

# Hidden From Their Eyes: Christian Civilization's Failure to Recognize Ezekiel 36:25–27 as Vital to the New Covenant

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## 1. Introduction

After the passing of the original Apostles, and even after the collecting together of what's recognized as our canonical New Testament, the door was opened for the "ravenous wolves" that Paul sorrowfully predicted (Acts 20:26–30; 1 Timothy 4:1–2; see also 2 Peter 3:16–17). The Gospels, epistles and Revelation all warn of false apostles and false teachers who try to lead everyone after themselves with doctrines of *δαιμονίων*.

Controversy arose in emerging Christian Civilization over the meaning and use of the Greek verb *βαπτίζειν* by the various authors of New Testament books. Even though the term "Christian baptism" is not found in the New Testament, it eventually came to describe what was thought to be the foundational sacrament for the Christian Church.<sup>1</sup>

This essay proposes that flawed ekklesiology in Christian Civilization drives controversy about baptism.<sup>2</sup> The proposed solution elaborated in this essay is that the New Testament Apostolic water *βάπτισμα* was the inauguration of Ezekiel 36:25 and actually was only for the repentant of Israel, represented today by Messianic Jews. On the other hand, Messiah Yeshua intended for his superlative last-days outpouring of the Holy Spirit, promised by the prophet Joel, to continue throughout this age for *everyone*, whether for Jews, whether for Greeks. In recent times a strong hint of this thesis comes

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Gagnon begins his article on baptism stating that "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5) ironically, has come to symbolize the disunity of the church throughout history. Robert A. J. Gagnon, "baptism" in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, first ed., edited by George Thomas Kurian (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 191; Tertullian wrote his treatise *De Baptismo* only about 170 years after Messiah's resurrection, but his description of practices and theological motivations for baptism are already greatly embellished compared with practices described in New Testament; In modern times, the 1982 publication, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, by the World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland, laments on page 2 under Commentary, "The inability of the churches mutually to recognize their various practices of baptism as sharing in the one baptism, and their actual dividedness in spite of mutual baptismal recognition, have given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the Church."

<sup>2</sup> Among others in the Messianic Jewish movement, Mark Kinzer proposes the term, *bilateral ecclesiology*, to help correct, and emphasize, the divinely-commanded need for Jewish disciples of Yeshua to ensure that their New Covenant interests within larger Israel are achieved, while simultaneously making room for all the churches of the Nations to organize as led by Scripture and the Holy Spirit, in solidarity and partnership with the interests of Jewish disciples of Messiah. Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism, Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005).

first from the reemergence of Messianic Jews as a visible part of the larger *Ekklesia*. Further evidence comes from the missiological phenomenon of non-western, spiritually-active “continuationist” churches seeing ongoing rapid growth, while western “cessationist” churches struggle to keep parishioners.

## 2. Ignatius’s letters: A foundation for the parting of ways

One of the most fateful developments of early Christian Civilization was the flawed assumption that the Christian Church was Christ’s chosen rival to the Jewish Synagogue. This supersessionist assumption led to religious subjugation of Judaism and to continuing outbreaks of persecution of Jews, up to and including the Holocaust.

Whether Ignatius's letters are genuine or not, whether they actually date from the early second century or not, and whether interpolations were introduced into the text or not, ultimately all these questions are moot. All too quickly Ignatius’s view of “Christianity” vis-à-vis Judaism became widely accepted in Christian Civilization, helping to force the so-called “parting of ways.”

For if we continue to live in accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace. (Magnesians 8:1)

Let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity. For whoever is called by any other name than this one does not belong to God. (Magnesians 10:1)

It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity. (Magnesians 10:3) *Apostolic Fathers English*<sup>3</sup>

The term “Christianity” is not attested in the canonical NT. Evidently it was coined later for the collective expression of faith in Yeshua that Ignatius says is explicitly at odds with Judaism. In modern times Ignatius’s view is called supersessionism, meaning that “Christianity” supersedes Judaism.<sup>4</sup>

According to Ignatius, any Jew practicing Judaism and who believes in Jesus Christ – Yeshua the Messiah – is engaging in absurdity. For Ignatius, Jews who trust in Yeshua must abandon their Israelite heritage and assimilate into “Christianity.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd ed., Greek texts and English translations, edited and translated by Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992, 1999, 2007), Accordance, version 2.7. Used by permission.

<sup>4</sup> Compare Michael J. Vlach, "[Various Forms of Replacement Theology](#)", *The Master's Seminary Journal*, and, David Novak, "[Supersessionism Hard and Soft](#)" online at, First Things.

<sup>5</sup> In the mid-second century, Justin Martyr commented censoriously about Jewish disciples of Yeshua who maintain their relationship with Jewish Civilization in Trypo 46–47 (see the Appendix). Justin Martyr frets

The problem with Ignatius's teaching is that Yeshua specifically ordered his Jewish followers to maintain their Jewish heritage, despite the difficulties. In Matt 21–22, Yeshua rode the donkey into Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, publicly declaring his kingship in accord with Zechariah 9:9. He cleansed the Temple and told cutting parables to his rivals. We then read in Matt 23:1-3:

Then *Yeshua* spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying, “The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. So whatever they tell you, do and observe. But don't do what they do; for what they say, they do not do.  
(Tree of Life Version, a recent Messianic Jewish translation.)

So just after Yeshua's public, Messianic-donkey-ride, he told his Jewish followers to abide under the authority of the *Throne of Moses*, the Leadership of Israel—currently occupied by the scribes and Pharisees.

Yeshua did not tell disciples from the Nations, the Gentiles, to obey the scribes and Pharisees' judgments for Israel, but only his Jewish followers. He also excludes competing Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Sicarii, and any other Jewish group from receiving such obedience. The Nazarene Jewish followers of Yeshua (compare Acts 24:5) did indeed maintain their Jewish heritage at least into the Fourth Century.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish disciples of Yeshua were to preserve their relation with Jewish Civilization, even in the face of flawed Jewish governance. This parallels Romans 13:1-7 where Paul wrote Gentile followers of Yeshua to submit to rulers of their own nations, even though they would be pagans. In short, trusting Yeshua would not be easy for either Jew or Greek.

Paul, as Apostle to the Nations, certainly did not tell all Jews and Gentiles to form into “Christianity” as the successor to Judaism. Instead, in Galatians, for example, Paul wrote of his receiving a revelation to go to Jerusalem to present his personal special revelation of the Good News that he'd been proclaiming to the Nations. He spoke to existing Apostolic authorities that included Ya'akov, Kayfa and Yoḥanan (James, Peter and John). In Galatians 2:7 Paul said they not only acknowledged the legitimacy of his message for the Nations, but indeed the divine authority of his message:

But, on the contrary, having seen that I have been entrusted with the good news of the uncircumcision, as Peter with that of the circumcision. (YLT)

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that tradition-observing Jewish disciples of Yeshua try to make Gentile disciples of Yeshua into Torah-obedient proselytes.

<sup>6</sup> See, Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the end of the New Testament period until its disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1988, 1992, 2010.)

This verse tells of an *Evangelion* of the uncircumcision that is distinct from an *Evangelion* of the circumcision. Usually, this verse is rendered in English as the Gospel “to” the uncircumcision, or “to” the circumcision. In other words, Christian Civilization typically wants to say there is only a single Gospel for both Gentiles and Jews. But Paul is actually making a different argument, that there is an *Evangelion* for the Nations that Paul received by special revelation, and it differs from the *Evangelion* for Israel established by Yeshua among his original Twelve Apostles. The *Evangelion* for the Nations, entrusted to Paul, is not good news for Israel, and the *Evangelion* for Israel, entrusted to Peter, is not good news for the Nations. But both *Evangelia* are based on the central facts of the Yeshua’s Jewish life, Messianic ministry, rejection, crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension, and outpouring of the Spirit of promise, all of which could be called the *core Gospel*. But the outworking of the core Good News for either Israel or the Nations is different, even though full harmony between them was always intended. Ignatius may have failed to carefully read what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

Paul cannot mean Jews cease to exist, nor that males and females cease to exist. Throughout history Christian Civilization has practiced marriage, meaning that males and females are honored in their physical masculine and feminine roles. But now, according to the Good News, no male has an advantage over a female in access to the Almighty. So then, Jews who trust Yeshua as their Messiah were never intended to vanish, but to maintain relations with their Jewish heritage. Now, in the New Covenant, Jews have no advantage over the Nations, but all have equal access to the Almighty by trusting Messiah Yeshua. Paul wrote similar sentiments for all the parts of Messiah’s Body in 1Corinthians 12:13, but this time he wrote, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληγνες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι – whether Jews, whether Greeks, whether slaves, whether free. So, Jews, as Jews, can be made part of Messiah’s body upon receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit by trusting Yeshua as Messiah. That further means that all issues pertaining to Jewish Civilization are also received by Jewish believers where applicable. As such, this article argues that Peter’s command to the “House of Israel” in Acts 2:38 for the eschatological washing in Yeshua’s name is based directly on Messiah Yeshua’s public endorsement of Yoḥanan’s washing-βάπτισμα in Luke 20:3–4, made only about eight weeks earlier.

Misreading the New Testament Scripture under the flawed paradigm of triumphal-Christianity displacing Judaism led to defects in doctrine and practice, not the least of which relate to baptism in the New Testament.

### 3. Matt 28:19: Beyond a Water Rite

Christian Civilization took Matthew 28:19 as Christ's command for universal Christian water baptism performed *by* Christians *for* all Christians that join the Christian Church. This command is supposed to be the basis for Peter's command in Act 2:38 on Pentecost, and for all episodes of Apostolic water baptism in the New Testament. After long evaluation, and in fear of the Almighty (יִרְאַת הַיְהוָה) and in dread of misrepresenting the risen Yeshua, I've come to dissent from the idea that Yeshua commanded *water* baptism for disciples from the Nations in Matt 28:19. The following rendering in David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible* seems to reveal the intent of the verse much better:

Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim*, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*.<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not Stern's rendering is considered fitting, Yeshua is nevertheless depicted by Matthew as commanding his believing Jewish Apostles to go to the Nations. Yeshua did not directly command Gentiles, "Get water baptized!"; nor did he command the Gentiles, "Baptize yourselves!" as if they would know how to do it. The command is for his Jewish Apostles, notwithstanding the fact that Christian Civilization avows that the command means a water rite is to be performed for all Christians by Christians.

Assuming for a moment that this command could be for a water rite, the questions we face include: Since Yeshua told his first Jewish followers that he did not come to annul the Torah, but to fulfill, and that their righteousness must surpass that of the Torah scholars and Pharisees, have Christians throughout the ages been familiar with Israel's requirements for suitable water for such a washing? Wouldn't Yeshua's command for such a rite depend on the recognized norms during his experience in late Second Temple Judaism? Or, can Christian Civilization assume that it can declare fit whatever water sources and ritual forms it likes?

Regardless of these questions, everyone recognizes that no water baptism in the canonical NT is ever performed with such a "formula" as Matt 28:19. Nor is there any proof that this verse refers merely to verbal pronouncement of a trinitarian formula. On the contrary, one may easily understand that this is Matthew's post-resurrection apostolic *ipsissima vox* summary of Yeshua's will, rendered in Matthean Greek.

A book by Australian Anglican David Broughton Knox, published posthumously, counters the idea that Yeshua ordered water baptism in Matt 28:19. Knox wrote:

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<sup>7</sup> The venerable ASV has, "baptizing them **into** the name"; Arguably, βαπτίζειν may also hint at *purify* (see below) so that the Apostles are to *purify* pagan Gentiles by a full knowledge of the triune YHVH.

This “great commission” of Jesus contains no reference to administering water baptism. The reference to baptizing is entirely metaphorical in line with other uses of the word by Jesus. It is a command to proclaim the news of Messiah’s coming to the nations to make them disciples of the true God, to immerse the nations into the revealed character of God so that their whole way of life is changed and their cultures sanctified (cf. Rev 21:24).<sup>8</sup>

Articles online about Knox by colleagues describe him in highly favorable terms.<sup>9</sup> Knox’s judgment about Matt 28:19 cannot be simply dismissed as irrelevant or eccentric.

Why don’t more authorities acknowledge the conclusion Knox reaches? It’s probably the same reason that Knox’s judgment was published posthumously. Today no one is burned at the stake for heresy, thankfully. But anyone challenging the long-avowed, traditional interpretation of Messiah’s words would doubtless draw strong negative reaction by Christian Civilization. Even so, the commandment stands: “Do not follow a crowd to do evil. Nor are you to testify in a case, to follow a crowd and pervert justice.” (Exodus 23:2, TLV). So, if someone finds themselves at odds with the majority, a clean conscience demands standing for the truth, even if everyone else is convinced they are right and you are heretical. Concerning Matt 28:19, could Christian Civilization have misunderstood Matthew’s extremely brief conclusion to Messiah’s resurrection? Paul wrote certain standing instructions in 1Cor 10:11–12:

Now these things happened to [Israel] as an example, and it was written down as a warning to us—on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore, let the one who thinks that he stands watch out that he doesn’t fall. (TLV)

With this warning by Paul in mind, Moses had already warned the entire community of Israel to beware of stumbling in blindness (Lev 4:13):

Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins, but the deed is hidden from the eyes of the community, yet they have done one of *ADONAI*’s *mitzvot* that are not to be done, then they are guilty. (TLV)

Surely Christian Civilization is no less prone to fail to understand the will of the Almighty than Israel. If the leaders and majority of Israel could miss the Messiah, then Christian Civilization could misunderstand Messiah’s words. Indeed, the deep dispute

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<sup>8</sup> *Selected works of Broughton Knox (volume 2) Church and Ministry*, (2003), 261–316, see 278.  
<https://matthiasmedia.com/products/works-of-broughton-knox-vol-2>

<sup>9</sup> <https://banneroftruth.org/us/about/banner-authors/david-broughton-knox/>  
<https://moore.edu.au/resources/broughton-knox-servant-of-christ-jesus/>  
<https://acl.asn.au/resources/david-broughton-knox-what-we-owe-to-him/>

between the Roman Church and Reformation Churches, and Evangelical and other non-Catholic Churches arises over differing interpretations of Yeshua's words.

For one thing, the internal testimony of Matthew's Gospel is highly inconsistent with assuming that Matt 28:19 must be a new universal water baptism *for* Christians performed *by* Christians. In Matt 15:1–21, Yeshua *vigorously refuted* an extra-biblical pharisaical ruling for Jews to wash hands from assumed defilement before eating bread. So then later in Matt 28:19 it is not reasonable to assume that Yeshua commanded gentile Christians to water baptize other gentile Christians, something not even hinted at in the Hebrew Bible. Yeshua refutes one non-Mosaic water rite as useless and misleading in Matt 15, but supposedly, after triumphing over death, he commands, *de novo*, a non-Mosaic rite for Gentiles to perform among themselves in Matt 28?

Some assume that the *Didache* 7:1–3 is evidence that Messiah's command was understood as the Christian trinitarian water rite. However, critical scholar Clayton Jefford suggests that there's no indisputable proof that the extant *Didache* preserves a genuine, unaltered description of early practice performed by Messiah's actual apostles:

Admittedly, the phrase “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (7.1, 3) must be retained as something of an evolutionary peculiarity within the text. The phrase is rare in NT literature (perhaps a later addition?) and unique within other writings of late first- and second-century literature. Its presence in the *Didache* is difficult to explain in this regard if the text is indeed to be attributed to the earliest Christian situation.

These elements—Trinitarian formula, reference to “Christian,” references to “gospel”—indicate that a second hand may be at work within the text representing a later (if not dramatically so) contribution to the *Didache's* earlier perspective on the ancient Christian community.<sup>10</sup>

In Jefford's estimation, it's possible that a later hand inserted the Matthean phrasing into the original text. Regardless, except for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the *Didache* was not considered a canonical, apostolic writing. The work is most likely redacted from various sources, perhaps continuously over a lengthy interval. Too, the *Didache* orders people to fast prior to baptism, something directly at odds with Acts 2:41.

Furthermore, if Matt 28:19 was literally a command for the Apostles to go to the Nations with a new water rite, the question arises: Why in Acts did the Apostles avoid

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<sup>10</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, *Didache, The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2013), 15. Also, for recent scholarly conjecture see, Shawn J. Wilhite, *The Didache, A Commentary*, Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series, eds Paul A. Hartog, Shawn Wilhite (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019).

the gentiles, as detailed in Acts 10? Only after God's rather blunt vision to Peter did he go to the Nations. The Cornelius episode is thought to have occurred some ten years after the resurrection. John Nolland wrote a three-volume critical, conservative commentary on Luke, as well as a critical, conservative commentary on Matthew. Nolland notes in his Matthew commentary the uncertainty that Matt 28:19 is a direct command from Yeshua:

One might suspect that if the mission to the Gentiles had been as patently obvious to the earliest disciple group as the instruction from the risen Lord should have made it, then the problems leading up to the meeting of Acts 15 would not have occurred in the way they did. Compression is involved here: Matthew and Luke (but neither is the actual innovator here) both merge things together, some of which clearly came to be recognised as the will of the risen Jesus only with the passage of time.<sup>11</sup>

So, if Matthew 28:19 was as patently obvious to the first generation of Yeshua's followers as virtually all of Christian Civilization today thinks it is, then why wasn't Messiah's command in Matt 28 simply cited at the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council, and everyone dismissed to go home? Nolland by no means denies the authority of any NT text that exhibits effects such as compression in time and language. But properly understanding such texts requires sensitivity to nuance. Nolland goes on to write:

Matthew's 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' is quite distinctive. It is the Matthean use that predominated in later Christian baptismal practice. And this seems to have had a distorting effect on the understanding of Matthew's words. We cannot know whether the Matthean church used the words formulaically in baptism or not. But given the variations in NT language, clearly there was no agreed baptismal formula. And I think it unlikely that Matthew is reflecting the language of baptismal practice.<sup>12</sup>

Christian Civilization tolerates a virtually universal assumption that Matt 28:19 is directly behind Peter's command on Pentecost in Acts 2:38. But jumping out from Lukan testimony in Acts 2:38 to try to find the Apostolic source in Matthew, in Matt 28:19, is not prudent. Luke 24 and Acts 1 are Lukan sources for Yeshua's "Great Commission," and Yeshua indeed talks of his Apostles going out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, as well about being baptized with water, and of being baptized

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<sup>11</sup> John Nolland, *Matthew, New International Greek Testament Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1266-67. Accordance version 2.4, used by permission.

