

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN1D_The Lamb of God is Baptized)

After the Pharisees question John regarding His identity, Jesus approaches John to be baptized. When John sees Jesus approaching, John states “Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.” Of course, this statement is packed with meaning to any Jew or proselyte to Judaism who was in earshot of John. Every Jew was familiar with the animal sacrifices required by the Mosaic Law, especially the lamb that was sacrificed annually at Passover.

The word translated “lamb” in John 1:29 only appears four times in the New Testament (Jn 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pe 1:19). The passage in 1 Peter is an allusion to Isaiah 53:7 – “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” Every quotation of Isaiah 53 in the New Testament (Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Peter 2:22-24) applies directly to Christ.¹ All of these passages refer to the sacrificial work of Christ, Who as the Perfect God-man paid the penalty for man’s sin. Some points in this regard:

- ❑ In the New Testament passages mentioned above (Jn 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pe 1:19), Jesus is compared to a sacrificial lamb due to His death, innocently and patiently endured to **expiate** sin.²
- ❑ The sacrifice of the Passover (Paschal) lamb in the Old Testament typified the sacrificial, redemptive death of the Messiah (Ex 12:21-27 cf. Isa 52:13-53:12).³
- ❑ All animal sacrifices offered in accordance with the Mosaic Law had an **atonement versus expiatory** value. Only Christ’s sacrificial death could completely *remove* sin, whereas an animal sacrifice could only *cover* sin.
- ❑ In John’s last book, the Revelation, John uses a different Greek word for “lamb” (*arnion*) and uses the title to convey triumph in memorializing the completion of Christ’s sacrificial work (see Re 5:6-13; 6:1-3, 5, 7; 7:9-10, 14, 17; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 9-10; 15:2-3; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23; 22:1, 3).
- ❑ John develops the theology that results from the **expiatory** work of Christ in his 1st Epistle more so than he does in his Gospel (1 Jn 1:7; 2:2, 4:9-14); however, his allusions to the expiatory work of Christ in his Gospel are undeniable (Jn 1:29; 3:14; 6:51; 10:11; 11:49-52; 12:24; 18:11).

In verse 30, John the Baptist affirms the preexistence of Jesus as God when he states that “After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.” This is essentially a restatement of verse 15.

In verses 31 & 33, John the Baptist indicates that he did not know Jesus as the Messiah. He obviously knew Jesus for they were cousins (Lk 1:36). However, during the thirty years that passed between Jesus’ birth and the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry with John’s baptism,

¹ Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1976 – 1992).

² Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 752.

³ The first specific mention of the sacrifice of a lamb is the offering of Isaac by Abraham (Ge 22:2-8). A lamb was also prescribed as a guilt offering (Lev 14:10-25) and in association with the Nazirite vow (Num 6:1, 12) even though there is no direct connection to the Messiah in these sacrifices.

John (and many others) had not made the connection between the extraordinary events associated with Jesus' birth and His Person as the God/man/Messiah.

John the Baptist indicates that one of the purposes of his baptisms was that the Messiah be revealed to Israel. We also know that another purpose of John's baptism was for repentance (Matt 3:11) – an outward manifestation of the change of mind that had occurred in the Jewish person toward God's promised coming Messiah. The apostle John chose to focus upon the former purpose of John the Baptist's baptism, i.e. the revelation of the Messiah, which purpose was more consistent with the theme of his Gospel – Jesus was the divine Son of God. On the other hand, it is Matthew who focuses upon the latter purpose of John's baptism, i.e. repentance of the nation of Israel (Matt 3:11-17). Mark and Luke make only a brief mention of John's baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22). Jesus' baptism by John had nothing to do with the second purpose – repentance – but everything to do with the first purpose of John's baptism – the revelation of the Messiah.

