

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

οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀσμένως ἀποδεξάμενοι λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν.
the (ones) truly then gladly receiving word of him were baptized,

gladly, adv., only twice in N.T., *gladly received*, nom. pl. masc. part.; 6 times: 5, *receive*, 1, *accept were baptized*: 3pl. aor. ind. pass.

καὶ προσετέθησαν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχὰι ὡσεὶ τρισχίλια.
and there were added the day that (one) souls about three thousand.

were added, 3pl. aor. ind. pass., tss. *to add, give, increase souls*, nom. pl.

Whether we read the Greek or the English there are two statements in verse 41. There is in either language a proper syntax, or arrangement of the words which divide into a subject and a predicate. The subject has its nominatives, adjectives, prepositional phrases, clauses and assorted particles. The predicate contains everything from the verb and following. Here are its verbs, adverbs, objects, indirect objects, adjectives, prepositional phrases, clauses and assorted particles. Here are these two statements divided into their subjects & predicates:

The first statement

The subject – Then they that gladly heard the word
The predicate – were baptized.
The simple statement is – They were baptized.

The second statement

The subject – And the same day there
The predicate – were added unto them about three thousand souls
Simple statement is – There were added souls.

Together these simple statements read: They were baptized and there were added souls.

Or we could treat the text like this to more thoroughly define all of its parts: This verse is made up of two independent clauses. This is the order in which they appear in the text:

They were baptized.
There were added souls.

Now that we have arrived to these bare statements we can begin to put the relative parts into place and understand the sense of the verse.

In the first independent clause the plural pronoun 'they' is defined by an adjective clause which reads 'that received his word.' Now we know who 'they' are that 'were baptized.'

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In the second independent clause the information tells us 'when' and 'how many, approximately' and 'where' When? 'the same day.' How many? 3,000 (an adjective) further defined by the word 'about' (an adverb). Where? 'unto them.' The word 'there' is a pronoun redefined by the noun 'souls' [a predicate nominative]. Now we know that 3,000 souls were added unto them on the same day.

Put both of these independent clauses together again and we could also say it like this:

On the same day (as they that gladly received His word and were baptized) there were 3,000 souls added unto them.

Whether we leave the statement as it reads in our KJV Bible or supply the sense of the text as we have just done here is the point: The text doesn't say how many were baptized, but it does tell us approximately how many were added to the church on that same that that these baptisms took place. Now, what difference does any of this make? Well, for me it is a proof text which shows that baptism does not put anyone into a church. Now if this is true then we may also say that neither does the new birth.

Now let's see this verse speak freely. This verse has a context in which it is set. Like a fabric that is woven together by threads running warp and woof, this verse has a relationship with the verses surrounding it. It is communicating its part of a larger idea which both precedes and succeeds it. Put it all together and we have the whole idea. This verse is a part of the events which occurred on the day of Pentecost.

My opinion is that the church of 120 members had very likely chosen to meet together at the temple especially on this day, the day of Pentecost. Our Lord Jesus had been coming here with His disciples, particularly during the last few days of His earthly ministry. These disciples were in Jerusalem because the Lord had commanded them to *wait* in Jerusalem *for the promise of the Father* (Acts 1.5); that, *ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.* (Ac.1.8) Suddenly, this church being assembled on this day, the Spirit of the Lord descended upon them. The result was that they miraculously began speaking in the languages of the many thousands of Jews that had come there from so many different nations to celebrate Pentecost. Some of the Jews wondered what this sudden outburst of preaching Christ in the various languages could mean, and others mocked. At this the apostle Peter gave an explanation. It was a proof of the partial fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. He goes on to say that, though Jesus of Nazareth had showed Himself to be the Messiah through so many supernatural evidences as the One approved of God, some fifty days ago you rejected and crucified Him. Well, He is raised from the dead, He is presently seated at the right hand of the Father, and He has shed forth this promise of the Holy Ghost which *ye now see and hear.* *This same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, is both Lord and Christ.* (Ac.2.1-36)

What follows is a response from the masses of the gathered Jews that heard Peter's message. What we know is that the Spirit of the Lord began to work among the multitudes gathered. (cf. Ac.2.6) *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?* And Peter commanded them all to *repent, and be baptized every one of*

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you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
(Ac.2.37, 38)

The response was astounding. About three thousand souls were added to the church that day. (v.41)
That much we know. But let's consider for a moment what we don't know.

We do not know how many Jews had come to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost, except that they were called multitudes. (2.6)

We don't know how many asked the question of the apostles, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* (v.37) And, therefore,

We can't know how many responded in obedience to the gospel preached that day and were baptized?

These are all reasonable conclusions from these Scriptures which give testimony to this account. From what is written we know that about *three thousand souls were added* to the previous number of the church at Jerusalem, which was about an hundred and twenty. And why is this so important? Because attached to this are a number of other important points which we might have overlooked.

