



Conducted by
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“Please distinguish between the baptism administered by John the baptist and the baptism authorised by Jesus in Matt. 28:19”.

FIRSTLY I mention that “baptist” was not part of John’s name, nor was it a title of any kind. His name was John. The angel said so (Luke 1:13); his mother said so (Luke 1:60); and his father said so on the writing tablet (Luke 1:63). John is described as “John the baptist” because he carried out the baptising with his own hands, Jesus made and baptised more disciples than John (and John baptised multitudes) but did not personally immerse anyone – his disciples did the baptising (John 4:2)).

There are three kinds of baptism mentioned in the New Testament: baptism in water, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and baptism in fire (see Luke 3:16,17). The first is a *command* to be obeyed; the second was a *promise* to be bestowed on certain disciples in the early years of the church; and the third will be a *punishment* meted out to all those who refuse and reject Christ. Obviously men had no control over the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and equally have no say in precisely who will incur the baptism of fire. Thus the only baptism which directly concerns us in this life is the baptism in water. Baptism in water, despite what some may say, is the “one baptism” mentioned in Eph. 4:4; and it was commanded both by John and by Jesus.

Water baptism is of two kinds, *prospective* and *retrospective* – the one pointing forward to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, and the other pointing back to it.

John’s Baptism

John’s baptism was prospective, and was completely valid until Pentecost (Acts 2:1) and was administered by both John and his disciples and the disciples

of Christ. John the baptist was the forerunner of Jesus, to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord (John 1:23). There was great need for such preparation. From the close of Malachi's prophecy and for about 400 years, God had left the children of Israel to be guided by the Old Testament, but they drifted far away from it. Various sects, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, arose and the people were corrupted both religiously and morally. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" was the cry which John sounded forth. Vast multitudes came to him knowing him to be a prophet of God, and were baptised by him. Mark 1:4,5 says "John did baptise in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptised of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins." We notice that his baptism was a baptism of repentance just as his message was a call for repentance: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance..." (Luke 3:8) was a prerequisite of John's baptism. Christ's baptism also requires to be preceded by repentance. Candidates for John's baptism confessed their sins prior to baptism, but this does not seem to be required prior to Christ's baptism. We notice also from Mark 1:4 that John's baptism was for (or unto) the remission of sins, just as Christ's baptism is for the remission of sins. We appreciate of course that this was part of the *prospective* nature of John's baptism, Christ's blood not yet having been shed for the sins of mankind. Simultaneously Jesus was also preaching that the kingdom was at hand and His disciples were baptising the repentant: "After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judæa; and there He tarried with them and baptised. And John also was baptising in AEnon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were baptised." (John 3:23). John's baptism, like Christ's, was obviously immersion. We know that John eventually was put in prison and later beheaded because he was bravely outspoken to King Herod regarding Herod's sinful association with Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Jesus continued the call of "Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand". People, by and large, accepted him as the One foretold by John, and followed Him as God's Messiah. Many continued to be baptised by Christ's disciples and were baptised, of course, with John's baptism. Christ's message, like John's had been, was that the kingdom of heaven was at hand - it was not a reality, as we know, until Pentecost. The *prospective* baptism of John's continued, therefore, to be administered. It has been suggested that the phrase, "For John was not yet cast into prison" (John 3:24) implies that the administering of John's baptism ceased after he was committed to prison. But I really don't see why it should be thought that God's will could be thwarted by the whim of Herod. I couldn't imagine that Jesus would stop preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, just because John had been imprisoned.

Christ's Baptism

After Christ's death however, and just before His ascension to heaven, He gave to His apostles His parting instructions to preach the gospel to every creature and to administer His (Christ's) baptism. He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in (into, R.V.) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Heretofore nothing had been done in the name of Christ, inasmuch as "all power, or authority" had not been delivered into His hands, but from His death onwards everything was to be done in His name (or by His authority). In accordance with these instructions from Christ, Peter on the day of Pentecost, when asked by his hearers what they must do, said, "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins....." (Acts 2:38). Thus we have the first recorded instance of baptism being commanded *in the name of Jesus Christ* (or in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Thenceforth John's baptism would be no longer valid, having

been superseded by Christ's baptism. The kingdom of heaven is now in existence and a reality.

