

# Baptism

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study on baptism, but just a collection of many of the relevant passages in the New Testament. You will probably find that there is plenty to be getting on with! Please be sure to have your Bible to hand as you read through these notes, and **look up the references!**

## The Word 'baptism'.

Before we even get into the various biblical references, a few thoughts about the word itself. (All Greek words in *italics*)

*Baptizo* comes from the word *bapto* which means 'to dip'. New Testament (NT) examples of the use of *bapto* are in **Luke 16:24, John 13:26 & Revelation 19:13**, where it seems to mean exactly what we would mean by 'dip' - touching something into a liquid to a greater or lesser extent.

*Baptizo* means a more complete dipping and is used in non-biblical Greek to mean to dip repeatedly, to submerge, sink or overwhelm. The only NT reference I could find to a 'non-baptism' use of *baptizo* is **Luke 11:38**, referring to Jewish ceremonial washing.

The noun *baptismos* is used in the NT for these ceremonial washings in **Mark 7:4, Hebrews 6:2 & Hebrews 9:10**, but the word *baptisma* ('immersion, submersion') is used exclusively to mean Christian baptism. A striking picture, perhaps, of how the young Christian Church took on Jewish customs and gave them a totally new perspective!

## New Testament Examples

John the Baptist: **Matthew 3:11-17.**

John and Jesus: **John 3:22,23 & 4:1-3**

Jesus' command to his disciples: **Matthew 28:19,20. Mark 16:15,16.**

Baptism of those who put their trust in Jesus:-

3,000 on the day of Pentecost: **Acts 2:37-42.**

People in Samaria who believed through Philip: **Acts 8:12.**

The Ethiopian Official: **Acts 8:25-40**

Conversion of Saul/Paul: **Acts 9:18.**

The Roman army officer Cornelius and his friends and relations in Caesarea: **Acts 10:46-48.**

Lydia and her household in Philippi (Greece): **Acts 16:14-15.**

The jailer in Philippi and his household: **Acts 16:30-34.**

In Corinth (Greece), Crispus the Jewish leader, his household and many other Corinthians: **Acts 18:8.**

The strange case of the 'disciples' at Ephesus: **Acts 19:1-7.**

## **Baptism in what and into what?**

Very often the NT writers talk about being baptised in, with, by or into something or someone. There are two simple points here, but unfortunately we can get muddled - sometimes our Bible translations have not helped! Let's try to get it a bit clearer . . .

The simple difference is between **in** and **into**. We understand the difference between these two words: to be **in** something is a position, but **into** always means movement, doesn't it? So let's apply this baptism **in** or **into** to some New Testament passages:-

In water and/or in the Holy Spirit. Although some translations say 'by' or 'with', the Greek word is 'in'. The simplest place to start is probably **Matthew 3:11**, where John the Baptist describes the difference between himself and Jesus. There he is, **in** the river baptising people, and says that he uses water to submerge people but Jesus will use the Holy Spirit. Have a look at **Luke 3:16, John 1:3, John 1:26 & 33, Acts 1:5, Acts 11:16**. All these passages use the word 'in' to describe what is used for the baptism. **Acts 10:48** also uses 'in' - 'baptised in the name of Jesus Christ'.

Baptised 'into' seems to mean that baptism is a means of moving into something. If you say that you were driven into Exeter by your friend, it means that your friend did the driving, and it was the driving that took you into Exeter. End result? You were in Exeter! See what you make of these passages:-

**Matthew 28:19** '. . . baptising them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit . . .'

**Acts 8:16** 'they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus.'

**Acts 19:3,5** ' "Into what then were you baptised?" And they said, "Into John's baptism" . . . they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus.' What a strange thing, to have been 'baptised into a baptism'! No wonder they had some problems!

**Romans 6:3,4** 'all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into his death . . . buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.'

**1 Corinthians 1:13,15** Baptised into Paul? NOT a good idea!

**1 Corinthians 10:2** 'Baptised into Moses' - what did that mean?

**1 Corinthians 12:13** Baptised in one Spirit, into one body.

**Galatians 3:27** Into Christ, like getting into a new set of clothes!

## What does it all mean?

We have seen enough already to realise that the use of baptism by Christian believers in the New Testament was very different from the Jews' use of ceremonial washings, though their understanding of its significance seems to have developed. Paul is the main one to take this understanding forward, but he is certainly not alone!

