

# Who Can Baptize?



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<sup>47</sup>“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” <sup>48</sup> And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.” - Acts 10:47+48a (NASB)

Restoration Movement Literature

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The question proposed, who can baptize, is a common one – can only ministers baptize? How about only elders, or pastors? Must someone be ordained to be baptized?

In the Catholic faith, only priests can baptize. In Mormonism, only priests ordained in the order of Melchizedek can baptize. In most denominations, only ordained ministers/elders/deacons can baptize.

So who is right, or perhaps none? **What does the Bible say?**

For the sake of our study, we are speaking only of *water baptism*. The baptisms of the Holy Spirit, fire, and suffering are not in context of this study. However, you are encouraged to check out the chart entitled, “The Five Types of Baptism in the New Testament” at [www.callaochristianchurch.org/bible-studies](http://www.callaochristianchurch.org/bible-studies).

So for our study who can conduct water baptisms, let us first establish the fact that there are no baptisms in the Old Testament. This is expected, as the Old Covenant/Testament did not include baptism as part of the Law of Moses.

So let us look at the people who baptized in the New Testament:

<b>Who Conducted a Baptism in the Bible?</b>		
<b>#</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Scripture Reference</b>
1	John the Baptist	Matthew 3:1-15; Mark 1:4-9; Luke 3:3-21; John 1:24-33*
2	Jesus’ disciples	John 4:2
3	Jesus’ Apostles	Acts 2:14, 38, 41
4	Philip the Evangelist	Acts 8:12+13, 38
5	Ananias the Disciple	Acts 9:10, 18; 22:16
6	The brethren from Joppa who accompanied Peter	Acts 10:23, 47+48

7	Unknown (Scripture does not specify); could have been Paul, Timothy, or Luke	Acts 16:1-3, 11, 15
8	Paul or Silas	Acts 16:33
9	Paul	Acts 18:8; 19:5
10	Paul, Apollos, Peter	1 Corinthians 1:12+13, 16
* There are many more passages about John the Baptist baptizing. For the sake of the length of the chart, just the initial examples are given.		

What can we learn from these examples?

Obviously, we expected that John the Baptist, Jesus' disciples and Apostles (including Paul) could and did baptize – but what about the others? Who were they?

## PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

There was Philip the disciple/Apostle from Bethsaida and then there was Philip the Evangelist, first chosen to serve tables in Acts 6:5.

How can we be sure that it was Philip the Evangelist who baptized in Acts chapter 8 and not Philip the Apostle? Acts 8:1 says that all in the church at Jerusalem were scattered abroad *except the Apostles*. Specifically, then, it says in Acts 8:5 that the other Philip went down to Samaria, preached, and baptized many, including Simon the Sorcerer and the Ethiopian Eunech (Acts 8:12+13, 38).

So where did Philip get his authority to baptize?

Philip was chosen to serve tables (Acts 8:1+2, 5). Specifically, he was *not* commissioned (i.e. sent) specifically for the purpose of preaching, teaching, or baptizing, as that is exactly why the Apostles why approved his appointment to serve tables so they would not have to.

So when the church scattered and Philip therefore also, he went down to Samaria and preached and baptized. What is interesting is that the Scripture says *so did everyone else* (Acts 8:1+4).

No one questions that Philip's baptisms were valid, as God Himself whisked him away miraculously to preach and baptize again (Acts 8:39+40).

**Philip was commissioned/ordained to serve tables** but when he found himself removed from that duty by being scattered with the rest because of persecution (Acts 8:1, 4+5), **he obeyed the Great Commission** (Matthew 28:18-20) as it was given to the Apostles (i.e. not him) **with God's blessing and great results!**

So, we can see that although a man may be commissioned/ordained to a certain task, *this does not limit him to that task*. Philip took on the role of evangelism not because he was ordained or commissioned to do so, or even because anyone told him to, but because **the opportunity was there.**

**CONCLUSION:** Philip's right to preach and to baptize does not come from anything other than the fact that all Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:5+9), universally ordained by Jesus Christ to go into the entire world, baptize, and teach (Matthew 28:19+20), just as Philip did!

## **ANANIAS THE DISCIPLE**

There are three Ananias' in the Bible/New Testament: Ananias, husband of Sapphira, who died as a result of his habitual lying (Acts 5:1-5), the high priest Ananias who persecuted Paul among other Christians (Acts 23:2, 24:1), and Ananias the Disciple (Acts 9:10+13), who baptized Saul/Paul. Naturally, it is the last Ananias we concern ourselves with:

All we are told about Ananias is that he was a Christian by faith, Jew by culture, living in Damascus, who practiced the law devoutly and thus was respected among the Jews (Acts 9:10+13). Saul/Paul had seen Ananias in a vision before he met him (Acts 9:12).

