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The River Jordan

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LESSON 10

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Editor-In-Chief: HERBERT W. ARMSTRONG

Managing Editor: Richard H. Sedliacik

Contributing Editor: Ronald B. Nelson

Circulation Manager: Richard Rice

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United States: P.O. Box 111, Pasadena, California 91123

Canada: P.O. Box 44, Station A, Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2M2

Mexico: Institución Ambassador, Apartado Postal 5-595, México 5, D.F.

Colombia: Apartado Aéreo 11430, Bogotá 1, D.E.

United Kingdom, rest of Europe and Middle East: P.O. Box 111, St. Albans, England AL2 2EG

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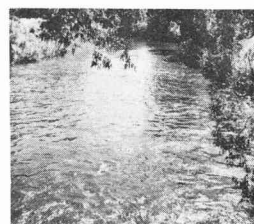
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About Our Cover . . .

Our cover shows a scenic spot along the banks of the River Jordan in the modern nation of Israel. It was in this river that many repentant believers were baptized by John "the Baptist." It was also in this same river that John baptized Jesus Christ.

This lesson reveals the plain truth about water baptism. It shows exactly what Jesus and the apostles of His early New Testament Church taught about this grossly misunderstood step in God's plan of salvation.

Z. Kluger Photo



SHOULD YOU BE BAPTIZED?

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The apostle Peter commanded the crowd gathered in Jerusalem: "Repent and be baptized every one of you. . . ." But is Acts 2:38 relevant in the space age? Does God require baptism for one to become a Christian today?

The ancient ritual of water baptism seems passé to some in the Western world. There are religions today which no longer require literal baptismal rites — especially those entailing total immersion in water. A good many dismiss water baptism as an antiquated ceremony to be relegated to a primitive or medieval church.

Should we follow the many in rejecting a literal adherence to this biblical practice? How can you *know* whether any such custom is just a carryover of old-fashioned, anachronistic human ideas — or really what the Creator of heaven and earth truly wants His followers to practice today?

Is Baptism a Required Step?

The most direct and vital of all passages concerning water baptism is found in Acts 2:36-42. In

his inspired sermon on that momentous day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter indicted his listeners for their part in murdering the Messiah.

Many were cut to the heart with guilt and shame. Their spontaneous response came in a flash: "Men and brethren *what shall we do?*" (verse 37).

A very good question.

What do you do when you, individually, come to recognize — as this first century group did — that you have been in rebellion against the laws and purposes of your Creator?

Notice the inspired answer to their question: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and *be baptized* every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (verse 38, RSV).

The preceding lesson made the necessity for

repentance crystal clear. But the very next step, as stated in Acts 2:38, is *water baptism*.

Baptism, as we shall learn from this study, is clearly a required step in God's plan of personal salvation for you as an individual.

In this extremely important lesson, we will come to understand exactly what God commands concerning water baptism. We will begin by learning the symbolic meaning of baptism. Then we'll study the Old Testament types that prefigured

New Testament baptism, the practice of John the Baptist, Jesus' personal example, continuing right on down to the apostolic practice in the first century church.

This lesson will ask and answer such questions as: What is baptism? What is its biblical history? What is its purpose? What is its meaning for today's twentieth-century man? Why is it indeed a vital step in achieving personal entrance into the Kingdom of God?

LESSON 10

The Deeply Symbolic Meaning of Baptism

A great deal of symbolism surrounds the subject of baptism. We need to *thoroughly understand* that symbolism to know exactly why God requires baptism of those who would become true followers of Christ — Spirit-begotten children of God.

1. How did Jesus Christ condemn sin in the flesh? Rom. 8:3-4; Heb. 4:15. Why did He suffer death? I Cor. 15:3. What happened to His dead body? Verse 4; Rom. 8:11.

COMMENT: Christ "condemned" sin by living sinlessly through the power of the Holy Spirit. He died for our sins — His death paid the penalty of sin that we have incurred — and was buried. After three days He was "quickened" — that is, He was made alive, or given life — by God's Spirit. His resurrection shows He triumphed over sin and death.

2. Is baptism *symbolic* of one's death, burial and resurrection from a "grave"? Col. 2:12-13; Rom. 6:2-6. Also read the subsequent verses of Romans 6 up to and including verse 13.

COMMENT: Just as Christ died for our sins and was buried, our baptism — being plunged into a watery "grave" — is symbolic of the death and *burial* of our old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, our coming up out of the waters of baptism is symbolic of our rising up from our "grave" to live a *new life* free from the guilt of past sins and the death penalty our sins incurred.

Baptism, then, pictures the *death, burial* and *resurrection* of Christ. It also pictures the death and burial of the sinner and his rising up to begin living a Christian life.

Let's elaborate on the above a little further.

Going down into the water clearly pictures the death of Christ and our old self. Likewise, being buried in the water pictures the burial of Christ,

and of our old sinful life. And coming up out of the water pictures Christ's resurrection, and our coming up to walk henceforth "in newness of life" — in obedience to God's laws. We now reckon ourselves as dead, so far as sin is concerned, but *alive* through God and His Son Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:11).

