



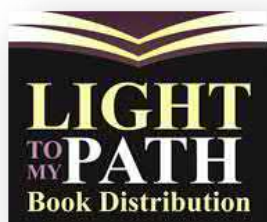
# THE PARTING OF THE WATERS

An Examination  
of the Various  
Views of Christian  
Baptism

F. Wayne MacLeod

# The Parting of the Waters

*An Examination of the Various Views  
of Christian Baptism*



**F. Wayne Mac Leod**

**Light To My Path Book Distribution**

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## The Parting of the Water

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# Introduction

This study was written many years ago and sat in an “unpublished” folder on one computer after another. The reason for this is because, for many years, this was a difficult topic for me to address. I grew up in a tradition of infant baptism. This study is not the first study I did on this subject. I can still remember the research I did on infant baptism before I went off to Bible School. I was convinced that the practice was biblical and had all the verses to prove it.

Even after many years, I still remember the setting. Some students had gathered in a room at the Bible School where I was attending. Somehow the subject of baptism came up. The words I heard that day still haunt me: “How could any Christian believe in infant baptism?” I took those words personally and felt deeply hurt by them.

As time went on, I continued to hear people commenting to me on this subject. They would tell the joke about a book called “What the Bible Teaches about Infant Baptism,” which only had blank pages when you opened it. They would laugh and move on, leaving me frustrated and angry. While I never really expressed it to them, I felt hurt and rejection because of what I believed. I felt that I was a second-class Christian because I believed what I did.

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The opportunity came for me to do a research paper on the subject for a theology class. Knowing all the arguments favouring infant baptism, I determined that I would examine each one individually to see if it brought clear evidence of the practice in the Bible. That paper was probably one of the most difficult I ever wrote. It challenged my position and what I had believed for many years.

Now I want to confess something here. It is one thing to come to a conviction about what you feel the Bible is teaching, and quite another to act on that conviction. As a result of that research paper, I believed that baptism in the New Testament was for believers. However, it would not be for years that I would have the courage to act on what I felt the Bible was teaching. There were a couple of reasons for this.

First on my mind was the fact that I had grown up with the tradition of infant baptism. I had a call from God to full-time ministry. In my mind, that call implied working as a pastor in my denomination. If I could not stand behind the denomination's key distinctive, I had no chance of being ordained as a pastor in that denomination. This threw the plans I had for my future into chaos.

Second, infant baptism was the position of my family. I struggled deeply to go against what my family had believed for generations. How would they respond if I took a stand against their firmly held beliefs? This grieved me deeply.

Third, I must admit, my heart still harboured anger against those who ridiculed my infant baptism convictions. I was reluctant to join them and hear them rejoicing over the fact that I had surrendered finally to their position.

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For years after that, I held believers' baptism but refused to be baptized as a believer. As the years rolled by, I would often feel a gentle conviction in my heart to follow through with what I believed the New Testament taught. This seemed to come to a head on one occasion, and I felt the need to speak to the pastor of the Baptist church I was attending. I made an appointment and sat down with him in his office. I have no idea how long I talked and can't even remember what I said that day, but I started from the beginning and explained how and why I had come to a conviction about believers' baptism. The pastor sat quietly, listening to me without interrupting. I ended that conversation by saying, "I think I need to do something about this."

When I finished talking, the pastor said: "Well, there is nothing that I can say. You have covered everything." He went on to say to my absolute horror: "It just happens that on Sunday we have a baptismal service; would you like to be part of it?"

There was nothing he could have said that would have floored me more than those words. He was giving me the opportunity now to do something about my belief. I still remember my hard response: "I don't know."

Hearing this, he said: "You have just spent all this time telling me what you believe and that you need to do something about it. Now that I offer you an opportunity to do just that, you say: 'I don't know.'"

I knew the hypocrisy of this answer, but the obstacles were bigger than that pastor understood. He reminded me very bluntly that I was putting other things before God. I confessed



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to Him that he was right, but I still wasn't sure if I could go ahead with being baptized.

We ended that conversation with him saying: "Let me know if I should put your name down for baptism." He left the door open, and that meant that I needed to do some serious soul searching in the days to come.

Over the next few days, I was in deep agony. I struggled with the obstacles I was facing and what I believed to be the teaching of the Word of God and His leading in my life. I knew I had to obey what I felt His Word taught, but I did not want to do it. It was one of the most intense spiritual battles I had ever experienced. I prayed: "Lord, I want to obey, but I just wish that the pastor would hold me under the water until I died so that I could die in obedience and not have to face what comes after."

I remember making two lists on a piece of paper as I reflected on what I should do. The first list was for the reasons why I should be baptized. The second list was for the reasons I should not be baptized. When that list was complete, and I studied it, the answer was quite clear. The mind was convinced, but the heart was still powerfully resisted.

Ultimately it boiled down to an act of the will. I had to act on what I felt that Lord wanted me to do. I picked up the phone and made the most difficult phone call I had ever made. I told the pastor that I would be part of the baptismal service.

The night before the baptism, I so wished I could die. That didn't happen, and I went to church. I was waiting in a change room, getting ready for the baptism. Another pastor came in

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to see me and quoted a passage of Scripture: “And those who believed were baptized.” He wasn’t expecting what took place when I broke down into uncontrollable sobbing. From where I sat, I could hear the swish of water as other candidates were being immersed. With each swish came an equally great movement of water in the form of tears and waves of terror and grief. Finally, my time came. As I stood in the baptismal tank before the congregation, the pastor asked me if I wanted to say something. The words that came out were these: “I don’t want to be here, but I need to obey.” And with those words, I was plunged into the water and came up alive to face an uncertain future.

For years after that baptism, I could not watch another baptism without breaking down into uncontrollable sobbing. My whole body would tremble and shake. In fact, the entire pew would shake as I sobbed.

Baptism was one of the most difficult steps I have ever taken in my spiritual life. I do not regret taking this step of faith. It taught me much that I cannot detail here. In the years to come, I would be required to baptize new believers in the church where I worked. God was certainly preparing me for what was ahead.

The rejection and misunderstanding of those early days at Bible School had a profound impact on me. All too many people are quick to judge without ever taking the time to understand someone else’s position. When I held to infant baptism, no one ever asked me why I held that position. No one ever asked me to explain it from a Biblical perspective. They just assumed that because they didn’t see it, it had to be wrong.

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I also saw how easy it is for people to ridicule or question the salvation of those who hold another opinion. It has often grieved me that baptism or other such doctrines have so divided Christians that in some cases, they assume that someone who does not believe as they do is not a true believer.

Let me assure you that you do not have to come to the same conclusion as I did. I have great fellowship with sincere believers who are convinced of infant baptism. I have learned much from them and respect them as godly men and women of faith. There will be differences in our understanding of the Scriptures, but unity comes from our common bond in the Lord Jesus and what He has done to secure our salvation.

I expect that when my life on earth is over, and I go to be with the Lord, I will meet believers of every denomination who have trusted the Lord Jesus and accepted His work on their behalf. In this world, they were not perfect. They did not always understand things correctly. But they knew the Saviour and relied on Him for their eternal salvation and forgiveness. I am also quite certain that I will also discover that I, too, fell short in my practice and understanding of Him and His purpose. I have a suspicion that I will be deeply grateful for His grace and forgiveness toward me and my failures.

My purpose in writing this study is to share my journey and help believers of every perspective think through this important doctrine. While I cannot be totally impartial in this study, I hope that I can at least faithfully present the arguments from the various positions currently out there

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concerning this question of baptism in the New Testament church.

- F. Wayne MacLeod



# Chapter 1 - Covenantal Infant Baptism

Some years ago, after coming to my position on believers' baptism, I was teaching an Old Testament survey course. In the process of that study, I addressed the roots of infant baptism in the covenant God made with Abraham. After the study, a woman came up to me and said: "Wayne, had my church explained to me what you explained today, I would have had my children baptized as infants." As one who had adopted a position on believers' baptism, I wasn't sure how to answer that statement. What it showed me, however, was that there is often a lack of teaching on this subject. I have met believers in mainline infant baptism churches who cannot explain why their church has adopted its position on baptism.

What is true of infant baptism is also true of many other theological issues. We are all too quick to let someone else think for us, and we go along with them. We take their word for it but do not have a personal conviction based on our study of the Scriptures.

As I said in my introduction, I grew up accepting infant baptism as a biblical practice. This belief perplexed my believers' baptism friends as they could not find any evidence for this in Scripture. In this chapter, I want to explain how I came to accept this position at that time in my life.

## The Parting of the Waters

### *Abrahamic Covenant*

Our study of infant baptism begins well before the New Testament church was established. It starts with the separating out of a people by God for Himself in the days of Abraham. God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 17:7 and told him that He was going to make an everlasting covenant with him and his descendants:

*7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (Genesis 17:7, NIV)*

This covenant was an agreement between God and His people. God promised to be their God, and His people committed themselves to live in obedience to Him. In many ways, a covenant is like a marriage vow with each partner pledging himself and herself to the other. There was a special relationship between God and the Jewish nation. It was not that they deserved the favour of God more than other nations, for they would prove to be unfaithful. While they often broke their covenantal vows with the Lord, they were still God's chosen people.

So that His people would be reminded of their covenantal relationship with Him, God gave them a sign. Listen to what God told Abraham in Genesis 17:10,11:

*This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it*

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*will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.*  
(Genesis 17.10,11, NIV)

Like a wedding ring, this sign of circumcision was a sign to the people of God that they belonged to Him and were accountable to Him for their lives and actions.

What is important for us to note is that the sign of the covenant was not given to those who had faith in God or understood their responsibility towards Him. It was given to male infants at the age of eight days. At eight days old, these infants did not have any memory or comprehension of the purpose of the sign given them. Many of these circumcised children grew up and turned their backs on God. Circumcision was not a guarantee that these children would serve the Lord, nor did it show that they were even in a right relationship with Him. It did, however, remind them of their obligation. They would go through life carrying in their flesh a reminder that they belonged to God and were under obligation to Him as their Lord.

