

IS BAPTISM
ESSENTIAL
TO SALVATION?

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This subject has been prompted by the matter of baptism being discussed publicly in recent times, and it is felt that it is very important that this subject should be understood clearly from the Bible, without being coloured by what we ourselves have been taught from childhood and perhaps in various churches. We feel there is some misunderstanding today by some preachers as to what baptism means as taught in the Bible. Therefore, it is not surprising that people who hear the Bible quoted respecting baptism or other subjects should take what is said without investigation for themselves.

Now we are going to study the Bible on this important subject of baptism, and seek to determine if baptism is really essential for salvation.

The first time baptism is mentioned in the Bible is in connection with John the Baptist preaching repentance to Israel. John called upon Israel, who were God's typical people, to repent of their neglect in not observing as well as they might their Law Covenant which God made with them at the hands of Moses. John baptized in water those Israelites who showed a change of heart and wished to serve God by observing the Law Covenant to the best of their ability. This is shown in Mark 1:4,5. Here we have the record respecting John the Baptist, "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."

We remember John the Baptist was six months older than our Lord, and that meant he began at 30 years of age, six months ahead of our Lord's ministry, which commenced six months later. When we read texts like this it is very important to keep in mind that this remission of sin was not original sin. This baptism was not for the original sin of all condemned in Adam, but sins against the Law Covenant only. If it had meant original sin, the sacrifice of Christ would have been unnecessary. John's baptism in water symbolized heart repentance for sins against the covenant God gave to Israel as a nation, and only to Israel. The Lord had said through the prophet, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth." God took Israel out of all the other nations, and used them as a typical people, and ignored the other nations at large.

Some ask, Why did John baptize the Israelites in the

River Jordan as a symbol of repentance for sins against the Law Covenant? Why didn't he sprinkle the people with water? Turning to John's Gospel 1 from verse 29 we read, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the holy spirit." This means that God sent John to baptize, and God would see that John had the correct instructions in regard to the form of baptism. Besides, John probably knew that the word "baptism" really meant to immerse, or submerge in water those who came to him to take the symbol of heart repentance. They took the symbol of water immersion to picture repentance for sins against their Law Covenant.

We note from Luke 7:29,30 that obedience to John's call to repentance pleased God. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." In other words, they ignored John altogether. They were a law unto themselves, in not accepting this God-sent servant who called them to repentance to prepare their hearts for the Messiah, who was going to commence His ministry six months after John the Baptist.

Other texts relating to John's baptism are helpful also. Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 2 from verse 36 read, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." We note there a qualifying statement, "even as many as the Lord our God shall call." This promise was not to all the nations at large, but to as many as God would call after

those Jews, their children, and those "afar off", referring to the Gentiles. We note that those who were "pricked in their heart" when they heard of the dreadful sin of crucifying the Lord, were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins—remission of sins against the Law Covenant. This was John the Baptist's baptism being practised for remission of sins; washing away their sins in respect of their disobedience to the Law of Moses.

Then we have the case of the Apostle Paul, who also had sinned against the Law Covenant, and after his conversion on the Damascus Road, we read in Acts 9:18, after he was blinded and later his sight was restored considerably we have this testimony, "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized." We are not told what kind of baptism this was, in this verse, but we have a text to help us by comparing Acts 22:16. We see from this text that Paul took John the Baptist's baptism,— "And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In his heart, he came back into harmony with God under the Law Covenant, because he was a Jew. John the Baptist's baptism applied to him. When we read of people being baptized for remission of sins, we can be quite sure that it is John the Baptist's baptism, and not Christian baptism.

