

## Water Baptism

In lesson 13 we briefly considered what the Bible teaches concerning water baptism. However, since water baptism is strongly emphasized in many churches and is frequently misunderstood, we will devote this entire lesson to this topic.

### What is the meaning of the word "baptism"?

There are many who teach that the Greek word "*baptizo*" means "to immerse (or dip) in water" or "to sprinkle with water." In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist says: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall *baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*" Notice that there are three *different* baptisms mentioned in this verse. There is: 1) baptism with water; 2) baptism with the Holy Ghost; and 3) baptism with fire. Two of these baptisms have *no connection with water*. There are at least seven different kinds of baptism in the Bible and most of them have nothing to do with water. Let us look at other examples.

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And *were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea*" (I Corinthians 10:1-2). These verses refer to events in Exodus 13-14. God divided the waters in the Red Sea and Israel walked through the sea on *dry ground*. According to the verses quoted above, Israel was baptized when they walked on the *dry ground*. There was clearly *no water* involved in this baptism. It was a *dry baptism!*

"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). Jesus Christ had already been baptized with water (Luke 3:21). Yet he speaks of a future baptism in Luke 12:50. This is a reference to His coming death on the Cross. His crucifixion is said to be a baptism, but he was not immersed in water nor sprinkled with water. In this context, the word "baptism" *does not* mean "immersed in (or sprinkled with) water."

In the Bible, the word "baptism" carries the idea of being placed into something or being identified with something. When Israel walked through the sea on dry ground, they were *placed into* the leadership of Moses. When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, He was *identified with* our sin and the death that sin brings. Romans six tells us that we are baptized into Jesus Christ. This is a work of the Holy Spirit and has no connection with water. The Holy Spirit *places us into* Jesus Christ. We are identified with His death. In other words, God counts the death of Jesus Christ to be the payment for our sins.

### Which baptism?

It is unfortunate that many believers immediately think of *water baptism* whenever they come across the word "baptism" in the Bible. As we have seen, there are several different baptisms in the Bible and many of them have no association with water. The Bible mentions:

- 1) Israel being baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea (I Corinthians 10:1-2)
- 2) Several different baptisms of the Law [More is said about this below.]
- 3) Traditional Jewish baptism ceremonies (Mark 7:1-9) [It should be noted that these baptisms were never commanded by God and were strongly denounced by Jesus Christ. Included were such practices as baptizing (washing) their hands before eating and baptizing cups, pots, pans, etc.]
- 4) John's baptism of repentance (Luke 3:3) [Besides being a call to repentance, this baptism introduced Jesus as Israel's Messiah (John 1:31).]
- 5) Christ's death baptism on the cross (Luke 12:50)
- 6) Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11) [This baptism took place in Acts 2 (Acts 1:4-5, 2:3-4).]
- 7) Christ baptizing with fire (Matthew 3:11) [This is a future baptism of judgment upon Israel (Matthew 3:7-12).]
- 8) The Holy Spirit baptizing believers into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13)

Some have listed as many as twelve different baptisms in the Bible. We must not *assume* that "baptism" means *water baptism*. Interpreting the baptism in Romans 6, Galatians 3:27, and Colossians 2:12 to mean *water baptism*, destroys the teaching of these verses. Religious works are added to these passages that are intended to emphasize God's grace (Romans 6:14).

### **The beginning of water baptism**

It is commonly taught that water baptism is a New Testament doctrine and that it began historically with John the Baptist. However, this is not true. Hebrews 6:2 and 9:10 mention "the doctrine of baptisms" and "divers washings" in association with the Law of Moses. Israel practiced many types of water baptism during Old Testament times. These baptisms (or washings) are found in Exodus 29:4, Leviticus 14:4-7, Numbers 8:7, 19:7-10, and several other Old Testament passages.

The Jews did not ask John the Baptist, "What are you doing?" or "What is baptism?" when he began to baptize. They knew what baptism was after hundreds of years of living under Moses' Law. They merely wondered why *John* was baptizing instead of another prophet or the Christ (John 1:25). *Remember that water baptism began in the Old Testament.* It is a doctrine of *the Law*, not a doctrine of living by grace (Romans 6:14).

### **Is water baptism a symbol?**

Many teach that the baptism by the Holy Spirit in Romans 6 is water baptism and symbolizes our burial and resurrection with Christ. Verse four says that we are "buried with him by baptism into

death." This baptism actually *does* something; it is not a mere symbol. The Bible never teaches that people are buried in water. It makes no sense to think that going under water (being immersed) in baptism is a symbol of our burial with Christ. We do not bury people in water and neither did any of the cultures mentioned in the Bible. Christ was buried in a dry tomb carved out of a rock! Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that water baptism symbolizes burial. Instead water baptism represents *a ceremonial cleansing or purification* (John 3:23-25, Acts 22:16, Numbers 31:23-24, Ezekiel 36:25).

