

Are Christians Really Baptized Into Christ?

Ephesians 4:4-5: *4 There is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*



Arise and be baptized! This and many other similar scriptural statements have in many ways defined Christianity. Unfortunately, because Christianity is so splintered, it applies these very important words and instructions in a wide variety of ways. Some say baptism changes you, others say it is a symbol and others say it is necessary for heaven. Some baptize infants, others baptize children and others adults only. Some baptize into a church or denomination, while others baptize into Christ. Some see baptism as a necessary beginning to walk towards Christ, while others see it as a symbol of having decided to sacrificially follow Christ. How can all of this be one baptism? It can't! What do we do with all of this? We search the Scriptures and look for the originally intended message behind Christian baptism.

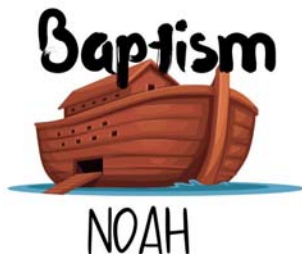
There are many scriptures that talk about baptism in many different ways. As we walk through several of these texts, we will do so with the objective of understanding what it means to be **baptized into Christ** – that *one baptism* spoken of in our theme text.

Let's start with the end product, which is **baptism into Christ:**

Matthew 28:18-20: *18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the son and the holy spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Before this “great commission” to *make disciples of all nations* and baptize them, there were other kinds of baptisms, like the baptism of Noah, Moses, fire, suffering and others. As we will see, these appearances showed us different parts of the whole picture of what baptism would come to mean. As we go through several of these examples, we will identify what it adds to the full and final picture of true baptism into Christ. It can be confusing, so we need to carefully go through the scriptures.

In the New Testament, some Old Testament events were referred to as baptism. We will start with a New Testament description of Noah and the ark. The Apostle Peter begins by explaining that Jesus died once for all. He explains that this one-time sacrifice was a witness to the “spirits now in prison” (**1 Peter 3:19**).



As the scripture continues, the connection of the flood and baptism appears:

1 Peter 3:20-21: *20 (Those fallen angels who followed Lucifer) Who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21 **Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you**—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

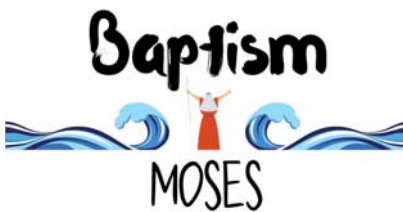
We have Noah and his family, the ark and a whole lot of water. What does this have to do with Christian baptism?

Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you - Peter tells us the ark represented Jesus, and that those “in Jesus,” those baptized in Jesus, are lifted out of the sinful and destructive state of the world.

It’s like a parable - Noah moved through the water on the ark. The ark saved him. Jesus is our “ark” - we go through the water of baptism as a symbol of our salvation. In this first little piece, Peter compares the Christian baptism to Noah and the ark.



Baptism’s Meaning: Those in the ark represented those who are baptized into Christ’s death. Baptism here is a picture of how Jesus provides us salvation and deliverance in him.



1 Corinthians 10:1-4: *1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; 2 and **all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.*

Paul gives us three pictures here:

1. When Israel passed through the Red Sea that parted as the Israelites left slavery in Egypt, they were considered **baptized into Moses**, who represented Jesus. Moses was their deliverer and mediator between themselves and God.

They were covered with water, like a baptism, even though they didn’t physically get wet. The walls of the sea were on either side of them and clouds were overhead. The Apostle Paul helps us see Moses delivering the people in this *picture* of baptism.

2. They *all ate the same spiritual food* when they were in the wilderness. We know they physically ate manna every day that came down from heaven. It was “spiritual” food in that it was miraculous and happened supernaturally.

This spiritual food followed the experience of this “baptism.”

3. *They were drinking from a spiritual rock...the rock was Christ* - No wonder Moses was disciplined for striking the rock!

The Israelites experienced “baptism” by walking through the Red Sea under Moses’ leadership and guidance. They were then supplied with spiritual food and spiritual drink.

These three pictures show us the ingredients Israel needed to embrace and accept their Messiah. They needed to accept Moses as God’s chosen leader first before those other things were added.

Christianity works in much the same way. Accepting Jesus as God’s chosen Savior, we are then baptized “into Christ.” After our acceptance, we are provided spiritual food and drink.

Peter shows us baptism through Noah and the ark. By staying in the ark, Noah and his family were buoyed up out of sinful humanity. We need to stay in our ark, Jesus, to be protected as well. Paul compared baptism in Christ to Israel passing through the Red Sea led by Moses. We need to follow Christ as the Israelites followed Moses through the water to save them from Pharaoh’s army.



Baptism’s Meaning: Moses delivered Israel from slavery and death by leading them through the water and under the cloud. Jesus delivers by creating the path through sin and death. Baptism here shows us the necessity of following the example before us. Walk in Jesus’ footsteps.

