

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BAPTISM

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CONCERNING THE PREPOSITIONS USED:

Matthew. 3:11 says that John the Baptist baptized WITH ("en") water UNTO ("eis") repentance.

In John 1:26, the Greek "en," is again translated with the English "with," and also in v.33.

To translate the Greek preposition "en" as instrumental, by the English "with," does not exclude immersion. One could make the argument that "sprinkling, or pouring, is in view. But, the definition of the Greek, "baptizo" requires that, as the instrument is water, the mode is immersion. To translate with the locative, as, "...baptized in water," would be to emphasize the mode. However, John is making a contrast—not between two modes, but between two instruments: Water, and the Spirit.

In New Testament Church Pneumatology, Holy Spirit baptism is the Holy Spirit placing one into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). In this passage, the Greek "en" is theologically most properly translated with the English "by". For, this described act is not synonymous with that event of which John the Baptist spoke.

In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist declares that Christ will baptize "with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire." This is either referring to:

1. Pentecost, in totality, or,
2. To Pentecost and the Day of the Lord, or,
3. To the Day of the Lord Exclusively.

If the prophecy refers to Pentecost, then the prophecy was fulfilled then, and there is nothing future concerning spirit baptism. But, Old Testament prophecy will not allow for that. Joel, Chapter Two, refers to the Day of the Lord, in speaking of the pouring out of God's Spirit—an event that is yet future.

If the reference is to both Pentecost and the Day of the Lord, then we have a partial fulfillment at the former and final fulfillment at the latter. Many conservatives would hold this view.

If, finally, Matthew 3:11 refers to the Day of the Lord, then what about Pentecost? (I Corinthians 12:13).

A further problem relates to the issue of whether, in Holy Spirit baptism, it is Christ that baptizes, or the Holy Spirit. Hence, a matter of how to translate "en."

Toward resolution of these difficulties, only one of the three positions can coincide with the proper interpretation of Matthew 3:11, and solve the grammatical problem. The dispensationalist believes the church began at Pentecost,¹ and is formed by the Holy Spirit baptizing the new convert into the body of Christ. (The idea of Christ doing the baptizing, and that one is baptized by Christ into the Spirit is an alternate view, but erroneous. Only Matthew 3:11 lends support to this view, and then, only when wrongly interpreted.) The preposition, "en," is most assuredly to be viewed as instrumental, not locative. So, if the correct interpretation of the prophecy can be attained, then the problem will disappear.

John the Baptist said that Christ would do the baptizing. In Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4, 5, Jesus spoke words that are assumed to produce, upon their fulfillment, the fulfillment of John's words. But, it is not so. Our Lord never said in either place cited that He would do any baptizing, on the coming Day of Pentecost. He said, in the Lukean passage, that He would send the promise of the Father upon them. In John 14:26, He said that the Father would send Him, in His name. Acts 1:4, 5 calls it the promise of the Father, and He says, "ye shall be baptized...".

The consistent view, is, Matthew is totally talking about the Day of the Lord, in Matthew 3:11. The prophecy has nothing directly to do with the Day of Pentecost. Matthew's "fire" is obviously representative of judgment, not the fire that fell on Pentecost. The word is used in verses 10,11 and 12. Ten and 12 are definitely fire; why would the tenor change in the middle verse? Some would separate the Holy Ghost part, from the fire baptism. But such an interpretation is without a sound basis.

To view Christ baptizing with the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, is in violation of the theology of Paul. Christ never said, in speaking of Pentecost, after His resurrection, that He would do any baptizing on that day.

The correct position, is, that on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit baptized (i.e. placed) those 120 believers into the Body of Christ, the Church, and continues to do so throughout the course of the Church program. The Holy Spirit is the Baptizer in this age, adding members to the Body of Christ. Christ will also engage in a work of baptizing—not now, but, at His return to the earth, In fact, He will administer two baptisms at that time. First, He will baptize unbelievers with the consuming fire of His judgment (II Thessalonians 1:6-10, synonymous with the "fire" of Matthew 3:11). Then, He will baptize Israel, to whom alone John's messages were addressed, with the Holy Ghost. He will be the baptizer in that day, in fulfillment of Matthew 3:11, and much Old Testament prophecy. Joel establishes the position. In chapter 2, verse 28, the Lord Jesus (note verse 27) is recorded to say that He will pour out the Spirit. This was neither fulfilled, nor partially fulfilled, on the Day of Pentecost. Nothing recorded in the Joel Two took place on the Day of Pentecost, a distinction which Peter himself makes, in Acts 2:33, "...this which ye now see and hear". Peter recognizes that the things Joel prophesied had not taken place. Only, the same Holy Spirit of which the prophet had spoken, had now come. It was the same kind of thing.

Further, Joel's prophecy (2:28), establishes that the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh, which is in definite contrast to the occurrence on the Day of Pentecost.

Joel continues, to establish that all his prophecy concerns the Day of the Lord, and none of it on the Day of Pentecost: Chapter 3:1 solidly establishes the time frame. It is the same time of which Matthew spoke, in chapter 3, verse 12, when the wheat is gathered into the millennial barn, and the chaff is burned up in judgment. It is, in verse 2, Joel continues, when the nations shall be gathered against Jerusalem. It is when Israel shall know that Jesus is their Lord Jehovah, the Messiah; when He is dwelling among them on earth (verse 17).

In Acts, nowhere is "en" used with water baptism. The locative/instrumental/dative form is used without a preposition. But, when a word about Holy Spirit Baptism follows, "en" is used in every case. Deduction: In the Gospels it was a new event, so a more specific statement is given. In Acts, they all knew what John did, but Holy Spirit Baptism was yet future (1:5), and a new concept (11:46), requiring a safeguard in language, by the adding of the preposition.

CONCERNING JOHN'S BAPTISM VS. CHRISTIAN BAPTISM:

Luke 3:3--John came preaching ("karusso") the "repentance baptism" ("baptisma metanoia") "eis aphesin amarton". It is the baptism dedicated to, or representing such repentance as leads to one's being forgiven.

Matthew. 3:2--John's "repentance baptism" was restricted to the concern of the setting up of the kingdom on earth. First, the people were to confess their sins, while being baptized (Matthew. 3:6), the baptism being the outward demonstration of the inward reality of repentance. Secondly, there was to be a change in conduct, demonstrating their sincerity (Matthew. 3:7-9). Thirdly, there was a warning of judgment on those who refused to repent (Matthew. 3:10). Fourthly, their baptism, repentance and good works would pave a smooth road for the King, en route to the establishing of His kingdom (Luke 3:1-5). The result would be the availability of salvation for all mankind (Luke. 3:6; John 1:29).

Acts 2:38--This is only to the nation of Israel. We have seen how closely baptism is related to John's message. That message is all that Peter knows at this point, so he preaches it. (It was also the disciples' message. In Matthew 5-7, they are taught the Laws of the Kingdom. In Chapters 8 & 9, they are given the King's credentials. In Chapter 10, they are sent forth to preach the kingdom message, v.7, as Christ also had been preaching [9:35].)

However, John's message was not one for the purpose of obtaining the "New Birth". But, for bringing forth the King and His kingdom, so the King can provide the New Birth. Note Acts 19:4. It is said to these disciples that John's baptism of repentance was designed to prepare them for salvation. John's ministry was not an end, but a means to an end. The object was to prepare them to "believe" on their coming Messiah. John's ministry didn't bring salvation, except in the same O.T. sense that those who believed were safe until Messiah came to provide the perfect(ed) redemption. He ministered to a covenant people, though they were in unbelief. They were circumcised in body, but not in heart. **All who were genuine believers in heart, also believed on Christ when they heard of Him** (John 5:46,47). So, in Acts 19:4, even though a man had believed John's message and truly repented and been baptized, he still was required to actively respond concerning Christ, upon His appearing. For in Acts 19:3, we are told these disciples had received John's baptism. It was genuine, for they are called "disciples". But, in verse five, they are not merely rebaptized—they receive a new baptism--Christian (i.e. local church program) baptism (introduced in Acts 10:48, in the home of the first recorded gentile convert). There is a distinction. Their first baptism (19:3) had been only John's, as taught to them by the recently departed Apollos (18:24,27), who only knew of that same evangelist's doctrine (18:25). Acquilla and Priscilla educated Apollos before he departed to Achaia (18:26). Meanwhile, the disciples of chapter 19, discipled by Apollos, were enlightened by Paul, upon his coming, and baptized in the new baptism. John's baptism concerned only the establishing

of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Church baptism concerns the crucified and risen Christ. The former is a baptism of repentance; the latter, of confession. Those who received John's baptism, upon meeting the Messiah and placing faith in Him, did not have to be baptized with the new baptism (when it was later established, as in the case of the Apostles). Those who received John's baptism, as in Acts 19 **after** the new was instituted (Acts 10:48), were invalid in their baptism, though saved, yet deficient their discipleship.

Note that Peter said, "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). So, he has gone one step beyond John's baptism, and reached out to the fulfillment. Christ has come. They must now follow up on any commitment they made under John's ministry, and actively confess Christ. Since it is to Israel he is preaching, baptism is tied very strongly into it. The word "for" is the Greek "eis", as is always used in this context. The baptism does not save, but it is the strong Jewish connotation showing through, that the baptism demonstrates sincere repentance. Acts 13:24, "When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance **to all the people of Israel**", and 19:4, "...John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, **saying unto the people**, that they should believe on him which should come after him..."(author's emphases), clearly show that this message is to Israel.

