



# **The Meaning and Reality of Baptism**



# **THE MEANING AND REALITY OF BAPTISM**

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”  
(Mark 16:16a)

This booklet is free upon request.

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When you believe in the Lord Jesus, it is very important for you to be baptized. But what is baptism actually about? Many believe that baptism is just a formality or ritual. However, this is not so; rather, every believer must go beyond the surface to see and enter into the reality of baptism. The Bible reveals three wonderful pictures to portray the reality of baptism in vivid detail:

1. The children of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14)
2. Their crossing of the Jordan River to enter the good land (Joshua 3 & 4)
3. Noah's passing through the great flood in the ark (Genesis 7)

These historical examples from the Holy Scriptures each symbolize the reality of baptism today.

### **1. Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14)**

After the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt for many years, God demonstrated His power to Pharaoh by sending ten plagues, so that Pharaoh would finally let His people leave Egypt. As they were traveling in the wilderness, the LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to lead the way. When they left Egypt, Pharaoh had a change of heart and began to pursue them with his army. The Israelites were so afraid! The Red Sea was before them, and Pharaoh and his army were behind them. Then God commanded Moses to lift up his rod and stretch out his hand over the sea to divide it; and God parted the waters of the Red Sea to let His people cross through it on dry land. Pharaoh pursued hard after them. But as soon as the last Israelite had crossed the Red Sea, the waters returned and swallowed Pharaoh and his entire army.

Paul refers to the crossing of the Red Sea when he wrote about baptism in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2: *“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud,*

*all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*” In these verses we can see three aspects of baptism: a) being under the cloud, b) passing through the sea, and c) being baptized into Moses. Keep in mind that the cloud is of the heavens and the sea is of the earth. When you are baptized, you are immersed into water, like the Red Sea. This is the visible testimony of baptism that you now belong to God. But there is much more than just the act of being baptized into water -- there is also the reality of baptism as seen by the cloud.

### *Baptized with Water and with the Holy Spirit*

In the Bible, the ‘cloud’ refers to the Holy Spirit. The reality of baptism comes from the Holy Spirit. You cannot see the Holy Spirit, just like you cannot see the air. That is why the Bible uses the visible water as a symbol of the invisible Holy Spirit. The water is a visible testimony, while the Spirit is the invisible reality! Without the Holy Spirit, water baptism is empty and meaningless. But as the verses mentioned above show us, we were baptized not only by passing “through the sea”, but also by being “under the cloud”, that is, baptized in the water and with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist testified in Mark 1:8: *“I indeed baptized you with water, but He [the Lord Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 12:13: *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink of one Spirit.”* It is essential that anyone being baptized believes that he at that moment is not only being baptized with water, but much more, with the Holy Spirit! Just as the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea and the cloud, we must be baptized not only into water, but also into the heavenly reality of the Holy Spirit. This requires the living faith.

## *Baptized into Christ*

1 Corinthians 10:2 also tells us that we were baptized “into Moses.” Nowhere in the Holy Scriptures does it say that the Israelites were baptized into Moses. Then why did Paul mention it in this passage? We need revelation! In the Holy Scriptures, Moses is a picture, a type, or shadow of Christ. So when Paul writes that the Israelites were all “baptized into Moses”, that means that the believers are baptized into Christ! When you first believe in Christ Jesus, you receive Christ into your life. But you still need to be baptized **into** Christ. Thus the original language (Greek) of the New Testament sometimes uses the term ‘believing into’ to describe our faith (see John 3:15-16; 11:25-26). The English language does not have such a concept; we only say “believe in” Jesus Christ, never “believe into” Jesus Christ. This will help us to understand why Galatians 3:27 with regard to baptism says: “*For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.*” Romans 6:3 also makes this point very clear: “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death?*” Therefore, the goal of the living Christian faith is not only for the believers to receive Christ, but to bring the believers into Christ. With this understanding of the goal, every new believer would naturally want to be baptized.

Thus, by believing in Jesus Christ and being baptized into Him, we are “joined” unto Christ. Other translations use words such as, “grafted”, “united” or “become one” (Romans 6:5). We enter into a wonderful union with Him! Through this union, we partake of all the riches of Christ and everything He has accomplished:

- His perfect humanity
- His divinity
- His death and resurrection
- His ascension
- His authority, and all His works

Paul said in Ephesians 2:5-6: “...[God] *made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together,*

*and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* Consider this question: where are we today? Are we on the earth? Or are we in the heavens? Both! We are here on this earth, but the Lord Jesus is seated in the heavens; and we also are seated with Christ in the heavens. How can this be? This is only possible if we have been joined to Christ through the Holy Spirit. If we are not joined to Him, how could we have died, resurrected, and ascended together with Him? There is no other way except by the living faith and baptism into Jesus Christ. The verses in Romans 6:3-6 show us that our union with Christ comes through baptism. This is our salvation. We can see how important it is to be baptized. Thus, the Lord spoke in Mark 16:16a, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”*

