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MINISTRIES

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What Is Baptism?

The author of Hebrews says that there are six basic teachings of the Messiah, which he calls the “elementary doctrine of Christ.” These teachings are called the “basic principles” of the oracles of God, and they are equated to milk as opposed to solid food. That is to say, these elementary teachings are what spiritual babies need—those who, in the words of the author of Hebrews, are “unskilled in the word of righteousness.”

The author of Hebrews expresses an earnest desire for his readers to move on to maturity and learn the deeper teachings of the Messiah, but he is frustrated that they still need someone to teach them the basics:

Hebrews 5:12-14

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

In other words, according to the author, until we get a solid grasp of the elementary teachings of the Messiah, we simply aren’t ready to move on to the “solid food” of God’s Word. We are unskilled in the word of righteousness. Therefore, if we care about going deeper into the Word of God, it’s imperative that we make sure we have a good grasp of these basic principles.

So what is the milk of God’s word? What are these elementary teachings of the Messiah? The author of Hebrews lists several of these teachings in Chapter 6:

Hebrews 6:1-2

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

You'll notice in that passage that there are six doctrines of Christ. These are declared to be foundational. Again, these elementary doctrines are:

- Repentance from dead works
- Faith toward God
- Instruction about washings
- The laying on of hands
- The resurrection of the dead
- Eternal judgment

In this teaching we'll be unpacking only one of these elementary teachings: Instruction about washings. What does this mean? In Greek, this phrase is *baptismon didachis*. As Messianic Jewish scholar, D. Thomas Lancaster, explains:

Baptismon is the plural of *baptismos*, which simply means a submersion in water, usually for washing. You can hear the close relationship to the Greek word *baptisma*, which our English Bibles translate as "baptism," but it means immersion or submersion. In a Jewish context, it refers specifically to ceremonial immersion in a pool of living water for the sake of obtaining ritual purity. *Didachis* means "instruction" or "teaching."

-D. Thomas Lancaster, "Six Foundational Principles of Ancient Jewish Christianity," p. 61

So it seems that the author of Hebrews considers teaching about baptisms to be a basic, foundational teaching of Messiah that all believers should have a firm grasp of.

The Bible certainly has a lot to say about the topic of baptism, and baptism is a very important ceremony in Christianity. But are we really sure we understand it? Why is baptism so important? What does it represent? Where did it come from?

While our practice of baptism in Christianity comes primarily from the New Testament, a lot of people might be surprised to discover that there were many different kinds of "baptisms" in broader Judaism during New Testament times.

This New Testament ritual of baptism wasn't developed in a vacuum. When John the Baptist shows up in the New Testament and starts baptizing people in the Jordan River, nobody is walking by and saying, "What is that? That's weird!" They already knew what he was doing—he was baptizing!

While the baptism practiced by the early followers of Yeshua has a distinct and deeper significance in light of Messiah, which we'll talk about later, lots of Jewish sects had their own versions of the practice. The actual ritual of water immersion itself didn't originate with John the Baptist, nor was it exclusive to followers of Yeshua.

So where *did* these ritual washings, or baptisms, originate? The Torah! The Torah actually gives instructions regarding ritual washings for many different reasons. Here are a few:

- Consecration of the priests (Leviticus 8:6-9)
- Ritual cleansing from skin disease (Leviticus 14:8-9)
- Ritual cleansing after contact with various bodily fluids (Leviticus 15)

- Ritual cleansing after contact with a dead body (Numbers 19:14-19)

Real quick, a “ritual” is simply a prescribed way of doing things. Rituals can originate from either YHWH or man. So when we say “ritual,” we are not referring to manmade ritual traditions, but rather to the prescribed ways of doing things as outlined by YHWH in the Torah. These rituals are most often, but not always, associated with the priesthood.

In the Torah, a main function of ritual washing was to return to a state of ritual purity. Why? The primary reason was so that the worshipper could participate in the Tabernacle or Temple service. This is what the Torah says after it lists some of the instructions of ritual purity:

Leviticus 15:31

Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.

In many cases, when a person would become ritually unclean, they would need to wash in a ritual bath, or *mikvah*, in order to return to a state of ritual purity. This was so they could participate in the tabernacle or temple service without defiling it through their ritual impurity.

The Wisdom of Sirach, written between 200 to 175 BCE, actually uses the Greek verb *baptizo*, that is baptizes, to refer to the Torah’s ritual washing instructions:

Sirach 34:25

If a man immerses [baptizo] after touching a dead body and touches it again, what has he gained by his washing?

