

Hebrew for the Goyim

© 2007, Pat Mercer Hutchens, Ph.D.

Baptism

I know a woman who was baptized first at an early age, although not as an infant. It was performed by a pastor who completely immersed her *one* time (backward) in water.

Later she was baptized again when joining another denomination, one which did not accept the first one-immersion as legitimate. The second was performed by a pastor who required complete immersion in water (forward) *three* times, once in the name of the Father, once in the name of the Son and once in the name of the Holy Spirit.

A third baptism was done with total immersion three times (backward) in the Jordan River in Israel, with the assumption that Jesus had been baptized this way.

A fourth baptism done when becoming a part of the Jewish faith also required complete immersion three times. However, no one actually performed this immersion — the woman simply *immersed* herself *three* times as religious leaders observed and verified.

Some baptize babies by sprinkling, as a sign they are “children of the covenant” — as circumcision was Abraham’s sign of covenant with God. Others baptize by pouring water over the celebrant and a few even symbolically baptize symbolically for dead relatives.

Many who fled to America renounced for-

mer baptisms and were re-baptized. Generally, Catholics becoming Protestants or Protestants becoming Catholics are re-baptized.

Why Different Forms:

Most believe their practice is the correct, Biblical method and no longer question it. The dividing line is between those who believe baptism is done on the basis of a personal testimony of faith, and those who believe it is a sign of being a part of a covenant family — thus proper for children of believers. Certainly if circumcision is a model, it was performed on eight day old boys; yet, if someone later joined Abraham’s faith, they were circumcised at any age.

Hebrew Dictionary:

What is the Hebrew word for the English word *baptize*? It is *tevilab* (טבילה). What is the Hebrew word for *dip*? It is *tevilab* (טבילה). What is the Hebrew word for *immersion*? It is *tevilab* (טבילה). The root is *teval* (טבל), found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Scriptures speak of “making clean” with water.

One of God’s essential attributes is purity and since man cannot meet God’s standard, purification was necessary. External

washing and changing of clothes were symbols of internal cleansing (Gen. 35:2). The methods used included fire, water and blood. “Bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and *wash* them with water” (Ex. 29:4f). Notice this was done at the *door* of the tabernacle. After washing, they were dressed with pure priestly garments. Holy *anointing* (משחה, same letters as *messiah*) oil was poured on their heads. As Aaron and sons went about priestly duties, there was a bronze laver for further washing their hands and feet.

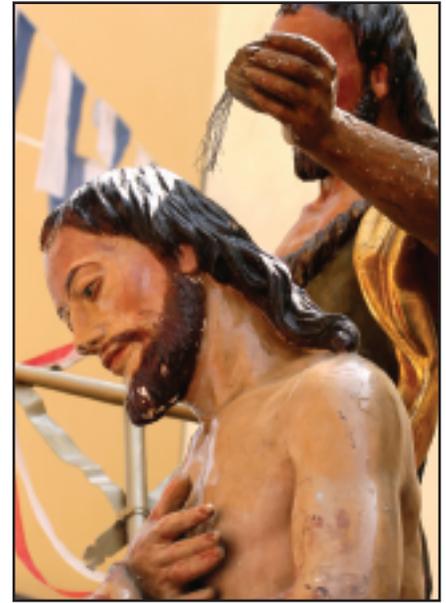
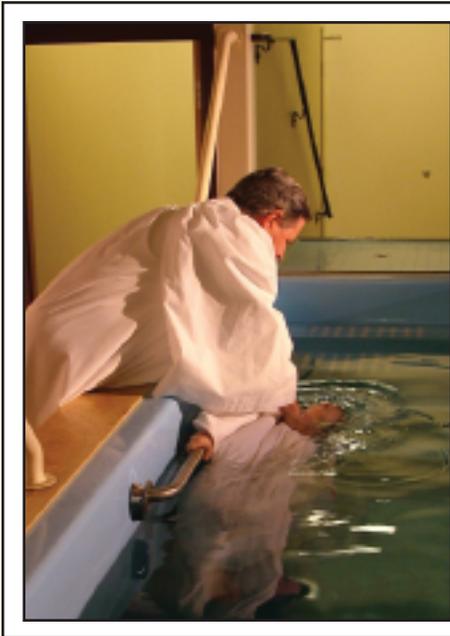
The Bible tells a story about Naaman who had leprosy. The prophet Elisha told him, “Go to the Jordan and “*wash* (רצץ) yourself” seven times and you will be clean” (II Kings 5:10). He balked at first but finally went down to the River Jordan and “*dipped*” (טבל) seven times. He was healed. Both *wash* and *dip* meant go down into the water. However, anyone who has seen the Jordan River (Naaman knew Syrian waters were cleaner) knows it is often muddy. This washing had to do with obedience and faith, not with the condition of the water.

Was John a Baptist?

John (who was later called “Baptist”) was a Jew who immersed people. The New

STU YOTE





Testament was written in Greek, and *baptizmo* is a Greek word — but immersion was a Jewish practice. Mark (chap.1) says, “John came baptizing (immersing) in the wilderness, preaching a baptism (immersion) of repentance for the remission of sins. Then *all the land of Judea and those from Jerusalem ...* were all baptized (immersed) by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

(1) This was **before** Jesus’ ministry. Jews **did not** ask, “What on earth does he mean — baptize?” They **knew**. Again, *baptizmo* was a Greek word for a Jewish practice. In Hebrew and Aramaic the word was *immerse* (טביל) and John probably used that word anyway. In fact, some scholars believe the book of Mark was written first and in Hebrew. If so, would that we could find a copy!

(2) John said, “I immerse *with water*.” Speaking of Jesus who would come *after* him, “He will immerse *with the Spirit* of the Holy One.” *Tevilah* (טבילה) was immersion and Jews knew perfectly well what the practice was. Why, then, would people think it is only a Christian practice?

(3) Why was Jesus, a Jew, baptized by John a Jew? In the book of Matthew (written by a Jew), we find Jesus was immersed “*to fulfill all righteousness*.” Since there was no New Testament at that time, he *had to be referring* to righteousness as practiced by historic Judaism. Jesus was being consecrated to a public priestly ministry. Hebrew Levitical law required all priests to be consecrated when “thirty years old and above” to do the work in the tabernacle (Num. 4:3).

(4) Jeremiah 31:34 speaks of a time when all

the house of Israel and Judah will know the Lord, needing no one to teach them. I Peter 2:5 speaks of a *universal* “priesthood of believers.”

Should everyone be physically washed, dipped, or baptized?

The thief on the cross beside Jesus is cited for many reasons — and we will cite him again. He called out to Jesus, “*Lord*, remember me when you came into your kingdom.” Romans 10:9 says if one “confesses the Lord Jesus” and “believes *in his heart* God raised Jesus from the dead,” he is saved. The thief was not immersed, yet Jesus told him, “Absolutely, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Back to the Hebrew root.

Teval (טבל) is the root of the words — *dip, baptize and immerse*. The letter *tet* (ט) generally refers to something that encloses or covers. *Bet* (ב) indicates the covering is *inward* or spiritual. Note: *tov* (טב) means *good*, not of oneself — but *God-covered*.

Tov (ט) the last letter of the alphabet, was originally \times or $+$ and later τ . It is similar to *tet* (9th letter). *Tet* (⊗) is *tov* (x) *encircled* (⊗). As this encircled *tet* (⊗) is found in *surround, clean, bathe, dew, cover over; pure, clean and dip*, it appears the word is not limited to one form. *Tet* is in the heart of the word *trust* (בטח) and *sin*, (חטא), both indicating being “covered” one way or the other. Biblically, a sinner approached God by being dipped (טבל) with blood (Gen. 37:31), dipped (טבל) in water (Num. 19:18), water poured over him (Lev. 11:32), or touched with hyssop dipped (טבל) in blood (Exodus 12:22). Most

important, the *form* must be accompanied by *faith*, because “the *just* (one right with God) shall live by *faith*” (Hab. 2:4).

Essenes (Jews) bathed each morning for bodily purity. “Living (running) water” was the water of choice, as oxygen makes it cleaner. The Jewish *mikveh* (מיקוה) is similar to a baptismal. John oversaw the immersion of people in a river (up to 5,000) but there were pools (מיקוה) for washing in Jerusalem and throughout Israel. They were normal for all Jews, including followers of Jesus and are the forerunner of later Christian immersion.

Mikveh.

The root of *mikveh* is *koveh* (קוה), meaning both *hope* and *wait*. Traditionally, observant Jewish men go into the *mikveh* every Friday to purify themselves before Shabbat. Women go into the *mikveh* once a month after completing their menstrual cycle. Consider *kav* (ק) as *caf* (כ), a container holding the mind which recognizes the need for cleansing, and *vov* (ו), a link to Heh (ה), referring to Yahweh, the personal name of God. One’s hope (קוה) is not in the water, but in God, indicating *faith is at work*. Faith produces *hope* (קוה) which requires *waiting* (קוה). So then, water immersion is the physical symbol of spiritual agents (faith and hope) which are at work making one clean before God. Jesus, following Biblical precedents, instructed baptism for disciples in all nations,” and further instructed, it is “faith that makes you whole.”