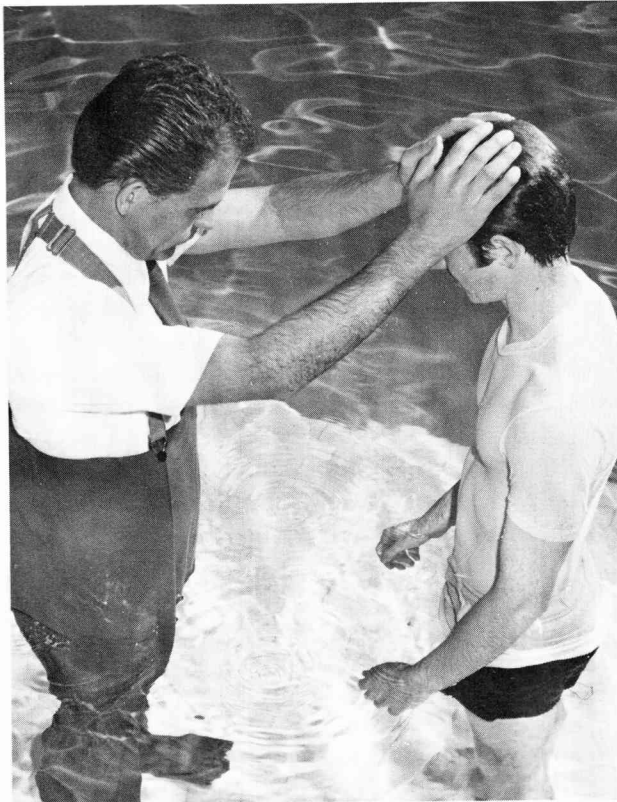
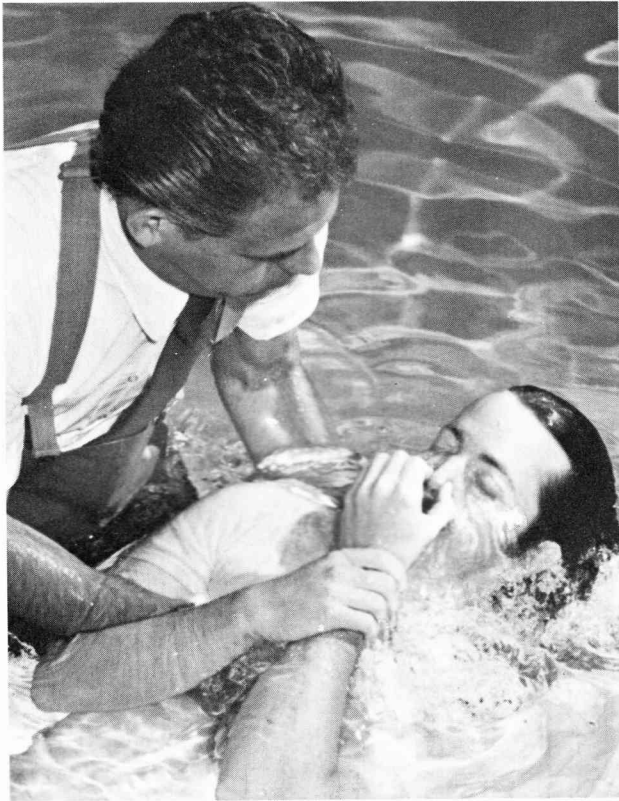
After baptism and the "laying on of hands" (which we'll discuss later), Christ begins to "live" within us by means of God's Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10). The Holy Spirit enables us, as we yield to God from that time forward, to *resist* the devil's influence which leads us to sin, and to go on to obey God's spiritual laws (verse 13).

The Apostle Paul said: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Water baptism is simply an ordinance of Christ by which we *symbolically express* our faith in Him as our personal Savior — our belief and acceptance of His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism is also a symbolic outward expression of our sincere and total repentance of our old sinful life — our "burial" of that sinful life. And baptism pictures our rising up to a *new* life of spiritual obedience to God.

Baptism clearly signifies that our selfish, vain and sinful self has to die. It shows our realization of our own sins, our vanities, our wretchedness. It is an *outward acknowledgement* of our realization that the old self must die in order that we might rise again to live — this time really live — by God's laws and commandments as made possible through His Holy Spirit.

Baptism, in the final analysis, shows our *total surrender* to God. It symbolizes the *complete* burial of the old sinful self and our beginning a new life surrendered to the will and authority of God.



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BAPTISM—At top, repentant believer is “buried” by immersion in water. Above, the Holy Spirit is imparted through the “laying on of hands” ceremony which immediately follows baptism.

The Flood a Type of Baptism

The Old Testament contains significant types which prefigure New Testament water baptism. These foreshadows are vital to our understanding of Christ’s and the apostles’ teachings concerning this practice. We begin with Noah and the Flood.

1. After men had begun to multiply upon the face of the earth, did they sin grievously against God? Gen. 6:5, 11-12. Just how corrupt had mankind become in God’s sight? Same verses.

2. What did God say He would do to the earth’s population as a result of their incorrigible wickedness? Gen. 6:7. By what means of destruction? Verse 17.

COMMENT: Mankind had so completely corrupted itself that God had no other alternative but to put the entire human race out of its self-imposed misery — except for one man and his family.

3. Who, in that world of rampant sin, found grace in God’s sight? Gen. 6:8. Why did God favor Noah? Verse 9. Also notice II Peter 2:5 compared with Psalms 119:172.

COMMENT: Noah “walked with God” — He obeyed the voice of God and preached *obedience* to God’s will. But no one would listen.

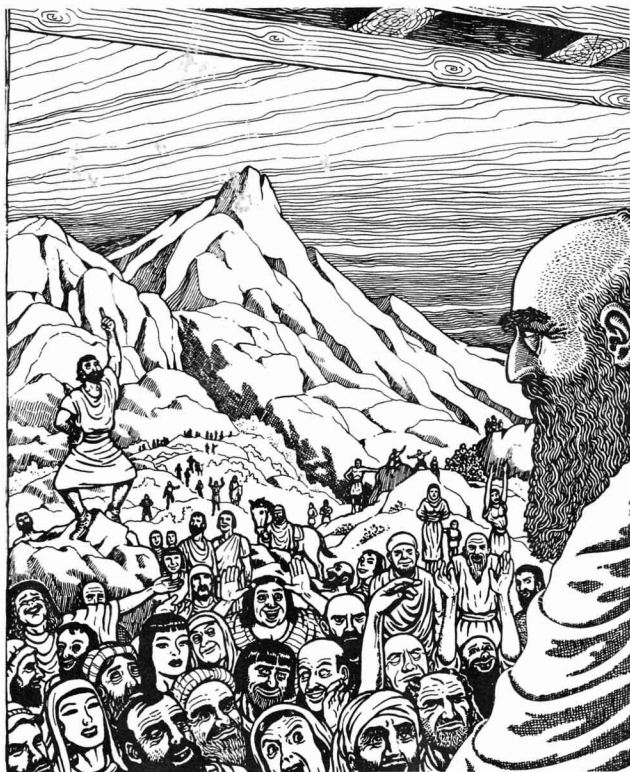
4. God told Noah to build an enormous vessel so he and his family could escape the great flood He would bring on rebellious mankind (Gen. 6:14-17). How did Noah demonstrate his belief — his *faith* — in God’s promise of salvation from the flood — the penalty of the world’s sins? Gen. 6:22; Heb. 11:7.

