

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

TITLE: “BAPTISM IN THE NAME OF JESUS” IN THE BOOK OF ACTS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

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The aim of this study is to evaluate the teaching of “Oneness or “Jesus’s name alone,” theology in relation to the rite of baptism. Christian baptism is deeply rooted in that Christ commanded it to be practiced (Matt 28:19). This study seeks to show that Luke in the book of Acts is not giving Christians a new “formula” for baptism in his thematic phrase "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" but he is presenting a contextual response of Peter. The study also shows that an appreciation of the context of the book of Acts, particularly 2:38, will help the readers to embrace the triadic “formula” embedded in the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19. Hence the study seeks to point out the meaning of baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts and to some extent pursues the significance of baptism in triadic formula.

Chapter 1 reveals that baptism is an important rite which most Christians practice. The chapter also shows that there are differing views when it comes to the doctrine of Baptism. Amongst many differing views; the issue of some calling it a sacrament yet others see it as an ordinance is one of them.

Chapter 2 explores the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus by analyzing the antecedents to baptism in the OT and NT backgrounds. The study also analyses the historical theology of baptism, the practice and the “formula” throughout the different periods in history. The chapter shows that baptism in the name of Jesus was practiced during the apostolic era and later in the successive years it was administered in the triune formula with variations of either once or triple immersion.

An exegetical-theological analysis of Acts 2:38 in chapter 3 shows that baptism in the name of Jesus is not a new formula for baptism but a contextual statement of conviction of belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The chapter further reveals that “baptism in the name of Jesus” in the book of Acts played a pivotal role in buttressing the role of Jesus both as the Messiah and the savior of the world to Peter’s audience.

Chapter 4 concludes and points out that baptism in triune God is very necessary in the life of Christian convert because it helps an individual firstly, to appreciate the unity of the Godhead in the salvation on mankind, secondly to appreciate the fact that one is being subjected under the authority of the entire Godhead. It further concludes and shows that baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts should be interpreted contextually. The chapter recommends and affirms to the Christian world to continue baptizing in triune formula because that’s what was commanded by Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19).

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A thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of the degree

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by

Khonzile Khumalo

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Dedicated to

My Lord and Redeemer

My beautiful wife and friend Gracious Mzizi

My firstborn son Khanyiso Khumalo

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GNT	Greek New Testament
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NPNF	Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SDABC	SDA Bible Commentary
SDAE	SDA Encyclopedia
SDABD	SDA Bible Dictionary

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The foundation of Christian Baptism is deeply rooted in the very fact that Jesus himself was baptized by John in the river Jordan (Matt 3:15, 16). Ellen G White contends and says “the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper are two monumental pillars, one within and one without the church. Upon these ordinances Christ has inscribed the name of the true God.”¹ Not only his act of baptism that we find the roots of Christian Baptism, but also his command to his disciples gives Christians a reason to preach and practice it (Matt 28:19).² Millard Erickson expands: Christ commanded the act of baptism (Matt 28:19-20). Since it was ordained by him, it is properly understood as an ordinance rather than a sacrament. It does not produce any spiritual change in the one baptized. Thus, it conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing. In particular, we are not regenerated through baptism, for baptism

¹ Ellen G White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1946), 273.

² All Bible References are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), unless otherwise stated.

presupposes faith and the salvation to which faith leads. It is, then, a public testimony that one has already been regenerated.³

According to Alton Bryant, John's baptism has its roots from the baptism of the Jews which is found in the Mosaic laws of purification and washing of the proselytes— "the proselyte baptism"⁴ (Exod 30:17-21; Lev 11:25). Thus, John's baptism was connected with repentance hence he insisted that Jews need to repent, be baptized and be spiritually prepared for the Messiah who was to come. Out from this background John the Baptist made a declaration for the baptism which Christ was to initiate after his own baptism—the Christian baptism which symbolizes a union with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5) and becoming part of Christ' body (1 Cor 12:13). The necessity of Christian Baptism is further alluded to in Mark's gospel (Mark 16:16). Most Christian groups with varying ways do practice Christian Baptism and admit that it is one of the important rites in Christendom. However throughout Christian history there have been some differences in the manner in which this rite is practiced among Christians. There have been some controversies over the mode, the meaning, the purpose and the action of baptism itself. The main focus of this research is on the action or the "formula" of Baptism in the context of Acts 2:38. The questions that will help us further clarify the focus of the study are: does the Baptizer need a formula when baptizing? Does one need to utter some words when baptizing? According to the Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook, during baptism the minister should recognize the commitment of the one being baptized in a brief statement, such as: "Because of your profession of faith in Christ as your Savior and

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1105.

⁴ Alton Bryant T, ed., *The New Compact Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 69.

your desire to live a new life in Him, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁵ After the minister has said these words, he then immerses the candidate once on water.

Furthermore, in line with fundamental belief number fifteen of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the 20th edition Church Manual states that, “by baptism, we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin.”⁶ Commenting on Matthew 28:19, Gulley further elucidates the thought and say “Christ mentioned three steps in baptism: making disciples (*matheteusate*), baptizing them (*baptizontes*), and teaching them (*didaskontes*), which is only possible with adults.”⁷ A closer examination of the above statements of belief of Seventh-day Adventist Church shows that the Church falls on one group of Christians who believe that baptism must be by immersion of a candidate *once* in water invoking the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

However, on the other hand, Donald F Durnbaugh of the Schwarzenau Brethren, an Anabaptist Church, believes that the “ordinance of baptism must be done through triple immersion, that is, dipping three times forward in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁸ He holds that in baptism the candidate should be immersed forward three times in water calling the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to represent the three day process of death, burial and resurrection of

⁵ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventist Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 166.

⁶ General conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2022), 173.

⁷ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: The Church and the Last Things* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 392.

⁸ Donald F, Durnbaugh, ed., *The Brethren Encyclopedia* (Philadelphia, PN: Brethren Press, 1983), 82.

Christ.⁹ Thus, the second century church manual of discipline known as the *Didache*¹⁰ (AD 120-150) from Everett Ferguson states that: Concerning baptism, baptize in this way: After you have spoken all these things, “baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water.”¹¹ Furthermore, Justin Martyr one of the Church fathers who wrote in 140 AD cited in Alexander Roberts states that, “For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost, they then received the washing with water.”¹² Again, the Baptist Faith and the Message maintains the same understanding and states that “Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”¹³

On the other hand, the third group of Christians holds that baptism should be by immersion once in water calling the name of Jesus as it is recorded in Acts 2:38. For instance, Arrington maintains that “baptism must be administered in the name of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the authority of Jesus and affirming the pleroma of divine revelation in Him— that entire God revealed through his Son.”¹⁴ Garfield T.

⁹ The *Schwarzenau Brethren*, sometimes called the German Baptists, are an Anabaptist group that dissented from the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed European state Churches during the 17th and 18th centuries.

¹⁰The *Didache* is one of the earliest Christian treatise written in Koine Greek, (late first or early second century AD). It provided practical instructions into the way the earliest Christians were to live and worship.

¹¹ Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 1987), 34.

¹² Alexander Roberts, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. I; Justin Martyr's Apology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1980), 183.

¹³ Melton J Gordon, *American Religious Creeds*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY: Triumph Books, 1991), 175.

¹⁴ French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 31.

Haywood, a pioneer of the Oneness denomination maintains the same notion and says baptism must be in the name of Jesus alone. According to Haywood, “the abundance of evidence in Acts shows the significance of baptism as only being administered in the name of Jesus.”¹⁵ For Oscar Cullmann, “the book of Acts speaks thus of first Christian Baptisms in the context of the Pentecostal story”¹⁶. By this point Cullmann posits that in this first Christian Baptism there is a new element of the gift of the Holy Spirit which is imparted neither by Jewish proselyte baptism nor by Johannine baptism. Furthermore, Murray also observes that H. Evander pointed out that, there is not one example in the whole NT literature of a baptism taking place in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Those who believe in the oneness doctrine maintain that this was the practice of the apostles as it is cited in the book of Acts chapter 2, 8, 10 and 19 respectively.¹⁸ They maintain that this is the formula which Christians should follow and it finds its roots as early as the apostolic times.

Most modern church historians and theologians maintain that “tripartite” baptism or baptism according to Matthew 28:19 is not the correct baptism which the Apostles administered. For example, the German theologian Edmund Schlink maintains that baptism must be in the name of Jesus alone and he contends that the NT speaks only of baptism upon (in) the name of Jesus Christ (with slight variations). In that case, the baptismal command in Matthew 28:19 cannot be the historical origin

¹⁵ Garfield T. Haywood, “The Birth of the Spirit in the Days of the Apostles,” in Dayton, *Seven “Jesus Only” Tracts*, 4-5.

¹⁶ Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1950), 10.

¹⁷ George Raymond. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 82-83.

¹⁸ Acts 2:38 “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”; Acts 8:16 “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”; Acts 10:48 “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ”; Acts 19:5 “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”

of Christian baptism. At the very least, it must be assumed that the text has been transmitted in a form expanded by the church.”¹⁹

Those who upheld the baptism in Jesus’ name, also called “the Jesus’ Name doctrine” or “Oneness” doctrine are also non-Trinitarian proponents who deny the existence of a triune God but maintain that the name “Jesus” is the correct and entire name of God. Thus Patterson contends and says, the name Jesus is for the Son also is the name of the Father and also the name of the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ Furthermore, Robert Young a modern theologian says that Matthew 28: 19 is a text that was polluted and the Trinitarian baptism was post-apostolic interpolation and corruption.²¹ The belief that the name of Jesus is the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit in the context of Matthew 28:19 and the notion that the book of Acts gives a baptismal formula which should be followed by Christians is a hot potato for the Christians over the subject of Baptism. According to Bernie Wade, this has caused major divisions and schism both in conservative and charismatic denominations around the world.²²

It is clear therefore that on one hand we have the express command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 concerning the Trinitarian baptism yet on the other hand we have the words of Apostle Peter in Acts 2:38 calling his hearers to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. The baptism in the name of Jesus appears to be a puzzle in relation to Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19.

¹⁹ Edmund Schlink, *The Doctrine of Baptism* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 27-28.

²⁰ Patterson Eric, *The Future of Pentecostalism in the United States* (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2007), 123–124.

²¹ Robert Young, a Presbyterian, was the first Bible author of the modern era to put Matthew 28:19 in italics in his Bible version titled, *Young's Literal Translation (YLT)*, along with a footnote indicating he believed it to be forged.

²² Bernie L Wade, *Baptism According to Matthew 28:19* (Sulphur, KY 40070, USA: Truth, Liberty and Freedom Press), 17.

Notably, The Jesus Only Pentecostals teach that the name of Jesus in Acts 2:38 stands for the whole Trinity: the Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit. They contend that the terms “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are merely *titles* reflecting the three different personal manifestations of one being who is God of the universe. As such, they also maintain that for water baptism to be valid, baptism must be conducted in the name of Jesus, not in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Study is therefore set out to deal with these following three issues;

- (1) To ascertain the “meaning of baptism in the name of Jesus” in the context of Acts 2:38. Is it a formula set out to be followed by Christians as Oneness theologians maintain?
 - (2) To ascertain whether the name of Jesus in Acts 2:38 stands for the Trinity (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit) as the Oneness theologians put it.
 - (3) Finally, to look into the implications for the doctrine of the Trinity.
- This study is therefore set out to grapple with the above issues so as to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in Theology.

Statement of Problem

There are some groups in the Christendom which maintain that baptism must be “*in the name of Jesus Christ alone*” as witnessed in Acts and not “*in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*” as found in Matthew 28:19.²³ They reject the Triune baptism presented in Matthew 28:19 because they do not believe in the doctrine of Trinity. They see the book of Acts introducing a formula for baptism.

²³ Kulwant Singh Boora, *Baptism in the Name of Jesus (Acts 2: 38) from Jerusalem to Great Britain* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2011), 43.

Does the phrase “baptized in the name of Jesus” in the book of Acts introduce a new formula for baptism? If this is so, what are the Implications for the doctrine of the Trinity?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the meaning and the significance of the phrase “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” and its variations in the book of Acts, and to ascertain the implications thereof. This study also seeks to discuss the different arguments raised against the Trinitarian baptism of Matthew 28:19 and also seeks to bring clarity among these arguments by pointing out the meaning of Baptism in Acts. The study will also find out whether there is any contradiction between the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 and the practice of the Apostles in the book of Acts. Finally, the study seeks to find out whether baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts is a new concept for Baptism for the Christians different from that of Matthew 19:28 or not.

Significance of Study

Although much has been written about the subject of Baptism, the writer of this work realizes that the concept of Baptism in the name of Jesus as presented in the book of Acts has not been dealt with extensively so as to answer to the controversies that exist today among Christians. Furthermore, the writer of this research realizes that the meaning of Baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts also has not been given by scholars. A number of Theologians have written much about baptism in reference to Matthew 28:19 which recognizes the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the answer to the question: why Peter in Acts 2:38 did not follow

the same express command of Jesus but rather uttered it differently has not been answered. Could there be a reason why and what is the significance to that effect? This study seeks to fill that gap and bring harmony between the two baptisms as they appear in both Matthew and Acts. It is hoped that through this research, readers may be able to discover the truth concerning the reason why baptism in Acts was administered in the name of Jesus alone. The research hopes to clarify the above issue to Christians and hence help them appreciate the teaching about the Triune God. As such they will also be able to defend the same as they encounter Anti-Trinitarian groups and at the same time remain consistent with the teachings of the Bible.

Delimitations of the Study

The main discussion of the study will be on baptism in the book of Acts. I will also discuss the relationship between the Command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 and the practice of the Apostles in Acts. The study will also look at the contextual-theological meaning of the phrase “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” in Acts and the implications of the issue. Although I may make some reference to other biblical passages where baptism is mentioned outside the book of Acts, I will not attempt to discuss in depth each and every text that talks about baptism outside Acts. Again arguments over the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ evolve also around the trinity doctrine; I will not delve into that study deeply because that is not my focus.

