

Chapter 1

There are many words in the Bible which are often misunderstood by theologians and Bible students. Words and phrases like Israel, covenant, born again, election, shedding of blood, etc., are amongst those that are frequently misunderstood by many. One word that is as misunderstood as any other is the word **baptism**. Unfortunately, the misunderstanding of the word baptism has often lead to seriously wrong teaching concerning the nature of salvation. Therefore, it is very necessary that we clearly understand the Biblical teaching concerning the matter of baptism.

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How Do We Understand the Word Baptism?

As we examine how the Bible speaks of baptism, we can readily understand why there is so much controversy and misunderstanding concerning the subject of baptism.

John the Baptist baptized unto the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Jesus was to baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). He, Himself, was baptized by John the Baptist even though He had no sin (Matthew 3:16). Jesus also was to experience a baptism relating to the cross which was to be shared by the disciples (Mark 10:39). Believers are to be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). They were baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3), into the name of Christ (Acts 2:38), in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5), and in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48). In Mark 16:16 and in Acts 2:38 the Bible appears to teach that baptism is a requirement for salvation.

Indeed, the subject of baptism is confusing. Therefore, in this study each and every reference to baptism will be examined so that we might discover harmony between all of them.

In the process of understanding the word “baptism,” we will also learn much more about this wonderful salvation God has so lovingly and compassionately bestowed on those who have become saved. We will learn much about what happened at the cross and what happens to the individual who does become saved.

As we try to harmonize each and every Biblical reference to baptism, it is most important that we first discover the Biblical meaning of the word “baptism.” Once we clearly know the meaning of this word, we will be greatly helped in understanding all of the Biblical references to it. And wonderfully, as we understand the meaning of the Biblical references to it, we will also receive a much clearer understanding of God’s magnificent salvation plan.

We must follow a fundamental principle as we seek to understand the meaning of the word “baptism.” That principle is that the Bible is its own interpreter. Indeed, it is its own dictionary. Therefore, our study will be altogether within the pages of the Bible.

In the Greek language, the words that identify with baptism are *baptizo*, translated baptize; *baptismos*, translated baptism; and *baptisma*, translated baptism. John the Baptist is John the “*Baptistes*.”

What about the Greek Word *Bapto*?

Before we look at these Greek words, we should look at a similar Greek word, *bapto*. The reason we should look at this word is because many Bible students are convinced that the word “baptize” means to immerse. One of their arguments is that the root word from which “baptism” is derived is the word *bapto*, and it is always translated “dip” in the Bible.

The fact is, when we carefully study the Bible’s usage of the word “baptism,” we will discover that it is never used to signify immersion. Moreover, we will find that the word “baptism,” if it has any spiritual application, **always** has to do with the washing away of

our sins. These two principles will be clearly seen as we go along in our study.

On the other hand, the Greek word *bapto* or a similar word, *embapto*, is always translated “dip.” But when we look at every place in the Bible where either *bapto* or *embapto* is found, we will find that they are never used as synonyms for the washing away of our sins. That is, in no way do they signify or relate to salvation. Therefore, even though in some ways they may be a cousin word to “baptism,” actually, they are different words as God uses them in the Bible.

To make sure this is so, let us take time to examine every place in the Bible where the words *bapto* and *embapto* are found

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In John 13:26, we read:

Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped [bapto] it. And when he had dipped [bapto] the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

Similarly, in Matthew 26:23, Mark 14:20, and Luke 16:24 we read:

Matthew 26:23: And he answered and said, He that dippeth [embapto] his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

Mark 14:20: And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth [embapto menos: an active participle] with me in the dish.

Luke 16:24: *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip [bapto] the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

It can be seen that the words *bapto* and *embapto menos* in these verses have nothing to do with washing away of sins. Whatever God is teaching in this action of dipping the sop and giving it to the betrayer Judas, it has nothing to do with the salvation of Judas. Nor does the dipping of the finger of Lazarus provide salvation for Lazarus or the rich man.

One other Bible verse employs a derivative of the word *bapto*, and that is Revelation 19:13, which declares:

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped [bapto] in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

Actually, the word *bapto* is the Greek word *bebammenon* which is a neutral participle perfect middle which literally translates “having been dipped.”

This verse is speaking of Christ as the Savior who bore the wrath of God for our sins. The question is, in whose blood was his vesture dipped. If it were in **His** blood then in this passage the word “bapto” or *bebammenon* would relate to salvation. But if the blood in which His vesture was dipped was **our** blood, then we would know that the word “bapto” is not identifying with salvation because our blood cannot bring salvation.