<sup>12</sup> Nolland, *Matthew*, 1268.



with the Holy Spirit. From a one-dimensional view of these passages, Acts 1 even occurs after Matthew 28. In other words, timewise, Matthew 28 is followed by Acts 1 and the Lukan report is silent on any new command for a universal water rite for the Nations.

The fact is, there's no command from Yeshua for a new water rite in either Luke or Acts, or the Fourth Gospel. The obvious biblical explanation for the Apostolic water washings in Acts is that after Yeshua's Messianic donkey-ride into Jerusalem, he *publicly endorsed* Yoḥanan's washing-βάπτισμα as a commandment from heaven, so that it was incumbent on Israel to submit to it. About eight weeks later, on Pentecost, the Apostles proclaimed Yoḥanan's heavenly revealed water washing to the "House of Israel" in the name of the risen Messiah Yeshua who'd *publicly endorsed it*.

Matthew's intent about Messiah's words in Matt 28:19, then, is no light question. It is far wiser to pause and reconsider, and to repent from a flawed teaching today, if necessary, than to face Yeshua at his judgement seat, whose eyes are a flame of fire, and then watching many works burned up as wood, hay and stubble.

After the passing of the original Apostles, the emerging Christian movement began a trend of accreting unbiblical baggage. Indeed, the background behind the entire bloody Reformation is blunt proof of this tendency. But this tendency is witnessed much earlier. The widely-avowed Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is thought to have reached its current form around the time of the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. One of the latter confessions is: "I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." The verbiage strongly reflects Yoḥanan's washing for Israel, now applied to the "Catholic" Church. (We must also note that the Latin version transliterates βάπτισμα with *baptismum* and does not use a form of *mergo*.)

It seems that regarding Matt 28:19, words were put in Yeshua's mouth that he never intended. One might well remember Yeshua's question to his disciples, with a slight modification, "How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about water?" (compare Matt 16:11).

#### **4. Yoḥanan's command to produce Good Fruit through repentance**

Regarding the NT baptism controversy, we are told in John 3:22–24 that before Yoḥanan was imprisoned, he and his disciples, and Yeshua and his disciples, were washing the repentant Jewish people coming out to them, and that Yeshua became more successful than Yoḥanan (John 4:1–2).

But then, in Luke 7:18–35, we are told that *after* Yoḥanan was imprisoned, everyone following Yeshua had been baptized with Yoḥanan's washing-βάπτισμα (vv. 29–30). This implies that neither Yoḥanan nor Yeshua were baptizing Jews to "initiate" them into their own little bands of disciples. Rather both were performing the

eschatological washing *for all Israel*. This is precisely what Paul taught many years later in a synagogue, “Yoḥanan had proclaimed a βάπτισμα of repentance to all the people of Israel” (Acts 13:24). We’re also told that Yoḥanan said of Yeshua, “I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel” (John 1:31). Indeed, the Almighty “sent” Yoḥanan to baptize with water (John 1:33). Yoḥanan’s washing was not his own cool idea to make a splash in Israel.

This evidence implies that the national purification washing was to prepare Israel for the Kingdom of Heaven. If this washing were performed correctly among Jewish believers, then it would remain an important New Covenant witness for Israel (see below). But since supersessionist Christian Civilization avows that the NT teaches an initiatory “universal Christian baptism for the Christian Church,” then clear testimony to Israel vanishes in the fog of Gentile Christian controversy over baptism.

Recall also that after Yeshua rode the donkey, the Chief Priests and elders confronted him in the Temple, asking him the source of his authority. In kingly composure, Yeshua turned the tables, demanding their findings on Yoḥanan ben Zechariah. Was Yoḥanan’s βάπτισμα from heaven or from humans?

Yeshua was not squirming to avoid a difficult question. Instead, he knew that Yoḥanan’s washing-βάπτισμα was from heaven, so he essentially tested Israel’s leadership about the heavenly origin of Yoḥanan’s washing, and thus the heavenly origin of his own authority. Israel’s leaders feigned ignorance, so Yeshua reprovved them (Matt 21:31–32):

Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. For Yoḥanan came to you in *the way of righteousness*, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him.

In a word, by reprovving Israel’s leaders, Yeshua *publicly endorsed* Yoḥanan’s washing-βάπτισμα as Israel’s eschatological washing, there in Israel’s Holy Temple, just days before the crucifixion—regardless if Israel’s leaders accepted Yoḥanan’s washing or not.

Now, Yoḥanan promised that the Coming One after him would “baptize” with the Holy Spirit, and yet he also told the crowds coming out to him:

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8).

So, a long time before anyone received the post-resurrection, eschatological Gift of the Holy Spirit, humble, sincere Jews *were expected* to produce the good fruit of repentance. Today, despite all the confusion and controversy about baptism, it seems that many humble Yeshua-followers from many different Christian denominations have repented and are unpretentiously trying their best to produce the fruit of a repentant lifestyle.

Back in the first century, *before* Yeshua's death and resurrection, repentant prostitutes surely were living a very different life. But could one infer that they had been regenerated? Could anyone be regenerated into the image of the risen Messiah before Yeshua's death and resurrection?

Few would doubt that one's conscious awareness of sin is ushered to the conscience by the Holy Spirit's aid, and that such an inner revelation can lead to repentance. Indeed Peter, freshly filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4, preached Yeshua, rejected, crucified and risen, to the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem on Pentecost, telling them that God has made Yeshua both Lord and Messiah. Those who heard Peter's message were "cut in their heart." Surely the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter was working to convict them. But Peter clearly said that these convicted hearers had *not yet received* the Holy Spirit, but that they could by repentance and participation in Israel's national, purification washing.

So it was with Yohanan, who preached to the repentant Jews who came to him to participate in his washing. Yoḥanan promised all repentant hearers that later they would be "baptized" with the promised Gift of the Holy Spirit poured out by the Coming One (compare Acts 2:33). The Greek structure of Yoḥanan's word of comparison of βαπτίζειν, water and Holy Spirit, can easily indicate "instrumental transformation" as in "purified with water" or "purified with the Holy Spirit" instead of the idea of "locative position" or "immersing" that so many today assume about βαπτίζειν.

If Yoḥanan's hearers have not yet been "purified with the Holy Spirit" then it seems clear that no one was yet "regenerated" into the image of the death-conquering Yeshua. Not until *after* his horrific execution and glorious resurrection. The vehicle to achieve the hoped-for regeneration remains the reception of the eschatological Gift of the Holy Spirit (compare Titus 3:4–7), promised by Yoḥanan to the repentant, and then offered to the repentant from Acts 2 onward. Also crucially worth mentioning, Luke–Acts, the largest contribution to the NT from a single author, never uses any term for personal regeneration. Arguably, that transformative effect is included in Lukan usages of βαπτίζειν when linked with the Holy Spirit.

Confusion about the Holy Spirit in Christian Civilization has grown to the point of grieving and insulting the Holy Spirit. Multitudes of the meek in modern Christian Civilization are living-out the fruit of repentant humility as best they can at various levels of zeal, but regrettably, according to Scripture many have not yet been regenerated according to the biblical definition, though through no fault of their own.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This of course goes against long-held traditions in various denominations of Christian Civilization, especially those that espouse sacramental baptismal regeneration performed on infants.

Still, even before Yeshua's death and resurrection, yet-to-be-regenerated tax-gatherers and prostitutes *were* in the process of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Yeshua said they enter in front of the unrepentant "pseudo-righteous." So, likewise in modern times, despite controversy and division in modern Christian Civilization about which "ordo salutis" is biblical, humble people with limited grasp of the Good News can produce fruit worthy of repentance, *and* be entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

But that does not mean Christian Civilization has well-and-fully understood the original Good News. Ultimately there is *no excuse* for persistent controversy and flawed teachings about water, the Holy Spirit, and regeneration. Yeshua said that the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete sent from God, is the Spirit of truth. When the Paraclete comes, he would guide into all the truth those who listen to him (John 16:13). Confusion and controversy in Christian Civilization seem to be telling signs that few are listening to the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

Plenty of unwarranted ideas about βαπτίζειν sprouted and took root after the Jewish Apostles departed. Robert Gagnon points out that the NT Apostolic water rite was performed immediately, not after days, months or years.<sup>14</sup> But even the *Didache* prescribes fasting a few days prior to the rite. As a result, in this article I focus on the canonical New Testament writings received by Christian Civilization.

Also, modern critical texts like the SBLGNT and NA28 are considered by many conservative scholars to be closer in form to the original writings than are the TR or Majority Text, even though only a few differences of consequence exist throughout all texts. Still, Mark's "longer ending" is evidently from a non-Markan hand<sup>15</sup> and many researchers, like Daniel Wallace, do not consider it original or canonical.<sup>16</sup> Jerome and Eusebius evidently wrote that the best texts of Mark that they were aware of lacked the so-called longer ending. So likewise, after some years of study, I eventually came to recognize that Mark 16:9-20 is not canonical.

##### **5. A personal anecdote about water baptism**

However, in my case, hopelessly naïve as a new, young-adult believer in Yeshua in 1977, the first congregation I visited was a Church of Christ in the DFW Metroplex in TX. On

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<sup>14</sup> Gagnon, "baptism," 200.

<sup>15</sup> Travis B. Williams, "Bringing Method to the Madness: Examining the Style of the Longer Ending of Mark," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20.3 (2010), 397-419.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, "Mark 16:8 as the Conclusion to the Second Gospel" in *Perspectives on the Endings of Mark, 4 Views*, ed. David Alan Black, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008), 14-72.

my very first meeting, which was also my last, the associate pastor quoted Mark 16:16 to me, literally telling me that if I were not immersed in their church I would “go to hell.”

I was too new in faith to reply to his claim, but from my previous personal experience seeking and interacting with the Almighty Creator, and with Yeshua, I was deeply troubled and had a very hard time believing what he said. Trust in the crucified and resurrected King of kings and Lord of lords, *PLUS* my performance of a water rite, to find God’s pleasure to keep me out of hell? That seemed so outrageously inconsistent.

I never went back to that church, but since I didn’t know if he was correct or not, I earnestly promised the Almighty that I would study this issue diligently for as long as it might take to get understanding, similarly to how I’d studied military electronics and avionics for two years, eight hours a day, five days a week, becoming an enlisted radar tech for F-4 Phantom jets in a USMC jet squadron, and serving in that capacity for the following four years. I promised the Almighty that when I understood what the Bible said, then I would certainly obey what is prescribed.

Thus, in 1977 I began personal biblical studies during off-duty time for the four years of the rest of my enlistment, and, due to circumstances, I had a lot of off-duty time. In about 1979 I became affiliated with the modern Messianic Jewish movement and that added a vital perspective to my studies. By about 1985 I reached the overall conclusions about baptism that I still hold today.

## 6. Extended Senses of βαπτίζω and cognates

Modern popular teachers about baptism in podcasts and Youtube lectures tend to oversimplify the meaning of βαπτίζω and cognates, typically saying that βάπτω and βαπτίζω are effective equivalents and that they mean dip, plunge or immerse.

Though I may have missed such a lecture, I’ve never heard a podcast or Youtube lecture ever mention the terms *synchronic* or *diachronic* senses when talking about the meanings of βάπτω and βαπτίζω. The point of those two technical terms is to identify senses of a word in question for a particular time period (*synchronic*) or the change in meaning over a lengthy period of time (*diachronic*). Evidently βάπτω was the earliest verb of this family of words and used in Homer. But the Greek language drifted through typical linguistic changes and certain verbs were modified with a longer suffix, such that βάπτω became βαπτίζω. From there, both words started down their own paths of usage. Careful scholars recognize various meanings for βάπτω and βαπτίζω and other cognates during the first century. Gagnon mentions that New Testament writers used βαπτίζω with various extended senses.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gagnon, “baptism,” 191–2.

Indeed, Eckhard Schnabel, after reviewing lexicons and textual examples, devised a formal lexical entry for the verb βαπτίζω that includes a number of differing physical and figurative extended senses.<sup>18</sup> The following succinctly presents the various senses in Schnabel's lexical entry. I've omitting recurring wordage in which Schnabel ties each sense back to the concept of immersion. Schnabel does note that the 1b sense of βαπτίζω, which is for purifying, is used often in the NT. Schnabel also notes that the 1f sense applies to βάπτω, but not to βαπτίζω, indicating that the two words acquired different meanings during their centuries of usage.

#### I. Physical Uses

1. To put into a yielding substance. . .
  - 1a. to cleanse with water . . .
  - 1b. to make ceremonially clean: to purify, to cleanse, to baptize
  - 1c. to take water or wine by dipping a drinking vessel
  - 1d. to perish by submersion in water: to drown, to sink (ships)
  - 1e. to put to death a living being: to slaughter, to kill, (I presume Schnabel has in mind the Jew on Masada who “baptized” his sword in his neck, committing suicide in the sight of the Romans.)
  - 1f. to tinge fabric with color: to dye (Schnabel notes that this sense is attested for βαπτειν, but not for βαπτίζειν.)

#### II. Figurative uses

2. to be overpowered by an abstract reality, such as debts, arguments or thoughts: to be overwhelmed (in intangible or abstract realities)
3. to become intoxicated: to be drunk

Yet, even before Schnabel devised his lexical entry, the BDAG had listed:

1 wash ceremonially for purpose of purification, *wash, purify*, of a broad range of repeated ritual washing rooted in Israelite tradition (cp. Just., D. 46, 2) Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “The meaning of βαπτίζειν in Greek, Jewish and Patristic Literature,” in *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, 44, vol. XXIX, 2011, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, Bauer, ed. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 164; Compare, “βαπτίζω [βάπτω; “immerse, plunge, dip”] in the NT only of ritual or ceremonial washing—a. in Israelite tradition *wash, purify* Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38.” *The*

In modern times, some denominations of Christian Civilization not only ignore the sense of purifying, but they also ignore figurative, metaphorical senses 2 and 3 as inapplicable to the NT. Gagnon, however, explains the ramifications of failing to realize metaphorical usage.

Modern blindness to metaphorical uses has inhibited most from seeing that Pauline references to being baptized into Christ or Christ's body are first and foremost metaphorical references to baptism in the Spirit (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; Rom 6:3; cf. 1Cor 10:2).<sup>20</sup>

In light of both 1Cor 12:13 and Titus 3:4–7 that speak exclusively in terms of the Holy Spirit, Paul arguably uses βαπτίζειν and cognates solely for *life-transforming* Spirit baptism in Gal 3:27, being clothed with Messiah; in Rom 6:3–4, spiritually united to Yeshua's death *on the cross*, and co-entombed with Messiah in his death to sin; in Eph 4:5, one Lord, one faith, one *spiritual transformation*; and in Col 2:11–12, a circumcision of the body of flesh *without hands*. Many who avow water baptism in these verses say it symbolizes what the Holy Spirit actually does.

For a change, the Holman Christian Standard Bible translates Rev 19:13, “He wore a robe stained with blood, and His name is the Word of God,” not the near universal “dipped in blood.” Likewise, Hebrews 6:2 in the NIV reads, “instruction about cleansing rites” translating βαπτισμός with the idea of purification.

Luke cited the Septuagint Greek (LXX) Isaiah a few times<sup>21</sup> and that likely means he was familiar with Isaiah 21:4 LXX. The recent NETS<sup>22</sup> translation renders that verse: “My heart wanders, and lawlessness overwhelms (βαπτίζει) me; my soul has turned to fear.” This detrimental, abstract LXX usage of βαπτίζειν in Isaiah parallels the detrimental, abstract usage of βαπτίζειν and βάπτισμα in Luke 12:50. So, physical immersion or dipping does not convey the strong detrimental sense intended in this usage. Instead, the LXX from some two centuries before Yeshua shows that βαπτίζειν could mean much more than only dip, plunge or immerse for authors and readers of New Testament writings.

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*Concise Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Fredrick William Danker, Kathryn Krug, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 67.

<sup>20</sup> Gagnon, “baptism,” 192.

<sup>21</sup> See, *The Greek New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), appendix, “Index of Quotations,” under Isaiah, 859.

<sup>22</sup> *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Mark 10:38–39 very likely tells of Yeshua originally challenging the two brothers *in Hebrew* with a Hebrew idiom, “drinking a cup and getting staggering drunk,” found in both the Hebrew Bible (Ezek 23:33; Jer 25:15) and the NT (Rev 14:10a, cf. Rev 16:19b). The Hebrew idiom indicates suffering the Almighty’s directed punishment. Yeshua arguably said, “Can you drink the cup I drink, or be drunken with the drunkenness with which I am drunken?”<sup>23</sup> Mark’s so-called “low” literary style is amenable to using βαπτίζειν for getting drunk, as did Plato, Philo, Josephus and Plutarch, among others.

As noted, the BDAG (and other lexicons as well) list the sense of purify for the verb βαπτίζειν. Moreover, several times the NT form of “Spirit baptism” is explicitly described in terms of “pouring out” but not “immersing into.” This strengthens the idea that βαπτίζειν was often used instrumentally, to signify transformation of the character of the object receiving the action. Neither immersion or pouring were the crucial idea, but rather *purification* or *inner regenerative transformation* by whatever process.

On the other hand, neither Josephus nor Philo of Alexandria used the verb βαπτίζειν to describe Jewish purifications as did the Jewish NT writers. Yet, both did use it for drunkenness. Still, Josephus, Philo and Jewish NT writers also used this verb metaphorically and abstractly without being limited to mechanical immersion.

Yet, in Antiquities 18:116–117, Josephus used three Greek nouns, βαπτιστής, βαπτισμός, and βαπτισις, to describe Yoḥanan. For Josephus the explicit result of Yoḥanan’s activity is *purifying* the body, after first *purifying* the soul by repentance.

For that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body; supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness.<sup>24</sup> Antiquities 18:116–117 (18.5.2)

Arguably, the great prophet Yoḥanan was known in his generation in Hebrew as “(המטהר) *ham’taher*—the Purifier” and that his national, eschatological washing “purified” those Jews who’d repented, as Josephus reports. Decades later, Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* contains further ancient testimony of this sense of purification:

By reason, therefore, of this laver [λουτροῦ] of repentance and knowledge of God, which has been ordained on account of the transgression of God’s people, as Isaiah cries, we have believed, and testify that that very baptism [βάπτισμα]

<sup>23</sup> See, H. Ben Keshet, “Mark 10:38–39: Was Jesus’s Challenge ‘Drinking the Cup and Becoming Drunk’? Extended Senses of *Baptizō* in the NT,” in *EQ* 90.3 (2019), 246–63.

