



---

Conducted by  
Frank Worgan

---

*"I have heard that there are many designs of baptism. What are they?"*

I wonder what the questioner means by the use of the phrase, 'many designs of baptism'? It is the use of that word 'designs', which is intriguing. Is this a question about the many 'purposes' of baptism? Or are we being reminded of the fact that there are certain religious bodies which claim that there are many 'modes' of baptism, and who say that the act of baptising may be carried out in various ways, including the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of the one coming to baptism? We need to clarify this particular point before we proceed any farther.

### MODES OF BAPTISM

First; the assertion that there are many *modes* of baptism is quite erroneous because the word, '*baptizo*,' 'to baptise,' which occurs 76 times in the Greek New Testament, has to do, without exception, with an immersion in, and an emergence from something. In other words, with the act of 'dipping.'

The practice of 'sprinkling' comes from a quite different Greek word. It is the word '*rhantizo*,' 'to sprinkle,' which is found just 4 times in the New Testament scriptures, in a cluster of verses in **Hebrews, chapters 9 and 10.**

The word 'pouring' is derived from the word '*ekcheo*,' which means 'to pour out.' In the form of '*ekcheuno*,' it occurs in Acts 10:45, where it describes the '*pouring out*' of the Holy Spirit in the house of Cornelius, and, in the form of '*katacheo*,' in Matt. 26:7 and Mark 14:3 it describes how the Lord Jesus was anointed by the woman with the alabaster flask of ointment, which was '*poured upon*' His head. None of these words is ever used with reference to believer's baptism, nor have they the significance of baptism.

The conclusion is obvious. There is no linguistic authority for regarding either sprinkling or pouring as the baptism about which we read in the New Testament.

Without entering into a prolonged discussion of the origin and spread of the substitution of sprinkling or pouring for true baptism, it deserves to be said that both practices were quite unknown to the early Church. They were declared to be '*alternative modes*' for baptism by the Council of Ravenna in the year 1311, and neither was normally practised in this country until after the Reformation.

In 1556 a book recording John Calvin's approval of 'infant sprinkling' was published in Geneva. It authorised the priest to '*take water in his hand and lay it upon the child's forehead*,' and 'Protestants' who had fled to Geneva to escape the persecution instigated by Queen Mary, carried this practice back to Scotland in 1559. It soon found its way down to England during the reign of Elizabeth the First - (who, it might be noted, was herself immersed) - but it was not until 1643 that the Westminster Assembly, after prolonged debate, decided on the strength of the casting vote of Archbishop Lightfoot who presided over the Assembly, to admit sprinkling as a form of baptism.

It is important to understand that biblical scholars have never denied that immersion

is true New Testament baptism. What these churches did was to introduce sprinkling and pouring as '*permissible alternatives*,' but it is an acknowledged fact that all biblical scholars agree that the baptism practised by the early Church was, without exception, immersion in water. I suggest that preachers and teachers of the Word should be very careful to avoid the use of the word 'mode' when speaking about baptism and should rather speak of the '*action*' of baptism.

### VARIOUS BAPTISMS

Let us bear in mind that the word 'baptism' only describes the action. It does not define the '*design*,' or '*purpose*' of the action. This must be determined by the context in which the word is used.

1) Hence we find reference to '*the baptism of John*' Matt. 21:25. This was, of course, the baptism carried out by John the Baptist, and in Matt. 3:7, it is even referred to as '*his baptism*.' This was a baptism declaring repentance, with a view to receiving the forgiveness of sins at the coming of the Messiah whose approach John was proclaiming. Mark 1:4, and Luke 3:3-6. This baptism ceased to be valid when the Christian age began and baptism was performed 'in the name of Jesus Christ.' Act 19:1-5.

2) In Luke 12:50, the Lord Jesus Himself says, "*I have a baptism to be baptised with*," and Mark 10:38 reveals that He was speaking about His forthcoming death, which might be called His '*baptism of sorrow*.'

3) There is also the '*baptism with (in) the Holy Spirit*,' which Jesus promised His apostles, Acts 1:5, and which they received on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:1-4.

4) The same word - '*baptismo*' - is used to describe '*the washing of cups*' and other objects, by the Pharisees in their effort to avoid ceremonial defilement.

5) In 1 Cor. 10:1-2, Paul describes the experience of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. He states that, under the cloud which overshadowed them and passing through the sea, they were '*baptised unto Moses*,' He is referring to the fact that, in this figurative and symbolic 'baptism,' the people identified themselves with Moses, God's appointed representative and accepted his leadership.

6) Paul also wrote to the Corinthians in Cor. 15:29, about certain people whom he describes as being '*baptised for the dead*.' We must leave a full discussion of this phrase for another time, but regardless of what 'Mormons' may claim, it does not refer to a special kind of baptism, but to the fact there were people at Corinth who were denying the possibility of resurrection - (thus, denying the resurrection of Christ Himself). Their baptism, therefore, was a '*baptism on behalf of a dead Christ*.'

7) In Heb. 6:2, the writer uses the phrase '*the doctrine of baptisms*,' again using the word '*baptismos*,' where it has to do with the various 'washings' by means of which both people and objects were cleansed.

8) *The baptism which concerns us*, however, is that to which Paul refers in Eph. 4:4-6, where he states that there is '*one baptism*.' This immersion in water upon the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, in accordance with the command of the Lord Jesus Himself in Matt. 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16.

### THE 'DESIGN' - (PURPOSE) - OF BAPTISM

Baptism has, indeed, as the question states, 'many designs.' Among the reasons for submitting to this command of the Lord we may mention the following.

1. To be identified with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Rom. 6:3-5.
2. To receive the remission of sins. Acts 2:28.
3. To be saved. Mark 16:16.
4. To be born anew. John 3:5.
5. To be added to the Body of Christ, the Church. 1 Cor. 12:13.
6. To 'put on Christ.' Gal. 3:27.
7. To receive 'the gift' - 'dorea' - free gift of the Holy Spirit.

How sad it is, then, that people who make so much of the sprinkling of water on the head of a helpless, spiritually unconscious infant, fail to understand the real beauty and significance of the ordinance, which the Lord Jesus Himself commands!

*(Questions please, to Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way,  
Houston, Renfrewshire. Scotland. PA6 7NZ.)*