The Differences

It is not quite true to say that this is the last we hear of John's baptism. Communications are rapid in this age, with the mass media; but not so then, in Christ's day — no morning papers or radio and T.V. news bulletins. News travelled very slowly, and although John's baptism had been replaced completely by Christ's, some of the preaching disciples were unaware of it and were continuing to administer John's baptism. Paul encounters this state of affairs at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7), as do Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28). These instances show that John's baptism was still being practised, and illustrates how the apostles dealt with it.

Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preach the gospel in the synagogue. We are told that Apollos was a Christian Jew and was not only eloquent but was "mighty in the scriptures": "This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, *knowing only the baptism of John*". Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside, or took him home, and expounded to him "the way of the Lord more perfectly". They brought him up-to-date and no doubt explained that John's baptism had now been replaced by Christ's baptism (although we are not told that Apollos was rebaptised). In the other case (Acts 19:1-7), we find that Paul, on conversing with twelve disciples in Ephesus, discovers that they too know only the baptism of John. Paul's first question was, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" He was not, of course, alluding to the indwelling of the spirit; for this all receive who repent and are baptised (Acts 2:38) and he had therefore no grounds for doubting this. But some disciples, after and apart from baptism, by the imposition of apostolic hands received supernatural gifts of the Spirit and it is to this which Paul refers (as is proved by his bestowing such gifts at the close of the conversation). When he received the answer, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit," he suspected that something was amiss regarding their baptism, and therefore asked, 'Unto what then were ye baptised? And they said, 'Unto John's baptism''. Paul no doubt realised that if they had not heard of the Holy Spirit they could not have been baptised into the name of Father, Son *and Holy Spirit*. Paul goes on to explain the *prospective* nature of John's baptism, and that John baptised on the basis that those baptised undertook to believe on One who would come after John — that is, on Jesus Christ. "And when they heard this they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied". Perhaps we may wonder why Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John, *was not rebaptised* but the twelve men at Ephesus who had been baptised unto John's baptism *were rebaptised*. If Apollos was not rebaptised (and we are not told that he was) we can only presume that Apollos had been baptised during the period when John's baptism was valid *i.e.* prior to the time when Christ's baptism superseded it at Pentecost. If this premise be a correct one we can further deduce that none of the disciples who had received John's baptism while it was valid were required to be rebaptised. The twelve disciples on the other hand had received John's baptism after Pentecost (after it had become *invalid*) and therefore had to be rebaptised, or, if you wish, had to be baptised for the first time with valid (Christ's) baptism. The incident shows that Paul was in the habit of inspecting the condition of the disciples he encountered, and that he attached great importance to it, and to baptism.

Summing Up

I can sum up by saying that both baptisms were by immersion in water, were for the remission of sins, and were contingent upon repentance. Candidates confessed

their sins prior to John's baptism (Matt. 3:6). John's baptism was not *in the name of Jesus Christ*, for He had not at that time received all authority. John's baptism was, however, with God's authority: "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected *the counsel of God against themselves*, being not baptised of him" (Luke 7:30). John's baptism, it is said, did not put one into the church (or kingdom): this must be so, since the church was not in existence until Pentecost, nor was it for "the putting on of Christ", as was Christ's baptism (Gal. 3:27). Yet John's baptism was perfectly valid in its time and those baptised were required, and expected to believe on and obey the Son of God as soon as He was manifested — they were, "to believe on Him who should come after him (John) that is on Christ Jesus" (Acts 19:4).

These remarks may help the questioner and, I hope, stimulate further discussion and study of the question. One is continually confronted with the importance God attaches to baptism, yet it is incredible to hear men who claim to be students of God's word say that it is not very important. If men, by refusing to be baptised with *John's* baptism, "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" (Luke 7:30) how can men possibly say that by rejecting *Christ's* baptism they are not also, *and more so*, rejecting God's counsel against *themselves*.