It would be easy for us to say that this sign of circumcision was only for the Jews. But let's consider what the apostle Paul told the Gentile believers in Rome:

*Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the faith of Abraham. **He is the father of us all.** (Romans 4.16, NIV)*

Do you see what Paul is saying here? He told the Romans that Abraham was not just the father of the Jewish faith but



## The Parting of the Waters

also the father of all who had faith in God. He repeats the same thought in Galatians 3.6-9:

*Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance through Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.' **So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.** (Galatians 3.6-9, NIV)*

In Galatians 3:6-9, the apostle taught that the true people of God are those who have put their faith in God. Abraham is the father of all who believe, both Jews and Gentiles. In other words, we who believe today have become children of Abraham and part of the people of God.

God told Abraham that He was making an "eternal" covenant with him and his descendants. According to Paul, if you believe today, you are Abraham's descendant and "blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." You have entered a covenantal relationship with God. God promises to be your God, and you promise to love and obey Him.

Having established that all who believe are children of Abraham and part of a covenantal relationship with God, we must now consider the sign of that covenant agreement in the New Testament. How do we move from the covenant sign of circumcision to baptism? Circumcision was no longer required of New Testament believers. While many in Paul's day wanted to make it so, the church officially rejected this as a requirement.

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What we do see in the New Testament, however, is the practice of baptism. But is there any connection between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament? Consider what the apostle Paul told the Colossians in Colossians 2:11,12:

*In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.*  
(Colossians 2.11,12, NIV)

Notice how Paul connects the meaning of circumcision and baptism in these verses. He tells us that believers are circumcised in Christ by the cutting off of the sinful nature. By baptism, they symbolized death to the sinful nature and resurrection to newness of life. Circumcision and baptism, Paul tells us, symbolize the same thing, dying to sin. Since the death of the Lord Jesus, circumcision is no longer practiced. Baptism has now taken its place. Baptism represents our death to sin and our new life in a covenant relationship with God through the work of His Son Jesus.

It is here that we come to the crucial point of this study of covenantal infant baptism. Circumcision and baptism symbolize the same thing. Both are signs of entrance into a covenant relationship with God. Circumcision was applied to the children of God's people in the Old Testament even though they would not remember it or understand it. Would it not follow then that baptism, as a sign of the new covenant, should also be applied to the children of believers? If Jewish children bore a symbol of the covenant in their flesh, should our children not also have a symbol of their obligation to God?

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If baptism is for believers and their children, then it should follow that there would be some evidence of this in the New Testament. Supporters of covenantal infant baptism turn to several passages to show that this is indeed the case.

### *Household baptisms*

Consider the following passages:

*Yes, I baptised the **household of Stephanas**; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptised anyone else. (1Corinthians 1:16, NIV)*

*At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and **all his family** were baptised. (Acts 16:33, NIV)*

*One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When **she and the members of her household were baptised**, she invited us to her home. (Acts 16.14,15, NIV)*

To these cases mentioned above, we could also add the family of Cornelius in Acts 10. While not specifically mentioned, the context would also indicate that he and his family were baptised by the apostle Peter.

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In these cases, we discover that when God placed His hand on the parents, they did not see themselves in isolation from the rest of the family. Like Joshua of old, they proclaimed:

*As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 25:15, NIV)*

The parents saw to it that the entire family committed themselves to seek the Lord God. They placed themselves and their children under the obligations of the covenant. Their home would become a God-seeking and God-honouring home. Because it was a covenantal home, their children, who were under their authority, were also subject to the covenant and its signs.

### *Other Scriptural Support*

Consider the attitude of Jesus towards children in Matthew 19:14:

*Jesus said: 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' (Matthew 19:14, NIV)*

It is obvious from this passage that the Lord Jesus has a special place in His heart for children. If the kingdom of heaven belongs "to such as these," would it not be wrong to keep the sign of that covenant from them?

In 1 Corinthians 7:14, we read:

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*For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. (1 Corinthians 7.14, NIV)*

Paul told the Corinthians that the children of a believing parent were holy. Because their parents were part of a covenantal agreement with God, these children are also part of that same covenant (even as they were under the Old Testament). This does not mean that they are automatically believers, but they are under obligation to God because they are part of a Christian home and favoured with the teaching of God's Word in that home.

Let also consider Acts 2:38,39:

*Peter replied, 'Repent and be **baptised**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is **for you and your children** and for all who are far off -- for all whom the Lord our God will call' (Acts 2:38,39, NIV)*

In this passage, Peter told his listeners that they were to repent and be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. In so doing, they would receive the forgiveness of sins and the promised Holy Spirit. Notice that what Peter had to say here was not just for them but also their children. In other words, they and their children were to repent and be baptized, and they would receive the promised Holy Spirit from God.

Let me make just one more point here. The believers of the early church were initially, for the most part, from a Jewish background. The concept of a faith that was separate from

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the rest of their family was foreign to them. They served God not so much as individuals but as a family unit. The father led his family in the worship of the God of Israel. A rebellious child would be severely punished. If a son or daughter turned from the Lord God and worshipped other gods, they could be put to death. It was only natural for a Jewish family to bring their child to be circumcised and placed under God's covenant. Would this attitude not be carried over into the Christian faith of these Jews? Would they not bring their children as they always had to participate in the covenant sign? There is no evidence in Scripture forbidding children to join in the sign of the covenant as they had from the days of Abraham. Doesn't the absence of any teaching to the contrary cause us to believe that they continued with this practice, seeing their children as part of the covenant God had made with them? If children were part of that covenant, should they not be baptized as a symbol of their participation?

Believers who have adopted a position of covenantal infant baptism do so from an understanding that God is a covenant-keeping God who has a heart for them and their children. Like the Jews of the Old Testament, they place themselves and their families under obligation to God. For these believers, there is a connection between the symbolism of circumcision and baptism. Just as infants were circumcised by Jewish families, baptism should also be given to the children of Christian families to show that they are under obligation to God.



## Chapter 2 - The Position Re-examined

Having examined the position of covenantal infant baptism in the last chapter, it now falls on us to explore the argument in more detail. As I explained in the introduction, this was not an easy task for me. Even as I write, I still feel a certain reluctance to go back over this painful territory. My intention here is to share my theological journey and not necessarily to convince anyone of my position.

The journey from an infant baptism position to one of believers' baptism began with a research paper I did in Bible School. As I set out to work on this paper, I did not doubt that the argument for covenantal infant baptism was based on Scripture. I determined, however, to put each of the arguments to the test to see if this was what I understood Scripture to say. Let me share with you this journey.

### *The Old Covenant and the New Covenant*

There was no question in my mind that the Scriptures taught that God was a covenant-keeping God. He had entered a covenantal relationship with His people in the Old Testament. The prophet Jeremiah, however, prophesied that a day was



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coming when God would make a new covenant with Israel. Listen to what the prophet said about this new covenant:

*31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31, ESV)*

Jeremiah told Israel that this new covenant would not be like the covenant made with Abraham, their father. Though Israel was already part of a covenant relationship with God, many did not truly know or serve God. Under this new covenant, however, everyone would know the Lord from the least to the greatest. They would be forgiven of their sin and have His law written on their hearts. No unbeliever would be part of this new covenant. By telling us that the new covenant was not like the old covenant, Jeremiah makes a clear distinction. Things would be different under this new covenant.

The writer to the Hebrews explains this more fully when he says:

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*6 But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. 7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. (Hebrews 8:6-7 ESV)*

Hebrews 8:6 tells us that the covenant Jesus mediated was better than the old covenant. He tells us that if the first covenant had been faultless, there would not have been a need for a second covenant. Jesus came to establish another covenant that would replace the first. This old covenant would become obsolete and vanish:

*13 In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Hebrews 8:13 ESV)*

Jesus did not come as a priest according to the Jewish tradition. He was not legally qualified to be a priest according to the Law of Moses because He was not a descendant of Aaron. Listen to the words of Hebrews 7:

*11 Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? 12 For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. 13 For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that*

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*tribe Moses said nothing about priests. (Hebrews 7:11-14  
ESV)*

Note a couple of details here. Christ was not a priest according to the order of Aaron. He did not come to administer the Old Testament covenant laws. He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 7:12 tells us that a change in the law was required under this new priesthood. According to the old law, Jesus could not even be a priest because He did not descend from Aaron. Jesus did not modify or update the Old Covenant —He fulfilled it and established a completely new and different covenant under a new priesthood and law.

The New Covenant is not the Old Covenant—its priesthood and regulations are different. We need to be careful about applying Old Testament requirements to this New Testament covenant. Just because children were circumcised under the Old Covenant does not mean that this will be the case for baptism in this New Covenant under the priesthood of Christ, unless there is clear evidence in the New Testament to support this. Let's take a moment, therefore, to examine this evidence to see if it does support the baptism of children under the new covenant.

### *Household baptisms*

The first set of verses used to support infant baptism in the New Testament comes from the passages that speak about household baptisms. While there is no actual proof for this, the assumption is that there were infants in these households. An examination of these passages, however, reveals in three

## The Position Re-examined

out of four cases that the members of the families were believers.

Regarding the household of Cornelius, in Acts 10, we read:

*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and **all his family were devout and God-fearing**; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. (Acts 10.1,2, NIV)*

Consider also what Acts 16 tells us about the Philippian jailer and his family:

*The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because **he had come to believe in God -- he and his whole family**. (Acts 16.34, NIV)*

Writing about the household of Stephanas, Paul says:

*You know that **the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia**, and they devoted themselves to the service of the saints. (1 Corinthians 16.15a, NIV)*

Also consider 1 Samuel 1:21,22 in relationship to this question of households.

*When the man Elkanah went up **with all his family** to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow, **Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, 'After the boy is weaned, I will take him** and present him before the Lord, and he will live there always.'* (1 Samuel 1.21,22, NIV)

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1 Samuel 1:21,22 clearly stated that Elkanah with all the family to the annual sacrifice. Notice, however, that the phrase "all his family" did not include the infant child and his wife. If the reference to the family did not include the infant child, how can we be sure that the New Testament verses on households include infants?

There is simply no proof that there were any infants at all in these households. The only description we have of these families is that they were believers. These verses, therefore, do not provide evidence of the practice of infant baptism in the New Testament.

### *Argument from Silence*

Let's move now to the argument that states that the Jews were so accustomed to their children receiving the sign of the covenant that they would have naturally brought them to be baptized, just as they would for circumcision. The assumption is that the absence of any problems in the New Testament church proves that children were also accepted for baptism. Surely, if things had changed, there would be teaching or some rebuke stating that children were no longer entitled to participate in the covenant sign.