We walk in Jesus’ footsteps as Israel walked in Moses’, and in the other picture, we need to stay in Jesus, our “ark,” to be delivered. The apostles give us two different aspects of what Christian baptism means through these Old Testament examples.

Next, a quick look at “cleansing” under the Jewish Law:



Once delivered from Egypt, the people of Israel had to be “sanctified” to be able to go before God:

Exodus 19:10-11: *10 The LORD also said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.*

A critical part of being “sanctified” – set apart for a holy purpose - was their clothes and bodies being physically clean. This prepared them to go before God, making them presentable before God. This sanctifying of the people will be important in our discussion later.

The Jewish Law was detailed about cleansing from infection or disease. The book Leviticus talks about times of cleansing after a disease.

These cleansings were linked to their spiritual cleansing as well:

Leviticus 15:14-15: *14 Then on the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting and give them to the priest; 15 and the priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD because of his discharge.*

(Source: Life Application Study Bible) God told the Israelites how to diagnose contagious skin diseases and mildew so they could avoid them or treat them. These laws were given for the people’s health and protection. They helped the Israelites avoid diseases that were serious threats in that time and place. Although they wouldn’t have understood the medical reasons for some of these laws, their obedience to them made them healthier. Many of God’s laws must have seemed strange to the Israelites. His Law, however, helped them avoid not only physical contamination but also moral and spiritual infection.



Baptism/Cleansing Meaning: As the Old Testament priest offered atonement for diseases after cleansing, so Jesus through his sacrifice offers remission of our sins once we have come to him.

This is much more than being messy or needing to clean up after being sick. There is the sanitary aspect but there is also the spiritual aspect as well. The New Testament will bring this out more clearly.

This is going to be important in our discussion, but for now, know that cleansing was an important part of the Law.

With some Old Testament history before us, we will next look at **John's baptism** and how it worked. The first question is regarding the method.



Did John sprinkle water on people or did he immerse them in water?

Let's first consider the New Testament word for *baptism*:

Baptism: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #907 *baptizo*; to immerse, submerge; to make overwhelmed (i.e., fully wet); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism



This was NOT just a sprinkling. Baptism is a specific ritual of immersion, meaning to be "overwhelmed" with water, or "fully wet." The practice of sprinkling an infant's head in some Christian denominations does not fit with the scriptural description of baptism.

John the Baptist played an incredibly special role to bring us from the Old Testament cleansings and rituals into the New Testament coming into Christ. He brought an "in-between" kind of baptism.

Matthew 3:6: (KJV) *And were baptized <907> of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*



Baptism's Meaning: We can already see several symbolic meanings for baptism. The main point here is that baptism thus far is a cleansing and a full immersion to show a new life unfolding.

Baptism or cleansing, in one form or another, has always been important with God's chosen people. No wonder it shows up within Christianity!

To be baptized literally means to be submerged, and symbolically has different shades of meaning. Where does John the Baptist fit into all of this?



John the Baptist's work made an indelible mark on the Jewish nation at the time he preached. He also made an indelible mark on our entire Christian culture moving forward from those days. In fact, in many denominations of Christianity, John's work is still central to their evangelizing efforts.

The role of John the Baptist was to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. There were 400 years between the last words of the Old Testament in the book of Malachi and when the New Testament begins. No prophets were sent to Israel during this time and Greek influence began to corrupt Judaism. John had a lot of work to do in order to get the people ready to receive their Messiah!



This was a long time without communication from God. John’s role was to get the Jews in sync with God once again.

First, let’s establish the difference between the **baptism of John** and **baptism in the name of Jesus**. John was all about repentance, but this was only the first stage.

John identified himself as the forerunner of the Messiah, and his work was to prepare Israel:

Mark 1:1-5: *1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4 John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of **repentance** <3341> for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*

Repentance: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #3341 *metanoia*;
(subjectively) compunction (for guilt, including reformation);
by implication reversal (of [another's] decision)

John preached a *baptism of repentance* (meaning “reversal”) for the forgiveness of sins.



But why is it described this way if baptism by John didn’t actually forgive sins?



Verse 4 above says he was *preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. The baptism of repentance was to prepare the nation for the coming forgiveness of sins through Jesus.


It was clearly labeled as a baptism of repentance:

Acts 13:24: (KJV) *When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of **repentance** <3341> to all the people of Israel.*

In writing the book of Acts, Luke is talking about the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. It was a preparation only. This question is good because this is a confusing scripture. It's a baptism of repentance (pause, next part:) for the forgiveness of sins which will come from Jesus who was not on the scene yet. We have to put those two separate pieces together.

Repentance is the basic first step of reversing oneself, relating to sin. **John's baptism** was a national preparation for Israel to be ready for the introduction of their Messiah. This was for Israel only – no one else.


John was only baptizing for about six months, but this short period of time changed everything! Just like in the Jewish Law, John's baptism also showed itself to be a work of preparation.

