

## Water Baptism (How)

Concerning how a baptism should be performed, the *First London Baptist Confession* (1646) states that "the way and manner of dispensing this ordinance, is dipping or plunging the body under water."

**What did the Greek verb *baptizo* ("baptize") originally mean? Do a word study.** The word "baptize" in our English Bibles is from the Greek root *baptizo*. As can be seen, it remains an untranslated word in our Bibles! Our English word "baptize" is merely a letter for letter transliteration of the original Greek. Outside the Bible, *baptizo* was used in reference to sunken ships (Thayer) or with reference to men who perished by drowning (Brown, *NIDNTT*, I, p. 144). BAGD thus defines it as meaning to "dip, immerse, plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm."

"Despite assertions to the contrary, it seems that *baptizo*, both in Jewish and Christian contexts, normally meant 'immerse,' and that even when it became a technical term for baptism, the thought of immersion remains. The use of term for cleansing vessels (as in Leviticus 6:28) does not prove the contrary, since vessels were normally cleansed by immersing them in water" (Brown, *NIDNTT*, I, p. 144).

**The Testimony of History:** "The Greek language continued to be spoken for many years after the times of the apostles. During all this period they, to whom the word *baptizo* was vernacular, understood it to signify *immerse*; and immersion has always been the practice of the Greek Church to the present day. The Greeks must have understood the meaning of their own word. The Latin fathers also understood the word in the same way; and immersion prevailed in the western as well as in the eastern churches, until near the time of the reformation. Effusion was allowed instead of immersion, in case of sickness; but it was accounted an imperfect baptism" (J.L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, p 36).

The fundamental meaning of *baptizo* is to immerse, and that is evidently the primary mode of baptism in the New Testament.

The Greek word used to refer to washing one's whole body is *louo* (John 13:10, Acts 9:37, 16:33, Hebrews 10:22-23, 2 Peter 2:22).

The word used to refer to washing only a part of one's body (such as the hands) is *nipto* (Matthew 6:17, John 13:8).

If one was washing one's clothes, then *pluno* (4150) was used (Revelation 7:14).

The specific Greek words for "sprinkle" is *rantizo*, 4472).

The Greek word for "pour" is *ekecho*.

Significantly, none of these words were not the words used in the New Testament with reference to baptism. The question is: **If Jesus designed to command pouring or sprinkling, why did he not use the proper word for denoting it?**

**Technical Note:** As to the difference between *bapto* (911) and *baptizo* (907), Both mean “to dip,” but *baptizo* is an intensive form of *bapto*. For instance, *baptizo* was used to mean “to cause to perish” (as by drowning a man or sinking a ship; *NIDNTT*, I, p. 144).

**What in Mark 1:9-10 implies that John’s mode of baptism was something more than merely sprinkling people with water?** John and Jesus were not just “by” the Jordan river, but were down “in” (*eis*) it. Then, after being baptized by John, Jesus came up “out of” (*ek*) the water. All this “in” and “out of” the water would have been unnecessary if John had merely sprinkled Jesus.

**According to John 3:23, why was John baptizing at Aenon near Salim?** Not because it was such a lovely place, nor because it was close to the synagogue, but rather because there was “plenty of water” there. It does not take much water to sprinkle. The entire city of a large city could be sprinkled with a washtub full of water. John would have only needed “plenty” of water if he used a method of baptism that required a lot of water!

**What in Acts 2:17, 33 has led some to conclude that pouring is the correct form of baptism?** See Acts 10:44-48. Because of the reference to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:33 (“poured” is from *ekcheo* (1632a), “pour out”). The LXX uses *ekcheo* to translate the Hebrew word *sapak* (“to pour”) in Genesis 9:6, 37:22, Exodus 30:18, Numbers 19:17, Judges 6:20, and of course Joel 2:28-29 (Brown, *NIDNTT*, II, p. 855).

**Where did Philip take the Eunuch to be baptized in Acts 8:36-39?** Notice that they “went down” (*katebesan*) “into” (*eis*) the water and then “came up” (*anebesan*) “out of” (*ek*) the water. Though in the desert, Philip and the Eunuch both undoubtedly carried enough water to satisfy their thirst. A sufficient quantity of water might easily have been poured to wet the hand of the one doing the baptizing if the sprinkling method were used—there was certainly no need for both of them to go into the water. It appears that Philip’s method of baptism required more water than was readily available from a canteen!

