THE QUESTION

Did the early church baptize people right away, or make them wait?

Asked by a THF member on August 9, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 24 early Christian passages and 94 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-baptize-people-right-away-or-make-them-wait

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

The early church usually taught people first, had them fast, and baptized them once they had repented and chosen to follow Christ. Tertullian even advised delaying baptism in many cases. The fire of the Spirit's baptism was seen at Pentecost as a sign, and one writer rejected groups who claimed fire appeared at every baptism.

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SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	Teaching came first, then baptism	**2**	**6**	The fire at Pentecost showed the Spirit	**4**
2	Candidates fasted before being baptized	**2**	**7**	Claims of visible fire were rejected	**5**
3	Baptism followed repentance and free choice	**3**	**8**	The Spirit sometimes came after baptism	**5**
4	Tertullian warned against careless, hasty baptism	**3**		What these passages don't tell us	**6**
5	Quick baptisms in Acts had clear signs	**4**		The Sources: 24 early Christian passages and 94 Bible verses, with links	**6**

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POINT 1 OF 8

Teaching came first, then baptism

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Didache says to baptize after first saying all the things it has taught. The Apostolic Constitutions likewise tell church leaders to instruct new learners in the basics of the faith and only then baptize them.

1 "And concerning baptism, baptize in this way: After you have first said all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19, in living water."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 "Instruct the catechumens in the basic elements of religion, and then baptize them."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 15, page 7** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 8

Candidates fasted before being baptized

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Didache asks the person being baptized, the one baptizing, and others who can, to fast beforehand. So even a quick baptism had at least a day or two of preparation.

3 "But before the baptism, let the one who baptizes fast, and the one being baptized, and any others who can. And you shall instruct the one being baptized to fast one or two days beforehand."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 8

Baptism followed repentance and free choice

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Justin says baptism is for the person who chooses to be born again and has repented. He describes washing those who have been convinced and agreed to the teaching, not people who were rushed in.

4 “Since at birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, due to our parents coming together, and were raised with bad habits and wicked training; so that we may not remain children of necessity and ignorance, but may become children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins previously committed, the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe is pronounced over the one who chooses to be born again and has repented of sins.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 3, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

5 “But we, after we have washed the person who has been convinced and agreed to our teaching, bring them to the place where those called brethren are assembled, so that we may offer heartfelt prayers together for ourselves, for the baptized person, and for everyone else everywhere.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Justin Martyr,** *First Apology* (c. 130–165 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 8

Tertullian warned against careless, hasty baptism

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian says baptism should not be handed out carelessly. Because a request can deceive, he thinks waiting is often better, depending on a person's situation, character and age.

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6 “But those whose duty it is know that baptism should not be given carelessly.”

later in the same passage

“And so, according to each person's circumstances, disposition, and even age, delaying baptism is preferable.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Baptism* 18 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 8

Quick baptisms in Acts had clear signs

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Tertullian explains the fast baptisms in Acts, like the Ethiopian official. He says God had first given clear, public signs that these people were ready, so they are not a rule for every case.

7 “If Philip baptized the chamberlain so quickly, we should remember that clear and public evidence had come first that the Lord considered him worthy.”

later in the same passage

“God's approval sends certain signs ahead of time. Every request can both deceive and be deceived.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Baptism* 18 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 8

The fire at Pentecost showed the Spirit

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The Treatise on Re-Baptism reads John's words about fire as speaking of the Holy Spirit himself. The tongues like fire at Pentecost made it plain that the disciples were baptized in the Spirit.

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8

"But those who are not ignorant of the nature of the Holy Spirit understand that what is said about fire is said about the Spirit Himself."

later in the same passage

"For in the Acts of the Apostles, according to that same promise of our Lord, on the very day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had descended upon the disciples so that they might be baptized in Him, there were seen sitting upon each one tongues as if of fire."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 21, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 8

Claims of visible fire were rejected

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

The same writer warns about groups who claimed fire appeared on the water every time they baptized. He treats this as a deception, which suggests the church did not expect visible fire at each baptism.

