

Water baptism is an accepted form of worship or obedience in most of the Christian denominational systems. If we include water baptism of infants, then those who do not practice any form of water baptism are definitely in the minority.

It is universally accepted that water baptism, either immersion or sprinkling, does not save anyone. We won't canvass the authenticity of either form of water baptism but focus rather on the ordinance itself and its place in God's purposes.

Water baptism has been so long a Christian tradition that it goes unquestioned as being valid in today's present dispensation of the Grace of God. A casual reading of the Gospels will show water baptism prevalent in the ministry of John the Baptist, the Disciples of Christ, and the ministries recorded in the Book of Acts. Water baptisms or washings were embedded from the beginning of Israeli history in the Levitical, Temple services, in the daily lives of the people and is featured in prophesy. This Israeli highlight of everyday life continued right through the Gospel and Acts periods. Old Testament or New, water baptism can be found and thus by sheer weight of presence its place in today's orders of service is affirmed for many.

In the modern Christian era, water baptism is understood as a demonstration of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord and is a public confession of an inward act of faith in Him. It is positioned awhile after the confession of faith in Christ for the modern believer but not so in the New Testament. For many, undergoing water baptism is a unifying statement that they are a child of God and is an essential part of denominational (church) membership. It is widely seen as an obedience issue rather than one essential for salvation. As sincere students of the Word we need to know if these rationales are scripturally valid.

As with all Bible topics, the Bible study rules must be observed if we are to fully understand the place and significance of water baptism today. The questions of who, what, when, where and why are important in our examination of water baptism. Likewise we need to note its contexts and of course the wide comparison of Scripture with Scripture is another essential basic to a prudent study. These are all essentials of rightly dividing water baptism; we do not want to be unapproved and ashamed before our Lord on any subject.

We begin by taking a passage from John's Gospel. Here it is recorded that once news of the Baptist's prophetic preaching reached the leadership in Jerusalem, a deputation was sent to make inquiries;

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. Joh 1:19-31

The first question posed to John was concerning his identity, "who are you?" Not once did the delegation ask anything as to water baptism itself as if it were some new and strange feature of public witness. Water baptism was very well known to them, it was

an integral part of their religious and social life when John appeared. But even more so, they knew that water baptism was to accompany the witness of Messiah, (Ez.36), Elijah (Mal.4:5) and “that prophet” (Deut.18:15-18).

Water baptism in its opening context is in relation to the prophetic coming of Israel’s Messiah and it was seen in the ministry of John the Baptist who heralded that coming Kingdom of Glory. This is confirmed by the questions of the delegation and by John’s first and later explanation;

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. (Isaiah 40) Joh 1:23
And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. Joh 1:19-31

Water baptism in an opening context, relates to the coming of Israel’s Messiah to Israel. It was part of Israel’s history, social life and expectation of the coming Kingdom out of heaven on earth.

One of our greatest barriers to Bible understanding is to read back into the New Testament our western “Christian” culture. We believe Christ was crucified on Friday (or Wednesday) which is incorrect insofar as Israel did not have a calendar with recurring Monday through Sunday. Israelis did not marry in a church or by a priest or officiating pastor. While the orthodox Jews gathered in the synagogue most of the early “churches” of the New Testament were assemblies of believers in private homes. There were no huge, glorified buildings; money was collected for the poor saints in other locations not to pay huge salaries or build bigger buildings. In many cases we subconsciously read back into the Bible setting our “church” concepts and this might also include our traditions of water baptism. Are our water baptism traditions in harmony with the Word or have they altered the truth of it over the centuries?

Water baptism first occurs in a very strong context, namely the preparation of Israel for the coming Kingdom they were promised, and the manifestation of the saving, cleansing One through whom that Kingdom would arrive;

And this is the record of John,He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias, (Is.40).I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me,Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. ... but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. Joh 1:19-31

Water baptism, as clearly explained by John, was part of the preparation of Israel for their Messiah who would take away sin and bring in the Kingdom. This context of water baptism has nothing to do with us today, we are not being prepared for the coming earthly Kingdom, we are members of the church which is His Body destined for the heavenly Kingdom arena. Christ certainly died to take away our sin and sins but observing water baptism directs our attention away from our calling and hope.

