

TOPIC IX.

BAPTISM - IS IT REQUIRED FOR SALVATION?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) state it this way.

"Baptism by immersion in water by one having authority is the first saving ordinance of the gospel and is necessary for an individual to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to receive eternal salvation. All who seek eternal life must follow the example of the Savior by being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost."¹

The Roman Catholic Church states,

"Holy Baptism holds the first place among the sacraments, because it is the door of the spiritual life; for by it we are made members of Christ and incorporated with the Church."

"Baptism is held to be necessary both in precept and means. This doctrine is grounded on the words of Christ. In John 3, He declares: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Christ makes no exception to this law and it is therefore general in its application, embracing both adults and infants. It is consequently not merely a necessity of precept but also a necessity of means."

"The fate of infants who die without baptism must be briefly considered here. The Catholic teaching is uncompromising on this point, that all who depart this life without baptism, be it of water, or blood, or desire, are perpetually excluded from the vision of God."

"In Holy Baptism, God liberates us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Born children of a fallen humanity, in the baptismal waters we become God's reborn children and inherit eternal life. By water and the Holy Spirit we are made members of the Church, which is Christ's body. As we live with him and with his people, we grow in

¹ From: Church of Jesus Christ of LDS <https://www.lds.org/topics/baptism?lang=eng> -

faith, love and obedience to God's will."²

The Lutheran Church.

Baptism is one of the two sacraments that mark Lutheran theology and practice, the other being The Eucharist(or Holy Communion). We believe both to have been instituted by Jesus. Martin Luther defined sacraments as actions whose outward signs point to God's command and promise. They contain two things: 1. The Word of God that makes the action or elements a sacrament, 2. An outward sign - which in Baptism is the ancient element, the 'stuff' of life, water. Luther said, "... when the Word accompanies the water, Baptism is valid, even though faith be lacking. For my faith does not constitute Baptism, but receives it."

Luther's Large Catechism (IV, 83) instructs that Baptism "overcomes and takes away sin." Luther suggests that the water of the old creation and the Word of the new achieve the new creation in human beings. Sin is washed away, the sinner is 'drowned,' the old self is shattered, 'helpless as a crying infant with empty hands and uninformed head and no report card at all.' This time, newness comes not by the breath of God, as at creation, but by the death of Christ. ELCA³ Lutherans believe that baptism addresses itself to the question of salvation. In God's gift of Baptism we are assured the forgiveness of sins to live a free, responsible and joyful life - in order that we might be saved everlastingly."⁴

Seventh Day Adventists

"Baptism symbolizes and declares our new faith in Christ and our trust in His forgiveness. Buried in the water, we arise to a new life in Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit."

"By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of

² From "New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia" on line.

³ Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

⁴ Lutheran Church Baptism, on line.

their teachings. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; 16:30-33; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12, 13.)"

"However, while baptism is vitally linked to salvation, it does not guarantee salvation. Paul considered Israel's exodus experience to be a symbolic representation of baptism: 'I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.' 'Immersed' in water—the cloud above and the water on each side—the people of Israel were symbolically baptized as they passed through the Red Sea. Yet in spite of this experience 'God was not well pleased' with most of them (1 Cor. 10:1-5). So today, baptism does not automatically assure salvation. Israel's experience was written for our "admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:11, 12)."

"From the beginning SDA's, in common with their Protestant heritage, have rejected any view of baptism as an *opus operatum*, that is, as an act that, in and of itself, imparts grace and effects salvation." ⁵

Southern Baptists

"Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water. ...It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus." ⁶

Before we answer the question definitively, it would be profitable to study the entire matter of baptism, its origins and how it came to be understood by the apostles. This is important.

The three verses often used to teach that baptism is required for salvation are; Mark 16:16, where Jesus is quoted as saying, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

Then, John 3:5, "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

⁵ ("Baptism," *SDA Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., p. 128).

