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## Water Baptism

BY RICHARD JORDAN

While seldom recognized, there are a number of *different* types of baptisms in Scripture. Not every baptism has to do with water. For example, speaking of Israel's exodus from Egypt, Paul writes:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;

"AND WERE ALL BAPTIZED UNTO MOSES IN THE CLOUD AND IN THE SEA" (1 Cor. 10:1, 2).

This is obviously not a "water baptism" for Israel crossed the Red Sea on "*dry ground*" (Ex. 14:22). Pharaoh and his army, of course, were the ones who were plunged into the water as it thundered down on them in judgment. But it was Israel who is said to have been baptized. For Israel this was a *dry baptism*!

This helps to clarify the true meaning of the term *baptism*. The word itself is simply an Anglicized form of the Greek word, *baptizo*. Unfortunately, for too long denominationally influenced lexicons have defined *baptizo* as "*to dip*." That this *cannot* be an adequate definition is easily seen from Scripture.

In Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist said Christ would "*baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire*." Was He to "*dip*" people in the Holy Spirit and fire? In Luke 12:50 Christ called His death a baptism. Was He "*dipped*" into death? In I Corinthians 12:13 we read, "*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*." Are believers "*dipped*" into one body? The answer to these questions, of course, is *no*. This is a totally inappropriate definition.

It is from this *erroneous* definition that the whole idea of baptism as a burial with Christ in water has evolved. But the fact is that Christ was *not* buried in water. No one buries people in water, except perhaps as an expedient when at sea.

In general Scriptural usage the word *baptism* indicates *complete identification* whether with an element, a person or a group. This is why Paul said in Romans 6:3, "*As many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death*." In other words, the only way to become one with Christ is to be identified with him in His death by faith.

As to *water baptism*, it is imperative to have an understanding of just what it indicates or symbolizes. Fortunately it is not difficult to determine the proper meaning associated with *water baptism* in Scripture. Repeatedly it is used to represent a *ceremonial cleansing*.<sup>1</sup> While we do not bury in water, we certainly do wash in water and this is clearly the meaning associated with water baptism in Scripture.

When Peter said in Acts 2:38, "*Repent and be baptized*," did he mean "repent and be *buried*"? Of course not! He meant repent and be *cleansed*. Water baptism symbolizes *cleansing*—not burial—and this is why the question arose in John 3:23-25 about *purification* in connection with the baptism of John.

One more passage: In Acts 22:16 Ananias declared to Saul, "*Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins*." Notice: "*Wash away*" does not spell or mean "*bury*."

Never in Scripture does water baptism refer to burial, but always to a *cleansing*. To understand the reason for this we need to understand the place of water baptism in the program of God for the nation Israel.

First we should recognize that water bap-

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1. Denominational biases which read *water* into passages like Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:12—which speak of our identification in Christ—have robbed the term of its meaning.

tism is not simply a so-called “New Testament ordinance.” It is, in fact, a practice firmly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures and God’s program for the nation Israel.

In John 1:25 John the Baptist was asked, “*Why baptizeth then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?*” Obviously these inquirers were not surprised by John’s practice of water baptism as though it were something new to them. Rather, they expected the practice of water baptism in connection with the coming of Messiah. Where could this expectation have come from except the prophecies found in the Old Testament Scriptures?

And remember: the Mosaic economy was still in force during the ministries of both John and Christ. Hebrews 9:17 declares, “*A testament is of force AFTER men are dead.*” Thus the new covenant could not possibly replace the old until *after* the death of Christ. That means that the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are actually “Old Testament books” until their very concluding chapters!

John’s baptism was not something *new*—rather it was a ceremony thoroughly understood by those to whom he ministered.

Water baptism did not begin with John the Baptist. When we turn to the Scriptures to trace its development we quickly learn that water baptism is a *ceremonial cleansing that pertains to the kingdom* promised to the nation Israel.

## A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS

In Exodus 19:5, 6—at the very giving of the Mosaic Covenant—God’s purpose in giving birth to the nation Israel is clearly revealed:

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.

