

Understanding Baptism

Believer's Baptism

What Is Baptism?

Why Be Baptized?

What Does Baptism Symbolize?


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What Is Baptism?

"Those who accepted his message were baptized..."

—Acts 2:41a

Baptism is often described as an outward sign of an inward change. It is a public testimony that you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your baptism powerfully proclaims what God has done, and is doing, in your life. In addition, as a follower of Jesus, you are publicly saying that you join with Christians from around the world who are unified by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Great Commission

After Jesus' death and resurrection, he ascended into heaven. Before leaving, he gave his disciples a command about what to do after he left this world. This command is known as the Great Commission.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

—Matthew 28:19–20



- The word *baptize* comes
- from the Greek verb
- *baptizo*, meaning to cover
- or plunge in water, wash,
- dip, immerse.

Why Be Baptized?

Baptism is one of the most important practices in the church. It reminds us of Jesus' death and resurrection, and our relationship to God and one another through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commands us to be baptized. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his followers to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19). Choosing to be baptized is an act of obedience to the Lord Jesus. It is one of the first steps you can take to demonstrate your willingness to follow Jesus' teachings.

Jesus set an example by his own baptism. Jesus' willingness to be baptized serves as an example for his followers. In baptism, we do as Jesus did (1 John 2:6). We follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

Baptism is a testimony. In baptism, you publicly identify with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3–5). You declare that you no longer live for yourself, but now seek to live for Christ, in dependence on God and obedience to him. Your baptism can be an opportunity to share the gospel with friends and family, to let them see what God has done in your life.

Baptism unifies Christians. Your baptism is a witness to other believers that you are a member of the body of Christ—the worldwide community of believers. In the Gospel of John, just before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed that his followers would be unified (John 17:20–23).

Baptism can bolster your faith. For many people, the experience of being baptized strengthens their faith. It can solidify your commitment to live the rest of your days as a follower of Jesus.



What Happens During Baptism?

Although baptism may look quite different from group to group, there are more similarities than differences. (Your church leaders will give you instructions before your baptism so that you will be prepared.)

1. **Water is always present**, whether it is in the form of a natural body of water (like a river or lake), a baptistery in a church, or a swimming pool.
2. **A church leader**—usually a pastor or church elder—will ask you a few questions to give you a chance to profess your faith outwardly. You may be asked to:
 - Profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Profess your confidence that your sins have been forgiven.
 - Profess that by the power of the Holy Spirit you will do your best to follow Christ’s teachings.
 - Profess that by the power of the Holy Spirit you look forward to living forever with Christ.
3. **The leader will say**, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
The leader will then immerse you in the water.



What does it mean to be baptized *in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*?

Jesus instructed his followers to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). In Scripture, to do something in the name of a particular person means that the act is done with that person’s authority. For example, in the book of Acts, the apostle Paul commands an evil spirit to come out of a woman “in the name of Jesus Christ” (16:18). In other words, it was by Jesus’ authority—not Paul’s—that the evil spirit departed. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acknowledges that the baptism is done under authority of the Trinitarian God: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 1:13–15.)

- To *profess* means to
- declare openly and
- freely to others. In
- baptism, this could
- mean that you state
- what you believe in
- your own words, or that
- you affirm (say “yes” to)
- a few specific questions
- about your faith.

What Is Believer's Baptism?

Believer's baptism refers to the practice of baptizing *only* those who have a personal faith in Jesus. Churches that practice believer's baptism baptize only believing adults and children who are old enough to profess a personal faith in Jesus (sometimes called the "age of accountability") and communicate a desire for baptism and understand its meaning.

In believer's baptism, the emphasis is on:

- Faith as a human response to God's grace.
- A believer who trusts in God.
- The obedience and faith of a believer.
- A believer's witness to the world.

An Example from the New Testament (Acts 2:5–41)

The apostle Peter preached to a large crowd from many regions who had gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. He explained to them how it was God's perfect plan for Jesus to die on the cross and rise again. It was impossible for death to keep hold of Jesus. When the audience heard this, they realized that they needed to turn from their unbelief. They asked, "What should we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Three thousand new believers were baptized.

Christians agree that the act of baptism itself does not save a person. Salvation comes through Christ alone by faith.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."—Ephesians 2:8–9



4

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will baptism save me?

Baptism does not save you—only Jesus does. Jesus told the thief on the cross who was crucified alongside him that “today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus assured the thief that he would be with him in the afterlife. The man was not saved because of good works or rituals—nor any baptism ceremony—but because of his faith in Jesus. (See Ephesians 2:8–9.)

