

## What Hinders Me from Being Baptized (Acts 8:36-40)?<sup>a</sup>

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### Context

1. Philip was originally preaching in Samaria
2. Philip was directed by an angel to minister to an individual Ethiopian, who was reading a passage concerning Jesus from the Book of Isaiah.
3. Philip explains the passage and the man believed that Jesus was indeed the predicted Jewish Messiah.

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### Passage

*[35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. [36] Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" [37] Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." [38] So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. [39] Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. [40] But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.<sup>1</sup>*

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### Catching Away by the Spirit

1. **Acts 8:39** - *Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away . . . but Philip was found at Azotus*
  - A. **caught** is ἥρπασεν [*hērasen*] from ἁρπάζω [*harpazō*] - to snatch or seize
  - B. The same word describes
    - I. The way in which Paul was **caught up** to the third heaven, to Paradise and heard inexpressible words (2Cor. **12:2-4**)
    - II. The way in which living believers will be **caught up** together with the dead in Christ at the Rapture (1Th. **4:17**)
    - III. The way in which Christ, as the *man child*, ascended to God and His throne (Rev. **12:5**)

IV. In the Latin Vulgate, the grand-daddy of all bibles which held sway for hundreds of years in the middle ages, the term is rapuit, related to the verb rapio, rapere, “to seize, snatch, tear away”

a. It is this Latin verb from which we derived the phrase “the Rapture”.

b. Philip experiences mini-Rapture event of sorts

2. Philip eventually reappears in Azotus (OT Ashdod).
3. Azotus is about 20 miles north of Gaza, both of which are on the coast, whereas Philip met the Ethiopian on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza in the (inland) desert region.
4. Philip was divinely lead, both to meet the Ethiopian and in his departure
5. Who can doubt that the timing and path of the Ethiopian’s trip was any less directed by God (Ps. [37:23](#); Pr. [3:6](#); [16:9](#))?

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## Baptism<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Part of the Great Commission

A. **Mat. [28:18-20](#)** - *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

B. **Mark [16:15-16](#)** - *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

### 2. One of only two Christian ordinances: the Lord’s supper and baptism

A. Both are *signs*: visible activities which represent deep spiritual realities which cannot be seen

### 3. After coming to Faith

A. **Baptism, like the Lord’s supper, is the business of only those who have already come to saving faith**

- B. **Mat. 28:19** - . . . *Go therefore and (1) make disciples of all the nations, (2) baptizing them . . .*
  - C. **The Ethiopian in this passage (Acts 8:37)**
  - D. **Peter on the day of Pentecost: “Repent . . . and be baptized” (Acts 2:38)**
  - E. **Philip in Samaria: “When they believed Philip . . . both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12)**
  - F. **Simon the sorcerer: “also believed [and] was baptized” (Acts 8:13)**
  - G. **Saul of Tarsus was “filled with the Spirit . . . arose and was baptized” (Acts 9:17-18)**
  - H. **Cornelius' household received the Holy Spirit and were subsequently baptized (Acts 10:47-48)**
  - I. **Response of an individual who is of consenting age who knowingly places their faith in Christ**
    - I. **Child baptism does not count (we do not endorse the idea, help by some, that NT baptism is equivalent to OT circumcision and therefore can be applied to infants before the age of consent)**
4. **Biblical evidence underscores an immediacy, a zeal, even a fervor, for new believers to be baptized**
- A. **The new Ethiopian believer: within minutes of conversion. “See, water! What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36)**
  - B. **Day of Pentecost: thousands on the same day (Acts 2:38,41)**
  - C. **Philip’s preaching in Samaria: on the same day, or within a short time (Acts 8:12). Even Simon (Acts 8:13)!**
  - D. **The conversion of Saul in the next chapter: within 3 days of his encounter with Christ, the same day Ananias laid hands on him (Acts 9:17-18)**
  - E. **The conversion of those at the household of Cornelius: within hours of their conversion (Acts 10:44-48)**
  - F. **The conversion of Lydia and her household at Philippi: the same day of their conversion (Acts 16:13-15)**

- G. **The jailer at Philippi: within hours of his conversion (Acts 16:30-33)**
- H. **Disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus: shortly after conversion (Acts 19:1-5)**
- I. **My own situation: a year between — perhaps preachers and teachers don't emphasize the immediacy enough**

- I. **If we seek closer intimacy with the Lord and desire to please Him, why wouldn't we follow Him in baptism?**

