

The Prophets and the Law until John did Prophecy:

Did *Yohanan ben Zechariah* Intend to Inaugurate Ezekiel 36:25–28?

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Abstract

The recent Enoch Seminar's John the Baptist online conference featured an international forum of lecturers who proved that the eschatological activity of *Yohanan ben Zechariah* is still subject to debate and controversy.¹ The material available at the Enoch Seminar website indicates that one of the most widely agreed-upon issues was that *Yohanan's* washing was by immersion. Some presenters suggest that *Yohanan* was influenced by Ezekiel 36:25–28,² but no presentation focused on proposing that Ezekiel's eschatological washing was the specific prophetic promise that *Yohanan* intended to inaugurate. A probable reason, though unspoken, is the assumption that βαπτίζειν and cognates mean immerse in the NT, not sprinkle, thus, at the outset, there is no possibility that *Yohanan* inaugurated Ezek 36:25. But the wording of Ezekiel's purification washing may intend a more thorough splashing than scattered drops, and NT authors may actually have intended a known extended sense of *purifying* for βαπτίζειν and cognates. This article explores these issues and proposes that *Yohanan* did indeed intend to inaugurate Ezek 36:25–28, together with the Coming One greater than he.

Keywords

John the Baptist, baptism, immersion, Ezekiel 36:25, sprinkling, pouring, inaugurated prophecy, pure water

1. Introduction

D. Broughton Knox starkly observed, “Baptism is a bone of contention amongst Christians.... There is no other doctrine or practice in which differences of opinion are so diverse among Christians who hold that the Bible is the source of what they should believe on Christian matters!”³ Knox's analysis led him to oppose the view that Matt 28:19 commands a water rite:

¹ Enoch Seminar [<http://enochseminar.org/online-2021>]

² For example, Jonathan Klawans' handout on day three, “John's Baptism: An Innovative Rite of Atonement” quotes Ezek 36:22–26. [<https://rb.gy/u8qfxo>]

³ D. Broughton Knox, *Selected Works, Volume II, Church and Ministry*, in *Part 4, Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, ed. Kirsten Birkett (Sydney NSW: St Matthias Press, Ltd., 2003), 263–315 (263).

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“Baptize” in Matthew 28 is fully metaphorical, as were both the other two applications of the word by Jesus (Spirit baptism and suffering baptism). In none of these three uses of the metaphor of baptism by Jesus is there any reference to the practice of water baptism ... Jesus himself did not follow this practice of administering water baptism (John 4:2), and Paul regarded it as a matter of indifference, having no relationship to the gospel he was commissioned to preach. In fact, he put the two activities in sharp contrast (1 Cor 1:17) for the emphasis in Greek falls heavily on “not to baptize.”⁴

John Nolland similarly doubts that Matt 28:19 reflects “baptismal practice.”⁵ Knox also rejected the Markan longer ending as lacking “apostolic authorization” and so “is not to be included in the canon.”⁶ For Knox, then, the NT contains no command from Jesus Christ establishing water baptism for the Christian Church. Instead, the apostolic water baptism practiced in the NT was emblematic of repentance, such as in Isa 1:16 and Jer 4:14, and in James 4:8 and 1 Cor 6:11.⁷ But this suggestion seems to fall quite short of the urgent importance of the messianic water rite first attributed to John the Baptist, and then later to the apostles, as described in the NT.

This essay does agree with Knox that Matt 28:19 speaks of a great transformation that was never tied to water baptism, and that the Markan longer ending is from a hand other than Mark,⁸ and so is not canonical. Yet, in contrast to Knox’s view, this article explores the idea that Yoḥanan intentionally inaugurated Ezek 36:25, “I will *splash*⁹ pure water on you, and you shall be pure,” similarly to the way Isaiah’s “voice in the

⁴ Knox, *Church and Ministry*, 277–282.

⁵ Nolland writes, “Matthew’s ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ is quite distinctive. It is the Matthean use that predominated in later Christian baptismal practice. And this seems to have had a distorting effect on the understanding of Matthew’s words. We cannot know whether the Matthean church used the words formulaically in baptism or not. But given the variations in NT language, clearly there was no agreed baptismal formula. And I think it unlikely that Matthew is reflecting the language of baptismal practice.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), Accordance electronic ed., 1268.

⁶ Knox, *Church and Ministry*, 280, n.6.

⁷ Knox, *Church and Ministry*, 264–266.

⁸ Travis B. Williams, “Bringing Method to the Madness: Examining the Style of the Longer Ending of Mark,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20.3 (2010) 397–419.

⁹ The Hebrew word זרק that is usually translated *sprinkle* in Ezek 36:25 basically means throw, and in other verses it is translated by *splash* (NIV), *throw* (ESV), and *dash* (JPS 1917) (compare Exod 24:6; 29:16, 20; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2, 14; 8:19, 24). For a quantity of water to accomplish a washing, the effect is a splash.

wilderness” inspired him (Isa 40:3; John 1:23). The fervor associated both with Yoḥanan’s washing and later with the apostolic water rite could well be explained by the national, eschatological purification in Ezek 36:25.

This article first assesses Ezek 36:25 as the possible source from which Yoḥanan drew inspiration for his washing. Then NT use of βαπτίζειν is tested against today’s widespread view that Yoḥanan immersed the repentant, over against the likelihood that he splashed pure water to *purify* the repentant.

2. Ezekiel 36:25 as the source for Yoḥanan’s activity

Although proselyte baptism is commonly suggested as the source behind Yoḥanan’s washing, Robert Webb and others note that “the evidence compels us to conclude that proselyte immersion, as described in rabbinic texts such as *b. Yeb.* 46a–47b and *b. Ger.* 60a–61b, was most probably not practised prior to 70 CE.”¹⁰ But even if individual proselyte baptism actually was practiced in the days of Yoḥanan, as argued by Craig Keener,¹¹ that would not prove Yoḥanan borrowed it for his eschatological, national washing. For that washing, Yoḥanan’s inspiration very likely came from elsewhere. Ezekiel 36 is thus worth considering (translation by Moshe Greenberg):

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the lands, and bring you to your soil. I will throw purifying water on you and you will be purged; of all your impurities and of all your idols I will purge you. Then I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put inside you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit inside you, and so bring to pass that you shall follow my laws, and my rules you shall carefully observe. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people while I will be your God.¹² (Ezek 36:24–28)

Ezekiel 36 may indeed have inspired Yoḥanan, just as Isaiah’s voice in the wilderness inspired him. Adela Yarbro Collins writes that Yoḥanan’s distinctive parallelism, “I have

¹⁰ Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 123–28.

Likewise, Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 64–69 (69).

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John, A Commentary*, Vol I (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 444–48.

¹² Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, ed. David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 726.

baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” does evoke Ezek 36:25–28.¹³ Correlations between Ezekiel’s promise and Yoḥanan’s activity can be drawn:

1) The Ezekiel 36 purification is said to occur immediately prior to Israel’s eschatological kingdom (vv. 28–38). Yoḥanan performed his water rite while stridently warning of the imminent kingdom.

2) Ezekiel 36 links bodily purification to moral reform, and to inner transformation of a new heart and a new spirit, associated with the Almighty putting his Spirit in Israel (vv. 26–27). Yoḥanan demanded complete moral reform by repentance from those coming to him, echoing Ezek 36:31, “Then you shall remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good, and you shall loathe yourselves on account of your iniquities and your abominations.” Also, in the second part of Yoḥanan’s parallelism the Coming One *transforms* Israel by the Holy Spirit and burns away the chaff, implying internal renewal (compare Isa 4:4: אִם רָסַח אֶלְנֵי אֵת צֹאת בְּנוֹת-צִיּוֹן וְאֵת-דָּמֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם יְדִים מִקַּרְבָּהּ בְּרוּחַ מְשַׁפֵּט וּבְרוּחַ בָּעַר).

3) If Yoḥanan considered himself the divine agent sent to “splash pure water” on Israel, then he would actively perform the purification for repentant Israelites who would be purified passively. This accords precisely with the NT’s portrayal of Yoḥanan actively performing his washing for passive worshippers.

4) Ezekiel’s purification is a one-time eschatological washing that is not repeated, in contrast to repetitive Qumran washings, and to routine washings of the Torah. By all appearances the repentant participated in Yoḥanan’s eschatological washing only one time.

5) Ezekiel 36:17 says the *House of Israel* was exiled because of horrendous moral failure by the wicked. But even the humble righteous like Daniel and his companions and Ezekiel were exiled as well. Collective Israel was prophetically pronounced to be a woman unclean by monthly defilement. So, the Ezek 36:25 purification is likewise for the entire *House of Israel* (vv. 17, 21, 22, 32, 37), which accords with Yoḥanan’s statement that his work was for the benefit of Israel (John 1:31).

6) Yeshua’s demand to participate in Yoḥanan’s washing to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:13–15) also accords with the Ezekiel 36 premise since Yeshua, too, as a Jew, bore his own part in the *House of Israel’s* defilement, even if he himself was guiltless and righteous. It seems that according to implications of the NT narrative, Yeshua’s acknowledgment of and participation in the *House of Israel’s* purification, administered by Yoḥanan, furnished him a fully righteous standing before the Almighty, accordingly

¹³ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark, A Commentary*, Hermeneia, Harold Attridge, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 146.

enabling the giving of the promised Spirit to him as the Davidic heir. In other words, upon being purified by Yoḥanan, Yeshua received from heaven the Spirit foretold in Isa 11:1–5 for the righteous *shoot* and *branch* of Jesse. The synoptic narrative says that immediately the Bat Qol heavenly voice confirmed Yeshua as the well-pleasing Son (compare Psalm 2).

7) According to Acts 10–11 and Acts 15, the early Jewish followers of Yeshua were zealous to observe the commandments of the Torah (also compare Acts 21:17–26). This zeal accords with Ezek 36:27: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” A central question through Acts was how the Jewish followers of Yeshua should relate to people from the Nations, which Ezek 36 does not deal with directly. However, Paul does refer to Isa 11:10 in Romans 15:12 as part of the justification for proclaiming the Good News to the Nations, strengthening the idea that early disciples saw Yeshua as the Davidic heir of Isa 11:1–5.