We will discover that the blood that was on his garments was the blood of those He had come to save. A Bible citation that helps us understand this is Isaiah 63:2-3:

*Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and **their blood*** shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.*

Please note that the phrase “*and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments*” is similar to the phrase “*vesture dipped in blood*” found in Revelation 19:13. We see, therefore, that the phrase “*that His vesture was dipped in blood*” is referring not to **His** blood but to the blood of those He came to save. This verse in Isaiah is speaking of Jesus as He was being punished for the sins of those He came to save. He was both the judge and the lamb. His anger against sin is against the sinner He came to save. But He as our substitute is receiving the penalty for sin demanded by God’s righteous fury against sin. He alone bore the wrath of God for our sins but it was as if we whom He came to save were present with Him.

Therefore, in principle it was our blood that stained His garments. We will learn more about this very important concept later in this study. Our blood on His apparel is the evidence that He is the one who had become sin on behalf of those He had come to save. His vesture was dipped in our blood.

He gave His life and experienced the second death, so that we would be washed of our sins. We read in Revelation 1:5:

*And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in **his own blood**.*

And we read in I John 1:7:

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the **blood of Jesus Christ his Son** cleanseth us from all sin.*

Thus, we see that Revelation 19:13, where a derivative of the word *bapto* is used, as well as all of the other verses where we find the words *bapto* or *embapto*, give us no clue as to the meaning of the word “baptism.”

[* Note: **bold** type added by author for emphasis.]

What Does the Word “Baptism” Mean?

Returning to our study of the Greek words *baptizo*, *baptismos*, and *baptisma*, we find that usually they are translated as “baptize” or “baptism.” But in a few instances, the context does not allow that translation.

We should examine each place in the Bible where these words are translated other than “baptize” or “baptism.” This will help us to obtain the meaning of these Greek words.

First, we will look at Mark 7:4, where we read:

And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

Thus, we see that Revelation 19:13, where a derivative of the word bapto is used, as well as all of the other verses where we find the words bapto or embapto, give us no clue as to the meaning of the word “baptism.”

The word “wash” employed here is from the root of the Greek word *baptizo* which ordinarily is translated as “baptize.” The word “washing” is *baptismos* which ordinarily is translated as “baptism.” Moreover, in Luke 11:38 we read:

And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.

In this passage, the word “wash” is the Greek word *baptizo* which also ordinarily is translated as “baptize.”

Likewise, in Hebrews 9:10 we read:

Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

The word “washings” is the Greek word *baptismos* which also is usually translated “baptism.”

Note that in all these passages the English words wash and washing are the same words as the Greek words which can be transliterated “baptize” or “baptism.” The context of each of these

These passages, therefore, show us that in the Bible the word “baptize” means to wash or cleanse or purify.

verses clearly shows that the word “washing” is a correct translation. Furthermore, there is no implication of dipping or immersion. For example, “tables” (Mark 7:4) are not dipped or immersed to clean them. These passages, therefore, show us that in the Bible the word “baptize” means to wash or cleanse or purify.

These washings of the pharisees before dinner and the washing of cups, pots, brazen vessels, and tables are all related to the ceremonial cleansings of the Old Testament. This is intimated by the language of Luke 11:39-40, which immediately follows the verse dealing with pharisees washing before dinner. Jesus says:

And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?

This agrees with what we read in Hebrews 9:10, which declares that these Old Testament washings (and the Pharisees were attempting to keep as perfectly as possible the Old Testament ceremonial laws), stood only as carnal ordinances. We will look into

these Old Testament ceremonial washings in greater detail later in this study.

We will discover that these Old Testament washings were signs pointing to the washing away of our sins by Christ's atonement. Thus, we can see why references to them in the New Testament Greek language are called *baptizo* or *baptismos* as we have seen in the above verses.

It might also be noted that the Greek words *baptizo* or *baptismos* are never translated "dip" or "immerse." This is in complete harmony with the principle that the idea of immersion is never used as a synonym for salvation. But as we will learn, washing or cleansing or purifying are repeatedly used to describe salvation. We will see this in verses such as Ezekiel 36:25 and Acts 22:16.

Ezekiel 36:25: 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.

Acts 22:16: And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Remember, too, that earlier in our study, we looked at Revelation 1:5 and I John 1:7, where we read about the blood of Jesus washing and cleansing us from our sins.

We may thus be assured that *baptizo* means to wash or cleanse. As we continue this study, we shall see to a much greater degree how true this is.

Old Testament Shadows of Cleansing from Sin

To understand and appreciate the significance of baptism we must begin in the Old Testament, where the foundation was laid to prepare us for the New Testament baptism in any of its usages.

In the Old Testament, God employs a number of signs or figures that point toward forgiveness of sins. The first of these was the shedding of blood. God laid down a rule that without the shedding of

blood there could be no remission or cleansing from sin (Hebrews 9:22).

