

The Form of Baptism

by John R. Rice

John R. Rice emphasizes that biblical baptism requires immersion in water, reflecting a burial and resurrection with Christ.

Scripture: John 3:23

Topics: "Baptism", "New Testament"

Description

John R. Rice emphasizes the importance of understanding the form of baptism as clearly outlined in the Bible. He highlights that true baptism requires water, much water, going down into the water, a burial in water, a resurrection from the water, and coming up straightway out of the water. Rice contrasts sprinkling and pouring with immersion, explaining that the Bible consistently portrays baptism as a burial and resurrection, not a mere symbolic act. He addresses misconceptions about baptism, urging believers to follow the biblical model of baptism as demonstrated by Jesus and taught in the New Testament.

Transcript

The form of baptism is very clear from the Bible. Let us notice the plain teaching of the Scripture about this matter.

1. The form of baptism requires WATER. John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize you with water" (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26,33). A Bible baptism requires water. The word translated with in the above verse is usually translated in. The meaning here is, "I baptize you in water," though the King James version does not make that clear. But certainly, Bible baptism requires water.

2. New Testament baptism requires MUCH WATER. John 3:23 says, "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there."

3. New Testament baptism requires a GOING DOWN INTO THE WATER. Acts 8:38 says: "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." We see why much water is required, for it should be enough water for both the one baptized and the person who performs this beautiful ceremony to go together down into the water.

4. The Bible requires a BURIAL IN WATER. We are told in Romans 6:4:

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The following verse, Romans 6:5, says that baptism is a planting. Colossians 2:12 again specifically states that baptism is a burial:

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

5. New Testament baptism requires next a RESURRECTION FROM THE WATER. That was taught in the above Scriptures and especially in Romans 6:5:

"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

6. The last element in New Testament baptism is COMING UP STRAIGHTWAY OUT OF THE WATER to meet the smile of a heavenly Father who is pleased, and to walk in the joy of the Holy Spirit who fills the obedient Christian. So it was when Jesus was baptized, as we are told in Matthew 3:16,17:

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, sang, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Bible baptism, then, requires (1) WATER, (2) MUCH WATER, (3) GOING DOWN INTO THE WATER, (4) A BURIAL IN THE WATER, (5) RESURRECTION FROM THE WATER, (6) COMING UP OUT OF THE WATER! If you would be baptized as Jesus was, baptized as He commanded us to be when He said about His own baptism, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," (Matthew 3:15), then plainly, dear child of God, here is the way !

SPRINKLING AND POURING ARE NOT BIBLE BAPTISM

Although the word sprinkle is used a number of times in the New Testament, it is never used about baptism. And the word which is translated baptize is never translated sprinkle in the entire New Testament. Sometimes people who use sprinkling instead of baptism, and can find no Scripture for it in the New Testament, turn to Ezekiel 36:25 as an evidence for sprinkling. That verse reads:

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you."

They make a mistake, however, in not reading the rest of the same passage. Now read it again, beginning at verse 22, reading through verse 28. Notice from verse 22 that the message is to the house of Israel who are scattered out among the heathen. Notice that verse 24 promises to Israel "For I will take you from among the heathen. and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land." The Lord here is promising the restoration of Israel to their own land at the second coming of Christ. Then follows God's word that on these children of Israel He will sprinkle clean water and cleanse them from their idols. Verse 26 then tells of the conversion of Israel when God will give them new hearts. Verse 28 says:

"And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers."

This passage is clearly addressed to the people of Israel who will be regathered at the second coming of Christ, into the land of Canaan which God gave to their fathers. It is not promised to Gentiles, nor to anybody during this church age, and is not a prophecy of baptism. This does not refer, then, to baptism, as

sprinkling nowhere else does.

But what did the Lord mean when He promises to sprinkle clean water on Israel? Just this: in the Old Testament ceremonial law, God commanded water of separation to be sprinkled on people for ceremonial cleansing. It was sprinkled on the Levites to separate them from the rest of Israel, in preparing them to work in the temple, as you see in Numbers 8:6,7.

"Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."

This water of separation, or water of cleansing, was to be sprinkled on the third and seventh day on people who became ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body. (Numbers 19:11-22). That water was also to be sprinkled upon the tent, upon all the vessels, as well as upon people, as you see from Numbers 19:18.

"Clean water" in these passages means not simply clear water, but water which is ceremonially clean. Actually it was not clear water, but as you see from Numbers 19:17, it was water and the ashes of a burnt red heifer, mixed together. God will make Israel ceremonially clean when He leads them to their own land.

The Bible foretells that many ceremonial laws will be restored among Israel when Jesus returns and sits on the throne of David at Jerusalem. The feast of tabernacles is an example (Zech. 14:16). Ezekiel, chapters 40 to 46, tells about the temple, the priesthood, and the offerings in that kingdom age. The Bible does not mention baptism in that time.

Notice from that passage in Ezekiel 36:22-28 that in any case they will be regathered first, then sprinkled with clean water (or the water of separation which all Israel understood) and then be converted, be given a new heart! That is not the order with baptism, for in the Bible, baptism always comes after conversion, not before it. Neither this Scripture, nor any other in the Bible uses sprinkling in connection with baptism. Sometimes marginal references on baptism point to this Scripture in Ezekiel. Remember that all the marginal references in the Bible are put in there by men, and are not a part of the inspired Word of God. Where those references were written by men who practice sprinkling, naturally they try to point to some verse to teach sprinkling.