“And YE SHALL BE UNTO ME A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS, AND AN HOLY NATION. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

God’s stated purpose concerning the nation Israel is that she is to be “*a kingdom of priests and an holy nation,*” through whom the Gentile nations could draw nigh to God. This is what Isaiah refers to when he wrote:

“But YE SHALL BE NAMED THE PRIESTS OF THE LORD: MEN SHALL CALL YOU THE MINISTERS OF OUR GOD” (Isa. 61:6).

Ultimately this will, of course, be accomplished during the kingdom reign of Christ, when Israel is dwelling in her land and the nations find salvation and blessing through her instrumentality.

All of this awaits Israel’s *redemption*. The “*if ye will obey...then ye shall be*” principle of the law assured that the “*knowledge of sin*” would abound. Because of her failure, the nation Israel soon found herself in need of a Redeemer. Thus while the *hope* of Israel looked to the promised coming kingdom, the *need* of the nation for *cleansing* must first be faced.

With this in mind it is important to remember that of all the people or things to be baptized it was the priest who stood foremost. Exodus 29 sets forth the procedure for induction into the priest’s office. Two very important steps of consecration are included:

First must come *cleansing*—a *washing with water*:

“And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and SHALT WASH THEM WITH WATER” (Ex. 29:4).

Second, there was the *anointing with oil*:

“Then shalt thou TAKE THE ANOINTING OIL, AND POUR IT UPON HIS HEAD, AND ANOINT HIM” (Ex. 29:7).

Just as the sons of Aaron were the priests through whom the people of Israel could approach God, so the nation Israel itself will one day be “*a kingdom of priests and an holy nation*” through whom the Gentiles will draw near to God (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17, 18, Isa. 60:1-3, Zech. 8:20-23). It is in this light that John the Baptist appears on the scene preaching his “*baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel*” (Acts 13:24).

In other words, John’s “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Mark 1:4) was a means of national repentance and preparation to be the kingdom of priests God ordained that favored nation to be. Matthew 3:1, 2 is important here:

“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

“And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

And how were they to thus prepare for the coming kingdom? Keep reading:

"Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,  
"And WERE BAPTIZED OF HIM IN JORDAN,  
CONFESSING THEIR SINS" (vs. 5,6).

John's baptism was the means of *fleeing from "the wrath to come"* (v.7). And no doubt is left as to what this "wrath to come" will involve:

"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

"And now also THE AXE IS LAID UNTO THE ROOT OF THE TREES: THEREFORE EVERY TREE WHICH BRINGETH NOT FORTH GOOD FRUIT IS HEWN DOWN, AND CAST INTO THE FIRE.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST, AND WITH FIRE:

"Whose fan is in his hand, and HE WILL THOROUGHLY PURGE HIS FLOOR, AND GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE GARNER; BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE" (vs. 8-12).

Notice the choice set before Israel: there was a judgment coming and if they wanted to be the "wheat" that is safely carried into the barn and not the "chaff" that is to be burned with the fire of judgment, they must be identified as the believing remnant through the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

### THE LITTLE FLOCK

John's baptism became a watershed issue for Israel. Luke 7:29, 30 tells us,

"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, JUSTIFIED GOD, BEING BAPTIZED WITH THE BAPTISM OF JOHN.

"But the Pharisees and lawyers REJECTED THE COUNSEL OF GOD AGAINST THEMSELVES, BEING NOT BAPTIZED OF HIM."

This, of course, is the reason that water baptism was associated with salvation and the remission of sins. Salvation was through faith, but the only way they could express their faith was by doing what God required—preparing to function as "*a royal priesthood*." First must come the cleansing; then the service. Ezekiel 36:25 promises Israel:

"Then will I SPRINKLE CLEAN WATER UPON

YOU, AND YE SHALL BE CLEAN: FROM ALL YOUR FILTHINESS, AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS, WILL I CLEANSE YOU."

The "*sprinkling with clean water*" was the necessary first step of faith in forming the nucleus of the coming kingdom, the group of Jewish believers which our Lord called His "little flock."

"FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK; FOR IT IS YOUR FATHER'S GOOD PLEASURE TO GIVE YOU THE KINGDOM" (Luke 12:32).

The next step in preparing this believing remnant was Matthew 3:11's *baptism with the Spirit*. This baptism would correspond to the second rite of consecration to the priesthood—the *anointing*. The baptism with the Spirit would provide the needed empowering for the nation's coming service.

This explains why our Lord's post-resurrection ministry ties these two things—the baptism of repentance and the anointing of the Holy Spirit—so closely together. For example:

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

"He that BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

"AND THESE SIGNS SHALL FOLLOW THEM THAT BELIEVE; In my name shall they cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues" (Mark 16:15-17. Cf. Luke 24:47, Acts 1:4-8, etc.).

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter's appeal to Israel is clearly a further development of John's call to repentance:

"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" (Acts 2:38).

Here the order is clear: first the *washing*—"repent and be baptized"—and then the *anointing*—"ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Those who feel the role of water baptism somehow changed at Pentecost should notice that the pre- and post-resurrection baptisms were identical. "*Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins*" is exactly what John proclaimed in Mark 1:4. Nothing has *changed*. Rather there had simply been the historical *development* of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, followed by the out-pouring of the Spirit. The kingdom was no longer simply "*at*

hand” as it had been with John; now the time had come to actually *offer* it to Israel.

And even after Pentecost those who refused to be baptized stood as condemned before God as did those in Luke 7:30, for Peter goes on to declare,

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:39, 40).

This basic issue of gathering together the believing remnant of Israel—the “*little flock*” of Luke 12:32—runs through the ministries of John, our Lord and the Twelve in early Acts. This “little flock” represented the nucleus of the governmental authority for the coming kingdom. Those in Israel who refused to “*repent and be baptized*”—to identify themselves as those who had changed their minds about Christ being their Messiah through the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins—were to be “*destroyed from among the people*” (Acts 3:23).

It is of this little flock of Jewish believers that Peter later writes,

“BUT YE ARE A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, AN HOLY NATION, A PECULIAR PEOPLE; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Thus we say again: In Scripture, water baptism is a *ceremonial cleansing that pertained to the kingdom* promised to the nation Israel.

## GENTILE BAPTISM

If water baptism is thus associated with cleansing the nation Israel for its ministry in her kingdom, where does the baptism of Gentiles under the commission of Matthew 28:19 fit?

Even here, water baptism is again demonstrated to symbolize cleansing—and again clearly associated with Israel’s kingdom.

Remember that the priests were not the only ones to be baptized. In connection with the cleansing of lepers, Leviticus 14:9 instructs:

“ . . . Also HE SHALL WASH HIS FLESH IN WATER AND HE SHALL BE CLEAN.”

The “nations” of Matthew 28:19 are of course considered “*unclean*” by Israel and thus must be baptized--be cleansed--in order to gain access to Israel’s kingdom and acceptance into God’s favor.

Both Israel and the Gentiles needed to acknowledge their need of cleansing. The former in order to be worthy to minister the things of God, the latter to be the recipients of those things.

## WHAT ABOUT US?

The fact that water baptism pertains to Israel’s kingdom program demonstrates why it has *no place* at all in the program of God today. It was a ceremonial washing participated in *until* the nation Israel and its program were set aside.

With “*the fall of Israel*” God raised up the apostle Paul and through him sent “*salvation to the Gentiles*.” Following the raising up of Paul the practice of water baptism clearly underwent a change. The first real indication of this in the Scriptural record is found in Peter’s experience at Cornelius’ house in Acts 10.

As the Lord began to prepare Peter to recognize the change in program taking place in mid-Acts (e.g., Acts 10:28), He also prepared him for the change in baptism. As Peter addressed those assembled in Cornelius’ house, he received a shock:

“To him [Christ] give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

“WHILE PETER YET SPAKE THESE WORDS, THE HOLY GHOST FELL ON ALL THEM WHICH HEARD THE WORD.

“And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:43-45).

