

10 August 2006

Question:

Looking at Acts 2:41, Where did they baptize 3,000 people?

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Answer: Looking carefully at what the Bible says:

Act 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

1] Those that received the word gladly were baptized

Note: It does not say when they were baptized, who baptized them, or how they were baptized. It only says that they were baptized at some point.

2] The same day [Pentecost] 3,000 souls were added to the believers ranks

There are lots of things we typically don't think about or consider.

We assume it was water baptism - but Scripture doesn't say whether it was or was not water baptism. When John was baptizing in the Jordan he made the following statement:

Mat 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

It could be that the 'baptism' of Acts 2:41 was the same 'baptism with the Holy Ghost and fire' that the original 120 had just an hour earlier had received of God them selves; not a water baptism at all.

One thing is clear. In spite of several denominations teachings, the passage indicates that baptism is result of and follows the decision made by the believer himself to trust Jesus as Lord. It is not made or done by someone else for them and the actual baptism occurs after the individual becomes a believer - it is an act of witness and testimony by a believer.

A 3,000 strong water baptism service would be a marathon.

A few points:

1] There were 120+ believers when the events took place; 3,000 afterward. If all 120 performed water baptisms on the 3,000 immediately that would be 25-30 people each (average). Even if each baptized twice that number it could have been done in an hour or so.

Water Baptism 'services' then were far less elaborate and faster than now. No personal testimonies, no 3 point sermons - or emotional statements and no songs or background music. It was essentially nothing

more than "I baptize you in the name of the Jesus Christ our Lord", dip, and out. Of course I don't know the exact words used but this was the same quick and fast method used by John the Baptist who baptized hundreds and thousands by all by himself in the Jordan River. Most water baptisms in Acts were spur of the moment events - not scheduled, coordinated services.

Side note: Jesus disciples baptized others - even more than John the Baptist - when Jesus walked on earth among them. But Jesus himself did not baptize. The Baptisms were done under His authority and leadership but he himself did not baptize anyone. Why not ???

Joh 3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized.

Clarifying this the apostle John explains that when the Pharisees became concerned because 'Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John' (the Baptist), the apostle goes to explain that 'Jesus himself baptized not, but (only) his disciples (baptized)'

Joh 4:1-2 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

Why didn't Jesus baptize anyone even when he was asked to do so?

(Remember John the Baptist's statement when Jesus came to him to be baptized)

Because: Jesus baptism was with the Holy Spirit.

2] There were several large pools (cisterns) in and around the Temple in that day. The Gospel of John mentions 2: Siloam and Bethesda. there are others mentioned in the OT, whether they are the same or not I don't know. The pool of Bethesda had 5 porches - large 'pool' decks - think of it like the pool area at Metro Beach Park without the safety fence. My impression is that between these 2 alone and given the number of believers able to perform the baptism, it **could have** been physically done easily and fairly quickly. I have included a rough map of the Temple area in Jesus day below. I hope it comes through the e-mail system. Notice all the pools and the location of Solomon's porch to the east and south and the Royal porch to the south and west - both were public gather areas for teaching and meetings.

3] Not only does Scripture not tell us when the baptisms took place, it does not indicate how the baptisms were performed. Church tradition - which always tends to divide the body of Christ - say there were at least 3 methods: immersion, pouring (anointing) and sprinkling. As far as I have been able to determine, Jewish baptisms (there were baptisms in Jewish tradition before Christianity) were always by immersion - either partially or

completely. Jewish baptisms were typically done by Rabbi's or those recognized as God's messenger. The Jewish leaders challenged John the Baptist in this regard:

Joh 1:25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

Now with these facts - let's speculate a bit.

A crowd of 3,000 new believers is mixed in among a much larger crowd that had gathered to see and hear what the mighty wind and all the native tongue talking was all about.

- I cannot imagine the 3,000 believers pushing their way through the massive crowd to get to the 2-3 pools around the Temple. Keep in mind the pools were always crowded under normal conditions - it was at Bethesda that Jesus healed the man who couldn't get into the water when 'the angel disturbed the waters' because the normal crowd around the pool was so great. The 120 +3,000 pushing their way into the pools would have caused a riot as they pushed aside those already at the pools for other reasons.
- I cannot imagine the 120 being so organized as to be to coordinate among themselves who would go to each pool much less dividing the believing crowd among themselves in order to baptize them.
- I cannot image the Temple leadership allowing this mass of people to madly rush in and out of the Temple through the others at the Temple to get to the pools. The crowd, although large, has been orderly. They would not permit anything that looked like 'fans rushing the soccer field', it would have caused a panic and brought out the Romans.

So what are we left with.

We don't know if the baptism of the 3,000 was with water or if it was with the Holy Spirit.

- I expect the 3,000 were baptized with the Holy Spirit immediately - as the 120 had been baptized an hour or so earlier.
- I expect that the water baptism followed at some place and some time later. Water Baptism was important to the early church in obedience to Jesus command. It was a public witness to others of what had been done by the Lord in the life of the believer.

Perhaps water baptism at the pools became part of the daily meetings when the church gathered at the Solomon's Porch area of the Temple.

