

Being Baptized

Douglas Thomas

Any teaching about Jesus or His ways, works, or people presents an opportunity to denominations to quarrel. Denominations are not evil. Division within the Church of Jesus is harmful, though. To “denominate” something simply means to “name” it. “Nomine” is the Latin word that we would translate as “name” in English. Perhaps you have heard some theologian call certain people “nominal Christians”. That means that the people are believed to be Christian only in “name”, not in actuality; not in character or in life. If you name your congregation, “the church that meets at Sylvester’s home,” you have created a denomination. It doesn’t have to be registered with the government to qualify as a denomination. The registration process is still just related to taxes.

All denominational headquarters have statements instructing their followers regarding acceptable beliefs related to Christian baptism. With all due respect for your favorite denomination, I hope to challenge you to look past their statements and consider the value and the meaning of the many teachings offered by the Spirit of wisdom as He inspired the writers of the holy Book with regard to baptism. I believe that a good place to begin is by examining the *words* used in their writings and their meanings.

Some words used by Bible writers with regard to being Baptized

Bapto (Strong’s NT#911) is a verb that just means “to cover with a fluid or to overwhelm”. In the King James Version of the Bible it is translated “dip”. It is the word from which the rest of the baptism-describing words are derived. **Baptizo** (Strong’s NT#907) is the verb form that is used to describe a ritual of absolution (washing), designating the act of baptizing or washing something or someone. In Mark 7:4, it is used to describe a ceremony performed by the Pharisees to cleanse themselves after being in public. One out of 14 times “baptist” appears in the new testament, this word is what is being translated. The other 13 times “baptist” is translating **Baptistes** (Strong’s NT#910). Two words that are translated “baptism” in the KJV are **baptismos** (Strong’s NT#909) and **baptisma** (Strong’s NT#908). **Baptisma** means “immersion”. It is a technical word that is being used to describe a ceremony. It could just as well describe the submersion of any article in a fluid. **Baptismos** is used to refer to a religious ceremony of absolution, or washing. It appears twice in the letter to the Hebrews (6:2 and 9:10), and is translated once as “baptisms” and once as “washings”. It is the followup of **Baptizo** (wash) in Mark 7:4, translated there as “washings”.

This is the text of Mark 7:1-8, including the various words that are being translated as variations of “wash” or “baptize”, with the Strong’s word numbers inserted to inform you: (KJV is used because it is copyright-free. Look it up in your favorite translation to have it in the language you speak if you like.)

¹Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. ²And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen (NT#449: **aniptos**), hands, they found fault. ³For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash (NT#3538: **nipto**) their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. ⁴And when they come from the market, except they wash (NT#907: **baptizo**), they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (NT#909: **baptismos**) of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. ⁵Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen (NT#2839: **koinos** “unclean, unholy”) hands?

⁶He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. ⁷Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing (the words “the washing” were inserted here by the KJV translators to aid in the understanding of the text) of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.

The practical, every day words that are used in this text are referring to washing as a form of absolution, or ceremonial cleansing. In Acts 22, Luke recorded Paul’s deliverance from the Jews who were trying to kill him after throwing him out of the temple area. When Paul started speaking to the Jews, when describing the ministry to himself of Ananias of Damascus, he quoted Ananias as having instructed him to “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins...” (verse 16). The word translated “wash” in this place (Strong’s NT#628: **apolouo**) was a word related to the words “divorce, deliver, redemption, riddance, let die, have remitted, completely wash away”.

The words listed and defined above are the colors used to paint the pictures of baptisms that are mentioned in the Book. Finding the statements, explanations, implications and the unanswered questions presented in those pictures will help us to determine what our Lord wants us to believe and to do with regard to baptism. Before examining the pictures in the Book, let’s examine some statements from some denominational headquarters. A few are very strange, and have their sources in the traditions of men, not the holy Book.

Denominational Teachings on Baptism

Effect of Baptism

There is no means of obtaining life but submitting to the God Who created it. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6). We can only be baptized into Christ once. There is only one truth regarding the identity of Jesus, the identity of His Church, the identities of Believers who make up the parts of the Church. This does not mean that any denomination has yet discerned what the entire truth is on any of these subjects. For the Church to make declaration of Jesus being the exclusive means of being introduced to the Father as a father is not error. For a denomination to make the declaration of themselves being the only bearers of truth or ministry or administration regarding these subjects is evidence that they are arrogant fools.

Many denominations and even some independent congregations are in this sad condition. By default, to have this attitude includes the teaching that in order to be saved - in order to “go to heaven” - you must be a member of this one, true, catholic or exclusive denomination, and be baptized by one of their priests or pastors or ministers or elders or whatever they call their holy people.

Some of these, in order to maintain their strong control over their “flock”, others as a result of basing their baptismal teaching on one or another misinterpreted Scriptures, teach that a follower only attains rebirth or eternal life when properly baptized by the employees of the proper denomination.