Methodology of the Study

This study utilizes a biblical systematic theological approach by making references both in Old and New Testament. It uses historical-grammatical method of analysis to review some related literature from the following sources: Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries, Bible encyclopedias, magazines, Journals,

Systematic Theology books, lexicons and electronic sources related to the subject. Thus, in Chapter one, the study provides the background of the Study, the problem statement for the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, delimitations and methodology. In Chapter two, it is the review of literature relevant to the subject under study to find out how baptism has been portrayed both in Old and New Testament writings. Baptism in historical theology was also analyzed for the purposes of appreciating the development of the mode and “formula” for baptism throughout the different periods in history. Chapter three is an analysis and synthesis of the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ using the Bible and the relevant information gained in literature review. Some exegesis was conducted on the key text that gave rise to our problem statement. Bible commentaries and theological dictionaries were contacted to gain more clarity. Chapter four is a summary of the findings and conclusions as well as some recommendations for further study. The theological significance and implications of the issue are discussed in this chapter.

Overview of the Study

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives an introduction to study. It introduces the study by giving a background of the study and states the problem that needs to be addressed through in-depth investigation and analysis. It also gives the purpose of the study and its significance. The chapter continues to mark some delimitations of the study so as to give the study a pointed-out focus. The second chapter basically deals with the review of relevant literature for the topic under study. The chapter deals with the roots of baptism practice in the Old Testament era. The chapter deals also with the background of baptism in Matthew 28 and Acts through analyzing different views on how the practice have been administered in early

apostolic era, post apostolic, during church fathers, medieval period, Reformation, modernism and postmodernism up to the present Pentecostalism period.

The third chapter analyzes and synthesizes the different views of scholars and gives an evaluation using the Bible and other foundational literature. The chapter gives an in-depth analysis of baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts. A study of the historical, cultural and literary context of Acts 2:38 will be conducted so as to gain insights into the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts. The fourth chapter deals with summary and conclusion of all the findings of the study.

This chapter gives answers to the problem of the study and draws some implications over the conclusion. Finally, the chapter also suggests some areas of interest that need some further study.

Definition of Key Terms

Trinitarian: While the term Trinity does not occur in Scripture, Trinitarian doctrine is based on the belief in oneness of God and the threeness of God.²⁴ The basic beliefs include the following: (1) God is one; (2) God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and (3) each of the three persons of the Godhead is fully and equally God. Furthermore, Erickson define Trinity as “the three persons so closely bound together that they are actually one.”²⁵

²⁴ James R. Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: B& H, 2008), 103.

²⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 221.

Baptism: The English word baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizo* which means to “to plunge, dip, immerse” something in water. This is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible.²⁶ According to Lake, it is the rite of initiation whereby Christians confess their faith in Christ and are admitted into membership in the Christian Church. The rite serves as a sacrament of salvation, a sign of commitment, a symbol of identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection.²⁷ Beasley-Murray views it as the union with Christ in his redemptive acts, entry into the kingdom of God, and life in obedience to the rule of God.²⁸

²⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham: England: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 967.

²⁷ Donald M. Lake, “Baptism,” *The New International Dictionary of the Christian*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 1:9.

²⁸ Beasley-Murray, “Baptism,” *New Dictionary of theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 1:70.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This second chapter basically seeks to review the relevant literature for the topic under study. The chapter is mainly divided into four main parts; namely, Baptism in light of the Old Testament background, historical background of baptism in the New Testament period, Different views of Baptism in the name of Jesus in the different periods of history from Apostolic to the present time of Postmodernity.

Historical background of Baptism in the Old Testament

The purpose of this first segment of the chapter is to take a closer backward look into the Old Testament era so as to have an appreciation of the historical background to baptism going forward and to see its subsequent developments. This chapter may not touch every Jewish antecedent in reference to baptism but to survey the landscape against which Christian Baptism came to birth in order to view its meaning and significance now. The researcher will not draw conclusions regarding baptism on the basis of these antecedents but to gain insights through assessing their relevance and relationship with baptism. These antecedents include the symbolism of

water in religious matters, the rite of circumcision, ritual cleansings and Jewish proselyte baptism.

In the Old Testament worldview, water has always been used as a significant substance for religious symbolism. Right from the beginning, rivers ran out of Eden, as a symbol of life (Genesis 2:10), surrounding God's creation up to a time when God set up order of separation; some were held up by the firmament and some in the ground (Exo.15:8). In the Genesis account of the flood, we find that all those who did not believe in the word of God through Noah were destroyed by water while Noah and his family were saved. The waters that destroyed the whole antediluvian world were on the other hand used to save Noah and his family as the ark floated above the waters. The apostle Peter in his narration of the flood story makes a link with baptism in his conclusion and says, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21 NASB). Commenting on this phrase, Wayne Grudem posits that Peter makes it clear that baptism saves you not as a removal of dirt from the flesh but "as an appeal to God for good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"¹ (that is, as an inward, spiritual transaction between God and the individual, a transaction symbolized by the outward ceremony of baptism). As such, Peter does not give room to the teachings which maintains that baptism is a sacrament which carries saving power in itself but rather it is an ordinance which symbolizes an entry to a new life in Christ (Rom. 6:4).

The same idea of baptism symbolism occurs in the Exodus story and is mentioned by the apostle Paul to the Corinthian Church. He reminds this Church that "our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea" (1 Cor. 10:2).

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 974.

As Leonard Zee observes it, “Paul thinks of the crossing of the sea as a baptismal metaphor, and employs it as a warning against baptismal presumption.”² Through the ordinance of baptism the element of deliverance from chaos of sin and rebirth through the water is always seen. The children of Israel marched in the red sea through the walls of water on dry land to the other side of the sea. At God’s command, the waters roared back and covered all the Egyptians as they attempted to pursue the Israelites. “The flood covered them; they went down to the depth like a stone” (Exod. 15:1, 5). Thus, in the Exodus incident at the red sea, one will note that the drowning, destroying, chaotic waters of the red sea became the instruments for the deliverance of God’s people.

Furthermore, water was often used significantly in the Hebrew people to conduct their religious rituals of cleansing as well as in hygienic washings. This ritual cleansing had a spiritual symbolism in many respects. One notable practice was that of a high priest in the great Day of Atonement which was done on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. According to the biblical account in Leviticus sixteen, the priest was instructed to take a bath the whole body before putting on his priestly garments for this day (Lev. 16:4-5). By taking this water bath, the priest would be symbolically clean and was ready to perform the task before him. This ritual of water baths and many more in the Old Testament era clearly became one of the antecedents of Christian baptism. On the same vein, however, Beasley-Murray posits that the recognition that baptism has essential antecedents in animistic views of the supernatural nature of water and the destructive power of holiness must not blind us to the differences between an early Semite washing in a sacred spring, the High priest of

² Leonard J. Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and The Lord’s Supper: Recovering The Sacraments For Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 75.

Israel bathing himself in the Temple on the Day of Atonement, publicans and sinners responding in Jordan to the call for repentance from the John the Baptist, and the Christian believer confessing in baptism his identification with Christ in his redemptive action and thereby anticipating the renewal of the universe.³ More pertinently, one should be able to draw a line between the primitive ritual bath practices with the rite of baptism today.

The belief that water had supernatural powers was an idea from the pagans who ascribed the healing power of water to a god, who signified his presence in the stirring of waters. As such, Bultmann notes that the Jews who could recognize no deity but the Lord preserved essentially the same idea but modified the status of the Spirit who gave the water its healing virtue to that of an angel.⁴ Furthermore, Tertullian thought of a real angel present to make the baptismal waters effective as the angel was seen to be giving healing power to the pool in Bethesda (John. 5:4).

In summary, the intentions of God to cleanse and purify his people can be inferred from these ritual baths, especially in the context of the religious performances of his priests-prophets. This is also attested by the divine anticipation for cleansing in Ezekiel 36:25 affirming that in the last days God would provide this newness of life to all who identify with him.

Christian Baptism and Circumcision

The rite of circumcision has numerous references in the Bible. It was communicated by God to Abraham, his descendants and their slaves as a “token of the covenant” with God for all his generation as an everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:13).

³ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism and The Lord's Supper: Recovering The Sacraments For Evangelical Worship*, 2.

Every man was required to observe this rite and see it that his child on the eighth day was circumcised, and non-observance was *kareth* in Hebrew (cutting off) from the people (Gen. 17:10-14, Lev. 12:3). The Gentiles were supposed to be circumcised first for them to be allowed to partake of the Passover feast (Exo. 12:48). The teaching about circumcision in relation to baptism has met with a number of arguments among scholars. Cullman contends: “as circumcision marks the entry of an individual into the privileges of the old covenant of Jews with God, so is baptism, which naturally marks the entry of an individual into the privileges of the new covenant”.⁵ In this sense, Cullmann seems to suggest that for Christian Baptism to have meaning, one should trace its roots from the rite of circumcision. This notion has since opened up many teachings which include the belief in infant baptism, baptism as a replacement of the rite of circumcision and many more. Thus, Murray concludes and says “as the old covenant (circumcision) included Abraham’s offspring along with Abraham, and as the offsprings, too, received the richest blessing which the covenant disclosed, we cannot therefore believe that infants today are excluded from what the Abrahamic covenant provided”⁶. In this notion therefore, Murray seems to suggest that since circumcision was done also on infants, then baptism must also be performed on them. However, he does not back up his arguments with the biblical evidence whether the baptism of infants is a biblical injunction or it is an assumption arrived at since the two rites have certain parallels. The assumption that because there are certain parallels between the two rites, it is therefore legitimate to argue that baptism, like circumcision, must be performed on infants, regardless of other factors

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 10.

⁵ Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 57.

⁶ John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), 48.

gave birth to a compromise to the biblical text especially when we observe that circumcision was done only on males only. Following this line of thinking, it will mean that baptism must be done to males alone. However, looking at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, in the letter written to the Gentiles, it is clear that the apostles handled baptism and circumcision as two different ceremonies.

So far, in this brief survey of this antecedent to baptism, one would appreciate that Christian baptism and circumcision have parallels in the sense that they are both rites of admission but in quite different communities. As such, to conclude that Christian baptism must follow the pattern of the rite of circumcision gives rise to a lot of problems which cannot be settled in one sentence. As McCormack puts it, “to assume that because they are both rites of admission they were both administered under precisely the same conditions is to be in grave error.”⁷

Christian Baptism and Proselyte Baptism

There seems to be no consensus among scholars concerning the roots of Christian baptism. However, one thing that comes out vividly is that the theology of Christian baptism was informed by the Jewish proselyte Baptism. According to Ferguson it is assumed that proselyte baptism was earlier than the Christian era⁸. It is therefore a general trend among scholars today to accept this view and that it was in fact the antecedent of the baptism of John. Proselyte baptism was a Jewish ritual practice of bath purification which was self-administered in the presence of witnesses

⁷ J McCormack, *Infant Baptism* (St Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1953-54), 125.

⁸ Everet Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 548.

who gave instructions according to the commandments of Judaism.⁹ This was practiced by Jews to those who were born in pagan Gentiles, a sign which marked an entry to the Jewish covenant of becoming one in the faith of the true living God. The male candidates were firstly administered to the rite of circumcision if they accepted the teachings of the whole Jewish law (the Torah). According to Cheslyn Jones, “candidates were questioned about their motives, told some of the laws they would have to observe, if they consented, were circumcised immediately.”¹⁰ When healed, they immersed themselves naked in water or in case of women, were put in the water by other women for purification.

Historical Background of Baptism in the New Testament

This second segment of the chapter is an endeavor to gain understanding on how Christian baptism was practiced in the New Testament period. Most Christian scholars agree that baptism is an important rite that is done by many Christians today. Evidence from the New Testament shows that this rite was important to early Christians and even to Jesus Christ (Matt 3: 1: 1-17, Acts 10:37; 13:24).

Baptism of John the Baptist

As noted above, baptism at first was linked with Jewish ritual baths as well as circumcision. However, later it came out to be a separate rite practiced by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. Thus with the arrival of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea, he gave the meaning to why the Jews were to be baptized, that is, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, thus giving baptism a new direction. Unlike

⁹The tractate Mikwaoth (“Immersion Pools”) in the Mishnah lays down requirements in the regard to the size of the pool and the quantity of water in order to assure that a total immersion was possible.

¹⁰Cheslyn Jones, *The Study of Liturgy* (Oxfordshire, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73.

the Jewish proselyte baptism which was self-administered, the NT baptism was conducted by the baptizer upon the believer. The biblical account reveals that John Baptized at Aenon near Salim “because there was much water there; and people were coming and were being baptized” (John 3:23). The rendering of the text shows that there was plenty of water to support baptism by immersion. A number of NT accounts support this practice. For example, in the book of Matthew, “after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water” (Matt 3:16). In the book of Acts, “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of it” (Acts 8:38-39). Above all, the words ‘baptize’ and ‘baptism’ comes from the Greek root *baptizo*, meaning ‘to immerse.’ A related root is *bapto*, which means “to dip in or under.” This root *baptizo* is used more than sixty times in the NT to denote the baptism by immersion. The NT background reveals that baptism was practiced as a rite of acceptance and initiation into the community of salvation. It is during this time of John the Baptist where Jesus began his public ministry. His message was linked with that of John in that he called for true repentance and announced that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:4,15). Notably, Lee and Porter agree with other scholars in the notion that Jesus was thus baptized by John as presented in the synoptic gospels.”¹¹ It was during this baptism in which John was able to identify and introduce Jesus and his mission to his listeners (John 1:29). The voice which was heard from heaven and the coming of the Spirit in the form of a dove placed a seal of approval as it were both on Jesus as the Son of God and the water baptism. According to Donald McKim, “the baptism of Jesus was the paradigm, or model, for the early

¹¹Lee Martin McDonald, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 127.

Church's baptisms".¹² Ellen White also notes that "Jesus did not receive baptism as a confession of guilt, but He identified Himself with the penitents of Israel who were responsive to the preaching of John."¹³ Through this act of his baptism, believers realize a deep significance in the rite of baptism. All who will follow him should take the steps He took in baptism. Matthean's account reveals that John was reluctant to baptize Jesus (Matt 3:14), but in response Jesus said "permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (verse 15).

