

# ADVANCED BIBLICAL COURSE



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*Water Baptism*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The subject of water baptism has been one of much misunderstanding, much difference of opinion and much division among Christians through the years. We must be careful when dealing with this subject not to condemn or criticise others for their convictions, but rather share what we believe the Scriptures present in terms of this truth. We must also bear in mind that today baptism is not something as clearly understood as in the times of Jesus. In early New Testament times baptism was something that was practised by many different religious groups, etc. For example, the proselytes to Judaism were required to stand in a bath of water up to their necks, and after having heard the law read to them, they could immerse themselves beneath the water as an indication of acceptance of the law and the initiation into the Judaistic religion.

Jesus then came along and took something well known and familiar to the people and vested in it the great unchanging truths of the Christian faith. We have a specific problem because through the years the subject of baptism has undergone many changes and revisions in the religious world and in the minds of men and women. It is therefore extremely important that we clearly explain the meaning of baptism and its necessity to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

**I THE BIBLE CHAIN ON WATER BAPTISM**

We begin in presenting this truth with the following chain of verses: -

◆ **Matthew 3:13-15**

*“Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptised by Him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me?’ But Jesus answering said to him, ‘Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he permitted Him.” (NASV)*

The first point we make is that even though it was unnecessary for Jesus to be baptised, He considered it important enough and proper as our example, to be baptised by John; *“Permit it at this time, for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* (NASV)

Jesus is at all times the example for us as believers and although there are certain things in the life of Jesus which are impossible for His disciple to do (such as die on the cross for the sins of the whole world). His life and example certainly must be followed as far as possible. Because of this, then, it is important for every disciple of Jesus to consider baptism as an important aspect, seeing that the Master did so too.

◆ **Matthew 28:19-20**

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of age.”* (NASV)

The second important aspect concerning baptism is that Jesus commanded that His disciples should be baptised. Even though it may not appear important to certain individuals to undergo believer’s baptism, yet if one considers the question whether it is important to obey Jesus, then baptism becomes a must for every true disciple of Jesus Christ.

From these two verses we in turn see that the process of making disciples involves two major matters; one, baptising them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and two, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded us.

If Jesus considered baptising as an essential part of producing His disciples, the logical conclusion is that every individual who seeks to become a disciple of the Master should consider baptism as an essential.

◆ **Romans 6:36**

*“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised 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.”* (NASV)

From these verses we draw the following conclusions: -

- Baptism symbolises the death and resurrection of Jesus. When one considers the matter there is really no other symbol that can so adequately symbolise death and resurrection.

As one is immersed beneath the water, it symbolises burial, and as one rises from the water, it symbolises resurrection.

- By means of this ceremony the believer is in fact united with Jesus in His death and also united with Him in His resurrection. According to this Scripture it is clear that water baptism is the means whereby the death and resurrection of Jesus becomes a reality in the life of the believer, and the power of both His death and of His resurrected life becomes available to the believer and ready to be practically applied in his life.
- The believer's baptism then becomes, in a sense, a point in his experience to which he can turn again and again when faced with temptation, and tell himself, "I do not need to yield to this temptation because my old nature was crucified with Jesus when His death became mine through the act of baptism." On the positive side, again the believer looks back to the point of baptism and tells himself that he can rise up and live with power and victory because through his baptism the new life of Jesus became his very own.

However, misunderstandings can arise from the previous points raised. It would appear at first that the power lies in the baptism, that the actual water does something to the individual. This cannot be accepted for the simple reason that the Bible clearly teaches that the power lies in the actual death and resurrection of Jesus and not in the water in the baptismal pool. This distinction must clearly be made. It is not purely the water that affects the individual, but the "faith action" expressed through the ceremony of baptism by the one who believes in Jesus. We are **not saved by baptism**; we are saved by the death of Jesus which He died for us in our place. Therefore the next matter of great importance in the issue of baptism is the "faith" of the believer in Jesus Christ and what He has done.

◆ **Colossians 2:12**

*"Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him, through faith in the working of God Who raised Him from the dead." (NASV)*

Baptism is an action of faith. Water baptism in the New Testament is not the baptism of adults, but is "*believer's baptism*". The power of baptism is released by the faith the individual has in what our Lord Jesus has done for us on the cross, which is symbolised by baptism. It is faith that makes baptism significant and releases the power from the death and resurrection of Jesus.