<sup>24</sup> *The Works of Flavius Josephus, Complete and Unabridged*. New Updated Edition, translated by William Whiston, A.M. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987). Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.9.



which he announced is alone able to purify [καθαρίσαι] those who have repented; and this is the water of life. But the cisterns which you have dug for yourselves are broken and profitless to you. For what is the use of that baptism [βαπτίσματος] which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize [Βαπτίσητε] the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! The body is pure [καθαρόν]. *Trypho* 14.<sup>25</sup>

Greek users recognized various extended senses for βαπτίζειν and cognates, including purify, and not only the idea of immersion.

It also seems reasonable to propose that the significant Hellenistic Jewish component of the Jerusalem *Ekklesia* (Acts 6:1–7) very likely included literary-competent native Greek speakers who helped shape into Greek the narratives they heard from the Twelve. These Hellenistic Jewish disciples may have been responsible for coining the noun βάπτισμα. It is widely recognized that βάπτισμα is only attested in Christian writings. Regardless, it seems difficult to believe that βάπτισμα was devised solely to bear the sense of *immersion*, rather than any extended sense that βαπτίζειν could bear, including *purification* or even *drunkenness*.

Luke 11:38, in its textual setting and in light of the passive ἐβαπτίσθη, seems to show that Yeshua refused to let his hands be washed / purified before the meal. Very likely servants poured water for guests. The Tree of Life Version of the Bible, produced as a helpful version for Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua, renders this verse: “But the Pharisee was surprised when he saw that Yeshua did not do the ritual handwashing before the meal” (TLV). So, it is highly doubtful that Luke is saying Yeshua refused to be passively immersed in a mikveh before the meal.

Mark 7:1-4 likewise speaks of purifying hands from defilements, and how contemporary *Halachah* required purification processes that doubtless including dipping objects in a mikveh, and that were described in Mark with the verb βαπτίζειν and noun βαπτισμός. The TLV renders verse 4: “And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they perform a ritual washing. There are many other traditions they have received and hold, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels.” So even the TLV recognizes that the result of ritual washings was ritual purification, according to *Halachah*, not merely immersing for the sake of immersion. For the Jewish NT writers, βαπτίζειν and cognates speak of the resulting effect of *purification*, not merely an action.

In the fourth century, Jerome revised Old Latin translations of the NT into what is called the Latin Vulgate at a time when Greek was still an international language.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Christian Apologists* (English). English from the public domain translations of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Language updated and modernized by Rex A. Koivisto. Copyright © 2007 OakTree Software, Inc.

Surprisingly, the Vulgate *transliterates* βαπτίζω as *baptizo*, βάπτισμα as *baptismus*, βαπτισμός as *baptismus* and βαπτιστής as *Baptista*.<sup>26</sup> Yet, *mergo* was Latin for immerse, while *tingo* and *intinguo* bore similar “mechanical action” oriented senses, like dip, as well as instrumental effects. Jerome indeed translated βάπτω with *intinguo*, or dip (Matt 26:23, Mark 14:20, Luke 16:24, John 13:26), and *aspergo* (Rev. 19:13). But βαπτίζω and cognates were all *transliterated* into Latin. Today one can also find photographic copies of texts of Old Latin online and, indeed, they likewise had transliterations of βαπτίζω and cognates before Jerome performed his revision. Philip Burton commented on the Old Latin use of particular Greek words:

In the case of the specifically Christian words it is generally true that the more central a term is to the gospel message the harder it will be to translate. Even if there is a Latin term of similar denotative force in the ordinary language, it may not possess the hallowed connotations of the Greek word. Thus *baptisma/us* and *angelus* in the special sense 'angel' are almost completely unchallenged, despite the use of *intingo* (*intinguo*) to render βάπτω at Luke 16:24, John 13:26, and *nuntius* to render ἄγγελος 'messenger' at Luke 9:52.<sup>27</sup>

Arguably Latin *transliterations* of βαπτίζω and cognates show that Latin users recognized that more meaning was borne than only *mergo* in Latin, or for us, immerse, and that this likely involved instrumental purifying or transformative effects.

Moreover, the Latin verb *mergo* is indeed found in the Vulgate NT. In Matt 14:30 we find it with Peter on the stormy sea: “But seeing the wind, he became terrified. And beginning to sink (*mergi*), he cried out, saying, ‘Master, save me!’” (TLV). So, although this verse does not use βαπτίζω, but rather, καταποντίζω for sinking into the sea, the Latin Vulgate renders it with *mergi*, or for us, being immersed. So, this is evidence that the Latin Vulgate *could* have rendered every usage of βαπτίζω with *mergo*, if they’d thought it was equivalent. But since they did not, then this is early authoritative evidence that βαπτίζω was not thought by early readers of the NT to mean only immerse.

In short, NT use of βαπτίζειν is much more flexible than what most modern NT readers realize. It seems the sense often intended by Yeshua-believing Jewish authors of the NT is *purify*, and was used for diverse rituals, not solely for immersing in a mikveh.

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<sup>26</sup> See, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam*, 5th revised ed., edited by Robert Weber, Roger Gryson, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1969, 1983, 1994, 2007). Accordance version 3.8. Used by permission.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels: A Study of Their Texts and Language*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144–45.

### 7. Splashing Israel with pure water: Ezekiel 36:25 as Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα?

Proselyte immersion is commonly suggested as the source behind Yoḥanan's washing, even though Robert Webb and others note that "the evidence compels us to conclude that proselyte immersion, as described in rabbinic texts such as b. *Yeb.* 46a–47b and b. *Ger.* 60a–61b, was most probably not practised prior to 70 CE."<sup>28</sup> But even if proselyte immersion actually was practiced in the days of Yoḥanan, as argued by Craig Keener,<sup>29</sup> that would not prove Yoḥanan borrowed it for his eschatological, national washing.

If βάπτίζειν and cognates were used in the NT often to signify purification, then a significant alternative to proselyte immersion arises as the source of Yoḥanan's Messianic washing, and that is Ezekiel 36:25–28, here translated by Moshe Greenberg:

I will throw purifying water on you and you will be purged; of all your impurities and of all your idols I will purge you. Then I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put inside you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit inside you, and so bring to pass that you shall follow my laws, and my rules you shall carefully observe. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people while I will be your God.<sup>30</sup>

Christian Civilization and Messianic Jews alike recognize that both the outer and inner transformation promised by Ezekiel strikingly parallel the combined work of Yoḥanan with water and Yeshua with the Holy Spirit in the age of the New Covenant. Also, zeal for the Torah by Spirit-filled Jewish disciples of Yeshua described in Acts 21:20–26 is strongly supported by Ezekiel's wording "you shall follow my laws, and my rules you shall carefully observe."

Adela Yarbro Collins writes that Yoḥanan's distinctive parallelism, "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" does evoke Ezek 36:25–28.<sup>31</sup> Also, during the 2021 international online Enoch Seminar on John the Baptist,

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<sup>28</sup> Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 123–28. Likewise, Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64–69 (69).

<sup>29</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, Vol I (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 444–48.

<sup>30</sup> Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 726.

<sup>31</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark, A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Harold Attridge, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 146.

Jonathan Klawans' one page handout for day three, "John's Baptism: An Innovative Rite of Atonement" quotes Ezek 36:22–26,<sup>32</sup> and therefore, at the very least, suggests that these verses had a direct effect on how Yoḥanan understood his prophetic calling. In other words, Ezekiel 36 may indeed have inspired Yoḥanan, just as Isaiah's "Voice" in the wilderness inspired him.

The Ezek 36:25 premise is fortified by a prominent allusion in no less significant a place than the prayer that Yeshua instructed his disciples to pray (Luke 11:2–4). Joel Green remarks that "reverberations of Ezek 36:16–32" are heard in Yeshua's model prayer:

"I shall sanctify my great name . . . and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes" (v 23). This perspective from Ezekiel is important not only for establishing the eschatological edge of the opening of this prayer of Jesus, but also for the way it summons those who pray this prayer to behave. Why must God sanctify his name? Because it has been profaned by God's own people . . . <sup>33</sup>

We do indeed note a strong echo of Ezek 36:23 in Yeshua's prayer, "hallowed be Thy name," or, "may Your name be sanctified":

ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου (Matt 6:9 and Luke 11:2)

ἀγιάσω τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ μέγα (Ezek 36:23, LXX)

Yeshua, then, would arguably be aware of Israel's need for purification in Ezek 36:25 prior to the kingdom, which, evidently, Yoḥanan had inaugurated.

Impressive correlations between Ezekiel's promise and Yoḥanan's activity can be drawn:

1) The Ezekiel 36 purification is said to occur immediately prior to Israel's eschatological kingdom (vv. 28–38). Yoḥanan performed his water washing while stridently warning of the imminent kingdom.

2) Ezekiel 36 links bodily purification to moral reform, and to inner transformation of a new heart and a new spirit, associated with the Almighty putting his Spirit in Israel (vv. 26–27). Yoḥanan demanded complete moral reform by repentance from those coming to him, echoing Ezek 36:31, "Then you shall remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good, and you shall loathe yourselves on account of your iniquities and your abominations." Also, in the second part of Yoḥanan's parallelism the Coming One

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<sup>32</sup> [ <https://rb.gy/u8qfxo> ]

<sup>33</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 441–42.

*transforms* Israel by the Holy Spirit, burning the chaff, implying inner renewal (compare Isa 4:4: אִם רָחַץ אֲדֹנָי אֶת צִאֲת בְּנוֹת־צִיּוֹן וְאֶת־דְּמֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם יְדִיחַ מִקֶּרְבָּהּ בְּרוּחַ מְשַׁפֵּט וּבְרוּחַ בָּעֵר).

3) If Yoḥanan considered himself the divine agent sent to “splash pure water” on Israel, according to Ezekiel 36:25, then he would actively perform the purification for repentant Israelites who would be purified passively. The Gospels indeed say that Yoḥanan actively baptized<sup>34</sup> while the repentant people coming out to him, including Yeshua, were passively baptized.<sup>35</sup> Since Greek does have a middle, reflexive verb form suitable to describe self-immersion, the actual use of active and passive verbs to describe Yoḥanan and the repentant people points away from mishnaic self-immersion. The NT’s portrayal of Yoḥanan actively performing his washing for passive worshippers accords very well with Ezekiel 36:25.

4) Ezekiel’s purification is a one-time eschatological washing that is not repeated, in contrast to repetitive Qumran washings, and to routine washings of the Torah. By all appearances the repentant participated in Yoḥanan’s eschatological washing one time.

5) Ezekiel 36:17 says the *House of Israel* was exiled because of dreadful moral failure by the wicked. But even the humble righteous like Daniel and his companions and Ezekiel were exiled as well. Collective Israel was prophetically pronounced to be a woman unclean by monthly defilement. So, the Ezek 36:25 purification is likewise for the entire *House of Israel* (vv. 17, 21, 22, 32, 37), which accords with Yoḥanan’s statement that his work was for the benefit of Israel (John 1:31), not merely a band of his disciples.

6) Yeshua’s demand to participate in Yoḥanan’s washing to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:13–15) also accords with the Ezekiel 36 premise since Yeshua, too, as a Jew, bore his own part in the *House of Israel’s* defilement, even if he himself was guiltless and righteous. It seems that according to implications of the NT narrative, Yeshua’s acknowledgment of and participation in the *House of Israel’s* purification, administered

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<sup>34</sup> Active verb for βαπτίζω: Matt 3:11a; Mark 1:8a; Luke 3:16a; John 1:26 Yoḥanan baptizes with water; Matt 3:11b; Mark 1:8b; Luke 3:16b Messiah will baptize with the Spirit; Mark 1:4, Mark 6:14, 24 Yoḥanan baptizes; John 1:25, 33a Yoḥanan baptizes the people; John 1:33b Yeshua baptizes the people with the Spirit; John 3:23a Yoḥanan baptizes the people; John 3:26 Yeshua/disciples baptize the people; John 4.1; 4.2 disciples baptize the people. Paul also said that he himself baptized people in 1 Corinthians 1:13-16.

<sup>35</sup> Passive verb for βαπτίζω: Mark 1:5 and Matt 3:6 are middle-passive forms usually understood as permissive middles to add focus to repentant subjects who seek to be baptized ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ by Yoḥanan; Matt 3:13, Yeshua baptized by Yoḥanan; Matt 3:14, Yoḥanan protests he should be baptized by Yeshua; Matt 3:16 and Mark 1:9, Yeshua baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 3:7, crowds baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 3:12, tax collectors baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 3:21, the people baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 3:21b, Yeshua baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 7:29, tax collectors baptized by Yoḥanan; Luke 7:30, Pharisees not baptized by Yoḥanan; John 3:23b, the people are baptized by Yoḥanan.

by Yoḥanan, furnished him a fully righteous standing before the Almighty, accordingly enabling the giving of the promised Spirit to him as the Davidic heir. In other words, upon being purified by Yoḥanan, Yeshua received from heaven the Spirit foretold in Isa 11:1–5 for the righteous *shoot* and *branch* of Jesse. The synoptic narrative says that immediately the Bat Qol heavenly voice confirmed Yeshua as the well-pleasing Son (compare Psalm 2).

7) According to Acts 10–11 and Acts 15, the early Jewish followers of Yeshua were zealous to observe the commandments of the Torah (also compare Acts 21:17–26). This zeal accords with Ezek 36:27: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” A central question through Acts was how the Jewish followers of Yeshua should relate to people from the Nations, which Ezek 36 does not deal with directly. However, in Romans 15:12 Paul does refer to Isa 11:10 as part of the justification for proclaiming the Good News to the Nations, strengthening the idea that early disciples saw Yeshua as the Davidic heir of Isa 11:1–5.

These points of correlation between the NT narrative of Yoḥanan’s activity and Ezek 36:25 lead one to wonder why this premise is ignored by researchers. Evidently the traditional framing of NT baptism for Christian Civilization, together with certain objections directed at Ezek 36:25, have thwarted research into this possibility. A few possible objections are now discussed.

#### **8. Objection: Ezekiel 36:25 is figurative, not a prophecy for literal fulfillment**

Various biblical researchers have commented that Ezek 36:25 is not literal, but rather is a figurative expression.<sup>36</sup> In antiquity, however, Yoḥanan might well have taken Ezek 36:25 to be inspiration for action as he evidently did with other Hebrew Bible passages. Moshe Greenberg describes Ezek 36:16–38 in context as: “the boldest conceptualization of the redemption of Israel as a divine necessity, drawing from the concept its ultimate conclusion concerning the future of human nature.”<sup>37</sup> Such a passage could certainly arouse intense Jewish hope for actual physical redemption, and for action by someone like Yoḥanan.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, Eyal Regev, “Washing, Repentance, and Atonement in Early Christian Baptism and Qumranic Purification Liturgies,” *JJMJS* 3 (2016), 47, 57–58; Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 105–6; R. Nir, “Josephus’ Account of John the Baptist: A Christian Interpolation,” *JSHJ* 10 (2012), 56, n.83; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel, A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, translation from German, SCM press Ltd, 1970), 498; G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 390.

<sup>37</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 725; Compare Daniel Bloch’s comment, “In 36:16–38 the theology of the book [of Ezekiel] reaches its zenith.” Daniel Bloch, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, NICOT, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340.

A fragment of Ezekiel discovered by Yigael Yadin during archeological digs on Masada consists of Ezekiel 35:11–38:14 and is designated *MasEzek* (1043–2220). Unlike other biblical and sectarian texts recovered at Masada, the *MasEzek* fragment was found buried beneath the synagogue floor, with a fragment of Deuteronomy, and so is dated no later than 73 CE, when Masada fell to the Romans.<sup>38</sup> This discovery is consistent with the Jewish custom of interring worn out Scripture scrolls, such as in the Cairo Genizah. Near Yoḥanan’s time and local setting, it seems a group of Jews studied these chapters of Ezekiel heavily, including chapter 36, evidently wearing out that part of the scroll.

In the mid-second century CE, R. Yosie and R. Meir, two disciples of R. Akiva, took Ezek 36:25 as an actual event to be expected in the messianic future, dispelling the idea that in antiquity this passage was considered figurative.

The Sages taught ( *Tosefta* 5:5): *Mamzerim* and Gibeonites will be pure in the future; this is the statement of Rabbi Yosei. Rabbi Meir says: They will not be pure. Rabbi Yosei said to him: But hasn’t it already been stated: “And I will sprinkle [splash] clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek 36:25)?  
b. *Kiddushin* 72b.<sup>39</sup>

Irrespective of rabbinical extrapolation, this discussion bolsters the likelihood that Yoḥanan saw Ezek 36:25 as vital for the messianic future. This rabbinical debate also mollifies a comment by R. Akiva reported in m. *Yoma* 8.9 that combines Ezek 36:25 with Jer 17:13 in a midrashic word-play to comfort Israel as to its standing of purity.<sup>40</sup> The word-play does not constitute exhaustive rabbinical interpretation of these verses, but only a midrashic parable. Thus, the verse’s primary meaning would not be ignored, just as R. Akiva’s disciples argued in b. *Kiddushin* 72b.

Though Ezek 36:25’s meaning has been disputed, certain Jewish sages argue that it relates to Israel’s status in Ezek 36:17 as a נְדָה, or a woman in menstruation that the Almighty pronounced on the *House of Israel*. So, splashing מֵי טְהוֹרִים in Ezek 36:25 would not refer to purification from corpse impurity by sprinkling מֵי נְדָה as in Num 19:13, 20,<sup>41</sup> but to purification from bodily discharge as in Leviticus 15, now applied corporately to Israel.

<sup>38</sup> Yigael Yadin, *Masada, Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*, translated from Hebrew by Moshe Pearlman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 180–91.