So there’s no doubt that the practice of baptism in the New Testament has its roots in the ritual washings of the Torah. And by the time of the first century, many Jewish sects had expanded the ritual washings of the Torah in their own purity ceremonies. For instance, some Jewish communities required immersion in water even as part of their process for Gentile conversion to Judaism. New Testament scholar, Dr. Craig Keener, writes this:

Many Jewish people were also familiar with a sort of baptism associated with conversion, a once-for-all kind of turning. Although some have questioned whether Jewish people practiced conversion-baptism this early, it appears in various sources. Even the late first to early second-century Stoic philosopher Epictetus mentions it (*Diatribai* 2.9.20). Later rabbis would not have borrowed the practice from Christians, and it is difficult to imagine conversion to Judaism being accepted without purification.

-Craig Keener, “Baptism,” *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*

Having said that, there are definitely some differences where we can see that the baptism ritual as performed in the New Testament was unique.

While “conversion-baptism” was likely practiced among other Jewish sects in the first century, when John the Baptist and Yeshua’s early followers came on the scene, their version of baptism took on another dynamic. They not only required Gentiles to get baptized, but also Jews. So everyone, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, went through baptism as a sign of their membership to the Messianic Kingdom.

Not only that, but the baptism practiced by followers of Yeshua had a more central place in their faith than that of other Jewish sects. For the sake of simplicity, we'll refer to type of baptism practiced by Messiah followers as "Messianic Baptism." To followers of Yeshua, baptism was a defining moment.

While other sects, like the Qumran community, required baptism for membership into their community, it was apparently not as central. Keener writes:

Those joining the Essene sect were also baptized during their initiation, and this immersion also offers an analogy. But this baptism did not have the same force as that of John's baptism or that of Jesus' disciples. For the Essenes, it was simply the first of many purification rituals, and only a small component of the process of joining the sect. For John and Jesus' movement, a single, emphatic baptism itself represented a transition to the new life.

-Craig Keener, "Baptism," NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

What is the meaning of Messianic Baptism?

As we already covered, the actual ritual itself was not developed in a vacuum. The early Messianic believers were not the only ones practicing ritual immersion in water. But, just like we see with the feast days, the custom of baptism was infused with a profound and deeper meaning in light of the Messiah.

First, the followers of Yeshua seem to have modeled their practice of baptism after that of John the Baptist. For instance, repentance and forgiveness of sin is at the center of the ritual.

Mark 1:4

John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of **repentance for the forgiveness of sins**.

Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ [Yeshua the Messiah] **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So here we see that the ritual of Messianic Baptism symbolizes repentance, leading to the forgiveness of sins, and this is the case all the way since John the Baptist. But as John himself acknowledges, the symbol of baptism was to be expanded even further in light of the coming of Messiah. He was simply preparing the way of Messiah:

Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

In fact, later in Acts we see this distinction between John's baptism and the disciples' baptism even clearer:

Acts 19:1-6

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy

Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus” [Yeshua]. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus [Yeshua]. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

The Messiah Himself recalled John’s prophecy just prior to His ascension:

Acts 1:4-5

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So what do we see when the apostles begin baptizing in the book of Acts? In light of Messiah’s death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as the Holy Spirit being poured out on Shavuot/Pentecost, there are some notable symbolic additions! It was still a symbol of repentance, but now it was a mark of identification with the Messiah as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit—just as John had prophesied!

So first, according to Acts 2:38, baptism was done in the name of Yeshua the Messiah. What does that mean? Keener writes this:

Baptism “in Jesus’s name” distinguishes this baptism from other Jewish immersion practices [...] baptism in Jesus’s name does not involve a ritual formula uttered over an initiate but the new believer’s “calling on the name of the Lord” Jesus [...] The Jesus movement used it as a line of demarcation within Judaism even from an early period and that the primarily line of demarcation was faith in Jesus’s exalted status.

-Craig Keener, “Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 1,” pp. 982, 984

In other words, baptism was distinct among the other ritual washings of Judaism in that it was a symbol of one’s conversion to the Messianic sect of Yeshua followers. It is performed as a symbol of one’s confession of faith in Yeshua as Messiah and the lord over their life.

