

AN EXAMINATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL AND SYNOPTIC MATERIALS

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MATERIALS
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Any investigation into the ministry of John must come to grips with the meaning and significance of the baptism he practiced. Understanding the significance of this baptism is best aided by first investigating the historical materials concerning proselyte baptism and the lustrations performed at Qumran to determine any possible correlation between John's baptism and this historical data. Second, the synoptic materials which present that baptism must be examined exegetically and theologically to determine its meaning.

An examination of the historical materials with an emphasis on the similarities and differences between John's baptism and that practiced on proselytes and on the members of Qumran reveal such striking distinctions between them that no direct dependence of John on these baptismal washings can be discerned; though John echoes similar theological motifs. An analysis of the synoptic texts indicates that the significance of John's baptism relates to both soteriological and eschatological matters. An analysis of John's prophetic preaching reveals its eschatological significance while an analysis of the statements which link baptism to repentance and the forgiveness of sin reveals the soteriological implications.

The major conclusions reached with regard to the eschatological significance is that John's baptism serves as a sign of the inbreaking kingdom of God in the person of Christ in both physical and spiritual dimensions, it serves to identify the repentant community which is delivered from the eschatological wrath, and it serves as a sign of the Messiah's future work of judgment and salvation. The major conclusion reached concerning its soteriological significance is that this baptism gave immediate outward expression in symbolic action to inward conversion/repentance which alone secured the forgiveness of sins.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity



Adviser

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick Danker, <u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</u>
<u>ET</u>	<u>Expository Times</u>
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<u>JBL</u>	<u>Journal of Biblical Literature</u>
NCB	New Century Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<u>NIDNTT</u>	<u>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</u>
NIGNT	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<u>NTS</u>	<u>New Testament Studies</u>
<u>RQ</u>	<u>Restoration Quarterly</u>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary

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INTRODUCTION

According to Mark's record, "all the country of Judea was going to him [John], and all the people of Jerusalem: and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). John as the forerunner of the Messiah had a very important ministry. The principal characteristic of this ministry was the baptism he performed. So crucial was this practice to his ministry that he became known simply as the Baptizer.

It is the purpose of this study to determine with as much exactness as possible the meaning and significance of this baptism. The procedure followed will be to first analyze the historical data pertaining to proselyte baptism and the baptismal washings at Qumran to determine what correlation can be made between John's baptism and these early baptisms. The similarities and differences will be studied to elucidate any comparisons which can be made and conclusions drawn regarding John's relationship to these practices. Next, the synoptic texts will be analyzed exegetically and theologically to discover the significance of John's baptism as presented in the Gospel materials.

Two primary factors in John's baptism are immediately noticeable in the Gospel materials, namely its eschatological orientation and its soteriological implications. The

prophetic preaching of John will be studied to determine how his baptism relates to his eschatological presentation. Then, the integration of John's baptism with repentance and the forgiveness of sins will be studied to determine its soteriological significance.

By following this procedure it will be demonstrated that John's baptism was unique, quite distinct from proselyte baptism or that practiced among the members of Qumran, though reflecting similar theological motifs. It will be shown to have had a threefold eschatological thrust; serving as sign of the inbreaking kingdom of God, serving to identify the repentant community which would be delivered from the future wrath, and serving as a sign of the Messiah's future work of judgment and salvation. It also will be demonstrated that his baptism had soteriological import by giving immediate outward expression in symbolic action to inward conversion/repentance which secured the forgiveness of sins. So as well as having eschatological importance it is a sign of personal salvation.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL BACKDROP OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

John and Proselyte Baptism

Of paramount interest in our investigation into the significance of John's baptism is the question of whether or not proselyte baptism influenced John's practice. Can it be demonstrated with any degree of confidence that proselyte baptism is historically antecedent to the ministry of John the Baptist? The pre-Christian origin of proselyte baptism is regarded by many investigators as axiomatic.¹

The Argument of Jeremias

The most persuasive argument for seeing Jewish proselyte baptism as the source for John's baptism has been

¹Such is the opinion of Emil Schurer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner, 1985), Vol. II, p. 322; Israel Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, First Series (New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1967), p. 37; Harold Henry Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," Hebrew Union College Annual 15 (1940), p. 316; T. F. Torrence, "Proselyte Baptism," NTS (1954-53), p. 154; George Herbert Marsh, The Origin and Significance of the New Testament Baptism (Manchester: Manchester University, 1941), p. 9.

put forward by Joachim Jeremias.¹ Arguing from the alleged similarities between proselyte baptism and Christian baptism he maintains proselyte baptism must have been older and influenced Christian baptism because of Jewish hostility to Christianity.² This line of argument "assumes that either Jewish proselyte baptism influenced Christian baptism or vice versa, but certainly the two rites could have developed independently of one another."³

The Historical Origin of Proselyte Baptism

An argument from silence

G. R. Beasley-Murray raises an important preliminary question: "If proselyte baptism was a universally accepted institution in Judaism before the Christian era, how are we to explain the fact that there is not one clear testimony to it in pre-Christian writings and its complete absence of mention from the writings of Philo, Josephus, and the Bible,

¹Cf. Joachim Jeremias, Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, trans. by David Cairus (London: SCM Press, 1960); The Origins of Infant Baptism: A Further Study in Reply to Kurt Asland, trans. by Dorothea M. Barton (Naperville: A. R. Allenson, 1963). Many other scholars have repeated Jeremias' views without adding substantially to his arguments or, writing independent of Jeremias, have affirmed essentially the same points. Cf., for example T. F. Torrence, "Proselyte Baptism," p. 150-154; H. H. Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," pp. 313-314; Gesa Vermes, "Baptism and Jewish Exegesis," NTS 4 (July 1958), pp. 308-319.

²Jeremias, Infant Baptism, p. 24.

³Derwood Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," RQ 25 (FQ 82), p.14.

particular the New Testament?"¹ Certainly this constitutes an argument from silence but the sheer volume of the material gives considerable force to the argument. Many scholars deny any significance to this phenomenon. Schurer, for example, speaking of Philo and Josephus, writes "No one has ever been able to point out a single passage in which those writers were necessarily called upon to mention the matter."² It is thus argued that these writers had no occasion to mention proselyte baptism. If the subject had ever arisen in their writings, they would have alluded to the rite. But this is not entirely correct. In the New Testament Paul often mentions circumcision; it is likely that if proselyte baptism was intimately connected with it he would have mentioned it also. In addition, Josephus refers to the conversion of Izates, King of Adiabene; much is said of circumcision but nothing is said about proselyte baptism.³ Perhaps even more striking is the lack of reference to proselyte baptism in the Jewish work of Joseph and Asenath, which records the

¹George R. Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1962), p. 19.

²Schurer, A History of the Jewish People, Vol. II, p. 323. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews; XX.ii.r.

³cf. S. Zeitlin, "The Halaka in the Gospels and Its Relation to the Jewish Law at the Time of Jesus," Hebrew Union College Annual 1 (1924), p. 359. Zeitlin concludes, "Had baptism at this time been required, Josephus would not be silent on this point."

conversion of the Gentile Asenath to the Jewish faith.¹ Though the account is quite detailed there is no mention of baptism. Kilpatrick believes that the book is early, possibly 100-30 B.C.,² while Kuhn doubts that the book should be placed any earlier than the first century A.D.³ In an area where proselyte baptism might be expected to flourish, it was not practiced by this group bent on proselytizing about the beginning of the Christian era.

An argument based on the uncleanness of Gentiles

Jeremias believes that the most decisive argument for the early date of proselyte baptism arises from a consideration of the uncleanness ascribed to the Gentiles. The early view among all Jews was that the levitical regulations regarding purity applied to Israel alone, so that Gentiles were not considered unclean. All that was necessary for conversion was circumcision. Jeremias argues that at the end of the first century B.C. Gentiles began to be considered

¹cf. S. West, "Joseph and Asenath: A Neglected Greek Romance," Classical Quarterly 24 (1974), pp. 70-81; V. Aptowitzer, "Asenath, the wife of Joseph: A Haggadic Literary-Historical Study," Hebrew Union College Annual 1 (1924), pp. 239-306.

²G.D. Kilpatrick, "The Last Supper," ET 64 (1952), p. 5.

³K.G. Kuhn, "Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran," Scrolls and the New Testament, ed. by K. Stendahl (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 261.

personally impure and could not be admitted into Jewish communions without a ritual of purification.¹ He refers to Eduyoth 5:1 where it is stated that "the blood of a gentile woman... the School of Shammai declare unclean" and to Niddah 4:3, where it is written "The blood of a gentile woman ... the School of Shammai declares clean, but the School of Hillel say: It is like to her spittle or her urine." From these statements Jeremias concludes that the Hillelites considered a gentile woman to possess the permanent impurity of a menstruous woman. He then proceeds to date these pronouncements on the basis of the following considerations. Tosefta Yoma 4:20 relates how a high priest became unclean when spat upon by an Arab. The Arab is unclean because he is made that way by his wife who is continually in the unclean state of a menstruous woman. The high priest involved - Simeon, the son of Kamithes - was in office in 17-18 A.D. So by this time the Gentiles are unclean. He asserts,

What we have said shows with certainty that proselyte baptism reaches back to pre-Christian times; for in that moment in which it was acknowledged that the Gentiles were impure, the necessity of a bath of purification on conversion was admitted.²

¹In Schurer's judgment this simple observation is sufficient to scatter all objections. He writes, "This general consideration is of itself so conclusive that there is no need to lay any very great stress upon individual testimonies." Schurer, A History of the Jewish People, Vol. II, p. 322.