Baptism

JOHN THE BAPTIST

**It could not take away sin,
but it could prepare the heart of the baptized one
for the privilege of having sin taken away.**

Just as the Israelites had washed with water to purify themselves before coming before God and bringing their sacrifice to the priests, John's baptism was also a preparatory cleansing work making the people "clean" in their hearts and minds, seeking after the Messiah to take away their sins through his sacrifice.

This showed the personal repentance John was illustrating by his type of baptism.

THE LAW

Cleansing

Remember, the people had as their basis the Jewish Law. This is why we first talked about the people having to cleanse themselves before bringing their sacrifice to the priest. Washing was the preparation, not the actual atonement for sin. John was there for their preparation to receive Jesus as the Messiah.

Baptism

JOHN THE BAPTIST

 THIS WAS A SPECIFIC TYPE OF BAPTISM
FOR A SPECIFIC GROUP OF PEOPLE
AT A SPECIFIC TIME IN HISTORY.

This isn't the kind of baptism Christians should do today because the Messiah arrived 2,000 years ago. We aren't preparing to move from the Law to Christianity like they were.

This is an important point because it is too easy to miss it – we love the thought of repenting from our sins because it gets people on a new path. But we have to put this type of baptism in the context of the nation of Israel as Jesus was just starting his ministry.

John was baptizing and preaching, and then:

John 1:29: *The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*

Something just changed! The moment Jesus was identified was the moment John's work would begin to diminish. John's disciples were troubled by John's decreasing popularity. This is exactly what happened once Jesus started his own preaching.

John's disciples asked him why Jesus' followers were baptizing more than they:

John 3:27-30: *27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent ahead of him. 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.*

What a humble heart! John knew his mission was for a limited time and for a limited purpose. He wasn't number one and had no desire to be. He showed the people the need to repent for their sins and get their hearts and minds in the right attitude so that Jesus could take it from there.

Important points:

1. In Jesus' ministry, it never mentions going back to John's baptism after Pentecost.
2. John's baptism was one of the final rituals of the Law.
3. All along, the Law had been showing them and leading them to the Messiah.

The point of John's ministry was always, *Behold the Lamb of God*. His message: *Look at Jesus, not at me*. The decrease in John's ministry was because the Messiah had come, and that would lead to the remission of sins.

When Jesus appears, John does not all of a sudden freeze, stop and just go away. There was a phasing out of John's baptism and a phasing in of following Jesus. There was a period of overlap.



We know from John 1:35 to 2:12 that some of John's disciples transferred over and became Jesus' disciples, specifically Andrew and Peter. Were all the apostles baptized by John? Can we assume they all were "baptized into repentance," especially since they would later baptize others?



It didn't matter if they were baptized by John or not – it was not required. While it seems reasonable they were, we are not told.

Think about all the people Jesus healed and preached to and said, *Your sins are forgiven you*. Most were nowhere near water. They were not required to first have John's type of baptism anymore because Jesus was there – the Messiah had arrived. Once Jesus was on the scene, the relevance and importance of John's baptism diminished.

So, no, the apostles did not necessarily have to be baptized by John because they were following the one John was pointing to. John was getting the nation ready to follow Jesus, but the hearts of the apostles already saw Jesus as worthy to be followed.

The remission of sins comes after the repentance stage and is accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus. **John's baptism** only symbolized Israel's necessary national repentance.

Repentance is one thing. Remission – freedom or pardon from that which you repented – is another.

**Remission: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #859 *aphesis*; freedom;
 (figuratively) pardon**

Luke 4:18: (KJV) (Jesus speaking) *The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach **deliverance** <859> to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at **liberty** <859> them that are bruised.*

Deliverance and liberty are the same Greek word for “remission,” as in, you are free to go. You have freedom.

John's baptism didn't have anything to do with being free or released from sin. It had everything to do with looking at what shackled them, what they were stuck in. He preached how to gain that freedom and throw off those shackles. Once baptized, they were not all of a sudden free and forgiven, but they were in a position to recognize their sinfulness and need for forgiveness. This is what John's baptism accomplished.

Jesus' ministry completely replaced the need for John's message of repentance only. **Being baptized into Christ**, which we will talk more about, involved the remission or pardon of sins after repentance. Jesus' ministry and baptism eventually was the complete journey. *Repent and then I can pardon your sin and send you the holy spirit.*

John's type of baptism was only needed for a few months prior to Jesus' ministry as a preparation. Once the Messiah arrived, it gradually became obsolete. Jesus' type of baptism would last the whole 2,000 or so years of the age the gospel message would go forth.

John will receive honor and dignity in the kingdom for the work he did for Israel. He served this incredibly important role in this transition time because the people were without godly guidance. He came on the scene and single-handedly did this work to prepare for the Messiah. The honor he will be given is well-deserved.



Baptism's Meaning: John's baptism was about repentance and was an integral part of the national preparation and ritual cleansing Israel needed to prepare for their Messiah. In contrast, eventually Jesus' type of baptism (baptism into Christ) would replace John's and be about repentance, forgiveness and the holy spirit.

Jesus' baptism would be about all of these things, not just one. Repentance did not get left behind; it was included in something entirely different.