The problem with this argument is that the opposite could be equally true. If children were brought regularly for baptism, why is there no evidence of it in the New Testament? Adult baptisms are regularly mentioned, but there is no indication of infant baptism. This is in stark contrast to circumcision in the Old Testament, where the practice is spoken of often. The

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silence speaks equally as loud for believers' baptism as it does for infant baptism.

*"Suffer the little children to come unto me" Matthew 19:14*

In Matthew 19:14, mothers brought their children to the Lord Jesus. While the disciples tried to stop them from doing so, Jesus told them to let these children come to Him. There is no question that children have a special place in the heart of our Lord Jesus. His heart is always open to receive them.

The problem here, however, is that Jesus was not baptizing children here. The context is found in verse thirteen. These children were brought to Jesus so that He could put His hands on them and pray for them. There is no water mentioned here. If we are to follow the example of Christ in this passage, we need to pray for our children and lead them to Him. This passage is not intended to give instruction on baptism but to show that Christ has a heart for little children and will receive all who come to Him.

*"Holy children" (1 Corinthians 7:13,14)*

*13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. (1 Corinthians 7:13-14 ESV)*

## The Parting of the Waters

1 Corinthians 7:14 tells us that the children of a believing parent are holy. The assumption is that if they are holy, they should be baptized. A closer examination of the passage, however, reveals that it is not only the children who are holy but also the unbelieving spouse. If we see this verse as a reference to baptism and grant baptism to the "holy" children, should we not also do so for the unbelieving spouse in the same household described as "holy"?

The context of 1 Corinthians 7:13,14 shows us that the problem being addressed is the union between a believer and an unbeliever. What happened when one partner came to know the Lord in a marriage? Did this mean that they were now living in sin by being unequally yoked? What about their children? Were these children illegitimate because God did not accept the marriage? Paul assured his readers that God expected new believers to remain with their partners. He assured them that God accepted their marriage. Their children also were legitimate or holy.

The passage does not refer to baptism, nor was it intended to be instruction on baptism. Paul's purpose is to show believing husband or a wife whose partner was not a believer that their marriage was still acceptable to God and that their children were not unclean or illegitimate.

### *The Promise for you and your children (Acts 2:39)*

*38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all*

The Position Re-examined  
*who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to  
himself." (Acts 2:38-39 ESV)*

In Acts 2:38, Peter called his listeners to repent and be baptized. In so doing, they would receive the forgiveness of sin and the promised Holy Spirit. This promise was for them and their children as well as for those who were far off.

I have sat under preachers who used this verse to prove the call of Scripture for Christian parents to baptize their infants. They interpret the verse to mean that God's promise for believers and their children is repentance and baptism.

A closer examination of this text, however, shows that the promise of this verse is not baptism but forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for those who repent of their sin and identify with Christ in baptism. This promise of forgiveness was for the Jews and their children and Gentiles from every nation. Peter is saying that anyone who repents of sin and identifies with Christ, regardless of nationality or age, can know the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The passage does not promise baptism to infants but forgiveness and the Holy Spirit.

While not all readers will agree with my interpretations of the verses, the point I want to make is that we must take the time to examine what we are taught. Writing the book of Acts, Luke commended the Jews in Berea because they listened to the apostles but also searched the Scriptures for themselves to see if what they heard was true:

*10 The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by  
night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the*



## The Parting of the Waters

*Jewish synagogue. 11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. (Acts 17:10-11 ESV)*

As I wrestled through each of these arguments, I found it difficult to support my former position on baptism. This, however, was my theological journey. Each person must be convinced in their minds about what the Scriptures teach.

Not all proponents of infant baptism base their understanding of infant baptism on a covenantal relationship with God stemming from the Old Testament. In the next two chapters, I would like to examine two other positions on infant baptism found in the church of our day.

# Chapter 3 - Baptism as a Means of Salvation

Believers in covenantal infant baptism are all in agreement. Baptism is not a means of salvation but rather an indication that a child is under a covenantal obligation to God and part of a family that has chosen to love and serve Him. On the other side of this debate are those who see baptism as a means of salvation for their children. In other words, the God of grace has chosen baptism as a means by which He blesses and saves His children. He has given His church the obligation to bring salvation to the world through baptism.

Those who adhere to this view base their doctrine on Bible verses showing the connection between baptism and salvation. I will examine the interpretation of these verses in the next chapter. For now, let's try to understand the Biblical basis for the doctrine of salvation by baptism from the perspective of proponents of this view.

## The Parting of the Waters

### *Baptism, Forgiveness and Salvation*

In Mark 16:16, as Jesus prepared to return to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel. He then made this statement:

*(15) And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. (16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. - Mark 16:15-16 ESV*

Note that Jesus told His disciples that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Jesus does not say that these individuals were only to believe to be saved; he also told them that they needed to be baptized.

Also consider the ministry of John the Baptist as recorded in Luke 3:

*He went into the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3.3, NIV)*

Luke describes the ministry of John the Baptist as "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." There seems to be a strong connection between John's "baptism of repentance" and the "forgiveness of sin."

Speaking to Nicodemus about the importance of being born again, Jesus said:

## Baptism as a Means of Salvation

*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."  
(John 3.5, NIV)*

Proponents of baptism as a means to salvation interpret Jesus' use of the word "water" to refer to baptism. "No one can see the kingdom of God," say supporters of this position, "unless they pass through the waters of baptism." According to them, the Spirit of God works through the waters of baptism to bring salvation.

Listen to the words of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost:

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2.38,39, NIV)*

Peter told his listeners that they were to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sin. While he could have told his listeners simply to repent, Peter told them also to be baptised for the forgiveness of sin.

After sharing his testimony with the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul concluded with the following statement:

*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name. (Acts 22.16, NIV)*

Notice that Paul told these Jews to be baptised and wash their sins away. This has led some to understand that there is more

## The Parting of the Waters

to baptism than just a symbol. Proponents of baptism as a means of salvation see here a reference to cleansing and forgiveness through baptism.

Writing in his epistle, the apostle Peter compares the floodwaters of Noah's day to baptism. In this illustration, the apostle makes a striking statement:

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were **saved through water**, and this water symbolises **baptism that now saves you** also – not the removal of dirt from the body but a pledge of a good conscience toward God. (1 Peter 3.21, NIV)*

Peter told his readers that Noah and his family were saved through water and the water of the flood of Noah's day symbolized "baptism that now saves you" (NIV).

Consider what the apostle Paul told Titus in Titus 3:5:

*He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3.5, NIV)*

Notice the phrase "the washing of rebirth." Proponents of baptism as a means of salvation interpret this to show that rebirth takes place through the waters of baptism. The Spirit of God blesses this baptism and renews the baptismal

Baptism as a Means of Salvation  
candidate. The verses we have listed here show us a connection between forgiveness, salvation, and baptism.

### *The Church's Responsibility*

While those who support this position claim that salvation is by the grace of God, they believe that baptism is how that grace is applied to the life of a child. The children they baptize are sinners in need of forgiveness. God, however, has given the church the ministry of reconciling humanity to Himself:

*And this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5.18, NIV)*

Christ told His disciples that if they forgave men their sins, they would be forgiven:

*Again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.' (John 20.21-23, NIV)*

Those who see baptism as a means of salvation see it as their responsibility to unleash the forgiveness of God through baptism.

In the next chapter, I will respond to this argument and comment on the interpretation of the verses used to support this view.



# Chapter 4 - Is Salvation Through Baptism Biblical?

In the last chapter, we examined the belief that baptism is a means of forgiveness and salvation. We mentioned the verses of Scripture used to support this idea. It falls on us now to look more closely at this doctrine to see if this is really what the Scriptures teach.

If there is one truth this position underlines, it is that we are sinners in need of salvation. David understood this when he wrote:

*(5) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. - Psalms 51:5 ESV*

Another important truth underscored by this position is that the church of Jesus Christ has an obligation on its shoulders to reach out to those who are lost in sin. The church has a great responsibility to reach out to a lost world. The Lord has given it the ministry of pointing men to their need of salvation. Just before He returned to the Father, the Lord Jesus issued this command to His disciples:



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*(19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." - Matthew 28:19-20 ESV*

The church of our day has the awesome task of making disciples from people of all nations and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a responsibility we must take seriously. Having said this, let's take a moment now to examine the various Bible passages used to support the idea that salvation is through baptism.

### *Does the Sign of the Covenant Guarantee Salvation?*

The first matter we must address is the question of whether baptism or circumcision guaranteed salvation. To answer this, consider the many young children of Israel who were circumcised as infants. Did all of them serve and honour the Lord God in their lives? A quick reading of Scripture shows us that God killed some for their rebellion and abandonment of the faith. In fact, after Solomon's death, when the nations of Judah and Israel were divided, the entire nation of Israel turned its back on the Lord God and set up another religion in opposition to the faith of their fathers. While circumcised as children, these men completely abandoned the Lord God.

Consider this also in more modern terms. Do all those baptized as children continue in the faith? Do we not see all around us men and women who, though baptized as infants in their church, have now turned their backs on the Lord God

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and want nothing to do with Him? Evidence in real life shows us that baptism does not guarantee true salvation.

Beyond this evidence in real life, there is evidence in Scripture that shows that God also poured out his Spirit and saved individuals who had never been baptized. Consider the case of Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. Cornelius was a Roman. As Roman, he would not likely have been baptized as a Christian, for Christianity was only starting to have an impact in those days. Though he was a God-fearing man, Cornelius did not know the Lord Jesus and the salvation He offered. God told Cornelius to call for Peter, who would explain the gospel to Him. When he heard what Peter had to say, Cornelius accepted the message and became a Christian. Here was a man who became a believer in the Lord Jesus before baptism.

Later, in Acts 10, we read how Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles. He saw how the Spirit of God transformed these pagans into men and women filled with awe and praise to God. Seeing how God has saved and filled these man and women with faith, Peter declared:

*(47) "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" - Acts 10:47 ESV*

Clearly, baptism was not the means of salvation. These men and women were already saved before Peter baptized them. These examples show us that God does not wait for men and women to be baptized before saving them.