²Jeremias, Infant Baptism, p. 26.

This argumentation falters on two grounds. First, it is not at all clear that by A.D. 18 the Gentile was generally considered in Judaism to be unclean. Our knowledge of Gentile uncleanness in this early period is very uncertain. It must be admitted that Tosefta Yoma 4:20 and some New Testament passages (Jn. 18:28; Acts 10:28; 11:12) imply a type of uncleanness to the Gentiles. However, these testimonies must be balanced by statements such as Pesahim 92a, where it is stated by the Hillelites - and not opposed by the Shammaites - that the Gentile is unsusceptible to uncleanness. On the strength of this Daube is convinced that proselyte baptism was outside the levitical sphere. He writes, "Pagans were not susceptible of levitical uncleanness, so in principle there was simply no room for purification."¹ Perhaps there were parts of Judaism in which the Gentile was thought to be unclean, but such ideas were not universal.² Or it may be that there were different kinds of uncleanness attributed to a Jew and to a Gentile. Beasley-Murray writes,

I can see no solution to this problem other than postulating a distinction between the uncleanness to which the Jew is susceptible and the uncleanness of the Gentile... On this basis it would be possible to maintain that, in the case mentioned by Jeremias, the Arab was unclean under one category (as a Gentile) and that through him the High Priest was rendered unclean under another (as a Jew, susceptible to levitical laws).³

¹David Daube, The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism (New York: Arno, 1973), p. 107.

²Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," p. 17.

³Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 21, n.2.

A second problem with Jeremias' argument is that it fails to give due consideration to the method by which a gentile, once he is unclean, might be purified. It does not necessarily follow that once the Gentile is reckoned unclean proselyte baptism immediately becomes the only means of purification.¹ The matter of Gentile uncleanness and the manner of its removal are in reality two separate questions, and as to time of origin, not to be related to one another as cause and effect. In the Joseph and Asenath story, Joseph refuses to kiss Asenath because she was unclean, but on conversion she is cleansed and purified without proselyte baptism.

Historical references

Jeremias believes that the earliest reference to proselyte baptism occurs in Test. Levi 14:6.

Out of covetousness you will teach the commandments of the Lord; wedded women you will pollute, and the virgins of Jerusalem you will defile; and with harlots and adulteresses you will be joined, and the daughters of the Gentiles you will take to wife, purifying them with an unlawful purification.

Jeremias interprets the last clause as a reference to proselyte baptism and dates it at the close of the first century B.C.² The problem is that no two scholars seem to agree on

¹Smith, "Proselyte Baptism," p. 18. G. F. Moore separated proselyte baptism from Levitical cleansing. George Foot Moore, Judaism: In the First Centuries of the Christian Era, reprint (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp.332-335.

²Jeremias, Infant Baptism, p. 26.

the interpretation of the relevant clause. Charles thinks that it may refer to lay observance of customary purifications or that it is a declaration that any purification is unlawful.¹ Zeitlin relates it to the purification after the menses.² In addition, most scholars place the book in the second century B.C.³ "The great uncertainty with regard to the dating of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in general and the Aramaic fragment of Testament Levi 14:6 in particular renders it inadvisable to base any crucial argument on this passage."⁴

The first clear references to proselyte baptism belong to the first century A.D. Epictetus at the end of the century makes mention of baptism as a distinguishing feature of the convert to Judaism.⁵ The Sibylline Oracles IV 163-167 is believed by most to refer to proselyte baptism. The date of the text is well established at about 80 A.D.⁶ In the Mishnah

¹Robert Henry Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. II, p. 313.

²Zeitlin, "A Note on Baptism for Proselytes," JBL 52 (1933), p. 78.

³cf. the list provided in Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 23, n.1.

⁴Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," p. 19.

⁵Epictetus, Dissert, II. 9.9-21.

⁶cf. N.A. Dahl, "The Origin of Baptism." Norsk Thelogisk Tidsskrift 56 (1955), p. 41; Charles, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, II, p. 373.

a discussion is recorded as having taken place between R. Eliezar, a Shammite, and R. Jehoshua, a Hillelite, as to the importance of circumcision and baptism.¹ This controversy cannot be earlier than the end of the first century A.D.² Pesachim 8 is generally regarded as the earliest reference to proselyte baptism.

R. Eleazar b. Jacob says: Soldiers were guards of the gates in Jerusalem; they were baptized and ate their Paschal lambs in the evening.

Abrahams views this piece of evidence particularly weighty in view of the fact that Eleazar ben Jacob the Elder was one of the most trustworthy reporters of Temple events and rites. That this took place around A.D. 67 is commonly accepted.³ This last datum still leaves us without evidence that proselyte baptism took place half a century earlier but it does greatly enhance the possibility. Beasley-Murray observes, "It would be unreasonable to suggest that these men were the first proselytes to receive baptism; an established custom is being observed."⁴ Since new ideas take time to win approval it is somewhat unlikely that proselyte baptism

¹Yebamoth 46a-47b.

²cf. T. M. Taylor, "The Beginning of Jewish Proselyte Baptism" NTS 2 (1955-56), p. 195.

³Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, p. 37.

⁴Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, pp. 24-25.

should suddenly have sprung into being and gained instant recognition in all Israel and the Dispersion. It is therefore possible, if not probable, that Jewish proselyte baptism was practiced at the time John began his ministry. However, the questions regarding how much earlier than John the practice can be dated, and more pertinently, how widespread it was, cannot be answered with any degree of certainty.

Similarities and Differences Between John's Baptism and Proselyte Baptism

We must look to other lines of evidence to answer the question of whether the Jewish rite exercised a dominant influence over John's baptism. Are the similarities in terminology, accompanying procedures, mode of administration, and theology sufficient to justify the conclusion that John was influenced by the Jewish practice?

Baptismal terminology and procedures

There is no direct connection between the baptismal terminology of the New Testament and that used of proselyte baptism. The verb βαπτίζω along with the related nouns βαπτισμός and βαπτίζειν stem from the central background of Jewish washings.¹ Beasley-Murray observes, "The group of

¹ βαπτισμός in Mark 7:4 is used to refer to ordinary Jewish washings.

words connected with βαπτίζεῖν reflect contemporary terminology used of lustrations of all kinds practiced among the Jews."¹ There are some parallels to be observed between the baptismal rites and catechetical instruction of Christian baptism in the early church and those observed in proselyte baptism.² However, the Christian sources from which these parallels are derived - the Didache and Hippolytus belong to the second and third centuries A.D. In addition many of these regulations are general regulations for Jewish lustrations and could have later influenced Christian baptism without involving the intermediate step of proselyte baptism.³ There is certainly no indication that John was influenced by such procedures.

Theological similarity

The basic connection between John's baptism and proselyte baptism is probably to be found in Jewish conversion theology. The view that conversion from heathenism to Judaism implies a new life is clearly attested in the

¹Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 27.

²Ibid, pp. 25-28.

³Smith, "Proselyte Baptism," p. 23.

Talmud.¹ Undoubtedly the thought of ritual and ceremonial purification was present in John's baptism as it was in proselyte baptism, but we need not think of John as deriving his theology of baptism from Judaism.

Theological differences

It is significant to note that John baptized Jews while proselyte baptism was administered to Gentiles. It is sometimes argued from Matthew 3:8,9 and Luke 3:8 that John believed that the entire nation of Israel had become unfaithful and was to be regarded as Gentile.² But those texts in no way imply that John made such a connection. Also, in contrast to proselyte baptism, John's baptism had a prominent eschatological thrust.³

¹Pesahim 91b reads, "One who separates himself from his uncircumcision is like one who separates himself from the grave." Also Yehamoth 48b states, "One who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born."

²cf. William F. Flemington, New Testament Doctrine of Baptism (London: SPCK, 1948), p. 16.

³Anderson observes that proselyte baptism "could hardly have been the source of derivation of his baptism, since: (a) John's baptism was administered to Jews, not outsiders, and it came as an initiation to a truly purified and refined Judaism; (b) as we gather from the longer accounts of the content of the Baptist's preaching from Q in Mt. 3:7-12 and Lk. 3:4-9, it was directly connected with the imminent coming of God in judgment." Hugh Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, NCB (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), p. 71.

