

Is Water Baptism  
Essential to Salvation?

BY ELDER JOSEPH LUFF



ENSIGN PUBLISHING HOUSE  
INDEPENDENCE, MO.

[www.LatterDayTruth.org](http://www.LatterDayTruth.org)



# Is Water Baptism Essential to Salvation?

BY ELDER JOSEPH LUFF.

To us this question sounds about the same as would the inquiry, "Is faith in God necessary?" We cannot understand why it should be asked by persons who have read the Bible carefully for themselves; but it *is* being asked, and that, too, by honest and intelligent persons. Hence we venture a very plain answer and a few plain reasons for that answer. We shall use the Bible in so doing, believing that God's word will be taken in preference to ours.

Our answer is, "*Yes, water baptism is essential to salvation.*"

In support of this answer we proceed in the same way as if faith, instead of baptism, was the principle inquired of. Not a man who accepts the claim of inspiration for the Bible will doubt the necessity of faith unto salvation, after reading:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.—Heb. 11:6.

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.—Mark 16: 16.

These and similar passages forever settle the question in favor of faith being an essential to salvation. Consistency, if nothing else, would demand that if equally strong, plain and comprehensive tests could be found supportive of water baptism, that the question would be settled just as quickly. *Can they be found?* Let us see as we pass along. We shall go carefully and note the testimony of witnesses as we proceed, then give a list of their names, in order, at the close.

Zacharias, the priest, was visited by an angel, while attending to his priestly office, and told that his prayer had been heard and that a son would be given him by his wife, Elizabeth. He was to call the child John. The angel further said of the promised child:

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and

the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.—Luke 1:15-17.

By this we learn that John was to be the forerunner of Christ and was to turn many from disobedience to wisdom (or counsel) of the just (God), and thus make ready a people for what Christ should bring.

In due time the babe was born, and at the time set for its circumcision friends gathered to witness the ceremony. Some suggested the name Zacharias for the child, but its mother insisted that it must be called John. When its father (who had been without power of speech ever since the angel gave him the promise of a son) was appealed to, by signs, to settle the question, he secured a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." Instantly upon writing this his tongue was loosed and he was led by the Holy Ghost to prophesy concerning the babe in these words:

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.—Luke 1:76,77.

We call attention to these passages, because they introduce John to us as the agent of God, appointed to do a specific work, and Zacharias as a prophet of God, whose inspired testimony declared that by the doing of that work remission of sins was to come to the obedient.

Right here is a good place to ask and answer the question, "What was the work John was sent to perform in order to give remission of sins?" Let us read again:

There was a man sent from God whose name was John.—John 1:6.

He that sent me to baptize with water.—John 1:33.

I baptize with water.—John 1:26.

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.—Mark 1:4.

This proves: First, that John's baptism was a water baptism; second, that God sent him to perform it; and third, that it was the work by which remission of sins was to come to the people.

So far then we have gained two strong, unimpeachable witnesses; one inspired of God to prophesy that John's work would bring remission of sins, and the other sent of God and filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb to qualify him

for the work referred to, viz: "Baptizing in water for the remission of sins." Please write down the names of these two God-chosen witnesses—Zacharias, the priest and prophet, and John the Baptist. Surely no sane man will dispute that they testified that water baptism is for the remission of sins.

Next we introduce Luke, the historian. Is he a competent witness? Let us see:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.—Luke 1:1-4.

Eye-witnesses, and men having perfect understanding of all things connected with the case from the very first, are generally accounted first class witnesses. Such was Luke, according to the above. Therefore, being duly qualified, we ask for his testimony upon the matter before us. Here it is:

The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.—Luke 3:2,3.

We shall take the liberty of entering the name of Luke on the roll of witnesses, who testified that by the command of God baptism was observed for the remission of sins. This makes three reliable witnesses.

We now turn to those twelve men who had been chosen as apostles to represent God's government, and ask as to their competency to testify. The fact that Christ selected them should be sufficient on this; but we want to make the case clear, hence we introduce the Master's charge and promise to them. Listen to it: Jesus

Commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. \* \* \* Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come unto you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.—Acts 1:4,5,8.

The sense of this is, without question, that these men were to receive power by the Holy Ghost to become witnesses in Christ's stead, not only in

Jerusalem and all Judea, but their testimony was to hold good to the uttermost part of the earth. Now, according to the following chapter, these men waited in Jerusalem, as commanded, and the Holy Ghost came as promised, and under its power they testified. What was their testimony on the point under consideration?

Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice. [Here follows his memorable appeal and argument, which caused the people to be "pricked in their heart" and ask, "what shall we do," to which the spokesman, Peter, replied for himself and the eleven who were standing up with him and were appealed to]: Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.—Acts 2:14,38.

Evidently the same Spirit that was with John the Baptist from his birth and with Zacharias and Luke was the "power" of Pentecost that moved these apostles to thus speak, for their testimonies are alike. Thus we have secured fifteen witnesses, all of whom were amply qualified and authorized to speak for Christ. Not a dissenting voice among them.

Next we place on the stand a special witness, named Ananias, and as we proceed we will associate another with him. We find word concerning him in the 9th and 22d chapters of Acts. Saul of Tarsus, the church persecutor, was met on the way to Damascus, by the Lord, who told him in answer to his question, "What wilt thou have me to do, Lord?"

Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.—Acts 9:6.

Obedient to this command Saul went, or was led, to Damascus, and in due time was visited by the servant of Christ, Ananias, who uttered these words:

And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.—Acts 22: 16.

There was nothing ambiguous about that command, and Saul "arose and was baptized."—Acts 9: 18.

We note further that Ananias, in delivering his message to Saul, said:

The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.—Acts 22:14,15.

This leads us to conclude, as is stated, that Saul was to be a witness of what he heard from the mouth of Christ and of what he had seen and learned from Ananias.

What had he heard from the mouth of Christ? We have already shown the command to go to Damascus, and the promise that he would be there, told what he *must do*. What was he told to do when Ananias came? Be baptized to wash away his sins. This then is the testimony of Ananias, the special messenger, and Paul the chosen witness. Will the reader please add the names of Ananias and Saul to the former fifteen witnesses who clearly testify that baptism is for the "washing away" or "remission" of sins? Surely these are sufficient; but at the risk of surfeiting the enquirer, we place others on the stand.

We have already shown clearly that the Holy Ghost led Zacharias to testify as he did in this case, and that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost from his birth. We have also shown that it was the Holy Ghost, or the "power" promised the apostles that made them witnesses for Christ. The good book says also that when that promise was fulfilled:

They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.—Acts 2:4.

And with this incontrovertible evidence before us we fear nobody's objection as we write down the name of the Holy Ghost as a witness in favor of baptism for the remission of sins.

With feelings of strong confidence we now introduce Jesus Christ to the reader as a witness in the case. Here is what he says:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

If, as everywhere admitted, this birth of the Spirit means baptism of the Spirit, the same must be said of the birth of the water. Hear him again:

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.—Mark 16:16.

Remember, it was Jesus who sent Ananias to Saul with the command to be baptized and wash away his sins. For evidence of this, read:

Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me.—Acts 9:17.

It was Jesus who promised and afterwards sent the Holy Ghost on Pentecost to inspire the apostles to testify as they did.

This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.

Without hesitation we inscribe the name of Jesus Christ as having testified and having authorized and inspired others to testify that baptism is for the remission of sins.

Did the Father authorize or sanction the doctrine? Let us see: The Holy Spirit that gave the apostle "utterance" on Pentecost was "*the promise of the Father.*" (Acts 1:4). John the Baptist was *sent of God* to preach and baptize with water. (See John 1:6-33). The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the "*counsel of God*" by refusing the baptism of John. (See Luke 7: 29, 30). This could not be possible unless God had counselled them to observe it. The voice of the Father was heard as Jesus came forth from the water, after he had received baptism at the hands of John:

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.—Matt. 3:17.

Is this enough evidence? By it we have shown that God counselled or commanded the ordinance, sent John to administer it, approved openly of his Son's submission to it, and furnished the "power" on Pentecost to inspire its proclamation, with an extension of the promise of the Holy Ghost to as many as should obey it. What would be conyincing evidence if this is not? If anything is needed to complete the matter it surely will be found in the declaration of Christ:

I have not spoken of myself; but of the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting; whatsoever I speak, therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

This surely settles the matter, for if Jesus, as already shown, both taught the necessity of water baptism, observed it himself, and sent Ananias and the twelve apostles to preach it—*all by the commandment of the Father*—we have the undoubted right to place the name of God, the eternal Father, on our list of witnesses who testified in favor of water baptism being essential to salvation.



Now let us thoughtfully, and in the light of our eternal hope, inspect the array of witnesses. We place them, by their choice, all on one side of this great and important question, and we provide a column for the signatures of those who dare to testify against or contrary to them. Look at this, kind reader, and then answer the questions we propound:

WATER BAPTISM.	
FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.	NOT NECESSARY TO SALVATION
<p style="text-align: center;">WITNESSES:</p> ZACHARIAS. JOHN THE BAPTIST. LUKE. PETER AND THE REST OF THE ELEVEN. ANANIAS. PAUL OR SAUL. THE HOLY GHOST. JESUS THE CHRIST. GOD THE FATHER.	<p style="text-align: center;">WITNESSES:</p>

Is there any witness who has ever testified, or who now testifies, on the subject, whose word or judgment you would sooner trust than any or all of these? Has any man lived, or does he now live, who holds better authority to speak on this subject than these? Have you the evidence upon which to impeach any one or all of these witnesses? Does your hope of life depend upon your agreement or disagreement with the testimony of these witnesses? Can God, Christ and the Holy Ghost testify as above, and yet approve of any man's testimony or attitude to the contrary? Have you any reason for believing that God, Christ and the Holy Spirit have changed their mind on this subject? Would you not feel safer and happier on the side where God, Christ and the Holy Spirit stand? These questions are asked in all seriousness.

If there is any name or list of names upon whose testimony you would rather take your chances in the judgment, write them in the opposite column above, add to them all the titles that theological seminaries can confer; multiply the names and titles until you have exhausted your sources of supply; roll up the scroll and take it with you to the bar where men are to be judged by the words that Christ has spoken, and there make it the certificate

of your right to eternal life. Essay the task of proving that God, Christ, the Holy Ghost and all of heaven's appointees of the apostolic age were mistaken in this matter, and after so doing, fall back upon the men whose word you have taken in preference to Christ's; show that all these refused or failed to believe that baptism was essential, and then await the result. What will it be? Angels and archangels will gather around the Author of eternal truth and raise the banner containing Christ's words:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That divine Spirit which moved Paul to write to the Romans will inspire this company first to point to the inscription upon the banner they have raised, and then to exclaim:

What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.—Rom. 3:3,4.

Reader, we believe you would not dare to enter a name on the blank column above, and declare your acceptance of it in preference to those we have given. Nay, more, we believe you would not wish to do it. You want these whose names are given to be your friends when the river of death has been crossed. Here we advise you to move unto their side of every question now, and be not ashamed because of human reviling or scorn, for Jesus has said:

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.—Mark 8:38.

We have answered affirmatively the question propounded, and have put forward the best authority in heaven and on earth as witnesses. Their testimony we leave with you.