Shedding of Blood Equals Giving of Life

Throughout the Bible we find the emphasis that our sins are washed away by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. For example we read:

Colossians 1:14: *In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*

Hebrews 9:14: *How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge you conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

In the Old Testament, God employs a number of signs or figures that point toward forgiveness of sins.

1 John 1:7: *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

These verses together with many like them clearly associate Christ's blood with our salvation.

This introduces us to a very significant problem: when we look carefully at Christ as He is paying for our sins, we do not see Him literally shedding His blood. We see Christ as He endures the agony of God's wrath for our sins, doing so without shedding His blood. After He declares, "*It is finished*" He still retains His blood. Later in our study we will learn that when He cried, "*It is finished*" the penalty for sin had been fully paid. All that followed: His physical death, His burial, and His resurrection, were the evidence that He

had fully paid for our sins. But when He said *“It is finished”* he still was physically alive, He still retained most of His blood. It is true that He lost some blood as he experienced the lashes by which He was beaten and as they placed a crown of thorns on His head and as they nailed Him to the cross.

In spite of all of these traumatic events, He still retained enough blood so that physically He was very much alive when He said *“It is finished.”*

Moreover, after He was physically dead, the soldier thrust the spear into His side and water and blood flowed from Him. Therefore, we wonder why God insists that Christ shed His blood for our salvation.

The key to solving this difficulty is the phrase that is found in Deuteronomy 12:23:

*Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the **blood is the life**; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh.*

Furthermore, Leviticus 17:11 declares:

*For the **life of the flesh is in the blood**: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*

In these verses God is teaching that life and blood are virtually synonymous. This is readily understood if we realize that any man or animal whose blood has been removed is dead. It is imperative that our blood be within us if we are to be alive.

Therefore, we can understand that when the Bible speaks of the blood of Christ it is speaking of the life of Christ. All of the verses which speak about the blood of Christ have in view the life of Christ.

For example, when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and the sweat was pouring from His body like great drops of blood, it is speaking about Him giving His life as God was punishing Him for our sins. The Bible speaks of “sweat” and sweat comes from labor or work. Jesus was working to save us as God was punishing Him with the second death on account of our sins. *“Like great drops of*

blood” means He was giving His life. It means He was enduring the second death, eternal damnation for our sins.

This is why in John 6 God insists we are to drink the blood of Christ. God is teaching by this that we are to receive eternal life because Christ gave His blood. That is, Christ gave His life so that we can have life.

John 6:54-57 declares:

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

In this passage Jesus is emphasizing that we receive our life (eternal life) because Christ gave His life by experiencing the second death on our behalf.

We know that the term **shedding His blood** is equivalent to **giving His life**. Christ gave His life in the ultimate sense because He experienced the second death, eternal damnation, on behalf of all those He came to save.

Therefore, we are not to look at the physical blood of Jesus as being the instrument of salvation. Salvation is possible because Jesus experienced the second death, eternal damnation. That is, He gave His life in the ultimate eternal sense. The giving of His life is expressed by the phrase “He shed His blood.” Thus, the Bible uses this phrase as God declares “*without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.*”

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He experienced the second death, eternal damnation, on behalf of all those He came to save.

During the days of the Israelites, the priests repeatedly offered blood sacrifices of birds and animals as they sought forgiveness for their own sins as well as for the sins of the people. None of their sacrifices was sufficient for a permanent, eternal cleansing so they were required to sacrifice repeatedly. Whatever forgiveness was derived from these sacrifices was only because they were types or shadows looking forward to the shed blood of Christ on Calvary. That is, they looked forward to the time when Christ would become sin for those He came to save. Because He took upon Himself the sins of those he planned to save, He had to experience the second death, which was the eternal wrath of God which is God's just penalty for sin.

When Christ shed His blood for our sins, that is, when He gave His life, He brought an end to the blood sacrifices. The fact that He endured the second death, eternal damnation (He shed His blood), was sufficient to provide eternal cleansing for those who have believed on Him as the sacrifice for their sins.

It might be noted that God wants us to remember the great sacrifice of Christ's shed blood by means of the Lord's supper. By partaking of the elements of this wonderful supper, we remember the Lord's death until He comes (I Corinthians 11:26). We remember that He cleansed us from our sins by His shed blood, that is, by giving His life.

Moreover, after we have partaken, and the bread and the fruit of the vine become part of our body, we are reminded that if we have been saved, we are completely identified with Christ in His death and in His resurrection, so that it is as if each one of us who believe on Him had hung on that cross and suffered the eternal punishment of hell for our sins. Moreover, the elements of which we partake represent the fact that we receive our life (eternal life) because He gave His life.

