

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

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Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church



We believe that salvation is a gift of God which is given to all who place their faith in His Son Jesus as their Lord and savior. Jesus then directed the new believers to follow that step of faith by entering into water baptism. Water baptism is an outward symbol of their spiritual identification with His death, burial and resurrection.

(Romans 6:1-15)

1. What does “baptism” or “to be baptized” mean?

The Greek noun, *baptisma*, baptism, consisting of the process of immersion, submersion and emergence from *baptio*, to dip. This term is used of John the Baptist’s baptisms as well as Christian baptisms. The Greek verb *baptizo*, to baptize, to dip, was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another.¹

2. What type of baptisms were done during the days of Jesus?

A. Jewish proselytes: An Israelite was never baptized by water. They were born under the terms of the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 15:1-12). But Gentiles who desired to become identified with the Jewish people entered into the water as an outward symbol of an internal commitment of faith in Jehovah as their one and only living God.

B. John the Baptist - the forerunner of Jesus: He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (Luke 3:3). That

water baptism puzzled the Pharisees – the religious teachers of Israel, for they wanted to know what right John had to baptize anyone since he was not the *Messiah*, the prophet *Elijah* or the *Prophet* (John 1:19-34). The Pharisees did know that the Prophet Zechariah had spoken on behalf of God “*On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.*” (13:1). John’s message to Israel was “*Repent (of your sins) for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:1-2). The spiritual willingness of some of the Jewish people to repent of their sins was symbolized physically when they allowed John to baptize them in the waters of the Jordan river. The Pharisees were more confused by John’s baptisms because that spiritual ritual was reserved for Gentile proselytes. But John was teaching that the chosen people of God had to be cleansed *spiritually* in preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom.²

C. Christian Baptism: John had told the Jewish people that he was baptizing with water but the one who would come after him would baptize men and women in the Holy Spirit and the fire of judgment. (Which came to pass three years later on the Day of Pentecost [Luke 3:16-17, Acts 2].) The apostles of Jesus were first commanded to baptize all new disciples in water just before He ascended into heaven after his death, burial and resurrection. He told them “...*go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*” (Matt. 28:16-20). Christian

Baptism is first experienced on a *spiritual* level. It occurs after a Jew or a Gentile confessed with their mouth Jesus as Lord and believed in their hearts that God raised Him from the death (Romans 10:9-10). The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians and explained to them that at the moment one placed their faith in Jesus as their Lord, He saves them from their sins, and the wrath of God. Then they were given the gift of the person of the Holy Spirit who in turn *spiritually* baptizes (places into, identifies) them into the mystical body of Christ with all other believers. At that point they then became one with Christ, and one with all the other believers since the beginning of the church (1 Cor. 10:13). This *spiritual* baptism means that the new believer is *identified* with Jesus in all that He is and does. The new believers are *identified spiritually* with His death, burial, and resurrection life (Rom. 6:6).³
Note: All the above water baptisms were an outward *physical* demonstration symbolizing an inward *spiritual* reality, a shadow of the reality (Gal.3:27).

3. Can a person be a follower of Jesus without being baptized in water?

Some Christian groups believe unless you are baptized in water you can't be a true follower of Jesus. This is called "*Baptism for the Remission of Sins.*" They base their belief on the words of the apostle Peter when he stood up on the Day of Pentecost in the Temple area in Jerusalem and said to the Jewish people "*Repent (change your mind about Jesus) and let each one of you be baptized (identified) in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). In other words your sins will not be forgiven by God *until* you are physically baptized in water. *Other Christian groups had a different view.*

A. Context is the key to understanding: The above interpretation of Acts 2:38 does not take into account the full context of the Good News of Jesus Christ. **(1)** We are *saved by faith and not works* – works defined as the need to *add* an act of water baptism to our faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9, Rom. 10:9). **(2)** The thief who placed his faith in Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah while they both hung on the Roman Cross was never baptized and yet because of that faith he was given the gift of salvation (Luke 23:39-43). **(3)** In this first century context of 33 AD we find the apostle Peter addressed a Jewish audience that had agreed with the Roman Government leaders that Jesus was a political rebel and blasphemer and thus deserved death on a cross. This Jewish audience was asked by Peter to "*repent*" of their distorted view of Jesus and their sin of rejecting him as their Messiah (Matt. 27:25). Some 3,000 Jewish men repented of that sin and accepted Him as their Messiah. By public water baptism they disassociated themselves from a nation that agreed to have him crucified and they became personally and spiritually *identified* with Him as their new Lord, Savior and Messiah. Baptism thus became the *outward* sign that their sin – in connection with the rejection of Jesus as their Messiah (as well as their personal sins), had been washed away. But the act of water baptism did *not* save them.

B. Baptism for the remission of sins: Charles C. Ryrie gives an alternative interpretation of the "*baptism for the remission of sins.*" The Greek preposition *for* (eis) can also be translated "*because of.*" That translation can also be found in the words of Jesus when He said to the Pharisees "*The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for (or because of, not in order to) they repented at the preaching of Jonah*" (Matt.

