

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN CHRISTIAN BAPTISM?

SPRINKLING WATER ON AN INFANT'S HEAD IS NOT BIBLICAL BAPTISM

Over the centuries the traditional churches have practiced the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of each infant as its baptism. However, excluding Catholicism there are probably more Christians nowadays who recognize full immersion in water as the appropriate method than those who consider sprinkling as sufficient. So which practice really is baptism in the biblical sense? Yet interestingly, Luke tells us that those who were baptized were “**men and women**” (Acts 8:12) i.e. they *were adults capable of making a mature decision on such a serious matter*. But what about the idea of sprinkling or pouring water on someone?

WHAT DOES THE WORD ‘BAPTIZE’ MEAN?

The word ‘baptize’ is a transliteration of the NT Greek words *baptizoo*, *baptisma*, and *baptismos* rather than being a translation. These terms mean “dip frequently or intensively, plunge, **immerse**” according to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. All reputable scholarly works give the same or similar definitions. These words have several applications.

THE EARLY PRACTICE WAS OF IMMERSION IN WATER

JOHN'S BAPTISM

❖ “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [*John the Baptist*], and they were **baptized** by him **in the river Jordan**, *confessing their sins*” (Matt. 3:5, 6).

This baptism by John included **Jesus himself** even though he was sinless. Jesus gave his reason as: “...*it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness*” (Matt. 3:15). This possibly referred to a symbolizing of his coming death, burial and resurrection. It further served as an **example** setting the pattern for the later baptisms “into his death” to be performed by later Christians. So Christians today cannot afford to ignore the seriousness of ‘full immersion in water’ and what it represents.

BAPTISM UNDER JESUS' AUTHORITY

❖ “After this *Jesus* and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was **baptizing**. *John* also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, **because water was plentiful there**, and people were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John’s disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he [*Jesus*] who was with you **across the Jordan**, to whom you bore witness—look, **he is baptizing**, and all are going to him’” (John 3:22-26).

❖ “... although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples...” (John 4: 2).

BAPTIZING BY PHILIP OF THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

❖ “And he [*Philip*] commanded the chariot to stop, and they both **went down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he **baptized him**. And when they **came up out of the water...**” (Acts 8:38).

It is very likely that both Philip and the Eunuch were carrying drinking water for their journey. So if sprinkling was the correct procedure Philip could easily have sprinkled water on the eunuch’s head. However, the account tells us that, they both “*went down into*” and “*came up out of*” the water. In view of other factors that we shall look at shortly there is no reason to think that the Eunuch was anything other than being completely covered by water.

Evidently the above passages refer to literal baptism i.e. immersion in water. So when the words “baptize”/“baptism” occur ordinarily in the NT they always imply one’s being immersed in water. Yet, when these words are used figuratively/metaphorically it is clearly indicated in the context of the passage.

METAPHORICAL BAPTISM INDICATES IMMERSION

- ❖ “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). Also see Colossians 2:12.

This is an example of baptism in a figurative sense. Nevertheless it is based on the literal full immersion (“buried”) of the new Christian rather than a simple sprinkling.

ONE MUST BE A BELIEVER BEFORE GETTING BAPTIZED

REPENTANCE LINKED WITH BELIEF

- ❖ “I [John the Baptist] baptize you with water for {mng: in view of} **repentance**” (Matt. 3:11).
- ❖ “...Jesus came...proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel**”” (Mark 1:15).

THREE THOUSAND PENTECOST BELIEVERS

- ❖ “So those who **received his word** were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2: 41).

SAMARITAN BELIEVERS

- ❖ “But when they **believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

When these Samaritans believed Philip’s preaching (vs. 12), they “were baptized” which is defined as “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (vs. 16).

CORNELIUS AND FAMILY

- ❖ ““And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone **who believes in him** receives **forgiveness of sins through his name.**’ ... ⁴⁸And he [Peter] commanded them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.** Then they asked him to remain for some days” (Acts 10:42-43, 48).

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR

- ❖ “Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘**Believe in the Lord Jesus**, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ ³²And they **spoke the word of the Lord to him** and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was **baptized at once**, he and all his family” (Acts 16:30-33).

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

- ❖ “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he **told him the good news about Jesus.** And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! **What prevents me from being baptized?**’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:35-38).

Very likely Philip had raised the subject of baptism during his witnessing to the eunuch so that he would respond with his words: “what prevents me from being baptized?” Please note that the eunuch

was a mature person capable of real understanding so as to believe the things taught by Philip concerning Jesus Christ. Clearly the right response to hearing the good news of the Kingdom is to believe it, to repent, and to be baptized.

