

BAPTISM:

What is it? Who needs it and who should do it?

Where and when should baptism happen?

How should it be done, and why do it at all?

by Stanley Scism

What is baptism? Immersion. ‘Baptize’ comes from the Greek *baptizo*, and various translations, rather than translating the word, simply adopted it, as today many languages adopt English scientific words rather than translating them. *Baptizo* means ‘dip’ or ‘plunge’, and was frequently used in secular settings referring to, for example, submerging cloth in dye to change its color. To do this, one must submerge the cloth in the dye, and so this word, meaning ‘dip’ or ‘plunge’, was used. The text mentions specifically being baptized in water (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5; Acts 8:38), and says John chose a baptismal spot because “there was plenty of water” (John 3:23).

Where should people be baptized? Wherever enough water is for immersion. John the Baptist baptized people in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5). Jesus’ disciples probably also did at first, since Jesus started his ministry at Jordan. Later, Jesus spent much of his ministry near the Sea of Galilee. Cornelius (Acts 10) lived in Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea coast. Philippi (Acts 16) and Ephesus (Acts 19) are near the sea.

A baptism need not be conducted *only* in oceans or rivers—the Ethiopian (Acts 8) was baptized in a body of water somewhere along the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. The Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:33) were baptized wherever Paul’s and Silas’ wounds were washed, very probably not the sea, since salt water would sting the wounds.

The text doesn’t mention precisely where 3,000 people were baptized on the Pentecost Day (Acts 2)—Jerusalem had a small river and many water tanks and pools—nor where Philip baptized the Samaritans (Acts 8). In conclusion, we see various places of baptism, as long as the place contained enough water for immersion, since that’s what baptism is.

Who should be baptized and who should baptize them? Everyone who believes and repents should be baptized. John baptized from the whole surrounding area all who came to him and confessed their sins (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5). He demanded they change their lifestyle (Luke 3:10-14). Jesus’ disciples baptized people who had been following John (John 3:26) and baptized many more than John did (4:1-2). Jesus told us to baptize *everyone* (Matthew 28:19); Peter told *everyone* to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38); in New Testament times, *everyone* who believed was baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12,37; 10:2 and 47; 16:31-33; 18:8; 19:2-5). When we see WHY people are baptized, we understand why everyone needs to be.

Who should conduct baptism? Disciples did, apostles did, deacons evangelizing (Acts 8) did. The main point is how it’s done, not who does it.

So **how** should this be done? In Jesus’ name. The disciples baptized by Jesus’ authority (John 4:1-2) even before John the Baptist died. After they had been with Jesus for three years, Jesus, just before his Passion, said that, although they couldn’t remember for the moment all he was telling them, when the Holy Spirit came, he would remind them of

everything and also lead and guide them into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13). After Jesus rose again, he told them to baptize everyone in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), that they should preach repentance and remission of sins in his name (Luke 24:48), that they were witnesses (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8) and repeated the promise of the Holy Spirit and power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

On Pentecost Day, as soon as they received the Holy Spirit and power (Acts 2:4), they proclaimed Spirit baptism (Acts 2:14-21), proclaimed Jesus as Lord (Acts 2:22-36) and preached repentance and remission of sins (Acts 2:37-38), closing again with the promise (Acts 2:39) and the importance of salvation (Acts 2:40). They baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), healed in Jesus' name (Acts 3:6; 9:17-18, 34), proclaimed this healing as being in Jesus' name (Acts 3:16; 4:9-10); cast out demons in Jesus' name (Acts 16:18); preached Jesus (Acts 3:13-15, 17-26; 4:2,11-12,33; 5:30-32; 7:52-53,56; 8:5,12,30-35; 9:17,20-22,28; 10:36-43; 11:16-17,20; 13:23-39; 15:11; 16:31; 17:2-3,18,31; 18:5,25,28; 19:4,13; 20:21,35; 22:8-10,14-16; 24:24; 25:19; 26:8-9,14-18,23; 28:23,31), prayed in reference to Jesus (Acts 4:27,30; 7:59), rejoiced that they could suffer for Jesus' name's sake (Acts 5:32; 15:26; 20:24; 21:13) and the whole assembly highly honored Jesus' name (Acts 19:17). They were Jesus Christ's representatives on earth—earthly ambassadors of a heavenly kingdom. They were called *Christians* because they followed him (Acts 11:26; 26:28). The Sanhedrin and other enemies of the gospel acknowledged the name of Jesus had great power and authority (Acts 4:17-18; 5:28,40; 6:14) and saw that these people had been with him (Acts 4:13). (I use texts here only specifically mentioning Jesus' name, not ones mentioning no name or title at all, or saying simply 'the Lord,' since my purpose is to demonstrate that the text shows explicit reference in various ways to Jesus' name directly.) All this fulfilled Jesus' own command that 'in his name' they would heal the sick, cast out demons, speak with new tongues, and so on (Mark 16:17-18) and preach (Luke 24:47).