In Matthew 3:11, "eis" is used just as in Acts 2:38. If, as translated in Acts, it means "resulting in" something, namely, salvation, as baptismal regenerationists would say, then it would follow that the Matthew baptism must be viewed as resulting in repentance.² But it is obvious in Matthew that repentance precedes baptism (Matthew 3:7,8). It is then also obvious that the reverse is meant, that baptism is not "for" (i.e. the cause of, as if "gar" were the word used) something, but "unto" (the testimony to) something. In Matthew, it is a testimony to their repentance and belief of John's message, resulting in the forgiveness of their iniquities, as evidenced in a change of conduct, i.e. conduct conducive to the establishing of a kingdom of righteousness. In Acts 2:38, 39, it testifies to their faith in Christ (i.e., "in the name of") and resulting regeneration, as evidenced by the receiving of the Holy Spirit, manifesting a changed lifestyle. That Peter still had in mind John's message of the kingdom is demonstrated in Acts 3:19,20. True, he now speaks of the second coming. But, there is as yet no knowledge of the church program. In fact, in all of Peter's writings, you find little indication of any knowledge of God's new program. This author can identify no references in the Petrine Epistles to the rapture! In fact, Peter said that Paul's doctrine concerning the rapture was very hard to understand (II Pt. 3:16, "...of these things...", obviously the Return of Christ to earth, of which Peter had profuse understanding; "...some things...", which Peter declares difficult to comprehend, surely refers to the doctrine of the rapture).

That there is a clear distinction between John's baptism and Christian baptism, is well supported. Luke 3:2, Acts 10:37, 13:24, 18:25 and 19:3,4 clearly call it "John's baptism/baptism of Repentance." Acts 20:21 clearly shows that "repentance" is directed toward the Father, as "faith" is toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance is the theme of the preaching to the Jews. Faith is the core of the Gentile gospel.

Repentance is commanded for all (Luke 24:47 and Acts 17:30; 20:21). But contrast the actual messages preached throughout Acts. The word repentance is used 26 times from Romans through Revelation. But not one message is preached to a gentile in which the specific command is given, "to repent". Confession and faith are the key words. As church centrality shifted from Jerusalem (Acts 2-11:18), to Antioch (11:19ff, note 13:1-4, where the Apostle to the Gentiles is commissioned and sent forth), so the preaching shifts from Jews to Gentiles (in the sense that Jewish rejection increases, and gentiles increasingly turn to Christ, and, that the message is no longer kingdom oriented, but the gospel of grace). As it does, the terminology changes. They were called the people of "The Way" (e.g. Acts 22:4); now,

"Christians" (Acts 11:26). Concurrently, the relationship of baptism to the message changes. Nowhere among the Gentile messages is there any indication of baptism saving anyone. Only where it is akin to John's message does baptism appear to be related to salvation.

John the Baptist, then, preached to Israel a message requiring repentance, signified by water baptism, as preparation for the promised Messiah, that His coming and success might be easily achieved. Christ and His disciples preached the same, to Israel only, for the swift accomplishment of Messiah's purposes. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, then declared the same, but now, in the "Name of the Lord Jesus, to Israel, in order that Messiah might immediately return and establish His thwarted kingdom. In every case, water baptism is inseparably declared the outward demonstration of inward reality. This same message will again be preached during the Tribulation Period, although, then it will be the message of a rejected, crucified, buried, risen and returning King.

But once the Apostle to the GENTILES is placed by the Holy Spirit, in and through a GENTILE church, into the forefront, and the ministry is now in the third phase of Acts 1:8, following the third use of Peter's keys (Acts 10)--to the GENTILES (uttermost parts), where does baptism fit in? Jews who were baptized by John are now baptized in a local church setting (Acts 19:5)--"in the name of the Lord Jesus". Gentiles converted are baptized, but nowhere is found any kind of statement indicating that baptism is necessary to their salvation. First, a different "gospel" is preached. It is not the kingdom gospel, involving the repentance baptism. Now is proclaimed the gospel according to I Corinthians 15:1-4. Note: Acts 2:38 and 3:19, contrasted with 13:46; 14:7; 15:7-11 (notice that Peter even now says it is by faith for Jew and Gentile); 16:10, 31; 17:2-4--to Jews, as there is now no difference; 17:30,31, no word of a kingdom; 18:8; 18:24-28, a prime case in point, where a John the Baptist convert is taught the way "more perfectly." In Acts 26:17-23, Paul clearly shows that both repentance and good works have their place. Repentance, according to 20:21, and works as evidence of genuine faith. But, no baptism is mentioned. In 28:31, Paul, during two years of house arrest, identifies his message with the terms "kingdom of God" and the "things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ." I assume that this one who had received the full revelation from God concerning God's plan, instructed Jews concerning the postponed kingdom, including the gospel of the King Himself, while Gentiles, who would have little knowledge of, or concern for, a postponed kingdom, need only learn of the King. In any case, except for 19:5 (a special case concerning Jews who acted according to knowledge, and are now baptized in Christ's name, accompanied by the laying of hands and special manifestation of the Holy Spirit, in order to verify to them, sign seeking Jews, that it is all legitimate), any strong emphasis on water baptism relating to salvation is conspicuously absent, in the preaching of the gospel by the Apostle to the Gentiles, to both Jew and Gentile.