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*"Believe and be baptized" (Mark 16:16)*

*(15) And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. (16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. - Mark 16:15-16 ESV*

Notice how Mark 16:16 tells us that those who believe and are baptized will be saved. The connection between believing and baptizing is quite clear. Does this imply, however, that we can accept the Lord, but we are not guaranteed salvation until we are baptized? Is baptism a necessary ingredient for salvation?

To answer this, let's look first at that second half of verse 16 – *"but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* The passage tells us that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but condemnation comes to those who do not believe. In other words, while baptism is a symbol of one's belief, what condemns an individual is not the lack of baptism but disbelief.

Also consider the interaction between the Lord Jesus and the thief crucified on the cross beside Him. The thief, believing in Jesus, asked Him to remember him when he went to His Father.

*(42) And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (43) And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." - Luke 23:42-43 ESV*

Notice the response of Jesus to this thief – "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." There was no time

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for this sinner to be baptized. True salvation came to that unbaptized criminal. He would be in the presence of Jesus that very day.

Clearly, from this passage, we see that while baptism is a sign of a changed life, it is not a requirement for true salvation.

### *"Baptism of Repentance" (Luke 3:3)*

Luke 3:3 tells us that John the Baptist preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." We have an example of this preaching in Luke 3:7-9:

*(7) He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (9) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." - Luke 3:7-9 ESV*

John called people to repent of their sins. He baptized them as a symbol of that repentance. No one was baptized who was unwilling to repent. John's baptism was a baptism of repentance because he baptized those who repented of their sins. This humble repentance before God and the turning over of their lives to Him guaranteed forgiveness and not their baptism. The passage teaches us that repentance brought forgiveness, not baptism. Baptism was merely a symbol of this repentance toward God.

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*"Born of water" John 3:5*

*(5) Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. - John 3:5-6 ESV*

Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that unless a person was born of water and the Spirit, he or she could not enter the kingdom of God. The question we need to ask ourselves here is this: What does it mean to be born of water? While some see here a reference to baptism, Jesus explains Himself in the next verse when he says:

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. – John 3:6 ESV*

In John 3:5, Jesus speaks of water and Spirit. In the next verse, He speaks about flesh and Spirit. The words water and flesh are used interchangeably. An unborn child living in the womb of his or her mother is protected by fluid. At the time of birth, that fluid is expelled. The clear sign to the mother that her time has come is the breaking of her water.

Jesus speaks here about a very natural process of childbirth. A child is physically born with the expulsion of water from the mother's womb. This, however, is not the only birth an individual must experience if they are to enter the kingdom of God. Those who enter the kingdom of God must also be born again of the Spirit. The water Jesus speaks about here is not the water of baptism but physical birth.

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*"Wash away your sins" (Acts 22:16)*

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

In Acts 22:16, Paul called on his listeners to be baptized and wash away their sins, calling on the name of the Lord. As we seek to understand what Paul is saying here, we need to ask: How are our sins washed away according to this passage? Are they washed away by baptism, or are they washed away by calling on the name of the Lord? The criminal on the cross was forgiven because he called on the name of the Lord. To the best of our knowledge, he was never baptized. Paul is telling his listeners here that they were to wash away their sins by calling on the name of the Lord and, as in the case of John's baptism, demonstrate their commitment to walk in obedience by baptism.

*"Baptism that saves" (1 Peter 3:21)*

*(21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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 ESV*

Peter uses the illustration of Noah and his family being saved through the waters of the flood. He tells us that these waters symbolize baptism that saves us. Let's examine what Peter is telling us here.

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Notice how Peter goes on to say that the baptism to which he refers is not "a removal of dirt from the body" but "an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." This distinction is vital if we are to interpret the verse correctly.

Peter made it clear in this verse that the baptism to which he referred was not about the removal of dirt from the body. When we remove dirt from the body, we do so by using water. That water is poured over the hands so that the dirt can be removed. Peter tells us here that when he speaks about baptism, he is not referring to water being poured over someone. In other words, he is not talking about baptism with water.

Peter tells us that the baptism he is speaking about is a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostle is telling us that while physical water cleansed the body of dirt, there was a baptism that cleansed the conscience of all sin. That baptism was the result of the work of Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection. What saves us is not a baptism with water but a baptism of salvation that cleanses us on the inside. This salvation is possible because of the Lord Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sin and through His Spirit give us a clear conscience and right standing with the Father. Peter tells us that water baptism is not what saves us but rather a baptism of salvation that cleanses our conscience the work of Jesus Christ.

Is Salvation Through Baptism Biblical?  
*"Washing of regeneration" Titus 3:5*

*(5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior - Titus 3:5,6 ESV*

Paul told Titus in Titus 3:5 that believers have been saved through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains this in verse six by reminding us that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon us richly. The image here is one of water being poured upon an individual to cleanse him. The Jews were familiar with this purification rite. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit, like this water of purification, cleanses us from our sins and brings regeneration and renewal. This passage does not speak about baptism but of the ministry of the Spirit of God in the life of unbelievers, cleansing them and making them new creatures.

*"If you forgive their sins" (John 20:21-23)*

*(22) And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." - John 20:22-23 ESV*

In John 20:23, the Lord Jesus told His disciples that if they forgive sin, it would be forgiven, but if they refused to forgive, sin would not be forgiven. Does this mean that the apostles had the power to forgive sin? Does this imply that this ministry of forgiveness has been passed on to the church?



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The context of this verse is important. Jesus had just breathed on His disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. In this context, Christ told His disciples that if they forgave anyone their sin, it would be forgiven. Who has the power to forgive sin in this context? It was not until they received the Holy Spirit that this ministry could be possible. It was the Holy Spirit who indwelt them that made this ministry possible. He was the power behind this forgiveness.

How does the Holy Spirit make forgiveness possible? He would minister through these disciples as they presented the message of the gospel to the world. He would reach out through them and touch the hardened hearts of unconverted sinners to offer them forgiveness of sin. These disciples had in them the means by which forgiveness of sins was possible. The Spirit within them could grant forgiveness to whomever He wished. That Spirit would lead them to the people he wanted to forgive. They would move in response to His leading, offering pardon and passing God's judgement.

The power to forgive is not in the church but the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works through those filled with His presence, offering this forgiveness to those with whom they speak. This is not the task of a select few but a ministry God has given to all who know the indwelling Spirit. We go in the power of God's Spirit to offer forgiveness to our friends and neighbours. In the power of that Spirit, we see the miracle of forgiveness and rebirth taking place before us. Lives are transformed because the Lord Jesus empowers His people as His representatives through His Holy Spirit.

Baptism is not a requirement for salvation. Nor is baptism the means to salvation. Salvation is a work of God's Spirit in all

**Is Salvation Through Baptism Biblical?**  
**who repent of their sins and trust His work for cleansing and forgiveness whether they have been baptized or not.**



# Chapter 5 -

## Infant Baptism as Dedication

The third position held by those who believe in infant baptism sees baptism as a means of dedicating children to the Lord and placing them under the care of the body of Christ. It should be noted that even churches that do not practice infant baptism observe some form of infant dedication.

For the most part, those who hold this position do not see baptism as a means of salvation. It is merely a means of bringing children into the church and under its care. It should be noted that believers in this position do not necessarily see a connection to the circumcision of the Old Testament, nor do they make any reference in this baptism to a covenant with God.

The question we need to consider here is this: If we remove the focus on the covenant God made with Abraham and the idea that baptism is a means of salvation, then where do we find support for infant baptism in Scripture?

Probably one of the greatest supports for this view of baptism comes from Luke 2.22-24:

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*(22) And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (23) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") (24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." - Luke 2:22-24 ESV*

When the days of His mother's purification were over, Mary brought Jesus to the temple to present Him to God. The presentation of Jesus in the temple is seen as an example to follow. Parents present their children to the Lord through baptism.

In Matthew 19:13-15, Jesus encouraged parents to bring their children to Him for blessing. He rebuked His disciples for not allowing little children to come to Him:

*Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. (Matthew 19:13-15, NIV)*

Many parents bring their young children to be baptized for a similar reason. They seek the blessing of the Lord for the lives of their infants.

Advocates of this view of infant baptism also use references to household baptisms (1 Corinthians 1:16; Acts 16:33; Acts 16:14,15) to support their argument. The assumption is that

## Infant Baptism as Dedication

these households must have included children. They also use the same New Testament passages as those who believe in covenantal infant baptism to support their position. I will not repeat this here.

In this view, there is a heavy emphasis on the presentation of Jesus in the temple and His words encouraging children to come to Him. Children are brought for baptism to present them to the Lord and place them under the care and supervision of the larger body of believers. As the mothers of Jesus day, parents bring their children so that the church might lay its hands on them and bless them in Christ's name. Often during these baptisms, parents publicly declare their commitment to raise their children for the Lord and call upon the church to support, encourage, and pray for them.

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### *Need of the Larger Body of Christ*

One of the strong points of this position is the realization that we need each other in the process of raising our children for the Lord. Many people will influence the young child presented before the church. Each of these individuals will either point them to the Lord or away from the Lord. When the child is brought before the church in this manner, it is a reminder to each member and adherent that this young child will watch their lives. It also reminds each person present that the shape of this child's life will depend, in part, upon their

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influence in his or her life. We need this reminder as believers today.

### *Prayer for and Dedication of Children to the Lord*

We cannot underestimate the importance of prayer for our children. The Word of God tells us that our prayers will move the hand of God. We have seen God move in powerful ways in response to even one simple prayer offered up in faith. What will be the result of the concentrated prayers of the church as they cry out for children presented to the Lord? Only eternity will tell how many times those prayers moved God to work in the lives of our children. Any opportunity to present our children to the body of Christ for prayer is a welcomed opportunity.

### *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 22.21-24)*

This view of infant baptism uses the example of Jesus' presentation in the temple as proof of their position. The problem with this is that Jesus was not brought to the temple to be baptized. Let's look at Luke 2:22-24 more closely.

*(22) And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (23) (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") (24) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." - Luke 2:22-24 ESV*

## Infant Baptism as Dedication

There are two details we need to see here. First, the Law of Moses considered a new mother unclean for seven days because of the blood flow resulting from childbirth.

*(2) "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days. As at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. - Leviticus 12:2 ESV*

If the child born to the mother was a male, he was circumcised on the eighth day. The mother would continue in her uncleanness for another thirty-three days (Leviticus 12:3-4). At the end of this time, the mother went to the temple to present an offering for her impurity (Leviticus 12:6-8). This is what Mary was doing at the temple with Jesus.