*“Now faith is the assurance (reality, substance) of things hoped for and the conviction (proof) of things not seen.” (NASV Hebrews 11:1)*

It is faith that makes the great truths of the Word of God become a reality in our lives. It is faith that releases the power inherent in those truths. Thus the power that becomes a reality in the life of the believer through baptism is not in the ceremony, but in the truth it symbolises, and the ceremony carried out by faith becomes the action whereby the believer expresses his faith in that truth and therefore then experiences the power of his life. These points must be understood very clearly for it is because of the confusion of these issues that ‘baptismal regeneration’ has developed, i.e. the idea that by purely baptising an individual without faith would result in the new birth and a uniting with Christ in His death and resurrection. There can be no salvation without repentance of faith.

At this point a choice must be made whether to proceed with the other implications of baptism or to press on with the “*faith*” idea. If the individual shows that he or she has difficulties with the idea of personal faith, then it might be important at this point to continue with the chain that is taken up a little later in the study on the examples of believer’s baptism in the New Testament. If, on the other hand, the individual does not show that he or she has this particular problem one can now proceed with other implications inherent in baptism.

## **II FURTHER MEANING OF BAPTISM**

- ◆ Baptism indicates a turning away from the old life and an intention to live a new life in Christ. This must be clearly emphasised to the individual. Here is the idea of repentance, the ‘turning around’ of one’s course in life to going in the opposite direction and living the new life in Jesus Christ. As one is baptised by faith one is declaring to the congregation who are watching that one has turned around from the old ways and is now going to follow Jesus Christ as Master and Lord.
- ◆ Baptism means the individual has been washed and cleansed from his sin. The idea of washing and cleansing is also found in the ceremony of baptism in New Testament items. This has also come through and has been taken up in Christian baptism. The individual who is baptised by faith is clearly declaring that the past has been forgiven, that they have been completely cleansed and are starting a new walk with Jesus. This automatically places a responsibility upon those who witness this baptism, to also in turn forget the past of the

individual with which they might be familiar, and to accept such a person as a “new creature in Jesus Christ.”

- ◆ Baptism also indicates that the individual has received eternal life. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus that we receive eternal life. This eternal life is the same as the “resurrection life” and also the “newness of life” mentioned in Romans 6:4. As the individual is baptised by faith he or she declares to the congregation that they have received this eternal life in Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Baptism declares that the individual identifies totally with Jesus Christ. Baptism is the ceremony which symbolises the central work of Jesus Christ, namely His death and resurrection. As one is baptised by faith one declares one’s public identity with Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of their lives. In early New Testament times this was equivalent to signing one’s own death warrant. As Christians publicly proclaimed their identity with Jesus Christ they became marked men and women and were often subsequently persecuted and killed. A further implication of such a declaration is that the individual also proclaims that he or she has a new Master and Lord. 2 Corinthians 5:15 reads: *“And He died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”*
- ◆ Baptism indicates an identity with the “body of Christ.” As the individual is baptised by faith he or she proclaims to the body of Christ present that he or she identifies with that body. They are declaring their total allegiance to the local body of Christ, their commitment to the body of Christ and their willingness to serve, care for, love and minister to that particular body. By implication they are also calling upon that local body to in turn accept and receive them as a brother or sister and in turn to help them along the path, pray for them, care for them, minister to them, correct them and encourage them in the future. One can understand why so often churches require believer’s baptism therefore they will accept someone into membership. This baptism is not something that becoming a member of a church, such ‘so-called’ denomination, but rather an already member of a Body of Christ through saving faith. It is because by the act of believer’s baptism that individual has publicly proclaimed their commitment to the body. One can also understand how such an act of baptism would be a mockery if that individual was not genuine in their faith in Jesus Christ and in their commitment to the body of Christ.

### **III NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF BELIEVER’S BAPTISM**

- ◆ **Acts 2:41**

*“So then those who had received his word were baptised and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”*

Here we clearly understand that the people baptised and “*received*” the word of Peter. This indicates that first of all they were old enough and intelligent enough to understand the word that was preached, and secondly, that they received the word in the sense that they believed the word. The actual Greek word for “*received*” has in it the thought of gladly “welcoming” the word of God. Thus we conclude that these people exercised their faith and believed in Jesus Christ.

◆ **Acts 8:12**

*“But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ they were being baptised, men and women alike.”* (NASV)

It is clear in this passage that the people of Samaria “*believed*” the good news about the Kingdom preached by Philip. It is self-explanatory that they were both old enough to do that as they were “*men*” and “*women*” and that they put their faith in Jesus Christ.