Some groups base membership in one of their congregations or in their denomination on proper baptism. Baptism according to them doesn’t get you regenerated to eternal life, but it does get you initiated into the club. Rebirth is experienced prior to baptism, but without baptism, you cannot join their “rolls”. One of these congregations will not generally take the word of the person applying to them for membership, but requires a letter of endorsement from another congregation as evidence that the baptism has taken place. Without this evidence, these people require another baptism in their presence.

A third general group of doctrines simply states that baptism is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace,” meaning that baptism is merely symbolic, and does not change or do anything. It is a ritualistic statement of my endorsement of or agreement with the teachings of the Bible and/or the church, which state that I must be baptized. For some reason.

Who may be Baptized

I was once in an annual conference of a group of musicians and artists who were all conferring as members of a “major” denomination (one in which the membership now grows smaller every year). I was a member of both the denomination and the guild of artists and musicians at the time. One morning, the worship meeting was intended to give the leaders who had gathered from around the nation new ideas for making their baptism services more interesting or contemporary in style. When the time in the service came for the baptism, the leader went around the room slinging water on everyone present, baptizing us. This apparently indicated that all you have to do to qualify as a candidate for baptism was to be in the right place at the time the baptism was happening. I am not sure how you would get your letter of evidence written if you were going to try to join one of those congregations that required one.

Some denominations allow infants to be baptized. This practice was begun by one of those exclusive denominations that had been teaching that anyone not baptized by one of their workers was consequently banished to hell. When quizzed about the eternal condition of dying children who had not been baptized “properly”, their response was to offer to baptize them (without requirement of faith on the child’s behalf), and to thereby make them members of the church. The dynamic is the same as the one that creates the need for you to not only remember a story you have made up, but that new layers must be added to it as people ask for details, and these must be kept straight in your mind as you spread the lie thinner and further.

Perhaps as a continuation of whatever the early practice really was, perhaps as a result of someone having read Paul's mention (1 Corinthians 15:29) of the practice, a ritual of baptism is offered by some on behalf of people who have already died. It is also, perhaps, in one denomination, as a result of a desire to extort money from the living by promising that their employees can get your deceased loved one out of hell by baptizing you in their stead. Also it will help if you purchase several services of offering the blood of Jesus on a stone altar. Oh, you may want to purchase prayer candles or wheels, too. Those help get people out of hell lots of times. Paypal and major credit cards accepted.

Some denominations will only baptize you if you are joining their ranks. That is the purpose - to initiate you as a member of their congregation or denomination. Others require a statement of faith, declaring that you are a Believer in the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of your sins. They consider that they are baptizing you into Him as a fulfillment of your desire to be saved from sin and to become what He desires of you.

Methods of Baptism

As seen in the definitions, baptizing something is dipping or overwhelming it. Any branches on the Anabaptist limb of the Christian family tree, based on that fact, demand immersion, or submersion, as the only valid method of baptizing an individual. That individual must be a Believer.

The Greek orthodox denomination not only immerses a person, but immerses infants. Three times. Once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son, and once in the name of the Holy Spirit.

The Roman "catholic" denomination, being insistent that no one can come to the Father except through the Roman priests, had to answer two questions that arose regarding that erroneous insistence. One question was, "What about my dying baby?" The other question was, "What about my dying loved one who is on his deathbed and cannot be moved to the baptismal at the basilica?" They painted themselves into a doctrinal corner, so they cut a door in the wall to create a means of escape. Sprinkling and pouring became new methods of baptizing. Branches on the Roman catholic limb of the tree (including most Methodists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans), being offspring of the Roman church, brought these practices out of her with them.

Some denominations are called "evangelical," literally meaning that their major doctrines are from the Gospels in the Scriptures. There are some denominations that call themselves, "apostolic." Many of these do not allow any of their leaders to call themselves apostles, however. The reference to "apostolic" in their names is based on the fact that some of their basic doctrines are found in the teachings in the Scriptures of the apostles, not the teachings of Jesus as found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John. An example of a division between these two groups is in baptismal methods. Evangelicals with rare exception baptize their new members or infants "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," based on the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 28:19. The doctrinally different "apostolic" people baptize only "in the name of Jesus," based on several incidents recorded by Luke in Acts: 2:38, when Peter instructed the crowd gathered by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, 10:48, when Peter instructed

Cornelius and his gentile friends and relatives to be baptized in the name of Jesus, 8:16, when people had not received the Holy Spirit because they had “only been baptized in the name of Jesus,” and 19:5, when Paul baptized some people in the name of Jesus. Some of these denominations teach that you do not have access to the Lord or heaven without having been baptized by one of their ministers in the name of Jesus.

Authority for Baptism

Even though the government of the United States, and most, if not all, states have laws controlling which people have government-endorsed authority to preach or to perform marriage ceremonies, they do not interfere at the level of ministry that includes baptisms. Denominations make their own rules about who can baptize. Local congregations who are not related to other congregations make their own rules.

John the baptizer instructed his disciples to baptize with him. By the point in time referenced by the Gospel of John chapter 4, Jesus had instructed His disciples to baptize also, and they were baptizing more people than John and his disciples were.

