

baptism was performed, this text should settle the matter beyond doubt”. If we would only recognize that in everyday situations a burial of anything is a submerging, a covering, and an engulfing, then we would have no problem understanding that baptism is a full-body immersion. Wayne Jackson wrote: “Sprinkling is not immersion—which is necessitated in the identification with Christ’s burial and resurrection”. As Jackson observed, unless a person has been buried with Christ in water, he cannot claim to have been buried into his death or raised to a new life (Rom. 6:2-4). Sprinkling does not even begin to resemble a burial.

The second line of evidence which proves that baptism is full-body immersion is the Greek language (in which the New Testament was written). The word “baptism” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptidzo*. Transliteration simply means that the original Greek letters were converted into English letters to make a new word. Regarding the meaning of *baptidzo*, the majority of scholars and lexicons agree that it always means “to immerse or submerge.” Moses Lard boldly stated, “In not one instance where the word [*baptidzo*, BB] occurs, in all Greek literature, does it necessarily mean to sprinkle or pour.... On the contrary, the word occurs in thousands of cases and combinations where it must of necessity be translated immerse...”. Lexicographers, etymologists, and the majority of accepted linguistic scholars support Lard’s forthright statement. Nowhere in the Greek language will you find the word *baptidzo* to mean anything but immerse. For example, the Arndt and Gingrich Greek lexicon, which is the most scholarly and widely accepted Greek lexicon in use today, defines *baptidzo* as to “dip, immerse, dip oneself... in

Non-Christian lit... plunge, sink, drench, overwhelm”. The late Joseph Henry Thayer, prominent Greek scholar and professor of New Testament criticism at Harvard, also defined *baptidzo* as “to dip repeatedly, to immerse, or to submerge”. The one thing that both of these lexical authorities emphasize is that *baptidzo*, in its original first-century definition, meant to immerse, submerge, or completely cover. If we claim to be like the New Testament Christians, shouldn’t we understand the meaning of baptism the way they did? With reference to *baptidzo*, Greek scholar Marvin Vincent noted, “in Classical Greek the primary meaning is ‘to immerse.’ Thus, Polybius (i., 51, 6), describing a naval battle of the Romans and Carthaginians, says, ‘They **sank** *ebaptizon* many of the ships’” (238). Vincent’s research gives us a perfect illustration of what the Greek word *baptidzo* originally meant. Envision in your mind a ship sinking. What do you see? Do you see a vessel going fully under the water, or do you see a rain shower dribbling on a ship? The latter picture would be ridiculous to our minds. Likewise, the possibility of baptism meaning a sprinkling or pouring is both foreign and impossible in the Greek language. Greek scholar W.E. Vine observed that *baptidzo* “was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another, etc. Plutarchus uses it of the drawing of wine by dipping the cup into the bowl”. Expounding upon Vine’s definition, one can see that just as a cup is dipped into a bowl and is submerged in the liquid, so the human body must be submerged in water to be baptized properly.

The scholarly works of most eminent linguists and prominent lexicographers agree that *baptidzo* means “to immerse.” Among such works would be A.T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (p. 322), Gerhardt Kittel’s *Theo-*

*logical Dictionary of the New Testament* (p. 529), Lidell and Scott’s *Greek-English Lexicon* (p. 260), G.W. Lampe’s *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (p. 238), Colin Brown’s *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (p. 143), and William D. Mounce’s *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (p. 112). All of this lexical and scholarly evidence documents the fact that the original meaning of baptism in the first century was to immerse, dip, engulf, submerge, etc. Nowhere will a person find any evidence from the original language to show that *baptidzo* means to sprinkle. The Greeks had a word for sprinkle, *rhantidzo*. This word is used several times in the New Testament to convey the idea of sprinkling, but is never associated with baptism (Heb. 9:13,19; 10:22). If the Greeks had a word for sprinkling, and if the New Testament writers chose to use the distinct word for immersion, how can anyone suggest that there is biblical authority for sprinkling? The fact is, a person must go beyond the authority of the New Testament in order to formulate doctrines which teach that sprinkling is correct. In an article on the mode of baptism, Catholic scholars confess, “Fundamentalists are correct when they point out that the Greek word used in the New Testament for baptism is *baptidzo*, and that *this means immersion (dunking) only*” (emp. added). If even the most-avid proponents of sprinkling recognize that the word “baptism” means immersion, that should tell us something. We need to be reminded of the words of Paul. “Do not go beyond the doctrine of Christ” (1 Cor. 4:6).

# The Proper Mode Of Baptism

Ben Bailey



The phrase, “mode of baptism,” refers to the manner or method by which baptism is performed. Concerning the baptismal mode, there are two prominent variations in Christendom: sprinkling (or pouring) and immersion. In Protestantism, different religious organizations may even support both of these. In Roman Catholicism, the only recognized mode is sprinkling. While there are many who claim that the proper mode for baptism may be sprinkling or immersion, we must not let the majority be our guide. Rather, the Bible alone must guide us (Acts 17:11; Jn. 12:48; Ex. 23:2). So, the question remains: “Is there any word from the Lord” (Jer. 37:17) on the subject of the mode of baptism? Yes, there is. The Bible is clear on the mode of baptism that God requires.

