

# Baptism: God's Hallmark From Beginning To End

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## I. Introduction

What does baptism mean? What is its origin? Is it simply a religious ritual or is there deeper meaning to it? Does God have a purpose for it, if so what?

## II. God Uses Baptism Throughout History

### Baptism in the Old Testament

**Birth through water and the Holy Spirit**, the presence of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5) when someone/something is born is a theme that will remain throughout God's use of baptism. The first time God uses baptism in history is in creation. That is, how was the world "born"? Through water and the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:2, 9. The world was immersed under water, Genesis 1:2, then God brought the earth out of the water to new life, Genesis 1:9–10. The world was set apart this way, brought to new life for a specific purpose: to serve humanity, Genesis 1:27–30.

What else is born through water and the Holy Spirit? Every human being who enters this world does so through water and the Holy Spirit. That is, the mother's water breaks, the child is born, and given life by the Holy Spirit, Genesis 2:7; 7:22—the Hebrew word for Spirit is *ruach*, it also means *breath* and *wind* (cf. Zechariah 12:1—*ruach*; Job 12:10—*ruach*). And humans too are given life by God for a specific purpose, Psalm 139:13–16.

**Salvation through water and the Holy Spirit**, Noah and his family are brought to new life by a baptism of water, Genesis 6–8. God again submerged the earth under water, plunged it into death and brings it back up to new life. He cleansed it of its wickedness to make it a new creation once again through His Spirit, 7:17–8:1, 3—God uses *wind* (Hebrew: *ruach*) to bring the earth out of the water (very similar language to Genesis 1:2 and water receding, 1:9–10). Thus, Noah and his family were physically saved through a baptism of water accompanied by the Holy Spirit, Genesis 8:1, 13–19; 1 Peter 3:20–21. This baptism also had a purpose: Noah and his family were to fulfill the job Adam and his descendants failed to do, dominion over the earth, Genesis 9:1–3.

Israel is delivered to new life by a baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, Exodus 14:21–29—*ruach*; 1 Corinthians 10:1–4. This baptism also had a purpose: Israel entered the water as slaves, but they came out of the water a free and holy people, their new purpose, Exodus 19:1–6.

**God's priests must be cleansed before they can perform their duties**, before God can use something, it must be clean. Part of what God does with baptism is cleanse the entity or individual He's about to use. God demanded that uncleanness be removed by water, Leviticus 15:1–15. On the Day of Atonement (a day when God would cleanse His people and tabernacle of sin) Aaron and those associated with the atonement sacrifice had to go through a ritual bathing with water (a sort of baptism if you will) before they could perform their priestly duties, Leviticus 16:4, 24, 26, 28 (cf. Exodus 29:1–9).

These baptisms, from creation to God's priests, show a transformation in the thing being baptized. It enters the water lacking full life but comes out of the water completely new, a new creation with new life and ordained for a specific purpose. Both elements are present: water and the Holy Spirit. God's baptism also prepares the individual for service by cleansing them.

### Baptism in the New Testament

**John's baptism**, he came to baptize Israel with a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. John was there to offer God's salvation from the coming judgment and to turn the people back to God, Luke 1:16–17; 3:3–20. The people went into the water sinners and came out cleansed with a new life that was to be dedicated to God. God was calling His people to be holy once again, Luke 3:10–14. All the elements were there, the water and the Holy Spirit (dwelling inside John guiding His actions, Luke 1:15, 17).

**Jesus is baptized**, He is baptized into John's baptism but not for His own sins; He will cleanse His people and the world of their sins, Isaiah 53:4–12; John 1:29. To the people around, He goes into the water a carpenter's son. But He comes out of the water the Son of God empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit for a specific priestly ministry which begins immediately, Matthew 3:13–4:1. And once again the water and Holy Spirit are present, Matthew 3:16.

**Jesus teaches His disciples to baptize**, it collaborated with John's baptism of repentance and remission of sins, John 3:22–4:2.

**Jesus commands us to baptize**, before leaving to His Father's side, Jesus commands His disciples to baptize the nations, Matthew 28:18–20, something He wanted carried into and fulfilled by the church, Acts 1:8: the Israelites are baptized (for the remission of sins, to be saved physically from that perverse generation), Acts 2:38–41. The Samaritans are baptized, Acts 8:5, 12–17. The Gentiles are baptized, Acts 10:44–48. Paul was baptized and baptizes the nations, Acts 9:17–18; 16:14–15, 25–34; 18:8; 19:1–6.

Christ commanded baptism and His disciples carried it out. In all this, we see God's theme: water and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in the ones baptizing and in those being baptized—some receive the Holy Spirit immediately, others after being baptized and the laying on of hands. The one being baptized went into the water an Israelite, Samaritan, or Gentile, but came out of the water cleansed, a new creation, a holy people ready to serve God as His priests, Ephesians 5:1–2, 8; 1 Peter 1:15–16; 2:5, 9.

**At the end of time God will baptize the world once again**, at the beginning of time God baptized the earth to begin creation. Then He baptized it again in the days of Noah to cleanse it of its wickedness. Now at the end of time, God baptizes the earth once again, but this time with fire. He will cleanse it and melt it away but a new creation, a new earth will emerge, 2 Peter 3:5–13.

### III. Conclusion

Though Christians have been baptizing for nearly two thousand years, baptism did not begin with the Church. God used it at the beginning, throughout history, and He uses it today. It's not just as a symbol but a process God uses. The individuals or entity enter the water, where they undergo a death or deathlike cleansing, and come out of the water a new creation with a specific purpose and calling. Baptism is a new beginning by water and the Holy Spirit.