

Baptism in Water Cannot Save

1 Peter 3:20: Which sometime were disobedient (i.e., spirits of the lost who died in the flood, 4:6) when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, 8 souls were saved by water.

21: The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Now 1 Peter 3:21 *cannot* mean we are saved by the act of baptism in water for the following reasons:¹

1. That would make water the savior, instead of the Lord Jesus. However, He said, “I am the way” (John 14:6).
2. It would imply that Christ died in vain. If water can save people why did the Lord Jesus have to die?
3. Having already been water baptized, many have shown by their lives afterward that they were never truly born again (went in a dry sinner, came out a wet sinner).

Neither can this verse mean we are saved by *faith plus baptism*.

1. This would mean the Savior’s work on the cross was not sufficient. According to this view, when He cried, “It is finished,” it wasn’t really so – they insist that baptism must be added to the cross for salvation. Scripture proclaims Jesus as the Creator (John 1:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:16). Insisting that anything more must be added to Him and His finished work is heresy!
2. If baptism is necessary for salvation, it is strange that John 4:1-2 states the Lord did not personally baptize anyone. The actual baptizing was done by His disciples.
3. The Apostle Paul thanked God he baptized very few of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:14-17). This would be strange thanksgiving for an evangelist if baptism were essential for salvation! Furthermore, in verse 17 he adds that “Christ sent me not to baptize”. The fact that Paul did baptize some shows he taught believer’s baptism, but the fact that he baptized only a few shows he did not consider it a requirement for salvation.
4. The penitent thief on the cross was not baptized, yet he was assured of being in Paradise with the Lord Jesus on that very day (Luke 23:43).
5. The Gentiles who were saved in Caesarea received the Holy Spirit when they believed (Acts 10:44), showing they then were Christ’s (Rom. 8:9b). After receiving the Holy Spirit – *after* being born again – they were baptized (vv. 47, 48). Hence, baptism was not necessary for their salvation. They were saved first and then baptized in water.
6. In the NT, water baptism is always connected with death, burial, and resurrection, not with spiritual birth in this life.
7. There are about 150 passages in the NT which teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus – plus nothing. All these cannot be overturned by a mere two or three verses that *seemingly* teach baptism is necessary for salvation. Such advocates simply need to learn their true meaning.

¹ Adapted from *Believers Bible Commentary*, William MacDonald, (Thomas Nelson Pub., Inc., 1995) p. 2274