Baptism in the Early Church

In the NT accounts, Christian baptism was performed only to those who believed and showed faith in Jesus Christ. The command to baptize was part of Christ's great commission to his disciples and the whole Church to make disciples and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This commission was the great gospel charter of the early Church. The first baptisms in early Christianity are recorded in the book of Acts. On the day of Pentecost after Peter had preached to his audience, they were convicted and exclaimed, "Brethren, what shall we do?" In his response, Peter replied, "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37, 38). It is from this passage and other related passages as well as in the Pauline writings (Roman 6:3) where a number of arguments have been raised against the Trinitarian "formula" presented in Matthew 28:19. Thus, according to David K. Bernard, "the Trinitarian formula from Matthew 28:19 became

¹²Donald K McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues In Christian Thought* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 125.

¹³Ellen G White, *The Desire of Ages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1898), 111.

popularized over time.”¹⁴ Bernard believes that the development of baptism according to Matthew 28:19 was a post-Apostolic age of interpolation and corruption and that the Trinitarian clause in Matthew 28:19 was added in the 2nd century. He maintains that the original baptismal formula in early church history was in the name of Jesus alone. On the other hand, however, the *Didache* from Thomas O’Loughlin instructs and says that “baptism is to be done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, according to the Great Commission.”¹⁵ In a bid to understand the practice of baptism during this era, different views in favor of the name of Jesus alone as well as those arguments which favor Trinitarian baptism are worth considering.

Baptism in the Name of Jesus

Most followers of the Jesus’ name doctrine maintain that baptism in the name of Jesus is the proper method that is to be followed by Christians, and feels that baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is not proper because Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not names but titles of one person. Thus, according to Hall, “baptism according to Matthew’s triune formula does not have reference to proper names, but rather, descriptive “titles” identified with the “one name” of Jesus.”¹⁶ In his view, Hall sees the name of Jesus encompasses the Father and the Holy Spirit in baptism. Hence, he concludes and says in baptism the oral proclamation of Jesus’ name during the practice is thus essential for the forgiveness of sin and one’s personal experience of salvation. In his analysis of Acts 2:38, Hall

¹⁴Bernard David, *The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost: The Oneness of God* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press 2000), 138.

¹⁵Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A window on the earliest Christians* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 11.

¹⁶J. L. Hall, *Doctrines of the Bible*, ed. J. L. Hall and David K. Bernard (Hazelwood, MO: World Aflame, 1993), 193-194.

maintains that the act of disciples of baptizing in the name of Jesus was actually the fulfillment of the Trinitarian baptism. Hall seems to have a backing support from Bernard David in his work “the New Birth.” Bernard maintains that Acts 2:38 gives three steps which one has to go through in the process of baptism in the name of Jesus, that is, repentance, water baptism and receiving of the Spirit.¹⁷

The main baptismal prerequisite which both agree on is repentance and it was Peter’s call to his audience. Hans Conzelmann also picks up the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus to those who had repented and say baptism is effective only when it’s done in the name or into the name of the Lord.¹⁸ He further observes that the proclamation of the name of Jesus appropriates the individual to the Lord. This act of baptism is made possible only on the basis of the name, which is the name of Jesus. Conzelmann seems to suggest that the saving event is transferred to the baptized person. In this, it becomes clear that the name of Jesus is mentioned in the process as in other incidents of healings and exorcism.

In the book of Acts, healings were made possible only in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Therefore, in baptism the idea of ownership also comes into play. The person being baptized is henceforth owned by this name (Jesus) as well as being protected. This idea is expressed by the Apostle Paul in second Cor. 1:22 that baptism is a seal of God in an individual. The same idea is being upheld by Bernard and says “baptism administered “in the name of Jesus” implies the oral invocation of the name by the baptizer during the baptismal event¹⁹. He further maintains that the use of a

¹⁷David K. Bernard, *The New Birth* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame, 1995), 23-24.

¹⁸Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (London, UK: SCM Press LTD, 1969), 48.

¹⁹David K. Bernard, *The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ: Deification of Jesus in Early Christian Discourse* (Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing co., 2016), 217-18.

name during the process signifies acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior and bears witness to the fullness of the Godhead residing in Him. He holds that a person's name points to their power and authority. Thus, he posits: baptism "into the name of the Lord Jesus" places recipients in a new community of faith under the authority of Jesus.

In his command in Matthew 28:19, Christ instructed the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Thus, according to Conzelmann and Bernard's position that says when one is baptized in the name of Jesus, he is being submitted under the ownership and protection of Jesus Christ, the same becomes true when one is baptized in the name of the father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The three members of the Godhead come in and take care of the baptized person. Bernard, however, argues and "say the Greek term for "name" (ὄνομα) in Matthew, the same word is found in parallel accounts (Mark 16:17 and Luke 24:47) appears in Acts in the singular form."²⁰ He concludes and says this term serves as a reference to the one name of God—the name Jesus. This conclusion however, poses a challenge in the doctrine of Trinity which sees God as one in three persons. This conclusion by Bernard will be dealt with in the next chapter of this work. Furthermore, Michael Green maintains the same idea that in the NT baptism means incorporation into Christ, that is, "baptism into Christ" or "baptism into the name of Christ" (the "name" being, to the Hebrew mind, the "person", the "character", sometimes the "ownership" of the one named).²¹ By this notion, Green affirms that baptism is a total commitment which brings us into the most intimate union with Christ. In his work, Lars Hartman

²⁰ Bernard, *In the Name of Jesus* (Hazelwood MO: Word Aflame, 1992), 41-54.

²¹ Michael Green, *Baptism: its Purpose, Practice and Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 48.

also defends Jesus' name baptism as the rite practiced in the early church and say "the first Christians spoke of their baptism as one "in the name of Jesus Christ" or "into the name of the Lord Jesus"²² (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, Acts 8:16). For Berkhof, baptism in the name of Jesus according to Acts 2:38 (*epi toi onomati Jesou Christou*) and other related expressions (*onomati Jesou Christou; eis to onoma Jesou Christou or tou kuriou Jesou; eis Christon.*) was probably referring to a baptism on the confession of Jesus as the Messiah. According to Berkhof, these expressions may simply serve to stress the fact that the recipients were brought into special relationship to Jesus Christ, whom the apostles were preaching, and were thereby made subject to Him as their Lord. These expressions were not intended to introduce a baptismal formula but it is quite evident that this was contextual. As such, Berkhof further argues and says "it is quite evident that when the Church later on felt the need of a formula, it could find no better than that contained in the words of the institution (Matt 28:19)"²³ He continues to note that this formula was already in use when the Didache (*The Teaching of the twelve Apostles*) was written in 100 A.D. The above brief survey of Jesus alone doctrine shows that the proponents strongly believe that baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts 2:38 with other variations is a formula that needs to be embraced by Christians. Thus, French argues: "the repeated allusion to baptism in the name in Acts suggests a spoken formula. The name was to be invoked audibly, "over against the believer simply being baptized with respect to or appealing to the

²² Lars Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the Early Church* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd, 1997), 37.

²³Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), 693.

work or authority of Christ.”²⁴ This notion is also maintained by David Norris citing that “the words in Acts 2:38 present a Greek construction which shows that the words were to be invoked orally during baptism.”²⁵ Furthermore, Beasley-Murray in his notable work brings in a different viewpoint by suggesting that “the name of Jesus was to be on the lips of the candidate baptized as well as uttered by the baptizer.”²⁶ He further notes that the name was therefore uttered in confession and prayer.

Baptism in the name of Jesus in the Postapostolic Era

This section is an endeavor to closely examine how the ordinance of baptism was administered during the period of the church Fathers. The section will give a brief survey of some of the prominent Church Fathers who can serve as a representative of the period under study to determine how the ordinance of Baptism was performed. So far, in this research we have observed that the mode of baptism during the time of the disciples was immersion. According to Herbert Kiesler, “during the postapostolic period, a number of changes occurred in the manner in which baptism was conducted.”²⁷ There was the introduction of Infant baptism, Sprinkling or affusion of water as well as pouring of water.

During the first and second centuries, Clement of Rome who was a contemporary of Paul, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, wrote in 96 A.D concerning God the Father that He chose the Lord Jesus Christ and us, that through Him we

²⁴Talmadge L. French, *Our God is one: The Story of the Oneness Pentecostals* (Indianapolis, IN: Voice and Vision, 1999), 215-16.

²⁵David S. Norris, *I Am: A Oneness Pentecostal Theology* (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame, 2009), 216.

²⁶GR Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1962), 100-101.

²⁷Herbert Kiesler, “The Ordinances: Baptism, Foot Washing, and Lord Super,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology Vol. 12*, (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 589.

become His own people and that his holy name is to be invoked upon every precious soul.”²⁸ From this time up to the early second century, baptism in the name of Jesus alone was faintly referred to by Church fathers. Some Church Fathers who were defending Christianity include Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Tatian, Athenagoras, and Theophilus of Antioch, et cetera.

According to Donald McKim, the *Didache* states that “from the earliest times in the Church, baptism was administered with the Trinitarian formula and attested to the forgiveness of sins.”²⁹ Writing from around AD 150, Justin Martyr wrote in his *Apology* quoting Isaiah 1:16-20 and John 3:3-4 that “the practice of Christian Baptism when administered in the triune name, brings about regeneration, illumination, and the forgiveness of sin.”³⁰ Justin maintains that this new creation that happens at baptism is a result of self-dedication to God whereby “the children of necessity and ignorance” become “the children of choice and knowledge.” On the other hand, in his proposition about Tertullian on baptism, Pelikan observes that “the most precise statement of Tertullian on baptism actually came, not in his treatise, *On Baptism* but in his polemical treatise, *Against Marcion* (1:28).”³¹ He notes that Tertullian specifically taught that baptism brought forth four gifts namely, remission of sins, deliverance from death, regeneration, and bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

²⁸Cyril C. Richardson, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 73.

²⁹McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major issues in Christian Thought*, 126.

³⁰Roberts, *Justin Martyr's Apology*, 183.

³¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian tradition: a history of the development of doctrine: The emergence of the catholic tradition* (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 163.

On baptism as the remission of sins, the epistle of Barnabas alludes to baptism as a “washing,” which “confers remission of sins.”³² The epistle further states the experience which the candidate has where the burden of sin and defilement is lifted up upon baptism and the new life with fruits of hope in Jesus Christ emerge. However, Cyprian maintains that “sprinkling and pouring were also proper and that baptism did not consist in the submersion of the body but rather the application of saving water to the head” (Epistle 75:12). This began as a way of attending to those who could not get into the baptismal pool because of health reasons, but later it continued as a norm. During this period, baptism was administered in the triune formula. However, the interpretation and application of the triadic formula varied a lot.

We note that during the third centuries, candidates were dipped three times confessing the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as well as anointing and the laying of hands. For instance, according to Hippolytus, “a baptismal candidate going down into the baptismal pool, the baptizer was to put a hand on the candidate and ask whether they did believe in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The minister will repeat His question three times in respect of each person of the Trinity.”³³ In this proposition, the triune name was used in baptism but pouring the candidates on the forehead three times respectively.

Yet on the other hand, Tertullian maintains that “a candidate could be dipped in water or amid the utterance of some few words, is sprinkled.”³⁴ Tertullian sees no

³²James A. Kleist, ed., *Epistle of Barnabas* (New York, NY: The Newman Press, 1048), 19.

³³ Hippolytus, *The Apostolic tradition*, Ante Nicene Fathers, volume 5, ed. Robert A and Donaldson J. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 21.

³⁴ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers vol.3, ed. by Robert A and Donaldson J. (Grand Rapids, MI: WMB Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

difference whether a man is dipped in water or is sprinkled on his forehead. Accordingly, only the candidates should solemnly profess their faith shortly before baptism and renounce the evil ways of the devil and his angels.”³⁵ Tertullian maintains the same idea with Hippolytus and observes that there upon the profession of faith; baptismal candidates were immersed three times into the baptismal waters accompanied by Trinitarian incantations.”³⁶

Commenting on Romans 6, Origen asserts that the Lord himself told his disciples that they should baptize all peoples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit not to employ the name of Christ alone in baptism. He further argues that the legitimate baptism had to be performed in the name of the Trinity.”³⁷ Cyprian affirms the same notion stating that Jesus in Matthew 28:19 commanded his disciples to baptize in the triune formula (the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). Cyprian maintains that it was not enough just to baptize people in the name of Jesus Christ, and conclude that the remission of sins could follow immediately. However, Christ himself commanded the disciples to go and baptize in the full and united Trinity.”³⁸

Furthermore, Ferguson observes: As for Clement of Alexandria “it was important for the candidates to receive instruction before Baptism. He further observes that candidates were to study the first six chapters of the *Didache* which gives the distinction between the way of life and the way of death, after which the

³⁵ Tertullian, *The chaplet*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 3 ed. Robert A and Donaldson J. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

³⁶ Tertullian, *The Crown*, 3.

³⁷ T P Scheck, *Origen: Commentary on the epistle to the Romans Books 1-5* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 28.

³⁸ Cyprian, *Epistles*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 5, ed. A Robert and J Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 73.

candidates can be baptized.”³⁹ The *Didache* continues to state that, “both baptizer and baptized ought to fast before the baptism and the candidate himself was to be told to keep a fast for a day or two beforehand” (Didache 7). This position by Clement gave rise to the baptismal classes and formulation of creedal teachings to those who were preparing to be baptized. This emphasis on teaching before baptism is also seen in Tertullian writings saying “they who are about to enter baptism ought to pray earnestly, fasts, kneeling down, spending of night in prayer, and with confession of all past sins.”⁴⁰

According to Kelly, by the close of the second century, “catechism classes and basic baptismal creeds, both declarative and interrogative though not formalized, began to evolve.”⁴¹ Earle Cairns concurs with Kelly and says “by the end of the second century a probationary period as a catechumen was added to test the reality of the experience of the convert.”⁴² Notably, baptism during this period was generally by immersion and was done in the triune formula. The practice of affusion, sprinkling and other forms of baptism came as secondary initiatives in the middle of the third centuries. However, Walker contends and says “with the early disciple’s baptism was generally in the name of Jesus Christ.”⁴³

³⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the early church: history, theology, and liturgy in the first five centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 315.