The second point we need to make from Luke 2 is the reference in verse 23 to the law of the firstborn – *"as it is written in the Law of the Lord, Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"* (Luke 2:23). This law is found in Exodus 13:2:

*(2) "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." - Exodus 13:2 ESV*

According to Numbers 18:15-16, the firstborn male child was redeemed (bought back) from the Lord at the cost of five shekels:

*(15) Everything that opens the womb of all flesh, whether man or beast, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours. Nevertheless, the firstborn of man you shall redeem, and the*



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*firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. (16) And their redemption price (at a month old you shall redeem them) you shall fix at five shekels in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. - Numbers 18:15-16 ESV*

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia has this to say about the practice:

*The custom of redeeming the firstborn son is preserved among the Jews to this day. After thirty days the father invites the "Kohen," i.e. a supposed descendant of Aaron, to the house. The child is brought and shown to the "Kohen," and the father declares the mother of the child to be an Israelite. If she is a "Kohen," redemption is not necessary. The "Kohen" asks the father which he prefers, his child or the five shekels; the father answers that he prefers his son, and pays to the "Kohen" a sum equivalent to five shekels. After receiving the redemption-money, the "Kohen" puts his hands on the child's head and pronounces the Aaronite blessing (Nu 6:22-27).*

*("The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia". Marion, IA: Laridian, Inc., 2017. This book is in the public domain. Electronic files copyright © 2017 by Laridian, Inc. All rights reserved.)*

Mary brought Jesus to the temple to present Him as a firstborn child and pay the price to redeem Him according to the Law of Moses. Luke 2 is not intended to give instructions for baptism. It shows us that Mary was faithful to the Law of Moses and its teaching about purifying herself and redeeming the firstborn child.

## Infant Baptism as Dedication

*“Let the little children come” (Matthew 19:13-15)*

We have already examined the story of mothers bringing their children to Jesus. This passage shows us the heart of Jesus for little children but makes no mention of baptism. Jesus laid His hands on these children and prayed for them. He did not baptize them. John 4:1-2 tells us that Jesus did not baptize at all:

*(1) Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (2) (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples) - John 4:1-2 ESV*

In this story, the disciples, who were the ones to baptize, tried to push these children away. Jesus received them, and while He did not baptize them here, He laid His hands on them and prayed. If we follow the example and instruction of Jesus here, we will spend time with our children, value them and pray for them.

While the passages used to support this view do not speak about baptism, the position does show us the importance of the body of Christ in raising our children. We can learn from this that our prayers and example will have a powerful impact on the next generation. An African proverb says: “It takes a village to raise a child.” This is true for the church. May God give us the grace to follow the example of Christ in valuing and praying for the church of the next generation.



# Chapter 6 -

## Believers' Baptism

We come now to believers' baptism. Those who adhere to this view believe that because baptism was commanded and instituted by Christ, our understanding of it should come directly from the New Testament. These individuals generally see no need to go back to the Old Testament to understand baptism. Let's take a moment to summarize the Biblical support for believers' baptism in the New Testament.

### *The Command of Jesus to Baptize*

Just before returning to His Father, Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. {19} Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 28:18-19 NIV)*

Notice the connection between making disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## The Parting of the Waters

Those who committed themselves to Jesus were baptized as a symbol and pledge of their commitment to Him.

### *The Baptism of Jesus*

This is not the first time we read about baptism in the Gospels. Jesus was baptized around the age of thirty by John the Baptist.

*(21) Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, (22) and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." - Luke 3:21-22 ESV*

*(16) And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; (17) and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." - Matthew 3:16-17 ESV*

It is interesting to note that during the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a special way. In those days, the Spirit of God fell on those God wanted to use in ministry. It also appears that after His baptism, Jesus would enter the wilderness to be tempted by Satan and then begin His public ministry. The baptism of Jesus seemed to be a crucial step toward this public ministry. Jesus declared in baptism a submission to the Father and the Spirit for the work He had come to do. That work would ultimately lead to a cruel death

## Believers' Baptism

on the cross. Jesus would speak of this death as a baptism that would cause Him great distress:

*(50) I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! - Luke 12:50 ESV*

For Jesus, baptism symbolized a complete and total surrender to the Father's purpose—even death on a cross.

### *Baptizing the Followers of Jesus*

Like John the Baptist, it was the practice of Jesus and His disciples in the early days of His ministry to baptize those who decided to follow Him:

*After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. (John 3:22 NIV)*

While Jesus, himself, did not baptize, He instructed His disciples to baptize those who become His disciples:

*(1) Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (2) (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), (3) he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. - John 4:1,3 ESV*

Those who committed to follow Christ were baptized as a sign of their devotion to and His teaching.

## The Parting of the Waters

### *Belief and Baptism*

The New Testament seems to teach that belief in the Lord Jesus, and His work were requirements for baptism. Consider the following verses:

*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16 NIV)*

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38 NIV)*

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41 NIV)*

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

*"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." (Acts 10:47 NIV)*

*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. (Gal 3:27 NIV)*

You cannot read these verses without seeing the connection between baptism, repentance, and belief. Nowhere does the New Testament teach the baptism of unbelievers. Baptism in

## Believers' Baptism

the New Testament is accompanied by repentance and faith. Faith in Christ is very clearly a necessary qualification for believers' baptism in the New Testament.

It is important to note that even those who baptize infants are generally in agreement with this. Most infant baptists will also baptize adults who have never been baptized as a child. They typically only do so, however, if that adult demonstrates a commitment to the Lord Jesus and His purpose. Understand that just as infant baptists are willing to baptize adults who make a faith profession, believers' baptists also willingly baptize children who make a similar profession of faith.

Of all the positions we have discussed, this position is the easiest to understand. The emphasis is on the clear teaching of Christ and the apostles. These believers feel no need to study the covenants and laws of the Old Testament to understand what Jesus and the apostles teach us about baptism. Those who are baptized under this position testify to what the Lord has done in their lives. Their baptism allows them to publicly share their faith and commitment to follow the Lord Jesus.





# Chapter 7 - Believers' Baptism and the New Covenant

I must admit that coming from a covenantal infant baptist position, I felt somewhat disappointed by the lack of emphasis on the covenant God made with His people in the believers' baptist position. For many who held this view, baptism was simply a public declaration of what Christ had done for them.

In Genesis 17, God chose Abraham to be the father of a people He had separated for Himself. While Abraham was the father of the Jews, this was only the beginning of what God had in mind. God intended to call out, through Abraham, a people from every nation and tongue. Listen to what He told Abraham in Genesis 17:1-5:

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. (Genesis 17.1-5, NIV)*

## The Parting of the Waters

God told Abraham that through him and his descendants, every nation would one day be blessed:

*I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.*  
(Genesis 22.17,18, NIV)

The Psalmist understood this great plan of God when he wrote:

*9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.*  
(Psalm 86.9, NIV)

How would the Lord accomplish this great purpose? He would do so through the nation of Israel. He chose them to be the instruments through which this great plan for the whole earth would be accomplished. Listen to what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

*"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. (Isa 42:6 NIV)*

*"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isa 49:6 NIV)*

## Believers' Baptism and the New Covenant

God would make Israel a “covenant for the peoples and a light for the Gentiles.” They would bring “salvation to the ends of the earth.” Israel was the vehicle through which the message of salvation would spread. Abraham would become the father of a people that spanned every nation on the earth. He would become the father of all who believed. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians:

*Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (7) Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. (8) The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” (9) So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:6-9 NIV)*

The covenant God made with Abraham is now seeing its fulfilment in us who believe. The covenant God made with the Jewish people through Abraham had a gospel purpose. He set them apart and blessed them so that the world would come to know the Messiah and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the day was coming when, after having fulfilled His promise to Abraham, God would establish a new covenant with His people:

*“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Jeremiah 31:31 NIV)*

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By His death and resurrection, Jesus would become the mediator of this new covenant.

*To Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:24 NIV)*

Having accomplished its purpose, the old covenant would now give way to a new one.

*By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:13 NIV)*

Believers from every nation and language would now enter a covenant relationship with God through the Lord Jesus. Listen to what Jeremiah had to say about this new covenant God would establish through the mediatorship of His Son Jesus:

*“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (34) No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Jeremiah 31:33-34 NIV)*

Those who belong to this new covenant are a changed people. From the least to the greatest, each will know the Lord God and experienced the forgiveness of sin. God will write

## Believers' Baptism and the New Covenant

His law on their hearts –it will be their delight to obey Him. They would serve Him with a new and transformed heart. Is this not what happens to an individual who is born again? Does he or she not come to know God personally, receive the forgiveness of sin and a new heart? Do they not then enter a covenant with God to be His faithful and obedient children? Does He not also promise to be their God?

To become a child of the old covenant, you needed to be born into the nation of Israel. Entrance into this new covenant is no longer by physical birth into a particular family or nation. To enter this new covenant, you must be spiritually born as a child of God. The Apostle Paul teaches this in Romans 9 when he says:

*For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.*  
(Romans 9.6-8 NIV)

Paul told the Romans that not all of Abraham's descendants were truly God's children. It is those who believe who are children of Abraham and children of the promise:

*Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. (Galatians 3:7 NIV)*

Jesus repeated the same thought in the Gospel of John when He said:

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*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- (13) children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12-13 NIV)*

According to Jesus, those who receive Him and believe in His name are children of God. It is these true children who are the fulfilment of God's Promise to Abraham. Only those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham:

*So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:9 NIV)*

The new covenant we enjoy today is the fulfilment of the great promises that God made to Abraham when He told him that he would become the father of many nations. Like a marriage, this covenant joins us to the father through the work of His Son. Entrance into covenant relationship is by faith in the God of Abraham who promised salvation to the ends of the earth through His son Jesus. Those who receive Him and believe in His name become children of God. and enter a lifelong covenant relationship with God. He promises to be their God, and they promise to be His faithful and obedient people.

Like circumcision of the Old Testament, baptism is a sign of entrance into a covenantal relationship with God. In baptism, candidates declare their faith in Christ and covenant with God to live as His children. They boldly claim God's promise that He will be their God, never leave or forsake them. In their baptism, they identify with the covenantal family of God who, from Abraham, looked to the Messiah who was to come.

