

(8a) ISRAEL TODAY: New Beginnings

Many believe what has happened in the nation of Israel in the last 60 years is a fulfillment of Bible Prophecy. What does Revelation have to say about Israel today? Revelation informs us that to stand before God when Jesus returns, we must be part of Israel (Revelation 6:17, 14-16; 7:1-4). According to the Bible to be a true Israelite is a matter of the heart, and not about birth, blood and genes (Romans 2:28,29). Both Jews and non-Jews can be part of the Israel of God by belonging to Christ, who is THE SEED of Abraham (Galatians 3:16,29,28). By the blood of Jesus, Non-Jews become "fellow citizens" of Israel through baptism of faith (Ephesians 2: 11-14,19; Galatians 6:15,16; 3:26,27; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Biblical baptism is important for forgiveness of sins, salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15,16; John 3:3,5). As can be seen, baptism is to be carried out for those who have repented of sin; have put their faith in Jesus; and have been born again. For this reason the New Testament church did not baptize infants because they can't repent, believe, or comprehend the need to be born again at such a young age. Infant baptism was introduced into the Christian church to accommodate the idea of original sin in which it was believed that un-baptised babies would be damned on account of Adam's Guilt.

While many methods of baptism have been used, the New Testament knew of only one method, which was by complete immersion (Ephesians 4:5). John baptized where there was "much water" because baptism by immersion requires a large amount of water (John 3:23). He was baptizing "in" Jordan, and when He was baptized, Jesus came up "out" of the water (Matthew 3:5,6,16). When Philip was baptizing, both he and the eunuch were "in" the water (Acts 2:38,39). Clearly Biblical baptism is by immersion. The Greek word "baptizo," means to immerse or dip completely under.

For centuries the Christian Church used the Biblical method of immersion as seen in many places by the 3-4 feet deep baptisteries they used. These are found in Nazareth, Jerash in Jordan, ancient Ephesus in Turkey, the Churches of St. John of Laterano and St. Paul in Rome, and the church complex next to the leaning bell tower of Pisa. The practice ceased because it was less convenient than baptism by sprinkling (Faith of Our Fathers, 94th ed., p 277). The teachings of the Bible should come before human convenience.

Baptism means that through baptism of faith in the Christ's death and resurrection, we die to sin and our old sinful way of living and rise to a new life with Christ living in us (Romans 6:4-7; Colossians 2:12;

Galatians 2:20). Secondly, we become the Children of God in baptism, with all the rights and privileges of God's home (John 3:3,5; Galatians 3:26,27). Finally, baptism is likened to a marriage, as we become Christ's wife and part of His body (Romans 7:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 5:25-32; Isaiah 54:5).

Some wonder whether re-baptism is ever necessary. Yes, if a person has never been baptized according to the Biblical method of baptism by immersion, because such a person has never really yet been baptized. Yes, if a person has turned away from Christ and allowed the old life of sin to take control of his or her life in a very obvious manner. Such a person needs to crucify the old life of sin through the baptism of faith. And yes, if significant new truth is discovered by a person. This occurred in an experience in Paul's ministry when people received significant new light (Acts 19:1-7).

Baptism - The way to be a true Israelite. When should you and I be baptized? Do we believe Jesus is our Saviour? Have we repented – confessed and forsaken our sins? Do we understand and accept the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 28:19, 20)? When we can answer yes to all these questions we should definitely not put off baptism (Acts 22:16). If you have not yet been baptized by immersion, or have already been baptized by immersion but since that time have discovered significant new Biblical truth, why not decide right now to follow what God has revealed to you in His word?