<sup>39</sup> *The William Davidson Talmud*, online, [ [www.sefaria.org.il/Kiddushin.72b.12-13?lang=en](http://www.sefaria.org.il/Kiddushin.72b.12-13?lang=en) ]

<sup>40</sup> *Wm. Davidson Talmud*, [ [www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah\\_Yoma.8.9?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en](http://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah_Yoma.8.9?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en) ]

<sup>41</sup> For Jews of Ashkenazi heritage, Ezek 36:16–38 is the *Haftarah* for the week’s reading of *Shabbat Parah* that consists of Num 19:1–22, so linking Ezek 36:25 to Num 19.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Metzora 17

Therefore, the Holy One compares the uncleanness of Israel to the uncleanness of the menstrual period, when < a woman > is unclean and < then > purified. So, the Holy One is going to purify Israel, as stated (in Ezek 36:25): *I will sprinkle [splash] pure water upon you, and you shall be pure.*

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Metzora 18

Another interpretation: (Ezek 36:17): *Their way before me was like the uncleanness of a menstruous woman*, and not like the uncleanness of a corpse. With a corpse in the house, a high priest does not enter there; but in the case of a menstruous woman, a high priest enters into the house with her and sits with her on the couch, but on condition that it not be shaken (when they sit on it). So, if Israel were compared to the impurity of death, the Divine Presence would never return upon them; however, they are compared to the menstruant, because there is cleansing for her in a mikveh, so that the priest may be with her in the house and not be afraid. Thus, the Divine Presence dwells with Israel, even though they are more unclean than those who serve stars, as stated (in Lev 16:16): < *The tent of meeting* > *That dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.*<sup>42</sup>

With this in mind, the pharisaical representatives' question in John 1:25 is worth review: τί οὖν βαπτίζεις εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς οὐδὲ Ἡλίας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης. The question was not about *what* Yoḥanan was doing; they recognized the washing. Instead, *why did Yoḥanan, himself*, perform this washing *if* he was not Messiah, or Elijah or the Prophet. The low-hanging evidence of this verse evidently intends to indicate that Jerusalem Pharisees recognized Yoḥanan performing the national eschatological washing that they also expected. Even so, they were unsure which of Israel's eschatological figures would perform it. Ezekiel 36:25 promises an eschatological national washing without specifying who performs it, only that the Almighty would ensure that it takes place.

#### **9. Objection: No NT author cites Ezekiel as Yoḥanan's source**

All must agree that the NT simply does not offer *any* direct source of inspiration for Yoḥanan's washing. Nothing says it was based on proselyte immersion. Nothing says it was based on Ezekiel 36:25. Without an explanation, we are left to weigh the options. Posing Ezekiel 36:25 is no more speculative than any other proposal.

The pre-inscripturated, vocally proclaimed *evangelion* of Yeshua's followers, especially in Judea and Galilee, might indeed have presented Ezek 36:25 as Yoḥanan's

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<sup>42</sup> Wm. Davidson Talmud, [ [www.sefaria.org.il/Midrash\\_Tanchuma\\_Buber%2C\\_Metzora.17.1?lang=en](http://www.sefaria.org.il/Midrash_Tanchuma_Buber%2C_Metzora.17.1?lang=en) ]



source. However, the aims of later written NT documents in koine Greek suggest understandable reasons for authors to sidestep express citation of Ezek 36:25.

The four gospel authors composed their works decades after the Apostles began declaring Yeshua's death and resurrection. There would be little point, then, in highlighting every detail about Yoḥanan, especially since he had preached the imminent arrival of Israel's kingdom ushered in by the Coming One. But Israel's kingdom, as promised in Ezek 36:28–38, had not arrived, and Israel's leaders, as well as the authorities of the Roman empire, had rejected the Coming One, identified as Yeshua.

According to the NT narrative, after Yeshua's suffering on Passover the first disciples quickly realized that Israel's majority rejection of Yeshua produced severe long-term consequences, forcing a delay of Israel's kingdom (Acts 1:6–8, compare Luke 19:11–27; 21:20–24). Still, Luke reports Peter preaching that even Yeshua's rejection and the kingdom's delay also were foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:12–21). If so, then later gospel writers faced a quandary: How much indirect eschatology should they include in their work? If they spell out that Yoḥanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25, then they would also need to explain why the kingdom of Ezek 36:28–38 has not arrived, but instead has been delayed. All things considered, since Ezek 36:25 applied directly to the *House of Israel* anyway, and not to those of the Nations who later trusted in Yeshua, then NT authors writing in Greek may not have felt a pressing need to explain Yoḥanan's activity in detail. Beyond that, for NT authors focus on the risen Yeshua was critical for everyone, whether for Jews or whether for Greeks. Thus, it seems, details about Yoḥanan are few.

Though there is no direct NT citation of Ezek 36:25, there are apparent allusions. Hebrews 10:22 urges readers λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ. Use of ὕδατι καθαρῷ, *pure water*, certainly seems to refer to ὕδωρ καθαρὸν in Ezek 36:25, and it is often noted. The addressees of Hebrews apparently were Jews, so this allusion would be coherent.

Then, John 3:5 is commonly noted with Ezek 36:25–27 for Yeshua's word, ἐὰν μή τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ. This broadly accords with the water, the Spirit, the kingdom and transformed lives promised in Ezekiel 36. Beasley-Murray writes as follows about John 3:5 (though he himself comes to a different conclusion):

If the text is to be read as it stands, there is much to be said for the interpretation enunciated by Bengel, and characteristic of British exposition: "Water denotes the baptism of John into (i.e., preparing for) Christ Jesus". Such a view assumes that entry into the kingdom of God requires baptism of water and of the Spirit. The conjunction of water and Spirit in eschatological hope is deeply rooted in the

Jewish consciousness, as is attested by Ezek 36:25–27 and various apocalyptic writings (e.g., Jub. 1:23; Pss. Sol. 18:6; Test Jud 24:3) ....<sup>43</sup>

The synoptics show that Yeshua's first followers also regarded Yoḥanan highly, ultimately considering him the direct fulfillment of “my messenger” of Mal 3:1 as stated by Yeshua (Matt 11:10; Luke 7:27; also Mark 1:2). In Matthew's telling, Yeshua said that πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου ἐπροφήτευσαν—for all the prophets and the Torah until Yoḥanan did prophesy (Matt 11:13). In other words, when Yoḥanan appeared, promises of Israel's kingdom were no longer an unfulfilled hope for the future. Now they were actually finding fulfillment, just as we are told that Peter declared, “And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days” (Acts 3:24). This implies that even without citation, Yoḥanan's washing was likely foretold in the Hebrew Bible, and that prophecy like Ezek 36:25 was now being inaugurated.

This also makes much sense in light of Luke chapter 1 and the miraculous origin of Yoḥanan. No other great leader of Israel in the Hebrew Bible is ever said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit while in his mother's womb. Yoḥanan's conception was miraculous and his name was given from heaven beforehand—Yoḥanan was planned by the Almighty. Let me also add that it is so burdensome to bear Christian expositors who fret that Christians will be drawn after Yoḥanan in some untoward way if they acknowledge his unique greatness. But for literate people who know that Israel was led by Judge-Kings, High Priests and national Prophets such doubts are baseless.

Luke carefully spells out that Yoḥanan is completely human, while Yeshua is the incarnate Son of the Most High. Yoḥanan is to lead Israel to find the Messiah of the house of David. Yoḥanan was promised by his father's prophecy to be a guiding prophet for Israel, and Yoḥanan also declared himself to be the “Voice” of Isaiah. That being the case, it's extremely hard to swallow the idea that Yoḥanan, by himself, cooked-up his own water rite, borrowing proselyte immersion from pharisaical Judaism.

In light of Yoḥanan's prophetic background, it makes at least as much sense that Yoḥanan saw himself as the inaugurator of Ezekiel's promised purification of Israel, said to occur just before the establishment of Israel's kingdom.

On a different note, Yoḥanan's claims of Israel's imminent kingdom, together with his washing, attracted socially diverse Jews. Albert Baumgarten provides an incisive critique of Robert Webb's proposal of understanding Yoḥanan's washing in six simultaneous complementary perspectives. Baumgarten queries:

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<sup>43</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC, Vol. 36, eds Ralph P. Martin, et al, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic (formerly published by Thomas Nelson) 1999), (Kindle edition), 49;

One wonders how contemporary Jews were able to hear six possible meanings simultaneously without being totally confused. This dilemma should have been particularly acute for the prostitutes and tax collectors, at the lower end of the socioreligious ladder, who were especially enthused by John's message, according to Matt 21:32 and elsewhere in the gospels.<sup>44</sup>

Yoḥanan's swift recognition as a prophet seems to have been tied to his washing. Ezekiel 36:25 exists in the Hebrew Bible as an eschatological national purification just prior to the kingdom. However, if Yoḥanan did not inaugurate this purification, but instead invented some other one just before Israel's kingdom, then would that not confuse the Jewish population as well? Why should a real prophet invent a new washing when Ezekiel had promised one six centuries earlier?

#### **10. Objection: Like Naaman in 2Kings 5:14, Jews practiced immersion, not affusion**

Wide consensus holds that late Second Temple routine Jewish washings were by self-immersion. Archeological discoveries of *mikvaot*, purpose-built immersion pools, throughout the Jewish homeland, together with 2Kgs 5:14 and the Mishnah, are evidently thought to prove this point. A closer look raises several questions.

First, even if more rigorist leanings toward Levitical commandments were widespread among all Jews in the days of Yoḥanan, that still would not annul Ezekiel's prophecy from six centuries earlier. Yoḥanan could have inaugurated Ezek 36:25, splashing pure water on the repentant, completely unconcerned about self-immersion in a mikveh.

Moreover, in separate work Ronny Reich and Yonatan Adler both say that the earliest archeological mikvah discovery dates only to 164 BCE, well into the Hellenistic period of the Second Temple.<sup>45</sup> In fact, the five books of Moses challenge the idea that purification *requires* self-immersion. There are Torah verses where objects are dipped (טבל), yet other verses in close proximity call the worshipper to ambiguously wash their body (רחץ). For example, regarding a person with skin disease, Leviticus 14:6 has טבל for dipping the living bird, cedar, scarlet thread and hyssop, and v. 16 has a cohen

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<sup>44</sup> Albert I. Baumgarten, "The Baptism of John in a Second Temple Jewish Context," chapter 26 in, *Wisdom Poured Out Like Water: Studies on Jewish and Christian Antiquity in Honor of Gabriele Boccaccini*, eds. J. Harold Ellens, et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 404.

<sup>45</sup> See, Ronny Reich, "Miqwa'ot (Jewish Ritual Immersion Bath) in Eretz-Israel in the Second Temple and the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990); Yonatan Adler, "The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in Eretz-Israel from the Hasmonean Period until the End of the Talmudic Era [164 BCE–400 CE]," (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2011) in Hebrew; and Ronny Reich, *Mikvaot Taharah* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Tzvi, 2013), in Hebrew.

dipping his finger into oil. Between these two verses, v. 8 has רחץ for a person who is to wash to be purified, טהר. Again, near the end of Leviticus 14 for a mold-infested house, v. 51 has טבל for dipping the living bird, cedar, scarlet thread and hyssop, yet Leviticus 15 concerns male and female bodily defilement and purification by water, all of which require רחץ for washing. So טבל is certainly used in the Torah along side רחץ, but no commandment demands personal washing by טבל, dipping/immersion. The “fence expanding” tradition of the late Second Temple eventually codified bodily washings by a dipping/immersion of טבל even though they were actually commanded with the more ambiguous רחץ.

Beyond that, even the Babylonian Talmud, b. *Ber.* 22a,<sup>46</sup> says affusion of nine *kav* of water, about four gallons, was acceptable for certain rabbinical purifications, in place of immersing in forty *se’ah*, about one hundred and twenty gallons of a kosher mikveh.

Our Rabbis taught: A *ba’al keri* on whom nine *kabs* of water have been thrown is clean. Nahum a man of Gimzu whispered it to R. Akiba, and R. Akiba whispered it to Ben ‘Azzai, and Ben ‘Azzai went forth and repeated it to the disciples in public.

R. Zera told R. Hiyya bar Abba:

The nine *kabs* must be like the forty *se’ah*: just as the forty *se’ah* are for immersion and not for throwing, so the nine *kabs* are for throwing and not for immersion.

Nahum of Gimzu was R. Akiva’s teacher, and Akiva was evidently executed in the second Jewish revolt in 135 CE. Thus, not long after the days of Yoḥanan, affusion *specifically* was considered acceptable as a purification process for some defilements, even for fastidious Jews. So, if Yoḥanan claimed Ezek 36:25 as his inspiration, then even scrupulous Jews would have no reason to reject him if he “splashed pure water” on them.

Regarding 2Kgs 5:14 and Naaman the Aramaean, there is more going on with this text than is usually realized. The Masoretic Text (MT) of the Aleppo Codex dates from the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, and, like the famed Leningrad Codex of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, has the Hebrew verb רחץ, *wash*, paired with טהר, *purify*, that occur in vv. 10, 12, 13, but then in v. 14 it has the verb טבל paired with טהר. Similarly, the LXX has the verb λούω, *wash*, paired with καθαρίζω, *purify*, in vv. 10, 12, 13, but then in v. 14 it has βαπτίζω paired with καθαρίζω.

However, Jerome (c. 342 or c. 347–420 CE) based his Latin translation on much earlier Hebrew texts available in his day, and he also compared early Greek versions. In

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<sup>46</sup> *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*, [ [http://www.halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth\\_22.html](http://www.halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth_22.html) ]

Jerome's Latin version *all four verses*, vv. 10, 12, 13, and 14, have the Latin verb *lavō*, *wash*, paired with *mundō*, *cleanse*.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, in fourteen of the sixteen verses where טבל occurs in the MT, the Latin Bible has a form of *tingō*, *dip/immerse*, not *lavō*.<sup>48</sup> This strongly implies that the Hebrew texts available to Jerome in the fourth century did not have טבל in 2Kgs 5:14, and that very likely the Greek texts did not have βαπτίζειν.

It is unclear precisely when the Aramaic Targum and Syriac Peshitta reached their current text forms, yet it is surprising that *all four verses*, 10, 12, 13, and 14, in the Aramaic Targum have what appears to be a Hebrew loan word טבל, *dip*, paired with אַתְּסִי, *heal*. Moreover, the Peshitta, *in all four verses*, has ܘܫܘܚܘܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ, *wash, bathe, swim* paired with ܘܕܝܘܒܝܗܘܢ, *purify*.

Jerome evidently had no manuscripts of 2Kgs 5:14 with טבל in Hebrew or with βαπτίζειν in Greek. Or, at the very least, it would seem that the manuscripts Jerome thought were the best had רחץ or λούω. Moreover, the identical word-pairs found in all four verses in Jerome's Latin, the Aramaic Targum, and the Syriac Peshitta implies that the source texts for all three versions were also uniform in all four verses. All of this evidence points to the likelihood that the very early Hebrew text of 2Kgs 5:14 had רחץ, but that at some point in the common era, as *mikvaot* became more prevalent and established, Hebrew copyists replaced רחץ with טבל.

Whatever the case, it is highly questionable to depend upon 2Kgs 5:14, whether in Hebrew or Greek, as proof of the meaning of βαπτίζειν in the NT.

#### 11. Objection: Βαπτίζειν means immerse, not pour

This objection has been a rallying cry of *credobaptists* against *paedobaptists* in past generations. Predominant NT evidence has the Apostolic water rite performed in response to understanding the Good News, as *credobaptists* contend, against vague inferences of household baptism allegedly including toddlers and infants. *Paedobaptists* typically acknowledge that βαπτίζειν can mean immerse, but that it also bears extended senses such as *purify*. Thus, βαπτίζειν in the NT would not mean *sprinkle* or *pour*, per se, but rather *purify*, or some similar transformative meaning, and would be accomplished by whatever means Jewish culture demanded.<sup>49</sup> Still, ill-advised *paedobaptist* attempts to prove infant baptism in the NT seems to have brought, by association, disrepute to the concept that βαπτίζειν has various extended senses. The

<sup>47</sup> The modern version, the *Nova Vulgata* (1998) replaced *lavō*, *wash*, in v. 14 with *intinguō*, *immerse*.

<sup>48</sup> The Latin of 2Kgs 8:15 has *infudit* where the MT is טבל. This is the other verse without *tingō*.

<sup>49</sup> See the articles "Baptism," "Infant Baptism," "Believers' Baptism" and "Modes of Baptism" in, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 3rd ed. 2017), 260–68.

unfortunate side-effect seems to be the assumption by many *credobaptists* that βαπτίζειν only means immerse in the NT with no other extended senses.

Yoḥanan’s saying in Mark 1:8 describes both his activity with water and the Coming One’s activity with the Holy Spirit as a semantic parallel. Any NT description of the metaphorical mode of Yeshua’s action would be a valid possibility for Yoḥanan’s activity. Peter cites Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα (רְשַׁף-לִבְּלִי עַל-כָּל-בָּשָׂר וְיִשְׁפָּא) and, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου (יְהַרְרֵתְּ אֶת-יְשׁוּעָה) (Acts 2:17–18), in which the mode in both Hebrew and Greek is pour out. Luke reports Peter’s own words (Acts 2:33), saying that after ascending Yeshua received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο—Yeshua “poured out” the promised Holy Spirit (compare Acts 10:44–45; Romans 5:5; Titus 3:5–6). This arguably relates directly to βαπτίζειν in Acts 1:5 where Yeshua promised ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἀγίῳ. The dative ὕδατι can be locative, or it can just as easily bear an instrumental effect, such as purifying *by means of water*, while ἐν and the dative πνεύματι ἀγίῳ associated with βαπτισθήσεσθε also could be locative, but could also very well suggest a purifying transformation *by means of the Holy Spirit*. Despite claims that βαπτίζειν means immerse, we here see “pour out” depicted by Luke as Yeshua’s mode to cause the transformational purification that βαπτίζειν conveys. If so for Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, then why couldn’t Yoḥanan also pour out pure water, as in Ezek 36:25?

## 12. Yoḥanan’s preaching arguably was in Hebrew

The earliest material we have about Yoḥanan is in Greek, yet the spoken language during his prophetic activity was Semitic, arguably Hebrew.<sup>50</sup> Steven Fassberg argues that a great portion of first-century Jews in Judea and Galilee were Hebrew speakers:

For Hebraists, the existence of both Hebrew and Aramaic documents at Qumran and other sites in the Judean Desert, as well as the Hebraisms in the Aramaic documents and the Aramaisms in the Hebrew documents, demonstrate that speakers in Palestine before and after the turn of the Common Era were at least bilingual (in many cases also trilingual with Greek).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Compare Martin G. Abegg’s 2020 online Accordance talk, *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, with a slide showing that in Caves 1–11 more than 1,000 manuscripts were recovered: 248 biblical scrolls, and of *non-biblical manuscripts*, 600 were in Hebrew, compared to 140 in Aramaic and 22 in Greek.