◆ **Acts 8:36-38**

*“And as they went along the road they came to some water and the Eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptised?’ And Philip said ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ And he ordered the chariot to stop and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as Eunuch; and he baptised him.”* (NASV)

Here again we have a passage that has been left out of many new translations of the Bible, namely verse 37. The reason again is that many original manuscripts do not contain this verse. However, again, this is an extremely important verse and I personally believe it should be inserted as it clearly indicates by implication that the Eunuch in fact believed with all his heart on the Lord Jesus Christ.

◆ **Acts 9:18**

*“And immediately there fell from his (Paul’s) eyes, something like scales and he regained his sight and he arose and was baptised.”* (NASV)

Here we have the account of the baptism of the apostle Paul. From the entire passage in chapter 9 it is clear that Paul had come to an encounter with Jesus Christ and a conversion experience. The moment he rose from the ground where he had fallen he was a different

man. His submission to Jesus Christ as Lord is found in the words in verse 5, “*And he, trembling and astonished, said ‘What wilt Thou have me to do?’*”

Unfortunately this passage has been left out of many modern translations as it does not have sufficient manuscript support in the minds of the translators. However, it is an extremely important passage as it indicates the dramatic change that had come over the apostle Paul on the Damascus road. One moment he was on a path of persecution, attack and an enemy of Jesus Christ. The next moment he is found a servant in submission to the same One Whom he persecuted.

◆ **Acts 19:1-6**

“*And when they heard this they were baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus.*” (Verse 5, NASV)

Here we have the account of some Ephesian disciples who had not been born again. From this passage we find that firstly, these people were old enough to understand what they were doing and to discuss their faith with Paul. Secondly, Paul made it clear to them that they were to leave the baptism of John, which was a baptism of repentance, and he told “*the people to believe in Him Who was coming after him, that is in Jesus.*” Thus it was in response to this teaching that they were baptised in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Here again we find that it was ‘believer’s baptism’ that took place.

◆ **1 Corinthians 1:14**

“*I thank God that I baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius.*” (NASV)

Here we have a casual remark of two individuals who had been baptised by Paul. Nothing is said whether they were believers or not. However, when we turn to Acts 19:29 we find that Gaius was a ‘travelling companion’ with Paul from Macedonia. This obviously indicates, together with the way they were treated by the Ephesians in that passage, that Gaius was a strong believer and a worker with Paul. Although this does not give us conclusive evidence that Gaius believed when he was baptised, it certainly indicates strongly that he was, and in the light of the previous five examples that we have, we can happily conclude that the New Testament believers never practised anything but ‘believer’s baptism.’ They would never baptise anyone who had not put their faith in Jesus Christ.

The ‘Household’ Baptisms: those who believe in infant baptism often point to what is known as the ‘household’ baptisms in the New Testament. The argument is that where

these entire households were baptised, surely there should have been some babies present. Let us examine them.

◆ **Acts 10:24,44-46**

*“And on the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them and had called together his relatives and close friends.” (NASV)*

The argument here is that there must have been entire families with babies present. Verse 44-46 on the other hand shows us that these were people *“listening to the message,”* a feat impossible for babies! Furthermore, it was because *“the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message”* that the disciples proceeded to baptise these people.

According to the Scriptures we find that it requires the faith of the believer in Jesus Christ before the Spirit of God is given to that individual. This is clear from Acts 2:38-39. In these two verses it is clear that repentance is necessary before one can receive the Holy Spirit.

◆ **Acts 16:14-15**

*“And when she and her household had been baptised....”*

Here we have another “household baptism.” Although we cannot speak for Lydia’s household, it is clear that she herself believed as verse 14 reads, *“A certain woman named Lydia...a worshipper of God, was listening, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” (NASV)*

◆ **Acts 16:25-34**

*“And he took them that very hour of night and washed their wounds and immediately he was baptised and all his household.” (NASV)*

Here is the story of the Philippian jailer who after an earthquake which opened the doors of the prison where Paul and Silas were kept prisoner, went through a dramatic experience.

Again, the argument is given that surely there must have been babies in this household. However, verse 34 clearly tells us that, *“he brought them into his house and set food before them and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.”* In other words, this man and his entire household believed on God. Therefore it is clear that there were no babies present and that it was a case of believer’s baptism.

◆ **Acts 18:8**

*“And Crispus, the leader of the Synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptised.”*

Here again, it is quite clear that this man believed with his entire household and that those “*who were believing*” were the ones who were baptised.

◆ **1 Corinthians 1:16**

*“Now I did baptise also the household of Stephanus...”*

Here we have no indication as to whether there were any babies or children present.

However, when we turn to 1 Corinthians 16:15 we discover that the household of Stephanus “*were the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for the ministry of the saints.*” Babies could hardly be “*firstfruits*” referring to converts, and also be quite unable to “*devote themselves for the ministry to the saints.*” In this verse we find every indication that the household of Stephanus were in fact the first converts of Achaia and devoted Christians who were committed to ministering to other believers.

As we examine the eleven examples and references in the New Testament to water baptisms, we find that in 10 out of the 11 cases there is every evidence that they were believers who were baptised and that there were no babies present. The only exception is the household of Lydia, where we find no indication whatsoever. It would be in keeping with common logic to conclude that in the light of the fact that the New Testament teaches faith in connection with water baptism and in turn gives 10 out of 11 examples indication faith present, that we should conclude that the New Testament teaches “believer’s baptism” and that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished is an essential ingredient in that ceremony.

#### **IV THE METHOD OF BAPTISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

There may still be a problem in the minds of some as to how baptism should be carried out. From the previous study we have seen that in the New Testament examples there is no indication of how the baptism was carried out other than the two incidents of Jesus and the Ethiopian Eunuch, where it is recorded that they “*went down....*” And “*came up*” out of the water.

Now the obvious question is, “How do we arrive at the conclusion that immersion is the way it is to be done?” Could it not have been possible that the candidate went down into the water and there stood in it while water was either poured on his head or sprinkled over him?

- ◆ First, from the fact that the New Testament writers chose to use the word ‘baptiso.’ In order to see the real meaning of ‘baptiso’ let us first see what words are used in Greek for: -
  - Sprinkle: Hebrews 9:13 – ‘rantiso’  
Hebrews 12:24 – ‘rantismos’  
Exodus 29:21 – ‘raneis’  
Numbers 8:7 – ‘peri-raneis’

All the above words are derived from ‘raino,’ to sprinkle. It can be seen here that our word ‘rain’ has link with this Greek word. Furthermore there is only one other word used in the New Testament, and that is in Hebrews 11:28, ‘proschusis.’ The same is used in 1 Peter 1:2. (The above are all the references to sprinkling in the New Testament.)

- Pour: Revelation 16:2 – ‘ekcheo’ derived from ‘cheo,’ the same word is used on other occasions such as Acts 10:45 with reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Dip: There are three references in the New Testament: -
  - John 13:26 – ‘bapto’
  - Luke 16:24 – ‘bapto’
  - Revelation 19:13 – ‘bapto’
- Baptiso: Now we come to the word chosen by the writers to describe the action we are in the process of studying. It is significant that none of the other words were chosen, always this word.

First of all we find that according to the grammatical rules of Greek, this word is an ‘intensive’ form. It is easy to see that it is similar to the word for ‘dip’ above, i.e. ‘bapto.’ If ‘bapto’ then means to dip, ‘baptiso’ being a more intensive form means to completely dip.

Secondly, in Jewish proselyte baptism, also called ‘baptiso’ by the Greeks, the candidate stood in a pool of water up to his neck while the commandments of the law were read to him. He then indicated his acceptance by plunging beneath the surface.

Thirdly, in Judaism, the Jewish religion of the day, all objects were ceremonially cleansed by immersing them in a bath of water; this was practised before and after the time of Christ, and was also called 'baptiso' by the Greeks.

Fourthly, such sects as the Essenes or Qumran practised immersion and called it 'baptiso.' In fact there is a baptismal pool preserved in one of their caves. (The Qumran caves, where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered).

Fifthly, the word was used in Greek plays, such as that of Homer, where he describes the sinking of a ship as being 'baptised by the waves'!

Although the meaning of these various baptisms of that era are all different from the Christian baptism of believers, it is the mode that is indicated by the word 'baptiso' that is important to us, and thus we find what it meant to those of that day, not what we would like it to mean today!

- ◆ The second reason why we are sure that immersion is meant in the New Testament is because of the meaning of Baptism. Romans 6:3-4 indicates that baptism signifies death and burial, and also resurrection. It is hardly possible to signify burial with sprinkling or pouring – we don't bury a person by sprinkling sand on them, or even pouring sand on them in small quantities, but we put them completely under or inside as the case may be. Even the burial of Jesus, Whose death this signifies, was that placing Him entirely in the tomb, a hole in the ground or rock, horizontal or vertical, whatever the case may have been, and there He was covered by the great stone.