NOTE: The KJV contains verse 37, that is, the words “And Philip said if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” These words are not included in any modern version, even including the NKJV.

THOSE IN CORINTH

❖ “Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed in the Lord**, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul **believed** and were **baptized**” (*Acts 18:8*).

THEREFORE NOT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

❖ “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both **men and women**” (*Acts 8:12*).

This speaks of adult men and women who are therefore capable of making a mature decision. Furthermore, as shown from the many verses above, infants cannot be believers and there are no examples in the Scriptures of young children being baptized.

CLARIFYING THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESCRIPTIONS OF BAPTISM

IMMERSION OF SACRED UTENSILS

The Greek word *baptismos* was not used exclusively of John’s or Christian baptism but was also used in the Greek Septuagint of the OT, in Hebrews 9:10 and in Mark 7:4 concerning the ritual ordinance of the washing of utensils which were dipped in water.

BAPTISM OF PERSONS WAS A PRACTICE BEGUN BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

There is no real evidence that Pharisees or others baptized proselytes i.e. Gentile converts into Judaism as some have proposed, at least not until after the end of the 1st century. Furthermore, such a practice was not based on any Mosaic or other Hebrew Scripture law and so was not required by God. In contrast John’s baptism was required and baptism in Jesus’ name is required (Luke 7:30; John 1:33 and 3:26, 27). John stated that God was “*he who sent me to baptize with water...*” (John 1:33), and so making John the first to administer baptism to persons. So neither the purification rituals under the Mosaic Law nor any supposed practice of proselyte baptism formed the basis for John’s baptism. It was a unique ritual that God had directly commanded John to administer. Yet when we read the NT accounts it becomes clear that there are several developments and descriptions of baptism:

- John’s baptising and Jesus’ authorisation for his disciples to baptise in water.
- Baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” in water.
- The word “baptism” as used figuratively e.g. baptism with fire, Jesus’ baptizing the Congregation in holy spirit; being baptized into Christ’s death.

YET THERE IS ONLY ONE CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

❖ “...one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (*Eph. 4:5, 6*).

SUMMARIZING THE DEVELOPMENTS

1. John's baptizing in water was for repentance and as a preparatory phase leading to and **in anticipation of one's forgiveness** of sins once Jesus had shed his blood (1 John 1:7). As a forerunner of Christian baptism it was phased out from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection. Then before his death Jesus authorized his disciples to baptize in water just as John had and with the same meaning as John's baptism i.e. in anticipation of one's forgiveness of sins.
2. After Jesus had shed his blood and after his ascension to God's right hand he metaphorically baptized his Church in holy spirit: firstly the Jewish believers at Pentecost and later on the believing Gentile household of Cornelius. This resulted in their having the gift of the spirit.
3. From then on Jesus' disciples were to baptize any new Christian in water and "**in the name of Jesus**" for the **actual forgiveness** of their sins.

THE PURPOSES OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

- ❖ "I [John] myself did not know him, but for this purpose **I came baptizing with water, that he [Messiah] might be revealed to Israel**" (John 1:31).
- ❖ "John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**" (Mark 1:4) *but it was incomplete until Jesus shed his blood* (1 John 1:7).
Please note that baptism did not cause repentance which was a prior change in the person.
- ❖ "And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, **telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him**, that is, Jesus." "On hearing this, they [*the 12 who were baptized in John's baptism*] were baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus**" (Acts 19:4).

*So John was pointing to or foreshadowing that baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus" that would eventually be based on **Jesus' shed blood**.*

ONLY AFTER JESUS HAD MADE HIS SACRIFICE IS THERE ACTUAL FORGIVENESS OF SINS

During the last supper, Jesus said to his disciples:

- ❖ "...for this is **my blood** of the covenant, which is poured out for many **for the forgiveness of sins**" (Matt.26:28). (*Also in Mark 14:24 and Luke 22:20*).
- ❖ John tells us that "...**the blood** of Jesus his Son **cleanses us from all sin**" (1 John 1:7).

In the letters of Paul and those of the writer to the Hebrews this thought concerning the shedding of Jesus' blood for the forgiveness of sins is repeated (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; and Col.1:14; Heb. 9:13-15; 10:11-22 and 12:24).

