

Baptism In The Name Of Jesus

Every time the Bible records the name or formula associated with an actual baptism in the New Testament church, it describes the name Jesus. All five such accounts occur in the Book of Acts, the history book of the early church. Let us examine each one.

THE JEWS ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

On the birthday of the New Testament church, the first Day of Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptized the waiting 120 disciples, just as Jesus had promised. (See Acts 2). When they were filled with the Spirit, they began to speak miraculously in languages they had never learned, as the Spirit gave the utterance, and this miracle attracted a large multitude. The apostle Peter, with the support of the other eleven apostles, preached the gospel to the thousands of curious onlookers (Acts 2:14). The crowd consisted of Jews from various nations who had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.

Peter began by explaining what had aroused their curiosity – the phenomenon of speaking in tongues – and identified it with the prophecy of Joel that God would pour out His Spirit in the last days. Peter continued quoting from Joel until he reached the following statement: **“Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”** (Acts 2:21). From this point he introduced the crowd to the Lord – Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He preached the simple gospel message, namely, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-36; I Corinthians 15:1-4). His message culminated with the proclamation, **“God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36).

Conviction of sin gripped the hearts of the listeners, and they **“said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”** (Acts 2:37). They were not asking how to receive an extra blessing, but how to obey the gospel Peter had just preached. They wanted to know how to be forgiven of their sins, including their rejection of the Messiah. They wanted to know how to accept Jesus as Lord and Messiah. In short, they wanted to know how to be saved.

Peter and the other apostles told them how to respond to the gospel message: **“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”** (Acts 2:38-39). About three thousand people believed and obeyed these instructions and were baptized accordingly (Acts 2:41).

By repentance people die to sin and self-will, thereby identifying with Christ’s death. By baptism they are buried with Christ. And by receiving the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Lord, they identify with Christ’s resurrection. (See Romans 6:1-7; 7:6; 8:2, 10-11).

For our study, it is important to note that the apostles commanded “every one of you” to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and that the message applied to “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Baptism in Jesus’ name is an integral part of responding properly to the gospel message and accepting Jesus as Lord.

Despite this clear, unambiguous instruction and the universality of its application, some people argue that it is directed only to Jews. Since the Jews already acknowledge the Father, they contend, the Jews merely need to add a profession of faith in Jesus, but the rest of humanity should be baptized into a trinity of divine persons. The account in Acts 8 refutes this theory, however.

THE SAMARITANS

In Acts 8, Philip the evangelist brought the gospel to the Samaritans, who were descendants of intermarriages between Jews and Gentiles. Although they were not Jews, they also “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).

Some people try to explain that even though the Samaritans were not Jews, their religion was largely based upon Judaism and like the Jews they already acknowledged the Father. Thus, these people claim, baptism

in the name of Jesus alone was appropriate for them as well but is not meant for everyone. The next account, however, dispels this supposition.

THE GENTILES

In Acts 10, God led the apostle Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. As he preached to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his household, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as on the Day of Pentecost. The Jewish Christians who had accompanied Peter were astonished **“because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost”** (Acts 10:45).

From this reaction, it is obvious that these people were Gentiles and were not previous converts to Judaism (proselytes). Gentile proselytes were considered full Jews, and proselytes had been in the crowd on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10). But these people were uncircumcised Gentiles, and consequently Peter later had to explain to the church why he had broken Jewish tradition by visiting the home of unconverted Gentiles and eating with them (Acts 11:1-4).

Although these Gentiles were neither Jews nor Samaritans, immediately after they received the Holy Spirit, Peter **“commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord”** (Acts 10:48). Of course, the name of the Lord is Jesus (Philippians 2:11). In fact, the oldest Greek manuscripts in existence today actually read “in the name of Jesus Christ” here, as do most versions today.

Some try to explain that Jesus Name baptism is only for Gentiles who already believe in the God of Israel, but I Corinthians shows that it is also for the most pagan of Gentiles. Corinth was a Greek city notorious for idolatry and immorality. The church in Corinth was full of divisions, with various groups claiming to be followers of Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ (I Corinthians 1:12). When Paul rebuked them for their divisions, he asked, **“Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul”** (I Corinthians 1:13). The obvious answer to the two latter

questions is, “No, Jesus Christ was crucified for us. No, we were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” Since they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, not Paul, they belonged to Christ, not Paul. Paul’s point was this: Since Jesus died for the whole church and the whole church was baptized in His name, the whole church should unite in following Him. If the Corinthians were not baptized in Jesus’ name, Paul’s argument makes no sense.