COMMENT: Many long, arduous and trying years were required to complete the ark. (Compare Genesis 5:32 with Genesis 7:11.) The pre-flood world had at least a century to repent of their sins *before* God sent this worldwide flood.

5. Does Noah’s escape from the tremendous flood — a watery “grave” for the sinning world — typify our deliverance from sin’s penalty through the symbolic meaning of water baptism? I Pet. 3:20-21.

COMMENT: Notice how the *Revised Standard Version* renders verses 20-21: “...eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

God provided a way for Noah and his immediate family to escape the old world of sin and the penalty it had incurred for disobedience to God’s laws. Noah *believed* God when He warned him of the Flood, and Noah obeyed God by building the



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SAVED FROM DEATH—Onlookers jeered obedient, faithful Noah just before he was sealed within the ark. Only those in the ark were spared from the sinning world's watery grave.

ark. He *demonstrated his faith by his obedience* (see James 2:17-26). This is the same kind of *active, LIVING* faith God expects of us today.

Noah was brought *up out* of the water that destroyed the sinful world and was saved physically. Today, we can be saved spiritually from the eternal penalty of sin — if we really believe Christ died for our sins and if we symbolically *bury* them in the waters of baptism.

Israel “Baptized” in the Sea

Another interesting Old Testament type pointing to New Testament baptism was the escape of Israel from Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt.

While the Israelites were in Egypt, they were Pharaoh's slaves — helpless and powerless under his taskmasters — just as a sinner is the slave of sin (Rom. 6:16).

Egypt was a symbol of *sin* (Rev. 11:8). Pharaoh and his army can be compared to Satan and his demons who bring us into captivity to sin. God commanded Israel to *come out* of Egypt — sin. Israel obeyed.

The Israelites began their exodus out of Egypt under Moses after they applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts (Ex. 12:1-13; 30-

37). Their departure from Egypt is a type of our departure — our *repentance* — from spiritual sin! The blood of the lamb which protected them from the death angel is symbolic of the blood of Christ — *our* “Passover lamb” (I Cor. 5:7) — whose blood was shed for the remission of our sins. Thus Christ's shed blood saves us from the penalty of *eternal* death.

1. Whom did God commission to deliver Israel from the clutches of Egyptian bondage? Ex. 3:10-12; Acts 7:35.

2. Is Moses therefore referred to as a *type* or prefigure of Christ? Acts 7:37; 3:20-22. What did God send Jesus Christ to deliver us from? Rom. 3:24-25.

COMMENT: Moses, sent by God to deliver Israel from *physical* bondage, was a type pointing to Christ whom God sent to deliver repentant believers from the *spiritual* bondage of sin.

3. How did the Israelites react to leaving Egypt behind them? Num. 33:3.

COMMENT: The Israelites left with great exaltation and elation over their deliverance from the bondage (sin) of Egypt.

4. While the Israelites were rejoicing over their newfound freedom, what did Pharaoh and his army begin to do? Ex. 14:8-9.

COMMENT: Just accepting Christ and His blood for the remission of past sins does not make us *forever* free from sin. The Israelites thought they were free from the bondage of Egypt — that is until Pharaoh began to pursue them!

5. What did Moses say when the Israelites became fearful of Pharaoh's oncoming army? Ex. 14:13-14.

6. Did God tell them to bog down, give up, and quit, giving up all hope of escaping the Egyptians? Or to go forward in obedience, *trusting* Him and His power to deliver them? Verses 15-16.

COMMENT: God likewise tells twentieth century Christians to *go forward* in obedience to Him, trusting Him and His power — the Holy Spirit — to deliver them!

7. What external help did the Israelites receive from God to protect them from Pharaoh and his army? Ex. 14:19-20.

COMMENT: The angel of the Lord in the cloud had gone before the Israelites to show them the way. Now he went behind them, between them and their enemies, to *protect* them.

We need external help today, too — and very desperately! What we need is God and His Holy Spirit to help us keep ourselves from falling into the clutches of future sins, once our past sins have been forgiven and covered by Christ's blood.

8. When God divided the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could pass through (Ex. 14:21-22), were they fearful? Ps. 78:53. Did they trust God to keep the walls of water from crashing down upon them? Heb. 11:29.

9. What happened to the Egyptians who pursued the Israelites? Ex. 14:26-28.

COMMENT: Here we see Pharaoh and his army, who represented the sins of Egypt in which Israel had lived, *buried* in a watery grave. How wonderfully this typifies the symbolism of Christian baptism! — "We know that our old self [our old sinful, carnal self] was crucified [killed and *buried* by baptism, verses 3-5] with Him [Christ], so that the sinful body might be [symbolically] *destroyed*, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6, RSV).

10. Therefore, isn't Israel's deliverance from Egypt (sin) through the *waters* of the Red Sea clearly referred to as a type of Christian baptism? I Cor. 10:1-2.

COMMENT: God often required many of the Old Testament prophets, including Moses, to *act out* the things He would bring to pass in the future (see Ezek. 4:1-17; 5:1-4). Likewise, God requires those who now sincerely want to have their past sins blotted out and covered by Christ's blood to per-



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"SIN" LEFT BEHIND—Remains of Pharaoh's army washed ashore after being destroyed and buried by the waters of the Red Sea.

form the *physical*, yet deeply symbolic act of baptism! It impresses the MEANING of baptism upon us, and is an *outward sign* illustrating our deeply sincere repentance and belief in Christ's sacrifice for our sins.

And so the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea and the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in a watery "grave" (symbolizing the destruction of our "old man," or past life of sin), clearly typify New Testament water baptism.

John's Baptism

Just before the coming of Christ, and the subsequent arrival of the Holy Spirit, God commissioned John "the Baptist" to administer the "baptism of repentance." Let's understand what it was.

1. Was John a prophet of God? Luke 1:63, 76. Was there any greater prophet? Matt. 11:11.

2. For whose ministry was John sent to proclaim and prepare the way? Luke 1:76; Matt. 3:1-3.

3. Was John also sent to baptize with water? John 1:26, 31, 33.

COMMENT: Remember that baptism symbolizes *burial* of the old carnal, sinful self. It is the *outward* expression of inward repentance.