**“How” Summary: What is the fundamental, true and proper, primary meaning of *baptizo*?** It means to dip, immerse. A secondary (more incidental) meaning of *baptizo* is “to wash,” but washing was merely the purpose for which the immersion was performed. It is used thus in Mark 7:4 and Luke 11:38.

### III. Water Baptism (Who)

**Introduction:** The clear New Testament example is the baptism believers. They seem to all have been professing believers.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> London Baptist Confession (1646):** Article 39, states that baptism “is an ordinance of the New Testament, given by Christ, to be dispensed upon persons professing faith, or that are made disciples; who upon profession of faith, ought to be baptized, and after to partake of the Lord’s Supper.”

**Who did Jesus instruct the apostles to baptize in Matthew 28:19?** Jesus’ command was to baptize those who have actually become disciples (Mt 28:19).

ESV **Matthew 28:19** . . . make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

This would seem to rule out infant baptism. Most illuminating is a tract someone once produced on what the Bible says about infant baptism: Its interior is blank!

**Controversy:** However, many in the historical church practice infant baptism (Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox). Though of course they would want to baptize any adult converts, they feel scripturally justified in baptizing their own infants. They claim the reason the New Testament seems to record only the baptism of believers is simply due to the fact all were first generation believers. They accept believer's baptism but accuse Baptists of being divisive for not accepting infant baptism.

### **Infant Baptism**

**How might Mark 10:13-16 be used to justify infant baptism?**

**How does Acts 2:38-39 serve as a basis for infant baptism in some people' minds?** *See also 2:41.* The reference to the promise being for "your children" is a supposed basis for infant baptism. However, Peter went on to limit it to those "whom the Lord our God will call." Also, Acts 2:41 states that only those who "accepted his message" were baptized. How could infants have accepted Peter's message?

**How might some squeeze infant baptism out of Acts 16:13-15?**

**How could Acts 16:29-33 support infant baptism?**

**What can be learned about the jailer's family from Acts 16:34?** That however old the children were, they were at least old enough to believe.

**How would Acts 18:7-8 serve to support infant baptism?**

**What evident for infant baptism could be found in 1 Corinthians 1:16?** *See also 1 Corinthians 16:15.*

**How could 1 Corinthians 7:14 be applied paedobaptism?**

**What reasoning from Colossians 2:11-12 could be used to justify infant baptism?** The reasoning is that since circumcision and baptism are paralleled here, and that since the Jews circumcised infant boys, then it must be appropriate for Christians to baptize their infants.

The ultimate basis for infant baptism is Covenant Theology, which sees great continuity between the Old and New Testaments. A parallel to the physical circumcision of covenant family infants is the baptism of covenant infants.

**What damping effect might Galatians 3:6-9 have on the practice of infant baptism? See also Matthew 3:1-10, Romans 9:6-8.** In the New Covenant, the emphasis is on spiritual descendants, not physical descendants.

**ESV Romans 9:6-8** . . . not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

**“Who” Summary:** In the Schleithem Confession of 1527, the Anabaptists declared that Baptism is not for infants, but for those who have already consciously decided to be Christians. Article 1 reads: “Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with him in death, so that they may be resurrected with him, and to all those who with this significance request it of us and demand it for themselves. This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the pope. In this you have the foundation and the testimony of the apostles (Matthew 28, Acts 2, 8, 16, 19)” (*The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*, p. 139).

### **Baptism for the Dead (Just for Fun!)**

**What odd, unexplained practice is revealed in 1 Corinthians 15:29?** Evidently the Corinthians church practiced the vicarious baptism for people already dead (with no indication from Paul whether he approves or not). This is the only reference in Scripture to this practice, and it is not even clear here exactly what it was that was being done. It may have been a practice of the pagan unbelievers in Corinth. It may have been some sort of “washing” by non-Christian Jews to prepare their dead for a resurrection. It may have been done by the Christians on behalf of those martyred before they could be baptized. The Mormons have made a major doctrine out of this *one* obscure reference, building on it a whole theology of baptism of the dead!

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**Optional Further Reading:** *Manual of Church Order*, J.L. Dagg (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990) & NTRF’s web page articles on baptism at [www.NTRF.org](http://www.NTRF.org).

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