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Volume XIV
Issue 329

Israel's Baptisms

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

*Wherefore, having left the word of the beginning of the Christ, unto the perfection we may advance, not again a foundation laying of reformation from dead works, and of faith on God, of the teaching of **BAPTISMS**, of laying on also of hands, of rising again also of the dead, and of judgment age-during (Hebrews 6:1-2).*

John did baptize in the wilderness (Mark 1:4).

Why did John the Baptist baptize?

Did God send Paul to baptize?

Why was Jesus baptized?

How many baptisms are there today?

Surprising to some, baptism was nothing new to John the Baptist. When he came on the scene baptizing with water, Israel knew what he was doing. No one even questioned him, "What on earth are you doing?" "Why are you getting all of these people wet?" This is because baptism was already a practice of their national faith.



covered by these books, Jesus Christ was born and ministered under Israel's "Old Covenant" (Galatians 4:4¹) and Himself was a minister to the "Circumcision" (Romans 15:8²).

The word *baptism* does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures.

BAPTISM AND THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

One of the great hindrances to our understanding of Israel's many different "*baptisms*" (Hebrews 6:2) is the failure to recognize them in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Let's note two main reasons for the failure of many to recognize the *baptisms* of the Hebrew Scriptures.

***Baptism* traditionally has been taught to be a "New Testament ordinance."**

Many believe that a new era, or program, began in the "Gospels" of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. However, the reality is that, during the time period

Since the word baptism is the *transliteration*³ of a Greek word, it obviously does not appear in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, it is often overlooked that this Greek word transliterated "*baptize*" also appears in some of these same Bibles as "*wash*" (such as in Hebrews 9:10⁴; Mark 7:4⁵). Thus, such a statement

1. "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, **made under the law.**"
2. "Jesus Christ was a **minister of the Circumcision** for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the Fathers."
3. Expressing words of a language by means of the characters of another alphabet. (Webster)
4. "Which stood only in foods and drinks, **and different washings**, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

The word translated "*washings*" is translated "*baptizings*" in both *Young's* and *Concordant* literal translations.

5. "When they come from the market, except they **wash**, they eat not.

(see **BAPTISM**, page 2983)

Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XIV, No. 329 – January 31, 2012

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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BAPTISM (continued from front page)

found in Acts 22:16 makes sense:

Arise, and be **baptized**, and **wash** away your sins
(Acts 22:16).

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

The Greek words *baptisma* and *baptizo* transliterated “baptism” and “baptize” convey the idea of *staining* with a *dye* (i.e., to be *identified* with a substance – such as dye).⁶ Thus, the implication of the word is *separation*⁷ and *identification*.⁸

It is a misconception that all baptism is “water baptism.” In this study we will be limiting ourselves to the study of *water baptism* – a religious rite given to the Nation Israel; but not all baptism in the Scriptures is associated with water. There are actually a number of “non-water” baptisms in the Bible. Let us note a few before moving on.

Israel’s Baptism to Moses⁹

All were baptized to Moses (I Corinthians 10:2).

Israel’s Baptism of Fire

He shall baptize you with holy spirit and with fire (Luke 3:16).

*And many other things there are, which they have received to hold, as the **washing** of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.”*

6. Baptism: “To dip into any coloring liquid for the sake of the effect; to dye ... To affect by the peculiar influence of coloring matter ... Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state or condition of any object, is capable of baptizing that object; and by such change of character, state or condition does, in fact baptize it.” James W. Dale, *Classic Baptism*, p. 352.

Baptism: ““To identify or to dip so as to make one with, or to so identify something with something else, so that its character and nature is changed.” — S. Lee Homoki, *Baptism is a Good Bible Word*

Baptism: “[It] was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment.” — W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*

7. As the dye *separates* the substance that it colors from its original identification and into a new one, so does *baptism*. In fact, Israel’s ceremonial rites of baptism were called “*the water of separation*” (Numbers 19).
8. “In general scriptural usage the word ‘baptism’ indicated complete identification, whether with an element, a person or a group.” — Richard Jordan, *Water Baptism*, p. 4
9. Israel went across the Red Sea on “*dry ground*” (Exodus 14:22), but yet was “*baptized*” (i.e., identified with Moses). The Egyptians however were immersed in water, but they were NOT baptized.