### *The Powers of Satan and Darkness Destroyed*

Through God’s divine intervention, Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in the Red Sea. Seeing God’s great work in destroying their enemy, the Israelites broke into joyful songs of praise and thanksgiving to God on the other side of the Red Sea. What a wonderful result of crossing the Red Sea! This is a picture of our experience of baptism today. When you are baptized, the powers of Satan and darkness are destroyed just as Pharaoh and his armies were destroyed. They can no longer pursue you. When you are baptized, not only do you enter into Christ and are joined to Him, but at the same time you will also experience that God has already judged and destroyed Satan together with the power of darkness and death through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Hebrews 2:14 says: *“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power over death, that is the devil.”* Praise the Lord!

This must be everyone’s subjective experience of baptism. When Satan comes to attack you, you must touch the reality of baptism in your spirit. You must boldly proclaim to the devil and the power of



darkness, “You have already been judged and destroyed by Christ’s death on the cross; and I am now joined unto Christ. From now on, you have nothing to do with me anymore!” The powers of darkness will flee from you when you proclaim this. We are more than conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37)! You must learn to stand upon this reality of baptism; then Satan and his forces are rendered powerless. Paul says in Colossians 1:13, “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed (transferred) us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*” What a baptism we have!

## **2. Crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 3 & 4)**

Now let us consider the next example of baptism - the Israelites’ crossing of the Jordan River. The Israelites had already crossed one body of water, the Red Sea, where God destroyed Pharaoh and his army, signifying God’s judgment on Satan and the entire power of darkness at the time of our baptism. Why then was there still a need for a second crossing - the crossing of the Jordan? Physically, the Israelites already came out of Egypt, yet the Egyptian customs, ways, and tastes were still ingrained in them. Subsequently, during their journey in the wilderness, they continually murmured against Moses, indulged in the lust of their flesh, worshiped their idols, and rebelled against God. They even refused to enter into the Promised Land. As a result, they wandered around in the wilderness for forty years! Their condition parallels the condition of many believers today. Though we have believed in Jesus Christ and have received eternal salvation, we still live according to our flesh, our fallen natural man, and our self. We continually sin and rebel against God. But God’s work is very thorough which is evident in the second picture of baptism: the crossing of the Jordan. This picture shows us how baptism goes further to also deal with our “self”, our flesh and our fallen, natural man.

The entire old rebellious generation that came out of Egypt save two died in the wilderness, but the new generation crossed over the Jordan to enter into the good land, according to the way ordained

by God. When the feet of the priests who held the ark stepped into the Jordan, the waters, which came down from upstream stood still. The priests then stood firmly on the dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all of Israel crossed the river. God commanded Joshua to appoint one man from each of the twelve tribes to take a stone from the midst of the Jordan where the priests were and carry it out of the river over to the place where they were to lodge. Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan where the priests who bore the ark stood. After the priests with the ark had also crossed the Jordan, the waters came and buried the twelve stones that God commanded Joshua to put in the Jordan. This passage of the Bible is very meaningful for us today.

### *I Have Been Crucified with Christ*

The stones that Joshua placed in the midst of the Jordan represent our self, our flesh, and the entire fallen, old creation. They have been buried in the Jordan River! Romans 6:6 tells us that our “*old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*” When we enter into the water of baptism, our old self is buried there; and when we come out of the water, we emerge as a new man - signified by the twelve stones the Israelites carried out of the Jordan. Paul writes in Romans 6:4, “*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” Since our old man has been buried through baptism, we can now walk in the newness of life! By being baptized into Christ, we are a new creation: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17). The old life has been done away with; in Christ we are brought forth as a new creation! Going forward we no longer live our old life; now it is Christ who lives in us: “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I*

*now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).*

Now when Satan comes to tempt you, or to condemn you because of your failures, or when you feel weak in yourself, you must proclaim to Satan, to yourself, and to God: “My old man has been crucified with Christ! I have been baptized! Christ now lives in me!” Galatians 5:24 says: “*And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*” Hallelujah! Please remember that the reality of this fact is in the Spirit! For this reason it is so important for us to be baptized into Christ and to learn to walk in the spirit daily.