Washing? When Saul/Paul was in Damascus, after he had seen the Lord Jesus on the way there, the Lord sent a disciple called Ananias to go to him so that he would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. We can read the original account in **Acts 9:1-19**, but Paul himself tells the story later, when he is arrested in Jerusalem and speaks to the Jews there. See **Acts 22:1-21**, but especially **verse 16**. Remember that Paul is speaking to Jews, so he will tend to emphasise the links between Jewish practice and Christian baptism, but he still reports Ananias saying that baptism carried 'washing' as part of its meaning. See also **Ephesians 5:26** and **Titus 3:5**. We shall come back to this later.

Death, Burial . . . and Resurrection! One of the key passages about baptism is **Romans 6:1-11**, where Paul first introduces the fresh Christian perspective on the meaning of immersion baptism. Perhaps we shall get a better idea of the impact of what he says if we substitute another word, such as 'immersed', for the word 'baptism'.

We have already seen Paul's picture of 'clothing ourselves with Christ' in **Galatians 3:27**. He combines this with the picture of burial and resurrection in **Colossians 2:8-19**. He also brings into the same passage a reference to Jewish circumcision, which meant much to the Jews in the Colossian church, but may confuse us today. Basically, the removal of the foreskin by circumcision was a symbol of a Jew being made holy (set apart) to God, a member of his chosen people.

Paul uses a word which means 'taking off a layer of clothing' in **verses 11 & 15** and in **3:9**, and links it to circumcision, Jesus' death and resurrection and our baptism. He especially emphasises the meaning of baptism as a demonstration of our leaving behind our old life, like taking off and discarding a layer of clothes or like leaving the 'corpse' of our old life in the grave, while we are 'resurrected' to new life in Jesus. Strong imagery! There is more here if you want to explore in depth, but hopefully this will be enough to get you started!

And so to **1 Peter 3:18-22**. **Verse 19** is a bit tricky, but **verse 21** is where our attention lies, as it talks about baptism. 'Baptism now saves you', says Peter, not as a washing process but as an appeal to God for (or of) a good conscience. What does that mean?

Firstly, 'baptism saves you' is not something we would expect to hear, but perhaps the analogy of a marriage vow or an oath of allegiance is useful. Simply going through a marriage ceremony, although it might make people officially married, will do little to affect their marriage relationship unless it reflects what is really going on between them. If it *does* reflect their feelings and intentions towards each other, it is very valuable. The marriage vow makes them married and declares the union publicly. Baptism has a similar value in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. (For more detail on this verse, try reading '*A World Under Water*', which is Chapter 3 of Watchman Nee's book '*Love Not the World*'. Not very easy reading, perhaps, but you may find it useful.)

The 'appeal to God of (or for) a good conscience' is 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ'. What does this mean? Taking Paul's picture of death and resurrection, baptism presents a graphic way of leaving behind our old life and embracing new life in Jesus. The death of my old life would get rid of a bad conscience, but the only way I can hope for a positively **good** conscience is by the resurrection life of Jesus **in** me. This is one of the most amazing things about what God has done for us in Jesus. Not only has he dealt with my past sins but he has also consigned my old way of life to death and **given me a new quality of life which is pleasing to him!**

Paul has much to say about this new life in the Spirit in ***Romans 8***, which follows directly on from his teaching about baptism and death to the old life in ***Romans 6***. Definitely worth following up, and I would recommend another title by Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life*, as the best book I know which deals with this vital aspect of our life in Christ. Don't try to read it too fast!

As a parting thought . . . Many of the truths we have looked at here overlap into a biblical understanding of two more aspects of the Christian life:-

1) The meaning of sharing bread and wine together with fellow Christian believers in what is variously known as 'The Lord's Supper', 'The Breaking of Bread' or 'Holy Communion'.

2) The work of the Holy Spirit, poured out and indwelling.

You will find it useful to delve further!

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