## 5. **A response out of obedience to identify publicly as a Christian**

- A. **Obedience and zeal are a good thing**
  - I. **1Pe. 3:21 - . . . baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) . . .**
- B. **Spontaneity has a value**
- C. **Later baptism can also be highly significant — personal factors will differ, obedience and desire are the key**

## 6. **Theological significance**

- A. **Nice to know at some point, but Biblical evidence doesn't support the need for in-depth explanation prior to the event**
- B. **A outward picture of Holy Spirit baptism**
  - I. **With the exception of the transitional period in Acts during which the Spirit was initially baptizing various people groups, Spirit baptism has since been simultaneously with saving faith.**
  - II. **Thus, in our age, Spirit baptism *precedes* water baptism**
  - III. **Baptism is an external rite reflecting the inward reality of being born again and joined spiritually with the Body of Christ, as a member of the true Church**
    - a. **1Cor. 12:13 - *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.***
    - b. **Spirit baptism, a God-initiated work, is invisible in its essence**

- c. **Water baptism, a man-initiated act, serves as an outward declaration of our willing identification with Christ**

#### IV. As John the baptist declared

- a. **Mark 1:8 - *I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.***
- b. **John's baptism of repentance using water prefigured the baptizing work of the Spirit**
- c. **Christian baptism, after coming to faith, is an outward manifestation of the baptizing work of the Spirit having occurred in the life of the believer**

#### C. Identification with Christ in burial and resurrection

- i. **Rom. 6:3-5 - *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection . . .***
  - a. **Our descent beneath the water is a picture of death**
  - b. **Our ascent up from the water is a picture of resurrection**
  - c. **Baptism serves as an external enactment of our death to sin and coming to life in God—a death and re-birth: being born anew**
  - d. **The ending of a former connection that we may enter a new one**
  - e. **As one commentator put it, “. . . it is a setting forth of the great fact that we federally died and were buried with Christ, unto sin, unto the world, and unto all of the old creation; and are now raised with Him and share His risen life; . . .”<sup>3</sup>**
  - f. **As another stated, “That, as Jesus Christ in his crucifixion died completely, so that no spark of the natural or animal life remained in his body, so those who profess his religion should be so completely separated and saved from sin, that they have no more connection with it, nor any more influence from it, than a dead man has with or from his departed spirit.”<sup>4</sup>**

## D. Dead in trespasses, alive in forgiveness

I. Col. **2:11-13** - *In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses . . .*

a. Both burial and resurrection are associated with baptism:  
 “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith”

i. Descending in the water represents our burial whereas ascending out of the water pictures our raising up with Him by faith

E. Symbolizes the washing away of sin, the physical cleansing power of water as an analogy of our regeneration by God’s Spirit

Acts **22:16** - *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*<sup>5</sup>

## 7. Immersion: evidence that NT baptism was by immersion:

A. John baptized people “in the Jordan”, not “by or near the Jordan” (Mat. **3:6**; Mark **1:5**)

B. At Jesus’ baptism by John, Mark states that *Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan* (Mark **1:9**). Matthew further states that *Jesus came up immediately up from the water.*

C. Here, *both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water*

D. Acts **16:13-15** - Lydia and her household were undoubtedly baptized in the local river where they were praying, *And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside . . .* (Acts **16:13**)

E. Passages such as Colossians **2** and Romans **6** wherein Paul compares baptism with being buried

## 8. Abysmal Baptismal Confusion

A. Roots of the problem

- I. **Whereas only God can initiate salvation (birth men and woman from above), man can initiate baptism**
  - II. **Men love rituals, especially religious rites—often mistaking religion for relationship**
- B. **Baptism based on parentage (children of Christians)**
- I. **Dedication is another matter. It is appropriate to have a child presented in a service where the spiritual oversight of God, as well as the privileges and responsibilities of the parents, are sought on behalf of the child.**
  - II. **My own baptism: at one month of age in England, then at age 34 after having come to faith.**

C. **Baptism as the instrument of regeneration?**

The Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches, most Lutheran bodies, and many in the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal church hold that baptism is the direct instrument of regeneration. Roman Catholics subscribe so strongly to this view that, accordingly, they also hold that all adults or infants who die unbaptized are excluded from heaven.<sup>6</sup>