When Jesus took water baptism, we find He commenced a new symbol for Christian baptism. How do we know Jesus did not take John's baptism? For the reason that John's baptism pictured washing away sins against the Law Covenant, and Jesus had no sins of any kind to wash away, hence He could not go to John and take John's baptism. That is why John the Baptist was so amazed that Jesus, the perfect One, should come to him for baptism. John could not understand it, because he knew that for the Israelites whom he was baptizing, it pictured remission of sins. Jesus had no sins to be pictorially washed away. In Matt.3:13-15 we see how John the Baptist was in some concern about Jesus. "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" If either of us need baptism, John would say, it is me, not you. "Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him." When John could see that Jesus required this service of him, he immersed our Lord in the River Jordan without knowing the depth of the new symbol the Lord was taking for Christian baptism.

So far as we know Jesus did not explain to John the Baptist that His baptism was different to that which John was performing for the repentant Israelites. The words of Jesus in Luke 12:50, however, are very revealing. These words of our Lord were spoken quite a time after He had been baptized in the River Jordan. "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The margin says, "How am I pained until it be accomplished." We see here Jesus was speaking of a continual baptism going on in His heart. This was death baptism, that which He entered into when He consecrated His life to the Heavenly Father. "I have a baptism to be baptized with", and all His life this baptism was going on. It began when He consecrated His life to God and symbolized it in water, John the Baptist serving Him. It was going on each day of His life, and was not consummated until the Cross. Jesus then, in going to John the Baptist, was symbolizing His death baptism, giving His life for the world of mankind when He was baptized in water by John. He had previously consecrated His heart to God before He came for the symbol.

Thus our Lord set a pattern of water immersion for Christians, all who accept the invitation to walk in the steps of Christ in sacrifice. He set the example for others to yield their lives in death baptism, and then take the symbol afterwards—being a symbol of that already taken place in the heart. The matter is beautifully presented to us in Rom. 6:3-5. This is the Apostle Paul speaking; he who was now so well equipped with all the truths of the Bible, after he had been captivated on the Damascus Road and yielded his life fully to the Lord. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" We see here Paul is speaking not of water baptism at all, but of the real death baptism. All that are baptized into Jesus Christ are baptized into His death. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Here we see clearly the Apostle is not speaking of water baptism at all, but rather of death baptism. This is the important point to keep in mind—that water baptism is but the symbol of the reality. Notice how clearly verse 5 reads—"If we have been planted together in the likeness of his (Christ's) death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

We have a similar quotation from the same Apostle in Col. 2:12. Paul here says, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Here again there is no reference to water at all, no reference to the symbol but to the reality, heart baptism, heart submerging into Christ's death. As Christ was on the altar from the time of His consecration at Jordan, for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, so also are true Christians on the altar of sacrifice all their lives.

In Isa.53:12 we have a lovely prophecy. This whole 53rd chapter is referring to our Lord's great sacrifice. In verse 12 we have a description of our Lord's death baptism, written so many years beforehand under the guidance of the spirit of God through the prophet when he declared, "because he hath poured out his soul unto death." This pouring out of His soul unto death was going on day by day for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of our Lord's ministry, pouring out His life on behalf of humanity. He was pouring out His human life so that when He said, "It is finished", the sacrifice was provided on behalf of all humanity.

The Apostle Paul, having been planted in the likeness of Christ's death, said in 2 Cor.4:10,11, when he was describing his sacrificial life in the steps of the Master, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body; for we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." That is a very deep truth revealed by the Apostle Paul; bearing about in the body the dying, or the sacrifice, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Bearing about in the same manner as did Jesus, the great Head of the Church. From this standpoint we can well understand the words of the Apostle again in 2 Tim.2:10,11. Paul's words here to Timothy read, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." If we are planted together in the likeness of His death, His death baptism, we shall also live with Him.

Continuing, then, with the thought that the Lord's people of this Gospel Age are baptized into Christ's death, we have the words of the Apostle Paul again in 1 Cor.12:12,13. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body,

whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit." Not only is the Head, Christ Jesus anointed, but the body is also anointed as they are sacrificed in His steps. Paul, of course, wrote when the High Calling had been extended to the Gentiles. It was no longer restricted to the Jews, but now "by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles." Here again he was not speaking of water baptism, but of the reality, heart submerging or immersion into Christ's death, a yielding of one's whole being, the same as when Jesus consecrated His life on the altar for the sacrifice for all of humanity.