Here is another record concerning John, his ministry and the place of water baptism;
In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Is.40). And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. Mat 3:1-6

Water baptism was preceded by the appeal to repent and to repent for very special reasons; the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near and the people needed to prepare

for that Kingdom. In response to John's call, they went out and were baptized by him, confessing their sins.

Water baptism accompanied repentance and confession of sins as a preparation for the Kingdom as depicted in Isaiah 40; make straight the way of the Lord. Water baptism, accompanied by repentance and confession of sins as preparation for the earthly Kingdom is not how we practice it today. The call to repent, to be water baptized and confess sins was not directed to us. Isaiah has appeared twice in the record of John's ministry and Isaiah 40 is very clearly directed to a specific people: [Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isa 40:1-3](#)
[O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd \(cp.Ez.34\): he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young. Isa 40:9-11](#)

Water baptism, repentance and confession of sins were in the earthly Kingdom context. The "my people" of Isaiah were the people of Israel, not our church. Speak comfortably to Jerusalem and Zion does not mean words of comfort to our calling in heaven. There is no Scriptural authority to wrench water baptism from these earthly contexts and carry it across into our calling today. "Behold your God" and His Kingdom of Isaiah is the very proclamation of the water baptism of John; to make their God manifest to them. Their God would rule the world from Jerusalem and keep them safe from their enemies, see Is.41:8-14.

John and Christ preached to God's people, Israel; the "my people" of Isaiah 40, not you and me today. Israel remained God's people right through the Gospel and Acts and were anticipating the fulfillment of the promises God had made to their fathers which included a King ruling in righteousness and deliverance from their enemies. Paul looks to this in Roms.11 where he quotes Is.40. Water baptism was a confirmation of these promises insofar it was a divinely ordained preparation for them. Water baptism in the N.T. did not herald the introduction of "the church"; rather it accompanied the announcement that the very Kingdom so widely proclaimed, was near at hand. These Psalms, like Isaiah 40, speak of Zion and the cities of Judah, and summarize that great Kingdom hope;

[Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein. For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah: that they may dwell there, and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it: and they that love his name shall dwell therein.](#)

[Psa 69:34-36](#)

[In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. Psa 72:7-11](#)

So far we have seen that water baptism is inseparable from the preparatory witness of John the Baptist. Remember this word preparation. Baptisms or washing were common place in Israel; not anything so unusual as to need explanation. There were washings inside the Temple for the Priests and offerings, and washings outside it for the common people. Baptisms were a part of Israeli life.

Water baptism belongs to the church Israel and is inseparable from that calling and those purposes God ordained for and through her. Here are His words to that nation;

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. And now if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to Me above all the nations; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel. Exo 19:4-6 (cp. Is.61, 1Pet.2:9)

Israel was to be that Kingdom of Priests separated from, but among the nations to whom they would testify, Is.43-44. To obey God's voice and to keep the Covenant related initially to the Law given to them through Moses, but later the words of the Lord through the other prophets.

The Law, its Tabernacle services and the Prophets were a preparation for Israel. They taught the Holiness of God, the sinfulness of people and such wonderful redemptive truths as identification, substitution and transference for atonement and forgiveness of sins. The Law brought in the knowledge of sin and condemnation, Roms.3:19-20. While the Law and Tabernacle services could not make the offeror perfect as regards the conscience see Hebs.9, it was an instrument for education and faithfulness and the Law required many baptisms or washings. Remember, baptism and washing are synonymous terms.

Here are some of the baptisms required in the Law. The Priests had to be washed before entering service, Ex.29:4, 30:17-21, Lev.16:4. Some sacrifices were washed, Ex.29:17, Lev.1:9, 13. The leper had to wash for cleansing, Lev.14:8, 9. Those who touched a person with an issue were to wash their clothes and bathe or baptize themselves, Lev.15:5-10. The one chosen to release the scape goat and carry the bullock and goat for the sin offering outside the camp had to wash his clothes and baptize himself in water, Lev.16:26-28. Any unclean person was to be sprinkled (or baptized) with the watered ashes of the red heifer and on the seventh day the unclean was to purify himself, wash his clothes and bathe himself in water, Numb.17-19.

Water is a great cleansing agent and baptisms or washings were typical, they pictured a greater cleansing and King David understood this. Rather than turn to the priests in the tent he had constructed, he called upon the Lord to purge and wash him. It was David who rejoiced in the blessedness of those whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered by faith and the reckoning of God, not the death of an animal; Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Psa 51:6-7

For You do not desire sacrifice; or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psa 51:16-17

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. Psa 32:1-2 (Roms.4:6-8)

Water baptism belonged with the things the Lord did not desire, the things of outward show; the things that were only typical. Water baptism was a means of education and preparation for the greater cleansing. Paul writes in Hebrews the truths David had understood and which were ascribed to Christ;

Then truly the first tabernacle had also ordinances of divine service and an earthly sanctuary.....the Holy Spirit signifying by this that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. Heb 9:1

For it was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him who did the service perfect as regards the conscience, which stood only in meats and drinks, and different kinds of washings (baptisms) and fleshly ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. Heb 9:8-10.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. Heb 10:1

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Heb.10:4-7.

It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins, they, along with the different kinds of washings/baptisms were imposed until the One about whom the Scriptures spoke, would come. John's water baptism and its remission of sins were inseparable from those things which were imposed until the time of reformation, or literally, the time when things would be set right. Water baptism belongs with the things that were designed to teach salvation, water baptism did not save anyone any more than it only typically cleansed the priest under the Law. To this ministry of Zechariah's son the Angel spoke, and when his tongue was loosed, Zechariah echoed the words;

And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, (Mal.4:5-6) and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Luk 1:16-17

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: Luk 1:68-70

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, Luk 1:76-78

John's ministry and water baptism were to, "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" and only "to give knowledge of salvation.....by the remission of sins". What was typical in the Old Testament could not make the offerors perfect, neither could water baptism of the New Testament;

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Heb.10:7.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Joh 1:29

John's water baptism was typical, not true, a transition from forgiveness or remission of sins in the Temple and the sacrifice, to remission or forgiveness and a cleared conscience in the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

Water baptisms were a feature of Israeli spiritual life; an inseparable part of their education in redemption. Hebrews 10 tells us that the Law was a shadow of good things to come and the shadow was not the substance; not the reality which cleared the conscience. The Law spoke of righteousness by faith, and other redemption truths but it only pointed to the Kingdom out of Heaven on the earth where water baptism belongs. The Law with its water baptisms did not anticipate our calling to heavenly places.

Paul writes at length about the Law in Galatians. The Law was a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ in whom they would be made righteous and in whom they would inherit the Kingdom on earth:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Gal 3:24-25

Now that faith is the key to righteousness, the weak and beggarly elements are to be discarded as a means of achieving it, Gal.4:9. It is difficult to let something go that has been part of a spiritual life for centuries. I'm certain those demanding the faithful be circumcised for righteousness, see Acts 15 and Galatians, could bring forth Scripture to prove their point, but there were changes brought about by God and these they were not observing. Today, holding onto water baptism can be supported by Scripture, but not Scripture rightly divided. But it is protested, Christians today don't water baptize to be saved, only to show they are either, obedient, joining a denomination or showing Christ's death burial or resurrection. However, all these rationales are not fitting in our calling today when it has been replaced with a baptism by God Himself through the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism changed in purpose prior to Acts 28. John came baptizing, but later The Lord commanded the disciples to go into the world and preach the gospel, baptizing those who believed upon which point the promised gifts would follow, Mark.16. I don't believe this command is ours today but putting that aside, what we do notice is that if this be water baptism, then that of John and the Lord's disciples was no longer applicable. The water baptism of the Gospels was only a preparation, an introduction to Christ and that purpose was over. When God changes something it is imperative that we note and respond to those changes. If God changed the nature or purpose of water baptism between the Gospels and Acts, then it is not impossible to believe that He removed it when Israel was nationally put aside at Acts 28.

How strange it would be if the water baptisms of today are based upon the Gospel accounts when those were removed by the Lord Himself. Reading Acts 19 we find this to be so;

[And it came to pass, that...Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Act 19:1-5](#)

Those baptized according to John had not received the Holy Spirit or gifts, things had changed, and John's baptism was no longer appropriate. And, just as Mark 16 described, they received the gifts when Paul laid his hands upon them and these gifts are described as the "blessings of Abraham", Gals.3:2, 6-7, 14. The Holy Spirit descended upon The Lord at his water baptism to prove to John that he was indeed the One, Jn.1:23. The Holy Spirit gifts did not fall on all those who had repented and were water baptized during the Gospels for Pentecost had not been fulfilled; the Holy Spirit had not been shed forth.