## Believers' Baptism and the New Covenant

With this as the background, the covenantal believers' baptist emphasizes the New Testament teaching on the requirement of the new birth for baptism. While baptism is a New Covenant sign, it is only completely understood when seen in the light of God's overall purposes as recorded in the Old Testament.

The position shows the harmony between the Old Testament and the New. God is working out His purposes for the entire world. We are the fulfilment of the promises God gave to Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is not just for Jews. It is part of our heritage as Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus as well. It is the foundation stone upon the new covenant with Jesus as mediator is built.

Baptism is a sign of entrance into a covenantal relationship with God. It is more than an outward sign to the world that I belong to Christ. Like marriage, baptism is the exchanging of vows between God and His child. Like Jesus, we submit to the purpose and will of God, even if it means our death. We also accept God's promises to sustain and keep us no matter what lies ahead.

When I was baptized many years ago, it was a step I struggled with deeply. Personally, it had little to do with sharing my testimony with the people who witnessed it. As I stood in that baptismal tank, it was just God and me. I was making one of the most difficult decisions I had ever made. I was taking a stand that I knew would change my ministry plans for the future. I did not know how those closest to me would respond. My flesh wanted nothing to do with this baptism. I took that step as an act of obedience to the Spirit's leading and my conviction about the teaching of Scripture. I knew I had to obey the Lord even if it hurt. God was calling



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me to trust Him. That day we entered a covenantal agreement. I chose to honour Him even when it hurt. He chose to sustain and keep me in the calling He had on my life until I stood before Him in heaven.

# Chapter 8 - Sprinkling

It falls on us now to examine the various modes of baptism. These modes fall into three categories: sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. In this chapter, we will discuss the Biblical basis for sprinkling as a mode of baptism.

To understand why sprinkling is used in some churches as a mode of baptism, we need to return to the Old Testament. In Exodus 24, Moses stood before the people of God and declared to them all the words of the covenant God was making with them. The people of Israel then proclaimed their willingness to walk in obedience to these words:

*(7) Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." (8) And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." - Exodus 24:3-8 ESV*

Notice how Moses sealed this agreement by "throwing" the blood of the offering on the people.

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The blood that stained their garments was a reminder of their commitment to the Lord God. The death of a sacrificial animal sealed this agreement. From that point forward, they were separated from all other people through this covenantal relationship with God.

Later in Exodus 29, God showed Moses how he was to ordain Aaron and his sons to the priesthood:

*(19) "You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, (20) and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. (21) Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' garments with him. -*

*Exodus 29:19-21 ESV*

Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons to the priesthood by sprinkling blood on them.

The law of Leviticus 8:10-11 states that religious objects were consecrated by sprinkling anointing oil on them:

*(10) Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it and consecrated them. (11) And he sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times and anointed the altar and all its utensils and the basin and its stand, to consecrate them. - Leviticus 8:10-11 ESV*

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After healing from an infectious disease, the Israelites would present themselves to the priest for examination. The priest would then declare them healed of their illness and sprinkle blood on them for their cleansing.

*(5) And the priest shall command them to kill one of the birds in an earthenware vessel over fresh water. (6) He shall take the live bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. (7) And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the leprous disease. Then he shall pronounce him clean and shall let the living bird go into the open field. - Leviticus 14:5-7 ESV*

Through this ceremony, individuals were welcomed back into full communion with the family of God's people.

Those who were defiled by touching something unclean were required to come before the priest and have him sprinkle water upon them to purify them from their uncleanness:

*(13) Whoever touches a dead person, the body of anyone who has died, and does not cleanse himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from Israel; because the water for impurity was not thrown on him, he shall be unclean. His uncleanness is still on him. - Numbers 19:13 ESV*

As we move closer to the New Testament, the prophets picked up on this theme of sprinkling. Speaking about the

## The Parting of the Waters

coming Messiah, Isaiah tells us that this Suffering Servant would sprinkle many nations.

*So will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.  
(Isaiah 52:15 NIV)*

The sprinkling referred to here was symbolic of the forgiveness of sin. The day was coming when the pagan nations would come to the Messiah and be cleansed from their sin. The Lord Jesus would sprinkle them with his blood and they would become His people.

Ezekiel too, spoke in these terms when he said.

*{24} "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. {25} I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. {26} I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. {27} And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.  
(Ezekiel 36:24-27 NIV)*

According to Ezekiel, the Lord would call His people out of exile. He would sprinkle clean water on them and they would be cleansed of their sins. The sprinkling of God's people with water indicated a cleansing and forgiveness of sin.

The sprinkling of blood or water in the Old Testament represented the forgiveness of sin and the entrance into a

## Sprinkling

covenantal relationship with God. By means of sprinkling, an object or person was set apart for the Lord for His exclusive use. By means of sprinkling, an individual was declared healed of his or her disease. Sprinkling represented the power of God to cleanse, renew and heal.

The writer to the Hebrews ties the sprinkling of the Old Testament with the blood of Christ and its power to cleanse us from sin in Hebrews 9:

*{13} The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. {14} How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:13-14 NIV)*

Notice here how the writer compares the blood of Christ to the sprinkled blood of the old covenant. Christ's blood, sprinkled upon our conscience and lives cleanses us from sin. We are encouraged, therefore, to draw near to God with hearts that have been sprinkled to cleanse them from sin.

*Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22 NIV)*

Sprinkling is a symbol of what God has done in the lives of his people. He has cleansed them and consecrated them for Himself. By means of the sprinkled blood we have access to God.

## The Parting of the Waters

We see here in this position a connection between the Old and New Testament. The laws of purification see their ultimate fulfilment in the person and work of Christ on the cross. Baptism speaks of that purifying work.

Practically, this mode of baptism could be useful in cases where immersion may not be possible. Sprinkling is rich in symbolism and points us to the work of Christ and the purifying power of His blood.

While the laws of purification certainly point us to the work of Christ, this does not necessarily mean that we are to apply this to New Testament baptism. While the writer to the Hebrews draws a connection between the Old Testament law of purification and the blood of Christ, it was not his intent to give us instructions on how to baptize. His intent here is to show the readers how Christ's death fulfilled the Old Testament purification laws. If these laws are fulfilled, should we carry them into the New Testament and apply them to a New Testament covenant sign?

It is important to note here that sprinkling was not the only means of purification. An individual who needed to be cleansed from an infectious disease was also to bathe in water.

*{8} "The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. {9} On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair; he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair.*

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*He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean. (Leviticus 14:8-9 NIV)*

In this case sprinkling was insufficient for cleansing. The body and clothing of the individual were to be completely cleansed with water before they could be declared clean.

On the day of Atonement, a goat was sacrificed for the sins of the people. The priest then took a second goat, place his hands on its head and release it into the wild as a symbol of what God had done in forgiving his people of their sins. The priest who released this goat into the wild was to bathe himself in water for purification before being able to return to the camp:

*(26) And he who lets the goat go to Azazel shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward he may come into the camp. - Leviticus 16:26 ESV*

Individuals who were unclean by means of a bodily emission or by eating defiled food were to bathe in water before they could be declared clean. (See Leviticus 15:18; 17:15,16). Anyone who refused to bathe in water would continue to be impure before God:

*(16) But if he does not wash them or bathe his flesh, he shall bear his iniquity.” - Leviticus 17:16 ESV*

If we see the laws of purification as applying to baptism in the New Testament it would be as legitimate to immerse a candidate in water as it would be to sprinkle as that both methods were used in the Old Testament purification rites.



## The Parting of the Waters

Sprinkling as a mode of baptism is derived mainly from the Old Testament purification laws. The symbolism of this method is quite rich. The question we must ask ourselves, however, is whether these Old Testament laws should be applied to New Testament baptism.

## Chapter 9 - Pouring

The next method used to baptize is to pour water over the head of the baptismal candidate. To find the Biblical basis for this, we must again return to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, oil and incense were sometimes poured over objects to consecrate them to the Lord. We see this in the case of Jacob in Genesis 28:

*(18) Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. (Genesis 28:18 NIV)*

The context of the verse tells us that Jacob intended to set aside this place as the location of a house for God:

*(20) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear (21) so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God (22) and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (Genesis 28:20-22 NIV)*

This same principle is applied to the consecrating of individuals for the Lord's service. Part of the ordination

## The Parting of the Waters

service for Aaron and the priests of the Old Testament involved pouring oil on the priest's head to consecrate him to the ministry.

*He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. (Leviticus 8:12 NIV)*

In Leviticus 21, the high priest is identified as having had the sacred oil poured on his head.

*The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. (Leviticus 21:10 NIV)*

Kings in Old Testament times were also anointed with oil to set them apart for their work (see 2 Kings 9:3 and 1 Samuel 10:1). Similarly, water poured on the head of the baptismal candidate represents their consecration to the Lord.

Under Old Testament law, certain offerings were poured out before the Lord (see Numbers 28:7). The act of pouring out an offering was a symbol of complete surrender to God. The drink offering that was poured on the ground could no longer be reclaimed. It was completely surrendered to the Lord. The apostle Paul compared his life to a drink offering in 2 Timothy 4 when he said:

*(6) For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. (2 Tim 4:6 NIV)*

Paul surrendered his life to the Lord, never to reclaim it again. This mode of baptism reminds us that we are to offer our lives in complete surrender to God as a drink offering poured out before him.

## Pouring

In the writings of the prophets, “pouring” takes on a new significance. Ezekiel reminded his people that the day was coming when the Lord God would pour out His Spirit upon His people.

*(29) I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 39:29 NIV)*

The prophet Joel tells us the same thing:

*(28) ‘And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions (Joel 2:28 NIV)*

Paul told Titus that believers are saved by the washing of regeneration and by the renewal of the Holy Spirit who was poured out upon us:

*(5) He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5-6 NIV)*

Water poured on the head of a baptismal candidate represents the work and ministry of the Spirit of God.

In the New Testament, a woman approached Jesus with a jar of special perfume. She broke the seal and anointed his head with the contents. Jesus explained the significance of this act in Matthew 26:12:

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*(12) When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. (Mat 26:12 NIV)*

By pouring perfume on the Lord Jesus, this woman was setting Jesus apart for a particular ministry. This woman's act was symbolic. It represented the consecration and commitment of Jesus to do the will of the Father in dying for our sins. By pouring water on the head of the baptismal candidate, advocates of this method proclaim their willingness to submit to the will of the Father even as Jesus did.

