

## Testing the Waters: A Reevaluation of Yeshua's Five Sayings on βάπτισμα

Hanoch Ben Keshet

The three synoptists Mark, Matthew and Luke portray Yeshua making use of the Greek verb *baptizō* (βαπτίζω) and noun *baptisma* (βάπτισμα) in five sayings: Luke 12:50, Mark 10:38–39, Mark 11:30 [with Luke 20:4, Matt 21:25], Matthew 28:19, and Acts 1:5.<sup>1</sup> These sayings not only help define the contours and boundaries of *baptizō* and *baptisma* in the NT, some directly impact ecclesiology and soteriology. This article reviews Yeshua's five sayings to determine whether or not the meanings of *baptizō* and *baptisma* correspond precisely to the meanings of the Hebrew verb *taval* (טבל) and noun *tevilah* (טבילה), or to the English terms immerse and immersion. This question was stimulated by study of Yeshua's words in Mark 10:38–39 in Greek, and in the modern Hebrew translation, *Habrit Hahadashah* (HNT)<sup>2</sup> which assumes that the Hebrew *taval* and *tevilah* represent *baptizō* and *baptisma*. *Tevilah*, however, does not occur in the Tanakh and it is not verified in Qumran literature.<sup>3</sup> It does occur a number of times in the Mishnah, compiled more than a century after the NT. So, from the standpoint of word origin, there are reasons for caution when considering the translational correspondence of these Greek and Hebrew words. Moreover, a new English Bible translation, the *Tree of Life Version* (TLV), provides a fresh, Messianic Jewish-friendly rendering of the Tanakh and New Covenant writings.<sup>4</sup> The TLV translates *baptizō* and cognates, rather than merely transliterating them as baptize and baptism as has been customary in most English versions. Yet, similarly to the HNT, the TLV translation committee seems to have assumed that *baptizō* and cognates correspond almost exclusively with *immerse* and *immersion*.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Yeshua's five sayings are ordered chronologically according to Kurt Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 15<sup>th</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005). Mark 16:16, found in the "longer ending" of Mark 16:9–20, is not considered in this article since it is widely recognized to be an addition by a non-Markan hand. Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), 102–106.

<sup>2</sup> The elucidated translation, *Habrit Hahadashah*, מברית החדשה, *Mevo'eret*, (Jerusalem: Bible Society in Israel, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Early researchers of the Copper Scroll (3Q Copper Scroll [3Q15] I 11–12) thought they detected use of *tevilah*. Later, however, more sophisticated research techniques showed that *tevilah* is far from certain as the actual reading. (Yonatan Adler, "The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in *Erez-Israel* from the Hasmonean Period until the End of the Talmudic Era [164 BCE – 400 CE]," [Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2011], 19–20) in Hebrew.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible, Tree of Life Version*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Nida popularized the translation concepts of formal equivalence, which focuses on form and content of the source and target language, and dynamic equivalence, which focuses the overall message in the source and target language. In either approach assumptions are made about word meanings in both the source and target language, such as with *baptizō* and *taval*. Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

This article shows that *baptizō* and *baptisma* are not always best represented by the Hebrew words *taval* and *tevilah* or by *immerse* and *immersion*. Jewish NT authors certainly used *baptizō* to describe Jewish life in Greek terms. Yet *baptizō* simply is not neatly interchangeable with a single Hebrew or English term. Such an assumption, with potentially far-reaching consequences for NT interpretation, could yield misleading results. This article suggests that Jewish NT authors often used *baptizō* and *baptisma* to emphasize the causation of intangible effects, especially purification. In the late Second Temple defilement (*tumah*) and purification (*taharah*) were of great importance in Jewish life. For example, a Jew who enters a house where there is a deceased human contracts corpse defilement, even if there is no direct contact with the body (Num 19:14–20). This is an intangible defilement that nevertheless could have tremendous consequence for a Jew.<sup>6</sup> Recovery of a pure status from this particular defilement includes having ashes of a dead calf sprinkled on the defiled person twice during a seven-day period, something that on the face of it hardly seems to confer “purification.” So, the Jewish people were involved with all kinds of daily defilements, as well as various Torah procedures to recover a pure status. This article suggests that *baptizō* and cognates often were used to directly convey the causation of purity without specifying the form of the Torah procedure.

Recognized or not, even Hebrew usage of *taval* often implicitly suggests effects that result from dipping or immersion. Joseph’s coat was purposely dipped, *taval*, in blood, for the obvious understood effect of being *stained*.<sup>7</sup> The entire point of mishnaic *tevilah*, self-immersion, is to achieve *purification*. But whereas the mishnaic term *tevilah* primarily emphasizes the form of the rite and secondarily the implied effect of purification, in the NT, *baptizō* reverses the emphasis and primarily stresses the effect, purification,<sup>8</sup> while the form often must be derived from context. Indeed, Romans 6:4 evidently contains the earliest attestation of *baptisma*, and Paul’s use relates to enormous ontological transformation, not to simple inert immersion.

Two of Yeshua’s five sayings refer directly to Yohanan’s rite, thus warranting its review as well. Clearly Yohanan’s rite was tightly bound to the imminent kingdom that he proclaimed, and this leads to crucial questions: Did Yohanan simply devise an eschatological rite? Or perhaps did he inaugurate a prophecy from the Tanakh, specifically Ezek 36:25? The sense of *baptizō* as it is used in the NT heavily impacts both propositions. If *baptizō* speaks of purification without emphasis on mode, then

---

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the Centurion’s comment of not being worthy of Yeshua coming under his roof (Luke 7:1–10) meant that he wished to spare Yeshua from such a defilement (Acts 10:28; m. Oholot 18:7).

<sup>7</sup> Jewish LXX translators indeed jumped to the other side of the form-effect dichotomy and translated *taval* in Gen 37:31 with ἐμόλυναν, *stain*, making implicit the modal form, dip, and making explicit the resulting effect.

<sup>8</sup> Compare the BDAG’s first definition of three for *baptizō*: “1. wash ceremonially for purpose of purification, wash, purify, of a broad range of repeated ritual washing rooted in Israelite tradition (cp. Just., D. 46, 2) Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38.” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition, Bauer, ed. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000], 164); Compare also Friberg’s definition of *baptizō*: “(1) of Jewish ritual washings wash, cleanse, purify by washing.” (*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Friberg, Friberg, [Victoria, BC, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2005], 87).

Yohanan may well have inaugurated Ezek 36:25. If instead *baptizō* is solely understood in terms of *taval* and immerse, then the implication is that Yohanan would have devised his own rite since there is no clear eschatological rite of immersion in the Tanakh.

This article discusses evidence that *baptizō* and *baptisma* convey a range of meaning, including senses beyond the concept of immersion. Yeshua's third saying illuminates the national importance of Yohanan's rite for Israel which supports the view that Yohanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25, Israel's promised kingdom purification. Yeshua's fourth saying, Matt 28:19, may not refer to a liturgical rite, but rather could well be Yeshua's command to his Jewish apostles to ensure relational transformation between gentile disciples and the Almighty. Yeshua's fifth saying shows that Yohanan's rite is subordinate to Yeshua's spiritually-transformative, universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This exploration of Yeshua's five sayings challenges not only Christian assumptions about baptism, it also raises important questions for the Messianic Community. If Yohanan and Yeshua inaugurated Israel's promised purification (Ezek 36:25–27) then the Messianic Community must reconsider its current teaching and practice. We turn now to Yeshua's first saying.

## I. Luke 12:50

אֶלָּא שְׁעָלִי לְהִטָּבֵל טְבִילָה וַיְמָה פְּבֻדָּה עָלַי הַמּוֹעֵקָה (HNT) עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּשָּׁלֵם! (TLV)	But I have an immersion to endure, and how distressed I am until it is finished! (TLV)
---	--

Culy, Parsons and Stigall transliterate *baptizō* and *baptisma*: “I have a baptism (with which) to be baptized.”<sup>9</sup>

Luke portrayed Yeshua using the newly-coined verbal noun *baptisma* to bear sacred freight, what Craig Evans says is “undoubtedly a reference to his impending death.”<sup>10</sup> In John Nolland's view of this verse, “[t]here is no sufficient reason for making recourse either to the baptism of John or to Christian baptism to account for the wording of the text here. While the precise imagery must belong to the Greek language phase of the tradition, the representation of the threat of disaster in terms of a flood of water is well attested in the OT.”<sup>11</sup> The point to make is that the earlier Semitic phase of tradition of Luke 12:50, indeed Yeshua's words themselves, might well have used detrimental imagery from the Hebrew Tanakh. If so, then the HNT's *tevilah* requires justification since the word does not occur in the Tanakh, and it has not been attested prior to the Mishnah. Beyond that, the Hebrew *taval* does not convey dire senses of disaster or death in the Tanakh, nor does *tevilah* in the Mishnah.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 442.

<sup>10</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 193–204.

<sup>11</sup> The examples listed are 2 Sam 22:5; Pss. 69:2–3, 15; 32:6; 124:4–5. John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35b (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 708–709. Accordance ebook.

One might instead use *tava* (טבע), the term for drowning. Indeed, Hebrew translations of Josephus' *Wars* and *Antiquities* typically use *tava* for *baptizō* to describe sinking ships and drownings.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Joel Green's approach to interpreting *baptisma* in this verse, typifying many commentators, suggests images of immersion and perilous flash flooding, and that "the metaphor of 'baptism' may portend calamity and judgment."<sup>13</sup> This approach requires various interpretive stages: a) the action of immersion, into b) conjectured metaphorical raging floods, which are c) implicitly life-threatening by drowning, leading to d) an unspecified detrimental effect, from which to imply e) Yeshua's Passover suffering and death.