Q. When Jesus and his disciples baptized others, did they change the meaning of John's baptism? Which kind of baptism were they performing for others? Was it the same as John's baptism to repentance, or some sort of hybrid now that Jesus was here?

John 4:1-3: *1 Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John, 2 (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were) 3 he left Judea and went away again into Galilee.*



Did they change the meaning of John's baptism? No. The whole purpose of Jesus' work before his crucifixion and ascension was to prepare Israel for their Messiah. Jesus was there to prepare them to accept him. This required them to repent and prepare themselves for what their Messiah would later ask of them. True Christian baptism would not be instituted until after Pentecost. It was not yet the time for a new baptism. It was still time for the turning from where they were to now following who they could see, Jesus of Nazareth.

Q. Why didn't Jesus personally baptize anyone? His apostles baptized under his direction.



Maybe it was because people would only want to be baptized by Jesus himself, or that it would be perceived to hold more weight than being baptized by a common disciple. Jesus was preaching and healing – he was the teacher. Baptism was a symbol; he was the real thing. Maybe his disciples did the work of this symbolism so that Jesus could focus on the more important work of being Messiah. Jesus had to complete his sacrifice before the new and living way was open for his followers to be baptized into Christ.

As we put together all these pieces, we have a clear picture of a transition time with one purpose of baptism phasing out while another is starting to phase in.

Putting so many details about baptism out on the table helps us to begin to realize that this ritual tells a profound story about God's plan!

What about Jesus and his own baptism? He was a perfect man, so why would he need that "ritual cleansing" Israel needed?

This is an important question because Jesus, as a perfect man, emphatically stood above everyone else. He was acceptable to God just the way he was. Also, as we shall see, both Jesus and John spoke about other baptisms. It is important to put all of this in order, so we see how they fit into the true **baptism into Christ.**

Q. Why would Jesus be baptized by John? He wouldn't need to prepare his own heart to receive himself as Messiah. He had nothing to repent for.



Exactly! There has to be a different reason. Let's take a look at the circumstances.

Jesus being baptized by John unmistakably connected him to John:

Luke 3:3-4: *3 And he (John the Baptist) came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, The voice of one crying in the wilderness (from Malachi 3:1), make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (from Isaiah 40:3).*

Jesus being baptized by John would show everyone that he approved of what John was doing. It would give John credibility.

John was there to point to Jesus. Appropriately, Jesus went to be baptized by him:

Matthew 3:13-15: *13 Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to prevent him, saying, I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? 15 But Jesus answering said to him, Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he permitted him.*

fulfill all righteousness – the New Living Translation says, *we must carry out all that God requires.* The rituals of the Law required cleansing. Jesus was perfect; he did not need cleansing, but he needed to fulfill every aspect of the Law. Part of this was his baptism as a fulfillment of all those ritual cleansings. He became the ultimate ritual cleansing. (As the Old Testament priest offered atonement for diseases after cleansing, so Jesus through his sacrifice offers remission of our sins once we have come to him.)

Jesus followed the Law from his youth. As a Jew, Jesus was considered a full-grown man at age 30 and was ready to fulfill the Law. In so doing, he had to present himself at baptism to offer his sacrifice to God, proclaiming to all Israel his readiness to do God's will. Jesus was ready to begin his true walk to fulfill the ransom price and Messiahship. He would bring an end to the Law.

John said to him, *I shouldn't be baptizing you!* This helps us to see John's humility. But Jesus explained that this was important and to let it happen, and John did. John did not fully understand why, but he trusted Jesus that baptizing him was appropriate.

This Old Testament prophecy needed to be fulfilled:

Psalms 40:7-8: *7 Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.*

Jesus came to be baptized to proclaim his readiness before all of Israel that he came to do God's will. This was to fulfill the Law in his responsibility to be able to serve God first and foremost.

In **Matthew 3:16-17**, Jesus comes up from the water, the spirit of God like a dove descends on him, and there is an audible voice from God saying, *This is My beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased.* The apostles received the holy spirit at Pentecost, but this was Jesus' "Pentecost."

The holy spirit came, indicating he was now begotten of God's spirit as a result of this baptism. Jesus' baptism was obviously very different than everyone else's. That ritual

cleansing of baptism prepared the actual sacrifice to be offered. It is a beautiful picture of Jesus' own sacrifice being prepared before God.



Baptism's Meaning: Jesus' own baptism shows us that just as all those under the Old Testament Law were to ceremonially wash, Jesus lawfully did the same to show his acquiescence with God's will.

Jesus didn't need to be cleansed, as he wasn't sinful, but he was fulfilling the requirements of the Law as a Jewish man. It also showed his willingness to die as a ransom sacrifice on behalf of mankind.



John was a descendant of the Old Testament high priest Aaron on both his mother's and father's side according to **Luke 1:5**. Priests in the Old Testament presented sacrifices to the Lord, and here John was presenting the ultimate sacrifice when he announced Jesus as *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world* in **John 1:29**.

