

What Did They Know Before Baptism?

By Jimmy Stevens

INTRODUCTION: In the first century, in New Testament times, what did people know and believe before they were baptized for the remission of sins?

- A. Today, many are baptized for all kinds of reasons. Peer pressure. “Everyone else is doing it.” Condition for getting married. Win favor from family. Be part of a denomination.
- B. Others believe they were “baptized for the remission of sins” simply because they read or heard a few verses of what the Bible says baptism does. To become part of a denomination that is nowhere mentioned in the Bible.
- C. Members of some churches of Christ have received in local fellowship those who claimed to be baptized for the remission of sins while believing a denominational concept of Christ’s church. They may argue:
 1. “If they have to know everything about living the life of a Christian and how the church is organized and functions, no one can be saved.” **This dodges the fundamental question of what they had to know at the time of their baptism.**
 2. “All they have to know is that Jesus saves when they are baptized.” **This ignores what else sinners in the New Testament knew.**
 3. “There is a difference between ‘gospel’ and ‘doctrine’. We accept one’s baptism based on the gospel about Jesus and not on doctrine about the church.” **The Bible does not make a distinction between gospel and doctrine, nor is there one revelation for sinners and one for Christians.**
 4. “Even though they were part of a denomination when they came to us, we have to accept their word that they were baptized for the remission of sins.” **How could they believe they were baptized for the remission of sins and still be part of a denomination that may not even teach that?**
- D. What does one have to **know** and **believe** before being baptized according to the Bible? The New Testament (NT) shows that people believed what they heard from gospel preaching before being baptized. Paul’s explanation, Rom 10:13-16

I. Fundamental rules for understanding the Bible.

- A. ***The Bible must be taken as a whole to gain a full understanding of God’s truths.***
- B. Not Old Testament (OT) only, or NT only, but all of it is God’s truth. It is why the whole Bible is preserved by God for us today. 2 Tim 3:15-17, Rom 15:4
- C. “Is the Law of the Old Testament binding on us today?” NO! Heb 8:6-7, 13. But the removal of the Old Law did not make the Old Testament any less truthful or important in our full understanding of God’s plan for redeeming mankind. It will **support** and **agree** with whatever is said in the New Testament about salvation.
- D. “What does that have to do with the question of our lesson?” If I believe that my baptism saves me, yet do **not** believe in the kingdom or church in which salvation is found how can I have the kind of faith that saves? **A person cannot hear wrong and then believe and be baptized right.**
- E. The New Testament is the only source for what sinners **heard** and **believed** before being baptized, but too often Christians fail to teach all that was revealed.

II. The “Grand Theme” of salvation in the Bible centers around two basic facts.

- A. ***Blood atonement*** for sin through the death of Christ. Gen 3:15, Matt 26:28, Eph 1:7, Acts 2:38, Rom 6:3-4
- B. ***Kingdom*** of prophecy and fulfillment always referred to the only church Jesus said He would build and save. Gen 49:10, Micah 5:2, Psa 45:6, Heb 1:6-9, Col 1:13-14

III. The message of first-century preachers to sinners included salvation through the death of Jesus and the entrance into the kingdom or church for which He died.

- A. NT leaned heavily on the Old Testament to prove that their preaching of Christ and His kingdom of salvation was foretold since the beginning of time.
- B. Kingdom texts: Deut 18:18-19, Isa 9:6-7, Dan 7:13-14, Acts 3:24, Matt 3, 4:17, 23, 16:18-19, Mark 9:1

IV. In every case of conversion in the New Testament, sinners were taught about the great kingdom of Christ and the atoning blood that provided entrance into that kingdom through baptism.