Some people have the perception that because the word "baptism" in our English Bibles first occurs in connection with John that John was the first to practice baptism. However, Hebrews 9:10 indicates that Judaism included among other things, various baptisms as a part of its heritage. The Mosaic Law ceremonies had many baptismal rites which had been practiced for 1500 years before John came on the scene.⁴ The rite of baptism had been practiced by Jews for centuries prior to John's baptism and it had nothing to do with personal salvation.⁵

There is a lot of confusion that has resulted from the fact that John's baptism involved repentance. This is probably due in part to the fact that some people erroneously equate repentance with forgiveness of sins. Of course, as we have seen in previous studies, the word repentance (metanoeo) simply means to change one's mind or opinion. John's baptism was a Jewish baptism that highlighted the change of mind that had occurred in the recipient of that baptism. The change of opinion or mind was in regard to Jewish responsibility as a covenant people toward their relationship with Yahweh in view of the coming kingdom.

No other nation had a covenant relationship with Yahweh as did Israel and no other nation had the evangelistic responsibility toward other nations as did Israel. This covenant relationship made the Jewish people "near" to God, whereas the Gentile nations were considered "far" from God (Eph 2:17). By the time that John came on the scene, Israel had transgressed her covenant relationship with Yahweh through distortions of the intent and purpose of all facets of the Mosaic Law. Israel was run by a religious/political mafia that oppressed and opposed any true efforts at spiritual reform. The religious leaders had no spiritual relationship with Yahweh and had totally distorted the Law into a system of works. They did not arise on the scene overnight, but they had slowly come to dominate Israel during her history after her return from Babylonian captivity and subsequent subjugation to the Roman Empire. In its present state, Israel's spiritual life did not provide God with the vehicle that He could use to bless the Gentile nations. Perhaps the advent of the Messiah Himself could bring about the spiritual repentance necessary to bring into existence the Messianic Kingdom once the Messiah's other purposes had been accomplished (Psa 22; Isa 53).

Today, in the Church Age, when we present the Gospel of salvation through faith in the work of Christ alone, we do not ask people to also become readjusted to the covenants that God

⁴ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 29.

⁵ "Baptisms, or ceremonial purifications were common among the Jews. Not only priests and other persons but also clothing, utensils, and articles of furniture were thus ceremonially cleansed (Lev. 8:6; Ex. 19:10-14; Mark 7:3-4; Heb. 9:10)." Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 142.

made with Israel through baptism and repentance. John's baptism was for a covenant people, which we are not.

Today, many Christian pastors and denominations practice water baptism and teach that water baptism is a picture of burial and resurrection based upon Romans 6:3, 4 & Colossians 2:12. However, this is far from correct. Paul is describing the spiritual phenomenon of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that identifies the believer with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. The result of the baptism by the Holy Spirit should be a new walk.

The Nine Baptisms in the Bible

In the way of summary of this lesson, let us review the nine baptisms mentioned in the Bible. An interesting observation is that of these nine, no where does the Bible specifically endorse water baptism of the Church Age believer. Also, nowhere in the Bible is the Church Age believer specifically said to be baptized with (as in receiving) the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Church Age believer with (as in receipt of) the Holy Spirit is only implied in Scripture.

Non-Water Baptisms

- ❑ Baptism of Moses – 1 Co 10:1-2
- ❑ Baptism of the Cup – Mt 20:22; 2 Co 5:21; 1 Pe 2:24
- ❑ Baptism of the Church Age believer by the Holy Spirit Into Jesus – Ro 6:3 - implied; 1 Co 12:13; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12 - implied
- ❑ Baptism of the believer by Jesus with the Holy Spirit – Millennial or kingdom believer (Mt 3:11; Lu 3:16) & implied for the Church Age believer (Ro 8:9; 1 Co 3:16; Eph 1:13; Tit 3:5-6; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:13)
- ❑ Baptism of fire – Mt 3:11; Lu 3:16 (occurs at the 2nd Advent of Christ)

Water Baptisms

- ❑ Baptism of John – Matt 3:6 (mentioned in association with the confession of sins as a result of repentance on the part of the recipient)
- ❑ Baptism of Jesus by John – Matt 3:13-17 (purpose: to identify the Messiah)
- ❑ Baptism of the believer in anticipation of the kingdom – Matt 28:19
- ❑ Baptism for the dead – 1 Co 15:29*

* Paul was criticizing this practice in this passage as invalid, not endorsing it.