When the persecution of the Church began with the assistance of Saul of Tarsus, Luke recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 8) that all of the Believers were scattered out of Jerusalem except the apostles. As they spread throughout Judea and Samaria, fulfilling the prophecy that Jesus spoke over them just before ascending from the earth, they “went about preaching the word.” Philip, who had been ordained to a ministry of distributing food to widows in Jerusalem, was in Samaria, preaching, casting out demons and healing people. Perhaps he had a second ordination ceremony, like his first, at the hands of all of the gathered apostles, sending him into a ministry of miracles and evangelism. Perhaps the persecution was his ordination ceremony. He was separated from the leaders, who had been doing all of the greater works of ministry rather than equipping others to do them. Luke did not record that someone more important or authoritative than Philip was called in to do the baptisms of the Samaritans when they believed, though he did point out that apostles were sent to baptize the new Believers with the Holy Spirit. I infer then, that the water baptisms were performed by Philip or others. Paul made a point in his first letter to the Church at Corinth that he rarely baptized people with water. He did not make a point of who was doing it, but in some congregations months or years went by before he returned to them and even appointed any elders in them.

By the time the Church of Rome that called themselves “catholic” was formed, only their priests could baptize. Later, during a persecution of the Church, Anabaptists declared that simply being a priest approved by the Church of Rome was an insufficient authority to baptize. Many priests of the Roman church had renounced their faith in Christ to avoid persecution or death, but then intended to resume their posts in the church when the persecution subsided. Anabaptists not only declared these traitors to be unfit for further service in the Church, but condemned their earlier works as fake - having no spiritual value or effect. According to the Anabaptists, anyone who had been baptized by one of the defectors had not really been baptized into Christ, and therefore still needed to be baptized. The masters of the Church of Rome had more power (and thugs) than the Anabaptists did, so the Anabaptists became the new victims of persecution. As they formed their own spiritual communities and congregations, they were forced to form their own statements

regarding theology, including who in their midst had the authority to baptize. Their elders were given that authority. The Believers today who can trace their spiritual ancestry back to the Anabaptists still limit the authority to baptize to the elders in their groups who have been installed in offices of eldership. Congregations or denominations whose governmental or ministerial design is based on the clergy/laity model instituted by the Church of Rome limit the authority to baptize to their priestly caste as the Roman Church does.

Since the Jesus movement swept about the earth in the 1960's, and later through the influence of the Charismatic movement, many Believers have come to believe and practice that any Believer has not only the authority, but the responsibility to lead others to Christ. Many would also believe that any Believer has the same authority to baptize a new Believer.

Biblical Examples of Baptism

Ordinary Baptisms

Water

John the baptist described his baptism as being “for repentance,” (Matthew 3:11). Being a *prophet* sent into Israel to declare their sinful state, he was empowered to see into the hearts and/or lives of individuals and groups and to know their particular sins. When asked by some people who had come to him to be baptized what their errors were, he answered by describing their sin or by describing what changes should occur in their behaviors (Matthew 3:7-10; Mark 6:17,18; Luke 3:10-14). Apparently, if a person was going to be baptized and could not think of a sin from which to repent, John would inform them of the sin in question. When Jesus appeared before him to be baptized, John looked in the spirit at Jesus and could only see *his own* sin. He tried to change the ministry and make Jesus baptize him (Matthew 3:14), but Jesus insisted that things were as they should be, even though the usual order of a righteous man baptizing a repentant sinner was not the case in this baptism. Jesus identified Himself with us by taking on flesh and passing through every requirement of the covenant Israel had with Yahweh, including its last revelation of requirements brought through its last prophet.

When John was imprisoned for his prophetic ministry to the king, Jesus began to preach what John had been preaching: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matthew 4:12-17). When He gathered disciples, He taught them to baptize for repentance, and they were even more numerically effective at it than the disciples of John had been (John 4:1-3). As numerous as these baptisms were, they were spread over months or years, and are still overshadowed by the number of new Believers who were sent to baptists by Peter when he, freshly full of the Holy Spirit, preached to them his first sermon on the Gospel of Salvation - three thousand in one day (Acts 2:37-41).

Philip preached the Gospel of Salvation very effectively in Samaria. He and perhaps other Believers who were refugees with him baptized converts there (Acts 8:4-13). He was dispatched by an angel to a lonely desert highway to encounter a political leader from a neighboring nation and share the Gospel of Salvation with him. When he believed it, Philip baptized him and then disappeared from his presence and “found himself” in Azotus, which was between 5 and 20

miles away (Acts 8:26-40).