Second, according to Acts 2:38, Messianic Baptism is connected to the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, which is simply to say the gift of the Spirit’s work in the believer’s life. This has many elements, including empowering believers toward keeping God’s commandments, as Paul emphasizes in Romans. One of the ways the gift of the Holy Spirit can manifest is in the prophetic empowerment and tongues, as the book of Acts seems to emphasize.

The symbolism of Messianic Baptism for the believer is carried even further in Paul’s epistles. It illustrates the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah. Moreover, it illustrates the death of our “old nature” and our being made a new creation in Messiah:

Romans 6:1-4

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Now, many people might be inclined to think that all of this symbolism connected to baptism is just taught in the New Testament. It's asserted that John the Baptist and the disciples simply took water immersion and applied their theology to it, essentially pulling these concepts out of thin air!

While we certainly get a fuller picture in the New Testament, many people might be surprised to learn that the symbol of water immersion is connected to these very prophetic expectations in the *TANAKH*! Several passages about the New Covenant prophesy of a time when sin will be forgiven and God's people will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and made into a new creation—and these important prophecies are linked to being cleansed with water!

Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols **I will cleanse you**. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So it's no wonder that we see the apostles connecting these promises of Scripture to water baptism—the *TANAKH* had already made the connection! For the apostles, water baptism stood as a logical symbol to use to express the reality of these biblical promises breaking forth in Messiah.

But wait! There's more! The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 3:20-21, applies the imagery of Noah's flood to Messianic Baptism.

1 Peter 3:20-21

because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Messiah Yeshua),

It should be noted that this passage is sometimes used to suggest that baptism is required for salvation. We'll address that idea a little later in this teaching. For now, let's focus on the symbolism that Peter is bringing out of this ritual.

According to Peter, our baptism proclaims another dynamic of the gospel message. Just as the floodwaters brought death to man, they were also the means of making the ark buoyant, thus saving man through Noah and his family. In the same way, it was through His death that the Messiah would conquer death and bring salvation to all who believe.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-4, Paul relates Baptism to the crossing of the Red Sea. This was Israel's corporate experience of salvation. Paul uses that experience as an analogy to the salvation we have in Messiah. Israel was redeemed and brought through the waters—"baptized" if you will—and thus became identified as one people of God. In the same way, we've been redeemed through Messiah, and through baptism, we are thus identified as the one people of God. Paul makes this clear a couple of chapters later:

1 Corinthians 12:13

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

In summary, here is what we've learned so far:

- 1) The baptism ceremony, as we know it today, is rooted in the Torah's ritual washings.
- 2) Ritual immersion was practiced for various reasons among the Judaisms of the 2nd Temple period. It's likely that a form of conversion-baptism, as we find in later rabbinic literature, was also practiced at the time.
- 3) John the Baptist immersed people in water as a symbol of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He was utilizing a practice that all Jews of the time were familiar with; he simply applied symbolism relevant to the coming of Messiah existent in the *TANAKH*.
- 4) The disciples appear to have modeled their baptism after John's and utilized it as a symbol of conversion to their Messianic sect of Judaism. In contrast to other Jewish conversion-baptisms, which required it only for Gentiles, Jews and Gentiles both went through Messianic Baptism.
- 5) In addition to forgiveness of sins, Messianic Baptism identifies us with the body of Messiah. It's a picture of the Gospel. It's a symbol of the Holy Spirit's work and of us becoming a new creation in Messiah.

For the rest of this teaching, we're just going to go through all of the common questions that people ask about baptism. Let's begin...

1) Is Baptism required for salvation?

Some Christian denominations teach that the ceremony of baptism is required to be saved. This idea is based on a reading of a few particular verses in the New Testament.

But before we get there, it's important to look at what Scripture clearly says regarding what is required for salvation:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

You'll notice that we are saved by our faith, not by faith plus works or our faith plus a ritual. Now, if we truly have saving faith, then good works, including getting baptized, will be the natural outgrowth of that faith. But just as Paul made clear in the book of Galatians that Gentiles do not need to get circumcised to be saved, the same can be said about baptism. Anyone insisting that a ritual is necessary for salvation is basically saying the same thing that Paul's opponents in Galatians were saying, and that's not a good place to be!

Furthermore, Paul clearly distinguishes baptism from the gospel in his letter to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 1:14-17

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its

power.

Paul makes it especially clear that baptism was not at the heart of the Gospel for him. He said his mission was to preach the gospel, not to make sure everyone was baptized. But if baptism were necessary for salvation, why would Paul distinguish it from the gospel?

