

# THE BEREAN

"... examining the scriptures daily..." (Acts 17:11).

B. G. Echols, Editor

Telephone 423-6849

## BAPTISM AND SALVATION

BY B. G. ECHOLS

**T**he great mass of any generation may be wicked, but God can protect and save the few who are faithful. The way of the most is neither the best, the wisest, nor the safest way to follow. Often we may ponder, "Can I be right and all these people be wrong?" Peter shows us that it has always been a small number who accept salvation. We should expect it to be so now. *"Wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved through water"* (1 Pet. 3:20). It is better to be one of eight in the ark than one of many in the flood. Thus we are encouraged to persevere and remain faithful in the midst of all opposition which we may experience. Noah was not disheartened. He did not abandon his purpose even though they were few in number and the great mass of humanity continued to be wicked.

"Wherein" is the ark. They were saved in the ark, but it was "through water." The water which was a means of destruction to others became the very means by which the eight were delivered to a cleansed earth. They found safe passage in the water. The water was the destruction of the carnal, sensual element, and a regeneration of humanity. They found their safety, in an important sense, in the water. It is water that is under discussion. Water once saved the world, water cleansed away wickedness. There was a new beginning, new possibilities, and new hopes.

*"Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism"* (1 Peter 3:21). The few Christians being saved are separated from the vast number of Gentiles. "Which" refers back to water. "A true likeness" is Greek *antitupon* from which we get the word "antitype." The same word is used in Heb. 9:24. Baptism is the antitype of the water through which Noah was saved. Noah owed his salvation to water, and in an important sense, water is employed in ours. Water is not employed in the same manner in each case, but it is employed. Noah was saved through water. There is a sense in which water is made instrumental in our salvation. Water is an instrument through which God exerts saving power in baptism as in the flood.

This is not a future salvation, but is "now." This explains the eagerness with which penitent believers were baptized in Acts (2:41; 8:36; 16:33).

Baptism is connected with faith and repentance and is involved in God's plan of salvation. It does for us what the water did for Noah and his family. As the water of the flood lifted Noah and his family out of the sinful world to a cleansed earth, so baptism is the dividing line between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light.

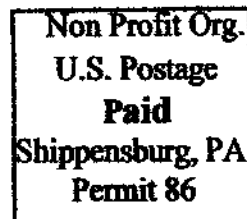
Before one is baptized, he is outside of Christ; after he is baptized, he is in Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). Before one is baptized, he has the guilt of sin; when he is baptized, he is forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16). No one can prove by the New Testament that baptism has no connection with salvation; and no one can prove that one can neglect it and have the favor of God. Let us all realize the deep meaning of our baptism, the death to sin and the new birth to righteousness. When one is properly and intelligently baptized today, he does not believe that the power of forgiveness resides in the water, but in God.

*"Not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God."* Baptism is not an external rite like Old Testament washings which were for the cleansing of the flesh. Regardless of how solemnly performed, it is not for external body cleansing. There is a washing of the body, but not for cleansing it. The inner meaning of baptism is not that the body puts away dirt, but the good conscience appeals to God (Heb. 10:22). A good conscience is one of sincerity, good intentions, and desires which instinctively seek after God (1 Pet. 3:16). A good conscience will ever be seeking God. Peter may, however, mean that baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience. One is baptized to obtain forgiveness and to have a clear conscience. His obedience is an appeal to God for that clear conscience.

*"Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* Baptism derives its saving effect from the resurrection of the Lord, for without the resurrection,

**The Berean**  
CHURCH OF CHRIST  
412 E. King St.  
Shippensburg, PA 17257

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baptism would be an empty form. Without the resurrection, baptism would have no power to save us. People could not rise with Him in baptism except through the power of His resurrection. His resurrection is the pledge of new life and new hopes to all who are baptized into His body. By the resurrection He is declared to be the Son of God and able to save all who believe in Him. He also gave proof the resurrection of believers.

He now can give grace and power to us because He *"is on the right hand of God, having gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him"* (1 Pet. 3:22). Christ returned to the realm He inhabited before He became flesh. Upon His ascension He was crowned king and began His reign from His royal throne. At the right hand of God is a position of honor and sovereignty (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3; 12:2). Christ is now king (Acts 2:29-36; Eph. 1:19-23). His story is carried to completion. Christ suffered and died. But what else happened? He was raised, ascended, and glorified. If the believer will retain his good conscience, he may hope for a similar experience.

Peter knew Jesus as a man on earth. There is no way a man would make up such a story as this about another man unless he was conscious of the resurrection and ascension as historical facts. No sooner did He suffer than He went to glory. Let us take heart in all our trials.

Christ occupies the highest post of honor. He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). If He is not now reigning as king, what is lacking? Peter stresses the power and glory of Jesus to encourage his readers to persevere in service even if persecuted. He was reviled, but He ultimately triumphed. He was raised from the dead and exalted to the highest honor in the universe. Thus we must not faint. In view of His exalted position, we should have no fear of what man may do. God can raise us even if our enemies kill us. Noah continued faithful and steadfast surrounded by a scoffing world. The Redeemer, though put to death, was at last exalted to God's right hand. Let us thus bear our trials patiently and not falter in persecution or opposition. He triumphed. We have salvation. Thus we can triumph!

Many of us struggle with hurts or habits - either our own or those of someone close to us. Do painful memories or past issues still limit you? There is hope. Start now by visiting the church of Christ. It's a safe place to find healing for the past and hope for the future. If you're tired of the past controlling you, meet with us. Everyone deserves another chance. We meet on Sundays at 9:50 a.m. and 6 p.m.