These points of correlation between the NT narrative of Yoḥanan’s activity and Ezek 36:25 lead one to wonder why this premise is not explored by more researchers. Evidently the traditional framing of NT baptism, together with certain objections directed at Ezek 36:25, have thwarted research into this possibility. A few possible objections are now discussed.

3. Objection: Ezekiel 36:25 is figurative, not a prophecy for literal fulfillment

Various biblical researchers have commented that Ezek 36:25 is not literal, but rather is a figurative expression.¹⁴ In antiquity, however, Yoḥanan might well have taken Ezek 36:25 to be inspiration for action as he evidently did with other Hebrew Bible passages. Moshe Greenberg describes Ezek 36:16–38 in context as: “the boldest conceptualization of the redemption of Israel as a divine necessity, drawing from the concept its ultimate conclusion concerning the future of human nature.”¹⁵ Such a passage could certainly arouse intense Jewish hope for actual physical redemption, and for action by someone like Yoḥanan.

¹⁴ For example, Eyal Regev, “Washing, Repentance, and Atonement in Early Christian Baptism and Qumranic Purification Liturgies,” *JMJS* 3 (2016), 47, 57–58; Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 105–6; R. Nir, “Josephus’ Account of John the Baptist: A Christian Interpolation,” *JSHJ* 10 (2012), 56, n.83; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel, A Commentary*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, translation from German, SCM press Ltd, 1970), 498; G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 390.

¹⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 725; Compare Daniel Bloch’s comment, “In 36:16–38 the theology of the book [of Ezekiel] reaches its zenith.” Daniel Bloch, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, NICOT, ed. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340.

A fragment of Ezekiel discovered by Yigael Yadin during archeological digs on Masada consists of Ezekiel 35:11–38:14 and is designated *MasEzek* (1043–2220). Unlike other biblical and sectarian texts recovered at Masada, the *MasEzek* fragment was found buried beneath the synagogue floor, with a fragment of Deuteronomy, and so is dated no later than 73 CE, when Masada fell to the Romans.¹⁶ This discovery is consistent with the Jewish custom of interring worn out scripture scrolls, such as in the Cairo Genizah. Near Yoḥanan’s time and local setting, it seems a group of Jews studied these chapters of Ezekiel heavily, including chapter 36, evidently wearing out that part of the scroll.

In the mid-second century CE, R. Yosie and R. Meir, two disciples of R. Akiva, took Ezek 36:25 as an actual event to be expected in the messianic future, dispelling the idea that in antiquity this passage was considered figurative.

The Sages taught (*Tosefta* 5:5): *Mamzerim* and Gibeonites will be pure in the future; this is the statement of Rabbi Yosei. Rabbi Meir says: They will not be pure. Rabbi Yosei said to him: But hasn’t it already been stated: “And I will sprinkle [splash] clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you” (Ezek 36:25)? *b. Kiddushin* 72b.¹⁷

Irrespective of rabbinical extrapolation, this discussion bolsters the likelihood that Yoḥanan saw Ezek 36:25 as vital for the messianic future. This rabbinical debate also mollifies a comment by R. Akiva reported in *m. Yoma* 8.9 that combines Ezek 36:25 with Jer 17:13 in a midrashic word-play to comfort Israel as to its standing of purity.¹⁸ The word-play does not constitute exhaustive rabbinical interpretation of these verses, but only a midrashic parable. Thus, the verse’s primary meaning would not be ignored, just as R. Akiva’s disciples argued in *b. Kiddushin* 72b.

Though Ezek 36:25’s meaning has been disputed, certain Jewish sages argue that it relates to Israel’s status in Ezek 36:17 as a נְדָה, or a woman in menstruation that the Almighty pronounced on the *House of Israel*. So, splashing מֵי טְהוֹרִים in Ezek 36:25 would not refer to purification from corpse impurity by sprinkling מֵי נְדָה as in Num

¹⁶ Yigael Yadin, *Masada, Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*, translated from Hebrew by Moshe Pearlman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966), 180–91.

¹⁷ *The William Davidson Talmud*, online, [www.sefaria.org.il/Kiddushin.72b.12-13?lang=en]

¹⁸ *Wm. Davidson Talmud*, [www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah_Yoma.8.9?lang=en&with=all&lang2=en]

19:13, 20,¹⁹ but to purification from bodily discharge as in Leviticus 15, now applied corporately to Israel.

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Metzora 17

Therefore, the Holy One compares the uncleanness of Israel to the uncleanness of the menstrual period, when < a woman > is unclean and < then > purified. So, the Holy One is going to purify Israel, as stated (in Ezek 36:25): *I will sprinkle [splash] pure water upon you, and you shall be pure.*

Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Metzora 18

Another interpretation: (Ezek 36:17): *Their way before me was like the uncleanness of a menstruous woman*, and not like the uncleanness of a corpse. With a corpse in the house, a high priest does not enter there; but in the case of a menstruous woman, a high priest enters into the house with her and sits with her on the couch, but on condition that it not be shaken (when they sit on it). So, if Israel were compared to the impurity of death, the Divine Presence would never return upon them; however, they are compared to the menstruant, because there is cleansing for her in a mikveh, so that the priest may be with her in the house and not be afraid. Thus, the Divine Presence dwells with Israel, even though they are more unclean than those who serve stars, as stated (in Lev 16:16): < *The tent of meeting* > *That dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.*²⁰

If these comments correspond to Yoḥanan's view of Ezekiel 36, then the washing Yoḥanan performed was for the entire nation, not merely for his band of disciples.

With this in mind, the pharisaical representatives' question in John 1:25 is worth review: τί οὖν βαπτίζεις εἰ σὺ οὐκ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς οὐδὲ Ἠλίας οὐδὲ ὁ προφήτης. The question was not about *what* Yoḥanan was doing; they recognized the washing. Instead, *why did Yoḥanan, himself*, perform this washing *if* he was not Messiah, or Elijah or the Prophet. The low-hanging evidence of this verse evidently intends to indicate that Jerusalem Pharisees recognized Yoḥanan performing the national eschatological washing that they also expected. Even so, they were unsure which of Israel's eschatological figures would perform it. Ezekiel 36:25 indeed promises an eschatological national washing but without specifying who would perform it, only that the Almighty would ensure that it takes place.

¹⁹ For Jews of Ashkenazi heritage, Ezek 36:16–38 is the *Haftarah* for the week's reading of *Shabbat Parah* that consists of Num 19:1–22, so linking Ezek 36:25 to Num 19.

²⁰ *Wm. Davidson Talmud*, [www.sefaria.org.il/Midrash_Tanchuma_Buber%2C_Metzora.17.1?lang=en]

4. Objection: No NT author cites Ezekiel as Yoḥanan's source

All must agree that the NT simply does not offer *any* direct source of inspiration for Yoḥanan's washing. So, posing an explanation as to why no NT author cites Ezekiel as Yoḥanan's source is no more speculative than any other proposal about this issue.

The pre-inscripturated *evangelion* of Yeshua's followers, especially in Judea and Galilee, might indeed have presented Ezek 36:25 as Yoḥanan's source. However, the aims of later written NT documents suggest understandable reasons for authors to sidestep express citation of Ezek 36:25.

The four gospel authors composed their works decades after the apostles began declaring Yeshua's death and resurrection. There would be little point, then, in highlighting every detail about Yoḥanan, especially since he had preached the imminent arrival of Israel's kingdom ushered in by the Coming One. But Israel's kingdom, as promised in Ezek 36:28–38, had not arrived, and Israel's leaders and authorities of the Roman empire had rejected the Coming One, identified as Yeshua.

According to the NT narrative, after Yeshua's Passover suffering the first disciples quickly realized that Israel's majority rejection of Yeshua produced severe long-term consequences, forcing a delay of Israel's kingdom (Acts 1:6–8, compare Luke 19:11–27; 21:20–24). Still, Luke reports Peter preaching that even Yeshua's rejection and the kingdom's delay also was foretold by the prophets (Acts 3:12–21). If so, then later gospel writers faced a quandary: How much indirect eschatology should they include in their work? If they spell out that Yoḥanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25, then they would also need to explain why the kingdom of Ezek 36:28–38 has not arrived, but instead has been delayed. All things considered, since Ezek 36:25 applied directly to the *House of Israel* anyway, and not to those of the nations who later trusted in Yeshua, then NT authors writing in Greek may not have felt a pressing need to explain Yoḥanan's activity in detail. Beyond that, for NT authors focus on Yeshua was critical for everyone, whether for Jews or whether for Greeks. Thus, it seems, details about Yoḥanan are few.

Though there is no direct NT citation of Ezek 36:25, there are apparent allusions. Hebrews 10:22 urges readers *λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ*. Use of *ὕδατι καθαρῷ*, *pure water*, certainly seems to refer to *ὕδωρ καθαρὸν* in Ezek 36:25, and it is often noted on the verse. Since the addressees of the book of Hebrews apparently were primarily Jews, then this allusion would likely be comprehensible. Then too, John 3:5 is commonly noted with Ezek 36:25–27 for Yeshua's word, *ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ*, which broadly accords with the water, the Spirit, the kingdom and transformed lives promised in Ezekiel 36. Beasley-Murray writes:

If the text is to be read as it stands, there is much to be said for the interpretation enunciated by Bengel, and characteristic of British exposition: “Water denotes the baptism of John into (i.e., preparing for) Christ Jesus”. Such a view assumes that entry into the kingdom of God requires baptism of water and of the Spirit. The conjunction of water and Spirit in eschatological hope is deeply rooted in the Jewish consciousness, as is attested by Ezek 36: 25– 27 and various apocalyptic writings (e.g., Jub. 1:23; Pss. Sol. 18:6; Test Jud 24:3)²¹

The synoptics show that Yeshua’s first followers also regarded Yoḥanan highly, ultimately considering him the direct fulfillment of “my messenger” of Mal 3:1 as stated by Yeshua (Matt 11:10; Luke 7:27; also Mark 1:2). In Matthew’s telling, Yeshua said that πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου ἐπροφήτευσαν—for all the prophets and the Torah until Yoḥanan did prophecy (Matt 11:13). In other words, when Yoḥanan appeared, promises of Israel’s kingdom were no longer an unfulfilled hope for the future. Now they were actually finding fulfillment, just as we are told that Peter declared, “And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days” (Acts 3:24). This implies that even without citation, Yoḥanan’s washing was likely foretold in the Hebrew Bible, and that prophecy like Ezek 36:25 was now being inaugurated.

