

# **Baptism: Necessary, or Symbolism?**

by Homer Kizer

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# Baptism: Necessary, or Symbolism?

As a seventeen-year-old emancipated minor attending, then, Oregon Technical Institute, I took a job as the janitor of a church in Klamath Falls that sprinkled—as if dampening a shirt so it could be ironed—converts with holy water. I would periodically spill the basin of blessed water, and would have to refill the basin from a basement faucet.

Were the baptisms of those babies sprinkled with tap water valid? Did those babies become disciples of Christ when droplets flicked onto their faces dampened foreheads and cheeks? Or were those droplets as meaningless as raindrops? Did my bumping the baptismal fount with the vacuum cleaner invalidate the baptism of those babies?

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For a disciple of Christ Jesus, baptism is commanded: Jesus said, "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Yes, the thief on the cross has the promise of being in paradise without being baptized. His death was eminent. In a figurative sense, his death occurred when he was raised on that cross; he wasn't coming down from that cross alive. He didn't need to experience the symbolism of death and physical resurrection—and that is what baptism is all about. The thief was alive after figuratively experiencing his own death. His actual death would come shortly. But for a few hours, he lived though he were dead. He lived physically as one who had been raised from his own death.

Baptism is just that: physical life after death. A person voluntarily enters his or her own water grave, in which, if not raised from it, the person would actually die. But the person is raised from the dead, or resurrected, to live as a physical human being, with the penalty for the person's sins having been paid. It is, in symbolism, what the great White Throne Judgment is in reality. As such, baptism is complete submersion in water. A person doesn't die if rained upon—I spent enough years living along the Oregon Coast to state this with certainty.

The thief on the cross had been under the sentence of death for some period of time before he was nailed to his cross, but once nailed to his cross that death sentence was a reality. Likewise, the penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23). Sin is lawlessness, or the transgression of the laws of God (1 John 3:4). A person can steal for any number of years before experiencing his or her death, but the person was sentenced to death with his or her first theft. The person's fate is directly analogous to the thief on the cross's prior to his crucifixion. The Apostle John writes, "If we say

we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). So all of humanity is under the sentence of death. All await their fate. All will die. At some point, all will be in exactly the position the thief on the cross was when spikes were driven through his hands and feet. That point might be in a hospital bed, or experiencing chest pains, or as an automobile rolls over and over. Death is eminent, yet the person still lives. That point can be when a person enters his or her watery baptismal grave.

You need to understand what baptism is, what it means, how it is accomplished, and why even Jesus was baptized. You need to understand its seriousness, and not delay being baptized but request baptism upon repentance. You don't need to be perfect first. On the contrary, you should be baptized when you realize that you are no longer hostile to the laws of God—your life as a Christian begins with baptism.

Baptism as a ceremony predates God the Logos coming as the man Jesus Christ. Proselytes to Judaism were circumcised and baptized and required to offer a sacrifice. The promise that came from Abraham through Isaac was ratified by circumcision, which was the symbol of separation. By that promise, Israel became the firstborn son of the Lord (Exod 4:22); by that promise, Israel was made a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). To partake of that promise, foreskins were clipped. A man became a physical Israelite, grafted into physical Israel, who had been slaves in Egypt. Physical Israel left slavery behind when the nation passed through the Red Sea. Paul writes to Gentile converts at Corinth: "I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corth 10:1-2). So a proselyte to Judaism was, by baptism, leaving Egypt and slavery behind as the proselyte became part of a holy people.

But the slavery left behind was of the flesh, was physical slavery. The promise of being holy was also physical. And the covenant by which this promise came to physical Israel was abolished by the death of the Covenantor (Eph 2:15). No longer is there a distinction of foreskins. Under the second covenant, circumcision is of the heart and mind [*naphesh*] (Deu 30:6), a figurative expression for the equally figurative expression of writing the laws of God on hearts and minds under the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10-12 & 10:16-17). The new covenant is with spiritual Israel; its spiritual promises are ratified by spiritual circumcision, which is as real as clipped foreskins. The Apostle Peter writes, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). He adds, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (v. 9). So the sacrifice required to be part of spiritual Israel is to proclaim the mighty acts of Christ. This is, in modern parlance, taking Christ to the world.

