THE QUESTION

What does it mean to be baptized for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29)?

Asked by a THF member on May 18, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 12 early Christian passages and 150 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-does-it-mean-to-be-baptized-for-the-dead-1-corinthians-15-29

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Paul mentions people being baptized for the dead only to argue that the dead will rise. Tertullian says the practice itself, whatever it was, is beside the point and does not approve it. He holds that Paul's aim was the resurrection of the body, and he stresses that the church has only one baptism.

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POINT 1 OF 6

Paul raised it to defend the resurrection

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

Tertullian says Paul brought up this baptism for one reason. Whatever those people were doing, they did it because they expected the dead to rise, so their own practice made Paul's case for the resurrection of the body.

1

> "His only purpose in mentioning it was to press the resurrection of the body even more strongly, since those who were vainly baptized for the dead were doing it because they believed in such a resurrection."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Tertullian left the practice unexplained

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

Tertullian sets the practice aside as unclear, and in the same passage he calls those who did it vainly baptized. He compares it with pagan washings and prayers for the dead, and he denies that Paul was pointing to some new god behind it.

2

> "Now, never mind that practice, whatever it may have been."
>
> *later in the same passage*
>
> "So do not think that the apostle is pointing here to some new god as the author and defender of this baptism for the dead."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

He read it as baptism for the body

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

Because Paul teaches one baptism, Tertullian explains the phrase another way. The dead here means the body, since it is the body that dies. Baptism then looks ahead to the body being raised.

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3 “Therefore, to be baptized for the dead really means to be baptized for the body, because, as we have shown, it is the body that becomes dead.”

later in the same passage

“What then shall those do who are baptized for the body, if the body does not rise again?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

The church knows only one baptism

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

Tertullian points to Paul's words about one baptism. Ignatius also lists one baptism among the things all Christians share, and he says it is given so believers share in the Lord's death.

4 “In another passage, the apostle says there is only one baptism.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *Against Marcion* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

5 “For if there is one God of the universe, the Father of Christ, "of whom are all things;" and one Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord, "by whom are all things;" and also one Holy Spirit, who worked in Moses, and in the prophets and apostles; and also one baptism, which is administered so that we should share in the death of the Lord; and also one chosen Church; there should likewise be but one faith in respect to Christ.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 1, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

Baptism pictures dying and rising with Christ

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

The Apostolic Constitutions explains what happens in baptism itself. Going into the water is dying with Christ, and coming up is rising with Him. In this sense every baptism looks toward the resurrection.

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6 “The going down into the water is dying together with Christ. The coming up out of the water is rising again with Him.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 11, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

Paul's chapter is about the body rising

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

Tertullian and Irenaeus both read this chapter as a defense of the resurrection. Tertullian says Paul set out the Lord's death and rising as the ground of our hope. Irenaeus insists that the same flesh that dies is the flesh that will live.

7 “He did this in order to draw from it the rule of our hope and its foundation.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 48 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

8 “In what other mortal flesh can life be shown if not in the same flesh that is put to death because of the confession of God?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book V* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 3, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages do not say who was baptized for the dead or how the practice worked.
- None of these writers teaches that Christians should be baptized on behalf of the dead.
- 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.

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WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 12 early Christian passages and 150 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–12, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 13–89, in Bible order), then 73 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 *12 passages from 6 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistles of Ignatius* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 3** "also one baptism, which is administered that we should have fellowship with the death of the Lord… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–4*

2 *Against Heresies: Book V* (on point 6) In the same way that Christ rose in the substance of flesh and showed His disciples the marks of the nails and the wound in His side (which are the… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book V* **Quote 8, page 4** states clearly and without any doubt to the Corinthians that he is referring to the body of flesh and nothing else: "Always carrying in our body the dying of Jesus… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Against Heresies: Book IV* (on point 6) You err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Regarding the resurrection of the dead, He says, "Have you not read what God spoke, saying, 'I am the… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 5–7*

