

THE BIBLICAL GROUND FOR THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS

Rev. Herman HoeksemaThe reader is reminded that the publication of this pamphlet was occasioned by the appearance and free distribution of a little treatise on the same subject by Dr. M. R. De Haan, pastor of the Calvary Undenominational Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The treatise was entirely negative with respect to purpose and contents and purported to be a conclusive and convincing refutation of the doctrine of infant baptism. In it the author made the bold statement, that those who believe in the truth of infant baptism have no argument whatsoever. The Word of God, he asserted, has nothing to say in favor of the practice to baptize children of believers.

Such bold statements can hardly go unchallenged.

Immediately upon the publication of the treatise of Dr. De Haan we devoted a short article to it in "The Standard Bearer," in which we claimed that the great confidence and boldness of speech of which the writer avails himself could only be explained from a profound ignorance on the part of the writer with respect to the subject he attempts to treat. At the same time, however, we promised that at a convenient time we would write a treatise on the same subject. This promise we now fulfilled. In this little pamphlet we offer to those that are interested in the truth of the word of God, the proposition and its proof, that baptism of children of believers is founded on the Scriptures. The treatise is positive in purpose, contents and form. I do not enter into a controversy. I make no attempt to refute the arguments of Dr. De Haan, for the simple reason that there is nothing to refute. My sole purpose, was to offer a single, simple, yet incontrovertible proof that infant baptism is a scriptural doctrine. This being my purpose, I did not enter into an explanation of various doctrines and questions that are closely connected with the subject we are discussing. I did not elaborate upon the idea of the covenant, on the question who are in the covenant, on the significance of baptism as such, etc. All this was strictly unnecessary for the single purpose I had in mind, namely, to show that Scripture sustains the doctrine of infant baptism. For the practical purpose I have in mind this treatise must rather be brief than comprehensive; it must be clear rather than profound. And, therefore, discarding all irrelevant material, however important it may be in itself, I confined myself to a single line of argumentation.

I offer to the readers three propositions, each of which I will prove from the Word of God:

1. There is only one people of God, throughout the ages, both in the old and in the new dispensation: the true Israel, the seed of Abraham.
2. Though differing in form, circumcision and baptism are essentially the same in meaning.
3. It is the clearly revealed will of God that the **generations** of His people, whether they be among Jew or Gentile shall receive the sign of the covenant, circumcision as long as these generations of His people are among the Jews, baptism when these generations are among all nations, Jew and Gentile both.

I. One People: of the Old and New Dispensation

First of all, then, there is the proposition that there is only one people of God and that these are the true seed of Abraham, both in the old and in the new dispensation.

I make it no secret that I consider this truth fundamental and essential to the understanding of infant baptism.

All premillennialists deny it. It is for this very reason that a PRE must also be a Baptist. He separates God's people. According to him there are two peoples of God, two different seeds of Abraham, the Jews and the Church, natural Israel and spiritual Israel. The Jews are real and natural Israel with special privileges, a special promise, a separate covenant for them only, a special future. For them is the earthly Jerusalem, earthly mount Zion, the earthly throne of David, the earthly temple and the earthly land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. They will be the real and true Israel forever, the proper seed of Abraham. But believers of the new dispensation are called the seed of Abraham in a figurative, spiritual sense of the word. Of them the apostle speaks in his third chapter of the epistle to the Galatians.

I maintain that this entire view is erroneous, false, anti-Scriptural. Over against it I offer, that the Word of God knows only of one seed of Abraham, the spiritual, the elect, the children of the promise. This is true both of the old and of the new dispensation. It is not correct to say that in the old dispensation the Jews were the seed of Abraham, while in the new dispensation believers are this seed. **The** Jews never were the seed **of Abraham**. It is correct to say, that for a time the seed of Abraham were found exclusively among Abraham's descendants, as they are found now among all nations. But Scripture never identifies Abraham's descendants with the seed of Abraham. The latter, the children of the promise, are at all times only the believers. In the times of the Old Testament they are found in the generations of Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham Israel. In the new dispensation they are among all nations, there being no difference anymore between Jew and Gentile. But wherever they are found the children of the promise, named after Abraham as the father of believers, are always the true children of God, the believers. **These** and these only are the seed **of Abraham**.