Three things were required of Jewish proselytes: circumcision, baptism and a sacrifice. Under the new covenant, drawn disciples are spiritually modified through the circumcision of their hearts and minds. No one can come to Christ unless drawn by God the Father (John 6:44, 65 — for a longer discussion of being drawn, request, *Conversion, What Do you Mean?*). The natural mind, subject to years of Satan's broadcast of rebellion, is hostile to God: "For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot" (Rom 8:7). But the promise of the new covenant is that the drawn disciple's mind will be changed, will be circumcised. If a person realizes that his or her thoughts are no longer hostile to the laws of God, in all likeliness, the person has been drawn. There really is no other reliable early-on indicator of being modified spiritually.

So, under the new covenant, circumcision isn't preformed with a knife. In fact, a drawn disciple doesn't do anything. Just as, under the Sinai covenant, foreskins were cut on the eighth day, thereby making an infant holy on the symbolic day when the great White Throne Judgment will occur, a spiritual Israelite is made

holy as if resurrected on the eighth day. This spiritual Israelite did no more to make him or herself holy than an infant under the Sinai covenant did when circumcised. Newly drawn disciples are as spiritual infants, eight days old.

(The eighth day of Tabernacles is a high Sabbath, and is actually a separate feast. It is a memorial to when God will resurrect all of humanity in the great White Throne Judgment. Of the Sabbaths listed in Leviticus 23, it is the eighth although it is the seventh annual Sabbath. As such, it occupies the same position in the annual Sabbath calendar that the weekly Sabbath occupies in the weekly calendar. It is when all can come to God the Father.)

For Jewish proselytes, baptism followed circumcision. In Greek, the linguistic icon translated as baptism is *baptizo*, which is best understood as "to immerse," as in "plunge in," or "dip in." It does not mean to sprinkle, for which the icon *rantizo* exists, or to pour, for which the icon *cheo* exists. Thus, baptism is the literal submersion of a person, which would cause a person to drown if the person is not raised from the water. Rain never baptized anyone, nor does sprinkling with holy water.

The Apostle Paul writes,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Rom 6:3-5)

Baptism is serious business. The death of God the Logos as the man Jesus Christ was a high price for God the Father to pay so that He could have an out-of-season relationship with drawn disciples. Sin, any sin regardless of how small, separates a human being from the Father, who will not abide sin. Since the penalty for sin is death, the death of each sinner will pay the penalty for the person's sin. But dead humans know nothing: "[F]or there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol [the grave], to which you are going" (Eccl 9:10). The person's death paid the penalty for the person's sin, but the person has ceased to exist. "For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust

again" (Eccl 3:19-20). The person returns to the base elements of the earth. The person has no immortal soul, which would be receiving eternal life through fornication or by however the person was conceived. Eternal life is the gift of God (Rom 6:23). There is no other way to receive eternal life other than by receiving it as a gift from God. (For more information, request *Heaven, Hell or Somewhere Between*.)

A dead person cannot take advantage of him or her having paid the penalty for the person's sin. This dead person hasn't been judged, but will be (Heb 9:27). But to be judged, the person must first be resurrected, or reconstructed from the elements of the earth. This is what we see in the great White Throne Judgment when all of humanity who haven't been drawn ahead of time will be resurrected as physical human beings to be judged (Rev 20:11-15). They have paid the ultimate penalty for sin without knowing why they had to die, without knowing God, without having a chance to be saved. This will not be a second chance to receive salvation. Everyone gets only one chance. God is not a respecter of persons. The Chinese peasant who died without ever hearing the name of *Jesus Christ* will have a chance to accept Christ as his or her sovereign in the great White Throne Judgment. But the drawn disciple has his or her chance now. The Apostle Peter writes, "For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Jesus said, concerning disciples, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

Baptism is, symbolically, death and resurrection as a physical human being in the great White Throne Judgment. It is more than sort of putting your old man to death. As far as God is concerned, it is literal death, and actual resurrection. Reconstructing you from base elements is no more difficult for God than is raising you from a baptismal pool for your pastor.

But a jaded attitude toward baptism has crept into Christianity. Among many disciples, the tendency exists to slough off baptism as a snake might shed its skin, leaving behind a film of the old man, as the person crawls away the same as before, with the person's venom sacs full. Not much seems to actually happen when a person is baptized. The disciple usually doesn't feel the Holy Spirit enter him or her. There are no tongues of fire. The person gets wet. Hands are laid on the

person; a prayer is said. Everyone welcomes the person into the fellowship of Believers. Then all go home.

