

Do I Need to be Rebaptized?

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"Mr. Wilson:

I was baptized when I was a baby. Do I need to be rebaptized?

Sincerely,

Brian"

"I was baptized when I was 12 and now I am 36. I drifted in and out of various churches until I was 30. My spiritual life today is much improved than when I was baptized. Should I be rebaptized?

Thanks,

Robert"

"I am fifty-one years old. I fell away from the Lord and lived an immoral life for about ten years. I have been attending church for the past three years. Should I be rebaptized?

Thank you,

Marion"

Dear Brian, Robert, and Marion:

Before I respond to your questions, please consider a little background information on baptism:

Because of a severe famine, Abraham's descendants moved into Egypt. After they relocated, the famine became so dire that everyone who lived in Egypt, including the Israelites, sold themselves to Pharaoh for food. (See Genesis 47) Over time, the Israelites became very important to the economy in Egypt.

They provided cheap labor for a succession of Pharaohs for hundreds of years. (I believe some of the pyramids are an enduring testimony of their bondage.) Their bondage and suffering appeared to be endless until the Lord sent Moses to deliver Israel out of Egypt.

As a precondition for deliverance, the Lord required the Israelites to show respect for His higher authority. He commanded the Israelites to rest from their labors on His holy Sabbath. This act of defiance (resting on Sabbath) put Pharaoh on notice that a rebellion had begun in Goshen, where the Israelites lived.

Pharaoh responded by promptly increasing their workload with unreasonable demands. I believe Pharaoh did this for two reasons: First, if slaves had time to rest from their labors, then their work quotas were obviously insufficient. Second, as a king, he could not tolerate rebellion

and still remain powerful in the eyes of his subjects.

Therefore, he asserted his authority by imposing great suffering on the Israelites. For economic, political, and spiritual reasons, Pharaoh could not afford to let his slaves obey any other god than himself. (The Egyptians revered the Pharaohs as descendants of the gods and naturally, the Pharaohs did everything possible to protect and perpetuate this spiritual status.)

"Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: 'Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, "Make bricks!" Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.' Pharaoh said, 'Lazy, that's what you are – lazy!

That is why you keep saying, "Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks." The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, 'You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.'

When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, 'May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" (Exodus 5:15-21)

God sent ten horrible plagues upon Egypt, and finally, Pharaoh finally allowed Israel to leave Egypt. No sooner had Israel departed than Pharaoh had a change of heart. He gathered up a huge army including 600 of his best chariots and all of the other chariots of Egypt. He chased after *his* slaves and found them near the Red Sea at Pi Hahrioth. When the Israelites saw Pharaoh and his mighty army approaching, they were overwhelmed with anxiety. They had no weapons or defense.

"They said to Moses, 'Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, "Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?" It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!' Moses answered the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.' " (Exodus 14:11-13)

Pharaoh would have immediately captured the Israelites, but the Lord who had been leading Israel in a cloud, moved from the front of the Israelite caravan to the rear of the camp. The Lord descended in a cloud of fire and darkness between the two groups.

Throughout the night, a dense darkness enveloped Pharaoh and his army, but at the same time, the cloud provided light for the camp of the Israelites. Shortly after sunset, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and a strong east wind blew the water apart so that dry ground appeared in the middle of the Red Sea.

"And [in the middle of the night] **the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.**" (Exodus 14:22, insertion mine)

A few hours before sunrise, the Egyptian army began to assemble for an attack on Israel, but the Lord threw the Egyptian army into confusion. The darkness was so dense they could not see one another or which way to go. As this was occurring, the last of the Israelites arrived on the other shore.

When the Lord lifted the darkness over Pharaoh, the king and his army saw an amazing sight. Pharaoh saw the Israelites standing on the other shore and the path through the sea was still open. Immediately, he sized up the situation and gave the order to charge. All of his soldiers raced into the sea without hesitation. When the entire army was in the sea, Moses stretched out his hand again and the waters flowed back. In a matter of moments, Pharaoh and all of his army, including his horses and chariots, disappeared.

Of course, the Israelites were overcome with joy and thanksgiving! A miracle had happened! This story reveals a few facts:

1. Pharaoh lost his firstborn son during the tenth plague. A few days later, in pursuit of his slaves, Pharaoh lost his army and his life. The leadership of Egypt was never heard from again. The nation had been decimated by ten horrible plagues and within a few days of letting the Israelites depart, Egypt did not have a king or an army because Egypt had defied the Lord of Hosts.
2. Although the Israelites were delighted to cross over the Red Sea on dry ground, the Red Sea became a physical barrier. There was no possibility of returning to Egypt; a point they would later lament.
3. Given the tensions of the moment, the Israelites did not realize they were heading into a giant hostile desert.
4. Over time, word spread throughout the surrounding nations that Israel was a special nation with a special God. The God of the Israelites was more powerful than any other god and this information kept tribal kings away from a helpless Israel while the Israelites remained in the desert.