Ananias of Damascus received revelation from Jesus in a vision about where the home was in which Saul had been staying since being blinded by Jesus while traveling there. He was instructed in the vision to go there and lay his hands on Saul so that he would be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. As soon as he was healed, he was baptized by Ananias (Acts 9:10-19). Saul spent time in several places for several years, ending up in his home city of Tarsus, located in the present nation of Turkey. Barnabus sought him out and brought him to the predominantly gentile congregation of the Church in Syrian Antioch. Jewish Believers were fearful and bitter toward Saul for his persecution of them earlier, but the gentiles had no such concerns, so he was welcomed to the ministries there. After being sent out by the Church at Syrian Antioch into a mission of evangelism and church-planting, Saul, who is also called Paul, and Barnabus dissolved their ministry team and formed new ones.

Paul associated himself with Silas and some other Believers and proceeded to another tour of the Mediterranean Sea, evangelizing, encouraging Believers in previously planted congregations, and launching new ones. In the Roman colony Philippi, they cast a spirit of divination out of a young girl and caused such an uproar in the city because of it that they were illegally beaten and imprisoned. While stocked in the inner cell of the prison in Philippi, Paul and Silas were praying and singing while the other prisoners listened. At midnight, an earthquake caused their bonds to be loosed and the prison doors to open. When the jailer, asleep in his home next door discovered first that the prison doors were opened, and then that no one had escaped, he realized that his prisoners were being released by their God and asked them to instruct him regarding the Gospel of Salvation. Believing it after hearing it, he and his household were baptized. They did not even wait until the sun rose (Acts 16:16-35).

Later, when Paul was in Ephesus, he met some “disciples” (Acts 19:1). Whose disciples they were is not specified, but when quizzed about whether or not they had received the Holy Spirit since believing, they indicated that they had never heard of any Holy Spirit. Paul’s next question was about their baptism. The form of his question was to ask them what they had been baptized “into.” They had been baptized by someone other than John, apparently, but had received the baptism that was related to his Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven. They had repented, but had not been exposed to the Gospel of Salvation - the good news that Jesus had died on the cross and been raised from the dead - only the good news that the Kingdom was at hand. Paul baptized them into Christ (19:1-5).

The Holy Spirit

While preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, John, in speaking of the King, described Him in terms that did not present Him as a Savior. In Matthew 3:7-12, he told the political leaders of the nation that judgment was coming to them at the hands of One Who would baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit. He told the crowd of Believers he was baptizing and preaching to in Luke 3:15-18 the same thing, and Luke called it “good news” (verse 18). This is part of the Gospel of the Kingdom - the good news that the King is coming to rule and bring justice. John did introduce Jesus to the crowd and to his disciples as “the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world,” but did not preach to them the Gospel of Salvation - how to be saved from sin and

be reborn. His prophecy of the baptisms of fire and the Holy Spirit came in a context of warnings. He did not mention the fire or the judgement in Mark 1:8, only the Holy Spirit as the medium of baptism.

Even though the experiences of the Believers in Acts 2:1-4 and 4:23-31 are not called “baptisms” in their contexts, Luke recorded Jesus in 1:4-8 as speaking to His disciples about “the promise of the Father,” which would cause them to receive power. He called this promise, being “baptized with the Holy Spirit,” and “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” It is easy to deduce from these words that what the disciples received in these two events could be interchangeably described as

- 1) the promise of the Father
- 2) being baptized with the Holy Spirit
- 3) having the Holy Spirit come upon us
- 4) being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4 & 4:31)

When Philip effectively shared the Gospels of Salvation and the Kingdom with Samaritans in Acts chapter 8, two apostles were dispatched by the apostolic leadership in Jerusalem to baptize them in the Holy Spirit. They had already been baptized into Christ by Philip, but when the apostles laid their hands on them and prayed for them, they “received the Holy Spirit,” (8:4-17). Similarly, the disciples Paul found in Ephesus, who had only received John’s baptism, were baptized into Christ, and then Paul laid his hands on them, and “the Holy Spirit came them,” (Acts 19:1-7).

Typical (Prophetic, or Spiritual) Baptisms

“Typical” is a word that can be used to refer to a member of a group or a characteristic of a group- such as: having four wheels is typical of most automobiles. A “type” more literally means a representation, or a figurative image of something that corresponds to it as an “antitype”. An example of this usage is that the tabernacle Moses built in the wilderness was a place where Yahweh temporarily manifested Himself. He “dwelled” there for a while. The tabernacle was a type, or figure, of the temple that David designed and Solomon built. When Yahweh entered that temple, the priests had to come out of it, because God’s glory was so great in it that they could not do anything in His presence. That temple was a type of the temple that Herod built. God entered that temple as the man Christ Jesus. One day, Jesus was in that temple’s buildings when He made a whip and drove the animals and their owners out of them (John 2:13-22). The Jews asked Him for a sign that He had the authority to do it. His reply was to declare that they could destroy the temple and that He would raise it back up in three days. His flesh had become the temple of God. He had taken the type to a new level, dwelling among men in a “tent” again (see 1 Peter 1:13&14). His physical body while He was on the earth was typical of Believers gathering together in love and becoming His body. The Church, the “body of Christ,” being an antitype of the flesh of Jesus that received condemnation on the cross, is typical of an eternal temple made by Our Father. He is building it of living stones. He carried His blood into this eternal temple to pay for our sins. Some Believers will be pillars and other parts of that building forever (see Revelation 21:22 & 3:12).