This was a significant departure from the program Peter had been working under! All the Gentiles had to do to receive the Holy Spirit was *believe*, in sharp contrast with the previous requirement of the prior baptism of repentance (Acts 2:38). Peter then hastily baptizes them, asking, “*Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized?*” (See Acts 10:45-48).

Clearly water baptism was not functioning in the same way it had been previously with Israel. Paul’s own attitude toward baptism reflects this change:

“I thank God I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius:

"Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.

"And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

"For CHRIST SENT ME NOT TO BAPTIZE, but to preach the gospel. . ." (I Cor. 1:14-17).

Certainly if Paul were working under the commission given to the other Apostles he could never have said this! When God interrupted Israel's prophetic program and ushered in "*the mystery*," by the very nature of things He interrupted Israel's baptism. As Israel "*diminished*" (Rom. 11:12) through the later Acts period, so water baptism gradually diminished in importance and a new baptism emerged on the scene to take its place.

Today there is no priestly nation or class exalted above others. God is now reconciling both Jews and Gentiles to Himself in one body simply through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary (Eph. 2:13-18).

When the believer trusts Christ as Savior, that moment "*by one Spirit [he is] baptized into one body*" (I Cor. 12:13) and thus "*baptized into Christ*" (Gal. 3:27). There is no room for a water ceremony here. No human rite or ceremony can place the believer "*into Christ*." No, the "*one baptism*" of the "*one body*" is performed by "*one Spirit*"—not by preacher or priest.

The mechanics of positional truth—of being "*in Christ*"—is this Spirit baptism. So completely adequate is our position in Christ by virtue of this Spirit performed baptism that we are told:

"And YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM. . ." (Col. 2:10).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST" (Eph. 1:3).

In light of such completeness in Christ afforded to even the simplest believer the very moment of salvation, we ask: What could possibly be accomplished by water baptism that Christ and His finished work at Calvary have not already accomplished?

If this question is faced honestly, it will soon be apparent that not only does water baptism have no place in God's program today, but to practice it is to cast a reflection on the glorious, all-sufficient, finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 2:20).

We thank God that "*by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body*." God forbid that we should add to that "*one baptism*" which unites us to Christ and his people and makes us *complete* in Him.

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*A Personal testimony:*

## OUR SAD STORIES

We all have our share of pain and trauma, whether it be physical, mental or emotional. I have mine and you have yours. There's no end to the evils in this life. The god of this world has made sure of it!

I spent three years in therapy talking about my own tragic life experiences, which only served to keep it all fresh in my mind *daily*, which kept that pain alive in my life for 30+ years after therapy.

I got *no* relief from those miserable memories until *after* I learned that God gave us a Book, one Book in English, the King James Bible. After learning what the *true gospel* of my salvation is and *believing* it, and then learning how to rightly divide the scriptures, and I learned *who* I really am *in Christ*, and what God's plan and purpose is for me, I was made free from that hell on earth! Praise God, the God of peace, the God of all comfort!

I finally learned that dwelling on the past and feeling sorry for myself not only does me harm, and all those people around me harm, it's also *living a lie*! Those things were no longer happening to me, yet I had been trained by my therapist to live (in my mind) *as if* they were still happening in the present. Of course, psychology will deny that, but that is exactly what man's mental 'therapy' does!

But, blessed be the only wise God Who instructed our Apostle Paul to give us the *true antidote* to our sufferings, which we find fully and completely explained in Romans through Philemon KJV!

PLEASE NOTE: After salvation we will still have suffering in this life because: (1) our saved soul and spirit resides in this body of sin, and (2) we still must live in a fallen sin-cursed world.

However, having an intelligent understanding of God's written word rightly divided, enables us to live in the *identity* that God has given us *in Christ*. In other words, when you *believe* God's truth "to" and about us today, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

Rightly dividing the word of truth gives us *the key* to get the profit out of God's word that God intends us to have which gives us *inner peace* in the midst of a crooked and perverse world.

In Christ, in this life, we are freed from the *power* of sin, but we will not be free from the *presence* of sin until the catching away of the Church the Body of Christ (i.e. commonly known as the Rapture).

—LeighAnn Mycko

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