Though baptism does not save you, the Bible is clear that those who choose to follow Jesus should take the step of baptism. If you are a believer and you have been putting off being baptized, talk to a church pastor, elder, or ministry leader about what is holding you back.

2. Should I be baptized even though I can't live a “good” Christian life?

Baptism is not just for those who have it all together. Baptism is one of the first steps in a Christian's life—not the last. In the New Testament, when people believed in Jesus as their Savior, they were baptized very soon after believing—sometimes immediately. They didn't wait until they were “good” enough. It is not by your own strength that you overcome your struggles; it's by God's power. It's about relying on the Holy Spirit to change you to be more like Christ. God is at work in you, but it's a process, so it takes time. Be assured that “[God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

3. I want to be baptized, but I'm worried about being in the water and being in front of people. What should I do?

You are not the first person to have these concerns. It's common for some people to:

- Have a fear of water.
- Be concerned about a disability that makes being in water difficult.
- Be uncomfortable speaking in public.
- Feel embarrassed about their appearance.

Speak with your church leaders about your unease. They will find practical solutions to your concerns to help make your baptism experience a day that you will look back on with joy.

Frequently Asked Questions

4. What does it mean that I am unified with other Christians through baptism?

The Spirit of God has an end and goal for believers—to transform us into the image of Christ (Romans 12:1–2). We may be works in progress, but we are God’s work (Ephesians 2:10). The words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians are a humbling reminder that baptism is an external symbol of our unity as believers. Our baptism, our faith, and our Lord unite us into one body, one family: the church. “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4–6). (See 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:27–28.)

We are no longer strangers to other Christians. We are now brothers and sisters, called to love one another and help each other. We are the family of Jesus Christ, united to serve God and become more like Jesus. As Jesus said in the Great Commandment:



“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ... [and] ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

—Mark 12:30–31

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Frequently Asked Questions

5. If I was baptized as a baby, do I need to be baptized again?

Many churches that practice believer's baptism will encourage you to be baptized now as an adult because believer's baptism is a profession of your own faith in Jesus—not your parents' or someone else's. Check with your church leaders about your church's views on baptism.

6. I was baptized when I first became a Christian, but then fell away from the Lord. Should I be baptized again?

Typically, a person who was baptized as a believer is not rebaptized later. Christians will still have struggles and will sin after trusting in Jesus and after being baptized. The New Testament writer John wrote to believers that "if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confessing our need for forgiveness doesn't just happen at baptism, but is an ongoing part of our Christian lives. But the good news is that God promises to forgive us and purify us from all sin. We are still his beloved children even when we fall away from him.

7. If I was baptized in believer's baptism at another church, do I need to be baptized again when I change churches?

In baptism, you are baptized into the worldwide community of believers (the body of Christ), not a particular church or denomination. Most churches will not ask you to be baptized again. However, some circumstances surrounding your baptism may warrant this. For example:

- You did not understand what you were doing when you were baptized.
- You agreed to be baptized only because you were pressured into it or did it just to please someone else, but you didn't make a personal commitment to Jesus.
- The church in which you were baptized did not teach the biblical gospel message of salvation.

Talk with your church leaders about your situation. (See Acts 19:1–5 as an example of rebaptism.)

Frequently Asked Questions

8. Should I be baptized if I'm not sure whether I'm saved?

Many new believers have doubts. If you have trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, doubts do not need to prevent you from being baptized. You are a child of God, sealed and loved by God himself, even if, at times, you might not feel like it. You may want to:

- Share your concerns with a trusted Christian friend or ministry leader.
- Look up and read the following verses in the Bible. What does each passage say about who you are as a believer in Jesus? Romans 5:1; 8:15–16, 38–39; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Ephesians 1:9–11; 2:19; Philippians 1:6.
- Ask God to help you feel assured that you are his child, sealed and loved for all eternity. “The [Holy] Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16).
- Take this passage to heart: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

Ask Yourself:

Do I believe that Jesus died for sin and rose from the dead?

Have I confessed my sins to God and asked for forgiveness?

First John 1:9 tells us that God forgives and cleanses those who confess their sin. (A repentant heart is more important than remembering every sin you’ve committed.)

Have I expressed to God a desire to follow him for the rest of my life?

Do I wish to join the body of Christ and help care for Christians around the world as well as those in my local church?

Do I want to publicly say that I belong to Christ?

If you answered yes to these questions, consider taking that next step of baptism.

Where Did Baptism Come From?

People in the Old Testament did not baptize. However, some practices provide the background for baptism. Purification rites and sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the need for cleansing from impurity, evil, and sin.

In the Old Testament, the high priest ritually washed himself before his service on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:3–4, 26–28). Water symbolized a spiritual washing from sin.