Why did Ananias devoutly live by the Law although he was free from it? (Galatians 2:15+16) For the same reason Paul and Timothy would do the same – to be an effective witness for Jesus among the Jews living both in Jerusalem and abroad (Acts 16:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:20+23).

Although Jesus Himself sent Ananias to witness to Saul/Paul (Acts 9:10-16), Jesus did not ordain him as a member of any special priesthood (other than the priesthood of all Christians – 1 Peter 2:5+9); no, simply as a Christian – as a disciple of Christ – he went and told Saul/Paul to do the same thing as everyone else in the book of Acts did – believe, repent, and be baptized – for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 22:16). Ananias baptized him by the command of Christ (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

Ananias falls off the pages of Scripture after he was sent by Jesus to witness to Saul.

**CONCLUSION:** Where did Ananias get his authority to baptize? It was not by priesthood; it was not by merit; it was not even by desire. No, it was by the same commission Christ had given all men – to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19+20), that Christ simply repeated here! (Acts 9:10-16)

## THE BRETHREN FROM JOPPA

In Acts 10:23, some unnamed brethren from Joppa join Peter on his way to Cornelius' house to witness to his household.

After Peter preaches to them, and the spirit of the Lord comes on Cornelius' household, Peter says, "Who can deny these people water?" (Acts 10:47) and then he **commanded** they all be baptized (Acts 10:48).

As the only companions with Peter, these unnamed "brethren from Joppa" were the ones who baptized Cornelius' household; obviously Peter did not command himself! (Acts 10:48)

**CONCLUSION:** Of all the people in the New Testament to baptize, these people are not only without any list of qualifications, they are not even named. This clues us into a fact about baptism we will confirm a little later in the study – and that is one's baptism **is not contigent** on the qualifications of the baptizer.

## THE UNKNOWN BAPTIZER(S)

In Acts 16:1-3, 11, 15, Lydia's household is baptized, yet it is not specified who baptizes them: we know from Acts 16:1-3, that Timothy had joined Paul, and by Acts 16:11 we know that Luke had joined their party at some point. By Acts 16:15, Lydia's household is baptized, but we are not told by whom.

Paul, Timothy, or Luke could have baptized Lydia's household – or perhaps just two – or one of them. Scripture does not indicate, nor does it seem to matter. In fact, Paul himself says he wished he would have not baptized some people because they were under the impression that the qualifications of the baptizer mattered (and they were taking pride in such a myth), when they do not! (1 Corinthians 1:14+15)

**CONCLUSION:** Just as in the case of the unnamed brethren from Joppa above, the qualifications of the baptizer are not discussed in Scripture – by either command or precedent. **The point is not who baptizes – but rather that one had repented and been immersed into Christ! (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3+4; Galatians 3:27)**

## SILAS

In Acts 16:33, the Philippian Jailer and his household were baptized. The two people present who could have baptized were again Paul and Silas.

Some would immediately assert and say that Paul baptized. However, Peter did not baptize Cornelius' household although he had witnessed to them and commanded they be immersed (Acts 10:47+48). There simply is no Scriptural precedent to assume that the evangelist present always baptized as well.

According to Acts 15:32, Silas was also a prophet. In the Bible, “prophet” commonly means “preacher”, which certainly seems to the case, since he was recorded in that same verse for preaching a lengthy message!

**CONCLUSION:** Could Silas have baptized? Certainly; if unnamed brethren from Joppa could baptize, and it did not seem to matter who baptized Lydia's household, and Philip the Evangelist baptized with no more of a commission than a table waiter, what difference does it make? None! The qualifications for a baptizer are irrelevant; the qualifications for baptism are only for the baptismal candidate – that they have faith and repentance! (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 1:14+15)

## APOLLOS

Our final Scriptural example of a man who baptized was Apollos (1 Corinthians 1:12+13, 16). Apollos was a preacher who was boldly proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, but needed also to be taught more thoroughly about the faith, and that was done by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28).

Apollos was baptizing along with Paul and Peter according to 1 Corinthians 1:12+13, and 16. It makes logical sense that he would only be baptizing along with Peter and Paul after the incident in Acts 18, as at before that time he was only acquainted with the baptism of John (Acts 18:25).

**CONCLUSION:** So Apollos did not gain his “right” to baptize from Peter or Paul, as he was doing it right with them in Corinth. He did not gain it from Aquila and Priscilla; he only gained knowledge of the proper baptism from them (Acts 18:25+26). No Christian need commission another as Christ has commissioned us all! (Matthew 28:19-20)

So if no Scriptural example demands qualifications of its baptizers...

