

Biblical Baptism Ceremony

NOTE: The biblical word for baptism referred to any ceremonial washing and means plunging, dipping or immersing with the result of complete coverage. Ritual immersion had to take place in a pool (Heb. *mikveh*) with water from a fresh water source and deep enough to submerge oneself by squatting. Ritual washings were also gender-specific: men and woman did not immerse together or in the same place. No one was allowed to touch the one immersing. The Jewish apostles would have followed this custom for the immersion of new disciples. The following ceremony is constructed on this concept.

Preparation - Candidate

There are three steps for the candidate to prepare for immersion:

1. Reflect on your immersion. Take a minute and think about the life transition that immersion in the Messiah will help you mark. Immersion represents a spiritual transformation from one state to another. Prepare yourself by writing in a journal, or saying a personal prayer, or reading something of meaning to you.

2. Prepare the body. Empty your bladder. Shower or bathe, paying attention to every part of your body. Wash yourself thoroughly head to toe and shampoo your hair. Remove any calluses or dead skin. Clean under your nails -- toenails, too. (Nails do not need to be cut.) Comb through your hair. Clean your ears, blow your nose, brush and floss your teeth, rinse your mouth.

3. Simplify your immersion appearance. Remove all regular clothing, eyeglasses, contact lenses, dental plates, hearing aids, makeup, nail polish, jewelry, watches, etc. Wear only such covering as modesty dictates. Each person enters the water without rank or status. Simply a child of God.

The candidate may enlist the aid of a friend to inspect him prior to the immersion to ensure that preparation is complete.

When you enter the water do not rush. Walk slowly. Relax into the embrace of the water, into whatever the next moment may hold for you.

Ceremony Introduction - Leader

The leader invites the candidate to enter the water. (Use a natural water source, if possible, such as a stream, pond or lake.)

"Because this is a Biblical rite, we can draw certain conclusions from this experience. First, based on the practice of immersion in the Bible, the one being immersed is not assisted in the rite, but immerses himself in the water as Yeshua did. I will serve as a witness to make sure that all the hair and body parts go completely under.

Second, it is normal to undergo ritual immersion to reflect a change in one's life. "Psalm 24:3 and 4 says, "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD ? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." In the ceremony, no attempt is made to wash the hands with soap, because the purpose is to show the clean or innocent state of the hands. Washing the hands do not make one innocent. This is confirmed by Yeshua's words when the Pharisees enquired why his disciples did not wash their hands before eating. 'It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man but what proceeds out of the heart.' Immersion, then, is a testimony of a heart condition, not the means of creating the heart condition.

Third, this immersion is different from every other ritual washing described in Scripture, because it symbolizes the death and resurrection of our Lord and Messiah Yeshua and our union in him. That is why Scripture says there is "one Lord, one faith and one immersion." Immersion is

Biblical Baptism Ceremony

not only our testimony of a changed life but a pledge to die to self and live for Yeshua in the blessed hope of joining him in resurrection on the last day.

Before we go into the water I'd like to ask [name of candidate] to give us his testimony of how he came to faith in Yeshua."

Testimony - Candidate

Candidate gives his testimony while standing in the water.

Bread Ceremony (Optional)

Leader: Hear the promise of Micah, "You will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."
(Mic 7:19)

Members of the group cast pieces of bread into the water to act out the promise of forgiveness as promised by Micah. (This ceremony is best conducted at a natural water source.)

First Blessing

Leader: "Blessed are You, O Lord, our Father, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us regarding immersion."

First submersion. The candidate lowers himself completely under water and then stands up.

Second Blessing

Leader: "Blessed are You, O Yeshua, our Lord and Messiah, who has saved us by means of Your atoning sacrifice."

Second submersion. The candidate lowers himself under water for the second time and stands up.

Third Blessing

Leader: "Blessed are you, O Holy Spirit, for the cleansing of our hearts and the creation of a new life."

Third submersion. The candidate lowers himself under water for the third time and stands up.

Celebration

The leader and candidate exit the water. (Provision needs to be made for towels and a private place to dry and change clothes.)

The group now sings a hymn of praise for the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

A party could be planned to share the joy of immersion.