A type/antitype relationship is like the relationship between a photograph and the person whose

picture was printed on the photograph. One is an image or promise or description or introduction of the other. There are experiences described or referred to in the Bible as baptisms that do not fit into any of the descriptions above. In some, there is no place for controversy about whether the baptized was immersed or sprinkled because the medium of the baptism was dirt or air.

Israel was Baptized in the Cloud and in the Sea

Please read 1 Corinthians 10:1-11. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth to instruct them to study all of the events that occurred between the exodus of the nation of Israel from the property of the nation of Egypt and their entry into the property that had belonged to the descendants of Canaan. He reasoned that they needed to learn about those events because they were typical of events the Church would experience. Those events had happened and were written down to admonish us.

Paul went into detail about some of the experiences of Israel on the journey to the promised place, describing their sin-filled responses to opportunities Yahweh was giving them to know Him better, to know who they were in His opinion, and to know their identity and destiny as His nation - His priesthood. Paul described two of the experiences as baptisms. In terms used to refer to several baptisms in the Scriptures, he mentioned what or whom they were baptized into. He mentioned the media used for the baptisms. Israel was baptized into Moses, and they were baptized into him in the cloud and in the sea.

When thinking of the time that they were baptized in the cloud, Paul may have had in mind the point in time at which the descendants of Israel had poured out of the mountainous wadi (a riverbed-like stretch of valley through a mountain range) onto the beach at the Red Sea. The only way forward was to swim, and the only way back was into the wadi that was full of the pursuing army of Egyptians. The cloud of the revealed presence of Yahweh had been before them, leading them. At this point, it passed over them and rested behind them, being a light to them during the night, and a darkness to the Egyptians.

He may have considered the fact that the cloud of Yahweh's presence was a covering to the people in the daytime, and that by being under His presence, under His leadership, that they were placing themselves under the authority and the leadership that He had placed in Moses as a deliverer. By being "under" or "overwhelmed by" Yahweh they were made Moses' people.

Paul called their trip through the Red Sea a baptism. Moses described the journey as being "on dry ground," meaning that even though the sea was "a wall to them on their right hand and on their left," and they were under sea level, they were not wet. The baptism the Egyptian army received in the waters of the Red Sea was very different. They got wet and stayed wet until the fish ate their flesh. When Israel came out of the sea bed on the Saudi Arabian side of the sea, they were acknowledging Moses as their leader and savior, because he had stretched out his hand over the sea to part it. He had prophesied to them that the Egyptians they saw that day would never be seen by them again.

Noah was Saved by being Baptized in the Ark

In his first letter that achieved Scripture status, Peter wrote a short but interesting statement about

baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22). Teaching about ordinary baptisms was not the point of the paragraph this statement is found in. The context is his teaching on the suffering that Believers can expect to experience in life. His path of thought passed through the suffering of Believers to the suffering of Jesus on their behalves. In describing His suffering, Peter mentioned the Lord's journey to the prison where spirits were whose disobedience provoked the judgement of the flooding of the earth. In passing, Peter wrote that the Noah family was saved through water in the ark. He added that there is an antitype now that saves us - baptism. He did not add extensive theological insight regarding what he meant.

One denomination misunderstands what he wrote to mean that when one of their employees baptizes one of their converts, that convert becomes saved, or born-again, by obedient observance of the ritual. This is a very clear contradiction of the rest of Scripture's instruction regarding how to be born again. The confusion comes from the failure to differentiate between being saved from the death we are doomed to by being sons and daughters of Adam and being saved from the sorts of things that Noah was saved from through the flood. Noah was saved from the satanic order of government in the earth that promoted rebellion against the King of Heaven. The satanic order of social practices that God called great wickedness was washed away in the flood. Noah was the new earthly king standing in the authority of Yahweh on the earth. We are saved from our past, our old influences, our old habits, and anything else we will leave under the waters of baptism by faith. If we will take it down into the cleansing stream, our Deliverer will make it stay there.

Jesus Was Baptized Into the Grave on the Cross

The text of Luke 12:50 is simply The Lord's statement that He was going to be baptized and that He was anxious to be done with it. There is no explanation of His use of the words "baptism" and "baptized." Paul's letter to the church in Rome includes the statement, "we were buried with Him through baptism into death." This gives some ideas about how to understand what Jesus must have been talking about.

In Paul's use of the concept of baptism in his letters and his discussions of it as recorded by Luke in Acts, he normally considers the baptized person to have been baptized "into" something or someone. The Romans 6:3-6 text presents the idea that we were baptized with Christ into death. The two experiences mentioned here that Jesus had, which we are declared to have joined Him in, were crucifixion and burial. One was the path to death, and the other was experienced after death. It seems that the process of entering into death would be the baptism into it, so we were baptized with Him by being crucified with Him, and experienced death with Him by being in the grave with Him as a result of the baptism.

