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The Baptism

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Matthew 3:13-14

Key verses: Matthew 3:13-17; 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 2:1-20; 4:1-13; John 1:1-18

Key personalities: God as the Trinity, Jesus, and John the Baptist

Timeline: The God of Eternity walks the earth, fully God and fully Man, about 26-28 A.D. During this time, Pontius Pilate becomes Roman governor of Judea.

By the Jordan River, an ominous apoplectic figure, John the Baptist, proclaimed repentance to prepare for the coming Messiah. This served as the climax to John's ministry and as the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

"Crossing the Jordan." The setting is the area frequented by major Biblical events. This was where Abraham built altars to God, where Jacob saw the ladder to Heaven, where the waters divided for Joshua on Israel's entrance into the Promised Land and, just to the west was Jericho, where the walls fell down. This is where birds fed Elijah and where the chariots of God carried him away to Heaven. This is where Elijah heals Naaman. This is the spot where Jesus faced His 40-day temptation. Just to the south is where the once fertile valley and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were judged and destroyed--where nothing grows even today. Just to the east is the mountain Nebo where God shows Moses the land and the future of Israel, where Moses dies and is buried. This is the entrance to the Promised Land (Jos. 3; 2 Kings 2; 5; 14).

Key Happenings: The beginning of Jesus' ministry!

A perplexed John tries to prevent Jesus from being baptized with a sense of shock and puzzlement, "*I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"* Why? John did not want Jesus to be baptized because John knew that He did not need it, nor needed to repent. Yet, Jesus comes to him anyway. Jesus gives His reason, saying, "*It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*"

The Jordan River is a small river compared to the Nile or Amazon, yet it sets a stage as a connecting point for all of time. Why was John was baptizing in this historic spot of the Jordan River? Because of all the history? Possibly. This is also where the most water was; and John was left out where the teachers of the law did their ceremonial cleanings (Matt. 3:5-6; John 3:23)

Cosmic Testimony! The heavens open and the full acknowledgment of the Trinity testifies to the world and confirms that Jesus is fully God and is the promised Messiah! Jesus received witness and prophecy directly by God Himself! The Holy Spirit testifies and *descends like a dove* (Matt. 12:28; Luke 3:22). This refers to the gentleness of the Holy Spirit, not that it was a bird with feathers! The dove makes a good symbol of the Holy Spirit, but is not the Holy Spirit. The *dove* means "promise" and a "new beginning," and symbolizes new hope and the promise of a new world and heaven to come (Gen. 8:10-12; 22:2; Ex. 4:22; Isa. 40:3; 42:1f; 64:1; 65:17; Psalm 2:7; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Why was Jesus baptized? John's baptism was for preparation, cleansing, confessing, and repentance for the remission of sins to prepare people for Christ. (Mark 1:4-5). The baptism itself

does not cleanse; it is only the public ceremony or statement of the commitment of the person being baptized! Thus, Jesus' Baptism was not the same as Christian Baptism. Jesus was without sin, even though John's baptism was to repent, Jesus was not repenting, but fulfilling "Righteousness" (Mark 1:5; Luke 7:29-35; Heb. 4:15). Since John was prophesying that the Messiah was coming, preparing the way, thus this baptism was also an introduction, inauguration or ordination for His ministry. He was initiated and presented to Israel. Jesus Himself did not baptize anyone, but His disciples did, and then called us to do so, too (Matt. 3:11; 28:19-20; John 1:29-34; 4:1-2; Acts 2:38; 8:35-38; 10:47-48).

Some people heard John's message, saw their filth, and sought to be clean (children of God--the Elect), while others made up excuses and lived in denial of their sin and their lost state (children of the devil) (Prov. 28:13; John 8:44)! People do the same today! You will never have freedom, or true life, unless you relinquish your determination of pride to have your own way! Being stubborn or being in denial will cause you to go to Hell, and you will miss what you could have had!

Jesus was setting an example by doing the Father's Will. Jesus was baptized not because He needed cleansing, but to be identified as one of us, to be identified with Israel and humanity so He can take our place of God's wrath (Psalm 40:7-8; Matt. 5:17; Luke 12:50; John 4:34; 8:29; II Cor. 5:21).

Some Christians get confused about what Baptism means and take Jesus' example out of its context and meaning. Sometimes, people see Jesus' baptism as pertaining to us and missing the fact Christian Baptism was not instituted yet (Matt. 28:18-20).

Baptism for the Christian means a ceremonial cleansing and purification: A sign that tells God and others that we have repented and seek His forgiveness and desire to accept a new life. The word literally means to be *immersed*; when you put in the context of the passages, it means to be immersed in the identification and obedience of Christ, not just about water or mode, which is a mere symbol (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14; 15: 25-27; Col. 2:11-12; Titus 3:5).

- It is a symbol of our union and covenant with our Lord (1 John 5:11-12).
- It is a sign of our commitment to be His disciple (Matt. 28:19).
- It is a work of our Lord that we participate by contributing our faith and obedience (Rom 6: 3-11; Col 2:9-13)!
- If baptism was essential for salvation, why do you suppose that Jesus did not baptize anyone?
- Baptism is significant and is not to be ignored, fought over, or taken lightly.
- Baptism in of itself does not cleanse us of sins. The cleansing occurs only by what Christ did that on the cross on our behalf! Baptism is the declaration of our commitment to what Christ has done. To say that baptism has the power to remove sin is to reduce who and what Christ did and creates a works-based means of regeneration and salvation; this is most certainly not true!
- Baptism is our call as a sign of our regeneration, our acceptance of His grace.