When we study a subject like baptism, we might dismiss it as being just about dunking in water. Instead, we see in its intricacies how it is all about the unfolding of God's plan.

Let's look at other types of baptisms mentioned by John and Jesus.

First, John speaks of a baptism of the holy spirit and fire:

Matthew 3:11-12: *11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove his sandals; he will baptize you with the holy spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor; and he will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*



Some Christians speak of this **baptism of fire** as being the power of the holy spirit; however, this type of baptism is not mentioned again after this proclamation by John.

This fire can be understood by viewing the context of John's statement:

Matthew 3:7-10: *7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.*

Some of the religious leaders came to John's baptism to observe and question what was taking place – not to be baptized. By the holy spirit working in John, he could discern the hearts of the religious leaders. The majority of them were not right with God. John called them a *brood of vipers* – a family of snakes!

10 The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

When John tells them Jesus will *baptize you with the holy spirit and fire*, these are two different expressions.

recap
recap

1. At Pentecost, the faithful would be **baptized with the holy spirit**, as they were called by God and answered that call. We will look at this shortly.
2. The remainder of the nation of Israel lost God's favor for a long time when the call to follow Jesus went out to the Gentiles. Israel would go through a **baptism of fire**, meaning judgment and trouble. Baptism of fire isn't a good thing! We use the idiom "baptism by fire" today to describe learning something the hard way or persevering through a difficult trial.

Based on the context, we do not want be "baptized by fire" because it represents destruction because of the misuse of privilege. Jesus was coming as the Messiah. Some would accept him and others would not. Those who would not would be subject to the national judgment and desolation Jesus proclaimed.

This was spoken TO the Pharisees ABOUT the Pharisees:

Matthew 23:37-39: *37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. 38 Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! 39 For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

There is a dramatic cutting off of the nation. Scripturally, *fire* can symbolize either destruction or purification. When John in **Matthew 3:10** says, *every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*, he is saying they are going to be destroyed as a nation. They had lost their place of privilege. Jesus reiterates this here in Matthew 23. Just a few years later, the Temple was destroyed and Rome dispersed the Jews throughout the Roman world. The nation of Israel ceased to exist for almost 2,000 years! The prophecy came true. **Baptism of fire** is not a good thing.



Baptism's Meaning: This baptism of fire refers to the dispersion of Israel as a nation in AD 70. It represented the fire of destruction which would eventually open the door to their reconciliation.

Israel was reconciled by being brought back into God's favor. We witnessed this in our own day when we saw Israel return to their land. They are growing toward God's favor now, in spite of all the difficulties they face, as prophecy foretold.

In the same context, John also spoke of the baptism of the holy spirit.

This began on the Day of Pentecost in an unmistakable way:

Acts 2:3-4: *3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the holy spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit was giving them utterance.*

The apostles were literally baptized, physically “covered over” with the holy spirit. It was a plain, dramatic statement of God’s acceptance.

Note: It says *tongues AS OF fire*; in other words, like fire, but not actual fire – their hair was not literally on fire.

(Source: Barnes Notes on the Bible) Anything long, narrow and tending to a point is thus in the Hebrew called "a tongue." The word here means, therefore, "slender and pointed appearances" of flame.



Regardless, why the symbol of fire and not water? Why weren’t they baptized in water, especially if we don’t know if they were previously baptized in water by John?



Perhaps the reason for that is this baptism comes down from heaven. Think about Jesus’ baptism in water, but the holy spirit came down from heaven in the symbol of a dove. Pentecost had a different kind of symbol, shown as “tongues” like fire pointing at them. This is where God’s spirit really began to work and when Christianity was born. The apostles were given the enlightenment and the words to take God’s gospel to the nations from this day forward.

The apostles at Pentecost were proven to receive the holy spirit by Jesus. The Apostle Paul, the 12th apostle, DID need to be baptized and was baptized by Ananias. He needed to be cleansed before he was presentable to Christ. Remember, he was an enemy of Christ before his conversion.

This shows why the Apostle Paul needed water baptism – he needed to be cleansed, to turn around from his previous course of persecuting Christians. These men at Pentecost had already been proven by following Jesus. Their desire to be with Christ showed their hearts to already be ready.

While the rest of Jesus’ true followers do not experience this drama of having tongues like fire upon them, we do experience its results:

Titus 3:4-6: (YLT) *4 And when the kindness and the love to men of God our Saviour did appear 5 (not by works that are in righteousness that we did but according to His kindness,) He did save us, through a bathing of regeneration, and a renewing of the holy spirit, 6 which He poured upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*

Jesus received what is called the “full measure of the holy spirit” according to **John 3:34**. Everyone else is given just a portion. But what about the order in which it is received?



Does a person receive the holy spirit and then get baptized, or does the baptism bring about the ability to receive the holy spirit? In the examples we’ve looked at of Jesus being baptized by John and at Pentecost, the holy spirit is given immediately after or even simultaneously with the act of baptism.



Baptism is a symbol. The symbol shows a picture of something that happens. The timing happens both ways. Some are baptized and the holy spirit comes to them. Some have the holy spirit and come to realize they want to be baptized.