But if the noun *baptisma* instead meant an event characterized by overwhelming effect, as Howard Marshall remarks about *baptizō* on this verse,<sup>14</sup> then these steps are superfluous. Yeshua would instead face a) a *detrimental ordeal* that implies b) his Passover suffering and death. For this solution, one need only accept the premise that *baptizō* and *baptisma* are not restricted to the concept of immersion, but that they also can directly express various positive and negative effects. We find a usage of *baptizō* similar to Yeshua's saying in Isa 21:4 LXX where the narrator is baptized by lawlessness. Luke was certainly familiar with the LXX Isaiah; three of his five Isaiah quotes are from the LXX according to the UBS<sup>5</sup> Greek NT.<sup>15</sup> If so, then Luke very likely knew Isa 21:4 in the LXX:

My heart wanders, and lawlessness overwhelms me;  
my soul has turned to fear (NETS)<sup>16</sup>

Here Jewish LXX translators framed *baptizō* to convey overpowering effect; "lawlessness overwhelms [*baptizes*]" (injuriously). This verse provides diachronic support for the idea that *baptizō* also conveys overwhelming effect in Luke 12:50.<sup>17</sup> If so, then Luke's use of the noun *baptisma* in a cognate construction almost certainly reflects the verb *baptizō*'s sense of overwhelming effect. Consequently, *baptisma*

<sup>12</sup> See Hebrew translations for Wars: Liza Ulman's (ירושלים: כרמל הוצ"ל, 2012, 2009 and Simhoni's version, (מושב בן-שמן, ישראל: מודן הוצ"ל, 1968). Hebrew translation for Antiquities by Avraham Shalit, (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 2011, 1944).

<sup>13</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 508.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall says, "The verb βαπτίζω is here used without primary reference to the rite of baptism, but in the metaphorical sense of being overwhelmed by catastrophe." (Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke, NIGTC* eds. I. Howard Marshall and Ward Gasque, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 3:519).

<sup>15</sup> The "Index of Quotations" section of the UBS<sup>5</sup> lists Isa 40:3–5 in Luke 3:4–6; Isa 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19; and Isa 6:9 in Luke 8:10. *The Greek New Testament*, 5<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition, under the direction of Holger Strutwolf, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), 861.

<sup>16</sup> *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> In Acts 2:23 Luke tells us that Yeshua's crucifixion and death (the very *baptisma* of Luke 12:50) were at the hands of lawless men (διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων), reminiscent of a lawless-acting lawless one (ὁ ἀνομῶν ἀνομεῖ) and lawlessness (ἀνομία) in Isa 21:2, 4. Yet this evidence seems too meager to assume that Luke echoes Isaiah in Acts 2:23.

would represent an event characterized by overwhelming effect, such as an ordeal. If that is the case, then the following suggested translations are justified.

אֶלֶּא נִשְׁעָלִי לְהִשָּׁבֵר בְּמִשְׁבֵּר וְיָמָּה כְּכִדָּה עָלַי     I have an ordeal to be overwhelmed  
הַמִּוֶּעֱקָה עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַם.     with, and how distressed I am until it is completed.

The suggested Hebrew translation uses words from the root *shever* (ש-ב-ר) to say that Yeshua must be broken in a crisis, which well-expresses his anticipated Passover torment and death.

If *baptisma* refers broadly to an ordeal in Luke 12:50, then other occurrences of *baptisma* are amenable to fresh interpretation. The *baptisma* of repentance for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3) might not refer exclusively to immersion, but to an overarching, *repentance experience* composed of several activities. Many different lawless acts are surely anticipated in Yeshua's *ordeal-baptisma* of Luke 12:50. If so, then the *baptisma of repentance* may be composed of the peoples' response to Yohanan, confessing sins, participating in his rite for purification, his recognition of forgiveness, and their realization of their fitness for the imminent kingdom. In this case, *baptisma* would refer broadly to the entire repentance and purification process, not solely to the washing. This approach could help harmonize Josephus' description, since he focuses on Yohanan's rite to purify the body (Antiquities 18:116–117).

This review of Yeshua's first saying suggests a range of meaning for *baptizō* and *baptisma* beyond that portrayed in the HNT or TLV translations. The next saying suggests that NT writers portrayed other contemporary senses of *baptizō* on Yeshua's lips.

## II. Mark 10:38–39

[א] הָאֵם יְכוּלִים אַתֶּם לִשְׁתּוֹת אֶת הַכּוֹס שֶׁאֲנִי     [A] Are you able to drink the cup I drink,  
שׁוֹתָהּ [ב] אוֹ לְהִטָּבֵל בְּטָבִילָה שֶׁאֲנִי נִטְבָּל?     [B] or endure the immersion I must  
(HNT) endure? (TLV)

Rodney Decker renders the B line as: “Or to be baptized with the baptism with which I will be baptized?”<sup>19</sup>

These verses offer an example of Hebrew parallelism found frequently in the Tanakh. According to James Kugel's terminology, A and B lines make up Hebrew parallelisms. Kugel points out that “B, by being connected to A—carrying it further, echoing it, restating it, it does not matter which—has an emphatic, ‘seconding’ character, and it is this, more than any aesthetic of symmetry or paralleling, which is at the heart of biblical parallelism.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 9 – 16: A Handbook on the Greek Text: Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 63–64.

<sup>20</sup> James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry, Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1–58.

Robert Stein explains that A, drinking the cup, is a metaphor from the Tanakh signifying an ordeal thrust upon the referent.<sup>21</sup> Yeshua's ordeal is martyrdom.<sup>22</sup> The B line also signifies martyrdom and, like many, Stein takes *baptizō* and *baptisma* as metaphors of immersion in floods or rituals.<sup>23</sup> While this is possible, Mark instead may have used *baptizō* and *baptisma* for metaphorical drunkenness (שִׁכָּרוֹן), which is the express result of drinking the cup. If so, then both A and B metaphors are conceptually cohesive, both express detrimental effect, drunkenness in B is an intensification of drinking the cup in A, and both metaphors occur in the Tanakh.<sup>24</sup> Consider, for example, Ezek 23:32–33:

Thus says Adonai Elohim: “You will drink of your sister’s cup, which is deep and wide . . . You will be filled with drunkenness and agony, a cup of horror and desolation—the cup of your sister Samaria. (TLV)

Moreover, first century Greek speaking audiences would indeed recognize *baptizō* in the sense of drunk. Everett Ferguson’s book, *Baptism in the Early Church*,<sup>25</sup> presents metaphorical uses of *baptizō* from non-Christian authors, including occurrences for drunkenness or stupefaction. Among the authors Ferguson presents using this sense are Plato, Aristophon, Philo, Josephus, Plutarch, Lucian, and Achilles Tatius.<sup>26</sup> Plato wrote in his *Symposium*:

I am myself one of those who yesterday was drunk [βεβαπτισμένων]<sup>27</sup>

Recent Hebrew translations of Plato recognize this usage:

<sup>28</sup>(bolding added) . אתמול [got drunk] שִׁכְּרָמוּ שְׁהָרִי גַם אֲנִי נִמְנָה עַל אֵלֶּה

Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish writer in Greek, used *baptizō* in this sense in *Contemplative Life*. The following Hebrew translation is by the Bialik Institute in Jerusalem, and the bolded word ישתכרו is “they will get drunk”:

וידועים לי אנשים אחדים אשר בהיותם	I know of some, who when under the
מבוסמים, אך בטרם ישתכרו כליל מכינים	influence (ἀκροθώρακες), but before
מראש בתרומות ובהבטחות את המשתה	they are completely drunk
שלמחרת היום. <sup>29</sup> (bolding added)	(βαπτισθῆναι), arrange beforehand

<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 482–490.

<sup>22</sup> Compare R. T. France, “Here, the context demands that it be understood of suffering rather than of punishment.” (France, *The Gospel of Matthew, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 758).

<sup>23</sup> Stein, *Mark*, 482–490.

<sup>24</sup> See Isa 51:17–23, Jer 13:12–13; 23:9; 25:15–38; 51:7, Hab 2:15–16, Zech 12:2.

<sup>25</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> The examples of these authors are discussed in the *Evangelical Quarterly* article by Hanoch Ben Keshet, “Mark 10:38–39: Was Jesus’s Challenge ‘Drinking the Cup and Becoming Drunk’? Extended Senses of *Baptizō* in the NT”, EQ 90.3 (2019), 246–263. Also included in the article is Eckhard Schnabel’s lexical entry for *baptizein* that includes various extended senses, including that of intoxication.

<sup>27</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism*, 53.

<sup>28</sup> סיפריה פילוסופית, ש. טשרניחובסקי (ירושלים: הוצאת ד”ר יהודה יונביץ, תרפ”ט), כך ראשון, ע’ 22.

<sup>29</sup> על חיי העיון, כתבי פילון האלכסנדרוני, כך א, (ירושלים: מוסד ביאליק, 1997), 46.

donations and subscriptions for  
tomorrow's drinking bout.<sup>30</sup>

Philo was a near contemporary of Jewish NT authors and here he used *baptizō* expressly for drunkenness. Furthermore, none of his six usages of *baptizō* in any of his extensive works describe mikveh self-immersions. Philo did use *baptizō* for negative effects like “overwhelming the soul.” Then too, Ferguson writes: “Plutarch’s most frequent metaphorical usage of *baptizō* is with reference to drunkenness. As might be expected, this usage occurs in his Table Talk: a body not sodden with (or under the influence of — ἀβάπτιστον) wine (6 int. = Moralia 686B)” and, “a body not yet soaked (intoxicated — βεβαπτισμένον) (3.8.2 = Moralia 656D),” as well as, “those soused [βεβαπτισμένοις] by yesterday’s debauch (Cleverness of Animals 23 = Moralia 975C).”<sup>31</sup> Since Plutarch lived from 47 CE to 120 CE his audience would have been contemporaries of Mark’s audience, implying they likewise would have been familiar with *baptizō* as drunkenness.

The following English illustration shows how *baptizō* might refer directly to intoxication without metaphor:

The wine was drunk by the man.

The man was drunk by the wine.

Two distinct senses occur: the act of drinking, and the effect of drunkenness. Note that intoxication is expressed directly without metaphorical imagery. Evidently *baptizō* underwent a similar sort of development.

Yeshua’s followers certainly launched *baptizō* and *baptisma* on a special semantic trajectory, yet fresh nuances familiar to the minority Messianic/Christian subculture would not eclipse broader contemporary usage for centuries. Mark evidently used *baptizō* in the popular sense of drunk to portray Yeshua’s test of martyrdom. From this vantage point it is tempting to conjecture that Matt 20:22–23 is missing Mark’s B line for no more mysterious a reason than that the noble-minded Matthew, unlike working-class Mark, refused to drag *baptizō* and the freshly-minted *baptisma* down into such “low company.”<sup>32</sup> In John Nolland’s analysis of the Matthean use of Mark, Matthew tends to be ‘considerably more conservative in the reproduction of the words of Jesus than in the rendering of [Markan] narrative.’<sup>33</sup> If so, then the omission of Yeshua’s terms *baptizō* and *baptisma* may indicate that Matthew did not consider them important, much less sacramental, but rather an unneeded repetition. In view of this discussion, the following B line translation of Mark 10:38–39 is justified:

---

<sup>30</sup> Author’s translation. Compare Ferguson, *Baptism*, 57, and Philo, *Contempl. Life*, 5.46 (LCL 363:140).

