

Ritual Immersion (The Origin of Christian Baptism)

by Robert Wurtz II

The sermon explores the origin and significance of ritual immersion in Christian baptism, drawing on Jewish law and the New Testament.

Scripture: Leviticus 11:36, Leviticus 15:28, Psalm 51:7, Matthew 3:16, John 3:5, Acts 22:16

Topics: "Christian Baptism", "Ritual Purity"

Description

Robert Wurtz II delves into the historical controversies and innovations surrounding water baptism, exploring the transition from immersion to 'clinical baptism' by pouring, as seen in the case of Novatian. The sermon also touches on the significance of ritual immersion in Jewish culture, emphasizing the strict adherence to immersion laws even during times of war. The restrictions and requirements for water used in the mikveh are discussed, highlighting the meticulous process involved in ensuring purity. The sermon concludes by examining the spiritual purification and cleansing aspects of immersion, shedding light on the profound importance of this ancient practice.

Transcript

Many thousands of people have died over the issue of water baptism. It is not my intent to further such strife within the Church. With great reluctance I wish to consider baptism as it was formerly known as 'ritual immersion'.

The Innovation for Novation (the Origin of 'Clinical Baptism')

Pope Cornelius I wrote that as Novatian was about to die, "he received baptism in the bed where he lay, by pouring" (Letter to Fabius of Antioch [A.D. 251]; cited in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 6:4311). Dr. Roy Blizzard writes... "From the beginning, baptism had been by immersion for the remission of sins. Novation, at an adult age, grew sick. Nigh unto death, he called for baptism. He received only clinical baptism by sprinkling, only on the condition that, if he got well, he would be properly baptized. Following his recovery, he was ordained to the priesthood and rose to the highest rank in the Roman clergy. The controversy arose over whether one unscripturally baptized could attain to such an office." N.H. Pius in his book "An Outline of Baptist History" writes... "Having raised baptism to a sacrament, it was but natural that these church authorities should insist upon baptism under all conditions. So that when immersion in water was not possible, some form as near to immersion as possible was to be administered. While there would

be no baptism without immersion, they felt that something must be done, hence, when there was not sufficient water in which to immerse, they poured water upon the head. Now as baptism had been vitiated as to its fundamental principle, other innovations soon followed. In the third century we find the introduction of clinic baptism (from kline, a couch), the baptism of sick persons confined to their beds. Of this Cramp says: "It was not Baptism, properly so-called, as they were only sprinkled with water or had water poured on them. The reason alleged for this departure from apostolic practice was the necessity of baptism to the salvation of the soul, and the consequent danger of depriving it, lest the sickness should terminate in death. Thus one error led to another. If those clinics recovered they were not baptized afterwards, but they were not admitted to the ministry. Novation, however, was an exception to the rule. He had been sprinkled or received a pouring on his head, when his dissolution was hourly expected. After his recovery, his eminent qualifications for the ministry induced the churches to deviate from the established custom, and he was ordained." ANY exception to a law soon become THE law as has been found in many cases throughout history and practical life. Sprinkling was sanctioned by the Church at the council of Revenna in 1311 CE and the choice was offered between sprinkling and immersion.

History of the Jewish Mikveh

The term mikveh in Hebrew literally means any gathering of waters, but is specifically used in Jewish law for the waters or bath for the ritual immersion. The building of the mikveh was so important in ancient times it was said to take precedence over the construction of a synagogue. Immersion was so important that it occurred before the high Priest conducted the service on the Day of Atonement, before the regular priests participated in the Temple service, before each person entered the Temple complex, before a scribe wrote the name of God, as well as several other occasions.

Josephus tells us that even during the years of war (66-73 A.D.) the laws of ritual immersion were strictly adhered to (Josephus Wars, 4:2:05).

Immersion was required for both men and women when converting to Judaism. There were three prerequisites for a proselyte coming into Judaism: Circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice (Maimonides, Hilkh. Iss. Biah xiii. 5). Immersion was required after a woman has her monthly cycle (Leviticus 15:28). This quite possibly was what was happening with Bathsheeba when David saw her. The timing of the pregnancy concur's with such a proposition. Immersion was also required for pots and eating utensils manufactured by a non-Jew (Encyclopedia of Jewish Religion p-263).

The Water Restrictions

There were basic restrictions on the water used in the mikveh including such rules as:

(1) the mikveh can not contain other liquid besides water. (2) The water has to be either built into the ground or be an integral part of a building attached to the ground. (3) The mikveh cannot be flowing except for a natural spring, river or ocean. (4) The water can not be manually drawn. (5) The water cannot be channeled to the mikveh by anything unclean. (6) The mikveh must contain at least 40 sa'ah or approximately 200 gallons of water.

The term sa'ah is an ancient Biblical measurement equivalent to approximately five gallons. All six requirements come from the original Hebrew words found in Leviticus 11:36. Rabbi Yitzchok ben Sheshes said the amount of 40 sa'ah was derived from the idea that the largest normal human body has a volume of 20 sa'ah, therefore the amount of water needed to "nullify" this body is double this amount or 40 sa'ah.

Why Be Immersed?

To the ancient Jew, the mikveh was a process of spiritual purification and cleansing, especially in relation to the various types of Turmah or ritual defilement when the Temple was in use. Although God has not revealed all the meaning of the mikveh, it is obvious because of the amount of space given to it in Scripture, and the effort of Jesus to fulfill it, the command is of utmost importance.

How Immersion Was Done

Jewish baptism has never been taken lightly, but in ancient times immersion was to be performed in the presence of witnesses (Yebam. 47b). The person being baptized made special preparations by cutting his nails, undressed completely and made a fresh profession of his faith before the designated "fathers of the baptism" (Kethub. 11a; Erub 15a). The individual stood straight up with the feet spread and the hands held out in front. The candidate would totally immerse themselves by squatting in the water with a witness or baptizer doing the officiating. Note the New Testament points out the fact that Jesus came up straightway out of the water (Matthew 3:16).

The earliest drawing of Christian baptism was found on the wall of a Roman catacomb in the second century showing John standing on the bank of the Jordan helping Jesus back to shore after self-immersion.

Ancient sages teach that the word mikveh has the same letters as Ko(v)Meh, the Hebrew word for "rising" or "standing tall," therefore we see the idea of being baptized "straightway."

Notes:

Ron Moseley; Lecture notes from Arkansas Institute for Holy Land Studies (Jewish Culture, History of the Church, Jewish Roots).

Dr. Ron Moseley "Yeshua" A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church: Ebed publications C. 1996

Josephus Works "Wars of the Jews"

Dr. Roy Blizzard; "Heresies, Controversies, and Schisms in the Early Church" Part II

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/pius/pius.html>

http://www.catholic.com/library/Baptism_Immersion_Only.asp

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/robert-wurtz-ii/ritual-immersion-the-origin-of-christian-baptism/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net