- **Baptism is connected to Old Testament practices of cleansing and purification.**
- **Old Testament people saw little distinction between physical washing and ceremonial cleanliness; physical acts were spiritual acts as well.**
- **Old Testament purity laws pointed toward the spiritual cleansing that was to happen through Christ.**

In ancient Israel, offering a sacrifice was a conscious act of repentance for sin. Therefore, only believers in the God of Israel could bring

a sacrifice to the altar of God. In sacrifice, the believer was to be identified with the death of the animal given on behalf of sins. Understood in this way, baptism is seen as identification with the death of Christ. In both the Old Testament act of sacrifice and the New Testament act of baptism, it is faith that connects the believer to God and to the community of believers.

By the time of Jesus, people in Israel would go through a ritual of cleansing by going down into a pool of water as a symbol of purification. Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist (or John the Baptizer), preached repentance and baptized people in the wilderness of Judea (Matthew 3:1–2). John baptized people as an expression of their repentance. He prepared their hearts for the coming of Jesus. John was from a priestly lineage, so he may have transformed the priestly rites of purification into baptism (Luke 1:5–17).

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John was bewildered, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" John recognized that Jesus, being sinless, did not need to be baptized for repentance. But Jesus insisted that he should be baptized because it was "proper...to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:14-15).



Jesus' baptism was not one of repentance, but was:

An initiation into Jesus' public ministry. Shortly after his baptism, Jesus called his first disciples and he began to publicly teach, heal the sick, and perform miracles.

A time for God the Father to announce his approval of his Son. "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:16–17). All three Persons of the Trinity—God the Father (in a voice from heaven), God the Son (Jesus in human flesh), and God the Holy Spirit (in the form of a dove)—were present at Jesus' baptism.

An act of obedience to God the Father. Jesus said it was "fitting" or "proper" that he be baptized. Jesus' baptism is an example for his followers, then and now, to obey God's command to be baptized. The Son of God submitted himself to the will of God the Father.

Did Jesus baptize anyone?

The Bible does not record an instance of Jesus baptizing someone, however, the Gospel of John tells us that during Jesus' ministry on earth, his disciples baptized other followers of Jesus: "Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples" (4:1–2; also 3:22).

Did the First Christians Baptize?

The first Christians baptized new believers from all sorts of backgrounds, ethnicities, and social statuses. The Bible records many instances of Jesus' disciples living out his Great Commission of making disciples and baptizing them. Here are a few examples from the book of Acts:

When Peter was speaking to a large crowd during Pentecost, the audience was "cut to the heart" and asked, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." About 3,000 people accepted Peter's message and were baptized. Acts 2:5–41

The apostle Philip explained the good news of Jesus to a devout Ethiopian man. When the man believed, he immediately asked to be baptized. Acts 8:26–40

Paul (also known as Saul) was a Pharisee who relentlessly persecuted Christians. After an encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he believed in Jesus and was later baptized. Acts 9:18

When Peter saw that God had poured out the Holy Spirit on Cornelius—a devout, God-fearing Roman centurion—and his household, Peter immediately gave orders that they should be baptized. Acts 10:1–48

Lydia, a businesswoman, became the first convert in Europe when she heard the apostle Paul's message. She and her household were baptized. Acts 16:11–15

After witnessing the power of God through Paul and Silas who were prisoners, their jailer brought them to his house where they explained the message of salvation to everyone present. The jailer and his household believed and were immediately baptized. Acts 16:25–34

Just like people 2,000 years ago, we too are called to repent and be baptized.



What Do Christians Believe?

In the first few centuries of Christianity, Christians developed brief summaries of the truth about Jesus which promoted unity and identity among believers. These statements of faith were known as creeds. New believers would memorize and study them before being baptized.

Churches today will often ask believers to participate in a baptism class or meet with a pastor or church elder to ensure that everyone who wants to be baptized understands the basics of the Christian faith and the meaning of baptism.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed is perhaps the oldest and most widely accepted Christian creed. Though it is called the Apostles' Creed, the apostles did not write it. In fact, no one knows for certain exactly when this creed was written. It is called the Apostles' Creed because it summarizes the teachings of the apostles passed on to believers.

*I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic² Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.*

• The word *creed* is
• from the Latin word
• *credo*, meaning
• "I believe."
• Creeds are simple
• summaries of
• beliefs.

² *Catholic*, in this context, means "universal." The Church is all people throughout the world who have trusted in Jesus.

