BAPTISM: IS IT NECESSARY?

To begin our study today, I want to make a brief but important clarification. The topic we are going to cover is deeply enriching, and to understand its full beauty, we will look at a few words in their original language, Greek. This will allow us to discover beautiful nuances that are sometimes lost in translation.

However, I don't want you to think that all of our topics will be this complex, or that the Bible is a mysterious book that can only be understood with a Greek dictionary in hand.

The beauty of the Scriptures lies in the fact that its main message is clear, direct, and accessible to everyone. Today, we will use this tool like a microscope to appreciate a specific detail, but remember that God's truth shines with total clarity even in our simplest daily reading.

The meaning of the Word Baptize

The word **"baptism"** has a fascinating origin that takes us directly back to the language in which the New Testament was written: Koine Greek. This was the common tongue of the Hellenistic world, a historical and cultural period of antiquity that began after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) and concluded with the rise of the Roman Empire (31 BC).

Perhaps you did not know this, or perhaps you have wondered: Why do we base our analysis on the Greek text if Jesus spoke Aramaic?

To explore this question in greater depth, I invite you to read my book "*Why Do You Not Understand My Language?*" specifically the chapter titled **"BEHIND THE WRITTEN WORD,"** where you will find a more detailed explanation of this subject.

Thayer's Dictionary Definition:

baptizō (βαπτίζω, G907) literally means:

- To immerse repeatedly, to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge completely, to sink (as in the case of sunken vessels), to immerse.
- To cleanse by dipping or immersing, to wash, to cleanse with water, to wash oneself, to bathe, to immerse in order to dye or change the state of something.
- To overwhelm, to dominate, to inundate, or to cover completely.

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Although it derives from a simpler word, **baptō** (βάπτω, G911), which means “to wet” or “to soak,” the term Jesus used when referring to baptism is **baptizō** (βαπτίζω, G907), the direct root of our English word. The noun "baptism" entered English through the ecclesiastical Latin baptismus, which came from the Greek **baptismós** (βαπτισμός), while the verb "baptize" derives from the Greek **baptízō** through Latin and Old French.

Baptism and Immersion in Water

The word **baptizō** was well known among the Greeks of that time and was used to describe situations such as when a ship sank completely beneath the sea or when clothmakers immersed a white piece of fabric in a vat of dye to transform it into a new color.

In the Greek writings of the New Testament, we find that the Gospel writers used forms of the verb **báptō** (βάπτω, G911), which is related to **baptízō** (βαπτίζω, G907), to describe certain actions performed by Jesus.

For example, during the Last Supper, when the disciples asked Him who would betray Him, Jesus replied:

“Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this morsel after I have dipped it.” Then He dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ” (John 13:26, BSB).

In the Greek text of the New Testament, the verb used is **embáptō** (ἐμβάπτω), a compound form related to **báptō**, which expresses the action of dipping or immersing something in a liquid. In this passage, it describes how Jesus dipped the bread before handing it to Judas.

Likewise, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we find the verb **báptō** again. The rich man pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue (Luke 16:24).

These passages show that the writers of the New Testament used **báptō** and its compound forms to describe actions involving wetting or dipping something into a liquid. However, when referring to baptism, they use the verb **baptízō** (βαπτίζω, G907).

The choice of **baptízō** rather than **báptō** to refer to baptism was not accidental, but deliberate and purposeful.

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When the biblical writers looked for the exact Greek word to describe baptism, they chose *baptizo*, which literally means "to submerge," "to plunge," or "to immerse under water." If we translate that same action back into Aramaic—the language of Jesus—the equivalent word is **teval***(טְבַל)*, which means precisely to perform a washing by immersion.

The Jews of that era knew this concept very well because they practiced the *mikveh*, which were ritual baths of purification by total immersion. Therefore, when Jesus taught about baptism in Aramaic, no one imagined a few drops of water; everyone immediately visualized someone being completely submerged.

As we can see, the meaning of these terms helps us understand that baptism involves immersion in water.

This idea is consistent with the fact that John the Baptist chose a place where there was plenty of water for baptizing (John 3:23). Likewise, Matthew recounts that after Jesus was baptized, He came up out of the water (Matthew 3:16), which is consistent with the idea that He had entered the water to be baptized.

As important as understanding the meaning of the word baptism is, which leads us directly to the manner in which it should be performed, it is equally important to determine whether baptism is truly necessary and to understand its purpose.

Is Baptism Necessary?

The Command of Jesus Christ

One of the passages, though not the only one, that addresses this question clearly is found in Matthew 28:18–19, where Jesus declares:

"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," (Matthew 28:18–19 BSB)

These words were neither a suggestion nor an optional recommendation, but a command given by Jesus to His disciples. Before instructing them to go and make disciples of all nations, He declared that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth. In this way, He linked the mission He was entrusting to them with the authority that belonged to Him. Within that mission, baptism is explicitly included as part of the instructions they were to carry out.

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Therefore, through this command, Jesus established how His disciples were to proceed in carrying out the mission He had entrusted to them.

Jesus' Teaching to Nicodemus

In a significant conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews and a teacher of Israel, Jesus explains that one must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus at night, does not understand His words and asks Him a question: "Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4, KJV). In response to this question, Jesus tells him:

"Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is ***born of water and the Spirit****."* (John 3:5, BSB).

Thus, Jesus' teaching is not limited to the command He later gave His disciples to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In His conversation with Nicodemus, He also declares that being born of water and the Spirit is necessary to enter the kingdom of God. Both passages deserve to be examined together, as they show that baptism is not a practice introduced on human initiative, but rather a matter that must be studied in light of Jesus' own teachings and the instructions He gave to His disciples.

The Purpose of Baptism

According to Scripture, baptism is connected with the forgiveness of sins and forms part of the response instructed of those who desired to obey the message of the gospel. It is not presented merely as an external ritual, but as part of the instructions given by the apostles in response to those who asked what they should do. We read the following in Acts 2:37–38:

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and asked 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." (Acts 2:37–38, BSB).

The sequence of the account is significant: upon hearing the message, those people asked what they should do, and Peter responded by mentioning repentance and baptism in the name of

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Jesus Christ, explicitly connecting them with the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, when examining the purpose of baptism, we cannot overlook the words Peter used in answering that question.

Baptism in the Practice of the Early Church

Throughout the New Testament, we find numerous accounts of people being baptized in accordance with the instructions given by Jesus. These are not isolated cases, but examples that demonstrate a recurring practice among those who received and accepted the message of the gospel. This allows us to examine the pattern followed by the early disciples and how this teaching was carried out in practice. Let us consider a few examples:

*"Even tax collectors came to be **baptized.** "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?""* (Luke 3:12 BSB)

*"Those who embraced his message were **baptized**, and about three thousand were added to the believers that day."* (Acts 2:41 BSB)

*"But when they believed Philip as he preached the gospel of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women."* (Acts 8:12 BSB)

*"Can anyone withhold the water to baptize these people? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have!" [48] So he ordered that they be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay for a few days."* (Acts 10:47–48 BSB)

*"For all of you who were **baptized** into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."* (Galatians 3:27 BSB)

The Baptism of Saul of Tarsus:

After Saul of Tarsus came to know Jesus, Ananias came to him and said, *"And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on His name.'"* (Acts 22:16, BSB)

"At that instant, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and his sight was restored. He got up and was baptized, " (Acts 9:18, BSB)

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The Philippian Jailer: Believing and Being Baptized

Paul spoke with the jailer after he had drawn his sword to take his own life, and the following took place:

*"Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?**" [31] They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] Then Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his house. [33] **At that hour of the night**, the jailer took them and washed their wounds. And without delay, **he and all his household were baptized**. "* (Acts 16:30–33, BSB)

The Baptism of Jesus: An Example of Obedience

When Jesus came from *"Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. [14] But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" [15] "Let it be so now," Jesus replied. "It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness in this way." Then John permitted Him."* (Matthew 3:13–15, BSB)

Fulfilling All Righteousness Encompasses Three Fundamental Dimensions:

1. **Public Anointing as the Messiah:** The official inauguration of His earthly ministry. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were to be washed with water and anointed with oil before beginning their public service. The water did not cleanse Jesus; heaven publicly testified to who He was. (Matthew 3:16–17, BSB)
2. **Full Identification with Sinful Humanity:** Although Jesus was holy, He came with a mission of substitution: to bear the guilt of the world. By standing in the same line as sinners at the Jordan, Jesus identified Himself with us.
3. **Setting the Perfect Example of Obedience:** By submitting to John's baptism, Jesus validated John's ministry and demonstrated that no human being is above God's commandments. Though free from sin, He humbled Himself and entered the water, establishing an absolute and unquestionable example for anyone who chooses to believe in Him and follow in His footsteps.

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Baptism, in addition to being a commandment, represents our union with the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3–4, BSB). Likewise, those who have been baptized into Christ have clothed themselves with Him (Galatians 3:27, BSB).

Objections to Baptism

The Thief on the Cross: An Exception or a Rule?

Some people argue that baptism is not necessary and cite the case of the thief on the cross as an example. Although there is no biblical record confirming that he had been baptized, he received this promise from Jesus: *"Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:43, BSB)

We cannot deny what the biblical text declares; however, we must distinguish between an individual case and a general teaching. The fact that Jesus made this promise to the thief does not, in itself, prove that baptism is unnecessary for those who receive the message of the gospel. **An exception does not constitute a general rule**. It would be a mistake to take an extraordinary, isolated event in Scripture and use it to nullify an explicit instruction given by Jesus.

Consider, for example, Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in an extraordinary manner without experiencing death as other human beings do (2 Kings 2:11, BSB).

Could we use his case to claim that no one has to die?

Clearly not. What happened to Elijah does not establish the general experience of humanity. In the same way, the case of the thief on the cross is not sufficient to invalidate the instructions Jesus gave His disciples concerning baptism.

Therefore, we should not use the case of the thief on the cross to conclude that baptism is unnecessary. The proper approach is to examine this event within its own context and compare it with the full scope of New Testament teaching, without turning an individual circumstance into a general rule. **A sovereign exception does not constitute a general rule.**

This subject is explored in greater detail in my book *Why Do You Not Understand My Language?* in the chapter entitled *"Trapped in the Exception"* available at **theansweredword.com**.

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Is Believing Enough to Be Saved?

Similarly, some people maintain that baptism is unnecessary because certain biblical passages state that whoever believes will be saved, without explicitly mentioning baptism. For example: *"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* (Romans 10:13, BSB)

It is certainly true that this passage does not mention baptism, but neither does it deny it. Therefore, this is not a sufficient argument for rejecting baptism. This subject is also explored in greater detail in my book *Why Do You Not Understand My Language?* in the chapter entitled *"The Danger of the Isolated Verse and the Half-Truth."*

However, to establish a doctrine solely on passages that mention faith while ignoring those that connect baptism with the forgiveness of sins and salvation would be to examine the Scriptures only partially.

The Philippian Jailer: Believing and Being Baptized

The Philippian jailer was told, *"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household"* (Acts 16:31, BSB), without any mention of baptism. However, we must ask ourselves: Does this mean that the Philippian jailer did not need to be baptized?

As we continue reading the account, we find that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his household. That very night, the jailer was baptized along with his household (Acts 16:32–33, BSB).

Notice the detail: when he was told to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, he was not being told that he could disregard any other instruction from the Lord. In fact, the account continues and shows us that the jailer heard the word, believed, and was baptized.

Consider an everyday example. If someone tells you, *"If you believe you can win the competition, you will succeed,"* does that mean you can stop training? No. Believing that you can win does not mean you should ignore the actions necessary to achieve your goal.

In the same way, we cannot conclude that baptism is unnecessary simply because Acts 16:31 mentions faith without mentioning baptism in that same sentence. The account itself allows us to see what happened after that statement.

Therefore, we should not interpret an isolated statement in a way that contradicts or nullifies other explicit instructions from the Lord. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19, BSB). The question is not whether we should believe or be

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baptized, as though we had to choose between the two, but whether we are willing to take into account everything the Lord taught.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, we have examined the meaning of baptism, its purpose, and its importance within the teachings of the New Testament. We have seen that Jesus not only commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations and baptize them, but also spoke to Nicodemus about the necessity of being born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Likewise, Peter's words on the day of Pentecost show that baptism was presented as part of the response required of those who wished to obey the message of the gospel: to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The examples of Saul of Tarsus, the Philippian jailer, and the Ethiopian official, among others, allow us to observe that baptism held an important place in the response of those who received the message and believed in Jesus Christ.

We have also considered the example of Jesus Himself, who submitted to John's baptism, and examined some of the objections raised to argue that baptism is unnecessary. In doing so, we have seen the importance of not building a doctrinal conclusion on the basis of a single passage while ignoring other texts that address the same subject. The case of the thief on the cross, as well as passages that speak of faith without explicitly mentioning baptism, must be examined in their context and in light of the full scope of biblical teaching.

The issue, therefore, is not a matter of choosing between believing in Jesus Christ and obeying His instructions, as though the two were incompatible. Faith should not be used as an argument to dismiss what the Lord Himself commanded.

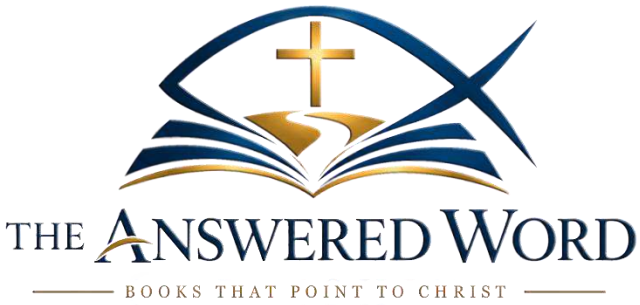
If we acknowledge the authority of Jesus, we must also take His words seriously and seek to understand and obey everything He taught.

The question is not merely whether we believe in Jesus, but also whether we are willing to take His commandments seriously.

Baptism should not be treated as a mere human tradition, nor should it be dismissed through isolated interpretations. We must examine what the Scriptures teach, consider their passages as a whole, and act according to the truth we find in them.

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May every reader examine these texts with a sincere heart, without allowing preconceived ideas to carry more weight than the words of Scripture. For when studying a teaching of our Lord, the goal should not be to find arguments to justify what we already believe, but to understand what He taught and be willing to obey Him.



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