⁶ Southern Baptist Convention - basic beliefs (online)

And, I Peter 3:18-22, 18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19: in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, 20: who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. 21: Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22: who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

In the first case, we know that Mark 16:9-20 was added later and were not in the original documents Mark penned. Nevertheless, the importance of baptism in the early church is not to be dismissed or taken lightly, as long as we understand the actual purpose and intent of the action.

In John 3:5, most commentators view "born of water" as Christian baptism. Then, they go on to say that this is essential to salvation. Others, such as me, do not see it that way. First, Christian Baptism was unknown to the Jews. It did not occur at all until after Jesus' resurrection and the church began to engage in the practice under the New Covenant that was not initiated until the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Second, the context is clearly "birth." Third, the word baptism or baptize is not used. Fourth, there is never a statement on the Bible about being born again through baptism. Fifth, John 3:5 says "born of water" and in the context of the discussion with Nicodemus, the context is physical birth as Nicodemus has just asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Sixth, Jesus would have never attributed a physical act as a means to spiritual salvation now would have the apostles. This would be the same with making "circumcision" a prerequisite for salvation, something Nicodemus and every Jew would have gladly grasped. Then we would be resorting to "works" or "tradition" as a means to salvation...which is what the Catholics and others do.

In I Peter 3:18-22, we have an analogy of baptism, that of the flood. We will return to this later. In Mark and I Peter baptism is coupled with salvation. So we need to get a clear picture of baptism.

Let's look at how it came to be and from where.

Baptism means to "dip into," "wash" or "immerse." It comes from the Greek "bap-tid-zoh" meaning to cover or wash with a fluid. This in turn comes from the root "bap-toh" meaning to "dip into."

The history.

For the ancient Jews, there was a common act of ritual and spiritual cleansing prior to approaching or engaging in a holy act commanded by God. It applied to the priests, Levites and to common people. This was in force from the tabernacle period beginning with Moses, through the temple period of the first century. Sacrifices for sin, presentations for healings, dedications, and preparation for holy days were some of the things involved. We see examples of this in both the Old and New Testament.

The water used in the ritual cleansing for the Jews is to be fresh, pure and uncontaminated. This stems from Genesis, chapter 1 where the water created by God in the beginning is deemed to be pure and that which the Spirit of God used to bring forth life. In Genesis 1:9 we read,

"Then God said, 'Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear'; and it was so."

The Hebrew word for "gathered" is "qavah." A pool for gathered water where these ritual cleansings are held is called a "Mikvah" from the same root. This exact word is found in Isaiah 22:11 and translated "reservoir" in the NASB.

The first mention of a container for this ritual purification is found in Exodus 30:18-21,

18: "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. 19: "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; 20: when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire *sacrifice* to the LORD. 21: "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."

A picture of ritual washing for ceremonial cleansing can be found in Leviticus 14:1-9,

1: Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2: "This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. Now he shall be brought to the priest, 3: and the priest shall go out to the outside of the camp. Thus the priest shall look, and if the infection of leprosy has been healed in the leper, 4: then the priest shall give orders to take two live clean birds and cedar wood and a scarlet string and hyssop for the one who is to be cleansed. 5: "The priest shall also give orders to slay the one bird in an earthenware vessel over running water. 6: "As for the live bird, he shall take it together with the cedar wood and the scarlet string and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slain over the running water. 7: "He shall then sprinkle seven times the one who is to be cleansed from the leprosy and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird go free over the open field. 8: "The one to be cleansed shall then wash his clothes and shave off all his hair and bathe in water and be clean. Now afterward, he may enter the camp, but he shall stay outside his tent for seven days. 9: "It will be on the seventh day that he shall shave off all his hair: he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water and be clean."

The importance of running water harkens back to the Genesis one principle. This would be done in a stream or river such as the Jordan.

Solomon's commission of a great washing tub is found in II Chronicles 4:2-6,

2: "Also he made the cast *metal* sea, ten cubits from brim to brim, circular in form, and its height *was* five cubits and its circumference thirty cubits.⁷ 3: Now figures like oxen *were* under it *and* all around it, ten cubits, entirely encircling the sea. The oxen *were* in two rows, cast in one piece. 4: It stood on twelve oxen, three facing the north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east; and the sea *was set* on top of them and all their hindquarters turned inwards. 5: It was a handbreadth thick, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, *like* a lily blossom; it could hold 3,000 baths. 6: He also made ten basins in which to wash, and he set five on the right side and five on the left to rinse things for the burnt offering; but the sea *was* for the priests to wash in."

This is the first mention of a full body immersion. It looks as if anyone entering the temple was to first, wash him or herself using soap and water and then, second, become immersed in the ceremonial cleansing that had been ordained by God early

⁷ About 42-45 feet making the diameter about 13-14 feet and the depth 7-8 feet deep. The metal was a about 3 inches thick.

on. The water in the laver and the "sea" was essentially natural rainwater or water brought in by pots from the river and poured in.

The ceremonial cleansing has a spiritual significance of purification and was not for the purposes of hygiene. One was to wash clean before embracing this ceremony. The ritual is similar to what we know as baptism. The term "baptism" (bapto) is a Greek word and it is used in the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew טָבַל (tah-bal-to wash completely). Two other Hebrew words are used for ritual and normal bathing or washing, ("rah-chats" and "kabas"). The ceremony is traditionally called "tvilah" from the Hebrew "tah-bal." The two are very similar in method as "tvilah" was to be performed in a water source from a natural spring, river, rain water and such in which the participant is to be fully immersed.

Immersion in this ritual manner was to establish a restoration of spiritual and personal cleanliness before being allowed to participate in any temple activities. For example, in Leviticus 22:4-7 we read,

4: "No man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or who has a discharge, may eat of the holy *gifts*⁸ until he is clean. And if one touches anything made unclean by a corpse or if a man has a seminal emission, 5: or if a man touches any teeming things by which he is made unclean, or any man by whom he is made unclean, whatever his uncleanness; 6: a person who touches any such shall be unclean until evening, and shall not eat of the holy *gifts* unless he has *bathed his body in water*. 7: 'But when the sun sets, he will be clean, and afterward he shall eat of the holy *gifts*, for it is his food."

In II Kings 5:1-14, we have the important account of the healing of Naaman, captain of the army of Aram.

1: Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, *but he was* a leper. 2: Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3: She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." 4: Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5: Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and

⁸ The remains of the burnt offerings and sacrifices the priests and Levites were permitted to eat.

took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand *shekels* of gold and ten changes of clothes. 6: He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7: When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending *word* to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me." 8: It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent *word* to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9: So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. 10: Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will* be clean." 11: But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' 12: "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13: Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you *to do some* great thing, would you not have done *it*? How much more *then*, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14: So he went down and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean."

The importance of this is not that the water of the Jordan had healing properties, but that obedience to God and faith by action brought forth the healing. The water was just the means whereby this act of obedience and faith resulted in Naaman's healing.

The Mikveh (or Mikvah)

Somewhere during the later history of Israel and after the return from the Babylonian captivity, there were structures built into the ground and given the name "mikveh" or "mikvah" after the scriptural term for a "collection of water" or a "reservoir." These came into use as a means of performing the ritual cleansings, especially in areas that were distant from the temple. Perhaps with the growth of local synagogues, the mikvah began its existence. There is little information prior to the first century regarding the development and use of the mikveh.

The few Biblical accounts where the term "mikveh" arose are as follows. The translation of "mikveh" are in bold italics.

Genesis 1:10, "God called the dry land earth, and the *gathering of the waters* He called seas; and God saw that it was good."