Conclusion

What significance then did proselyte baptism have for John? There is no evidence that John directly borrowed forms and procedures. Though it is not unlikely that John utilized similar cultural forms. This however is of secondary importance when compared to the theological considerations. The basic connection between the two baptisms is to be understood in terms of a basic theological motif. Proselyte baptism symbolically pointed to the termination of one's relationship to pagan society and the beginning of a new relationship to the God of Israel. It appears that John developed this basic theological contention within his own unique religious framework, bringing over the concept of symbolical purification/consecration into his own rite. It should be noted that both baptisms are set against the backdrop of the extensive use of water in the Old Testament for ceremonial cleansings from defilement. The significance of proselyte baptism is not that it forms the basis for John's baptism but that it shows that John did not minister in a vacuum. It demonstrates that the Jewish mindset to which John ministered was theologically prepared to view baptism as a symbolical rite signifying purification. This understanding is pertinent in coming to grips with the soteriological implications of John's baptism.

John and Qumran

Since the discovery of an Essene center at Kherbet Qumran in the Judean wilderness many scholars have come to understand John the Baptist in light of Qumran, postulating that he spent some time there.¹ It's interesting that both John and the Qumran community appealed to Isaiah 40:3 to explain their presence in the wilderness. In the Manual of Discipline it is said of the initiates who have completed their period of probation:

And when these become members of the Community in Israel according to all these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of ungodly men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare the way of Him; as it is written, Prepare in the wilderness the way of ... make straight in the desert a path for our God (Isa. XL, 3). This (path) is the study of the law which He commended by the hand of Moses, that they may do according to all that has been revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit (1QS 8:13-16).²

¹cf. J.A.T. Robinson, "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community," Harvard Theological Review 50 (July, 1957), pp. 175-191; W.H. Brownlee, "John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls," in The Scrolls and the New Testament, ed. K. Stendahl (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 33-53; John Pryke, "John the Baptist and the Qumran Community," Revue De Qumran 4 (April, 1964), pp. 483-496.

²Translation from Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (New York: Heritage Press, 1962), p. 66.

W.H. Brownlee remarks,

This particular stretch of wilderness was chosen, rather than the wilderness of Sinai, because Is. 40:3 used words for wilderness which sometimes designated the basin of the Dead Sea (arabah), or even specifically a district west of this lake (midbar as in Josh. 15:61 and II Chron. 26:10) Here would the Lord's glory be revealed in the work of the Messiah. The study and practice of the Law and Prophets would bring in this glad day.¹

Similarities Between John and Qumran

General similarities

The members of the community went out into the desert "with the intention of entering into the new covenant of the last days and of preparing for the advent of the kingdom of God."² A study of the Qumran materials will reveal similarities with John the Baptist in their apocalyptic imagery, their appreciation for the Biblical traditions centering in the wilderness, their rejection of the conventional religion of the times, and their strong Messianic expectations. Such similarities, however, by no means prove that John was an Essene or, for that matter, had any connections with the Essenes at Qumran.³ The differences are far more striking

¹Brownlee, "John the Baptist," p. 35.

²Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 13.

³F.M. Cross has observed, "It seems methodologically dubious to argue on the basis of John's desert life that he was at one time associated with the desert community of Qumran." Frank Moore Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 204.

than the similarities. This is particularly true with regard to baptism.

Similarities in connection with baptism

Baptismal rites were practiced among the Covenanters at Qumran and many find the historical origins of John's baptism in these rites. There are, indeed, some similarities to John. At Qumran repentance and entrance into the new covenant were associated with baptismal ceremonials. The Manual of Discipline reads,

He cannot purify himself by atonement, nor cleanse himself by water of purification, nor sanctify himself in streams and rivers, nor cleanse himself by any water of ablution. Unclean, unclean he is, as long as he rejects the statutes of God, so that he cannot be instructed within the community of His council. For it is by the spirit of God's true council that the ways of man, all his sins are atoned, so that he can behold the light of life. It is by the holy spirit of the community in His truth that he can be cleansed from all his sins. It is by an upright and humble spirit that his sin can be atoned. It is by humiliating himself under all God's ordinances, that his flesh can be cleansed, by sprinkling with water of purification, and by sanctifying himself with water of purity. May he establish his steps for walking in perfection in all God's way, as He commanded at the fixed time of His revealing (them), without turning aside, to the right or to the left, and without walking contrary to a single one of all His words. Then he will be accepted by an agreeable atonement before God, and it shall be unto him a covenant of everlasting community.¹ (1QS 3:4-12; cf. 5:13f).

¹Translation from P. Wernberg-Møller, The Manual of Discipline (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), pp. 24,25.

Also, confession of sins was involved in the Qumran lustrations in preparation for a coming divine judgment (1QS 1:24f; 5:13). And like Johannine baptism "the entire setting of Qumran repentance and involvement into the New Israel is eschatological."¹ To this should be added that the stress on moral demand, like John, was a dominant motif of their teaching. Clearly, the "waters of purification" were of themselves powerless to cleanse the impenitent. It is "by the holy spirit"² and obedience to the commands of God "that his flesh can be cleansed." Beasley Murray notes,

Here is a striking example of the Jewish ability to distinguish between 'outward and visible' and 'inward and spiritual,' the ritual and the moral, flesh and spirit, yet a refusal to separate them. Water cannot cleanse the rebellious spirit, but submission to the ordinances of God can cleanse the flesh."³

¹Matthew Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins: Studies in the Jewish Background of the New Testament (London: T. Nelson, 1961), p. 97.

²In the passage cited above "the holy spirit" is apparently synonymous with the "upright and humble spirit" in the following sentence, and is replaced by "himself" in that which succeeds it.

³Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 14. Fitzmyer who finds the ritual washing of the Qumran Essenes a "plausible explanation" for John's baptism writes, "It was useless to 'enter the water' (i.e. partake in Essene ritual washing as a member of the community) unless one were willing to turn from evil doing." Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke (1-1X), AB (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1981), p. 460.

The Differences Between John's Baptism and the Baptism of Qumran

While we recognize that such similarities as these do exist, it is important to observe that there are also striking differences. As Johnson aptly remarks, "to consider him an Essene, or to suppose that he had been trained by them, is to force the evidence."¹

The very nature of the Qumran lustrations are by no means certain. Such passages as IQS 2:25-3:12; 3:4-7; 5:8-23 seems to suggest that the first ablution of the initiate was more than simply a first bath; it apparently signified entrance into the company of the purified.² F.M. Cross maintains that they repeated the initiatory rite of baptism at the yearly ceremony of covenant renewal.³ In addition,

¹Sherman E. Johnson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark, HNTC (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 36.

²cf. Brownlee, "John the Baptist," pp. 38f; Oscar Cullmann, "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity," in The Scrolls and the New Testament, ed. Stendahl, p. 21; Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran, p. 234; Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the new Testament, p. 17. H.H. Rowley, however, maintains that there is no clear statement that a first ablution had the character of an initiatory rite, although he does concede that this first admission to the ablutions of the sect in the water reserved for the members did have a special character. cf. Harold Henry Rowley "The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect," in the New Testament Essays, Studies in Memory of T.W. Manson, ed. by A.J.B. Higgins (Manchester: University Press, 1959), pp. 219-223.

³Cross, The Ancient Library of Qumran, p. 234.

"it is fairly clear that in Qumran the washing was not an unrepeatable occurrence, which marked admission into the fellowship, but was a daily routine."¹ Josephus conveys the impression that the baths of the Essenes were taken not once daily, as is commonly assumed, but at least three times per day: following the passage of a stool, before the midday meal and before the evening meal.² In light of the nature of these ritual washings "it is questionable whether the term 'baptism' should be used for the ritual of water purification either at Qumran or among the Essenes."³

Whatever the exact nature of the ablutions at Qumran it is quite obvious that they do not appear to have had the decisive character that marked the baptism of John. One entered the Qumran community primarily by taking vows and renewing the covenant, while the central fact remembered about John was that he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.⁴ Unlike the repeated rituals at

¹Helen Ringgreen, The Faith of Qumran, Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Trans. by E.T. Sander (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 245.

²Wars of the Jews, II, 8.5,9.

³William S. LaSor, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972), p. 150.

⁴cf. Shermom Johnson, St. Mark, p. 36. The New Covenant at Qumran was simply a renewal of the Old Covenant and had little more in common with the New Covenant of Christianity than its name. cf. Matthew Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins, p. 97.

Qumran which were directed chiefly toward ceremonial cleanliness John's baptism which was closely linked with the forgiveness of sins, was a once-for-all act having distinct eschatological import in light of the coming Messiah. The Baptism that John practiced was such a unique activity of the prophet that he became known simply as "the Baptizer." In addition, the ritual washings at Qumran had a much narrower application. Hugh Anderson perceptively comments, "The ritual of baptism at Qumran was monopolised by those members of a separatist group who had withdrawn into a monastic life and regarded themselves as the elect. John's baptism was for all and carried the appeal to all to be ready against God's day."¹ On the basis of such striking differences Pfeiffer concludes. "The Qumran water purifications have more in common with the 'washing of hands' in Matthew 15 than they do with Christian baptism"²

Conclusion

Though there are similarities between John and Qumran the differences are so extensive (especially as regards baptism), that it makes the possibility of contact

¹Hugh Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, NCB (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), p. 71.

²Charles F. Pfeiffer, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 55.

unimportant.¹ W. Lane declares, "If the Baptist was ever associated with the community he broke with its tradition and found his destiny along wholly different lines. His mission was shaped by the summons of God which came to him in the wilderness."² John, as the last of the Old Testament prophets, did not need to borrow, adopt, or modify the teachings and practices of Qumran, or for that matter, any other Jewish sect. He no doubt received his message in typical prophetic tradition. The significance of Qumran lies not in its relationship to John but to the community to which he ministered. The cultural-religious climate of Qumran may have served as a bridge for John. In this sense the Covenanters prepared the Way of the Lord better than they knew - by preparing the way for the forerunner.

¹LaSor remarks that "the prophetic spirit of John the Baptist-which was recognized by his contemporaries, including Herod, the Pharisees, and the people, if we can put any confidence at all in the only extant records we have about John-would be sufficient to account for him and for all that he did." LaSor, The Dead Sea Scrolls, pp. 152-53.

²William Lane, The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), p. 48.

A Summary Statement

The historical origins of proselyte baptism are questionable though it is likely to have been practiced to some degree during the time of John. The differences in administration and theological significance make it unlikely that John is depending upon proselyte baptism. However, there is a link between John's baptism and Jewish conversion theology which finds its connection in the motif of symbolical purification. The people would have been religiously and culturally prepared to accept the symbolical nature of John's baptism.

There is no evidence that John spent any time with the religious community at Qumran. The differences between John's baptism and the washings at Qumran are so striking that John's baptism must be understood along different lines. Nevertheless such similarities as found in the eschatological nature of both baptisms as well as the emphasis on repentance, confession of sin, and moral consequences are significant. Qumran served well as a cultural and theological bridge for John since the theological motifs conveyed in John's baptism would not have been completely new.

CHAPTER II

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

The baptism of John can only be understood in connection with his overall ministry. To understand the eschatological significance of his baptism one must first understand the historical and literary setting of John as well as the nature and meaning of his preaching.

The Historical and Literary Setting of John:

The Wilderness

The Old Testament Context for John's Ministry

Isaiah 40:3-5

It's historical significance

All three of the synoptics interpret the mission and message of the Baptist in terms of the wilderness prophet predicted in Isaiah 40:3-5 (Matt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4-6). Historically and contextually the Isaiah passage is addressed to the people of Israel to make the way of the Lord ready. The coming of the Lord is the theme, which is a central concept in Old Testament eschatology. The Lord is again visiting his people; not in judgment but in blessing. The wilderness

setting is exegetically significant. It was through the desert that God led Israel, redeeming them out of the shackles of Egyptian bondage. Undoubtedly, this historical Exodus serves as the backdrop for Isaiah's announcement of a second Exodus which will be marked by the coming of the Lord.

Luke goes on to quote Isaiah 40:4-5 whereas Matthew and Mark allude only to 40:3.¹ Verse 4 explains how the way is to be prepared. Whenever a deep obstructing valley is encountered it is to be raised so that it will be level with the rest of the road. Likewise, whenever a mountain or hill is encountered, it is to be brought low so that it is no longer an obstacle. In like manner the steep places will be leveled and the jagged, rough places shall be smoothed. The imagery here pictures the servants of a king who would smooth out and straighten the road in preparation

¹This is in keeping with Luke's theological aim to present the story in its total sweep. Mark's citation is a composite quotation from Ex. 23:20, Mal. 3:1 and Isa. 40:3; passages which convey the image of the forerunner Elijah. "The blended citation functions to draw attention to three factors which are significant to the evangelist in the prologue: the herald, the Lord, and the wilderness. In the verses which immediately follow, the significance of each of these elements is emphasized by Mark, who sees in the coming of John and Jesus to the wilderness the fulfillment of the promised salvation of which the prophet Isaiah had spoken." Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, pp. 40-41. Mark's real interest centered in the Isaiah prophesy as the fundamental primer for understanding the nature of John's ministry. Mark with added force is drawing attention to the preparatory ministry of John as the forerunner of the Messiah.

for their sovereign's arrival. Isaiah employs a variety of figures calling for the removal of obstacles and hindrances so that all will be ready for the Lord when He comes. In a somewhat veiled way Isaiah is calling for repentance.

The passage would have had immediate application to Israel's historical situation. The implication here is that the Lord was to return to Jerusalem through the desert route by which the exiles would return from Babylon, and that a fitting preparation for His advent would be the removal of obstacles and the construction of a highway. Hendriksen observes that this imagery "symbolically pictures the approach of Jehovah for the purpose of leading the procession of Jews who will be returning joyfully to their homeland after long years of captivity."¹

It's application to John as the eschatological forerunner

Not to deny this historical meaning, Isaiah 40:5 sets the whole passage in an eschatological context and relates it ultimately to the preparation which will culminate in the Messianic Kingdom. The "glory of the Lord" revealed in Cyrus' liberation of the exiles from captivity in no way exhausts the full eschatological impact of the passage. The

¹William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 198.

promise is too extensive to be fully verified in that event or period of history. With the destruction of the Temple under Nebuchadnezzar the glory would depart from Jerusalem; but with the coming of the Lord there would be a reversal of the situation. It is this eschatological coming that is primarily in view. The generic nature of the Isaianic passage and its distinct eschatological emphasis made it admirably suitable to describe the activity of John.¹ The Evangelists, realizing the connection, appropriately used the prophecy to expound John's role as herald.² As the forerunner of the Messiah he sought to remove the obstacles in the hearts of the children of Israel preparing them for the coming of the Messiah.

¹It is interesting that Luke used the term "salvation" (σωτηρία) rather than "glory" (δόξα). This may stem from Luke's desire to apply the passage specifically to the immediate situation introduced with John's appearance. The fulfillment motif in Luke has a strong emphasis on the Gentile's share in the kingdom. The promise of future salvation found in the latter half of the book of Isaiah is the proper context for understanding the gospel.

²John was a major step toward the final realization of the prophecy, but John did not exhaust its meaning. The preparation cannot be final until the Lord's climactic advent to restore Israel and establish the Davidic kingdom.

The Historical Context of John's Ministry

The place of John's ministry

It is in keeping with John's own understanding of his role as forerunner (cf. John 1:23) that he centered his ministry in the wilderness of Judea (Matt. 3:1). The wilderness is a rugged area west of the Jordan extending upward toward Jerusalem. It is a region of rugged gorges and arid wasteland. In ancient times it was infested with wild animals.¹ The wilderness setting is in keeping with the Isaianic perspective on the forerunner who will appear in the wilderness.² Israel's birth as a nation occurred in the wilderness therefore it is not striking that the call to renew sonship in light of the nearness of the kingdom would occur in the wilderness as well. The nation is called into the wilderness in preparation for a new covenant with God. The call to repentance is deeply rooted in the wilderness tradition. The wilderness was the site for many

¹Charles F. Pfeiffer, Baker's Bible Atlas, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), p. 201.

²Luke does not particularly stress this wilderness motif as Matthew and Mark. It's significant that he designates the area of John's proclamation as "the district around the Jordan" (περίχωρον τοῦ Ἰορδάνου) rather than "wilderness" (ἐρήμω) and he does not include a description of John's appearance or diet.

powerful calls to spiritual renewal uttered by the prophets to a sin-laden nation. "They return to a place of judgment, the wilderness, where the status of Israel as God's beloved Son must be re-established in the exchange of pride for humility."¹

John's appearance and diet

Both Matthew and Mark emphasize this wilderness motif by describing John as a wilderness prophet. McNeile notes, "The description (absent from Luke) of his person; ascetic and prophetic, is thus made to carry on the thought of the prophecy, 'a voice of one crying in the wilderness.'"² John appears in wilderness garb clothed in a garment of rough camel hair with a leather belt about his waist eating locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6).³ John's

¹Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 50.

²Alan Hugh McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: MacMillan and Co., n.d.), p. 21.

³According to Leviticus 11:22 four kinds of locusts were allowed for food. The wild honey referred to was no doubt the honey produced by wild bees which was so common in these regions. Such honey was not deposited "in hives under human care, but in hallow trees and rocky recesses of the wilderness (cf. Deut. 32:13; I Sam. 14:25)." D. Edmond Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of the Servant (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 34. Both his diet and dress are familiar to the wilderness nomad and characterize life in the desert. See C.H. Kraeling, John the Baptist (New Haven, 1951), pp. 10f., 14f.,

material garb was very similar to that of the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:18) and was thus well suited to his office. It is very possible that John even consciously took Elijah as his model. Plummer observes the parallel, "There is the same rough garb and ascetic life, the same isolation from society and fearlessness towards it, the same readiness to rebuke kings or multitudes ... The lives of both prophets are a protest against the contemporary society."¹

The Significance of John's Wilderness Ministry

This emphasis on John's wilderness ministry as seen in the application of Isaiah 40:3-5 to him as forerunner, the wilderness setting as well as the description of his appearance and diet serve to demonstrate the eschatological nature of his ministry. As the wilderness forerunner he is calling Israel to spiritual renewal in light of the salvation which the Messiah will inaugurate. In keeping with his function as the wilderness prophet who prepares the way for the Messiah his baptism must have eschatological impact. The eschatological significance of this baptism will become clear once the significance of his eschatological preaching is understood.