Some say that the number three thousand applies to both statements in verse 41. Remember, the basic statements are simply these: *They were baptized* and *Souls were added*. But some say that this verse rather communicates this: that 'about three thousand souls gladly heard the word, were baptized, and were added that same day to the Jerusalem church.' But is this what it says? Well, there is a problem with that interpretation because neither the Greek nor the English supports it.

In the first statement, the plural pronoun *they* leads us back to those that were *pricked in their hearts*. (v.37) How many *they* were, is not revealed. What is revealed is that they *gladly heard the word and were baptized*. Again, we don't know how many *they* were. In the second statement, the noun *souls*, by logical inference, refers to that same indeterminate number represented by the plural pronoun *they*. But here the noun *souls* is qualified with an adjective telling us how many *were added* to the church, and that number is said to be *about three thousand*.

What happens if we apply the adjective which modifies the noun *souls* to the plural pronoun *they*? ... *they that gladly received the word* ... The idea being communicated is changed. Not only is verse 41 changed to read something like, 'And three thousand souls heard his word, were baptized and were added to the church', but verse 37 is affected as well. Now, not only were about three thousand souls added to the church, and about three thousand that gladly heard the word and were baptized, but it was three thousand which were pricked in their hearts asking of the apostles, '*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*' What happened by interpreting verse 41 like this but that a ripple effect was felt even back to verse 37.

When verse 41 is properly interpreted the entire episode is clear and sensible. There was a multitude of Jews gathered in Jerusalem to observe Pentecost. They, that heard the witness of Christ preached by

the disciples in the tongues of the nations from which so many had come, were baffled. Some mocked, and others took note and asked what they should do. Some responded by repentance and baptism. And there were three thousand souls added to the Jerusalem church that day. This text is that clear. But the episode didn't end here. It continues in verse 42. *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* The plural pronoun *they* in this verse refers to the three thousand souls that were added to the church that day. Souls is the antecedent of the plural pronoun *they*, *they continued steadfastly ...* The three thousand that were added to the church functioned along with the other one hundred and twenty because they were all of the same body, the church at Jerusalem. Now the church membership has increased to number about three thousand one hundred and twenty. There are at least these three things which can be derived from such an interpretation if this is correct.

1. Baptism is not conditioned on church membership, but on a profession of faith in Christ.
2. Baptism doesn't add souls to the church.
3. Church members must be able to assemble with the church to which they are added.

Baptism is not conditioned on church membership, but on a profession of faith in Christ

First, because there were more baptized than added to the Jerusalem church the condition for baptism is clear. It is right to baptize believers. It is wrong to condition baptism on church membership. Churches should always obey the commission of Christ to baptize them that believe. This practice was maintained by John the Baptist, his disciples, and our Lord Jesus' disciples. This was the practice of Philip when he baptized the Jewish eunuch that had come from Ethiopia in Act 8. It was the practice of Paul when he met the twelve disciples in Ephesus. (cf. Ac.19) And there was even a church in Ephesus.

Baptism doesn't add souls to the church

Second, again, because there were more baptized than added to the Jerusalem church it should be clear that baptism adds no one to a church. Think about this for a moment. Since the number baptized is greater than those that were added to the church the logical conclusion is that those 3,000 souls were added for some other reason than for baptism. What could that reason be? The most basic reason is that they, as opposed to those that were not added, would be remaining in Jerusalem. The others would be returning to their homes that were in foreign lands. (Ac.2.8.-11) But whatever the reason might be, the fact remains that baptism does not add anyone to a church.

Church members must be able to assemble with the church to which they are added.

Third, and a segue from the previous point, because the church is a local assembly of baptized believers covenanted together to carry out the commandments of Jesus Christ, its members must be able to come together as a whole church. Those three thousand souls that were added to the Jerusalem church are said to have *continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.* That was only possible if they remained in Jerusalem. Obviously for them to have *continued steadfastly* they did remain in Jerusalem. This accords perfectly with the fact that a church, a whole church, a church properly ordered after the word of God must be able to assemble together in one place at one time. (Ac.15.22; 1Co.14.23) If a church has members which cannot possibly assemble with it, so that it might be a whole church that is assembled,

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something is wrong with its organization. Today there are many churches which claim to practice local church doctrine, but their members live hundreds, even thousands of miles away; some live on completely different continents.

A correct interpretation of the text of Acts 2.41 is important. From it flows information that is so basic for the churches to know. The whole account taken together harmonizes with other texts of Scripture which supports these same truths: that baptism shouldn't be conditioned on church membership, but on a profession of faith in Christ; that baptism doesn't add anyone to the church; and finally, that the church is a local body of believers.

We need to believe what it written, the way it is written. The word of God is not to be bent to agree with our peculiar doctrinal bias. Rather, our thoughts are to be supported by the word of God. Let's be a people of the Book! Only by interpreting the word of God correctly can we come to right conclusions.

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