Furthermore, if baptism were required for salvation, then there can't be any exceptions; otherwise it clearly isn't *required* for salvation. We know of at least one person who was saved without receiving baptism—that is, the thief on the cross next to Yeshua. Yeshua said that the thief would be with him in paradise despite the fact that the thief wasn't baptized.

Another significant exception is found in Acts 10:44-48. Here the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles who heard the Gospel—they even begin speaking in tongues. It was only after the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles when Peter said, “[Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?](#)”

The new believers wouldn't have received the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit if they weren't already saved through the receiving of the Gospel by faith. If baptism were required for salvation, they wouldn't have received the Holy Spirit until *after* they were baptized.

“But wait!” Someone might say. “Peter connects forgiveness of sin to water baptism in Acts 2:38!” Actually a closer look at the passage clearly connects forgiveness of sins with repentance, not baptism. Baptism relates to what is to be done after salvation as a symbol of the person being cleansed of their sins through the Messiah.

Others might point to a passage in Peter's first epistle, which, if read in isolation, certainly appears to suggest that baptism is required for salvation:

1 Peter 3:21

[Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ \[Yeshua the Messiah\].](#)

However, the context makes it clear that the type of baptism Peter is talking about is the immersion into Messiah's death and resurrection. It's the spiritual reality that the ritual of water baptism symbolizes. How do we know? Well, let's read the whole passage:

1 Peter 3:18-21

[For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ \[Yeshua the Messiah\].](#)

First, baptism is being used as a metaphor relating to Noah's ark. Just as the ark brought people safety though the waters, so too does baptism signify being carried safely away from our sinful nature and into our new hearts as new creations because of Messiah's death and resurrection. Peter is speaking of how

we left our sinful lives behind, and now we are living righteously in Messiah.

Second, notice Peter's use of the phrase, "not as a removal of dirt from the body." Immersion in water washes away dirt, but it does nothing to cleanse the inward person. Clearly, Peter is referring to something deeper than the mere ritual here. He's talking about repentance, which begins in a person's heart, hence Peter's words, "as an appeal to God for a good conscience."

So Peter connects baptism with repentance because baptism is the outward symbol of what *actually* saves us. He views baptism as a proclamation of our death with Messiah and our being raised as a new creation.

2) Is Baptism a one-time occurrence?

As we covered earlier, immersion in water is rooted in the ritual washings of the Torah. Ritual washings were certainly not a one-time occurrence but were repeated quite often. Even orthodox Jews today continue the regular practice of ritual washing for many different reasons.

However, Messianic Baptism, like Jewish conversion-baptism, is distinct in meaning even though it is the same physical ritual. To the apostles, Messianic Baptism was kind of an initiation ritual into their movement, so presumably that would only be a one-time occurrence.

Nevertheless, there are many reasons why followers of Yeshua today might go through baptism more than once. In addition to an initial water baptism as a symbol of their declaration of faith in Yeshua, perhaps someone might decide to immerse in water as a symbol of their rededication to the Messiah later on. Others might get baptized in conjunction with important life events, such as marriage, to symbolize entering into a new chapter of their life. When believers visit Israel, they might get baptized in the Jordan River as a way to memorialize Yeshua's baptism and their connection to Him through faith.

While that initial baptism, as a symbol of a new believer's declaration of faith in Messiah, is important and special, there's nothing in Scripture restricting believers from being baptized more than once and for different reasons if they want to.

3) Is Baptism the same as a *Mikvah*?

We talked about this a little earlier, but just to give further clarification, a baptism is a type of ritual washing that's rooted in the ritual washings of the Torah. The physical ritual—that is, immersing oneself in water—is the same. But Messianic Baptism is distinct in meaning.

The word *mikvah* literally means a "gathering of water," and it came to specifically refer to the actual ritual bath, like the ritual baths found around where the Second Temple stood or the ones found at Qumran. Traditionally and historically, the mikvah consisted of "living water." D. Thomas Lancaster explains:

Immersion for purification entails a full body baptism into "living water," that is, naturally flowing water: rain, spring, or river water that has not been artificially drawn from a well or cistern [...] The Hebrew word for such a natural gathering of water is *mikvah*.

-D. Thomas Lancaster, "Six Foundational Principles of Ancient Jewish Christianity," p. 62

A baptism can occur in a traditional *mikvah*—that is, a ritual bath—or in a natural body of water such as the Jordan River. We see both being utilized in the New Testament.

