



## A Look at Acts 2:39

I thought it might be well for me to comment on a verse-**Acts 2:39**. Though we often refer to **verse 38**

of Peter's sermon on Pentecost, we would do well to read the context. **Verse 39** is abused by many. Let's look at **verses 37-41**.

"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? 38 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. 39 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. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls."

The **39<sup>th</sup> verse** is an abused text by four major religious factions to prove their particular heresy.

**THE PENTECOSTALS** use the verse to prove that the Holy Spirit's miraculous power is available to all men today. They consider "the Promise" to refer back to **verses 16-21**.

These verses are a quote of a prophecy of Joel, which states that wonders will be done in the last days by those of "all ages", old and young, "all genders", sons and daughters, "all social status", my servants and handmaidens, and "all nations", all flesh.

They ignore a sermon had been completed and Christ was shown to be both Lord and Christ and they had killed Him. The listeners asked the question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's answer in **verse 38** shows the question was not what shall we do to get these miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. Rather, what do we do

to be forgiven for our killing our Messiah? It was a specific question about salvation and not about speaking in tongues or the wonders and signs of Joel's prophecy. The question preceded the offer of salvation and the gift of the Spirit. **Acts 2:39**

**THE ROMANISTS** who favor infant baptism make their emphasis on the inclusion of children receiving the promise offered by Peter. On the contrary, it is a promise to the descendants of the listeners who could enjoy the promise of salvation and the Holy Spirit if they too repent and are baptized.

It is ludicrous to get out of this text that there is grace bestowed in baptizing unbelieving babies who need no repentance. There is no water regeneration taught in **verses 38 – 39**. There is no merit or dispensing of grace by baptizing infants who can neither believe nor in need of repentance.

Even Albert Barnes, who advocated infant baptism, rebukes those who try to use this verse to advocate infant baptism. "*It does not refer to children as children, and should not be adduced to establish the propriety of infant baptism, or as applicable particularly to infants. It is a promise, indeed, to parents, that the blessings of salvation shall not be confined to parents, but shall be extended also to their posterity. Under this promise parents may be encouraged to train up their children for God; to devote them to his service; believing that it is the gracious purpose of God to perpetuate the blessings of salvation from age to age.*"

**THE CALVINISTS** are the third group that abuses this text. They take their clue from the expression, "even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The word, "call", is the trigger word for a Calvinist. Their doctrine is that God calls specific persons to salvation to the exclusion of others.

When they hear the word "call", it conjures up in their mind the whole theory of election, predestination, and eternal security. They like to point out the last phase of **verse 39** is in the middle voice and this means God is doing the calling.

In Robertson Word Study (he is a Calvinist) writes, "*It is a first aorist middle subjunction with 'an' in an indefinite relative clause, a perfectly regular construction. The Lord*

*calls men of every nation, anywhere, whether Jew or Gentile.*” We have never read the verse any other way than the Lord is calling men to Himself.

**THE BEREAN BIBLE SOCIETY** is the fourth group that abuses the text and are the successors of E. W. Bullinger, Cornelius Stam, and J. C. Ohair. They teach that the Gospel invitation offered here by Peter was for Jews only.

They are hyper or ultra-dispensationalists in that they believe this offer by Peter was for a Jewish millennial kingdom.

They believe baptism is a Jewish ordinance and has been phased out for today and not a requirement for this dispensation.

They ignore that those who are “afar off”, in **verse 39**, are the Gentiles as **Ephesians 2:12-16** plainly affirms.

They pretend that the gospel of Peter and Paul differ and that Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, revealed a different Gospel than Peter.

Such alleged scholars wrest this Scripture as they do all the Scriptures.

**II Peter 3:15-16:** “15 And account *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; 16 As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, **which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.**”

The listeners and their children and those who were “afar off” (Gentiles) are all made the promise of the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit when they repent and are immersed. This agrees perfectly with other Bible passages.

1. **The Gospel call is for the Jew first, also to the Greek.**  
**Romans 1:16:** “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”
2. **Those who are “afar off” are the Gentiles.**  
**Ephesians 2:12-13:** “12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus **ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.**”
3. **The Lord calls men to Himself by the Gospel. Listen how it is done.**

**II Thessalonians 2:13-14:** “13 But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. **Why does God send out this call? He wants all men to come to repentance and not perish.**  
**II Peter 3:9:** “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”
5. **The call to the Father is offered to “whosoever will”.**  
**John 3:16:** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”  
**Revelation 22:17:** “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. **And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.**”

So our Pentecostal, Romanist, Calvinist, and Berean friends have twisted or perverted this text. It is very simple to understand the meaning.

In **verse 37** a question is asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Since we killed the Christ.)

In **verse 38** an answer is given. There are two commands, “Repent and be baptized” and two results promised “the remission of sins and the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In **verse 39** we are told who can repent and be baptized and enjoy the promise of salvation. “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.**”

In **verse 40** an offer was made, “Save yourselves (it is passive) from this untoward (perverted) generation.”

In **verse 41** we are told the response to the offer that Peter made in his sermon, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added ...about three thousand souls.”

Do not be misled by the theologies of men. A text out of context becomes a pretext.

Those who responded had heard the call of God and they came to Him and obeyed the offer.

God does the saving if we do not refuse His call.

Joel had said, "And it shall come to pass, that **whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered:....**" Joel 2:32a

Paul was told, "And now why tarriest thou? **arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.**" Acts 22:16

God has called you by the Good News of the Gospel and now you need to call upon Him. God has always planned that Abraham's seed, which is Christ, be a blessing to all nations, not just the Jews. The promise to all was made in Peter's sermon on Pentecost in **verse 39**.

What says the Scripture? **Galatians 3:8:** "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, **preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.**"

**Galatians 3:27-29:** "27 **For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 **And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**"

Won't you, like the 3,000 on Pentecost, gladly receive the Word and be baptized and let the Lord add you to His Church?

He will keep His promise. That has been His desire for all men from the foundation of the world.