- A. Faith in Christ's power to save and faith in His one kingdom or church were required before one could be baptized for the remission of sins.
- B. Few examples of what was taught and what was believed before baptism.
 1. Acts 2:14-47, 3000 on Pentecost.
 - a. Explains the power of Jesus as King in His kingdom. Vs 22-36.
 - b. Then spoke of baptism for the remission of sins. Vs 37-38.
 - c. More teaching on becoming a member of the only kingdom or church in which to be saved. V 40-41, 47. **Were they baptized without a clue about the relationship to which they were added?**
 - e. **Before these were baptized they understood and believed there was only one church of which to be part to be saved.**
 2. Acts 8:4-16, Philip in Samaria.
 - a. He proclaimed the power of Christ in the one kingdom (church) God would save, and that baptism into Christ was for the remission of sins. Vs 5-7, 12-13.
 - b. Vs 9-11, injects background information about their repentance.
 - c. After their baptisms there was great joy because salvation had come to that city. V 5.
 - d. **Before these were baptized they understood and believed there was only one church of which to be part to be saved.**
 3. Acts 8:26-40, Philip and the Ethiopian.
 - a. To Samaritans, he "*preached Christ to them.*" V 5. Do you suppose Philip preached something different to the Ethiopian when he "*preached Jesus to him*"? V 35.
 - b. It is necessarily implied that he used the OT prophesy to teach the Ethiopian the same thing about Christ and His kingdom as he did to the Samaritans. From Isa 53:4-8, 12, he would have taught about Jesus as the crucified and exalted king and baptism for the remission of sins,
 - c. The Ethiopian's response to Philip was the same as those in Samaria. Vs 36-39.
 - d. **Before he was baptized he understood and believed there was only one church of which to be part to be saved.**
 4. Acts 9:1-19, Saul of Tarsus.
 - a. Paul (Saul at this point) knew the gospel claims that Jesus was the Son of God and about the one church—both of which he hated. 7:54-8:3, Stephen's death. 9:1-2.
 - b. All he lacked was being convinced that what he knew about Jesus and the church was the truth. From Jesus convicting Saul on the road to Damascus and the teaching of Ananias, what Saul opposed and tried to destroy he became convinced that he should believe and obey it. V 18, V 22:16'

- c. **Before Saul was baptized he understood and believed there was only one church of which to be part to be saved.**
- C. **“If one was baptized and became a part of a denomination, would he have to be baptized again?”** No. He would have to be baptized for the first time. Why were they a member of a denomination if they believed their baptism put them into Christ’s church? If they believed the denomination was Christ’s church their faith was wrong when they were baptized.
1. Acts 19:1-6. Ephesian 12. These were taught the truth about baptism and the kingdom.
 - a. Apollos taught the one kingdom and one baptism into Christ because that is what John the Baptist taught. Acts 18:24-26.
 - b. Their faith was faulty because they believed in an obsolete doctrine about Jesus and His kingdom.
 - c. They did not believe in the **resurrected** Christ or the **established** kingdom, because they had not heard that they had taken place. **YOU CANNOT BELIEVE WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW!**
 - d. Having their knowledge updated allowed them to update their faith and therefore have the right kind of faith to be baptized. They gladly submitted to being baptized “again”. Vs 19:4-5.
 - e. If these men, who were certainly aware that there was only one baptism and only one kingdom or church, were baptized “again”, what should that tell the person who claims to be baptized for the remission of sin while believing a denominational concept of the kingdom or church?
 - f. **Can one be baptized for the remission of sins with an incomplete faith?**
 - D. What did the people understand and believe before they were baptized? What was preached; only one gospel of salvation through the blood of Christ; only one baptism for the remission of sins to contact that blood; salvation found only in one church or kingdom whose head and king is Christ.
 - E. Today, You cannot preach about faith in Jesus without preaching faith in His kingdom. Cannot preach about His kingdom without preaching the one church. Cannot preach about one church without preaching about how to be added to that church. Cannot preach about how to be added to the church without preaching baptism into the death and blood of Christ for the remission of sins. Cannot have the right kind of faith without having the right information regarding salvation. Cannot fully believe in Jesus without believing in the church for which He died.
- V. **When the people of the NT were baptized they not only believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and Savior of their souls, but that they were also added to the only kingdom, body, or church that Christ would save His church, or as the apostle Paul called it the “church of Christ”.**
- A. There is only one church. Col 1:18, 24, Eph 1:22-23, 4:4, 5:23, 1 Cor 12:13-14, 20
 - B. A local group of that one body is called a church of Christ, Rom 16:16

CONCLUSION: Since the great theme of the Bible is about a Savior and His kingdom, then that is what one must believe before being baptized for the remission of sins. The details of growing in that faith come along as one matures. John 16:13, 2 Pet 3:17-18