

A CHALLENGE TO BAPTISM IN THE GREAT COMMISSION BEING WATER BAPTISM

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A writer from Connecticut who is not a member of the church responded to the article, “Add Thou Not unto His Words,” in which proof was given of the well-known Baptist preacher Adrian Rogers preaching out of the *Baptist Manual* instead of the Bible. The writer set out to prove that since *nations* were to be baptized, then the element in which they were to be baptized could not be water. He wrote, “It is impossible to baptize (or to immerse, or to dip, or to cleanse, or to wash) nations *with water*, this baptizing cannot be understood as a reference to baptism with water.” After a discussion of the Greek grammar of Matthew’s account of the Great Commission, he asks which of the KJV, “...*teach* all nations, baptizing them...” or the ASV, “...*make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them...” is guilty of “adding unto his words”? The answer in short is “neither.”

The Greek verb supporting the translations given above is *matheteusate*, which according to the lexicon of Arndt and Gingrich means “*make a disciple of, teach (tina) someone Mt 28:19*” (p. 486). The noun form of the word means “*learner, pupil, disciple*” (*ibid.*). Therefore, neither English translation is wrong or “adding unto his words.” Both renderings, the KJV and ASV, correctly translate the passage. It is the effort to set aside water from the baptism of the Great Commission that is the problem.

The assumed premise of the questioner, “It is impossible to baptize...nations *with water*” simply cannot be sustained. Concerning Jacob, “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins” (Gen. 35:11). In the singular and plural Jacob’s descendents were referred to as “nation” and “nations.” Upon their release from Egyptian bondage how many of the fathers were baptized in water? Paul wrote, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10:1-4). The waters were a wall on their right hand and on their left, and the cloud covered them (Exod. 14:22; I Cor. 10:1-2). How many of the nation of Israel were baptized? Five times Paul answers, “All.”

All disputation is laid to rest about who is to be baptized, whether “nations” or “individuals,” by comparing the parallel text of Mark 16:15-16, which reads, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” The gospel is to be preached to “every creature.” How are the “nations” to be baptized? One at a time—“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

The first recorded gospel sermon was given on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ. It was preached to “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Toward the conclusion of the sermon Luke recorded, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Who out of all the nation of the Jews was baptized? Luke answers, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The baptism of the Great Commission is water baptism because the same speaker wrote, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 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” (I Pet. 3:21).

Additionally, when the Gentiles were brought into the body of Christ they were added at the point of water baptism. Peter questioned, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:47-48). Incidentally, the word translated “Gentiles” in Acts 10:45 is the same word translated “nations” in Matthew 28:19.

Now, knowing this, how can any conscientious person stand with Rogers and the Baptists who preach, “Baptism isn’t necessary for salvation”? Disciples are made by baptizing them. If a disciple is a learner or follower, and Jesus said go...teach...baptize, that is what a disciple will do; otherwise, he is not a disciple.

There are more reasons to believe water is the element of the baptism of the Great Commission, but the ones studied here answer the letter from Connecticut.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18-20).