## **ARE THERE ARE SCRIPTURAL QUALIFICATIONS LISTED FOR ONE WHO BAPTIZES?**

The truth is there are no qualifications for baptizers in the New Testament, outside of the example that every person who baptized in the New Testament was a Christian. And although we have that as example, see Q&A #1 below why even that is not a “requirement” imposed by Scripture, but simply a consistency across all the examples.



However, let me answer some objections to that conclusion:

**1)** “If you are telling me that there are no qualifications as to who can baptize in Scripture, then are you saying women can baptize?”

Friend, let me put it another way – **there is not one Gentile who ever baptized anyone in the New Testament. Are we to assume then that only Jews can baptize? Of course not!** The examples in Scripture are there for our understanding of how something was done, but not as a command by themselves or for setting up of a list of qualifications. If so, then by example only Jews could baptize! No, an example without a command is a story. All the same, a command without an example is missing an assembly manual!

**Thankfully, in the New Testament, we have both – the command and the example** – the command to baptize (Mathew 28:19+20), and examples that anyone (even unnamed or unknown people – see chart points #6 & #7 above) can baptize, as exemplified all throughout the book of Acts. Paul himself dispels **the myth that it matters who baptizes**, because it does not matter (1 Corinthians 1:14+15).

**2)** What about Hebrews 5:4? Some will point to this and other verses to say only a priest/pastor/minister/elder, etc. can baptize – that it requires ordination?

**The context of Hebrews 5:4** is the verses and chapters preceding it – **the passage is talking about Jesus – and no one else:**

In Hebrews 4:1-13, Jesus is spoken of as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath rest. Then, starting in verse 14, the conversation naturally moves into the subject that Jesus is our High Priest of the New

Covenant – and He is a better, more compassionate and eternal priest – unlike the Levitical (i.e. Aaronic) priests of the Old Testament that have been fulfilled by Christ (Matthew 5:17) in a prescribed replacement (Hebrews 7:12) as the Law of Moses was abrogated by the law of faithfulness to Christ (Romans 3:27).

**In fact, starting in Hebrews 5, we are still only talking about Jesus and his superiority as fulfilling of the Old Testament priesthood: there is no context of talking about anyone else.**

**In fact, the book of Hebrews – from the beginning - and all the way through chapter 10, is making a case on how Jesus is superior** to the prophets and the angels (chapter 1), how He is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (chapter 2), and then how He is **the** High Priest to all Christians (starting in Chapter 4, going all the way through chapter 10).

In fact, in the latter part of Hebrews chapter 5 itself, it makes the discussion clear that we are only talking about Jesus:

- a) the Son of God – verse 8
- b) lived perfectly – verse 9
- c) the source of eternal salvation – verse 9
- d) predicted in Old Testament prophecy to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek (verse 10, speaking of Psalm 110:4)

If Hebrews 5:4 was talking about mere men being ordained unto ministry to baptize (or do anything else), does any man meet the qualifications of the priest qualified to do these things in Hebrews 5:8+9? Certainly not!

In Hebrews 5:1-6, Jesus is being compared to the old, Levitical priesthood which the Jewish readers were very familiar – and how Jesus is superior to this old priesthood in every way:

a) The priests of the Old Covenant/Testament had to offer gifts and sacrifices repeatedly (Hebrews 5:1); but Jesus, having offered up Himself once for all – as a priest after the order of Melchizedek AND being the Son of God – Hebrews 5:5+6 – no longer had to offer up gifts and sacrifices (Hebrews 5:9, 7:27, 9:12, 10:10; Romans 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18). What man is a priest after the order of Melchizedek AND the Son of God but Jesus? None!

b) The priests of the Old Covenant were beset with weakness (Hebrews 5:2); but Jesus was perfect (Hebrews 5:9). Any man who wants to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek has to be sinless therefore; and there was only one – Jesus.

c) The priests of the Old Covenant had to offer up sacrifices for both himself and the people (Hebrews 5:3); Jesus offered up Himself (Hebrews 5:9).

d) The high priest of the Old Testament was Aaron and his descendants (Hebrews 5:4); Jesus was the fulfillment of the old priesthood (Hebrews 5:9+10), and one requirement to being part of the priesthood was on the basis of an indestructible life! (Hebrews 7:16) Only Jesus, and his type/shadow Melchizedek Himself, qualifies (Hebrews 7:3).

**CONCLUSION:** It is both out of context and against Scripture to assume that someone has to be part of the priestly order of Melchizedek to baptize or have another ministry role: this would require that person be the Son of God (Hebrews 5:5+6), be perfect (Hebrews 5:9), offer

Himself up as a sin sacrifice (Hebrews 5:9), and be independently indestructible! (Hebrews 7:16) No one but Christ fits these criteria and that is the point!

