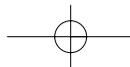
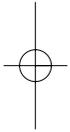


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Why Do We Baptize Infants?



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Why Do We Baptize Infants?

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■ **Why do Presbyterians baptize infants?** We must confess that some bring their children for this sacrament because of the sweetness of the ceremony, or because of the traditions of family and church, or even with the misguided expectation that somehow “holy water” will magically protect their child from hell. Yet neither sentiment nor tradition nor superstition is sufficient reason for believers to bring their children to be baptized. And, thankfully, such reasons are not the basis of our church’s practice. We baptize infants because we believe that the Bible teaches us to do so.

My goal in this booklet is to explain pastorally the scriptural foundation for infant baptism. To do this, I will first present the biblical support for infant baptism as I have presented it in new members’ and church officers’ training classes over the past twenty-five years. Then I will conclude by offering words of explanation that I have often used as a pastor during the administration of the ordinance. My goals are to help explain why we should baptize the infants of believing parents and also to help pastors better know how to administer the sacrament in ways that are meaningful and helpful for their churches. Thus, I plan to present this material in terms that are accessible to laypersons, leaving technical discussions to able scholars in other books.

One further word of preparation relates to my own journey regarding baptism. I did not always accept the practice of infant

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baptism. I was raised among dedicated, faithful, and well-instructed Baptists who believed that the Bible regards only those who decide to follow Christ as proper candidates for baptism. As a result, I well understand and respect those who have questions about the legitimacy of a practice that they feel has no biblical warrant. I also do not want to do or teach anything that the Bible does not support. Thus, the paragraphs that follow are more than the recitation of a party line; they are the reflection of the thought process that led me to believe that Scripture teaches that God wants believing parents to present their children to him in baptism.

The biblical explanation will flow as follows:

I. The Biblical Background of Infant Baptism

Salvation is through the *covenant of faith* in the Old and New Testaments.

The faithful receive a *covenant sign* in the Old Testament.

The *covenant continues* in the New Testament.

The *covenant sign changes* to reflect New Testament blessings.

II. The Biblical Basis for Infant Baptism

The absence of a contrary command

The examples of household baptism

III. The Biblical Benefits of Infant Baptism

The devotion of parents

The blessing of children

THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF INFANT BAPTISM

The Covenant of Faith

Many of the children in our churches enjoy singing the song "Father Abraham Had Many Sons." This song contains a

The Biblical Background of Infant Baptism ■

vital New Testament truth: "Father Abraham had many sons—I am one of them and so are you." When they sing these words, our children are not merely echoing a statement of faith that a Jewish child in the Old Testament could make. The truth of these words *still* applies.

A key concept in the New Testament is that *all* of God's people (Jew or Gentile—past or present) are blessed in accordance with the covenant (i.e., promise of blessing) that God made with Abraham. The Lord promised in this "everlasting covenant" that Abraham and his descendants would know God's blessings on the basis of faith in his provision (Gen. 15:1–6; 17:1–8). No one was to receive God's blessings on the basis of personal merit or on the basis of some ceremony. Out of his mercy alone—and before they could qualify for it in any way—the Lord covenanted to be the God of Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:7). The people would know and claim the blessings of this covenant by expressing faith in God's provision as Abraham had done (Gen. 15:6). Thus, God promised always to bless Abraham and his descendants by grace through faith (cf. Eph. 2:8–9).

But what does a covenant with a Jewish patriarch have to do with people in God's church today? The apostle Paul reminds us that God said to Abraham, "All nations will be blessed through you" (Gal. 3:8; cf. Gen. 12:3). The "everlasting covenant" that God made with Abraham (Gen. 17:7) continues to be in effect and continues to cover us. The Apostle Paul writes, "So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal. 3:9).

This means that we who have faith in Christ as God's provision for our salvation are blessed in accordance with Abraham's covenant. We are Abraham's spiritual descendants and are still covered by the covenant that God first made with him. Paul writes, "Consider Abraham: 'He believed God, and

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it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham” (Gal. 3:6–7). Whether or not they are biological descendants of Abraham, believers today are his spiritual children through the everlasting covenant that God provided through Abraham.

There is no other way to be a child of God than to be included in Abraham’s covenant. There is no other covenant of salvation, and unless we are part of Abraham’s covenant, we are not part of God’s people. As the apostle says, “He [Christ] redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:14). Those who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior receive the covenant promises of Abraham and are his spiritual children, regardless of their time or place of birth (cf. Gal. 3:29).

The Covenant Sign

After making the covenant with Abraham to bless him and his descendants by grace through faith, God provided a covenant sign both to mark those who were recipients of his promise and to signify his pledge to provide for those who had faith in him. It is important to remember that the sign was given after the covenant had already been made; it was neither a precondition of the covenant nor a means of manufacturing it. Faith was and is the sole condition of knowing the blessings of God’s covenant.

The sign of circumcision. The covenant sign that God gave the Old Testament people was circumcision. The removal of the foreskin from the male reproductive organ signified the removal of spiritual uncleanness from God’s people and communicated that God’s provision for blessing was being passed on to all the children of Abraham from generation to generation (cf. Gen. 17:10–14; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Col. 2:13).