On a different note, Yoḥanan’s claims of the nearness of Israel’s kingdom together with his associated washing appealed to socially diverse Jews, not merely learned elite. Albert Baumgarten provides an incisive critique of Robert Webb’s proposal of understanding Yoḥanan’s washing in six simultaneous complementary perspectives. Baumgarten queries:

One wonders how contemporary Jews were able to hear six possible meanings simultaneously without being totally confused. This dilemma should have been particularly acute for the prostitutes and tax collectors, at the lower end of the socioreligious ladder, who were especially enthused by John’s message, according to Matt 21:32 and elsewhere in the gospels.²²

²¹ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC, Vol. 36, eds Ralph P. Martin, et al, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic (formerly published by Thomas Nelson) 1999), (Kindle edition), 49; See also, James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1970, 2010) 192; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 195–6.

²² Albert I. Baumgarten, “The Baptism of John in a Second Temple Jewish Context,” chapter 26 in, *Wisdom Poured Out Like Water: Studies on Jewish and Christian Antiquity in Honor of Gabriele Boccaccini*, eds, J. Harold Ellens, et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 404.

Yohanan's swift recognition as a prophet would seem to have been tied closely to his washing. Ezekiel 36:25 exists in the Hebrew Bible as an eschatological national purification just prior to the kingdom. However, if Yohanan did not inaugurate this purification, but instead invented some other one just before Israel's kingdom, then would that not confuse the Jewish population as well? Why should a real prophet invent a new washing when Ezekiel had promised one six centuries earlier?

5. Objection: Like Naaman in 2 Kings 5:14, Jews practiced immersion, not affusion

Wide consensus holds that late Second Temple routine Jewish washings were by self-immersion. Archeological discoveries of *mikvaot*, immersion pools, throughout the Jewish homeland, together with 2 Kgs 5:14 and the Mishnah, are evidently thought to prove this point. A closer look raises several questions.

First, even if the more rigorist leanings toward Levitical commandments were widespread among all Jews in the days of Yohanan, that still would not annul Ezekiel's prophecy from six centuries earlier. Yohanan could have inaugurated Ezek 36:25, splashing pure water on the repentant, completely unconcerned about self-immersion in a mikveh.

Moreover, in separate work Ronny Reich and Yonatan Adler both say that the earliest archeological mikvah discovery dates only to 164 BCE, well into the Hellenistic period of the Second Temple.²³ In fact, the five books of Moses challenge the idea that purification *requires* self-immersion. There are Torah verses where objects are dipped (טבל), yet other verses in close proximity call the worshipper to ambiguously wash their body (רחץ). For example, regarding a person with skin disease, Leviticus 14:6 has טבל for dipping the living bird, cedar, scarlet thread and hyssop, and v. 16 has a cohen dipping his finger into oil. Between these two verses, v. 8 has רחץ for a person who is to wash to be purified, טהר. Again, near the end of Leviticus 14 for a mold-infested house, v. 51 has טבל for dipping the living bird, cedar, scarlet thread and hyssop, yet Leviticus 15 concerns male and female bodily defilement and purification by water, all of which require רחץ for washing. So טבל is certainly used in the Torah along side רחץ, but no commandment demands personal washing by טבל, dipping/immersion. The "fence expanding" tradition of the late Second Temple eventually codified bodily washings by a

²³ See, Ronny Reich, "Mikva'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); Yonatan Adler, "The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in Eretz-Israel from the Hasmonean Period until the End of the Talmudic Era [164 BCE–400 CE]," (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2011) in Hebrew; and Ronny Reich, *Mikvaot Taharah* (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben Tzvi, 2013), in Hebrew.

dipping/immersion of טבל even though they were actually commanded with the more ambiguous רחץ.

Beyond that, even the Babylonian Talmud, *b. Ber. 22a*,²⁴ says affusion of nine *kav* of water, about four gallons, was acceptable for certain rabbinical purifications, in place of immersing in forty *se'ah*, about one hundred and twenty gallons of a kosher mikveh.

Our Rabbis taught: A *ba'al kerī* on whom nine *kabs* of water have been thrown is clean. Nahum a man of Gimzu whispered it to R. Akiba, and R. Akiba whispered it to Ben 'Azzai, and Ben 'Azzai went forth and repeated it to the disciples in public.

R. Zera told R. Hiyya bar Abba:

The nine *kabs* must be like the forty *se'ah*: just as the forty *se'ah* are for immersion and not for throwing, so the nine *kabs* are for throwing and not for immersion.

Nahum of Gimzu was R. Akiva's teacher, and Akiva died in the second Jewish revolt in 135 CE. Thus, not long after the days of Yoḥanan, affusion *specifically* was considered acceptable as a purification process for some defilements, even for fastidious Jews. So, if Yoḥanan claimed Ezek 36:25 as his inspiration, then even scrupulous Jews would have no reason to reject him if he "splashed pure water" on them.

Regarding 2 Kgs 5:14 and Naaman the Aramaean, there is more going on with this text than is usually realized. The Masoretic Text (MT) of the Aleppo Codex dates from the 10th century CE, and, like the famed Leningrad Codex of the 11th century, has the Hebrew verb רחץ, *wash*, paired with טהר, *purify*, that occur in vv. 10, 12, 13, but then in v. 14 it has the verb טבל paired with טהר. Similarly, the LXX has the verb λούω, *wash*, paired with καθαρίζω, *purify*, in vv. 10, 12, 13, but then in v. 14 it has βαπτίζω paired with καθαρίζω.

However, Jerome (c. 342 or c. 347–420 CE) based his Latin translation on much earlier Hebrew texts available in his day, and he also compared early Greek versions. In Jerome's Latin version *all four verses*, vv. 10, 12, 13, and 14, have the Latin verb *lavō*, *wash*, paired with *mundō*, *cleanse*.²⁵ In contrast, in fourteen of the sixteen verses where טבל occurs in the MT, the Latin Bible has a form of *tingō*, *dip/immerse*, not *lavō*.²⁶ This

²⁴ *Soncino Babylonian Talmud*, [http://www.halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth_22.html]

²⁵ The modern version, the *Nova Vulgata* (1998) replaced *lavō*, *wash*, in v. 14 with *intinguō*, *immerse*.

²⁶ The Latin of 2 Kgs 8:15 has *infudit* where the MT is טבל. This is the other verse without *tingō*.

strongly implies that the Hebrew texts available to Jerome in the fourth century did not have טבל in 2 Kgs 5:14, and that very likely the Greek texts did not have βαπτίζειν.

It is unclear precisely when the Aramaic Targum and Syriac Peshitta reached their current text forms, yet it is surprising that *all four verses*, 10, 12, 13, and 14, in the Aramaic Targum have what appears to be a Hebrew loan word טבל, *dip*, paired with אַתְּסִי, *heal*. The Peshitta, *in all four verses*, has ܘܫܘܟܘܢܐ, *wash, bathe, swim* paired with ܘܫܘܟܘܢܐ, *purify*.

Jerome evidently had no manuscripts of 2 Kgs 5:14 with טבל in Hebrew or with βαπτίζειν in Greek. Or, at the very least, it would seem that the manuscripts Jerome thought were the best had קרח or λούω. Moreover, the identical word-pairs found in all four verses in Jerome's Latin, the Aramaic Targum, and the Syriac Peshitta implies that the source texts for all three versions were also uniform in all four verses. All of this evidence points to the likelihood that the very early Hebrew text of 2 Kgs 5:14 had קרח, but that at some point in the common era, as *mikvaot* became more prevalent and established, Hebrew copyists replaced קרח with טבל. Whatever the case, it is highly questionable to depend upon 2 Kgs 5:14, whether in Hebrew or Greek, as proof of the meaning of βαπτίζειν in the NT.

6. Objection: Βαπτίζειν means immerse, not sprinkle or pour

This objection was a rallying cry of *credobaptists* against *paedobaptists* in past generations. Predominant NT evidence has the apostolic water rite performed in response to understanding the Good News, as *credobaptists* contend, against vague inferences of household baptism allegedly including toddlers and infants. *Paedobaptists* typically acknowledge that βαπτίζειν can mean immerse, but that it also bears extended senses such as *purify*. Thus, βαπτίζειν in the NT would not mean *sprinkle* or *pour*, per se, but rather *purify*, or some similar transformative meaning, and would be accomplished by whatever means Jewish culture demanded.²⁷ Still, ill-advised *paedobaptist* attempts to prove infant baptism in the NT seems to have brought, by association, disrepute to the concept that βαπτίζειν has various extended senses. The unfortunate side-effect seems to be the assumption by many *credobaptists* that βαπτίζειν only means immerse in the NT with no other extended senses.

Yohanan's saying (Mark 1:8) describes both his activity with water and the Coming One's activity with the Holy Spirit as semantic parallels. Any NT description of the metaphorical mode of Yeshua's action would be a valid possibility for Yohanan's activity.

²⁷ See the articles "Baptism," "Infant Baptism," "Believers' Baptism" and "Modes of Baptism" in, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 3rd ed. 2017), 260–68.

In Acts 2 Peter cites Joel, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα (עַל־כָּל־בָּשָׂר יִפְשַׁע רוּחַי) (Acts 2:17) and, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου (יִפְשַׁע רוּחַי) (v. 18), in which the mode in both Hebrew and Greek is pour out. Luke reports Peter’s own words (Acts 2:33), saying that after ascending Yeshua received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and ἐξέχεεν τοῦτο. Yeshua “poured out” the promised Holy Spirit (compare Acts 10:44–45; Romans 5:5; Titus 3:5–6). This arguably relates directly to βαπτίζειν in Acts 1:5 where Yeshua promised ὅτι Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐν πνεύματι βαπτισθήσεσθε ἀγίῳ. The dative ὕδατι can be locative, or it can just as easily suggest an instrumental effect, such as purifying *by means of water*, while ἐν and the dative πνεύματι ἀγίῳ associated with βαπτισθήσεσθε also could be locative, but could also very well suggest a purifying transformation *by means of the Holy Spirit*. Despite claims that βαπτίζειν means immerse, we here see “pour out” depicted by Luke as Yeshua’s mode to cause the transformational purification that βαπτίζειν conveys. If so for Yeshua and the Holy Spirit, then why not for Yoḥanan and pure water?