¹Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, reprint (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, n.d.), p. 27.

The Eschatological Preaching of John

The dramatic appearance of John the Baptist on the stage of Jewish history created a wave of excitement throughout Palestine. John's thundering proclamations brought an end to more than four hundred years of prophetic silence. Without question his arrival and ministry marked "an eschatological event of the first magnitude."¹ "Now in those days John the Baptist² came preaching" (Matt. 3:1a). All three synoptics employ the present participial form of κηρύσσω to denote the characteristic activity of John.³ John was functioning as a herald, proclaiming truth in keeping with his role as a forerunner.⁴ The word was

¹Lane, The Gospel According to Mark, p. 47.

²John is simply identified as "the Baptist" (ὁ βαπτιστῆς) by Matthew where as in Mark the present participle is used (βαπτίζων) emphasizing his repeated action in baptizing and is correctly rendered in RSV "the baptizer."

³The absence in Matthew (followed by Mark) of any historical background may indicate that such historical information was unnecessary since by this time the early church would have been quite familiar with his person and role. It may reflect as well, that the theological concern of the Evangelist was not with the Baptist's history in itself but only with John's place vis-a-vis Jesus in the presentation and spread of the gospel.

⁴κηρύσσω means "to proclaim after the manner of a herald; always with a suggestion of formality, gravity, and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed." Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 346.

employed "in a military sense of the herald who stepped out before the army to make an important announcement."¹

John's Proclamation of Repentance

The core of John's message is concisely captured by Matthew: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 3:2). The eschatological nature of John's preaching is first seen in his emphasis on repentance. This call to repentance is set against a rich background in the Old Testament. Hill remarks, "From the time of Jeremiah, the root šûb, which best represents the meaning of 'repent' in the N.T. is closely connected with the covenant, and indicates a deliberate turning or returning: the term designates the return of Israel to Yahweh, i.e. to the covenant established between God and his people."² The summons to 'turn' basically connotes a return to the original relationship with the Lord. This "Presupposes that the relationship of the people and of the individual

¹Ralph Earle, The Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), p. 28.

²David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), p. 90.

to God must be understood in personal terms, sin and apostasy disturb and break this personal relationship."¹ This thought of turning around as expressed by the Hebrew verb šûb is rendered by ἐπιστρέφω in the LXX (cf. Amos. 4:6, Hos. 5:4; 6:1). The change from ἐπιστρέφω to μετανοέω in the New Testament to express the Hebrew šûb "shows that the NT does not stress the concrete, physical concept implied in the OT use of šûb, but rather the thought, the will, the nous."² The New Testament emphasis is on the decision by the whole man to turn around. μετανοέω has to do with a change of ones mind and purpose.³ It indicates "a complete change of attitude, spiritual and moral, towards God."⁴ μετανοέω may include the idea of sorrow, but the sorrow is the by-product not the repentance itself.⁵ Repentance involves "a reversal of ones whole course of life, a complete

¹NIDNTT, s.v. "μετάνοια," by Jurgen Goetzmann, 1:357.

²Ibid, p. 357.

³Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), p. 287.

⁴Moulton and Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1930), p. 403.

⁵Stanley D. Toussaint, Behold the King, A Study of Matthew (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 60.

change of direction."¹ This complete re-direction has distinct moral and ethical overtones. According to Fitzmyer "when used in a religious sense, it connotes 'conversion, reform of life.'"² This "conversion" had radical consequences in the moral life. In the train of the Old Testament prophets John is calling Israel to turn back to God.³

John's Proclamation of the Kingdom

The eschatological nature of John's preaching is also seen in his proclamation of the kingdom which is vitally connected to his emphasis on repentance. That judgment would precede the kingdom was a major theme of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Ezek. 20:34-38; Mal. 3; Zech. 13:8-9). John's call to repent was an urgent call since the kingdom of heaven was at hand.⁴ Without denying individual repentance

¹Francis W. Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew: A Commentary (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 89.

²Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX), p. 459.

³Meier denies the historicity of John's proclamation viewing it more as the product of the theological creativity of the Evangelist. According to Meier Matthew's concern for eschatological morality "is so powerful that he coopts the Baptist as a preacher of Christian repentance by placing the words of Jesus in John's mouth." John Meier, "John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel," JBL 99 (May, 1980): 383-405.

⁴For contemporary Jewish thinking around the time of John, on the place of repentance as a necessary preliminary to the kingdom see Adolf Buchler, Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic literature of the First Century, (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

which is necessary for personal salvation John's message had distinct eschatological overtone intended to culminate and climax in Israel's national salvation.¹ Israel's hope is characteristically eschatological. John "is the prophet of God's eschatological hour. Men are to turn from their sins because the kingdom of God is near."² John is an eschatological figure whose activity sets in motion the process that shall culminate in the judgment and redemption of the Messiah.

The nature of the kingdom

Of particular significance is the nature of the kingdom John proclaimed. Hendriksen considers the phrase "kingdom of heaven" to mean "God's kingship, rule, or sovereignty, recognized in the hearts and operative in the lives of people."³ In a similar vein Lenski writes, "Jesus was approaching and by the revelation of himself with power and grace as the Messiah and by the completion of his redemptive work he would stand forth as the king of salvation from heaven and would by faith enter into the hearts of men,

¹see S. Lewis Johnson, "The Message of John the Baptist," Bibliotheca Sacra 113 (January, 1956):30-36.

²Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, trans. by D.E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), p. 47.

³Hendriksen, The Gospel According to Matthew, p. 196.

making them partakers of his kingdom."¹ While the above is true any interpretation which limits the "kingdom of heaven" to the sovereign rule of God in the heart has not come to grips with John's eschatological emphasis. It is primarily the final manifestation of the kingdom through Messiah that is in view; the prophetic age to come when the prospect of righteousness and bliss will be realized.

Several arguments can be given in support of this position.

First, John as well as Christ made no explanation of the kingdom they proclaimed. Since the characteristics of the kingdom were clearly revealed in the Old Testament any explanation would be unnecessary to those whose minds were saturated with Old Testament Scripture; nor does Matthew add any word of explanation. Beare observes, "Matthew does not feel it necessary to explain what 'the kingdom of heaven' means, for he knows that his readers, like the hearers of John's preaching, are well acquainted with the expression."²

Second, the disciples themselves conceived of an earthly kingdom in light of the Old Testament prophecies

¹R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus. The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 95.

²Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew, p. 89.

and Christ's own teaching (Matt. 20:20-21; Acts. 1:6). Certainly Christ would have corrected their misunderstanding had their notions been wrong. Toussaint remarks,

The request of Matthew 20 could be explained as a mistaken notion if it were made early in the disciples career. However, this request is made after they heard the doctrine of the kingdom as taught by the Lord for many months. In fact, they were the very disciples whom the Lord had pronounced blessed because of their insight into the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 13:11-17).¹

Third, John announces that the kingdom is "at hand." The verb ἐγγίζω means to "approach, come near"² and is used here with regard to the approaching kingdom. The perfect tense (ἤγγικεν) emphasizes that the kingdom had drawn near in the person of the king and was presently in a state or condition of nearness. According to Hill, to say that it is "at hand" is to say "that decisive establishment or manifestation of the divine sovereignty has drawn so near to men that they are now confronted with the possibility and the ineluctable necessity of repentance and conversion."³ Johnson writes,

The Mediatorial kingdom promised in the Old Testament, while not here is near. The perfect tense, with its indication of an action in the past with present continuing results, points to the approach of the kingdom in the approach of the king. He is now here, and therefore the kingdom is now near. The only question is the attitude of the nation to him.⁴

¹Toussaint, Behold the King, p. 62.

²BAGD, p. 213.

³Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 90.

⁴Johnson, "The Message of John the Baptist," p. 35.

It is this nearness that lends urgency to the summons to repent as a prerequisite to enter the kingdom. "For all the hope and glory that it may hold for Israel, it will be a fearful day of reckoning for all who have been unfaithful and disobedient."¹

A final argument in support of this position is the initial restricted application of the kingdom proclamation. The institution of the kingdom was contingent upon its reception by the nation of Israel. Thus in presenting the kingdom Christ restricted the kingdom message to that nation (Matt. 10:5-6). This deliberately imposed limitation on the scope of the message suggests strongly that the earthly aspect is being emphasized.

Objections to the earthly aspect of the kingdom

This concept of the kingdom and its offer to Israel is sometimes objected to on the basis that it minimizes the cross relegating it to a secondary purpose. This presents no problem, however, if it is understood that in light of such passages as Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 the substitutionary death of the Messiah becomes a necessary preliminary to the establishment of the kingdom.² Theologically, it would be difficult to postulate a righteous kingdom apart from a completed redemption. Christ was offering the kingdom by way of the cross. Nor does this concept of the kingdom

¹Beare, The Gospel According to Matthew, p. 89.