Returning to Galatians three, Paul writes that those who had been baptized into Christ had put on Christ and as a consequence were Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. The promise was given to Abraham before the Law;

[For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Gal 3:27](#)
[And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:29](#)

While I believe the Holy Spirit baptized or united them into Christ, the likelihood is that most of them would have been water baptized and all those believers had the supernatural gifts as per Mark 16. They were Abraham's seed and heirs with Abraham. This inheritance is on the earth; it is not associated with our heavenly calling. Here is the inheritance given by promise;

[Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many;](#)

but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (This is a reference to Genesis; see 12:3, 7, 13:15-16, 15:5-7). And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Gal 3:16-18

Genesis 15:6 speaks of righteousness by faith and is quoted in Gals.3:6. The very next verse in Gen.15 that is verse 7, speaks of the Promised Land and is referred to in Gals. 3:16-18. The Promised Land is the inheritance those who were water baptized were expecting. The supernatural gifts are the blessing of Abraham and these are mentioned in Gals.3:1-5 and 14. Before Acts 28 water baptism belonged with righteousness by faith, the Promised Land and supernatural gifts; all found in the O.T. After Acts 28, our calling was given by revelation, see Eph.3:7-10, a secret not found in the O.T. and without water baptism involved.

Water baptism must be rightly divided, it cannot be separated from that previous dispensational purpose and justified today in a completely different calling which has nothing to do with supernatural gifts or the Promised Land. However, righteousness is ours in Christ because that redemptive truth continued across Acts 28. Keeping water baptism today and discarding supernatural gifts and the Promised Land is not correctly handling the Word of Truth.

Our calling is to an inheritance never given Abraham by promise, 2Tim.1:9. Our calling does not include supernatural gifts, Eph.4:7-13. Our calling doesn't go back before the Law, it goes back before the foundation of the world;

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, Eph 1:3-5 (See also 2Tim.1:9)
In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: Eph 1:11

Our calling does not include water baptism. Please meditate on the words "made without hands" and "the faith of the operation of God" in this passage about us today; Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. Col 2:8-12

God does not change as to character and virtue, but He changes the sets of conditions; he can remove, alter or introduce things as he leads people according to his purposes. God's purposes changed after Acts 28 to a heavenly one. This is why we are to rightly divide, or separate the different things in God's Word else we be found ashamed and unapproved, that is reprobate. Just as John's baptism was removed after faith came, so water baptism was removed completely at the introduction of the new set of conditions. After Acts 28 God introduced through Paul, a heavenly purpose in which water baptism plays no part. Our baptism is entirely by God's doing, not by man's doing. By faith in Christ our Lord we are complete in Him we were baptized into Christ by God and there is nothing to be added to the completeness God has prescribed us.

The baptism in today's dispensation is that made by the faith of the operation of God and is contemporary with that circumcision made without hands. Here is a wider view in this Colossians' passage;

And you are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power, in whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in whom also you were raised through the faith of the working of God, raising Him from the dead.

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Col 2:10-14

Our completeness in Christ is in all Christ accomplished, not in anything "manmade". The emphasis is not on any circumcision or baptism conducted by the Israelis according to the Law, but on the cutting off of our Lord and His resurrection from the dead; this is very important. We are complete "in Him". By baptism we were buried with him and in Christ we were raised from the dead by the working of God. We have been made alive with him, all trespasses forgiven (past, present and future), and those ordinances of Acts 15 in which the Law was contained (Eph.2:15) were blotted out or as Ephesians puts it, abolished. But how can we be buried with him in baptism?

Baptism speaks of identification or immersion into something or someone. Here are just three examples;

For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now. Act 1:5 (see Jn.1:33).

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. 1Co 10:1-4

But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. Mat 20:22

John baptized Israel with water. Either sprinkling or immersion but the Lord baptized with the Holy Spirit, and those baptized by him were "sprinkled" or "immersed" in supernatural gifts. Cornelius, the first gentile featured in Acts, received these gifts before he was water baptized, Acts 10:44-47. It is interesting to note that Paul, the only apostle commissioned to the gentiles, while he was deploring the divisions at Corinth, observes he was not sent to water baptize but to preach the gospel. Many a theory regarding this can be found but I believe Paul's commission was different to that of Matt.28:19-20, Mark 16:15-17 and Acts 1:8. However, Paul did baptize Israelis, just as he circumcised Timothy whose mother was a Jew, see 1Cor.1:12-17, Acts 19 and Acts 16.

Paul wrote to the Israeli Corinthians that their fathers had been baptized or "immersed" in Moses by the cloud and sea; the people were united with, "immersed in" their deliverer by baptism. Many have noted that the people went across the sea dry shod, Ex.14:21, so they were not baptized into or united with Moses by any water. Noah wasn't touched by any water either so was Peter referring to water baptism in 1Peter 3? We must not assume that baptism refers to water, or that water baptism unites anyone with Christ. Israel was united into Moses without water, and the believers of the Gospels and Acts were united into Christ without water as we are today. Reading water baptism into Roms.6:3-4 and Gals.3:27 could be hasty and traditionally colored.

In Matt. 20 the Lord is speaking about His pending suffering and death; the next baptism he was to experience. He had already been baptized in water and the Holy Spirit. He was to be immersed or baptized in suffering and death, see verses 17-19.

In Colossians 2, our baptism is mentioned in a passage more about circumcision and again, the circumcision is not the fleshly one ordered under the Law, but the circumcision of our Lord when he was "cut off". So we were buried with our Lord by baptism but Paul goes on to write, "in whom also you were raised through the faith of the working of God, raising Him from the dead." Would we be united with Christ's burial by water baptism but then raised by faith in the working of God? In Christ we were raised because in Christ we were buried with him. How and what constitutes us as being "in Christ"? Is it water baptism or a different working of God? Ephesians supplies the answer;

[That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Eph 1:12-14](#)

At the point when we believed we were sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit. We were not sealed in Christ at water baptism, and as we shall see shortly, water baptism does not reflect the glory that God has graced upon us because we are in Christ. This glory goes way beyond his death burial and resurrection. Water baptism has no place in this great salvation for the church which is His Body in heavenly places. We are sealed in Christ until the redemption of the purchased possession, that great future day when all that God has promised us will be a blessed reality. And being sealed into Christ is unto the praise of His glory, that is, the glory of the Father who has so saved us.

[For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. Eph 2:8-9](#)

In Ephesians chapter one we are assured that, upon believing into Christ, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit. At that time, we were sealed unto the day of redemption, the Holy Spirit being the pledge or good deposit of that future redemption. Thus we are assured on two counts that the great day of glory is ours, first because the Holy Spirit sealed us and secondly The Holy Spirit is the pledge, or as the KJV has it, earnest, or down payment if you will of our inheritance. This inheritance is ours now and will be in all reality in that day when the purchased possession is redeemed.

[That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Eph 1:12-14](#)

There is no equivocation here. This sealing was made at that moment we believed, and despite the fact nothing of that sealing was felt or in any way experienced by the human sensory preceptors, we are indeed secured. Not only so, most of us were ignorant of this incredible blessing when we believed, but this operation of the Holy Spirit was effective and complete at that time with no annual update or misplaced water baptism to be added after the event.

Later in Ephesians Paul urges us to put off our former manner of life so as not to grieve the Holy Spirit who sealed us to the redemption of the purchased possession;

[And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.](#)

Eph 4:30

Many of us find it difficult to hold these truths with great conviction because of the lack of “experience”, but truth is not dependent on our feelings. Let’s face it; the water baptism ceremony is full of feeling, the accolades of the “church” members, family and friends. Our lives contain a myriad of emotional high and lows and what a massive memory bank of such experiences builds within us for the day our bodies are less capable. But we have a circumcision made without hands and a baptism by the faith of the operation of God, Col.2:11-12 and we are sealed by The Holy Spirit; nothing felt, no crowds, no family or friends. Later we might be joyous when we learn these wonderful truths. More importantly, no person or human agency established any of this. This great sealing action of the Holy Spirit was to the praise of His glory, not for the praise of man. Water baptism, which is a baptism made with hands, has no place in this calling; it does not represent all that The Father has given us in Christ. To undergo an ordinance belonging to an earthly calling when we are called to a heavenly one is not an act of obedience, it is mixing and extinguishing the things that differ, not distinguishing them, Phils.1:9-10.