Some people, wanting to preserve tradition-based baptism practice (see historic record evidence at this essay's end), say 'in Jesus' name' means only 'by Jesus' authority,' whereas 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' indicates baptism formula. This is an arbitrary distinction—one could as easily say 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' means 'by the authority' and 'in the name of Jesus' indicates baptismal formula. The texts in Acts indicate apostles baptized—every time a liturgy is mentioned—in Jesus' name.

Why would apostles interpret Jesus' command of Matthew 28:19 this way? Because they heard Jesus say he'd come in his Father's name (John 5:43) the Father gave Jesus (John 17:11), and that the Holy Spirit would come in Jesus' name (John 14:26). Since there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4), whom Jesus had said is Spirit (John 4:24), therefore this Holy Spirit Jesus spoke of was God himself, whom Jesus said was also in him (John 5) and would be in them. Jesus said he himself would be in them (John 14:17). Since there is only one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4), clearly the Spirit who created the world (Genesis 1:2), the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit in Jesus was all the same, and so the apostles used the terms 'Spirit of Jesus' and 'Holy Spirit' interchangeably (Acts 16:6-7). The same God showed himself in different ways; the name in each case was Jesus.

In the Old Testament, Moses heard God identify himself as 'I AM' at the burning bush. When Moses asked, in effect, 'I AM what?' God responded, 'I AM WHO I AM.' Moses thereafter referred to God as *YHWH*, variously translated as 'The Eternal', 'The Self-Existent One', 'The Self-Revealing One'—grammatically the third person equivalent of I AM, i.e., HE IS. The Jews would have probably pronounced *YHWH* as *Yahweh* if they'd been willing to pronounce it at all—instead, they considered it too holy to speak, so would substitute the *Adonai*, meaning 'Lord', for it in public reading. The

juxtaposition of *Adonaʼs* vowels into *YHWHʼs* consonants led to the hybrid term *Jehovah*, which is not in Hebrew text.

‘HE IS’ what? The Jews added titles indicating God’s attributes: *YHWH-Jireh* (‘HE IS my provider’), and so on, including *YHWH-Shua* (‘HE IS my Savior’). This shortened to *Yab-shua* (or with a modern English *J*, Joshua) and in the New Testament, influenced by Greek and by English pronunciation, Jesus. So the name Jesus connects to the ancient name, YHWH, and refers to God saving us, bringing us to baptism’s purpose. Gabriel told Mary to name her baby Jesus because he’d save people from sin.

Why should people be baptized? What is it for? Baptism is for forgiveness (=remission) of sins, for salvation, to identify with Jesus’ death and burial, as part of our new birth, and as part of putting on Christ. Each of these aspects we now show:

A. The same Greek word is variously translated in the King James Version as ‘remission’ and ‘forgiveness’, therefore English language distinctions of meaning between these two words are irrelevant to original language purpose. The same Greek word is used throughout, and the NIV translates it ‘forgiveness’ each time. Jesus said ‘repentance and remission [forgiveness] of sins were to be preached’ in his name in all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, and Peter did this on Pentecost Day by telling them, ‘Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness [remission] of sins.’ Paul testified that Ananias told him to immediately get baptized, ‘washing away’ his sins (Acts 22:16).