7. In the NT, βαπτίζειν and cognates often convey a sense of *purify*

Driven by subject matter, the New Testament contains the highest concentration of occurrences of βαπτίζειν and cognates by a wide margin compared with contemporary works such as the LXX or the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Josephus and Justin Martyr.²⁸ Even a cursory review of βαπτίζειν in these works reveals various extended senses beyond inert immersion, including *purify*. Perhaps then, Yoḥanan was actually known as *the Purifier*, and not *the Immerser* as often assumed.

Eckhard Schnabel reviewed lexicons²⁹ and a range of Greek texts and devised a lexical entry for βαπτίζειν that includes clearly differentiated extended senses, including

²⁸ H. Ben Keshet, “Baptized with the Holy Spirit: Acts 1:5 as the Guiding Paradigm for Baptism in Acts,” *JPT* 30 (2021) 221–241 (222–30). The following data comes from Accordance XIII, Oak Tree Software. New Testament of 138,160 words: the verb βαπτίζειν occurs 77 times, the noun βαπτιστής 12 times, the noun βάπτισμα 19 times, the noun βαπτισμός 4 times, βάπτειν 3 times, and ἐμβάπτω twice; Luke-Acts alone of 19,480 + 18,450 = 37,930 words: βαπτίζειν 27 times, βαπτιστής 3 times, βάπτισμα 10 times, βάπτειν once. (βαπτισμός does not occur); LXX of 623,800 words: βαπτίζειν 4 times, βάπτειν 17 times. (βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής, and βαπτισμός do not occur); Philo of Alexandria of 449,300 words: βαπτίζειν 6 times (once for *drunken*), βάπτειν in two passages (one for dying colors). (βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής, and βαπτισμός do not occur); Josephus of 475,700 words: βαπτίζειν appears 10 times in *Wars*, 4 times in *Antiquities*, and 1 time in *Life*. *Antiquities* 18:116 describes Yoḥanan with three cognate nouns, βαπτιστής, βαπτισμός and βάπτισμα (for purifying the body). βάπτειν is found 3 times (for dyed hair or dying colors); Justin Martyr of 88,000 words: βαπτίζειν 9 times, βάπτισμα 8 times, βαπτιστής 5 times. (βάπτειν and βαπτισμός do not appear).

²⁹ Liddell, Scott, Jones *A Greek-English Lexicon; Diccionario Griego-Español; Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG); Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*; Louw-Nida *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*.

purify.³⁰ The following abbreviated form includes all extended senses but omits Schnabel's repetitive wording. Schnabel labors to keep immerse as the referent idea behind each extended sense, though that is debatable in several instances. Even so, distinctly differing senses are listed, some of which occur in the NT.

I. Physical uses

1. to put into a yielding substance; glosses: "to plunge, to dip, to immerse."
 - 1a. to cleanse with water; gloss: "to wash."
 - 1b. to make ceremonially clean; gloss: "to purify" or "to cleanse"; gloss of (later) ecclesiastical language: "to baptize."
 - 1c. to take water or wine by dipping a drinking vessel; gloss: "to draw."
 - 1d. to perish by submersion in water; gloss: "to drown": to suffer death by suffocation; or to sink [of ships].
 - 1e. to put to death a living being; gloss: "to slaughter" or "to kill"; to plunge a knife into the body of an animal or a human being.
 - 1f. to tinge fabric with a color; gloss: "to dye"; frequently attested for *baptein*, but not for *baptizein*.

II. Figurative uses

2. to be overpowered by an abstract reality, such as debts or arguments or thoughts; gloss: "to be overwhelmed" or "to be immersed" ("immersed" in intangible or abstract realities and consequently overwhelmed by their force).
3. to become intoxicated; gloss: "to be drunk."

Schnabel's entry is worthy of careful review, and for this article's purpose, sense 1b. is particularly relevant: to make ceremonially clean; "to purify" and "to cleanse" and in later ecclesiastical use "to baptize." When this sense is understood as intended by NT authors to describe Yoḥanan's activity, then at once Ezek 36:25 becomes far more sensible as his source.

A lesser-known sense in Schnabel's list finds expression in a recent translation, agreeing with entry 1f., "changing the color of fabric." The HCSB renders βάπτειν

See Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Meaning of βαπτίζειν in Greek, Jewish and Patristic Literature," *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, vol. 24 (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 2011), 3–40 (7–11).

³⁰ Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Language of Baptism: The Meaning of βαπτίζω in the New Testament," *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century; Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 217–46.

(βεβαμμένον) in Rev. 19:13 quite sensibly as, “He wore a robe stained with blood” in contrast to the near universal, puzzling rendering of “dipped.”

Yet, even before Schnabel devised his lexical entry of βαπτίζειν, the BDAG had listed:

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 11:38.³¹

The *Analytical Lexicon* by Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg lists the definition of βαπτίζειν as dip and immerse and then:

1) of Jewish ritual washings *wash, cleanse, purify by washing*.³²

According to A. Oepke’s article in the *TDNT*, βαπτίζειν in the LXX had become a technical term “for washings to cleanse from Levitical impurity, as already in Jdt 12:7; Gk. Sir 31 (34):30.”³³ Likewise, Thayer’s, *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, from the latter 19th century includes: to cleanse or purify by washing;³⁴ The Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon contains: dip, plunge, to be drowned, sink, disable ships, flooded, to be drenched, soaked in wine, draw wine, perform ablutions, or wash.³⁵ Evidently *perform ablutions* and *wash* reflect Jewish purifying processes. James Dunn reiterates this in his article discussing baptized as metaphor, “In the LXX [βαπτίζειν] occurs three times to denote a ritual washing or immersion (2 Kgs 5:14; Jdt 12:7; Sir

³¹ Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, Bauer, ed. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 164; Compare, “βαπτίζω [βάπτω; “immerse, plunge, dip”] in the NT only of ritual or ceremonial washing—a. in Israelite tradition *wash, purify* Mk 7:4; Lk 11:38.” *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Fredrick William Danker, Kathryn Krug, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 67.

³² *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, (Victoria, BC, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 87.

³³ Albrecht Oepke, “C. בָּטַח and βαπτ(ί)ζειν in the OT and Judaism,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, translator and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, ninth printing 1978), 1.535–36.

³⁴ *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament*, Revised and Enlarged, Thomas Sheldon Green. M.A., and a Supplement, Prepared by Wallace N. Stearns under the supervision of J. H. Thayer (Boston: Repository Press, 1896), 29.

³⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. by Sir Henry S. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940, revised supplement 1996), 305–6.

34:30).³⁶ Then, Howard Marshall, in his article on the verb baptize, concludes similarly on Yoḥanan's parallelism:

What John meant was "I have drenched you with water, but he will drench you with the Holy Spirit," or "I have cleansed/purified you with water, but he will cleanse/purify you with the Holy Spirit."³⁷

Max Turner likewise remarks on the second half of Yoḥanan's parallelism: "[Yoḥanan] forged his metaphor to affirm the stronger one to come would *cleanse* Israel."³⁸ Craig Evans also observes: "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."³⁹ These scholars agree that βαπτίζειν and cognates convey a sense of *cleanse*, or *purify*.

Mark 7:2–4 plainly uses νίπτω, βαπτίζειν and βαπτισμός in a purity-labile Jewish context. Luke 11:38 has a passive form of βαπτίζειν, evidently showing that Yeshua refused to participate in the customary *netilat yadaim* (hand-washing) before eating bread, which in this case evidently was poured by house servants for the guests. Some take βαπτίζειν here to mean immersion in a mikveh, but that is difficult to maintain since the verbform in almost all manuscripts is passive.⁴⁰ Some translations of βαπτισμός in Heb 6:2 likewise assume purification, such as, "instruction about cleansing rites" (NIV) and "teaching about ritual washings" (Christian Standard Bible, and HCSB).

³⁶ James D.G. Dunn, "Baptized' as Metaphor," *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honor of R.E.O. White*, JSNT Supplement Series 171, eds Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 294–310 (302).

³⁷ Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of the Verb 'Baptize'" in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, 234, eds Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 8–24 (22–23).

³⁸ Max Turner, *Power from on High, The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series 9, eds. John Christopher Thomas, et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 184–5.

³⁹ Craig A. Evans, "The Baptism of John in a Typological Context" in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series, 234, eds Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 45–71 (70).

⁴⁰ Daniel Wallace comments: "The reading ἐβαπτίσαστο is found in \mathfrak{P}^{45} 700, while almost all other witnesses read ἐβαπτίσθη. Most likely the passive is original, being better attested externally and even more difficult (since the Pharisee's amazement would presumably be due to Jesus intentionally not washing his hands)." *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), Accordance electronic ed., 424.

Josephus described Yoḥanan and his activity with cognate nouns βαπτιστής, βαπτισμός and βάπτισις, all three of which are tied to “purifying” the body.

They must not employ [βάπτισις] to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body [ἀγνεία τοῦ σώματος] implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior.⁴¹ Antiquities 18:116–117 (18.5.2)

Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho* contains further ancient testimony of this sense:

By reason, therefore, of this laver [λουτροῦ] of repentance and knowledge of God, which has been ordained on account of the transgression of God’s people, as Isaiah cries, we have believed, and testify that that very baptism [βάπτισμα] which he announced is alone able to purify [καθαρίσαι] those who have repented; and this is the water of life. But the cisterns which you have dug for yourselves are broken and profitless to you. For what is the use of that baptism [βαπτίσματος] which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize [Βαπτίσθητε] the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! The body is pure [καθαρόν]. *Trypho* 1.14.⁴²

Greek users thus recognized various extended senses for βαπτίζειν and cognates, realizing this word group was not constrained solely to the concept of immersion.