Just a few verses later in Matthew 26, the Lord gathered His disciples around Him and instituted the Lord's Supper. Notice what He told His disciples on that occasion:

*(28) This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Mat 26:28 NIV)*

"This cup that we share," says Jesus, "represents my blood that was poured out for you." Baptism by pouring water over the head of the baptismal candidate points us to the blood of the new covenant and the death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.

There is much to be said in this position about the symbolism of pouring. Pouring is a symbol of consecration. It represents the work of the Spirit of God in an individual's life and the complete surrender of that life to the Lord. It reminds baptismal candidates that their lives need to be poured out before the Lord and points them to the blood of the Lord Jesus sacrificed for them. As with sprinkling, this mode could be useful where it was not possible or practical to immerse the baptismal candidate.

### Pouring

The position ties the Old and the New Testament together and reveals how the Old Testament purification rituals point us to the coming Messiah and His work on the cross for our salvation. While it may be easy to see how pouring water over the head of a baptismal candidate could have great significance, baptism is not an Old Testament purification ritual. The biggest problem with this position is that there is no clear evidence in Scripture that New Testament baptism should be celebrated according to the Old Testament purification rules.



# Chapter 10 - Immersion

It is generally assumed by those who see immersion as the proper mode of Christian baptism that since it is a New Testament practice, our study must be based on the teaching of Christ and the apostles. This study begins with an analysis of the Greek words used in the New Testament for “baptism.”

The Greek word for baptism is βάπτω (*báptō*). This word occurs about three times in the New Testament. There are also several variations of the word (baptisma, baptizo and baptismos). While these variations generally have the same meaning, there is one distinction. The word βαπτισμός (*baptismós*), which occurs about four times in the New Testament, always refers to ceremonial washings and is not used to refer to Christian baptism.

## *Baptismos (βαπτισμός)*

The word *baptismós* occurs four times in the New Testament. In each case, it speaks about Old Testament ceremonial washings. Mark 7:4 is an example of this:

(4) *When they come from the marketplace they do not eat*



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*unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. (Mark 7:4 NIV)*

The word is translated as “various washings” in Hebrews 9:10 and refers to the ceremonial washing of the Old Testament.

*(8) By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing (9) (which is symbolic for the present age).*

*According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, (10) but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation. - Hebrews 9:8-10 ESV*

In Hebrews 6:2, the writer encouraged his readers to leave the elementary doctrines and “instructions about washings” and go on to maturity.

*(1) Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (2) and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. - Hebrews 6:1-2 ESV*

The word “*baptismos*” does not speak about New Testament baptism but is used in the New Testament to refer to the Old Testament practice of dipping objects in water to cleanse them (see Numbers 31:23).

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### *Baptisma (βάπτισμα)*

This second Greek word occurs about twenty-two times in the New Testament. It means “to dip.” Of the twenty-two occurrences of this word, the vast majority of these refer to the baptism of John. The next most common usage is to speak of a baptism of death:

*But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. (23) And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. (Matthew 20:22-23 KJV)*

*But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! (Luke 12:50 NIV)*

The Lord Jesus speaks here about a baptism of death that He and some of His disciples would face. This death would overwhelm them.

Paul uses this word *baptisma* in a similar way when he writes to the Romans and the Colossians.

*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:4 NIV)*

*(12) having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him*

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*from the dead. (Colossians 2:12 NIV)*

The apostle Paul speaks of being buried with Christ through baptism into death and raised through faith. He teaches this to both the Romans and the Colossians. In his mind, baptism was a symbol of dying to self and the newness of life in Christ. Those who believe in immersion point out that when a baptismal candidate goes down into the water, he or she symbolizes this death. When they come up out of the water, they testify of new life in Christ.

In 1 Peter 3:20,21, Peter uses the story of Noah and his family going through the waters of the flood as a symbol of baptism. They were in the midst of the waters of death but were saved.

*(20) because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. (21) Baptism, which corresponds to this, 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 3:20-21 ESV*

The word *baptisma* helps us to understand something of the meaning of baptism. The New Testament shows a connection between baptism and death to sin and self. Paul speaks in Romans and Colossians about the symbolism of being buried through baptism. Those who practice immersion dip (baptisma) believers in water and bring them back up to represent this death and resurrection.

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### *Bapto (βάπτω)*

The word *bapto* occurs three times in the New Testament in this form. It is translated by the word “dip” or “dipped” in every occurrence but never by the word ‘baptize.’

The first occurrence of the word “bapto” is found in the Gospel of Luke.

*So, he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ (Luke 16:24 NIV)*

In this case, Lazarus asks Abraham to dip the tip of his finger in water and place it on his tongue to cool it.

The second occurrence of the word is in John 13:26.

*Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. (John 13:26 NIV)*

The word is used here to describe taking a piece of bread and dipping it in sauce.

The last occurrence of the word is in the book of Revelation.

*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. (Revelation 19:13 NIV)*

This passage describes a rider of the white horse, likely a reference to the Lord Jesus. The rider wore a robe dipped in blood, a reference to his crucifixion and death on our behalf.

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The three verses that use the word baptizo all speak of dipping or immersing an object in water, sauce, or blood.

### *Baptizo (βαπτίζω)*

The final word used in the New Testament for baptism is the word “baptizo.” This word is used more frequently than any other word. Baptizo also means to dip but can also be translated by the words immerse, submerge, overwhelm, or saturate. Advocates of immersion point us to the actual meaning of the Greek words and examples in Scripture that could indicate that immersion was the practice of the early church.

Mark tells us that John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

*(9) In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. - Mark 1:9 ESV*

Speaking of this event, Matthew tells us that after His baptism, Jesus “went up from the water.”

*(16) And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him - Matthew 3:16 ESV*

The use of the phrase “went up from the water” seems to indicate that Jesus was in the Jordan River when He was baptized. We could argue that Jesus went down into the water and John sprinkled or poured water on Him, but we have no

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proof for this. The only indication we have of how Jesus was baptized is found in the use of the word baptizo, meaning to dip, immerse or submerge.

In John 3:23, we read:

*Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (John 3:23 NIV)*

From the context, it appears that John chose this location because there was plenty of water. While John's choice of this region does not prove that He baptized by immersion, we could legitimately ask why John would need "plenty of water" if he were only going to sprinkle or pour water over the heads of those he baptized. Would not a tiny stream of running water have sufficed? Once again, the only clear evidence of how John baptized is found in the word baptizo. John was dipping, immersing, or submerging people at Aenon because there was plenty of water.

In Acts 8:36,37, we read the story of how an Ethiopian eunuch came to the Lord when Philip shared Christ with him in the desert. After accepting the Lord and finding some water along the road, the eunuch requested Philip to baptize him.

*(36) 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?" (38) And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. (39) And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of*

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*the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. - Acts 8:36-39 ESV*

Notice that “they both went down into the water” (verse 36). While it is unclear how much water there was in that location, there was sufficient for them both to wade out into it. The baptism did not take place beside this water but in the midst of it. Both Philip and the eunuch went into the water for this baptism. While it might be conceivable that Philip sprinkled or poured water over the head of the eunuch when they went into this water, the use of the word baptizo indicates that he “dipped” him in it.

Another important passage related to the mode of baptism is found in Romans 6:4, where Paul tells us that we were buried with Christ through our baptism. How does baptism symbolize this burial with Christ? Advocates of immersion see here a reference to how a candidate is immersed in water during baptism. This immersion in water represents the death and burial of the old nature.

### *Strong emphasis on the meaning of the Greek Words*

This position places a strong emphasis on the meaning of the Greek words used for baptism in the New Testament Greek. The context of these words also gives support to immersion as the mode of baptism. For example, John chose a location with much water to baptize (dip) those who came to him. Both Jesus and the Ethiopian eunuch went into the water to be baptized (dipped).

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### *Limitations*

I recall speaking to a friend of mine about the mode of baptism. I asked him what he would do if it were not possible to baptize an individual by immersion due to physical limitations such as not enough water or the sickness of the candidate. He told me that God would understand that baptism was not possible and would not expect it of this person. There are situations where immersion is not physically possible. In these situations, individuals are refused the privilege of baptism unless another method is used.

### *Problem Verses*

Certain verses in the New Testament seem to connect baptism and ceremonial washings of the Old Testament. Take the following as examples:

*When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash (baptizo). And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing (baptismos) of cups, pitchers and kettles.) (Mark 7:4 NIV)*

*But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash (baptizo) before the meal, was surprised. (Luke 11:38 NIV)*

*They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings (baptismos) —external regulations applying until the time of the new order. (Hebrews 9:10 NIV)*



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In these passages, the Greek word for baptism (baptizo) is used in connection with the term used for Old Testament purification rites (baptismos). Those who practice sprinkling or pouring use these verses to say that if the New Testament writers made this connection, it would be safe to assume that immersion is not the only way to baptize. Since sprinkling and pouring were also acceptable methods used to purify an object or person in the Old Testament, it should also be a proper method of baptism.

In response to this, we must return to the Greek word used to refer to ceremonial washings. The word baptismos speaks of dipping in water. It is never used in the New Testament to refer to sprinkling or pouring water over something. In the verses listed above, cups, pictures, kettles, and hands were not sprinkled with water to wash them but completely dipped in water.

Those who believe in sprinkling or pouring point out the use of the word “baptizo” in 1 Corinthians 10:

*(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. (2) They were all baptized (baptizo) into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Corinthians 10:1-2 NIV)*

These individuals tell us that the children of Israel were not immersed in the sea as they crossed on dry land, yet Paul tells us that they were baptized. The Egyptians who followed after them were immersed and drowned. The Israelites were merely sprinkled by the mist of the walls of water. They

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interpret this verse to say, therefore, that sprinkling is a legitimate form of baptism.

Notice, however, how Paul words verse 1. He tells us that these forefathers were all “under the cloud” and “passed through the sea.” Paul is telling the Corinthians that these Israelites had water beside them and on top of them –they were surrounded or immersed (baptizo) “in the cloud and in the sea” (verse 2).

I must admit that I can’t be completely objective in this study. For many years, I have met infant baptists who could not defend their position on baptism. My hope for them is that this study would help them see how sincere believers in their denominational heritage have come to this conclusion based on their interpretation of Scripture.