⁴⁰Ibid., 20.

⁴¹Kelly J N D., *Early Christian creeds 3rd ed.* (New York, NY: David McKay Company, 1976), 61.

⁴²Earle E Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries: A history of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 119.

⁴³ Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1970), 87.

Baptism in Post-Nicene period

The period from the fourth century saw some variety of changes in the Christian practices and doctrinal views as far as baptism is concerned. Infant baptism as well as adults was commonly practiced during this period. Baptism was viewed as a sacrament, that is, waters of baptism had some saving grace in them. As such, Dean Peterson notes, “the Church had a significant place in administering God’s grace to sinners.”⁴⁴ Because of this belief, those who practiced baptism outside the universal Church of state were described as doing a “sordid and profane bath.”⁴⁵ This notion brought about an idea that there was no salvation outside the Church.

Baptism for Augustine was necessary to wash the depravity of inherited sin of Adam. Thus, according to Argyle in Gilmore’s *Christian Baptism*, “the materialistic decadence of much of the post-biblical theology of baptism may be associated with a failing grasp of the biblical doctrine of grace.”⁴⁶ The suppositions by Augustine that baptism helps to cleanse the person from the inherited sin of Adam seem to have contributed to the establishment of the practice of infant baptism. However, the NT presents a different view over the doctrine of Christian baptism. It teaches that faith in Jesus is the prerequisite of Christian baptism. Also the NT in the Pauline writings teaches that Christian baptism portrays the death, burial and the resurrection of the Lord.⁴⁷ While furthering his proposition, Augustine regarded baptism in the name of

⁴⁴ Dean A Peterson, *A concise History of Christianity, 2nd ed.* (Canada, USA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2000), 94.

⁴⁵ *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5:565-572.*

⁴⁶ A. W Argyle, “Baptism in the Early Christian Centuries,” in *Christian Baptism*, ed. A. Gilmore (London, UK: Lutter Worth Press, 1959), 188.

⁴⁷ Mark 16:16; Acts 8:37; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12 respectively.

the Trinity as true baptism even when administered by an unworthy person.⁴⁸ To affirm his strong belief in the Trinitarian formula, Augustine maintained that in baptism one receives the grace of God, and receives a seal of the Holy Spirit which marks one who belongs to Christ. These baptisms were generally performed once a year at Easter after proper instruction was made to the converts because baptism was commonly thought of dealing with a person's past sins not his future faults.

As the Christianity became popular, worship ceremonies became more ritualistic and formal. The Church began to be led by bishops who were then seen as the central figures of Christian life. Baptism during the post-Nicene period generally was performed in the Trinitarian formula with variations of mode.

Baptism in the medieval period

The doctrine of the original sin by Augustine in relation to baptism influenced the scholars and Christians of the Middle Ages. During this period, baptism was seen as the key to salvation. It was seen as water made holy by the word of God for washing away of original and actual sins as well as its penalties.

Some notable beliefs of this period can be observed in the works of Thomas Aquinas, a catholic theologian who lived between (1225-1274) periods. Thomas represents the peak of Scholasticism and was known for his notable works of *Summa Contra Gentiles* (a summary of the true faith against the Gentiles) and *Summa Theologica* (a full summary of Theology). For Aquinas, "baptism may be given not only by immersion, but also by affusion of water, or sprinkling with it."⁴⁹ However, he reveals his belief in immersion by commenting and saying "Christ's burial is more

⁴⁸ Augustine, *City of God: Fathers of the Church, vol. 24* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1954), 43.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 4:2380.

clearly represented by immersion; wherefore this manner is more frequently in use and commendable.”⁵⁰ According to Argyle in Gilmore’s *Christian Baptism*, Aquinas holds that both single and threefold immersion are lawful, since one immersion signifies the oneness of Christ’s death, and of the Godhead, while the threefold immersion signifies the three days of Christ’s burial and also the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead.”⁵¹

Philip Schaff affirms that Immersion continued to be the usual form of baptism, especially the threefold immersion in the name of the Trinity.⁵² The practice of the threefold baptism was common during this era though with varying interpretations. Philip also notes an introduction of the single immersion with the belief in the triune God practiced by Gregory the great of Spain. Argyle notes this development and says the fourth century Council of Toledo, held in AD 633 decreed that one immersion was sufficient.⁵³ On baptism he observes that several preparatory and accompanying ceremonies were performed. These include exorcism, breathing upon the candidates to signify the receipt of the Holy Ghost, touching of the ears with the exclamation: Ephphatha! (Mark 7:34), to signify the spiritual understanding, etc. Again, in the act of baptism itself, the candidate first, with his face toward the west renounces Satan. Upon facing the east, he vowed fidelity to Christ and confessed his faith in the triune God through rehearsing the Creed, or in answer to questions.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ William A. Argyle, “Baptism in the Early Christian Centuries,” in *Christian Baptism*, ed. A. Gilmore (London, UK: Lutter Worth Press, 1959), 219.

⁵² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume III: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1882), 286.

⁵³ Ibid.

Thereafter comes the threefold or the single immersion in the name of the triune God, with the calling of the name of the candidate.

Baptism in the Reformation period

This section examines the position and the practices of the reformers on baptism as it is presented in the biblical narrative. In looking at the reformation period in general Dean maintains that no other person symbolizes the reformation like the German theologian Martin Luther (1483-1546).⁵⁴ Patrick concurs and says “no reformation figure has had a greater impact on theology than the doctor of faith Martin Luther.”⁵⁵ It is in this line of thought that baptism during this period will be looked at in the eyes of the theology of Martin Luther. Baptism during this period was seen as a sacrament of divine origin and was conducted following the command of Jesus of Matthew 28:19.

According to Luther, Baptism is a work of God because one is baptized in the name of the triune God.⁵⁶ Thus he maintained that though baptism is performed by a man, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act. The reformers still practiced infant baptism because they still believed in Augustine’s view of the original sin. In Luther’s notable book entitled “the Large Catechism”, he divides the baptismal section of his Large Catechism into three sub-sections, along with an exposition on infant baptism. The second section deals with the efficacy of baptism. The other two sections pertain to the nature and condition of baptism. Oberman observes “reformers insisted that baptism brings about a real presence of God. More than a sign of a

⁵⁴ Dean, A Concise History of Christianity, 195.

⁵⁵ Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 339.

covenant or a pledge of faith, baptism hosts a divine event where the baptized is brought into the realm of saving faith.”⁵⁷ While the reformers generally accepted the practice of infant baptism, they believed that only the one who believes receives what is offered and promised in baptism. This was part of Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith. He also affirms that in baptism there is death and resurrection; that is, full and complete justification by faith in God’s ongoing forgiveness of the one who is both justified and a sinner. According to Luther, in his Small Catechism, “baptism is not simple water only” because “the water is applied in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and is thus connected with God’s word.”⁵⁸

Baptism in the modernism period

The age of modernism as far as the doctrine of baptism is concerned has no significant theology in that regard. It was a period broad with ideas of enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The period during modernism believed that doctrines evolved. The modernist says that in previous centuries, the dogmas of the faith, such as the dogmas of the Trinity, baptism etc., were true, but since doctrines evolves, they may no longer be true today. For the modernist, a doctrine evolves into whatever accommodates the needs of the current culture. The fact that the doctrines of faith are of God is seriously undermined and the fact that God cannot contradict himself is at stake.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Work*, (LW) vol. 55, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T Lehmann (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1955-76), 242-43.

⁵⁷ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and Devil* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 227.

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism*, ed. Carl Gausewitz (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 171.

According to Jim Leffel in the book ‘the Death of Truth’, modernism is no friend to Christianity.”⁵⁹ Among other things, modernism is directly opposed to the biblical understanding of Christian doctrines.” The modernists rejected the idea of God governing the world but embraced the theory of *deism*. As such baptism during this period was not considered an important issue, people were encouraged to “make up their own minds and choose their courses of behavior”. The idea of a bible, church or a king to guide individuals was revolted by the modernist. There was a lack of consensus concerning the form of baptism among Christian communities during this period. The few Christian communities who sought to follow the bible as far as the baptismal rite is concerned; they embraced baptism “in the name of the Holy Trinity, professing faith in Christ.”⁶⁰

Baptism in the Postmodernism period

As the name suggests, postmodernism began as a reaction to all the ideals, principles and values that lie at the heart of the enlightenment or modern mind-set. By its very nature the postmodern worldview is difficult to explain. One aspect however, is of special interest to philosophers and is central to the entire postmodernist movement is by Stanley Grenz and who says “postmodernism affirms that whatever we accept as truth and even the way we envision truth are dependent on the community in which we participate; there is no absolute truth, rather truth is relative to the community in which we participate.”⁶¹ Postmodernism says that there is a sea

⁵⁹ Jim Leffel, “Our Old Challenge: Modernism,” in *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis, MI: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 24.

⁶⁰ Jerry Pillay, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 2-7.

⁶¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 8.

of “truths”; they believe that there is not only one way, but plenty of room for diversity.”⁶² For postmodernity, truth is not stated but experienced, so before they integrate with truth, they want some hands-on experience with it. Postmodernists also believe that truth and morals are different from each other; what is good for one may not necessarily be good for the other or *vice versa*. Thus, the doctrine of baptism in the name of Jesus during this period finds it difficult to thrive because of postmodern thinking. Richard and Brian observe this thinking and say “postmodernism openness to spirituality seems like a positive step away from modernism naturalism, but this kind of spirituality is inherently anti-Christianity because it considers the Christian message true only for those who accept it as such.”⁶³ However, Os Guinness in Hank Hanegraaff argues and says “Christianity is not true because it works (pragmatism); it is not true because it feels right (subjectivism); it is not true because it is my truth (relativism). It is true because it is anchored in the person of Christ.”⁶⁴ This is true with the doctrine of baptism; it finds its meaning and purpose in Christ.

Baptism in the Triune formula

At the close of his ministry, Christ commissioned his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). In these words, it is quite evident that Jesus expected that those who will accept the gospel should be baptized in the name of the triune God. As already noted above in this study, baptism in the name has to do with “being

⁶² Miroslav Pujic, “Postmodernism: An Emerging Culture,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 2 (2006): 4-10.

⁶³ Richard R Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 88-171.

⁶⁴ Hank Hanegraaff, *What is Truth? The Best of the Christian Research Journal* (Charlotte, NC: Christian Research Institute, 2009), 9.

part of the family, belonging to or on the basis of the authority” of someone, that is, the triune God. White posits and says “Christ made baptism the entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wishes to be acknowledged as under the authority of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost”⁶⁵. In his work, Hart echoes the same and says, “Jesus issued His great commission to the Church to make disciples and baptize them in the one name of the triune God, and to teach them obedience.”⁶⁶ John Murray concurred: we must take our point of departure from the very formula which Jesus used in the institution; “baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and Holy Spirit.”⁶⁷ The baptism into the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit has been observed to signify a relationship of union to the three persons of the Godhead. Matthean text in Matthew 28:19 has been pictured by most scholars as providing the basis of conducting Christian baptism.

The mode of baptism in relation to the above text has generally been seen as immersion. James Bannerman’s comment is worth noting: in reference to the mode of baptism, the question is whether a particular method of applying water or of relating the person to water is of the essence of the symbolism, i.e., baptism in Matthew 28:19 cannot be properly administered by any other mode other than immersion.⁶⁸ The Greek rendering of Jesus’ words can be analyzed (πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, GNT). Literally, the statement should be translated: “while going

⁶⁵Ellen G White, *God’s Amazing Grace* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1973), 143.

⁶⁶Geoffrey Hart, *Right to Baptize: The contemporary dilemma* (Hodder and Stoughton: The Evangelical Fellowship Press, 1966), 25.

⁶⁷ Murray, *Christian Baptism*, 6.

make disciples of every nation, immersing them *into the name of* the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

According to some biblical scholars, the phrase “*in to the name of*” was frequently used in the Greek-speaking world in accounting contexts to refer to a transfer of ownership. Thus, Moulton and Milligan observes: “The phrase *eis (to) ὄνομα τίνος* is frequent in the papyri with reference to payments made ‘to the account of any one.’ The usage is of interest in connection with Matthew 28:19, where the meaning would seem to be “baptized into the possession of the Father, etc.”⁶⁹ The preposition ‘into’ strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship-with or a coming-under-the-Lordship of the triune God. Carson notes: “It is a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s covenant community and of pledged submission to his lordship.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, William Vine argues and says that the phrase in Matthew 28:19 “would indicate that the baptized person was closely bound to, or became the property of, the one into whose name he was baptized.”⁷¹

Beasley-Murray further observes and says “if we take this Greek background for this phrase, “undoubtedly this meaning would fit the drift of the passage well; the peoples are to become disciples of the sovereign Lord and baptism is a means to this end; the idea of appropriation, dedication, submission, belonging, that attaches to the Greek use of *eis to ὄνομα*, perfectly accords with the major motif of making

⁶⁸James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), 123.

⁶⁹ James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914-29), 451.

⁷⁰ D.A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 597.

⁷¹ William E Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1940), 907.

disciples.”⁷² As such, from this evidence, it would mean that “into the name of” (*eis to ōnōma tou*) may mean one: Becomes the possession of; comes under the protection of; is under the control of; establishes a vital union with; passes into the new ownership of; enters into fellowship with; comes under the Lordship of; enters into the communion of; becomes a disciple of.

We can conclude and say through these words, Christ was commanding His disciples to baptize people “into the possession of” the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those who are baptized are placed under “the protection of” the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They were to immerse people “into the ownership of” the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through this kind of baptism, the believers were to enter “into a vital union with” the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and hence accepting the Lordship of the triune God.

Arguments against the Credibility of Matthew 28:19

There are some higher critics⁷³ who claim that the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 is not original to the text of Matthew⁷⁴. One of the main proponents of this claim is Fredrick. C. Conybeare. They claim the phrase “in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit” was inserted at a later date by the first Nicean Council of AD 325. They claim that the correct reading of Matthew 28:19 appears to be in Luke 24:47. However, one may ask questions and say: is there any historical and textual evidence that the text of Matthew 28:19 appeared later? Or

⁷² G R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Exeter, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1962), 90.