That is why God is taking out a people who will delight to walk in the steps of Christ, and to walk as He walked in His grace and strength. He, the perfect One, was able to do all things perfectly. The followers of Jesus are covered by the robe of His righteousness when they accept Him as their Saviour, and God is looking at them through the perfection of Jesus; that is why they have hope of attaining to the same glory, by the Lord's grace and strength. By the spirit of God all are baptized into this Body of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, bond and free; made to drink into one spirit, for the body is not one but many members.

Another text with reference to death baptism is found in Gal. 3:27,28. Paul again speaking says, "for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Those who have taken the same privileged opportunity of laying down their lives with Christ on the basis of His perfection, put on more and more the disposition of the great Head Himself. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus", on the basis of faith in Christ and complete consecration to God. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice", is the invitation that God gives to those who are prompted in their hearts to yield themselves to God's service, to be dead with Christ if so be they may live with Him in the same glorious inheritance as He has already entered into.

Up to now we have referred to the baptism of John the Baptist for remission of sins against the Law Covenant, for Israelites only, and up to the time of Christ's first advent and the early Church. Then we have referred to Christ's death baptism, and His true followers being baptized into His death. Also we have mentioned that water baptism is a

symbol only, both in the case of John's baptism and death baptism. Now we come to our question—Is baptism essential for salvation? We may add, Is death baptism essential for salvation?

We ask again, Was death baptism essential for Jesus? Our Lord answers that question in Matt. 20:28, as to whether death baptism was essential for Him. Our Lord says, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." This tells us distinctly that death baptism was essential for Jesus. He came not to be ministered unto, to be waited on, to be served, but He came to serve. He came to lay down His life in sacrifice; hence death baptism was essential for our Lord, for that was the great mission for which He came into the world, —to taste death for every man. And death baptism was essential for our Lord's great exaltation to the Father's right hand.

Turning to John 17:4,5, we remember this lovely prayer was given to the Father on the night just before Jesus' crucifixion, after the Memorial Supper and just prior to Gethsemane. "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." He is saying His sacrifice is as good as completed. He knew He was to be brought to the slaughter, and in a few hours He would be crucified. He knew He was to be the Lamb of God on this particular Passover season. He had finished the work God gave Him to do. Death baptism was essential for Jesus to accomplish salvation for humanity, and for the Father raising Him to His own right hand, that He might have the preeminence in all things.

And is it not also so with Christ's consecrated followers? We have such texts as Rom. 6:5,—"If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." The Apostle Peter explains the same matter very beautifully to us in 1 Pet. 3:20, 21. Peter is referring to the Ark of Noah's day, which saved a few, even eight, from the great Flood of water. He is telling us here, after speaking of the Ark, "a like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." We ask, What is the figure? The Flood of water which there submerged the world meant death to the world, while Noah and his family, though submerged in the same water, were hidden in the Ark, and by the Ark their lives were spared. Similarly, Christians baptized into Christ's death, to become members of

His body, are in their Ark of safety, and by proving faithful unto death are saved in the First Resurrection. But to use Peter's words here, and say that water baptism doth now save us, is absolutely unscriptural. The Apostle Peter was not talking about water baptism, but baptism into Christ's death, which saves the Christian in the First Resurrection. This verse has been used by certain preachers to impress the thought that water baptism is the means of salvation. Peter is not talking about water baptism at all here, but the real death baptism that means Christians are saved in the First Resurrection as they prove faithful unto death.

