

BAPTISM

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THE BEREAN PUBLISHING TRUST
52A WILSON STREET, LONDON EC2A 2ER
ENGLAND

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ISBN 0 85156 131 4

Revised edition	1989
Reprinted	1995

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On Reading the Bible
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The Lord Jesus Christ, God or only Man?
The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul
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Let us consider the teaching of the Word of God concerning Baptism. From the standpoint of some of our friends in the Baptist denomination, this would be quite a simple subject, for they would tell us that when a person comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, the next thing he ought to do is to be immersed in water. They will assure us that this was done in apostolic times and it is what believers should do today. The reasons usually brought forward are one or more of the following. The newly saved person would be told that water baptism is a seal of believers, or it is a sign to unbelievers, or it takes the place of circumcision, or it is a confession of Christ, or it is the initiatory ordinance of Christianity, or it is the putting on of the uniform of a Christian, or it is a means of grace, or it brings the believer under God's covenanted mercy. Some will say the Lord Jesus Christ was baptised, therefore every believer should be baptised too. We wonder if some of those who use these arguments ever consider what they are saying in the light of the Word of God? The Lord Jesus Christ was circumcised; does that mean that every believer today should follow Him as an example in this respect? The Lord Jesus Christ attended the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day. Is every professing Christian to do this too? The Lord kept the feasts of Leviticus. He kept the Passover. Have we to do that because He did it? No; we shall find that these arguments, though outwardly appearing impressive, are not Scriptural. We must be very careful when we say the Lord did a certain thing and we therefore ought to copy Him. The reasons urged above for water baptism are seldom backed up by the Word of God.

Let us come afresh to the Scriptures and see what they actually do teach on this subject. First and foremost baptism is not exclusively a New Testament doctrine; it has its roots in the Old Testament. This is brought forward in the Epistle to the Hebrews chapter six. Here we have the things that have to be left by the progressive believer, if he is going on and growing up spiritually; going on to maturity, going on to perfection. Verse one reads "Therefore leaving the principles (the A.B.C., the elements, the rudiments, the **beginnings**) of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on" to full growth. Among the items to be left are these, "not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God, of the doctrine of **baptisms** ...". The reader will notice the plural is used, baptisms, washings, and it occurs again in chapter nine where the writer is dealing with the Tabernacle and its significance. The Tabernacle and the most holy place are referred to in verses seven and eight. Verse nine reads "Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect". "Perfect" and "perfection" are two key words in Hebrews. They mean **mature** and **maturity**. These sacrifices did not touch the conscience, but stood only in meats, (foods) drinks and divers baptisms (divers washings). The washings of the Old Testament, the washings of the priests, and of the parts of the sacrifices, are actually called "baptisms". The first occurrence of the word "baptism" in the Bible is found in the book of Job, and it occurs there in chapter 9:31 and is translated "plunge". We speak now of course of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and this was the version commonly used in the Lord's lifetime. It is also found in the book of Kings, when Naaman dipped (baptised) himself in Jordan. We read in Exodus 12 of the hyssop which was **dipped** (baptised) in blood, and also in Numbers where the same hyssop was **dipped** (baptised) in water. In the blessings of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 33, there is a rather strange reference concerning Asher, "let him **dip** his foot in oil"; "**dip**" is the word "baptise"; literally let him **baptise** his foot in oil. This is highly figurative language, meaning that Asher is going to be rich in oil and olives. So the washings of the Old Testament were **baptisms**, and the Epistle to the Hebrews urges us that these things must be left by the believer who wants to go on to maturity. In Old Testament times these washings represented internal cleanliness, but they only touched the outside. They could never touch the **mind** or the **conscience**, and that is why they have to be left by anyone who wants to grow up spiritually and leave babyhood behind.

Now when we come to the New Testament and consider baptism, we commence with John the Baptist. We call him “John the Baptist” rather than “John the Baptiser” because his position was unique. In the Old Testament the persons themselves did the baptising or washing. With the exception of Moses who consecrated Aaron, John the Baptist was the first person to baptise somebody else, and we are told in Scripture quite clearly why he baptised, and what the baptism was. We are not left to guess. Let us turn to the Gospel according to Mark. The first chapter, verse three reads “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. John did baptise in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of **repentance**”. This is the first thing stressed, together with forgiveness, the remission of sins. Forgiveness was linked with John’s baptism of repentance, and he called upon them that came to him to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, that is, external actions must prove that it was the real work inside. When Israel failed, they were called to repent and turn back to God. There had to be that change of heart and turning back to the Lord. Many times in the Old Testament we have that stressed, and here is the great climax. Their great King-Priest and Saviour came to them at last in the flesh. What a change there had to be in their hearts and lives! Repentance means a **change of mind**, and we must not confuse it with the word “penitence”, although it may lead to this. John’s baptism was linked with a change of heart and with the forgiveness of sins. Do we preach today that God forgives our sins by our being immersed in water? We do not if we are instructed in the Word of Truth rightly-divided. John’s baptism linked together the believing remnant of the people of Israel.