As far as God is concerned, the person died and has been resurrected just as the majority of humanity will be in the great White Throne Judgment—and yes, judgment is on the person.

The Apostle Peter, on that day of Pentecost, said to his fellow Israelites, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38). Peter's use of repent [*metanoeo*] implies to think differently than before—and a spiritually modified disciple does think differently although, at first, the differences between now and before are minimal just as one might expect about the day-by-day activities of an eight day old infant who has had his foreskin clipped.

We see the seriousness of baptism in the pattern of the temple. The Apostle Paul writes, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you" (1 Corth 3:16). Usually this is read to mean that God tabernacles with disciples; in a literal sense God dwells in each disciple through the presence of His Breath [*Pneuma*] within each disciple as the earnest of the promised eternal life. But in a figurative sense, the disciple is the temple of God in that the Christian walk traverses the stations of the temple. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6—these are the metaphors assigned to the three temple gates (i.e., a gate, a door, and a veil) that stood between the world and the Holy of Holies. In addition, Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved" (John 10:7-9). But God the Father is the outer gatekeeper (v. 3). No one can come to Christ unless drawn by the Father (John 6:44, 65), unless the gatekeeper opens the gate to the inner court; and no one can go to the Father except through Christ (John 14:6). Salvation requires passing through all three gates, and arriving at the mercy seat.

Once in the inner court, a disciple encounters the altar of sacrifice, covered by Christ's shed blood as the disciple's sin offering (Matt 26:28). The disciple has to accept Christ's sacrifice, or the disciple cannot proceed to the laver, where the priests washed their hands and feet before entering the sanctuary through the door known as *the truth*. The altar of sacrifice and the laver represent baptism. The disciple figuratively lays down his or her life just as Christ laid down His. Then the disciple emerges from the water of the laver washed clean, free from sin because the disciple has been reconciled to the Father by Christ's death and

justified by the risen Christ bearing the disciple's sins, as portrayed in the symbolism of the two goats of Yom Kippurim. Both goats were Israel's sin offering. One was sacrificed. The other had the sins of Israel read over it before it was led into the wilderness by the hand of a fit man. The two goats were a shadow of the reality that is Christ's death and resurrection. Christ will return to Satan the sins He presently bears when Satan is bound following Christ's return as the all powerful Messiah.

Once baptized, the disciple, as part of a royal priesthood, enters the sanctuary through *the truth*. Inside the sanctuary, the only light is from the candlestick. A disciple is spiritually illuminated by the Word of God; the disciple needs no other illumination. The disciple then encounters the Table of Showbread, where the grain offerings are poured out. These are the disciple's works, which the disciple voluntarily gives. Because they mean something to the disciple, they mean something to God. Plus, the loaves of showbread have had frankincense poured over them—they smell better than they taste. Christianity can be sweet to the nose but bitter in the mouth. It requires disciples to live contrary to the ways of the world. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. / For I have come to set a man against his father, / and a daughter against her mother, / and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; / and one's foes will be members of one's own household" (Matt 10:34-36). Jesus promises His disciples that they will be hated by the world and persecuted. And the world will hate disciples for the works they do.

The error of lawlessness leaves disciples without an offering to leave on the Table of Showbread. Symbolically, these disciples cannot proceed farther. They cannot go to the altar of incense, where disciples offer up their prayers (Rev 5:8). Nor can they pass through the rent veil, called *the life*. They do not rest under the Mercy Seat, where they belong; they lose the grace which came with them being placed in a covenant relationship when spiritually modified. Their bodies are no longer arks of the covenant over which rests the Mercy Seat and the two cherubim.

A baptized disciple becomes an actual ark of the new covenant. Inside the disciple are the two tablets of the law of God—written in the disciple's heart and mind are the laws of God. Also inside the disciple are the jar of manna and Aaron's budded staff. The jar of manna represents eternal

life: Jesus said, "Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:57-58).

Beside the ark of the covenant was the Book of Deuteronomy as a witness against Israel (Deu 31:26). The new covenant is the second covenant mediated by Moses with better promises added when Christ became its mediator; the new covenant is the Moab covenant made spiritual instead of physical. And the terms of the covenant have disciples believing God unto obedience by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in the Book of Deuteronomy, all of them.

