



# BAPTISM

**Reading:** John 3

## Baptism – a new start

Sin separates us from God and brings death. If we want to come back to God we must turn from our own ways to His way. Baptism is the way God has chosen for us to make a new start.

## Baptism is essential for salvation

**1. The teaching of Jesus and his apostles** – Just before he ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus said to his apostles,

*“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. **Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved**, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:15,16).



The apostle Peter taught the Jews on the day of Pentecost:

*“Repent and **be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins**”* (Acts 2:38).

Baptism is the command of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. It is essential for the **forgiveness of sins** and **salvation**.

**2. The example of Cornelius** – Cornelius was a *“devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God”* (Acts 10:2). You might think that his service to God was complete and there was nothing more he could do. But the apostle Peter commanded him to be baptized. The lesson is clear – even good living, God-fearing people can only be saved through baptism.

## 3. Baptism was practised in New Testament times

REFERENCE	NOTES
Matthew 3:13-17	Jesus himself was baptized. He did not need to be baptized for his sins to be forgiven because he had never sinned. His cousin, John the Baptist, knew this and so was unwilling to baptize him, but Jesus said, <i>“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”</i> . Jesus set an example for others to follow.
John 3:22, 4:1-3	Jesus was involved in baptizing others.
Acts 2:41	As a result of the apostles’ preaching on the day of Pentecost 3,000 were baptized.
Acts 8:5-13	Philip baptized people in Samaria.
Acts 8:26-40	Philip also baptized an Ethiopian official.
Acts 9:1-19	Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) was baptized. As he travelled to Damascus to persecute Christians there, the Lord Jesus spoke to him from heaven. Saul then realised that Jesus really was God’s Son, and that he had been wrong to persecute Christians. So he was baptized and became a completely changed person.
Acts 10	The apostle Peter baptized Cornelius, the first Gentile believer.
Acts 16:25-33	A jailor and family in Philippi were baptized.
1 Corinthians 1:12-16	The apostle Paul baptized Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas.



## How were people baptized?

The Greeks used the word ‘baptizō’ to describe the dyeing of cloth. The cloth was ‘baptized’ or immersed completely in the dye. No part of the cloth could be left out of the liquid otherwise the dyeing would be patchy. In the same way baptism is a complete immersion in water – the person being baptized goes completely under the water.

The practice of christening by sprinkling with water is not taught in the Bible. The examples of baptism we read about in the Bible involved a large amount of water because the person being baptized went right under the water:

- John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon “because water was plentiful there” (John 3:23).
- Jesus was baptized in a river. Afterwards he “came up out of the water” (Mark 1:9,10).
- Philip helped an Ethiopian eunuch to understand the work of the Lord Jesus. We are told: “And as they were going along the road they **came to some water**, and the eunuch said, ‘**See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?**’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they **both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away ...**” (Acts 8:36-39).

**Baptism is essential for salvation. It is a complete immersion in water.**

## The meaning of baptism

Baptism is a symbol of the washing away of past sins, because at our baptism all these are forgiven, allowing us to make a fresh start:

*“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and **wash away your sins**, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).*

But baptism is more than a washing away of sins, as this passage from Romans 6 shows:

ROMANS 6:3,4	NOTES
<i>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?</i>	Paul is talking to baptized believers. He says that they were baptized into Christ Jesus – into his death.
<i>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,</i>	Being put completely under water is like being buried. This associates us with the death of Jesus,
<i>in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.</i>	so that as Christ was raised from the dead to start a new life, so we start a new life after baptism.

Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. As the body of Jesus was buried in the tomb, so in baptism our body is buried in water. Going completely under the water is a symbol of dying with Christ. In this way we confess that we deserve to die because of our sins. It also represents the end of our old life in which we were slaves to sin. Then just as Jesus rose from the grave, so we rise from the water, set free from our past sins, to begin a new life in Christ. It is a life dedicated to following the example of the Lord Jesus.

Since baptism is a symbol of dying and rising with Christ, it is clear that a person needs to go right under the water to be baptized, and not have a few drops of water sprinkled on them.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus was speaking about the birth of a new life that takes place at baptism, explaining that a person cannot have a place in God’s future kingdom unless that person is baptized. The words “and the Spirit” show that baptism is more than a physical





immersion in water. It is a spiritual rebirth – being “*born again*” by the effect of the Word of God in our minds and hearts (1 Peter 1:23). Baptism is only effective when accompanied by a sincere attitude:

*“Baptism ... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as **an appeal to God for a good conscience**, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism is an outward sign of a response to God which comes from the heart. It is our declaration to God that we believe that our sins can be forgiven and wish to start a new life in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not a ritual of washing done to become a member of a church.