8. Yoḥanan’s preaching very likely was in Hebrew

The earliest material we have about Yoḥanan is in Greek, however the linguistic milieu for his prophetic activity was Semitic. Steven Fassberg and others argue that a significant portion of the first-century Jewish population in Judea and Galilee were Hebrew speakers:

For Hebraists, the existence of both Hebrew and Aramaic documents at Qumran and other sites in the Judean Desert, as well as the Hebraisms in the Aramaic documents and the Aramaisms in the Hebrew documents, demonstrate that speakers in Palestine before and after the turn of the Common Era were at least bilingual (in many cases also trilingual with Greek).⁴³

⁴¹ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books 18–19, trans. Louis H. Feldman, LCL 433, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, ... 2000), 81–3.

⁴² *The Christian Apologists* (English). English from the public domain translations of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Language updated and modernized by Rex A. Koivisto. Copyright © 2007 OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.5.

⁴³ Steven E. Fassberg, “Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74 (2012), 263–80 (274); also see, *Hebrew in the Second Temple Period: The Hebrew of*

Yohanan was popularly recognized as a prophet for Israel, and certain authorities recognized him at least potentially as a prophet (John 1:19–28 (25)). A population of Hebrew speakers would strongly point to Yohanan declaring his message in Hebrew. Then, too, these Hebrew speakers likely devised Yohanan's nickname. If, as Josephus wrote, Yohanan's activity was for purification of the body, then the name given might have been evoked by a priestly role in Lev 14:11, הַפְּהִיז הַמַּטְהָר, so yielding, יוֹחֲנָן הַמַּטְהָר, Yohanan *the Purifier*, later rendered in Greek by NT writers as Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστής.

Moreover, Luke reported Yohanan's admonition to crowds, tax-gatherers and soldiers and then commented, "So, with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people" (Luke 3:18). Yohanan thus preached more than what is found in the NT. Plausibly, then, Yohanan's original parallelism, in Hebrew, may not have been a fixed phrase, but rather a fixed emphasis on the difference between him and the Coming One. The following are purely speculative suggestions. Perhaps Yohanan variously said:

אני טיהרתי אתכם במים, אך הוא יטהר אתכם ברוח הקודש

I purified you with water, he will purify you with the Holy Spirit

At other times perhaps,

אני רוחץ אתכם במים, והוא ירוחץ אתכם ברוח הקודש

I wash you with water, he will wash you with the Holy Spirit

And at other times,

אני זורק עליכם מים, אבל הוא ישפוך עליכם את רוח הקודש

I am splashing you with water, he will pour out on you the Holy Spirit.

Regardless, according to Yonatan Adler, the following is the sole example of use of טבל in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Note that טבל is in *qal*, not in the *hiphil* stem.

[כ] וְלִנְוֹגַע בְּשִׁכְבַּת הַזֶּרַע מֵאָדָם עַד כּוֹל כְּלֵי יִטְבּוֹל וְהַנּוֹשֵׂא אוֹתוֹ

[יטב] וְלִיִּטְבּוֹל וְהַבְּגָד אֲשֶׁר תִּהְיֶה עָלָיו וְהַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׂאֵנָה יִטְבּוֹל

[במי] ׀ [...] (4QToharot A [4Q274] 2i 4–6)

the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources, ed. by Steven E. Fassberg et al., Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 108 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); see also, *The Language Environment of First Century Judea: Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels*, ed. by Randall Buth and Steven Notley (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁴⁴ Adler, "The Archaeology of Purity," 18–19 (Hebrew).

Thus, the *Modern Hebrew New Testament*⁴⁵ version with הטביל is questionable:

אני הטבילתי אתכם במים, אך הוא יטביל אתכם ברוח הקדוש

Whatever the case, there seems to have been only a brief transition period between the traditions about Yoḥanan in Hebrew or Aramaic to those in Greek. We are told in Acts 6:2 that the twelve apostles wished to dedicate themselves to τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, the word of God, doubtless focusing on both the Hebrew Bible and Yeshua's words. But in light of their Greek-speaking Jewish comrades who trust Yeshua, it seems likely that the apostles did not neglect the Greek Bible, nor ignore an accurate presentation in Greek of Yoḥanan's and Yeshua's lives and deeds. The Greek pericopes about Yoḥanan preserved in the NT, including use of βαπτίζειν and cognates, may have initially consolidated among Hellenist Jewish disciples in the early apostolic congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1–2).

9. *Βάπτισμα*, freshly-coined for the *Evangelion*

One thing is widely recognized, as stated by R. T. France: “*βάπτισμα* is an exclusively Christian word, which appears for the first time in the NT. Its use in Rom 6:4 shows that it was already current in Christian circles before Mark wrote.”⁴⁶ G. R. Beasley-Murray notes:

In view of the fact that [*βάπτισμα*'s] earliest employment is for the baptism of John, it could conceivably have been coined by John's disciples. More plausibly, it is a Christian innovation, and was applied by Christian writers to John's baptism in the conviction that the latter should be bracketed with Christianity rather than with Judaism.⁴⁷

Beasley-Murray's suggestion that Christian use of *βάπτισμα* was to distinguish between Christianity and Judaism is questionable (see Justin Martyr above who uses *βάπτισμα* for both Jewish rites and Christian interests). Nevertheless, both France and Beasley-Murray suppose that early disciples of Yeshua coined the verbal-noun *βάπτισμα*. Such linguistic creativity would be no surprise in light of the astounding events reported among that first generation of Yeshua's followers. This newly-coined noun *βάπτισμα* seems to have been capable of bearing whatever extended sense that *βαπτίζειν* bore. Thus, in Mark

⁴⁵ *Modern Hebrew New Testament (MHNT)* Copyright © The Bible Society in Israel, 1976, 1991. Accordance Version 3.2.

⁴⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), Accordance electronic ed., 66.

⁴⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, “Baptism, Wash,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 1 (Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1986), 143–50 (149–50).

10:38–39 and Luke 12:50 βάπτισμα conveys the sense of *severe injurious detriment* that βαπτίζειν also bore. This implies that βάπτισμα could likewise bear the sense of purification, such as found in Justin Martyr, or any other abstract sense untethered to physical immersion.

Evidence is lacking that coinage of βάπτισμα had any relationship with the Hebrew noun טבילה, a word that is not found in the Hebrew Bible, nor has it been attested among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yonatan Adler notes that early Copper Scroll⁴⁸ researchers thought they detected ניקרת הטבילה (grotto for immersion) etched in the text. However further research with advanced analytical techniques replaced that reading with a far less-clear reading that has no categorically decided meaning, [?]יל. ⁴⁹ So, as of yet, there is no undisputed attestation of טבילה until the Mishnah, some two centuries after Yoḥanan and more than a century after composition of the NT documents.

Despite lack of evidence to prove טבילה was known by NT writers, there seems to be a wide-spread injudicious hypothesis that βάπτισμα = טבילה = immersion. This assumption exacerbates difficulties, for example, in interpreting Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3. Luke reproduced verbatim Mark’s phrase about Yoḥanan’s activity: κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν—proclaiming a βάπτισμα of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Stanley Porter, Joel Marcus and Dan Wallace grappled with Mark 1:4 in terms of a religious water rite. Porter concludes his essay without resolution:

The grammar here does not say that John preached for people to repent and be baptized; it states that he preached a baptism ... that is restricted by the concept of repentance, as opposed to other restricting factors (here unspecified). Although not specified, either baptism or repentance, or both, seem to lead ... to forgiveness of sins (although agency is not expressed). ⁵⁰

Joel Marcus likewise offers no resolution:

Particularly enigmatic is the meaning of the genitival expression βάπτισμα μετανοίας (“baptism of repentance”). Is Mark implying that it was a baptism *consisting* of repentance (genitive of content)? A baptism *resulting from* repentance (genitive of source)? A baptism *issuing in* repentance (objective

⁴⁸ The Copper Scroll (3Q15) was discovered in 1952 at the back of Qumran’s Cave 3 and has been dated variously as early as CE 25–75 to as late as CE 70–135.

⁴⁹ Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity,” 19–20 (Hebrew).

⁵⁰ Stanley E. Porter, “Mark 1:4, Baptism and Translation,” *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honor of R.E.O. White*, JSNT Supplement Series 171, eds Stanley E. Porter, Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 81–98 (98).

genitive)? A repentant baptism—that is, perhaps, a baptism involving repentance or repentant people (adjectival genitive)? Any of these is possible, since “a substantive in the genitive limits the meaning of a substantive on which it depends” without exactly defining the nature of the limitation.... It seems inconceivable, moreover, that so many people would have left their homes to make the long journey into the desert to be baptized by John if they had thought that they had already been purged by repentance, if they had not believed that his baptism would confer some sort of spiritual blessing. And they probably would not have thought so unless John himself encouraged the belief. Whatever one thinks of the grammar of Mark 1:4, moreover, it has John proclaiming *baptism*, not in the first instance repentance. Repentance, then, is *part* of the baptismal gestalt but not its leading edge.⁵¹

Daniel Wallace puzzled over the phrase before Porter and Marcus:

There are various possible interpretations of this phrase: “baptism that is based on repentance” (causal), “baptism that points toward/produces repentance” (purpose or production), “baptism that symbolizes repentance.” In light of such ambiguity, it may well be best to be noncommittal: “baptism that is somehow related to repentance.”⁵²

Doubts evidently arise because Porter, Marcus and Wallace evidently think βάπτισμα refers to a water immersion that they assume Yoḥanan performed. Marcus, for example, says the most distinctive aspect of Yoḥanan’s ministry was his “practice of immersing in water those who came to identify with his movement.”⁵³ But βάπτισμα in Mark 1:4 may not refer directly to Yoḥanan’s water rite, much less to immersion.

