

A Study of Baptism

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Introduction

The word baptize is from the Greek word *baptizo*, and the word baptism is from the Greek word *batisma* or *baptismos*. Together they are found 100 times in the New Testament. Thayer's Lexicon lists three primary meanings of the word baptize:

1. to dip repeatedly, to immerge, submerge
2. to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water
3. metaphorically, to overwhelm

Of those 100 times, 14 are found in the four Gospel accounts of the one time Jesus uses the word figuratively to refer to the overwhelming sufferings of His life. Matthew's account (20:22) tells of Jesus asking His disciples, "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" One other time the word is used figuratively in 1 Corinthians 10:2 in reference to Moses and the Israelites. There it says: "And all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea."

6 Times for "Baptism of the Holy Spirit"

Six times the word is used in connection with the Holy Spirit. Four of those are found in the various Gospel accounts (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33) where John the Baptist speaks of his baptism in water compared to the time that Christ will baptize "with the Holy Spirit." The other two are found in the book of Acts and clarify what John was talking about. In Acts 1:5, Jesus told His apostles shortly before the day of Pentecost, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." The fulfillment of that takes place in Acts 2:4 when Peter and the others are "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." Notice this baptism was not performed by men, but by God Himself from above.

The only other time this occurs is in Acts 10-11. There the Gentiles are also given the gift of speaking in tongues for the purpose of convincing the Jewish brethren that proclaiming the gospel message to the Gentiles was indeed God's will. Peter says in Acts 11:15-16, "The Holy Spirit fell on them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" The phrase "at the beginning" refers to the gift of speaking in other languages that first occurred on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. This too was a baptism performed not by men, but by God. (See also 1 Corinthians 12:13.)

The Remaining 79 Times

"Baptism of the Holy Spirit" should not then be confused with the common practice of baptism in the days of the early church. The remaining 79 times show by context, or lack of anything contrary to it, that the word baptize/baptism refers to being immersed in water (the primary and literal meaning of the word). John the Baptist stated over and over that his baptism was in water. In fact, John 3:23 says he was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim "because there was much water there." In Mark 1:9-10, when Jesus was baptized by John, they both went into the Jordan river and came back up out of the water. In Acts 8:38-39, Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and then both came back up out of the water. Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 speak of being "buried with Him through/in baptism." Note also that Peter, in 1 Peter 3:20-21, compares baptism to the water of the flood.

Notice also that these baptisms are also performed by men's hands, not directly from above. That only occurred two times: once for the Jews in Acts 2, and once for the Gentiles in Acts 10. Also notice that the two occasions of Holy Spirit baptism were fulfillments of promises, while baptism in water is a command.

Which Baptism is the "One Baptism?"

Around 63-64 AD, long after the church began on the day of Pentecost (about 33 AD), Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

Which baptism is this? Was it Spirit baptism performed by the Lord that was intended then to continue for all ages, or was it water baptism performed by men? It can't be both--only one is now operational. We read about two specific instances of Spirit baptism, but never again is it mentioned.

But look at Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of ALL THE NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE." This was baptism in water to be performed by men. To whom was it to be performed? To all nations. For how long? Apparently always, to the end of the age.

Regardless of what people believe about the purpose of baptism, the New Testament, with the exceptions noted above, uses the word to refer to being immersed in water. It is this water baptism that is commanded throughout all of time for all people. Note also that the idea of sprinkling or pouring is foreign to Scripture and to the inherent meaning of the word baptize.

"You Must be Born Again"

John 3:1 tells of Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, coming to Jesus. He professed his belief in Jesus, acknowledging that "no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him (verse 2)." Jesus, apparently seeing his interest in the kingdom, told Nicodemus in verse 3, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus takes Jesus' statement literally as he apparently thought of how a fleshly birth introduces one into this fleshly world. But Jesus' kingdom is a spiritual one and is entered by means of a spiritual birth, as Jesus describes in verse 5: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Most scholars today believe that Jesus was speaking here of baptism. Perhaps Nicodemus was familiar with the practice of baptizing proselytes. Gentiles who wished to practice the Jewish religion were, in a sense, born again. Lightfoot, in *Horae Hebraicae* explains: "As soon as he grows whole of the wound of circumcision, they bring him to Baptism, and being placed in the water they again instruct him in some weightier and in some lighter commands of the Law. Which being heard, he plunges himself and comes up, and, behold, he is an Israelite in all things."

Nicodemus was perhaps also familiar with the baptism being administered by John the Baptist. Jesus certainly was and states that one must be born again, not only of water, as John had been doing, but also of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38, Peter said they would receive not only forgiveness of sins when they were baptized, but also the gift of the Holy Spirit. Numerous passages in the NT speak of the Holy Spirit dwelling within a person after he/she has been born again (see 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 12:13).