### **Baptism in the dispensation of grace**

John the Baptist and the twelve apostles were sent to water baptize (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 1:4; 16:16). However, Paul wrote: "For *Christ sent me not to baptize*, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (I Corinthians 12:13).

As we have previously studied, we are now living in the dispensation of grace. We have seen that water baptism began under the Old Testament Law. What is God's will in this dispensation concerning water baptism? Ephesians 4:5 clearly says that there is "*one baptism*" for the Body of Christ in this dispensation. Not two! Not three! There is only *one* baptism in this dispensation!

What is the "one baptism"? "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13). *All* members of the Body of Christ have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body. Since *all* have undergone this baptism, it is obvious that this must be the "one baptism." There is, therefore, no place for water baptism in this dispensation. If we add water baptism to the I Corinthians 12:13 baptism, we have *two* baptisms. However, this cannot be! We must not contradict God's Word by changing "one" and making it read "two."

If we truly understand the "one baptism" in this dispensation, we will know that there is no need for water baptism. The "one baptism" gives us a position in which we are "complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10). We have been blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). What benefit can water baptism add to this? Nothing! When certain churches or denominations insist on teaching water baptism, we must reject religious tradition and hold to God's Word!

### **Review Questions**

#### **True or False**

1. Many churches place a strong emphasis upon water baptism.
2. The nation of Israel was water baptized unto Moses in the sea.
3. The word "baptism" in the Bible always means "being placed into water."

4. Israel had "one baptism" under the Law of Moses.

### **Multiple Choice**

5. The baptism of John the Baptist:

- a. introduced Jesus Christ to Israel as the Messiah
- b. called the Gentiles to repentance
- c. was strongly denounced by Jesus Christ
- d. was a symbol of Christ's death on the cross

6. Acts 2:4 tells about:

- a. the crucifixion of Christ.
- b. the Holy Spirit baptizing believers into the Body of Christ.
- c. Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit as prophesied in Matthew 3:11.
- d. John's baptism of repentance.

7. The baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ:

- a. is the same as Christ's baptism with fire.
- b. is the "one baptism" mentioned in Ephesians 4:5.
- c. is the only baptism found in the Bible.
- d. is the same as Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

### **Fill in the Blanks**

8. Many wrongly teach that water baptism is a \_\_\_ Testament doctrine and that it began historically with \_\_\_\_\_.

9. It is wrong to teach that the baptism by the Holy Spirit in Romans 6 is \_\_\_ baptism and our burial and resurrection with Christ.

10. Ephesians 4:5 clearly says that there is "\_\_\_ baptism" for the Body of Christ in this dispensation.

### **For Further Study**

1. Exodus 19:5-6 tells of God's purpose that Israel "*be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*" What will Israel be named during the millennial kingdom according to Isaiah 61:6?

2. As a kingdom of priests, the nation of Israel will bring salvation to the Gentiles when Christ is reigning on the earth. What ceremony is required for priests? See Exodus 29:4.

3. Acts 13:24 tells us that John the Baptist preached his "baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel." According to Mark 1:4, what was John's baptism for?
4. John was sent to prepare Israel to become a kingdom of priests. What was Israel to do in preparing for this kingdom? See Matthew 3:5-6.
5. Water baptism was required for the Israelites to "flee from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). What will happen to the "chaff" who were not baptized by John? See Matthew 3:10-12.
6. Water baptism was associated with salvation in Israel. How does Luke 7:29-30 emphasize the importance of being baptized by John?
7. How do Mark 16:15-17 and Acts 2:38 confirm that water baptism was related to the forgiveness of sins in Israel?
8. Compare Mark 1:4 and Acts 2:38. Did the basic purpose of water baptism in Israel change after Christ died and rose again?
9. Many denominations teach that water baptism is a required ordinance for the church today. What do we learn about ordinances in Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14,20?
10. Some people will argue that Paul baptized with water and therefore we should also. However, Paul baptized with water only in his *early* ministry. Later he taught that there was only "one baptism" and it was not water baptism (I Corinthians 1:17, 12:13; Ephesians 4:5). What other practices did Paul participate in during his *early* ministry? Should we follow these practices today? See Acts 16:3, 18:6, 18:18, 21:26.

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