In the first chapter of John’s Gospel another reason is given and a very important one, and one that is usually ignored or passed over. The Pharisees came to him and in verse twenty five asked him “Why baptisest thou then if thou be not the Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?” Then verses 29-31 John points to the Lord and says “I knew Him not: but **that he should be made manifest to Israel**, therefore am I come baptising with water”. How many Baptists tell us that the Lord Jesus was baptised in water to **make Him manifest to His chosen people Israel**? That was the Divine reason given for the Lord’s baptism. So first of all we have the baptism of John the Baptist connected with repentance, and identification with the believing remnant of those who were saved, and also the public manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

In Matthew’s Gospel chapter three there is another baptism mentioned. Here the Baptist is saying “I indeed baptise 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 baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:**” or literally “baptised in Holy Spirit and with fire”. The fiery Holy Spirit is referred to in the second chapter of Acts verses two and three, it is linked with the promise of the Father in Acts 1:4: “And, being assembled together with them, (the Lord) commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised (literally, in) Holy Spirit not many days hence”. This is explained for us in the last chapter of Luke’s Gospel, the Lord again speaking to the eleven. In verse forty nine we read “I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with **power from on high**”. So power from on high is connected with this fiery Holy Spirit. What was this? **it was the powerful equipment of the twelve for the proclamation of the gospel and the earthly kingdom ministry accompanied with the miraculous gifts.** In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth he refers to the Holy Spirit giving these gifts and baptising them (uniting them) together. So 1 Corinthians 12:13 refers to being baptised in one spirit and although our version says “by one Spirit”, the Greek reads “in one Spirit”, and so sharing these gifts together as the Holy Spirit chose to distribute them. Thus we have a baptism that was yet to come after John the Baptist’s ministry. It was linked with the powerful endowment of the twelve for this earthly kingdom testimony by the Holy Spirit and we find it going all through the Acts of the Apostles accompanied by **evidential miracles.**

There is also Peter’s baptism. As Peter was divinely appointed and sent to the Jew, to the circumcision, we shall expect this to be in keeping, and so it is. Acts chapter two describes the day of Pentecost, and here is this man energised and guided by the Holy Spirit, so he is not making any mistakes. We read in Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptised every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins”. So his ministry was similar to John the Baptist’s. John preached baptism for the forgiveness of sins and so did the apostle Peter. This is in harmony with the Lord’s great statement in Mark 16 “He that believeth and is baptised, shall be

saved". We have no right to read this as "he that believeth shall be saved and ought to be baptised". This may raise problems in our minds, but we must first of all adjust our conceptions and our thoughts to what God has said, otherwise, we can never get truth.

We come now to another aspect of baptism quite different from the foregoing. In Luke 12:49 we read "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straightened (narrowed, held in, literally) till it be accomplished". What was this baptism? Obviously it was nothing to do with water. This was the death baptism of Calvary. The mother of Zebedee's children has asked that her sons should sit on the Lord's right hand in the Kingdom (Matt.20:21) but Jesus answered and said "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be **baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?** They say unto Him, we are able. And He saith unto them Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and **be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with**". This was a baptism of suffering and death. Little did they know what they were asking, and with one exception (namely John), all had to follow the Lord in martyrdom. Peter and Paul followed Him in this respect and so did the twelve apostles.

Let us sum up again; we have the washings, the baptisms of the Old Testament, contained in the ceremonial law of Moses. We have the water baptism of Israel, unto repentance linked with John the Baptist. We have the Spirit baptism of power and miraculous gifts, Pentecost and onwards, and the death baptism of Calvary of the Saviour with its suffering and shame. Now let us take another aspect of this subject. Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 10:1 "Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and were all **baptised unto Moses** in the cloud and in the sea", and most of us who face this carefully, notice this is a most unique baptism because, although they went through the water, **they were not touched by it**. They went through on **dry land** and there are at least four Scriptures which emphasise this. You will find them in Exodus 14:22; 15:19 and Psalm 66:6 and Hebrews 11:29, where each context tells us that Israel went through **dry shod**. Here is a **dry baptism**; the only ones that were immersed in water then were Pharaoh and his hosts. That was Divine judgment; they were drowned. For Israel it was a **dry baptism**. All were baptised **unto Moses** so one can have, as we have seen, quite a number of aspects of baptism that have nothing to do with water at all. What did this baptism do? **It united them with all that Moses stood for in Divine law and ceremonial** and that is the **first great underlying teaching of baptism**. It is so easy to go through some external rite and never understand what that rite is really meaning. Here the whole nation of Israel, redeemed and brought out of Egypt, is linked with all that Moses stood for in law and ceremony. Mark you, this is the **first baptism** in point of time in Scripture. The first occurrence of the **word** is in the book of Job. But the first baptism was Israel coming through the Red Sea miraculously, and they had a similar experience of passing through Jordan **on dry ground** as they entered the promised land at the end of the wilderness wanderings (see Josh. 3:13-17; 4:22). This is also rich in typical teaching.