A few chapters later, Paul alluded to their Jesus Name baptism again, showing it was administered to everyone, even those who had been the most pagan and immoral: “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Corinthians 6:9-11).

In short, the New Testament reveals that people in every conceivable class are to be baptized in the name of Jesus – whether Jews, Samaritans (part Jews), or Gentiles (non Jews).

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN AT EPHESUS

Faced with the undeniable evidence we have discussed, many people concede that baptism in the name of Jesus is acceptable. Some even agree that it is the original method and that it is to be preferred. Yet many of the same people say, “I have already been baptized another way, so I don’t see the need to be rebaptized. After all, it’s the intent of my heart that counts.” While this reasoning may seem plausible to the human mind, let us see how the Bible addresses this issue.

In Acts 19, Paul met some disciples at Ephesus who had been baptized according to the teaching of John the Baptist. John was a prophet of God, and his baptism was ordained of God for his time (Luke 7:28-30). John baptized by immersion in water (Matthew 3:16; John 3:23), and he required repentance and confession of sins before he would administer baptism (Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:7-8).

Nevertheless, when Paul learned that these disciples at Ephesus had received only John's baptism, he explained to them that John's ministry pointed to Jesus Christ, and then he baptized them a second time. This time, **"they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"** (Acts 19:5). The only difference between the two baptisms was their new understanding of Jesus and the invocation of the name of Jesus upon them.

Although their prior baptism had been a positive step towards God, Paul did not tell these men to be content with it. Nor did he say that their new knowledge and faith made a further step unnecessary. Instead, he considered the name of Jesus to be so important that, although their previous baptism was done upon repentance and faith, by immersion in water, and by a man of God, he rebaptized them in order for them to take on the name of Jesus in baptism.

Likewise, we do not attack, ridicule, or condemn anyone who has taken a step towards God in baptism. In a world of unbelief, apathy, and even hatred of God, any attempt to please God and fulfill His Word is commendable. But once a person understands the complete biblical message of the identity of Jesus Christ and the importance of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, he should not be content with what he has done in the past. If he has never been baptized in the name of Jesus, following the apostolic precedent he should be rebaptized with the invocation of that name.

THE APOSTLE PAUL

Some people try to sidestep the whole issue of the baptismal formula by saying that "in the name of Jesus" does not mean to invoke the name but merely to act upon the power and authority of Jesus. But the way to act upon His power and authority is to invoke His name in faith in obedience to His Word.

The conversation of Saul of Tarsus (later the apostle Paul) provides a good example. When Saul came to Ananias as the Lord had directed him, Ananias instructed him, **"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins,**

calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Saul knew exactly what the Lord’s name was, for he had recently asked, “Who art thou, Lord?” and the Lord had replied, “I am Jesus” (Acts 9:5).

The command of Ananias shows that the name of Jesus is to be called at water baptism. The Greek verb translated “calling” here literally means “invoking.”

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME IN BAPTISM

The Book of Acts establishes that the apostles and the early church consistently baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This pattern is the norm for the church today. It is our responsibility to obey the commands and examples in the Book of Acts regardless of whether we understand the reasons for this practice or the importance of it. Obedience is the only course open to us if we truly accept the Bible as our sole authority for faith and practice and if we truly desire to make Jesus the Lord of all of our life, including our thoughts, values, beliefs, and practices.

Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is not an arbitrary practice, however. Using the name of Jesus in baptism is inextricably linked with the very purpose of baptism itself. All the reasons for being baptized in water are also reasons for invoking the name of Jesus at baptism. If someone wishes to be baptized but refuses the invocation of the name of Jesus, he has not fully grasped the reasons why he should be baptized. Let us examine these reasons.

1. As a minimum, all groups in Christendom agree that the purpose of water baptism is *to express faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior*. When the listeners on the Day of Pentecost accepted Jesus as Lord and Messiah, they were baptized (Acts 2:36-38, 41). When the Samaritans “believed Philip preaching...concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized” (Acts 8:12). When the disciples of John at Ephesus heard that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy of John the Baptist, they were baptized (Acts 19:4-5). When the Corinthians “believed on the Lord,” they were baptized (Acts 18:8). The proper way to express faith in Jesus is to confess His name, and in each of the cases just cited, the

candidates expressed their faith in Jesus by being baptized in the name of Jesus.