B. Jesus (Mark 16:16), Peter (1 Peter 3:21) and Paul (Titus 3:5) all said this washing is part of our salvation.

C. Paul said we are baptized into Jesus’ death (Romans 6:3) and we are buried with him in baptism (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

D. We should be ‘born of water and Spirit’ (John 3:5) as Israel was ‘baptized to Moses in the cloud and in the sea’ (1 Corinthians 10:2), yet not fall away as they did (1 Corinthians 10:6). These are the ‘baptisms’ mentioned in Hebrews 6:2. There are two baptisms—water and Spirit; the singular ‘one baptism’ of Ephesians 4:5, read in context of 4:2-7, speaks of the one water baptism the entire Early Church practiced—Jesus’ name immersion, as we have seen: one baptism, just as they all worshipped one God, Lord of them all, and had one faith and belonged to one Body—hence the command to bear with each other in love and keep unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (v. 2-3). Rebaptism in water takes place, as in Ephesus, when believers (Acts 19:1-2), already baptized, but not in Jesus name (Acts 19:3), are rebaptized, this time in Jesus name (Acts 19:5). The Bible has no record of people previously baptized with the words ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost’ being repeated over them, and then later baptized in Jesus name, for the simple reason that baptism in the titular formula was not used in Bible days, but was rather a post-apostolic interpretation and practice.

E. We put on Christ in both water baptism in Jesus name (Galatians 3:27) and Spirit baptism speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enables (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:4).

When are we to be immersed in Jesus name in water? As soon as we believe in Jesus and repent of our sins. On the Day of Pentecost, 3000 were baptized that same day (Acts 2:41). The Samaritans were baptized as soon as they believed (Acts 8:12), and the Ethiopian interrupted Philip’s sermon to ask for baptism, which he received immediately (Acts 8:36-38). Paul was baptized without delay (Acts 9:18; 22:16). Cornelius’ household, who had already received the Holy Spirit, were ordered to be baptized in Jesus name, which happened within a few days at most (Acts 10:48). The Philippian believers (Acts 16:13-15) and jailor (Acts 16:31-33) were baptized immediately, the jailor

without even waiting for the sun to rise. The Ephesian elders, like the Samaritans and everyone else mentioned in this paragraph, were baptized as soon as they believed (Acts 19:5). Immediately. What's the rush? For forgiveness of sin, salvation, identity with Christ, rebirth, putting on Christ!

Beside the Scriptures, historic sources verify that the early church baptized in Jesus name:

Canney's *Encyclopedia of Religions* (1970), page 53: 'Persons were baptized at first "in the name of Jesus Christ"...or "in the name of the Lord Jesus".'

Encyclopaedia Biblica (1899), I, 473: 'It is natural to conclude that baptism was administered in the earliest times "in the name of Jesus Christ" or "of the Lord Jesus." This view is confirmed by the fact that the earliest forms of the baptismal confession appear to have been single.'

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed. (1910), II, 365: 'The trinitarian formula and trine immersion were not uniformly used from the beginning...into the name of the Lord the normal formula of the New Testament. In the 3rd century baptism in the name of Christ was still so widespread that Pope Stephen, in opposition to Cyprian of Carthage, declared it to be valid.'

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (1951), II, 384, 389: 'The formula used was "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" or some synonymous phrase; there is no evidence for the use of the trine name....The earliest form, represented in the Acts, was simple immersion...in water, the use of the name of the Lord, and the laying on of hands. To these were added, at various times and places which cannot be safely identified, (a) the trine name (Justin)....'

Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1898), I, 241: 'the original form of words was "into the name of Jesus Christ" or "the Lord Jesus".'

Heick, Otto. *A History of Christian Thought* (1965), I, 53: 'At first baptism was administered in the name of Jesus.'

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), I, 351: 'The evidence...suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered, not in the threefold name, but "in the name of Jesus Christ" or "in the name of the Lord Jesus".'

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (1957), I, 435: 'The New Testament knows only baptism in the name of Jesus..., which still occurs even in the second and third centuries.'

Walker, Williston. *A History of the Christian Church* (1947), page 58: 'The trinitarian baptismal formula...was displacing the older baptism in the name of Christ.'

Summary: baptism is *immersion in any large enough body of water, upon belief in Jesus as Son of God and as Savior from sin and upon repentance, in Jesus name for the forgiveness of sins, to be buried with Jesus, to put on Christ, to be born again, to be saved. It is for everyone—now. This is how Jesus' apostles, who lived with him for three years and saw him on earth in ministry and after his resurrection, obeyed his command and wrote it down for us to follow. If we hear what is right and don't do it, this is foolishness, we deceive ourselves and build our lives on sand (Matthew 7:24; James 1:22-25), but if we hear and do what is right, this is true wisdom, and we build our lives on the Rock of our salvation.*

If you want to be baptized in Jesus name, or you want to know more, please contact Stanley Scism, c/o 8855 Dunn Road, Hazelwood, MO 63042 USA or this person: