

Baptism (part 2 of 6): From John to Jesus By Alan Hitchen

The morning star of the gospel age was John the Baptist. As the great forerunner of the Messiah, God gave him the “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet*” (Lk. 3:3-4). All who heard John’s preaching and wanted to be ready for the kingdom were baptized (Mt. 3:2). All who refused to accept his baptism “*rejected for themselves the counsel of God*” (Lk. 7:29-30).

What happened next? After Jesus’ death, the Law of Moses ended and the king began reigning over his kingdom. What role did Jesus give baptism in the New Covenant? Did he remove it or change its power or purpose? Was the link between baptism and remission of sins broken? As Mark began his gospel with John’s “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,*” he ended it with Jesus’ warning that of all who heard the gospel, only “*he who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mk. 1:4; 16:16). With “*all authority in heaven and earth*” Jesus told his apostles to “*make disciples of all the nations baptizing them*” (Mt. 28:19). He also demanded “*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*” (Lk. 24:47). Since it all began at Jerusalem, Peter’s first sermon reveals the purpose and scope of repentance, remission of sins and baptism in the new covenant.

As Peter reached the conclusion that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, “*they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” His inspired answer revealed the new role of baptism. “*Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:37-38). Consider the similarities and differences in how John preached baptism and how Peter preached baptism:

John preached a “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*”

Peter preached “*repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.*”

A second similarity between the two baptisms was in making disciples:

Jesus was “*making and baptizing more disciples than John*” (Jn. 4:1)

The apostles: “*make disciples of all nations baptizing them*” (Mt. 28:19)

The third similarity was the element in which baptism was administered.

“*I came baptizing with water.*” “*He who sent me to baptize with water.*” “*John baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there.*” (Jn. 1:31, 33; 3:23)

“*See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?*” “*Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*” “*Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized*” (Acts 8:36, 38; 10:47)

Jesus clearly kept the same element of **water** and the same purposes of **remission of sins** and **make disciples**. But baptism also went through a major revision and transformation. Not only did water baptism continue to make disciples and give remission of sins, but it was also given extraordinary powers! Power so manifold in its immensity that the power of the new birth (Jn. 3:3-5), Noah’s Ark (1Pet. 3:21), Israel’s passage through the Red Sea (1Cor 10:1-3), and the covenant of circumcision (Col. 2:11) were used to illustrate what Jesus’ baptism does today.

The power God gave John's baptism was insignificant compared to the potency Jesus gave to his. Even as late as Paul's return to Ephesus, as he found some who knew only John's baptism, he explained the difference. *"John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."* John's baptism pointed toward the future. It was a baptism of preparation only. *"When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."* (Acts 19:3-5). Luke did not elaborate on the differences because Paul had already done so in his letters.

Jesus Death, Burial, and Resurrection

While John's baptism offered remission of sins, it was upon the same basis as the animal sacrifices in the Law. Since *"it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"* (Heb. 10:4), John's baptism had the same power as animal sacrifices. Only the blood (death) of Jesus gave God the necessary power to *"be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:24-26). After his death, burial and resurrection, those with *"faith in Jesus"* are *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* Jesus' death paid the full debt of all sin so those in the New Covenant could be *redeemed* (ransomed from the power and consequence of sin). Since animal blood could never do this, Jesus death also redeemed all the saved who lived before his death: *"for this reason, he is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant"* (Heb. 9:15). Only after his death was there *"a propitiation by His blood."* *"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified."* (Heb. 10:14).

John baptized those living *"under the first covenant"* when it was only *'in his forbearance'* that *"God had passed over the sins previously committed."* The difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism is the same as the one between Moses' Law (first covenant) and the gospel: *"I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, ... For I delivered to you first of all that which I also*

received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures," (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The difference is: *'Christ died for our sins,' 'was buried' and 'rose again the third day.'*

Because these three things gave the gospel the power the Law never had, they are the gospel! The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and now *"baptism in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Mt 28:19) is our death, burial and resurrection with him. The

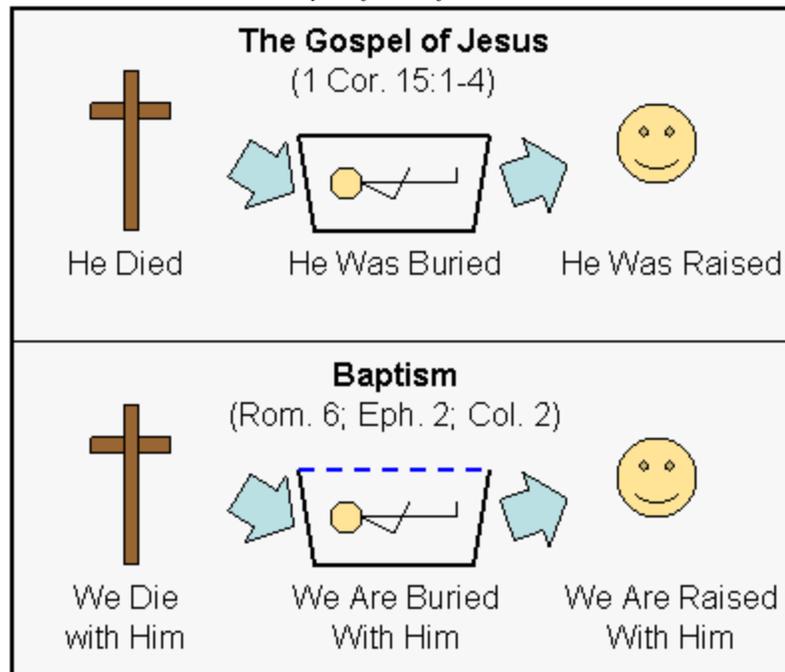


chart to the right illustrates how *"baptism"* corresponds to *"the gospel of Jesus Christ."*

A careful reading and comparison of Romans 6:2-6; Ephesians 2:1-6, and Colossians 2:12-13 reveals exactly how baptism accomplishes the three distinct parts of the gospel. First, just as Jesus died for our sins when crucified, we too are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and when placed under the water, “*our old man was crucified with Him.*” Second, as our body is buried under the water, we are “*baptized into His death,*” and “*buried with Him through baptism into death.*” Thus as we followed the example of the Eunuch and Philip, we “*went down into the water,*” and were crucified with him, died with him, and were buried with him.

The final part of baptism began as we were being pulled up and “*coming up out of the water.*” It was then that we were “*in the likeness of His resurrection.*” In baptism God “*has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.*” Summing up: “*buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.*” So as Jesus “*was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification*” (Rom. 4:25), in baptism we are delivered up for our trespasses and raised with him in justification! Jesus was crucified and buried because we were dead in sin and he was raised for our justification (Isa 53:1-12). We were *baptized and buried* with him because we are dead in sin. We were *baptized and raised up* with him because we are justified by forgiveness and remission of sins.

So as the gospel is **Jesus** death, burial and resurrection, baptism is **Our** death, burial and resurrection **With Him!** At Golgotha, Jesus was crucified, then taken to a tomb and then came out alive from that tomb. At baptism, we were crucified with Him, then we were buried with Him and then we came out alive with Him. This is why “*as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Gal 3:27), and why “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Cor 5:17).

In Part 3, we will see several illustrations in the Bible that clarify the role of baptism.