<sup>51</sup> Steven E. Fassberg, “Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74 (2012), 263–80 (274); also see, *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. by Steven E. Fassberg et al., *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*, 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); see also, *The Language Environment of First Century Judea: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*, ed. by Randall Buth and Steven Notley (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Yoḥanan was popularly recognized as a prophet for Israel, and certain authorities recognized him at least potentially as a prophet (John 1:19–28 (25)). A population of Hebrew speakers would strongly point to Yoḥanan declaring his message in Hebrew. Then, too, these Hebrew speakers likely devised Yoḥanan’s nickname. If, as Josephus wrote, Yoḥanan’s activity was for purification of the body, then the name given might have been evoked by a priestly role in Lev 14:11, הַכֹּהֵן הַמְטַהֵר, so yielding, יוֹחַנָן הַמְטַהֵר, Yoḥanan *the Purifier*, later rendered in Greek by NT writers as Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστής.

Moreover, Luke reported Yoḥanan’s admonition to crowds, tax-gatherers and soldiers and then commented, “So, with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people” (Luke 3:18). Yoḥanan thus preached more than what is found in the NT. Plausibly, then, Yoḥanan’s original parallelism, in Hebrew, may not have been a fixed phrase, but rather a fixed emphasis on the difference between him and the Coming One. The following are purely speculative suggestions. Perhaps Yoḥanan variously said:

אני טיהרתי אתכם במים, אך הוא יטהר אתכם ברוח הקודש

I purified you with water, he will purify you with the Holy Spirit

At other times perhaps,

אני רוחץ אתכם במים, והוא ירחץ אתכם ברוח הקודש

I wash you with water, he will wash you with the Holy Spirit

And at other times,

אני זורק עליכם מים, אבל הוא ישפוך עליכם את רוח הקודש

I am splashing you with water, he will pour out on you the Holy Spirit.

Regardless, according to Yonatan Adler, the following is the sole example of use of טבל in the Dead Sea Scrolls.<sup>52</sup>

[כ] וְלִנְוֹגַע בְּשִׁכְבַּת הַזֶּרַע מֵאָדָם עַד כּוֹל כְּלֵי יִטְבּוֹל וְהַנּוֹשָׂא אוֹתוֹ

[יִטְבַּל] וְלִהְבִּגַּד אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶה עֲלָיו וְהַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאֲנָה יִטְבּוֹל

[במִי] ׀ [...] (4QToharot A [4Q274] 2i 4–6)

Note that טבל is in *qal*, not in the *hiphil* stem. Thus, the *Modern Hebrew New Testament*<sup>53</sup> version with הטביל is questionable:

אֲנִי הַטְּבִילְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִים, אֲךָ הוּא יִטְבִּיל אֶתְכֶם בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ

<sup>52</sup> Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity,” 18–19 (Hebrew).

<sup>53</sup> *Modern Hebrew New Testament (MHNT)* Copyright © The Bible Society in Israel, 1976, 1991. Accordance Version 3.2.

Whatever the case, there seems to have been only a brief transition period between the traditions about Yoḥanan in Hebrew or Aramaic to those in Greek. We are told in Acts 6:2 that the twelve apostles wished to dedicate themselves to τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ—the word of God, doubtless focusing on both the Hebrew Bible and Yeshua’s words. But in light of their Greek-speaking Jewish comrades who also trusted Yeshua, it seems likely that the apostles did not neglect the Greek Bible, nor did they ignore an accurate presentation in Greek of Yoḥanan’s and Yeshua’s lives and deeds. The Greek pericopes about Yoḥanan preserved in the NT, including use of βαπτίζειν and cognates, may have initially consolidated among Hellenist Jewish disciples in the early Apostolic congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–2).

### 13. Βάπτισμα, freshly-coined for the *Evangelion*

It is widely recognized, as stated by R. T. France, “βάπτισμα is an exclusively Christian word, which appears for the first time in the NT. Its use in Rom 6:4 shows that it was already current in Christian circles before Mark wrote.”<sup>54</sup> France’s remark possibly responds to Beasley-Murray who had earlier written:

In view of the fact that [βάπτισμα’s] earliest employment is for the baptism of John, it could conceivably have been coined by John’s disciples. More plausibly, it is a Christian innovation, and was applied by Christian writers to John’s baptism in the conviction that the latter should be bracketed with Christianity rather than with Judaism.<sup>55</sup>

Beasley-Murray’s suggestion that Christian use of βάπτισμα was to distinguish between Christianity and Judaism is questionable (see Justin Martyr above who uses βάπτισμα for both Jewish rites and Christian interests). Nevertheless, both France and Beasley-Murray suppose early disciples of Yeshua coined βάπτισμα. Such linguistic creativity would be no surprise in light of the astounding events reported among that first generation of Yeshua’s followers. This newly-coined noun βάπτισμα seems to have been capable of bearing whatever extended sense that βαπτίζειν bore. Thus, in Mark 10:38–39 and Luke 12:50 βάπτισμα conveys the sense of *severe injurious detriment* that βαπτίζειν also bore. This implies that βάπτισμα could likewise bear the sense of purification, as in Justin Martyr, or other abstract senses untethered to physical immersion.

Evidence is lacking that coinage of βάπτισμα had any relationship with the Hebrew noun טבילה, a word not found in the Hebrew Bible, nor attested among the Dead Sea

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<sup>54</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Accordance electronic ed., 66.

<sup>55</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Baptism, Wash,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 1 (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1986), 143–50 (149–50).



Scrolls. Yonatan Adler notes that early Copper Scroll<sup>56</sup> researchers thought they detected ניקרת הטבילה (grotto for immersion) etched in the text. However further research with advanced analytical techniques replaced that reading with a far less-clear reading that has no categorically decided meaning, [מקרת הטבו/יל?].<sup>57</sup> So, as of yet, there is no undisputed attestation of טבילה until the Mishnah, some two centuries after Yoḥanan and more than a century after composition of the NT documents.

Despite lack of evidence to prove טבילה was known by NT writers, there seems to be a wide-spread injudicious hypothesis that βάπτισμα = טבילה = immersion. This assumption exacerbates difficulties, for example, in interpreting Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3. Luke reproduced verbatim Mark's phrase about Yoḥanan's activity: κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν—proclaiming a βάπτισμα of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Stanley Porter, Joel Marcus and Dan Wallace grappled with Mark 1:4 in terms of a religious water rite. Porter concludes his essay without resolution:

The grammar here does not say that John preached for people to repent and be baptized; it states that he preached a baptism ... that is restricted by the concept of repentance, as opposed to other restricting factors (here unspecified). Although not specified, either baptism or repentance, or both, seem to lead ... to forgiveness of sins (although agency is not expressed).<sup>58</sup>

Joel Marcus likewise offers no resolution:

Particularly enigmatic is the meaning of the genitival expression βάπτισμα μετανοίας (“baptism of repentance”). Is Mark implying that it was a baptism *consisting* of repentance (genitive of content)? A baptism *resulting from* repentance (genitive of source)? A baptism *issuing in* repentance (objective genitive)? A repentant baptism—that is, perhaps, a baptism involving repentance or repentant people (adjectival genitive)? Any of these is possible, since “a substantive in the genitive limits the meaning of a substantive on which it depends” without exactly defining the nature of the limitation....

It seems inconceivable, moreover, that so many people would have left their homes to make the long journey into the desert to be baptized by John if they had thought that they had already been purged by repentance, if they had not

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<sup>56</sup> The Copper Scroll (3Q15) was discovered in 1952 at the back of Qumran's Cave 3 and has been dated variously as early as CE 25–75 to as late as CE 70–135.

<sup>57</sup> Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity,” 19–20 (Hebrew).

<sup>58</sup> Stanley E. Porter, “Mark 1:4, Baptism and Translation,” *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honor of R.E.O. White*, JSNT Supplement Series 171, eds Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 81–98 (98).

believed that his baptism would confer some sort of spiritual blessing. And they probably would not have thought so unless John himself encouraged the belief. Whatever one thinks of the grammar of Mark 1:4, moreover, it has John proclaiming *baptism*, not in the first instance repentance. Repentance, then, is *part* of the baptismal gestalt but not its leading edge.<sup>59</sup>

Daniel Wallace puzzled over the phrase before Porter and Marcus:

There are various possible interpretations of this phrase: “baptism that is based on repentance” (causal), “baptism that points toward/produces repentance” (purpose or production), “baptism that symbolizes repentance.” In light of such ambiguity, it may well be best to be noncommittal: “baptism that is somehow related to repentance.”<sup>60</sup>

Doubts appear to arise because Porter, Marcus and Wallace evidently think *βάπτισμα* refers to a water immersion that they assume Yoḥanan performed. Marcus, for example, says the most distinctive aspect of Yoḥanan’s ministry was his “practice of immersing in water those who came to identify with his movement.”<sup>61</sup> But *βάπτισμα* in Mark 1:4 may not refer directly to Yoḥanan’s water rite, much less to immersion.

The first native Greek speakers who heard Mark’s Gospel read publicly, including Jews, likely were familiar with extended senses of *βαπτίζειν* such as in Plato, the Greek Bible, Philo of Alexandria (compare also Josephus) and Hellenistic culture in general, and probably were familiar with nouns like *βαπτιστής* and *βαπτισμός*. However, the neologism *βάπτισμα* likely was unfamiliar for most. Steve Mason describes the function of the word-form *βάπτισμα* ending with *μα* as a “neuter result noun” unlike *βαπτισμός* ending with *μός* that was an “action-noun.”<sup>62</sup> So, Greek audiences likely weighed

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<sup>59</sup> Joel Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 63–5.

<sup>60</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 80.

<sup>61</sup> Marcus, *John the Baptist*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Compare Mason’s analysis of Josephus’s description of Yoḥanan, speaking of *ὁ βαπτιστής*: “The action-noun *βαπτισμός* has an obvious meaning. This and the agent-noun *βαπτιστής* both derive from the cognate verb *βαπτίζω*. That is, *βαπτίζω* | *βαπτισμός* | *βαπτιστής* have the same relationship as *ὕβριζω* | *ὕβρις* | *ὕβριστής*: verb, action-noun, and agent-noun.” Then, in contrast to Josephus, Mason writes, “when Christians referred to John’s or other immersion, they showed a decided preference for the neuter result-noun *τὸ βάπτισμα*, not the action-noun *βαπτισμός*. NT texts mostly use *βάπτισμα* (19 times), and the apostolic fathers (6), Greek apologists (19 times), and Eusebius (42 times) have it exclusively—Eusebius, tellingly, except in the two places where he quotes Josephus on John.” See Mason’s excellent Enoch Seminar paper: “John the Drencher (aka Baptist), a Judaeon *Vir Bonus* in Josephus, AJ 18:116–119,” Steve Mason, University of Groningen, Enoch Seminar, 11–14 January 2021. Also compare A.T. Robertson,

βάπτισμα in terms of *result* or *effect*, not an action. After a mystifying hour-and-a-half Mark's rushed story is over. The audience has heard this new word βάπτισμα four times, two times directly related to the activity of Yoḥanan (Mark 1:4; 11:30). However, the other two usages in Mark 10:38–39 relate to a *severe challenge* of drinking a cup and of somehow being baptized *injuriously*. Yeshua's original Semitic figure behind the Greek seems to have been “drinking a cup and becoming drunken” to tell of impending disaster (compare Ezek 23:33, Rev 14:10a). At the very least, βάπτισμα in Mark 10:38–39 bears a strong negative sense, and Luke also uses βάπτισμα to describe the same detrimental *crisis-ordeal* Yeshua would suffer (Luke 12:50).

Two questionable assumptions thus confuse the elucidation of the βάπτισμα μετανοίας: a) that βάπτισμα = immersion, and b) that Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 speak of the Yoḥanan's water rite.

Arguably, Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 instead intend a *crisis-ordeal* of profound heart-wrenching repentance that leads to actual forgiveness of sins, what Joel Marcus suggested as “a baptism *consisting* of repentance (genitive of content).” In other words, Yoḥanan refused perfunctory mouthing of a laundry-list of transgressions.<sup>63</sup> He would not allow hearts to remain distant from the Almighty, as warned centuries earlier in Isa 29:13. Yoḥanan demanded that Jews hearing his strident message face a personal *crisis-ordeal*, recognizing with heart-crushing apprehension how unworthy they are of the imminent kingdom: cut in heart to the quick, turning to the Almighty in complete broken repentance, declaring guilt, and then receiving Yoḥanan's purifying washing, humbly recognizing sins forgiven and fitness for the kingdom. All of these details are packed into what Mark later described in Greek as a βάπτισμα of repentance.

Nevertheless, Yoḥanan's purification washing is also included within Mark's *crisis-ordeal*, ensuring that true broken repentance is followed with a purification washing. In Mark 1:4, βάπτισμα seems to function like a large, outer “Russian doll” of *crisis-ordeal* that includes hidden within a smaller doll, the unspoken idea of Yoḥanan's water rite for *purification*.<sup>64</sup> This nuance also seems to inform Luke's use of βάπτισμα μετανοίας in Acts 13:24 and Acts 19:4.

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*Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, 1919), 149–154.

<sup>63</sup> Confession of guilt is prescribed in the Torah, as seen in Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40–42; Num 5:7; compare Ezra 10:1; Josh 7:19; Dan 9:4–15. Yoḥanan strove to ensure no one would “honor the Almighty with their lips, but their hearts still remain far from him” as warned in Isaiah, and repeated by Yeshua in Mark 7:6–7.

<sup>64</sup> Mark 1:4's elusive nuance might be the reason Matthew did not copy it in his gospel.

#### 14. Yoḥanan's water-Spirit parallelism with a sense other than immerse

Yoḥanan contrasted his activity with water against the Coming One with the Holy Spirit:

ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα ὑμᾶς ὕδατι, αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.  
(ESV) (Mark 1:8, compare Matt 3:11; John 1:33; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

Is βαπτίζειν to be understood as immerse with the dative taken as locative?<sup>65</sup>

I have immersed you in water, but he will immerse you in the Ruach HaKodesh.  
(CJB)

Or is βαπτίζειν to be understood as purify with the dative taken as instrumental?<sup>66</sup>

I purified you by means of water, but he will purify you by means of the Holy Spirit.

Evidence to decide the question is not in the verse itself. Nevertheless, in purity-labile Jewish culture, Yoḥanan's Jewish listeners certainly knew water purifies, and though any rite's mechanical mode had a degree of importance, the result of purification was decisive. The Coming One's activity with the Holy Spirit must bring to mind life-changing power that would radically transform Israel (compare Num 11:29; Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10; Ezek 36:27; 39:29). Surely no one was concerned with mere *inert engulfment*. Beasley-Murray, a European Baptist,<sup>67</sup> sees emphasis on instrumental effect, not solely the locative sphere:

Is it feasible that John might have contrasted his baptism with water as one mode of cleansing and renewal with the Messiah's baptism with Spirit and fire as a more powerful means of cleansing and renewal? Here it is necessary to observe the strict parallelism of language used by the evangelists in contrasting the two baptisms; in Mark, "I baptize you with water (ὕδατι), but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (πνεύματι ἁγίῳ)"; in Matthew and Luke, "I baptize you with water (ἐν ὕδατι) ... he will baptize with (ἐν) Holy Spirit and fire" ... the ἐν as well as the

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<sup>65</sup> Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament, ed. Martin Culy (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), Kindle edition, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Most modern English Bibles render Mark 1:8 instrumentally as baptize *with water* ... baptize *with* the Holy Spirit. NIV, NLT, ESV, NRSV, REB, KJV, NKJV, NASB, HCSB, CEV, Douay-Rheims, English Revised Ver., ISV, NET Bible, Weymouth NT, and Young's Literal.

<sup>67</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1972, reprint 1997), v–vi.

simple dative signify in each case the instrument or means employed in the baptism. The Spirit is an agency comparable with water and fire.<sup>68</sup>

Beyond that, in the synoptics the accusative ὑμᾶς receives the effect of βαπτίζειν by means of ὕδατι and πνεύματι ἁγίῳ and πυρί.

ἐγὼ μὲν ὕδατι βαπτίζω ὑμᾶς ... αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Luke 3:16)

Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν ... αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Matt 3:11)

Yet in the Fourth Gospel, ὑμᾶς does not appear. Instead, βαπτίζειν occurs only with ἐν and the dative ὕδατι and the dative πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι. (John 1:26)

ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν ὕδατι βαπτίζων. (John 1:31)

ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὕδατι ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ' ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ' αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. (John 1:33)

While it could be possible to understand βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι as locative, “immersing into water,” it is highly problematic to continue the parallelism and imagine Yeshua “immersing [people] into the Holy Spirit” as though into a static pool. In any case, as mentioned above, in Acts 2:33 Peter says Yeshua ἐκχέω (ἐξέχεεν) “pours out” the Holy Spirit, as in the citation of Joel. So, the NT evidence for βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ points away from locative immersing toward an instrumental transformative washing of regeneration *by means of* the Holy Spirit, as in Titus 3:5–6.

When considering βαπτίζειν in the NT, one must remember that in the Fourth Gospel Peter indeed “plunges” himself into the sea, but by βάλλω, not by βαπτίζειν.

καὶ ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν (John 21:7)

Likewise, the disabled man’s plea is not framed with βαπτίζειν but again with βάλλω:

κύριε, ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω ἵνα ὅταν ταραχθῇ τὸ ὕδωρ βάλλῃ με εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν· (John 5:7)

These two episodes would have been perfect places to use βαπτίζειν if it meant, “to plunge, to dip, or to immerse.” If the author understood βαπτίζειν as *to immerse*, then one might have expected phrasing in chapter 1 such as: ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, and οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, but these constructions do not occur.

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<sup>68</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 37–38.

Luke uses εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, but in direct association with κατέβησαν, not with the usage of βαπτίζειν that also occurs in the verse.

καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, ὃ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος, καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν. (Acts 8:38)

Both Philip and the Ethiopian go down εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, but afterward only the Ethiopian is baptized, thus making it problematic to prove immersion by εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, and instead making it more sensible to see βαπτίζειν as causing a transforming effect, such as *purifying* the Ethiopian.

Meanwhile, the phrasing, εἰς τὸ πῦρ also occurs in the gospels, however, again with βάλλω, not βαπτίζειν, as in Yeshua's teaching:

καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν (John 15:6)

Matthew and Luke portray Yohanan warning crowds of being,

ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται (Matt 3:10; Luke 3:9)

Mark and Matthew use similar phraseology about a demonized child cast into fire and water:

καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτόν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν (Mark 9:22)

εἰς τὸ πῦρ ... εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ (Matt 17:15)

Mark and Luke have Yeshua describe the wicked cast into the sea for permanent immersion.

βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν (Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2)

The synoptic narrative of the legion of demons that entered a herd of swine is similar:

καὶ ὤρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, ὡς δισχίλιοι, καὶ ἐπνίγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. (Mark 5:13; Matt 8:31; Luke 8:33)

The herd rushes εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, or in Luke, εἰς τὴν λίμνην. It is also worth noting that βαπτίζειν is not found in any synoptic account of this story, even though, for example, Diodorus Siculus described animals cut off by the flooding Nile and perishing, being baptized, βαπτίζόμενα.<sup>69</sup> NT authors never use βαπτίζειν either for drowning, or for sinking ships (compare Luke 5:7; 8:23–24; 8:33; 17:2; Acts 27:18–20; Matt 14:30). This is in contrast to Josephus's usages several times (*J.W.* 2:556; 3:368, 423, 525, 527; *Ant.* 9:212; *Life* 15). Quite obviously then, different authors might use certain extended senses of βαπτίζειν that appealed to them, but then ignore other senses.

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<sup>69</sup> Diodorus Siculus (c.90–30 BCE), *Historical Library*, book 1.36.9.

If immersing people into water had been the crucial be-all and end-all of Yoḥanan's activity, then there is reason to wonder why no NT writer used εἰς ὕδατα to stress this form. Likewise, if Yoḥanan expected Yeshua to immerse people in the Holy Spirit, then there is reason to wonder why εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα was not used.

Nevertheless, there is one verse in Mark that, at a glance, might seem to validate the concept of immersion into the Jordan. The trouble is the Matthean parallel counters the idea. Mark wrote:

ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου.  
(Mark 1:9)

The Matthean parallel reads:

Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. (Matt 3:13)

Matthew reworked the Markan εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην using ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην to say Yeshua was “in the vicinity of the Jordan.” Matthew's rendering thus counters the idea that Mark intended to say that Yoḥanan immersed Yeshua into the Jordan. Beyond that, Mark's actual intent with εἰς in 1:9 is clarified by other verses:

ἦλθεν διὰ Σιδῶνος εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Mark 7:31)

Mark says Yeshua and his disciples went “to” the sea, not “into” it. Here again the Matthean parallel rewords the verse:

παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Matt 15:29)

Also compare Mark's usage in the Olivette Discourse:

Καὶ καθήμενος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν (Mark 13:3)

The Matthean parallel:

ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν Ἐλαιῶν (Matt 24:3)

In this light, it is unlikely that Mark 1:9 intends that Yoḥanan immersed Yeshua in the Jordan, rather than of being purified at the Jordan.<sup>70</sup>

Regarding Yoḥanan's activity and the preposition ὑπὸ, Robert Webb notes:

An interesting feature of the form of John's baptism is that it is described as being performed “by John” (ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, Mark 1:5; cf. v. 9), and John himself states, “I baptize ...” (Matt 3:11 = Luke 3:16; Mark 1:8). All evidence in Second-Temple

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<sup>70</sup> Compare the LXX, 1 Kgs 2:8 (Shimei met David to curse him “εἰς the Jordan”) καὶ αὐτὸς κατέβη εἰς ἀπαντὴν μου εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ ὤμοσα αὐτῷ ἐν κυρίῳ; 2 Kgs 6:4 (lumbermen cut down wood from the banks) καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ ἔτεμνον τὰ ξύλα.

Judaism points to Jewish ritual bathing practices being self-administered. John's participation in the act of baptizing, therefore, is probably John's innovation and may have contributed to his nickname, *the baptizer*.<sup>71</sup>

In 1Cor 1, Paul emphasizes that he himself actively baptized: ἐβάπτισα ... Κρίσπον καὶ Γάϊον (v. 14), and ἐβάπτισα ... τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον ... οὐκ οἶδα εἴ τινα ἄλλον ἐβάπτισα (v. 16). Active administration of the water rite by Yoḥanan and Paul is dissimilar to mishnaic self-immersion, so there is no reason to consider Yoḥanan's rite to be derived from it. Webb agrees, but does not know how Yoḥanan actually washed the repentant:

The most distinctive feature of John's baptism is that he administered it to the person being baptized rather than the immersion being self-administered. The method by which he administered the baptism is unknown.<sup>72</sup>

If Yoḥanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25, then the method was by *splashing pure water*.

### 15. Yoḥanan Beyond the Jordan

The Fourth Gospel locates Yoḥanan as active "beyond the Jordan" at Bethany,

These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων  
(John 1:28)

Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness.

ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας (John 3:26)

[Yeshua] went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained.

Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πάλιν πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου εἰς τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἦν Ἰωάννης τὸ πρῶτον βαπτίζων καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐκεῖ (John 10:40)

According to John 10:40, Yoḥanan was first baptizing somewhere across the Jordan, but not at the Jordan itself, and this verse indeed clearly defines our perception of John 1:28 and John 3:26.

We are also told that Yoḥanan performed his washing elsewhere:

John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim.

Ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλείμ (John 3:23).

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<sup>71</sup> Robert L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research Studies* 10.2 (2000, revised 2005), 280.

<sup>72</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 214.



These verses provide greater detail than the synoptics as to where Yoḥanan was active. The synoptics use the Jordan river as a general landmark to provide basic orientation for audiences unfamiliar with precise topology.<sup>73</sup> The term “beyond the Jordan” still takes the Jordan river as a major reference point, specifying the location of Yoḥanan’s activity in relation to the Jordan. The synoptics, therefore, ought not be pressed to mean Yoḥanan was necessarily at or in the Jordan river’s channel, but rather that he was in its general vicinity.

The location of Bethany beyond the Jordan (as distinct from Bethany near Jerusalem, John 11:18) has eluded researchers. Leon Morris notes that in the third century, even though Origen knew that nearly all Greek manuscripts had Βηθανία in John 1:28, Origen was unable to locate a town on the other side of the Jordan with that name when he visited the land.<sup>74</sup> This led to Origen adopting Bethabarah instead of Bethany. But Bruce Metzger remarks that if Bethabarah actually had been original, there would be no adequate reason to change Greek texts to Βηθανία since it appears to be the more difficult reading.<sup>75</sup> A change in the opposite direction is more comprehensible.

Regardless, the first century site called Βηθανία might not have been an established village, per se, but a location with a colloquial name because of its importance to the region. It is possible that Βηθανία reflects the theophoric Hebrew name, בית עין-יה, or *Beit Ayn-Yah*, Place of the Spring of Yah, which would evoke the idea of a generous, abundantly flowing spring suitable for drinking and purification. In modern Jordan, Wadi Al-Kharrar has in recent times been recognized as the location of Βηθανία, whose headwaters are an oasis with flowing springs and it is located about two kilometers from the Jordan river.<sup>76</sup>

Whether or not Wadi Al-Kharrar is the location of Bethany beyond the Jordan, there is reason to wonder why Yoḥanan performed his activity at any place other than the Jordan river, if that is where he actually performed his washing. The answer may be

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<sup>73</sup> Compare Bruce Chilton, “John the Baptist: His Immersion and his Death,” *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, eds S. Porter and A. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>74</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Revised*, NICNT, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), Kindle Locations 3452-3453 (Kindle Edition); See also, J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* NICNT, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle Locations 2452-2459 (Kindle Edition).

<sup>75</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2000), 171.

<sup>76</sup> [ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1446> ]; [ [www.baptismsite.com/archeological-findings](http://www.baptismsite.com/archeological-findings) ]; [ [www.seetheholyland.net/tag/wadi-al-kharrar](http://www.seetheholyland.net/tag/wadi-al-kharrar) ]

that Yoḥanan never used water from the actual channel of the Jordan river, but instead used any flowing spring water in the Jordan valley draining into the Jordan.

The guide for pure water for Israel is given in Leviticus 11:36, "However, a spring or cistern in which water is collected shall be pure."<sup>77</sup> This verse was also taken as the basis for the development of the purpose-built mikveh for purification. The two sources of water in Lev 11:36 are a spring, or a cistern, and these two demonstrate the different ways water would maintain purifying power. The sages recognized that spring water could purify even when flowing along. However, a cistern collecting rain water could provide purification only if the water was standing. The Mishnah reinforces the idea that one may immerse in spring water that is flowing (or creeping along), or one may immerse in standing rain water that has collected in a mikveh pit. On the other hand, flowing rain water does not meet the criteria for Jewish purification.

The question regarding Yoḥanan then revolves around how he and the Jews of his generation viewed the quality of the water of the Jordan river flowing in the channel south of the Kinneret, or Sea of Galilee. The Mishnah regards the Jordan river north of the Kinneret, from the springs of the Banias, as the highest grade of water, *living waters*, (מים חיים, *mayim ḥaim*) and suitable for use in preparing the ashes of the red heifer in accord with Numbers 19:17. Even though it flows, one could immerse in it. However, the Jordan river south of the Kinneret was not considered *living waters*, but mixed waters, and was not suitable for preparing the ashes of the red heifer. The Kinneret can collect much rain water during the winter, which would be suitable for purification while standing, but evidently not while flowing. However, we read in m. *Parah* 8:8 that about a century after the days of Yoḥanan the sages ruled:

All seas are equivalent to a ritual bath (mikveh), for it is said, "And the gathering (*ulemikveh*) of the waters He called the seas" (Genesis 1:10), the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Judah says: only the Great Sea is equivalent to a ritual bath, for it says "seas" only because there are in it many kinds of seas. Rabbi Yose says: all seas afford cleanness when running, and yet they are unfit for zavim and metzoraim and for the preparation of the hatat waters.<sup>78</sup>

Rabbi Yose ruled that a sea, such as the Kinneret, provides purification even when flowing, like the Jordan river south of Kinneret. The problem is that Rabbi Yose's ruling was about a century *after* Yoḥanan, so there can be no certainty that Yoḥanan treated the Jordan river south of the Kinneret as a source of water suitable for purification, whether by immersion, or whether by pouring nine kav, or whether by splashing.

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<sup>77</sup> [ <https://www.sefaria.org.il/Leviticus.11.36?lang=bi&aliyot=0> ]

<sup>78</sup> [ [https://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah\\_Parah.8.8](https://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah_Parah.8.8) ]

Ezekiel 36:25 specifies that pure water would be splashed on Israel, and this would be made sure if spring water was used. In the Fourth Gospel we are told that one of the places where Yoḥanan performed his washing was Aenon, which is described as: “Aenon, ‘place of springs,’ is of uncertain site (suggestions are northeast of the Dead Sea; near Sychem in Samaria; in the Jordan valley of Samaria; south of Scythopolis).”<sup>79</sup>

Another striking point of the Fourth Gospel is that twice Yeshua promises his hearers that they would receive “living water” from him (John 4:10; 7:38), which is a wonderful metaphorical description of the Holy Spirit. In Jewish life, living water was the highest grade of water for purification, and was considered by the sages as cool, sweet spring water that flows continually, even in the midst of summer.

At the very least, this evidence is supportive of the proposition that Yoḥanan used spring water to splash on the repentant to purify them, but that he very likely did not immerse them in the channel of the flowing Jordan river.

#### **16. Luke 20:4 and Acts 2:38: Yoḥanan’s washing in the name of Messiah who endorsed it**

Many scholars, including F.F. Bruce, Howard Marshall, Richard N. Longenecker and Dan Wallace hold that Luke and Acts were composed as two parts of a single Lukan work that originally circulated together.<sup>80</sup>

Yet early in sub-Apostolic days, Luke’s Gospel was fixed with the other three Gospels, so that Acts was essentially left to go solo. Tatian’s second century *Diatesseron* was good in one sense, emphasizing the four recognized Gospels out of all the pseudo writings that were popping up. Regrettably, once the Four Gospels were grouped, Luke lost place as the *direct underpinning* for reading Acts.<sup>81</sup> Modern Bibles keep Luke and Acts separated—so helping to obscure baptism for modern Christian Civilization.

The fact is, Luke–Acts speaks multiple times of Yoḥanan and his national, eschatological purification for Israel (Luke 3:1–17, 21–22; 7:27–30; 9:19; **20:4, 6**; Acts 1:5; **1:22**; 10:37; 11:16; **13:24–25**; 18:25; 19:3–4). Thus, Yoḥanan’s purification washing was crucial for Israel, but it heralded the even greater purification for Israel, and all the

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<sup>79</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Volume 36, Word Biblical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1987), p. 52. Kindle Edition.

<sup>80</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, revised, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, general ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 3; I. Howard Marshall, *Acts, TNTC*, (Nottingham: IVP, 1980), location 193 of 7577; Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, revised ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 900; Dan Wallace, “Formatting the Word of God with Dan Wallace” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tS793siOulw> from timestamp 7.41 to 8.57.

<sup>81</sup> Compare Michael Bird’s article, *The Unity of Luke-Acts in Recent Discussion*, JSNT 29.4 (2007), 425–447, for a review of differing levels of “unity” proposed by various scholars.

Nations, by Messiah Yeshua, purifying them all by pouring out the Holy Spirit (compare Acts 2:33 and Titus 3:4-7).

Mark 16:16 in the longer ending is most likely not canonical; Matt 28:19 is most likely metaphorical (the *Didache* notwithstanding); and Luke–Acts has no command from the resurrected Yeshua for a new “Christian water baptism for the Christian Church.” So, arguably, there never was a “Christian” water rite commanded by Christ for the later, gentile-led “Christian Church.”

Anyway, such terminology as “Christian baptism” is impedingly *anachronistic* since the term “Christian” was not even coined till around ten years after the resurrection (Acts 11:26), and that was in Antioch, not Jerusalem, and evidently by those outside that local *ekklesia*, not by disciples of Yeshua.

Many in Christian Civilization opine that the Christian Church was born on Pentecost, and that the Christian Apostle Peter baptized those first Christians with the holy Christian Baptism commanded by Yeshua in Matt 28:19. But in Acts 2 Peter actually addressed: “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (vs 5), “Men of Judea” (vs 14), “Men of Israel” (vs 22), “all the house of Israel” (vs 36).

Most in Christian Civilization would be surprised, if not shocked to realize that Paul never wrote the term “Christian Church” in any epistle. On the contrary, he did write in Romans 16:4 of “the churches of the Gentiles,” which, in light of Peter’s Acts 2 addressees ought to point Christian Civilization in the proper direction of one Spiritual Body composed of many different parts, *whether Jews, whether Greeks* (1Cor 12:13).

Still, in Luke, the last usage of any cognate of βαπτίζειν occurs in Luke 20:4, by Yeshua, “Was Yoḥanan’s βάπτισμα from heaven or from men?” In Acts, the first usage of βαπτίζειν occurs in Act 1:4–5, again by Yeshua, “Yoḥanan baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

One has to over-infer Yeshua’s statement in Luke 24:47 to conclude that he commanded universal water baptism: “repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Why wouldn’t Yeshua just make baptism clear? Why wouldn’t Luke’s narrative just spell baptism out? And if water baptism was intended, then surely this is Yoḥanan’s βάπτισμα since Luke called it a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). It seems that Yeshua (and then Luke) purposely avoided mention of water baptism. Regardless, all must repent. Thankfully, in modern times many humble people in many denominations have repented and have turned from sins with as much zeal as they can, and with as much understanding as possible.

Since there is no command from Yeshua for a new “Christian” water rite in Luke–Acts, then one ought to consider Yeshua’s statement in Luke 20:4 as the likely source for the Apostolic water rite in Acts. Yeshua had ridden the donkey into Jerusalem, declaring his kingship over Israel. In the Temple he affirmed Yoḥanan’s washing as having the same authority behind it as the authority behind his Messianic claims. So, it is wholly understandable that on Pentecost the Apostles would proclaim Yoḥanan’s divinely commanded washing for Israel *in the name of Yeshua*, the death-conquering Messiah *who’d publicly endorsed it* only eight weeks earlier (Acts 2:38).<sup>82</sup>

Even so, Yoḥanan himself said that his washing prophetically prefigured the Coming One’s greater purification with the Holy Spirit.

#### **17. Acts 1:5 and 11:16: Keys to understand baptism in Acts**

Luke portrays Yeshua in Acts 1 repeating the contrast found a total of six times in the Gospels and Acts: John baptized with water, but the Coming One baptizes with the Holy Spirit, (Matt 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, Acts 11:16). The vast majority of English translations have these verses framed instrumentally, baptized “with” water or Holy Spirit, but not as locative, baptized “in” water or Holy Spirit. That would imply that readers are to understand a transformative *effect* is conferred by being baptized: a physical purification with water, or a spiritually regenerative, true purifying transformation with the Holy Spirit. The contrast between the two elements means that being baptized with the Holy Spirit far surpasses being baptized with water, and that there is no mixing or confusion between the two.

#### **18. A personal anecdote about being baptized with the Holy Spirit**

As I mentioned above, in 1977 I was confronted with being water baptized or going to hell, according to the Church of Christ. I began to study the issue as best I could, buying many reference books, commentaries, dictionaries of biblical languages and lexicons. After several more months, in 1978 I began to sense a strange dryness, an internal thirst. One afternoon while off-duty, I went to a Christian book store on the FW side of DFW and the kind lady proprietor asked if I was looking for something in particular. Out of character for me, I simply told her I was feeling thirsty lately. She turned and pulled a slim book from off a shelf and suggested it to me, *Holy Spirit Baptism*. I had no idea what that meant, but I flipped through the book and saw that it contained a good number of Scripture references, so I decided to buy it. I thanked the lady and left.

Just before going to sleep that evening, I again leafed through that book and looked up the Scripture verses. I was astonished. I read about the Gift of the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>82</sup> This view is under an anathema of the Council of Trent.

promised by the Father, that would be like “being clothed with Power from on High.” Wow. I knew I’d never had such an experience.

