

Biblical Baptism—No. 3

Dub McClish

“Will there be anyone in Heaven who has not been baptized?” When one stresses the New Testament’s clear teaching on baptism, a question similar to this often arises. This question does not concern infants or those who are mentally incompetent. Rather, it relates to those who have sufficient mental faculties to make them accountable and responsible beings before God. Will there be any such in Heaven who were not baptized? While such questions often seem to be designed more to appeal to emotions than to seek and accept the Truth, they nonetheless deserve a Biblical answer.

This question has two correct answers. The first correct answer is, “Yes, there will be many, many people in Heaven who were never baptized.” The Bible even calls many of them by name. Jesus said: “And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 8:11). *Kingdom of heaven* in Matthew usually refers to the church (Mat. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 16:18–19, 28; et al.), but in this statement it obviously refers to the eternal Heaven. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never heard of baptism, but Jesus said they will be in Heaven. Hebrews 11 records a long list of great heroes and heroines of the faith. Starting just outside the Garden of Eden with Abel, the writer names many Old Testament saints to the time of the prophets, finally saying that time failed him to list others (v. 32). The writer affirms that each one lived “by faith.” The implication is unmistakable that each one named will be in Heaven at last, but none of them ever heard of baptism. The Bible contains numerous other illustrations of the same fact. So, yes, there will be many people in Heaven who were never baptized.

However, all of these had in common the following: **They all lived before Christ died on the cross.** Baptism was not a part of the Patriarchal or Mosaic law systems, under one or the other of which every person lived before Calvary. Salvation under those systems required faith in and obedience to God, along with animal sacrifices. However, the blood of bulls and goats could not remove sin (Heb. 10:4). That blood was typical of the sacrifice of Jesus’ perfect blood. Thus, the cleansing power of His blood “flowed backward” to redeem those Patriarchs and Jews who had been faithful to God in their respective law systems (Gal. 4:4–5; Heb. 9:15). We should not think this any more unusual than that Jesus’ blood “flows forward” to cleanse us of sin today. We will discuss the second correct answer to the question subsequently.

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