This grand truth is emphasized by two verses we have already examined, Revelation 1:5 declares that Jesus, "*washed us from our sins in his own blood,*" and I John 1:7 reiterates, "*the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"

Offerings by Fire

A second Old Testament figure or type employed by God in relationship to cleansing was that of an offering by fire. Ordinarily, the offering by fire was an act that was done simultaneously with the shedding of blood. The animal was killed and then offered as a burnt offering by fire. It was also sometimes performed without the shedding of blood, for instance, when a cereal offering was made (Leviticus 6:14-17). We see this also in Leviticus 5. If a sin had been committed by someone, he was to offer a lamb or a goat as a sin offering (Leviticus 5:1-6). If he could not afford an animal, he was to offer two turtledoves or two pigeons (Leviticus 5:7-10). If he could not afford these, he was to offer flour as a sin offering. Leviticus 5:11-12:

But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is a sin offering.

It might be noted that normally the priests were to eat of the burnt offering and whoever touched it became holy (Leviticus 6:16-29). This offering, which looked to Christ's atonement, reminds us of Jesus' words in John 6:53-56:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

Even as the priests ate of the burnt offering, which pointed to the spiritual blessing that would come from Christ as the burnt offering, so we are partakers of the body of Christ as He offered Himself as a burnt offering, an offering by fire for our sins.

This beautiful truth is emphasized in the Lord's supper. As we partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper, we are symbolically partaking of the broken body and shed blood of Christ. That is, this is a sign that points to the marvelous truth that if we have become saved we have been given eternal life because Christ gave His life for us. He endured the equivalent wrath of God demanded by the law of God as payment for our sins. Just as the burnt offerings and blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were ceremonial laws pointing to the coming of Christ to pay for our sins, so, too, the New Testament Lord's supper is a ceremonial law pointing to the death of Christ.

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Coals of Fire

Returning to the offering by fire, we see another aspect of this in the burning of incense. Incense laid on the coals from the altar of burnt offering pointed to the atonement to be provided by Jesus. We see this in the experience of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. When these three men offered strange fire to the Lord, God killed them and 250 others (Numbers 16:1-35). When the Israelites murmured about this, God sent a plague among them, which killed 14,700 (Numbers 16:41-49). To stop the plague, Moses told Aaron in Numbers 16:46-48:

... Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and

make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

Of course, it was not the physical offering of incense that produced atonement. The physical act was a shadow that pointed to the spiritual reality of Christ enduring the wrath of God for our sins.

The same figure for cleansing was used by God in preparing Isaiah for his ministry. Isaiah 6:5-7 declares:

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

The live coal represents Christ who endured the fires of hell on behalf of those He came to save. By His enduring the wrath of God, our sin is purged. That is, we are cleansed of our sins.

Incidentally, this is why Romans 12:20 teaches:

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

The enemy is anyone who is not saved. The food and drink we give him is the Gospel. The coals of fire represent the salvation provided by Christ because He endured the fires of hell.

Thus, we see that in addition to the shedding of blood, God used the offering by fire as a symbol of cleansing from sin.

Washing or Bathing

A third figure or type employed by God in relationship to cleansing from sin is that of washing or bathing in water.

Let us consider the Old Testament high priest as he was about to offer sacrifice. Outside of the most holy place wherein the ark was placed was a laver filled with water. Exodus 30:17-21 indicates:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: 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 unto 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.

This washing of the priests' hands and feet was necessary because the priest had guilt. By this washing, he was ceremonially cleansed so that he could come into the presence of the Lord and offer the sacrifice.

This washing of the priests' hands and feet was necessary because the priest had guilt. He himself was a sinner. By this washing, he was ceremonially cleansed so that he could come into the presence of the Lord and offer the sacrifice.

The fact that washing with water was related to cleansing from sin can be seen additionally in a number of other Old Testament references. The leper who was healed was clean after he had

washed his clothes and bathed his body (Leviticus 14:9). A discharge from a person's body made that person unclean before God (Leviticus 15:2). When his discharge had cleared up, "*then he shall number to himself seven days for his cleansing, and wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in running water, and shall be clean*" (Leviticus 15:13). This washing was to be followed by a burnt offering (Leviticus 15:15).

To eat an animal that had died of itself was a sin (Leviticus 22:8), but the guilty person could be cleansed by washing. Leviticus 17:15-16:

And every soul that eateth that which died of itself, or that which was torn with beasts, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger, he shall both wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even: then shall he be clean. But if he wash them not, nor bathe his flesh; then he shall bear his iniquity.

A final example of the Old Testament use of water for cleansing is given in Numbers 8:6-7:

Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.