⁷³ Higher criticism is a process which begins with skepticism about the Bible and about the Biblical narrative. It imposes human reasoning over and above the Scriptures. Higher criticism does not accept the Bible at its word, but questions the Bible. Higher criticism often questions the attributed authorship of Biblical writings.

⁷⁴ Fredrick C. Conybeare, *The Eusebian Form of the Text of Mt. 28:19* (ZNW, 1901), 275-88.

are there variant readings in the text in question? We have noted however in this study from the *Didache* (AD 50-70), an early second century document an allusion to the full text of Matthew 28:19. Thus the *Didache*⁷⁵ (AD 120-150) from Everett Ferguson states that: Concerning baptism, baptize in this way: After you have spoken all these things, “baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water.”⁷⁶ Not only we find this allusion from the *Didache* alone but from other early Church Fathers like Justin Martyr, Tertullian in *On Baptism* and *Against Praxeas* and other Church Fathers before the council of Nicea which came in AD 325. How possible is it that it was added later? Justin Martyr one of the Church fathers in 140 AD cited in Alexander Roberts states that, “For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ and of the Holy Ghost, they then received the washing with water.”⁷⁷

Also, according to the editors of the Greek New Testament dictionary, fourth edition, this text has no variant reading to indicate it being a secondary text nor is it marked with any letter (A B C D) which they used to confirm the degrees of certainty of the manuscript. It is only the last word in verse 20 (world) which has a note of variant which is also marked with the letter A to signify the high degree of probability.⁷⁸

⁷⁵The *Didache* is one of the earliest Christian treatises written in Koine Greek, (late first or early second century AD). It provided practical instructions into the way the earliest Christians were to live and worship.

⁷⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1987), 34.

⁷⁷ Alexander Roberts, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. I: *Justin Martyr's Apology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 183.

⁷⁸ Barbara Aland, et al., *The Greek New Testament Bible Dictionary* (Stuttgart, Germany: United Bible Society Publishers, 2010), 116.

The internal evidence of the book also shows that Matthew 28:19 fit in the literary style of Matthew's gospel, with his frequent use of triads. We also note that the chiastic force of the Great Commission that not only baptism, but all Christian life hangs in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew's audience was Jewish. Perhaps the most significant purpose behind some of Matthew's use of triads might be the principle from the Torah that, "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (Deuteronomy 17:6).

Some scholars also believe and confirm that the oldest Greek Manuscript group, the Textus Sinaiticus, contain the full words of Matthew 28:19.⁷⁹ They maintain that when one looks at the Bible manuscript the following evidence is obtained: There is no Greek manuscript of the last page of Matthew that does not include these words. The words are as well found in every Old Latin (Vetus Latina/Itala) that date before the Vulgate. They are also found in all Vulgate manuscripts and in every Aramaic/Syriac edition. Finally, the words are found in every copy of the Boharic and Sahidic Coptic, Geez Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Gothic, Old Church Slavonic and Saxon versions which contain the last page of Matthew's gospel.

In *Biblical Hermeneutics, Second Edition* edited by Bruce Corley, et al in the chapter on "Biblical Criticism and Biblical Preaching", they give a comment on the textual corruption of 1 John 5:7, which appears in both the *Textus Receptus* and KJV but does not mention the corruption of Matthew 28:19.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Brooke Foss Westcott & Fenton John Anthony Hort, *Greek / English Interlinear New Testament coded with Strong's numbers*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1881), 2.

⁸⁰ Bruce Corley, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 388.

Ellen White's comment over this subject is worth noting: In baptism we are given to the Lord as a vessel to be used. Baptism is the most solemn renunciation of the world. Self is by profession dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the candidate, and in the presence of the whole heavenly universe the mutual pledge is made. *In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost*, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism, and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present.⁸¹

She goes on and maintains that "Let every soul be careful how he shall conduct himself after he has made his profession before many witnesses. Who are these witnesses? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the entire heavenly universe are witnesses of that burial in the water in the likeness of Christ's death. Those who have been truly converted have been buried with Christ in the likeness of His death, and raised from the watery grave in the likeness of His resurrection, to walk in the newness of life. By faithful obedience to the truth these are to make their calling and election sure."⁸²

In summary, It is true there are Bible passages that are missing in some ancient manuscripts, for example, the longer ending of Mark or in almost all Greek manuscripts 1 John 5:7 is missing, but Matthew 28:19 is not one of those. The evidence shows that there is no single manuscript of Matthew where this phrase is missing. While it is true that we don't currently have any manuscript of Matthew's last page before the third century, from the third century onwards there is an abundance of evidence that these words are authentic to Matthew's gospel.

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases 57* (Silver Spring, Maryland: Ellen G Estate, 1900), 10.

Summary and Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates that the ordinance of Christian baptism is an old practice dating back to the time of the NT to present. It shows that baptism is one of the major ordinances that have been conducted throughout the history of Christianity to date. The historical theology of baptism demonstrates that baptism in the name of Jesus is a doctrine that has been developed in the 19th century by Oneness Pentecostals basing their argument in Acts. On the other hand, evidence from history proves that the emphasis on the name of Jesus was mainly during the time of the Apostles and had a contextual meaning hence it had no effect on the triune formula. The practice of baptism in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19) has been seen by most of the scholars in history to be the foundation of the Christian doctrine as far as baptism is concerned. Finally, the review demonstrated that the invocation of the name of the Triune God upon baptism has some soteriological implications and is very significant both to the baptized and the baptizer.

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* 57, 10.

CHAPTER 3

THE ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS OF THE ISSUE

This chapter begins by discussing the submissions concerning the date and author of the book of Acts as found in both the external and internal evidence. Historical Context, Cultural Context, Literary Context, Syntactical Analysis, Grammatical Analysis, Semantic Analysis, Word studies and Theological Analysis will form a part of this chapter so as to arrive to a clearer understanding concerning the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts.

Authorship and Date of the book

The book of Acts is one of the longest books of the NT and contains one thousand and three verses as compared to one thousand one hundred and fifty-one in Luke and one thousand and seventy-one in Matthew. However, Witherington observes that Acts has eighteen thousand three hundred and seventy-four words as compared to nineteen thousand four hundred and four of Luke.¹ In the book, the whole Deity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is presented as active in the affairs of humanity. As Darrell notes, “the Father is active through the Son by means of the

¹ B Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 6.

Spirit to enable Jesus's followers to proclaim God's forgiveness."² The language is that of a historical monograph in the Greco-Roman sense.

External Evidence

In his notable work, FF Bruce observes that the earliest statements about the authorship of Acts which have survived belong to the last forty years of the second century.³ These include the Muratorian Fragment (c.170-200), the evidence from Irenaeus, who explicitly mentions Luke as the author of the gospel and Acts. Similar testimony is also given by Clement of Alexandria as he says "Luke; in the Acts of the Apostles records that Paul said, "men of Athens, I see that in all things you are very religious" (*Strom. V. 12*). Bruce further maintains that church fathers like Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius and Jerome in their writings all affirm that the author of the two works was Luke the beloved physician.⁴ Furthermore, the Andrews study bible comments and say the book of Acts was probably written before the death of Paul (ca. A.D 67), in about A.D 62 or 63 in Rome. Since Luke never mentions the terrible persecution of Christians by the emperor Nero (A. D. 64) or the tragic fall of Jerusalem (A. D. 70), this conclusion seems to be correct.⁵

Internal Evidence

The book Acts of the Apostles follows the fourth gospel in the NT. Arno Gaebelein contend and say "there is no doubt that the writer of the third Gospel record

² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: An exegetical commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 49.

³ FF Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1965), 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Andrews Study Bible, ed. John L. Dybdahl et al. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010), 1417.

is the one whom the Holy Spirit selected to write this account of the establishment of the Church on earth and the events connected to it.”⁶ He supports his position by referring to the similarities of the beginnings of the two accounts, that is the third gospel and the fifth account. Both treatises touch *Theophilus*, such that it makes it clear that the former treatise known to Theophilus is the third Gospel called the gospel of Luke and the writer of that gospel also penned the book of Acts. Generally, scholars support the authorship of Luke-Acts’ account; only few dispute it. As noted by Dr. Bruce that the only serious denial of this view is of recent times by the evangelist A C Clark in *The Acts of the Apostles (1933)*, 393.⁷ The affirmations of the Lukan authorship can also be found through an analysis of both accounts (Luke-Acts) and observe the similarities in the diction, especially the medical, which also attest to the fact that Luke was a physician. Again several sections where he speaks as one who travelled with Paul (Acts 16: 10-17; 20: 5-15; 21: 1-18; 27: 1-28:16). Paul himself mentions “Luke the beloved physician” in context that suggests Luke was a gentile (Col. 4:10-11, 14; Philemon. 24). It is this Luke who was identified by the early church as the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Historical Context of Acts 2:38

According to M. Eugene Boring “the interpretation of the Bible must be historically oriented.”⁸ This is because the Bible is oriented towards the mighty acts of God in history.⁹ For that reason, the understanding of any book of the Bible is aided

⁶ Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), 6.

⁷ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1.

⁸ Eugene M Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1989), 8.

⁹ Ibid.

by the knowledge of the historical situation of its original recipients. Darrel concurs and posits “historical insights can be particularly useful in showing us where history has gone or what might have driven it.”¹⁰

According to R Tracy, the period of the book of Acts is one when Judea moved out of and into the sphere of Roman control¹¹. Since Pompey’s conquests in the east and the formation of Syria as a province in 58 BC, Rome had been a neighbor. Thus the events of the book of Acts are set against the changing political situation in Judaea. Following Jesus’ command (Acts 1:4) the disciples remained in Jerusalem and pleaded for guidance and empowerment from God. They remained in the upper room and continually prayed with one mind. God fulfilled his promise (Joel 2:28) and filled them with the Holy Spirit, who gave them the ability to speak in (*tongues*) other languages they had previously not known. The descent of the Holy Spirit with power drew the attention of a large international crowd of diasporic Jews who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, known in Hebrew term as *Shavuot* and in Greek as *Pentecost*. Thus, this text takes place during this event of Pentecost, which occurred around fifty days after Jesus’s resurrection. This significant event marked the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, empowering them to proclaim the message of Jesus to a diverse crowd in Jerusalem. Because of this gift of speaking in new (*tongues*) languages, they were able to preach to this captivated diverse audience and share the message of Jesus with fellow Jews who have been eagerly waiting for their Messiah. About three thousand people were convicted (Acts 2:41) and were baptized in the name of Jesus.

¹⁰ Bock, *Acts: An exegetical commentary on the New Testament*, 6.

¹¹ R Tracey, *The book of Acts in its Greco-Roman Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 223.

In chapter one (Acts 1:4), Luke makes mention of the promise of the Father, which is the Holy Spirit. In chapter two the promise is realized and leads many to conviction. This conviction from the crowd resulted in baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. One thing of interest is that the apostle Peter confirms that the presence of the Holy Spirit (2: 16, 33) was a result of the working of the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead and made him sit in his right hand. The mention of the three members of the Godhead in a single chapter by Luke is significant and it has some soteriological connotations in the sense that the plan of salvation in which baptism is the result of is a function of the whole Deity. As Apostle Paul will note and say “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Interestingly, having confirmed with power that they were not drunk but it’s the result of the presence of the Spirit (Acts 2:15), after they were convicted by his sermon, Peter went ahead to call them to the baptism administered in the name of Jesus alone.¹² Peter’s move not to mention the Holy Spirit in his call to baptism should be looked contextually not didactic.

Cultural Context

The audience on the day of Pentecost consisted of Jews from various regions and backgrounds who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (πεντηκοστής). It is worth noting that this crowd in Acts two consists of both ethnically Jewish people and the proselytes who had converted to Judaism (Acts 2:11). Previously, Luke records in Acts 1:15 that there were about one hundred and twenty people gathered in the upper room. When the sermon was delivered, there

¹²Understanding the historical context helps us appreciate the relevance of Peter’s words in Acts 2:38 to the specific setting and audience. It appears here Peter was intentional in using the name

were now a mixed multitude of more than three thousand (Acts 2:8-11). The above texts show us that in the time of Jesus and the Apostles, Jewish cultural identity was already complex, mixed, and diverse, and hence Peter's audience was such. Pentecost (πεντηκοστής) was one the great three Jewish pilgrimage feasts to Jerusalem during the year (Deut. 16:16), this is why verse 8-11 make mention of many people from different nationalities were present. Noack maintains that "in Judaism it was believed that on this day significant things had taken place in the past."¹³ It was the day when God once again revealed himself in a unique way, signaling a new relationship between God and his people. Thus, William Neil observes "Pentecost had also come to signify for Jews the commemoration of the giving of the Law at Sinai fifty days after the Exodus Passover. For Luke this, too, would be seen as having a Christian fulfillment in the giving of the Spirit fifty days after the Christian Exodus Passover, the Crucifixion and Resurrection."¹⁴ Kremer observes that the context of this mixed group shows that these were not merely ethnic but also geographical with varying cultures. Marshall notes that, however, "these many diaspora Jews had returned to Jerusalem to live, for him, this is more likely meant here."¹⁵ Whatever the case, we find these gathered before the Apostles to inquire about this phenomenon which had just befallen them. Ferguson observation on the Jewish beliefs is worth noting: At any given time it would be possible to find Jews believing almost anything and

of Jesus alone, yet in preceding verses he has just mentioned the presence of the Holy Spirit among them.

¹³ B. Noack, "The day of Pentecost in Jubilees, Qumran, and Acts," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* (1962): 1:73-95.

¹⁴ William E. Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 72.

¹⁵ I H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 70.

everything, and this especially true at the beginning of the Christian era.¹⁶ By this, Ferguson notes that Judaism was more a matter of “orthopraxy” than of “orthodoxy.” It is in this context that we find them in controversy with Jesus because the way they practiced their belief was more legalistic and hypocritical.

