

Baptism: Root Meaning



Foundations (Day 114)
by Derek Prince

We are working our way systematically through the six great foundation doctrines of the Christian faith as stated in Hebrews 6:1-2. The six doctrines listed there as the foundation of the doctrine of Christ are as follows:

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward God
3. The doctrine of baptisms
4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgement

In Part 2 we examined the first two of these six doctrines, repentance from dead works and faith toward God – or, more simply, repentance and faith. Now we shall move on to the third of these great foundation doctrines, the doctrine of baptisms.

The logical way to begin this study is to discover, if possible, the correct, original meaning of the word baptism – or, more accurately, of the verb phrase "to baptise," from which the noun baptism is formed.

Upon examination, this word baptise proves to be a most unusual word. Actually it is not an English word at all. It is a Greek word, transliterated into letters of the English alphabet. If we write out the original Greek word in English letters, as accurately as it is possible to do, this gives us baptizo. Then, with the change of the final o to an e, we have the word in the form which has now become familiar – baptize– though we will use the British form baptise.

At this point someone may reasonably ask: Why was this particular word never translated? Why was it simply written over from Greek to English letters? Was it because the correct meaning of the original Greek word was not known, and therefore the translators did not know by what English word to translate it? No, this is definitely not the explanation. As we shall see in due course, the Greek word baptizo has a definite and well-established meaning.

By far the best known and most influential of all the English translations of the Bible is the King James Version – the

Copyright © Derek Prince Ministries

version which was translated and published through the authority of King James of Britain in the early years of the seventeenth century. It is through this translation that the word baptise has gained a place in the English language. Through this King James Version the word baptise has been carried over into the majority of all subsequent English versions of the Bible, as well as into a great many translations of the Bible into the languages of the world. Yet this word baptise, both in its origin and in its form, is in fact completely alien to almost all those languages.

How did this unusual and unnatural form first find its way into the King James Version of the Bible? The answer lies in the fact that King James, though holding political power as an absolute monarch, was answerable in matters of religion to the bishops of the established Church of England. Now the relationship between James and his bishops was not always too cordial, and James did not wish the new translation of the Bible, published in his name and with his authority, to make his relationship with his bishops any worse.

For this reason he allowed it to be understood that, so far as possible, nothing was to be introduced into the translation which would cause unnecessary offence to the bishops or which would be too obviously contrary to the practices of the established church. Hence, the Greek word baptizo, which could easily have become, in translation, a source of controversy, was never translated at all, but was simply written over directly into the English language.

Devotional

Transcript: WD-B052-114-ENG
Last Updated: 03 Feb 2025
Website: derekprince.com

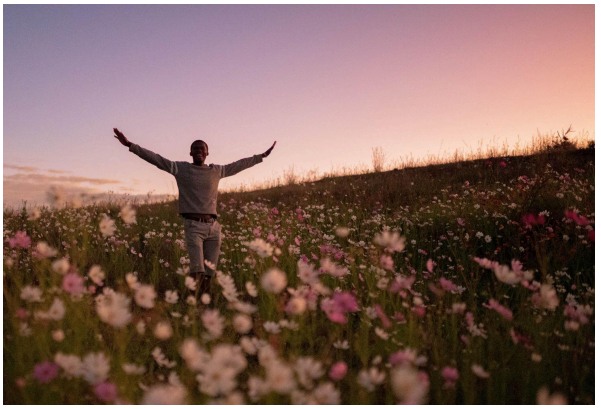


Bible Teaching Resources



Books

Illuminate and expand your understanding of the Bible with the Derek Prince collection of Christian books.



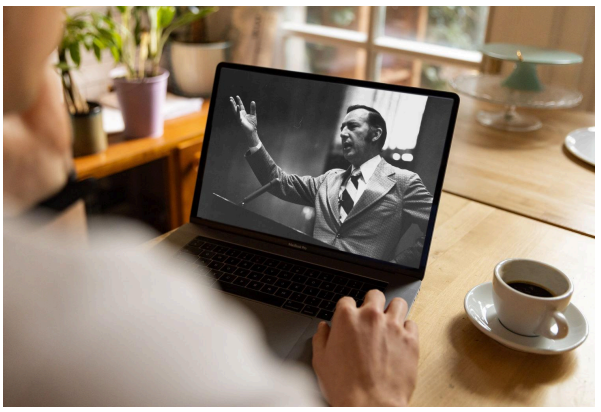
Daily Devotionals

Browse free biblically inspired daily devotionals by Derek Prince for practical teachings to uplift your Christian faith.



Legacy Radio

Listen to inspiring 10-minute messages and connect faith to life with the Derek Prince Legacy Radio podcast.



Sermons

Watch original and digitally remastered sermons by Derek Prince. Includes full message transcripts (free download).



Official App

Available free, download the official Derek Prince Ministries app and equip your faith, anywhere, anytime.



Proclamations

Declare life and experience the transformative power of God's Word with our Bible-based Proclamations.

Copyright © Derek Prince Ministries