

# 1 Peter 3:21

by Danny Brown

*"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." (1 Peter 3:21, KJV)*

This statement is found in the following passage: *"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: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him."* (1 Peter 3:20-22)

Peter had been discussing the matter of suffering. Should one suffer for well doing or for evil doing? Peter used the example of Christ as one who suffered for well doing. He suffered crucifixion for sins once, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He used the antediluvians as an example of suffering for evil doing. The thoughts and intents of their hearts were evil and that continually. Christ, in the spirit, preached to them through Noah, a preacher of righteousness, but they refused to hear and were disobedient. In the flood, they suffered the loss of all their earthly possessions and also their lives. Upon death they're suffering continued for they entered the Hadean world into a place of torment with nothing to look forward to but the judgment and the lake of fire to follow. Peter concluded his discussion by speaking of the ark "wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." (1 Peter 3:20) The salvation here referred to is, physical salvation, that is, they were saved from the corruption and degradation of the antediluvian world by the waters of the flood in which all the other beings were destroyed. Noah and his family were transported by the waters of the flood, to a new world and a new life.

God is as concerned about man's spiritual well being as He was about Noah's physical salvation, if not more so. The scheme of redemption is the grandest system ever devised by God for man. It includes the planning and efforts of God from the time man first sinned: the sacrifice of Christ, the revelation of the will of God by the Holy Spirit, the change of man's heart, a knowledge of the truth, faith, repentance, confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and Peter reveals that baptism is also included in God's plan for man. However, the purpose of baptism is not without controversy. Since the early centuries baptism has been studied, discussed, argued about and fought over. Some say it is a time of dedication of infants, some say it is an outward sign of an inward grace, that is, it is just a symbol of the salvation already received, some say that

whenever salvation occurs, baptism is only a figure and not a procurer of it, some say it is the entrance into their denominational fellowship. On the other hand the Bible says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved:" (Mark 16:16) "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," (Acts 2:38) "and now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16) The apostle Peter, who was guided into all truth (John 16:13), says, "Baptism doth also now save us." (1 Pet 3:21)

## **Type and Antitype**

The statement under consideration is "*the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us.*" The Greek word here translated figure is antitupon and is found in the New Testament only here and in Hebrews 9:24.

"A Type is a shadow cast on the pages of OT history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the NT revelation." (Baker Dictionary of Theology, pg. 533)

"The word type occurs frequently in the New Testament, and under very different meanings. In its original and primary meaning, it properly signifies the mark or impression made by one thing upon another; and sometimes, in a more lax sense, that general likeness or resemblance, which one thing may bear to another. See John 20:25; Acts 7:43; 23:25. But the term is usually employed to denote a prefigurative action or occurrence, in which one event, person, or circumstance, is intended to represent another similar to it in certain respects, but future and distant." (W Carpenter, Popular Lectures, Pg. 342)

"In the N. T. language antitupon as a subst. means **1.** a thing formed after some pattern Heb ix 24 (R, V. like in pattern). **2.** A thing resembling another; its counterpart; something in the Messianic times which answers to the type (see tupos) prefiguring it in the O. T. . . . as baptism corresponds to the deluge: 1 Pet iii. 21 (R. V. txt. After a true likeness). (J. H. Thayer, pg. 51)

An example of "type and antitype" is found in Numbers 21, at which time the children of Israel spoke against God and Moses because of the difficulties of the journey. Because of this God sent fiery serpents among the people. Upon Israel's confession of sins, Moses was told: "Make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." (Num 21:8) In His day Jesus said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

(John 3:14-15) Jesus observed the connection between the lifting up of the fiery serpent that healed the stricken obedient Israelites and the spiritual healing (salvation) that would come to lost mankind when He was lifted up on the cross and when obedient sinners would comply with His plan for redemption. 1. The event in Numbers was the type, form, figure to which reference was made. 2. The lifting up of the lord on the Cross was what was like the former event, the figure corresponding to the lifting up of the fiery serpents, the antitype. 3. As here, the antitype is always superior to the type.

“ . . . 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 . . .” (1 Pet 3:20-21) The antecedent of “the like figure” is clearly not the ark, but water; and the idea is, that as Noah was saved by water, so there is a sense in which water baptism is made instrumental in our salvation. Baptism corresponded to the water by which Noah was saved; or that there was a use of water in the one case which corresponded in some respects to the water that was used in the other; that is, in effecting salvation. The apostle does not say that it corresponded in all respects, such as, to quantity, or to the manner of application, or to efficacy; but there is a sense in which water performs an important part in our salvation, as it did in Noah’s.

