

1Pe 3:18 (NKJV) For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.²¹ There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

We come now to v21 which has always been a very misinterpreted verse.

1Pe 3:21 (NKJV) There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

This is a verse that is often used to promote a false doctrine called “baptismal regeneration”., or the requirement that baptism is necessary in order to be saved. The Mormons believe this, as does the Church of Christ, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Anglican churches. According to the Christian Restoration Association which supports baptismal regeneration, what a person must do in order to become a Christian is to “*believe, repent of sin, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins*”.¹ The major denominations that adhere to this false doctrine often use [John 3:5](#) as a proof text which says,

Jn 3:5 (NKJV) Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

For some, these verses represent what we might call a shortcut to salvation. It is a way for a person to simply avoid both repentance and faith. We certainly recognize that for a lost person to be called on by God to abandon trusting in themselves and their ideas of goodness is generally something that is both uncomfortable and unnecessary in their mind. However, for biblical salvation to occur, what God requires is a genuine humility that is directly linked to both repentance, and faith in Christ on God’s terms.

Just because we have the entire New Testament, we clearly know that no one is saved because of baptism. There are some denominations such as the Church of Christ which believe that a person cannot be saved until they have been baptized – even though if you asked them they would say that all that was needed was repentance and faith. However, what they may fail to tell you is that they believe that you cannot enter into God’s kingdom until you are baptized.. So, if someone makes a profession of faith in Christ, they immediately rush them off to the church to be baptized to make their salvation complete. I am personally convinced that the majority of these people in this denomination are very sincere in their love for Christ, but what that denomination has done is to add another element to the work of salvation. Biblically, salvation requires both repentance and faith, but they have added the physical act of baptism to the spiritual mandate.

¹ Got Questions, ep.

I think it is important to appreciate that in the early days of the church that a Jewish person becoming a Christian was an enormous, monumental break with the rich cultural and religious history that made them Jewish. No other nation on the earth had ever had God work on their behalf in the way that He did with Israel. Baptism never did, nor does it ever do anything for the believer. Baptism is an outward profession of what has already happened to someone inwardly. In Peter's day, baptism marked a public break with Judaism and it clearly identified the new believer with Jesus Christ in an outward, open, public way. This was no small issue simply because once the person was baptized, it meant that the unsaved Jews completely rejected that individual and would isolate them from society. They would not allow them to work for them, not buy any of their products, and constantly ostracize them for their faith in Christ. For many people who came to Christ, it simply meant that they no longer would have a way of making a living for their family. They could neither buy or sell anything if they bore the mark of baptism in their life. Consider it to be similar to the antichrist requiring everyone after the mid-point of the Tribulation to take a mark that allows them to buy and sell. For the person who comes to Christ during the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation, they will not take the mark, and will effectively be doomed to a kind of physical starvation.

I have personally witnessed this in West Java, Indonesia where Islam allows the families of people who have come to Christ and have been baptized to actually be killed by their family. They are totally rejected and their life becomes very perilous to say the least. The same is true in Pakistan and other Islamic countries. Too very often in America, baptism has no real meaning to people. Over my Christian life I have seen many young people baptized, and deep down I did not think that it meant much to them. I saw this video on Facebook one time where a young boy did a cannon ball into the baptistry, and what deeply grieved me was not the boy jumping into the baptismal pool, but that the audience started laughing. It was as if the church itself had no reverence for the act of baptism.

So, because of the actual cost that baptism would have meant for Peter's audience, baptism in the early church was actually a way of weeding out what we might call "false conversions". Today, with things like infant baptism and sprinkling, the actual cost has been severely removed. If I can say it this way, when someone came to Christ in Peter's day, the cost to do so, which included baptism, was no small matter simply because it immediately placed them in harm's way.

Obviously, v21 is referring back in some way to v20 where it states that eight people "**were saved through water**". I think that the NASB and ESV both provide the best translation of that last phrase when they say that "**eight persons were brought safely through the water**". That is the idea behind what Peter is communicating – not that the water saved them, but that they were saved from drowning like everyone else. We know from [Genesis 6:5-7](#) that God was very grieved with what was happening in Noah's day. Listen to how that is described,

Ge 6:5 (NKJV) **Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."**

However, [Genesis 6:3](#) says that God was going to give them a period of grace of 120 years.

Ge 6:3 (NKJV) **And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."**

In the overall context of these verses in Genesis 6, it is generally believed that what God was saying was that He was going to give man at that time 120 years before He would destroy the earth. It was a picture of God's longsuffering and patience – what we might call a “period of grace for these wicked people. We know from [2 Peter 2:4-5](#) that Noah actually preached during that time for people to repent, but without any results.

2Pe 2:4 (NKJV) **For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, *one of eight people*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly;**

Now, probably the best way to translate the beginning of [1 Peter 3:21](#) is as the NASB does when it says,

1Pe 3:21 (NASB) **Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

So, what v21 is doing is linking us back to v20. The word for “**antitype**” comes from the Greek word “*antitupon*” which simply means something that is a resemblance of something else. I.e., it is a model or a figure of something else. So, the “**antitype**” corresponds to the type, or the actual thing that is being represented.² In the Scriptures, the type is always provided in the Old Testament, and the antitype is provided in the new Testament. So, if you go back and read v20 slowly and carefully, the “**ark**” is the actual type.

1Pe 3:20 (NKJV) **who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.**

There is nothing in the story of the flood where Noah or his family were actually in the water. They were saved **from the water** because they were in the “**ark**”. The ark is what saved them, not the water. The water is what God used to actually destroy the earth, not to save it. I.e., the ark was prepared to safely bring Noah and his family through the flood (or the water), and therefore the ark is the Old Testament type. So, in our passage in v21, baptism is clearly referring to the ark. It cannot be called an “**antitype**” if it does not have an Old Testament “**type**” – which is clearly the ark and not the flood. We know from the rest of the New Testament teaching on baptism that baptism does not save anyone. It never has and it never will. In fact, according to [Romans 6:3-14](#), baptism is simply a symbol, a picture, and a representation of Christ's death and resurrection. That is why when we are baptizing someone we say “*Buried with Him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life*”. Baptism is simply a picture of the death and resurrection of Christ. So, the picture here is that the one who appropriates Christ's death and resurrection is saved even as Noah and his family were saved from the flood of God's judgment when they entered the ark. If I can say it another way, Christ is our ark, and we must appropriate His death and resurrection in our life through faith and repentance in order to be saved.

² Zodhiates, 196.

In all of this, we do not want to forget that in the same way that God destroyed the early earth in Genesis by water, He will also destroy the present earth by fire. [2 Peter 3:10-12](#) says,

2Pe 3:10 (NKJV) But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

As a believer, you do not have to be afraid of this judgement. In the same way that Noah was brought to safety through the ark, so you also will be brought to spiritual safety through faith in the work of Christ.

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