- I. **Not for salvation**
    - a. **Many clear passages (as I mentioned above, where baptism occurs after coming to Faith**
    - b. **There are also a few not-so-clear passages which require more careful scrutiny (e.g., John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 1Pe. 3:21; Acts 22:16)**
- D. **Baptism based on membership within a Church**
- E. **Baptism as *prerequisite* for membership in a Church**
- F. **Baptism as *prerequisite* for participation in the Lord's supper**
- G. **Baptism as how one “becomes a Christian” — in a cultural sense**
- I. **Baptism doesn't make a person a Christian: “you must be born again” or “born from above” and *then* baptism follows**
  - II. **Mismatch: people, especially children, get water baptized who have never been Spirit-baptized.**

### III. Confusion about what or who is a Christian: cultural Christianity vs. biblical Christianity

#### H. Child baptism and church membership in the Puritan times of Jonathan Edwards

##### I. What we learn: where the clear principles of God's Word are compromised, messy complications are sure to follow!

As the 1640s gave way to the 1650s, more and more children of the earliest settlers failed to experience God's grace in the same fashion as their parents, and hence they did not seek full membership in the churches. The problem became acute when these children began to marry and have children of their own. Under the Puritans' Reformed theology, converted people had the privilege of bringing their infant children to be baptized as a seal of god's covenant grace. Now, however, many of those who had been baptized as infants were not stepping forth on their own to confess Christ. Yet they wanted to have their children baptized. The Puritan dilemma was delicate: leaders wished to preserve the church for genuine believers, but they also wanted to keep as many people as possible under the influence of the church.<sup>7</sup>

Under the initial impulse to institute a pure church, the early New Englanders baptized children only if the parents were full communicant members of the church. But they soon faced a troubling question. What happened if those baptized children grew to adulthood but were never certifiably converted, even though they might be upstanding in other respects? Should the children of these half-way (baptized) church members be baptized? If God's covenant, as the Old Testament clearly said, extended to many generations, how could the grandchildren of the regenerate be denied the sacrament? After much debate, a synod of clergy declared in 1662 that children of half-way members could be baptized.<sup>8</sup>

The second and third generation saw a disquieting change of temper. The ideal of a church of the regenerate was faced with a condition of increasing indifference and the failure in many of evidence of conversion. A concession to this condition was made in the Half Way Covenant (1662), which without admitting the unregenerate to communion permitted the baptism of their children. The new plan called forth controversy but was at length generally adopted. It may have led to the weakening of the religious life that was characteristic of the early eighteenth century in New England as elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

Although infant baptism was not as much a matter of course in New England as in Anglican England, it was by now regarded



virtually as a right. For a respectable family to have unbaptized children or grandchildren would be a stigma.<sup>10</sup>

## II. Messy, messy, messy!

- a. **Non-believers as members of the church.**
- b. **Church “members” who were denied communion.**
- c. **Non-believers having their children baptized — when even proponents of child baptism based their support for it on the participation of their parents in the New Covenant.**

III. **The church, out of what was no doubt a well-intended zeal to evangelize the lukewarm populace of pew-sitters, winds up departing from God’s Word and eventually elevates the appeasement of non-believers over fidelity and obedience in serving God.**

IV. **The church becomes a “ritual service-station” for a secularized culture: an uncomfortable place nonbelievers occasionally endure in order that they or their offspring can be “sprinkled, married, and eventually buried.”**

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## The words of the Eunuch: *What hinders me from being baptized?*

### 1. A small step of obedience which can bring great blessings.

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[SpiritAndTruth.org](http://www.spiritandtruth.org) Scan Code<sup>c</sup>

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#### Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), (Acts:35-40)
2. Verse 37 is thought by some to be an later addition to the text. For example, the NAS places verse 37 in brackets and footnotes the verse indicating, “early manuscripts do not contain this verse.”
3. [Ref-1054](#), Rom. 6:3
4. [Ref-1330](#), Rom. 6:3
5. Compare with Ephesians [5:25-26](#).

6. [Ref-0185](#), Baptism
  7. [Ref-0958](#), 48
  8. [Ref-1348](#), 30.
  9. [Ref-1096](#), 341
  10. [Ref-1348](#), 355
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#### Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).
- Ref-0958** Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992). ISBN:[0-8028-0651-1](#)<sup>d</sup>.
- Ref-1054** Newell, *Romans Verse-by-Verse* (n.p.: Word Search Corporation, 2007).
- Ref-1096** John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967).
- Ref-1330** Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (n.p.: n.p., 1826).
- Ref-1348** George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). ISBN:[0-300-09693-3](#)<sup>e</sup>.
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#### Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/27\\_Acts\\_8\\_36-40/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/27_Acts_8_36-40/index.htm).
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-8028-0651-1>.
- e** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?0-300-09693-3>.