<sup>31</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Compare Matt 11:19, drunkard, and Matt 24.49, drunkards, which do not occur in Mark. Together with other influences, this *ennobling* inclination toward *baptizō* and *baptisma*, involving eternal life, probably prevented patristic writers, and subsequent generations, from recognizing the legitimate sense of drunkenness in Mark.

<sup>33</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC; (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 10. Accordance electronic ed.

[ב] או כְּשֶׁכָּרוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְשַׁתְּכֶר הַתְּשִׁתְּכֶרוּ? [B] Or the drunkenness which I am drunken, can you be drunken?

If drunkenness is intended in Mark 10:38–39, then Yeshua may have viewed such passages as Jer 13:12–14 as a foreshadowing of his own messianic destiny. Jeremiah declared that kings on David’s throne would be filled with drunkenness, together with priests and prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all to signify impending ruin during the First Temple. Yeshua too was Israel’s king by the Almighty’s decree (even if the national leadership refused him) so his choice of expression, cup and drunkenness, foretold not only his own martyrdom, but Jerusalem’s coming disaster as well. Unlike Jeremiah’s forecast, however, Yeshua suffered unjustly. Jerusalem’s cup, on the other hand, resulted from her own impiety and directly recapitulates Jeremiah’s bleak promise.

Thus far, Yeshua’s sayings in Luke 12:50 and Mark 10:38–39 evidently convey wide-ranging senses of *baptizō* that are not well-represented by either *taval* or immerse.

We next consider Yeshua’s saying that refers directly to Yohanan’s *baptisma*. Joel Green observes that, “John’s baptism is more at home in later Jewish literature in which physical and metaphorical cleansing are combined.”<sup>34</sup> Yohanan’s *baptisma*, then, is a washing with water (physical act) that religiously purifies (intangible effect). Although Yohanan’s activity is often understood in terms of immersion, the following discussion considers the likelihood that *baptisma* refers directly to a *purification event* without implying immersion. The Tanakh certainly stipulates various purification rites, so there is no loss of significance for Jews if the original intent of Yohanan’s *baptisma* is that of a *purification rite*. This sense leads to the possibility that Yohanan’s *purification* is indeed the inauguration of Ezek 36:25, the promised purification of Israel, and this would make Yohanan’s *baptisma* crucial for both Israel and the Messianic Community. This possibility sharply contrasts the typical Christian view that Yohanan’s rite did not directly fulfill any prophecy and that Yeshua commanded a Christian rite that supersedes Yohanan’s.

### III. Mark 11:30, Luke 20:4, Matthew 21:25

טְבִילַת יוֹחָנָן הֲאֵם מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא? The immersion of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me!” (TLV)  
(HNT) אוּ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם?

Members of the Jewish leadership council, the Sanhedrin, publicly questioned Yeshua about his authority. Yeshua turned their inquiry on its head and demanded a public declaration of their findings on Yohanan’s *baptisma*. R. T. France rightly rejects any thought of evasion in Yeshua’s words: “Jesus’ counter-question about the authority of John is not a pointless trick to escape giving a straight answer, but a clear claim to a

---

<sup>34</sup> Green, *Luke*, 164.



continuity of mission: the authority by which John operated is that of Jesus also, and the implication that it is a divine authority is barely veiled.”<sup>35</sup>

All three synoptic narratives place Yeshua’s riposte just after he rode the donkey into Jerusalem whereby he publicly proclaimed himself Israel’s king (Zech 9:9).<sup>36</sup> All three of the Synoptics follow that with Yeshua’s cleansing of the Temple. These two deeds establish Yeshua’s public claim to be messiah and his rebuke of Israel’s leadership. Yeshua’s retort to Sanhedrin leaders, recorded by all three Synoptics, is not as an itinerant rabbi, but as Israel’s king. No rivalry divides Yohanan the prophet and Yeshua the king. Instead, they are allies for Israel’s kingdom.

First century Jewish readers of Mark, Luke and Matthew, would almost certainly recognize weighty implications: king Yeshua publicly tied his “name” to Yohanan’s *baptisma* by endorsing it in the Temple, and arguably by so doing he effectively added this “messianic” rite to all other existing Torah rites for Israel (cf. Matt 5:17–20).<sup>37</sup> Since Luke-Acts contains no subsequent command from Yeshua for any other water rite, then his declaration is very likely the source for the post-resurrection messianic *baptisma* in Acts. In other words, Yeshua publicly endorsed Yohanan’s rite just before Passover, and Peter publicly commanded this national rite in Jerusalem for “all the house of Israel” by Yeshua’s authority, or in Messiah’s name, only seven weeks after Passover, on Shavuot.

From the standpoint of consistency, it seems likely that Yohanan’s rite originated in the Tanakh. Yeshua, as Messiah, was promised in the Tanakh. Yohanan, the messenger of Malachi<sup>38</sup> and voice of Isaiah,<sup>39</sup> was also promised. Yeshua’s activity of baptizing with the Spirit was promised and was identified with Joel’s outpouring (Acts 2:16–21, 33). Yohanan’s activity seemingly also would be foretold since he prefigures Messiah Yeshua and his activity with the Spirit.

To be sure, Yohanan’s rite lacks an identifying citation prompting commentators like Robert Stein to conclude “the origin of John’s baptism is unknown.”<sup>40</sup> But Yohanan surely knew its origin, and almost certainly Yeshua and the first disciples knew its origin. It seems likely that NT authors composed their works with the strictures of copying costs and scroll size limitations in mind.<sup>41</sup> Thus even Isaiah’s sublime *suffering servant* receives limited mention in the NT, and Yeshua

---

<sup>35</sup> R. T. France, “Jesus the Baptist,” *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 97.

<sup>36</sup> Matt 21:1–9, Mark 11:1–10, Luke 19:28–38, as well as John 12:12–19.

<sup>37</sup> The apostles continued to teach in the Temple (see Acts 2:46; 3:1; 4:12, 20–21, 25, 42; 6:7), which demanded their observance of Torah purity standards.

<sup>38</sup> Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; Matt 11:14; 17:10–12.

<sup>39</sup> Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4–6; Matt 3:3.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Stein, “Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 2, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 6.

<sup>41</sup> E. Randolph Richards, “Reading, Writing, and Manuscripts,” in *World of the New Testament, The: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, eds. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 345–366.

quotes from that passage just once, “And he was numbered with the transgressors.”<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah’s new covenant is cited only twice, in Hebrews,<sup>43</sup> while outside Hebrews the key term “new covenant” (καινή διαθήκη) is found only in Luke 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25 and 2 Cor 3:6. Yet, most would agree that limited explicit citation of a passage does not mean that NT authors lacked awareness of it. Peter said that all the prophets had prophesied about the days in which they lived (Acts 3:24). So, the idea that Yohanan’s *baptisma* was recognized as drawn from the Tanakh is sound. The remainder of this section explores the hypothesis that Yohanan’s *baptisma* was the inauguration<sup>44</sup> of Ezekiel’s purification that ushers in Israel’s kingdom.

#### *Ezekiel 36:25–27*

Commentators regularly note Ezek 36:25–27 on Yohanan’s activity with water, and on Yeshua’s activity with the Spirit, but no one states explicitly that Yohanan inaugurated the prophecy. Mark Kinzer, for example, suggests that Yohanan’s linkage of purifying water and empowering Spirit “recalls” Ezek 36:24–28, but he does not state unequivocally that Yohanan inaugurated the prophecy.<sup>45</sup> Yet despite the lack of acknowledgment of Ezek 36:25–27’s inauguration, these verses do evoke the new covenant salvation paradigm, especially the promise of the removal of stony hearts and the indwelling Spirit. Arguably, early Jewish sages considered Ezek 36:25 to be an actual eschatological promise for Israel.<sup>46</sup> The sages, R. Meir and R. Josi, both talmidim of R. Akiva, debated Ezek 36:25’s purifying power, but neither doubted that it would literally occur in the days of messiah.

Our Rabbis taught: Mamzerim and Nethinim will become pure in the future [i.e. the messianic future]: this is R. Jose’s view. R. Meir said: They will not become pure. Said R. Jose to him: But was it not already stated, *And I will sprinkle [splash] clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean?* R. Meir replied, When it is added, *from all your filthiness and from all your idols*, [it implies] but not from bastardy. Said R. Jose

---

<sup>42</sup> The UBS<sup>5</sup> “Index of Quotations” has six listings for Isaiah 53: John 12:38; Rom 10:16; Matt 8:17; Acts 8:32–33; 1 Pet 2:22; Luke 22:37 (*Greek NT*, 859).

<sup>43</sup> The UBS<sup>5</sup> “Index of Quotations” has two references for Jeremiah’s *new covenant*, Heb 8:8–12; 10:16–17 (*Greek NT*, 859).

<sup>44</sup> The term “inauguration” is drawn from “inaugurated eschatology” in which aspects of the Almighty’s kingdom are present, but not all aspects in their fulness. This view is sometimes described as the both “already and not yet” kingdom. See for example, George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, reprinted 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Kinzer does suggest that fulfillment occurs when the baptismal mission of Yohanan’s greater successor achieves the full reality of which Ezekiel prophesied. (Mark S. Kinzer, *Searching Her Own Mystery: Nostra Aetate, the Jewish People, and the Identity of the Church* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015], 93–94).

<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Jews and Christians today often consider Ezek 36:25 metaphorical. (Compare Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, Supplement Series 62, Ed David Hill, [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991], 105–106).

to him: When it is [further] said, *will I cleanse you*, you must say,  
From bastardy too. . . (*Kiddushin* 72b).<sup>47</sup>

In view of this possibility, the following discussion reviews several points of affinity between Ezekiel's prophecy and Yohanan's activity.