5 *Against Marcion* 8 **Quotes 1, 2, 3, 4, pages 2, 3** "Corinthians 15:29. Now, never mind that practice, whatever it may… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 48 **Quote 7, page 4** "we will see whether there is a good reason for this. Now it is certain that they adopted this practice with such a presumption that they supposed the vicarious baptism… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *Against Marcion* 8 (on point 6) is truly ungrateful and unjust if he does not mean to restore this same substance of ours in the resurrection, in which so much has been endured in loyalty to… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · source 8*

8 *Epistles* (on point 5) are not born in the Church can be sons of God! For the blessed apostle declares and proves that baptism is where the old man dies and the new man… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 9–11*

9 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 5) "as those who are dead cannot work wickedness any longer, so those who are dead with Christ cannot practice wickedness… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) "dead, or rather of the one dying together with Christ. But before baptism, let him who is to be baptized fast. For even the Lord, when He was first baptized… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 6, page 4** "This baptism, therefore, is given into the death of Jesus: the water is instead of the burial, and the oil instead of the Holy Ghost… [continues online] **read ›**

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Archelaus, *c. 270–300 AD · source 12*

12 *Disputation with Manes* 1 (on point 6) the cross is done away with. And if the cross was not endured, then Jesus did not rise from the dead. And if Jesus did not rise from the dead… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *77 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

13 **Genesis 23:6** rather, hear us. You are a king from God among us. Bury your dead in our choicest tombs, for none of us will by any means withhold his tomb from you, to keep you from burying your dead there." **read ›**

14 **Exodus 30:20** Whenever they go into the tabernacle of witness, and whenever they come near the altar to minister and to offer whole burnt offerings to the Lord, they shall wash with water, and so they shall certainly not die. **read ›**

15 **Leviticus 11:32** And anything on which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether any wooden vessel, or garment, or skin, or sack; any vessel with which work is done shall be dipped in water and be unclean until evening, and then it shall be clean. **read ›**

16 **Leviticus 14:6** As for the live bird, he shall take it, with the cedar wood, the spun scarlet, and the hyssop, and he shall dip them and the live bird into the blood of the bird that was killed over running water. **read ›**

17 **Leviticus 14:31** the one for a sin offering and the other for a whole burnt offering, with the sacrifice; and the priest shall make atonement for the one being cleansed before the Lord. **read ›**

18 **Leviticus 16:24** He shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garment; then he shall go out and offer his whole burnt offering and the whole burnt offering of the people, and make atonement for himself, for his house, and for the people, as for the priests. **read ›**

19 **Leviticus 16:26** The one who sends away the goat that was set apart for release shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water, and after that he may come into the camp. **read ›**

20 **Numbers 6:11** And the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and one for a whole burnt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin he committed concerning the dead person; and he shall sanctify his head on that day, **read ›**

21 **Numbers 11:34** So the name of that place was called Graves of Craving, because there they buried the people who craved. **read ›**

22 **Numbers 15:24** then it shall be, if it is done unintentionally, out of the sight of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one calf from the herd, unblemished, for a whole burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma to the Lord, with its sacrifice and its drink offering as prescribed, and one male goat of the goats for a sin offering. **read ›**

23 **Numbers 16:33** So they went down, they and all that was theirs, alive into Hades; and the earth covered them, and they perished from the midst of the congregation. **read ›**

24 **Numbers 19:13** Everyone who touches the dead body of a human soul, if he has died, and does not purify himself, has defiled the tabernacle of the Lord; that person shall be destroyed from Israel, because the water of sprinkling was not sprinkled on him; he is unclean; his uncleanness is still in him. **read ›**

25 **Numbers 19:17** And for the unclean they shall take some of the burnt ashes of the purification, and they shall pour running water over them into a vessel. **read ›**

26 **Numbers 19:18** And a man who is clean shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the house and on the furnishings and on the persons who are there, and on him who touched the human bone, or the slain, or the dead, or the tomb. **read ›**

27 **Numbers 19:20** But the man who is defiled and does not purify himself, that person shall be utterly destroyed from the midst of the congregation, because he has defiled the holy place of the Lord, because the water of sprinkling was not sprinkled on him; he is unclean. **read ›**