9

"They are said to describe it in such a way that, as soon as they have gone down into the water, fire immediately appears on the water."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 22, page 7** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 8 OF 8

The Spirit sometimes came after baptism

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

The writer points out that the Samaritans were baptized first and received the Holy Spirit later, when the apostles laid hands on them. He also notes that the apostles themselves received the Spirit some time after being baptized.

10

"In the same way, when the Samaritans were baptized by Philip, they did not receive the gift until the apostles, who were invited from Jerusalem to Samaria, came down to them, laid hands on them, and gave them the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Anonymous,** *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Source 24, page 8** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

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THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not set one fixed length of time people waited before baptism.
- They do not say whether visible signs like the tongues of fire ever happened again after Pentecost.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 24 early Christian passages and 94 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–24, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 25–68, in Bible order), then 50 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *24 passages from 11 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 7 (1885 English) **Quotes 1, 3, page 2** “concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:19… [continues online] **read ›**

Justin Martyr, *c. 130–165 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** “we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *First Apology* (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · source 4*

4 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English; on point 8) “therefore did he exclaim, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” He persuaded, at the same… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · source 5*

5 *Stromata* 7.6 But we say that the fire does not make flesh holy, but sinful souls. We do not mean the common fire that destroys everything. We mean the fire of wisdom, … [continues online] **read ›**

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Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–7*

6 *On Baptism* 18 (1885 English) **Quotes 6, 7, page 4** "needs no waiting for; the work is completed, and the apostle snatched away… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On Baptism* 10 "again by saying that he baptized in repentance only, but that One… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · sources 8–9*

8 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 "baptize with the baptism of repentance, but He confers the gift of adoption. He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *Discourse on the Holy Theophany* 1 "me with the fire of Divinity. Why do You wait for water… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 10*

10 *Commentary on John* 6 (on point 3) repentance," teaching that the benefit of baptism is connected with the intention of the person baptized. To him who repents it is salutary, but to him who comes to it… [continues online] **read ›**

Dionysius of Alexandria, *c. 232–265 AD · source 11*

11 *Epistles and Epistolary Fragments* (1885 English) "they had already previously received the Holy Spirit from that very baptism… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Epistles* (on point 8) "who agree with him argue that the putting away of sins and the second birth can come from the baptism of heretics, among whom, as they themselves admit, the Holy… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Epistles* (on point 8) "Or if they say that the power of baptism comes from the greatness of the name, so that those who are baptized anywhere and in any way, in the name… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 14–18*

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 6) on that day, at the third hour, the Lord Jesus sent on us the gift of the Holy Ghost, and we were filled with… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "the catechumens in the elements of religion, and then baptize them… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) "do we also permit such as these to enter only to hear, until they show the fruit of repentance, that by hearing the word they may not utterly and irrecoverably… [continues online] **read ›**

17 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 2) "concerning baptism, O bishop or presbyter, we have already given instruction, and now we say this: you shall baptize as the Lord commanded us, saying, "Go and teach all nations… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *Apostolic Constitutions* be satisfied with one baptism only, the one into the death of the Lord; not the one given by wicked heretics, but the one given by blameless priests, in the… [continues online] **read ›**

Anonymous · *sources 19–24*

19 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (on point 8) by itself, could not be enough to give salvation. Otherwise, on that principle, we would have to believe that even Gentiles and heretics, who misuse the name of Jesus, could… [continues online] **read ›**

20 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (on point 6) "John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy… [continues online] **read ›**

21 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 8, page 5** "a man of this kind should return to you again, you will certainly hesitate whether he may have baptism or not. And yet it will be fitting for you, in… [continues online] **read ›**

22 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** "because John said that we must be baptized in the Holy Ghost and in fire, from the fact that he went on to say and fire, some desperate men have… [continues online] **read ›**

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23 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 (1885 English) “3:16 Moreover, I think also that we have not unsuitably set in order the teaching of the Apostle John, who says that three bear witness, the Spirit, and the… [continues online] **read ›**

24 *Treatise on Re-Baptism* 1 **Quote 10, page 5** “that the same kind of thing is common in the present day and happens often: many people, after baptism, leave this life without the laying on of the bishop's… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *44 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

25 **Matthew 3:6** They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. **read ›**

26 **Matthew 3:11** I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. **read ›**

27 **Matthew 3:16** Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. **read ›**