WHAT ABOUT THE BAPTISM AND THE POURING OUT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Peter in Acts 2:16-18 said that was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel where God said, "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." It is reasonable for one to ask, then, if the pouring out of God's Spirit could bring about a baptism of the Spirit, why could not pouring water bring about baptism with water ? The answer is of course, that God poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples at Pentecost until they were completely covered as well as filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit completely surrounded them. (In Acts 5:15 people seem to have been healed by Peter's simply passing by them.) So people might be baptized by pouring if enough water were poured on them to make it a burial, which baptism is, as the Lord plainly says in Romans 6:4,5 and Colossians 2:12. However, since in Bible baptism they went down into the water to be baptized, and were buried, it is clear that they did not pour water on people until they were covered up. The difference is, of course, that the Holy Spirit was in Heaven with the Father and was sent down upon the people to cover and fill them, while water is not. The Bible very clearly shows the form of baptism, and no spoonful of

water nor a glassful of water on the head can picture a burial and resurrection, as the Bible says baptism does.

WAS JESUS SPRINKLED, STANDING IN THE JORDAN RIVER?

Jesus certainly went down into the water of the Jordan River when He was baptized. Mark 1:9-10 says:

"And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him."

Jesus was baptized IN JORDAN and came straightway up out of the water. Sometimes Our Methodist and Presbyterian friends teach that Jesus stood in the water of the Jordan River and that John poured, or sprinkled, water on His head. However, the Bible says nothing of the kind. If preachers are really sincere in teaching that Jesus went down into the water of the Jordan River and was sprinkled, or that Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip sprinkled the eunuch, then why do they not baptize that way ? Why do not Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopalian and Lutheran preachers lead people down into the water before they sprinkle them? They surely know that Jesus, when He was baptized, taught us to do it the same way, for He said: "THUS" (this way) "it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." The only answer they can make is that they do not think the form matters, just so it suits the person who is to be baptized.

Another thing which shows the insincerity of those who sprinkle is that they preach against immersion, say that it is not taught in the Bible, AND YET WILL BAPTIZE BY IMMERSION ANYONE WHO INSISTS UPON IT, if they cannot get them for church membership any other way! There is only one form of baptism, as the Lord says in Ephesians 4:5. Jesus was not baptized three ways that day in the River Jordan! He said for us to be baptized "thus," that is, as He was. Some will say, "Well, I think any form of baptism will do, just so it satisfies your own conscience." No, dear friend, a "good conscience" will be one that wants to follow the Word of God and do exactly what Jesus said. If we do not do it as He said, it will not have the meaning which He gave. We are to please the Lord Jesus, not ourselves, nor others.

Great Bible scholars of all faiths, Protestants and Catholics, agree that baptism in Bible times was by immersion, was a burial. However, many preachers who have been content to follow the traditions of men instead of the Bible, say, "Well, the form of baptism doesn't especially matter, anyway," and so deceive the people. This book is not written to defend any denomination. I am simply urging people to come back to God's way and follow the Bible instead of the traditions of men. The Scripture repeats twice that we are buried with Christ in baptism, so that we may know that the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan was a burial.

THE WORD "BAPTIZE" MEANS IMMERSE

If baptism is immersion, then why doesn't the Bible plainly say immerse? It does! The word baptize means exactly that. The reason it was not translated immerse is that the word was not translated at all! as you will see in the next chapter. When the King James version of the Bible was translated, in 1611, to translate the word baptize, giving its literal meaning, immerse, would have caused great embarrassment and confusion to the Church of England. Remember that the Episcopalian church was then, and is now, supported and its ministry controlled, in England, by the government. So King James instructed the translators, in such cases, not to translate the word, but to simply spell it with English letters and let it go. So baptizo, the

Greek word spelled with Greek letters, was simply spelled baptize in English letters. The word baptize was never heard of as an English word before it was so translated. There had been very little circulation of the Scriptures among the common people before the King James translation, since scholars read the Scriptures in Latin, or in Hebrew, or in Greek. When the Revised Version and other modern translations were made, baptism had become such an issue that no interdenominational group of translators could agree on how to translate it, so the word was left as it is, baptize.

However, the people who, even today, speak the Greek language know the meaning of the word and have always baptized by immersion. Greek or Orthodox Catholics have never used anything but immersion. How could they when the word, in everyday use, means immersion?

SCRIPTURES UNANIMOUS ON IMMERSION FOR BAPTISM

Everywhere I go, I find many earnest Christians who are amazed to see how they have been misled on the matter of baptism. In a Louisiana town a young woman, a bank clerk, a devout Methodist girl, came to me and said: "Brother Rice, will you give me some of the Scriptures which teach sprinkling for baptism? It is strange, but all the Scriptures I happen to know about baptism seem to teach immersion. Methodists baptize either way but I do not happen to remember the Scriptures which teach sprinkling."

I was somewhat embarrassed, and I feared she would not believe me if I told her there were no Scriptures teaching sprinkling for baptism. So I said instead, "Suppose we get my big concordance and look up every verse in the Bible which mentions baptizing, baptism, or baptized." So we got the book before us and began. She was amazed that there was no mention of baptism in the Old Testament. We read through every verse referring to baptism, and when I looked up, her face was as white as death.

"Brother Rice," she said, "somebody has misled me. I trusted them, I thought they knew the Bible and had Scripture for everything they did. I have been deceived." Breaking into tears, she ran into her room and lay across her bed sobbing. I was a guest in the home and that night she did not come to supper. But that night she brought extra clothes to the service and at the close, with others, she followed her Lord in baptism. The cry of that poor, misled girl who followed tradition, who had faith in men, is with me today. People have a right to know the truth as to what God's Word teaches about baptism.

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