28 **Numbers 31:23** everything that passes through fire shall be clean; yet it shall be purified with the water of purification. And whatever does not pass through fire shall pass through water. **read ›**

29 **2 Kings 13:21** As they were burying a man, behold, they saw the raiding band, and they threw the man into the tomb of Elisha; and the man went down and touched the bones of Elisha, and he came to life and stood up on his feet. **read ›**

30 **Proverbs 14:19** The evil will fall before the good, and the ungodly will wait at the doors of the righteous. **read ›**

31 **Ecclesiastes 5:10** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

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32 **Ecclesiastes 6:4** For the untimely birth came in vanity and goes in darkness, and its name will be covered in darkness. **read ›**

33 **Ecclesiastes 6:9** Better is the sight of the eyes than wandering of the soul. This also is vanity and a choosing of the wind. **read ›**

34 **Ecclesiastes 7:14** In the day of goodness live in good, and in the day of evil, see; see, God has also made the one to match the other, concerning speech, so that man may find nothing after him. **read ›**

35 **Isaiah 7:19** and they shall all come into the valleys of the land, and into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves, and into every crevice. **read ›**

36 **Judith 2:8** and their wounded shall fill their ravines and their brooks, and an overflowing river shall be filled with their dead; **read ›**

37 **Wisdom of Solomon 14:23** For whether they perform child-murdering rites, or secret mysteries, or frenzied festivals with strange customs, **read ›**

38 **Wisdom of Solomon 19:3** For while they were still holding their mourning in their hands, and lamenting at the tombs of the dead, they seized upon another plan of thoughtlessness, and pursued as fugitives those whom they had begged to go and had driven out. **read ›**

39 **Wisdom of Sirach 31:25** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

40 **Baruch 2:17** Open your eyes and see; for it is not the dead in Hades, whose spirit has been taken from their inward parts, who will give glory and justice to the Lord; **read ›**

41 **Baruch 3:11** that you are counted with those in Hades? **read ›**

42 **Baruch 3:19** have vanished and gone down to Hades, and others have risen up in their place. **read ›**

43 **1 Maccabees 9:43** When Bacchides heard of it, he came on the Sabbath day to the banks of the Jordan with a large force. **read ›**

44 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

45 **2 Maccabees 4:19** the vile Jason sent envoys from Jerusalem, who were citizens of Antioch, to carry three hundred drachmas of silver for the sacrifice to Hercules. But those who carried the money asked that it not be used for a sacrifice, because that was not fitting, but be spent for some other purpose. **read ›**

46 **2 Maccabees 5:10** He who had thrown out many to lie unburied had no one to mourn for him; he had no funeral of any kind and no place in the tomb of his fathers. **read ›**

47 **2 Maccabees 6:4** For the temple was filled with wild living and drunken partying by the Gentiles, who amused themselves with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred courts, and who also brought in things that were not fitting. **read ›**

48 **2 Maccabees 6:9** and that they should slaughter those who would not choose to change over to Greek ways. So one could see the misery that had come. **read ›**

49 **2 Maccabees 7:14** When he was near death, he said this: “It is better to die at the hands of men and to look for the hopes that God gives of being raised up again by him; but for you there will be no resurrection to life.” **read ›**

50 **2 Maccabees 7:36** For our brothers, after enduring a brief pain, have now fallen under God’s covenant of everlasting life; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just penalties for your arrogance. **read ›**

51 **2 Maccabees 12:24** Timothy himself fell into the hands of those with Dositheus and Sosipater, and he begged them with much deceit to let him go safe, because he held the parents of many of them and the brothers of some, and if he died, it would turn out that these would be disregarded. **read ›**

52 **2 Maccabees 12:35** But a certain Dositheus, one of Bacenor’s men, a horseman and a strong man, caught hold of Gorgias; and seizing his cloak, he dragged him off by force. And as he wished to take the cursed man alive, one of the Thracian horsemen bore down on Dositheus and cut off his shoulder, and Gorgias escaped to Marisa. **read ›**

