

Understanding Baptism: A Personal Study

Introduction

Understanding baptism is something that is important to everyone who wants to follow God. There are different views of baptism, but our hope in this study is that with both your Bible and your heart open, you will learn what the Bible teaches about baptism. No, you don't need to know Greek, you don't have to go to a seminary to study, and you don't have to be a rocket scientist. Jesus' teachings were for fishermen, soldiers, government workers, the intellectually elite – everyone! You *can* understand baptism and God's will for your life.

Some basic ground rules: As with all scripture, you can pull just about any scripture out of context and say that is the way things have to be. We are not going to do that in this study. In the section **Examples of Baptism** we will set the context of the scripture in a brief summary, scriptures will be listed, and straightforward questions will be asked afterwards. We also have sections on **Teachings on Baptism** and a brief study on **Understanding Faith and Grace**. And at the end of the study we have some additional questions for you to consider.

The New International Version scripture text is provided for your convenience, but we encourage you to use your Bible. You may want to write your answers down so that you can refer back to them later. Please feel free to use this for your personal study, or in a group Bible study.

Let's get started!

The elders

Examples of Baptism

Let's start by looking at several examples of baptism in the scriptures. We will begin with the book of Acts, which records the growth of the early church shortly after Jesus ascended to heaven.

Context: Peter is speaking to a large group of Jews from many countries who have gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, when the barley harvest was about to begin. There was a sound like a big blowing wind, the Holy Spirit appeared as flames over each of Jesus apostles, and the crowd heard them speaking in their own native languages. It has been seven weeks since Jesus was crucified. Through his teaching, Peter has explained to this Jewish audience that Jesus was the very Christ for whom they had been waiting.

Acts 2:36-41

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

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

³⁸ 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. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

- ☞ When the Jews learned that they had killed Jesus the Christ, how did they feel, and what did they ask? (verses 36-37)
- ☞ What did Peter tell them to do? (verse 38)
- ☞ What two things did Peter say would happen to the sins of the people when they repented and were baptized? (verse 38)
- ☞ How many of the people did Peter say should be baptized? (verse 38)
- ☞ Was this promise only for these people? (verse 39)
- ☞ What did those who listened to Peter do? (verse 41)
- ☞ How important was baptism to these people in terms of coming into a right relationship with God?

Context: Philip is in Samaria preaching the good news about Jesus. A boastful sorcerer named Simon encounters Philip.

Acts 8:9-13

⁹ Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰ and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.”

¹¹ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹² 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. ¹³ Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

- ☞ How much influence did Simon have over the people of Samaria? (verses 9-11)
- ☞ Did the people of Samaria change their belief in Simon and believe Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ? (verse 12)
- ☞ When they believed Philip's teaching about the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ, how did they respond? (verse 12)
- ☞ How did Simon respond to Philip's teaching? (verse 13)

Context: The church is growing and the message of Jesus is touching many lives. Followers of Jesus are being persecuted and scattered to many places. Yet those who were scattered continue to teach about Jesus wherever they go. An angel spoke to Philip, one of Jesus' followers, and the angel told him to go to the south road out of Jerusalem.

Acts 8:26-39

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

- ☞ Did the Ethiopian eunuch understand the scriptures? (verses 30-31)
- ☞ What did Philip do for the Ethiopian eunuch? (verse 35)
- ☞ Once the Ethiopian eunuch understood Jesus' teachings, what did he want to do? (verse 36).

- ☞ What orders did the Ethiopian eunuch give? (verse 38)
 - ☞ Did the Philip sprinkle the Ethiopian eunuch with water, or did they go down into the water and then come up out of the water? (verses 38-39)
 - ☞ Did the Ethiopian eunuch rejoice about his following Jesus teachings before he was baptized or after? (verse 39)
- 🔍 Is baptism just an empty act of someone getting in water, or must it be based on an understanding of Jesus' teachings?

Context: Paul has been teaching about Jesus in Jerusalem. Some Jews from the province of Asia stir up the crowd and Paul is beaten. Roman soldiers intervene, arrest Paul, and bind him with chains. Paul speaks with the Roman commander and asks for permission to speak in his own defense. The commander gives him permission, and Paul tells the crowd of his conversion experience.

