

Baptism Background**Acts 2:38**

Baptism is a hot topic among churches today. There is much discussion about the proper method of baptizing (sprinkle, dip, pour, dunk), and there are many different views about the function of baptism. Does a person need to be baptized to be saved? Is it necessary that a person be baptized to join a church? Should infants be baptized? Is there a difference between John's baptism of repentance (Mark 1:4) and so-called Christian baptism (Acts 18:24—26; 19:1—7).

Most fundamental churches demand baptism as a requirement for church membership but understand that baptism is not needed today for salvation. They explain baptism to be an outward expression of an inward reality. It is said to be a picture of our baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ. They see it as a physical replay of a spiritual truth.

That sure does sound nice, but has absolutely no biblical support. The true meaning of baptism is lost because it is stolen from Israel's program and applied to the Church, the Body of Christ. It's little wonder that there is so much confusion.

Definition

There are at least 12 baptisms in the Bible, and only one of those baptisms is "wet." For instance, there is the baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2), baptism into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), a baptism of death (Matthew 20:22—23), a baptism of fire (Matthew 3:11) and a baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2). Obviously baptism does not necessarily mean being dunked under water.

The one word that characterizes all these baptisms is *identification*. When the Israelites were baptized into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2) they were being fully identified with him. When we were baptized into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) we were identified with the Body of Christ, becoming members of that Body. When Israel was baptized with the Holy Spirit, they were identified with the Holy Spirit and thus demonstrated spiritual gifts. When Israel will be baptized with fire (Matthew 3:11), they all will be identified with the seven-year Tribulation and the outpouring of God's judgment. When those in Israel were water baptized, they were being identified with the Little Flock of remnant believers.

Mode

There are three modes of water baptism: pouring, sprinkling and immersion. The most common in fundamental circles is that of immersion. They define baptism to mean immersion, then use Mark 1:10 ("And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened") and Acts 8:38 ("and they went down both into the water...") to show they were submerged fully into the water. However, if I were to say, "I'm going down to the lake," it would be understood that I'm not saying I'm going to completely submerge myself under water. Going down to the water is not going under the water. Also, according to Acts 8:38, both the baptizer and the one being baptized would have both submerged themselves under water. This obviously is not the case. These verses actually prove nothing, other than that water baptism was performed.

They also claim that baptism is a picture of Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 which shows our complete immersion into Christ. However, these verses do not teach water baptism. These verses actually assure

the believer of his position in Christ, not the position that a believer should take as he's being dunked under water. In actuality, immersion is never clearly taught in Scripture.

Another less common practice today is baptism by pouring. This has some Scriptural support because the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised to Israel (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16) and then described as a pouring out of the Spirit in Acts 2:17—18. The immersionists say this is about Spirit baptism, not about water baptism and therefore has no bearing on what method should be used to water baptize. The affusionist (those who baptize by pouring) counter that there is a definite connection between the pouring out of the Holy Spirit and water baptism (Acts 10:47), seeing these two baptisms in one section of the Bible.

Sprinkling is used often in Scripture. For instance, when Aaron was installed into the priesthood, Moses was told to take blood from the altar and sprinkle it on Aaron and his sons to purify them (Exodus 29:19—21). Once serving as priests, there were multiple times they were to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the altar (Leviticus 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:17; 5:9, etc.). At the Second coming, the Lord will sprinkle clean water on Israel to cleanse them from their filthiness (Ezekiel 36:25). The vessels of the temple were also purified by Moses through the sprinkling of blood (Hebrews 9:21), an act of purification (Hebrews 9:23). In like manner, Israel was also said to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2). These sprinklings were for purification (Numbers 8:7; Hebrews 9:13), the same purpose as John's baptism (John 3:22—26).

Washing is another word used in Scripture that often is a reference to baptism. While Peter refers to Jesus sprinkling Israel with blood, John refers to it as being washed (Revelation 1:5), as does Paul (1 Corinthians 6:11). Water baptism was used as a means to wash away sins (Acts 22:16). These washings were baptisms, as can be seen by the Greek word *baptismos* used in Hebrews 9:10 and translated washings. It would appear that washings, for purification sake, was done by sprinkling and not dunking as is so commonly taught.

One verse that seems to confirm that baptism was done by dipping into water is Luke 16:24 where the rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to dip (*bapto*) the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue. However, it must be understood that before people were sprinkled, the hyssop branch was first dipped in water, or blood, then shaken over the people to sprinkle them (Numbers 19:18, Psalm 51:7; Hebrews 9:19). The dipping was not done to those being baptized, but to the object that would be used to sprinkle the people to baptize them.

A new ritual?

“Scholars are unsure of the exact origin of baptism.” I ran across this quote as I was studying what others believed about baptism. They often see Jesus as the instigator of baptism for Christians, and therefore it's necessary for us to be baptized to be obedient to Jesus. It's obvious that these “scholars” are biblically illiterate (Do a search to see how many time Jesus confronted the religious leaders of Israel with the question, “Have ye not read?” They were ignorant of the most basic truths of Scripture. Matthew 21:42). God instituted baptism in the Mosaic Law. One thing that confuses the issue is that most people split baptism into two parts; Jewish and Christian. They don't realize that baptism in the Old Testament was continued into the New Testament and relates only to Israel. There really is no such thing as Christian baptism. There is confusion because people do not rightly divide Scripture.

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