We can't use this symbol as a measuring stick or pointer that tells us when and where the holy spirit appears. It shows us that the holy spirit is given when the heart is truly God's and God accepts that person's consecration.



Baptism's Meaning: The baptism of the holy spirit is a privilege unique to Jesus' followers and, as we will see, is a result of true baptism into Christ.

Jesus himself spoke of another baptism, the **baptism of suffering**.

Context: James and John asked Jesus to be at his right and left hand in kingdom glory:

Mark 10:38-40: *38 But Jesus said to them, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized? 39 They said to him, We are able. And Jesus said to them, The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. 40 But to sit on my right or on my left, this is not mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.*

This baptism is a picture of being “immersed” in self-sacrifice. There's no water involved. This is also sometimes referred to as “the baptism of the cross.” It is a symbol of being covered over in that self-sacrificing life that walks in the footsteps of Jesus. It is not a literal, physical pouring of something onto you. Instead, it is the walking through *the valley of the shadow of death*, walking through the trials and tribulations to be Christlike. It is an important aspect of what **baptism into Christ** means.



Baptism's Meaning: This baptism showed all of Jesus' followers that their lives would be marked by hard testing. Like the baptism of the holy spirit, this is not the actual baptism into Christ; it is a result of that baptism.

True **baptism into Christ** is the giving up of one's life to do the will of God. If that sacrificial offering is accepted by God, the holy spirit is given. That is the **baptism of the holy spirit**.

So many moving parts! The most important thing to realize here is that all of these baptism lessons bring us to a clear conclusion.


Ceremonial washing, Israel's deliverance, John's baptism, the baptism of the holy spirit and of suffering all lead us to true Christian baptism.

So, what is “baptism into Christ”?

This really is the culmination of all we have learned about this whole symbol of immersion. With all of this groundwork in place, we need to determine if our own Christian interpretation of baptism comes up short. How do we figure this out? Ask questions and rely on scriptural answers!



Q Is Christian baptism the result of an acknowledgment of one's own sinfulness, or is it a symbol of a completely new direction in life?

 Because **John's baptism** was only about repentance - only about the acknowledgement of our own sinfulness - we know that **baptism into Christ** is much more.

This is explained when Paul came to Ephesus and came upon a certain group of believers not baptizing correctly for the time period:

Baptism



INTO CHRIST

Acts 19:2-5: 2 He said to them, Did you receive the holy spirit when you believed? And they said to him, No, we have not even heard whether there is a holy spirit. 3 And he said, Into what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism.

Even though John's kind of baptism became irrelevant once the Messiah arrived, it carried on for a while anyway. Again, its purpose was for the national preparation of Israel at that specific time.

4 Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Q Do these all mean the same thing, and what do they have to do with being immersed in water?

Baptism into the holy spirit	Baptism into Christ/of Christ
Baptism of/with the holy spirit	Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus

 All of these are parts of the same thing.

Baptism into Christ and **baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus** are the same and can be used interchangeably.

Baptism



**INTO CHRIST/
OF CHRIST**

Baptism



**IN THE NAME OF
THE LORD JESUS**

The symbol of water baptism shows a condition of heart and decision, that the person has made a life-long commitment to the Lord.

Baptism
of/with the
HOLY SPIRIT
(Pentecost)



Baptism

into the
HOLY SPIRIT
(the desired result of
our baptism into Christ)



Baptism into the holy spirit is a result of that decision. Again, when we think baptism, we have to think symbolically because it is showing us a bigger picture.

The **baptism of the holy spirit/with the holy spirit** is used to describe what occurred at Pentecost when the holy spirit was formally given to specific followers of Jesus.

All of these different parts lead us to the true **baptism of Christ**.

The receiving of the holy spirit is a major indication of a life offered to and accepted by God. The life has to be offered by the individual, but it has to be accepted by God in order for the holy spirit to be given. Every baptism does not necessarily result in the holy spirit being given. *See the Bonus Material for suggested additional episodes on this and other topics we touched on today.*

A spirit-begotten person sees, thinks, speaks and acts differently than they did before (see **2 Corinthians 5:17**). Their loyalty and allegiance is to God first. They are committed to a higher purpose - doing things God's way instead of their way.

When should a Christian be baptized? Jesus said it simply in a parable - first count the cost:

Luke 14:27-30: *27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, This man began to build and was not able to finish.*

The lesson is to think before such a serious decision is made. We shouldn't "carry the cross" just because it feels like the right thing to do, or because our friend chose that way. Our motivation should be because we believe we are called by God to follow Christ.

A Christian should be baptized only after they have made the deep commitment of giving up their will and control of their life to God. It should not be done flippantly or casually.

This should NOT be an easily concluded decision, as it means one's life will be completely revitalized:

Romans 6:3-6: *3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? (Obviously, baptism is a symbol.) 4 Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.*

Baptism symbolically pictures the death of our old life. This goes beyond just feeling clean and repentant; it is about being drawn, called and compelled to put our old lives behind and adopt an entirely new way of living.