This cleansing by water was followed by a burnt offering and a sin offering (Numbers 8:8-13). Thus, we see that God used the shedding of blood, the offering by fire, and cleansing by water as means to signify spiritual cleanness.

Thus, we see that God used the shedding of blood, the offering by fire, and cleansing by water as means to signify spiritual cleanness.

Unfortunately, there was a serious problem connected with these Old Testament symbols of cleansing. While the believer could wash in water, offer a blood sacrifice, and make an offering by fire, and be ceremonially cleansed of his sin, he never had the permanent cleansing which identifies with eternal life. He had to offer the same sacrifices again and again. The high priest had “*to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s*” (Hebrews 7:27). We read in Hebrews 10:1-3:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Gifts and sacrifices were offered, as we read in Hebrews 9:9-10:

Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

How does John the Baptist fit into the picture? Was the baptism he performed part of the Old Testament washings or is something new being introduced?

Therefore, the Bible clearly shows the need for a more permanent cleansing. Jesus provided the permanent cleansing by His death on the cross.

Thus far then we have learned that ceremonial acts of the Old Testament congregation, which looked forward to the washing

away of sin by the coming Messiah, include the blood offerings, the burnt offerings, and washing with water. Washing with water could include sprinkling, washing the hands and feet, and even washing the whole body. Like wise in the New Testament church age God introduced the ceremonial sign of water baptism which emphasized and pointed to our need to have our sins washed away.

Having reviewed these Old Testament washings, the next question we must face is: How does John the Baptist fit into the picture? Was the baptism he performed part of the Old Testament washings or is something new being introduced?

We will look carefully at his activity as we continue this study.

The Baptism of John the Baptist

Early in the Gospels, the strange figure of John, who was called the Baptist, is seen by the River Jordan, calling the Jews to repentance and baptizing them in the river. What baptism was this? Was it related to the water baptism of believers which followed after Pentecost? Or did it bear a closer relationship to the washings of the Old Testament which we have seen were a part of the Old Testament ceremonial laws. Since it was called “baptism,” we know that it had to be related to cleansing or washing.

We can find the answer to these questions if we consider for a moment the timing of John’s baptizing. Let us carefully look at John baptizing Jesus.

The time had almost arrived for ending the ceremonial laws, the Aaronic priesthood, and the temple as the place where God came down to man. The great high priest, Jesus, who was to offer Himself as the sacrificial Lamb, was to appear at any moment. He was to be the fulfillment of all the Old Testament laws which looked forward to His coming.

The Aaronic priesthood was fast becoming obsolete. Hebrews 8:13 declares:

In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Thus, God writes to us in the Book of Hebrews regarding the end of the Aaronic priesthood and the related covenant. A new priesthood was being established.

But the new high priest had to be ceremonially cleansed. We will develop this point as we continue this study.

Let us recall that a laver or basin was located in the temple. The high priest was required to wash his hands and his feet with water from the laver before he ministered at the altar. Exodus 30:17-21:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: 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 unto 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.

By having his hands and his feet washed the high priest was ceremonially cleansed and could proceed with his priestly duties.

The Baptism of Jesus

But Jesus was the sinless one. What does the washing of priests who were sinners before God have to do with Jesus? Much, if we will recall the roles Jesus was to play in the salvation drama that was unfolding.

First, He had to come as the high priest who was to offer the sacrifice. Second, He was to be the Lamb that was to be sacrificed. This is seen so beautifully in the words of John the Baptist in John 1:29, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

He had come to save mankind, and in order to do this, He had to completely identify with sinful man. While He, Himself, was without

sin, He became sin for us. He was laden with every dirty, rotten sin that those whom He had come to save had done. He stood, therefore, guilty before God. He became as one who needed cleansing for sins.

We must remember, of course, that His priesthood was in a real sense altogether different from the Aaronic priesthood in that His was an eternal priesthood after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6, Hebrews 7). In another sense it was patterned after the Aaronic priesthood (Hebrews 9:24, Hebrews 10:1). Therefore, He had to be ceremonially washed before He could offer the sacrificial Lamb.

How could He be washed? He could not go into the temple and use the laver located there because it could be used only by the Levites. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah. Moreover, the laver in the temple was related to the altar in the temple and the holy places. Jesus' altar was to be the cross and the holy place was to be heaven itself (Hebrews 8:1-2, Hebrews 9:24). Therefore, something quite different from the temple laver was required for His ceremonial washing.

How could He be washed? He could not go into the temple and use the laver located there because it could be used only by the Levites.

