

# The Mode of Baptism

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Baptism signifies and seals union with Christ and cleansing from the pollution and guilt of sin. The central import is that of union with Christ, ingrafting into him, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace. In reference to the mode of baptism the question is whether a particular method of applying water or of relating the person to water is of the essence of the symbolism.<sup>1</sup> The Baptist contention is that the mode is of the essence of the symbolism and that, since to baptise means to immerse, baptism is not properly administered by any other mode. The Baptist argument rests mainly upon two contentions: (1) that *βαπτίζω* means to immerse<sup>2</sup> and (2) that passages like Romans 6:3-6 and Colossians 2:11, 12 plainly imply that the death and resurrection of Christ provide us with the pattern for immersion in, and emergence from, the water.<sup>3</sup>

We may now proceed to examine these two arguments.

## A. *The Meaning of βαπτίζω*

*The Old Testament.* In the Septuagint<sup>4</sup> *βαπτίζω* occurs very infrequently (II Kings 5:14; Isa. 21:4). In Isaiah 21:4 it is used in a figurative sense to translate the Hebrew word *txb* which means to terrify, startle, or fall upon. It would appear that nothing very determinative regarding the precise import of *βαπτίζω* can be derived from this instance. In II Kings 5:14 the reference is to Naaman's baptising of himself seven times in Jordan, and *βαπτίζω* translates the Hebrew word. It is the word *βαπτω* which occurs most frequently in the Septuagint, occurring some seventeen times. In most of these instances it translates the Hebrew word just as *βαπτίζω* does in II Kings 5:14. It means to dip or be moist with. In Leviticus 11:32 *βαπτω* translates the Hebrew word *azb* and no doubt refers to immersion — the articles concerned are put into water. In Psalm 68:23(24) *βαπτω* translates the Hebrew word *‡bf* which means to smite through. But the Greek seems to convey a different idea, one akin to that of the Hebrew word *‡bf*.

There need be no question then that *βαπτίζω* means to dip and so also does *βαπτω* which is the Greek rendering. Furthermore, that *βαπτω* may also sometimes refer to immersion there need be no question. This appears in Leviticus 11:32. The question is whether *‡bf* and *βαπτω* necessarily refer to immersion and that they therefore mean to immerse. It can readily be shown that *‡bf* and *βαπτω* do not mean immersion. That is to say, the dipping denoted by and *βαπτω* is not always to be equated with immersion. This fact that dipping is not equivalent to immersion needs to be stressed at the outset. Far too often in anti-baptist discussions this fact is overlooked and a good deal of unnecessary argumentation arises from the oversight.

In Leviticus 14:6, 51 we have the ritual prescribed for the cleansing of a leper and of a house in which the plague of leprosy appeared. The priest was to take the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop and the living bird and dip them in the blood of the bird that was slain. It is obvious that a living bird cannot be immersed in the blood of another bird. It may be dipped in such blood but such dipping could not be immersion. Here is a case where *βαπτω* is used to denote an action that cannot be construed as immersion. And so *βαπτω* does not mean immersion. It can refer to an action performed by immersion but it can also refer to an action that does not involve immersion at all. Hence there is no reason arising from the meaning of the word *βαπτω* why in any instance of its occurrence it should refer to immersion. When it

does refer to immersion our knowledge that this is the case is not derived from the word *βαπτω* but from other considerations.

It is also worthy of note that in these two instances the live bird was to be baptised *into the blood* (*εἰς τὸ αἷμα*) of the slain bird. Hence even “baptism into” (*βαπτω εἰς*) does not mean to immerse, and the preposition “into” does not add any force to the argument that *βαπτω* means to immerse.<sup>4a</sup>

In Leviticus 14:16 we have another instance which, while not as conclusive as Leviticus 14:6, 51, nevertheless, points in the same direction. This has reference to the sprinkling of oil. The priest took some of the log of oil and poured it into the palm of his left hand. Then he dipped his right finger in the oil that was in the palm of his left hand and sprinkled the oil seven times before the Lord. Now it *may* be possible to pour into the cupped left hand enough oil so that the right finger may be immersed in this oil. But it is not an easy performance. The passage concerned does not indicate any such requirement. All that is prescribed is dipping of the right finger in the oil which is in the palm of the left hand, and it is quite unreasonable to suppose that immersion of that right finger was required. Dipping of the right finger in the oil was all that was requisite for the sprinkling which followed, and dipping without the necessity of immersion is rather plainly indicated to be the action in view.

Again in Ruth 2:14 we have the word of Boaz to Ruth: “dip thy morsel in the vinegar”. It would be quite unreasonable to insist that the custom to which Boaz referred was to *immerse* one’s morsel in the vinegar. On the other hand the idea of dipping something in vinegar is reasonable and natural. No doubt that was what Boaz had in mind.

This same meaning of *βαπτω* could also apply in I Samuel 14:27, where we are told that Jonathan put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in the honey. In this case it is of course not unreasonable to suppose that the end of the rod was completely covered by the honey. But it is not necessary to suppose this.

What we have found is this: there is one case where *βαπτω* and even *βαπτω εις* does not mean and cannot mean immersion (Lev. 14:6, 51); there is the other case where it is unreasonable to suppose that immersion was required or took place (Lev. 14:16); there is still another instance where dipping but not immersion is the reasonable and natural supposition (Ruth 2:14); finally, in the case of I Samuel 14:27 immersion is not unreasonable but it is not by any means necessary to the action denoted. Hence we have no reason to suppose that in a great many other instances immersion is the action denoted by *βαπτω*. In other words, we have no ground upon which to insist that in Exodus 12:22; Leviticus 4:6, 17; 9:9; Numbers 19:18; Deuteronomy 33:24; II Kings 8:15 immersion is the mode of action referred to in the respective cases. There is nothing in the Hebrew word used nor in the context of the passages concerned which requires immersion. And the Greek word *βαπτω*, as we have just found, does not require immersion. So we are compelled to conclude that there is nothing to show that in any of these instances just cited immersion was practised or even suggested. And returning to II Kings 5:14, the case of Naaman, where we have *βαπτίζω* rather than *βαπτω*, this instance cannot be adduced to prove that Naaman immersed himself in Jordan. Without doubt he bathed himself in Jordan; but there is no evidence derived from the terms used either in Hebrew or Greek, or from the details of the narrative, to prove that Naaman immersed himself. Again, Joshua 3:15 cannot be adduced to prove that the priests’ feet were immersed in Jordan. We are told that their feet were baptised in the brink of the river. It is quite possible that their feet were immersed in the water. But there is nothing to prove this. Dipping of their feet in the brink of the river is all that is necessary to satisfy the terms used both in Hebrew and Greek. Besides, in verse 13 we are told that, when the *soles* of the feet of the priests would rest in Jordan, the waters would be cut off and stand in one heap. In verses 15 and 16 we are told that, when the feet of the priests were *dipped* in the brink of the river, the waters

stood and rose up in one heap. Surely the kind of contact with the water, mentioned in verse 13, satisfies the terms of verse 15. To demand more for dipping than the resting of the soles of the priests' feet in the water would be indefensible.

In all of the passages so far considered there is only one instance where *βαπτω* clearly refers to an action which involved immersion. It is the case of Leviticus 11:32. It is also highly probable that in Job 9:31 the idea corresponds to that of immersion. At least the idea is much stronger than that of mere dipping and is more akin to that of plunging. Only in these two passages is the idea of immersion required to express the action denoted by *βαπτω*.

There are still two passages to be considered: Daniel 4:30 (LXX vs. 33); 5:21. In these instances *βαπτω* translates the Aramaic verb [bx. This Aramaic verb occurs elsewhere in the book of Daniel (cf. 4:12, 20, 22). But only in 4:30; 5:21 is it translated by the Greek verb *βαπτω*. The Septuagint rendering of the clause in question in each case is: *καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δρόσου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ εβάρφη*. This refers to Nebuchadnezzar whose body was bathed with the dew of heaven. It is possible that the meaning of the Greek rendering is that his body was dipped in the dew of heaven, that is to say, dipped in the dew with which the herbs and grass of the field were drenched. It may be that the thought expressed is that his body was drenched or bathed from the dew of heaven. On the other hand, the meaning may be as weak as that his body was simply moist or wet with the dew of heaven. In any case the thought cannot be adjusted to the notion that his body was immersed in the dew of heaven. This would require the most arbitrary and unnatural twisting of the terms and would amount to unreason in the lowest degree. So again we have an instance of the use of *βαπτω* in another sense than that of immersion. Therefore it does not mean immersion.

*The New Testament.* In the usage of the New Testament *βαπτω* recedes into the background and *βαπτίζω* comes into the foreground. The former occurs only four times (Luke 16:24; John 13:26(2); Rev. 19:13) whereas the latter seventy five to eighty times. There are twenty occurrences of the substantive *baptisma* and three of *baptismos*.

In determining the meaning of these terms used to denote baptism it must be remembered again that the question is not whether they may be used to denote an action performed by immersion. It is not our interest to deny that they may be used to denote such an action. The question is whether these terms *mean* immersion and therefore always imply in one way or another the act of immersion and could not properly denote an action performed by any other mode. This is the precise question that is relevant to the Baptist contention. And we are concerned now to deal with the evidence which the New Testament itself presents. The thesis which we are propounding is that the terms for baptism are used to denote actions which were not performed by the mode of immersion and that, while these terms could refer to immersion, yet they do not *mean* immersion. In other words, we undertake to show that the Baptist contention that *βαπτίζω* and its cognates mean immersion is not borne out by the evidence and that *βαπτίζω* can be used to denote an action which neither indicates nor implies immersion. We propose to show this by appeal to several passages and groups of passages.

#### 1. *Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:2-5; Luke 11:38.*

In Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:2-5 we have express allusion to the custom of the Jews, called "the tradition of the elders", to wash their hands before eating bread. "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread" (Matt. 15:2). "For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash their hands, do not eat, holding the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3). There is some uncertainty as to the precise force of the word *πυγμή* in the clause, *ἐὰν μὴ πυγμῇ νίψωνται τὰς χεῖρας*, whether it refers to the wrist or to the fist. Both Lightfoot and Edersheim claim that according to Jewish custom



An observation to which interest and importance attach is that there is a variant in the manuscript authority. Some manuscripts use the word *βαπτίζω* in verse 4, others the word *ραντίζω*. The latter means to sprinkle, and so the rendering in this case would be: “and when they come from the marketplace they do not eat except they sprinkle themselves”. If this reading is correct then this passage offers proof that sprinkling was regarded by the Jews as a proper mode for the removal of defilement. We should have to suppose that the intercourse of the market-place was regarded by the Jews as increasing the defilement and it would be reasonable to think that the purification required for this defilement would be more elaborate or extensive than that which was ordinarily necessary before eating, that is to say, more extensive than the mere washing of the hands. The reading “to sprinkle” would very readily supply the answer to this more extensive purification.

If we were to adopt the reading which uses the word *βαπτίζω*, this might appear to give support to the Baptist contention that immersion is the practice alluded to. In other words, it may be argued that while, ordinarily, all that is requisite before eating is the washing of the hands yet after the intercourse of the market-place the total washing of immersion is requisite. And it could be argued that this is the force of the distinction made between the requisition referred to in verse 3 and that referred to in verse 4. Additional support might be derived from the consideration that in the latter part of verse 4 the “baptism of cups and pots and brazen vessels” are adduced as examples of the traditions in view, baptisms which were presumptively performed by immersion.”<sup>9</sup>

There is no good reason for controverting the validity of this argument provided evidence could be adduced to prove that after return from the market-place rabbinic or Pharisaic tradition required immersion before eating. In that event this would be a case in which the word *βαπτίζω* would be used with reference to an action that was performed by immersion. We are not in the least concerned to deny that *βαπτίζω* can be thus used any more than are we interested in denying that in the latter part of verse 4 the word *baptismos* is used with reference to actions which were performed by the mode of immersion. In other words, let us grant to the fullest extent that in verse 4 the verb *βαπτίζω* and the noun *baptismos* are used with reference to acts of immersion, this by no means proves that either the verb or the noun *means* immersion in such a way that neither of them could be used with reference to an action performed by another mode. To adduce cases in which “baptise” or “baptism” is used to denote an action performed by immersion does not prove that they *mean* immersion. Our inquiry now is conducted to the end of showing simply that “to baptise” does not *mean* “to immerse”.

There are, however, two premises upon which rests the argument that in verse 4a we have an instance of the use of *βαπτίζω* to denote an action performed by immersion: (1) that *βαπτίζω* is the proper reading; (2) that there is good evidence that on returning from the market-place immersion was the rabbinic requisition. Neither of these premises is substantiated. To say the least, there is doubt as to both. Hence the argument is not established. And it must be remembered that in Luke 11:38 we have an instance of the use of *βαπτίζω* with reference to an act of washing or cleansing which, in accordance with Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:3, was performed by washing the hands. So there is no proof that in Mark 7:4a the word *βαπτίζω* is used in the sense of immersion.

## 2. *Hebrews 9:10-23.*

In verse 10 we have the expression “divers baptisms” (*διαφόροις βαπτισμοίς*). The allusion is to various symbolical lustrations of the Old Testament. The word “divers” indicates that lustratory rites of various kinds are in view. It is not probable, however, that all

the lustratory rites are contemplated. It is likely that those which had more direct relevance to the purification of persons are intended; the preceding verse, which is closely coordinated with verse 10, is concerned with the gifts and sacrifices which could not make him that performed the service perfect as to the conscience. But even if we recognise this delimitation we have still to note that lustrations of various kinds are envisaged.

The significance of this passage as it bears upon our present interest is that the “divers baptisms” referred to in verse 10 must surely include the lustrations expressly referred to in the succeeding verses. In these verses a contrast is drawn between the intrinsic inefficacy, or at least relative inefficacy, of the ritual ordinances of the Levitical economy and the transcendent efficacy and perfection of Christ’s purificatory and expiatory work. In a word, the imperfection of the Levitical lustrations is contrasted with the lustration once for all perfected by Christ. In this sustained contrast every lustratory rite that comes within the writer’s purview must be included in the “divers baptisms” of verse 10. And that simply means that the lustratory rites mentioned in the succeeding context must come within the scope of the “divers baptisms”.

In verse 13 one of these lustratory ordinances is expressly stated to have been performed by sprinkling — “for if the blood of goats and bulls and ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh”. When we bear in mind that here a lustratory rite of the old economy is contrasted in respect of its efficacy with the finality and perfection of the blood of Christ and when we remember that it was precisely this thought of relative inefficacy that prompted the reference to “divers baptisms”, it becomes exegetically impossible to exclude this rite, or these rites, of verse 13 from the scope of the “divers baptisms”. And this means that a lustratory rite performed by sprinkling can be called a baptism.

Again in verse 19 reference is made to the *sprinkling* of the book and all the people, and in verse 21 to the *sprinkling* of the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry (*cf.* Exod. 24:6-8). These ordinances are expressly stated in verse 23 to have been purificatory. We cannot exclude them from the scope of the “divers baptisms” of verse 10.

We must conclude, therefore, that the word “baptism” refers to an action that can be performed by sprinkling as well as by any other mode. It cannot, therefore, mean immersion.

Besides, we know that several of the Levitical lustrations, in addition to those mentioned in this chapter, were performed by sprinkling (*cf.* Lev. 14:4-7, 16, 49-53, 16:1.9; Numb. 8:5-7; 19:18, 19).<sup>10</sup> If the Baptist argument is valid then the “divers baptisms” of Hebrews 9:10 will have to be restricted to those lustratory rites which were performed by immersion and must exclude the most significant lustratory rites and actions of the old economy. On the face of it such a supposition is arbitrary. When examined it becomes quite untenable. For what lustratory rites are more pertinent to the contrast instituted than those which were performed by other modes than that of immersion, examples of which are given in the succeeding context? And what immersions,<sup>11</sup> prescribed in the Old Testament, are directly pertinent to the precise thought of this passage and will satisfy the description, “divers baptisms”?

This passage, therefore, provides us with an instance of the use of the word “baptism” (*baptizmos*) to denote actions which do not involve immersion. Baptism does not mean immersion but can refer to actions performed by other modes. This is what we might expect to be the case in such a passage as Hebrews 9:10. As we think of the diverse modes of cleansing in the Old Testament, sprinkling stands out most prominently as one of the modes and appears in some of the most distinctive lustratory rites. It would be strange indeed if such rites were not in view in the expression, “divers baptisms”.

### 3. *The Baptism of the Spirit.*

John the Baptist contrasted his own baptism with water with the baptism which Jesus was to dispense: “I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance . . . He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11; *cf.* Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Without question there is here an express allusion to Pentecost. Acts 1:5 and 11:16 confirm this, for in these passages the contrast between John’s baptism and that of Jesus is instituted in connection with Pentecost: “John indeed baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost was undoubtedly baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire.

If baptism means immersion then the statement of John that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire must mean strictly “he shall immerse in the Holy Spirit and fire”, and any language used with reference to the baptism of the Spirit, however figurative it may be, cannot depart from or violate this basic meaning. In other words, the symbolism cannot represent an entirely diverse mode of the relation of the disciples to the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Spirit to them. But what we actually find is that the baptism of the Spirit is referred to in terms that are quite contrary to the idea of immersion and in fact preclude it. In Acts 1:8 the Holy Spirit is represented as coming upon the disciples: “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you”. The verb is *ἐπέρχομαι* and conveys the notion of “coming down upon”. In Acts 2:17, 33 the Holy Spirit is represented as having been poured out, and the verb is *ἐκκέω*.<sup>12</sup> In Acts 10:44; 11:15 the Holy Spirit is represented as having fallen upon the persons concerned, and the verb is *ἐπιπίπτω* it is surely significant that the terms in each case are those of affusion and not of immersion. Yet it is precisely this affusion that is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the baptism with fire, referred to in the texts cited above, received its symbolic fulfilment, to say the least, in the cloven tongues like as of fire that sat upon the disciples at Pentecost (*καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ’ ἑνα ἑκαστον αὐτων*). If this is baptism with fire or, at least, the external symbol and sign of the baptism with fire, this baptism cannot be adjusted to the notion of immersion. But to the notion of immersion this phenomenon must be adjusted if the Baptist argument is correct that baptism means immersion.

It is not without relevance in this same connection that in the Old Testament the giving of the Spirit, in some cases explicitly referring to Pentecost, is promised in terms of pouring out, shedding forth, and sprinkling (Isa. 32:15; Joel 2:28; Prov. 1:23; Ezek. 36:25-27 where the Hebrew words are *hr[ ,rpn* and *qrz* meaning respectively to pour out, shed forth, and sprinkle). The language of the Old Testament provides the imagery of the New Testament and is quite foreign to the notion of immersion.

#### 4. *The Sprinkling of the Blood of Christ.*

Baptism symbolises, represents, and seals the application to us of the blood of Christ for the removal of the guilt of sin. The figure used in the New Testament for this application of the blood of Christ is that of sprinkling (Hebrews 9:13, 14, 22; 10:22; 12:24; I Pet. 1:2). It would be strange if the baptism with water which represents the sprinkling of the blood of Christ could not properly and most significantly be performed by sprinkling. It cannot be too frequently insisted that according to Scripture cleansing from the guilt of sin is adequately and effectively administered by the mode of sprinkling no less than by the modes of affusion and immersion.<sup>13</sup>

Sufficient evidence has been presented to show that in the usage of the New Testament *Baptizo* does not mean to immerse. It can be used with reference to immersion but it can also be used with reference to affusion and sprinkling. The New Testament, therefore, confirms

the conclusions derived from the study of the Old Testament. Both Testaments mutually support each other in this respect.

It is, however, necessary to consider several other passages in the New Testament because they have been appealed to on both sides of the argument; some of them have been used by anti-immersionists and some by immersionists. It is necessary to examine them in order to determine whether they lend any weight to the argument in favour of or against the immersionist contention.

(a) *I Corinthians 10:2*. “All were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” If the Baptist argument is correct, then there must be allusion to the mode of baptism in this text. At least, in order to satisfy the terms of the passage the children of Israel would have to be regarded as having been immersed in the cloud and in the sea.<sup>14</sup> Now it is only too apparent that they were not immersed in the sea — they passed through the sea upon dry ground. They did not enter into the water nor did the water come upon them (*cf.* Exod. 14:22). And as respects the cloud the reference is surely to the pillar of cloud that went before the children of Israel by day, a cloud that did not come upon them and into which they did not enter (*cf.* Exod. 13:21). So the word βαπτίζω is used here with reference to an event or series of events which did not involve immersion in any way.

If the Baptist should retort that, since the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea (Exod. 14:22), were thus below the level of the water and hemmed in by it on both sides, they could be regarded as immersed in the sea, then we have the strange notion that to be below the level of the water amounts to immersion, even though the water comes into no contact whatsoever with our bodies. If this is the case, we shall have to revise our concept of immersion to such an extent that it will be very different from that which is required by the Baptist contention. Besides, even if it were allowed that the going into the midst of the sea conforms to the idea of immersion, we must also take into account the cloud in which the children of Israel were baptised. There is no evidence that the children of Israel entered into the cloud or that the cloud came upon them.

The main relevance of this passage is simply that the word βαπτίζω can be used without any intimation or suggestion of mode, that βαπτίζω itself does not express mode, and, particularly, that it does not mean to immerse.

(b) *Acts 8:26-40*. Anti-immersionists have appealed to this text in support of their own contention. They argue that since this was desert it would be improbable, if not impossible, to find enough water for purposes of immersion. This is not a valid argument. There is the possibility of sufficient water for such a purpose and the terms used would indicate that there was a well or pool or stream of water. Anti-immersionists cannot prove that there was not sufficient water for immersion. Neither can it be proved that the Ethiopian eunuch was not immersed by Philip.

It becomes equally necessary, however, to show that the Baptist appeal to this text to prove immersion is indefensible.<sup>15</sup> The text does not prove that Philip immersed the eunuch. Such an inference may seem to be contradicted by the express terms of the passage. Is it not said that both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water (καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφοτέρω εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ) and that they came up out of the water (ἀνέβησαν ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος)? Is not immersion implied in the prepositions “into” and “out of”? The fact is that immersion cannot be established by such expressions. It should be noted that Philip as well as the eunuch went down into the water and came up out of the water. If such expressions imply or prove immersion, then they mean that Philip immersed himself as well as the eunuch. But such a supposition is quite unreasonable.<sup>15</sup> Why should Philip have immersed himself, and why would Luke be so anxious to inform us that Philip immersed himself as well as the eunuch?



It is not now maintained that Philip did not immerse the eunuch when he baptised him. That may have been the mode in this case. But what is to be recognised is — a fact too frequently ignored in the Baptist argumentation — that this passage does not prove immersion. The expressions, “they both went down into the water” and “they came up out of the water” are satisfied by the thought that they both went down to the water, stood on the brink or stepped into the edge, and that Philip baptised the eunuch by scooping up the water and pouring it or sprinkling it on him. This is *all* that can be shown to have occurred. As far as the going into, and coming up out of, the water are concerned nothing is stated in respect of the eunuch that is not also in respect of Philip himself. Hence there is no proof of immersion in this passage. What the actual mode was we simply do not know, and this text does not support the Baptist contention.

(c) *The Baptism of John.* The baptism of John is said to have been in Jordan (*ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ* — Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5) and into Jordan (*εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην* — Mark 1:9). He also baptised in Aïnon near to Salim because there was much water there (*ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ* — John 3:23).

At the outset it should be understood that John may have baptised by the mode of immersion; there does not appear to be evidence by which immersion could be disproved. Furthermore, if John baptised by the mode of immersion there is in this very consideration a good reason for choosing Jordan and Aïnon as the sites of administration — there was abundant water in both places. And the expressions used with reference to Jordan, namely, “in the river Jordan” and “into the Jordan” could readily be taken as reflecting, to some extent at least, on the actual mode.<sup>16</sup> The point upon which emphasis must be placed is that the expressions used and the consideration mentioned in reference to Aïnon, that there was much water there, do not prove that immersion was the mode and that the exigencies of immersion were the reasons for choosing Jordan and Aïnon. There are several other sufficient reasons why Jordan and Aïnon should have been chosen.

We know only too well that in Palestine water supplies were jealously prized and guarded, and we know how friction sometimes developed over the use of water supplies. To say the least, it would have been prejudicial to John’s ministry for him to have baptised except where there was abundant water. Large multitudes came to John’s baptism. It would have been disrupting to a local community and an interference with their needs for large multitudes to congregate around limited water supplies. Apart from the actual water used for baptism, it would have been interference amounting to impropriety to deprive people of ready access to the water supply requisite for their daily needs.

Again, apart from the consideration of the water used in baptism and apart from the impropriety of interference with the needs of a local community, it would be necessary to seek a place of much water in order to meet the needs of those who congregated. Oftentimes the people who came to John’s baptism came long distances. In many cases it is altogether likely that animals were used for conveyance. Those who came would therefore need water for their own use and for the use of the animals they may have brought. It is obvious that a place of much water would be indispensable.

We have thus a whole series of considerations which coalesce to show that a place of much water was requisite apart from the question of immersion. Hence the choosing of Jordan and Aïnon does not prove that these places were selected because they afforded the amount of water requisite for immersion.

The expressions, “in the river Jordan” and “into the Jordan” do not prove immersion. As far as the expression “in the river Jordan” is concerned it may be nothing more than a designation of location just as “baptising in Aïnon” in John 3:23 designates location. Consequently, the expression “in the river Jordan” proves nothing respecting the mode of

John's baptism. And as far as the expression "into Jordan" is concerned we found already that even such an expression as "going down into the water" does not necessarily imply immersion. Standing in the water or on the brink of the river would satisfy completely the idea expressed.

(d) *Acts 2:41; 10:47; 16:33*. These passages have sometimes been adduced to disprove immersion. But they establish no such conclusion. There is nothing in the actual circumstances of these instances of baptism which makes immersion impossible. On the other hand, there is nothing to suggest, far less to require, immersion. Hence it is far better not to appeal to such passages in this debate. An argument is only weakened in its effectiveness when it is supported by irrelevant or inconclusive data.

*Conclusion.* On the basis of such considerations as these, derived from both Old and New Testaments, we are led to the conclusion that though the word βαπτίζω and its cognates can be used to denote an action performed by immersion yet they may also be used to denote an action that can be performed by a variety of modes. Consequently the word βαπτίζω itself cannot be pleaded as an argument for the necessity of immersion as the mode of baptism.

It is still possible, however, that other evidence could be presented to show that immersion belongs to the essence of the symbolism. We turn, therefore, to the other phase of the Baptist argument in support of the thesis that immersion is the only proper mode of baptism.

## *B. The Burial and Resurrection of Christ*

The two passages upon which the greater part of this phase of the argument for immersion rests are Romans 6:2-6; Colossians 2:11, 12. In essence the argument is that, since baptism represents union with Christ in his death and resurrection, immersion in water and emergence from it provides an analogy which graphically portrays that which is represented and sealed by baptism. Romans 6:3, 4 would appear to indicate such symbolism: "Or are ye ignorant that as many as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life." But more careful analysis will show that there is no necessary allusion to the mode of baptism.

It is beyond dispute that the leading thought of the apostle here is that of union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. And verses 5 and 6 are confirmatory. They carry on the same thought in different terms: "For if we have become planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in that of the resurrection: knowing this that our old man has been crucified with him, in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, to the end that we should no longer serve sin,."

Paul is here dealing with the antinomian argument and, in order to rebut it, he sets forth the particular phases of union with Christ that are peculiarly adapted to that purpose, namely, union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. He does this to show that every one who is united to Christ is, by virtue of the efficacy of Christ's death and the power of his resurrection, freed from the dominion of sin, lives a new resurrection life, and therefore cannot make his Christian faith and profession a plea for, or an inducement to, continuance in sin. Baptism, by which the Christian profession is registered and sealed, means baptism into union with Christ, and Paul is here stressing what such union means, particularly in reference to the death and resurrection of Christ. Believers died with Christ, they were planted together in the likeness of his death, they were buried with him, they were crucified with him, they were raised up with him and planted together in the likeness of his resurrection.

It is very easy to focus attention upon one or two of the terms which Paul here uses and

make it appear that the indispensable mode of baptism is after the analogy of what we have arbitrarily selected. It is very easy to point to the expression “buried with him” in verse 4 and insist that only immersion provides any analogy to burial. But such procedure fails to take account of all that Paul says here. It should be noted that Paul not only says “buried together” (*συνετάφημεν*) but also “planted together” (*συμφυτοί*) and “crucified together” (*συνεσταυρωθη*). These latter expressions indicate the union with Christ which is symbolised and sealed by baptism just as surely as does “buried together”. But it is only too apparent that they do not bear any analogy to immersion. Even if it should be conceded that the different shades of meaning possible in the case of “planted together” (*συμφυτοί*) leave room for some resemblance to immersion, yet no resemblance can obtain in the case of “crucified together”. We are represented as having been hung on the cross together with Christ, and that phase of union with Christ is represented by our baptism into Christ not one whit less than our death in him and our burial with him, not one whit less than our being planted with him in the likeness of his death and our being raised with him in the power of his resurrection. When all of Paul’s expressions are taken into account we see that burial with Christ can be appealed to as providing an index to the mode of baptism no more than can crucifixion with him. And since the latter does not indicate the *mode* of baptism there is no validity to the argument that burial does. The fact is that there are many aspects to our union with Christ. It is arbitrary to select one aspect and find in the language used to set it forth the essence of the mode of baptism. Such procedure is indefensible unless it can be carried through consistently. It cannot be carried through consistently here and therefore it is arbitrary and invalid. This passage as a whole points up the arbitrariness of such procedure by emphasising a phase of our union with Christ that bears no analogy whatsoever to that of immersion.

Confirmatory of this conclusion is Galatians 3:27. Here another implication of our union with Christ is argued by the apostle. The form of statement is closely similar to that of Romans 6:3. In Romans 6:3 Paul says: “As many as were baptised into Christ were baptised into his death”, and in Galatians 3:27: “For as many as were baptised into Christ did put on Christ”. It would be just as legitimate to insist that there is reference to the mode of baptism in Galatians 3:27 as in Romans 6:3. But in Galatians 3:27 the figure used by the apostle to set forth the import of baptism into Christ has no resemblance to immersion. It is the figure of putting on a garment. The plain inference is that Paul is not alluding to the mode of baptism at all. And neither may we suppose that he is in Romans 6:2-6. We should be faced with contradictory testimony as to the mode of baptism if we supposed that these passages allude to it.

In I Corinthians 12:13 we have the same effect. “For by one Spirit have we all been baptised into one body.” The figure here is the making up of one unified organism and is quite foreign to the notion of immersion.

The only sane conclusion is that in none of these cases is reference made to the mode of baptism.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis is plainly upon the meaning of baptism into Christ, that is to say, of union with him. Indeed, so paramount is the thought of union with Christ that the allusion to the rite of baptism need not be considered as overt. While it might not be proper to say that allusion to the rite of baptism is not at all present in the use of the word “baptise” in these passages, yet in such expressions as “baptised into Christ”, “baptised into his death” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27), and “baptised into one body” (I Cor. 12:13), it is not the rite of baptism that is in the foreground but rather the idea of union with Christ. “Being baptised into” is a way of expressing “union with”. To be “baptised into Moses” (I Cor. 10:2) is to be bound to Moses in the fellowship of that covenant of which Moses was the mediator. In a word, it is to be a disciple of Moses. Paul protests to the Corinthians that they were not baptised “into the name of Paul” (I Cor. 1:13): it would have meant that they had been baptised into the discipleship of Paul rather than into that of Jesus. To be “baptised into Christ” is to be bound to him in the

bonds of that union that makes us the beneficiaries of all the blessings of redemption and pledges us to his Lordship. The rite of baptism is the sign and seal of this union. But the language of the symbol and seal becomes so closely attached to that which the symbol represents that this language may be used to express that truth when the symbol itself has receded into the background of thought. Hence in these passages which have been considered it is not the rite of baptism that is in the foreground. Indeed, reference to the rite may have receded almost to the point of disappearance. It is union with Christ that claims the thought, and the language of baptism has been appropriated to give emphasis to that thought as well as to express the fulness and richness of the union involved.

*General Conclusion.* We have seen that the two pillars of the Baptist argument for the necessity of immersion, when examined in the light of the evidence provided by the Scriptures themselves, do not rest upon solid foundations. The usage in respect of βαπτίζω and its cognates does not show that these terms imply immersion.<sup>18</sup> There are very few instances where it can be shown that they refer to immersion, and there are many instances where it can be shown that they refer to actions performed by other modes than that of immersion. βαπτίζω, therefore, does not mean to immerse. The collateral Baptist argument drawn from similitude to the burial and resurrection of Christ has been shown to rest upon an arbitrary selection of one or two texts, and the invalidity of this selection is demonstrated by the very passage which appears to give strongest support to the contention. βαπτίζω, we must conclude, is one of those words which indicate a certain effect without itself expressing or prescribing the particular mode by which this effect is secured.

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## Notes

1. Cf. James Bannerman: *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1868), Vol. II, p. 123.
2. Cf. Alexander Carson: *Baptism in its Modes and Subjects* (Philadelphia, 1845), p. 19; A. H. Strong: *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia, 1909), Vol. III, p. 993. Carson says, "BAPTO has two meanings; βαπτίζω in the whole history of the Greek language has but one. It not only signifies to dip or immerse, but it never has any other meaning." Strong says, "This is immersion, and immersion only". Cf. also John Gill: *op. cit.*, pp. 307 ff.; Abraham Booth: *Paedobaptism Examined* (London, 1829), Vol. I, pp. 40-131.
3. Cf. Alexander Carson: *op. cit.*, pp. 142 ff.; A. H. Strong: *op. cit.*, pp. 940ff.; John Gill: *op. cit.*, p. 310; Abraham Booth: *op. cit.*, pp. 162 ff. For a statement and criticism of the Baptist position cf. Robert Wilson: *Infant Baptism a Scriptural Service, and Dipping Unnecessary to its Right Administration* (London, 1848), pp. 286 ff.
4. In the discussion which follows account is taken simply of instances appearing in the canonical books of the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is not deemed necessary to enter into a detailed discussion of each instance of βαπτω and βαπτίζω. The purpose of our discussion is simply to show that βαπτω in the usage of the LXX does not mean immersion and that it cannot be shown that βαπτίζω means immersion. It is not forgotten, of course, that as able an immersionist as Alexander Carson allows that βαπτω does not always mean to dip but that it also has a secondary and derived meaning, namely, to dye (cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 18 ff.). Other immersionists, however, do not concede as much as Carson. In any case it is well to review the Old Testament usage in reference to βαπτω. This provides a necessary and suitable introduction to the New Testament usage in reference to βαπτίζω and its cognates. For discussion of Isaiah 21:4 cf. Robert Wilson: *op. cit.*, pp. 178 f., 267 ff.

4a. An objection to the validity of the argument drawn from Leviticus 14:6, 51 could be urged on the basis of the consideration that the blood of the bird that was slain flowed into the living water in the earthenware vessel and that it was not simply in the blood of the slain bird that the living bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet, and the hyssop were dipped but in the mixture of water and blood in the earthenware vessel. This is the view of able commentators such as Keil and Delitzsch, S. H. Kellogg, J. P. Lange and others. If this view of the ritual could be proven, the position taken above would have to be modified. For it might be maintained that, in such a case, there could be enough fluid for immersion of the four items specified. There are, however, two things to be said in reference to this objection. (1) Even on the supposition that it was in a mixture of blood and water that the items were dipped, it is not apparent that there would have been enough fluid for purposes of immersion. (2) The terms of the passage do not indicate that the procedure was such as is supposed in this objection. Leviticus 14:6 says simply that the four items were dipped "in the blood of the bird that had been slain upon the living water". And in Leviticus 14:51, 52 the blood of the bird that had been slain and the living water are distinguished. In verse 51 it is distinctly specified that the four items were to be dipped "in the blood of the slain bird, and in the living water". Verse 52, again, distinguishes between the blood of the slain bird and the living water, just as it distinguishes between the living bird and the other three items.

"And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the living water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar-wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet." Hence there does not appear to be good reason for adopting the view that it was in a mixture of blood and water that the items concerned were dipped nor good reason for relinquishing the view adopted.

If the Talmud should be appealed to in support of the view that the blood and the living water were mixed (see tractate *Negaim*, Chapter XIV, Mishnah 1), it should be borne in mind that the tradition referred to in this tractate distinctly provided that only a quarter of a log of living water was put in the earthenware vessel. Obviously a quarter of a log of water, together with the blood of the slain bird, would not provide enough fluid for immersion of the living bird, not to speak of the additional items which were to be dipped.

5. *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Tohoroth* (London, The Soncino Press, 1948), p. 552; cf. Alfred Edersheim: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (New York, 1910), Vol. II, pp. 10 ff.; John Lightfoot: *Works* (ed. Pitman, London, 1823), Vol. IX, p. 153, Vol. XI, pp. 399 ff.; H. B. Swete: *Corn. ad loc.*; Joseph Addison Alexander: *Corn. ad loc.*

In appealing to the Talmud caution has to be exercised. The committal to writing of a great many of these traditions is later than the early Christian era. There is often doubt as to the antiquity of some of these traditions, and so in many cases we cannot be sure that they go back as far as the first century of the Christian era. However, the rabbinic tradition embodied in the Talmud in many instances antedates the Christian era and we can discover in the Talmud that which exactly corresponds to the traditions so frequently condemned by our Lord. Hence there is oftentimes a great deal of help derived from the Talmud in the interpretation of the New Testament.

6. *Op. cit.* p. 11.

7. *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Tohoroth* (as cited), pp. 419 ff.

8. Cf. the Talmudic tractate *Kelim*, Chapter I, Mishnah 5 (*The Babylonian Talmud* as cited, pp. 9 f.); the Talmudic tractate *Negaim*, Chapter XIV, Mishnah 2, 3, 8 (*The Babylonian Talmud* as cited, pp. 292 ff.). It is noteworthy in this connection that the Old Testament prescriptions for the cleansing of uncleanness arising from leprosy or a running issue or the seed of copulation *etc.* do not stipulate that the bathing required be by immersion. It

was distinctly prescribed that the person to be cleansed should bathe himself in water. Sometimes the expression used is that he bathe his flesh in water and on at least one occasion it is said that he must bathe all his flesh in water (Lev. 15:16). But the terms used for such bathing are not such as to require immersion. In Hebrew the term is *[hr* and in the LXX *louw* (cf. Lev. 14:8, 9; 15:1-33). It may be that in many cases the bathing was performed by immersion. But this was not stipulated and there were many circumstances under which it would be most difficult, if not impossible, for immersion to take place (cf. especially Lev. 15:13). The important consideration is that immersion was not prescribed (cf. for a discussion of Mosaic purifications Edward Beecher: *Baptism in reference to its Import and Modes*, New York, 1849, pp. 32 ff.).