With regard to the latter, we have the obvious example of John the Baptist and Yeshua utilizing the Jordan River for baptism.

With regard to the former, a lot of people might be surprised to learn that the 3,000 people that were said to have been baptized in Acts 2:41 were likely baptized in *mikvaot*, which were all around Jerusalem. The Temple Mount hosted thousands of worshipers daily—many more during the feast days—so plenty of *mikvaot* needed to be available to accommodate everyone.

4) How is Baptism performed?

A lot of us who have grown up in traditional Christian churches view baptism in light of what we've seen and experienced in accordance with our denomination's traditions. For most of us, that usually includes the Pastor standing either beside or in a baptismal pool and dunking a person in the water. (We'll cover other methods, like water sprinkling and even infant Baptism a little later.)

While there's nothing necessarily wrong with that method, that's not how it was practiced by the apostles in the first century. Keener writes:

“Baptism in this period involved mainly supervision while the people coming for purification immersed themselves; the disciples could, like John, supervise mass baptisms without individual attention (Luke 3:3, 7, 12, 16, 21).”

-Craig Keener, “Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 1,” p. 995

So a Messianic Baptism in the first century consisted of supervised self-immersion in water. Some might wonder who is qualified to supervise a baptism. Does it have to be a minister of some kind? Well, not necessarily, although a pastor or leader within the community would certainly meet the qualifications. Ideally, however, it should at least be someone committed to the faith of Messiah.

Also, some people wonder if a woman could supervise a baptism. There is nothing in Scripture indicating that the one supervising a baptism can't be a woman. Keener continues:

What specifies that a baptism is in Jesus's name is the recipient's confession of faith in Jesus. This is not to suppose that early Christians would not have cared who supervised baptisms (which were probably effectively self-dunkings) [...] There is no indication that one needed to be “ordained” to oversee baptism (Acts 8:38; 9:18), but early Christians probably at least expected Christian commitment for anyone performing Christian acts, including overseeing baptism.

-Craig Keener, “Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Vol. 1,” p. 984

5) Does a “sprinkle” count or does baptism need to be full immersion?

Every indication in Scripture is that baptism is full immersion in water. The word in Greek literally means “immersion” or “submersion.” The ritual washings after which baptism is modeled are likewise full-water immersions.

When Romans 6:4 says, “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,” that metaphor only makes sense with immersion. Just as people are buried under ground, the baptized person is “buried” under water.

According to extra-biblical historical evidence, it seems that the method of sprinkling was only used on rare occasions as an exception, not a rule. For instance, the Didache, a first century Christian treatise, mentions a type of sprinkling in the instructions it gives for baptism:

Didache 7

And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, **pour out water three times upon the head** into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

So biblically and historically, the ideal method of baptism is full immersion in water. Even the early communities that made allowances for sprinkling admit that such a method wasn’t the ideal.

6) Into what name are we baptized—Yeshua’s name only or the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? And what does that mean?

In Matthew 28:19, Yeshua told His disciples to make disciples of all nations and baptize them “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” But in Acts 2:38, when Peter instructs people to be baptized, he says to do it in the name of Yeshua the Messiah. Which is it?

In either case, despite tradition, scholars recognize that being baptized “in the name” did not entail a ritual formulaic phrase uttered by the baptism overseer. Christian scholar, D.A. Carson, writes:

There is no evidence we have Jesus’ *ipsissima verba* here and still less that the church regarded Jesus’ command as a baptismal formula, a liturgical form the ignoring of which was a breach of canon law. The problem has too often been cast in anachronistic terms. E. Rignebach points out that as late as the Didache, baptism in the name of Jesus and baptism in the name of the Trinity coexist side by side: the church was not bound by precise “formulas” and felt no embarrassment at a multiplicity of them, precisely because Jesus’ instruction, which may not have been in these precise words, was not regarded as a binding formula.

-D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” p. 598

The point is that baptism “in the name” is an outward confession of faith in that name, that’s it. And biblically speaking, the “name” reflects character, authority, and reputation, not syllables or liturgical recitations.