And so God introduced us to John the Baptist who was a transition character raised up to be a bridge between the Old Testament law on the one hand, and on the other hand, the new covenant which was to be established by Jesus. John's father, Zechariah, was a priest of the seed of Aaron and his mother, Elizabeth, was a descendant of Aaron. John, therefore, was of priestly rank. He was inherently qualified to administer the ceremonially cleansing water. Moreover, he was specifically mandated by God to baptize with water. Matthew 3:13-15:

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus

answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

The focal point of the priestly office of John the Baptist was distinctly related to the Aaronic priesthood which was almost ended. The task of John the Baptist was to be the one who prepared the way for Jesus by ceremonially washing Him and by announcing Him as the Messiah. However, since Jesus' priesthood was not of the tribe of Levi, John had to perform his tasks elsewhere, not in the temple.

So John was at the River Jordan, baptizing and calling for repentance. The baptismal rite he offered could have no less signification than that of the ceremonial washings outlined in Old Testament law and was surely adequate for the ceremonial washing of a priest.

The Old Testament washings and sacrifices were dim shadows of the cleansing to be provided by Christ's atonement and which pointed to salvation to be provided by the coming Messiah. The baptism by John was also pointing to the cleansing to be provided by Christ's atonement.

Jesus Is Baptized

Now the high priest, the Lord Jesus, has arrived on the scene. But before He can officially begin to perform His work as high priest as we have already learned, to fulfill all righteousness He has to be ceremonially cleansed, even as Aaron was ceremonially cleansed before he began his work as high priest. John the Baptist has arrived to apply the ceremonial cleansing water to Jesus. The cleansing anticipated by the shadows of ceremonial washings is about to become a fact of history.

It would become a fact of history as God poured out His wrath upon Jesus when He went to the cross. The shadow, that is, the washing or baptism provided by John the Baptist is sharply and intensely focused. It is still a shadow, however. The water baptism of John had no cleansing value in itself even as the shadow of a tree has no substance in itself. The tree can exist without the shadow, but the shadow is nothing without the tree. The closer the shadow is to

the tree, the more clearly the shadow reflects the true substance of the tree.

So John cries out for repentance; he speaks of baptism or washing for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:4, “*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*” It almost sounds like the cross has already happened.

The water baptism of John had no cleansing value in itself even as the shadow of a tree has no substance in itself.

John’s baptism, together with the baptism by the apostles before the time of the cross, was, therefore, of the same nature as the Old Testament washings in that they were a shadow of a future event, but they were far more intense and vibrant with meaning. These baptisms were pointing to the requirement that we must have our sins washed away. Both repentance and the washing away of sins could be accomplished only by the action of God in applying the washing provided by Jesus to our lives.

So the drama unfolds. The sacrificial Lamb (Jesus) is on the scene. The high priest (also Jesus) who is to offer the sacrifice has arrived.

Perhaps John the Baptist chose the Jordan River because it is the river where Naaman was cured of his leprosy. Do you recall when Naaman, the Syrian leper, came to Elisha for healing? Elisha told him to wash seven times in the Jordan River and he would be clean. II Kings 5:9-10:

So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

God used leprosy as a type for sin. The healing of Naaman, by washing in the River Jordan, was a type or shadow pointing to cleansing from sin.

Jordan River: A Picture of Hell

Another cogent reason why John the Baptist may have been baptizing in the Jordan River is because the Jordan River at times is used by God as a picture of hell. Remember when Israel went into the land of Canaan, the river was at flood stage and yet Israel went through the river on dry ground. The priests with the ark were in the bottom of the river when Israel crossed over. The ark represented Jesus who endured hell for us, thus permitting us to pass, as it were, through hell without being touched by the wrath of God.

Another cogent reason why John the Baptist may have been baptizing in the Jordan River is because the Jordan River at times is used by God as a picture of hell.

When Jesus was baptized (washed) in the Jordan River, it emphasized that He must endure the wrath of God, symbolized by the Jordan River, in order that He might be washed of our sins which had been laid upon Him.

Likewise, the people who were baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and by the apostles were being reminded that because of their sins, they were under the wrath of God. And only after they had endured the eternal wrath of God (symbolized by the Jordan River), could they have become washed or cleansed of their sins. This washing or baptism in the Jordan River signified their need for someone to bear their sins for them. It pointed to the fact that they needed a Savior to pay for their sins.

Returning to John the Baptist, Jesus was appearing on the scene. Even as the priest had to wash so that he would be holy before the

Lord, Jesus, as we have learned, had to be ceremonially washed. Jesus' ceremonial cleansing was accomplished by being baptized by John the Baptist. Through the act of baptism, He was ceremonially cleansed: He was ceremonially washed; He was purified so that He could go on to offer the sacrifice for sins.