Again their high expectations of the Messiah who was to liberate them from the Romans made them to reject Jesus Christ as the Messiah because Christ was not doing according to their own expectations. Wright notes that the *Psalms of Solomon*, a pseudepigraphic work written in Pharisaic circles in the first century BC reflects that the most widespread messianic hope in the first century was for the Davidic Messiah who was to come and destroy all the enemies of Israel with an iron rod, reign forever in the throne of David in justice and righteousness (2 Sam. 7; Isaiah 9:11; Jere. 23:5-6; Psalm 2, 9, 110).¹⁷

To sum up, the way the Jews interpreted the functions of the messiah who was to come made them shun Jesus and his ministry. Thus Mark L Strauss observes “the opposition Jesus faced from the Pharisees and the Scribes centered especially on his teaching and actions relating to the law and the Sabbath”.¹⁸ He accused them of pride, hypocrisy, and greed, warning the people to do as they say but not as they do (Matt 23:3)¹⁹. Ellen white gave a comment over the incident of Pentecost and said “the priests and rulers were greatly enraged at this wonderful manifestation, but they dared not give way to their malice, for fear of exposing themselves to the violence of

¹⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 537.

¹⁷ Ruben. B Wright, “Psalm of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *the OT Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J.H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 2:667.

¹⁸ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 497.

¹⁹ Ibid.

the people.”²⁰ Thus in answer to the accusation that said they were drunk, Peter tactfully presented the gospel to this mixed group. White notes “Peter did not refer to the teachings of Christ to prove his position, because he knew that the prejudice of his hearers was so great that his words on this subject would be of no effect. Instead, he spoke to them of David, who was regarded by the Jews as one of the patriarchs of their nation.”²¹

It is interesting to note that these Jews in Peter’s audience believed in David as one of their patriarchs but did not believe in Christ. This could be the reason in his address Peter made a link of David and Jesus by saying “for it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself (David) says: “the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Acts 2:34-35). By this Peter declared that David believed in Jesus as his Lord and thus by implication they were also expected to accept the divinity of Jesus Christ. From the mention of David as their patriarch, we can safely infer that these Jews had no problem in the belief of God the Father since their patriarch did so as well as the fact that they had come to Jerusalem for such. But these on the other hand, had a strong hatred of Christ and some of them, according to White, “had taken an active part in the condemnation and death of Christ”.²² Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached with power the gospel about the crucified but now risen Christ. Consequently, they trembled and convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus a call was made with an emphasis to the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith in Jesus

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²² *Ibid.*, 42.

was a requirement for this baptism to be possible as in the days of John the Baptist who preached a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”

Literary Analysis

This section deals with the literary analysis of Acts 2:38 as the focus of our Study. It is in this text of the book of Acts we find the concept of Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ without mentioning the two other persons of the Godhead as presented in Matthew 28:19. Acts as a second volume of Luke’s work covers a brief historical account. For example, Luke-Acts covers not the centuries outlined by other historians like Herodotus and Josephus, but less than sixty years from the birth of Jesus to the imprisonment of Paul at Rome (4 BC-AD 62). The reason for this brevity is that Luke, like certain ancient historians is selective. He reports only what is “important, essential, personal or useful.” Luke-Acts, similar to ancient histories, moves in a geographical and chronological progression (in Luke-Acts) from Jesus to the Jerusalem church and Paul at Rome. In summary, Acts is a sociological, historical, and theological work explaining the roots of this new community, as a sequel to Luke’s story of Jesus portrayed in his gospel.²³

The book of Acts is a literary work that belongs to a genre of historical narrative. It is a history of the early Christian Church tracing its beginnings from Jesus Christ’s ascension to the activity of the apostles and the expansion of the early church. While the book has some elements of biography and religion, its main objective is to describe historical events and trace the development of Christianity. It gives a chronological account of the apostles’ missionary activities, their interactions with both Jewish and Gentile audiences, and the challenges they encountered in

founding and preserving the gospel. Acts 2:38 falls within Peter's powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost, where he called the crowd to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ leading to baptism in the name of Jesus.

Certainly, throughout the whole book, baptism in the name of Jesus became the most salient feature in the lives of the disciples as well as the manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power in the church which was experiencing exponential growth. The book shows a symbiotic relationship in the work between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. For instance, the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch in chapter 8 reveals the working of the Holy Spirit yet in chapter 9 particularly verse 5, Luke shows us the direct intervention of Jesus Christ. Thus William contend and say "it was the intentions of Luke to show us that "Jesus remained active and alive in the early church; it's only the manner in which he worked that changed"²⁴ Importantly, the book of Acts has indications of the presence of divine direction in every activity, where God the Father and the risen Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit play important roles in the movement of events. As such Luke views God as trinity in his treatise and stresses unity on purpose because at one point he mentions the father (7:56), another point he mentions the Son (Jesus) (9:5) and yet in another page he mentions the Holy Spirit(8:29; 13:2). It is clear that Luke exalt the "name of Jesus" in baptism, healing on purpose not necessarily negating the other two members of the Godhead. Thus, Gulley observes and says, "Each member of the Godhead plays a unique part in the plan of salvation, with the Father as Source, the Son as Mediator, and the Spirit as Actualizer. Since

²³ Scott Shauf, *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (BZNW 133 Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005), 60 – 61.

²⁴ J William, *Acts: The New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 98.

Christ's ascension, the Spirit comes not to replace the risen Christ but to bring Him to believers, and to do a work for Christ on earth that is complementary to the work in heaven."²⁵

Syntactical Analysis

This section is an endeavor to interpret the phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” in the context of baptism portrayed in the book of Acts. The section will further give significance and meaning of the whole text.

Text

And Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 NASB).

Πέτρος δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν καὶ λήμψεσθε τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Acts 2:38 GNT).

Syntactical Analysis

In Acts 2:38, the sentence structure consists of two main clauses:

1. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ.”
2. “For the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The first clause contains two *imperatives*: “repent” and “be baptized.” It is the mood of command. The little word “and” is a copulative, coordinating conjunction, which joins two items of equal syntactic importance. Therefore, repentance “and”

²⁵ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 31.

baptism in this context seems to be inseparably connected in accomplishing their joint purpose. Thus, indicating that forgiveness of sins and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are contingent upon the fulfillment of these two mandates, the first a change of mental attitude and the second, an overt act²⁶. The mention of “*every one of you*” indicates that this instruction applies to all individuals addressed. The prepositional phrase “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” modifies the verb “*be baptized.*” For the second clause, forgiveness and the Spirit are presented as the principal gifts of God which Christ provides to those who repent and are baptized.

Grammatical Analysis

The phrase “*in the name of Jesus Christ*” can be analyzed grammatically. “In” is a preposition, “the name” is a noun phrase acting as the object of the preposition, and “Jesus Christ” is a compound proper noun functioning as a modifier of “name.”²⁷

Semantic Analysis

The phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” carries semantic significance. In biblical language, the term “name” often conveys the authority, power, and character of a person. Baptism performed “in the name of Jesus Christ” signifies that the act is carried out by the authority and in recognition of who Jesus is and what he represents. Thus Bock concurs and says “the baptism that takes place in the name of Jesus Christ shows the authority Jesus has at God’s side in heaven”.²⁸ If the name of Christ stands for His authority and character, the question is whether His authority and character are similar or different to the authority and character of the Father and the Holy Spirit. If

²⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1998), 1106.

²⁷ James Hope Moulton, 3rd ed., *A grammar of New Testament Greek* (Berlin and Groningen: T & T Clark, 2000), 266.

²⁸ Bock, *Acts: An exegetical commentary on the New Testament*, 143.

there are the same, why is Christ only mentioned? Does this mention denote exclusiveness or contextual emphasis on Christ without necessarily excluding the other two members of the Godhead? Bock's observation is worth noting: the interchange between God the Father and Christ as one called upon shows the unity of the work between God and the exalted one.²⁹

Following this submission, it is quite clear that the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit work together in the process of saving humanity. In this context, Peter presents the package of salvation to his audience as deeply rooted in their acceptance of Jesus Christ. Fitzmyer affirms this experience and says "the phrase "in the name of Jesus" in Greek has commercial overtones of ascribing something to someone. As such salvation is acknowledged as rooted in the work of Jesus Christ"³⁰. Accordingly, Bruce maintains: the name may well have been confessed publicly at baptism³¹ (Acts 22:18, Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 8:5-6). On the other hand Jervell posits: "At the least, it was pronounced over the one being baptized"³²

Word Studies

Repent (*Μετανοήσατε*): The Greek word used for "repent" is derived from two words: "meta" meaning change and "noeo" meaning to think. It conveys the idea

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 266.

³¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the NT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988a), 70.

³² J. Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles: NT Theology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 150.

of a change in thinking, attitude, or direction. In this context, it refers to a turning away from sin and a turning towards the acceptance of the name of Christ³³.

Be baptized (*βαπτισθήτω*): The Greek word for “be baptized” is a passive imperative form of “baptizo.” It means to immerse, dip, or wash. In the New Testament, it typically refers to water baptism, signifying identification with Christ and the initiation into the Christian faith.

In (*ἐπι*): The Greek preposition “epi” in this context indicates the mode or manner of baptism. It can be understood as “on the basis of” or “with respect to.” Therefore, baptism is performed on the basis of or with respect to the name of Jesus Christ. The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG) labels this use of the preposition ἐπι with the dative object τῷ ὀνόματι as a “marker in idiom of authorization.” The one named in the genitive is the one who has the authorizing function.³⁴

Name (*ὀνόματι*): The Greek word for “name” refers not only to the literal name but also to a person’s character, authority, and reputation. It signifies more than just a word; it represents the essence and power of who Jesus is.

Jesus (*Ἰησοῦ*): The name “Jesus” in Greek is “Iesou”. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Yeshua” (meaning “Yahweh is salvation”). This name identifies Jesus as the Savior and emphasizes his redemptive role.

Overall, Acts 2:38 highlight the significance of baptism in the name of Jesus. The preposition “in” (epi) suggests the mode or manner of baptism. Baptism “in the name of Jesus” signifies a baptism that is performed on the basis of or with respect to

³³ Richard Charles Henry, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 105.

³⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., by Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press), s.v. “epi.”

the authority, character, and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is an outward expression of faith, symbolizing identification with Jesus, his teachings, and his saving work.

Theological Analysis

The phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” has theological implications. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is significant in Christian theology because it represents a person’s identification with Jesus, his death, burial, and resurrection. It denotes an association with Jesus’ teachings, lordship, and redemptive work. By being baptized in Jesus’ name, believers publicly express their faith in Jesus as their Savior and commit to following him. The emphasis on baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:38 reflects the theological understanding that salvation and forgiveness of sins are found in Jesus alone. It signifies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the acknowledgment of his role in the redemption of humanity. Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and men (1Tim. 2:5). According to the words of Professor Victor Figueroa, “Peter was calling them to accept Jesus as the Messiah whom they were still waiting for. Baptism in the name of Jesus was not a formula, but a conviction of belief in Jesus Christ as the promised messiah”³⁵. Contextually, Peter talked to these Jews who were still waiting for the promised messiah and would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

In summary, Acts 2:38, with its instruction to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, carries profound theological and symbolic meaning, emphasizing the importance of personal faith, the recognition of Jesus’ authority, and the transformative power of his redemptive work. Thus Paton comments and say “the

³⁵ Victor Figueroa, PhD., class notes for THST 603 Seminar in Ecclesiological Issues; Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya, March 2018.

verb (metanoew) is not to be restricted to mere sorrow for sin i.e., repentance in the sense of contrition; but it imports a change of views, mind, and purpose, and a consequent change of disposition. It is repentance in the sense of conversion.”³⁶ Here Peter’s hearers are required to change their views concerning Jesus. From regarding Him as an impostor, a false Christ, they were now to believe in Him as the true Messiah and be baptized in his name, and to submit themselves to Him as their Lord and King. With this change in their views, there would be a corresponding change in their feelings. Μετανοήσατε, then, denotes a change in an ethical sense, as the immediate moral condition of their baptism. Peter’s audience was implored to submit in the ordinance of baptism as a public profession for their faith in Jesus Christ. They were to show publicly that they were now accepting the fact that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. To this end, the Bible testifies: “so then, those who had received his word were baptized: and that day about three thousands souls were added” (Acts 2:42).

Comparative analysis of Matthew 28:19 Baptism and Baptism in Acts

The oneness theologians are adamant that for baptism to be valid it must be administered in Jesus’ name alone. Yet on the other hand Jesus made a command to the disciples to baptize in the Triune “formula”. Firstly, the command to baptize is predicated upon the words of Jesus saying that “all authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:18-20). Borgen comments and says these words of Jesus give a picture of a victorious military general who assures his followers of his unlimited authority.³⁷ In Matthew, the disciples were commanded to go (πορευθέντες) and make (μαθητεύσατε) disciples of all nations. The aorist participle “go” modifies

³⁶ Paton J. Gloag, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T. Clark, 1870), 109.

the aorist imperative “make disciples” acting to reinforce the action of the main verb. For Christ’s followers to be able to make disciples of all nations they must go. The other present active participles “baptizing” (βαπτίζοντες) and “teaching” (διδάσκοντες) shows the manner on how they will make these disciples of all nations.

The other aspect that we find in this pericope is that there were to baptize into (εἰς) the “name” (ὄνομα) (singular) not in the names (plural). Another observation is that; the use of one preposition, “into” (*eis*), with the verb suggests that there is one action into the one name (ὁνόμα) of the three personalities. Marvin Vincent maintains that, “Baptizing *into* the name has a twofold meaning: Firstly, *unto* denoting *object* or *purpose* and Secondly, *into* denoting *union* or *communion with*”³⁸. Thus, the disciples were to go and make disciples of all nations, calling them to repentance and baptize them *into* a personal relationship with, *into* the possession of, *into* the discipleship of, and *into* a union with the triune God.

On the other hand, in Acts 2: 38, Peter said “be baptized *upon* (ἐπὶ) the name of Jesus Christ and in Acts 10:48, he commanded that Cornelius and his colleagues to be baptized in (ἐν) the name of Jesus Christ. Vincent notes that, “to be baptized upon the name is to be baptized on the confession of that which the name implies: *on the ground* of the name; so that the name Jesus, as the contents of the faith and confession, is the ground upon which the becoming baptized rests.”³⁹ Furthermore, “In the name has reference to the *sphere* within which alone true baptism is

³⁷ P Borgen, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T. Clark, 1996), 59-60.

