

BAPTISM



INTRODUCTION

Kumbh Mela is a mass pilgrimage of faith in which around 100 million Hindus gather over the course of a 55-day celebration to bathe at the juncture of rivers they consider to be sacred; the Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati. To put this in perspective, this gathering is the equivalent of one-third of the United States population traveling to bathe in the Mississippi River in a town one-tenth the size of St. Louis. This festival is the largest gathering of human beings on earth. Hindus believe that bathing in these rivers cleanses one of all sins. Ironically, Hindus who wash in the Ganges River for spiritual cleansing are bathing in one of the top five most polluted rivers on the planet. They seek ultimate cleansing from one of the filthiest places in the world.

What can wash away my sin?

Every human being must face the question posed by an old hymn, "What can wash away my sin?" The person whose eyes have been opened to recognize his or her own sin and the sacrifice of Jesus to pay for that sin, answers this question in a way distinct from all the rest of humanity. "Nothing," we say. "Nothing but the blood of Jesus," cry those who understand the gravity of their sin before a holy God. Baptism is the believer's proclamation of faith. It is the outward expression of an inward belief. Once a person believes in Jesus Christ, baptism is the demonstration that they have entered into the kingdom of God; into a relationship with Jesus as savior and king.

The purpose of this study is to examine what the scripture teaches about baptism.

- *What do you currently understand about baptism?*
- *Were you baptized as a child?*
- *Have you ever seen a Christian baptism?*

JESUS COMMANDED HIS FOLLOWERS TO BAPTIZE THOSE WHO BELIEVED.

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

Shortly after rising from the dead, proving He is the promised Messiah, Jesus gave His followers these instructions as the marching orders for the Jesus movement called the church.

- *Why do you think Jesus stressed His authority in this commandment? What does "all authority" mean?*
- *What three things did Jesus command His disciples to do in these verses?*
- *How do you baptism sets a foundation of obedience in the life of a new Christian?*

THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WAS TO BAPTIZE ANY AND ALL WHO BELIEVED.

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 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 16:25-33

The book of Acts is full of examples of people being baptized. Whenever a person became a Christian, as recorded in Acts, he or she was immediately baptized. See also Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12-13 and Acts 8:35-38. We believe that this section above reveals that baptism is separate from salvation but is intricately linked

to salvation as the demonstration of one's faith. In other words, simply being baptized, without having faith in Jesus, is not what gives salvation. We are saved through our belief in the work of Jesus on the cross. Paul's summary of the gospel, spoken to the jailer, was "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The jailer did believe. Therefore, Paul immediately baptized him.

- *What is necessary for salvation?*
- *Why do you think this man was so eager to be baptized?*



**BAPTISM IS A FORM OF IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST.
BOTH WITH HIS SUFFERING ON OUR BEHALF AND HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD.**

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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 6:3-4

Jesus accomplished ALL through His death and resurrection. Since the wages of sin is death, Jesus died in our place. He was then buried in a tomb to rise again on the third day. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven to stand before the Judge of the universe, God Almighty, in order to show that He had completely triumphed over sin and death, vindicating us before God.

When we hear the good news of Jesus and believe it, we are transferred out of the worldly kingdom into Jesus' kingdom. We shift out of death into life. We are engrafted into God's family. We are now IN CHRIST.

Being IN CHRIST brings with it all the benefits that God has to give. Being IN CHRIST is what causes us to change; to become new.

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”
2 Corinthians 5:17*

Get this. Romans 6:3-4 teaches that just as Jesus died, when we believe our old self dies. And just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we gain a new nature. We become a new creation, “...that we too may live a new life!”

Baptism communicates that what Jesus did for us on the cross, God has also done in us upon believing. It is a symbol of the death of our old self and the creation of our new life in Christ. Just as Jesus was condemned, killed and buried, God has condemned our old selfish nature. He effectively put it to death; burying it through baptism. In the same way that Jesus rose again, by believing, we are united with Christ; resurrected with a new self to a new life.

This is called union with Christ. This can be understood in the covenant of marriage. When a man and woman marry, they enter into a covenant with each other, exchanging a ring as a symbol of their covenant. In the same way, being united with Christ through faith brings us into covenant relationship with Him. Baptism is the symbol of that covenant; the ring of the relationship with God.

BAPTISM IS THE VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF A CHANGED HEART THAT HAS RECEIVED THE OFFER OF FORGIVENESS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.

*“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 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. 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 2:37-39*

Our view on baptism is that it is intended for people who have come to faith, whether adults or children, as this verse indicates, but old enough to have believed. We hold to this because baptism is associated in this section with the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit, both of which occur when we believe, not when we are infant-baptized. According to verse 38, salvation requires repentance on our part, something an infant cannot have.

As for infants, our practice is what is called infant dedication, a declaration of the parents' intent to bring up their child in the ways of the Lord, but without baptism being part of this dedication. We believe this is the best way to avoid confusing an individual who believes, later in life, as to whether or not they should proceed with baptism.



BAPTISM IS ALSO A SEPARATION FROM OUR PREVIOUS LIFE OF INDEPENDENCE FROM GOD. AND IN THIS SENSE. IT SAVES US FROM THE ENSNARING NATURE OF SIN.

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God...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 symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 3:20-21

We do not believe baptism saves a person eternally, in and of itself. We believe, in accordance with Acts 16:31, that we are saved through repentance and faith; turning from our old life to what Christ has done on the cross. However, in a different sense, baptism does save us, as this scripture teaches us.

- *In what sense did the waters of the flood save Noah and his family?*
- *In what ways can you imagine baptism as a practical means of making a break with our previous life of independence from God?*
- *How does obeying God through baptism affect our conscience, according to this section?*

Baptism saves us, but not by cleansing us from our sin and making us new. That happens when we believe in Jesus. However, baptism does save us in a different sense. It doesn't save us eternally, but it does save us from living as if Jesus didn't die for us. It helps us make a break from our old life.

It is this break from our old life, through God's power to transform us internally, that demonstrates to an unbelieving world that the gospel is true. This change of life will always be imperfect. As it says in James, "we all stumble in many ways." (James 3:2) We will never arrive, but we can be a demonstration to those on the outside of faith to notice how different we are from who we used to be. Even a man who made himself an enemy of Christianity in the third century, a man named Porphyry, was amazed at the changed lives of believers.

"For we are surprised and truly perplexed in mind at such things, if a man, when once he is washed from so many defilements and pollutions, shows himself to be pure; if by wiping off the stains of so much weakness in his life, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, theft, unnatural vice, poisoning, and countless base and disgusting things, and simply by being baptized and calling on the name of Christ, he is quite easily freed from them, and puts off the whole of his guilt just as a snake puts off his old slough."

-Porphyry

SUMMARY

Baptism, then, is an act of proclaiming to God to the local church body, to ourselves and to the world our belief in Christ; our desire to follow God. As Jesus followers, we follow His example when we are baptized.

- *What do you now understand about baptism?*
- *Do you have any questions about baptism?*
- *Is there anything preventing you from being baptized?*