Messiah’s Baptism of Suffering and Death

Are you able to drink out of the cup from which I am to drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized? (Mark 10:38).

OLD TESTAMENT WATER BAPTISM

*WHICH STOOD ONLY IN FOODS AND DRINKS, AND **different washings, and carnal ordinances**, imposed on them until the time of reformation* (Hebrews 9:10)

Notice we are told that the “*different washings*” (i.e., water baptisms) were a part of Israel’s “*carnal ordinances*.”

Water baptism was a part of the consecration of priests.¹⁰

*And this is the thing which you shall do to them, to hallow them, for being priests to Me: take one bullock, a son of the herd, and two rams, perfect ones ... And Aaron and his sons you shall bring near to the opening of the tent of meeting, and **bathe them with water*** (Exodus 29:1, 4).

Water baptism was a part of the consecration of the Levites.¹¹

*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. Thus shall you do to them, to cleanse them: **sprinkle water of purifying on them**, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them **wash their clothes**, and so make themselves clean”* (Numbers 8:5-7).

Water baptism was a part of the priestly function of the Tabernacle.

*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, **to wash withal**: and put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and **put water** ►*

-
10. It should be remembered that Israel was to become a “*kingdom of priests*,” and therefore all would need this water rite (Exodus 19:5, 6; Isaiah 61:6; cf. I Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

11. Israel’s tribe of Levi had the work of ministering in the sanctuary assigned to them.

*in it, for Aaron and his sons **shall wash their hands and their feet** there. When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall **wash with water**, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire to the LORD: so they shall **wash their hands and their feet**, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations” (Exodus 30:17-21).*

Water baptism was a part of various forms of Israel's purification rites.¹²

*Every soul who eats that which died by itself, or that which was torn by beasts, whether he is one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and be unclean until the evening: then shall he be clean; but if he **washes them not, nor bathes his flesh**; then he shall bear his iniquity (Leviticus 17:15-16).*

*A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for **a water of separation: it is a purification for sin**.*

12. “Ceremonial baptism in both the Old and the New Testaments has the meaning of a work of purification, changing the condition of the recipient from a state of defilement to one of purity.”
— Charles Baker, *A Dispensational Theology*, p. 549

*... He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purifies not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean. Whoever touches the dead body of any man who is dead, and purifies not himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because **the water of separation** was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet on him. ... And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burned heifer of purification for sin, and **running water shall be put into a vessel**: and a clean person shall take hyssop, and **dip it in the water, and sprinkle it** on the tent, and on all the vessels, and on the persons who were there, and on him who touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and **wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water**, and shall be clean at evening; but the man who shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: **the water of separation** has not been sprinkled on him; he is unclean. And it shall be a perpetual statute to them, that he who **sprinkles the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he who touches the water of separation shall***



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be unclean until evening. And whatsoever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the soul who touches it shall be unclean until evening. ... Everything that may abide the fire, you shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with **the water of separation**: and all that abides not the fire you^p shall make go through the **water** (Numbers 19:9, 12-13, 17-22; 31:23).

Water baptism is a part of Israel's rebirth under the New Covenant.

*I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I **sprinkle clean water on you, and you^p shall be clean**: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:24-28).*

JOHN'S WATER BAPTISM

For Israel to be separated and identified with "water" through a ritual was for them to be ceremonially "cleansed" or "purified." This was the foundation of John the Baptist's baptism.

*Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews **about purifying**. And they came to John, and said to Him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same **baptizes**, and all men come to Him (John 3:25-26).*

As you will notice, when the question arose concerning *ceremonial purification*, the issue that was actually discussed was *water baptism*.

Israel expected Messiah to come baptizing. It is im-

portant to observe that the question asked of John the Baptist, concerning his practice of baptism, was NOT "What in the world are you doing?" but, "Why?" Water baptism was nothing new to Israel!

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." Are you that prophet?" And He answered, "No."

Then they said to him, "Who are you? That we may give an answer to them who sent us. What say you about yourself?"

He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as said the prophet Isaiah."

*They who were sent were of the Pharisees, and they asked him, and said to him, "**Why do you baptize then**, if you are not that Christ, nor Elijah, neither that prophet?" (John 1:19-25).*

The PERSON of John the Baptist

He was of Israel's priestly line (Luke 1:5, 8-11).

He was a consecrated Nazarite¹⁴ (Luke 1:15).

He was full of God's spirit (Luke 1:15).

He was "*the voice*," preparing Messiah's way (Matthew 3:1-4; cf. Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 11:7-15).

The MESSAGE of John the Baptist

*He came into all the country about Jordan, **preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins** (Luke 3:3).*

John not only *practiced* the rite of water baptism; he *preached* it. It was not a side issue for him; it was ►

13. The subscript "p" indicates the 2nd person plural "ye" in the Old English.

14. The word "Nazarite" comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning *consecrated* or *separated*; and refers to one who was separated as "*holy to the Lord*" by the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1-12).

central to his ministry. After all, He was John **THE BAPTIST!**

The NAME of John's Baptism

John's baptism was "*the Baptism of Repentance.*"

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4).

The PURPOSE of John's Baptism

John's baptism was a purification ritual "*for the remission of sins*" (Mark 1:4-5; Luke 3:3), to manifest Messiah to Israel.

The next day John sees Jesus coming to him, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, 'After me comes a Man Who is preferred before me: for He was before me.' And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (John 1:29-31).

The REQUISITE of John's Baptism

The recipients of John's baptism were required to repent and bring forth fruits of that repentance.

Bring forth therefore fruits suitable for repentance (Matthew 3:8; cf. Isaiah 1:16).

The NATURE of John's Baptism

John's baptism was a "*carnal ordinance,*" physical water ceremonially applied to the flesh.

Which stood only in foods and drinks, and different washings, AND CARNAL ORDINANCES, imposed on them until the time of reformation (Hebrews 9:10).

The IMPORTANCE of John's Baptism

John's baptism was the counsel of God for Israel.

All the people that heard him, and the publi-

cans, 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 (Luke 7:29, 30).

John's baptism was a means of fleeing the "*wrath to come*" (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7).

The EXTENT of John's Baptism

All those of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, except the leadership, accepted John's baptism.

There went out to him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins (Mark 1:5).

THE WATER BAPTISM OF CHRIST

The IMPORTANCE of Christ's Baptism

There were four important events in the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are brought to our attention by the fact that the Lord's age is given in relationship to each of them. His water baptism is one of them.

Circumcised the eighth day (Luke 2:21; cf. Genesis 17:10-12; Leviticus 12:2-4).

Presented the fortieth day (Luke 2:22-24; cf. Leviticus 12:2-8).

Confirmed at twelve years (Luke 2:41-42).

Baptized at thirty years (Luke 3:21-23; cf. Numbers 4:3; 8:7).

The UNIQUENESS of Christ's Baptism

Christ's baptism was an introduction to His Messiahship.

The next day John sees Jesus coming to him, and says, "Behold the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, 'After me cometh a Man Who is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew

*Him not: but that **He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water***” (John 1:29-31).

Christ’s baptism was a testament to His righteousness.

Christ’s was not the usual baptism (Mark 1:4) and thus raised even John the Baptist’s question of “Why?” (Matthew 3:13-14). The answer Christ gave was that it was “*to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15; cf. Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:5; Galatians 5:3).