**Romans 6:5-8,11** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that **our old self was crucified with him** in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that **we would no longer be enslaved to sin**. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.....**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

### Steps to the new life

Being baptized and starting a new life in Christ is the most important decision we can ever make. It is a decision for life and should not be taken lightly. The way to baptism and a new life in Christ can be summarised in the following steps.

1. **Know and believe true Bible teaching** – A person needs to understand and believe the one true Gospel message before being baptized (Mark 16:15). See also Acts 16:31 and 18:8. Before the Samaritans were baptized they were taught and believed the Gospel message:

*“But when they **believed** Philip as he **preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12).

Cornelius and the Ethiopian were both taught from Scripture before being baptized.

2. **Repentance** – John the Baptist taught, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Peter said, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins**” (Acts 2:38). See also Acts 3:19. Repentance is essential before baptism. The Bible word ‘repent’ means ‘to have a change of mind’. Once a person hears the Gospel and comes to understand how sinful he is in God’s eyes, he will be truly sorry for his sins and will seek God’s mercy and forgiveness. He will openly acknowledge his sins before God with a sincere and total desire not to sin like this again. This involves a complete change of heart and the desire to make a fresh start in life.
3. **Conversion** is a turning around, or a change of direction. The apostle Peter said, “**Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out**” (Acts 3:19). A person who has truly repented (changed his mind) will then seek to turn his life around (be converted) and make a fresh start. The process of changing from being self-centred to being God-centred is not easy to do and will continue for the rest of his life.
4. **Baptism** is a washing away of past sins by association with the death of Jesus. In symbol we die with Christ and confess that we deserve to die because of our sins. In symbol we rise with Christ to start a new life dedicated to following his example.
5. **The new life in Christ** – Past sins are completely forgiven at baptism. It is the end of our old self. We have to change to be Christ-like. This will not happen overnight and is a lifetime’s work. The change will not be complete until God’s kingdom because we still have human nature. After baptism we should not be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). However, we can pray for the sins we commit after baptism to be forgiven. The new life is discussed further in Lesson 36.





## Baptism is not for children

The Bible is clear that a person must believe the true Gospel message, recognise his sinfulness and need of salvation and so repent, and start to change his way of life before baptism. How can this be done by a baby? A baby cannot recognise sin in its life and want to change. Baptism is a mature decision. There are no examples anywhere in the Bible of the baptism of children.

**Baptism is for adults – christening or baptism of children is not taught in the Bible.**

## Abraham's heirs by baptism

Baptism brings us into a new relationship with God and His Son. We are baptized into Christ and become members of God's family through him. Galatians 3 shows us that by being baptized we become Abraham's descendants (spiritual Israel) and so become heirs to the promises that God made to him (see Lesson 12). This is why we can look forward to living in God's kingdom on earth:

*"... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ ... you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).*

## People in Old Testament times

Those who lived before the time of Jesus could not be individually baptized into the death of Jesus, so people like Abraham were not baptized. But as we showed in Lesson 24, God considered Abraham to be righteous because of his great faith.

The Law that God gave to Moses showed the people of Israel that they were sinful and displeasing to God. The sacrifices of perfectly formed animals pointed forward to the sacrifice of the sinless Lord Jesus. If people in Old Testament times really wanted to be forgiven and believed that God could help, He would. David said:

*"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1,2).*

The sacrifices and the Law of Moses are no longer needed because Christ, the perfect sacrifice, has died for us. Believers can now associate themselves with his sacrifice by baptism.

## Summary

1. Baptism is essential for the forgiveness of sins and salvation.
2. It is a complete immersion in water, symbolising the washing away of past sins.
3. Baptism is also a symbol of dying and rising with Christ. It represents the end of our old life in which we were slaves to sin and the start of a new life in Christ.
4. Through baptism we enter into a new relationship with God and His Son. We become members of God's family.
5. Baptism is for adults who recognise their sinfulness and wish to repent.

## Verses to learn: Romans 6:3,4

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

**Passages to read: Acts 8,9,10 and Romans 6**