A related passage is Titus 3:5, where Paul said, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The word "washing" is from the Greek word *loutron*, which refers to (according to Thayer's Lexicon) the act of bathing and is used here in the NT and in other writings to refer to baptism. The word "regeneration" is from the Greek word *palingenesia*, which is taken from two root words "born" and "again."

Paul's statements here indicate a strong connection between washing/water/baptism and being born again, just as Jesus seems to in John 3:5. Paul says that salvation and righteousness comes not by our own good deeds, but that God has ordained that it come, at least in part, through baptism. It is at that point, he says, that we are "renewed by the Holy Spirit."

The NT Teaching on Baptism

There are numerous places in the New Testament that refer to baptism.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commanded His disciples to go and baptize all nations.

In Mark 16:16, Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned."

In Acts 2:38, as already mentioned, after the people asked what they needed to do, Peter said, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Verse 41 says "those who received his word were baptized" and there were about 3000 then added to the church.

In Acts 22:16, Ananias told Saul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

The Bible teaches that salvation is only through Christ, the Son of God (John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-13). It also teaches that we put Christ on through baptism. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Paul reminds Christians in Romans 6:3-4 that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death." He says that just as Christ died, was buried, and was raised again, so also we "through baptism [are raised to] walk in newness of life."

Notice Paul does not say that baptism is symbolic of salvation; it is not our re-enactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is, in fact, God's re-enacting such in us as He gives to us at that point a brand new of life in Jesus! (See also Colossians 2:12-13.)

1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches the same thing: "By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." Just as Paul said to the Romans, it is at the point of baptism that we come into the body, or church of Christ.

1 Peter 3:20-21 says, "In [the ark] a few, that is, eight persons, were saved by water. And corresponding to that (the like figure), baptism now saves you-not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

The Purpose of Baptism

- Mark 16:15-16 "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." [coupled with believing: to be saved]
- Acts 2:38 "Peter said unto them, Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." [coupled with repentance: to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit]
- Acts 2:41 "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousands souls." [to be added to the body of Christ]
- Acts 22:16 Ananias told Saul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." [to wash away sins]

- Romans 6:3-5 "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." [to be buried into Christ's death and be raised to a new life; to be resurrected with Christ]
- 1 Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." [to be added to the body of Christ]
- Galatians 3:27 "All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." [to put on Christ]
- Colossians 2:12-13 "Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." [to be buried with Christ and raised up; to be made alive in Christ; in order to be forgiven of all transgressions]
- 1 Peter 3:20-21 "In the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you-not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." [to be saved; to appeal to God for a good conscience]

Some have counted about 60 places in the NT that speak of necessity of faith in salvation and thus conclude that faith is all that is needed. But the NT also speaks of repentance about 40 times and baptism about 30 times. In one place it teaches that faith saves us; in another it says that without repentance there is no salvation; in another it says that baptism saves us. Is it not reasonable to conclude that all three are necessary for salvation?! There are numerous verses about the need for each one of these; why leave any one of them out?

In the book of Acts, when the question was asked, "What must I do to be saved?" some were told they needed to believe because they had not yet done so. Others were told to repent because they had not yet done that. And still others were told to be baptized because that still needed to be done. If the NT and its teachings are taken as a whole, then it is certainly reasonable to conclude that God requires faith, repentance, and baptism for a person to be saved.

When Were They Saved in Acts Chapter 2?

Acts 2 is one of the most fascinating chapters in the Bible. It records the events of the day of Pentecost just a few weeks after the crucifixion of Jesus. As John the Baptist and Jesus had both promised (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5), the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and were given the miraculous ability to speak in languages they had not previously known.

Peter then proceeds to preach one of the great sermons of all time to the thousands who had gathered there in Jerusalem. Peter concludes his sermon with these words, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36)."

Peter's sermon accomplished its purpose as we see the people "pierced to the heart" and asking Peter and the other apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" They believed what Peter had said in his sermon; they were convinced and convicted of their sin of rejecting and killing Jesus. Peter's response to them was, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)."

At what point were they saved? On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to them about Jesus and His crucifixion. In Acts 2:37, it says, "When they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the

rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?" They had listened to Peter and had come to believe that they had, in fact, crucified the Son of God. It was at this point that they believed. But was that belief enough to save them?

Apparently not, or else Peter would have answered their question by saying something like: "There is nothing you need to do now; you're already saved because of your belief. Go and try to live for Christ now." But that is not what Peter said. In verse 38, Peter first told them they needed to repent. To repent means to turn around and change directions. For the people listening to Peter, it meant to turn away from their sin and their fight against Jesus; they needed to turn to Him and accept Him and His way of life.

(Repentance is also taught in several other places in the book of Acts as a necessary part of God's plan of salvation: Acts 3:19; 5:31; 17:30.) Would then their faith coupled with repentance be all that was needed for salvation?

No, because Peter also told them to be baptized for the remission of their sins. In fact, it is clear that they were still not saved before baptism because in verse 40 Peter kept preaching, saying "Be saved from this perverse generation."