Such is my contention.

And now the proof from the Word of God.

First of all I call your attention to [Rom. 9: 6-8](#): "Not as though the word of God had taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel. Neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted for the seed."

It is evident: (1) That the apostle is here speaking of the Jews of the old dispensation. (2) That he makes a distinction between those that are of Israel and those that are Israel indeed. The people as such, the nation, were all of Israel. But even in the old dispensation that nation was

not Israel. They were all of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, yet they were not all the seed. (3) That only spiritual Israel, believers, they that were born not of the flesh, but of the promise, i.e., by the power of that promise, as Isaac was, are the seed. The **children of the promise** are counted for the seed. When the Lord, therefore, speaks of the seed of Abraham such is the whole argument of the apostle, you must not make a mistake and apply that word of God to the Jews. It does not mean the Jews, but only the true Israel, the children of the promise for they and they only are the seed of Abraham. Please notice, that my proposition is proved: The Jews were never the seed of Abraham, though the seed of Abraham, for a time were Jews.

Consider, next [Rom. 4:11-16](#): "And he received the sign of circumcision a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised; that he might be a father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also. And the father of the circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all."

A detailed explanation of this rich passage is neither possible in this short treatise, nor necessary. But with a view to my proposition I submit the following: (1) That Abraham is here pictured as the father of all them that believe, both of those that are of the circumcision (the Jews), and of those that are of the uncircumcision all nations). They that believe, therefore, are the seed of Abraham whether they are of the law or simply of faith. (2) That only in that sense is he the father of circumcision. Not all that are of the circumcision that is, that are circumcised in their flesh, are the seed of Abraham, but only those among them that also believe. For he is the father of circumcision, that is, **to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham**, vs. 12. (3) That to this one seed there is one and the same promise, that with their father Abraham, they should be heir of the world. They which are merely of the law are not heirs of the promise at all; but only they which are of the faith of our father Abraham, and he is the father of us all. One father Abraham, one seed of Abraham, one promise, and one way to obtain the promise: the way of the righteousness which is by faith.

Further, I submit to your consideration [Rom. 2:28, 29](#): "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

This passage speaks for itself and needs no elucidation. A mere Jew never was the seed of Abraham, never was a real Jew. Only he was a real Israelite, in whose heart was present the spiritual reality corresponding to the sign of circumcision, that is, faith. Again: not the Jews are the seed of Abraham; they never were; believers only are.

Again I would call attention to a passage that is perhaps the clearest statement of the unity of the people of God in the old and new dispensation, [Gal. 3:7-9, 16-19](#); 4:1-7. I will quote only the following, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham . . . Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to thy seed as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed which is Christ . . . And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

Notice, please, (1) That essentially and centrally the seed of Abraham is Christ and He only. The apostle emphasizes this truth in vs. 16, even drawing an argument from the fact that the singular is used instead of the plural. (2) If Christ is the seed of Abraham in the central sense, it stands to reason, that they only can be seed with Him, that are in Him, whether they be of the old or of the new dispensation. That is, therefore, the believers and they only, are the seed of Abraham, vs. 7. (3) That again, they and they only are the heirs according to the promise; there is one promise for the one seed. (4) That (and pay special attention to this), the apostle compares the Church of all ages to a growing child. In the old dispensation it is the heir, that is still a child, and is, therefore, under the tutorship of the law. But now, in the new dispensation it has grown into an adult. It is a son and has received the inheritance. The point is here, that the Church of the old dispensation and that of the new are likened to one person. When the child grows into an adult does it become an altogether different person, or is it not rather the same individual only developed? It is, therefore, the clear teaching of the Word of God, that there is only one people of God, that this people of God is called the seed of Abraham in Christ, that, therefore, this seed of Abraham is not the Jews, neither the Gentiles, but the believers with faithful Abraham. The unity of the Church of all ages is incontrovertibly established.

Do not imagine that these are the only passages that establish this unity. Scripture never speaks any different language, except, perhaps, for those that refuse to compare Scripture with Scripture. I can call attention to many other passages. The more I study the Word of God, the more I become convinced that this is the only line Scripture ever draws.

