

# Baptism – A Loyalty Oath

Baptism comes from the term **בַּרְטִיזָו** and simply meant “to dunk.” It was a term frequently used in the marketplace where a piece of cloth was “baptized” in a vat of dye. The cloth identified with what was in the vat.



In the secular world, we sign a piece of paper, publicly put a diamond ring or gold band on a finger, or place a hand over a heart, on a Bible, or in the air – a public and material means of communicating important ethical obligations. It's known as taking a “vow”, swearing an “oath”, making a “promise.” As presented in the biblical text, baptism is a **physical expression addressing an immaterial moral matter – it's a tangible and public means communicating a spiritual commitment.** Can an oath be broken? Certainly. And with that consequence. But can a Believer fully engage in biblical living without baptism? Certainly not. Baptism publicly leverages the seriousness of the Christian life, encourages an eternally effective impact, and dynamically allows for “us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:15).

In the Greek translation of the Hebrew text, the term is used twice, one being in **2 Kings 5** (*specifically 5:14*) – Naaman “baptized” himself in the Jordan river per Elisha’s instructions. This event was connected to Naaman subsequently openly aligning his spiritual priorities with Yahweh’s (5:15, 17-19).

In **Matthew 3:1-6**, the historical account documents that John the Baptist “baptized” 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews as a physical expression of their publicly aligning their priorities with the offer of the Kingdom of Heaven and its standards.

Shortly after, in **Matthew 3:13-15**, John “baptized” Jesus. It wasn't a sin or forgiveness issue. Jesus was publicly communicating His allegiance to the plans His Father had for Him.

One of Christ's final commands to His disciples in **Matthew 28:19** was to have them “baptize” Believers - a physical expression openly addressing a spiritual issue.

In Luke's historical account found in **Acts 8:5-13**, pagans involved in the occult believed in Jesus for eternal life and were consequently “baptized” – they publicly declared their allegiance to Christ in contrast to the evil supernatural entities that had been their priority.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 3:21** that being “baptized” saves a Christian who is already saved – “...baptism now saves you...” Those saved from the penalty of sin (*justification*) could be saved from the power of sin (*sanctification*) by obediently engaging in baptism. Baptism is a good work. How is it a good work?

In the New Testament, certainly to 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians and to us as well, baptism is a public expression of a loyalty oath to Christ, in contrast to rebellious supernatural spirits, authorities, and powers in the world – “lawless idolatries” and “elementary principles” (Gal. 4:3, 9, Col. 2:20, 1 Peter 3:22, 4:3). Baptism makes it clear – “I'm with Him who sits at the 'right hand of God.' I'm identifying with the 'Lion of Judah.' The person and plans of Christ are my priority.”

In a nuanced translation of Peter, baptism is a pledge to Christ for “attentiveness to an obligation” – that obligation being “good behavior” and “doing right” (1 Peter 3:16, 17, 21, 4:19). Baptism “saves” a Believer by helping them “lean into” the Christian life.

In the Christian life, biblically moral obligations are NOT a burden but fuel for being spiritually significant – they facilitate usefulness to the Master. That's why in the early church they didn't wait long to be “baptized” - they put “fuel” in the tank immediately.

So what? What does baptism do? What happens as a result of taking a loyalty oath to Christ?

- We **GAIN** God's appreciation. It pleases Yahweh **Mt. 3:16-17**
- We **GIVE** encouragement to other Believers. Stand firm **1 Pt. 5:12**
- We **GET** fuel for the fight. We're in a real and dangerous spiritual battle. **1 Pt. 5:8-9**
- We **DRAW** a line in the sand. We provoke the ire of the **elohim** (gods). **Mt. 4:1-11**