Under what circumstances should a baptized person be rebaptized? If I commit a serious sin, do I need to be rebaptized as a "do over" in order to get right with God?



There is no scripture that tells us to rebaptize. The only time someone might want to be rebaptized is if they did not understand their original baptism.

If they were thinking they were just repenting of their sins and trying to be clean, that's nice, but it is no longer an appropriate baptism for Christianity anymore. The time for John's baptism is over, and it was for the purpose of a national cleansing for Israel early in the New Testament.

If this person did not understand that baptism was unto sacrifice and are now ready to make that sacrifice, then yes, maybe a rebaptism is warranted or appropriate. Baptism is not something we have to do to be saved. It is a symbol of what goes on in our heart, an indication that we want to walk with Christ.

If we were baptized as a baby, we might want to be baptized at the point when we understand what walking with Christ entails. As an adult, if we are called to follow Christ, then yes, consider baptism again. Baptism is the ultimate picture of this personal decision.

What exactly does baptism symbolize?

Romans 12:1-2: *1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice...*

This is saying we are giving ourselves up for Jesus. This symbol is so special. It's as if the baptizer is our Lord Jesus lowering us into the water and accepting our change of life.

We present ourselves into the hands of our baptizer – trusting them with our very life because they lower us down backwards into the water. We are helpless to save ourselves at that point and need to trust they will bring us up out of the water.

...acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

We are only acceptable through Christ's ransom price paying for our sins. This is shown as we lay down our lives in the immersion process. We must give up our own will, putting our lives into the hands of Jesus and let him carry us through this process.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Not conformed - be transformed - like a caterpillar to a butterfly that starts out as one thing and transforms into another that can fly. Our minds are transformed by the begetting of the holy spirit. Again, it is God's choice whether or not to accept someone who asks to follow Christ. His acceptance is shown symbolically as being pulled up out of the water cleansed.

As we descend into the water, we realize our life is symbolically ending as a human being. As we re-emerge out of the water, we are pledging to live a transformed life, by the grace of God. It is all a *picture* of what we are agreeing to and what God is promising us. This is what baptism is.

...so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Now we can live differently than before. Water baptism is a symbol. It doesn't physically change us; it indicates what we have dedicated ourselves to.

2 Timothy 2:11-12: *11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 If we endure, we will also reign with him; If we deny him, he also will deny us.*

Our baptism is a constant reminder that we have to “die” with him so that we can live with him.

 One of the most popular questions we receive from listeners is, “Do I have to be baptized in order to be saved?”



The short answer is no, we do not. Salvation is in two parts which we have covered in previous episodes. (See Bonus Material.) We are baptized to show our desire to follow Christ. There is no hellfire to be saved from; there is only sin and death. Jesus ransomed all from sin and death. Some become his true followers and receive a heavenly reward, but most will be resurrected from their graves to be saved later. So, no, we do not need to be baptized at the present time to be saved.

What is the result of an appropriate Christian baptism? (John’s type of baptism would be inappropriate today):

2 Corinthians 5:17-19: *17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

The world is being reconciled back to God. If we are baptized into Christ and that pledge is accepted by God, we become a “new creation.” Just as Jesus was changed at his baptism, we are changed when we dedicate our lives to God, to sacrificially follow Jesus. God accepts that and grants us His spirit. The granting of God’s spirit is the life-changing moment – not the baptism.

To be part of this new creation is to now be a prospective member of the body of Christ:

Galatians 3:27-29: *27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.*

The holy spirit is the great equalizer. Forget the past; we are all one in Christ. It doesn’t matter where we come from. Once we receive God’s spirit, we are all working towards the same goal. Being *Abraham’s descendants* and *heirs according to that promise* quoted from Genesis means eventually being a part of blessing all the resurrected families of the earth in God’s future kingdom. What a wonderful reward!

Baptism into Christ is a wonderful symbol and is the whole point of this conversation.

Here are some manifestations of the internal change that baptism represents:

Ephesians 4:1-6: *1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,*

We need to walk the walk in the way Jesus would have walked, the best we can.

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

We put ourselves in a position of servant, of tolerance, of gentleness. It doesn't mean getting what WE want, but doing things through love the way Jesus did.

3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

The unity of the spirit is necessary to the body of Christ. It is our responsibility if we are walking in Christ to preserve that unity as best we can.

4 There is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

One body, one spirit, one hope – it is all about ONE thing.

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Put aside for a moment all those other examples of baptism. This refers to the **baptism into Christ**. This is the one baptism to the one Lord and the one faith.

6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

These are the changes that come when we truly dedicate ourselves and use baptism as the symbol it is.



Baptism's Meaning: The symbol of baptism is a sacred public testimony. It is an outward demonstration of an inward response to a sacred calling from God Himself to become a part of the body of Christ. To be baptized into Christ is to surrender your life willingly and completely to doing only God's will. Baptism, as this outward sign of this mature inward commitment, should never be taken lightly. Let us thank God for this sacred and wonderful opportunity!