What are we going to do with the Ministry of the apostle Paul on the subject of water baptism? He made a very definite statement when he wrote to the church of Corinth and said "**Christ sent me not to baptise** but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). We wonder what our Baptist friends would do with him today if he were alive. He would possibly be called a disobedient child of God, yet he insisted that Christ sent him not to baptise, so water baptism is not an essential part of the apostle Paul's ministry. Some would tell us that what they call "the great commission" of Matthew 28, discipling all nations, baptising them in the name of the Trinity, is what we ought to be doing now. But the apostle Paul could not have come under this ministry, otherwise he could never have said "Christ sent me **not** to baptise but to preach the gospel". There are three great portions in his Epistles which deal with this subject. One is in Galatians, chapter five, which teaches the Galatian churches that baptism has united them all together in Christ, so there is no more Jew or Gentile, they are all one in Christ Jesus. This is the unity which we have seen before that baptism symbolises. Then there is a very important one in the Epistle to the Romans in chapter six. Here we come to a very controversial passage of Scripture as to whether water baptism or Spirit baptism is meant. It needs weighing over very carefully. The more we do this the more we are convinced that the teaching of this passage could never be true of merely going through some external rite. Extraordinary things are said in this sixth chapter verse three, "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were **baptised into His death?**"

Does immersing anybody in water automatically baptise them into Christ? Assuredly not. Would an unbeliever who was being baptised in water be baptised into Christ? Certainly not. But these believers were baptised **into His death**. There is a great stress in this context of being linked with the Lord's death. Look at verse four "we are buried with Him by baptism unto death". The figure changes in verse five, "we have been planted together in the likeness of His death", and then it changes again in verse six, "we have been crucified". Our old man **was**, (not **is crucified** as in our English version) it was crucified **with Him**. That is to say, when the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, our old nature, the old man, was crucified then in God's plan and purpose. Now there is not the slightest doubt that this verse is taking us back to Calvary. Nobody could possibly teach with truth that when someone is immersed in water, at that moment their old nature was crucified with Christ. But when we take the whole of the context we see the great stress of the link of the believer with Christ in His death, in His burial, in His quickening, in His raising. Here you have something God has done, not what men choose to do. We cannot believe for one moment that when someone decides on a certain day, at a certain time, they will be baptised by a minister, at that moment when they choose to do it, all these things suddenly become true. These truths are only effectual when a sinner comes to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepts Him as his Saviour. Then what happens? He learns from Scripture that God has linked him with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death, His burial, His quickening and His raising. That is truth. Whether he goes through some rite to make it evident or not externally is quite another matter.

Coming along further, let us turn to the Epistle to the Ephesians chapter four. Some of us are rejoicing in the glories of this Ephesian Epistle and we know in chapter four, three great unities are stressed. Each of them is seven-fold; the unity of the Spirit; the unity of the faith; the unity of the Body. First of all unity of the Spirit which God has made. No believer is asked to make it or could make it. God has made it, and all we are asked to do is to guard it faithfully, and it is described for us in verse four. There is one Body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, Who is above all and through all and in you all". You see "one" is the important word stressed all the way through. There is **one baptism**. Now is this God's baptism or man's baptism? If you accept what God has said you cannot make it two baptisms. I know that some people try to do so, but if they do that why not have two bodies, or two Holy Spirits or two Lords or two Gods and Fathers? We have **one** God and Father, **one** Saviour, **one** Spirit and **we have only one baptism**. Now then which is it going to be of all we have already considered? The reality of the Spirit linking us with the Saviour, or the external type of water? Is it going to be the **shadow** or will it be the **substance**? This is what people who are exercised about what they call "believers baptism" have got to face. Ephesians stresses **one baptism**. This cannot be made into two, so we must choose which it is going to be out of all that we have seen in this study. Will it be the **reality** which God Himself accomplishes with each of His redeemed children, or is it going to be the external type of water immersion? Let us now turn to Colossians 2;12, "Buried with Him in baptism". This verse is often quoted by those who are trying to prove that a believer should be immersed in water. But consider the context. First of all please note the tremendous statement which ought to be the joy and rejoicing of every believer who belongs to the Body, the Fulness of Christ "For in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and **ye are complete in Him**" (verse 9). How many of God's children apprehend this for themselves? How many know that in Christ they are **complete** they are as the Greek says **filled full**; not partially filled so that something else can or should be added! One cannot have **degrees** of completeness. We are either complete in Christ or we are not. Now if we are complete in Him, nothing can be added to that completeness without spoiling it. If one rite or one type or shadow, or even all of them are added, then the glorious fact is being ignored that we are **all sufficient in everything** in Him. That is point number one. The next fact is this; in verse eleven we have a circumcision **made without hands**. So it is not literal circumcision that is meant, but the spiritual equivalent. When the Apostle wrote to the Church at Philippi he said, "we are the circumcision who worship God **in the spirit** and have no confidence in the flesh". (Literal circumcision can add nothing to a member of Christ's Body;) We have now the reality of what immersion stood for, whether a believer has submitted to it or not, if we belong to this company redeemed by His Grace neither water baptism adds anything to the Church which is His Body, or any other type or shadow.