The first native Greek speakers who heard Mark’s Gospel read publicly, including Jews, likely were familiar with extended senses of βαπτίζειν such as in Plato, the Greek Bible, Philo of Alexandria (compare also Josephus) and Hellenistic culture in general, and probably were familiar with nouns like βαπτιστής and βαπτισμός. However, the neologism βάπτισμα likely was unfamiliar for most. Steve Mason describes the function of the word-form βάπτισμα ending with μα as a “neuter result noun” unlike βαπτισμός ending with μός that was an “action-noun.”⁵⁴ So, Greek audiences likely weighed βάπτισμα in terms of

⁵¹ Joel Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 63–5.

⁵² Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 80.

⁵³ Marcus, *John the Baptist*, 62.

⁵⁴ Compare Mason’s analysis of Josephus’s description of Yoḥanan, speaking of ὁ βαπτιστής: “The action-noun βαπτισμός has an obvious meaning. This and the agent-noun βαπτιστής both derive from the cognate

result or *effect*, not an action. After a mystifying hour-and-a-half Mark's rushed story is over. The audience has heard this new word βάπτισμα four times, two times directly related to the activity of Yoḥanan (Mark 1:4; 11:30). However, the other two usages in Mark 10:38–39 relate to a *severe challenge* of drinking a cup and of somehow being baptized *injuriously*. Yeshua's original Semitic figure behind the Greek seems to have been “drinking a cup and becoming drunken” to tell of impending disaster (compare Ezek 23:33, Rev 14:10a).⁵⁵ At the very least, βάπτισμα in Mark 10:38–39 bears a strong negative sense, and Luke also uses βάπτισμα to describe the same detrimental *crisis-ordeal* Yeshua would suffer (Luke 12:50).

Two questionable assumptions thus confuse the elucidation of the βάπτισμα μετανοίας: a) βάπτισμα = immersion, and b) Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 speak of the Yoḥanan's water rite. Arguably, Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 instead intend a *crisis-ordeal* of profound heart-wrenching repentance that leads to actual forgiveness of sins. In other words, Yoḥanan refused perfunctory mouthing of a laundry-list of transgressions.⁵⁶ He would not allow hearts to remain distant from the Almighty, as warned centuries earlier in Isa 29:13. Yoḥanan demanded that Jews hearing his strident message face a personal *crisis-ordeal*, recognizing with heart-crushing apprehension how unworthy they are of the imminent kingdom: cut in heart to the quick, turning to the Almighty in complete broken repentance, declaring guilt, and then receiving Yoḥanan's purifying washing, humbly recognizing sins forgiven and fitness for the kingdom.⁵⁷ All of these details are packed into what Mark later described in Greek as a βάπτισμα of repentance. Nevertheless, Yoḥanan's purification is included within Mark's *crisis-ordeal*, joining

verb βαπτίζω. That is, βαπτίζω | βαπτισμός | βαπτιστής have the same relationship as ὑβρίζω | ὑβρισμός | ὑβριστής: verb, action-noun, and agent-noun.” Then, in contrast to Josephus, Mason writes, “when Christians referred to John's or other immersion, they showed a decided preference for the neuter result-noun τὸ βάπτισμα, not the action-noun βαπτισμός. NT texts mostly use βάπτισμα (19 times), and the apostolic fathers (6), Greek apologists (19 times), and Eusebius (42 times) have it exclusively—Eusebius, tellingly, except in the two places where he quotes Josephus on John.” See Mason's excellent Enoch Seminar paper: “John the Drencher (aka Baptist), a Judaeon *Vir Bonus* in Josephus, AJ 18:116–119,” Steve Mason, University of Groningen, Enoch Seminar, 11–14 January 2021. Also compare A.T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 3rd ed, 1919), 149–154.

⁵⁵ See, H. Ben Keshet, “Mark 10:38–39: Was Jesus's Challenge ‘Drinking the Cup and Becoming Drunk’? Extended Senses of *Baptizō* in the NT,” in *EQ* 90.3 (2019), 246–63.

⁵⁶ Confession of guilt is practiced in the Torah, as seen in Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40–42; Num 5:7; compare Ezra 10:1; Josh 7:19; Dan 9:4–15. Yoḥanan strove to ensure that no one would “honor the Almighty with their lips, but their hearts still remain far from him” as warned in Isaiah, and repeated by Yeshua in Mark 7:6–7.

⁵⁷ Ben Keshet, “Drinking the Cup and Becoming Drunk,” 263,

broken repentance with a purification washing. In Mark 1:4, βάπτισμα seems to function like a large, outer “Russian doll” of *crisis-ordeal* that includes hidden within a smaller doll, the unspoken idea of Yoḥanan’s water rite for *purification*.⁵⁸ This nuance also seems to inform Luke’s use of βάπτισμα μετανολίας in Acts 13:24 and Acts 19:4.

10. Yoḥanan’s water-Spirit parallelism with a sense other than immerse

Yoḥanan contrasted his activity with water against the Coming One with the Holy Spirit:

ἐγὼ ἐβάπτισα ὑμᾶς ὕδατι, αὐτὸς δὲ βαπτίσει ὑμᾶς ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. (Mark 1:8, compare Matt 3:11; John 1:33; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

Is βαπτίζειν to be understood as immerse with the dative taken as locative?⁵⁹

I immersed you in water, but he will immerse you in the Holy Spirit.

Or is βαπτίζειν to be understood as purify with the dative taken as instrumental?⁶⁰

I purified you by means of water, but he will purify you by means of the Holy Spirit.

Evidence to decide is not in the verse itself. Nevertheless, in purity-labile Jewish culture, Yoḥanan’s Jewish listeners certainly knew water purifies, and though any rite’s mechanical mode had a degree of importance, the *result of purification* was decisive. The Coming One’s activity with the Holy Spirit must bring to mind life-changing power, radically transforming Israel (compare Num 11:29; Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10; Ezek 36:27; 39:29). Surely no one was concerned with *inert engulfment*. G. R. Beasley-Murray, a European Baptist,⁶¹ sees emphasis on instrumental effect, not locative sphere:

Is it feasible that John might have contrasted his baptism with water as one mode of cleansing and renewal with the Messiah’s baptism with Spirit and fire as a more powerful means of cleansing and renewal? Here it is necessary to observe the strict parallelism of language used by the evangelists in contrasting the two

⁵⁸ Mark 1:4’s elusive nuance might be the reason Matthew did not copy it in his gospel.

⁵⁹ Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 1–8*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament, ed. Martin Culy (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), Kindle edition, 11.

⁶⁰ Most modern English Bibles render Mark 1:8 instrumentally as baptize *with water* ... baptize *with* the Holy Spirit. NIV, NLT, ESV, NRSV, REB, KJV, NKJV, NASB, HCSB, CEV, Douay-Rheims, English Revised Ver., ISV, NET Bible, Weymouth NT, and Young’s Literal.

⁶¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1972, reprint 1997), v–vi.

baptisms; in Mark, “I baptize you with water (ὕδατι), but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (πνεύματι ἁγίῳ)”; in Matthew and Luke, “I baptize you with water (ἐν ὑδατι) ... he will baptize with (ἐν) Holy Spirit and fire” ... the ἐν as well as the simple dative signify in each case the instrument or means employed in the baptism. The Spirit is an agency comparable with water and fire.⁶²

Beyond that, in the synoptics the accusative ὑμᾶς receives the effect of βαπτίζειν by means of ὑδατι and πνεύματι ἁγίῳ and πυρί.

ἐγὼ μὲν ὑδατι βαπτίζω ὑμᾶς ... αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Luke 3:16)

Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὑδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν ... αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί (Matt 3:11)

Yet in the Fourth Gospel, ὑμᾶς does not appear. Instead, βαπτίζειν occurs only with ἐν and the dative ὑδατι and the dative πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

ἐγὼ βαπτίζω ἐν ὑδατι. (John 1:26)

ἵνα φανερωθῇ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν ὑδατι βαπτίζων. (John 1:31)

ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὑδατι ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ’ ὃν ἂν ἴδῃς τὸ πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ’ αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ. (John 1:33)

While it could be possible to understand βαπτίζω ἐν ὑδατι as locative, “immersing into water,” it is highly problematic to continue the parallelism and imagine Yeshua “immersing [people] into the Holy Spirit” as though into a static pool. In any case, as mentioned above, in Acts 2:33 Peter says Yeshua ἐκχέω (ἐξέχεεν) “pours out” the Holy Spirit, as in the citation of Joel. So, the NT evidence for βαπτίζων ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ points away from locative immersing toward an instrumental transformative washing of regeneration *by means of* the Holy Spirit, as in Titus 3:5–6.

When considering βαπτίζειν in the NT, one must remember that in the Fourth Gospel Peter indeed “plunges” himself into the sea, but by βάλλω, not by βαπτίζειν.

καὶ ἔβαλεν ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν (John 21:7)

Likewise, the crippled man’s plea is not framed with βαπτίζειν but again with βάλλω:

κύριε, ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω ἵνα ὅταν ταραχθῇ τὸ ὕδωρ βάλλῃ με εἰς τὴν κολυμβήθραν· (John 5:7)

These two episodes would have been perfect places to use βαπτίζειν if it meant, “to plunge, to dip, or to immerse.” If the author understood βαπτίζειν as *to immerse*, then

⁶² Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 37–38.

one might have expected phrasing in chapter 1 such as: ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, and οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα, but these constructions do not occur.

Luke uses εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, but in direct association with κατέβησαν, not with βαπτίζειν that also occurs in the verse.

καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφοτέροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, ὃ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος, καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν. (Acts 8:38)

Both Philip and the Ethiopian go down εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, but afterward only the Ethiopian is baptized, thus making it problematic to prove immersion by εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, and instead making it more sensible to see βαπτίζειν as causing a transforming effect, such as *purifying* the Ethiopian.

Meanwhile, the phrasing, εἰς τὸ πῦρ also occurs in the gospels, however, again with βάλλω, not βαπτίζειν, as in Yeshua's teaching:

καὶ εἰς τὸ πῦρ βάλλουσιν (John 15:6)

Matthew and Luke portray Yohanan warning crowds of being,

ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται (Matt 3:10; Luke 3:9)

Mark and Matthew use similar phraseology about a demonized child cast into fire and water:

καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτόν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν (Mark 9:22)

εἰς τὸ πῦρ ... εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ (Matt 17:15)

Mark and Luke have Yeshua describe the wicked cast into the sea for permanent immersion.

βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν (Mark 9:42; Luke 17:2)

The synoptic narrative of the legion of demons that entered a herd of swine is similar:

καὶ ὥρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, ὡς δισχίλιοι, καὶ ἐπνίγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. (Mark 5:13; Matt 8:31; Luke 8:33)

The herd rushes εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, or in Luke, εἰς τὴν λίμνην. It is also worth noting that βαπτίζειν is not found in any synoptic account of this story, even though, for example, Diodorus Siculus described animals cut off by the flooding Nile and perishing, being baptized, βαπτιζόμενα.⁶³ NT authors never use βαπτίζειν either for drowning, or for sinking ships (compare Luke 5:7; 8:23–24; 8:33; 17:2; Acts 27:18–20; Matt 14:30). This is in contrast to Josephus's usages several times (*J.W.* 2:556; 3:368, 423, 525, 527; *Ant.*

⁶³ Diodorus Siculus (c.90–30 BCE), *Historical Library*, book 1.36.9.

9:212; *Life* 15). Quite obviously then, different authors might use certain extended senses of βαπτίζειν that appealed to them, but then ignore other senses.

If immersing people into water was the crucial be-all and end-all of Yoḥanan's activity, then there is reason to wonder why no NT writer used εἰς ὕδατα to stress this form. Likewise, if Yoḥanan expected Yeshua to immerse people in the Holy Spirit, then there is reason to wonder why εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα was not used.

Nevertheless, there is one verse in Mark that, at a glance, might seem to validate the concept of immersion into the Jordan. The trouble is the Matthean parallel counters the idea.

ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρέτ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ ἐβαπτίσθη εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου.
(Mark 1:9)

The Matthean parallel reads:

Τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην τοῦ βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. (Matt 3:13)

Matthew reworked the Markan εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην using ἐπὶ more to say Yeshua was “in the vicinity of the Jordan” but not that he was immersed into the Jordan. Matthew's rendering thus counters the idea that Mark intended to say that Yoḥanan immersed Yeshua into the Jordan. Beyond that, Mark's actual intent with εἰς in 1:9 is clarified by other verses:

ἦλθεν διὰ Σιδῶνος εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Mark 7:31)

Mark says Yeshua and his disciples went “to” the sea, not “into” it. Here again the Matthean parallel rewords the verse:

παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας (Matt 15:29)

Also compare Mark's usage in the Olivette Discourse:

Καὶ καθημένου αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν (Mark 13:3)

The Matthean parallel:

ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν Ἐλαιῶν (Matt 24:3)

In this light, it is unlikely that Mark 1:9 intends that Yoḥanan immersed Yeshua in the Jordan, rather than of being purified at the Jordan.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Compare the LXX, 1 Kgs 2:8 (Shimei met David to curse him “εἰς the Jordan”) καὶ αὐτὸς κατέβη εἰς ἀπαντὴν μου εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ ὤμοσα αὐτῷ ἐν κυρίῳ; 2 Kgs 6:4 (lumbermen cut down wood from the banks) καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην καὶ ἔτεμνον τὰ ξύλα.

Regarding Yoḥanan's activity and the preposition ὑπὸ, Robert Webb notes:

An interesting feature of the form of John's baptism is that it is described as being performed “by John” (ὕπ' αὐτοῦ, Mark 1:5; cf. v. 9), and John himself states, “I baptize ...” (Matt 3:11 = Luke 3:16; Mark 1:8). All evidence in Second-Temple Judaism points to Jewish ritual bathing practices being self-administered. John's participation in the act of baptizing, therefore, is probably John's innovation and may have contributed to his nickname, *the baptizer*.⁶⁵

In 1 Cor 1, Paul emphasizes that he himself actively baptized: ἐβάπτισα ... Κρίσπον καὶ Γάϊον (v. 14), and ἐβάπτισα ... τὸν Στεφανᾶ οἶκον ... οὐκ οἶδα εἴ τινα ἄλλον ἐβάπτισα (v. 16). Active administration of the water rite by Yoḥanan and Paul is dissimilar to mishnaic self-immersion, so there is no reason to consider Yoḥanan's rite to be derived from it. Webb agrees, but does not know how Yoḥanan actually washed the repentant:

The most distinctive feature of John's baptism is that he administered it to the person being baptized rather than the immersion being self-administered. The method by which he administered the baptism is unknown.⁶⁶

If Yoḥanan inaugurated Ezek 36:25, then the method was by *splashing pure water*.

11. Beyond the Jordan

The Fourth Gospel locates Yoḥanan performing his activity “beyond the Jordan” at Bethany, ταῦτα ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ἐγένετο πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ὅπου ἦν ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων (John 1:28), and ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας (John 3:26). We are also told that Yoḥanan performed his washing at Aenon near Salim, Ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν Αἰνῶν ἐγγὺς τοῦ Σαλείμ (John 3:23). Later, Yeshua withdrew to the place beyond the Jordan where Yoḥanan was baptizing at first, Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν πάλιν πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου εἰς τὸν τόπον ὅπου ἦν Ἰωάννης τὸ πρῶτον βαπτίζων καὶ ἔμεινεν ἐκεῖ (John 10:40). These verses provide greater detail than the synoptics as to where Yoḥanan was active. The synoptics evidently use the Jordan river as a general landmark to provide basic orientation for audiences unfamiliar with precise topology.⁶⁷ The term “beyond the Jordan” still takes the Jordan river as a major reference point, specifying the location in relation to the Jordan. The synoptics, therefore, ought not be pressed to mean Yoḥanan was necessarily at or in the Jordan river's channel, but instead that he was in its vicinity.

⁶⁵ Robert L. Webb, “Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research Studies* 10.2 (2000, revised 2005), 280.

⁶⁶ Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 214.

⁶⁷ Compare Bruce Chilton, “John the Baptist: His Immersion and his Death,” *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, eds S. Porter and A. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 31.

The location of Bethany beyond the Jordan (as distinct from Bethany near Jerusalem, John 11:18) has eluded researchers. Leon Morris notes that in the third century, even though Origen knew that nearly all Greek manuscripts had Βηθανία in John 1:28, Origen was unable to locate a town on the other side of the Jordan with that name when he visited the land.⁶⁸ This led to Origen adopting Bethabarah instead of Bethany. Bruce Metzger remarks that if Bethabarah actually had been original, there would be no adequate reason to change Greek texts to Βηθανία since it appears to be the more difficult reading.⁶⁹ A change in the opposite direction is more comprehensible.

Regardless, the first century site called Βηθανία might not have been an established village, per se, but a location with a colloquial name because of its importance to the region. It is possible that Βηθανία reflects the theophoric Hebrew name, בית עין-יה, or *Beit Ayn-Yah*, Place of the Spring of Yah, which would evoke the idea of a generous, abundantly flowing spring suitable for drinking and purification. In modern Jordan, Wadi Al-Kharrar has in recent times been recognized by some as the location of Βηθανία, whose headwaters are an oasis with flowing springs and it is located about two kilometers from the Jordan river.⁷⁰

Whether or not Wadi Al-Kharrar is the location of Bethany beyond the Jordan, there is reason to wonder why Yoḥanan performed his activity at any place other than the Jordan river, if that is where he actually was performing his washing. The answer may be that Yoḥanan never used water from the actual channel of the Jordan river, but instead used any flowing spring water in the Jordan valley draining into the Jordan.

The authoritative guide for pure water for Israel is given in Leviticus 11:36, “However, a spring or cistern in which water is collected shall be pure.” This verse was also taken as the basis for the development of the purpose-built mikveh for purification. The two sources of water are a spring, or cistern, and these two demonstrate the different ways water would maintain their purifying power. The sages recognized that spring water could purify even when flowing along. However, a cistern collecting rain water could provide purification only if the water was standing. The Mishnah reinforces

⁶⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Revised*, NICNT, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), Kindle Locations 3452-3453 (Kindle Edition); See also, J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* NICNT, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), Kindle Locations 2452-2459 (Kindle Edition).

⁶⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2000), 171.

⁷⁰ [<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1446>]; [www.baptismsite.com/archeological-findings]; [www.seetheholyland.net/tag/wadi-al-kharrar]

the idea that one may immerse in spring water that is flowing (or creeping along), or one may immerse in standing rain water that has collected in a mikveh pit. On the other hand, flowing rain water does not meet the criteria for Jewish purification.

The question regarding Yoḥanan then revolves around how he and the Jewish people viewed the quality of the water of the Jordan river south of the Kinneret, or Sea of Galilee, flowing in the channel. The Mishnah regards the Jordan river north of the Kinneret, from the Baniyas, as the highest grade of spring water, מים חיים (*mayim ḥaim*) or *living waters* and suitable for use in preparing the ashes of the red heifer in accord with Numbers 19:17. Even though it flows, one could immerse in it. However, the Jordan river south of the Kinneret was not considered *living waters*, but mixed waters, and not suitable for preparing the ashes of the red heifer. The Kinneret can collect much rain water during the winter, which would be suitable for purification while standing, but evidently not while flowing. However, we read in m. *Parah* 8:8 that about a century after the days of Yoḥanan the sages determined:

All seas are equivalent to a ritual bath (mikveh), for it is said, "And the gathering (ulemikveh) of the waters He called the seas" (Genesis 1:10), the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Judah says: only the Great Sea is equivalent to a ritual bath, for it says "seas" only because there are in it many kinds of seas. Rabbi Yose says: all seas afford cleanness when running, and yet they are unfit for zavim and metzoraim and for the preparation of the hatat waters.⁷¹

So, Rabbi Yose judged that a sea, such as the Kinneret, could provide purification even when flowing, as in the Jordan river south of the Kinneret. As mentioned, the problem is that Rabbi Yose's ruling was about a century *after* Yoḥanan, so there can be no certainty that Yoḥanan treated the Jordan river south of the Kinneret as a source of water suitable for purification, whether by immersion or whether by pouring nine kav, or whether by splashing.