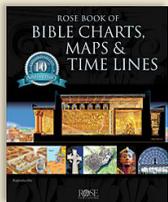
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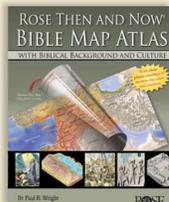
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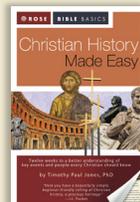
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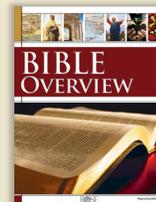
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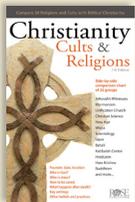


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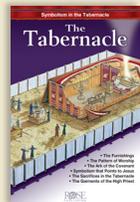


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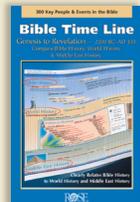
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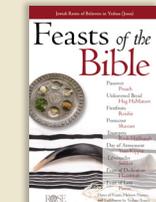
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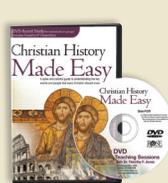


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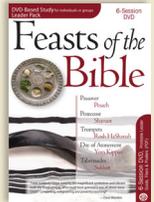


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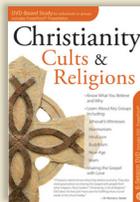
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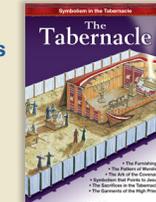
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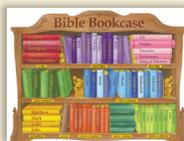


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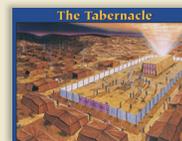
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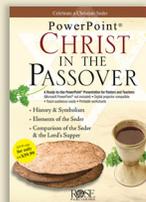


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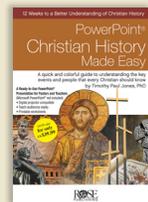
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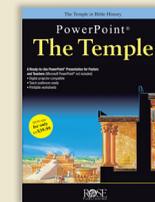
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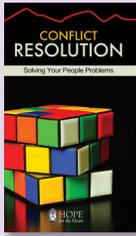
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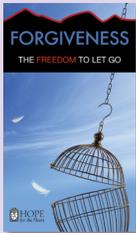
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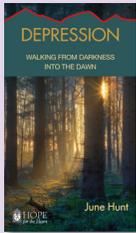
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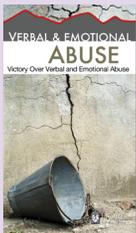
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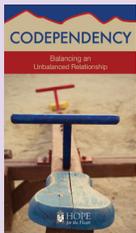
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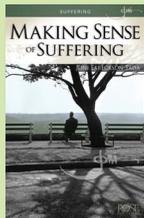
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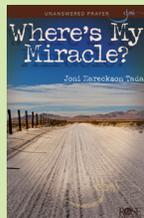
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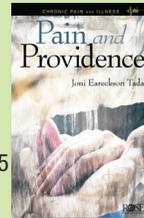
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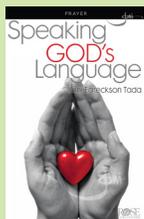
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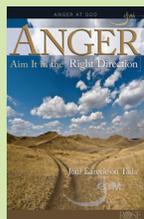
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JONI EARECKSON TADA

Joni Eareckson Tada, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Joni and Friends International Disability Center, is an international advocate for people with disabilities. A diving accident in 1967 left Joni Eareckson, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, without the use of her limbs. After two years of rehabilitation, she emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations. Joni has written over 50 books and numerous magazine articles. She was inducted into the Christian Booksellers' Association's Hall of Honor in 1995 and received the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003 from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

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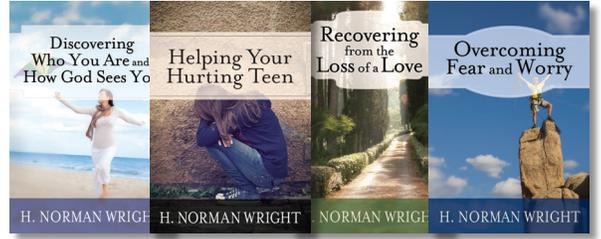


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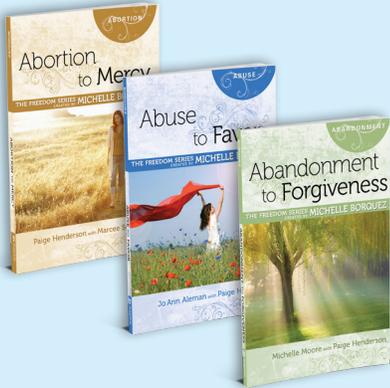
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