

Bible Class Discussion Guide

Following the Way – Week 2

Born into the Way (Acts 2:37–41)

Icebreaker Question

What’s something you put off for a long time—but when you finally did it, you wished you hadn’t waited so long?

Scripture Reading Prompt

Read Acts 2:37–41 aloud as a group.

We’ll explore how the first believers responded when they were “cut to the heart” and how that response still speaks to us today.

1. Transformation Begins with the Word

Read Acts 2:37

- What does it mean to be “cut to the heart”? Have you ever had a moment like that when Scripture pierced through your assumptions?
 - Why is conviction necessary—but not enough—when it comes to transformation?
 - Read Hebrews 4:12. What makes the Word of God different from other messages or ideas?
 - What might cause someone to delay obedience after experiencing deep conviction?
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2. Transformation Takes Shape in Surrender

Read Acts 2:38

Leader Note: For first-century Jews, baptism wasn’t unfamiliar—but it carried new meaning. Jews practiced immersion for purification and required Gentiles to be baptized to join God’s covenant people. For Peter to tell Jews to be baptized *in the name of Jesus* was a radical call to re-identify with the crucified Messiah as their King. It wasn’t just cleansing—it was surrender.

- Peter calls the crowd to **repent** and **be baptized**. How are these two responses connected? (See addendum)
- How might a first-century Jewish listener have understood Peter’s call to be baptized?
- Why is repentance more than just feeling regret or changing your mind?
What does real repentance look like in everyday life?

- **Ask the class:** Can you think of stories in the Bible where God used water in moments of salvation or transformation? (See addendum)
(Consider: Noah and the flood – Genesis 6–9; Israel crossing the Red Sea – Exodus 14; crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land – Joshua 3–4; Naaman washing in the Jordan – 2 Kings 5; Jesus’ baptism – Luke 3:21–22)
 - **Read Romans 6:3–4.** According to Paul, what happens in baptism? How does this deepen our understanding beyond baptism as just a symbol?
 - What role does faith play in both repentance and baptism?
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3. Transformation Comes Alive Through the Spirit

Read Acts 2:39–41:

- Peter says the promise is for “you, your children, and all who are far off.” What does this reveal about the reach of the gospel?
 - What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in this passage? How does the Spirit actively transform a believer’s life?
 - **Read Acts 22:16.** What was Paul told to do in response to the gospel? How does this confirm what we’ve read in Acts 2?
 - Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in your life today—or where do you desire to see transformation?
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Reflection and Application

- If someone in your life asked, “Why should I be baptized?” how would you explain it based on these Scriptures?
- What might you still be “waiting for” when it comes to full surrender to Jesus?
- If you’ve already been baptized, how does remembering that decision shape the way you live today?
- What part of this passage do you think most challenges or encourages our church?

Baptism and Salvation Through Water in the Bible

Baptism has been a topic of debate for centuries among Christians. So, what does the Bible really say about baptism? What's the meaning of baptism in Scripture?

To understand the significance of baptism, it's helpful to look for a recurring pattern throughout the Bible. The Bible often uses repeated images, ideas, or events to weave together its many stories and reveal a core theme that leads to Jesus.

The pattern we're focusing on here is the theme of God providing salvation through water. This theme shows up throughout the Bible and leads us to the stories of Jesus' baptism and the role of baptism in early Christianity.

From the Beginning

In **Genesis 1**, God begins by bringing order to chaos. He separates the waters to create space for life to exist (**Genesis 1:3-5, Genesis 1:6-8**). This separation allows dry land to emerge from the chaotic waters, where life can flourish. This is the creation of a new world for humanity.

But in **Genesis 3**, humanity disrupts that order, bringing chaos back into the world. From here on, God's work shifts from creating order to rescuing a remnant. God saves a group of people who pass through waters to enter a new creation.