So all that to say, both passages are correct. Baptism “in the name of Yeshua” is an outward confession of faith in Yeshua, which logically includes the mention of the Father and the Holy Spirit as part of that faith. Messianic theologian, Tim Hegg, puts it this way:

Undergoing a *mikveh* in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit means that by one’s faith in Yeshua, he or she has entered into the covenant community of Messiah and has

willingly and publically submitted to His lordship, having died with Him and having been raised with Him to a new life (Rom 6:3-4). Furthermore, this covenant community into which the disciple of Yeshua has entered is that which is established by the Father, the God of Israel, and as such, the believer is grafted into the believing remnant of Israel with whom God has established an eternal covenant (Rom 11:11ff). This remnant community is blessed by the continued presence of Yeshua through the abiding Holy Spirit Who convicts, encourages, enables, and sanctifies the disciple of Yeshua to walk in His footsteps, being more and more conformed to His image.

-Tim Hegg, *“Commentary on The Gospel of Matthew: Chapters 24-28,”* p. 1341

7) What about Infant Baptism?

Nowhere in the Bible is there any record of infants being baptized into the faith of Messiah. All the evidence we have in Scripture points to the fact that only believers in Yeshua were baptized as a public confession of their faith. Infants cannot make such a public confession of faith because infants cannot even make the conscious choice to put their faith in Messiah to begin with.

It is argued by some that Infant Baptism is the New Covenant version of circumcision. God commands His people to circumcise their sons on the eighth day after birth as a sign of their inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant community. Likewise, Infant Baptism is said to be the sign of inclusion into the New Covenant community of Messiah. But there’s nothing in Scripture indicating that baptism replaced circumcision.

Even those who support Infant Baptism admit that there’s really no explicit biblical basis for it. It’s simply inferred based on certain theological assumptions. We ought to base our theology and practice on what we can clearly see in the Scriptures.

8) What Does “Baptized with Fire” mean?

John the Baptist said that Yeshua’s baptism would be distinct from his own in a strange way. This is what he said:

Matthew 3:11

I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with **the Holy Spirit and fire**.

What did John mean when he said Yeshua would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire? Well, we already covered how the Messianic prophecies of Spirit-empowerment were connected with the imagery of water, such as in Ezekiel 36:25-27. So we shouldn’t be surprised to see John the Baptist using the picture of being baptized in the Holy Spirit to describe Yeshua’s baptism. But what does he mean when he says Yeshua will baptize with fire?

The Tanakh also links water and fire to judgment. For instance, Daniel 7:10 speaks of a “river of fire” that flows from the throne of the Ancient of Days. The Book of Revelation speaks of a “lake of fire.” Isaiah combines the image of wind—in Hebrew, *ruach*, that is “spirit”—with judgment:

Isaiah 30:27-28

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, **burning** with his anger, and in **thick rising**

smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a **devouring fire**; his **breath** [*ruach*] is like an **overflowing stream** that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.

In this passage we have the combination of fire, spirit, and water, as a symbol of judgment—hence John the Baptists’ use of these symbols in his own teaching. Thus, Yeshua’s baptism is one that is characterized by the work of the Spirit in both purification and judgment. Whether or not we place our trust in Messiah and pursue righteousness will determine whether we are purified or condemned by His baptism in the Day of Judgment.

9) Why was Yeshua baptized?

When Yeshua came to John to be baptized, John felt unworthy to do it. But Yeshua answered him:

Matthew 3:15

“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

What did Yeshua mean by this? Commentators have offered a variety of different explanations, and perhaps the meaning of Yeshua’s baptism could be multifaceted.

One approach is to see this as Yeshua identifying with sinners. Yeshua Himself was without sin, but His baptism represented His willingness to identify with the sinful people He came to save through His death and resurrection, which is symbolized by baptism. By submitting to John’s baptism of repentance, Yeshua symbolically took His place among sinners:

Isaiah 53:12

...he poured out his soul to death **and was numbered with the transgressors**; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

We know that baptism is ultimately a symbol of Yeshua’s death and resurrection according to Romans 6:3-4. So Yeshua here steps into the symbolism of His own atoning death and resurrection—He embodies, or fulfills, the meaning of baptism. Yeshua, the sinless Savior, submits to death—the punishment we deserve for our sin—in order to give us righteousness. And this is all symbolized by His baptism.

Another approach is to interpret Yeshua’s words against the backdrop of the Torah. If we interpret “righteousness” as simply obedience to God’s will, it seems reasonable then to see Yeshua’s baptism as a response to something in the Torah. Secondly, the word “fulfill” has prophetic implications throughout Matthew. So Yeshua’s baptism could perhaps be seen as a prophetic fulfillment of something in the Torah.