Acts 22:1-16

¹“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

²When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

⁸“ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰“ ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹²“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴“Then he said: ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

- ☞ Who spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus? (verse 8)
- ☞ What did Jesus say that Paul should do? (verse 10)
- ☞ Who came to speak to Paul in Damascus? (verse 12)
- ☞ After restoring Paul's sight, what did Ananias tell Paul to do to wash his sins away? (verse 16)

Review

When Peter preached in Jerusalem, what two things did he tell the people to do? (Acts 2:38)

What two things did Peter say the people would receive? (Acts 2:38)

What did Philip need to do for the Ethiopian eunuch? (Acts 8:30-31, 35)

Once the eunuch heard the good news about Jesus what did he do? (Acts 8:36-38)

What did Philip do for the people of Samaria? (Acts 8:12)

What did the people and Simon do after hearing the good news of Jesus? (Acts 8:12-13)

What did Ananias tell Paul to do to wash away his sins? (Acts 22:16)

Based on what you have read in these first three passages, which one of the following are the steps leading to forgiveness of sins?

- Teaching, hearing, forgiveness, believing, baptism, repenting.
- Forgiveness, hearing, teaching, baptism, believing, repenting.
- Teaching, hearing, believing, repenting, baptism, forgiveness.
- Teaching, hearing, believing, forgiveness, repenting, baptism.
- Believing, forgiveness, teaching, hearing, repenting, baptism.

Teachings on Baptism

Now let's study some teachings on baptism as found in Acts, Romans, and in the book of Matthew.

Acts 13:24

²⁴ Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

- ☞ What was it that John preached to Israel?
- ☞ Was the concept of baptism new to the Jews when Jesus started teaching, or was baptism taught before the coming of Jesus?

Acts 18:24-26

²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

- ☞ Was Apollos an enthusiastic and intelligent person who studied his Bible? (verse 24)
 - ☞ Did Apollos teach accurately about Jesus? (verse 25)
 - ☞ Did Apollos have a complete understanding of baptism as Jesus taught it? (verse 25)
 - ☞ What did Priscilla and Aquila do? (verse 26)
- 🔍 Is it possible to misunderstand or have an incomplete understanding of the teachings about baptism today? How important is it for us to have a full and correct understanding of baptism?

Acts 19:4-5

⁴ Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

- ☞ What was the focus of John's baptism? (verse 4)
- ☞ Once these people understood the difference between John's baptism and Jesus' teaching on baptism, what did they do? (verse 5)

Romans 6:2-7

² We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ 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.

⁵ If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

- ☞ As Christians, to what have we died? (verse 2)
- ☞ Who was “baptized into his death”? (verse 3)
- ☞ How do we get “into Christ Jesus”? (verse 3)
- ☞ How are we “buried with him”? (verse 4)
- ☞ What is the condition for us to “be united with him in his resurrection”? (verse 5)
- ☞ What does “like this” mean in verse 5?
- ☞ What part of us is crucified when we die and are buried in this way? (verse 6)
- ☞ What does this death do for us with regards to sin? (verse 7)

🔍 According to this passage our death to sin, burial in baptism, and walking a new life parallels Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Let's look at the parallel and how Jesus taught us through his actions.

Jesus	Us
He died on the cross.	We die to our old sinful self.
He was buried in the tomb.	We are buried in baptism.
He rose from the tomb to live again.	We rise from being buried in water to walk a new life.

🔍 Understanding this, does the sequence of death, resurrection, and burial agree with what the scriptures teach? Or looking at it another way, would it agree with scripture for us to die to our old self, begin walking a new life, and *then* be buried? Does baptism come *before* rising to walk a new life, or *after*?

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- ☞ Who was with Jesus in this passage? (verse 16)
- ☞ How much authority has been given to Jesus? (verse 18)

- ☞ What did Jesus tell these disciples to do? (verse 19)
- ☞ What did Jesus tell these disciples to teach? (verse 20)

🔍 Since Jesus is the sole authority and he has asked us to obey all of his teachings, how should we approach teachings from men that are different or incomplete with regards to Jesus' teachings?

Review

Which teaching on baptism are we to follow, John's teaching of a baptism of repentance, or Jesus' teaching on baptism being a death to our old sinful nature? (Acts 13:24, Acts 19:4-5, Romans 6:6)

Why is it important to have a clear understanding of baptism? (Acts 18:24-26)

How should our baptism parallel Jesus' death? (Romans 6:2-7)

When Jesus stated he had all authority, what did he tell his disciples to do and to teach? (Matthew 28:16-20)

Based on what you have studied in these passages, which of these is the correct sequence?