We say, What about water baptism? Throughout the Bible, of course, water baptism is used as a symbol. There has been misunderstanding throughout the various centuries, and a short newspaper cutting is of interest. Recently this appeared in the Press in England. It refers to the baptizing of infants by sprinkling. It says,—"bouncing babies have proved a little too bouncy for an English vicar who says some baptism ceremonies turn into fights at the font. Dr. Samuel Price, 68, vicar of Hazlemere, Buckinghamshire, asked his parishioners to have their babies baptized before they were a month old. Writing in his parish magazine, he said: 'Sometimes a vicar has to do battle with an infant too heavy to hold and occasionally a demon fighter. Spectacles are torn off and dashed into the font, ears are clawed, noses disfigured and fingers poked into the eye. After the Save the Children Fund, we must think of a Save-the-Parson-from-Danger campaign.'" We would say that vicar could be saved from all the difficulties if he read the Bible and found out there is no authority in the Bible for baptizing of infants by sprinkling or other means at all. It is completely unscriptural. But it has been performed over the centuries, and apparently it pleases some parents to have their little ones baptized thinking they derive some benefit in after life. It amounts to nothing; the infants may as well be sprinkled in the bath from day to day. This just shows what is performed with a misunderstanding of the Bible.

But does water baptism add to salvation? Is it essential to have water baptism for salvation? Did it add to our Lord's death baptism? No, indeed! Our Lord took it as a symbol only. The same applies to His followers. Those who have been baptized into Christ's death surely desire to take the same symbol as Jesus did, not because it is adding to the benefits of death baptism, but Jesus gave the outward sign and it is a good witness for Christians to do

likewise. But this is a personal decision, just as death baptism is a personal decision. The Lord does not command or force anyone to be planted in the likeness of His death. He offers the invitation to as many as the Lord our God shall call. God has not been calling all mankind to salvation in this life. He has been taking out a people for His name, to compose the Church of Christ and reign with Christ in the heavenly kingdom. When the kingdom is established the subjects of the kingdom, on earth, will be blessed with the Kingdom blessings which God provides through Christ and His Church with Him in glory. The majority of mankind will live here on the earth, which will be transformed to be like the Garden of Eden.

If we feel God is drawing us to death baptism through Christ, to yield ourselves and walk in the steps of Christ day by day, it is fitting to take the symbol of water baptism. If we do not feel we belong to the Lord fully, water baptism will never add to our salvation or confirm our consecration to God.

To guard against too much importance on the symbol of water immersion, we have the words of Paul in 1 Cor.1:12-17. "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul: and I of Apollos: and I of Cephas: and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Paul is saying here that he was rather glad he did not immerse in water those of the Church to whom he was writing. They might have said, You are baptizing us into your own denomination. The symbol is not essential, but it is a lovely picture of the reality. In the past, probably too much has been put upon the symbol. The immersion in water should never be performed until the person concerned is of an age to know whether his life has been yielded fully to God or not. Far better to delay the symbol of water immersion for a time, than for a person to feel he is a Christian because he or she has been baptized in water. The symbol is intended to show so beautifully that the heart is fully rendered to the Lord.

Our Lord need not have taken water baptism at all. He yielded His life before He came to John the Baptist. All who seek to follow Him in the matter of baptism should have

already given their lives to Him fully and completely. Then it is lovely to take the symbol to show that one is walking in the steps of Christ, by His grace and strength, the water baptism never adding to the contract but showing it has already taken place in the heart.

But let us keep in mind that water baptism is not essential to salvation. But for the Church, those who have been called to be of the Bride of Christ, death baptism is essential if they are to live and reign with Christ. Only those who are dead with Christ will live with Him. The remainder of mankind are going to live on the restored earth.

What about the world of mankind? Is death baptism essential for them for salvation? No, indeed! Death baptism will be finished with the completion of Christ's Church, and no symbol after that will be used. Christian baptism, death baptism, is only for the followers of Christ now. So for the world of mankind, we rejoice that millions of humanity will gain salvation through accepting Christ as their Saviour and enjoying human life, and not being baptized into Christ's death, as is required of a comparatively few of mankind who are invited to be sacrificers with Christ, in order to live with Him in the heavenly kingdom.