³⁸ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1886), 149.

³⁹ Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1, 149.

accomplished.”⁴⁰ In his observation, Motyer in Johnny Stringer contends and says “baptism *upon* the name of Jesus Christ signifies that baptism rests upon the authority of the Lord Jesus and is spiritually effective only through His personal presence and activity.”⁴¹ Gareth on the other hand concurs with Vincent and says “the phrase could either mean “by the authority of Christ” or “upon the confession of Jesus Christ.”⁴²

This brief analysis of both Matthean and Luke-Acts baptismal accounts shows that both Matthew and Luke in Acts indicate that baptism was done under the authority of a name. It can be inferred also that those who were to be baptized were to repent and show some faith in Jesus. The context of Acts 2:38 proves why Peter used a slight different grammatical expression—(ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Act 2:38)___ which literally mean upon the name of Jesus Christ or having made a confession of Jesus the Messiah___ they were to be baptized. The use of a name in general both in Matthew and in Acts suggests that it was invoked during baptism as it was done in the casting of demons (Matt 10: 8; Luke 10:17) as well as in the healings in Acts (Acts 3: 6).

Baptism and the doctrine of Trinity

The doctrine of Oneness Pentecostal which says there is only one person in the Godhead -Jesus Christ- in relation to baptism calls for a closer examination of the doctrine of Trinity. The United Pentecostal Church International believes that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not names of separate persons, but titles of positions held by God. This is the reason among many why they advocate for the name of Jesus alone

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Johnny Stringer, *The Book of Acts* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, 1999), 42.

in baptism. Thus Father Basil of Caesarea argues and says, “The naming of Christ in baptism is the confession of the whole.” On the other hand, to invoke only the name of the Father or Spirit is insufficient. The name of Christ is inclusive and adequate on its own, referring at once to the Father who gave the Son and the Spirit who is the unction.”⁴³

The doctrine of Trinity has been under attack throughout history coming down to our time. The Oneness teaching which upholds that there is one person in the Godhead who represents others in baptism causes a challenge to the interpretation of the doctrine of Trinity. As noted above, the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 is that baptism must be administered in recognition of the entire Godhead. Therefore, the doctrine of Trinity recognizes that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons of the Godhead who makes one God. Gulley observes: “the Trinity consists of three eternal, divine, equally self-existent Persons as one God. Each one is called “God” by another in the Trinity.”⁴⁴ As such, the evidence from the scriptures shows that this notion by the Oneness theologians is mistaken and incorrect.

Throughout the whole canonical scripture, we find the evidence of the Trinity. For example, to mention a few texts; we find evidence of the Trinity during Christ’s baptism. “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” (Matt 3:16-17) Again promising the Holy Spirit to his disciples Christ made reference to Trinity. “When the Helper comes, whom I will

⁴² Gareth L. Reese, *New Testament History: Acts* (Ann Arbor, MI: Buaun-Brumfield, 1966), 62.

⁴³ Basil of Caesarea, “De spiritu sancto 12.28,” in vol. VIII of *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 18.

⁴⁴ Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity*, 32.

send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about me.”(John 15:26). By this text, some see the Holy Spirit as just mere power or force from the Father and the Son since the Bible attest to the fact that He came from the Father through Jesus. (John.14: 15-17; 15:26). However, Rengstorf, et al. observes that “the Greek word *apostello* (to send forth or send out) was a technical term among the Jews for sending out an official representative with a special task (cf. Matt 11:10; Acts 10:17; Rev.1:1; 22:6).”⁴⁵ In John 14:16 Jesus promised that He will ask the Father for another advocate or Parakletos to be with his disciples always. The word used for another is “allos” in Greek which has a connotation of the same kind or nature. According to 1 John 2:1, Jesus is another Parakletos or advocate, hence the Holy Spirit is not the power of Jesus but he is also God. Thus Grudem posits that “if the Holy Spirit is understood simply to be the power of God, rather than a distinct person, then a number of passages would simply not make sense in the Bible because in them the Holy Spirit and his power or the power of God are both mentioned.”⁴⁶

Talking about this divine relationship, Jones has this to say; “when we recognize the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit we are able to speak about real threeness in God without violating the truth that God is one. Everything that is true of the Father is true of the Son, except that the Father is not the Son. Everything that is true of the Son is true of the Holy Spirit, except that the Son is not the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Karl H. Rengstorf, “*Apostello*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:400.

⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 232-233.

⁴⁷ Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 69.

This point affirms the truth we find that God is indeed one but also indeed three. The Anti-Trinitarian or Jesus only theologians are overlooking this fundamental truth of the relational nature of God in the Scriptures. Thomas Aquinas describes this triune relationship and says “the eternal life of God is a life of relationship. This helps us to understand the specific nature of God’s greatness and glory.”⁴⁸ Guthrie furthers this truth and says, “Oneness of God is not the oneness of a distinct, self-contained individual; it is the unity of a *community* of persons who love each other and live together in harmony.”⁴⁹ Affirming this important issue to students at the Avondale School, White has this to say: “We are to co-operate with the three highest powers in heaven,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these powers will work through us, making us workers together with God.”⁵⁰

Suffice to say that most bible scholars attest to the truthfulness of the doctrine of Trinity in the whole Bible. It is therefore a grave mistake to maintain that the name Jesus is for the Father and the Holy Spirit in baptism. It is therefore evident why Jesus would ask His disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The research in this segment would like to conclude and say those who immerse their candidates once in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are in line with the teaching of the Bible, and should continue practicing and teaching thus.

Theological Implications of the Doctrine of Trinity

⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen, TX: Christian Classic, 1948), 1.28.3.

⁴⁹ Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 92.

⁵⁰ White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 617.

The book of Acts esteems the doctrine of Trinity by picturing the activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit within the book. As one of the Christian teachings, the doctrine of Trinity and its theological implications is soteriological. The mention of the three members of the Godhead in a single chapter by Luke is significant and it has some soteriological connotations in the sense that the plan of salvation in which baptism is the result of is a function of the whole Deity. It emphasizes that salvation is an act of God in the history of planet earth. In the very first book of the Bible, we see God taking an active role when our forefathers had sinned in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15, we hear of the first gospel promise of a Savior who was to come and crush the head of the serpent.

The Oneness theologians in the book of Acts particularly chapter 2:38 follows the belief of Modalism which sees members of Trinity not as three distinct persons but one person who reveals himself in different modes in his creation. However, by following this notion, some biblical passages are hard to explain and still remain with meaning. For example, the Trinity was present during the baptism of Jesus. After Christ was baptized, as he came out of the waters, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father was heard from heaven confirming that Jesus was divine, which in this case, is something not practical if it were a single person (Matt 3:16-17). As such, Schaff clearly puts it and say “we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity; neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance.”⁵¹ Through this understanding, we realize that the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to Christian faith. It helps us understand better how God relates with his creation and vice-versa. Importantly, the book of Acts has indications

⁵¹ Philip Schaff, *The Greek and Latin Creeds*, The Creeds of Christendom, vol. 2. (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1877), 66.

of the presence of divine direction in every activity, where God the Father and the risen Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit play important roles in the movement of events.

The Bible posits that each one of the Godhead has a particular function He plays in the salvation of mankind and each member of the Godhead has played a major role in the history of mankind. Paul in Ephesians 1: 3-5 makes an important statement that we were blessed and chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world. So for the plan of salvation to be executed, each member of the Deity assumed his duty. As Norman Gulley observes it and says, “Each member of the Godhead plays a unique part in the plan of salvation, with the Father as Source, the Son as Mediator, and the Spirit as Actualizer. Since Christ’s ascension, the Spirit comes not to replace the risen Christ but to bring Him to believers, and to do a work for Christ on earth that is complementary to the work in heaven.”⁵²

Most Anti-Trinitarian confuses the essence of God to his roles and function in the whole drama of the great controversy. For this reason, it is of vital importance to have a clear understanding of the reality and the essence of the Deity. The doctrine of the Trinity helps us not to be idolaters but worshipers of a Triune, loving God (1 John 4:8). Samuel Powell observes this and posits “without the doctrine of the Trinity, our talk about God’s love can be overly sentimental as we attribute human emotions to God. But in the context of the Trinity, God’s love can mean only one thing---that the Father sent the Son to die as an atoning sacrifice and that the Holy Spirit has come to continue the ministry of Jesus and to bring about our response to God in the form of obedience and praise.”⁵³

⁵² Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God As Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), 31.

⁵³ Samuel M. Powell, *Discovering Our Faith: An Introduction to Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 2008), 332.

The doctrine of the Trinity also helps the individual members to realize the reciprocal love of God. As such God expects a relationship that will mirror the Trinity in His Church. This love of God accommodates the free will choices of individuals to belong to him by choice not by force. In the context of baptism, God as Trinity shows that the teaching of infant baptism is not in harmony with the scripture because the infants are not able to choose. Also the teachings about predestination that says God predestined others to be saved while others for doom are as well exposed to be unscriptural. This thesis maintains that God in the eternity past loved the world so much that the plan of salvation was laid even before man sinned. Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, volunteered to come and save man from the predicament of sin.

This thesis maintains that the book of Acts esteems the doctrine of the Trinity and the importance of the doctrine in the life of an individual believer. Different theories have been developed in the past and present concerning the significance of Jesus in the role of salvation. Recently, there is a growing wave of teaching in the African space which has obtained a lot of adherents_ the “African spirituality”. This belief emphasizes on praying to God the Father directly via the so-called ancestral spirit without necessarily recognizing the role of Christ. In the midst of this great controversy struggle, the devil has tried to obscure the significance of Christ in the plan of salvation. Ellen White comments and says “the wicked one redoubles his efforts to defeat the work of Christ in man’s behalf and to fasten souls in his snares”⁵⁴. However the Trinity doctrine in this research shows that the Father, the Son and the

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888), 441.

Holy Spirit are one. As such no one can recognize and accept the authority of the Father and yet fails to submit to Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

As noted above this thesis maintains that the true God is one (Deut. 6:4) in three distinct persons sharing the same essence. The doctrine of the Trinity must be distinguished from polytheism, that is, three gods like those (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) of Hinduism. Neither does it share the same understanding with the Muslim, and non-messianic Jews. These believe in a mono-personal god, they do not believe in the Messiah who has come, Jesus of Nazareth. This Thesis maintains that the true God is tri-personal. A God who divinely and eternally showed love within himself before he created the world and thus continued to love his creation for He is love (1 John 4:8). The Trinity doctrine thus helps us communicate our faith which includes a number of virtues. Thus in a world full of power struggle, the Trinity doctrine emphasizes on the virtue of love and humility (Philippians 2:5).

The doctrine of Trinity gives more clarity to the Old Testament text. This doctrine was coined by the early Church Fathers like Tertullian and Theophilus of Antioch to reveal the mystery of God as revealed by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians (Eph. 1: 9; 3:3). The use of “us”, plural statements in the OT makes this doctrine viable (Gen.1:26-27; 3:22; 11:7 & Isaiah 6:8). The word *ehūd* used to describe God in Hebrew also gives an emphasis on the unity in diversity of God. While “Elohim” and “Adonai” are plural terms used for God, the emphasis is the oneness of God in this plurality.

Furthermore, the doctrine of Trinity helps the Church see the great commission of Matthew 28:18-20 as a continuation of the mission of God to the Earth. In John 17: 18 Jesus indicated that as the Father had sent Him, He in turn sends

his disciples to the world. The doctrine of Trinity thus gives a contemporary individual a right theological framework for the purpose of existence.

Furthermore, the doctrine of Trinity gives a proper eschatological framework as we engage ourselves in the mission of the Master. The church is able to find hope for the future through the working of the third person of the Godhead. The doctrine of the second coming of Jesus is certain as we appreciate the work which Christ launched before his ascension and the sure promise of the angels in the book_ “this same Jesus will come just the same way he went to heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Finally, this thesis maintains that the phrase “baptized in the name of Jesus” in Acts 2:38 is a call not a formula to recognize and accept the authority of Jesus which is derived from him being part of the Godhead. Thus the book of Acts recognizes the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the thrust of all gospel activities during the era of the Apostles hence baptism was part of the mission of the Apostolic Church.

The Meaning of Baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts

The meaning of baptism in the book of Acts like any other biblical passages can be explained from the contextual narrative of the text. In the words of Gulley: “the theological meaning of baptism goes deeper than saying that baptism is immersion in water.”⁵⁵ Gulley further expands: “It must be understood in the context of the biblical view of God”.⁵⁶ To understand God and his redemptive act of love is fundamental in understanding any biblical doctrine. The redemptive act of God manifested in Christ’ death and resurrection further explains the act and the

⁵⁵ Gulley, *Systematic theology: The church and the last things*, 400.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

significance of baptism. Alfred Plummer notes, “it is only when baptism is administered by immersion that its full significance is seen.”⁵⁷ The evidence from the book of Acts (Acts 8:38-39) favors baptism by immersion, and this was a strong indication that the apostles believed in the death and resurrection of Christ. Thus, baptism by immersion had a theological significance upon the recipients of it.⁵⁸ The audience of Peter who were mostly Jews was to confess that Christ indeed died and rose from the dead, giving them hope of resurrection too. In baptism, candidates symbolically die with Christ and rise with him again. Paul, reminding Christians in Romans, said: do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death (Rom. 6:3); we were buried with Him through baptism into death (Rom.6:4). This as well affirms the mode of immersion in plenty waters (John 3:23). As we noted above, baptism during the early Church was often done in the name of Jesus Christ because he was the main subject whom they were presenting both to the Jews and the Gentiles. In explaining the symbolic act of baptism, Howard notes “in the symbolic act of baptism the believer enters into the death of Christ, and in a real sense that death becomes his death; and he enters into the resurrection of Christ, and that resurrection becomes his resurrection.”⁵⁹ So baptism in the book of Acts meant a belief or in a way a public confession that one accepts the death and the resurrection of Christ as well as identifying with Him as the promised Messiah. Baptism during the apostolic period also confirmed true repentance in an individual. That is why in his call Peter made it clear to his audience that they were to

⁵⁷ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke, The International Critical Commentary*, ed., Samuel R. Driver, et al., 5th ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1981), 88.