The Type: “ . . . the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” (1 Peter 3:20)

### **NOAH AND HIS FAMILIES’ SALVATION BY WATER**

**OLD  
WORLD**

**Water of Flood  
  
Eight Souls  
Saved by Water**

**NEW  
WORLD**

Water drew the line of separation between the old world and the new. 1. The water of the flood bore up the ark and delivered eight souls from corruption of the antediluvian world. 2. The water of the flood saved Noah and his family. 3. The flood destroyed the old world and brought Noah, his wife, his 3 sons and their wives to a new existence and to a new covenant with God.

The **Antitype:** *“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us”*

## OUR SALVATION BY WATER

**OLD  
MAN**

**Baptism**

**NEW  
MAN**

**Baptism doth also  
NOW save us**

Baptism, like the water of the flood, is the line of separation between the old and the new.

1. Baptism puts one into Christ (Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27) wherein there is no condemnation. (Romans 8:1) Thus by baptism one is delivered (forgiven) from the corruption (sins) of the old man.

2. As Peter said, "*baptism doth also NOW save us.*" It is the line of demarcation between the saved and the lost.

3. In baptism we are born again. (Jno 3:5) We enter into Christ (Rom 6:4) wherein we become a new creature, old things having passed away. (2 Cor 5:17) Thus baptism brings us into a new relationship to God through Jesus Christ, sins have been forgiven, now we have been raised to "walk in newness of life." (Rom 6:4)

Several translations confirm the above.

"after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism" (ASV)

"Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you" (RSV)

"There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism," (NKJV)

"And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you," (NASV)

"Baptism, the counterpart of that, saves you today," (Moffatt)

"Baptism, which corresponds to it, now saves you also"  
(Goodspeed)

"Now immersion which is a fulfillment of that type, now saves you" (Estes)

### **An Attempt at Evasion**

The attempt has been made to evade the force of our text, "baptism doth also now save us," by asserting that baptism is a figure or symbol of salvation and not the procurer of it. The argument goes something like this: Baptism has nothing to do with our salvation. Rather baptism is just a figure, emblem or symbol of salvation already received. Baptism figuratively reflects and recalls for the one being baptized the fact of his prior salvation.

"The saving by baptism which Peter here mentions is **only symbolic** (a metaphor or picture as in Ro 6:2-6), not actual as Peter

hastens to explain.” (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1 Pet 3:21.) (emphasis mine, DB)

“Doth also now save us. The water saved Noah and his family from perishing in the flood; to wit, by bearing up the ark. Baptism, in the proper sense of the term . . . in like manner now saves us; that is, the water is an **emblem of that purifying by which we are saved.** It may be said to save us, not as the meritorious cause, but as the indispensable condition of salvation. No man can be saved without that regenerated and purified heart of which baptism is the appropriate symbol, and when it would be proper to administer that ordinance. The apostle cannot have meant that water saves us in the same way in which it saved Noah, for that cannot be true. It is neither the same in quantity, nor is it applied in the same way, nor is it efficacious in the same manner. It is indeed connected with our salvation in its own proper way, as an **emblem of that purifying of the heart by which we are saved.**” (Albert Barnes, 1 Cor 3:21) (Emphasis mine, DAB)

James Cope had this to say about this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:21.

“1. The temporal rock in 1 Cor. 10:1,2 is made a figure of Christ. Does that make Christ figurative?

“2. ‘Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figure of the true; but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us.’ Heb 9:24. Does the tabernacle’s being a figure of spiritual matters – The Most Holy Place a figure of heaven – make heaven figurative?

“3. When Abraham offered Isaac and accounted that ‘God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure’ (Heb 11:19), does such mean that he thought God really would not raise up Isaac but that his resurrection would be only a figurative affair?

“4. This passage, therefore, cannot be disposed of by saying ‘It is just a figure.’

“5. The salvation is actual as certain as the resurrection of Christ is actual for the text says ‘by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.’

“6. The inspired comparison shows the connection baptism has with salvation:

- 1) God used water to deliver Noah

2) God used water – baptism – to save us.” (James Cope, Debate Notes IV, pg 5)

The conclusion of the inspired apostle Peter is unmistakable. “Baptism doth also now save us.” This salvation is not figurative, symbolic or an emblem, but is actual. If it does not save us from sin, from what does it save us? It does not save us from temporal punishment – such as, persecution, insult, hunger, sickness, death, etc. for the baptized man is just as subject to these as the unbaptized. Nor does it save from the filth of the flesh, for Peter plainly said it was “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Obviously, baptism saves from sin.