*So now, because of Jesus' sacrifice, full forgiveness of sins could take place which would be by water baptism in his name rather than in John's baptism. Such Christian water baptism began at Pentecost when: "Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ..." (Acts 2:38).*

WHAT DOES BAPTISM "IN THE NAME OF JESUS" SYMBOLIZE?

Christian baptism is an outward testimony of what has occurred inwardly in a believer's life.

THAT ONE HAS REPENTED AND HAS BEEN FORGIVEN

- ❖ "...And Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of YOU *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the **forgiveness of YOUR sins**" (Acts 2:38, 41).

Ananias said to Saul [*Paul*]:

- ❖ “And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized** and **wash away your sins**, calling on his name” (*Acts 22:16*).

THAT ONE HAS BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST, HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Christian baptism symbolizes a believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. In Christian baptism, the action of being immersed in the water symbolizes dying and being buried with Christ. The action of coming out of the water pictures Christ’s resurrection:

- ❖ “Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus were **baptized into his death**? ‘We were **buried** therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ‘For if we have **been united with him in a death like his**, we shall certainly be **united with him in a resurrection** like his. ‘We know that our **old self was crucified** with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (*Rom. 6:3-6*).
- ❖ “In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been **buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also **raised with him** through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses” (*Col. 2:11-13*).

So we symbolize our joining with and identifying with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection; also that we have died to our old way of life as we go under the water and have been resurrected to a new life as we come up out of the water as born again. It is **only complete immersion in water** that it is possible for these things to be symbolized.

WHY A PHYSICAL ACTION?

In the past certain prophets e.g. Jeremiah (Jer. 27 yoke) and Ezekiel (Jerusalem drawn on clay tablet) had to perform particular actions which were powerfully symbolic of dreadful realities that were to happen to the nation. So too, the symbolic action of water immersion has a very powerful sensory effect in focusing our mind on our joining with and identifying with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, that all our past sins are forgiven by God and that one is now embarking on a very different way of life. So baptism by immersion is an act of obedience, a public proclamation of one’s having the faith of Christ and being identified with Him. It is a picture of our having crucified our old self and having become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

REQUIREMENTS BEFORE BAPTISM

1. The baptizee must believe in and have “the faith of Jesus Christ” i.e. his belief system.
2. The person must understand what baptism signifies i.e. identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

If a person understands that Christian baptism is a step of obedience in publicly **proclaiming that one has taken on the faith of Christ**, and desires to be baptized, then there is no reason to prevent the believer from being baptized.

THE BIBLE’S FIGURATIVE USAGE OF THE WORD ‘BAPTIZE’

BAPTIZED WITH FIRE—this is a metaphorical baptism spoken of by John the Baptist and to be performed by Jesus when he judges the wicked (Matt. 3:11, 12; Luke 3:16, 17).

BAPTIZED INTO SUFFERING AND DEATH

- ❖ “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?**’ And they said to him, ‘We are able.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink you will drink, and with **the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized**’” (*Mark 10:38, 39*).
- ❖ “...all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** (*Rom. 6:3*).

BAPTIZED INTO MOSES—the Israelite experience metaphorically (1Cor. 10:2). This also serves as a type of Christian baptism.

BAPTIZED INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST—THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

- ❖ “For in one Spirit we were all **baptized into one body**—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to **drink** of one Spirit” (*1Cor. 12:13*).

Because God’s spirit is not a physical substance or something tangible it cannot be literally drunk. So the phrase “**drink** of one Spirit” is a metaphorical expression, but is compared to water, because of the reference to baptism. For the same reason one cannot literally be immersed in holy spirit.

NOTE: There are several metaphorical expressions in reference to one’s receiving of the **holy spirit**, and *baptize with holy spirit* is only one of them. These are:

- being filled with it.
- having it poured out.
- being anointed with it.
- having it come upon them.
- having it fall upon them.
- receiving it.
- being given it.

FIGURATIVELY “BAPTIZED IN HOLY SPIRIT”

This was the metaphorical phrase used by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 (also in the parallel accounts of Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and Jesus in Acts 1:5.

A 1ST CENTURY SPECIAL HISTORIC EVENT FOR THE CHURCH

Because baptism is always a single event the “baptism in holy spirit” was an historic event, but fulfilled in two main phases: 1) at Pentecost for **the Jews**, 2) at the home of Cornelius for **the Gentiles**. This historic event was when the church was metaphorically baptized in holy spirit:

FORETOLD BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

- ❖ “**I baptize you with water for repentance**, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**” (*Matt. 3:11*). Also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.

