

Baptism

In antediluvian times sin had reached such proportions that God issued an ultimatum to the world through Noah. An ark would be prepared in which all who wished to be saved from the coming floodwaters might enter; those who rejected the offer would be destroyed in the Flood. Eight persons accepted the divine plan and were saved. Peter made this penetrating observation: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 3:21.

Peter was saying this: We are saved by baptism as Noah and his family were saved through water. Of course, it was the power of God, rather, that saved Noah. Likewise, baptism does not cleanse the filth of sin; only the blood and power of Christ can do that. But baptism, like obedience in entering the ark, is "the answer of a good conscience toward God." When man by God's power gives "the answer," salvation provided "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" becomes effective. In this Old Testament illustration we find three ideas that help us understand the significance of New Testament baptism: (1) committal to water in God's way, (2) acknowledging there is no way of salvation other than His, and (3) deliverance from the former life through faith in the power of God to save.

We can see a parallel in the experience of the children of Israel. They "were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2. Here was a figurative baptism. With the cloud above and the water around them, the Israelites were enveloped by water as they passed through the Red Sea, and in this sense were baptized. They committed themselves to God by entering the sea. They came out facing a new life under God's leadership. Again, in an Old Testament illustration we gain some insight into the meaning of New Testament baptism.

I. John and Jesus and Baptism

It is evident from ancient accounts that John the Baptist was not the first to introduce the rite of baptism. Baptism by immersion was practiced when Gentile proselytes were received into the Jewish faith. It is not

clear just when or how the practice originated. Its antecedents were the rituals for cleansing prescribed in Leviticus 15 and Numbers 19. For a discussion of this topic and references to ancient sources, see *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 297, 298.

When John began baptizing, the rite took on a new meaning. Formerly only Gentile converts to Judaism had been baptized. Now John required baptism of the Jews—even the religious leaders—who accepted his call to repentance.¹

The high point in John's ministry was reached when Jesus came to him requesting baptism. Read the accounts in:

*Matthew 3:13-17

Mark 1:9-11

Luke 3:21-23

°What reasons did Jesus, the Sinless One, give for requesting baptism? Notice especially His response to John's objection. For a discussion of the incident, see *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 301-303.²

II. Baptism by Immersion

The Greek word *baptizō* means "to immerse," "to dip," or "to purify by washing." It was used to describe the act of immersing an article in a vessel of water, dye, or other liquid.

If we take the meaning of the word itself and add to it suggestions made in connection with baptisms recorded in the Bible, it is clear that Jesus was baptized by immersion and that John followed that practice regularly in his baptizing. See John 3:23. Philip did the same when he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. See Acts 8:36-39. The Bible contains no evidence that baptism by pouring or sprinkling was ever practiced in the early church.

°Assemble a group of four or five texts that give additional evidence of the meaning of "baptize" by showing that early baptism was by immersion.

III. Significance of Baptism

The best Bible portrayal of what baptism signifies to the Christian is Paul's description in Romans 6:1-11. °Study the verses carefully. Search for thoughts related to the following:

(1) The evidence in these verses for baptism by immersion.

(2) What is memorialized and what is symbolized when one is lowered under the water in baptism.

¹ See *The Desire of Ages*, pages 105:1 to 108:2.

² See *The Desire of Ages*, pages 109-113.

(3) What is memorialized and what is symbolized when one is lifted out of the water again?

(4) The significance of the whole procedure.

(5) The intended result in the individual's life.

(6) How baptism indicates committal to Christ. Consider again the Old Testament illustrations suggested earlier.

IV. Steps to Baptism

What spiritual preparation should be made for baptism? Which should come first, death or burial?

*Acts 2:37, 38

*Acts 2:41; 16:30-34

*Colossians 2:12

*Romans 6:4-8

V. What Baptism Accomplishes

Baptism serves three important purposes:³

(1) It is a public confession of one's faith in God and his acceptance of Christ as a personal Saviour.

(2) It signifies that one has already begun the new life in Christ.

(3) It is the step by which one enters church fellowship.

^oIn the following verses note indications of what is accomplished through baptism, and the Holy Spirit's relation to baptism and the baptized person.

*Luke 3:16

*Acts 2:41-46

*Galatians 3:26, 27

*Acts 1:5

*1 Corinthians 12:13

*Colossians 3:1-6

^oIn a simple, practical way describe what baptism should mean to a Seventh-day Adventist young person.

³ See *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 91-99.

"In baptism we are given to the Lord as a vessel to be used. Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Self is by profession dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the candidate, and in the presence of the whole heavenly universe the mutual pledge is made. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism, and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great Powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present." Ellen G. White, quoted in *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1074 (Manuscript 57, 1900). See additional comments in *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1074.

See also *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1075.

TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the difference between being *dead in sin* and being *dead to sin*? See Romans 6:1, 2; 7; 8:10; Galatians 2:19, 20; Ephesians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:12, 20; 3:3.

2. In what sense does a resurrection follow death to sin and burial by baptism? See Romans 6:1-10 (especially verses 3, 5, 6); Ephesians 4:24-32; Colossians 3:1-14.

3. Why is the mode of baptism—immersion, sprinkling, pouring—important?

4. Using the sources suggested below as a beginning, trace the development of the various modes of baptism.

The S.D.A. Bible Commentary, vol. 6, pp. 43-45.

Yost, F. H. "The Proper Form of Baptism," *Review and Herald*, Oct. 28, 1948.

Articles on "Baptism" in:

Hastings, James (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

———. *A Dictionary of the Bible*.

Stanley, Arthur P. *Christian Institutions*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881.

5. When is a person ready for baptism? Consider age, mental development, home conditions, spiritual condition.

6. Using the texts and other materials that seem best to you, prepare a Bible study on baptism to present to a particular individual or group.

7. There is only one instance of rebaptism mentioned in the Bible. Acts 19:1-5. What were the circumstances involved? Under what other circumstances might one be rebaptized? For the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on rebaptism, see index in the *Church Manual*. See also *Evangelism*, pages 372-375.