- Resurrection, burial, death
- Death, resurrection, burial
- Death, burial, resurrection

Understanding Faith and Grace

So, is baptism a process of “getting our ticket punched” so that God owes us salvation? Let’s study some more so that we are clear on this, starting with a brief look at sin in our lives.

1 John 1:8-10

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

- ☞ Are we lying if we say that we have no sin in our lives?
- ☞ Who are we deceiving if we say we have no sin?

Romans 3:21-24

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

- ☞ From whom does righteousness come? (verse 21)
- ☞ In whom must we believe and have faith? (verse 22)
- ☞ Who has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? (verse 23)
- ☞ Through what are we justified freely? (verse 24)

Romans 6:23

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- ☞ What are the wages that we earn – the consequence of our sin?
- ☞ What is the gift of God?
- ☞ In whom is that eternal life found?

Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

☞ What does these passage tell us about our old way of life and what sin was doing to us? (verses 1-3)

☞ Why did God act to save us? (verse 4)

☞ By what are we saved? (verse 5 and verse 8)

☞ Is salvation something we earn, or is it a gift? (verse 8)

☞ Can we “work” our way to salvation? (verse 9)

🔍 If someone said to you “If you open this box, you can have the gift of \$1,000 inside”, would your opening the box make it any less a gift? Would you have earned the \$1,000? Is *obedience* the same thing as *earning* or *working*?

🔍 The passages above are important, especially when studying baptism. We have seen many examples of baptism and we studied teaching on baptism. Yet it is an act of faith in God and obedience to his teaching – we are wholly dependent on God’s grace to save us. Based on what you have studied, which of the following statements correctly states God’s teaching on baptism?

- Baptism is work, and once completed God owes me salvation – I have earned it.
- I can get “into Christ Jesus” without being baptized.
- Baptism is an act of faith and obedience to God’s teaching that puts me “in Christ Jesus” and it is through faith in God and his grace that I can enjoy the gift of eternal life.

Part of the Plan

Based on what you have studied so far, let's take a look at several scriptures which contain summary or partial statements about salvation. These are not incorrect teachings – by no means! But we must understand *all* of God's teachings and be careful not to base our understanding on individual passages.

Luke 13:3

³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

- ☞ If we were to consider only this passage in relation to our salvation, what would be the only thing we would need to do so that we do not perish?

Romans 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- ☞ If we were to consider this passage only, what two things would be necessary for salvation? (verses 9-10)
- ☞ Does this passage discuss the importance of repenting of our old way of life?
- ☞ Because this particular passage does not mention baptism, does that mean that the other teachings on baptism are not important?

John 3:16

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

- ☞ What one thing does this passage say is necessary for eternal life?
- ☞ Does this passage discuss repentance, confession, or baptism?
- ☞ Because this passage does not mention these components of God's plan for salvation, are they any less important or less required?
- 🔍 Why is it important for us to understand *all* of God's teaching for us? Is there any danger in not following *all* of what he has taught?

Some Questions to Consider

- ☞ If Jesus himself said that we are to be baptized (Matthew 28:16-20), and we are told that we are “baptized into Christ Jesus” in order to have eternal life (Romans 6:2-7), does that make baptism essential for salvation or optional?
- ☞ Read Titus 3:3-7. What does this passage say about the “washing of rebirth”?
- ☞ Read Luke 18:9-14. Looking carefully at verse 9 which discusses the purpose for this parable, and verse 14 which draws the lesson. Is this passage a teaching regarding the “sinner’s prayer” or is it a parable about arrogance before God?
- ☞ In any of the scriptures you have read, in this study or on your own, are there any examples in the Bible of anyone being saved by a sinner’s prayer, or are there teachings of the apostles or other New Testament writers instructing us in the use of the sinner’s prayer?
- ☞ Read Matthew 7:21-23. How important is it for us to actually obey God’s will? Will it be possible for someone to claim to have a relationship with Jesus, but be turned away by Jesus because they did not follow God’s will?
- ☞ Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4. What kind of prayers should we pray, and for whom should we pray (verse 1)? What kind of lives does God want us to lead (verse 2)? Does God want everyone to be saved and to understand the truth (verses 3-4)?

Final Thoughts

We hope that this study has helped you with your understanding of baptism. It is an important part of God’s word. There are clear examples and teaching regarding baptism. From here, we hope you will continue in your study of God’s word and what he wants for you in your life. If we can assist you or study with you, we encourage you to contact us at info@homeofthesoul.org.