

The Power of Water Baptism

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All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.
The Holy Bible, NIV Version 1978, 1984 by New York International Bible Society
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Forward

Are you in the position where you have accepted Yahshua into your life, received the forgiveness of sins, felt the warmth of His love and presence, but yet you still do not have victory in your life? You know that there is something lacking?

Many followers of Yahshua struggle with the problem of sin, often being overwhelmed with a feeling of failure because they have done it wrong again, and again; for them it seems that there is no lasting freedom from their old life and its deeds. Is there a link between this common predicament and our failure to comprehend and to appropriate the true potential of water baptism? Yes, water baptism is the potential means of remedying the recurring difficulties that we have with our old sinful life. However, in reality many people consider water baptism as an 'optional extra'; "*Go through the waters if you really think you need to, but it doesn't necessarily affect your salvation or alter your position in Yahshua.*"

Is water baptism purely a symbolic act affirming what has already been accomplished and pointing to what the believer will attain in the future life? Surely there is more to water baptism than simply getting wet or being added to the membership register of a church.

The validity of the practice of water baptism must be examined from a biblical perspective in order to answer such questions as: "*Do I need it? Should it have any significant effect upon my life? Can it help me? What's it all about?*"

This article has been written to address many of the questions that are being asked and those that should be asked about water baptism. The writer does not seek to defend any particular church or denominational view on the subject, but to set out and discuss clearly the concept of water baptism and its practical implications as taught in Scripture. I am sure you will find this article both helpful and challenging – please read it with an open heart and mind.

The Editor.

The importance of baptism

For hundreds of years there has been great controversy regarding water baptism: controversy concerning the methods used, the age of the person concerned, and the conditions necessary for this step. Baptism has been administered to babies, young people, adults, saints and sinners; they have either been sprinkled with water, had it poured over them, or immersed in it. Some were baptised forwards and others backwards; some in the name of 'Jesus', others in the titles of 'the Father', 'the Son' and 'the holy Spirit'; some were immersed once and yet others were submerged three times in succession. All this, and more besides, is still being practised today. What, then, must we believe? What should a believer do? The only thing we CAN do is to go to the Scriptures and find out what Yahshua taught His disciples, for only that which is according to the Book will satisfy a hungry soul and find acceptance with the Almighty.

The apostle Matthew records the deep feeling which Yahshua the Messiah had about His teaching. Matthew writes, "*Then Yahshua came to them and said 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age' "*"¹

The Master was anxious for His teachings to be proclaimed and received among all nations, and those who believed His teachings were to be baptised. In his Gospel Mark explains a little more clearly when he says, "*He that believes and is baptised shall be saved*"². Yahshua, therefore, makes immersion obligatory to salvation*.

Since baptism is such an important an important step, we would do well to search the Scriptures, even as the Berean Congregation did³ to be sure we fully understand the Word of Yahweh with regard to this subject.

*Salvation

The rescue or deliverance from the power of sin and all its adverse effects in a person's life – and secured against its judgement.

What do we mean by baptism?

The word 'baptise' is derived directly from the Greek word 'baptizo'. Knowing the precise meaning of this word enables us to understand what the New Testament writers are alluding to. The word is made up of two parts. First the Greek verb 'bapto' which means "*to dip something in fluid and then to take it out again*" – as a brazier dipping hot steel in water to temper it. This same Greek verb is found in Luke 16:24, John 13:26 and Revelation 19:13, and carries this meaning in all three instances.

The addition of the syllable 'iz' into any Greek verb produces a verb that has a special causative meaning. That is to say, the compound verb thus formed always has a sense of causing something to be or to happen. The historical use of the word in Greek literature

¹ Matt 28:18-20

² Mark 16:16

³ Acts 17:10-11

always carries the same basic meaning: 'to dip', 'to plunge under', 'to submerge'. From this we can see that to be baptised means to be totally submerged and brought out again. Therefore sprinkling cannot be an adequate expression of this action.

How do we qualify?

The importance of baptism is underlined both in Yahshua's teaching and in His disciples' interpretation of it – but what are the conditions that have to be met before anyone is eligible for baptism?