Ezekiel 36:25 specifies that pure water would be splashed on Israel, and this would be made sure if spring water was used. We are told in the Fourth Gospel that one of the places where Yoḥanan performed his washing was Aenon, which is described as: "Aenon, 'place of springs,' is of uncertain site (suggestions are northeast of the Dead Sea; near Sychem in Samaria; in the Jordan valley of Samaria; south of Scythopolis)."⁷²

⁷¹ [https://www.sefaria.org.il/Mishnah_Parah.8.8]

⁷² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Volume 36, Word Biblical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1987), p. 52. Kindle Edition.

Another striking point of the Fourth Gospel is that twice Yeshua promises his hearers that they would receive “living water” from him (John 4:10, 7:38), which is a wonderful metaphorical description of the Holy Spirit. In Jewish life, living water was the highest grade of water for purification, and was considered by the sages as cool, sweet spring water that flows continually, even in the midst of summer.

At the very least, this evidence is supportive of the proposition that Yoḥanan used spring water to splash on the repentant to purify them, but very likely did not immerse them in the channel of the Jordan river.

12. Reframing baptism in the New Testament

This essay takes a very small step in reassessing senses of the βαπτίζειν word group, as well as how those senses were used by NT authors. There is reasonable evidence that Yoḥanan actually did inaugurate the *House of Israel's* purification of Ezek 36:25. As a result, traditional ecclesiastical formulations of Christian baptism must be reassessed.⁷³

In Luke 7:29 we are told that after Yoḥanan's arrest, all the crowds following Yeshua had been baptized with Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα. For Luke, then, anyone who performed the eschatological messianic washing associated with Yoḥanan and with Yeshua had performed Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα. The Fourth Gospel makes this clear in John 3:22–24 where Yeshua and his disciples were baptizing at the same time as Yoḥanan, and we are specifically told that Yoḥanan had not yet been thrown into prison. But, at the chronologically later point, in Luke 7:29, *after Yoḥanan's arrest*, all the crowds following Yeshua are specifically said to have been baptized with “Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα.” This strongly shows that before Yoḥanan was arrested, Yeshua and his disciples also performed the same eschatological messianic washing for Israel that Yoḥanan had inaugurated. It thus makes sense that in Luke 7:30 those who refused to participate in Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα had rejected God's will, so showing that Yoḥanan's washing not merely a pious idea, but a revelation from the Almighty and endorsed by Yeshua.

All three synoptic narratives present Yeshua favorably comparing the authority of Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα with his own divinely-given authority as Israel's donkey-riding king (Mark 11:28, 30; Matt 21:23, 25; Luke 20:2, 4). This episode occurs in the week before Yeshua's Passover suffering, just eight weeks before *Shavuot* (Pentecost) in Acts 2. There are, therefore, very good reasons to agree that Yeshua's public endorsement of Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα in the Temple, to Israel's leaders, was the source of apostolic water baptism in Acts “in the name of Messiah Yeshua,” or in other words, “by the endorsing authority of Messiah Yeshua” (compare Acts 1:22). In the twin Lukan volumes of Luke-Acts there is

⁷³ Compare the Council of Trent's declarations on baptism. [<http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch7.htm>]

no command from Messiah Yeshua for a new water rite to replace Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα. Instead, the death-conquering Messiah Yeshua repeats Yoḥanan's parallelism that promises the even greater eschatological era of God's people being baptized with the Holy Spirit. In Luke-Acts, Yeshua's saying sets the stage to reveal the great contrast between water and the heavenly Holy Spirit, even though the sanctifying power of this promised Gift was not fully appreciated until the salvation of the house of Cornelius.⁷⁴

The apostolic water rite performed in the first half of Acts, then, was Israel's promised eschatological purification, and was fitting for Jews in Jerusalem on *Shavuot* (Acts 2:38), for the Samaritan Israelites (Acts 8:12–13) and for the Jewish worshiper from Ethiopia leaving Jerusalem (8:36, 38). This purification was appropriate for the synagogue ruler Crispus (1 Cor 1:14) and for Stephanas' house (1 Cor 1:16), Paul's first converts in the region (1 Cor 16:15) who likely were Jewish. But Yoḥanan's βάπτισμα, endorsed by Yeshua, was specifically for Israel and thus was not part of Paul's commission to the Nations (1 Cor 1:17). So, all apostles, including Paul, recognized Israel's eschatological rite performed in Messiah Yeshua's name, since Yeshua had participated in it and had endorsed it. But Messiah never commanded it for the nations.

Matthew 28:19 cannot be arbitrarily imposed on Acts 2:38 as Peter's source when Luke's Gospel has no analogous command, and when the Lukan "Great Commission" of Acts 1:4–8 has no hint of a new water rite. As D. Broughton Knox points out, Matthew 28:19 is a Matthean use of βαπτίζειν that has nothing to do with a water rite, but rather with foundational spiritual *transformation* of the nations. This is contrary to Christian practice that became established in the centuries after Yeshua's resurrection.⁷⁵

Beyond this, the crucial New Covenant revelation occurs in the Cornelius episode (Acts 10:1–11:18), an incident saturated with purity-labile Jewish themes. Luke narrates

⁷⁴ See Ben Keshet, "Acts 1:5 as the Guiding Paradigm for Baptism in Acts," 236–41.

⁷⁵ The text of the *Didache* explicitly takes Matthew 28:19 as a command for a water rite (*Didache* 7:2). Though the *Didache* is quite ancient, it was not considered a canonical document included among those of the New Testament by most authorities. The best that can be deduced is that in the days when the *Didache* was composed, some people thought Matthew 28:19 meant a water rite. But the *Didache* also orders the people participating in the baptismal ceremony to fast at least a day or two before the ceremony (*Didache* 7:6–7), and this is clearly an added doctrine. Acts 2:41 says of those baptized, "and there were added that day about three thousand souls." So, those involved with the *Didache* cannot be proved to have understood Matthew 28:19 correctly. Nor does the *Didache* prove that all other followers of Yeshua thought Matthew 28:19 described a water rite. Furthermore, Clayton N. Jefford, a scholar of the *Didache*, suggests that the trinitarian formula in *Didache* 7:2 may not have been in the original text, but that it may have been added by a later copyist. See Clayton N. Jefford, *Didache, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2013), p. 15.

that after only a few verses into Peter's preaching in Caesarea, the gentiles believe his word: "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." We are told the Holy Spirit "fell" on the newly faithful gentiles (vv. 43–44). Peter's Jewish companions were stunned, *ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη ἢ δωρεὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐκκέχυται*—because also upon the nations the gift of the Holy Spirit hath been poured out (Young's Literal Translation). They are not stunned that the Holy Spirit was poured out. That was fully expected for Jews who trust Yeshua, even up till then. Instead, they are stunned that this Gift has been poured out *ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη*, *on the nations*.⁷⁶ So, here in the midst of Acts, perhaps a decade after Acts 2, Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua are shown to have been very much inwardly concerned with Israel and its purity-labile Jewish culture, in accord with Ezek 36:27. Do they all promptly realize what has now happened? Unsurprisingly, no.

The widely-avowed Christian view that Peter now performs Christian baptism to join Cornelius and house to the Christian Church is simply anachronistic imposition on the text. Peter specifically mentions water (Acts 10:47), and that must be compared with Acts 1:5, because in a few verses Peter is going to do that himself. We are told in Acts 10:48 that Peter shouldered apostolic authority. First, we consider the majority text:

Προσέταξέν τε αὐτοὺς βαπτισθῆναι ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου (Acts 10:48 Byz)⁷⁷

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

This is the widely-understood import of the verse. But the critical text, and the extended sense of *βαπτίζειν* for purify, provide a different understanding of what Luke is saying.

προσέταξεν δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ βαπτισθῆναι. (Acts 10:48 UBS⁵)

So, he commanded them in the name of Messiah Yeshua *to be purified*.

Evidently, Peter thinks the gentiles must certainly also be bodily purified, just like all Jews who undergo the messianic water washing. The story does not end here, however, even if an inconvenient chapter-break added centuries later makes it look like it does. And since the Cornelius salvation occurred some ten years after Yeshua's word in Acts

⁷⁶ In light of this episode, researchers ought to consider the possibility that other passages in Acts that include *βαπτίζειν* without mentioning water also refer directly to the palpable purifying transformation of one's initial reception of the Holy Spirit, known in that early generation of Yeshua's followers, such as for Paul (Acts 9:17–18; 22:16), Lydia and house (Acts 16:15), the Jailer and house (Acts 16:33), and Crispus and the Corinthians (Acts 18:8, compare 1 Cor 12:13). The correction of Acts 19:1–7 relates specifically to palpably receiving the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁷ Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform* (Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005), 276.

1:5, it evidently took time for Peter's memory to be jolted. But Peter soon did remember, ἐμνήσθην δὲ τοῦ ῥήματος τοῦ κυρίου, and now he fully understood what had happened.

Ἰωάννης μὲν ἐβάπτισεν ὕδατι, ὑμεῖς δὲ βαπτισθήσεσθε ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ.

Yohanan purified with water, but you will be purified with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 11:16)

This is actually a *crucial* New Covenant watershed moment. The Messianic Jewish leadership of the fledgling Messianic movement following Messiah Yeshua now realized that real human purification before the Almighty comes through the eschatologically out-poured Holy Spirit, but not by the great messianic washing inaugurated by Yohanan and endorsed by Yeshua. The occurrence of this striking event in Cornelius's house, almost certainly, is why Yohanan's parallelism was eventually remembered, and why, many years later, it was recorded six times in the four NT gospels and Acts, to emphasize the astounding divine revelation in Caesarea, reported by Luke in Acts 11:16. All six records of Yohanan's parallelism contrast water and the *Holy* Spirit. For Jews of the late Second Temple, the specific description as *Holy* Spirit would signify tremendous sanctifying, *life-transforming* power, just as had been witnessed in the house of Cornelius.

Regrettably, misunderstanding has bogged down comprehension of Yohanan's parallelism, due in part to misjudging the sense of βαπτίζειν. Beyond that, it also appears that this exalted transformative revelation informs the great majority of use of βαπτίζειν and cognates in Pauline epistles, as in Romans 6, Galatians 3, Colossians 2, 1Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and is comparable with Titus 3, but that will have to be explored in a different article.