After Paul wrote that we had been sealed by the Holy Spirit, he goes on to write these words;

[For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Eph 2:8-10.](#)

We are the Father’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works and our salvation from start to finish is by grace through faith; not of ourselves. Again, water baptism is excluded from grace and the salvation which is the gift from God. Nothing of human endeavor has a place here.

Some have observed that Ephesians is the great “in-ness” epistle. Here are just some of the glorious things that have befallen and appertain to us because we are “in Him”.

1. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing and seated in the heavenly places.
[Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Eph 1:3](#)
[Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, \(by grace ye are saved;\) Eph 2:5](#)
[And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus Eph 2:6](#)
2. We were chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blame in front of Gods face; there, in that place, we are the adopted heirs:
[According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, Eph 1:4-5 \(see also 1:11\).](#)
3. We have been highly graced in Him including redemption and forgiveness of sins;
[To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Eph 1:6-7 \(see also 4:32\)](#)
4. In Christ we are God’s holy temple dwelling in the heavenly places;
[In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Eph 2:21-22](#)

With these glorious things ours because we are in Him, adding anything is not only superfluous but perhaps shows deafness to the warning given here:

[Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. Col 2:8](#)

We might shudder to think that water baptism is a tradition of men when we read about its prevalence in the Gospels through Acts, but once that set of conditions was put to one side by God at Acts 28; when Israel was no longer His people, and we now learn of the wonderful things given us because we are in Him, then that is exactly what water baptism has become.

I appeal to you today, believe with all your heart this portion which follows that warning quoted above;

[Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: Col 2:8-10](#)

See this incredible parallel? In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead and we, who are wonderfully “in Christ”, are complete or filled full in Him.

With the beautiful riches of our present calling fresh in our mind we shall return to the earthly setting of water baptism as found in Mark 16. The stark comparison between the earthly dispensational setting of water baptism and our baptism established by God alone will become clearer to us as we accept the Scripture at its word.

Some translations omit these last verses from Mark’s Gospel but I believe we have gained the most by retaining them, especially since events following this account and other Scriptures are totally in harmony with it.

[And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.](#)

[And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.](#)

[So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.](#)

[And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mar 16:15-20.](#)

The Acts endorses this passage for indeed, mighty signs and wonders accompanied the message as confirmation. The sick were healed; the dead raised and while we have no record about any deadly drink, we certainly know where a serpent struck God’s servant but he suffered no harm, see Acts 28. Water baptism must not be separated from these things. If we water baptize, then we should expect the same blessings to follow. Each and every one of us should enjoy the gifts, should raise the dead, heal the sick and endure the viper’s strike. But this is not so and it is inconsistent to retain water baptism as a tradition when the features associated with it are absent.

The Lord opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, see Lk.24:45, and after 40 days instruction concerning the Kingdom of God He told them to tarry until Pentecost when the Holy Spirit would baptize them, see Acts 1:1-5. Thereupon one question and one only came to their minds:

[To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.](#)

[For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Act 1:3-6](#)

The earthly Kingdom had been expounded to them for forty days at the conclusion of which, the Lord commanded them to remain in Jerusalem and wait for baptism of the Holy Spirit. In what way is the promise of the Father and the question they asked

linked? And is there a link to the commission in Mark 16? The prophets will establish these links for us.

When Peter preached to Israel in Acts 2 & 3, his appeals included the need for water baptism, and the promise of the supernatural gifts. Not only so, had they repented and turned back to God, Christ would have been sent back to them; the King would have returned and established the Kingdom. Here are Peter's words;

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 2:38
Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Act 3:19-20

Water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit belong with the glorious earthly Kingdom promised to Israel. The Lord did not return back then and we conclude that insufficient numbers of the nation responded positively. The Lord's response to their question in Acts 1:7 assured them of the Father's will in the matter as to time, and we conclude that the timing was conditional upon Israel's response to God's call through Peter. This we believe was already embedded in prophesy as we shall see in Joel and Malachi.

We turn to Joel to see both the call to repent, the promise of the Holy Spirit's gifts and that Kingdom potentially moving from "at hand" to thy Kingdom has come. The supernatural gifts of Joel, Mark 16 and Acts are the same and inseparable from the earthly Kingdom.