²cf. Toussaint, Behold the King, p. 64.

offer and rejection make God's program with the church a mere afterthought.

The spiritual dimension of the kingdom

The kingdom announced involved the inbreaking of the rule of God in the person of Christ in both physical and spiritual aspects. Physical, in that the kingdom is being offered to Israel; spiritual, in that through the cross a complete redemption would be secured. When it becomes clear that there will be a delay in the establishment of the earthly kingdom due to Israel's unbelief (Matt. 11:20-24; 12:22-45) the emphasis of kingdom proclamation shifts from the earthly, Davidic aspect to the spiritual ecclesial aspect. Upon Israel's rejection of Him Jesus begins to focus on the present aspect of the kingdom and the new form in which it will be manifested (Lk. 11:20; 17:21; Matt. 13:24-52). This new emphasis does not annul the earthly dimension nor does it distract from Israel's future hope since the kingdom as prophesied in the Old Testament is based on unconditional promises (Gen. 12:1-7; 2 Sam. 7; Jer. 31:27-40).¹ Jesus

¹The Lord, following his official rejection as Messiah, anticipates the establishment of a new covenant people, the church (Matt. 16:18; 21:42, 43; 26:26-28). The church forms the present ecclesial/spiritual dimension of the kingdom program which is based on covenant relationship (Heb. 8:6-13). The church does not become the New Israel, but it does mark a new phase; a distinct advancement and development in the kingdom program stemming from the redemption secured through Christ. The church does not fulfill the covenant promises given to Israel but in light of the church's involvement in the new covenant the church becomes the inheritor along with Israel in the kingdom promises.

still continues to offer the hope of the future kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46).¹

Any understanding of John's baptism must take into account the importance of his repentance/kingdom proclamation. His baptism signaled the imminence of the kingdom.

John's Denunciation of Unbelief

John's scathing indictment

In Matthew John's preaching is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees whereas in Luke it is addressed to

¹The special phraseology, ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is unique to Matthew. This has been explained by some in light of the distinct Jewish character of the gospel. Matthew's selection of terminology may have been deliberately drawn from the Aramaic portion of Daniel's prophecy (2:44; 4:26; 7:27). The expression would have vividly recalled to the Aramaic speaking Jew the prophecies about the Messianic kingdom. Scroggie thinks these were the words originally spoken by Christ. "Our Lord, who spoke in Aramaic, would always use the phrase, and when writing in Greek, Matthew, in keeping with the special scope and character of the gospel retained, whereas, in the other Gospels the figure was translated as being what it also, although not exclusively, meant, the kingdom of God." W.G. Scroggie, A Guide to the Gospels (Old Tappan, N.U.: Fleming H. Revell Co. 1975), p. 67. It has also been postulated that "heaven" is a circumlocution for God. Bruce writes, "In the Judaistic period prior to the Christian era, the use of heaven as a synonym for God became common when a transcendent conception of God began to prevail." Alexander B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in vol. 1 of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1910), p. 10. However, the fact that Matthew does use the phrase "kingdom of God" may suggest a theological motive. Carson thinks the term has Christological implications. "Matthew's 'kingdom of heaven' assumes it is God's kingdom and occasionally assigns it specifically to the Father (26:29), though leaving room to ascribe it frequently to Jesus (16:28; 25:31,34,40; 27:42; probably 5:35); for Jesus is king Messiah." D. A. Carson, "Matthew," p. 101. The phrase leaves Matthew with more room to maneuver. Writing after the fact of the Christ event Matthew may be anticipating Christ's post-resurrection authority (Matt. 28:18).

the crowds (Matt. 3:7; Lk. 3:7).¹ Matthew portrays the Jewish leaders as one front, in alliance against Jesus and his emissaries.² Matthew reports that many (πολλοὺς) from these two groups were "coming for baptism."

There is no question in Luke that the crowds were coming to be baptized by John (βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ), however, Matthew's language (ἐπὶ τὸ βαπτίσμα) may be interpreted to mean that the Jewish leaders were coming out for critical observation.³ Their intention may have been nothing more than "to witness the strange, novel phenomena, and form their impressions."⁴ In Matthew the question takes on bitter sarcasm.⁵ Tasker postulates that these leaders "were actuated by no higher motive than fear that John's popularity with the people might lead to a movement which would jeopardize

¹This distinction reflects a different theological emphasis. The message was undoubtedly addressed to both groups; Matthew focuses particularly on Jewish leadership while Luke in keeping with the universal scope of his gospel draws attention to the whole multitude. It is not necessary to think this was all uttered just on one occasion. The common gospel tradition (whether oral or written) behind the canonical gospels probably contained John's preaching in summary form which was utilized by the gospel writers.

²These two rival parties do not often unite in common action. Only in Matt. 16:1 do we find them united again.

³The NIV translates, "coming to where he was baptizing."

⁴Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," p. 82.

⁵Both τίς and ὑμῖν are emphatic giving the question "the tone...of ironical surprise." Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907), p. 24.

their own position, for all regarded him as a prophet."¹
 In Luke the question is rhetorical and indicates the impossibility of escaping God's judgment.²

John labels them a "brood of vipers" (γεννήματα ἑχιδνῶν). There may be a nuance of spiritual unfitness in the phrase,³ but the most logical inference is that these leaders have been guilty of poisoning the people with their teaching. According to Fitzmyer "the expression is intended to convey the repulsive, even destructive character of those described."⁴ There may also be the added suggestion that these ecclesiastical leaders are in reality the offspring of Satan. The word γέννημα refers to "that which is produced or born (of living creatures), child, offspring."⁵ John seems to be insinuating that they have diabolical

¹Randolph V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 48.

²cf. Ian Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 139.

³"According to the law a viper was unclean and unacceptable to God and would defile anything it touched. In calling them snakes, John said they were unclean and spread defilement to everyone they touched." J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 85.

⁴Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX), p. 467.

⁵BAGD, p. 155.

connections.¹ The imagery of the snakes fleeing may have in view the fleeing of snakes from a field when harvest begins,² or the scattering of snakes before a prairie fire.³

John undoubtedly has in view an eschatological wrath (τὴν μελλούσης ὀργῆς). According to McNeile it is a "reference to the day of judgment upon sinners which the prophets had foretold (Is. xiii. 9, Zeph. i.15, ii.2f., Mal. iii.2, iv.1,5)."⁴ The OT prophets had predicted a period of divine wrath just prior to the establishment of the kingdom (Isa. 36:20-21; 34:1-3; Jer. 30:7; Zeph. 1:14,15,18 Joel 2:2; Amos 1:8). "Just as OT prophets often depicted it as the manifestation of an eschatological event, from which Israel itself would not escape, though individuals could find shelter in timely conversion, so John carries on the prophetic message."⁵ John viewed this wrath as imminent. John probably construed the period of wrath and the divine judgment which would precede the kingdom as a single event.

¹Meier notes, "John utters the very epithet Jesus will use of the scribes and pharisees (23-33). The enmity of this brood of vipers, aimed now at John, will bring Jesus to the cross." John Meier, Matthew (Wilmington, Del." Michael Glazier, 1980), p. 24.

²McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 27.

³Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 27.

⁴McNeile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 27.

⁵Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX), p. 468.

John's moral demands

John demands the evidence of a changed life before he administers the rite of baptism (Matt. 3:8-9; Lk. 3-8).¹ The term καρπός is often used to indicate the expression of a type or quality of life in deeds, whether good or evil (Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8; Acts. 26:20).² John is demanding a moral character and conduct which corresponds to the nature of genuine repentance.³ Most of the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders thought that the "merits of the Fathers" were sufficient for all Israelites. They put great stock in their physical lineage which they conjectured secured for them automatically a part in the kingdom.⁴ John attacked this assumption by stating that since God can even turn the stones of the desert into his sons, Abrahamic descent

¹"The Baptist's preaching summons men to 'do' something, but in full knowledge that this can only be 'true' of radical repentance, accompany it, grow out of it." Edward Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, trans. by David Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), p. 49.

²The metaphor has in view that which "grows" out of a fundamental disposition of the heart, it is not something that can simply be "done."

³The phrase "in keeping with" translates the Greek ἄξιος which when used of things in their relationship to other things means "corresponding, comparable, worthy." BAGD, p. 78.