But I must be brief.

I will just ask you, therefore, to take your Bible and compare [Hosea 1:10, 11](#) with [Rom. 9:24-26](#). The former passage is a prophecy of ten tribes; the latter explains that these ten tribes are the Church of the new dispensation, gathered from Jew and Gentile, so that the prophecy of Hosea is now fulfilled. Compare, too, [Jer. 31:31-34](#) with [Hebrews 8:6-13](#). In the passage from Jeremiah the prophet is speaking very specifically to Israel and Judah; but the epistle to the Hebrews is quoting this passage and Israel and Judah have now become the Church of the new dispensation. Compare again [Amos 9:11-15](#) with [Acts 15:13-17](#). Amos speaks of the restoration

of the tabernacle of David and of the possession of Israel of all the heathen, of the return of Israel to their land and of their everlasting Possession of it. But in [Acts 15](#), James explains that this restoration of the tabernacle of David and the possession by Israel of the Gentiles, is now fulfilled now the Gentiles enter into the fellowship of Christ. Note, too, please, that the keys of the house of David are now in the possession of Christ, Cf. [Isa. 22:22](#) and [Rev. 3:7](#). That Jerusalem and Mt. Zion are not destroyed, but that they are now realized, while only the shadows of them are destroyed; see [Isa. 28:16](#); [Rom. 9:33](#); [I Pet. 2:6](#); [Heb. 12:22](#); [Gal. 4:25, 26](#); [Rev. 3:12](#); 21:2; 21:10. That the same is true of the temple, the altar, the holy place, the sacrifice, the high priest, see [Heb. 9:1-12, 21-24](#); 10:19-21; [I Cor. 3:16](#); [II Cor. 6:16](#); [Eph. 2:18-22](#); [Rev. 3:12](#). And the land of Canaan, which is promised to Abraham and his seed, and which certainly shall be their everlasting possession is not the earthly country near the Mediterranean Sea, but is the heavenly country that is to come, when the New Jerusalem shall come down upon the new earth. In short the whole of the Word of God teaches this unity of the people of God and of all that pertains to them. All the promises are in Christ, and through Him they are for the true seed of Abraham, of all ages, the believers.

II. Circumcision and Baptism essentially the same

My next observation is that circumcision and baptism, though differing in form, are essentially the same in meaning.

Also this proposition I consider important, a necessary link in the chain of this single argument for infant baptism. The objection baptists love to make against the baptism of infants is not a scriptural one, but rather one they draw from their own mind. It is, that baptism is a sign and seal of the forgiveness of sin, of regeneration; that, therefore it may be administered only to those, whom we know to be believers, that is to those that confess their faith; that it is an established fact that many of the infants that are baptized in later life prove to be no children of God at all and are lost; and that for this reason it is certainly wrong to administer the sign of baptism to the children of believers, before they have come to years of discretion.

Against this argument many objections may be brought. But I want to emphasize what is to my mind the chief objection of all: the baptist with this argument directly argues against the Lord. For what he here urges against infant baptism holds in its force against infant circumcision; yet the circumcision of infants is directly enjoined by the Lord upon the seed of Abraham in their generations.

Also circumcision was a sign of the righteousness which is by faith, of spiritual circumcision of the circumcision of the heart, of regeneration and sanctification, of the cutting away of the old man of sin, of the love of God in a new heart. In all these respects the significance of the old covenant sign is the same as that of baptism. The identity of the two signs, though they differ in form, I will now proceed to prove from the Word of God.

1) First of all from passages that refer to circumcision only: [Lev. 26:40, 41](#): "If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of

their enemies; if then **their uncircumcised hearts be humbled**, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity." It is evident here, that an uncircumcised heart is the same as a heart that will not confess sin and iniquity. Of such a heart, therefore, circumcision was a sign.

[Deut. 10:16](#): "Circumcise, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no more stiffnecked." This is plain language. Circumcision was a sign of a circumcised, that is, of a sanctified heart.

