

Baptism—What does it mean?

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Few religious subjects have been more thoroughly discussed, debated, and preached and written about over the past 17 or so centuries than baptism. While it is interesting (and sometimes profitable) to read or hear what uninspired men say on this and other subjects, all that really matters to those serious about their souls is what the Bible says about it.

One of the most frequently disputed facets of this subject relates to the **action** involved when one is baptized. Let us consider some facts about the action of baptism.

When one checks *baptize* in any standard English dictionary, he will find the following (or similar wording): “to immerse in water, sprinkle, or pour water on, in the Christian rite of baptism.” One should remember that modern dictionaries reflect current and derived meanings and usages of words, rather than meanings of words as used in the Bible. Our interest is in what the Bible says concerning baptism.

- **Biblical descriptions of baptism:** When the Bible relates a case of baptism, what, if any, action does it describe? The fullest description of a baptism involves that of the man from Ethiopia, baptized by Philip: “And they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water...” (Acts 8:38–39a). It seems obvious enough that Philip did more than merely pour or sprinkle water on this believer, otherwise both of them got very wet unnecessarily.

Two statements from the apostle Paul indicate the action involved in baptism: “We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4); “Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2:14). The Bible mentions nothing of any other action than a “burial” for the act of baptism.

- **The Biblical word for “baptize”:** The English word *baptize* is but the New Testament Greek word *baptizo* spelled in our alphabet—a transliterated word. When one consults Greek dictionaries and lexicons for the definition of *baptizo* he will find it means to “dip, immerse, submerge, plunge.” Scriptural baptism, by New Testament description and definition, can only be accomplished by **immersion in water**. Not every immersion is a Scriptural baptism, but every Scriptural baptism must be an immersion in water. So say the Scriptures.

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