In Matthew 10:7, we find the original Great Commission. Given by Christ directly to the Apostles, it is to preach only to the Jews. The subject of the preaching is the Kingdom of Heaven. The object is to motivate the people to prepare the way for Messiah, that He may establish that kingdom. However, the King is rejected and the kingdom postponed.³ The commission is then revised and reinforced in its new form, in Matthew 28:19,20. Now the commission, in its revised form, is again committed to the Apostles, who no longer will serve in the capacity of the foundation stones of the kingdom, but of the Church (Ephesians 2:19,20). It now is the Gospel of Christ offering salvation to every individual, Jew and Gentile. Note Peter's declaration of this distinction in Acts 11:18, as he defends his different and offensive (to the Jews) actions in Cornelius's house.

A parallel is found in the relationship of baptism to the two different programs. John the Baptist commanded baptism as an outward demonstration of inward repentance. Peter continued the theme in Acts 2:38, as the newly created Church was entirely Jewish in makeup. However, when the revision materialized (Matthew. 28), and the first Gentile was converted (Acts 10), the message becomes one of confession and faith (Acts 10:37-43). No mention of baptism occurs in verse 43, defining the way of salvation. Faith alone brings remission of sins. Further, to demonstrate that regeneration has occurred, the record declares their receiving of the Holy Spirit. Cornelius and his household had believed. They were not yet water baptized. No mention of baptism had been uttered in this gospel message. It is obvious they have been regenerated. What about water baptism, then? In the Matthew Ten commission, there is no command to baptize, else the Holy Spirit baptizes unsaved people into the Body of Christ! The Baptism of John (the Baptist) was already in effect, and the disciples were already administering the same. Why, then, in Matthew 28 is there a command to baptize? Simply because the Christian Church baptism in this age of the gentile church (Acts 15:14), is different from John's, as previously shown. These are Gentiles. They have just been placed by the Holy Spirit into the Church. Now a public testimony is needed. In Acts 10: 47, 48, we have a new command for the Gentile church—to those already saved—"Be baptized." Allow me to reiterate for emphasis. Here is a group of Gentiles, in this dispensation, believing on Christ, baptized with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues—all the proof possible that they are genuinely saved, but not water baptized. Is water baptism, then, necessary for salvation? If any one person in all the Scriptures, in this dispensation, can be saved apart from water baptism, then anyone may be.

Further support is seen in that the Church, while still Jewish, had been known as the people of "This Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:23). Now, with the inclusion of Gentiles, and the shifting of the church's center of activity to Antioch (Acts 13, 14, where true New Testament missions begin), they are tagged with a new name (Acts 11:26).

One must see a distinction between the Church which is Jewish, and the Gentile Church (in the sense that it becomes primarily Gentile in makeup, though individual Jews are saved and become a part of it in all equality). The Gentile commission is different. Its makeup is different. Its baptism is different. There is no baptismal regeneration taught anywhere in Scripture. But even language, which on the surface might be construed to teach that error, is significantly absent from Church doctrine following Acts 10.

Indeed, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31a), "...Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...". I know some would say this is source material and not method. But, this heathen Gentile, in dire desperation, had asked how to get saved. He is already repentant. He must know all that is required of him, to be saved. He has heard the testimony of Paul and Silas. He has seen the powerful intervention of the God they serve. He does not need to be told to repent. When he ran in and fell down before them, he had already "changed his mind." The only thing he needs to know, and to do, is "Believe..." (i.e. place his faith in Paul's God as his own Lord and Saviour). And that is all he is told. Baptism follows, as it biblically should, but is neither stated to be, or implied to be, in any way involved in the saving act.

¹ Some may insist some other beginning point, but consistent dispensationalism will not allow it.

² Only in reading the verses will one likely be able to discern the point being made, here.

³ This is the position held by the author, and the following argument is based on this position. It is not my purpose to prove the argument at this point.