The Pattern in the Hebrew Bible

1. **Noah:** In **Genesis 6-8**, we see the flood as a "de-creation." The waters of the deep open, and everything is wiped out (**Genesis 7:22-23**). But God saves Noah and his family through the waters, bringing them to dry land to start a new humanity.
2. **Moses:** In **Exodus 2**, Moses is saved from the waters and raised in Pharaoh's house. Later, God rescues Israel by leading them through the Red Sea (**Exodus 14:16**), bringing them out of slavery and into a new life as His people.
3. **Joshua:** In **Joshua 3:2-4**, after the Israelites wander in the desert, they cross the Jordan River into the promised land. Once again, God leads His people through the waters to the place He's prepared for them.
4. **Isaiah:** In **Isaiah 11:10-12**, the prophet speaks of a future king from David's line who will bring Israel out of exile. This king will lead the people through the chaotic waters of their enemies to bring them into salvation.

The Pattern in the New Testament

1. **John the Baptist:**
 - In **Matthew 3:5-6**, John the Baptist calls people to repentance and baptizes them in the Jordan River, preparing the way for the Messiah.
 - **Mark 1:4** mentions John's baptism as a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," emphasizing the pattern of water as an act of renewal.

- **Luke 3:16-17** points to the coming Messiah, who will baptize with the Holy Spirit, signaling that John's baptism points forward to something greater.
- **John 1:31-34** connects John's baptism to the revelation of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, introducing baptism as part of God's redemptive plan.

2. Jesus' Baptism:

- **Matthew 3:13-17** records Jesus' baptism, where He goes into the waters and comes back out, continuing the pattern of salvation through water. The heavens open, and God's voice declares Jesus as His Son.
- **Luke 3:21-22** confirms Jesus' baptism, where the Spirit descends on Him, fulfilling the Old Testament imagery of God's presence through water.
- **John 1:32-34** echoes the significance of Jesus' baptism, with John the Baptist testifying that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the ancient pattern of water as part of salvation.

3. Baptism and the Church:

- **Acts 2:38** calls for repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing baptism as a continuation of the salvation pattern.
- **Acts 22:16** links baptism to the washing away of sins and an invitation to call on Jesus' name.
- **Romans 6:3-4** beautifully connects baptism with Christ's death and resurrection: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Baptism symbolizes this spiritual resurrection into a new creation.
- **1 Corinthians 10:1-2** compares baptism to the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, drawing a direct connection between salvation through water in the Old Testament and baptism as an act of salvation in the New Testament.
- **Galatians 3:27** states, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ," showing baptism as the means by which believers are united with Jesus.
- **Colossians 2:12** again links baptism to Christ's death and resurrection, reinforcing baptism as a means of participating in Jesus' victory over sin and death.
- **1 Peter 3:20-21** connects baptism to the salvation of Noah and his family through the floodwaters, showing that baptism now saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

4. Baptism and the New Creation:

- **Titus 3:5** speaks of "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," illustrating baptism as a spiritual renewal that cleanses and transforms the believer.

- **2 Corinthians 5:17** declares, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” Baptism marks this transition, where believers are brought into a new life and a new creation in Christ.

Conclusion

Baptism represents participation in the biblical pattern of passing through the waters of death, following Jesus into new life and a new creation. Through baptism, we identify with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection and experience the transformation that comes from God’s redemptive work throughout history.

Greek Grammar Note (briefly):

The phrase "**for the forgiveness of your sins**" (Greek: *eis aphesin tōn hamartiōn humōn*) applies to **both** verbs—**repent** and **be baptized**. The coordinating conjunction *kai* (and) joins two imperatives—**metanoēsate** (repent) and **baptisthētō** (be baptized). They form a unified command, and the result is tied to the outcome that follows: forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit.

So biblically and grammatically:

- **Repentance without baptism** is incomplete.
- **Baptism without repentance** is meaningless.
- **Together**, they represent a full response to the gospel—a **surrender both inward and outward**.

This is confirmed in other places too:

- **Mark 1:4** – John the Baptist preached “a baptism of repentance **for the forgiveness of sins**.”
- **Luke 24:47** – Jesus said that “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” would be preached in His name.
- **Acts 22:16** – “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”

Summary:

Repentance and baptism go hand-in-hand as the response to the gospel, and **together** they lead to the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Neither is presented as optional in the early church’s preaching. They are united acts of surrender.