PROMISED BY JESUS

- ❖ “...for John baptized with water, but you will be **baptized with (in) the Holy Spirit not many days from now**” (*Acts 1:5*).

FULFILLED IN TWO MAIN PHASES FOR COMMISSIONING THE CHURCH’S WORK

1. In Jerusalem for **JEWISH BELIEVERS ONLY**:

- ❖ “When the day of **PENTECOST** had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole **house** where they were staying. ³ And **tongues, like flames** of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each

one of them. ⁴ Then they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to **speak** in different languages, **as the Spirit gave them ability for speech**” (*Acts 2:1-4 HCSB*).

When the crowd thought that the 120 common disciples of Jesus, who by God’s spirit were boldly speaking out His message, were drunk Peter explained that this was not the case and that it was God’s work through Jesus:

- ❖ “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the **Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out** this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing ... ³⁸ And Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized** every one of YOU *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the **forgiveness of YOUR sins** and YOU will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit** ...’ ⁴¹ So those who received his word **were baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (*Acts 2:33, 38, 41*).

However, this is not the beginning of the Christian Congregation, as some think. The Congregation really began when Jesus chose his 12 apostles and set his teachings as the ethics of the Christian Church. Rather, both the Pentecost event and the Cornelius event were the giving to the Church the means to accomplish **the ‘Great Commission’** i.e. the gift of the holy spirit.

2. At the home of *Cornelius* for **GENTILE BELIEVERS**:

- ❖ “While Peter was still speaking these words [*the good news*], the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking in [other] languages and **declaring the greatness of God**. Then Peter responded, “Can anyone withhold [*the*] **water** and prevent these from being baptized, *who have received the Holy Spirit* just as we have? And he commanded them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**.”” (*Acts 10:44-48*).
- ❖ “As I began to speak, the **Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning**. ¹⁶And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (*Acts 11:15, 16*).

Professors Mullins and Bromily give the following four main reasons why ‘baptism in holy spirit’ is a past event:

FINALITY OF THE “BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

1. In Acts 1 Jesus predicts, that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would take place “*before many days*” (*Acts 1:5*). This would seem to point to **a definite and specific event** rather than to a continuous process.
2. Peter’s citation in Acts 2:17–21 of Joel’s prophecy shows that in Peter’s mind the event his hearers were witnessing was **the definite fulfilment of the words of Joel**.
3. The one other event that is described in the NT as the baptism of the Holy Spirit may be regarded as **the completion of the pentecostal baptism**. The passage is that contained in Acts 10:1-11:18, in which the record is given of the following events: (a) a miraculous **vision** is given to Peter on a housetop. (10:11-16), indicating that the things about to occur are of **unique importance**; (b) speaking in **tongues** occurs (10:45f.); (c) Peter declares to the brethren in Jerusalem that the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, in this instance Cornelius and his household, “*as on us at the beginning*” (11:15); (d) Peter also declares that this was a **fulfilment** of the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (11:16f.); (e) the Jewish Christians who hear Peter’s account acknowledge this as **proof that God has also extended the privileges** of the gospel to the

Gentiles (11:18). The baptism of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Cornelius and his household is thus **directly linked with the first outpouring at Pentecost**, and as the event signalling the formal opening of the door of the gospel to Gentiles, it is in complete harmony with the missionary significance of the first great pentecostal outpouring.

4. **Nowhere in the Epistles do we find a repetition of the special baptism of the Spirit** so that the event with Cornelius completes the baptism of the Spirit. This would be remarkable if it was understood by the writers of the Epistles that this baptism was frequently to be repeated. There is no evidence outside the book of Acts that the baptism of the Spirit ever occurred in late NT times... We conclude, therefore, that according to the NT teaching the pentecostal baptism, taken in conjunction with the baptism of the Spirit in the case of Cornelius, completes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a special event. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 427-8.

NOTE: Re. 3b. Please see STUDIES 3-12 and 3-13 showing that the languages spoken by the disciples at Pentecost were natural languages which the disciples understood.

RECEIVING HOLY SPIRIT BY THE LAYING ON OF HANDS **THE SAMARITAN BELIEVERS**

❖ “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, that they **might receive the holy Spirit**, for it had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had only **been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**. Then they **laid hands on them** and they received **the holy Spirit**” (*Acts 8:14-17 NAB*).

So even after baptism “it [*the holy spirit*] had not yet fallen upon any of them” until the apostles Peter and John prayed “that they might receive holy spirit” (vs 15) and laid their hands on them.