53 **2 Maccabees 12:43** And having made a collection, man by man, of provisions to the sum of two thousand drachmas of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, acting very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. **read ›**

54 **2 Maccabees 12:44** For if he had not expected that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been needless and foolish to pray for the dead. **read ›**

55 **2 Maccabees 12:45** And then, looking to the most splendid reward laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness—a holy and godly thought—he therefore made atonement for the dead, that they might be released from their sin. **read ›**

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56 **2 Maccabees 13:8** For since he had committed many sins against the altar, whose fire and ashes were holy, in ashes he met his death. **read ›**

57 **3 Maccabees 2:30** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

58 **3 Maccabees 6:31** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

59 **4 Maccabees 7:19** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

60 **4 Maccabees 16:25** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

61 **1 Enoch 8:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

62 **1 Enoch 22:4** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

63 **1 Enoch 22:10** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

64 **1 Enoch 22:13** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

65 **1 Enoch 46:8** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

66 **1 Enoch 67:11** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

67 **1 Enoch 103:3** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

68 **Matthew 27:52** The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; **read ›**

69 **Acts 8:19** saying, “Give me this authority too, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” **read ›**

70 **Acts 26:19** Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **read ›**

71 **Romans 6:3** Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **read ›**

72 **Romans 6:4** We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. **read ›**

73 **1 Corinthians 1:13** Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul? **read ›**

74 **1 Corinthians 1:15** so that no one should say that I baptized into my own name. **read ›**

75 **1 Corinthians 1:16** I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else. **read ›**

76 **1 Corinthians 3:11** For no one can lay another foundation besides the one laid, which is Jesus Christ. **read ›**

77 **1 Corinthians 3:19** For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written: He who catches the wise in their craftiness. **read ›**

78 **1 Corinthians 10:2** and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; **read ›**

79 **1 Corinthians 11:19** For there also must be factions among you, that those who are approved may be revealed among you. **read ›**

80 **1 Corinthians 12:13** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all given drink to share in one Spirit. **read ›**

81 **1 Corinthians 15:12** Now if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **read ›**

82 **1 Corinthians 15:13** But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised. **read ›**

83 **1 Corinthians 15:15** And we are also found false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if indeed the dead are not raised. **read ›**

84 **1 Corinthians 15:16** For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised. **read ›**

85 **1 Corinthians 15:29** Or else what will they do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for the dead? **read ›**

86 **Colossians 2:12** having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. **read ›**

87 **Hebrews 6:2** of the teaching of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. **read ›**

88 **1 Peter 3:21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now also saves us—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but the appeal of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **read ›**

89 **1 Peter 4:6** For the gospel was preached even to the dead for this purpose: that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. **read ›**

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ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *73 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.

Genesis 1:1 · 1:26 · 2:21

Matthew 3:17 · 4:16 · 22:30 · 28:19

Luke 15:4 · 20:36 · 22:32

John 1:6 · 5:1 · 20:20

Acts 13:47

Romans 1:3 · 2:16 · 6:9 · 8:8 · 8:9 · 8:11 · 8:13 · 8:34

1 Corinthians 1:23 · 3:2 · 5:7 · 5:11 · 6:14 · 8:5 · 15:22 · 15:30 · 15:32 · 15:35 · 15:36 · 15:37 · 15:38 · 15:39 · 15:42 · 15:44 · 15:45 · 15:46 · 15:47 · 15:49 · 15:50 · 15:51 · 15:52 · 15:53 · 15:55

2 Corinthians 1:3 · 1:8 · 3:3 · 3:6 · 3:7 · 3:14 · 3:15 · 3:16 · 3:18 · 4:4 · 4:6 · 4:7 · 4:8 · 4:10 · 4:11 · 4:14 · 4:16

Galatians 3:1 · 4:4 · 5:19

Ephesians 2:12 · 4:5

Philippians 3:11 · 3:20

2 Timothy 2:17

1 John 5:1

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

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What does it mean to be baptized for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29)?” on May 18, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY