

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA.55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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BAPTISM IN THE EPISTLES

When we considered the words of Peter in Acts 2:38 (No. **SB145**), along with the baptismal practices of the Acts period, it was quite apparent that the characteristic truths that have to do with our new life in Christ Jesus had not yet been revealed. The simple fellowship of the early Acts period was entirely Jewish. As Sir Robert Anderson has well said: "The Jewish temple was their house of prayer and common meeting place. Their beliefs and hopes and words and acts all marked them out as Jews."

However, when we come to the epistles written by Paul in the Acts period, we need to realize and note carefully that we are reading about a different class of Jews - not Jews in the land of Palestine but Jews who are the **diaspora** (dispersed ones). A century before Christ was born there were Jewish inhabitants living as citizens in every corner of the civilized world. Roman population statistics give the numbers as being 2,500,000 in the land and 5,500,000 outside.

Those among the exiled ones could only practice parts of the divine religion that God by law had given to Israel, and could not practice at all the latest addition to that law and religion which was given through John the Baptist. We know that John's water ritual was never proclaimed outside the land, and that it was never practiced_ rightfully by Jews among the exiles.

When we come to Paul's letter to the Jewish saints in Rome (See Rom. 2:17, 3:1, 2, Rom. 4:1, Rom. 7:1 for proof as to whom this letter was written), we realize that Paul is revealing certain new and transcendent truths that have not been revealed before and which carry through into the dispensation of grace and belong to our new life in Christ. In the Roman epistle, ritual baptism is superseded by real baptism, which is our identification with Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:3, 4. Paul declares here that as many as are (not "were") identified with Jesus Christ are identified with His death. This identification with His death is so that

we might also be reckoned by God as dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, also that we might share in His burial and resurrection. In this vital union we are to be walking in newness of life. This is even as Paul declares it in Gal. 3:27: "**As many of .you as have been identified with Christ, have put on Christ.**". We should not claim identification with Him unless this is true.

Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest, for many years teacher of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, gives a definition of *baptism* as used in Romans 6. He states: "It refers to the act of God introducing a believing sinner into vital union with Jesus Christ, in order that that believer might have the power of his sinful nature broken and the divine nature plated through his identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection." With this I full agree, especially with the statement that baptism is identification with Christ. I rejoice in his declaration that the "baptism" in Romans 6 is an act of God. The water rituals that men perform cannot bring about the blessed results set forth here. No ceremony of water baptism, not even the one performed by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, ever introduced a believer into vital union with Jesus Christ. This is the only reference to baptism in the Roman epistle.

1 Cor. 1:13, 14, 15, 16, 17. Six occurrences of the word *baptism* are found in these five passages. Not one of them has anything to do with the water ritual introduced to Israel through John the Baptist. To be "baptized in the name of Paul" could only mean that you had identified yourself with Paul rather than Jesus Christ, that you had become attached to him. There was a Pauline party in Corinth. Here Paul castigates his own party. However, men like Paul, who serve God in many places in a continuing ministry, will as a rule need to designate and identify certain trustworthy men as their contacts and representatives. They will keep in touch with these and they will represent them in all matters over which He has given them jurisdiction. This is a purely personal matter and has nothing to do with divine arrangements. I have set up such a system in numerous places.

This arrangement is clearly set forth in Acts 14:23 where Paul and Barnabas, according to the Greek text, "designated for themselves (*presbuteros*) in harmony (*kata*) with the out called ones." The translators have brought the words "ordained" and "every" into this passage in order to make it fit into ecclesiastical practices. No one should think that an individual cannot select one or two men as *presbuteros*. They may as well say that a U.S. President cannot have a personal ambassador to represent him. Paul and Barnabas designated someone to represent them in all places where such was needed. And the men they selected had to be harmonious or acceptable to the outcalled in that place.

In Corinth Paul had not identified anyone with himself except Crispus and Gaius. Thus none could accuse him of building a party around his own name. He gave thanks

to God that this was the way it had been. Then, as sort of an afterthought, he adds the household of Stephanus. This man was not a Corinthian, but a change of location did not cut him off from serving Paul (1 Cor. 16: 17).

Neither ritual or real baptism is in view in these six occurrences. It should be noted that Paul closes his remarks by declaring that Christ did not commission (*apostel/o*) him to baptize but to herald the gospel.

