

## **What Is Baptism?**

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20, KJV)

A study of the doctrine and practice of baptism must begin with the definition of the word. The word baptize is from the Greek *baptizo*, which comes from the word “*báptō*, to dip. Immerse, submerge<sup>1</sup>” The Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament tells us that the word was used to denote material dipped in order to be dyed, a ship that was submerged in a shipwreck, or even to drown. “The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped' (bapto) into boiling water and then 'baptised' (baptizo) in the vinegar solution.<sup>2</sup>” It is even used of a person being “over the head and ears in debt.<sup>3</sup>”

“Prof. Moses Stuart, a Congregationalist, while listening to a class reading and translating from the Greek testament, was surprised to hear a student translate Mark 16:16, ‘He that believeth and is sprinkled, shall be saved.’

‘Sprinkled,’ replied the Professor, ‘is *not* correct.’

‘Is it not in accordance with the *practice* of the denomination?’ asked the student.

‘That is not the question,’ replied the Professor. ‘You are now translating the Greek Testament, and the word means, *immerse*.’<sup>4</sup>

Not only must we study the meaning of the word, but we must also yield to the authority of Scripture by learning how Scriptures uses the word: it is then that we can be assured of what baptism is.

1. In Matthew chapter three, when John came baptizing, it is stated, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” (Matthew 3:5–6) Notice that those baptized were baptized in Jordan. If baptism were by sprinkling or pouring, then there would have been no need for them to have gone down into Jordan; but there was the need to go down into Jordan if they were immersed. No doubt this is also why we read, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water...” (Matthew 3:16) It is obvious that they were immersed by going down into Jordan and then came up out of the water.

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<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, [\*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament\*](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, Online Bible

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph.jsp?la=greek&l=BAPT%2FZW#lexicon>

<sup>4</sup> Clarence Larkin, *Why I Am A Baptist* pp 18-19, 1991, The Clarence Larkin Estate.

2. "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized." (John 3:23) We can once again see that the usage of the word accords with immersion, because there would be no other reason to specify that there was much water there.
3. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4) Here we see that the word is used to say that baptism is a burial. How is one buried? He is thoroughly covered, just as one who is baptized is thoroughly covered in water. Once again we find that the word is used to signify immersion. We see similarly in Colossians 2:12.

History also testifies to baptism being immersion. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History, stated, "But Satan, who entered and dwelt in him for a long time, became the occasion of his believing. Being delivered by the exorcists, he fell into a severe sickness; and as he seemed about to die, he received baptism by affusion, on the bed where he lay; if indeed we can say that such a one did receive it."<sup>5</sup> This is spoken concerning one Novatus, who lived in the third century, and is thought to be the first who was given what is called baptism by any way other than immersion. Eusebius was not convinced that Novatus was baptized, however, as we note his saying, "if indeed we can say that such a one did receive it (i.e. baptism)." And again, "Passing by a few things, he adds the following: 'For this illustrious man forsook the Church of God, in which, when he believed, he was judged worthy of the presbyterate through the favor of the bishop who ordained him to the presbyterial office. This had been resisted by all the clergy and many of the laity; because it was unlawful that one who had been affused on his bed on account of sickness as he had been should enter into any clerical office; but the bishop requested that he might be permitted to ordain this one only.'"<sup>6</sup> This testimony from history indicates that pouring for baptism was both new and not fully accepted. There is no reason that would this be so unless it was understood that baptism is immersion.

Thus we see that the meaning and usage of the word *baptizo* means to immerse, and that baptism is immersion.

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<sup>5</sup> Eusebius of Caesaria, ["The Church History of Eusebius,"](#) in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 288–289.

<sup>6</sup> Eusebius of Caesaria, ["The Church History of Eusebius,"](#) in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 289.