

# Water Baptising Babies

One popular view is that the New Testament teaches we should water baptise babies. But note:

- In the first case of water baptism recorded in the Book of Acts, we see only men and women were baptised. Acts 8:12 says: ***“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.”*** This verse does not say that these men and women had their babies water baptised.
- In not one place in the New Testament does it specifically record that babies were water baptised.
- In Acts 2:38-39, Peter preached to over 3,000 Jews about how to receive the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit: ***“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’”***

Note Peter said that the above promises were not only for adult Jews but were also *for their children*. In Greek, the word ***“children”*** is a form of the word “teknon” which can refer to a child of *any age*. This includes babies and toddlers. So Peter was here saying that all children personally need to repent. Repentance refers to a change of mind and will about unbelief, faith in God and in Christ, our known sins and who is our Lord – Jesus or ourselves.

In Acts 2:38-39, Peter was not teaching that water baptism alone provides babies and children with the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## All the Philippian jailor’s household had faith in Christ

But some may argue: “But Acts 16:33 refers to the babies and/or toddlers of the Philippian jailor being baptised when it says ***‘And immediately he and all his family were baptized.’***”

But note Acts 16:34 says: ***“Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”*** Here we see that it was not only the Philippian jailor who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Also all the other members of his household believed in the Lord. So his other family members who were water baptised were old enough to personally believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was therefore no babies or toddlers among those who were water baptised.

All of the jailor’s household believed in the Lord Jesus Christ after Paul and Silas had spoken the Word of the Lord to *all* of them. Acts 16:32 records: ***“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”***

## **A man-made church tradition**

One man-made church tradition claims that babies can be saved, be declared righteous by God, receive the Holy Spirit and become a member of God's Kingdom through the faith of their parents and other Christians when the babies are water baptised. But note in Ezekiel 18:3-32, God emphasises that children are accepted by God on the basis of their *own personal* response to Him and not their parents' response. Ezekiel 18:20 says: ***“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”***

In the Majority Greek Text on which the New King James Version is based, Acts 8:36-37 records that after the Ethiopian eunuch asked to be water baptised, Philip replied that he could be water baptised only if he believed with all his heart in the Lord Jesus: ***“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”***

## **What happens to unconverted unbaptised babies who die?**

I believe that the multiplied millions of unborn and born babies who have died without being converted to the Lord Jesus Christ, who were in a state of original sin (see Romans 5:12-19, Genesis 6:5, 8:21, Jeremiah 17:9, Psalm 51:5 and Ephesians 2:3) and who were not water baptised, will be saved by God's mercy and unmerited grace. This includes the millions of aborted babies. Romans 9:14-15 says: ***“What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’”***

James 5:11 states: ***“...the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”*** Psalm 103:8 declares: ***“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.”*** In Psalm 136, there are 26 mentions of the expression ***“For His mercy endures forever”***. Romans 11:32 says: ***“For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”***

In Matthew 19:13-15, Jesus reveals God's heart: ***“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”***

Other relevant verses are 2 Samuel 24:14, Psalm 25:6, 69:16, 79:8, Daniel 9:9, 9:18, Micah 7:18, Luke 6:36, Ephesians 2:4, 2 Timothy 1:2 and Hebrews 2:17.

## **King David's baby son**

The Apostle Peter said that King David was a prophet of God (see Acts 2:29-30). In the Old Testament, it is recorded that after King David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, she conceived a son. Just after she had given birth to this son, God led the prophet Nathan to tell David that the child would die (see 2 Samuel 12:1-11). After the child died, the prophet David spoke the following words about where the child was going after death. 2 Samuel 12:23 says:

***“But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”*** David said that he expected to go after his death to where this child would be already.

Verses such as Psalm 17:15, 21:5-6, 23:6 and Acts 13:22 imply that David would be going to heaven after he died. Acts 13:22 states that God said: ***“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’”*** Therefore, because David knew he was going to heaven, he was saying in 2 Samuel 2:23 that he would later be in heaven with his deceased child.

David’s child was born with original sin. Colossians 2:11-13 says that the Old Testament partial equivalent of water baptism was circumcision. David’s child died at the age of 6 days. In Old Testament times, the Lord commanded the Israelites to circumcise their boys on the eighth day after their birth (see Genesis 17:12). David did not circumcise his son after the boy died. David’s actions were different from many churchgoers who have had their babies water baptised after they have died during pregnancy or just after birth.

Even though the child was not circumcised and was a result of the great sin of adultery, the prophet David revealed that he expected the child to go straight to heaven.

## **Can newborn babies have saving faith on Earth?**

Someone may argue, “Psalm 22:9-10 mentions someone trusting God even at his mother’s breast and from the time of being in his mother’s womb and him having a good relationship to God. In Mark 9:42, Jesus spoke of little ones believing in Him. Psalm 8:2 refers to children and infants praising God. Luke 18: 16-17 refers to little children receiving the Kingdom of God. Therefore, newborn babies can have saving faith.”

Let us examine Psalm 22:9-10: ***“But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust when I was on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God.”***

At first glance, these verses seem to suggest that all fallen babies even from their mothers’ wombs can have a faith relationship to God. But like most false interpretations of Scripture, this involves taking Psalm 22:9-10 *out of context* with surrounding verses and in *isolation* from other parts of the Sacred Scriptures.

When we read Psalm 22:9-10 in relation to the verses surrounding it – Psalm 22:6-8 and 11-18 – and cross reference this passage with Matthew 27:35, 39-43 and John 20:25, we find that Psalm 22:9-10 is a prophecy about Jesus Christ. Compare all of these verses!

Verse 6 of Psalm 22 speaks of Jesus being scorned and despised by people. Verses 7-8 prophesy people mocking Him and saying ***“All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him, since He delights in Him!’”*** Compare to Matthew 27:39-43. Verse 11 prophesied that there would be no one to help Jesus while He was on the Cross. Verse 14 predicted what happened to Jesus’ heart. Verse 15 prophesied Jesus’ strength would dry up on the Cross and that His mouth would be very dry. Cross reference to John 19:28. Verse 16 predicted that Gentiles and not Jews would kill Him. The Jews called Gentiles by the word “dogs”. Verse 17 prophesied that the Gentile Romans would pierce Jesus’ hands and feet. Verse 18 predicts how the Romans would divide Jesus’ clothes among themselves by casting lots. Cross reference to John 19:23-24.

The verses which are either side of Psalm 22:9-10 are therefore clear prophecies about Jesus Christ. Even verse 1 of Psalm 22 is a clear reference to Jesus' Words on the Cross (see Matthew 27:46).

Psalm 22:10 speaks of Jesus knowing God intimately from His mother's womb. This is understandable because Jesus was born without original sin and had known the Father intimately from the eternal past. John 17:5 says that Jesus prayed: ***"And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."***

Psalm 22:9 speaks of Jesus trusting God the Father while on His mother's breasts. This is true because even from the time of His conception by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ was perfect and in total union with God the Father.

All other babies are born with original sin (see Romans 3:9-18, 3:23, 5:12-17 and Psalm 51:5) and without spiritual union with God. Unless they themselves *choose* at a later age to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, they can be water baptised one thousand times and they still will not become a member of God's Kingdom and a new creation in Christ Jesus.

Therefore no-one can use Psalm 22:9-10 to prove that babies besides Jesus Christ can have saving faith in God.<sup>1</sup>

Also note Mark 9:42 does not refer to newborn babies believing in the Lord Jesus Christ: ***"And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me..."*** In Greek, the phrase ***"little ones"*** is a form of the word "mikros" which means "a living being who is relatively young"<sup>2</sup> or "small in age."<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, the word "mikros" is used to mean little children but is never used to refer to little babies.

Luke 18:15-17 says: ***"Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.'"***

In Greek, the word ***"infants"*** is a form of the word "brephos" which means in this context "a newborn child, or an infant still older"<sup>4</sup> or "baby, infant".<sup>5</sup> In Luke 18:15-17, Jesus emphasises that He wants all babies or infants to be members of the Kingdom of God. But He does not specifically say here that babies can have saving faith.

Luke 18:15-17 shows also that in their relationships to God the Father, adults need to copy the child-like trust and dependence children have on their natural parents in order to receive the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew 18:14, Jesus said He did not want one little one to perish. In the context of Matthew 18:14, He was referring to children older than babies. But not all older children choose to have saving faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. So some older children do spiritually perish. In this verse Christ was saying He would like to see all children saved.

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed reading of Psalm 22 reveals that not all of its verses are a prophecy about Jesus Christ. This, however, is nothing unusual because the same thing occurs in Psalm 16 and Psalm 118. It is only verses 8-11 of Psalm 16 (cross reference with Acts 2:24-32) and only verses 22-23 and 26 of Psalm 118 (cross reference with Matthew 21:9) that refer to Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> Louw and Nida, page 645.

<sup>3</sup> Bauer, page 521.

<sup>4</sup> Vine, page 48.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer, page 147.

But in Matthew 18:14, Jesus was not saying that He forces little babies to have faith in Him while they are on Earth. Faith is a gift of God (see Romans 12:3 and Hebrews 12:2). But faith in God is not something which He forces babies, older children or adults to exercise in Him.

Matthew 21:15-16 says: *“But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ they were indignant and said to Him, ‘Do You hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise?’”* These verses refer to children and nursing infants praising God and *not* to them exercising *faith* for *salvation*. We must be careful not to conclude that just because someone praises God, this means they have saving faith. This is because Isaiah 55:12 refers to mountains, hills and trees praising God and Psalm 148:3 mentions the sun, moon and stars praising Him. Mountains, hills, trees, the sun and so on cannot exercise saving faith.

Matthew 21:15 records the children who praised Jesus, shouted *“Hosanna to the Son of David.”* Babies, who are baptised not long after birth by some churches, could never shout out, *“Hosanna to the Son of David.”* Very few toddlers up to 2 years of age could say this phrase properly.

## **Believers’ sanctified children are not necessarily saved**

Someone may argue that 1 Corinthians 7:14 infers that all children who have Christian parents are assured of being saved from eternal punishment and of going to heaven through the faith of their parents. This is because this verse speaks of the children of believers as being “holy”.

But note that the holiness referred to here does not relate to eternal salvation. This is because this same verse says that the unbelieving husband of a wife and the unbelieving wife of a Christian husband are sanctified because of their marriage to a Christian partner. In 1 Corinthians 7:16, the Apostle Paul tells the Christian husband or Christian wife that they cannot be sure that their “sanctified” unbelieving spouse will be eternally saved: *“For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?”*

So even though the children of Christian parents are sanctified in one sense, this does not guarantee they are eternally saved.

## **John the Baptist’s filling by the Spirit was not baptismal regeneration**

Luke 1:15 records that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he was in his mother’s womb. But this was a filling of the Holy Spirit for a special purpose in ministry. It was not a born-again experience in which he was made a new creation in Christ and regenerated with God’s eternal life. Also note John the Baptist was not water baptised as a baby at the time he was filled by the Holy Spirit.

In Old Testament times, believers were not regenerated in Christ nor did they become new creations in Christ. These two latter things only occurred in New Covenant times after Jesus’ death and resurrection (see Ezekiel 36:25-27, John 7:37-39 and Colossians 1:25-27). But in Old Testament times, some believers were filled with the Holy Spirit for various ministries or

purposes to which God had called them (see Exodus 31:1-5, Numbers 11:16-29, Judges 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6, 14:19, 15:14, 1 Samuel 10:6, 10:10, 11:6, 16:13-14, 19:20, 1 Kings 18:12, 2 Kings 2:15, 2 Chronicles 15:1, Ezekiel 2:2 and 1 Peter 1:10-11).

So Luke 1:15 does not suggest that water baptism results in babies being regenerated or born-again by the Holy Spirit or that we can be born-again without personal saving faith.

## **The influence of the pagan philosophies of Plato and Aristotle**

One view suggests that the opposition to the idea that babies can receive God's forgiveness, become new creations in Christ and so on through water baptism, is a result of a so-called "new secular understanding of the nature of man". This latter new secular understanding supposedly began in the Protestant Reformation period of the 1500's in Europe and concentrated more on the idea of humans as individuals than in previous centuries.

The above sounds impressive until we look at history. In fact, prior to the Renaissance (1350-1650 A.D.) and Protestant Reformation, large parts of the Church in Europe had their thinking coloured by various mixtures of pagan Greek philosophy with Christianity. For example, the pagan philosophy of Plato mixed with Christian teaching was called ultra-realism and the pagan philosophy of Aristotle mixed with Christian ideas was called moderate realism. Anselm (1033-1109 A.D.) and Duns Scotus (1266-1308 A.D.) were ultra-realist Catholic theologians. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Peter Abelard (1079-1142 A.D.) were two popular Roman Catholic theologians who taught moderate realism.

These paganised versions of Christianity downgraded the importance of the individual and individual will and *overemphasised* the *collective* nature of reality and society and *collective* decision-making. Ultra realism and moderate realism overemphasised the collective nature of reality and human society because these two philosophies regarded individuals as mere representations of broader universal truths. For example, individual humans were real as expressions of the broader reality of the whole human race. These philosophies taught that the state, the church, the family and other institutions of society were primarily collective units. The individual will and individual decision-making of people within these units were underemphasized.

As a result of this overemphasis of analysing society in solely or primarily collective and not individual terms, the church came to be regarded more and more as many water baptised families joined together. This "worldly" attitude was different from the New Testament emphasis on the church being a *collective group* made up of *individuals* who personally decided to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The idea babies can be saved through the faith of their parents or the Church as a collective institution is based on the theories of Plato and Aristotle and not the written Word of God.

In Matthew 10:21-22, Jesus spoke of individuals in the same family opposing each other because of their personal individual acceptance or rejection of Him: "***Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.***"

In Matthew 10:34-36, Jesus said: "***Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.'*** And 'a

*man's foes will be those of his own household.*” These verses clearly speak of individual decision-making in families in their attitudes to Jesus Christ.

A truly Biblical attitude neither overemphasises or underemphasises the importance of:

- the individual and individual will.
- the collective nature of society – in the form of families, nationalities, local churches, the church universal and so on.

Modern Western humanistic society focuses too much on individual rights and personal freedoms. But prior to the Renaissance (1350-1650 A.D.) and the Protestant Reformation, the Western world generally focussed too little on the individual and too much on the collective nature of human society and institutions. This was except for nominalist Roman Catholic theologians like William of Occam who emphasised the individual more.

Both the individualism of modern Western humanistic society and the Platonic and Aristotlian overemphasis of the Middle Ages on collective realities and collective human institutions are two unbiblical extremes to avoid.

## **The age of accountability**

God will only hold a child responsible for not devoting his life to Him, and not accepting Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and the King of his everyday life, once the child has reached an age that he can decide to do this. But only God knows when a child has reached such an age. Only God knows perfectly a child's thoughts, heart and development.

One child may reach this age of accountability much earlier than another. We must let God be the Judge of this.

I believe that prior to this age of accountability, all babies and toddlers go to heaven like King David's baby did.