This verse is important as it became a recognition that the natural, unspoiled or used water was the Lord's creation, and so as much natural water is used in the Mikveh as possible. The other places the word "Mikveh" is found are:

Exodus 7:19, "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their *reservoirs* of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of wood* and in *vessels of stone*."

Isaiah 22:10-11, 10: "Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem And tore down houses to fortify the wall. 11: And you made a *reservoir* between the two walls For the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, Nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago."

And most significantly,

Leviticus 11:35-36, 35: 'Everything, moreover, on which part of their carcass may fall becomes unclean; an oven or a stove shall be smashed; they are unclean and shall continue as unclean to you. 36: 'Nevertheless a spring or a *cistern collecting water* shall be clean, though the one who touches their carcass shall be unclean."

After the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C., and the rebuilding of it in 525, the washings were accomplished by immersion in the Jordan, or in pools (mikvehs) filled with running water, rain water, water brought in pots or a mixture as long as the greater percentage was fresh and naturally flowing water. This was to honor the creation of water by God before all else was created and thus it was pure and unadulterated. At the same time the practice of using the mikveh to illustrate or demonstrate a person's conversion to Judaism was introduced. There was the need it was determined to do a ritual cleansing for those coming from other religions or for Gentiles so they would be ceremonially clean to participate in Jewish activities and holy days.

By the time the New Testament was written, we see the various types of accommodations used for ritual purification and spiritual cleansing. For example,

John 2:1-6, 1: "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; 2: and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. 3: When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." 4: And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." 5: His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." 6: Now there were six stone water pots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

John 3:22-26, 22: "After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing. 23: John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim,⁹ because there was much water there; and *people* were coming and were being baptized-- 24: for John had not yet been thrown into prison. 25: Therefore there arose a discussion on the part of John's disciples with a Jew about purification. 26: And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him."

John 9:1-7, 1: "As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. 2: And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" 3: Jesus answered, "*It was* neither *that* this man sinned, nor his parents; but *it was* so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4: "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5: "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." 6: When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7: and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came *back* seeing."

"Washing" held significance for every Jew in Jesus' day. Traditions resulting in washing for all sorts of reasons had developed over the centuries and had either replaced or been added to what God had commanded in the law. They all became a means of self-righteousness for many religious Jews.

Mark 7:1-8, 1: "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, 2: and had seen that some of His disciples were

⁹ About midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, of the west side of the Jordan in a tributary of the Jordan and roughly six miles south of Beth Shan. The fact that John chose that place because there was much water there attests to the practice of total immersion in fresh running water.

eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. 3: (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; 4: and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) 5: The Pharisees and the scribes *asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" 6: And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7: 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' 8: "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

There is nothing in the Old Testament requiring the washing of one's hands before eating.

Then we have the amusing account of Jesus and Peter at the last supper.

John 13:3-10, 3: "*Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4: got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5: Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6: So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7: Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." 8: Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9: Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10: Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*."

At this time, mikvahs existed all over the Jewish world. They were used for ceremonial cleansing by both men and women. These are still built and in use today in many Jewish homes and synagogues and even in some designated "bath" houses.

Women went through both a physical bathing and a ceremonial purification after sex, or after her menstrual cycle and after child birth. Her clothes, bed coverings and all she touched had also to be cleansed. In private Mikvahs, all parties had to

entered naked after washing and totally immerse themselves including their hair in order to be counted as completing the word of the Law.

So the pool of Siloam (mentioned in John 9:1-11) would have been one of these public places for ceremonial bathing, spiritual cleansing and hoped for healing.

Baptism.

So, the act of baptism stems from the Jewish idea of being spiritually cleansed, mandated by the Law. It wasn't the only means to purification under the Law, however. Sacrifices, offerings, and other religious works were also involved in ancient Judaism.

As we approach the times of Jesus, baptism was also exercised to display a person's commitment to a new spiritual reality or religious faith as we saw when one converted to Judaism. We first see it used in a slightly different way and for a different purpose as John the Baptist appears.

So, our first encounter with baptism in the New Testament is in the person of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself. First, John 1:19-31,

19: This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20: And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21: They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he *said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22: Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23: He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." 24: Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25: They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26: John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, *but* among you stands One whom you do not know. 27: "*It is* He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28: These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. 29: The next day he *saw Jesus coming to him and *said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30: "This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31: "I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came

baptizing in water." 32: John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33: "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34: "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."¹⁰

In Matthew, Mark and Luke a specific purpose for this baptism is mentioned,

Matthew 3:11, (John is speaking) "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Mark 1:4, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."

Luke 3:3, "And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;..."

In Acts 19:4, "Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.'"

Matthew 3:1-3, 1: "Now in those days John the Baptist *came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3: For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"

Matthew 3:6, "...and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."

We see in this baptism of John and Jesus' disciples that people came to confess their sins and repent. This was very unusual. Confession of sins was not done publically like this, though the people were aware that God had said,

¹⁰ See also John 3:22-23, 3:26, 4:1-2, and 10:40,

Leviticus 5:1-6,

1: 'Now if a person sins after he hears a public adjuration *to testify* when he is a witness, whether he has seen or *otherwise* known, if he does not tell *it*, then he will bear his guilt. 2: 'Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether a carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean cattle or a carcass of unclean swarming things, though it is hidden from him and he is unclean, then he will be guilty. 3: 'Or if he touches human uncleanness, of whatever *sort* his uncleanness *may* be with which he becomes unclean, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know *it*, he will be guilty. 4: 'Or if a person swears thoughtlessly with his lips to do evil or to do good, in whatever matter a man may speak thoughtlessly with an oath, and it is hidden from him, and then he comes to know *it*, he will be guilty in one of these. 5: 'So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that he shall confess that in which he has sinned. 6: 'He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin." Etc.

And, Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion."

But to confess sin either publically, to John, or to Jesus' disciples at baptism, and then be baptized in preparation for the coming Messiah and God's kingdom was unheard of. This is why so many flocked to discover what was going on and asked questions about what they were doing.

Then we have the strangest account in Matthew 3:13-15,

13: "Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan *coming* to John, to be baptized by him. 14: But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' 15: But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit *it* at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he permitted Him."

This act has caused commentators considerable difficulty. All recognize this is not a baptism of confession of sin or repentance, nor is it some example for others to follow. Certainly it is not a fulfilling a requirement "to be saved" for the son of God Himself was and is sinless. Nor is it required by any statute or ordinance in

the Law. Jesus did not need "ceremonial spiritual cleansing" and John recognized this seeking for Jesus to baptize him instead.

So what is the point? Is it a symbol of Jesus' transition from a worldly life to a ministry? Some think so, others do not. But baptism does represent a shift from one thing to another. There is a past to move from and a future to enter. In Jesus' case, He calls it the means to "fulfill all righteousness." And He notes that it is fitting for "US" to do so. So Jesus links Himself with John in this act of "fulfilling all righteousness." This means to complete, bring to a conclusion, finish, and fulfill "righteousness." The Greek can also be translated "justice." So I suggest that Jesus, in being baptized, signifies that he will draw to a conclusion the entire righteousness and justice of God in Himself.

This concept is supported by Paul who says this,

"But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:21-26

And,

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
Romans 10:4

And,

"But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so

that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Galatians 3:22-25

So I suggest that Jesus comments and baptism may reflect the culmination and fulfillment of the Law in His own person and sacrifice. Now, does this have any bearing on the meaning and understanding of baptism in the early church?

Let's see. First, we can examine some of the teachings about baptism as it was practiced by John and Jesus' disciples. There is a shift in the traditional understanding as we see in:

Luke 3:3-18,

3: "And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; 4: as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT. 5: 'EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH; 6: AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.'" 7: So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8: "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 9: "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." 10: And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" 11: And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise." 12: And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" 13: And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." 14: *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about* us, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages." 15: Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, 16: John answered and said to them all, "As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of

His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17: "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Here we see John picturing judgment and the need to repent and prepare for the coming Messiah. An interesting note is that John dismisses the Abrahamic lineage the Jews built their salvation on. Instead he pointed them toward righteous and honest conduct to show their true repentance. Later in Luke 7:26-30 we read Jesus comments about John,

26: "But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and one who is more than a prophet. 27: "This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 28: "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." 29: When all the people and the tax collectors heard *this*, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. 30: But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John."

Verse 29 presents an interesting statement. "God's justice" rendered those who had submitted to the baptism of John in faith and repentance innocent or, "not guilty" in God's eyes. Even the tax collectors. But verse 30 shows that the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves and remained in their state.

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, new believers were commanded, for the first time, to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ "for the forgiveness of your sins." This was a brand new facet of this ceremony. In Acts 2:38, Peter command the converts on the Day of Pentecost to, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:36-42, 36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ--this Jesus whom you crucified." :37: Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38: Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39:

"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40: And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41: So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. 42: They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

There are some significant things here. First, we have the traditional "repent" still important today and as we know it indicates the need to change one's thinking from where they have been and are to where the Word and the Spirit of God now direct. Second, baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus" is brand new. This means that a person acknowledges and demonstrates that he or she comes under the authority and rule of Jesus Christ and unites with Him by faith, rejecting all other authority. Third, Peter says this is to be done, "for the forgiveness of your sins." Whether he means that this has occurred by faith or is an actual result of baptism is debatable. In the Jewish mind of the day, the ritual cleansing is done because one believes it important in obeying God and that, when engaged in, God accounts them clean. This is likely the mind set of Peter and he sees the entire sequence of events he lists as essential to the matter. He may be recalling John the Baptist of whom Mark writes, "John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Fourth, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit given to those who follow through with this procedure. Here, Peter may be harkening back to the preaching of John the Baptist who, as you recall, said, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Finally, we can understand the transition from John's baptism to Christian baptism as; "anticipation" to "acknowledgement."

As the book of Acts develops, we begin to see the order of things in terms of our question. And some apostolic words on this must be considered also.

So, as we advance into this, we begin with Acts 8:4-20,

4: "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. 5: Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them. 6: The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. 7: For *in the case of*

many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out *of them* shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. 8: So there was much rejoicing in that city. 9: Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; 10: and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." 11: And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. 12: But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. 13: Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. 14: Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15: who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16: For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17: Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. 18: Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, 19: saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20: But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"

Beginning in verse 12, we have a sequence of events somewhat different than Peter outlined on the Day of Pentecost. We have people believing, being baptized based on that belief. Then, later, Peter and John were sent to pray for and lay hands on the new converts that they might receive the Holy Spirit.¹¹

In Acts, chapter 8, we have this account,

8:36-38, 36: "As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"
38: And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him."

¹¹ There seems to apparently be two workings of the Holy Spirit. One prompting and confirming conversion and this special laying on of hands where power and gifts are imbued. This has been the subject of some debate, but those who have experienced both will testify to this occurrence. For more on this see my article on "A Brief Word Study on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit."

Verse 37, [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] is not in the earliest manuscripts and doesn't appear before the third century. However, it shows the thinking of the church regarding the basis for baptism. There is no note about the Holy Spirit in this account.

Then in Acts 9, we have the account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. At Damascus Saul was recovering in the house of Judas when the Lord commanded Ananias to a task.

Acts 9:17-18,

17: "So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18: And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

Then we have a reverse order of events in Acts 10:44-48 where Peter was speaking at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, where his relatives and close friends, all Gentiles had gathered with the Centurion in his home.

Acts 10:44-48,

44: "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45: All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46: For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, 47: 'Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?' 48: And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days."