A Christian-believer's baptism is the public profession that a change occurred in you by the way of repentance! Repentance is essential! We cannot have salvation without repentance. Yes, Jesus saves us and God's Grace is free, but grace cannot come into a heart where it is not welcomed. Being unrepentant means we will not welcome His grace! Baptism is not a magic "get into Heaven card" or to receive His blessings and riches. Repentance is mandatory; baptism is not. (This is why some Christian groups do not practice it (Salvation Army) (Eph. 2:8-9).

Righteousness means God's sovereignty that He rules and is pure and holy. It translates to How God is compared to and relates to us, because we are corrupted by sin, while He is pure (Matt. 5:20; 21:32; 23:23). This also testifies that Jesus is righteous and has the ability to take our sin and cover it by His atonement (Matt. 8:10; 20:28).

One and Only/the Only Son. This is a clear, absolute declaration of the Deity of Christ and a reference to the Trinity nature of God, of which Christ is the "eternal generation" of God, the Son, second person of the Trinity. (Ex. 24:9-11; 33:20; John 13:23; 14:8-10; Heb. 11:17; 1 John 4:9).

The Temptation of Jesus! Immediately following His baptism by John and just before the start of His public ministry, Jesus is hammered (Matt. 3:13-17; 4:12-17; John 1:29)!

Jesus is led out into the desert to be tempted by Satan with the destiny of His creation and humanity at stake. During this time, He fasted and remained true and loyal to who He was and to His mission to come. Satan pulls out all of his efforts and abilities in a futile attempt to convince Jesus to serve him. In so doing, Jesus would receive greater honor and glory faster by having more control. The problem is that Jesus was already fully God, thus had total sovereignty, glory, and control. Satan based his attack on what he thought would be Jesus' greatest weakness, His humanity. However, Satan failed, as Christ, using His humanity and not His divinity as identification and model for us, defeated Satan's attack through Scripture, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and obedience.

- The Spirit leads Jesus to this "challenge," after He endorses Him at the baptism, to go into the wilderness of Judea, a desolate place (Luke 3:22).
- Jesus fasted, and was tempted for forty days, as were Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8; Luke 4:2).
- Whenever we receive the Holy Spirit, Satan will come and try to attack us with all he has. He will use everything he can to convince us we have made a mistake and we need to turn to ourselves, or a substitute other than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!
- Satan's chief job is to try to rob us of what God gives, but we have the power to stop him!
- Satan also uses Scripture, but he abuses it by taking it out of its context and twists it to serve his purpose and not God's. When we misuse Scripture, we are modeling ourselves after Satan! Furthermore, we should never even consider testing God!
- We have the same tools to overcome Satan and temptations in general. Remember, Satan has been defeated!
- We even have the authority and ability to repel Satan by the blood of the Cross. However, we must never take him lightly, for spiritual warfare and our conflict with him is very real (Eph. 6:12)!

Jesus was focused on God's plan, as we must be with our faith, trust, and obedience to it in the plan of God (Eph. 6:16; Heb. 10:35-39).

Key Takeaway: Are you willing to obey Jesus as the One who is "God with us," and through whom "God is Savior?"

All that you do in life must be a reflection of a life surrendered to Christ. If you are so self-willed there can be no room for the living Christ, this may mean that others will use you, take advantage of you, get mad at you, ignore you, go around you, ridicule you, and persecute you! But remember, what they do to you, they do to Him! Make sure you are not the one persecuting the Lord!

There are many Bible teachers/preachers who turn the gospel of Jesus Christ into some kind of "easy-believe-ism," where repentance is not necessary. However, as you can see, the Bible has

something different to say. I would go with God's Word and not self-proclaimed prompters. John reminds us of the need to bear fruit in keeping with true repentance (Gal. 5)! Are you showing true acceptance of Jesus as your Lord? You can know this by doing what He says (Luke 6:46; John 3:30).

The Call to the Church? Let our Lord be LORD, He is to be more; you are to be less. Be willing to learn about Him, to grow by His example in our obedience and be willing to go through times of waiting, confusion, discouragement and even suffering. See these as opportunities for personal growth, faith building and strengthening.

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever seen a street preacher? If so, how did you feel about them?
2. How much obedience and willingness do you think is really necessary to follow Christ?
3. How do you feel knowing we do not have a God who is uncaring or unconcerned? That we can never say God you do not understand me, because He had become and is identified as one of us.
4. What would happen if Jesus were not without sin? How important is baptism?
5. What does Jesus' servant-hood, obedience and identification mean to you and your faith?
6. How do you feel about people in the church who say one thing, yet have a completely different lifestyle? Proudful hypocrites?
7. What are the rocks of sin that need to be torn up, exposed, and repented from in you?
8. John had a following and was successful. How do you define success?
9. Why do you suppose that Jesus did not baptize anyone?
10. The way to spiritual maturity and the glory of our reward is not from finding shortcuts, but tempered through, learning, experience, and overcoming adversities. It is a long and difficult process (Acts 14:22; Rom. 2:7). How can you make this a reality in your life?
11. Are you willing to obey Jesus as the One who was "God with us", and through whom "God is Savior?"
12. What would it mean in your church to have the leadership let our Lord be the LORD, and the leader is to be less? What does that mean? What would that look like? What would be the results?