What might Yeshua’s baptism be a fulfillment of? Well part of the process of the consecration for priests included immersing in a *mikvah* supervised by Moses:

Exodus 29:4

You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and **wash them with water**.

Based on this verse, one possible reason Yeshua was baptized was to begin preparing for his role as our

heavenly High Priest!

By being baptized, Yeshua recognized His priestly role as the one who would bear the sins of Israel and make atonement for them. That's why John the Baptist was involved. His role in Yeshua's baptism symbolically fulfilled the role of Moses in the consecration of the priests—that may be why Yeshua said it's “fitting for *us* to fulfill all righteousness.” Finally, the Holy Spirit that descended upon Yeshua in the form of a dove symbolizes the anointing oil used in the priests' ordination.

Another facet to understanding this event is to read it as part of the overall literary structure in Matthew. According to many scholars, Matthew structures his gospel as a retelling of Israel's story, embodied in the person of Yeshua. So we can understand Yeshua's baptism as part of the story of the New Exodus embodied in Messiah.

For instance, shortly after Yeshua's birth, Matthew says that Yeshua was taken to Egypt in order to be spared from Herod's decree to kill all the young boys in the region. This parallels Pharaoh's decree to kill all the baby Hebrew boys in Exodus 1. Yeshua and His family then return from Egypt, which parallels Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Yeshua is then baptized, which parallels Israel crossing the Red Sea. Yeshua then goes to the wilderness for 40 days, which parallels Israel's wilderness wanderings. Yeshua then gives His Sermon on the Mount, which parallels Moses giving the Torah at Mount Sinai. And so on and so forth.

Each of these explanations is an interesting way to understand Yeshua's baptism, and there's no reason to think that there is just one valid interpretation.

10) Is Baptism Commanded?

Just prior to His ascension, when Yeshua said to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” Grammatically, his emphasis was on making disciples. After all, what good is a water immersion ritual by itself? The entire point of Messianic Baptism is to symbolize the inward conversion that took place in the heart of the believer—it's an outward confession of becoming a disciple of Yeshua. Physical baptism can be summed up as an outward proclamation of our faith in the Word Messiah taught and practiced. It illustrates the inward process of spiritual cleansing and the promise of eternal life.

Yeshua's command was to create disciples; baptism is the physical symbol of that conversion.

Symbols are meaningless by themselves, which is why in the minds of the apostles, the inward washing away of sins and the physical baptism were tied together. Without meaning, the act of being baptized was nothing more than a bath. If it doesn't symbolize one's genuine faith in the Messiah and His teachings, what's the point? The same idea is true of circumcision, for example. Without its spiritual meaning, being physically circumcised is nothing. Physical circumcision is the sign of the spiritual covenant made with YHWH, which entails a circumcision of the heart.

Water baptism was a common practice in the first century, one Yeshua and his disciples took part in. We see this in both John 3:22 and John 4:2. So it only makes sense that new disciples in the faith would get baptized in water as an outward sign of their new commitment. This evidence is hard to deny. Remember, even Yeshua himself was baptized, and he is our example.

So why isn't baptism in the Torah? Well it is, in a way. Remember, before entering the tabernacle or

temple, a person has to immerse themselves in water, making themselves ritually clean and signifying spiritual cleanness. The High Priest had to bathe before putting on the holy garments and offering sacrifices such as the Yom Kippur sacrifice for atonement. What we see in the New Testament is the same ritual immersion being infused with deeper meaning in light of the Messiah and in accordance with prophecy. We are commanded to repent, and that leads to forgiveness; that forgiveness is a spiritual washing away of our sins.

Acts 22:16

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

In Ephesians, Paul indicates how our bride is to be “washed” in the water of the Word:

Ephesians 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Is that not also to be the same process for us, as the “bride of the Messiah?”

As you may have heard us say, the physical teaches the spiritual and the spiritual teaches the physical; in this, baptism is no different. Baptism, like circumcision, has two components—a spiritual truth followed by a physical manifestation of this truth. Paul taught us the same thing in regard to circumcision in Romans 2. There must first be a spiritual circumcision of the heart before a physical circumcision has any meaning. In the same way, baptism is first an inward process that is followed by a physical manifestation.