Coming down further in the chapter there are other types and shadows, the foods and the drinks of the ceremonial law that God gave to Israel, which were very important at the time the law was given. Are these binding

upon the Body of Christ? “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days” (Col.2:16). All these things are only **shadows** of things to come. That is exactly what God’s ceremonial law was and what all the types are. They are only something that is shadowing forth a great reality, and when the reality is come and enjoyed, the shadow can be put away, and if this is not done, the reality will never mean in experience what God intends it to mean. The point is that in this heavenly calling, we have **all the reality in Christ**, and it is **all** spiritual and the believer who is rejoicing in this glorious position does not come under God’s picture book. The glory of the calling of the Church which is His Body is that it has **no types or shadows**. This is its glory, not its loss. It has all the reality of every type because it is complete or filled full in Christ. If anyone says that completeness can be added to or improved by going through any rite or ceremony, they have never realised what this completeness means. That would be a denial of this complete filling that we have in our Lord and Saviour. What is then this one baptism of the Spirit connected with the Church of the Body of Christ? **It is the uniting by the Holy Spirit of the whole of this church with Christ Himself, the Glorious Head, in death, burial, quickening, raising and being seated in the heavenly places in Him.** This is a union that can never be broken, and it unites every single member together. This is why we are asked to keep it, and guard it as we would a treasure. Unity is the great thought behind this baptism. Every member of the Body has been crucified with Christ. When He was crucified, they were crucified. They are dead with Christ; they are buried with Christ; they are quickened, made alive with Christ; they are raised with Christ, and glory of all glories, they are seated where He is seated (Eph.2:6), seated in the Heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and are looking forward to being manifested with Christ. All this precious truth is what the **one** baptism of the Spirit accomplishes. If we have this we have **the reality**. If we have only immersion in water, we have the shadow without the substance. So let nobody say that because a member of this company is not immersed in water, that he is not a baptised believer. If the believer has not that one baptism of Ephesians four, he is without the one that really matters. But if we have this, we are complete in Christ and have everything, and are baptised believers in the truest sense, just as we are the true circumcision, though we know nothing of the external rite.

You will see that this subject has many and varied aspects, and that water baptism has its place in the Word of God, but it is linked with Israel, the sign people, while they were still in covenant relationship with Him. While Israel are still in covenant relationship with God, types and shadows remain. When Israel are divorced and laid aside by God, as they are now, the divine picture book stops and we have the reality which is spiritual. We realise we are creatures of sense and feeling. If there is something we can see or hold on to or touch or taste, that is the thing that appears to be real to us. But we must learn that this is not necessarily the thing that is real. It is only the shadow. If we have the spiritual reality that the Word speaks about, this glorious unity with the Son of God, **this is the thing that is real and lasting**, and is what you and I, if we are members of His Body, ought to be rejoicing in, and living in the strength of it here and now. One Baptism is ours by the operation of God Himself, (Col.2:12). The word “operation” is the word “working”. It was done by God’s working, not man’s. It was not done at the time any minister or anybody else chose to immerse a believer in water. It was God’s working when He identified us as believers and all His Church with His Son. Let us rejoice in it, let us live in the joy of it and look forward in sure and certain hope to the last great “with”—“Manifested with Him in Glory”, when the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ shall take place, His great Epiphany. At the present this glory is hidden. Then it will be revealed to all the heavenly hosts, the glory of the Head and His Body, His Fulness. Each member will be there in the Glory with Him, far above all. Let us thank God for such a wondrous calling and this mighty operation of His, baptising us and linking us with His Son in a bond that can never be broken.

Praise His Name. Amen.

STUART ALLEN