

What Is Baptism? (3rd)

(As we conclude our study of the mode of baptism, we will see from meaning and use of the Greek words for immersion, sprinkling, and pouring are not synonymous. Scripture shows the Lord using these three words together in the same context and it is obvious that they are not identical. Also, the use of prepositions with the Greek word for baptism clearly teaches that baptism is performed “in water” and not “with water.”)

Previously, we saw that immersion, sprinkling, and pouring are not synonymous and gave a simple illustration to prove this from Mark 1:5. Today, our desire is to look somewhat into the meaning and use of the two Greek words for sprinkling and pouring in connection with the Greek word βαπτίζω, and its kindred words.

The Greek word for sprinkle is ῥαντίζω and the basic Greek word for pour is ἐκχέω. The Greek word ῥαντίζω is used four (4) times in the New Testament with another word that kin to it (ῥαντισμός) is used two (2) times. The first word is found in Hebrews 9:13, 19, 21; 10:22 and the second word is found in Hebrews 12:24 and I Peter 1:2. It is obvious that these verses are not connected with performing the ordinance of baptism.

The Greek word ἐκχέω also has kindred word which is ἐκχύω. They are used eighteen (18) and ten (10) times respectively in the New Testament.

The Greek word βαπτίζω; however, is used eighty (80) times with its kindred words βάπτισμα (22x), βάπτω (to dip) three (3) times, and βαπτισμός four (4) times. The Greek word βαπτιστής which is translated “Baptist” is used fourteen (14) times.

When we look at the words for sprinkle and pour, they are never associated with the Greek word for baptize. The closest connection would be the two times the word pour is used in Acts chapter two. However, if the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit was baptism, why would these same people later be commanded to be baptized since they were already baptized with the pouring? Obviously, they are not one and the same act in this chapter. Clearly if God wanted sprinkling (or pouring) to be a mode for baptism He would have made it plain. When the Lord desires these three words (i.e., immerse or dip, sprinkle, and pour) to be used it is obvious what He means and there are no misunderstandings. Look at Leviticus chapter four. In verses 6 and 7, and verses 17 and 18, we find the following:

Lev. 4:6-7, “And the priest shall **dip** his finger in the blood, and **sprinkle** of the blood seven times before the Lord, before the vail of the sanctuary. And the priest shall put *some* of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which *is* in the tabernacle of the congregation; and shall **pour** all the blood of the bullock at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which *is at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.” (Emphasis mine—JKB.)

Lev. 4:17-18, “And the priest shall **dip** his finger *in some* of the blood, and **sprinkle** *it* seven times before the LORD, *even* before the vail. And he shall put *some* of the blood upon the horns of the altar which *is* before the LORD, that *is* in the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall **pour** out all the blood at the bottom of the altar of the burnt offering, which *is at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.” (Emphasis mine—JKB.)

Can anything be clearer than this that when performing the ordinances of the Lord in His tabernacle, that dipping (or immersing) and sprinkling and pouring are not the same thing? Would Calvin say that if the priest did not follow this as exactly given it would be a “trifling difference in the ceremony”? I think not.

Another interesting thing about the Greek word βαπτίζω and its kindred words and the ordinance is that in the Greek New Testament it is always “in” water. The King James Bible sometimes says that baptism was performed “with water.” The reason for this is (I believe) because of the rules given to the translators by King James I. At heart, he was a Catholic and wanted to move the Church of England back under Roman Catholicism; therefore, one of the rules given to the translators was that “the old ecclesiastical words to be kept.” What was meant by this “the old ecclesiastical words” was such words as used and understood by Roman Catholics. (This and other rules is why the Greek word for βαπτίζω was anglicized and the Greek word ἐκκλησία was not translated but “church” was substituted for it. That is a different study that may be discussed at a later time. However, lest I am misunderstood, while the King James Version translation was not divinely inspired, I believe it is the best English translation.)

As we previously stated, every time a Greek preposition is used in connection with baptism it is always the Greek word ἐν which should be translated “in.” This Greek preposition (ἐν) is used 2,781 times in the New Testament and 1,874 times it is translated “in” and 135 times “with.” Not one of these 135 times is in connection with the Greek word for baptize. There are 16 Greek words given the translation “with,” but only three (3) of them have the basic meaning as “with” and they are μετά, παρά, and σύν. It is interesting that not one of these three words is connected with baptism—baptism by water or by spirit. Therefore, to baptize in water, as we saw in Mark 1:5, would be immersion and not sprinkling or pouring.

Many other arguments can be supplied to support immersion or dipping for baptism. In John 3:23, we find “And John also was baptizing in Ænon near Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.” There is no need for “much water” to sprinkle a few drops of water on someone. Again, in Acts 8:38-39, it is written “And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” What need of both Philip and the eunuch going “down ... into the water” to sprinkle or pour water upon the eunuch? This is needful to perform immersion. Both went down into the water and both came up out of the water.

We have seen that the lexicographers agreeing that the Greek word means to immerse, and the reformers like Calvin, Luther, and others admitted to the meaning and practice of the early believers being by immersion, and from our study of the Scriptures, that all questions should be removed regarding immersion being what God requires for baptism. Additionally, the Greek Orthodox Catholics practice immersion today when baptizing, even with their babies. If anyone should know the meaning of the Greek word for baptism it would be Greeks.

Having briefly looked at the mode of baptism, we plan to move on to the other foundational principles of baptism—the subject, the purpose, and the administrator of baptism. It is important that we carefully study and understand these things since both Baptists and Protestants agree that the truth about baptism is essential to the validity of the New Testament congregation. Additionally, since baptism is one of the first things a believer is to perform in His obedience to Christ, it is important that he obey the Lord as God requires him to do so.