41

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

What does the passage say?

- Only those who received Peter’s word are identified as responding.
- They were baptized in accordance with Peter’s command.
- About three thousand people were added that day.
- They were added to the existing apostolic company.

Words to notice

- **Gladly received** - They welcomed Peter’s word with assent rather than merely hearing it.
- **Were baptized** - Their response was public and corresponded to verse 38.
- **Added unto them** - The three thousand joined the believing Jerusalem company gathered around the apostles.
- **About three thousand souls** - **“Souls”** means persons. **“About”** shows that Luke gives an intentionally approximate count.

A textual difference worth knowing

- The Textus Receptus includes the word translated

“gladly.” The KJV therefore reads, **“they that gladly received his word.”**

- Most modern critical texts omit the word, so the ESV and NIV read simply, **“those who received his word.”**
- Either reading records reception, baptism, and addition; the KJV/TR additionally describes the welcoming manner in which they received the message.

Cross-references worth marking

- Exodus 32:28 - About three thousand died in judgment after the golden calf. The numerical contrast with Acts 2 is striking, though Luke does not explicitly identify it as a type.
- Acts 1:15 - The earlier Jerusalem company numbered about 120.
- Acts 2:47 - The Lord continued adding to the assembly daily.
- Acts 4:4 - The number later grows to about five thousand men.

Do not miss

- Being present, hearing Peter, and even feeling conviction did not mean that every hearer received the word.
- The visible company was enlarged by people who received the apostolic word and submitted to its commanded response.

Text And Translation Helps

- **Pricked** in verse 37 preserves the image of being pierced by a sharp point. Luke uses a different Greek verb when Stephen's hostile hearers are "cut to the heart" in Acts 7:54.
- **Repent** and **ye shall receive** in verse 38 are plural. **Be baptized** is singular because it applies to **every one of you**.
- **Gift** in verse 38 is singular. One common gift is promised to the responsive company, but each person must join the repentant and baptized remnant.
- **Untoward** in verse 40 means crooked, perverse, or not turned toward the proper course.
- **Save yourselves** communicates responsible acceptance of rescue; the underlying command is passive, "be saved."
- **Gladly** in verse 41 is a genuine TR/critical-text difference, not merely a modern change of English style.

Common Ideas To Test

- "Being pricked in the heart means the hearers were already saved."
 - Test it by verses 37-38: their conviction produces a question, and Peter then gives the required response.
- "Peter says baptism merely symbolizes remission already received."
 - Test it by verse 38: Peter commands repentance and baptism **for the remission of sins**.
- "The gift must mean either the Holy Spirit Himself or one particular spiritual ability, with no interpretive question remaining."
 - Test it by Acts 2:4, 2:33, 10:44-47, and the wording **"gift of the Holy Ghost."** Both the gift-as-Spirit and gift-from-the-Spirit interpretations deserve examination.
- "Afar off automatically means Gentiles in the body of Christ."
 - Test it by Daniel 9:7, Peter's Jewish audience, and the later surprise surrounding Acts 10.
- "The Lord's call in verse 39 proves irresistible individual election in every dispensation."
 - Test it by the Israelite audience, the prophetic promise, and Peter's phrase **"the Lord our God."**
- "Save yourselves means people produce their own salvation."
 - Test it by the passive command: they are to let themselves be rescued from the condemned generation.

Session Summary

- Peter's accusation concerning the crucified and exalted Christ pierces the hearers.
- The group asks Peter and the apostles what it should do.
- Peter calls the group to repent and directs every one to be baptized in Jesus Christ's name.
- The singular gift is promised to the responsive company.
- The gift may be understood as the Holy Spirit Himself or as the prophetic endowment bestowed by the Holy Spirit.
- The promise remains attached to Israel, Israel's children, and those at a distance whom Israel's God calls.
- Peter calls responsive Israelites to be rescued from their crooked, Messiah-rejecting generation.
- Those who gladly receive Peter's word are baptized, and about three thousand are added to the Jerusalem company.

For Long-Term Study

Mark these themes as Acts unfolds

- The distinction between conviction and obedient response.
- Israel's collective responsibility and each person's required response.
- Changes in the order of water baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost.
- The identity of those described as **"afar off."**
- The development from the Jerusalem remnant to Samaritans, Gentiles, and Paul's later ministry.

Questions to keep asking

1. What statement causes the hearers to be pricked in their heart?

2. Which parts of Peter's answer are plural, and which part applies to every individual?
3. What are the two possible relationships between the gift and the Holy Ghost?
4. Why should the promise and calling in verse 39 first be interpreted within Israel's setting?
5. From what generation must the responsive hearers be rescued?
6. What distinguishes the three thousand from the rest of the multitude?

One sentence to remember

Peter calls convicted Israelites to repent, directs every one to be baptized, promises Israel's prophetic gift, and sees three thousand added to the believing Jerusalem remnant.