

Water Baptism¹

Baptism as we see being used in many churches today began during the exodus of the Jews from Egypt before the giving of the Law. We read in Exodus 19:5,6 that if Israel kept the covenant that they would become a kingdom of priests. This is the first hint of the future kingdom that was spoken of later by the prophets. At the time of these verses, only specific members of the tribe of Levi could be eligible for the priesthood. Now, however, all Israel was given a conditional promise that they could become priests in the future kingdom:

Exodus 19:5,6: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

This promise was later confirmed to Israel in the following verses:

I Peter 2:9: “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:”

Revelation 5:9,10: “...Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

There was a blood and water ceremony required for the priests from the tribe of Levi to observe before being placed into the priesthood:

Exodus 29:1-4: “And this *is* the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office: Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish, And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: *of* wheaten flour shalt thou make them. And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams. And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.”

Exodus 29:10,11: “And thou shalt cause a bullock to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation: and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the bullock. And thou shalt kill the bullock before the LORD, *by* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Later in a prophecy by Ezekiel, Israel was told of a future day:

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

It would appear that sprinkling was the method used in the water ceremony later to be known as baptism. Fast forward now to the time of John the Baptist and the preaching of the kingdom at hand. Israel was now ready to become that kingdom of priests if they would repent and submit to water baptism.

Matthew 3:1-6: **“In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”**

Matthew 4:17: **“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

As set forth in the early part of the book of Acts, the majority in the nation Israel didn't repent and submit to water baptism. After the stoning of Stephen (the last straw), the kingdom program was temporarily set aside and the current program, called the *mystery*, was ushered in through the Apostle Paul. Water baptism has no part in the *mystery*; however, we are identified with or baptized, by the Spirit, into a new joint body called the body of Christ.

I Corinthians 12:13: **“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”**

This is in accordance with the unity (i.e., the oneness) we have in Christ during the present program of God's grace. Here again, if we rightly divide the Scriptures, we see that whereas the kingdom program was replaced by the *mystery*, consequently water baptism was replaced by a Spirit(ual) baptism, or identification, with a new body, the body of Christ.

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

During the early ministry of the Apostle Paul, water baptism was practiced as were the gifts of the Spirit. This was the program he came out of and it took about thirty years for him to receive all the revelations from Jesus Christ pertaining to the new program, the Mystery. In his first letter to the Corinthians, we find Paul writing about the fact that water baptism and the gifts of the spirit were to be replaced with something better. Concerning the gifts, we learn that once all the revelations he was receiving were completed, they would “cease”, “vanish” or be “done away” (see I Corinthians 13:8-10). Concerning water baptism, he starts out in the first chapter by explaining that although he and the others had been water baptizing, *he* was not sent to baptize but to preach the gospel. So, with the gospel of the grace of God replacing the gospel of the kingdom, water baptism was being replaced by the one Spirit(ual) baptism administered by the Spirit the moment we believe the gospel (see the two passages just above).

I Corinthians 1:17: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”

Oh, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, how understanding this one truth, concerning baptism, from Scripture would remove much confusion in the Church today! For, in our current assemblies there is foisted upon us “tradition of men” and “rudiments of the world” as to who gets water baptized, when, at what age, and by what method; whether by sprinkling, dipping, pouring, or immersion (compare the verse above with the one below).

Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”