[Deut. 30:6](#): "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live." Again, this is plain in itself. Circumcision was a sign of the work of God's grace in the heart, whereby the heart is filled with the love of God.

[Jer. 4:4](#): "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and take away the foreskin of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem." In the language of the N. T. this is the same as saying: put off the old man of sin and put on the new man, which is renewed after the image of God in true righteousness and holiness. Circumcision was a sign of the putting off of the old man of sin.

[Rom. 4:11](#): "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised." Here circumcision seals the righteousness of faith; that is, God seals in the sign of circumcision, that He justifies the believers by faith and count his faith for righteousness.

2) Secondly, from passages that speak of the significance of baptism: [Acts 2:38](#): "Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is a sign of the remission of sins, that is, of the righteousness which is by faith.

[Act 22:16](#): "And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Baptism is the sign of the washing away of sin, of the righteousness which is by faith, the same as circumcision.

[Rom. 6:4](#): "Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life." Baptism, like circumcision, is the sign of renewal in Christ. In baptism we die with Christ and we rise with Him in newness of life and walk.

[Gal. 3](#):28: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is the sign of putting on Christ, that is, of being renewed in Him.

These passages may be multiplied. But there is, of course, no difference of opinion with respect to the significance of baptism. These passages, therefore, may suffice.

3) Thirdly, from passages that simply identify the two, circumcision and baptism:

[Col. 2:11, 12](#): "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; buried with him in baptism, whereas also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who

hath raised him from the dead." Here the apostle plainly identifies the signs of baptism and circumcision with respect to their significance. He writes to the Church of the new dispensation, that believers are circumcised in the spiritual sense of the word; and that this spiritual circumcision took place when they were buried with Christ in baptism. A more direct proof that circumcision and baptism are essentially the same in meaning, the change from the old into the new dispensation, i.e., from the dispensation of shadows into that of the fulfillment could not be given.

Phil. 3 :3: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Here the apostle does not mention baptism, neither does he refer to it, but he maintains that not the Jews, but the Church of the new dispensation in Christ Jesus are the circumcision. Even circumcision has not essentially been discarded, but is continued in the Church of the new dispensation!

My second proposition I regard as sufficiently established by proof from the Word of God.

The baptist often attempts to dispute the statement that also occurs in our Baptism Form, namely, that circumcision has been replaced by baptism in the new dispensation. Of this the baptist refuses to be convinced. Yet, nothing could be more evident from the Scriptures. It is simply a historic fact, that baptism forced circumcision out of the way. When baptism came, circumcision must be discarded. For a time they existed side by side especially in Jewish-Christian communities, and circumcision tried to maintain itself alongside of baptism. But this proved impossible and circumcision was forced to surrender its place in the Church. And why? Because the Word of God plainly teaches, as we have shown, that essentially baptism has the same significance as circumcision, that two signs with the same meaning could not exist side by side, that circumcision belongs to the time of the shadows, and, therefore, must make room for baptism as being the sign of fulfillment. Hence, if one would still insist that circumcision were necessary for the Christian Church, he could only do so because he attached significance to it as an element of the law, sought the righteousness which is by the law, so that Christ had become no effect to him. And surely, baptism as being the same sign essentially and having the form proper to the new dispensation. So true this is, that the apostle writes that we are circumcised when we are baptized, [Col. 2:11](#), 12; and that we are the true circumcision, Phil. 3:3.

III. A Sign for the Generations

I come to my third proposition: it is the will of God, plainly revealed in the Word of God, that this seed of Abraham, which is the same throughout the ages, shall receive the sign of the righteousness which is by faith, **in their generations**.