4. Who sent John and gave him authority to baptize? Luke 3:2-3; Matt. 21:23-27.

COMMENT: The chief priests and elders would not acknowledge the fact John was a prophet sent by God simply because if they had, they would also have been acknowledging that Christ's authority came from God, for John had previously acknowledged the greatness of Christ (Matt. 3:13-15).

5. Just exactly what was the message John the Baptist preached? Mark 1:4-5; Matt. 3:11. What was the purpose of his message? Luke 1:77.

COMMENT: John's message was the "baptism of *repentance*." It was exactly what it implied. Those John baptized had truly repented of their past sins and were actually forgiven by God. But they did not yet receive the Holy Spirit — the power to overcome the sinful nature of Satan and to obey God — for the Holy Spirit was not made available until *after* Christ's resurrection and ascension to heaven (John 7:38-39).

The account in Luke 1:77 clearly states that John the Baptist was sent "To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins." John was simply preaching *repentance from sin*. His message was preparing a people to receive and obey Christ when He came, thus preparing the way for His coming.

A New Testament Command

Now that this foundation of understanding has been laid, let's learn exactly what Jesus Christ commands us today concerning water baptism.

1. Did Jesus set an example for us in all things to show us that we should walk — live — as He did? I Pet. 2:21; I John 2:6. Was He baptized? Matt. 3:13-16.

COMMENT: Even though Jesus had no sins to repent of, He was baptized, setting an *example* for us to follow.

2. After His resurrection, Jesus told His twelve apostles (who formed the foundation of His one and only Church from that time to this very day) what they were to preach to the world. Did He plainly command them to baptize repentant believers? Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16. What, exactly, were the repentant to "believe"? Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12.

COMMENT: The true "gospel" or good news Christ commanded His Church to preach is not solely a message about His being our Savior — it is the very message He brought and preached — the good news of the coming Kingdom and Government of God.

One must also hear and believe the true gospel before being baptized. Christ's gospel includes not only believing on Him as our personal Savior, but also as our coming King. Those who believe the true gospel, accept Christ and believe He is their Savior, repent of their sins and are baptized, and live a life of overcoming, are the ones who will be saved — born again at the resurrection to inherit the Kingdom of God!

3. What was Peter's command to the believers on the Day of Pentecost? Acts 2:38.

4. Do we find that repentant believers were always baptized? Acts 2:41; 8:5, 12.

5. About ten years after the Apostle Peter preached his first inspired sermon to the Jewish people in Jerusalem, God sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He was sent to the house of Cornelius, a very devout Italian (Acts 10). Peter then proceeded to preach the entire gospel to Cornelius and his family (verses 33-43).

What did Cornelius and family receive even as they were hearing Paul's message — *before* being baptized? Verses 44-45. Was this a *special sign* from God to the apostles? Acts 11:17-18.

COMMENT: God made an exception in this instance. Repentant believers ordinarily must be baptized *first* before they can receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). But since Cornelius and his family were the *first Gentiles* to be called of God and

converted, God gave them the Holy Spirit before baptism as a *special sign* to prove to Peter and the other apostles that He had indeed also opened the way of salvation to Gentiles.

6. What did Peter then immediately command should be done with Cornelius and his family? Acts 10:47-48.

COMMENT: Peter, following Christ's instructions (Matt. 28:19-20), had Cornelius and other repentant believers in his family baptized!

Obviously baptism is *very important* to God — else He would not have made it an absolute command to be obeyed by all who would become true Christians.

The Correct Method

The religious world today is in great confusion regarding methods of baptism. Some "baptize" by sprinkling, and others by pouring water over the



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"CHRISTENING"—This darling Tanzanian baby is oblivious to the ceremony taking place. But was this "baptism" valid in God's sight? And what about millions of other similar ceremonies performed every year?

heads of new converts. Some don't baptize at all.

What is the correct method of baptism — or are they all correct?

It is interesting to note that the word "sprinkle" occurs only a few times in the New Testament, and always in connection with the blood of Christ — but *never* referring to baptism. The word "pouring" is also mentioned several times in the New Testament — but *not once* as a form of baptism!

Notice what the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says regarding baptism: "It is evident that baptism in the early church was by immersion. This is implicit in the terminology and context. . . . That Baptism took place by immersion is evidenced by Paul's presenting it as "being buried with Christ [Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12]" (pages 56, 58). The older version of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us that "The most ancient form usually employed was unquestionably immersion . . . in the Latin Church immersion seems to have prevailed until the twelfth century" (article, "Baptism").

In the year 1155, Thomas Aquinas wrote: "Baptism may be given not only by immersion, but also by affusion of water, or sprinkling with it. But it is the safer way to baptize by *immersion*, because that is *the most common custom*" (quoted by Wall, *History of Infant Baptism*, Vol II, pp. 391-393, emphasis ours).

Also Brenner — after a full investigation of the administration of baptism through the centuries — wrote: "Thirteen hundred years was baptism generally and regularly an immersion by the person under the water, and only in extraordinary cases, a sprinkling or pouring with water; the latter [sprinkling or pouring] moreover, was disputed — nay even forbidden" (Brenner, *Catholic History*, p. 306).

But pouring and sprinkling were beginning to grow common in the 14th century, gradually prevailing in the Western Church. It is quite plain that they were late innovations of men which had become the custom in the Catholic Church.

The word "baptize" is not an English word *per se*. It is a Greek word. And the New Testament was written in the Greek language. In translating the Bible into English, the translators left this word untranslated. Literally, in the Greek, the word is *baptizo*.

The definition is "immerse." It means to "plunge into" or "put into." It does *not* mean "to sprinkle" or "to pour." The Greek word for "sprinkle" is *rantizo* and "to pour" is *cheo*. The Holy Spirit inspired only the use of the word *baptizo*, meaning to immerse, when referring to baptism.

Therefore, sprinkling or pouring are *not* forms of baptism. *Immersion* — being placed completely

down under water — is. Baptism symbolizes the *burial* of the old carnal, sinful self. Only total immersion can properly symbolize death and burial; sprinkling or pouring are *not* symbols of a burial by any stretch of the imagination!

Let's notice what the Bible itself teaches concerning the proper mode or method of baptism.

1. Why was John baptizing in Aenon near Jerusalem? John 3:23.

COMMENT: John would have needed only a cupful of water to sprinkle, or a pitcher full to pour — but baptizing requires "*much* water."

2. How does the baptism of Christ prove that He was immersed? Matt. 3:16.

COMMENT: Jesus had to be put *down into* the water, for He "went up straightway *out of the water* . . ." It is ridiculous to think He could have come "up . . . out" of a sprinkle or a pour!

3. When Philip baptized the eunuch, did they both go *into* the water? Acts 8:38.

COMMENT: There was no purpose whatever for Philip to actually go *into* the water, except for the reason there was no other way he could plunge the eunuch *into* the river. Had sprinkling or pouring been the proper method of baptism, Philip would have needed only to bend over and scoop up the water in his hands.

The above biblical evidence clearly shows that immersion — being placed completely *under water* — was the only method of baptism practiced by the original Holy Spirit-inspired Church of God.

Other Kinds of Immersion!

Water baptism is an outward sign of inward repentance. It demonstrates to God one's willingness to put away permanently his or her old way of life and walk in His new way of life. Its meaning is *strictly symbolic* in the sense that water baptism itself has no mystical or magic effects on the person who is immersed. Its only physical effect is to get the person thoroughly wet! Nor is the Holy Spirit given by water baptism.

Surprisingly, there are several other distinct "baptisms" or immersions mentioned in the Bible. Let's understand what they are:

1. Did John the Baptist speak of another Christian baptism? Matt. 3:11.

COMMENT: John had just been warning the hypocritical religionists to demonstrate some fruits, or results of their alleged repentance (verses 5-8). Notice again what he said: "I baptize [immerse] you with water for repentance, but he [Jesus] who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize [immerse]

you with the Holy Spirit and [immerse you] with fire" (verse 11, RSV). Here John referred to two other kinds of immersion — neither of them in water.

First let's understand the "baptism of the Holy Spirit."

2. Did Jesus promise His disciples the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:4-5. When did the Holy Spirit finally come? Acts 2:1-4.

COMMENT: On that day of Pentecost, fifty days after Christ's resurrection, Jesus' promise and prophecy of John the Baptist were fulfilled. God began His spiritual Church on earth then by putting the Holy Spirit within His disciples.

3. Is God's Church actually the "*body*" of Christ? I Cor. 12:12, 14, 27; Col. 1:18.

4. How do we become members of that body — the true Church? Can we join it? Or must we be put "*into*" it by God's Spirit? I Cor. 12:13.

COMMENT: Notice that this scripture does not say we are baptized *in* the Holy Spirit — but *by* it! The receiving of the Holy Spirit in our minds as a spiritual begetting actually *puts us into* the spiritual body of Christ which is His Church!

So just being physically baptized in water does not put you into God's Spirit-led Church. You must be put into the Church by the Spirit of God.

In Romans 8:9, Paul tells us plainly that unless the Spirit of Christ dwells within us, we do not belong to Him. We become Christ's, then, when His Spirit comes into us.

Each member of Christ's "*body*" (I Cor. 12:27) — His Church — is joined to the other by the common bond of God's Holy Spirit residing in them. So when we become Christ's by receiving His Spirit, we are then put "*into*" His body — the Church of God — *by the Holy Spirit*.

The Scriptures plainly show that it is the receiving of the Holy Spirit which automatically plunges us — immerses, "baptizes," or puts us — "*into*" the Church of God. This immersion into the Church by the Holy Spirit is termed by the Scriptures, "the baptism *with*," "the baptism *by*," or "the baptism *of* the Holy Spirit."

5. Another "baptism" referred to in the Scriptures and directly connected with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, is mentioned in Matthew 28:19. Exactly what does this verse say?

COMMENT: The key expression in verse 19 is the phrase "in the name of." In Greek it is *eis to onoma*, an expression nowhere else used in the New Testament. Contemporary literature in Greek from that time period has been found with this expression and shows its full meaning: "The phrase . . . is frequent in the papyri with reference to payments made 'to



Religious News Service Photo

UNUSUAL BAPTISM—The candidate is immersed while lying on the ramp of an LST with a life-line tied to his waist. Photo was taken within striking distance of Japan during World War II.

the account of any one' The usage is of interest in connexion with Mt. 28:19, where the meaning would seem to be 'baptized into the possession of the Father, etc.' " (J. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 451).

We learned in lesson 8 that our receiving of the Holy Spirit following baptism *begets* us as the literal "sons of God" (Rom. 8:14; I John 3:1), finally to become His *born again* sons at the resurrection.

Matthew 28:19 simply means that when we receive the Spirit of God, we automatically, through this miraculous begetting, become unborn children in the divine family called "God." This becomes our "baptism" or immersion into both the family and power of God or into sonship, brotherhood (with Christ) and their inherent blessings. This is in *addition* to our immersion into the spiritual "body of Christ," both occurring at the same time.

At present, the literal spiritual Family of God consists only of the Father and the Son, Jesus

Christ. The Holy Spirit is the divine nature and power of the God Family — not a "third person" as some have assumed. (Much more about the Holy Spirit will be covered in the following lesson.)

6. But what about the "baptism with fire"? Should a Christian seek it? Turn back to Matthew the third chapter. Exactly what did John the Baptist prophesy concerning "baptism with fire"? Matt. 3:11.

COMMENT: The whole population came in great crowds to see John — mostly out of curiosity. But John was speaking in particular to the unrepentant, hypocritical religionists, as well as those who did repent. Notice carefully that some of those to whom John spoke — the repentant — were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit later.

But the others present — among them many hypocritical, unrepentant Pharisees and Sadducees — were going to be baptized with fire — *immersed* in Gehenna fire — unless they repented. They would be burned up as *chaff* (verse 12). This fire, as we learned in a previous lesson, is the ultimate fate of all the incorrigible wicked (Rev. 21:8; Mal. 4:1-3).

One other important point: the baptism of fire is *not* associated, as some say, with the "cloven tongues like as [flames] of fire" which sat upon each

of the disciples (Acts 2:3). This was a *special sign* of the first outpouring and receipt of the Holy Spirit that was given *only* at the very beginning of the New Testament Church. Speaking in “other tongues” (intelligible foreign languages) was another sign and was utilized that day in *communicating* with people from many nations of different languages who had come to observe the day of Pentecost (verses 1, 5-12).

Baptized By Christ’s Authority

Should a person be baptized “in the *name* of Jesus Christ”? Exactly what does this phrase mean? Let’s notice the simple biblical explanation.

1. Did Jesus baptize more disciples than John? John 3:22; 4:1. But did He actually perform the baptisms Himself? John 4:2. Then who did the baptizing? Same verse.

COMMENT: Jesus did not actually do the physical work of baptizing these people. He had His disciples do it for Him — in His stead.

2. Did the apostles baptize repentant believers in Christ’s *name*? Acts 2:37-38, 41.

COMMENT: The inspired Greek expression for “in the name of” means “by the *authority* of.” If you do anything in the name of another, you do it with or by that person’s authority — by his express *permission*.

Jesus’ disciples did the baptizing “in Jesus’ name” — that is, in His stead, for Him, by His authority —and that was considered just the same as if Jesus had actually done it Himself.

3. Are God’s ministers today commanded to do all things in the *name* of Christ? Col. 3:17.

COMMENT: Baptism, when performed by ministers of God’s Church, is therefore always done “in the *name* of Jesus Christ” — that is, by His *divine authority*.

The “Laying On of Hands”

1. Why did Peter and John lay their hands on repentant persons in Samaria following their baptism in water? Acts 8:14-17. Also notice verses 18-23.

COMMENT: Note that even though the people had been previously baptized in water, they did not yet have the Holy Spirit. This plainly shows that the Holy Spirit is not given immediately at or by water baptism — and yet Acts 2:38 shows that baptism does *precede* the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The “laying on of hands” (Heb. 6:2) is the key that solves this apparent enigma. The Holy Spirit is given to a person by prayer and the laying on of

hands of God’s ministry *following* baptism. Notice the sequence: first repentance; then water baptism; next the laying on of hands; then the receipt of the Holy Spirit as a result of the laying on of hands. And as we just learned, the receiving of God’s Spirit “immerses” or “plunges” the person into the Church (the spiritual body of Christ) and into the divine Family of God.

Salvation Without Baptism?

Since water baptism is commanded by God for salvation, what about the thief on the cross? Was he saved without being baptized? What about those utterly unable to be baptized?

1. Does baptism itself save us? Rom. 5:10.

COMMENT: Baptism in water is not what saves us, although it is a commanded step in God’s Plan of salvation. As explained before, it is merely *symbolic* of that which remits our sins — the death of Christ. It also pictures His resurrection, by which we are finally saved.

2. What did the thief on the cross ask Christ? Luke 23:42. What was Jesus’ reply? Verse 43.

COMMENT: Some have assumed from this verse that Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise *that very day*. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Consider the context of this verse. Remember the thief had asked: “Lord remember me *when* thou comest into thy kingdom” (verse 42). The plain fact, as we learned from our previous studies of the Bible, is that Jesus has not yet come into His Kingdom.

Grammatically, Luke 23:43 is ambiguous. Early Greek manuscripts did not contain punctuation. It would have been possible to show the proper phraseology by the use of the Greek word for “that” (*hoti*); however, Luke did not insert the relative pronoun, and the word “today” could be taken either with the first part of the sentence (“Truly, I say to you today”) or with the last part (“today you will be with me in Paradise”). Either one is grammatically possible.

Many early translators and commentators do not clearly show how they understood the Greek expression. Some of them (such as the Vulgate) are just as ambiguous as the original. A number of early translations and commentators do place the “today” with the last part. On the other hand, there is also early support for the other rendering. For example, the Old Syriac translation (often dated about 200 A.D.) clearly says, “I say to you today.” Some manuscripts of the Coptic translation also have this reading, as do the Greek patristic writers

Hesychius and Theophilus. An early apocryphal work, the Acts of Pilate, also connects “today” with “I say to you.”

Thus, even though either reading is possible grammatically, and even though many translators and exegetes read “today” as the time of being in Paradise rather than as the time of Jesus’ speaking, many other scriptures show *without equivocation* that the thief would not be with Jesus in Paradise that day. Where was Jesus himself that day? In the *grave*! (I Cor. 15:3-4; Mark 15:44-46.) This was hardly Paradise. So the other alternative is the *only one* which fits with the rest of the Bible!

The thief obviously was *unable* to be baptized. Since baptism is *not* the thing which saves us, or gives us eternal life, he did not lose his chance for salvation because of circumstances beyond his control. God makes allowances for such extremely rare cases.

But God commands water baptism for all who are able. If a person deliberately ignores, rejects, defies or refuses this biblical command, this would be an act of disobedience to God; and unless repented of, would undoubtedly cause loss of salvation.

We need not worry about the thief on the cross, or anyone utterly unable to be baptized. We do need to be very much concerned, however, about obeying God’s plain command when we *are able*.

How Long Should You Wait?

Many put off baptism. They feel they are too infirm, too old, too weak — or they feel they are “not ready” yet spiritually. Some even think they must be perfect before being baptized. But how could a person be “perfect” before he receives God’s Holy Spirit, which helps us to *become* perfect?

Then there are those who hesitate to request baptism because they do not feel they “know enough.” This fear is usually unfounded.

Sincere, heartfelt repentance and belief are the only prior conditions for baptism given in the Bible! It is *not* necessary to know all the books of the Bible in their order, the acrostic psalms, the background of the minor prophets, and have a complete understanding of the political situation in the cities Paul traveled!

It should be obvious that the 3,000 people who were baptized on that day of Pentecost in Acts 2 were not all Bible scholars. They undoubtedly, for the most part, knew only the basics — the “milk” of the Word — and perhaps not even that much. But they readily accepted the Word of God (Acts 2:41); they were not in doubt; they were sincerely and deeply repentant (verse 37).

One simply cannot expect to “know it all” when he is baptized. It is a matter of a lifetime of *growing* in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ *after* one is baptized. (Anyone who has progressed this far in this course of Bible study already possesses *much* knowledge!)

The truth is, none of these excuses is acceptable in God’s sight. If a person knows that God commands baptism, knows that he should be baptized, and his conscience convicts him — then he *should be baptized as soon as possible*.

Notice now several examples from the Bible:

1. When the Ethiopian eunuch came to understand Christ was his Savior, did he hesitate about being baptized? Did he put it off? Acts 8:35-38.

2. When Paul was first converted, and learned that Christ is the Son of God whom he had been persecuting, did he procrastinate about being baptized? Acts 9:1-18, especially verse 18.

COMMENT: Neither of these men put off water baptism. They saw their own personal need. They knew they needed Christ as their Savior and desperately wanted their sins blotted out by His shed blood. They felt dirty and despicable before God, as long as they stood before Him in their sins. They knew they were the slaves of sin, and did not have God’s Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

Therefore, as soon as was possible, they were baptized.

Old age makes no difference with God. Circumstances make no difference. There simply is no acceptable excuse for not being baptized when a person *understands* this vital, urgent spiritual truth and is physically able to obey it.

How Old Should You Be?

Baptism should be done as the result of complete and total repentance toward God and complete faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Only a *mature* mind, one which can truly “count the cost” (Luke 14:28-30), should consider baptism. Generally speaking, only mature adults should be baptized.

Even older children have not reached the maturity and stability of judgment where they have the self-discipline to truly repent, and believe. It is only near and at adulthood that the average person is sufficiently mature to comprehend the real significance of baptism. Only then do many seem capable of making a meaningful commitment to Christ.

An immature mind may experience an emotional feeling of *temporary* remorse. This may often be falsely construed as repentance, when it is only momentary, and soon forgotten. It is much like “puppy love.” How many teenagers, 13 to 18, have a

number of temporary emotional experiences of feeling sure they are “in love” and cannot be talked out of it?

They usually grow out of it, but in rare cases, of course, they may really “know their minds” — though this is the rare *exception* and not the rule. So it is with repentance and belief.

Experience shows that many who are baptized prematurely abandon their baptismal commitment at a later time. Of course this is not always the case. A number of fine young people have been baptized and have been remarkably faithful to their calling as Christians.

Some present the argument that the infants and older children of Cornelius’s household were baptized (Acts 10). This is merely an argument from silence. The Scriptures nowhere indicate whether or not Cornelius’s “household” included any children under adult age.

Those baptized in Cornelius’s house must have been *mature enough to understand* the prior conditions of salvation and able to truly repent and believe. It is highly unlikely that young children in the household would have been baptized. The same explanation applies to the baptism of the Philippian jailor’s “household” (Acts 16:31-33).

Jesus set us the example of what we should do regarding infants and young children. But it did *not* include baptism! There is no record of Jesus ever having commanded baptism for children, nor is there any biblical record of the early New Testament Church having performed such baptisms. Nowhere in the Bible is there an example or command for this common practice of our day.

The Bible shows Jesus merely laid His hands upon and pronounced blessings on little children (Matt. 19:13; Mark 10:13-16). Today, the ministers of Christ’s Church follow His example by invoking similar blessings upon the little children of its membership.

Rebaptism in the New Testament

Have you already been baptized? If so, was it done the way God commands? Had you *really* repented? Did you know what repentance is? Did you come to feel deeply broken up over your past way of life which was contrary to God’s way as it is revealed in the Bible?

Did you come to thoroughly abhor your past way of life so that you simply couldn’t stand to live with yourself any longer?

Did you not only feel this as a deep and very real emotion, but did you thoroughly understand that you are to strive to obey the living God and His law

from that day forward? Had you really come to Jesus Christ in unconditional surrender of your rebellion against God’s ways? Had you really repented of living by the standards of this world?

Did you really “count the cost” before baptism? Did you understand, fully, that you were being buried, and that a “new you” was to emerge from the water?

In this regard, there is a question that many students of this course have considered well worth asking. Many of our students have made a previous decision or commitment to what they then believed to be the truth of God. Some may have even been baptized or had a “religious experience” of some kind. Now, through this correspondence course, the magazines, booklets, and other literature published by the Worldwide Church of God, they have come to learn a *great deal* more about many biblical subjects — such as, for example, repentance, baptism and the Holy Spirit. So the puzzling question often arises: “What should I do? Should I be rebaptized?”

The New Testament itself answers that question: Remember the example of Apollos, during the early days of the first century church? (Be sure to read Acts 18:24 through 19:6.) He was an enthusiastic and eloquent speaker whose zeal at first exceeded his understanding. He repeated certain things he had heard concerning Jesus Christ and John the Baptist and about the message they preached. He convinced many of that *same message* who were then baptized as a result of hearing it.

But when the Apostle Paul came to question the people who had been taught and instructed by Apollos, he found that there was a key ingredient missing in their lives — the Holy Spirit of God. Paul not only found that these people hadn’t received God’s Spirit, but they didn’t even know what it was. And, as can well be understood, there is a surprising number of our students today who shared a similar lack of basic knowledge absolutely vital to salvation *before* studying with this course.

Apollos himself needed further instruction. He received it from a dedicated couple in the Church of God named Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:26). And, of course, those individuals to whom Apollos preached needed further instruction, which they received from Paul, after which they were all immediately *rebaptized*.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, you may need to consider rebaptism.

No matter what your previous religious history has been, don’t worry about it. Start afresh! Become a “new you.” Don’t delay in receiving and

putting the power of God's Holy Spirit to work in your life. Then you will be able to look forward to the day when this same Holy Spirit will *transform* you into a Spirit Being — a powerful and glorious, eternal member of the divine Family of God! (Rom. 8:11-23.)

Where to Get Help

For those of you who have come to the place where you want the precious blood of Jesus Christ to blot out your past sins — who desire to crucify the “old man” in the waters of baptism, desperately wanting God's forgiveness — who really want to obey God unconditionally — here is GOOD NEWS!

Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God reside in many cities in the United States, the British Commonwealth and other parts of the world. They are available, *if invited*, to answer your questions about spiritual matters, to advise and counsel with you about baptism, and to help you in any way they can. They won't try to pressure you into anything. But they will assist as only the called and chosen ministers of Christ can do.

Remember, you have a most merciful and compassionate heavenly Father. He is literally filled with the spirit of forgiveness (Ps. 86:5). He is eager and anxious to forgive any and everyone who repents.

God's ministers, though not perfect, mirror a portion of God's very character in this very important respect. The ministers of God's Church are warm, friendly, and concerned. They do not condone sin; but they won't condemn the sinner either.

