

# Introduction

If someone were to ask you to explain how Noah and his family were saved from the flood's destruction, what would you say? The answer may seem obvious, but what *would* your answer be? The Bible's answer is instructive. By inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16), the apostle Peter wrote that Noah and his family were actually "**saved through water**" (1 Peter 3:20).

Now that's an interesting answer-- "**saved through water**." One might not think of the flood waters *saving* people while at the same time *destroying* people. But they did. The same water that obliterated the wicked world (Genesis 6:5) carried Noah and his family far above the destruction, and eventually brought them safely to rest on the mountains of Ararat (Genesis 8:4), thereby gaining legitimate credit for saving them. Granted, the water wasn't the *only* thing at work in their salvation. God's mercy and grace, the ark, and Noah's obedience were all involved, as well. The water didn't save alone--it was one of several agents. And yet, undeniably, it was involved in their salvation, for the Holy Spirit indicated

through Peter that eight souls were "**saved through water**."

But now to the hard part. "Hard," I say, because it contradicts popular opinion, and that's often hard for us...especially when it comes to religion. Right after revealing to us that eight souls were "**saved through water**," Peter then writes, "There is also an antitype which now **saves us-- baptism...**" (1 Peter 3:21). After discussing the means of Noah's *physical salvation*, Peter affirms the means of our *spiritual salvation*. And, contrary to popular belief, he says baptism is involved.

## **BUT HE DOESN'T MEAN WATER BAPTISM DOES HE?**

He *must* mean water baptism. Context (along with other New Testament teaching) demands it. Let's consider the passage in greater detail.

### **What is an "antitype"?**

This question arises from Peter's use of the term in 1 Peter 3:21 (NKJV). "Antitype" means "counterpart," or "a thing resembling another." Peter is saying that baptism *resembles* the flood, and is a New Testament *counterpart* to that Old Testament event. How so? Well, it is sometimes argued that an invisible baptism with the Holy Spirit is what Peter is referring to, but water baptism more naturally fits. What biblical practice could *resemble* a sinful world

submerged in water (Genesis 7:19-20) more than a sinful *person* submerged in water? ("baptism," from the Greek word "*baptisma*," refers to "an immersion, submersion.") What's more, the New Testament teaches that water baptism is the occasion at which sin is removed (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and we are regenerated (Titus 3:5). Could there be a clearer counterpart to the flood, which also removed wickedness and then regenerated the world? (2 Peter 3:6-7)

### **"not the removal of the filth of the flesh" (1 Peter 3:21)**

Peter's next affirmation about this baptism further clarifies its identity. He writes that it is "not the removal of the filth of the flesh." In other words, this submersion is not to be misconstrued as being just a bath, or perhaps a ceremonial washing (something with which the Jews to whom Peter was writing--"the Dispersion" of 1 Peter 1:1--would have been well-acquainted). This point of clarification is telling. Were the baptism under question a purely spiritual event, such explanation would hardly seem in order.

## **BAPTISM AND SALVATION**

Though the above interpretation may disagree with common belief among many, it does harmonize with New Testament teaching concerning salvation. Receiving forgiveness of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit, and entering into Christ are *all preceded by baptism* (although *not only* by

baptism--just as the flood waters did not work alone to save Noah and his family, neither does the water of baptism work alone. There *must be* genuine belief/faith (Mark 16:16), true repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), and clear confession (Romans 10:9)--these, *along with water baptism*, lead to full salvation.) Consider the following passages:

### **Receiving Forgiveness of Sins**

Acts 2:38- "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....**'"

Acts 22:16- "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and **wash away your sins....**"

Note: John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, preached a baptism with water **for the remission of sins** (Mark 1:4-5). Should it strike us as strange that the Savior would instruct His apostles in a similar practice?

### **Receiving the Holy Spirit**

Matthew 3:16- "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the **Spirit of God descending** like a dove and alighting upon Him."

Acts 2:38- "...be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; **and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**"

### Entering Into Christ

Romans 6:3- "Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus**...?"

Galatians 3:27- "For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ."

### **BUT ISN'T THIS TEACHING SALVATION BY WORKS?**

Although this question is understandable, let the above verses first be considered in earnest. Clearly, baptism is connected to forgiveness of sins, without which there can be no certain relationship with God. Peter plainly states that baptism *precedes* reception of the Holy Spirit, just as it did with Jesus (Matthew 3:16). And, coming into Christ is clearly dependent upon being baptized (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). Whatever questions we may have, we must not pit them, or their supposed implications, against understandable Scripture. *Questions should be asked in light of Scripture, not in spite of it.*

But to the question directly, No, this understanding of Scripture does not teach salvation by works. Such a doctrine would, of course, be quite

opposed to New Testament teaching (Ephesians 2:8-9). What this understanding *does* acknowledge and affirm, however, is that God can and does call us to act in order to *receive*--as opposed to *earn*--His grace. And lest this be misunderstood or dismissed off-hand, let us consider the Lord's practice while He walked the earth.

Jesus told the ten lepers, "**Go, show yourselves** to the priests." "And so it was," we read, "that **as they went, they were cleansed**" (Luke 17:14). Did these men receive cleansing by works? Certainly not! Walking hardly cures leprosy. Was their healing a gift from God? Certainly it was! Yet, would they have received cleansing had they not acted? It seems unlikely--"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Jesus commanded the blind man, "**Go, wash** in the pool of Siloam." "And so," we read, "**he went and washed, and came back seeing**" (John 9:7). Did this man receive his sight by works? Who would dare affirm such a thing? Was his healing a gift from God? There can be no doubt. And, yet, the Lord put a condition on His grace. The Lord wanted the man to do something--a disturbing doctrine to many religious people, but a common doctrine in the Bible (e.g. Exodus 14:13-16; 2 Kings 5:10; Philippians 2:12-13). And, what this newly-seeing man told those who questioned him could almost be the words of a newly-baptized believer:

"...I went and washed (compare Titus 3:5), and I received..." (John 9:11).

God offers the gift of salvation to humanity, contingent only on submissive obedience to His commands: to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. This does not demean His grace, nor deny that salvation is a gift--after all, since when does telling a child to *pick up* and *unwrap* a gift change the fact that it *is* a gift? By way of another analogy: were a man to offer you a briefcase containing one million dollars, stating that the money would be yours if you would but reach out and take the briefcase, and you took him up on the offer, who would afterward assert you had tried to *work* for the money? No one. All would understand your act of reaching out and taking the briefcase as simple compliance with a simple condition--and a *gracious* one at that. So much for so little! So it is with God's plan for salvation: "He who believes and is baptized (*so little*) will be saved (*so much!*)..." (Mark 16:16)

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# "Saved Through Water?"

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