If He had not been baptized, He would not have been qualified to continue as high priest to offer the sacrificial Lamb. There were no short cuts in Jesus' work as eternal high priest. To "*fulfil all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15), He needed to wash before offering the sacrifice, just as the Old Testament priest was to wash his hands and his feet before offering the sacrifice. This baptism was a necessary ceremony because it pointed to the fact that Jesus was laden with the sins of all those He had come to save. Somehow He had to be washed of these sins.

If He had not been baptized, He would not have been qualified to continue as high priest to offer the sacrificial Lamb.

Jesus Is Anointed

Jesus now has been washed, but He cannot yet offer the sacrifice. One other action must take place. In the Old Testament, the priests were anointed with oil after they had washed. Thus, they would be consecrated to serve as priests (Exodus 30:22-31). The oil was symbolical of the Holy Spirit coming upon the priest to qualify him for the sacred task he must perform.

But Jesus was God. And as God, He was completely identified with the Holy Spirit. Colossians 2:9 declares, "*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" Why, then, must He be anointed with the Holy Spirit?

Let us remember that He had become sin for us. He had completely identified Himself with sinful humanity. He must follow the path of the Old Testament priest. Because He was the eternal high priest, the anointing was not to be with the oil which was just a

symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit Himself in the presence of the onlookers. The heavens opened as He went up from the water. We read in Matthew 3:16:

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.

He was anointed for His task. Peter said in Acts 10:38, “*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.*” He was washed and He was anointed. He was ready to offer the sacrifice for sins.

Thus far, we have discovered that washing with water was one means of becoming ceremonially cleansed of sin in accordance with Old Testament law. We have determined, too, that baptism means washing or cleansing. The baptism of John the Baptist was very similar to, but of far greater intensity than, the Old Testament ceremonial washings and was used by God to ceremonially prepare Jesus for His work as our eternal high priest.

To satisfy God’s infinitely perfect holiness and justice, He had to pay the penalty that was equal to or equivalent to eternal death for every sinner whom He had come to save.

Jesus Is Cleansed of Our Sins

To continue our study of the meaning of New Testament baptism, we must look again to Jesus. He had become, as we have seen, sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). It was as if He had taken on the sins and was guilty of the sins of every sinner who ever lived who was to believe on Him. He had to deal with an enormous, a staggering load of sin. To satisfy God’s infinitely perfect holiness and

justice, He had to pay the penalty that was equal to or equivalent to eternal death for every sinner whom He had come to save.

How was Christ to be cleansed from this load of sin? One basic requirement was that there must be the shedding of blood for without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins. His blood, therefore, must be shed. That is, He must give His life in the ultimate sense of suffering the punishment deserved by all those He had come to save. That punishment had to be equal to eternal damnation on behalf of each and every believer. His death was required and as we learned earlier, it was the second death, eternal damnation, that was required.

He had to suffer the torments of hell on an equivalent basis to that required by all those He had elected to salvation spending eternity in hell. He had to offer Himself as the one upon whom God's wrath was to be poured.

Hell is called a furnace of fire. Jesus says in Matthew 13:42: "*And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*" Thus, the Old Testament shadows of the atonement, which were the shedding of blood and an offering by fire, were completely fulfilled by Christ as He shed His blood and gave Himself as a burnt offering to be punished by the fires of hell. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus says in Luke 12:49-50:

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!

The fire that was to be kindled was that which He would endure in offering Himself as the sacrificial Lamb. Because He had taken our sins upon Himself, He had to be cleansed. Therefore, He rightly calls the sacrifice for sin a baptism, that is, a cleansing or purification.

Remember that the Bible teaches that the sins of the elect were placed on Him. Isaiah 53:5-6 declares:

*But he was wounded for **our** transgressions, he was bruised for **our** iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;*

and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Thus, Christ, upon taking on a human nature, was laden with a tremendous load of sin even though He Himself remained sinless. II Corinthians 5:21 teaches:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

How was Jesus to be Cleansed?

How was Jesus to have these sins removed? These sins had to be washed away. But how? Could God by His own divine decree just remove all of the sins and guilt from Him? The answer is an emphatic No! Such an action would be a terrible violation of the

Christ had to experience God's judgment in order to be set free of the huge load of sin that had been laid upon Him.

perfect justice of God. The only way the sins could be removed was by Jesus bearing the full and total wrath of God which was demanded by the law of God as payment for the sins. Only if the penalty demanded by God's law was fully paid could Jesus again enter into God's holy heaven.

Jesus speaks of this in Luke 12:49-50. Verse 49 declares that Jesus came to send fire upon the earth. The word "fire" in the Bible invariably points to God's judgment on sin. Christ had to experience God's judgment in order to be set free of the huge load of sin that had been laid upon Him. In this verse, He declares that the act of experiencing God's judgment should soon begin. Therefore, as we have just learned, He emphasizes in verse 50 that He has a baptism (remember the word "baptism" always signifies washing), to be baptized with (washed with) and that He is straitened (pressed or pressured) till it is accomplished.