28 **Matthew 7:6** Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. **read ›**

29 **Matthew 21:25** The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?” They reasoned with themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ **read ›**

30 **Matthew 28:19** Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **read ›**

31 **Mark 1:4** John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. **read ›**

32 **Mark 1:8** I baptized you in water, but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.” **read ›**

33 **Mark 16:16** He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned. **read ›**

34 **Luke 3:3** He came into all the region around the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of sins, **read ›**

35 **Luke 3:16** John answered them all, “I indeed baptize you with water, but he comes who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to loosen. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. **read ›**

36 **John 1:33** I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘The one on whom you see the Spirit coming down and remaining, he is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ **read ›**

37 **Acts 1:5** for John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” **read ›**

38 **Acts 2:3** Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them, and one rested on each of them. **read ›**

39 **Acts 2:4** They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. **read ›**

40 **Acts 2:38** Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **read ›**

41 **Acts 2:41** Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls. **read ›**

42 **Acts 3:19** Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, **read ›**

43 **Acts 4:4** But many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. **read ›**

44 **Acts 8:12** But when they believed Philip as he preached the gospel concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. **read ›**

45 **Acts 8:17** Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. **read ›**

46 **Acts 8:36** As they went on the way, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Behold, here is water. What is keeping me from being baptized?” **read ›**

47 **Acts 9:18** Immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he received his sight. He arose and was baptized. **read ›**

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48 **Acts 10:17** Now while Peter was very perplexed within himself about what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate, **read ›**

49 **Acts 10:47** "Can anyone withhold the water, so that these people who received the Holy Spirit just as we did should not be baptized?" **read ›**

50 **Acts 10:48** He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay for some days. **read ›**

51 **Acts 11:2** When Peter had come up to Jerusalem, those who were of the circumcision contended with him, **read ›**

52 **Acts 11:16** I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.' **read ›**

53 **Acts 13:24** after John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to Israel before Jesus' coming. **read ›**

54 **Acts 16:15** When she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." So she persuaded us. **read ›**

55 **Acts 16:33** That same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds, and he and all his household were baptized at once. **read ›**

56 **Acts 19:2** He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They said to him, "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." **read ›**

57 **Acts 19:3** He said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." **read ›**

58 **Acts 19:4** Paul said, "John indeed baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe in the one who would come after him, that is, in Christ Jesus." **read ›**

59 **Acts 19:5** When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **read ›**

60 **Acts 19:6** When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. **read ›**

61 **Acts 22:16** Now why do you wait? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' **read ›**

62 **1 Corinthians 1:5** that in everything you were enriched in him, in all speech and all knowledge, **read ›**

63 **Ephesians 1:12** so that we who first hoped in Christ would be to the praise of his glory. **read ›**

64 **Ephesians 2:2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. **read ›**

65 **Ephesians 3:12** In him we have boldness and access with confidence through his faithfulness. **read ›**

66 **Ephesians 3:14** For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **read ›**

67 **Philippians 3:6** as to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness that is in the law, found blameless. **read ›**

68 **1 Timothy 5:22** Lay hands hastily on no one. Do not be a participant in other people's sins. Keep yourself pure. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *50 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Psalms 110:4

Matthew 3:7 · 12:32 · 19:14 · 21:23 · 24:12 · 24:24

Mark 2:8 · 5:15 · 10:14 · 11:30 · 14:27

Luke 1:76 · 3:13 · 6:30 · 7:18 · 12:50 · 18:8 · 18:16 · 20:4

John 1:6 · 1:9 · 1:26 · 3:3 · 3:5 · 3:30 · 3:36 · 5:8 · 7:39 · 16:6 · 20:22

Acts 1:4 · 4:12 · 5:31 · 8:20 · 8:26 · 8:28 · 9:11 · 10:42 · 11:15 · 15:7 · 19:1

Romans 6:4 · 16:21

1 Corinthians 2:8

2 Corinthians 1:21 · 5:5

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1 Thessalonians 4:8

Hebrews 4:12

1 John 5:8

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early church baptize people right away, or make them wait?” on August 9, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “Did the early church baptize people right away, or make them wait?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-baptize-people-right-away-or-make-them-wait. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 1.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY