

# GRACE GAZETTE

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*Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

*Hebrews 12:12-13*

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## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

*Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. Matthew 3:13*

Few subjects have caused more division among professing Christians, than that of water baptism. Much has been written seeking to settle the issues of how much water it takes to baptize someone, who can rightly administer baptism, who is a proper candidate for this baptism, etc. Those who study the subject with no other information than what is to be discovered in the pages of Scripture must admit that the term “baptize” as it appears in the KJV bible, is not a translation of the Greek word from which it comes, but is rather a “transliteration”, which closely replicates the sound of the original word.

That Greek word is “baptizo” which literally means, “to make whelmed, or fully cover (i.e. to immerse)”. One thing is certain and that is that the practice of “baptism” in water is first mentioned in the scripture in relation to John the Baptiser whom the LORD sent into the world as the “*voice of one crying in the wilderness*”, (see Isa.40:3; Mat 3:3) to prepare the way of the LORD. He was set apart unto this task by the LORD who told Zacharias that his wife Elizabeth (who was barren) would bring forth a son called John, and that he would be, “*filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*” (Luk 1:15) “*And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*” (Luke 1:17)

No one, up until the time of John's appearing, was given to the practice of “baptizing” (i.e.; covering with water) men in a rather large body of water. “*And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.*” (John 3:23) Since he came out of the wilderness we can surely conclude that he had sat at the feet of none of the Bible scholars of his day, nor did he learn his doctrine and practice from men. Rather, he was called, taught, and sent by GOD to perform this “baptism”, to fulfill HIS purpose of announcing the coming MESSIAH.

John's “baptism” was not an end in itself but was given to illustrate the work of the MESSIAH in calling and equipping HIS elect to follow HIM. John called men to “repentance”, as the last of the Old Testament prophets. As such, he desired to look into the things which are now clearly revealed, but could only see CHRIST as a LIGHT upon the horizon (though he did see more plainly than those before him) and did not live to see HIM clearly establish HIS Kingdom by HIS death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the FATHER. The LORD spoke of this fact when HE said, “*Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*” (Luke 7:28)

Though John testified that JESUS of Nazareth was the “*LAMB of GOD which taketh away the sin of the world*”, he also faltered in his understanding of exactly how JESUS would establish HIS kingdom. John, like all of those prophets (in time past), expected that CHRIST would be a DELIVERER who would rescue HIS people from carnal oppression in his lifetime. He, finding himself in Herod's prison, could not understand the true mission of CHRIST, and thus sent messengers to inquire as to whether or not HE (i.e.; JESUS) was indeed the true MESSIAH. (see Mat.11:2,3)

Lest we forget the importance of John's ministry however, we must look at the fact that he was ordained of GOD, to “baptize” the LORD JESUS CHRIST in water. He felt unworthy to perform this task on the LORD, until the LORD pointed out to HIM that it was necessary for him to do so in order to fulfill the purpose of GOD for HIS baptism. CHRIST came to take away the sin of HIS people, and

in order to accomplish that end, HE must “become sin” for them and fulfill the jot and tittle of the Law in their room and stead. John’s baptism was “*unto repentance*”. CHRIST had no sin of HIS own, yet HE must bear the sin of HIS people and HIS “*repentance*” was unto the washing away of their sin. HE was baptized in their behalf as ONE without spot or blemish, yet bearing their shame before the world and HIS FATHER. Let those that propose water baptism for a believer, as a necessity in “washing away their sin”, explain to us how such could be necessary if CHRIST undertook it for them. Was HIS baptism a mere exercise in religion or did HE accomplish something for those whom HE loved?

The LORD JESUS CHRIST came into the world to fulfill the eternal purpose of HIS FATHER by whom HE was sent. “*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*” (John 6:38-40) Thus we see HIM fulfilling the FATHER’s will of bringing HIS many sons unto glory in everything which HE did in this world.

HIS “*baptism*” in water by John was no less a fulfilling of that will than was HIS death, burial, and resurrection. As John testified of HIM as the LAMB, he also manifested JESUS of Nazareth as that ONE who would take away the sin of the world, by baptizing HIM in water as a testimony to HIS fulfillment of all “requirements” necessary for HIS people to have complete salvation in HIM. Upon the completion of that “act” the SPIRIT of GOD, as a DOVE descended upon HIM, declaring, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” (Mat 3:17) If the FATHER who sent HIM is “*well pleased*” with HIM, what is man to not fall down before HIM? How can a man improve or add anything to that which HE has performed in the behalf of those for whom HE came into the world as a SAVIOR?

So can we not conclude that the water baptism of JESUS of Nazareth serves as a testimony to HIS complete salvation of HIS people to which nothing can be added, or thankfully taken away. With this in mind we can clearly see that water baptism cannot “take away sin” or make any of HIS children more pleasing in the eyes of the LORD, since they are already approved in HIM.

What then is the purpose of “water baptism” for the believer in the present age? It serves as a reminder of that which CHRIST has done. As John testified of CHRIST in HIS baptism, so too that man who believes, testifies to the world of the sufficiency of CHRIST as he follows the LORD’s example. Peter declares the purpose of this water baptism. “*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” (1Pet 3:21) In the act of baptism (i.e.; immersion) we can see plainly illustrated the death of CHRIST and HIS resurrection, as one is put under the water and then brought out even as CHRIST was put in the tomb, but arose a victor over it, coming out of that tomb signifying the New LIFE which is granted to those who are born again by HIS SPIRIT.

Baptism is not a “requirement” or “duty” which is laid upon the sons of GOD, but rather is a great privilege for them to be able to manifest their desire to be the followers of CHRIST, having been reconciled unto HIM. We see the joy that accompanies a new believer desiring to follow the LORD’s example and command illustrated in the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. “*And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*” (Acts 8:36-39)

It seems obvious that at some point Phillip had mentioned the subject of water baptism in his teaching of the Ethiopian. Yet we do not see Phillip demanding that he be baptized, rather we see the Ethiopian gladly requesting to be baptized as a testimony to his belief in the LORD JESUS CHRIST as the SON of GOD. Just as the LORD told Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal this to him but HIS FATHER which is in Heaven. Who should be baptized then? Those who believe that JESUS CHRIST is the SON of GOD which taketh away sin. Is this not the answer of a good conscience toward GOD? “*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*” (Heb 9:14) mam