2. Baptism is *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38), or to *“wash away...sins”* (Acts 22:16), and the name of Jesus is the only name given for remission of sins. *“Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43). Thus the proper way to seek remission of sins at baptism is to invoke the name of Jesus in faith. Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 not only connect remission of sins with water baptism, but they specifically connect remission of sins with water baptism in the name of Jesus.

3. Baptism is *part of our salvation* (Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21), and the name of Jesus is the only name given for salvation. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). (See also Acts 2:21; Romans 10:9, 13). Thus the proper way to integrate water baptism with the New Testament salvation experience is to invoke the name of Jesus.

4. Baptism is *a burial with Jesus Christ* (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). The Spirit of God did not die for us; only Jesus the man died for us and was buried in the tomb. To be buried with Jesus Christ, we should be baptized in His name.

5. Baptism is *part of our personal identification with Jesus Christ*. *“So many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death”* (Romans 6:3). *“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Galatians 3:27). If we seek to be identified with Him, we should take on His name.

6. Baptism is *part of the new birth* by which we are born into the spiritual family of God (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). We can also view the conversion experience, of which baptism is a part, as an adoption into the

spiritual family of God (Romans 8:15-16). A newly born or adopted child always takes on the name of his new family. Since we seek to enter into the church of Jesus Christ, which is called His body and His bride, we should take on His name. (See Ephesians 5:23; 29-32).

7. Baptism is *part of our spiritual circumcision*, or initiation into the new covenant (Colossians 2:11-13). Under the old covenant a male child officially received his name at his physical circumcision. (See Luke 2:21). Water baptism is the time when our new family name is invoked upon us at our spiritual circumcision.

In connection with the last two points, we know that the identifying name of our new spiritual family is Jesus, for at least two reasons. First, it is the only name in which we can receive salvation. (See John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Second, it is the supreme name by which God has chosen to reveal Himself to us. **“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”** (Philippians 2:9-11).

Some people say that the supreme name described in Philippians 2:9 is Lord. That is, God has given the man Jesus the supreme title of Lord. Although Jesus was openly and miraculously declared to be Lord by the resurrection and ascension, this declaration does not detract from the supremacy of Jesus as the personal name of God incarnate. The title of Lord serves to magnify the name of Jesus and underscore its true meaning.

Philippians 2:10 specifically states that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. Verses 10-11 do not merely say that everyone will acknowledge the existence of a supreme Lord, for many unsaved people already do that; the significance is that everyone will acknowledge that *Jesus* is the one Lord. As Bauer’s lexicon translates, “when the name of Jesus is mentioned’ every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And this event will fulfill the proclamation of Jehovah, who said, **“Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”** (Isaiah

45:23). At the last judgment, every being will acknowledge Jesus as the one God incarnate.

Colossians 3:17 says, “**Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.**” This verse does not require us to pronounce the name of Jesus orally before every activity, but it deals with the attitude in which we conduct every activity. All our words and actions should be consistent with the invocation of Jesus as Lord. When there is cause to invoke God’s name formally, such as at water baptism, which is both word and deed, this verse applies in a specific way, telling us to approach God in the name of the Lord Jesus. Just as we pray, lay hands on the sick, and cast out demons in the name of Jesus, so we should baptize in the name of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Using the name of Jesus in the baptismal formula expresses faith in

- the *person of Christ* (who He really is);
- the *work of Christ* (His death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation); and
- the *power and authority of Christ* (His ability to save us by Himself).

In short, baptism in the name of Jesus signifies that we trust in Jesus alone as our Savior, and thus it expresses the essence of saving faith. Since the only one who can take away sins is Jesus – not us by our deeds, not the water, and not the preacher —we call upon Him in faith, depending on Him to do the work.

The Bible teaches that everyone should be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and it reveals that every reason for baptism is specifically a reason for baptism in the name of Jesus. Thus baptism in the name of Jesus demonstrates reverence for and obedience to the Word of God over and above human tradition, convenience, or peer pressure.