But then we come to verse 41: "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls." Verse 47 goes on to say, "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

At what point were they saved? It could not be said much clearer than what it says in verse 41. They were baptized and were then added to the Lord's church. The Bible teaches that it was at the point of baptism that they came into a saved relationship with the Lord.

Is Baptism a Work?

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." A big problem in the early church was that of Jewish legalism. There were those who were falsely teaching that Christians also had to obey the Old Testament Law in order to be saved (Galatians 4:10, 21; 5:2-6). In Galatians 2:16, Paul declared that we are not saved by works of the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

We are no longer under the OT law today (Deuteronomy 5:1ff; Hebrews 8:7-13). Paul said in Galatians 3:24-25, "The law was our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." In Romans 1-5, Paul argues that salvation is through faith in Christ, not in the Law. In 4:13, he states that the promise to Abraham or his descendants was "not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."

Salvation is clearly a gift of God. There is nothing we can do to earn it. But there are some things we must do to receive that gift. Believing in Jesus is something we must do. Repenting is something we must do. And baptism is something that we must do. None of these earn salvation, but all are necessary in order to inherit salvation.

Many oppose baptism, calling it a work. But it is no more a work to earn salvation than is believing or repenting. In fact, faith itself is called a work in John 6:28-29: "They said therefore to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" So believing is doing something that God says we must do, but it's not a work that earns our salvation.

And repenting is doing something that God says we must do, and so is baptism. All these are things God says we must do in order to receive His grace. But none of these are meritorious works to earn salvation. Baptism, like faith, is also called a work, but it is the work of God.

Colossians 2:12-13 says, "Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions."

In Titus 3:5, Paul said, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."

Baptism is actually the most passive act (or work) of faith required for salvation. Believing is something we must DO; repenting is something we must DO (and often a very hard thing to do); but baptism is something DONE TO US. It is merely submitting in faith to the working of God in our lives.

The Walls of Jericho Fell by Faith

Joshua 6 tells the story of the Israelites marching around the city once each day for 6 days. Then on the 7th day, they marched around 7 times, blew their horns, and then shouted. The walls of Jericho fell down flat just as God had promised. Was their victory due to their own meritorious works or was it a gift of God?

God Himself said in Joshua 6:2 that it was a gift. But He went on to tell them that they had to do something in order to receive that gift. Hebrews 11:30 says, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days." It came by faith, but they did not receive it until they marched and shouted as God had told them to do.

Likewise, salvation for us today is certainly a gift that comes by faith. The NT makes that clear. But the same NT also teaches that there is something further we must do before that salvation is imparted. Numerous passages in the NT teach that baptism is also a part of the salvation process. The Bible teaches that salvation is only through Christ, the Son of God (John 14:6; 1 John 5:11-13).

It also teaches that we put Christ on through baptism. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Paul reminds Christians in Romans 6:3-4 that "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death." He says that just as Christ died, was buried, and was raised again, so also we "through baptism [are raised to] walk in newness of life."

The Bible says that the walls of Jericho fell by faith, but it happened when they marched and shouted just as God said to do.

The Bible also says that we today are given salvation by grace through faith, but it happens when we are baptized for the remission of sins just as God says we are to do (see Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20-21).

Meaning of "eis" in Acts 2:38

Some, in wishing to deny the importance and purpose of baptism, claim that the original Greek word *eis* in Acts 2:38 means "be baptized *because you already have* remission of sins." But such a translation and interpretation cannot be supported with a responsible study of Scripture and the Greek language.

In Acts 2:38 (KJV), Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ FOR (Greek *eis*) the remission of sins." According to one source, *eis* is translated in this way in the King James Version: Against -- 25 times; Among -- 16 times; At -- 20 times; Concerning -- 5 times; For -- 91 times; In -- 131 times; Into -- 571 times; That -- 30 times; On -- 57 times; To -- 282 times; Toward -- 32 times; Unto -- 208 times; Upon -- 25 times.

According to Thayer's lexicon, *eis* means "entrance into, or direction and limit: into, to, towards, for, among." The majority of the words listed above are consistent with that meaning. Many wish to believe teach that Peter said repent and be baptized "because of" the remission of sins.

There is, however, not a single instance of the Greek word *eis* in the KJV ever translated as "because of." Nor is there apparently any version of the Bible that translates Acts 2:38, "Repent, and be baptized . . . because of the remission of sins."

To better understand the meaning, consider the entire phrase "for the remission of sins." In the original Greek it reads: *eis aphasin ton hamartion humon*. That phrase is also found in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 where John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Did John preach and baptize because they already had forgiveness, or was it leading up to that time of forgiveness through Christ?

The real test, though, is found in Matthew 26:28. There Jesus said His blood "is shed for many for the remission of sins." What did He mean by that? Would He shed His blood because people already had forgiveness or in order that they might obtain it?

For more on this and other lessons, see [The Doctrines That Divide Us](#), available on Amazon.com.