

# SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER    ISA. 55: 1 0    FOR THE EATER  
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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### WHAT DOES *BAPTIZO* MEAN?

If someone should ask what the Spanish word *manzana* means, it would be of no help at all if he were told that "manzana means manzana." This could be repeated a hundred times but he would be no wiser than when he first asked the question. But if he were told that *manzana* means *apple* he would at once be in possession of a valuable and useful bit of information.

Even so it is with the Greek word *baptizo*. We offer no information at all when we say that *baptizo* means "to baptize." To do so means that we have given the same word, with a slight change in spelling, as a translation. This is nothing more than an exercise in futility.

In view of the fact that the Greek words *baptizo* and *baptisma* have not been translated in the *King James Version*, it would be good indeed if when we come upon a passage such as Mark 16:16 which says: "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ..**", to ask ourselves the question: "What would this verse say to us if *baptizo* were translated into English?" Could it still be used as an argument for the necessity of a water ritual in order for a person to be saved?"

Also in Acts 2:41 where we are told: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." Most people form a mental picture of 3,000 people marching off from the "upper room" to the river Jordan in order for one of the twelve apostles to dip them into water, or to have water splashed, poured, or sprinkled upon them. But what picture would they form if *baptizo* in this passage were translated into English.

In 1 Cor. 15:29 the question is asked by Paul: "**Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?**" If the two occurrences of *baptizo* had been translated here, would the Mormons then be able to make the word *baptize* to mean a water ritual and then read into it their elaborate system of ritual baptisms which are supposed to bring great benefits to those who are dead?

There are many who insist that *baptizo* means "to immerse," and that it should be translated by some form of this word in every New Testament occurrence. Some translators have done this but such a course denies altogether the historical development of *baptizo*, also the secondary and metaphorical use of this word. These meanings are far more important and momentous than its primary and basic meaning. The historical development of the word *baptizo* is a part of Scripture which should not be ignored.

Every student of the origin and development of words will know that a simple, basic word may suddenly take off and soar in meaning to almost unbelievable heights. For example, consider the word *heaven*, which comes from the word *heave*, that is to raise up, to exalt. The Greek word for heaven is *ouranos* which is derived from the verb *oro* which means "to raise" and the word *ana* which means above, or up. The basic meaning of the Greek word *ouranos*, the Hebrew *shamayim*, and the English *heaven* is height, in the sense of being over and above, and these words can, if desired, be applied as a descriptive name to any thing or being that is over and above. And in all three of the languages mentioned above, these words soar far above their primary meaning and are used as a designation of God Himself, the One who is most exalted, the One who is over and above all.

Even so it is with the word *baptizo*. It has also soared. Its history and development are most interesting. A study of this will reveal truth that will always be hidden from those who insist upon one basic meaning in all its occurrences. Consider these three passages in which *baptizo* is found.

In **Matt. 3:11** we read: "**I indeed baptize you with water. . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.**"

In Matt. 20:22 we read: "**Are you. . . able to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?**"

In Luke 12:50 the Lord declared: "**I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.** "

These three passages are certainly sufficient to show that there are passages in the New Testament where *baptizo* is used in reference to a water ritual, and that there are other passages where it cannot have reference to any such ceremony. Therefore, a serious blunder will be made by all who try to make this word represent only one idea. Careful meditation upon this word in all its occurrences and contexts will bring the conviction that this word is used by the Spirit of God to communicate to us a number of divine concepts. Are we to ignore all this truth in order to give preeminence to some water ritual with which we have become enamored?

In the study of any word its history must be carefully considered. Secondary meanings arise from primary meanings and metaphorical uses arise from literal meanings. Take, as an example the word *crank*. What did this word mean when it came into our language? It started out signifying something that was bent, and this underlying idea still persists in every use of this word. Out of it came the verb *crankle* which meant to *zig-zag*, and he who *crankled* moved in a course that had many sharp bends. This idea still survives today in the word *crinkle*, and those who *crinkle-crankle* move in a zig-zag manner. In the seventeenth century the word *crank* was used to denote a twist (a sharp bend) in speech as will be seen in Milton's *L'Allegro*: "Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee jest and youthful jollity, Quips and Cranks, and wanton Wiles, Nods and Becks and wreathed Smiles." Later this word was used to describe an eccentric idea or act, then to describe a person with a mental bent or twist, and we still call such people "cranks" today. Many who read this will remember the bent bar that was used to start an automobile. And what did we call this? A "crank," of course. From this record of facts we can see the importance of considering the historical meaning of words.