12:41). Repentance brought the remission of sins for this Pentecostal crowd, and *because* of the remission of sins they were asked by Peter to publicly identify with Jesus in water baptism.³ **Acts 2:38** would then read *Repent* (of your distorted views of Jesus) *and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus* (your Messiah) **because of** (eis) *the forgiveness of your sins*.

4. Were the first century *Gentile Christians* baptized?

Yes! **Philip**, the evangelist, preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to the *Samaritan* people (half Jewish and half Gentiles) and all those who believed in Jesus as their Messiah were baptized (Acts 8:12). Later Philip met an *Ethiopian eunuch* who appeared to be a Jewish proselyte on the road to Gaza, and shared the Good News of Jesus as Messiah with him. He then was baptized immediately after his conversion (Acts 8:36). *Paul* was baptized after his conversion by **Ananias** in Damascus (Acts 9:18). **Peter** baptized *Cornelius* the Roman commander and his whole family after they invited the risen Jesus to become their Lord and savior (Acts 10:48). **Paul** baptized *Lydia* and the *Philippian Jailer* after they and the members of their households all invited Jesus to become their Lord (Acts 16:15;33).

5. How soon after a person confesses Jesus as Lord should they be baptized?

Based on all the Biblical stories above it appears that it is normal to lead new believers into the waters of baptism as soon as they come to a Biblical understanding of its spiritual meaning.

6. How did the early church baptize new Jewish and Gentile believers?

According to an early first century docu-

ment "*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*" (or ***The Didache***) written by a Jewish Christian (50 AD) to help the new Gentile believers in their spiritual growth we find the following statement: "*And as touching baptism, thus baptize: When you first recited all these things (six doctrinal statements already stated early in the Didache) baptize unto the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in living waters. But if you have not living waters, baptize into other water; and if you cannot in cold, then in warm. And if you have not either, pour forth water three times upon the head, unto the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit. And before the baptism let the baptizer and him that is to be baptized and such others as are able first fast; but bid him that is to be baptized fast one or two days before.*"⁴

7. Should new believers be fully immersed in water or sprinkled with water?

A. Immersion: "Some Christians believe that a new Christian should be fully immersed in a pool of water in order to demonstrate by means of an outward sign that an inward spiritual reality has already taken place. By this outward physical sign of water baptism the believer portrays in *shadow* form, not only Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and their purpose in atoning for sin and delivering sinners from it's presence and power (Romans 6:5, Colossians 2:12)."⁵ But the encouraging word is that now the former sinner can walk in the newness of life that Christ has given him because of His resurrection from the dead.

B. Sprinkling: "Some Christians believe that a new Christian should be sprinkled with water to symbolize the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing of the life that occurs when one is baptized (*placed*) into the spiritual body of Christ by the Spirit" (Acts 2:2, 1 Cor.12:3).⁵ However, the Greek language has words for

sprinkle (*rhantizo*) and **pour** (*ballo*) which are not used in the context of baptism.

8. Who is able to baptize a new believer?

When Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize all new believers He did not mean that only the apostles should perform this spiritual ritual. All believers were free to baptize the new disciples of Christ: husbands can baptize wives and their children, wives can baptize husbands and their children, once they confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Single adults can baptize other single adults or anyone else who desires to be baptized. High school students can baptize their fellow students. Pastors and elders of a local church can baptize, among the many, but not because they hold an office of servant authority, but because they too are believes.

9. Where should baptisms take place?

According to the early church baptisms took place on the banks of a nearby river, streams, ponds, beaches or lakes. One took place in a desert. Most baptisms took place among family and friends or neighbors as a witness of the new believers faith in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I had the privilege of baptizing two disciples of Jesus in the head waters of the Jordan River in Northern Israel under a waterfall where we had the combination of *sprinkling* and *immersion* at the same time. Several Christian brothers stood in the water with us and we were all witnessed by several fully armed Israel soldiers watching from the rocks along side the rushing waters. This experience was more like the “*living waters*” mentioned in the “**Didache**.”

10. Should infants be baptized?

See a paper by Ron R. Ritchie “*Behold Children are a Gift of the Lord*” which can be found in the Literature Rack in the Fellowship Mall at Fellowship Bible Church.⁵

Reference Books and Papers

1. Vines, W. E.; *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*; Fleming Revell Company, Old Tappan, NJ (Pages 96-97)
2. Barclay, Wm.; *The Gospel of John*; The Westminster Press, Phila, PA (Pages 79-80)
3. Smith, Robert; *When All Else Fails...*; Word Books, Waco, TX (Pages 133-134)
4. Walters, Brent S.; *Didache*; Bibliographies, 1991 (Page 96)
5. Ritchie, Ron R.; *Behold Children are a Gift of the Lord*; Discovery Papers. Palo Alto, CA