Please feel free to write us and request to be visited in your own home by one of these men. Use the enclosed card to make your request, then mail it in the attached envelope to our office nearest you. (See page 2 for the addresses if you reside outside the United States.)

If you live in the *continental* United States and prefer faster service, please dial this toll-free number: 800-423-4444. (Students in California, Alaska, and Hawaii may call 213-577-5225 collect.) Be sure to mention the number of this lesson.

Perhaps there are some of you who are wondering about an earlier baptism. Others of you, having never been baptized, have come to realize the absolute necessity of baptism as a required step toward salvation. Regardless of your category, please feel free to call upon us to help you.

All of us in this worldwide Work of God want only to serve. We count it a privilege to be able to provide this service to our students, and it's *free and without any personal obligation*.

In the Meantime . . .

Remember, God wants us all to grow in grace and knowledge (II Pet. 3:18). One way to grow is by a careful study of the inspired Word of God. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Use your time. *Take time* to study the Bible even if you are busy and have many responsibilities. Review this and previous lessons in detail. Study and think about the down-to-earth, solid, specific points on Christian living which God outlines in His Word. Be sure you thoroughly comprehend the depths of real repentance.

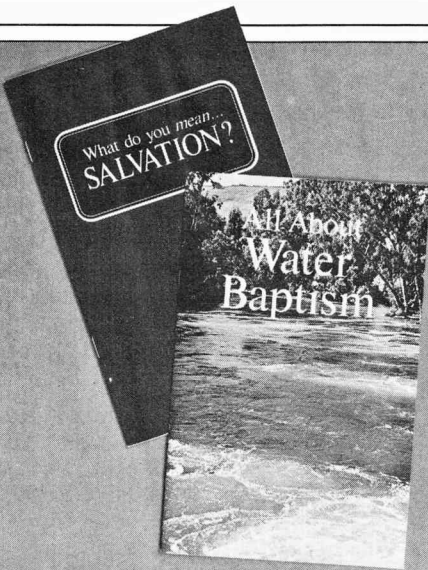
If you haven't already read our booklets, *What Do You Mean . . . Salvation?* and *All About Water Baptism*, be sure to send for them. Use the enclosed coupon and mail it to us in the attached envelope.

ANSWERS TO QUIZ

1-D	5-B	9-C	13-F	17-H
2-B	6-B	10-D	14-F	18-J
3-D	7-D	11-T	15-T	19-I
4-A	8-D	12-T	16-E	20-A

Rate Yourself

19-20 correct	excellent
16-18 correct	good
13-15 correct	fair



SUPPLEMENTARY READING

To request your free copies, use the convenient coupon and envelope found in this lesson.

TEST YOUR MEMORY

This quiz is designed to help you remember important facts you learned in the lesson. You simply circle or underline each correct answer. After you've finished this test, check your choices with the correct answers listed on page 15, and then rate yourself.

The Greek word *baptizo*, from which the english word "baptize" is derived, means **A.** to sprinkle. **B.** to pour. **C.** both to sprinkle, and to pour. **D.** to immerse, plunge into, or put into.

2. Sprinkling and pouring are **A.** forms of baptism which are just as acceptable to God as complete immersion in water. **B.** incorrect methods of baptism which were introduced by men. **C.** words mentioned in the Bible, therefore they are valid forms of baptism. **D.** the methods of baptism practiced by the true Church of God today.

3. Jesus was baptized **A.** by pouring. **B.** by sprinkling. **C.** because He was a repentant sinner. **D.** by total immersion in water as an *example* for us to follow.

4. Water baptism **A.** is an outward sign of one's repentance and submission to God. **B.** does not represent the burial of the old sinful self. **C.** is a form of initiation into a church. **D.** is the means by which our sins are forgiven.

5. What must the repentant believe before baptism? **A.** That Christ is their Savior—that's all. **B.** Christ's "gospel," which includes not only believing on Him as our personal Savior, but also as the King of the coming Kingdom of God. **C.** That Jesus did away with His Father's law. **D.** That Jesus obeyed the law in our stead.

6. Which "baptism" should a person *not* seek? **A.** Baptism in water. **B.** Baptism by fire. **C.** Baptism of the Holy Spirit. **D.** Baptism "into" the Family of God.

7. The Holy Spirit **A.** is given immediately upon baptism. **B.** is given before baptism. **C.** is given long after baptism. **D.** is given through the "laying on of hands" of God's minister immediately following baptism.

8. Which one of the following is *not* true? **A.** Baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. **B.** Baptism also pictures the death and burial of our old sinful life. **C.** Coming up out of the waters of baptism is symbolic of beginning a new life of obedience to God. **D.** Baptism merely pictures the symbolic death of our past sinful life—that's all.

9. How soon must repentant believers be baptized? **A.** We can't be sure since there are no examples given in the Bible. **B.** They can delay

baptism as long as they wish. **C.** As soon as possible. **D.** They must be baptized within 24 hours after repentance.

10. Should a person ever consider *rebaptism*? **A.** Never—not under any circumstances! **B.** Yes, especially if he *thoroughly understood* exactly what God required of him before his previous baptism. **C.** Not having received the Holy Spirit would not be a reason to be rebaptized. **D.** Definitely—especially if he now realizes he knew little or nothing about the purpose of what he was doing at the time of his previous baptism.

TRUE OR FALSE

11. The receiving of the Holy Spirit "immerses" one into—puts one into—the true "body," or church, of God. **T F**

12. Jesus' example was to bless children, not baptize them. **T F**

13. One must be very well grounded in the knowledge of the Bible before he can be baptized. **T F**

14. Sincere, heartfelt repentance and belief in Christ's gospel are not the only prior conditions for baptism given in the Bible. **T F**

15. God commands baptism for all who are able to be baptized. **T F**

MATCHING

Draw a line from each phrase in the left-hand column to the correctly related phrase in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 16. The Flood | A. Baptism commanded |
| 17. Pharaoh | B. Any church |
| 18. John's baptism | C. Tragic destruction |
| 19. Body of Christ | D. Holy Spirit |
| 20. Acts 2:38 | E. Foreshadowed baptism |
| | F. Christ's corpse |
| | G. Passover lamb |
| | H. Satan and sin |
| | I. God's true Church |
| | J. Emphasized repentance |



**Yours
for the
asking!**