Baptism into Christ is a symbol of a life that is changed. It is a symbol God put in place in various ways before Jesus came to earth because it was such an important and integral part of how His plan would work. We are to be baptized into Christ in a scriptural way and no other, taking it seriously.

**So, are Christians really baptized into Christ?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



Next episode

Join us next week on **November 13, 2023**

Episode 1307:

Is there a Christian Secret to a Happy Life?



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Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

What is the holy spirit? <https://youtu.be/YF0ovoQW4C0?si=f8sMIA6jHMmjrycV>

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What is baptism? https://youtu.be/67e-GRedBeQ?si=Z8wN8VQQ7PvEgIN_

Why was Jesus baptized? <https://youtu.be/v4CipPAajyg>

Biblical baptism – Lydia’s household:

Acts 16:14-15: *14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. 15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us.*

Acts 16:40: *They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.*

There is NO indication of any children – the implication is it was only adults who had believed. Households would follow the lead of the owner regarding their beliefs and worship.

Biblical baptism – Stephanas’ household:

1 Corinthians 1:14-17: *14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. 16 Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*

1 Corinthians 16:13-16: *13 Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love. 15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.*

Notice that the “household” which had been baptized in **1 Corinthians 1:16** was devoted for the ministry of the saints and in **1 Corinthians 16:16** are spoken of as men and these men heard and believed the gospel.

Biblical baptism – Paul and Silas in prison:

Acts 16:26-33: *26 And suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, Do not harm yourself, for we are all here! 29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 and after he brought them out, he said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 They said, Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. Same story!*

Where did baptism come into play in all of our examples?

- For those in Cornelius’ house, it was after hearing, believing and receiving the holy spirit.
- For the eunuch and Simon, it was after hearing or seeing the gospel made plain.

- For those at Pentecost, it was after their consciences were pierced.
- For Lydia and her house, it was after she heard the word and opened her heart to it.
- For Stephanas and his household, it was after the preaching of Paul.
- For the jailer and his household, it was after seeing miracles and believing.

All of these examples show people deliberately choosing to be baptized as a pledge to follow Jesus after hearing the gospel. They had to be of age to understand and make this choice.

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1306: Are Christians Really Baptized Into Christ?

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1306-baptize/>

See:  CQRewind
SHOW NOTES

1. How does the story of Noah and the ark illustrate baptism? How does this correspond with Christian baptism? Have you experienced “staying in the ark” of Jesus in your life? (1 Peter 3:19-21, Genesis 6 and 7)
2. Explain how the Israelites experienced baptism when they crossed the Red Sea. What elements did the Apostle Paul point to in Israel’s wilderness journey that parallel a true Christian walk? Describe the ideas behind Israel’s laws on cleansing to protect health. Did they only protect their physical health? Compare that with Jesus’ actions on our behalf. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Exodus 19:10-11, Leviticus 15:14-15)
3. Does the Greek word for “baptism” indicate the method of baptism? What was John the Baptist’s role in God’s plan? What did he preach? Did John’s type of baptism take away sin? How did John’s baptism reflect the cleansing rituals of the Law? Who was it *exclusively* aimed toward and at what time? (Matthew 3:6, Mark 1:1-5, Acts 13:24)
4. What was necessary on Jesus’ part before “baptism into Christ” included the remission of sin? When was true Christian baptism instituted? Why did Jesus need to be baptized by John? (Luke 3:3-4, 4:18, Matthew 3:13-17)
5. Explain John’s declaration that Jesus would baptize “with the holy spirit and fire.” How was Israel as a nation “baptized with fire”? Why did this happen? Is it forever? When did the “baptism of the holy spirit” begin? How do the rest of Jesus’ true followers receive the holy spirit? As a result of this baptism, what can the followers of Jesus expect? (Matthew 3:7-12, 23:37-39, Acts 2:3-4, Titus 3:4-6, Mark 10:38-40)
6. What does the symbol of water baptism indicate? Does this always result in the gift of the holy spirit to the person who is baptized? What should be *carefully* considered before baptism? What does baptism symbolically picture? (Luke 14:27-30, Romans 6:3-6, 12:1-2)
7. Describe in detail the act of baptism and what each step symbolizes. Does everyone need to be baptized at this present time in order to be saved? (Romans 12:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:11-12)
8. Why should we give up our present life to be baptized into Christ - to sacrificially follow Jesus? Why is this something to be sought after for those called by God? Describe the internal changes baptism represents in a faithful life as listed in Ephesians 4:1-6. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19, Galatians 3:27-29)
9. Have you prayerfully considered this step of faith? How has it changed your life, or what do you hope it will change in you?

Baptism’s Meaning: The symbol of baptism is a sacred public testimony. It is an outward demonstration of an inward response to a sacred calling from God Himself to become a part of the body of Christ. To be baptized into Christ is to surrender your life *willingly and completely* to doing only God’s will. Baptism, as this outward sign of this mature inward commitment, should never be taken lightly. Let us thank God for this sacred and wonderful opportunity!