⁴Justins' statement to Trypho (Dial 140) reads, "Your teachers think that the eternal kingdom will be given to those who are Abraham's seed according to the flesh, even if they are sinners and unbelieving and disobedient toward God."

does not mean inclusion within the family of God (Matt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8b). All are required to repent.¹

John's announcement of coming judgment

John anticipates impending judgment (Matt. 3:10, Lk. 3:9). Graphic terminology and description was employed

¹John's protest was not directed against the belief that God would fulfill His covenant promises to Israel. He rejected the notion that the Jew had a right to inherit that kingdom, simply as a Jew. John stressed that only the repentant members of the covenant community would find acceptance with Messiah. Nor is John suggesting anything about the admission and inclusion of Gentiles into the kingdom. He ministered solely to the Jews and gave no word about the relationship of the Gentiles to the kingdom.

to stress the judgment motif with special emphasis on its imminency and certainty.¹ Tasker observes,

The need for repentance was vital, for the coming judgment was inevitable and so immediate, that the prophet in his imagination could see a forest where the woodman was already at work laying his axe against the root of the trees doomed to be felled and burned because they had failed to produce good fruit.²

The significance of this scathing denunciation of Jewish unbelief and warning of coming judgment enhances the eschatological significance of John's baptism. By submitting to his baptism in the spirit of true repentance one separated himself from the nation under judgment. The judgment which John expected would quickly fall would swallow up the unrepentant not the repentant. Baptism vividly marked one's

¹Both ἐκκόπτεται (is cut down) and βάλλεται (thrown) are futuristic presents.

²Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 48. It is at this point that Luke introduces the questions of the multitude, the tax collectors, and the soldiers along with John's responses (Lk. 3:10-14). The comprehensive scope of Lukan content demonstrates that painstaking care was taken to present accurately the person and work of Christ to a Gentile audience. Luke, though selective, aimed at presenting the story of Jesus in its total sweep. Luke incorporates these verses to illustrate what John meant by his charge to "bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance." In these verses John "outlines the practical meaning of repentance in terms of love and justice for his hearers, including tax collectors and soldiers." Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p. 240. It's significant that John does not seek to upset the existing social structure - even in view of the "coming wrath." He advocates the sharing of the fundamentals of life (v. 11) and the avoidance of extortion, blackmail, and intimidation (vv. 13, 14) but he does not tell the tax collectors or the soldiers to give up their jobs. In fact, the last piece of advice he gives to the soldiers is be content with their wages.

separation from the unrepentant community which was under judgment.

John's Proclamation of the Messiah's Future Work

In Matt. 3:11-12 (par. Mk. 1:7-8; Lk. 3:15-18) John's eschatological proclamation now becomes more particular with a distinct Messianic emphasis.¹ By mentioning his own personal unworthiness even to remove His sandals, John is relegating himself to a subordinate position and attributing to the Messiah the qualities of dignity and might.² The greatness of the Messiah is especially seen in his baptism with the spirit and fire in contrast to John's baptism with water.³ No doubt John understood Messiah's baptism in terms

¹It is interesting that John does not name the Messiah but rather identifies Him as the "coming one." The announcement is framed in accordance with Israel's expectation either of the eschatological coming of God Himself or His appointed representative" W. Lane, The Gospel of Mark, p. 51. Perhaps there is an echo of Mal. 3:1f, 4:5f, or Ps. 118:26.

²The disciple of a rabbi was pledged to do anything for his master that a slave would do, except take off his shoes. John confesses himself unworthy even to perform this servile task for the "mightier" one. cf. Daube, NT and Rabbinic Judaism, p. 226.

³In Luke's account this Christological thrust is in response to the puzzlement of the people as to whether John was the Christ (Lk. 3:15-16).

of the promises of the Spirit's bestowal in the Old Testament.

Toussaint remarks,

Throughout the Old Testament prophesies the Holy Spirit is associated with the coming of the Messiah. It is one of the marks which identifies Him (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14, Joel 2:28-29). Not only was the Messiah to bring judgment but also a baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹

The exact interpretation of the baptism "with fire" presents no small difficulty.² Some take πυρί as a reference to judgment. In this case the ὅμῳς (Matt. 3:11) embraces two classes, both the repentant and the unrepentant. According to this view there are two different baptisms administered to two separate groups. Judgment is often associated with fire in the Old Testament (Isa. 29:6; 31:9; Ezek. 38:22; Amos. 7:4; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8; Mal. 3:3; 4:1) and the immediate context utilizes the imagery of "fire" to depict judgment (Matt. 3:19; par. Lk. 3:9; Matt. 3:12; par

¹Toussaint, Behold the King, p. 24. It was not possible for John at this stage in the development of the kingdom program to understand the full implications of that baptism. To John this would be the means by which Christ would accomplish a more perfect salvation and identify His people. The church age was unforeseen by John. To Luke and Paul the baptism of the spirit had much greater significance.

²Many commentators who have no problem with amending the text erase the notion of Spirit baptism in the original. They postulate that the original read either, "He will baptize you with fire" ("with the Holy Spirit" becomes a Christian interpolation in light of Pentecost) or "He will baptize you with wind and fire" (the early church identifying πνεῦμα with the Holy Spirit and thus making it πνεύματι ἁγίῳ). Such amendations rest on the assumption that a reference to the Holy Spirit as the bestower of blessing is unsuitable to a context concerned with destroying judgment.

Lk. 3:17). Gundry remarks, "The loosening of the parallel between John's and Jesus' baptisms and the putting of judgmental fire both before and after the baptismal fire (cf. v.10) militate against interpreting it as a purification of the righteous."¹ It is also significant that the phrase "with fire" is absent from Mark, a gospel which has no judgment context. It seems logical that if Mark viewed this as a purifying aspect of Messiah's baptism he undoubtedly would have included it.² In spite of this evidence others take the "fire" as an aspect of Spirit baptism, namely, purification. Toussaint places great weight upon the grammatical construction - two nouns joined by καὶ partaking of one preposition (ἐν).³ Hill contends that "neither 'spirit' nor 'fire' need be the agents of destroying judgment: both may refer to redemptive judgment, to refining, and cleansing, while verse 12 refers to destruction; cf. Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3.2f."⁴

¹Robert H. Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 49.

²Lane notes that in Mark, "John's message is telescoped to focus upon a single theme, the proclamation of a person still to come who will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit." Lane, The Gospel of Mark, p. 51. There are some who find judgment even in the reference to the "Holy Spirit." The "Holy Spirit" is to be understood as a mighty wind symbolizing judgment, aided by the fire that consumes what is swept away cf. C.K. Barrett, The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition (London: SPCK, 1954), p. 125-126.

³Toussaint, Behold the King, p. 70.

⁴Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 94.

Fire may have a purifying connotation in the Old Testament and there are indeed some striking parallels in the literature at Qumran where fire has a refining and cleansing effect.¹

The best explanation takes both aspects into account perceiving of Jesus' baptism as having a dual character. The Old Testament sometimes weaves together the threads of both refining and judgmental fire into the same fabric (cf. Isa. 4:4; Joel 2:28f.; Mal. 3:1-6; 4:1). At Qumran the imagery of fire may denote judgment as well as purification.² There is no reason why both nuances could not be in view.³ On this view Matt. 3:12 (par Lk. 3:17) is not a precise exegesis of Matthew 3:11 but an application of it in respect to the wicked.

With the advent of the Messiah a purging process will occur. John conveys a graphic picture by employing the imagery of the "winnowing fork" (Matt. 3:12). With this

¹cf. 1QS 4:20, 21; 3:7-9; 1QH 16:12.

²To the passages already mentioned in connection with cleansing should be added those which link fire with judgment (1QS 2:8; 4:13; 1QpHab. 2:11-13).

³"Often in Scripture fire symbolizes wrath. But fire is also indicative of the work of grace (Isa. 6:6,7, Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:3; I Pet. 1:7). It is not strange, therefore, that this term can be used both in a favorable sense, to indicate the blessings of Pentecost and the new dispensation, and in an unfavorable sense, to indicate the terrors of the coming 'judgment day.'" W. Hendriksen, The Gospel According to Matthew, p. 209.

instrument the Jews tossed their wheat against the wind blowing away the chaff, while the grain piled up in heap. The Messiah will "thoroughly clear His threshing floor" by ushering the children of God ("wheat") into the kingdom ("barn") and severing from them the unbelievers ("chaff") who are destined for eternal punishment ("He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"). This strong expression emphasizes the certainty and completeness of judgment.¹

The Messiah would thus perform a work of both judgment and salvation. John's baptism with water was a particularly effective way of foreshadowing the Messiah's future baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire.

It follows that just as John's purpose was to prepare a way for the lord by calling people to repentance, so his baptism pointed to the one who would bring the eschatological baptism in Spirit and fire. John's baptism was essentially preparatory.²

The Significance of John's Eschatological Preaching

Since the eschatological preaching of John is inevitably linked to the significance of his baptism several

¹Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, TNTC (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 98.

²Carson, "Matthew," p. 104.

points can be made with regard to the eschatological nature of that baptism. First, it was anticipatory of the inbreaking kingdom of God in both its physical and spiritual dimension. It is vitally linked to John's proclamation "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." As such it functions as "an eschatological sacrament anticipatory of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God."¹ Since the kingdom and the king are inseparable, submission to this eschatological rite marked a pledge of faith in the coming king. In this way, it served as "a confession of faith, namely of faith in the good news of the kingdom."²

Second, in view of the strong denunciation on the unrepentant community and the announcement of impending judgment John's baptism became the mark by which the repentant were identified and separated from those on whom the wrath of God would fall. Submission to John's baptism signified one's appropriation of the salvation of the age to come.