1 Corinthians 10:2. The people of Israel coming out of Egypt had long been identified with Pharaoh, most of the time as his slaves. They became identified with Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Not a drop of water touched them as they passed through. This passage helps us see the multifarious uses and meanings of *baptism* in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 12:13. The context of this occurrence of *baptism* begins with an illustration which declares: "**For even as the human body is a unit having many members, yet all the members of that body, even though many, are one body, so also is the anointed. For in one Spirit we are identified (or, merged) into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be slaves or free, and have all been made to drink of one Spirit.**"

This is the seventh and final reference to "**baptism in the Holy Spirit.**" The translators have recognized the preposition *en* in the first six occurrences, translating it as *with* each time, but in this final reference they have rendered it as "by," thus breaking with the truth declared in the first six passages, all of which declare the truth that the Lord Jesus would baptize (identify) them with the Holy Spirit. The first six passages declare what the Lord will do, not the Holy Spirit. If "by" is inserted here it could only express means or agency. It takes the Lord Jesus out of the picture and makes the Spirit to be a baptizer, an idea that can be found nowhere else in the Word. It is much better to render this occurrence in harmony with the first six references, then understand it as telling us that the Lord Jesus had identified these gifted Corinthians with one Spirit, and that this made them a body, a unit, and that they should function as such.

1 Corinthians 15:29. This passage presents no problems when *baptizo* is translated into English. Paul asks: "**If the dead rise not then what shall they do who are being identified with a dead Christ?**" There is no value in being identified with a dead Savior.

Galatians 3:27. Concerning this passage Kenneth S. Wuest says: "This reference cannot be to water baptism, for that never put a believing sinner into Christ. The Greek word *baptizo* means 'to put or place into.' " I wonder why he did not say

"identify" since he used this word numerous times in various articles on baptism.

Ephesians 4:5. The only divine relationship that faith can establish is our identification with Jesus Christ. This is the one and only baptism for all those to whom this epistle is addressed - the ones being and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the "baptism" that above all others should be called "Christ Baptism." Since there are many baptisms in the New Testament, it is proper to ask which one of these "divers baptisms" is the one baptism that is glorified in Eph. 4:5. I say it is our identification with Jesus Christ, which in turn identified us with His death, burial, and resurrection.

Colossians 2:12. This is the reigning passage dealing with baptism that should be the supreme guide for the one who is a believer now in this, the dispensation of the grace of God. This declaration presents real baptism, not ritual baptism. This is the "one baptism" set forth in Ephesians.

Hebrews 6:2. Among the Hebrews, especially those of the diaspora, there were many diverse teachings concerning the practice and importance of ritual washings, here called baptisms. Since these were usually performed in the temple by the priests, they became disputed matters when practiced by those in exile. Paul says: "Drop it, and go on to maturity."

Hebrews 9:10. The word here for washings is *baptismos*. There were many of these in the temple ceremonies.

1 Peter. 3:1. In the context of this occurrence we find that eight souls were saved by water. This was not by being dipped into it or having it sprinkled upon them. The same water that brought death to so many was a means of deliverance to Noah and his family. They floated in the ark on top of it all. The facts stand out clear. In the midst of universal wickedness, Noah was a righteous man identified with God. The seven others were saved because of their identification (relationship) with Noah. We are saved today because of our identification with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:13. The word here for "dipped" is a cognate of *bapto*. Do not be confused by the fact that it is spelled *bebammenon*. This is an inflection of *bapto*, and it is really no more strange than when we say that "went" is an inflection of "go." At the time John wrote Revelation, the word *bapto* meant both "to dip" and "to dye." I would translate this: "**Clothed in a vesture dyed with blood.**"

In these four studies we have examined every passage in the New Testament where the words *bapto*, *baptizo*, *baptisma*, *baptism os*, *baptistes*, and *embapto* are found. This material will provide a solid basis for all who desire to make an honest study of baptism. The stimulus for writing these studies arose out of my own deep concern for

the millions of professing Christians who make a water ceremony to be the beginning and the end of their relationship with God. I also felt great solicitude for the millions who live in the so-called "Bible belt" (but should be called the baptism belt) where baptism has superseded believing as the one essential work toward God (John 6:29).

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