Here is the call to repent in Joel and the potential intercession of the Lord in Mercy. Is Joel saying that the Lord could have returned and removed that Northern army before it did much damage and likewise, is Malachi saying repentance prevents destruction?:
Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent,... Joel 2:12-14a
Behold, I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, that I not come and strike the earth with utter destruction. Mal 4:5-6

Here are the supernatural gifts promised in Joel:

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joel 2:28

Peter and Paul both refer to the prophet Joel see Acts 2:17-20 and Romans 10:12-13.

Here is the earthly Kingdom in the very same chapter of Joel:

Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. Joel 2:21-24

And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. Joel 2:27

Water baptism and supernatural gifts are associated with the earthly Kingdom, when Christ dwells in the midst of Israel.

It was a pertinent question in Acts 1:4-6 because the outpouring of the Spirit and the earthly Kingdom are inseparable in the prophets and if the Lord was to pour out those gifts "not many days hence", then to ask would the Kingdom spoken by Joel, Isaiah and other prophets be restored at the same time was perfectly sound from those whose minds had been opened to the Scriptures. However, as Malachi and Joel

suggest, thy Kingdom come was conditional upon the nation repenting and insufficient numbers of Israelis repented. The Lord's answer "it is not for you to know" certainly gave scope for Israel to repent and the Kingdom established nearly two thousand years ago. Surely Israel will mourn when they realize what they did to Him and what could have happened not long after His first advent.

Joel says clearly when Christ dwells in His earthly inheritance the animals are not to fear for they will be sustained as well. Paul notes this hope for the animal kingdom in Roms.8:18-22. Water baptism, supernatural gifts and animals, this is not a heavenly setting.

Isaiah 32 also speaks of a King reigning and the wilderness becoming a fruitful field when the Spirit is poured upon Israel; the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom together in prophesy again. Not only abundance in Messiah's reign but also animals dwelling together in peace;

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: Isa 11:1

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. Isa 11:5
The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Isa 11:6-9. (See also Ez.36:22-38.)

If Isaiah says the child shall play on the hole of the asp when the Son of David reigns then it isn't difficult to conclude that Mark 16 and the promise of immunity against such serpents is the same earthly program. Water baptism, Spirit baptism of gifts and animal harmony in submission must not be wrenched from this earthly context and translated into a heavenly one.

This very passage of Isaiah is one of the prophetic comforts of hope used by Paul in Roms.15:4-13, see v12 & Isa.11:10. The hope outlined by Paul before Acts 28 was the earthly Kingdom where the wolf would dwell with the lamb. The Roman believers enjoyed supernatural gifts and most were water baptized. These things are inseparable and do not belong in our calling.

Water baptism belongs with Israel, their Temple services and daily life. It does not belong with us destined for heavenly places.

Water baptism belongs with repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. The Kingdom as described in Moses, the Law and the Prophets. This is not our hope today. Water baptism belongs with revealing Messiah to Israel; the King to rule in that Kingdom. We worship the Head of the church which is His Body today, both raised to the heavenly places.

Water Baptism belongs with repentance and confession of sins in preparedness for the King and the prophetic Kingdom. We are not being prepared for the earthly Kingdom today.

Water baptism belongs with the question, "will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Our calling today does not restore or replace the Kingdom to Israel.

Water baptism belongs with repent and he will send Christ back to Israel. Today, we are raised and seated with Christ in the heavenly places, Eph.2.

Water baptism belongs with supernatural gifts, the Promise of the Father to Israel. Despite the objections, these are not the blessings of the church which is His body.

Water baptism belongs with animals rendered harmless and dwelling peacefully

Together. Animals enjoy this in the Kingdom on the earth, not in heavenly places. Water baptism belongs with the earthly sphere of Christ's Kingdom. We belong to the heavenly sphere.

From the Gospels to that last chapter of acts, the hope is entirely an earthly one, but when Israel was nationally put aside at Acts 28:25-27, the earthly Kingdom program with water baptism was also put aside until a future resumption.

Water baptism does not belong in our worship today.

After Acts 28, water baptism has no place; it does not belong with our calling which is the heavenly sphere of Christ's Kingdom. We are looking for the Appearing, which takes place in the heavenly places where Christ sits at the Father's right.

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