Any explanation of the passage that makes Peter say that baptism does not save us is not an explanation, but a contradiction. Previous to baptism, the salvation mentioned in this text does not exist since it is baptism that “NOW saves us.” Subsequent to baptism, the salvation promised does exist – for “baptism doth NOW save us.” Without baptism, the salvation mentioned by Peter cannot exist since the passage makes it depend on baptism.

The compelling truth is that baptism saves, not as a symbol, not as an emblem, not in a figure and not in a picture. The inescapable truth is that baptism saves us.

### **Which?**

Below two statements are listed. Here are two questions to be considered with reference to these statements. Which of the two statements did the inspired apostle Peter write? Which of the two statements do you believe?

1. Baptism doth also not save us.
2. Baptism doth also now save us.

### **Synecdoche**

Synecdoche is defined as: The figure of speech that in which a part is put for the whole, the whole is put for a part, the plural is put for the singular, the singular is put for the plural, a definite number is put for an indefinite number.

In 1 Pet 3:21 “*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us,*” one condition of salvation is put for all the conditions necessary to salvation. The only condition mentioned is baptism. Faith (Heb 11:6; John 20:30-31), Repentance (Acts 17:30-31) and Confession that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (Rom 10:9, 10) are also necessary conditions of salvation. It should be obvious that baptism alone, like faith alone, does not

save. However, in this passage, "baptism" stands for all the parts necessary to salvation, a part put for the whole, a synecdoche.

## **Conscience**

Conscience is defined as the "moral faculty, which judges between right and wrong." (Smith Bible Dictionary) The standard of right and wrong is determined by what we believe. Thus when we do that which we believe to be right the conscience approves. On the other hand when we do that which we believe to be wrong our conscience disapproves and usually bothers us.

Peter said, "*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).*" The word translated "answer" is sometimes translated "Interrogation" or "inquiry." Thus baptism becomes an act through which an individual seeks to manifest a good conscience. When one comes to understand and believe the Bible to teach that baptism is necessary as a condition of salvation from such passages as Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; etc. He now believes that baptism is necessary "for the remission of sins." If he is baptized, his conscience approves, for he is doing that which he believes to be right, he has a good conscience. If he is not baptized, his conscience disapproves for he is disobedient to God and is acting contrary to what he believes to be right.

## **Efficacy**

No one that I know teaches that the water of baptism has the power to remit sins. Just like the Jordan River had no power to cleanse leprosy. However when Naaman dipped seven times in the Jordan River at the command of God he was cleansed of his leprosy. It was his obedience to the command of God in fulfilling the conditions God established. Likewise, today when we obey the commands of God and are baptized for the remission of sins, our sins are forgiven and we are saved.

Peter said, "*baptism doth also now save us . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:*" We are saved by the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7), but the blood of Christ would have no efficacy (power) if Jesus had not been raised. (1 Cor 15:14-19)

Notice the chart below. On the one hand we have the scriptures detailing what the blood of Christ does for us. On the other hand we have the scriptures detailing what baptism does for us. In the middle are the things done for us listed. Notice that the blood of Christ does for us the same things that baptism does.

WHAT		WHEN
Blood of Christ		Baptism
Rev 1:5	Wash Away Sins	Acts 22:16
John 19:34	Death of Christ	Rom 6:3
Heb 9:22	Rem. Of Sins	Acts 2:38
Heb 9:14	Good Conscience	1 Pet 3:21
Eph 2:13	Into Christ	Gal 3:27
Eph 1:7	Redeemed	Eph 1:7
Heb 12:13	Sanctified	1 Cor 6:11

The blood of Christ washes away sins (Rev 1:5); Jesus shed his blood in his death (John 19:34); His blood made remission of sins possible (Heb 9:22); by his blood we can have a good conscience (Heb 9:14); in Christ we are made nigh by his blood (Eph 2:13); in Christ we are redeemed by His blood (Eph 1:7) and by his blood we are sanctified (Heb 12:13). Likewise baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16); we are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3); baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38); baptism is the answer of a good conscience (1 Peter 3:21); baptism put us into Christ (Gal 3:27); we are redeemed when we are baptized into Christ (Eph 1:7) and sanctified by being baptized.

It is the blood of Christ that actually affects the things under consideration, but it is when one is baptized that these blessings are realized. What accomplishes these blessing? – the Blood of Christ. When do I receive the benefits? – When I am baptized into Christ where are all spiritual blessings. (Eph 1:3)