

Yochanan

Prophet of Fire

A Study of the Life and Ministry of John the Baptist

PART IV

JOHN'S

BAPTISM OF YESHUA



BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The notion that full immersion baptism came into existence with the church in the first century is entirely false as is the assertion it began with John. Indeed, immersion was a very common Jewish practice long before believers baptism became a church ordinance.



Baptism, known in Hebrew as *tvilah* which describes the act of full immersion is ritually practiced amongst orthodox Jewish people even until this present day

In the Mosaic law (Numbers 19.17-19; Leviticus 16.24-28) it was to be performed in a naturally occurring water source that was flowing (ie not a still pool of water as in a dam, etc). In the Mosaic law, baptism (*tvilah*) was largely performed as a purification ritual for those who had become ceremonially unclean. The practice of baptism amongst the Jews always required full immersion.

*"Then for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying naturally or the grave. Then 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 him from uncleanness, and he shall wash his clothes and **bathe himself in water** and shall be clean by evening."* (Numbers 19.17-19)

The Hebrew phrase "bathe himself in water" means to fully immerse himself and the body of water in which he was to do so was referred to as a "*mikvah*."



A modern day mikvah in a synagogue

ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH WORD BAPTISM

With the advent of the new testament being written in the Greek language, the Hebrew *tvilah* became the Greek *bapto*. This Greek word was used to describe the act of dying cloth, where the cloth is immersed in a dye solution and emerges completely changed. For example, white cloth may be immersed in green dye and the cloth comes out green, completely and permanently changed in character. Over time *bapto* evolved into the more familiar *baptizo*, but the meaning remained - to fully immerse.

Translation v Transliteration

There are several words in the English New Testament that aren't translated. Instead, translators chose to transliterate them. That means they spell the word in English like it sounds in Greek rather than translate it to its English equivalent. These words include: Amen (English – truly), apostle (English – one who is sent), angel (English – a messenger, sometimes human and sometimes non-human), blaspheme (English – to speak evil of or revile), Satan (English – one who opposes), Baptism (English – to immerse) etc.

So why would a translator get to a word and decide not to translate it and instead just spell it in English? In the case of baptism translating it "to immerse" carried political and religious ramifications in the days of the early English translations. They avoided raising those issues by retaining the Greek *baptizo* and spelling it baptism. In other words, when the religious practice of the day is pouring and sprinkling it has less ramifications to transliterate the word into "baptism" than it does to actually translate it "immerse." If they had put immerse in every instance of *baptizo* (verb) or *baptismos* (noun) in the New Testament they ran the risk of people questioning their current religious practice and they feared what might result.

The fundamental principle underlying John's practice of baptism is twofold;

1. Identification with the message of John and the Messiah to whom he referenced
2. Purification from sin and uncleanness in keeping with the ancient tradition of the Jews under the Mosaic law

The purpose of believers' baptism today is public identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and is performed under the authority of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as commanded by Yeshua.

THE BAPTISM OF YESHUA

The crescendo of John's ministry came one day when he noticed his cousin Yeshua making His way through the crowd. Millennia had passed since creation, God's 613 laws had been given by the hand of Moses, the Israelites had cycled through periods of obedience to those laws followed by periods of despairing lawlessness and all the while the prophets had consistently predicted this day. John stopped what he was doing, pointed out Yeshua to the crowd and exclaimed;

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD

(John 1.29)

Yeshua made His way into the Jordan and requested that John immerse Him, a request that John faltered at. He rightly identified himself as less than the least and said to Yeshua that he had need to be baptised of Him. Here is Yeshua's response;

"Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness"

(Matthew 3.15)

Given that Yeshua had neither the need to repent or come back to God, why would he subject Himself to John's baptism? Every major event in the life of Yeshua carries theological implications. His baptism was important for 6 reasons as follows:

Righteousness

At the time of His baptism, righteousness was defined as perfect conformity to the absolute standard of the Mosaic law set down in the Torah. By submitting to baptism, Yeshua was declaring that He would fulfill all of its righteous demands.

Identification

By submitting to baptism, Yeshua was publicly identifying with the message of John that the people needed to prepare themselves for the coming kingdom.

Connection to Israel

His baptism publicly connected Him to Israel and authenticated Him as the Messiah both visibly and audibly

Identification with the believing remnant

Those who were the believing remnant in Israel were responding to the preaching of John and by submitting Himself to baptism, He identified with that group of believers'

Identification with sinners

Yeshua came in human form to connect with mankind apart from sin. Yeshua had no sin to confess but identified with those who did in His baptism. Paul makes this point very clearly in II Corinthians 5.21;

"For He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"

The approval of the Father and the anointing of the Spirit

The following scriptures attest to the presence of the triune God at Yeshua's baptism.

God the Father: "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"

(Mark 1.11)

By identifying Yeshua in this way, God is connecting Him with the Son of Psalm 2, the Messianic Son, God the Son

God the Son: He was standing there in the Jordan with John

God the Holy Spirit:"and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him"

(Mark 1.10)