It is the very plain truth, revealed in Scripture and verified in all the history of the Church of God in the world from the beginning, that God causes His people to develop in the line of generations. Always He establishes His covenant organically in the line of **continued generations**. This is already evident from the protevangel in [Gen. 3:15](#): "I will put enmity between thee and the woman and **between thy seed and her seed**." This is clear from the

establishment of the covenant with Noah. "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you and **with your seed after you.**" [Gen. 9:9](#). Again this truth is revealed in [Gen. 17:7](#). "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their **generations** for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee and **to thy seed after thee.**" This is evident from the entire historical line of development, for the line of God's covenant runs in the line of generations, from Seth to Noah, from Shem to Abraham, from Abraham to Israel, from Israel to Christ, and even in the new dispensation it is very plain, that God has His people in the line of continued generations. Hence, the apostle Peter can preach on the day of Pentecost: "The promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call," [Acts 2:39](#). And when the Lord calls those that are afar off, it is equally true for them: the promise is unto you and to your children. Only in this light can it be understood that we read repeatedly in the Scriptures, that **houses** were baptized. I do not care one whit, whether you argue that there were little children in those houses or whether you maintain the very opposite. The fact is, that houses, families were baptized. It is the organic idea that is expressed. God deals with generations. It is only in this same light that everywhere children are considered as belonging to the Church, in the new dispensation as well as in the old. God establishes His Church in the line of continued generations.

Does that mean, that all the children according to the flesh in those generations are spiritual children of God, are the seed of Abraham? God forbid that we should teach this, or even maintain that we must suppose it! No, the children of the promise are counted for the seed, and they are not all Israel that are of Israel. But this true seed of Abraham is found in the **generations** of God's people.

Now it is the plainly revealed will of God, that these **generations** of the seed of Abraham shall receive the sign of the covenant, the seal of the righteousness which is by faith, the sign of regeneration, of the putting off of the old man of sin and the putting on of the new man in Christ, of repentance and the forgiveness of sin. **This was God's ordinance for Abraham and his seed. "And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations.** This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And be that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed," [Gen. 17](#) :9-12. In the old dispensation, then, children, all children that were born in the generations of the seed of Abraham must receive the sign of circumcision, the seal of the righteousness which is by faith, of a new heart, of conversion and sanctification.

And this was never abolished.

Identically the same seed of Abraham still exists, as we have plainly shown, the only difference being, that, instead of being among national Israel it is among all nations.

The same everlasting covenant stands still established with that seed of Abraham, that is mentioned in [Gen. 17](#) :7. And vs. 8 does not make this interpretation void, as Dr. De Haan thinks erroneously, for to Abraham and his spiritual seed God will indeed give the land of

Canaan for an everlasting possession, only the land will then have its heavenly form. Hence, it still holds for that seed of Abraham ([Gal. 3:7](#)), that God establishes His covenant with them **in the line of continued generations**, ([Gen. 17:7](#) and many other places).

Identically the same sign of that covenant still exists, the only difference being that, appropriate to the new dispensation it has changed its form from circumcision into baptism. The essence of the sign was never abolished, the form was. There is still the sign which is a seal of the righteousness which is by faith, of regeneration and sanctification, of repentance and the washing away of sins.

Hence: it still holds, according to the plain revelation of the Scriptures, **that the same sign and seal must be administered to the same seed of Abraham in their generations as a sign of God's everlasting covenant with them.**

And here I close my argument. It is simple; not at all involved; a child can understand it. It is entirely scriptural, not philosophical, neither based upon the traditions of the Church. And **it is incontrovertible**. Even Dr. De Haan will now understand the truth of infant baptism and retract his former statements, I feel perfectly confident.

When the Church entered into the new dispensation, when the seed of Abraham burst from its shell of national Israel to develop among all nations, the truth that this seed of Abraham is found in **the generations** of believers, was plainly revealed and had been brought into practice for centuries. Children were always regarded as belonging to the Church. **And this is the sole reason why in the New Testament you have no special command: be sure and baptize.** The Church **naturally** baptized infants. They could never **have conceived of anything else.** A special command to baptize houses, children included, would have been a strange phenomenon.

And the baptist must not approach us with the supercilious question: where do you read in the New Testament of a command to baptize infants?

The burden of proof is entirely with them.

They must prove where and when God ever retracted His promise to Abraham and his seed, that He would establish His covenant in the line of their continued generations; they must prove where and when God ever commanded the Church to discontinue the practice of administering the sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith to the generations of Abraham's seed, to the children of believers.

May the Lord bless this little treatise unto the hearts of many, keep us founded in the truth of His Word, and open the eyes of many more for the truth of His everlasting covenant with Abraham and his seed!