

Baptism

Developed 7/97 Revised 8/03 Edited/Reformatted 7/16

I. Introduction and Definition.

A. Baptism, rite involving water.

1. A Christian sacrament marked by ritual use of water and admitting the recipient to the Christian community.
2. A non-Christian rite using water for ritual purification.
3. An act, experience, or ordeal by which one is purified, sanctified, initiated, or named.

B. The term is derived from a Greek word meaning 'to immerse in or wash with water' (Mk. 7:4).¹

1. βάπτισμα ^{#908}: *baptism*

consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence (from *baptō*, to dip), is used (a) of John's baptism, (b) of Christian baptism, see B. below; (c) of the overwhelming afflictions and judgments to which the Lord voluntarily submitted on the Cross, e.g., Luke 12:50; (d) of the sufferings His followers would experience, not of a vicarious character, but in fellowship with the sufferings of their Master. Some mss. have the word in Matt. 20:22, 23; it is used in Mark 10:38,39, with this meaning.

2. βαπτισμός ^{#909}: *washing*

as distinct from *baptisma* (the ordinance), is used of the ceremonial washing of articles, Mark 7:4,8, in some texts; Heb. 9:10; once in a general sense, Heb. 6:2. See WASHING.

3. βαπτιστής ^{#910}: *a baptist, baptizer*

is used only of John the Baptist, and only in the Synoptics, 14 times

4. βαπτίζω ^{#907}: *to baptize*

primarily a frequentative form of *baptō*, 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, etc. Plutarchus uses it of the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl (*Alexis*, 67) & Plato, metaphorically, of being overwhelmed with questions (*Euthydemus*, 277D).²

C. Washing rites characterize priestly preparation for offering sacrifice in the Old Testament (Ex. 40:12-15).²

1. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest bathes both before and after his offering (Lev. 16:4,24).
2. Visitors to the Temple should not enter the inner courts without washing hands and feet (Tosepta Kelim I.6).

D. Water washings are linked not only with religious purity but also with concern for sinfulness and moral purity (see Isa. 1:16-17; Jer. 4:14; Ezek. 36:25). John's baptism and the ablutions of the Qumran covenanters belong to this tradition of cultic and moral ablutions.

E. More domestic versions of these concerns are found in Jewish ablutions in Jesus' time. John 2:6 speaks of large stone jars that hold water 'for purification' (see Mk. 7:2-4).

F. Jews also apparently performed baptisms of proselytes as part of the purification of new covenant members (Mishnah Pesahim VIII.7; Eduyyot V.2).

II. Development and Application: Baptism in the New Testament

A. John's baptism, which was a prophetic call to repentance and forgiveness of sins (Matt. 3:1ff.; Mk. 1:4ff.; Lk. 3:3-20; Jn. 1:6-8,19-34; Acts 19:4).

1. His ministry was based on preaching (Mt. 3:1; 2nd Tim. 4:2).
2. His message was on repentance and the imminency of the kingdom (Mt. 3:2).
3. His ministry, and thus his baptism was temporary (Mt. 3:3; Jn. 3:30).
4. His baptism emphasized repentance (Mt. 3:2).
 - a. The confession of sins (Mt. 3:6).
 - b. The recognition of coming wrath (Mt. 3:7).
 - c. The action of bearing fruit (Mt. 3:8,10).
 - d. His ritual baptism admitted to future real baptisms (Mt. 3:12).

B. Baptism of Christ.

1. It is not for sin (Mt. 3:13-15 esp. v.14).
2. It is a theophany (i.e. a self-revealing of God) in which Jesus is identified as 'Beloved Son' and commissioned as the herald of God's kingdom (Mk. 1:10-11; see Isa. 42:1-9).

¹ Points 1-4 taken from Vine, W.E., and F.F. Bruce. [Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#). Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981.

² Points C-F and much of II. taken from Achtemeier, Paul J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. [Harper's Bible Dictionary](#). San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.

C. Christian Baptism

1. The Reality. The spiritual event concurrent with salvation (Acts 1:5; 11:16; Rom. 6:3-11; 1st Cor. 12:12-14; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:9-12).
 - a. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:15,16).
 - 1) During the Age of the Local Church, this occurs at the moment of salvation. It is a spiritual activity accomplished by God, rather than a physical activity accomplished by man.
 - 2) It is the Holy Spirit coming upon and indwelling the believer (Acts 1:5; 2:2-4; 11:15,16).
 - b. The Baptism into Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:3-11).
 - 1) Every believer participates in this (Rom. 6:1-3).
 - 2) The believer is united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). This is a literal, albeit spiritual, union.
 - 3) The result is that we can now walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).
 - 4) This walk is a walk that is dead to sin, and free from sin (Rom. 6:6-11).
 - c. The Baptism into One Body—Christ (1st Cor. 12:12-14).
 - 1) Accomplished by the Holy Spirit (1st Cor. 12:13).
 - 2) Removes all distinctions by making each believer “in Christ” (1st Cor. 12:13).
 - 3) Indwells each believer (1st Cor. 12:13).
 - d. The Baptism of Sonship (Gal. 3:26-4:7).
 - 1) By faith in Christ alone (Gal. 3:26).
 - 2) Baptized into Christ, and clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27).
 - 3) No distinction (Gal. 3:28).
 - 4) Abrahamic heirs of promise (Gal. 3:29).
 - 5) The Holy Spirit is given as the evidence within our hearts of our sonship and status as heirs (Gal. 4:6,7).
 2. The Ritual (Acts 8:36,38).
 - a. The method is not specifically spelled out.
 - b. The use of water is certain. The practice of immersion is most likely, based upon the vocabulary and use of βαπτίζω and the context of the pertinent passages.
 - 1) They went down “into the water” (Acts 8:38) and came up “out of the water” (v. 39).
 - 2) Christ was baptized by John “in the Jordan” (Mk. 1:9) and then came up “out of the water” (v. 10).
- While the act of Christian baptism is a testimony of the person that his sins have been washed away, it also pictures and symbolizes the fact of the believing sinner’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11), for *baptizō* (βαπτίζω) means, “to dip, to immerse.” It never means “to sprinkle.” The Greeks had a word for “sprinkle” namely, *rantizō* (ῥαντίζω). The two words, *baptizō* (βαπτίζω) and *rantizō* (ῥαντίζω) are used in juxtaposition in Lev. 4:6.³
3. The Command.
 - a. An integral part of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19).
 - b. Making disciples means going, baptizing, and teaching.
 4. The Pictures.
 - a. At Corinth it was compared to Israel’s exodus through the sea and its eating of the manna in the desert (1st Cor. 10:1-4).
 - b. In other places it was compared with Noah’s escape from God’s wrath on sinners (1st Pet. 3:21)
 - c. It was also compared with Jesus’ death and resurrection; Christians symbolically die to their sins and former lives, a death they share with Christ, and are buried with him; as they rise from baptism in purity, they share the new life brought by Jesus’ resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4).
 5. The figure: suffering (Lk. 12:50).
 - a. Christ’s baptism of suffering.
 - b. The believer’s baptism of suffering.

³ Wuest, Kenneth S. [*Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*](#). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.