I have also met and been hurt by believers’ baptists who have never understood how anyone could find evidence of the baptism of infants in Scripture. Often this is because they have never sat down and listened to someone from an infant baptism perspective defend their beliefs. My desire is that believers’ baptists would have the opportunity to examine the arguments from the perspective of someone who believes in infant baptism.

I could have presented each position without offering any defence, but that would not benefit the reader. Assumptions are being made on both sides of this debate. Infant baptists assume that households contained infants. Believers’ baptists assume that because John went into the water, he automatically immersed every person he baptized. We can also become so focused on a verse or wording of a verse that

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we fail to see it in its context. I have attempted to point these details out in this study.

I have attempted to be honest with where I stand, and I have shared my theological journey with you. This is my journey. Your journey may not be the same. My hope and prayer are that this study will foster greater respect for people of different theological perspectives. I fellowship with sincere believers from both sides of this debate. I cannot be content to say that I believe something simply because that is what my denomination believes. I had to make this mine. It took me over twenty years to be willing to release this work. I trust it will not be divisive but rather a means of encouraging deeper understanding between believers on both sides of the fence.

In the final chapter, I want to examine baptism in the early history of the church to show that the difference of opinion over baptism is not a new issue in our day but one that has been debated for hundreds and hundreds of years.

# Chapter 11 - Baptism and History

In this study, we have confined ourselves to the teaching of Scripture and its interpretation by various believers. The debate over baptism, however, is not new. In this final chapter, I want to take a moment to examine how believers for centuries have wrestled to understand how baptism is rightly administered.

One of the first references to infant baptism in the Christian church comes from a scholar named Tertullian who lived at the close of the second century. Writing about the practice, he says:

*It follows that deferment of baptism is more profitable, in accordance with each person's character and attitude, and even age: and especially so as regards children. For what need is there, if there really is no need, for even their sponsors to be brought into peril, seeing they may possibly themselves fail of their promises by death, or be deceived by the subsequent development of an evil disposition? It is true our Lord says, Forbid them not to come to me. So let them come, when they are growing up, when they are learning, when they are taught what they are coming to: let them become Christians when they are competent to know Christ. Why should innocent infancy come with haste to the*

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*remission of sins? Shall we take less cautious action in this than we take in worldly matters? Shall one who is not trusted with earthly property be entrusted with heavenly? Let them first learn how to ask for salvation, so that you may be seen to have given to one that asketh. With no less reason ought the unmarried also to be delayed until they either marry or are firmly established in continence: until then, temptation lies in wait for them, for virgins because they are ripe for it, and for widows because of their wandering about. All who understand what a burden baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it than of its postponement.*

(Bridges, Donald and Phypers, David: The Water that Divides, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg. 74.)

Obviously, from what Tertullian says, infant baptism existed in the church of his day. Though he recognized the practice, he cautioned parents about bringing their children. He struggled with infant baptism for two reasons. Firstly, he felt that it was losing some of its significance. People were deciding to be baptized or have their children baptized without a proper understanding of what they were doing. “*Shall we take less cautious action in this than we take in worldly matters,*” he asked. Related to this objection was the second objection. Tertullian felt that since baptism was an important decision, the baptismal candidate needed to take the time to fully understand what he or she was doing before being baptized. There was no need to rush baptism. Because of its significance, it was better to wait until the candidate was truly ready. Some sources would indicate that baptism was such a serious matter in the church that, in some cases, the candidate was given a three-year probationary period to test his or her character before baptism. (Dowley, Tim (ed)

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Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans' Publishing Company, 1977, pg.10.)

The *Didache* was a manual of church practice. Scholars have dated it somewhere between the years 120 and 150. In it, we have a description of how baptism was to be practised.

*Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points and then baptize in running water, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither then pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before a baptism, moreover, the one being baptized must fast, and any other who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand.*

(Petry, Ray C., (ed), A History of Christianity: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962, pg. 13.)

In his book entitled "*First Apology*," Justin Martyr (a converted philosopher who lived in the second century) explains his understanding of Christian baptism. Bridge and Phipers summarise the teaching of Justin Martyr in the following words:

*Baptism for Justin is the means whereby men and women are dedicated to God and made new through Christ. It is given to as many as are persuaded and believe that the things are true which are taught by the church and undertake to be able to live accordingly. It is proceeded by prayer and fasting by the candidates and congregation.*

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*Then they are brought where there is water and are born again, being washed in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is administered that the baptized may obtain remission of sins formerly committed.*

(Bridges, David and Phyper, David, *The Water that Divides*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg.76)

Baptism for Justin Martyr was administered to those who believed the teachings of the church. It was through baptism that the candidate was forgiven his or her sins.

On the other hand, the writings of Origen and Hippolytus in the second and third centuries, indicate that infant baptism was quite widespread in the church. There appears to be no real objection to the practice. In his book "Apostolic Tradition," Hippolytus provides for both infant baptism and believers' baptism. In the case of believers' baptism, the believer was immersed three times in water following an anointing with oil for the departure of the evil spirits. He also felt that sins were forgiven through baptism.

(Bridges, David and Phyper, David, *The Water that Divides*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg.76)

What seems clear from the writings of these early Christian thinkers is that both infant baptism and believers' baptism were practised in the church by the second and third centuries. It is also clear that many of these early believers held that sins were forgiven through baptism. Because of the belief that sins were washed away by baptism, there was much debate over whether wrongs committed after baptism could be forgiven. Particularly in the church of the fourth

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century, there was a tendency to put off baptism until the point of death to ensure that all sins had been washed away before meeting the Lord.

By the fifth century, Augustine emphasised the doctrine of original sin: that children are sinners from birth and in need of salvation. Before this, there was a general feeling that a young child was innocent until he or she sinned. What Augustine taught was that even before the child had an opportunity to sin, he or she was under the judgement of God. With this teaching came a resurgence of infant baptism. If a child was lost from birth and baptism was the means of washing away his or her sin, children should be baptized.

Before the Reformation, the official position of the established church was infant baptism, though new adult converts were also baptized during the Middle Ages. It is worth noting that two groups took a stand against this official position. The Waldensians in the 1200s, believing the church was corrupt, felt it had forfeited the right to administer baptism. Members of this group were divided concerning infant baptism. Some believed in the baptism of believers by immersion. Others accepted infant baptism and saw it as a means of salvation. They baptize their children and would rebaptize anyone joining them from the “corrupt” established church.

The second group of importance was the Paulicians. They tended to be expressive in their views, sometimes taking up arms to fight for their position. This led to increased persecution at the hands of the established church. The Paulicians rejected infant baptism and baptized believers by pouring water over their heads.



## The Parting of the Water

By the sixteenth century, a group known as the Anabaptists challenged the official church position. Like the Paulicians, they rejected infant baptism. They believed the church's membership needed to be composed of those who had a personal relationship with the Lord. They gained many followers. Even the reformer Ulrich Zwingli was originally sympathetic to their doctrine. He is quoted to have said:

*Nothing grieves me more than that at present I must baptize children, for I know it ought not to be done.*

(Quoted in Bridge, David and Phypers, David, *The Water that Divides*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg.103)

He went on to say:

*I leave baptism untouched. I call it neither right nor wrong. If we were to baptize as Christ instituted it, then we would not baptize any person until he reached the years of discretion, for I find infant baptism nowhere written or practised. But we must practise it now so as not to offend our fellow men. It is better not to preach (adult baptism) until the world is ready to receive it.*

(Quoted in Bridge, David and Phypers, David, *The Water that Divides*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg.103)

It appears, however, that later in life, Zwingli would take a firmer stand in support of infant baptism. He based his argument for infant baptism on the fact that baptism was a sign of God's promise to man and not a sign of man's acceptance of God's promises.

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One of Zwingli's converts was a man named Conrad Grabel. He, too, had come to his convictions regarding baptism. Unlike Zwingli, however, Grabel stood firmly on the doctrine of believers' baptism. He gained an impressive number of followers. Many of his followers would die for their convictions on baptism. Because of the execution of one of these Anabaptists, Menno Simons, then a Catholic priest, gave himself to the study of the issue of baptism. Not being able to find infant baptism in the Scriptures, he committed himself to the cause of the Anabaptists. He would become a very influential figure in their cause.

During the time of Menno Simons, yet another very influential figure appeared on the scene. John Calvin has probably done more for the cause of infant baptism than any other theologian. Calvin emphasized that baptism was a symbol of the grace of God in imparting salvation to those He so desired. He felt that believers' baptism placed too much emphasis on man's part in salvation. Infant baptism, on the other hand, put salvation in the hands of God. Calvin emphasized the important connection between God's covenant in the Old Testament and the New Testament covenant. He drew parallels between the participation of children in the covenant signs of the Old Testament and their right to partake in the New Testament covenant signs. He gave to those who practised infant baptism a theological argument for their practice.

What does all of this teach us? We can see from this that the doctrine of baptism has been a controversial one. Already in the second century, we have clear evidence of the practice of believers' baptism, infant baptism, and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration (baptism as a means of salvation).

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From the writings of Tertullian, Justin Martyr and Hippolytus, we discover that the early church took great pain in examining their candidates. While there is evidence that the church practised adult baptism using a threefold immersion, provision was also made for other modes. The official position of the church for many years allowed for infant baptism. Before the Reformation, it was generally accepted that an individual's sins were washed through his baptism. With the coming of the Reformation, this position gradually shifted. Infant baptism became a symbol of the child's need for the grace of God. It did not guarantee salvation. The Reformation placed the word of God in the hands of the common people and gave them the right to interpret Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This led to a resurgence in the doctrine of believers' baptism and the Anabaptist tradition. Thousands of Anabaptists were killed because they rejected infant baptism. Over time, however, believers learned to respect each other. It was John Bunyan who wrote:

*I will not let water baptism be the rule, the door, the bolt, the bar, the wall of division between the righteous and the righteous.*

(Quoted in Bridge, David and Phypers, David, *The Water that Divides*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, pg.136)

I close with that thought. Baptism has for too long been the dividing wall between sincere Christians. Godly individuals can be found on both sides of the debate. Each is solidly convinced of his or her position based on their understanding of the Word of God. As Paul the apostle said:

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*Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgement on disputable matters ...each one should be fully convinced in his own mind (NIV, Rom.14.1,5).*



# Light To My Path Book Distribution

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