THE TWELVE WHO HAD ONLY JOHN’S BAPTISM AND NO HOLY SPIRIT

❖ “...Paul traveled through the interior regions and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples and asked them, “Did you **receive the Holy Spirit** when you believed?” “No,” they told him, “we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” “Then with what [baptism] were you baptized?” he asked them. “With John's baptism, they replied. Paul said, “John baptized with a **baptism of repentance**, telling the people that they should believe in the One who would come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were **baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**. ‘ And when Paul had **laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them**, and they began to speak with [other] languages and to **prophecy**. ’ Now there were about 12 men in all” (*Acts 19:1-7*).

WE STILL GET THE SPIRIT SINCE PENTECOST

Because “baptism in the spirit” is a past event and the receiving of the gifts of the spirit occurred only with the laying on of the hands of an apostle, does this mean that when someone is a new Christian that they no longer get God’s spirit? Clearly they do as Paul later wrote to the Ephesians:

❖ “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and **believed in him**, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**” (*Eph. 1:13*).

THE PRE-BAPTISM CONFESSION

However, because no miraculous gifts of the spirit are in evidence today, it is necessary, prior to baptism, for the new Christian to make a confession before other Christians of his/her faith by expressing an understanding of the faith to ensure that he/she truly is a believer:

❖ “Compete well for the faith and lay hold of that eternal life you were called for and made your good confession **in the presence of many witnesses**” (*1 Tim. 6:12*).

THE PROMISE THAT JESUS WILL “BAPTIZE IN HOLY SPIRIT”
DOES NOT RENDER WATER BAPTISM OBSOLETE

The Quakers, the Salvation Army and a few smaller groups who deny that water baptism is necessary often state, quite correctly, that water cannot purify one’s heart. It is a fact that, being brought into the new life by Christ Jesus is what purifies our hearts. Certainly John’s water baptism had nothing magical about it so as to make a change in the person who got baptised. Such a change would only come about for a person when Jesus provided holy spirit for them. Yet because of the statements by both John the Baptist and by Jesus (Acts 1:5) concerning ‘baptism in holy spirit’ it could easily be misconstrued that baptism in water was superseded by ‘baptism with holy spirit.’ However, as shown above it is most likely that ‘baptism in holy spirit’ was a single past event which provided the miraculous gifts. Notwithstanding this, new Christians certainly receive God’s spirit since that time. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that water baptism stopped being the publicly demonstrated symbol that someone has become a Christian

DOESN'T THE WORD “BUT” SHOW THAT WATER IS SUPERSEDED BY SPIRIT?

❖ “And I [*Peter*] remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with **water**, *but* you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit**’ (*Acts 11:16*).

However, someone may say doesn’t the “*but*” in “*but* you will be baptized with holy spirit” mean that water baptism was being replaced by baptism with the spirit? We might illustrate why this is not so by considering 1Corinthians 8:1 where Paul writes, “Knowledge puffs up, but [Gk. *de*] love builds up” and clearly does not mean we dispense with Bible knowledge or indeed any useful knowledge. It simply means that knowledge without love is inadequate. This is really an example of the very black and white way the Jews spoke back then. Similarly with John the Baptist’s words—the metaphorical baptism with spirit at that time given by Jesus was supplementary to the water baptism in his name:

1. In Acts 2:33-41 we saw a clear distinction between literal baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” and one’s receiving holy spirit. Furthermore, Peter does not say, ‘Repent and be baptized with holy spirit’, this being an action performed by Jesus at Pentecost and for Cornelius.
2. In Acts 10: 44-48 the literally reading in the Greek text is: “the water,” i.e., “Can anyone *withhold the water...*” indicating the water that was the well-known water of baptism. It is rendered this way in several versions of the Scriptures. For Cornelius and household they received the holy spirit even though they had not yet been baptized in water. However, Peter recognized the vital importance of being baptized in water and so commanded it.
3. In Acts 11:13-17 Peter relates the events at Cornelius’ home and says, “*I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John **baptized with water**, but you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit**.’*” However, this cannot be taken to mean, ‘I commanded water baptism, but then I remembered that I shouldn’t have done it.’ He is showing the fulfilment of John’s words regarding the significant new vital unique event of being “***baptized with the Holy Spirit***” as additional to the water baptism that he had confidently commanded in Acts 10:48. So Peter first sees the holy spirit manifested, and then he commands baptism in water as the outward symbolic action to be taken by Cornelius and his household, thus showing their repentance and that they had now been forgiven their sins, having believed the good news that they had heard from Peter.
4. In none of the passages contrasting John’s water baptism and Jesus baptism in holy spirit is it stated that Jesus would baptize with the holy spirit instead of water. Also the phrase “be baptized with the Holy Spirit” is really **a metaphor for what are now past events at Pentecost and at Cornelius’ home when receiving the miraculous gifts of God’s spirit.**

IS A PERSON NOT SAVED UNLESS HE HAS UNDERGONE WATER BAPTISM?