Although Christ was baptized by John, it was NOT “John’s baptism” that He received. John’s baptism clearly was for *sinners*. The recipients would stand in the water and confess their sins as a part of its ceremony. However, there were NO sins to confess at the Messiah’s baptism. It was NOT a baptism of purification! It was a testimony to His righteousness. His lips were astoundingly silent during His baptism, while Heaven itself was demonstratively vocal.

Christ’s baptism was an induction into the priesthood.

One was inducted into the priesthood through the water-rite.¹⁵ This ceremonial induction took place at the age of thirty (the age of Christ at His baptism).

From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation (Numbers 4:3).

Christ’s baptism was an identification with Israel.

Jesus entered the waters of Israel’s baptism to identify with the nation.

*Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He has poured out his soul to death: and **He was numbered with the transgressors**; and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors* (Isaiah 53:12).

Christ’s baptism was a separation from sinners.

Remember that baptism is both an identification *and* a separation. Christ not only identified Himself with His nation Israel in His baptism, He also separated Himself distinct from sin.

*For such a High Priest **became us**, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, **separate from sinners**, and made higher than the heavens* (Hebrews 7:26).

WATER BAPTISM & PAUL

While all of the Bible is *for* us, it is not all written *to* or *about* us. In our study of God’s Word we must give to Israel the things pertaining to Israel, and to the Body of Christ the things pertaining to the Body of Christ.

The risen Lord (II Corinthians 5:15) committed to Paul, the apostle, the dispensation of grace (Romans 16:25), dealing with God’s Heavenly purpose the “Body of Christ” (Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25; Ephesians 3:9; I Corinthians 9:17).¹⁶

The focus of this study has been on Israel’s ritual of water baptism. Although water baptism was *TO* and *FOR* Israel, religious and traditional teachings have committed larceny against Israel in assigning it to believers of our day.

This carnal ceremony, as with all of Israel’s other rites and ordinances, has no place with the Body of Christ. The only baptism operative today is the *ONE* where the believer is placed (separated and identified) into the Body of Christ.

There are two verses written by Paul that contradict traditional religious understanding regarding water baptism for today.

Unlike the Twelve Apostles, who were clearly *sent* to baptize under their so-called “Great Commission,”¹⁷ Paul was emphatically **NOT** sent to water baptize. ►

15. Water baptism was a part of the consecration of priests, as seen under the previous section “Old Testament Water Baptism.”

16. A.A. Sandoz (1888-1974), *Why Paul? Unveiling Practical Truth Veiled by Tradition*, Bible Student’s Press.

17. “Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them ... (Matthew 28:19).



For Christ sent me **not** to baptize, but to preach the gospel (I Corinthians 1:17).

For the twelve tribes of Israel there were various “different baptisms;” but in contrast, Paul declares for the *one* Body of Christ, in our day, that there is only *one* baptism.

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all* (Ephesians 4:4-6).

This one baptism is *not* a physical water baptism, but a spiritual one that brings the believer into union and identity with our Lord Jesus Christ.

*For as many of you as have been **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ* (Galatians 3:27).

*Don't you know that so many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death? 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 also should walk in newness of life* (Romans 6:3-4).

*For **by one Spirit** are we all baptized into one **body**, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are bond or free ...* (I Corinthians 12:13).

<><><><>

For those desiring further reading on the subject of *baptism*, here are a few valuable resources:

Articles (from past issues of the BSN)

Water Baptism, by Richard Jordan (#185)

What About Ordinances? by I.T. Sidebottom (#184)

Paul and Water Baptism, by Denis Durham (#307)

Books (from www.StudyShelf.com/baptism)

Baptism and the Bible, by C R. Stam.

Real Baptism: Religious Ritual, or Spiritual Reality? by Charles Baker.

There Is Only One Baptism in this Present Age of Grace (Is it by Water, or by Spirit?) by Robert C. Brock.



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