

The Action of Bible Baptism

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There is much misunderstanding in the religious world today concerning the action of Bible baptism. This misunderstanding is unnecessary as the Bible is clear on the subject. The action of baptism has to do with whether baptism is sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.

What the Original Language Says. The problem with consulting a modern English dictionary to define baptism is that a dictionary defines words as they are commonly used among people, and how words are commonly used often change over time. An English dictionary may define baptism in this way: “to immerse in water or sprinkle or pour water on...” To learn the meaning of the word “baptism,” as the Lord and the apostles used it, one needs but trace the word back to the original language in which the New Testament was written - *Koine* Greek (language from 300 B.C. to A.D. 500). Since *Koine* Greek is a dead language, the original meaning has not changed. The English word “baptism” is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptisma,” meaning immersion, submersion, a burial, an overwhelming.”

What the Lexicons Say. The English-Greek lexicons speak a clear message on the action of baptism. Here are definitions of the word “baptism” as given by reputable lexicons:

Thayer - “Overwhelm. Immersion, submersion.”

Minert - “*Baptisma* - immersion, dipping into, washing, washing away; washing by immersion.”

Bretschneider - “*Baptisma* - immersion, submersion.”

Liddel and Scott - “*Baptismos* - a dipping in water, ablution or immersion.”

What the Scholars Say. Here are some quotations taken from representative scholars of different religious organizations:

Adam Clark (Methodist): “Alluding to the immersion practiced in the case of adults, wherein the person appeared to be buried under the water, as Christ was buried in the heart of the earth. His rising again the third day, and their emerging from the water, was an emblem of the resurrection of the body” (*Commentary on Colossians 2:12*).

Conybeare and Howsen (Episcopalians): “This passage (Romans 6:4) cannot be understood unless it be borne in mind that the primitive baptism was by immersion” (*Life and Epistles of Saint Paul, Vol. 2, p. 169*).

Mosheim (Lutheran): “The sacrament of baptism was administered in this century (the first) without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by an immersion of the whole body in the baptismal font” (*Mosheim’s*

Church History, Vol. 1, p. 343).

John Calvin (Presbyterian): “The very word ‘baptize,’ however, signifies immerse, and it is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church” (*Institutes, Vol. 3, p. 343*).

Cunningham (Episcopalian): “Baptism means immersion; and it was immersion. Unless it had been so, Paul’s analogical argument about our being buried with Christ in baptism would have had no meaning” (*Growth of the Church, p. 173*).

Tholuck (Lutheran): “For the explanation of this figurative description of the baptismal rite, it is necessary to call attention to the well-known circumstance that in the early days of the church, persons, when baptized, were first plunged below and then raised above the water” (*Commentary on Romans*).

What History Says. Sprinkling and pouring began to be practiced as “baptism” only in exceptional cases and on persons on sick beds who might have died outside the church. The earliest specified case where water was poured on a person for “baptism” was around A.D. 251, in the case of Novatian, a bishop whose right to office was hotly contested because water was poured on him instead of his being immersed. It was approximately 1,000 years later that sprinkling and pouring was practiced.

What the Scriptures Say. “Nevertheless what saith the scripture?” (Galatians 4:30):

1. *Romans 6:4.* “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

2. *Colossians 2:12.* “Buried with him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

Two specific baptisms, in the Scriptures, demonstrate, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the action of Bible baptism is immersion; not sprinkling or pouring:

1. *The baptism of Jesus.* “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water...” (Matthew 3:16). For Jesus to have come up out of the water, He must have gone down into the water!

2. *The baptism of the Ethiopian.* “...and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water...” (Acts 8:38-39).

These all say the action of Bible baptism is immersion. What do you say?

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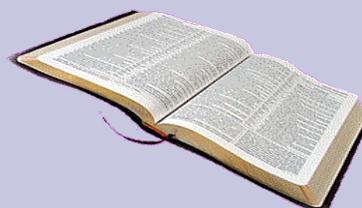
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