There are denominations who consider that in all cases a believing person is not saved unless he has undergone water baptism. These denominations consider water baptism as something that, in itself, accomplishes a person's salvation.

- **The criminal** dying alongside Jesus who expressed his faith, rather obviously had no chance to get baptized, yet he was promised to be with Jesus in the kingdom paradise.
- Those who become believers, but **die before** having the opportunity to get baptized or are **so frail** that it would be physically dangerous to fully immerse them in water.
- Those who become believers, but **live in outlying areas** with no one near them to administer baptism.
- Those who have believed, even for some time, but not got baptized in water because they **did not realize** that that was what was required i.e. not known all the factors involved in baptism.

Clearly God's saving work is not going to be frustrated by such limiting situations. Please see STUDY 14 which shows that it is the person's belief that saves and also showing that certain Bible texts have been misunderstood to the effect that it is the literal water baptism which saves.

THE REQUIREMENT OF BAPTISM FOR THOSE WHO ARE ABLE TO GET BAPTIZED

All of the above are exceptional circumstances. But for believers who are **circumstantially able**, then getting baptized in water it is essential for the following reasons:

1. WE HAVE JESUS' EXAMPLE OF HIS OWN BAPTISM

- ❖ “But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus **was baptized**, immediately he went up from the water...” (*Matt. 3:15, 16*).

2. WE HAVE JESUS' EXAMPLE OF OVERSEEING BAPTISMS PERFORMED BY HIS DISCIPLES

- ❖ “Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that **Jesus** was making and **baptizing more disciples** than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)...” (*John 4:1, 2*).

3. WE HAVE JESUS' COMMAND TO BAPTIZE

- ❖ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them** to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

Please see appendix below for the issue concerning whether or not the italicized words are genuine or not.

THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A COMMAND TO BAPTIZE BECAUSE the earliest disciples baptized people in the following cases:

- The three thousand believers at Pentecost (*Acts 2:38, 41*).
- The Samaritan believers (*Acts 8:12-17*).
- Cornelius and his household (*Acts 10:42-48*).
- Saul of Tarsus (*Acts 9:18*).
- The Philippian jailor (*Acts 16:30-33*).
- The Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:35-39*).
- Believers living in Corinth (*Acts 18:8*).

A DEMONSTRATION OF ONE'S FAITH

Getting baptized in water is a demonstration of faith that we are commanded by Jesus to do. As James said: "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2:20,26). Similar to our partaking of the Lord's supper, with its literal bread and wine, there should be no problem with the outward, physical action of literal water baptism?

The physical action of baptism in water helps us **to focus on:**

1. Our repentance and God's forgiveness of our sins.
2. Our dying to our old life and our resurrection into a new life.
3. The death and resurrection of Jesus that made this new life possible.
4. Our new union with Christ, especially in his death and resurrection.
5. Our future literal resurrection.
6. Our entry into the New Covenant
7. Our access to our Father in heaven.
8. Our having received holy spirit.
9. Our membership of Christ's Church.
10. Our inheritance of the future Kingdom.

At such a major point in one's life it is of great benefit to show to others, by the external action of water baptism, that we have the new life "in Christ."

OBEDIENCE TO OUR GOD AND OUR MESSIAH JESUS

John stated that God was "*he who sent me to baptize with water...*" (John 1:33). Jesus set the example by being baptized, by being responsible for the baptizing of others through his disciples, and by giving the command in Matthew 28:19. Jesus also said: "If you love me you will keep my commands" (John 14:15).

APPENDIX Re. Matthew 28:19:

There is strong feeling that the phrase "*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" in Matthew 28:19 was not in the original, primarily because Eusebius quotes it in 3 different forms as reading:

- "Go and make disciples of all the nations, [teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.]"
- "Make disciples of all the nations **in my name.**"
- "Go ye and make disciples of all nations, and **baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.** And teach them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Nevertheless, the doubted words do **appear in every extant Greek manuscript of this passage.** Furthermore, the book of Acts shows the apostles and disciples actually performing water baptisms and so indicating that it was in obedience to a command from Jesus.

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