In my humble simplicity I decided right then and there to ask Yeshua for this Gift, alone in my off-base apartment. I got dressed, sat on the edge of my bed, lifted my eyes heavenward and asked. I eagerly awaited, one, two, and then I noticed a gentle sensation that quickly grew into a powerful, torrential, surging sensation of holy *Living Love*—in me, on me, and through-and-through me. My mouth was graciously but firmly impelled to praise the Almighty, rapidly gushing-forth syllables with complete fluency, though in a language I did not know. The most glorious aspect of this experience was the magnificent awareness of the holy presence of Almighty YHVH right there with me, in me. It was as though we both joyously looked at each other with direct-eye contact, rejoicing with each other at our great mutual joy of this glorious experience. This lofty experience lasted in power for half-an-hour and then began to subside, but without losing the sense of the nearness of the Almighty. I felt wonderfully transformed, and for about a week it seemed as though I was walking about a foot off the ground. I had a new sense of spiritual discernment about people and surroundings, and my understanding of the Bible was enhanced to a new level of spiritual awareness that I’d not been able to comprehend before.

Let me also note that perhaps two years later, still a radar technician in the USMC, I got shocked by a freshly-charged 28,000-volt capacitor, and that shock literally made me jump a little there in the back seat of the jet. My experience of being baptized with the surging Holy Spirit was *just as palpable*, though of course of a vastly different character, and it lasted half-an-hour. It was not the split-second harsh bite of getting shocked. My experience definitely informed my search for understanding about baptism in the New Testament.

One final remark under this personal anecdote. As I got close to finishing my enlistment in the USMC, I knew I’d have G.I. Bill benefits from Uncle Sam for higher educational opportunities. Since coming to trust Yeshua, I had renewed fervor to return to university to finish an engineering degree, to learn biblical languages and to take on other biblical studies. One day off-duty, driving down the street, I prayed about a particular nearby university. I received a clear, compelling answer from Yeshua, “You are not going to get a degree.” His answer was accompanied by further elucidation. Yeshua did not want me to depend on an advanced degree from the academic world that I might be tempted to lean on. I grasped Yeshua’s point, but I definitely felt a bit helpless. I understood I could not remain biblically uninformed. So, I’d have to learn by seeking God’s guidance, not a scholastic advisor. Also, little did I know . . . in a few years personal computing would be a thing, and vast and wide-ranging treasures of biblical information would eventually become available on software, and later online.

### 19. Yeshua's command in Acts 1:5

Yeshua's contrast in Acts 1:5 is between elements, water or Holy Spirit. It is not between Yoḥanan's water baptism and some inexplicit "Christian water baptism" (of water-conveying-Spirit *ex opere operato* as the Roman Church argues). Being baptized with the Holy Spirit, as promised by Joel, was of crucial importance for the first generation of Yeshua's followers. There were no cessationist Apostles in the first generation of Yeshua's *Kehilah* – Assembly. At the same time, neither Yoḥanan nor Yeshua diminished or annulled the national importance of Yoḥanan's water washing for Israel, including for Jews, Samaritans and an evidently Jewish Ethiopian official on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, confusing episodes in Acts, Samaritans (Acts 8), Apollos (Acts 18) and the Ephesians (who are almost certainly disciples of Yeshua via Apollos, not Yoḥanan) (Acts 19) ought to be read in light of Yeshua's contrast in Acts 1:5.

Then too, Yeshua's statement in Acts 1:5 leans heavily against the idea that he had previously commanded a new *water* rite in Matt 28:19. If Yeshua had commanded a new water washing, then a more likely saying in Acts 1 would have been: You will baptize with water, and I will baptize with the Holy Spirit. But there's no hint of such a saying.

In any case, we note that in all six repetitions of the contrast between water and Holy Spirit, the term "Holy Spirit" is used, not just "Spirit." For Jews in the purity-labile Jewish culture and living in the land of Israel in Second Temple days, maintaining one's state of being "holy" was moment-by-moment work in all aspects of personal, household, communal and Temple life. So, for Jews to be told, first by Yoḥanan and then by Yeshua, that they would be "baptized"—permanently and actually purified—with the Holy Spirit, that was nothing short of astonishing. Yet, they did *not* fully understand the magnitude of this contrast between water and Holy Spirit until after the Cornelius episode.

The problem for modern readers is the obstructive assumption that Acts is an unsophisticated, flat narration of history—like sequential steps for recipes in a cookbook. Instead, because many of the people Luke wrote about in Acts were still living, Luke writes with careful nuance to avoid any affront. Plus, according to his

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<sup>83</sup> It is hard to imagine a high-ranking treasury official being permitted by his government to cross an international border with the Roman Empire and to travel for some 1,000 miles (perhaps 1,500?) to visit Jerusalem without compelling circumstances, as in his being a Jew and his wish to worship in the Temple of his God. On the other hand, Joseph, Moses, Daniel and his companions, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Mordechai were Israelites in high station in foreign governments. Moreover, the Ethiopian's reading of Isaiah suggests that he was already familiar with Moses and Israel's history, and so could grasp the general idea of Isaiah being an Israelite prophet, but not know precisely the meaning of his prophecies.

Gospel's introduction, Luke states that he's writing to Theophilus "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:4). Luke assumed his first century readers already had been taught things that later readers like us may not know.

So, although Yoḥanan announced this contrast between water and Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16), and although Yeshua established it (Acts 1:5), it seems clear in Acts that this contrast was not well-comprehended by the first disciples for some ten years, until the astonishing events in Cornelius's house. Then Peter came to remember Yeshua's word, and then the sharp contrast between being *purified with water* and being *permanently purified with Holy Spirit* finally became obvious to him (Acts 11:16).

## 20. Peter's remembrance of Yeshua's word in Acts 11:16

To be clear, in Cornelius's house Peter was boldly in character and reacting according to his lifelong ingrained Jewish fear of defilement. He mistakenly ordered the Gentiles water baptized—*purified*, just like all Jews and Samaritans were baptized—*purified* with Yoḥanan's eschatological purification. Peter regrettably gave this command after the Gentiles had already been permanently purified with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Christian Civilization has misread Luke's subtle nuance of Peter's portentous misunderstanding in Acts 10:47–48, and has erroneously inserted a later "Christian Baptism" invention into this Lukan revelation for defilement-conscious Jewish disciples.

Yet, Gagnon points out the typical flawed translation of Peter's command, and the actual intended meaning, that is in accord with the SBLGNT or NA28 critical texts.

Acts 10:48 should be translated as "he ordered them *in (en)* the name of Jesus Christ to be baptized" rather than "he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (cf. 16:18). Here the phrase functions as an authorization formula but for the verb "ordered" rather than the verb "be baptized."<sup>84</sup>

I agree, "And he commanded them in the name of Messiah Yeshua to be baptized—*purified*." Later copyists transposed the position of βαπτισθῆναι forward, so that the verse in the TR and Majority Text appears as a command for "Christian baptism."

Still, Peter, living in purity-labile Jewish culture with the Second Temple standing, can be forgiven because he quickly realized his mistake. The author Luke is not to blame for any confusion because his original, continuing narrative was not split by a "Chapter 11" division. In our days, with the recovery of so much information, together with freedom to challenge long-standing flawed doctrines of Christian Civilization, we have no excuse for not recovering what Luke originally intended here.

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<sup>84</sup> Gagnon, "baptism" 198.



The death-conquering Yeshua's repetition of the contrast between water and Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5, and its reiteration by our leading Apostle, Peter, in Acts 11:16, is arguably Luke's foundational point of reference for understanding baptism in Acts. Additionally, Lukan use of βαπτίζειν in Acts not only conveys the idea of purification, but even the more comprehensive sense of transformative "new birth" regeneration by the Holy Spirit, vitally purifying humanity before the Almighty (Acts 15:9).

Christian Civilization reads βαπτίζειν in Acts to refer to "Christian baptism." Instead, βαπτίζειν refers variously to either Yoḥanan's washing for Israel, endorsed by Yeshua, that instrumentally purifies with water, or it refers to the spiritual washing of regeneration for all—the New Covenant out-pouring of the Holy Spirit by Yeshua that instrumentally purifies repentant humans, permanently removing their "heart of stone."

### **21. Yeshua was never "baptized 'in' the Holy Spirit"**

If βαπτίζειν and cognates had been used in the NT with the sense of immerse and immersion, then one could posit that Yeshua himself was baptized in the Spirit at the Jordan river. However, there's no passage in the NT that says that Yeshua was baptized in, with, or by the Holy Spirit. There's no verse that supports James Dunn's assertion that "we may legitimately speak of the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at Jordan as a baptism in the Spirit."<sup>85</sup> Luke was mindful of both Yeshua and βαπτίζειν as he wrote Luke 3:21–22, Luke 11:38, Luke 12:50, Luke 20:4 and Acts 1:4–5. Yet Luke never wrote that Yeshua was baptized in the Holy Spirit, with the Holy Spirit or by the Holy Spirit.

Luke's use of βαπτίζειν in the context of the Holy Spirit was arguably for a permanent transformative purification. As Son of Man, Yeshua the man would be susceptible to physical defilements requiring water washings. Yet, Yeshua the virgin-born, holy Son of the Most High (Luke 1:35) was never in need of the transformative inner purification that all of natural-born humanity needs. Yeshua was never described as "*baptized* 'with' the Holy Spirit" because he always was and remains eternally pure. And writers of the NT did not use βαπτίζειν for the mechanical action of *immersing*, but rather most often for instrumental transformation, *purification*. So, there are very good reasons as to why there is no verse that says Yeshua was "baptized in the Holy Spirit."

### **22. Acts 8:16: first lacking, then receiving the Holy Spirit**

The Samaritans first lack the Holy Spirit and then with special remedy they receive the Holy Spirit, an episode likewise repeated in Acts 19 by the Ephesians. There are reasons

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<sup>85</sup> Dunn, *Baptism*, 24; see also, H. Ben Keshet, "Baptized with the Holy Spirit: Acts 1:5 as the Guiding Paradigm for Baptism in Acts," *JPT* 30 (2021), 229.

to believe more is intended in Acts 8:16 than *water* baptism, though it is usually translated as in the following:

For he had not yet fallen on any of them,  
but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The Greek reads:

οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν ἐπ' οὐδενὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιπεπτωκός,  
μόνον δὲ βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπάρχον εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.

It is universally thought that Luke writes about water. But is he? The underlined periphrasis above seems to bear specific, nuanced meaning. The Blass Debrunner Funk (BDF) grammar notes that both Γίνεσθαι and Ὑπάρχειν can have an effect in a periphrasis:

**354. Γίνεσθαι (in various tenses) with a present or perfect participle is sometimes also used in an analogous way to denote the beginning of a state or condition:** 2 C 6:14 μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις ('do not lend yourselves to . . .'), cf. §98. Further, e.g. C 1:18, H 5:12, Rev 3:2, 16:10, Mk 9:3 (7). Ὑπάρχειν only with the perfect participle; s. §414(1). Arnim 92; Regard 217ff. Did 3.8 s. §353(7).—LXX Is 30:12 πεπορθῶς ἐγένου. (Underlining added.)<sup>86</sup>

In Acts 8:16b, *βεβαπτισμένοι* is a perfect passive participle. Arguably, then, Luke is writing in nuanced Greek, saying that the Samaritans were only “*beginning to be baptized* into the name of the Lord Jesus” and would be fully incorporated “εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ” upon receiving the Holy Spirit. This subtle nuance is effectively plastered-over by Christian Civilization’s insistence on reading Acts with the anachronistic dictum, “Christian water baptism for the Christian Church.”

In any case, regarding the Samaritans, they’d heard the Good News, unclean spirits were driven out, paralyzed people were healed, the people were baptized, and there was *much joy* in that city. Certainly these signs would be taken in modern times as those of a great Christian revival.

Thus, the question that Christian Civilization *evades* is this:

How did Philip know that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen on anyone?

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<sup>86</sup> *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner. A Translation and revision of the ninth-tenth German edition incorporating supplementary notes of A. Debrunner by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961, 1989), Accordance version 1.3. Used by permission.

As a fellow continuationist I sympathize with AoG and Pentecostals, but I disagree with the typical formulation of their subsequence doctrine, and I would not naively say the evidence is merely “tongues” without much more qualification.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, I also disagree with the majority of cessationist Christian Civilization that says every Christian “gets” the eschatological Gift of the Holy Spirit upon “conversion” whether they know it or not. Or, in other words, “believe in Jesus” and you “get” the Holy Spirit. It would seem that a passage like Ephesians 1:11–14 could be a source for this assumption.

In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, [12] so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.<sup>88</sup>

[13] In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised holy Spirit, [14] which is the first installment of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s possession, to the praise of his glory. (NAB)

Evidently, modern non-sacramental churches take this to mean that one hears the Gospel, believes and is directly sealed with the Holy Spirit. This view is also the first stage in AoG and Pentecostal subsequence theology. Conversely, an NAB note explains the Roman Church’s interpretation of “the sealing” as their water-Spirit sacramental baptism, meaning that the Roman Church does not interpret this process as instantaneous or automatic at the point someone believes. But even beyond the Roman Church’s interpretation, Paul wrote that they were sealed with the “promised” Holy Spirit, and the concept of “promised Holy Spirit” in various wording is found in several places by Luke and Paul.

Luke 24:49 And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (TLV)

Acts 1:4 He enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for “the promise of the Father about which you have heard me speak.” (NAB)

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<sup>87</sup> It is so easy to falsely imitate “tongues” as Browne and Copeland do:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5XDalW-R\\_g&ab\\_channel=DoctrinalWatchdog](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5XDalW-R_g&ab_channel=DoctrinalWatchdog)

<sup>88</sup> The NAB note on this phrase distinguishes between the “we” in this verse as probably intending first Jewish believers, and then the “you” in vs 13 as intending Gentile believers.

## Hidden From Their Eyes

Acts 2:33 Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God and receiving from the Father the promise of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*, He poured out this—what you now see and hear. (TLV)

Acts 2:38–39 You will receive the gift of the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away—as many as *ADONAI* our God calls to Himself. (TLV)

Gal 3:14 In order that through Messiah *Yeshua* the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so we might receive the promise of the *Ruach* through trusting faith. (TLV)

And in similar terminology:

Eph 4:30 Do not grieve the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (TLV)

2Cor 1:21–22 Now it is God who establishes us with you in Messiah. He anointed us, set His seal on us, and gave us the *Ruach* in our hearts as a pledge. (TLV)

These verses were written to Ephesian, Galatian and Corinthian believers that Paul knew. He naturally would assume that they understood the process of salvation as he'd proclaimed it in their midst.

The specific question for modern readers is whether or not we ought to assume that the Lukan description of the “promised Holy Spirit” such as in Acts 2:33 is in any way different from the Pauline “promised Holy Spirit” in Ephesians 1:13. On the face of it, this seems impossible to accept. Joel, Isaiah, Ezekiel and other Hebrew prophets in the Hebrew Bible prophesied the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Israel and the people of God. It would seem that just as *Yeshua* was known as Messiah or Christ, so the last-days Gift of the Holy Spirit was also known as the “promised Holy Spirit.”

So, there are compelling reasons to believe that the Ephesian sealing with the “promised Holy Spirit” was of comparable palpable character to that of the 120 on Pentecost and to that of the house of Cornelius. In other words, in Ephesians 1 Paul is not teaching a doctrine to memorize, but is recalling a powerful spiritual experience, similarly to what he wrote in Galatians 3:2-5, that the Ephesians had participated in and that formed the basis of their walk with God and is the “One Baptism” of Eph 4:5.

So, returning to the Samaritans in Acts 8: If the modern cessationist view of Christian Civilization is correct, then why didn't these Samaritans just “get” the Holy Spirit like everyone today is supposed to have “gotten” the Holy Spirit? The typical half-

reply is that the Samaritans were in a unique, transitional episode in redemption history. But this just deflects the original question and refuses to face the obvious:

How did anyone *know* that they had not yet gotten the Holy Spirit?

The most apparent answer is that receiving the promised Holy Spirit was known among all those first Jewish disciples as an obvious and powerfully palpable experience of divine indwelling that even outside observers could detect, and that it was indeed accompanied by fluent praising of the Almighty, just as in Joel 2:28–32, and in Numbers 11:25.

By repenting and trusting Yeshua a yet unregenerate person arrives at the gracious opportunity to request and receive the powerful, palpable Gift of the Holy Spirit, of being endued with Power from On High, of being transformed, regenerated, born again.

It seems, unhappily, that the majority of leaders of Christian Civilization after the days of the Apostles asserted that they received the eschatological Gift of the Holy Spirit when often they actually were short. Quite likely, the vague term “conversion” arose among those who assert that, *ex opere operato*, the Holy Spirit is conveyed during a sacramental water rite, particularly for infants. Instead, unambiguously clear cases occur in Acts of powerfully receiving the Holy Spirit without a proximal water rite (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:44-45). This powerful experience is arguably described in Acts 9:17–18 / 22:16, Paul’s salvation; 16:15, Lydia; 16:33, the jailer; 18:8, Crispus and the Corinthians). On the face of it, the powerful experience of receiving the Holy Spirit is precisely the continuing promise of Joel for the “last days” that Peter cited on Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). Also note that Joel’s promise does not demand a proximal water washing either. Christian Civilization has long been in the blind about the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **23. Acts 19:1-7: Apollos and the Ephesians**

This episode of the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19 verily cries out of Jews who’d believed Apollos’s preaching about Yeshua in Ephesus *before* he was corrected by Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24–28). But someone inserted “Chapter 19” between these two related episodes, just as they did with “Chapter 11.” Apollos, *in Ephesus*, boldly preached about Yeshua accurately, but only knew Yoḥanan’s βάπτισμα (Acts 18:25). Apollos knew much, but evidently did not know of Yeshua’s promise of Acts 1:5, of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Ephesians, then, were Jews who’d become Yeshua’s disciples via Apollos, and who bore the exact same deficiency of Apollos, knowing only the βάπτισμα of Yoḥanan. So, when Luke says these *disciples* in Ephesus were only baptized with Yoḥanan’s water washing, he’s *not* saying they were disciples of Yoḥanan.

Arguably, clumsy exegetical explanations of the Ephesian deficiency may reveal personal misunderstanding by exegetes who are essentially in the same state as the Ephesian disciples, believing in Yeshua, but lacking the eschatological Gift of the Holy

Spirit. Instead, again, modern exegetes of Christian Civilization assume every Christian is supposed to have already gotten the Holy Spirit.

But really, in Acts 19:2a, did Paul just meander over to twelve unknown, random people on the Ephesian streetcorner and ask, “Hey guys, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

This is obviously absurdly ridiculous. Paul recognized that they were disciples of *Yeshua*. But he quickly suspected a deficiency—lack of the Holy Spirit.