How clearly does the Apostle explain the salvation of mankind on the earth. In 1 Tim.2:4-6 we read, "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." That is a wonderful statement Paul is making. Whether we send out missionaries to China or India or Africa, God will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. God will have them saved from the Adamic death in the resurrection. Then, throughout the lengths and breadths of this world, all who have never heard the name of Jesus will do so. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." They could learn nothing in death, because the dead know not anything. They are to be resurrected—all in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth—and in the Kingdom Age they will come to a knowledge of the truth. That is why the angels, on the night our Lord was born, sang "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill to men." They were surely glad tidings of great joy yet to be to all people. But how many people had passed away in the 4,000 years before the Saviour was born? That message is just as applicable and vital for all those people

as it will be to all the people who have been born in the 2,000 years since. It really means all people, when it says "God will have all men to be saved." They will be saved out of Adamic death by the resurrection, and then saved fully by gaining a knowledge of the truth and accepting Christ as their Saviour in the Kingdom Age. There will be no sacrificing then, no death baptism. God wants them to enjoy human life, and as they obey the laws of the kingdom they will progress and become the earthly subjects of God as His human creation.

So we find that baptism is not essential for the majority of mankind, neither death baptism nor the symbol in water. They will be saved by belief on the Son of God. Man will not need to say to his neighbour, Know the Lord, for all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. A man, though he be a simpleton, will not err in that time. Isaiah 35 tells us about this wonderful time, when all mankind shall know the Lord. So when we know the plan of God that He has provided for all mankind, every human being who has ever lived, it takes away the anxiety in respect of our friends or relatives who have not become Christians in this life. We find when we read the Bible that God has not chosen the best of humanity at all for the Bride of Christ. 1 Cor.1:26 tells us this, and we see that God's plan is going forward irrespective of what man does. Paul says in this passage, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called (to the heavenly inheritance); but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." No-one will be able to say, I did it myself, I was smart, I became a follower of Christ and gained the reward because I was accomplished, I had ability or a title or a degree. Worldly learning means nothing. It was said of our Lord, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? He had never been to the Pharisees' college, but He was taught of God. The Lord's people are also taught of God. Not many noble or mighty are chosen. Very often it is a hindrance to becoming a Christian now having too much worldly knowledge, or worldly goods. Such will have the opportunity later on to gain salvation on the earth.

But to the called-out church, death baptism is essential

for every member who is seeking the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. Death baptism is essential for everyone who will gain a place in the Bride of Christ—baptism into Christ's death. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life", is the promise to those, and only those, who are going to be with Christ in His heavenly kingdom.

Turning to a passage in Acts 8, from verse 26, we have the story of the Ethiopian who came to Jerusalem to worship, and Philip was directed to catch up with him and give him the words of Jesus. "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth; in his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speakest the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Verse 38, "And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." Isn't that a lovely incident? This Ethiopian had his heart yielded to God long before Philip came to him. This man was very devoted to God, and had gone up to Jerusalem to worship. This was required, of those who were able, from time to time at the various seasons. God knew the heart of this man, knew he was devoted, had yielded his life to the Lord, but had not the intellectual understanding. He was reading Isaiah 53, where Jesus had poured out His soul unto death. Philip, as the servant of God, opened up the Word and preached Jesus. He

was told Jesus had already come and sacrificed Himself, and now he could walk in the steps of Christ. This man had already given his life to God. "Here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" he asked. Nothing hinders any who have already the death baptism in their hearts. That is the right time to take the symbol, but not before. This man then went back to his own country, and took the Gospel to his own land, on the basis of God's blessing at the hands of Philip, in being enlightened in respect of Jesus in connection with this wonderful prophecy of Isaiah.

We also rejoice when we see the light of truth shining from the pages of God's Word. His wonderful Plan opens up to us, and all the events taking place today are a fulfillment of the Bible. We are nearing the end of the Gospel Age of 2,000 years for the selection of the Bride of Christ. God is taking out a people for His name. He dealt with Israel throughout the Patriarchal Age and the Jewish Age, and did not send the Gospel to the Gentiles until 34 years after the sacrifice of Christ. When those baptized into Christ's death have made their calling and election sure in the First Resurrection, the general resurrection will take place in the Millennial Age.