When He died on the cross, Jesus was plunged under the weight of the sin of all of humanity. Every sin was paid for but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is quite a bit of sin. He was overwhelmed with the filth of every heart, the evil of every miserable deed, my sin against you and yours against me, *every* sin. He was in the depths of the filth to the point of being separated from and forsaken by His Father while there (Matthew 27:46, Psalm 22).

Baptismal Experiences not Labeled as Such in Bible

Abraham was instructed to offer Isaac as a burnt offering

The story is in chapter 22 of Genesis. Abraham was baptized in a test regarding the surrender of the promised son that would enable the prophetic words about the nations of offspring Abraham would father. Isaac, the son, was baptized by means of the process of being prepared as a burnt offering. In verses 15 through 18, the angel of Yahweh declared that by passing the son through what amounted to death, Abraham had made certain the promises of inheritance would pass to Isaac and be realized.

Moses was saved through water in an ark

In chapter 2 of Exodus, the salvation of Moses through a water trip in an ark is related in verses 1 through 10. The ark was a basket made of papyrus. Because he was “boated” downstream into the view of the princess of Egypt, he was drawn into her household and saved from the first of three waves of deliverer-targeting infanticide. The Pharaoh had enacted a law demanding that Egyptian midwives should throw male Hebrew babies into the Nile River to destroy them. The deliverer was delivered through the intended means of destruction - the river.

This same practice was instituted by Herod when he feared being replaced by a Hebrew Deliverer Who was being sought by magi. When he asked them about the child they were searching for, Herod deduced from their answer that the child King might be as old as two years of age, and commanded that all the boys under the age of three in the area be destroyed. The same principality has been trying to destroy a generation of deliverers in the United States through the government endorsement and provision of pregnancy abortions for over thirty years.

Three Hebrew Boys in the Furnace

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were three young men who were relatives of Daniel's. Because they were in exile in Babylon, they were given demonic names by their captors. Hananiah, whose name meant “Yah has favored,” was renamed “Shadrach,” which meant, “I am fearful (of a god)”. Mishael, whose name meant, “Who is what God is?”, was renamed, “Meshach,” which means, “I am contemptible (before god)”. Azariah, whose name meant, “Yah has helped,” was renamed, “Abednego,” which is a Hebrew variation of “Abed Nego”, which meant, “Servant of Nebo (a Babylonian god)”. Daniel, whose name meant “God has judged,” or “God is my Judge”, was renamed, “Belteshazzar,” which meant, “Lady, protect the king”.

These young men, chosen because they qualified for a period of preparation for appearing before the king of the land by being either of royal or other noble heritage, young, without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, (Daniel 1:3,4) were humiliated by having their Yahweh-glorifying names changed to prevent their presence from blessing Him by their names referring to Him. In spite of their imposed new identities, they considered themselves God's people.

When they were challenged by their captors to deny their God by worshiping the king and an idol

made in his image (Daniel 3), Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were condemned to death for refusing. Their sentence was to be burned to death in a furnace. When they were thrown into the furnace, the men who were throwing them in were killed by fire that swept out of the furnace door.

While observing their fiery trial, king Nebuchadnezzar was astonished to see the young men walking around in the fire, without being bound as they were when thrown in. He also saw a fourth person in the fire with them, Who looked to the king as if He was a son of God. He drew near to the door of the furnace and called them out of the fire. He also called them, “Servants of the Most High God.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s entire government gathered around to see the miraculously saved young men. The king, whose last law written before the fiery baptism of the three Hebrews was that anyone in his kingdom who did not worship him at an appointed hour would be burned to death, wrote a new law. The first post-baptism law was that anyone in *any* kingdom who speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego would be cut to pieces and his property burned. This would be because there was no god like their God, Who could deliver as He had.

The three were then given authoritative government jobs and lived happily ever after.

Joseph was Sold as a Slave by his Brothers

Joseph experienced many baptisms. His first one occurred when he was sold by his brothers as an updated plan to their initial plan of letting him die in a pit (Genesis 37:23-28). Being his father’s favorite son was detrimental to Jacob’s older sons’ relationships with Joseph. The culture shock of being the favorite son prince to being a beaten and otherwise abused slave was probably pretty draining emotionally, eh? Sold into the household of a General of Pharaoh at the Egyptian market, Joseph was led by the Spirit of God to great favor and appreciation from Potiphar, his new owner. His next baptism happened by the hands of Mrs. Potiphar. When Joseph refused to adulterate with her, she accused him of raping her. This is the account of the result of that accusation (Genesis 39:19-23):

And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper.

What Joseph experienced was even beyond Paul’s prophetic word over you, which is that God has called you, you have responded in love, so God will cause everything to work together for your good (Romans 8:28). The description of Joseph’s situation is that God caused it to work together and make it *really* good - for himself and his entire family!