The first and most authoritative proof that baptism is full-body immersion is the Scriptures themselves. While we believe that lexicons are an important way by which to learn the meaning of words, and while church history can offer us insight on the beliefs of the post-apostolic church, we can define baptism simply from the text of the New Testament itself. There are at least four passages in the New Testament that plainly define baptism as full-body immersion.

The first passage is Mark 1:9-10. This is Mark’s account of the baptism of Jesus. Mark records, “And immediately *coming up from the water*, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove” (vs. 10, emp. added). In the first part of this verse, Mark records that Jesus came up from the water. Question: What do you first have to do in order to “come up out of” water? You first must *go down into the water*

before you can *come up out of it*. It is clear from this passage that Jesus was immersed. Eminent Greek scholar Kenneth Weust commented on Mark 1:9-11 by saying, “Clearly, immersion is in view here. In the next verse *ek* (out) is used, literally, ‘out from within.’ Jesus was baptized into the river and then came up out of the water”. The language of this passage suggests that Jesus was engulfed by (i.e., buried in) the water, and that He had to literally “come out from within the water.” This passage plainly teaches that one must be engulfed by (buried in) water and then come up out of it in order to be baptized like Jesus. There is no way anyone can suggest that this is anything else but the act of full-body immersion. The popular question people are asking today is, “What would Jesus do?” Concerning the subject of baptism, Jesus was immersed. The question remains: “Do you want to be like Jesus?”

The second passage which proves that baptism is immersion is Acts 8:38. This is the account of the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion. Luke records, “And he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Phillip and the eunuch *went down into the water*, and he baptized him” (emp. added). The mode of baptism under consideration here required Philip and the eunuch to go down into the water. Why did they both have to go down into the water? If sprinkling were the mode in this case, there would have been no need for both of them to go down into the water. Either Philip or the eunuch could have gone and retrieved the water. Burton Coffman provided further clarification of this verse when he wrote, “‘down into the water...up out of the water.’ No man could frame a sentence in any language that would show any more conclusively than does this one that the baptism here administered was by immersion”. As Coffman emphasized, when one envisions the picture that this text paints, it is easy to see the

Ethiopian eunuch had to go down into the water itself in order to be immersed so that he could then arise out of the water. This scriptural picture is in stark contrast to sprinkling, where only a few drops of water are placed on someone’s head.

Many who claim that the eunuch was sprinkled fail to take into account that he was on a long journey through very dry, parched conditions. Remember, the eunuch was traveling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. This would be a journey of more than a hundred miles, and would take several days by chariot. It is likely that the eunuch would have been carrying a container of water with him during his trip. Why, then, did he and Philip have to find water for his baptism? Could not Philip have poured some water from the eunuch’s drinking container to use in sprinkling him? Again, why did they *both go down into the water*? The late J.W. McGarvey, former professor of sacred history in the College of Bible in Lexington, Kentucky, added insight by noting, “It is clearly seen that neither Philip nor the eunuch would have gone into the water if the purpose had been to merely sprinkle or pour a small quantity of water upon the latter. The same reasons precisely which now keep preachers who practice sprinkling out of the water would have kept Philip and the eunuch out of it”. As McGarvey suggested, people are not going to get wet if they do not have to. Philip and the eunuch would not have gotten their clothes wet while traveling on a long journey if they did not have to do so. Therefore, it must have been imperative for both men to go down into the water so Philip could immerse the eunuch.

A third passage that teaches baptism to be immersion is John 3:23. In this passage, the Bible records that “...John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim *because there was much water*

*there...*” (Jn. 3:23, emp. added). When reading this passage, one must honestly ask, “Why did John need to be baptizing where there was *much water*?” The late Guy N. Woods succinctly stated that this verse “...evidences the fact that ‘much water’ is essential to the act which John performed. Here is incidental mention of that which shows that baptism must have been by immersion since ‘much water’ is not needed for either sprinkling or pouring”. It was not John’s purpose in this verse to tell us about the mode of baptism. However, one must account for the fact that John found it important to mention there was “much water” where John the Immerser was baptizing people. One must answer the question: “Why did John include the comment about “much water?” Surely, it does not take much water to sprinkle someone. John must have had a reason to go to Aenon to do his baptizing. The best evidence suggests that John was baptizing where there was “much water” because he needed enough water to carry out full-body immersion.

A fourth passage that proves baptism to be immersion is Romans 6:1-4. In this context, baptism is likened to a burial. Stop and think back to the last time you went to a funeral. Do you remember what they did with the body after the services were over? Did they sprinkle “a little dirt” on the casket? No. They buried the entire casket (containing the body) under the ground, completely covering it on all sides. Likewise, the linking of baptism with the idea of a burial clearly shows that Paul, the inspired voice of God, recognized that baptism was by immersion. R.L. Whiteside duly noted: “In baptism there is a burial, an immersion in water.... If there was no other source of knowledge as to how