Let it be emphasized, the only way that Jesus could have all of the sins washed away which were laid on Him was by enduring God's wrath demanded by God's law as payment for those sins. This is the washing (the baptism) that He desires. Only if those sins are washed away could He return to heaven.

Now we can understand what Jesus is saying to James and John in Mark 10:38-39:

But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized.

Jesus is saying to these two disciples, who represent all believers, that they are to drink of the cup that Jesus drank and that they would be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized.

How are we to understand this? We know that the cup that Jesus must drink was the full wrath of God poured out upon Jesus as payment for all the sins laden upon Him. But do the believers experience the wrath of God? It would appear that this is the case for Jesus says, "*Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of.*"

The answer to these questions can be understood when we realize that Jesus suffered the wrath of God as our substitute, as our stand-in. When God poured out His righteous wrath on Jesus, it was as though He were pouring out His wrath upon every individual whose sins were placed upon Jesus. Thus, when Jesus had fully suffered the wrath of God, it means that those whose sins were laid on Him had also fully suffered the wrath of God for their sins.

When Jesus paid for those sins, those sins were washed away from Jesus, Himself. They were also washed away from those He came to save because it was their sins from which Jesus was cleansed. That is why the Bible can say, "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*" (Romans 8:1).

Now we can understand the phrase in Mark 10:39, “*and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized.*” With the washing away of the sins that had been laid upon Jesus, we have been washed of our sins. This is so because Jesus fully paid for those sins. We who believe on Him have had our sins washed (baptized) away.

When God poured out His righteous wrath on Jesus, it was as though He were pouring out His wrath upon every individual whose sins were placed upon Jesus.

We Are Baptized Into His Death

Now we can understand Romans 6:3-6:

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ 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. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

The baptism referred to in these verses **does not** refer to water baptism as is commonly believed. This baptism refers to the washing Jesus experienced as He endured the penalty of God’s wrath for our sins.

We were baptized (washed) into Jesus Christ. This is into His death because the sins that were laid upon Him included my sins. He was cleansed or washed of them by enduring the second death, eternal damnation. Thus, since these were my sins it was I who was baptized (washed) or cleansed of those sins.

Burial: Proof that Death Has Occurred

Verse 4 declares, “*we are buried with him by baptism into death.*” What is the significance of the word “burial”? Let us examine this question.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they were told that in the day that they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would surely die (Genesis 2:17). The day they ate of the fruit, they did not die physically because after that Adam had several children and died at the age of 930 years.

However, in the day they ate of the forbidden fruit, they did die spiritually. At that moment, they became subject to the curse of God. Because they became cursed by God, they became subject to physical death. In fact, the whole creation was placed under the curse of God so that physical death is experienced by animals as well as man.

Because man was created in the image of God, and therefore, is accountable to God for his actions, the curse brought God’s wrath upon mankind.

Because man was created in the image of God, and therefore, is accountable to God for his actions, the curse brought God’s wrath upon mankind. The curse and wrath of God included the provision that if, after being justly tried and found guilty, he would be punished by being forever damned in hell, which is called the second death in Revelation 20:14, and is the penalty that mankind faces because of his sins.

Thus, we know that physical death is not payment for sin. Rather, physical death is the evidence or proof that man had come under the curse of God. The curse of God includes the fact that mankind is under the wrath of God. Because man came under the curse of God, his physical body suffers some decay while he still lives and becomes totally corrupted when he dies. The corruption is so obnoxious that

his dead body must be buried or otherwise destroyed. Therefore, the burial is the evidence that the individual has died, which in turn is the evidence or proof that he was under the curse of God and must be tried at a future date, before the judgment throne of God, when the sentence of eternal damnation will officially be placed on him.

Physical Death Is Not Payment for Sin

Is it true that man's physical death and burial are not part of the payment for sin? The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27:

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

The appointment to die cannot have physical death in view. The death that mankind is appointed to experience is the death experienced by Adam when he sinned. In I Corinthians 15:22, we read, "*For as in Adam all die.*" As we have learned, Adam experienced spiritual death when he came under the curse of God.

***. . . billions of people will never
experience physical death***

The fact that physical death cannot be in view in Hebrews 9:27, and that it cannot part of the payment for sin, can be seen for at least three very important reasons.

The first reason is the fact that billions of people will never experience physical death. When Christ comes on the last day, and every eye shall see Him, the billions of people who will be living at that moment will be brought before the Judgment Throne of God to answer for their sins. They will not have experienced physical death and yet their punishment will be full payment for their sins; they will spend eternity in hell.