⁵⁸ “Baptism,” *SDA Encyclopedia*, ed. Don F. Neufeld (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 128.

“repent and be baptized” in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). It demonstrated that one has accepted Christ’s cleansing and surrendered the old way of life and be buried together with Christ through baptism. By this surrender, an individual entered in a covenantal relationship with God. As in OT, circumcision marked the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:1-11), baptism in Christ’s name in NT marked an entry into a spiritual covenant with God. Paul likens baptism with circumcision and calls it “spiritual circumcision which was made without hands performed by Jesus” (Col. 2:11, 12). Thus Rice observes and says “by this act an individual is in line to receive the fulfillment of the covenant promises.”⁶⁰

Furthermore, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ during the apostolic Church was followed by the receipt of the Holy Spirit. The working together of Christ and the Holy Spirit at baptism can be seen vividly even during this period. Firstly, during Christ’s baptism, the Holy Spirit was seen coming upon Christ, anointing him with power to do the mission which was before him (Matt 3:13-17; Acts 10:38). Now during the Apostles’ period, when baptism was administered in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit generally followed to empower the believers (cf. Acts 19:1-6). In like manner, when believers today are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they are dedicated, consecrated and united with the triune God to spread the everlasting gospel. The Holy Spirit takes full control and cleanses the hearts from sin; John calls this the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11). This baptismal experience of the Holy Spirit on account of the name of Jesus saw the members being endowed with special divine gifts enabling them to do witnessing for Christ (Acts 1:5, 8). Thus Gottfried Oosterwal observes and says His gifts are “a special divine

⁵⁹ J. K. Howard, *New Testament Baptism* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970), 69.

⁶⁰ G. E. Rice, “Baptism: Union with Christ,” *Ministry*, May 1982, 21.

endowment, given at the time of baptism, to enable the believer to serve the church and to minister to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ.”⁶¹

Lastly, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts was not a new dimension or practice which did not recognize the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but it was a strong affirmation that Jesus Christ indeed is Lord and God. Through Him and His baptism, both Jews and Gentiles are welcome into the “spiritual kingdom of Christ.”⁶² Those who accepted his baptism were by virtue added to the church which is Christ’s body (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Summary and Conclusion

The concept of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:38 was a call to the Jews to show publicly that they now embrace Christ and his gospel. Embracing Christ meant that one became his disciple and a member in his church. This baptism in the name of Jesus required that all who will be subjected to it exhibited faith in the Lord Jesus. There was no room for infant baptism since the prerequisite during the apostolic Church was faith in Jesus. The baptism in Jesus’s name in Acts esteems the Trinitarian baptism in the sense that the Holy Spirit sent from the Father in the name of Jesus empowered and gave joy to all who confessed the name of Jesus, making them become active in the global mission of the Church. Baptism in Acts 2:38 is not a “new formula” which seems to demand all in the Christian world to embrace as the Oneness Pentecostals would say, rather it was a call to confession of faith in Christ as the Messiah. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the baptism in the name of Jesus in Acts

⁶¹ Gottfried Oosterwal, “Every Member a Minister, From Baptism to a Theological Base,” *Ministry*, February 1980, 4-7.

⁶² “Baptism: Symbol of Entrance Into the Church” [John 3:3, 5], White in *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6. ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6: 21.

was a water baptism through immersion upon confessing Jesus as the savior of the world (Acts 8: 36-38). The chapter reveals that Acts 2:38 must be interpreted and understood contextually. For one to be exposed to the baptism of Christ there should be repentance, which is, a change of thinking and behavior in the course of action. Forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit was guaranteed to all who showed remorse to sin and repented. The context of Acts 2:38 and the whole book of Acts in general show that there is generally a strong harmonious relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The view of oneness Pentecostals which says these are just titles of one person fails to meet with biblical truth as revealed in the book of Acts and the entire Bible. We notice how Luke pictures the triune God in his historical narrative and thus one can conclude and say, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:38 and other similar texts in the book meant an “appeal to confess and accept Jesus Christ as the center of all the teachings of the Apostles not necessarily a formula to be established.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The importance of baptism cannot be over emphasized. The study has shown us that for baptism to be significant, at least two things are mandatory to the recipient: repentance and faith. We observed that from Acts baptism was performed to those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ always preceded baptism. Commenting on this aspect of faith, Ellen White notes: “the steps in conversion, plainly marked out, are repentance, faith in Christ as the world’s Redeemer, faith in His death, burial and resurrection, shown by baptism, and His ascension on high to plead in the sinner’s behalf”¹

We noticed in Chapter 1 of this research that a background that gave rise to the statement of the problem demonstrates that a challenge has erupted in the Christian circles concerning the practice of baptism. The background indicates that arguments erupted within the Pentecostal movement about 1914 concerning the words of the Lord in Matthew 28:19 and the words of Peter in Acts 2:38. The heated argument is based on “the formula” for baptism and the debate on the doctrine of Trinity. Those who practice baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Jesus Only) claim to

¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 4 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1876), 40.

have received a special revelation from the Lord which says baptism must be done in Jesus name alone not according to Matthew 28:19. As such, the purpose is spelt out clearly so as to meet with such a challenge head on. This study is significant in the twenty-first century because this movement of Oneness theology disregards the teaching of the bible concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. The justification demonstrates that there is a need for a proper understanding of the Godhead to the individual members and the world church so as to be established in truth and be in a position of denouncing the doctrine of Anti-Trinitarians. For “Jesus Only” proponents, the Holy Ghost supposedly had revealed unto them that the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is Jesus Christ. In other words there is only one person in the Godhead and that person is Jesus Christ. Thus the study focuses itself in understanding the meaning and the significance of baptism according to the book of Acts. In this focus point, the study shows that the doctrine of Trinity in relation to baptism is central to the understanding of our salvation.

In the second Chapter of our study, the concept of baptism in the name of Jesus is investigated and analyzed throughout the eras of historical Theology. The chapter begins by analyzing the antecedent to baptism in the OT backgrounds. This analysis reveals that baptism in general has been practiced in different communities and different dimensions. On these different platforms baptism has been seen as playing a significant initiatory role either in the Jewish community or in the Christian one. The analysis further helps to give an appreciation of the development of Christian baptism. The baptism of Jesus and later his command at the close of his ministry is fundamental to the practice of the rite today. In this chapter we also observed that throughout the centuries, Christians have generally used the formula of Matthew 28:19 with slight variations. We have noted however the exception of

baptism during the Apostolic era where baptism was administered in the name of Jesus Christ or the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48). In all these instances we noticed that the mode of baptism was generally immersion in many waters (Acts 8: 38-39). Other modes of baptism which include affusion or sprinkling baptism came at a later stage of Church's history. The chapter further reveals that the mention of the name of Jesus occurs several times in the book of Acts and refers to a response to his power and authority (2: 38; 3:6; 4:8-10; 8:12; 10:48; 16:18, etc.).

Also, the baptism in the name of Triune God in this chapter reveals a privilege which one enjoys by being subjected to the ownership of the whole Godhead. Through this kind of baptism, we noticed that an individual follows on the same path which Jesus followed and experienced during his own baptism. Thus, a voice of God the Father was heard from heaven and the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove on one occasion (Matt 3: 16-17). We notice in this chapter that the triune baptism affirms that there is unity of purpose in the Godhead. The Jesus Only exponents claim that the words Father, Son and the Holy Spirit do not constitute names. The chapter has shown that those are names in verity. I also believe that Matthew 28:19 definitely confirms that "Father" is a name, "Son" is a name and "Holy Ghost" is a name.

The third Chapter is a theological-exegetical analysis of Acts 2:38 so as to arrive at the correct meaning of the text. We have noted that the baptism of the Jews in the name of Jesus at Pentecost follows Peter's exhortation to accept Jesus Christ as the Christ-Messiah, to accept him openly and join his Church. It was to deal with the guilt of the generation that was responsible for the crucifixion of Christ which also brought salvation to both Jews and gentiles. The forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit was the result. The exegetical analysis in this chapter reveals that baptism

in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:38 is not a formula for baptism as Oneness theologians maintain but rather it is a statement that calls for a belief or confession. The analysis further reveals that the “name of Jesus” in this text is not an all-inclusive name of other members of the Godhead. Instead, the mention of the name of Jesus alone in this text is both deliberate and contextual to the audience. The chapter shows that the audience of Peter on this day of Pentecost was a mixed one. The Jews from different nationalities had gathered for the same purpose, Pentecost. These were still blinded to the fact that Christ whom they had rejected and crucified was the Messiah they had long waited for. It is from this context Peter described the kind of baptism they were to be exposed in. The emphasis and the subject was Christ, not the Father or the Holy Spirit. Thus, the analysis of some words used in the text attests to this fact. For example, the word used for repent (*Μετανοήσατε*) indicates a change of mind, attitudes, feelings and direction. These were supposed to change the direction of fighting with Christ and begin to accept his name (*ὄνομα*), that is, his authority, character and personality. In this chapter, there is a comparative analysis of baptism in triune formula and Acts 2:38. The analysis demonstrates that baptism in Matthew 28:19 has a command on the imperative mood directed to those who were to perform this rite (*μαθητεύσατε*) while in Acts 2:38, it is a description of what will happen to those who accept the name of Jesus.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of baptism and the doctrine of Trinity which is revealed in the baptismal formula of Matthew. This analysis reveals that baptism must be performed in the Triune formula because the whole Trinity was involved in the plan for salvation of mankind. Thus, baptism by definition and implication requires that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be recognized in the whole process, hence the validity of Matthew 28:19 formula. Finally, the chapter

reveals that truly Jesus is God as the Oneness Pentecostals attest, but they are failing to realize that He is not the Father neither is He the Holy Spirit.; the Holy Spirit is God and the Father is also God. Again, the Father is not Jesus Christ nor is He the Holy Spirit. The chapter revealed that there is one God manifest in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Jesus Only Pentecostals teach that Christ is the Father, He is the Son and He is the Holy Ghost, of which I contend that it's a mistaken position of the doctrine of God.

Conclusion

This study concludes and says baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts should be interpreted contextually, and it means nothing more than a call for the individuals to confess Christ as both the Messiah and Lord. This is the original meaning of the term “baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” in the book of Acts. This study further concludes and says baptism in the name of Jesus in the book of Acts represents a person’s identification with Jesus, his death, burial, and resurrection. It denotes an association with Jesus’ teachings, lordship, and redemptive work. By being baptized in Jesus’ name, believers are called to publicly express their faith in Jesus as their Savior and commit to following him. The emphasis on baptism in the name of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:38 reflects the theological understanding that salvation and forgiveness of sins are found in Jesus alone. It signifies a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the acknowledgment of his role in the redemption of humanity. It is not a formula for baptism as some contend but a statement of belief and confession. Again to prove that it is not a formula, there are slight differences in wording in the passages dealing with this same subject (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19: 5).

The study sees baptism in the name of triune God as very necessary in the life of Christian convert because it helps an individual firstly, to have a proper theological

framework of the doctrine of God. Secondly, it also implores members of the Christian family to appreciate unity as an important theme of the Bible portrayed in the Godhead. Thirdly, to appreciate the fact that in baptism one is being subjected under the care, protection, authority and ownership of the entire Godhead. The study further concludes and says baptism in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit is necessary to every follower of Jesus. It concludes that the proper way of administering the ordinance of baptism is by immersion of a candidate in deep waters once in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (John 3: 23; Col 2: 12; Matthew 28:19 respectively). In simpler terms the process means a recognition and belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in full submission to God as Trinity. It means an individual has entered into a personal relation with Christ and is committed to living in harmony with the principles of the kingdom of God.

The study also concludes and says the invocation of a name (of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) upon baptism is significant because it actually affirms by whose authority and character the process is conducted. To this end, baptism as symbolizing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is vitally linked with salvation (Mark 16:16). This explains its importance not that baptism brings salvation; but the man Jesus who is behind the symbolism of baptism saves and saves to the uttermost (Act 4: 12).

Implications

The implications of correct interpretation of Acts 2:38 include a paradigm shift in the practice of baptism for the Jesus Only Pentecostals. This practice should be informed by a proper biblical-hermeneutical foundation. Failure to understand and follow the correct meaning of the biblical text is counterproductive. The correct doctrinal framework will enhance a proper worship experience which is based on a

true doctrinal foundation. A correct interpretation of the text has soteriological implications to the life of a believer. Proper doctrinal practice enhances the experience of salvation which involves repentance, confession, forgiveness, justification and sanctification. This becomes a believer's assurance of salvation.

A defective understanding of the role of the Trinity in baptism and concluding that the name of Jesus in the book of Acts stands for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit exposes individuals to the danger of losing salvation. It is Augustine from Roger Olson's work---*The Trinity*--- who asserted that "anyone who denies the Trinity is in danger of losing his salvation, but anyone who tries to understand the Trinity is in danger of losing his mind."² It is the mystery of God to be studied throughout the endless ages to come.

Recommendations

For the advancement of knowledge in the scholarly realm, this study recommends that research may be conducted to investigate the meaning of baptism by the Spirit and fire in the context of Pentecostal doctrine. The study further recommends that the institutions and Churches take some deliberate endeavors to teach their students and members of the Christian family the importance of baptism in the Triune formula. Since baptism is one of Christian doctrines, a full-fledged lesson may be prepared and be placed in the catechism (a manual of bible doctrines book) to teach those who have just joined the church as well as regular members proper hermeneutics of the book of Acts in relation to baptism. The meaning of baptism in the name of Jesus only, the work of the Holy Spirit and the issue of speaking in tongues in view of the emerging current trends in the worship styles may be

² Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 1.

discussed. A right systematic theology in these subjects will definitely impact the community of believers positively as far as their Christian experience is concerned. The comment by James Leo Jr. commenting on the benefits of proper systematic theology is worth noting: “Systematic Theology is very helpful in formulation and teaching of the biblical doctrines to Churches and institutions, serves as guide to biblical preachers and lay Christians, it also defends the gospel truth against error, philosophy and culture as well as affirmation of the Christian faith in the face of non-Christian religions.”³

³ James Leo Garrett Jr, “*Why Systematic Theology*,” CTR 3, No. 2 (1989): 281.

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