

How Much Instruction Before Baptism?



Foundations (Day 126)
by Derek Prince

Although it is necessary to emphasise the conditions for Christian baptism, we must also be careful to guard against an overemphasis on the need for teaching, which leads to unscriptural results. In some places – particularly in certain foreign mission fields – it is common to insist that all those who present themselves for baptism are first subjected to a prolonged period of instruction, extending over weeks or months, before they are accepted for baptism. This practice is traced back to the words of Christ in Matthew 28:19-20.

> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising 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."

This emphasis on preliminary teaching is partly due to the fact that in the 1611 King James Version Christ's words are translated: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." However, the modern version, "Go ... and make disciples" is more accurate.

Let it be granted, however, that those desiring to be baptised must first be taught. The question is, How long does this preliminary process of teaching need to take? Should the time required be measured in months, in weeks, in days or in hours?

The events of the day of Pentecost concluded this way:

> "Then those who gladly received his [Peter's] word were baptised; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." (Acts 2:41)

The three thousand people whose baptism is here recorded had, a few hours earlier, been open unbelievers who rejected the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be either the Messiah of Israel or the Son of God. From the end of Peter's sermon to the moment of their being baptised, the time required by the apostles to give them the necessary instruction could not have exceeded a few hours.

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Let us see how this corresponds with the response of the people of Samaria to the preaching of Philip.

> "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptised." (Acts 8:12)

No exact period of time for instruction is specified. As on the day of Pentecost, it could have been just a few hours. Certainly it could not have exceeded a few days, or a week or two at the very most.

Devotional

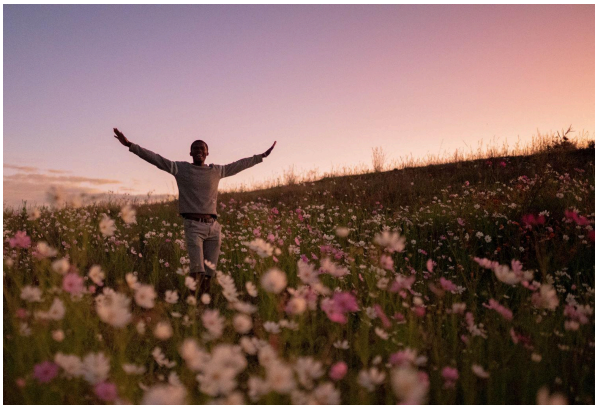
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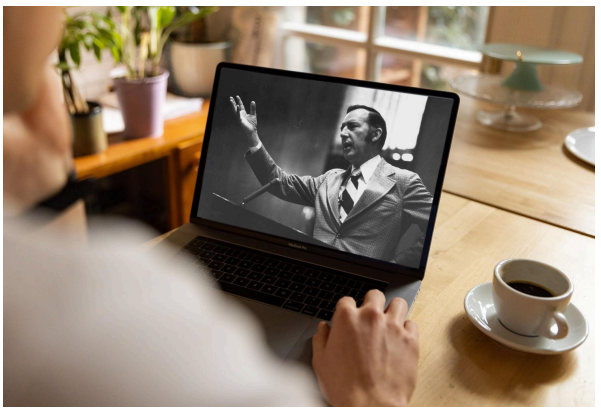
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