Eventually Joseph was exalted to assistant Pharaoh, and had authority over everything in Egypt

but Pharaoh himself. God revealed to Joseph that He had been involved in his life at every turn. Everything that had the appearance of being designed for Joseph's destruction was used to propel him into authority and benefit. When his brothers were before him, and became aware that the person who had absolute power over their lives was Joseph, they were afraid because of their evil treatment of him when he was powerless. His comforting response to their fear was (Genesis 45:4-8):

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

When their father Jacob died, the brothers again became afraid they would pay for their evil. Joseph again had faith to give them comfort (Genesis 50:15-21):

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." 16 So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Every tough thing Israel experienced in the path to the promised place happened and was written down for our admonition

Imagine for a moment the locally hated ethnic group of people in the area where you lived as a child. I expect that every ethnic group has another group that it despises. The despised group of people will always receive an insulting nickname from their despisers. You will remember the slur that referred to your local hated folks. Take that racial slur and apply it in any Egyptian's mind as the type of reference they would use to speak of sons and daughters of Jacob who were their slaves at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Jacob's people were just Egypt's slaves. They were not a nation. They did not even enjoy citizenship of any sort in Egypt. They were just Egypt's spics or wasps or buckwheats or buckras or cheeseheads or cherry pickers or gringos or some other-titled insulted, valueless, rights-less slaves.

From Yahweh's perspective, however, they were the people who descended from Jacob, whom

He loved. They were the people Joseph was led to prepare a way for when he was “sent” into Egypt ahead of them. They were the people He wanted to become to Him a “special treasure above all people”; a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:3-6). One of the many problems that God’s plan would encounter as He dealt with the people to transform them into a nation of priests was that they thought of gods, food, real estate, the value of life, the way of life, themselves, and everything else the same way Egyptians did. They did not know Yahweh. They did not know how to live as free people. They did not know how to live as holy people or as priests.

Being a Genius, Yahweh created an environment in which He could change their ideas about each of these and many other things. It was a place where they could encounter lack, but discover that Yahweh was an answer to lack. They could thirst, and find Him to be a drink-Giver. They could encounter enemies and discover Him to be a Mighty Warrior, dressed for battle. In this place, they could face many problems that their God could solve for them and through the process make Himself known. He could make them able to realize their new identities as citizens of the Commonwealth of Israel, the Nation of God. He could reveal in the wilderness through the covenant He intended to make with them His intent for their privilege of revealing His nature and identity to the rest of the earth.

Every time the offspring of Israel were thrown into a deep place of testing, they were being given an opportunity to become the people of God in a more real or more intimate way. Their God wanted to change their world view to make it like His. Every time they faced trouble they were being given an opportunity to be more securely baptized into Yahweh. Going down in what appeared to be destruction, they could have found their old identities being destroyed and their new ones being raised from that death. They could have found their fears being destroyed and their faith being raised from the ashes. They could have gained knowledge about Who their God was, who He wanted them to be, and what He wanted them to do, that could have caused them to enter the promised property instead of being buried in the wilderness.

Instead, they failed to recognize the goodness of God, the plan of God, or the value of doing things His way. Paul referenced this failure in chapter 10 of his first letter to the church at Corinth.

David’s persecution by Saul

In chapter 18 of 1 Samuel, Saul became afraid of David and began to try to kill him. The story continues in detail of Saul’s pursuit of David from place to place to destroy his life. Instead of David’s destruction, what was accomplished was the destruction of anything in David’s character that was like Saul. Because he encountered the destroyer in Saul, David was transformed into a king who could repent, who could face the challenge of his son Absalom when he tried to usurp David’s kingdom, and who could know Yahweh as a Mighty Deliverer.

David sought the power of his God when he needed to gain the strength and wisdom to face his enemies and his troubles. He looked to Yahweh to put him in power as king, and to keep him in power as king. He looked humbly at every crisis to discern what his God intended to do in it, and therefore he found that his God intended to bless him in it.

David's pursuit of the Amalekites

In chapter 30 of 1 Samuel, David experienced a baptism that was very beneficial to him. The scene was set in chapter 29 when David and his men were living in Ziklag, which was a city in the land of the Philistines. They were living there in exile from Israel because of the murderous intent of Saul against David. When David and his men appeared with the Philistine army as they prepared for a battle against Israel in Jezreel, they were condemned by the lords of the Philistines to the king of the Philistines as potential traitors who might attack them during the battle.

Being sent back south to their home in Ziklag, David and his warriors were shocked to discover that their town had been raided by Amalekites, who lived further south. The raiders took every human, every animal, and anything of value. They had also raided other Philistine towns, and had much stolen stuff in their possession. Some of David's own men responded to the crisis with threats to David's life. David responded to the crisis by encouraging himself in Yahweh and seeking His counsel. Being instructed by Him to pursue the Amalekites and recover everything and everyone, David obeyed and gathered all but 200 of his men to catch the thieves.

They returned successfully with not only *all* of their family members and *all* of their property, but all of the *other spoils* of the recent raids. They gave gifts to many cities of things acquired in their pursuit. Had their leader responded to the situation with the same attitude as the nation of Israel when they were in the wilderness, or with the attitude of some of his men, the baptism would have been their destruction. Instead, they were blessed by having encountered the trouble.