The Israelites crossed through the waters twice - first, through the Red Sea and then through the Jordan River. For this reason, the Israelites are also called *Hebrews*, which means “river-crossers”. We who believe in Christ and were baptized into Christ Jesus have crossed over or “*passed from death into life*” (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14) and have turned “*from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*” (Acts 26:18). Our old man and the old creation were buried with Him, and “*behold, all things have become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17b). Therefore, through one baptism, we also have crossed through the two waters! God has judged Satan and the world; He has also dealt with our old self and the flesh! In resurrection, God brought forth the new man; henceforth we should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

### **3. Noah’s Passing through the Flood in the Ark (Genesis 7)**

In the days of Noah, God saw man’s wickedness, corruption and violence on the earth. So God decided to judge and destroy all the evil on the earth through a great flood. “*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD*” (Gen. 6:8). God commanded Noah to build an ark exactly according to His instructions. Only Noah and his family (8 souls) were saved from God’s judgment by entering into the ark. What does this have to do with us today? Peter likens

baptism to Noah's salvation in the ark (see 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Just as Noah and his family were once saved from the flood because they were in the ark, so we will also be saved from God's coming judgment if we daily live in the reality of baptism.

Today we are living at a time in which Jesus Christ will soon return to this earth. The Holy Scriptures show us that when Christ returns, God's judgment will come upon the entire world. That time is very near! But what are people doing with their lives today? Most things revolve around eating and drinking, family and work, having a good time and enjoying life. This was exactly the same case in the days of Noah: *"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be"* (Matt. 24:37-39).

When the Lord Jesus comes again, God will judge the earth just as He did in the days of Noah. Right before He returns is the great day of God's wrath, a period which spans three and a half years, where God will judge the entire world (Rev. 6:17). As in the days of Noah, our salvation today from the coming judgment depends on our entering into the ark - entering into Christ and *His* church. This occurs through the reality (not the ritual) of baptism. Our living faith and our baptism into Christ lay the foundation for our salvation from the great day of God's wrath, which will come swiftly over the earth. Based on the reality of baptism, henceforth we must learn to live by Christ every day and prepare for the second coming of the Lord. If we do this, we will be spared from God's coming judgment just as Noah and his family once were.

## **Delay not – Be Baptized Now!**

We have now seen baptism portrayed through the Red Sea, the Jordan River and the ark, as clear and powerful examples of why we must be baptized. Through baptism, we enter into a marvelous union with Christ. John 14:20 is a precious word regarding this union: *“At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”* Such a union is so mysterious, yet so marvelous. It is clear that when we receive Christ into our hearts through faith, baptism must quickly follow in order for us to enter into Christ through that same faith. Thus, baptism is a necessity!

## **Repentance and Baptism**

When Peter first preached the gospel, the people of Jerusalem asked the apostle: *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). Peter answered them: *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). As soon as the people had repented of their sins, they were baptized without delay: *“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”* (Acts 2:41).

## **Peter at Cornelius’ House**

Some time later, God sent Peter to a Roman centurion, Cornelius, to declare the good news of Jesus Christ to him, his relatives and friends. As Peter spoke, those gathered at Cornelius’s house also believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and received the Holy Spirit. Peter responded right away, saying: *“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?”* And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47-48a). Peter even commanded them to be baptized!

## **The Example of Paul at His Conversion**

When Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, the Lord appeared to him in a great bright light that shone all around him. Saul became blind and was led by hand to Damascus where he prayed and fasted for three days (Acts 9:3-18; 22:5-11). Then the Lord sent a devout man, Ananias, to lay hands on him, that he should receive his sight again. Immediately after he had received his sight, Ananias said to Saul: *“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16).

## **The Example of the Prison Keeper**

Acts 16:25-33 clearly illustrates that believing in Christ and being baptized into Christ belong together. When Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises unto God in prison at midnight, *“suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prisoners door open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’ Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They answered, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”* They did not even wait until morning! Believing in Christ and being baptized into Christ belong together like a pair of shoes - you need one together with the other to have a balanced walk.

## The Example of the Eunuch

Some people may not like to be watched by too many people. Do not delay your baptism because of this. There is no requirement in the Bible for a crowd to cheer during a baptism. The only people that need to be present are the person being baptized and the baptizer. Let us look at an example in Acts 8:26-40. There was an evangelist, Philip, who preached the gospel to a eunuch in a chariot going through the desert. They were the only two people in the chariot besides the coachman. Verse 36 says, *“Now as they were going down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’”* The eunuch did not ask, “May I believe?” He asked whether he could be baptized. Philip answered, *“If you believe with all your heart, you may...So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him”* (vv. 37-38). This clearly shows that baptism immediately follows faith in Jesus Christ, and that one needs not be baptized in front of many people. The main point is that you must enter into the reality of baptism. Do not procrastinate! When you are baptized, you will be filled with joy, *“and [the eunuch] went on his way rejoicing”* (v. 39b).

J.S.

*“... ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”* (Acts 2:38)