You may be wondering by now, how this story relates to baptism. Everyone is born into slavery because of the curse of sin. We are born with a carnal nature and from time to time, this nature causes us to sin, that is, to do things that are foolish, wrong, and evil. God understands this, so the Holy Spirit is given as a gift to everyone at birth.

The Holy Spirit does His best to lead us into a submissive relationship with God, but many times, we act like Pharaoh. We refuse to do what the Lord wants, even when the evidences of His will are crystal clear. This may seem strange, but when a person becomes willing to do what the Lord wants, persecution always follows.

The Israelites were severely punished for resting from their labors on Sabbath, but they continued to obey the Lord until deliverance came. When the moment of deliverance finally came, they walked out of Egypt. When Pharaoh attempted to recapture his slaves, they walked

through the Red Sea. Because they followed the light and put their faith in the Lord, they remained free from slavery.

The parallel to this story is that when a person comes to a place in his life where he is willing to obey the authority of the Lord (faith means to go-be-do as God commands), persecution, grace, and deliverance will come. When a person experiences deliverance, he knows firsthand that he has a Savior.

After a person has such an experience with the Lord, he is qualified to make a public statement by baptism. A person who has experienced deliverance wants to inform the world that he has been set free from the curse of sin, left "the land of Egypt," buried the old man at sea, and entered "the land of Canaan" by God's grace.

No longer a slave to sin, he is a new creation! He has been set free through the power of Jesus! This is the idea behind the ordinance of baptism. Baptism is not a ritual that merits salvation. Baptism is an ordinance that indicates a transforming experience with Jesus has occurred and the new man wants to put the world on notice that he is not the same person any more.

Sometime after entering Canaan, the Jews adopted baptism as a ritual for citizenship. Whenever a Gentile wished to become a Jew, the Gentile had to undergo baptism. This ritual signified the death of the Gentile, his burial at sea, and the resurrection of that person as a Jew. (See how Paul uses this imagery in Romans 6:1-4.) Jesus referred to this ritual in His talk with Nicodemus:

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water [that is, willing to become a citizen of the kingdom] **and the Spirit** [that is, willing to receive the spiritual nature that is required in the kingdom of God]. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**" (John 3:5,6)

No born again person is perfect and it is impossible, as long as the carnal nature remains within us, to live without sinning. Of course, God knows this. A few hours before He went to the cross, Jesus initiated a special ordinance that few Christians really appreciate. This ordinance is foot washing.

"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.' 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' " (John 13:6-10)

As we travel the highway of life, the feet of born-again pilgrims become dirty with accumulated sins and a periodic "foot washing" is necessary to remove the sin. The foot washing ordinance (again, this is not a ritual that merits salvation) is a miniature baptism. The object lesson of this ordinance is that someone else (representing Jesus) does something for us (washes our feet) that we cannot do for ourselves (remove the guilt of our sins).

"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:14,15)

Unfortunately, most Christians ignore the foot washing part of the ordinance when partaking of the Lord's Supper. Many Christians waltz into church and partake of the bread and wine without realizing their desperate need to have their sins removed by Jesus (the foot washing). What is the point of partaking the Lord's Supper if we are unclean? Jesus said, **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."**

Now that some background has been presented, I can respond to your questions. Brian, if you have experienced "a total makeover," spiritually speaking, since becoming an adult and it is your desire to let everyone know that you have become a disciple of Jesus, I recommend that you be rebaptized.

Robert, if your "in and out" of church experience means that you abandoned the ways of the Lord and lived a sinful life, I recommend that you be rebaptized. On the other hand, if your "in and out of church" experience was largely that of dissatisfaction with various churches and you were continually searching for a more fulfilling experience while living in a way that was pleasing to the Lord, I think a good foot washing with the Lord's Supper will be sufficient. Either way, this is your call.

Finally, Marion, I am happy to learn that you are attending church. I hope and pray that you have found a new and wonderful experience in knowing Jesus. Given your brief comments about your past, I recommend that you be rebaptized also. Let your friends and family know that you wish to renounce your past. You have crossed through the Red Sea and with God's help, you will not be returning to the slavery to sin.

Larry Wilson