

## Who Will Offer a Correct Translation?

The proliferation of Bible translations in the past couple of decades has made me wonder about something. While the effort is being made to bring the Bible into the most modern, understandable terms, will any body of translators have the courage to properly render the Greek word, “baptizo” and its cognates? The word means, “to dip, plunge, immerse, submerge” and yet in the vast majority of English Bibles it is transliterated into “baptize” rather than correctly translated as “immerse.”

Certainly an entire article if not an entire series of articles could be devoted to the motives behind translators’ decisions to use “baptize” instead of “immerse.” One translator who used “baptize” said that he believed “immerse” is the correct translation and added it as an alternate in his version but he did not want to give the appearance of a bias toward a doctrine (<http://www.dtl.org/alt/background/baptism.htm>). A defender of the King James Version as a Divinely-inspired translation contends that God Himself chose the nebulous term “baptize” (<http://www.heritagebaptistchurch.info/2baptizo.htm>). Although it’s been written that the King James translators rendered the term “baptize” so as not to offend the Church of England or the Catholic Church, there is some question as to that charge.

Of the few translations that do say “immerse” instead of “baptize,” the most prominent one is the American Standard Version of 1901. Therein Acts 2:38 reads, “And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 11:11 is rendered, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Immerser: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” It’s easy to see why this proper translation would bother some. Catholicism and several of the Protestant denominations permit sprinkling or pouring, either as the only method or methods of what they call “baptism” or as an alternative to immersion. Correctly translating the Greek word, “baptizo” would quash their false doctrines. It’s obvious that the Baptist Church would be upset because the very name that they’ve taken for their denomination would be eliminated from the sacred text.

Defenders of the transliteration of “baptizo” claim that there are other words transliterated and, indeed, there are. “Angel” (Greek = “angelos”), “deacon” (Greek = “diakoneo”) and “apostle” (Greek = “apostolos”) are but a few of these. To none of these, however, has the transliteration been assigned such diverse English definitions as those that have been hung on “baptize.” If I tell someone to take a sponge and immerse it into water, will that person flick a few drops of water onto it or pour a little bit of water onto it? If he does what I say, he will put it under the water, will he not? He won’t ask me what “mode” of immersion I wish him to use on the sponge. He will plunge it beneath the water. That’s how something is immersed. In like manner, when Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, ASV), He did not leave any “mode” in question because there was no “mode” of immersion, and there is none yet today.

The various contexts surrounding the usages of “baptizo” in the New Testament actually define the term, even if it is incorrectly rendered “baptize.” Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death.” Colossians 2:12 begins, “Buried with him in baptism...” The close of Romans 6:4 speaks of the raising up after the immersion or burial. “... that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Even with the word incorrectly translated into English, it’s evident from the context that baptism is a burial or immersion and that one goes under and then comes back out of something, in this case, water (cf. Acts 8:38-39).

As stated in the opening paragraph, the movement is on for clearer translations of the Bible. (Actually, the thrust should ever be for accuracy in translation. Just because something is clearer doesn’t mean that it’s correctly translated. But that’s fodder for another article.) For those seeking to make the Bible “easier to understand,” why not include the correct translation of this critical Bible word in that version? It could make a powerful difference in the eternity of countless souls.