

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE

# BAPTISM

*What is biblical baptism?*

**STEP 16 OF 28**



## My Journey to Life, Step 16

### Foreword

*My Journey to Life* will give you the keys for finding peace of mind, harmony of body, and success in relationships. Every step will transform your outlook as you unpack each lesson. We pray they will help you to fall in love with the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. So together, let's walk the pathway step-by-step to a new life in Jesus.

### Preface

While Christian denominations have a variety of approaches to baptism, the Bible is very specific about how this important ritual is to be carried out. But why? Does it really make a difference how a person is baptized? Let's explore how the Bible's direction in this regard gives deep personal and spiritual significance to those seeking a new beginning.

## Step Sixteen—Baptism

**What is biblical baptism?** "By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus, we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings." —*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 217

**Bible Discovery:** Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12, 13

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, 15LtMs, *Manuscript 57*, 1900, par. 22

**1. What is the purpose of baptism?** Baptism demonstrates a person has recognized and repented of their sins, accepted Christ as their Savior, and committed to be in a covenant relationship with Him by living in harmony with the principles of His kingdom of grace.

**Bible Discovery:** Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 8:12; 10:48; 22:16

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 273.2; *Amazing Grace*, p. 143.2

**2. If I was already baptized as an infant, is it necessary for me to be re-baptized?** Infant baptism is a tradition that began well after the time of Christ. Nowhere in Scripture does the Bible teach infant baptism. Jesus' choice to be baptized as an adult remains our example. His

baptism forever gave this ordinance divine sanction for those who have experienced the “new birth” from the Holy Spirit.

Scripture indicates that *believers* were baptized, both men and women. Because infants and little children cannot experience conversion, they do not qualify for baptism. However, they are not excluded from Christ’s kingdom of grace. Believing parents and caregivers fulfill a vital role in guiding young children into a relationship with Jesus that will eventually lead them to make a personal decision for baptism.

Individuals who were baptized as adults but have discovered new transformational truth or individuals who have been baptized and subsequently broken their covenant with Christ may find heart-healing renewal in a rebaptism experience. Baptism does not free believers from further temptation and trial. If one falls into immorality or apostasy, God nonetheless welcomes back the repentant and transformed who renew their covenant through rebaptism.

**Bible Discovery:** Matthew 3:13-17; 19:14, 15; 21:5; John 3:6-8; Acts 8:12, 13, 29-38; 9:17, 18; 19:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:14

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, (1833), p. 133.2; *Sermons and Talks*, vol.1, p. 366.1

**3. Are baptism and salvation related?** Jesus taught that “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). In the apostolic church, baptism automatically followed acceptance of Christ. It was confirmation of the new believer’s faith; it still is today.

The apostle Peter used the experience of Noah during the Flood to illustrate the relationship between baptism and salvation. Sin, with its accompanying violence and immorality, had become so rampant that God warned the world through Noah to repent or face destruction. Only eight persons believed, entered the ark, and “were saved through water.” Peter describes it this way: “There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:20, 21).

Peter explains that we are saved by baptism as Noah and his family were saved through water. Of course, God, not the flood waters, saved Noah. By analogy, it is the blood of Christ, not the water of baptism, that removes sin from the believer.

**Bible Discovery:** Mark 1:11; Acts 16:30-34; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 2:8; 1 John 1:7

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, February 1, 1874, par. 2

**4. Does baptism guarantee salvation?** No. While baptism is linked to salvation, it does not itself impart grace and guarantee salvation. The believer must “die daily” to self and unbelief and continually choose the righteousness of Christ as the basis of salvation.

Paul considered Israel's exodus experience to be a symbolic representation of baptism: "I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink" (1 Corinthians 10:1-4). The Israelites were "immersed in water," as it were—the cloud above and the water on each side—as they passed through the Red Sea. Yet despite this symbolic baptismal experience, God was not subsequently pleased with most of them (verse 5). So today, baptism does not automatically assure salvation going forward. As we stay connected to Jesus and maintain our covenant relationship with Him by faith, our baptism continues to be a living symbol of death to our old life of sin and resurrection to new life in God.

**Bible Discovery:** Romans 6:3, 4; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 9; 10:1-5, 11; 15:31

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 111.2

**5. Does baptism need to be by immersion, or can it be by sprinkling or pouring?** There is no evidence that sprinkling or pouring was ever an apostolic practice but was introduced into Christendom hundreds of years after Christ.

