

There is no explicit evidence of infant baptism in the Bible. The earliest historical reference to infant baptism is in the third century, by Origen.



More importantly, what do we learn from the Bible?

“You must therefore go and make disciples of people of all nations my disciples. You must baptize them.” (Matthew 28:19 Barclay) People would have to become disciples of Christ prior to qualifying for baptism. A disciple is a taught one, a believer, a follower, in this case, of Jesus Christ.

Do infants have the capacity to comprehend the seriousness of baptism or to undertake the needed changes?

What does becoming a disciple involve according to the Bible? A number of things that infants and small children are incapable of doing. These include:

“Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (John 17:3 NAB)

Come to know God and Jesus, developing a relationship with them.

“Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah.” (Acts 3:19,20 NLT)

Repenting of one’s sinful course of life and turning one life over to God.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.’” (Matthew 16:24 NLT)

Turn from one's selfish ways and follow Jesus.

"What must I do to be saved?' They told him, 'Become a believer and you will be saved.'" (Acts 16:30-31 NJB)

A person must become a believer in Jesus Christ first.

"And they spoke the word of the Lord to him... and he was baptized at once." (Acts 16:32-33 ESV)

After receiving the word of God, the Philippian jailer accepted it and was baptized.

"For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" (Romans 10:13 NAB)

A believer must confess Christ publicly.

"I already told you,' he said, 'and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You don't want to become His disciples too, do you?' They ridiculed him: 'You're that man's disciple, but we're Moses' disciples.'" (John 9:27-28 CSB)

A believer makes an active choice to become Christ's disciple. Such a person would have the capacity to reject such discipleship, as did the Pharisees.

"Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38 NASB)

This shows that repentance must occur prior to baptism.

"When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.'" (Matthew 3:7-8 NAB)

This shows, even more forcefully, that repentance is required of the disciple prior to baptism.

“Hearing that they had turned him out, Jesus found him and asked, ‘Have you faith in the Son of Man?’ The man answered, ‘Tell me who he is, sir, that I may put my faith in him.’ ‘You have seen him,’ said Jesus; ‘indeed, it is he who is speaking to you.’ ‘Lord, I believe,’ he said, and fell on his knees before him.” (John 9:35-38 REB)

The person must believe in, and put faith in, Jesus.

“We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life... We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.” (Romans 6:4-6 NAB)

Baptism must be recognized by the believer as the turning point of their life. The believer is capable of, and does, change their life, crucifying their old self, and living, therefore, in newness of life.

“And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 3:21 NLT)

The disciples recognized that their baptism was their outward action symbolizing his changed, or clean conscience, toward God.

“But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:12 NIV)

Notice that only believers were baptized, and these were “men and women,” not little children.

Little children and infants are incapable of any of the above actions, and so, would not qualify for baptism.

Some have mistakenly thought that the Didache (c. 100 CE) talked about infant baptism, erroneously concluding that first century Christians practiced infant baptism. However, this cannot be, because the Didache said, "Before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and be baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before." (Didache, 7) Obviously, infants and small children are not only incapable of such decisions; it would be cruel to expect them to fast.

But the point is, that, based on the Bible, infants and small children do not have the capacity to comprehend the seriousness of baptism, or to undertake the needed changes. So infant baptism is not a practice in harmony with the Bible.