Repent: The first condition is stated in Acts 2:37-38 when Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost had finished and the listeners were cut to the heart, crying, "*men and brethren, what shall we do?*" Peter's reply was "*Repent and be baptised everyone of you in the name of [Yahshua] so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit.*" There are definite commands here: **first** repent, **then** be baptised. Repentance is the first response that Yahweh requires from any sinner who desires to be saved. It is a willingness and a determination to turn unconditionally from sin. Repentance, therefore, must precede baptism.

Believe: The second condition for believers' baptism is stated by Yahshua, Himself, in Mark 16:15-16. "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*"

The condition for baptism stated here is first to believe. Philip told the Ethiopian Eunuch, "*...if you believe in your heart, you may (be baptised)*"¹ The repentance of sin, humbly acknowledging one's sins, and a confession of faith in the death and resurrection of Yahshua as the necessary *propitiation for them, should then be followed by the outward act of obedience of being baptised. This is what Peter calls the "*answer of a good conscience towards [Yahweh]*" in 1 Peter 3:21, in direct reference to the *ordinance of baptism.

***Propitiation**

An offering which turns away Yahweh's wrath, resulting in divine pardon for sin and reconciliation with Him.

***Ordinance**

An established rule or practice which is of divine origin.

A disciple: A third criteria we should mention is that the candidate must desire to be a disciple; a follower and imitator of Yahshua. Baptism was regarded by Yahshua as an integral part of the process of making disciples. This does not imply that we must attend a large number of discipleship classes before becoming eligible for baptism, it simply means that we should have reached the decision to follow Yahshua for the rest of our lives. In the Scriptures most baptisms of new believers seem to have occurred very soon after true repentance and faith were in evidence.

¹ Acts 8:36-38

“In apostolic times it is plain that baptism followed immediately upon confession of faith in [Yahshua]. The repeated accounts of baptism in Acts gives ample proof of this. Faith in [Yahshua] and baptism were, indeed, not so much two distinct experiences as parts of one whole; faith in [Yahshua] was an essential element in baptism, for without it the application of water, even accompanied by the appropriate words, would not have been baptism.”
F.F. Bruce, Romans (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)
IVP (Leicester 1963) page 136.

What happens at baptism

After repenting, believing in Yahshua, and becoming a disciple, the act of baptism is seen by some as merely an outward sign of what has already been accomplished – a public proof of one’s sincerity in following Yahshua. Others maintain that Christian baptism should be regarded principally as the *baptisand’s “appeal to Yahweh for a clear conscience”¹ Whilst these views are correct, they are not an adequate description of the teaching in the Scriptures regarding this *sacrament. G.R. Beasley-Murray in his book *Baptism in the New Testament* says **“The idea that baptism is a purely symbolic rite must be pronounced not alone unsatisfactory but out harmony with New Testament itself.”**²

***Baptisand**

The one who is to be baptised – the candidate

***Sacrament**

An act or practice regarded as possessing a sacred significance

At the believer’s baptism, the holy Spirit performs an operation of great spiritual magnitude, which can be effected if we approach it with faith and the correct understanding.

“One receives nothing from his baptism without faith, and one receives nothing from his faith without baptism.”

H. Cremer.

When we are baptised, we are following in the footsteps of our Master, Yahshua. I am not referring here to the time when He was baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan in order to “fulfil all righteousness”, but to His death and resurrection. These are two works of grace that occur at baptism which are expounded by the apostle Paul who recognised this act to be rich in meaning and efficacy. The first is a burial.

“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into [Yahshua] were baptised into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death”³. The death that occurs in a believer’s life at baptism is the death of the sinful nature. This is the part of our character with which we are born, that part which is continually inclined to sin. It has no fellowship with Yahweh, nor can it. ‘Burial’ sets the seal on death, therefore baptism spells death for the ‘old man’ – the old order of living coming to an end. The power of sin

¹ See 1 Pet. 3:21

² G.R. Beasley-Murray in *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1962) page 263

³ Romans 6:3-4

is destroyed in our life “*and our sins are washed away*”¹. We should not confuse the loss of the sense of guilt at the moment of repentance and faith, when Yahshua enters our life, with this experience of washing away our sins, for it is as we are buried with Yahshua, calling on the name of Yahweh, that our sins leave us forever.

“The action of baptism primarily means, not that the baptistry becomes our grave, but that we are laid in the grave of [Yahshua].”

G.R. Beasley-Murray

The second work of grace at baptism is a resurrection. When Yahshua had been in the grave for three days and *redemption was an accomplished fact, He was raised from the dead by His heavenly Father. Paul tells us that when we are buried with Yahshua by immersion, our heavenly Father performs a miraculous work within us, and it is at this moment that our sins are removed and fully erased. Then we are raised with Him to a new life.

***Redemption**

The intervening act of Yahweh to purchase man’s deliverance from the effects and the punishment of sin through the vicarious death of Yahshua on the cross.

“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as [Yahshua] was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”².

This is the power of baptism – resurrection power, the same power that raised Yahshua from the dead. It is this power that raises us up to live a new life in Him.

In his commentary on the book of Romans, F.F. Bruce, asks the same question that we have been discussing. **“When believers were baptised, what happened? This, says Paul. Their former life came to an end; a new life began. They were, in fact, ‘buried’ with Yahshua when they were plunged in the baptismal water, in token that they had died so far as their old life of sin was concerned; they were raised again with Yahshua when they emerged from the water, in token that they had received a new life, which was nothing less than participation in Yahshua’s own resurrection life.”³**

**“Baptism...is a burial that leads to resurrection
a death that leads to life.”**

J.D. Pawson

In baptism we can see that Yahweh’s plan of salvation for mankind extends much further than the forgiveness of sin and an assurance of eternal life – He wants to save us utterly from the damaging effects of our sinful nature, and transform us into His likeness. This view is strongly supported in Galatians 3:27 where Paul says ‘*For all of you who were baptised into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah.*’ The passage indicated that we have been incorporated into Yahshua, hidden in Him⁴, becoming a part

¹ Acts 22:16

² Romans 6:4

³ F.F. Bruce, Romans (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (IVP, Leicester, 1963) page 136

⁴ Colossians 3:3

of Him. He's looking for a people who are a reflection of His glory in the world today, dead to sin and alive to Yahweh and to righteousness. This is why we so need the resurrection power of baptism.

Do you desire to be united with Yahshua in His resurrection? I am sure you do. Then you need to be baptised properly. In Acts 19:1-5, we read that Paul re-baptised twelve disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus because he knew that their baptism was not sufficient in the new gospel era; subsequent results proved him right!

How to be baptised

We have already established that baptism implies total immersion, in this instance in water, but how is it to be done? Once again we must turn to the Scriptures to find our answers.

If we study carefully the command of Yahshua at the end of Matthew's gospel, and the disciples' interpretation of it, we can see an apparent contradiction. Yahshua instructed us to be baptised in the name of the Father, Son and holy Sprit, and yet Peter baptised in the name of Yahshua on the day of Pentecost¹, and Paul said that we must do everything in the name of Yahshua².

The result of this is that some baptise in the name of the Father, Son and holy Spirit, whilst others baptise in the name of Jesus. Some even attempt a combination of the two in order to satisfy both criteria.

If we take a closer look at Yahshua's words in Matthew 28:19, we see that what He really said was "baptise them in the NAME...", the word 'name' being singular. Yahshua speaks of three persons but only one name – the name of the 'triune God'. What name is this? Two scriptures are important here: first, in John 5:43, Yahshua said "*I am come in my Father's name.*" When Yahshua was talking to His disciples³ about the coming of the holy Spirit, He said that the Father would send Him (the holy Spirit) in His (Yahshua's) name. The name which the Psalmist enjoins us to praise and extol is YAH – the 'Y' being written as 'J' in Psalm 68:4 (KJV) but correctly pronounced, with a 'Y' as in Halleluyah. This is the name of the Deity, and may be viewed as a 'Family' name⁴. Thus **YAH**weh is the name of the father, **YAH**shua is the name the son, and the **holy Spirit** came in the **name of YAH**shua.

The purest form of biblical baptism must therefore incorporate the use of the correct Hebrew name for our Saviour, Yahshua. Only baptism in the name of Yahshua perfectly fulfils all Scriptural criteria. It is important to consider how Ananias counselled Paul at the time of his *conversion. "*And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away calling on his name*"⁵.

***Triune**

The union of three persons namely, The Father, the Son and the holy Spirit in one 'Godhead'.

***Conversion**

A change of belief and character effected by the holy Spirit when a person first comes to saving faith in Yahshua.

¹ Acts 2:28

² Colossians 3:17

³ John 14:26

⁴ See Ephesians 3:15

⁵ Acts 22:16

On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter, using the words of the prophet Joel, exhorted his congregation with similar truth. “*And everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh shall be saved*”¹. Since salvation is a deliverance, surely at the time of baptism, when our deliverance from sin is completed, and our old lives are buried, it is appropriate for the candidate to say “Yahweh deliver me!”, (from the death of my old life into new resurrection life). Peter preached it, Paul modelled it. Should we not follow their example?

There are important outward actions which we must follow, but there is also a vital ingredient that must be released in our lives. This ingredient is faith.

“Baptism without faith in the Almighty’s power to transform is simply someone taking a bath fully clothed.”

The Editor

*“Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of [Yahweh]”*². When we are baptised, we need to have faith that the power of Yahweh will effect a miracle in our lives. Faith comes from hearing the word of Yahweh, so we need to understand and believe what the Scriptures promise with regard to baptism. It would be fair to say that the ultimate effect of baptism on our lives is in direct proportion to our faith in the power of Yahweh.

Who should baptise us?

I am sure that anyone can pour water over us. Equally, anyone can plunge us beneath the water of a river, pond or tank. But for baptism to effect the work which Yahweh intends, it matters very much who baptises us. We are told in Ephesians of a ministry working together in our lives to bring us to perfection³ This ministry has five manifestations; apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These ministers, working together in Yahweh’s plan, are those sent to perform the ordinances of the glad tidings.

What now?

Once we have been baptised, there is a further step to take, if we have not already done so, and that is to be filled with the holy Spirit. Once we have repented of our sins, believed in Yahshua and been baptised, we are in every respect clean but we are also empty. Yahweh does not want us to remain clean and empty, we need to be clean and full – full of his holy Spirit. “*Repent, be baptised ... and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit*”⁴. We must also seek to walk in the experience that was accomplished by faith at our baptism – staying dead to our sins. How can we do this in practice? Paul gives some very helpful guidelines in Romans 6.

¹ Joel 2:32

² Colossians 2:12

³ Ephesians 4:11-13

⁴ Acts 2:38

“Offer yourselves to [Yahweh]” (i.e. put yourselves in the service of Yahweh), the apostle says; “offer your bodies to him for the express purpose of doing His will (which is righteousness).¹

On the cross Yahshua died bearing our sins; in our baptism we were united to Him by faith, and His death became ours, our old ‘sinful’ self was crucified on His cross.

“Formerly you were a prisoner to sin, but now your old association with sin has been irrevocably severed by death – the death which you have died with [Yahshua].”

Yahshua died once for our sins, He rose from the dead and lives eternally; now death can no longer touch Him. We will not be dominated by sin (with the resurrection of the ‘old man’) if we consider ourselves to have died in Yahshua’s death and raised to a powerful new life in His resurrection. In short, we must consider ourselves ‘dead’ to sin, and this includes keeping away from the kind of activities which are synonymous with the ‘old man’ – the old way of living.

The conclusion of our discussion is clear: BAPTISM is a major step on the road to holiness, for it is to do with the putting away of the ‘old’ (that is our former life of sin – having the guilt of sins committed in our old state washed away, leaving us with a clear conscience) and the putting on of the ‘new’ (that which has been born of Yahweh – the life of the Spirit). It is therefore wholly necessary for believers to come to terms with the truth of this ordinance and take possession of its full benefits.

¹ Romans 6:13-14