9. There is good reason to believe that the “baptisms of cups and pots and brassen vessels”, referred to in Mark 7:4, refer to immersion (cf. the Talmudic tractate *Kelim*, Chapter XXV, Mishnah 3, 5). The reference to the baptism of “couches” (*klinon*) does not appear in several manuscripts. Hence the text is in question. There need be no question, however, that the Jews did require the purification of couches and beds (cf. Lev. 15:20). Edward Beecher, for example, does not appear to be on stable ground when he says, “But above all, the immersion of the couches on which they reclined at meals is out of the question” (*op. cit.*, p. 39; cf. Robert Wilson: *op. cit.*, pp. 229 f.). Apart from the question as to whether or not the reference in this case is to the immersion of couches (even assuming that the text is correct), Beecher’s flat denial of the possibility of a reference to immersion does not appear to be warranted. The Talmudic tractate *Kelim*, again, indicates that in rabbinic tradition provision was made that beds might be purified in parts and even for the dismantling of beds in order to purification by immersion (see Chapter XVIII, Mishnah 9; Chapter XIX, Mishnah 1. The relevant words in the latter are, “If a man dismantled a bed in order that he might immerse it. . .”). Alexander Carson, without appealing to these rabbinic provisions and without appeal to the Talmud, observes with good warrant: “the couches might have been so constructed, that they might be conveniently taken to pieces, for the purpose of purification” (*op. cit.*, p. 76). It is not now being contended, of course, that the baptism of couches necessarily refers to immersion. All that is being maintained is that we are not justified in appealing to Mark 7:4b to show that *βaptismos* cannot here imply immersion. For diversity of mode in Levitical prescription cf. Robert Wilson: *op. cit.*, pp. 228f.
10. There are so many instances of sprinkling in the ritual of the Mosaic economy that it is not necessary to give the citations. In connection with the blood of the sacrifices no action of the priest was more prominent than the sprinkling of the blood. And the significance of sprinkling is shown by nothing more than by the fact that when the high priest went into the holiest of all once a year on the great day of atonement he sprinkled the blood of the sin-offerings seven times before the mercy-seat and upon the mercy-seat (Lev. 16:14, 15). That this sprinkling had reference to cleansing appears from Leviticus 16:19: “And he shall sprinkle with the blood upon it (the altar) with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the children of Israel”. The Hebrew words used for the act of sprinkling are *p1?* and *,u*. Ezekiel 36:25 indicates as clearly as any text in the Old Testament the purificatory significance of sprinkling and the adequacy of sprinkling as a mode of purification. “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.”  
 For a discussion of Hebrews 9:10 cf. Robert Wilson: *op. cit.*, pp. 214 ff.; Edward Beecher: *op. cit.*, pp. 325 ff.
11. This is a cogent question. It is difficult to know what immersions of the Levitical economy could be adduced to meet the requirements of this passage.

12. *Cf.*, also, Titus 3:6 where the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of regeneration and renewal is said to have been “poured out” on us richly.
13. *Cf.* the discussion of Hebrews 9:10 above and particularly footnote 12.
14. John Gill says with reference to this passage that it was “a figure of baptism by immersion; as the Israelites were under the cloud, and so under water, and covered with it, as persons baptized by immersion are; and passed through the sea, that standing up as a wall on both sides them, with the cloud over them; thus surrounded they were as persons immersed in water, and so said to be baptized” (*op. cit.*, p. 311).
15. *Cf.* John Gill: *op. cit.*, p. 309. Calvin, whom Gill quotes at this point says with reference to Acts 8:38: “Here we see what was the manner of baptising among the ancients, for they plunged the whole body into the water: now the use is, that the minister only sprinkles the body or the head”.
16. *Cf.* John Gill: *op. cit.*, p. 308.
17. James Bannerman does not sufficiently take into account the data provided by the passages concerned when, with reference to Romans 6:3-5, he says: “There are two things which seem plainly enough to be included in this remarkable statement. *In the first place*, the immersion in water of the persons of those who are baptized is set forth as their burial with Christ in His grave because of sin; and their being raised again out of the water is their resurrection with Christ in His rising again from the dead because of their justification . . . And *in the second place*, their burial in water, when dying with Christ, was the washing away of the corruptness of the old man beneath the water; and their coming forth from the water in the image of His resurrection was their leaving behind them the old man with his sins, and emerging into newness of life. Their immersion beneath the water, and their emerging again, were the putting off the corruption of nature and rising again into holiness, or their sanctification” (*op. cit.*, pp. 47 f.). Many commentators have found in Romans 6:4 an allusion to immersion. But see for the contrary: Edward Beecher: *op. cit.*, pp. 86ff.; Moses Stuart: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Andover, 1835), pp. 272 ff.; Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia, 1864), p. 305; Robert Wilson: *op. cit.*, pp. 286 ff.
18. Even Calvin falls into the mistake of saying that “the very word *baptize* . . . signifies to immerse” (*Inst.* IV, xv, 19), though he argues in the same context that it is of no importance whether a person be wholly immersed or whether water be only poured or sprinkled.

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