When someone comes into the faith, the “water of the Word” through Messiah Yeshua cleanses them in his grace. This is the moment of conversion, the inward process. It is the moment when that person becomes a new disciple of Yeshua and is washed clean, allowing them to approach the Father. Then, as in the days of old when one had to bathe before entering the tabernacle or temple to offer their sacrifices or offerings to YHWH, the new convert was then physically baptized in water.

Think about it this way. When we celebrate Passover as believers in Yeshua, we not only remember the Exodus out of Egypt, but we remember the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Messiah as well. The Passover has been infused with deeper meaning in light of the Messiah, and so we celebrate it in accordance with that deeper significance.

In the same way, the ritual of baptism is now infused with deeper meaning—that is, the spiritual principles and promises—through the death and resurrection of Messiah.

Not only does it function to affect ritual purity—that is, our ability to go into the physical temple—it also reminds us of our need to be forgiven and purified morally, which is only possible through the work of Messiah. And while we are commanded to be spiritually cleansed through our faith and repentance, being “washed in the Word,” we can also apply this principle outwardly. The physical baptism thus symbolizes the spiritual baptism—that is, the forgiveness of sins that comes from our repentance—that has already occurred. This is all in light of the deeper significance realized in Yeshua.

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, understood the process by John the Baptist in the same way:

Antiquities 18.5.2 116-119

For immersion in water, it was clear to him, could not be used for the forgiveness of sins, but as a sanctification of the body, and only if the soul was already thoroughly purified by right actions

Thus, again, it was understood in the first century that the physical baptism symbolized the spiritual baptism—again, the forgiveness of sins following repentance—that has already occurred.

So when asking “is baptism commanded?” we would say that, no, there is no commandment to baptize or be baptized. There are commandments in the Torah for people to be immersed before entering the temple. A person’s salvation is not dependent upon their being baptized in water, neither is it a sin to not be baptized.

However, we do find great value in the practice of baptism, especially in light of the deeper significance realized in Yeshua—that we have repented, been forgiven, made clean, and can receive eternal life, and are identified with Messiah in His life, teachings, and mission. Of course, it’s also worth noting that Yeshua and the apostles themselves practiced baptism. In the spirit of walking as Messiah walked (1 John 2:6) and imitating the apostles (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9), baptism is an encouraged practice.

Conclusion

In summary, the subject of baptism can be a rather complicated topic, and in a lot of ways, this teaching simply served as an introduction.

When we come into the faith and repent, as we are commanded to do, we are spiritually cleansed by the forgiveness of our sins, as an internal baptism. When we repent, we are turning back to the Torah and following Messiah Yeshua.

This is why you will often find baptism in the context of making disciples. Repentance is required as the first step of a disciple. Their subsequent water baptism is evidence of their forgiveness that resulted from their repentance—of their being washed clean. It is only through faith in Messiah’s redeeming work that we are able to receive forgiveness, being made clean. Baptism is symbolic of this process, a visceral metaphor that we can experience and others may witness.

In the Torah we are taught to immerse ourselves in water before entering the tabernacle and going before our Creator; that immersion represents the state of being clean and pure of heart. The physical immersion actually does nothing to cleanse us spiritually, but it shows us the state we are to be in. We can achieve this state of purity of spirit if we first repent of our sins and receive forgiveness that comes only through the work of Messiah.

In the Brit Hadasha, or New Testament, we see water baptism closely associated with the making of disciples, or new converts in the faith. This baptism came only after the person repented of their sins and received forgiveness. Their baptism was an outward proclamation of faith in Yeshua and represented them being washed clean through the water of the Word.

In our repentance, we have turned our back on our sinful flesh, left it dead and buried and have resurrected after being washed clean through a washing in the Word, to use Paul’s language. We have been spiritually baptized.

We can also be physically baptized to symbolize the washing that results in our forgiveness and spiritual

cleanness leading to eternal life. The physical act of water baptism does nothing to actually cleanse us—it doesn't lead to our forgiveness nor our salvation, but that doesn't mean it is without value. Like physical circumcision proclaims that we are in covenant with YHWH, physical baptism is an outward proclamation that we have repented and received forgiveness, becoming spiritually clean before our Creator through the work of Messiah. It is a reminder to ourselves, and a witness to others, of the redeeming power of our Lord.

We hope that we've helped clarify some issues related to baptism, and we hope that you are inspired to immerse yourself in God's Word to learn more about this fascinating topic beyond this teaching.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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