A parallelism repeated six times in the NT was vital for the early messianic community: Yohanan baptizes with water, Yeshua baptizes with the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> This parallelism conforms to the water-Spirit motif of Ezek 36:25–27, as well as to Yeshua's teaching to Nicodemus about how to enter Israel's kingdom (John 3:5). In Lukan terminology, Yeshua "baptizes" (Acts 1:5) by "pouring out" (ἐξέχεεν) the Holy Spirit on his disciples (Acts 2:33).<sup>49</sup> If Yohanan's activity prefigures Yeshua's, then it makes sense for Yohanan's *baptisma* to have a similar form of pouring out, which then would well-match Ezek 36:25.

Yeshua's refusal to wash at the Pharisee's meal in Luke 11:38 supports the view that NT use of *baptizō* can refer to Jewish purification. In this verse, *baptizō* is taken to represent the purification of hands. Daniel Wallace remarks that Yeshua "did not first allow himself to be washed before the meal" suggesting that Yeshua "would be washed by another."<sup>50</sup> In 2 Kings 3:11 a relevant parallel occurs: "Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah, is here" (TLV). Pouring water on hands, therefore, was established Jewish tradition stemming back to the First Temple. The TLV correspondingly renders Luke 11:38: "Yeshua did not do the ritual handwashing before the meal." This indeed recalls the Jewish context but somewhat obscures the original Greek. The text makes no mention of hands and the goal is purification. Here *baptizō* is passive, meaning Yeshua *was not purified* (by someone else). This suggests a scenario in which servants poured water on guests' hands to purify them, which Yeshua snubbed.<sup>51</sup> Luke, then, evidently used *baptizō* to bear the intangible sense of *purifying*, which, implicit to this case, is accomplished by pouring water. If so, then rites that purify, like *netilat yadayim* and Ezek 36:25, evidently could be described by *baptizō* and *baptisma* regardless of their mode.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> *Seder Nashim, Kiddushin*, Hebrew-English Ed., Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi H. Freedman, (New York: Traditional Press).

<sup>48</sup> Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:33; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16.

<sup>49</sup> Titus 3:5–6 also has ἐξέχεεν for the "poured out" Holy Spirit. Although the TLV uses "mikveh" in Titus 3:5, mishnaic mikveh purification is actually by momentary self-immersion (טבילה בבת אוחת) in a kosher, forty *seah* mikveh. One cannot be purified by sitting in an empty mikveh pit and having water poured on them. One could, however, be washed by an abundant out-pouring in a mishnaic מרחץ (merhatz), or bath installation. Evidently, the Titus 3:5 λουτρόν (*loutron*), "washing" refers to a *merhatz*, not to a mikveh.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 441.

<sup>51</sup> Yeshua's refusal may have resulted from his Torah zeal for not adding to, or subtracting from, the mitzvot (Deut 4:2). Yeshua likely was ritually pure by the Torah and knew that he had no need to purify his hands. If so, then the Pharisee's assumption of Yeshua's obligation would be an erroneous application of Torah.

<sup>52</sup> The HNT translates Luke 11:38 into Hebrew with a passive of *taval*, suggesting that Yeshua had not been passively immersed. However, the HNT note for the verse cites a Mishnah selection that refers to purifying hands, which includes by pouring.

The book of Hebrews was very likely addressed to Jewish disciples of Yeshua. Hebrews 10:22 encourages hearers to draw near, having their bodies “washed with pure water.”<sup>53</sup> Many commentators agree that this refers to the messianic rite. The term “pure water” would strongly resonate with Jews, recalling Torah teachings on sources of pure water (Lev 11:36) as well as echoing Ezek 36:25.<sup>54</sup> For Jews, “pure water” was not incidental to the messianic rite, but was a crucial part of Jewish life and the messianic future. The use of *louō* (λούω) in this verse recalls the LXX Pentateuch’s regular use of *louō* for bodily washings, whereas neither *baptizō*, *baptismos* (βαπτισμός) nor *baptisma* occur in the Pentateuch.

Then again, Hebrews does use *baptismos* in Heb 6:2 and 9:10. Virtually all English translations, including the TLV, render the Torah rites of Heb 9:10 as “various washings” or “ablutions.” Remarkably, the TLV note for Heb 9:10 refers to Num 19:13, which speaks of sprinkling water to purify from corpse defilement, and which Heb 9:13 cites directly for “purifying the flesh.” This implies that the TLV recognizes that *baptismos* refers to Torah *purifications* in any mode, including sprinkling, such as those that the author cites in Heb 9:12–13, 19–22. In short, *baptismos* evidently stresses *purification* without concern for mode. However, the HNT translates Heb 9:10 as: וְכִי־יִי טְבִילוֹת (uvemeeney tevilot), “and various kinds of immersions.” But in the original Hebrew Torah there is no mention of even one *tevilah*; the word simply does not occur. More doubt arises with “various kinds” of *tevilot*. If one supposes that *tevilah* refers to mikveh self-immersion, then the form is actually *identical* time after time. This conundrum, then, leads to favoring the idea that Heb 9:10 does not describe self-immersions, but rather *different kinds of purification rites* by any mode. But this realization calls into question the TLV translation of Heb 6:2, “teaching about immersions,” since according to its own notes it could justify rendering the verse as “teaching about purifications.”

Moreover, the Gospels say that Yohanan actively baptized<sup>55</sup> while the repentant people, including Yeshua, were passively baptized.<sup>56</sup> The use of active and passive verbs to describe Yohanan and the repentant people points away from mishnaic self-immersion. This use, however, does align well with Ezek 36:25,

---

<sup>53</sup> The HNT notes for this verse include Exod 29:4 where Aaron and sons are to be washed, Lev 16:4 for the high priest’s washing on Yom Kippur, and Ezek 36:25.

<sup>54</sup> Compare, Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon Fee, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 474; F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1984) 249–252.

<sup>55</sup> Matt 3:11a; Mark 1:8a; Luke 3:16a; John 1:26 Yohanan baptizes with water; Matt 3:11b; Mark 1:8b; Luke 3:16b Messiah will baptize with the Spirit; Mark 1:4, Mark 6:14, 24 Yohanan baptizes; John 1:25, 33a Yohanan baptizes the people; John 1:33b Yeshua baptizes the people with the Spirit; John 3:23a Yohanan baptizes the people; John 3:26 Yeshua/disciples baptize the people; John 4:1; 4:2 disciples baptize the people. Paul baptized people in 1 Corinthians 1:13–16.

<sup>56</sup> Matt 3:6; Mark 1:5; Matt 3:13, Yeshua baptized by Yohanan; Matt 3:14, Yohanan protests he should be baptized by Yeshua; Matt 3:16 and Mark 1:9, Yeshua baptized by Yohanan; Luke 3:7, crowds, Luke 3:12, tax collectors, Luke 3:21, people baptized by Yohanan; Luke 3:21b, Yeshua baptized by Yohanan; Luke 7:29, tax collectors baptized by Yohanan; Luke 7:30, Pharisees not baptized by Yohanan; John 3:23b.

particularly when one agrees that *baptizō* speaks of purifying. In *Antiquities* 18:116–117 Josephus describes Yohanan’s *baptismos* in terms of “purifying the body” (ἀγνεία τοῦ σώματος).<sup>57</sup> If the foregoing is accepted, then the sense of Yohanan’s nickname as *ham’taher* (הַמְטַהֵר), “the Purifier,” is reasonable, and Yohanan’s *baptisma* would be his “purification event.”

The Ezek 36:25 premise is fortified by a prominent allusion in no less significant a place than the prayer that Yeshua instructed his disciples to pray (Luke 11:2–4). Joel Green remarks that “reverberations of Ezek 36:16–32” are heard in Yeshua’s prayer:

“I shall sanctify my great name . . . and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes” (v 23). This perspective from Ezekiel is important not only for establishing the eschatological edge of the opening of this prayer of Jesus, but also for the way it summons those who pray this prayer to behave. Why must God sanctify his name?

Because it has been profaned by God’s own people . . .<sup>58</sup>

We note a strong echo of Ezek 36:23 in Yeshua’s prayer, “hallowed be Thy name,” or, “may Your name be sanctified”:

ἀγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου (Matt 6:9 and Luke 11:2)

ἀγιάσω τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ μέγα (Ezek 36:23, LXX)

Yeshua, then, would arguably be aware of Israel’s need for purification prior to the kingdom in Ezek 36:25, which, evidently, Yohanan had inaugurated.

If Yohanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25 then his urgency about the looming kingdom is intelligible (Matt 3:2). Yohanan’s popularity with the Jewish people also makes sense, for not only was Yohanan himself foretold in the Tanakh, so was his purifying activity. Yohanan’s demand for repentance aligns with Ezek 36:31 where the people of Israel remember their evil ways and loath themselves for iniquities and abominations. The question of Yohanan’s identity by Jewish authorities in John 1:25 reveals the obvious national importance of Yohanan’s work. Evidently the Jewish authorities anticipated Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet performing what Yohanan was doing, and this, at the very least, suggests the possibility of Ezek 36:25’s inauguration. The Ezek 36:25 premise well-explains Yeshua’s insistence to undergo Yohanan’s rite to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:13–15) since all Jews, including Yeshua, automatically bear Israel’s *collective national impurity* of Ezek 36:17 (see below). So Yeshua’s insistence to Yohanan had nothing to do with his personal state of purity. This premise also supplies a reason for Yeshua to oversee his disciples as they baptized simultaneously with Yohanan’s (John 3:22 – 4:2). Yeshua and Yohanan

<sup>57</sup> Bruce Chilton comments: “Josephus more accurately [sic] observed that John’s baptism was not understood to seek pardon for sins, but to purify the body.” (Bruce Chilton, “John the Baptist: His Immersion and his Death,” *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 35).

<sup>58</sup> Green, *Luke*, 441–442.

both recognized the kingdom's nearness so they both performed Israel's end-time purification for the general public (called Yohanan's *baptisma* in his honor since he inaugurated it and was martyred for it).<sup>59</sup> This premise makes sense of Luke's comment that the crowds following Yeshua after Yohanan's arrest had received Yohanan's *baptisma* (Luke 7:29–30).

We now turn to the question of *splash* versus *sprinkle* in Ezek 36:25, which the TLV renders:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols.<sup>60</sup>

The Hebrew verb *zarak* (זרק) actually speaks of a throwing action, though it is usually translated *sprinkle* in this verse. The TLV renders *zarak* as *sprinkle* in some places in the Tanakh, but in Exod 9:8, 10 it has Moses *throwing* soot into the air, in Exod 24:6 it uses *poured out*, and in Lev 7:2 and 8:19, 24 it uses *splash*. The ESV renders Ezekiel's third use of *zarak* as "throwing blood" (Ezek 43:18), so by ESV standards Ezek 36:25 could read, "I will throw pure water on you." If one throws a teacup of water the effect is sprinkling, but if one throws a larger quantity, say a gallon, the effect is a splash. Compare the ESV "throwing blood" with the NIV "splashing blood against the altar" (Ezek 43:18). The point is that the Hebrew *zarak* is not bound to sprinkling, but to a throwing action, and if a considerable quantity is thrown the effect is a splash.

Why, then, would the Almighty splash pure water on Israel in Ezek 36:25? We are evidently informed in Ezek 36:17. When Israel dwelt on the land the people's sins defiled the land "like the defilement of a woman in her menstrual impurity." The Almighty consequently scattered Israel among the nations. However, verse 24 reverses the scattering and verse 25 provides the purification. Splashing pure water provides prophetic purification for the woman (collective Israel) whose defilement has now passed (by repentance). The Jewish Soncino commentary remarks on Ezek 36:25: "Since Israel's evil ways were compared to the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity (verse 17), the forgiveness of his sins is characterized as a purification by cleansing water."<sup>61</sup>

We now face a question about Jewish ritual practices as they developed diachronically: did Jewish women always self-immense to purify as they do today, and did, apparently, in the late Second Temple? Ronny Reich and Yonatan Adler,

---

<sup>59</sup> Craig Evans writes, "It is reasonable to assume that Jesus' understanding of baptism was essentially the same as John's, that is, that it was an act of eschatological purification, signifying repentance and re-entry into God's covenant with Israel." Evans does not mention Ezek 36:25, but it could obviously have been their source. (Craig A. Evans, "The Baptism of John in a Typological Context" *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002], 70).

<sup>60</sup> Compare a translation of the Latin Vulgate, "And I will pour [*effundam*] upon you clean water." (Douay-Rheims American Edition Version [Baltimore, MD: John Murphy, 1899]).

<sup>61</sup> A. Cohen, *Ezekiel*, Soncino Books of the Bible, 2nd ed. (New York: Soncino Press, 1983), 243.

who both wrote PhD theses on mikvaot,<sup>62</sup> note that although more than 800 purpose-built mikvaot have been discovered in the region, none date earlier than the second century BCE (the Hasmonean period) some 400 years after Ezekiel. No purpose-built immersion pools have been discovered that date anywhere near Ezekiel's day in the sixth century BCE.<sup>63</sup> One ought not assume that a woman's purification required self-immersion in Ezekiel's generation. In fact, Yonatan Adler describes the Torah's use of words from the root *r-h-z*, (ר-ה-ז) for bodily washing and concludes that its use is quite ambiguous:

The vague language employed by the Torah opens up various exegetical possibilities regarding the form of this activity, “washing” – by outpouring of water on the body from a vessel (affusion), sprinkling water on the body (aspersion), or *tevilah* of the body in gathered waters (immersion). Another exegetical possibility, of course, is that any form of washing is appropriate to purify a defiled person. [Author's translation]<sup>64</sup>

In addition, one ought to recall that Joshua made captive Gibeonites Israel's water carriers (Josh 9:27), which shows that people drew and bore water to supplement First Commonwealth water supplies. Solomon had 70,000 conscripted load bearers (1 Kings 5:15) and probably a significant amount of their work was hauling water. If so, and in light of the apparent lack of purpose-built mikvaot in the First Temple, then borne water, well-splashed on those wanting to be washed, may have been an acceptable purification practice.<sup>65</sup> Then too, prophets of the Tanakh used imagery of out-poured water in prophecies, probably reflecting common practice to make their visions immediately meaningful to hearers.<sup>66</sup>

Late Second Temple and post-destruction Jewish practices were fixed in the Mishnah by R. Yehuda Hanasi who died in 217 CE, nearly 800 years after Ezekiel. Late Second Temple sages endeavored to help Israel avoid transgression by devising “perimeter fences” (subsidiary rulings) to guard mitzvot. The mikveh pool was one of these innovations. Leviticus 11:36 describes the water sources that remain pure: “only a spring and a cistern that gathers water.” Yet later sages interpreted the verse as: “only a spring, and a cistern, and a gathering of water (*mikveh mayim*).” This

---

<sup>62</sup> Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity”, 2011; Ronny Reich, “Miqwa'ot (Jewish Ritual Immersion Bath) in Eretz-Israel in the Second Temple and the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods” (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> Ronny Reich's book, *מקוואות טהרה*, (*Mikvaot Taharah*) of 352 pages, has only three pages, 15–17, that discuss First Temple purification. Reich knows of only one suggested mikveh dating to the First Temple, but he notes that the structure is shallow, only 20 cm deep, less than 8 inches. The structure's purpose is uncertain, but Reich is certain that it is unrelated to mikvaot.  
(מקוואות טהרה, רוני רייך, [יד יצחק בן צבי: ירושלים, 2013], 17–15).

<sup>64</sup> Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity,” 15.

<sup>65</sup> Adler says 2 Samuel 11:2 in Hebrew could mean that Bat Sheva herself was “washing on the roof” (the Hebrew so reads to this author). Her washing may have been tied to purification after menses since in verse 4 she was “sanctified from her impurity.” (Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity,” 16).

<sup>66</sup> Isaiah 4:4 supports the idea that women could be purified by someone else. See also Joel 2:28–29; Isa 44:3; Ezek 16:9, 36:25, 39:28; Zech 12:10.

variation occurs in the Greek LXX<sup>67</sup> and coincides with the origin of purpose-built mikvaot in the Hasmonean period. The Mishnah requires *tevilah*, or self-immersion, in a mikveh for a Jewish woman to be purified, yet *tevilah* does not occur in the Tanakh. It is evidently Mishnaic Hebrew. Moreover, the five books of Moses never use immerse, *taval*, for bodily washings, though centuries later we find Naaman's washing described with *taval* (2 Kings 5:14).<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the Almighty had commanded Moses: "Lead Aaron and his sons up to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water (Exod 29:4; 40:12) . . . Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water (Lev 8:6)."<sup>69</sup> These verses, among others, imply that purification with water did not demand self-immersion and could involve someone else actively performing the subject's washing.

Yohanan, son of Zechariah the cohen, dressed like Elijah and self-identified as the voice of Isaiah. Surely the source for Yohanan's end-time ritual was Israelite culture, but did he depend on Second Temple authorities or on the prophets of the Tanakh? Yohanan could have devised a national purification based on Second Temple rulings. But one is surely justified in asking why a prophet who based his identity on centuries-old prophecies would ignore Ezek 36:25, which likewise had been promised for six centuries.

In summary, all three Synoptics record Yeshua endorsing Yohanan's *baptisma* to Jewish leaders in Jerusalem's Temple, and, from a narrative perspective, this endorsement came after Yeshua publicly declared himself king. Yeshua gave no command in Luke-Acts to supersede Yohanan's rite, so his Jewish followers evidently continued to perform Yohanan's rite by Messiah's authority, or in Yeshua's name. Since Yohanan's rite was divinely ordained, then it likely was foretold in the Tanakh and credible evidence points to Ezek 36:25 as Yohanan's source. With the foregoing in mind, including clear evidence that *baptizō* refers to purification, there is justification for the following translation of Yeshua's saying:

טָקַם הַטְהָרָה שֶׁל יוֹחָנָן, הָאֵם מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם הִיא אוֹ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם?	Yohanan's <i>purification rite</i> —was it from heaven or from man?
---	---

The discussion which follows reviews Yeshua's fourth, well-known saying, Matt 28:19–20. From the second century onward Christians assumed that Yeshua had commanded a water rite that replaced Yohanan's rite. But in light of the preceding, this view seems questionable since king Yeshua publicly endorsed Yohanan's rite as

<sup>67</sup> πλὴν πηγῶν ὑδάτων καὶ λάκκου καὶ συναγωγῆς ὕδατος, ἔσται καθαρόν·

<sup>68</sup> Sixteen occurrences of *taval* in the Tanakh demonstrate the possibility that full immersion was not intended with Naaman. Yonatan Adler comments that Naaman may have entered shallow water and immersed only part of his body (Adler, "The Archaeology of Purity," 16); If *raḥaz* described any form of washing in the First Commonwealth, then the narrator of 2 Kings may have used *taval* to emphasize that Naaman did not merely wash on the river bank with his servants' help. Rather *Naaman himself* got into the water. This action was worthy of remark for various reasons, including Naaman's personal involvement and the fact that it left the great military leader in a decided tactical disadvantage in the face of possible attack.

<sup>69</sup> *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures, The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).



divinely ordained for Israel. Thus, Matthew’s originally intended sense of *baptizō* for Yeshua’s command is of pivotal consequence. To be sure, this is not a question of whether or not *baptizō* in Matt 28:19 *could* mean a water rite with associated effects. As seen above, Yeshua’s first three sayings show *baptizō* and *baptisma* exhibiting a range of senses with and without reference to water. So here *baptizō* could mean a variety of things. The question is, what actually did Yeshua intend? This article suggests that Matthew used *baptizō* in Yeshua’s command to Jewish apostles without reference to water, but instead to *ensure the ongoing holy transformation* of formerly idolatrous first-century gentiles dominated by the Greco-Roman pantheon.

#### IV. Matthew 28:19–20

עַל כֵּן לְכוּ וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת כָּל הַגּוֹיִם לְתַלְמִידִים, הַטְבִּילוּ  
 אוֹתָם לְשֵׁם הָאָב וְהָבֶן וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְלַמְדּוּ אוֹתָם  
 לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת כָּל מֶה שֶׁצִּוִּיתִי אֲתֶכֶם. (HNT)

Go therefore and make disciples of all  
 nations, immersing them in the name  
 of the Father and the Son and the  
 Ruach ha-Kodesh, teaching them to  
 observe all I have commanded you.  
 (TLV)

R. T. France translates: “baptizing them into the name.”<sup>70</sup>

Does *baptizō* in Matt 28:19–20 speak of a ritual with water, or could it speak instead of transformation by growing acquaintance with the Almighty? The small Greek preposition *eis* (εἰς) can be translated as either “in” or “into” and, consequently, forces this question on us before we even begin to consider *baptizō*.

France’s translation, “into the name” (also the ASV, ERV, Weymouth NT) differs from other translations that have, “in the name” (TLV, NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, REB, KJV, ISV, Douay-Rheims). The potential conceptual difference between the two ideas is substantial. France’s “into the name” suggests an ontological transformation of one’s sphere of reality, from outside the Almighty’s sovereignty, or his name, to now inside that sovereignty, which France describes as “the new relationship and allegiance into which the one baptized is thus introduced.”<sup>71</sup> The translation, “in the name,” however, suggests a liturgical declaration of authority that authorizes the rite, without necessarily anticipating ontological transformation.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Hebrew translations. The HNT, above, uses “*leshem*” (לשם), as does Delitzsch, and it suggests that immersion is performed “for the sake of” joining the disciples with the Almighty’s cause. The Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew version uses “*beshem*” (בשם) which suggests a liturgical declaration is made that the immersion is performed by the authority, or “in the name,” of the Almighty. Thus, the preposition *eis* impacts one’s approach to *baptizō* in this verse. Additional evidence presented below, however, seems to support the “into the name” concept.

<sup>70</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1107.

<sup>71</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1116, note 3500.

Commentators have long noted that Acts and Paul's epistles record post-resurrection water baptisms that are not in the Matt 28:19 trinitarian "formula." Indeed, this alleged discrepancy has led some, such as F. C. Conybeare, Hans Kosmala and Donald Hagner, to suggest that the present trinitarian form was not in Matthew's text originally.<sup>72</sup> Hagner, however, does not discount the existing version outright and remarks that in contrast to Yohanan's baptism, "this baptism brings a person into an existence that is fundamentally determined by, i.e., ruled by, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>73</sup> Others who accept the existing form, like R. V. G. Tasker, question the idea that Matt 28:19–20 originally expressed liturgy:

[I]t may well be that the true explanation why the early church did not at once administer baptism in the threefold name, is that the words of xxviii 19 were not originally meant by our Lord as a baptismal formula. He was not giving instructions about the actual words to be used in the service of baptism, but . . . was indicating that the baptized person would by baptism pass into the possession of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.<sup>74</sup>

J. K. Howard unpacks Yeshua's saying even further:

Thus the one who is baptised "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" has entered the sphere of an entirely new relationship with God. He knows God as Father in the unique way which Christ, the Son, came to reveal. Further, the knowledge of this revelation is made actual in real experience by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup>

Hagner, Tasker and Howard present remarkable insights, yet in contrast to Yeshua's saying, they frame the verse passively, as though from a new disciple's perspective. This subtle viewpoint shift is significant because, from a passive perspective, the onus for deficiency falls on the disciple. But this is not a command for new believers to get baptized. Rather, *Jewish apostles* are made responsible to actively ensure what Hagner, Tasker and Howard teach: a breathtaking relational transformation of repentant gentiles with the Almighty. In this light it seems almost certain that the sense of *baptizō* in Yeshua's command is of causing ongoing ontological transformation beyond any one-time ritual action per disciple.

Yeshua's great commission in Matt 28:19–20 has four verbs directed to the apostles. The first is "go" and it is subordinate to the imperative verb "make

---

<sup>72</sup> Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14 – 28, 33b*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Inc., 1995) 887–888. See also Hans Kosmala, "The Conclusion of Matthew," *Studies, Essays and Reviews*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 1–16, and F. C. Conybeare, "The Eusebian Form of the Text of Matt 28:19," *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentlich Wissenschaft* 2 (1901), 275–288.

<sup>73</sup> Hagner, *Matthew*, 888.

<sup>74</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, *St. Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 275.

<sup>75</sup> J. K. Howard, *New Testament Baptism*, (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1970), 45.

disciples” that follows it. After the imperative verb, two subordinate participles indicate durative action:

Baptizing — βαπτίζοντες (present, active, participle)

Teaching — διδάσκοντες (present, active, participle)

Both verbs express continuing action in the present. This suggests that *teaching* is a continuing process from apostles to disciples, not a one-time act in the past. Likewise, this implies that the apostles are *baptizing* disciples in an ongoing, continuing process, and this sense does not strongly lend itself to a punctiliar one-time ritual act per disciple. But it would impressively support the idea of apostles ensuring their disciples’ ongoing relational growth with the Almighty.

Matthew’s community certainly included Jews who trusted Yeshua as Messiah. Matthew’s Gospel said that Yeshua, as king, endorsed Yohanan’s purification for Israel, thereby implicitly approving Yohanan’s message that he baptizes with water, but that the Greater One baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Thus, Jews in Matthew’s first century audience had no cause to understand Matt 28:19 as a new trinitarian water rite that would supplant Israel’s national *baptisma* inaugurated by Yohanan, and that could obscure Spirit baptism. They easily could have read *baptizō* in Yeshua’s command in a sense that does not suggest a new water ritual.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, all would agree that Matthew composed his Gospel decades after the Good News first had been proclaimed to the nations. Among other reasons, then, Matthew may have composed his closing lines in Matt 28:16–20 to *validate* for Jewish readers the current evangelization of the nations, which had begun decades earlier, and which had originated from Yeshua who had commissioned his Jewish apostles. These verses also remind gentile disciples that their faith in Yeshua rests on Jewish apostolic instruction. If this is Matthew’s intent, then one should not impose Matt 28:19 on all references to baptism in Acts and the epistles. Rather, one must interact with Luke, Acts and the epistles, and then let that knowledge inform one’s interpretation of Matthew’s authenticating summary:

- Yeshua’s last saying on *baptizō*, Acts 1:5, occurs after the resurrection and after the meeting of Matt 28:16–20, yet in it Yeshua contrasts water and the Holy Spirit. It is this saying that decides messianic Jewish acceptance of the gentiles when Peter repeats it verbatim in Acts 11:16. If Matt 28:19 commanded a literal rite for the nations, then why would Peter fail to quote it at this critical moment?
- In Acts, the Jewish apostles did not immediately go out to gentiles after Messiah’s resurrection. Acts 10 and 11 show that averseness to associate with gentiles had been the norm for some ten years.

---

<sup>76</sup> R. T. France typifies many who cannot see *baptizō* in non-water scenarios: “Yet now the full-blown rite of Christian baptism [sic] is introduced without any indication that this is something new. . . its sudden appearance right at the end of the gospel is surprising in the narrative context” (France, *Matthew*, 1116).

- Acts and 1 Cor 1 speak explicitly of water baptism, but not with a Matthean trinitarian formula. Paul, sent specifically by Messiah Yeshua to the gentiles, also says he was not sent by Messiah to baptize, 1 Cor 1:17. Paul made this comment in response to a dispute evidently involving Corinthians he actually had baptized.

Surely if use of *baptizō* in Matt 28:19 was meant to indicate that Yeshua actually *had* commanded a new water rite for all nations, and since he obligated the apostles to ensure that the gentiles obeyed his commands, then certainly Yeshua would have expected the rite's administration to be in accord with Israel's Torah and Prophets. Yeshua avowed that until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif would pass from the Torah until all things come to pass (Matt 5:17–20). Yeshua's early Jewish disciples were "zealous for the Torah" (Acts 21:20) and were surely concerned about such issues. They were also obligated to submit, as much as possible, to Torah scholars and Pharisees (Matt 23:2–3). That being the case, do gentile Christians have any apprehension about "pure water" as specified by Heb 10:22, or as defined by Lev 11:36?<sup>77</sup> Jewish *halakha* for "pure water" is involved. For example, onstage fiberglass tubs filled with tap water fall outside *halakha*. Does Yeshua's demand in Matt 5:17–20 mean that untold multitudes of Christians have fallen short regarding water baptism? But if water quality and ritual form do not matter to Yeshua, then why did he declare the inviolability of the Torah in Matt 5? Then too, the Acts 15 Jerusalem council specifically addresses circumcision for salvation of gentiles, but no mention is made of a water rite for gentiles. Again, why would Matt 28:19–20 be left unquoted if it spoke of a literal water rite for the gentiles? It very likely would have put a swift end to that debate.

In light of the foregoing, this article proposes that *baptizō* in Matt 28:19 means that Yeshua made his Jewish apostles responsible for facilitating their gentile disciples' ongoing spiritual purification, but that it does not refer to a literal water rite that would obligate non-Jews to dizzying ritual purity considerations. With this in mind, the following Hebrew and English translations are proposed:

<p>עַל כֵּן לְכוּ וַעֲשׂוּ אֶת כָּל הַגּוֹיִם לְתַלְמִידִים, הַכְשִׁירוּ אוֹתָם לְרִבּוּנוֹת שֶׁל הָאֵב וְהַבֵּן וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְלַמְדּוּ אוֹתָם לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת כָּל מֵה שֶׁצִּוִּיתִי אֲתֶכֶם.</p>	<p>Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations, <i>ensuring their true and "kosher" acquaintance</i> of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you.</p>
--	--

Here the term "kosher" is intended to evoke ideas of purification and sanctification that render the gentiles "fit" for submitting to, and associating

---

<sup>77</sup> Ronny Reich states that Byzantine archeological remains show that early Christians were not concerned about water sources, how it was gathered, how it was stored, how repairs were made to baptisteries, and so forth. Jews were far more meticulous in maintaining "kosher" mikvaot. (Reich, *Mikvaot Taharah*, 270).

with, the Almighty. The Hebrew likewise uses הִקְשִׁירוּ or “make them kosher,” or “fit,” for the רִבּוֹנוּת, or “sovereignty,” or “name” of the Almighty.

We now turn to Acts 1:5, the capstone of Yeshua’s five sayings. Yeshua contrasts the water used by Yohanan with the far greater Holy Spirit that he will pour forth to fulfill his promised giving of the “gift of the Holy Spirit” to Israel, and to the world.

