Was Water Baptism Only Required for Jews?

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When Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost asked what they should do to be saved, Peter commanded them to *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins…"* (Acts 2:38). In efforts to explain away the necessity of baptism for all men to be saved, some have claimed that water baptism was only for Jews, and was not required for Gentiles. They say that Gentiles today should listen to Paul instead of what Peter said in Acts 2. Is that true? Did Peter and Paul preach two different Gospels, two different ways to be saved?

Acts 2 marks the beginning of the Great Commission that Jesus said was for all nations (Jews and Gentiles), beginning at Jerusalem: *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47). The similarities between Luke 24:47 and Acts 2:38 are undeniable. In other accounts of the Great Commission, water baptism is found together with preaching to all nations—not just Israel (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). In fact, Matthew's account teaches that baptism is necessary to make disciples in all nations (Jews or Gentiles); and Mark's account implies that going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to every creature (Jew or Gentile) includes preaching water baptism for salvation.

The *"promise"* of Acts 2:38-39 was not just for the Jews (who were required to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost), but for *"all them that are afar off,"* which means Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:13, 17). Acts 1:8 gives an outline for the book of Acts, with the same Gospel message and plan of salvation going into all the world for all men: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). When reading the Book of Acts, the inspired account of the Gospel going into the whole world includes much about Paul's travels and conversions among both Jews and Gentiles, as he was preaching the same message to all.

Acts 10 records the first Gentiles being converted by the same Peter who preached in Acts 2. Peter commanded the Gentiles to do the same thing as the Jews—*"he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"* (Acts 10:48; cf. 2:38). Peter said he now realized that in every nation, whether Israel or otherwise, people must do two things to be accepted by God: *"…Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Act 10:34-35). They all *"worked righteousness"* to be accepted by being baptized (Acts 10:6, 48; cf. 2:40-41; 8:12, 35-39; 9:6, 18-19; 10:6, 34-35, 48; 16:15, 32-33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16). When recounting the conversions of the first Gentiles, Peter said God had made *"no difference"* between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:9). That is because there is one

Gospel system of faith that was once for all delivered (Jude 3)--not two Gospels, as in one for Jews and one for Gentiles (Rom. 1:5, 16; 16:26; Eph. 2:11-18; 4:4-5).

Also, Paul was not preaching a different Gospel than Peter. Paul himself (a Jew) had been commanded to be baptized to wash away his sins, and he did so before getting a bite to eat after fasting three days (Acts 22:16; 9:18-19). Paul, in writing to Galatians who were apparently mostly Gentiles, wrote that people are baptized into Christ, where there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile: *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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"* (Gal. 3:27-28; cf. Rom. 6:3-5, 16-18).