

INFANT BAPTISM

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LOGIC



ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

- A covenant of grace and promise
- An evangelical/gospel covenant
- The promised “seed” = Christ; all the promises find their fulfillment in him
- An everlasting covenant



MOSAIC COVENANT

- 400 years after Abrahamic covenant
- Cannot overturn the Abrahamic covenant and must not be confused with it
- A temporary guardian to prepare Israel for Christ’s coming

NEW COVENANT

- The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant
- Primarily new in relation to the Mosaic covenant; new in relation to the Abrahamic covenant only as a butterfly is “new” in relation to a caterpillar, or a flower to a bud (i.e., its fulfillment)

Circumcision

- An outward sign of God’s covenant promises.
- Sign of initiation into Israel, which was the Church in the Old Testament.
- Given to believing Abraham and his infant children.

Baptism

- Outward sign of *the same promises, only fulfilled in Christ.*
- Sign of initiation into the Christian Church—the *same Church, only expanded in Christ to include Gentiles.*
- Should be given to believers and their children.

“The baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.” (39 Articles of Religion)

ISRAEL

The Jewish Church/Church in the Old Testament, into which God always intended to bring the nations

THE CHURCH

The Israel of God—Israel with unbelieving Jews cut off and believing Gentiles grafted in through Christ

Unfaithful

Israelites

Merely ethnic Jews; only circumcised in the flesh

Faithful/ Spiritual Israel

“Circumcised” hearts



Unbelieving Jewish branches cut off

Believing remnant remains, united with Christ

Christ

Believing Gentiles* grafted in and made sons of Abraham through Christ

*Formerly separated by a dividing wall of hostility, which was broken down by Christ





Circumcision

For 2,000 years, infants were included in the outward sign of God's promises and in the membership of God's Church/covenant people.

Jewish Proselyte Baptism

In the years leading up to Christ's institution of Christian baptism, the Jews had already begun baptizing Gentile converts *and their infants* (even on the day of their birth). The apostles would have assumed that the proselytizing baptism of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) included infants.



Baptism

If infants were suddenly excluded from God's Church and covenant, it would have caused a major controversy and required a definite settlement.



Apostolic Language

Instead, the apostles used the infant-inclusive language of the covenant of circumcision when calling Jews to baptism (Acts 2:38–39; cf. Gen. 17:7, “*you and your children*”), and directly connected circumcision and baptism (Col. 2:11–12).

Instead, we read of the apostles baptizing believers *and their households* (e.g., Acts 16:15), generally understood to include young children, without the clear qualification that all believed (which would have been misleading to the Jewish mind if baptism was not for the children of believers).

Instead, the apostles recognized Old Testament baptisms in which children were included (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:2, “*all*” Israel was baptized in the Red Sea).

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

The earliest writers traced infant baptism back to the apostles and testified that it was the church's universal practice. Not a single writer questioned infant baptism for any biblical or theological reason. For example:

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- **Origen**, born 185 AD to a Christian family, writes that infant baptism was “received from the apostles.”
 - **Hippolytus** writes in 215 AD that infant baptism was the “unquestioned rule” of the whole church.
 - **Polycarp** writes of serving God “since infancy” (about 70 AD, time of the apostles).
 - **Justin Martyr**, born around 100 AD, writes of those “made disciples [*ematheteuthesan*, passive form] of Christ from childhood” (cf. Mt. 28:19).
 - **Synod of Carthage** in 253 AD, church leaders in Africa unanimously agree: infants can be baptized even at birth.
 - **Augustine** writes that infant baptism was “the firm tradition of the universal Church”; in all his travels, never encountered a single church that did not baptize infants.

Every major Protestant confession affirms infant baptism and most explicitly oppose the Anabaptists, the first major group in church history to reject paedobaptism (see 39 Articles, 27; WCF, 28.4; Belgic Confession, 34; Augsburg Confession, 9).

Methodists likewise affirmed infant baptism in their confession of faith (25 Articles, 17) and were especially strong proponents of infant baptism. John Wesley and every major Methodist theologian defended the practice from Scripture and church history (e.g., see Watson, Pope, Summers, Clarke, Ralston, Miley).

“[From] the grounds of infant baptism, taken from Scripture, reason, and primitive, universal practice ... it follows, that infants may, yea, ought to be baptized, and that none ought to hinder them.”
(John Wesley)



THE SPIRITUAL STATUS OF INFANTS

- the kingdom of heaven belongs to infants (Mt. 19:14)
- infants are blessed by Christ (Mk. 10:16)
- infants are provisionally justified by Christ (Rom. 5:12–21)
- infants do not reject Christ's universal, objective atonement
- if infants die, they are fully regenerated and enter heaven
- infants with a believing parent are holy/clean (1 Cor. 7:14)
- infants are to be raised “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1, 4)
- *If infants are redeemed by Christ and the proper subjects of regeneration and heaven, then they should be given the sign of God's promise of regeneration and received into God's family on earth.*