More than a few exegetes lean on Acts 19:2b: “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit” as though the Ephesian disciples do not know of the existence of the Holy Spirit. But if, as exegetes often surmise, they were disciples of Yoḥanan, then surely they would have known of the Holy Spirit since Yoḥanan promised that the Coming One would baptize all with the Holy Spirit.

Regardless, there is a similar terminology in John 7:39, and it doesn’t mean that there was no general knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, **for as yet the Spirit had not been given**, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐδέπω ἐδοξάσθη.

Not yet, for, was Spirit, because Yeshua was not yet glorified.

So, it is highly likely that Luke’s narration of Acts 19:2b means the Ephesians do not understand that the Holy Spirit is *now being given*, but not complete ignorance of such a thing as the Holy Spirit. (Compare the ASV, DLNT, LSB, and WYC versions.)

Luke uses language similar to the Samaritan episode.

μόνον δὲ βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπῆρχον εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (8:16).

ἀκούσαντες δὲ ἐβαπτίσθησαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (19:5).

There is no positive proof Luke is talking about re-water-baptism. Instead, as with the Samaritans, he is far more likely talking about the Ephesian disciples’ full inclusion into the “reality” of Messiah Yeshua, called his “name.” Arguably, Luke wrote this phrase as a prefatory, precursory statement in anticipation of what was immediately going to happen: Paul would lay his hands on the disciples and they would receive the Holy Spirit. It also seems highly likely that Paul would be thinking about this episode while writing Ephesians 4:3-6:

[Be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your

call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The episode of the Ephesians in Acts 19:1-7, properly understood, shines a light on Ephesians 4:5 and points to Spirit baptism, not to a water rite.

#### **24. 1Cor 1:14–17 vis-à-vis 1Cor 12:13: a Pauline reflection of Acts 1:5**

In light of the preceding, it is easier to see that Paul, who became “as a Jew” for Jews, was willing to perform Israel’s eschatological water rite proclaimed by Yoḥanan and endorsed by Messiah Yeshua, for Jews who trusted Messiah Yeshua. Still, Yeshua sent Paul as Apostle to the Nations, so performing Israel’s national eschatological water purification wasn’t really his primary occupation, as Paul emphasized in Galatians 2:7.

Moreover, as we saw above in Acts 10–11, Yoḥanan’s water washing was not crucial to salvation compared with being baptized with the Holy Spirit. With this in mind Paul’s comments in 1Cor 1 make good sense:

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.

Crispus was a synagogue ruler and was certainly Jewish. Gaius may easily have been a Jewish member of Crispus’s house, per Acts 18:8: “Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household.” Stephanas and house are said to be the first believers in the region (1Cor 16:15), making it likely that they too are Jewish, since Paul’s custom was to go to synagogues first (Acts 17:2). So, these water-baptized believers were likely Jewish—Paul very likely performed Israel’s eschatological purification for them, just as Peter and Apollos did for the Jews who heard them.

On the other hand, Luke’s narrative about Corinth, in Acts 18:1–8, reports on being baptized with the Holy Spirit, not water, since Luke had already shown earlier in Acts 10–11 in Cornelius’s house that being baptized with water was of far less consequence than being baptized–purified with the Holy Spirit. Yet Paul, who’d actually been in Corinth, writes his epistle with greater detail to the believers he knew, including to Jews who participated in the national eschatological washing that he’d administered.

Nevertheless, Paul also wrote about being baptized *ἐν* [in, with, or by] the Holy Spirit in 1Cor 12:13. Some sixty English translations of this verse at biblegateway.com render that highly flexible preposition *ἐν* with either “in” or “by.” Yet one recent version, the DLNT, uses “with.” I agree that “with” is the best choice in this verse.

For also, **ἐν** [with] one Spirit we all were baptized [ontologically merged] into one Body, whether Jews, whether Greeks, whether slaves, whether free, and we all one Spirit were given drink. (author's rendering)

For indeed with one Spirit, **we** all were baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free. And we all were given one Spirit to drink. (DLNT)

καὶ γὰρ **ἐν** ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν, εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληγες εἴτε δοῦλοι εἴτε ἐλεύθεροι, καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν.

James Dunn argues against the widely-held idea of being baptized “by” the Spirit. (I’ve added comments in square brackets [ ].)

In the NT **ἐν** with βαπτίζειν never designates the one who performs the baptism [such as in the rendering “by one Spirit”]; on the contrary, it always indicates the element in which the baptisand is immersed (or with which he is deluged [or with which he is radically transformed]) – except, of course, when it is part of a fuller phrase like ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ or ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι. And in each of the six other passages which speak of Spirit-baptism (Matt. 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33; Acts 1.5; 11.16) the Spirit is the element used in the Messiah’s baptism in contrast to the water used in John’s baptism.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, 1Cor 12:13 echoes and emphasizes what Paul wrote earlier in 1Cor 6:11:

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified **ἐν** the name of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and **ἐν** the Spirit of our God.

καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἤτε· ἀλλ’ ἀπελούσασθε, ἀλλ’ ἡγιάσθητε, ἀλλ’ ἐδικαιώθητε **ἐν** τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ **ἐν** τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν.

Dunn argues here too against typical views that 1Cor 6:11 refers to water baptism.

For most commentators this is “a baptismal saying” by which many understand that baptism is the key to its interpretation. But in fact Paul is not talking about baptism at all – he speaks rather of the great spiritual transformation of conversion which turned the Corinthians’ lives inside out and made immoral and impure men into saints, cleansed and justified by the authority and power of God. We may not assume that when Christians in the NT are recalled to the beginning of their Christian lives the reference is therefore to their baptism.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Dunn, *Baptism*, 125-126.

<sup>90</sup> Dunn, *Baptism*, 120.



The highly flexible preposition *ἐν* in both 1Cor 6:11 and 1Cor 12:13 arguably points to *instrumental transformation* caused by Messiah Yeshua pouring out the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:16), ontologically joining all such transformed people, whether Jews or whether Greeks, into one Body.<sup>91</sup>

#### **25. A solution for 1Cor 15:29: purifying [the dead] for the benefit of the dead**

There was a Jewish community in Corinth and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, became a disciple of Yeshua, and doubtless other Jews too. Paul wrote in his 1Corinthian passage on the Lord's Supper that some disciples had died. As regards βαπτίζειν in 1Cor 15:29, Paul arguably used “middle-passive” verbs that were intended to be taken as middle, not passive, to emphasize *subject focus* while the subjects actively perform the action on the objects, the dead.<sup>92</sup> So, this is not passive “baptized for the dead.” Rather, living Jews concerned about the care of the body “purified them” before burial, especially because of the resurrection to come. So, Paul talks about those, “Who *themselves* are *baptizing–purifying* [the dead] for the benefit of the dead.” Thus, according to Jewish tradition, as with Tabitha (Acts 9:37), they are purified for burial, in light of the coming resurrection.

The verse was a “throw away” statement by Paul against certain vocal disbelievers in the resurrection. Arguably they were Jewish disciples of Yeshua who'd been influenced by the elite Sadducees in Jerusalem, whether before or after their faith in Yeshua. Paul rebuffs them, saying that even contemporary Jewish practices in Corinth testify of the resurrection since concerned living Jews baptize–purify their dead before burial. Thus, Paul could accept this Jewish practice as a positive illustration for resurrection and not need to argue against it.

#### **26. Titus 3:5-6 is parallel to 1Peter 3:21: Both speak of being baptized with the Holy Spirit**

Paul makes explicit use of the term regeneration in Titus 3:4–7.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the *washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly* (ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως) through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (ESV) (emphasis added)

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<sup>91</sup> For a similar view from a highly respected “pentecostal” exegete, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, F.F. Bruce general ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1987), 603–606.

<sup>92</sup> See, H. Ben Keshet, “Whether Jews, Whether Greeks: Was 1Cor. 15:29 Addressed to Jewish Disciples of Jesus,” in *EQ* 88.4 (2016/17), 331–48.

This passage is the most explicit description of the “new birth” and arguably describes the same washing of regeneration of the outpoured Holy Spirit that occurred with Cornelius in Acts 10:44–45. Here in Titus, the Holy Spirit is poured out richly, while in Acts 10:45 the Gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles. In Acts 2:33 Peter described Yeshua:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out (ἐξέχεεν) this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (ESV)

The identical Greek word for *pour out* is used here as in Titus 3:6.

Previously in Acts 2:17–21, on Pentecost, Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy to the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem. Verses 17–18 read:

[17] ‘And it shall be in the last days (*plural*),’ says God,  
‘that I will pour out My *Ruach* on all flesh.  
Your sons and your daughters  
shall prophesy,  
your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams.

[18] Even on My slaves, male and female,  
I will pour out My *Ruach* in those days (*plural*),  
and they shall prophesy.’ (TLV)

Peter concluded with verse 21:

‘And it shall be that everyone who calls  
on the name of *ADONAI* shall be saved.’ (TLV)

Note this final verse.

Paul described the process of salvation in Romans 10:8–13 and he concludes with this same verse from this same passage in Joel. Paul wrote:

[8] But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith that we are proclaiming: [9] For if you confess with your mouth that *Yeshua* is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation. [11] For the Scripture says, “Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame.” [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all—richly

generous to all who call on Him (πλουτῶν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἐπικαλουμένους αὐτόν).

[13] For “Everyone who calls upon the name of *ADONAI* shall be saved.” (TLV)  
The last verse is the same one from the outpoured-Spirit-passage in Joel that Peter quoted on Pentecost. One must also recall that Paul had already written in Romans 5:5b:

Because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* who was given to us. (TLV)

So, Paul’s understanding of obtaining salvation in Romans 10:8–13 / Romans 5:5 corresponds *directly* with what he wrote in Titus 3:4–7. These passages correspond with Peter’s recitation of Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2:17–21, that is also succinctly described in Acts 2:33. And these passages also correspond with what happened with Cornelius. These verses all speak of receiving the fullness of New Covenant salvation by receiving the “last days” Gift of the richly outpoured Holy Spirit, the transformative divine indwelling of the humble and repentant, whether Jews or whether Greeks.

Arguably 1Peter 3:21 also speaks directly of the Holy Spirit βάπτισμα. Many exegetes fail to mention that 1Peter 3:21 is difficult construction, and that there are competing views on how to parse it. Mark Dubis, author of *1 Peter* in the Baylor handbook series, disagrees with commentators who think water baptism is the antitype to the water of the flood. Dubis writes:

A much more straightforward reading of the syntax emerges by taking ἀντίτυπον as a collective singular substantival adjective that appositionally modifies the immediately preceding ὑμᾶς. The word order especially favors this. Thus, it is the recipients themselves (and all Christians by extension) who are explicitly identified as the antitype, forming a counterpart to the ὀλίγοι in verse 20, who are the type (with both groups representing a small God-fearing minority of the general populace).<sup>93</sup>

Dubis makes a convincing case that this is the proper understanding for the *antitype*. But now I would also ask, why does Christian Civilization think βάπτισμα in this verse means water baptism? Why wouldn’t it mean Spirit baptism?

It’s hard to see how the water of the Flood of Noah that destroys the world corresponds with water baptism, though most commentators try to make that idea work. Why? Again, generally speaking, Christian Civilization is committed to a “Christian

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<sup>93</sup> Mark Dubis, *1 Peter, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament*, general ed. Martin M. Culy, (Waco: Baylor University, 2010), 125.

water baptism for the Christian Church.” That commitment is a deterrent for thinking in terms of a stand-alone, palpable Holy Spirit baptism.

Second, and sadly, the majority of Christian Civilization has never experienced the powerful, palpable reception of the eschatological Gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, very few have the exegetical or experiential basis for considering this alternative understanding. Still, there have been others before me who’ve suggested Spirit baptism for this verse. Many years ago, during his regular radio teaching lectures, Pastor Chuck Smith suggested that this verse does indeed speak of Spirit baptism.

*A hapax legomenon—ἐπερώτημα—adds confusion to this verse. Does it mean:*

- “pledge” NIV, CSB, HCSB, MSB, TLV, CJB
- “appeal” ESV, NASB, NAB, NRSV
- “interrogation” ASV, ERV
- “answer” KJV, NKJV
- “examination” Douay-Rheims
- “question” Young’s Literal

These translations go from “pledge” or “answer” to the other side of one’s conscience as “appeal” or “interrogation” or “question.” Obviously, with such polar-opposite diversity, something appears to be completely misunderstood. However, a possible resolution involves both ends of this polarized conundrum, as seen in the second sense out of three for ἐπερώτημα listed in the massive Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon:

2. answer to an inquiry put to a higher authority.

So, if we refer the ἐπερώτημα to Spirit baptism, then the “inquiry” or “appeal” is from a person with a good conscience toward God, and Holy Spirit baptism is God’s “answer” to that request. This makes very good sense.

So, the following is my understanding of this verse in a dynamic translation (I’ve added additional wording to help prompt the understanding).

Of which you are an antitype of Noah’s few, Spirit baptism now saving. This baptism is not of flesh for putting away filth, but is of a good conscience. Spirit baptism is God’s answer of a request to him, through faith in the resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

At the very least, people in Christian Civilization ought to quit using 1Peter 3:21 as a proof-text to teach salvation by water baptism.

## 27. Conclusion

This article has attempted to take a step forward to solve the long-standing controversy about Christian baptism for Christian Civilization by properly identifying members of the *Ekklesia*, the Body of Messiah: whether Jews, whether Greeks or any other distinctive part of the corporate Body. Once Jewish disciples of Messiah Yeshua are rightly identified and embraced within the Body of Messiah as faithful Jews who follow Messiah Yeshua, then the Apostolic water washing practiced in the NT can be recast with a strikingly different hue, being restored as a prophetic sign for Israel to recognize the nearness of the Tanakh's promised Kingdom, as well as the promised Messiah (John 1:31). More importantly, the Apostolic washing, called Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα, prefigures the far greater *purifying transformation* of the experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, which is also called the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. This palpable spiritual transformation cannot be acquired by works, but by trusting Yeshua alone.

**Appendix—Justin Martyr dialog with Trypho, 46-47 (Mid-Second Century CE)**

**Trypho 46** “But if some, even now, wish to live in the observance of the institutions given by Moses, and yet believe in this Jesus who was crucified, recognizing Him to be the Christ of God, and that it is given to Him to be absolute Judge of all, and that His is the everlasting kingdom, can they also be saved?” he inquired of me. And I replied, “Let us consider that also together, whether one may now observe all the Mosaic institutions.”

And he answered, “No. For we know that, as you said, it is not possible either anywhere to sacrifice the lamb of the Passover, or to offer the goats ordered for the fast; or, in short, [to present] all the other offerings.” And I said, “Tell [me] then yourself, I pray, some things which can be observed; for you will be persuaded that, though a man does not keep or has not performed the eternal decrees, he may assuredly be saved.” Then he replied, “To keep the Sabbath, to be circumcised, to observe months, and to be washed if you touch anything prohibited by Moses, or after sexual intercourse.” And I said, “Do you think that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and Job, and all the rest before or after them equally righteous, also Sarah the wife of Abraham, Rebecca the wife of Isaac, Rachel the wife of Jacob, and Leah, and all the rest of them, until the mother of Moses the faithful servant, who observed none of these [statutes], will be saved?” And Trypho answered, “Were not Abraham and his descendants circumcised?” And I said, “I know that Abraham and his descendants were circumcised. The reason why circumcision was given to them I stated at length in what has gone before; and if what has been said does not convince you, let us again search into the matter. But you are aware that, up to Moses, no one in fact who was righteous observed any of these rites at all of which we are talking, or received one commandment to observe, except that of circumcision, which began from Abraham.” And he replied, “We know it, and admit that they are saved.”

Then I returned answer, “You perceive that God by Moses laid all such ordinances upon you on account of the hardness of your people’s hearts, in order that, by the large number of them, you might keep God continually, and in every action, before your eyes, and never begin to act unjustly or impiously. For He enjoined you to place around you [a fringe] of purple dye, in order that you might not forget God; and He commanded you to wear a phylactery, certain characters, which indeed we consider holy, being engraved on very thin parchment; and by these means stirring you up to retain a constant remembrance of God: at the same time, however, convincing you, that in your hearts you have not even a faint remembrance of God’s worship. Yet not even so were you dissuaded from idolatry: for in the times of Elijah, when [God] recounted the number of those who had not bowed the knee to Baal, He said the number was seven thousand; and in Isaiah, He rebukes you for having sacrificed your children to idols.

But we, because we refuse to sacrifice to those to whom we were of old accustomed to sacrifice, undergo extreme penalties, and rejoice in death, — believing that God will raise us up by His Christ, and will make us incorruptible, and undisturbed, and immortal; and we know that the ordinances imposed by reason of the hardness of your people’s hearts, contribute nothing to the performance of righteousness and of piety.”

**Trypho 47** And Trypho again inquired, “But if someone, knowing that this is so, after he recognizes that this man is Christ, and has believed in and obeys Him, wishes, however, to observe these [institutions], will he be saved?” I said, “In my opinion, Trypho, such an one will be saved, if he does not strive in every way to persuade other men, — I mean those Gentiles who have been circumcised from error by Christ, to observe the same things as himself, telling them that they will not be saved unless they do so. This you did yourself at the commencement of the discourse, when you declared that I would not be saved unless I observe these institutions.”

Then he replied, “Why then have you said, ‘In my opinion, such an one will be saved, ‘unless there are some who affirm that such will not be saved?’” “There are such people, Trypho,” I answered; “and these do not venture to have any intercourse with or to extend hospitality to such persons; but I do not agree with them.

But if some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people’s hearts, along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren.

But if, Trypho,” I continued, “some of your race, who say they believe in this Christ, compel those Gentiles who believe in this Christ to live in all respects according to the law given by Moses, or choose not to associate so intimately with them, I in like manner do not approve of them. But I believe that even those, who have been persuaded by them to observe the legal dispensation along with their confession of God in Christ, shall probably be saved. And I hold, further, that such as have confessed and known this man to be Christ, yet who have gone back from some cause to the legal dispensation, and have denied that this man is Christ, and have repented not before death, shall by no means be saved.

Further, I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues, and everything by which they might obtain salvation and escape the vengeance of fire. For the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, and His boundless riches, hold righteous and sinless the man who, as Ezekiel tells, repents of sins; and reckons sinful, unrighteous, and impious the man who fails away from piety and righteousness to unrighteousness and ungodliness. Therefore, also our Lord Jesus Christ said, ‘In whatsoever things I shall take you, in these I shall judge you.’”