In Acts 16:27-34 we have the account of the Philippian jailer and his family.

27: "When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. 28: But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all

here!" 29: And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, 30: and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31: They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32: And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. 33: And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. 34: And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

We are seeing that the sequence is regular. Hear the word, repent, believe and then be baptized. The same in Acts 18:8 (in Corinth), "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized."

Then, finally in Acts we have the passage in Acts 19:1-6 where Paul was approaching Ephesus on his third missionary journey,

1: "It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2: He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they *said* to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." 3: And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." 4: Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5: When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6: And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying."

Here again, faith in Jesus was followed up with being baptized.

We are seeing quite often that baptism is commanded to be done after one expresses one's faith in Christ. Even Jesus, in Matthew 28:18-20 (entitled by the church - "The Great Commission) is quoting as saying,

18: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to observe all

that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Now the verse in I Peter 3:18-22,

18: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19: in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, 20: who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. 21: Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22: who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him."

Baptism corresponds to the rescue Noah experienced during the flood which saved him and his family. But it wasn't the water that brought "salvation" (rescue), it was the Ark.

Corresponding to the Ark, is the resurrection of Christ. Baptism corresponds as an antitype of the Noah experience. But it was Noah's faith and obedience in building the Ark that brought them safely through the water. The water then, becomes the means whereby salvation is recognized.

So baptism in its correspondence with Noah also corresponds with the meaning of salvation. One, by faith and obedience to the gospel secures salvation and eternal life due to Christ's resurrection. Baptism reflects this truth.

Conclusion.

Baptism pictures the movement (or change/shift) into the realm of eternal life and salvation from death and destruction.¹² This movement is through faith in Christ and is a confession and demonstration of that specific faith.¹³ It has the force of command that it be accomplished in the life of each believer. However, in and of itself alone, it does not carry the power of salvation any more than would a plunge

¹²Colossians 1:13-14, 13: "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14: in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

¹³Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven."

into the swimming pool on a hot summer day. Salvation is by faith, not by any specific work or set of works. We can understand the transition from John's baptism to Christian baptism as; "anticipation" to "acknowledgement."

Baptism in Jesus' name¹⁴ attaches to the ceremony the recognition of God in Christ as one's ultimate authority, and most of all a shift from one identity to another and one reality to another.

In Romans 5:20-6:7, Paul puts it this way,

20: "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21: so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. 6:1, What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2: May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3: Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4: Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5: For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, 6: knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7: for he who has died is freed from sin."

For Paul, the act of Baptism is essential for the Christian in terms of expressing and confirming one's uniting with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. In so doing, we express our unity with Christ as well as the doing away with the life and condition of sin and its hold on us, leaving it in the grave while rising to a new life in Christ, totally free from the grip all that sin (according to the Law) and this world had on us.

Is Baptism required in order that a person be saved? Since salvation is by faith, the strict answer is no. Baptism itself, as an act of the flesh or a religious "work" has no effectiveness. However, baptism is a mandated next step in the life of the believer. It is to be understood as an act of faith in obedience to God's Word even as is prayer, being led by the Spirit and so on.

¹⁴ Or in the "Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"

The question is, "Are we not delving into legalism here?" The answer is "No" because baptism is not a "work" we do in order to achieve some sort of favor or grace with God. It is a part of the "flow of faith" if you will. When we become believers, our "wants" begin to change from what we wish and think best according to the flesh, to what God wishes for us and thinks is best for us. We move from the authority of the world and self to the authority of Christ and the Spirit. This is a matter of the change of the heart, and baptism is a part of recognizing and celebrating that change. If we do not wish to follow the Lord in this manner and unite with Him in this response and flow of our faith, then we need to evaluate where we really are in our relationship with Him.¹⁵

There are those who for some reason cannot be baptized. The grace of God would indeed cover those circumstances, in my opinion.

¹⁵ Paul deals with this idea in II Corinthians, chapter 13.