No, Scripture does not give qualifications for baptizers because in baptism, it is not baptizer that matters one bit – it is that a person is believing, repentant, and in submission to their Lord in baptism that matters. **In fact, that is all that matters.**

**3)** Is there a priesthood for believers in the New Testament? If so, how many and which ones?

Depending on what theology one prescribes to, sometimes there is no priesthood (Islam), sometimes 2 priesthoods (Mormonism), and sometimes 1 (“the priesthood of all believers”), when it comes to a priesthood that people are involved in. Which is it?

It is important to realize that ALL references to men being part of the Aaronic or Melchizedekian priesthoods do NOT come from the Bible at all; all “proof” for this kind of thinking only comes directly from Mormon texts, as they plain demonstrate themselves:

<https://www.lds.org/topics/aaronic-priesthood?lang=eng> and  
<https://www.lds.org/topics/melchizedek-priesthood?lang=eng>.

Otherwise, without the “additions” to the Bible that the Mormon church claims, there is no Aaronic or Melchizedekian priesthoods for men in the New Testament. As well as it has been demonstrated, their use of texts like Hebrews 5:4 in an attempt to say that men have to be ordained of a particular priesthood to administrate an ordinance is attempting to apply something in Scripture attributed to Jesus Christ to men – this is dangerous indeed (see question and answer point #2 above for more detail).

No, there is **just one priesthood** which has men involved in the **New Testament – and it does not exclude women!** It is the “priesthood of all believers” as 1 Peter 2:5+9 describes. Absolutely all Christians are priests according to the New Testament; there are not different orders, or old orders resurrected – they have all been fulfilled by Christ! (Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 7:12)

## CONCLUSION

Scripture – by command or example – does not give us qualifications for baptizers. In fact, Paul makes it clear that who baptizes is not important at all, to the extent that he wished he had not baptized any of the Corinthians! (1 Corinthians 1:14-17)

Remember the following:

1) The only record we have of people who baptized in the New Testament were all Jews – if the example set forth is to be taken as a set of requirements for the baptizer – we all better find a Jew, fast! No, instead we realize with this understanding that the requirements for the baptizer are not what is important in any conversion.

2) The only “record” for the requirement of being baptized by “a Melchizedekian or Aaronic priest” is not found in Scripture, but only in the so-called “additions” to the Bible the Mormons have published.

3) No man can meet the qualifications of the Melchizedekian priesthood – only Christ can – as only Christ is the Son of God, perfect, could offer up Himself for all the people, and had and has an indestructible life. These are the requirements given for entry into the Melchizedekian priesthood in the latter part of Hebrews 5 and Hebrews 7:16.

4) Unnamed and even unknown people in the book of Acts baptized. There is no concern given as to who baptized, but only who was baptized!

5) Philip, who was commissioned as a table server in Acts 6, became an “evangelist of opportunity” in Acts 8 – supernaturally helped by God AFTER his preaching and baptizing career had taken off by his own accord (Acts 8:5). This shows us again that Philip did not need a special ordination, priesthood, or commission to preach and/or baptize (and neither does anyone else); it is inherent in the Great Commission Christ gave all men!

6) The only priesthood in the New Testament for believers is “the priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:5+9) – and that includes women! **Absolutely anyone can share Christ with another and then baptize that person into Christ.**

7) When we read books like Hebrews as a whole, in their context, we understand who was being discussed, to whom, and why. In Hebrews 5, we understand that a comparison between Christ and the Old Testament Levitical priests was occurring – not qualifications of ordination to baptize. Baptism is not even mentioned in the chapter, or even nearby. No, Christ is superior to the Levitical priesthood – the very fulfillment of it – and our service as the priesthood of all believers under Him gives us bold access to the throne of God! (Hebrews 4:16)

**The purpose of this study is to absolutely free the person who is reading it from denominational myths, Mormon inventions, and person prejudice that have done nothing but inhibit the simple message preached in New Testament Christianity from its beginning – “Repent and be baptized!” (Acts 2:38) And then**

everyone in the book of Acts forward (starting in Acts 2:41) did just that, and in the New Testament books following.

Share Christ with a friend today and then have the privilege of immersing them into Christ! It does not matter who you are, any more than it matters what body of water you baptize in! (Also not-so-curiously missing from any qualification in the New Testament)

Do not get hung up on who baptizes or where – only that a penitent soul is about to find forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit in the waters of baptism! (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21) With nothing but your will to stop you and the Gospel on your lips and water readily available – you, just like John the Baptist and all the other “baptizers” before you – are called to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ today to make disciples, AND baptize them! (Matthew 28:19+20)