When drawn by the Father, a disciple is spiritually modified. The laws of God are written on his or her heart and mind, which in modern parlance means that they have been put in the disciple's conscience. The disciple knows God because His laws have been internalized. And the disciple's sins have been forgiven. The disciple has become the ark of the new covenant and rests under the Mercy Seat, symbolic of grace. But the disciple is also the temple of God: all of the stations are within the disciple. Paul says that physical Israelites with circumcised hearts and minds only need to confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead, and they will be saved (Rom 10:9). The same can be said of spiritually modified disciples, only these disciples need the same baptism that Jewish proselytes needed in order to become part of spiritual Israel. Even physical Israelites, under the new covenant, need to be baptized to become part of spiritual Israel.

The offering Jewish proselytes were to bring to the temple becomes the spiritual work to which a drawn disciple has been called. The Apostle Peter wrote that disciples are made holy to proclaim the mighty deeds of Christ (1 Peter 2:9). They weren't called for personal salvation. They could just as easily received salvation in the great White Throne Judgment. Rather, they have been called out-of-season to do a work, a great work—and judgment is on them today. If they have no offering to bring to God, they are stopped before they reach the Holy of Holies. Yes, they can be spiritually illuminated, having great knowledge of God; but they are also unprofitable servants who have buried their talents.

Baptism is an essential part of becoming a disciple. Although a drawn disciple who has been physically prevented from being baptized can

certainly receive eternal life, the example is that a disciple should be baptized as soon as possible. The Ethiopian eunuch, when he heard the good news about Jesus, said to Philip, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). The chariot stopped, and "Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing" (v. 38-39).

If a person believes that Christ is the Son of God, it is time for the disciple to be baptized, understanding, of course, that as far as God is concerned, the watery grave is real death and judgment is now upon the disciple. The baptized disciple will have eternal life dwelling in the person. The disciple's sins are not only forgiven, but cease to exist as long as the disciple remains in the covenant relationship with God in which the disciple has been placed. Moses said of this covenant, "Surely, this commandment that am commanding you today is not too hard for you" (Deu 30:11). Jesus said His yoke was easy, and His burden light (Matt 11:30). But living in covenant with God does cause the disciple to be out-of-step with the world as humanity runs to its destruction.

As seen in the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, baptism results in a person going into the water and coming up out of the water. It is not being rained upon, or hosed down.

Usually, the laying on of hands for receipt of the Holy Spirit immediately follows baptism. In the example of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit came first. Peter then said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). And he ordered Cornelius and all of his household to be baptized.

Again, perfection doesn't precede baptism: it doesn't take making oneself perfect before the person is baptized. Baptism is symbolic of death and physical resurrection, with judgment coming upon the newly baptized individual. This is why Jesus was baptized.

When Jesus came to his cousin John to be baptized, "John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' (Matt 3:14). John's baptism was for the remission of sin. Jesus was sin free, and had no need to repent of sin. So how Jesus answered John becomes important: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15). Baptism is part of fulfilling

all righteousness; it is part of doing that which is right.

As God the Logos, Jesus hadn't passed through the Red Sea with Israel. He hadn't been under the cloud, but was in the cloud. Technically, even though He was born to an Israelite mother, as the Son of Man He wasn't part of Israel until His baptism. Also, judgment wasn't upon Him until after He was baptized. It was then when He defeated Satan. It was then when His ministry began. Likewise, for drawn disciples judgment follows baptism—disciples become a royal priesthood, called to proclaim Christ's mighty deeds to the world, while under judgment.

A drawn disciple enters a watery grave and symbolically emerges in the great White Throne Judgment—this is the essence of baptism. Christ's death pays the penalty for the sins which the disciple's death should have paid. The disciple has been born anew, or born again, as if physically resurrected. The disciple has also been begotten of God, a separate process that will result in glorification, in resurrection as an heir of God.

Glorification depends upon how the disciple judges him or herself. In the second covenant is this familiar passage: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you" (Deu 30:19-20). When the mediator changed from Moses to Christ, life changed from physical to eternal, but the terms of the covenant didn't change. Disciples have before them the choice of life or death. Christ commands us to choose eternal life by loving the Lord and obeying Him. But He won't force us to choose life. We must do that ourselves. Our making of that choice begins with baptism.

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