God gave the promise to Abraham in the Patriarchal Age, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed!" not just those living at the end of the age, but all who have ever lived, because Jesus Christ tasted death for every man. God knows every man, every individual throughout the length and breadth of the wide world. Everyone is kept in remembrance by God. That is a lovely thought, that as in Adam all die even so in Christ shall all be made alive. They are coming back to learn of the glorious plan of salvation. When mankind comes back Satan will be bound for a thousand years, to deceive the nations no more. They will have an opportunity to go forward without any hindrance. But obedience will be required even then. God does not force any of His human creatures, because they are created in His own image. Those who will not hear and obey "that prophet" will be destroyed from among the people, at the end of the thousand years. There will be a thousand years of opportunity. We do not wonder that the Lord has set aside a thousand years to restore humanity, when we see conditions today. No doubt they will come back in orderly fashion, generation after generation. It may take place in reverse order to that in which mankind have been born in this life. Each generation will know the previous one, and so on right back to the days of Adam.

In regard to 1 Cor.15:29, Paul has incorporated this into his wonderful 15th chapter, and right throughout this chapter he is telling us about the essential necessity of Christ's resurrection if there is going to be any hope for anybody. "For if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Paul knew of the truth of the resurrection of Christ, and that the plan of God would go on beautifully. In verse 29 he says, "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?" How can people be baptized for the dead? A while ago there appeared in the Press a report of some very earnest people who came to Australia, called Latter-Day Saints, and they were visiting as many of the various cemeteries as possible and collecting records of all the people who had died. They were putting these on microfilm, and later being baptized literally for those people they knew had died. They felt that was really something valuable they were doing for the people who had died. They were being baptized in water for the dead ones who were buried even hundreds of years ago. But surely mankind should have better knowledge than that. The Scriptures tell us that there is to be a resurrection out of death because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Then what does Paul mean? Why are they baptized for the dead? If the dead rise not, being baptized for anybody would be of no account. But Paul is here speaking of those members of Christ's body who are baptized into Christ's death. They are very vital in the sight of God. When Paul was on the road to Damascus on the mission to persecute the saints, Jesus called to him and said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Our Lord was in glory, and Saul was not persecuting Him literally, but was persecuting Christ's members. It was as though Paul was persecuting Christ Himself. So Paul says here, "What shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?" But the dead are going to rise. And the members of Christ's body, united with Him in death, will be united with Him in resurrection and associated with Him in giving life to the dead of humanity who have passed away. That is the great secret here. Why are they baptized for the dead? They would not be baptized for the dead if the dead rise not. But when the dead are all included in the resurrection, those who are Christ's members actually lay down their lives with Christ on behalf of humanity, because the merit of Christ covers this Church class all the time, and they are precious in the sight of God because they are Christ's members, and are

going to be united with Christ Jesus and bring about the resurrection of all the departed ones of the human family, right back to Adam. This is the only explanation that fits in the Plan of God in line with the wonderful presentation Paul has given us in this 1 Cor.15.

So do we not rejoice in the wonderful Plan of God that He has provided a First Resurrection for His people who are faithfully walking in Christ's steps during the Gospel Age, having the privilege of a death baptism with Him and symbolizing it in the waters of baptism. He has also provided that all the remainder of mankind shall have a resurrection back to the conditions lost in the Garden of Eden, by obedience to the laws of Christ's kingdom. All the obedient will be uplifted and blessed, that they may be able to become children of God on the human plane, and be to His praise for all eternity.

We surely rejoice that God's plan does not overlook any human being, and none will be lost except those who prove to be wilful sinners after 1,000 years' trial. This plan of God will surely solve all earth's problems. God provides all the help we need in the meantime to progress along the way that leads to eternal life. May God add His blessing to His Word in His wonderful Plan of Redemption, to His praise for all time.

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