The English word *baptize* is derived from the Greek word *bapto*, meaning "to dip in or under." In the New Testament the verb *to baptize* is used to refer to water baptism of believers (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:9; and Acts 2:41) as a metaphor of Christ's suffering and death. Paul's comment that we are buried by baptism unto death (Romans 6:4) only makes sense if the mode of baptism symbolizes death to the old life and rising to a new life in Christ.

The incidents of water baptism in the New Testament involve immersion. We read that John baptized *in* the river Jordan because "there was much water there." John immersed Jesus "*in* the Jordan" and after the baptism Jesus "came up out of the water" (Mark 1:9, 10 RSV). When Philip the evangelist baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, they both "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38, 39).

**Bible Discovery:** Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:23; Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:11, 12

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 321.1

**6. What is the significance of baptism?** Interestingly, the theological significance of baptism is also related to full immersion. We note that Scripture uses covering by waters as a symbol of great trouble and affliction. Jesus' water baptism represented a prophetic enactment of His suffering, death, and burial. Coming up out of the water represented His resurrection (Romans 6:3-5).

Through baptism, believers enter the death and resurrection experience of Christ. The sacred intimacy of the believer's relationship with Christ is shown through expressions like "baptized into Christ Jesus," "baptized into His death," and "buried with Him through baptism."



Seventh-day Adventists do not consider baptism a sacrament that of itself imparts grace and affects salvation. We prefer to call baptism an *ordinance* that shows the central truths of the gospel and the believer's total allegiance to Christ.

**Bible Discovery:** Psalm 42:7; 69:2; 124:4, 5; Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 295.4

**7. What does it mean to be “dead to sin” in the rite of baptism?** The apostle Paul states that in baptism believers “have been united together in the likeness of His [Christ’s] death” (Romans 6:5) and “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). This means that our old self, which centered on the things of this world such as power, material possessions, or sexual immorality, has been crucified and we are no longer slaves to doing wrong. The person who has died to self through the power of Christ’s crucifixion has been freed from sin.

Believers who enter the rite of baptism renounce their former lifestyle, confirming that the “old things have passed away” and their lives are hid with Christ in God. Baptism is not only a death, but a burial. We are “buried with Him in baptism.” When the believer goes down into the watery grave of baptism, the old life that passed away when he accepted Jesus as his Savior is buried.

When the Holy Spirit calls someone to repentance, He also calls them to baptism. Thus, baptism is also a mark of repentance. Believers die to their transgressing of the law and obtain forgiveness of sin through the cleansing blood of Jesus. The baptismal ceremony is a public demonstration of an inner cleansing—the washing away of sins that have been confessed.

The day a person is baptized is a time for joy and celebration! All of heaven rejoices!

**Bible Discovery:** Luke 15:7; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 6:17

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 40.3

**8. How does baptism inform our understanding of Paul’s words “alive to God”?** When we accept Jesus as Lord, His resurrection power goes to work in our lives. This power enables us to walk in newness of life through the energizing agency of the Holy Spirit. Though we are dead to sin, we are “alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

This new spiritual life lifts us to a higher plateau of human experience. We are walking and talking with Jesus every day! His Spirit gives us new values, aspirations, desires. Now all is focused on being like Jesus, fully committed to Him. We are new disciples of our Savior, and baptism is the sign of our discipleship.

**Bible Discovery:** Acts 1:5; 2:38; 8:12; 22:16; Romans 6:4

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, pp. 295.4; 296.2

**9. In what way is baptism a symbol of our covenant relationship with God?** In Old Testament times, circumcision marked the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham (Genesis 17:1-11) with national as well as spiritual significance. Abraham's circumcision signified and confirmed his previous experience of justification by faith—trusting in the Messiah to come for his salvation, and not in his own works. His circumcision was “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:22).

However, circumcision itself did not guarantee entrance into the true spiritual dimension of the covenant between Abraham and God. Abraham's heart, and those of his descendants, had to, by faith, remain at-one with the heart of God. When Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah, they broke their covenant relationship with God, terminating their special status as His chosen people (Daniel 9:24-27). Spiritual Israel then replaced the Jewish nation as God's people (Galatians 3:27-29).

Jesus ratified the covenant at the cross, and subsequently baptism became the sign of spiritual circumcision. The new covenant instituted at Jesus' death requires an inward faith, a renewed heart which Jesus called “the new birth” (John 3:6, 7). Circumcision of the flesh became obsolete at Calvary; baptism is now the event in which the believer ‘puts on Christ’ and demonstrates his or her relational covenant with Him, the God of unfailing, faithful love. Only our lack of faithfulness to this covenant-keeping God could ever cause our covenant with Him to be broken.

**Bible Discovery:** Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Isaiah 24:5, 6; Jeremiah 4:4; 31:33; Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11, 12

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health*, p. 355.4

**10. Do we receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism, as Jesus did?** A dove symbolizing the Holy Spirit alighted on Jesus at His baptism. The dove represented a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit that anointed Jesus for the mission God had assigned Him. His experience demonstrates that water baptism and Spirit baptism belong together. A baptism void of the reception of the Spirit of God is incomplete.

Today, when we are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we are also dedicated to the task of spreading the gospel, first to our family and friends, then wherever the Spirit provides opportunity.

The Holy Spirit prepares us for this ministry by purifying our hearts from sin and then helping us identify our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are talents and aptitudes that enable the believer to serve the church and witness to those who have not yet accepted Christ. These gifts conferred by the Spirit on the baptized believer builds up the body so that it may reach “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

**Bible Discovery:** Isaiah 4:4; Matthew 3:11-17; 24:14; Acts 1:5, 8; 10:38

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 112.1, 3; 113.1

**11. Can one just be baptized into Jesus and not join a church?** Baptism is a sign both of a person’s regeneration or new birth and of their entry into Christ’s spiritual kingdom. Since it unites the new believers to Christ, it also functions as the door to the church, which is the body of Christ. Through baptism the Lord adds new disciples to the body of believers, the church. Thus, they are members of God’s family, not left adrift as unattended spiritual orphans.

The church body is organized for service. Becoming a member of the body commits Christians to the missionary task of the church—carrying the gospel to all the world. Membership in that body involves “forbearing one another in love,” being “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2, 3).

**Bible Discovery:** Matthew 28:19, 20; John 3:3, 5; Acts 2:41, 47; Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:13

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 45.3

**12. What are the qualifications for baptism?** The first prerequisite for baptism is faith in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross as the only means of salvation from sin. In the apostolic church only those who believed the gospel were baptized.

Instruction in righteousness from the Word of God is also an essential part of baptismal preparation. At His ascension back to heaven after His resurrection, the last words Jesus spoke to His disciples were, “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 things that I have commanded you.”

Repentance is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Instruction in the Word of God produces not only faith in the heart of those willing to receive Jesus, but also repentance and conversion. In response to God’s call, people confess their sinfulness, submit themselves to God, accept His atonement and ask God for enabling power to consecrate themselves to new life with Him. As they come into relational covenant with God, they experience death to the sin that separates them from Him.

Those who have been instructed from the Word of God, experience repentance and accept Jesus as their Savior from sin must also bring forth “fruits worthy of repentance.” This simply means their lives will both demonstrate their commitment to truth as it is in Jesus as well as express their love to God through obedience to His commandments, including the surrender of erroneous beliefs and destructive practices. This does not mean that the baptismal candidate can never sin, but rather that the trend of their life reveals that Jesus abides in them (John 15:1-8).

Children who understand (within the restrictions of their maturity) the plan of salvation, have taken baptismal instruction and shown evidence of repentance in their life should not be denied the sacred ordinance of baptism.

**Bible Discovery:** Matthew 3:8; Mark 16:16; John 14:15; Acts 2:38; 8:12, 36, 37; 18:8

**Further Reading:** Ellen G. White, *Youth Instructor*, February 1, 1874, par. 4;

*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 400.1; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 93.3

### **Reflection...**

If you have not been baptized by immersion, Jesus invites you to enter into a covenant relationship with Him, sealing your commitment with Him in baptism. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

### **Next Step...**

More than just a one-time experience, profession of faith in Christ is a continuing journey of growth and development. In our next lesson, we’ll discuss how this growth takes place and understand God’s plan for us as we follow Jesus.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What does baptism signify?
2. What is the spiritual significance of an adult's baptism versus a baby's baptism?
3. Is baptism by the Spirit a one-time event? Explain your answer.

### **Further Reading**

Official Adventist Website: <https://adventist.org/baptism>

### **Contact Information**

Ellen G. White Estate: [mail@whiteestate.org](mailto:mail@whiteestate.org)

Request a personal Bible study: <https://www.bibleschools.com/en/personal-studies>

Visit your local Seventh-day Adventist Church: <https://www.adventistlocator.org>

Online prayer room: <https://www.wepray.mobi>