The basic word with which our study must begin is the word *bapto*. This word is found three times in the New Testament: Luke 16:24, John 13:26, and Rev. 19:13. An examination of these three passages will show beyond doubt that this basic word means "to dip." This statement many bring some comfort to the Baptists and some dismay to the Methodists. However, it is not my purpose to bring comfort or to cause dismay. My task is to speak the truth according to the facts discovered.

While the occurrence of *bapto* in Rev. 19:13 is translated "dipped," it contains a suggestion that a different concept is being set forth and a new dimension is being added. It speaks of a "vesture dipped in blood," and as this translation stands it sets forth the idea of the Lord Jesus clothed in a vesture that has been dipped in blood and is still dripping from having been so dipped. But since the history of *bapto* shows that it had already come to mean "to dye," this passage should be translated, "clothed in a vesture dyed with blood." Animal blood was a very common dye in ancient times.

In the ancient East, the work of dyeing was quite prominent and important. And since most dyeing was done by dipping the material into a liquid dye, the word *bapto* came to mean "to dye," as can be seen in numerous examples from Classical Greek, Koine Greek, and the Papyrus manuscripts. Dr. James W. Dale covers most of all this in his monumental work on "Classic Baptism."

In the process of time the word *bapto* came to be spelled *baptizo* which added intensity to the word making it more meaningful and useful. This is the word that is found eighty times in the New Testament.

The Greek-speaking Hebrews, those of the **diaspora**, knew quite well that *baptizo* meant both to dip and to dye. The Septuagint translators used it to render the Hebrew word for "dipping" in 2 Kings 5:14, and to translate the Hebrew word for "dyed" in Ezekiel 23:15. This was about 250 years before Christ.

Another meaning that the Greek-speaking Hebrews gave to the word *baptizo* is found in the Septuagint of Isa. 21: 4. The KJV reads "fearfulness affrighted me", but the Septuagint reads "**fearfulness baptized me.**" A more accurate rendering would be "**fearfulness overwhelmed me.**" In harmony with this concept is one of the very early occurrences of *baptizo* from the papyri, cited by Moulton and Milligan, where *baptisma* means flooded or overwhelmed with calamities. This shows that this word was then in use in the metaphorical sense, even by uneducated people, and shows why the Lord Jesus spoke of His death as a baptism in Matt. 20:22,23; Mark 10:38,39; and Luke 12:50.

From what has been set forth the reader will see the manifold concepts that the word *baptizo* has been used to designate. However, there is yet another truth that this word is used to express which, in my opinion, is most important of all. This word is used to denote a concept that grew out of the fact that *baptizo* had taken on the meaning of "to dye," and had become an important word in the process of dyeing. This can be better understood if we consider some of the facts related to the art of dyeing cloth.

When cloth is dipped into a vat of dye, it is not simply colored. It actually takes on the character of the dye into which it is dipped. There is a merger between the cloth and the dye that is permanent. Ancient dyers understood this and spoke of baptizing cloth in purple, scarlet, or blood. This invested or imbued the cloth with a certain color. Since this process introduced a dye that entered so deeply and so extensively into the very substance of the cloth so that no part was left unaffected, the cloth was no longer called wool, silk, or linen, but was called purple or scarlet by those who dyed it and those who sold it.

In Acts 16:14 we read of Lydia, who is described as being "a seller of purple." It is well known that the "purple" which she sold was the cloth that had been dyed by using the famous "Thyatirian purple," a dye that was obtained from a shell fish found in the Mediterranean. It was out of these facts that *baptizo* was deemed a suitable word to describe a concept that men desired to verbalize. However, the idea they were setting forth is very hard to express in English, since there is no English word that fully sets forth the ideas that they were using *baptizo* to express.

When a translator comes upon a problem such as this he must make do with what he has. He must use a word that comes nearest to expressing it, then build up its meaning.

The nearest we can come to denoting this concept is to use the words *identify* and *identification*.

That these words fall short is readily admitted, but it is a simple matter to build up the meaning of a word. Therefore, let it be understood that in the New Testament the words *baptizo* and *baptisma* are used in many occurrences to set forth the concept of an identification, and that this word includes the idea of a merger and an established relationship. This being my conviction I believe that when the Lord said '**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,**' He actually said, '**He that believes and is identified shall be saved.**'

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