Paul's church-planting near-death experiences

Please read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. Here, Paul mentioned to the church at Corinth that he could see a direct connection between the things that he and his companions suffered and the effectiveness of their ministries. He could also see thanks and glory being given to his God because He had been their Deliverer in all the troubles. He recited some of his baptisms in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33.

Please read Acts 16:16-40. This is the account of Paul and Silas confronting a major principality in the area of Philippi. The slave girl following them and announcing their assignment from heaven had been submitted to the oracle at Delphi, a demon who empowered fortune telling witchcraft. When Paul cast the demon out of the fortune teller, a series of events caused Paul & Silas to be beaten and imprisoned. In the night, during the "song service" of their new prison ministry, the Spirit of God responded with a liberating earthquake.

The jailer and his family became believers when they recognized the the earthquake's endorsement of Paul & Silas. The rulers of the city became fearful of their error of beating a Roman citizen without a trial, and tried to release Paul quietly from jail. Refusing to allow them to hide their foolishness, Paul demanded an escort through Philippi by the rulers, showing their vindication of Paul & Silas. The freedom and the endorsement by the rulers was a direct result of the confrontation of evil, the baptism of beating and imprisonment, and the hand of God raising them from the destruction, leaving His enemies in the wake.

As we seek to be involved in the works of God in the earth, following His direction into them, we will sometimes be led into what seems to be the hand of our enemies. Our faith must empower us to access the Life line in the place of baptism so that we are raised on the other side, leaving our enemies, or the things even of ourselves that are like our enemies, in the waters or fires of destruction. When you believe that you are walking in the will of your Father, but hard things come, expect your Father to be as awesome as usual, designing carefully the exposure and annihilation of those who intend to expose and annihilate you. Expect it. If you are, instead, expecting your destruction every time you see danger, if you are fond of what your God despises about your old identity, if you are spending more time *either* fearing *or* rebuking Pharaoh than praising Yahweh, you may be swept away with Pharaoh.

Some Criteria for Identifying Baptisms

- There is a real danger of our destruction
- God intends to effect growth through the baptism, usually in one or more of three areas:
 - Knowing our God
 - Knowing who He says we are
 - Knowing our purpose/ministry/destiny/calling
- We have to submit to our God and His fellowship in the baptism and in His intent in order to receive the blessing of the baptism becoming a prophetic act instead of merely being an empty ritual or pointless pain
- If we cooperate and expect our God to bless us in the baptism it frees Him to wash or burn away the influence or presence of our enemies
- Our landscape or environment for life or ministry can change through our baptism; we are taken to a higher place of provision, revelation, position, honor, authority

Remember the key to my criteria suggestions above: 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. Paul called “baptisms” Israel’s trip through the Red Sea and their submission to the presence and guidance of Yahweh manifested in the cloud and the pillar of fire. He wrote that the experiences of Israel during their trip from Egypt to the land they had been promised had happened, and had been written down, to admonish or warn us. Our God will always manage the tempter and prevent temptation from being beyond our present state of maturity. He will always empower us to respond properly to temptation by offering us the freedom to escape. The way of escape will always be the same Way: becoming more like Jesus.

If we really believe that God has called us according to His purposes, if we love Him and if we believe the prophecy that Paul wrote to the church at Rome also applies to us (Romans 8:27,28), we should have trouble thinking up anything to worry about or to fear. If it is true that our God intends to work everything together for our good, we should cooperate with His intent. We should give Him faith to work with and free Him to accomplish His desires in our lives: drawing us, changing us, protecting us and providing for us.

Baptismal Experiences in our Lives

Some of the circumstances or events in our lives that our God can use to constitute baptisms are:

- Difficult or costly people
- Problems in finances, health, relationships, work, etc.
- Persecutions
- Challenging Ministry assignments
- Lions and Bears (see 1 Samuel 17.31-37:
Small problems that prepare us to face big problems)

When we stop struggling with our God and start cooperating with Him, we will find Christ being formed in us, transforming our characters, attitudes, and values. Our knowledge of His character, attitude and values should influence the expectations we have in every situation we encounter. It should influence our responses to every situation. We should always expect to be delivered, converted, and empowered, through everything we experience between our time of having been called to belong to God and of His settling of us in the promises He has made about our futures. When I expect Him to abandon me, destroy me, or torment me, I am handing my life over to my enemies and giving them permission to accomplish those very things in my life.

How to take full advantage of our baptisms

- Have faith to look at bad things that happen with Romans 8:28 in mind
- Ask God what *He* is doing when bad things happen, and what we need to do to cooperate or commission with Him
- Don't start binding the devil and declaring war until you find out what your God is doing and how to cooperate or commission with Him
- Expect Him to raise us from the dead even if a baptism looks like it will destroy us
- James 4.7-10 SUBmit (that means get under) to God and resist the devil, and he will flee from you (or be destroyed by the baptism you are in)