

Baptism and Baptisteries

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The sacrament of baptism, says Mosheim, was administered in the first century, without the public assemblies, in places appointed and prepared for that purpose, and was performed by immersion of the whole body in the baptismal fount. [*Ecclesiastical History*, Philadelphia edition, vol. 1. p. 126.]

A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America by David Benedict

<http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/earlyhistory.htm>

"Thus you see *the place* where these various persons were baptized was a River, or a certain water; *their Action* was on this wise—they went down into the Water, *then*, being in the Water, they were baptized. This was done in places where there was much water. *The end* was to show forth Christ's Burial; now if there be not a Burial under water to show Christ's Burial, the great end of the Ordinance is lost: but Burial is well set forth by Dipping under Water." (Baptism Discovered Plainly and Faithfully, according to the Word of God. Pp. 28-31. London, 1885). John T. Christian "Did They Dip?"

<http://www.reformedreader.org/history/christian/chapter07.htm>

"The oldest Baptist church in the country is Hill Cliffe, in Cheshire, but on the borders of Lancashire. The old church was built in a secluded spot, far removed from public roads and enclosed by a thick wood, Tradition declares that the church is five hundred years old. A tombstone was recently discovered in the burial ground of the place, bearing date 1357. In digging the foundation to enlarge the old chapel, a large baptistery was discovered which was made of stone and well cemented. The baptistery must have belonged to a previous chapel. Oliver Cromwell worshipped at this church, and one of his officers occupied the pulpit. It is one of the pre historic churches, and a regular Baptist church." (Shackleford's Compendium of Baptist History, P. 274. Louisville, 1892).

John T. Christian "Did They Dip?"

<http://www.reformedreader.org/history/christian/chapter11.htm>

"We have reliable evidence that a Separatist, and probably a Baptist church, has existed for several centuries in a secluded spot of Cheshire, on the borders of Lancashire, about a mile and a half from Warrington. No spot could be better chosen for concealment than the site on which this ancient chapel stood. Removed from all public roads, enclosed by a dense wood, affording ready access into two counties, Hill Cliffe was admirably suited for the erection of a '*conventicula illicita*,' an illegal conventicle. The ancient chapel built on this spot was so constructed that the surprised worshippers had half a dozen secret ways of escaping from it, and long proved a meeting place suited to the varying fortunes of a hated and hunted people. Owing to the many changes inseparable from the eventful history of the church at Hill Cliffe, the earliest records have been lost. But two or three facts point to the very early existence of the community itself. In 1841 the then old chapel was enlarged and modernized; and in digging for the foundation, a large baptistery of stone, well cemented, was discovered. How long this had been covered up, and at what period it was erected, it is impossible to state; but as some of the tombstones in the graveyard adjoining the chapel were erected in the early part of the sixteenth century, there is

some probability for the tradition that the chapel itself was built by the Lollards who held Baptist opinions. One of the dates on the tombstones is 1357, the time when Wickliffe was still a fellow at Merton College, Oxford; but the dates most numerous begin at the period when Europe had just been startled by Luther's valiant onslaught upon the papacy. Many of these tombstones, and especially the oldest, as we can testify from a personal examination, look as clear and as fresh as if they were engraved only a century ago. * * * * Hill Cliffe is undoubtedly one of the oldest Baptist churches in England. * * * * The earliest deeds of the property have been irrecoverably lost, but the extant deeds, which go back considerably over two hundred years, described the property as being for the Anabaptists.'" (Goadby's Bye Paths, pp. 21 23).

John T. Christian "Did They Dip?"

<http://www.reformedreader.org/history/christian/chapter11.htm>

You have there (pointing to the **baptistery**) substantial evidence that I am not ashamed of that ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ; but if I am asked to say what is my creed, I think I must reply: "It is Jesus Christ."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon "The First Sermon in the Tabernacle "
(No. 369)

Delivered on Monday Afternoon, March 25th, 1861 by the

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons07.vii.html?highlight=baptistery#highlight>

The primitive Christians were under the necessity of baptizing either in open waters, or in private baths; for the state of the law would not *admit* of their erecting public baptisteries. It would appear from some of their writings, that in seasons more free from persecution they had been erected in a simple manner before the reign of Constantine. During his reign they became comparatively common...At this time baptisteries began to be built: but there were none within the churches till the sixth century; and it is remarkable that, though there were many churches in one city, yet (with a few exceptions) there was but one baptistery.—History of Baptism, pp. 167-168.

Chapter 5: The Ordinances of the Church

<http://www.pbministries.org/Theology/Davis%20Huckabee/Studies%20on%20Church%20Truth/chapter05.htm#1e>

There are several supposed objections which have been voiced against this mode of the ordinance, and it will be our object to consider the validity of these at this time.

First, it has been objected that the three thousand who were saved on the day of Pentecost could not have been immersed as that would have taken too long to accomplish. *Answer.* If only the Twelve Apostles baptized, they could have accomplished this in somewhat less than three hours if they baptized at the rate that Baptists do today. However, there were also seventy others who were authorized to baptize, who could, and doubtless did, assist the Twelve. At this same time, it is doubtful if immersion takes much longer, if any, than the ritual followed in sprinkling or pouring.

Second, it is objected that there was not sufficient water to perform the ordinance by immersion. *Answer.* Surely this objection proceeds only from someone who is extremely ignorant both of the geography of the Holy Land, and of the ways of the Jews. In a city of perhaps a million people, whose religion required of every one of them frequent ablutions, would there be an insufficient water supply for the purpose? In the Jerusalem area alone, there were no less than nine pools which were adequate for the purpose of immersion. These were the pools of Bethesda, Upper Gihon, Lower Gihon, Hezekiah's pool, the King's pool, or the pool of the Virgin, Siloam, and Solomon's Three Pools. These all ranged in depth from three to seventy-five feet.

Ibid.

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A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST DENOMINATION IN AMERICA, AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD
By David Benedict
1813

A MINIATURE HISTORY OF BAPTISM

<http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/benedict/baptism.htm>

A building or a portion of a church used for administering baptism. The history and institution of baptisteries is naturally connected with the development of the baptismal form. Immersion, which was customary in the ancient Church, required a basin of the requisite depth, and the custom of solemn seasons for baptism made necessary a considerable space for the reception of the numerous neophytes.

Baptistery

This article is reprinted from Victor Schultze, "Baptistery," from the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Volume I* (1952). The text is in the public domain.

<http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/things/baptisteries.htm>

Augustus Naef, Secretary to the Council of St. Gall, in a work published in 1850, records the success of the Baptist movement. He says: "They baptized those who believed with them in rivers and lakes, and in a great Wooden cask in Butcher's Square before a great crowd" (Naef, *Chronik Stadt und Landschaft St Gallen*, 1021). The number of converts grew with such rapidity that the baptistery was not sufficient for the immersions. Then it was that the Baptists sought the Sitter River. The Sitter River is two or three miles from St. Gall, and is gained by a difficult road. The only solution for the choice of the river is that it was a suitable place for Grebel to baptize his converts.

For the success of the Baptist movement at St. Gall there is the testimony of Fredolin Sickers, a Roman Catholic eye-witness. He says:

The number of converts increased so that the baptistery could not contain the crowd, and they were compelled to use the streams of the Sitter River (Arx, Geschichte des Kantons St. Gallen, 501).

John T. Christian "A History of The Baptists" Book 1

<http://www.reformedreader.org/history/christian/ahob1/ahobc10.htm>

When Grebel was forced by persecution to flee from St. Gall, Roggenacher, a skinner, and Eberle Polt, continued to teach and preach. The latter, Kessler says, was a pious, good-hearted man, practiced in the Scriptures, and of agreeable speech. He preached during the Eastertide in the Butcher's Hall and on the Berlingsberg. Sichers says:

Crowds came to be baptized in large vessels in the fields, and to each of the new baptized a new name was given (Sichers, Chronik, XX. 19).

Ibid.

The popular phrase, "mode of baptism," seems to us to beg the question. The real question is, What is baptism? Compare the case of the Lord's Supper. No Protestant insists strongly on any particular mode of observing the Lord's Supper. We may have our preference, and may recommend it - as sitting around a table, kneeling around a railing, sitting in the pews, etc., - yet we do not insist. But when the Romanist gives only the bread to the laity, reserving the cup for the priests, all Protestants cry out. The Romanist might say, "Why, does not the bread really represent the great fact that Christ gave himself for us? Does not the body include the blood? May we not get all that is essential to the ordinance in taking the bread alone?" We - all who are commonly called Protestants - answer two things: First, to take the wine also, makes a more complete and expressive representation. Second, our Lord told us to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him; what right have we to alter that which he appointed, is if we knew better than he?

Now just the same ground do Baptists take as to baptism. They do not insist strongly on the mere manner and circumstances of its administration. Thus, it is a mere question of taste and convenience whether it shall be performed in a stream or a baptistery. Dr. Judson preferred to baptize face foremost. Even the practice of trine immersion, which was once very common, and still exists in some quarters, while it is in our judgment unwarrantable and improper, may be considered a matter of no great importance. The question is, not what is the most appropriate manner of performing baptism, but what is the act to be performed. And when any think proper to alter this act, we object most earnestly, and for the same two reasons as in the other case. First, the act enjoined gives a more complete and expressive representation of those things which baptism denotes; in fact, without it the representation is grievously defective. Second, our Lord told us to baptize; what right have we to alter his appointment? He did not tell us to recline at a table as he was doing, and take bread and wine, but he told us to take bread and wine; and we do not insist on the reclining: we insist on the bread and wine. He did not tell us to be baptized in the Jordan, or in a river, as he was, but he told us to be baptized; and we do not insist on the Jordan, or any river, or any other mere circumstance, but we insist on the baptizing.

John Broadus "Immersion Essential to Christian Baptism"

<http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/broadus/immersionbroadus.htm>

Pardon a homely story. The summer after the battle of Gettysburg I was preaching in a brigade at the camp below Orange Court House, during the great and blessed revival in Lee's army. Many soldiers were finding Christian hope. After I had preached one day in an old church near the camp, a Presbyterian chaplain arose, called up several soldiers, and proceeded to "baptize" them, as he termed it, from a little bowl of water. When the services were about to close, a Baptist chaplain invited the congregation to go, after dismissal, to a baptistery which had been prepared at the foot of the hill, where the ordinance of baptism would be administered. He handed me his Bible as we went down the hill, asking me to read some passages and pray. I read the account of the baptism of Jesus, the commission in which he enjoins baptism, the account of Philip and the eunuch, and the passage in Romans, and then many soldiers were baptized.

As the crowd went away, a soldier said to the chaplain: "I tell you what, parson; this that you did down here was a great deal more like them Scriptures than what they did up yonder." Can anybody wonder that he thought so? Would not this be the general verdict of plain men, if they would just look on and consider? And the soldier of my story, though he had been sprinkled in infancy, never rested till he was baptized "like them Scriptures." If any one should say that this was but an ignorant man, I will add that an Episcopal gentleman of high position and culture once said to me: "Anybody can see that immersion is baptism, and I grant that it takes a good deal of argument and explanation to show that something else is baptism too."

Ibid.

Much is said about the scarcity of water in Jerusalem rendering it unlikely that the three thousand, on the day of Pentecost, were immersed. This seems, to some unreflecting people, a very strong argument when they are told that around Jerusalem there is, in ordinary dry weather, no running stream whatever, except the little rivulet from the fountain of Siloam; that even the brook Kidron does not contain a drop of water except in the rainy season, and the city was supplied by aqueducts, pools, and cisterns. Accustomed to think, with the schoolboy, that it is a remarkable providence that great rivers so often flow by great cities, and having never studied the water arrangements of ancient Jerusalem, these persons very naturally say: "Why, certainly; in a city without a river, a city so scarce of water, they would not have spared enough for immersing three thousand men." But only think a moment. Even if we knew nothing of the methods by which Jerusalem was actually supplied, here was a city of say two hundred thousand as its ordinary population, besides several hundred thousand visitors for a week at a time, during the feasts - a great population, with all their wants, including the washing of their clothes, and a people who attached extraordinary importance to ceremonial purifications and to personal cleanliness - and you say that in this great city they could not spare water enough for baptizing three thousand persons?

Besides, Jerusalem was repeatedly besieged. During the siege by Titus a vast multitude from the country crowded the space within the walls, and were kept enclosed there from April to September. There was scarcity of food, but, in none of the great sieges, not even in this last, of which we have so minute an account in Josephus, is there a word said about the scarcity of water in the city. In the one apparent exception, it is the besiegers that suffered from a scarcity of water (Josephus, Ant., 13, 8, 2). It is plain that Jerusalem must have possessed remarkable arrangements of some kind, giving an immense supply of water. And examination has sufficiently disclosed the character of these arrangements, as various writers have shown. (See especially a tract by Dr. G. W. Samson, "On the Water Supply of Jerusalem." published by the American Baptist Publication Society.)

I will add, not as caring to lay any stress on it, that in observing the remains of the immense pool just outside of Jerusalem on the West, which Robinson identifies with the Lower Pool of Gihon, I was struck with its adaptation to baptism. The pool, six hundred feet long, was made by building two walls across the deep ravine, so as to retain the water brought down in the rainy season. The

steep banks on either side present a succession of flat limestone ledges at various depths and often many feet wide, so that at whatever depth the water might be standing in the pool, there would be excellent standing room for a great number of persons, with the proper depth for baptizing. As there was an abundance of drinking water in the city from the cisterns and aqueducts, this pool was probably used for watering cattle and perhaps for washing clothes, while the limestone sides and bottom would keep it always clear. Persons who have educated themselves to dislike immersion might fear to stand on these ledges and practice it, but the Jews of that day were accustomed to purificatory immersions, and would have no fear nor difficulty.

Ibid.

(Note: John Broadus, a Baptist minister, theologian, and professor, lived 1827-1895)

http://www.sbhla.org/bio_broadus.htm

There was no difficulty in administering baptism by immersion. Mr. Horne remarks, "that the bath was always agreeable to the inhabitants of the East; and it is not at all surprising, that it should have been so, since it is cooling and refreshing. The bath is frequented by eastern ladies, and may be reckoned among their principal recreations. It was one of the civil laws of the Hebrews, that the bath should be used; Lev. 14:8, 9. We may, therefore, consider it as probable, that public baths, soon after the enactment of this law, were erected in Palestine, of a construction similar to that of those, which are so frequently seen at the present day in the East." [Intro. to the Crit. Study, &c., v. iii. p. 434] The Greek baths were usually annexed to the gymnasia, of which pastimes they were considered as part. The Roman baths were generally splendid buildings. It is said that at Rome there were eight hundred and fifty-six public baths; and according to Fabricius, the excessive luxury of the Romans appeared in nothing more visible than in their baths. Seneca complains, that the baths of the plebeians were filled by silver pumps; and that the freedmen trod on gems. Agrippa built 160 places for bathing, where the citizens might be accommodated either with hot water or cold, free of expense. The baths of Nero had salt water brought into them. Those of Caracalla were adorned with two hundred marble columns, and furnished with sixteen hundred seats of the same materials. Lipsius assures us, the baths were sufficiently large for 1800 persons to bathe at the same time. But the baths of Dioclesian surpassed all the rest in magnificence; 140,000 men were employed many years in building them. [Howard's Roy. Ency. v. i, Art. Baths. Potter's Antiq. of Gr. b. 1. c. 8., &c. Fosbroke's Ency. Antiq. vol. i., p. 46] The rich had baths at home, and frequently very magnificent ones. In Italy, and in the east, baths on a large scale are still seen. [Lon. Ency. Art. Baths; Adam's Rom. Antiq. pp. 375--81; Penny Cyclo. Art. Bath; Robinson's History of Baptists c. 9--11] In Modern Turkey, as well as among the ancients, bathing makes part of diet and luxury; so that in every town and in every village there is a public bath. [Lon. Ency. Art. Bathing] The baths in Persia consist of three rooms for the accommodation of bathers. The Persians are obliged to immerse, when they would cleanse themselves from any legal pollutions. Persons of distinction have their own baths in their own houses. [Millar's New Geograph. v. 1, p. 27, col. 2; fol. Sandy's *Travels in Turkey* &c. Took's *Russia*; Pococke's *View of the East*]

It is thus made plain to the unlettered, that no difficulty existed in the east in performing baptism by immersion.

G.H. Orchard "A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS"

<http://wayoflife.org/articles/orchard1-01.htm>

MIKVA - Washing

mikva.jpg This is a washing area near the Jewish Temple. This was used for Jewish washing ceremonies and may have been the scene of the baptisms mentioned in the New Testament. Courtesy of Gary Bennet. This is a small 4KB thumbnail. The full size image is 109KB. KEYWORDS: mikva, water, baptism, temple.



Ancient Baptistries

baptbyzant.jpg baptmamshit.jpg These early Christian baptistries are shaped like a cross. These baptistries are located in Avdat, and Mamshit/Mampsis in the Negev and likely built in the Byzantine era 250-600AD. The Arabs conquered the area around 636AD. Courtesy of Bruce Einspahr. This is a small 4KB thumbnail. The full size image is 230KB.

SCRIPTURES: Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Romans 6:3-5, 1Peter 3:21 KEYWORDS: baptistry, baptistery, baptize, baptise, water, baptism, immersion.



<http://www.ebibleteacher.com/imagehtml/ntthings.html>

Edinburgh Ency.- "In the time of the apostles the form of baptism was very simple. The person to be baptized was dipped in a river or vessel, with the words which Christ had ordered; and to express more fully his change of character, generally assumed a new name."

Isaac Taylor Hinton "A History of Baptism"

Published 1846

pg 60

"...the baptism of Saul, [#Ac 9:18](#) supposed to be done in the house where he was: but that does not necessarily follow, but rather the contrary; since he "arose" from the place where he was, in order to be baptized; and admitting it was done in the house, it is highly probable there was a bath in the house, in

which it might be performed; since it was the house of a Jew, with whom it was usual to have baths to wash their whole bodies in on certain occasions; and had it been performed by sprinkling or pouring a little water on him, he needed not to have rose for that purpose.”

John Gill “A Body of Doctrinal Divinity”