## V. Acts 1:5

כִּי יוֹחָנָן הִטְבִּיל בַּמַּיִם, אַבְל אַתֶּם תִּטְבְּלוּ בְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּעוֹד יָמִים לֹא רַבִּים. (HNT)	For John immersed with water, but you will be immersed in the Ruach ha- Kodesh not many days from now. (TLV)
--	---

Culy and Parsons translate: “For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>78</sup>

Moments before ascending Yeshua restated Yohanan’s promise in Luke 3:16, evidently establishing the paradigmatic guide for *baptisma* throughout Acts. Joel Green says, however, that many scholars instead take Peter’s command in Acts 2:38 as paradigmatic for baptism in Acts.<sup>79</sup> But Yeshua’s early followers clearly went through stages of learning, as in Acts 10–11 and in Acts 15, so it is precarious to assume that Peter fully understood baptism at that early period in Acts 1–2. Peter himself repeats Acts 1:5 verbatim in Acts 11:16 during one of the most important divine lessons, strongly suggesting that Yeshua’s saying indeed is paradigmatic for Acts.

The Culy and Parsons translation, above, and their comment on Acts 1:5, that *en pneumati* (ἐν πνεύματι) is “probably instrumental” rather than locative, fortifies the view that Yeshua intended his disciples to be transformed—wholly purified and sanctified—with the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup> If so, then, in accord with Max Turner’s conclusions (but from a line of reasoning quite different from his), the *donum superadditum* theory of many Pentecostal scholars for Spirit baptism in Acts cannot be sustained.<sup>81</sup> Purification and sanctification imply the new heart and new spirit promise of the New Covenant. Moreover, from a Jewish perspective, the very

---

<sup>78</sup> Martin Culy and Mikeal Parsons, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>79</sup> Joel Green remarks that Max Turner’s treatment of Acts 2:38 shows that many accept Peter’s command as the normative form of Christian baptism (see Turner, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel’s Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* Sup 9 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996], 397–398). Joel B. Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’ to ‘Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus’: The Significance of Baptism in Luke-Acts,” *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church*, 157n2.

<sup>80</sup> Culy and Parsons, *Acts*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Pentecostal scholars often argue that the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts provides no soteriological effect, but instead is given solely for charismatic power, making it an *additional* gift. Turner proves this view inadequate (Turner, *Power from on High*, 433–438).

terminology “*Holy Spirit*” or *Ruach Hakodesh* bears enormous transformative implications.

Yeshua made both the final statement in Luke about *baptisma* (endorsing Yohanan’s *baptisma*, Luke 20:1–8) and the initial statement in Acts about *baptisma* (reiterating Yohanan’s distinction between water and the Holy Spirit), but he made no command in Luke-Acts for a new rite to replace Yohanan’s. Yeshua’s sanctifying activity is far superior to Yohanan’s because he sends the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who bears power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8). Still, there is no sign that Yohanan’s *baptisma* is obsolete and Acts 2:37–41 in no way hints otherwise.

Prior to Acts, Luke used *baptizō* and *baptisma* in four divergent ways: for Yohanan’s rite (Luke 3:1–22; 7:29–30; 20:1–8), for the Greater One baptizing with the Spirit (Luke 3:16), for Jewish purification (Luke 11:38), and for an ordeal (Luke 12:50). Confusion arises by reading unspecified usages of *baptizō* in Acts as a universal Christian water rite despite this diversity in Luke, despite explicit mention of Yohanan’s rite seven times in Acts,<sup>82</sup> and despite the superiority of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. The internal evidence of Luke-Acts leads to the view that Yohanan’s rite was performed for repentant Jews in Israel by Messiah’s approval (Luke 20:4; Acts 2:38–41), for Samaritans (8:12–17)<sup>83</sup> and for the Ethiopian (likely Jewish) (8:35–38).<sup>84</sup> Yet, Luke also presents the apostles’ dawning realization that the Holy Spirit imparts ultimate purification and sanctification, for Jews, and for gentiles as well, which rituals cannot provide, not even Israel’s new messianic rite.

If Yeshua’s saying in Acts 1:5 is paradigmatic for Acts, then there is good reason to argue that Luke refers directly to being baptized with the Holy Spirit for Paul, (9:17–18; 22:16), for Lydia and house (16:13–15), for the Jailer and house (16:30–34),<sup>85</sup> and for the Corinthians (18:8). Neither water nor Spirit are mentioned so one cannot prove or disprove the claim, but Acts 1:5 better supports Spirit baptism. Apollos (18:24–28) and the Ephesians (19:1–7) were aware only of Yohanan’s *baptisma*, but this would not mean they were Yohanan’s disciples, or that they were ignorant of a supposed new Christian water rite. Instead they knew of Israel’s messianic purification for Jews (Acts 1:5a), but they did not yet know that Yeshua baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Act 1:5b).

---

<sup>82</sup> Acts 1:5, 21; 10:37; 11:16–18; 13:24–25; 18:24–26; 19:1–7.

<sup>83</sup> F. F. Bruce remarks that the Samaritans “were indubitably ‘lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Matt 10:5–6)” (Bruce, *The Book of Acts, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 167).

<sup>84</sup> Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Mordechai, Ezra and Nehemiah served in non-Israelite governments, and the nations listed in the Acts 2:9–11 diaspora support the idea that the Ethiopian was Jewish.

<sup>85</sup> Use of *parachrema* (παράχρημα) strongly suggests miraculous Spirit baptism since all fifteen occurrences of *parachrema* in Luke-Acts refer exclusively to supernatural events: Luke 1:64, 4:39, 5:25, 8:44, 13:13, 18:43, 19:11, 22:60, Acts 3:7, 5:10, 12:23, 13:11, 16:26, 16:33.

Variations in Acts' baptismal formulas often draw attention and Lars Hartman comments on the form found in Acts 8:16 and 19:5: "Now, a simple inquiry reveals that Luke uses the 'into' form when he himself is the narrator. This means that the form corresponds to his natural style, presumably the mode of expression he has learnt from his own Christian surroundings."<sup>86</sup> But if Acts 1:5 is Luke's paradigmatic guide for baptism, then his "into" style may bear greater significance than most suppose, including Hartman.

Acts 8:16 contains Luke's first use of "into the name of the Lord Jesus." This verse contains Luke's sole use of *baptizō* in the perfect participle form (though he uses *baptizō* some 31 times in Luke-Acts). Luke also used the unique periphrastic *βεβαπτισμένοι ὑπῆρχον* in Acts 8:16b. The ESV renders the verse:

[F]or he had not yet fallen on any of them,

but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

However, Acts 8:16b may actually bear the sense that "they only were starting to be baptized *into the name* of the Lord Yeshua" (a process that would be completed by receiving the Holy Spirit). Luke's periphrastic style indeed supports this proposal.

Acts 8:16a has a periphrastic construction with ἦν:

οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν ἐπ' οὐδενὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιπετωκός (ἦν ἐπιπετωκός)

Moreover, Luke-Acts contains more than twenty periphrastic constructions with ἦσαν<sup>87</sup> so, had he wanted, Luke could have framed Acts 8:16b similarly, as follows:<sup>88</sup>

μόνον δὲ ἦσαν βεβαπτισμένοι εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.

This makes the actual use of *hyperchōn* (ὑπῆρχον) in Acts 8:16b stand out as unique construction, evidently expressing something striking.

The BDF says, "Υπάρχειν only with the perfect participle . . . is sometimes used in an analogous way to denote the beginning of a state or condition."<sup>89</sup> The BDF apparently views Acts 8:16b as referring to water baptism, with the periphrasis in the form of a "perfect passive infinitive."<sup>90</sup> But if Acts 1:5 is guiding Luke's thought, then the "beginning of a state" makes good sense. If so, then the Samaritans had started to enter Yeshua's sphere of sanctified reality, but they would only fully enter by receiving the Holy Spirit and the transforming, sanctifying effect his presence brings. Though dated, J. R. Lumby says of ὑπῆρχον in Acts 8:16 that "this verb seems to be used with somewhat of its original force = 'to make a beginning.'"<sup>91</sup> Thus, Luke's

<sup>86</sup> Lars Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the Early Church*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World, eds. John Barclay, Joel Marcus and John Riches (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 38.

<sup>87</sup> For example, Luke 4:20; 5:17(2); 8:2, 40; 9:32; 14:1; 15:1; 23:55; 24:13; Acts 1:10, 13, 14; 2:2, 5, 42; 4:31; 12:12; 13:48; 14:7, 26; 21:29.

<sup>88</sup> Compare George Benedict Winer, *A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, trans. J. Henry Thayer, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: Smith, English, & Co., 1869), 350.

<sup>89</sup> Friedrich Blass and Albert Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, trans. Robert Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 180 (§354).

<sup>90</sup> Blass and Debrunner (*Grammar*), 213 (§414).

<sup>91</sup> J.R. Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Cambridge Greek Testament (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 181.

“into” style, as Hartman calls it, could be his way of describing the metamorphosis of one’s sphere of ontological reality “into the Lord Yeshua” by receiving the Holy Spirit and his transformative, sanctifying presence.

If this ontological “into” effect applies to the Samaritans, then the same ontological “into” effect evidently applies to the Ephesians in Acts 19:1–7. Like the Samaritans, the Ephesians expressly said they lacked the gift of Holy Spirit, Acts 19:2. The Ephesians, then, were not re-baptized with water. Instead they fully entered the sphere of ontological reality, “into the Lord Yeshua,” by receiving the sanctifying Holy Spirit, which occurred when Paul laid his hands on them. This means there is no Christian water baptism in Acts 19:1–7, but rather another outplay of Yeshua’s contrast between Yohanan’s water rite and the new sanctifying reality of receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>92</sup>

The Cornelius account strongly supports Yeshua’s Acts 1:5 contrast between water and Spirit, not least because Peter quotes it as his *coup de grâce* for the entire episode (11:16). Cornelius’ house received the out-poured Holy Spirit by hearing the apostle’s word and this shocked on-looking Jewish followers of Yeshua. Something, then, was not fully understood (and this is also implied by Peter’s shock at the visions of unclean animals just earlier in Acts 10). Modern readers often try to find relevance by focusing on Peter’s command that the gentiles be water baptized. Yet an unstated question presents itself. Why did Peter give this command? Was he commanding Christian water baptism? Or was he needlessly ritually purifying these non-Jews (as though they were repentant Jews) with Yohanan’s eschatological purification?

Then too, modern readers ought to realize that alternate textual readings exist for Peter’s command in Acts 10:48. The later Byzantine tradition (or Textus Receptus) promotes a liturgical form of baptism while earlier text forms do not. The Robinson and Pierpont Byzantine text reads:

Προσέταξέν τὲ αὐτοὺς βαπτισθῆναι ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου.<sup>93</sup>

[And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.]

In contrast, both the NA28 and SBLGNT critical texts read:

προσέταξεν δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτισθῆναι.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Two commands by Peter, Acts 2:38; 10:48, are “in the name of Yeshua the Messiah” ἐπὶ (ἐν) τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Luke’s two narratives in Acts 8:16; 19:5 are εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. The formulas of Peter and Luke differ. F. F. Bruce says: “There is probably a slight difference in force between this phrase (Acts 2:38) and εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (8:16; 19:5). Here [in Acts 2:38] the ἐν is to be understood instrumentally: the name of Jesus is an attendant circumstance of baptism...ἐπὶ, [means] ‘on the authority of someone.’” Bruce also says of 8:16 and 19:5: “So the person baptized ‘into the name of the Lord Jesus’ passes into the sphere in which Jesus is acknowledged as Lord, becoming (so to speak) Jesus’ property” (F. F. Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 129, 221.)

<sup>93</sup> Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform* (Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005), 276.

<sup>94</sup> Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28<sup>th</sup> Revised Ed., under the direction of Holger Strutwolf, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 415; Michael E. Holmes, ed., *Acts of the Apostles, The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 267; Bruce Metzger remarks that



[So he commanded them in the name of Messiah Yeshua to be baptized.]

The subtle difference is exceedingly significant. The Byzantine version implies that “in the name of the Lord” is liturgical, thus effectively promoting *Christian* water baptism. Yet, the NA28–SBLGNT critical text presents Peter expressing his “apostolic authority from Messiah Yeshua” to command non-Jews to be purified. While word position in Greek sentences is not always important, the fact that this variation occurs demonstrates that the position of βαπτισθῆναι was highly significant for early scribes. If so, then the NA28–SBLGNT text implies that Acts 10:48 is not necessarily liturgical Christian baptism. Rather it could be an apostolic command to purify the gentiles, and Peter had mentioned Yohanan’s *baptisma* explicitly only moments earlier (10:37). The narrative climax occurs when Peter remembers Yeshua’s Acts 1:5 saying and he finally sees that Yohanan’s rite is not the main source of purification (11:16). Instead, true purification and sanctification come through the Holy Spirit, poured out by Yeshua on Cornelius and his repentant house.<sup>95</sup>

If Acts 1:5 is the guide for understanding *baptisma* in Acts, then throughout Acts Yohanan’s *baptisma* retains Yeshua’s approval as Israel’s eschatological messianic rite for all Jews who turn to him in repentance.<sup>96</sup> Yet the Father’s greater promise, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is Yeshua’s utmost offer to Jews, and was stunningly revealed to be intended for gentiles as well. It appears that in Acts Yeshua’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the one unifying *baptisma* for the *ekklesia*.<sup>97</sup> If the foregoing is accepted, then no universal Christian water rite is found in Acts (though Yohanan’s messianic rite clearly was performed for repentant Jews).

Furthermore, the contrast of Acts 1:5 implies that no water baptism can guarantee reception of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Peter’s command in Acts 2:38–39 in no way proves that the Holy Spirit’s reception was inferred during the water rite. Instead, in accord with Ezek 36:25–27, repentant Jews are purified by water, and then they experience the Spirit’s reception. Luke describes vivid personal knowledge of receiving the Holy Spirit in Acts as, for example, *falling on them* (Acts 8:15–16). The Samaritan episode in Acts 8 turns entirely on the fact that observers and recipients were well aware whether the repentant were yet to receive or had already received the Holy Spirit.

---

scribes modified the verse: “The position of βαπτισθῆναι was moved forward to make it plain that ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι goes with it and not with προσέταξεν αὐτοῦς” (Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994, 1998, 2000], 336).

<sup>95</sup> Compare Acts 15:7–10, *purified their hearts*.

<sup>96</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 1:13–17. Paul performed a messianic water rite that evidently was not part of his calling to announce the good news to the nations. Crispus, leader of the synagogue, was certainly Jewish, and the others whom Paul baptized may have been Jewish as well. In 1 Cor. 7:17–18 Paul exhorted Jews to abide in their “circumcision,” or calling, as Jews. Surely they would also have observed the national purification inaugurated by Yohanan and endorsed by Yeshua.

<sup>97</sup> Compare Titus 3:4–7, as well as 1 Cor. 12:13 where all have been baptized with one Spirit, *whether* Jews, *whether* Greeks (εἴτε Ἰουδαῖοι εἴτε Ἕλληνες).

A key implication of Yeshua's saying in Acts 1:5 is that the promise of a permanent purifying transformation was not previously available. No one was *baptized-transformed* with the Holy Spirit prior to Acts 2. This sharply distinguishes the giving of the Holy Spirit after Yeshua's resurrection from all previous experiences in the Tanakh, and in the NT prior to Shavuot. None had been *baptized* with the Holy Spirit because permanent purification was unavailable until *after* Yeshua's atoning death provided the needed sin offering for humanity. Torah sacrifices surely reflect Yeshua's redemptive work, and the red heifer sacrifice (Num 19) provides a superb illustration, not only of Yeshua's accomplishment, but also of its relationship to the Holy Spirit's workings. Israelites could use living water<sup>98</sup> to purify from common Torah defilements that required bodily washing. Yet living water, by itself, could not purify Israel from severe and contagious corpse defilement. Only a specially chosen red heifer, specially sacrificed and burnt to ashes, provided that level of purification—and that solitary calf provided this purification for the entire nation. Nevertheless, according to the rite, living water was required for sprinkling the red heifer ashes in order to disperse their purifying power to anyone defiled by human dead. In a similar way the Holy Spirit, termed *Living Water* by Yeshua (John 7:37–39), could and did positively influence people throughout the Tanakh, though prior to Yeshua's Passover the purifying effect was limited and provisional. Yet after Yeshua's Passover the Holy Spirit was forever charged with what we can refer to as the purifying power of Yeshua's "ashes" since his holy *mortal* body "burned up," as it were, in his transformative bodily resurrection into everlasting life. Humanity is defiled and dead in sin, yet following Yeshua's Passover the purifying-sanctifying power of his sacrifice is borne to humanity by *Living Water*, the Holy Spirit. Now, after Yeshua's atoning death, his promise in Acts 1:5 is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would *baptize* or sanctify his remnant, permanently purifying them. Spirit *baptisma* in Acts is accordingly far, far more than a *donum superadditum*. In light of the foregoing, the following translations are well-justified for Acts 1:5:

<p>כִּי יוֹחָנָן טָהַר בַּמַּיִם, אָכֵל אֶתֶם תִּטְהָרוּ בְּרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּעוֹד יָמִים לֹא רַבִּים.</p>	<p>For Yohanan purified with water, but you will be purified with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now.</p>
---	--

## Epilogue

As a Christian, Emperor Constantine yielded to a widely held belief about baptism's power of forgiveness and remained unbaptized for twenty-five years, until his deathbed in 337 CE (twelve years after he had convened the Council of Nicaea). This belief, according to Everett Ferguson, "made it seem desirable in the minds of many

---

<sup>98</sup> *Living water* in Gen 26:19 demands a different understanding than the oft used translation, *running water*. "Then Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found a well of living water there" (TLV). Mishnaic sages understood *living water* as cool, sweet spring water that maintains its flow throughout summer, and it is the highest of six grades of water for purification.

to delay reception of such a powerful sacrament until death approached so as to gain maximum benefits from it without risking the loss of those benefits by further sin.”<sup>99</sup> Less than a century later, Augustine argued that Christian baptism purifies from original sin, thus justifying infant baptism, a view that prevailed for a thousand years and that remains the Roman creed. These changing views and practices by Christians of early centuries reveal a decided lack of consensus on baptism, and this itself reveals underlying confusion on the matter.

After the apostles’ passing, the *ekklesia* interpreted Matt 28:19 and John 3:5 as sources for a Christian water rite that was superior to all Jewish rites, and ultimately it was believed to be the doorway to everlasting life.<sup>100</sup> Currently, Acts 1:5 is widely interpreted as a contrast between Yohanan’s baptism and the superseding water-Spirit *Christian* baptism.<sup>101</sup> In addition, the early *ekklesia* quickly fell prey to supersessionism. Thus, Peter’s command in Acts 2:38 was proclaimed in the mistaken role of a supersessionist universal Christian water rite. These verses, understood in this way, paved the way for the sacramental idea that performance of a water rite conveys the Holy Spirit *ex opere operato*, a concept that hardly conforms to Yeshua’s saying in Acts 1:5.<sup>102</sup>

Beyond the NT, in what might be taken as guidance for relating to post-NT baptism, Michael Holmes advises a pragmatic approach to the teachings of the Apostolic Fathers, the earliest post-NT writings: “Rather than impose an extrinsic or artificial unity upon the collection, we should accept the lack of coherence for what it is: testimony to the vigorous diversity characteristic of early Christianity at this time in history.”<sup>103</sup> Works like Ignatius, *Didache*, Barnabas, the “Long Ending” of Mark, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus say or strongly imply that Christian water baptism provides salvation, but “lack of coherence” in these writings ought to be cause for concern about their baptismal teachings. For example, the NT gives no indication that fasting before water baptism was observed and Acts 2:41 says explicitly “there were added that day about three thousand souls.” In contrast, the *Didache* already explicitly commands fasting prior to baptism for as many participants as possible.

---

<sup>99</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism*, 629.

<sup>100</sup> The modern Roman catechism states: “1213 Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitalis spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’”

<sup>101</sup> William Kurz writes, “The disciples would receive a far greater baptism than that of John; they would be immersed in God’s own divine life! This promise will be realized at Pentecost, and then in Christian baptism, which involves both water and the Spirit’s indwelling and empowerment.” William S. Kurz SJ, *Acts of the Apostles, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 29.

<sup>102</sup> In the Lukan narrative Yeshua warned his disciples and the general public, not adversaries, of the Holy Spirit’s uncompromising sensitivity to insult (Luke 12:10).

<sup>103</sup> Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 17.

In conclusion, the Gospel authors surely invested great care in Yeshua's sayings since they portray him as the unique Son, risen from the dead and humanity's judge. Yeshua's five sayings, considered together, call both the *ekklesia* of the nations and the Messianic Community to conduct a thorough reevaluation of *baptizō* and cognates in the NT, especially in light of Ezek 36:25–27.