

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

FOR WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURES ABOUT BAPTISM

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No religious subject provokes more controversy than baptism. Feelings run deep, and with many, there is no room for discussion. This controversy is not due to a lack of bible teaching, for the bible has much to say about the subject. The problem seems to be a failure on the part of many to properly apply bible teaching.

One such area of misunderstanding is brought about by a failure to distinguish between the different baptisms of the bible. In the New Testament, we read of six baptisms. It should be noted that baptism is exclusively a New Testament word. If there are six baptisms mentioned, how do we harmonize that with the statement by Paul in Eph. 4:5 "there is one baptism?" This apparent problem is solved when we realize that of the six, four have already served their purpose, one is yet future, and one "the one" is currently in force.

SIX BAPTISMS

I. The baptism Moses. The account of this baptism is recorded in Exodus 14:5-30. New Testament mention is made in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. In these verses Paul affirms that 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. This was a historical event. It happened only once. Today we have no relationship to it, except in a typical way. In verse eleven Paul stated that "it happened unto them for ensamples," or by way of example. The idea is that these people were baptized into the covenant of which Moses was the mediator and thus brought under obligation to keep the precepts of that covenant. Today we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Since this is a typical baptism, it could not be the one commanded by Christ or the one spoken of by Paul in Eph. 4:5.

II. The Baptism of John. The baptism of John is recorded in Matthew 3:1-11. John prepared the people for the coming of Jesus (Luke 1:17). Israel was in great wickedness when John came, hence the necessity for someone to come and make the people ready for Jesus. John's mission as well as his baptism was preparatory in nature. The baptism of John differed from the baptism commanded by Jesus in that those baptized by John had to believe on Him (Jesus) that was to come, whereas those baptized by Christian baptism had to confess their faith in Christ (Acts 8:36-38), who had already come. After the great commission was given, people were baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:18-20). John never baptized in this name. John's baptism was for Jews only. Not so with Christian baptism, it was for all men (Mark 16:15-16). A study of Acts 19:1-5 makes it clear that John's baptism is not in force today, since Christ has come. Thus we may conclude that John's baptism became invalid after the death of Christ.

III. The Baptism of Suffering. We read of this in Matthew 20:22-23. Jesus often referred to his future sufferings as a baptism i.e. a burial or immersion in those sufferings. This is a figurative baptism in that it is a reference to the pain and anguish with which Christ was overcome (submerged) when he died on the cross for our sins. It should be noted here that the word baptism literally means to bury, submerge, immerse, or cover up. Even when used in a figurative way, the idea of a burial or covering up is still present. Thus we can say that Christ was buried or baptized in suffering. This, however, cannot be the baptism commanded all men by Christ.

IV. The Baptism of Fire. In Mt.3:11 we read "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." John was speaking to a mixed multitude, some of whom would later become the disciples of Christ and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others would reject the Messiah and be baptized with fire. Hence they were called a generation of vipers in v.7. The baptism of fire, therefore, refers to the punishment awaiting those who reject Christ. It is the final abode of the wicked in "hell fire." It is being cast into everlasting fire (Mt.25:41). It is to be cast "into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10).

The baptism of fire is yet future, has yet to be fulfilled (Mt.13:41-42).

V. The Baptism of The Holy Spirit. In this same verse (Mt.3:11), Jesus promised to baptize some with the Holy Spirit. To whom did Christ make this Promise? The answer is found in John 14:16-17 and John 16:3. In both passages, it is clear that the apostles were the ones to whom the promise was made. God had said in Joel 2:28 "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." There are only two kinds of flesh--Jew and Gentile. In Acts 2:1-4 we have an account of the Spirit being poured out on the Jews (Apostles) on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 10:44-48, we have the account of the Spirit being poured out on the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. It should be noted that the baptism of the Spirit was a promise and not a command. No one was ever commanded to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and only certain ones received the promise. Today there is but one baptism and it is not Holy Spirit baptism. On Pentecost Peter witnessed two baptisms, the Holy Spirit baptism on the Apostles, and water baptism on the 3000 converts (Acts 2:1-4 and 38-41). This was in A.D. 33. In about A.D. 44, Peter also witnessed two baptisms in the house of Cornelius Acts 10:44-48. But in A.D. 64, Paul wrote that there is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). When Paul so wrote, the Holy Spirit baptism had served its purpose and passed away.

VI. Christian Baptism or Baptism of the Great Commission. That leaves us with one baptism to discuss. None of the five we have studied thus far are the baptism with which are to be baptized today. Yet there is a baptism for people today (Mt.28:18-20 and Mk 16:15-16). In the work of the Apostles and inspired men of the Apostolic age, we find that

they labored under the great commission and baptized people in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38 and Acts 8:36-37).

The act of baptism required water according to Acts 8:37. How much water? Enough to go down into. Enough to bury a man. Enough to come up out of. It is evident that sprinkling or pouring were not modes of baptism in New Testament times. When one is baptized, the bible refers to it as a burial, a planting, having the body washed (Romans 6:3-4, Col.2:12, Heb. 10:22 and 1Peter 3:21).

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

In order to be baptized, one must be properly taught. Infants are not fit subjects for baptism. Jesus said "go teach all nations" (Mt.28:18-20). One must have an understanding of what is required before they can be acceptably baptized. In addition the bible teaches that one must believe (Mark 16:16) Repent (Luke 13:3) and Confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10 and Acts 8:37-38). When these requirements have been met, the subject is ready for baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

WHY SHOULD ONE BE BAPTIZED?

The bible lists a number of reasons why one should be baptized. Consider the following:

1. To obey the Lord. Acts 10:48
2. To be born again and become a child of God. John 3:5; 2Cor. 5:17
3. To be saved in Christ. Mk 16:16; 1Peter 3:21.
4. For the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38.
5. To wash away sins. Acts 22:16.
6. To obey the gospel. Rom. 10:16; 1Peter 4:17; 2Thess. 1:6-9.
7. To become a member of the church or the body of Christ. 1Cor.12:13.

If you have not been baptized, why not do so today?