¹Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes, reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 155.

²John Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Valley Forge: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), p. 44.

Third, it served as a sign of Messiah's future work as both Savior and Judge. John's baptism anticipated the Messianic baptism with Spirit and fire. The parallelism between John's baptism and Jesus' is more synonymous than antithetical. The contrast "is between the limited efficacy of John's baptism as a symbol of Spirit baptism and the full cleansing achieved by the Spirit baptism itself."¹ By virtue of the administrator and the Person to whom it pointed, John's baptism was eschatological in import. John's baptism initiated the eschatological event, Jesus' formed its heart and conclusion. Beasley-Murray sums up well this line of thought.

The forward look in baptism relates to both judgment and redemption, since the Messiah was to come to judge the wicked and deliver the righteous. In baptism a transition was sought from the condition and destiny of the unrighteous to that of the righteous. It sealed the repentant as members of the covenant people fitted for the appearing of the Messiah, and therefore with hope of inheriting the kingdom of the Messiah.²

¹Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p. 147. Allan writes, "Baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit need not be regarded as antithetical and exclusive. The former symbolized repentance. But repentance anticipates the gift of righteousness. Baptism with the Holy Spirit conveys the righteousness. The former is preparatory, the latter final." Allan, Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew, p. 25.

²Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 33.

CHAPTER III

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JOHN'S BAPTISM

Any study of John's baptism must address the soteriological implications of that baptism. Both Luke and Mark record that John came preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (βάπτισμα μετάνοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν). A question of no small import concerns the relationship between repentance, baptism, and the forgiveness of sins. As Fitzmyer remarks "Baptisma must be understood of a ritual washing having a religious connotation, and the following phrases specify the connotation."² The mode of baptism is of little importance. The issue here concerns its soteriological significance.

Baptism and Repentance

A Baptism for Repentance

Only Matthew says, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (εἰς μετάνοιαν, Matt. 3:11a). The phrase is

¹Archibald T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 26.

²Fitzmyer, The Gospel of Luke (I_IX), p. 459.

most difficult.¹ The preposition εἰς with the accusative often denotes purpose but this seems highly unlikely here. The force may be considerably weaker, "I baptize you with reference to your repentance."² Beasley-Murray sees in baptism a divine work, the fruit of which was conversion. He writes,

Yet in so far as baptism issues in conversion it presumes the activity of god, who therein accepts the baptized man turning to Him and makes of the act the pledge of his forgiveness and seal of the baptized into the kingdom. Both the conversion and the baptism involves human and divine actions."³

This position goes too far. The best solution is the suggestion of Gundry, "'For repentance' implies that baptism enabled people to actualize their repentance by carrying it out in symbolical action."⁴

A Baptism of Repentance

Both Mark and Luke use the terminology βάπτισμα μετανοίας. The issue here is whether the repentance was a direct result, accompaniment, or precondition of baptism. According to Plummer "repentance precedes the baptism, seals it and

¹Hill detects here a conscious effort to subordinate John to Jesus. Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, p. 93.

²See the excellent discussion by M. J. Harris on the preposition εἰς, and particularly his discussion on Matt. 3:11 and Acts 2:38. NIDNTT, S.V. "εἰς," by M.J. Harris, 3:1184

³Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 35.

⁴Gundry, Matthew: A Commentary, p. 48.

reminds the baptized of his new obligations."¹ It is significant to note that "for the Essenes baptism was a sign of a spiritual state already attained, and there is no indication that they endowed their (self administered) baptism with sacramental efficacy."² Theologically baptism is an outward symbol signifying that true repentance has occurred. However, the genitive phrase is probably best understood as simply "denoting the essential nature and quality of the whole religious act."³ Hence it is a repentance-baptism, i.e. a baptism characterized by repentance. While logically and temporally repentance precedes the baptism it is doubtful that John thought in such clearly distinguishable categories. Repentance and baptism were inseparably connected and could be viewed as one act.

Baptism and the Forgiveness of Sins

The Theological Issue

With the linking of εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁματιῶν to βάπτισμα μετάνοιας there emerges some important theological

¹Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke, ICC, reprint (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922), p. 86. Johnson writes, "John probably demanded repentance as a condition and administered baptism as an effective sign that God was now making the people pure." Johnson, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 36. See also Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p. 135.

²William F. Albright and Christopher S. Mann, Matthew: Introduction, Translation and Notes, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971), p. 26. cf. 1QS 3:3-12.

³Anderson, The Gospel of Mark, p. 70.

considerations. The construction εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν may connote either purpose¹ or result;² perhaps both nuances are in view.³ All agree that baptism without repentance has no redeeming value; but coupled with repentance does baptism have saving efficacy? Taylor thinks so; "Repentance is essential, but in harmony with the O.T. idea of representative action..., baptism gives expression to the act of repentance, and thereby becomes an effective action leading to the remission of sins."⁴

Arguments Against Baptismal Efficacy

John's rebuke

While conceptually, within their historical framework, baptism and repentance are inseparably connected, theologically, baptism cannot be regarded as in anyway securing the forgiveness of sins. This is confirmed by John's rebuke of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 3:8). John tells them to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.

¹BAGD, p. 229, 4f.

²BAGD, p. 225.

³Marshall would give the preposition the idea of "toward the goal of" pointing to a future Messianic forgiveness which serves as the condition for the future reception of the Spirit; but this is highly doubtful. cf. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, p. 136.

⁴Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark, p. 155.

"Repentance is the source of new life and spiritual fruit, not water baptism."¹

The record of Luke-Acts

This is also confirmed by Lukan theology and history. The theological significance of repentance is developed quite fully in Luke-Acts. The record in Acts is of particular importance, in that, by understanding the way the early church understood the connection between repentance, baptism, and forgiveness will be helpful in understanding these connections in John's ministry. This assumes that John's baptism and Christian baptism are not contradictory; rather, that to some degree, the latter is rooted in the tradition of the former.

Luke 24:44-49 contains Luke's summarization of what Jesus said to his disciples over the period of the resurrection appearances. In verse 47 Luke records that Jesus commissioned them to proclaim in His name "repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations" (μετάνοιαν εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).² Schweizer observes that this construction "is typical of Luke and shows that he expects forgiveness to

¹Johnson, "John the Baptist," p. 33.

²The majority of mss. read μετάνοιαν καὶ rather than μετάνοιαν εἰς. It is best, however to retain εἰς following p⁷⁵, X, and B.

come through repentance, not just at the last judgment."¹
It is vitally significant to note the absence of any mention of baptism. It is repentance/conversion that secures the forgiveness of sins.

In Acts 2:38 baptism is inseparably linked with repentance and cleansing as well as the gift of the Holy Spirit. This passage demonstrates that from the very beginning of the proclamation of the Christian gospel salvation and baptism were intimately connected. Believers were immediately and automatically baptized following conversion. Longenecker observes, "Whenever the gospel was proclaimed in a Jewish milieu, the rite of baptism was taken for granted as being inevitably involved (cf. 2:41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 18:8; 19:5; also Heb. 10:22; I Pet. 3:18-21)."² But while it is clear that baptism was inseparably linked to salvation it does not automatically follow that it was essential to it.

That baptism has no saving efficacy seems clear from the following considerations. First, in Acts 3:19 forgiveness of sin is viewed as a direct consequence of repentance and turning to God while nothing is said of baptism, even though it most certainly occurred.

¹Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, p. 377.

²Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in vol. 9 of Expositors Bible Commentary, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), p. 283.

Second, in other passages as well, repentance secures salvation with no mention of baptism. In Acts 5:31 repentance is linked with forgiveness; both viewed as gifts from God. In Paul's proclamation to the Athenians on the hill of Ares he declared that "God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30b), but nothing is said of baptism. In Paul's defense before Agrippa Luke reports that he had been preaching both to the Jews and the Gentiles "that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). It was through such proclamation that Paul intended to open the eyes of the unregenerate "so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith.." (Acts 26:18). There is no mention of baptism.

Third, if one argues from Acts 2:38 that baptism is effectual in securing the forgiveness of sins one must also argue that it is essential in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, in the account of the conversion of Cornelius and his household in Acts 10:44-48 it is clear that baptism followed the reception of the gift of the Spirit. In verse 47 Peter asks, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received (ἐλάβον) the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"

Also in Acts 19:1-7 faith is the condition for receiving the gift of the Spirit not water baptism. Luke records the account of the conversion of certain "disciples" of the teaching of John the Baptist. The normal relation between receiving the gift of the Spirit and believing is set forth in verse 2. NASB correctly renders the coincidental aorist participle πιστεύσαντες "when you believed." Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" The question is designed to discover whether this Ephesian group had received salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Their response is that they had not even heard that the Spirit had been given.¹ They were well aware that John spoke of a coming Messianic baptism with the Holy Spirit but what they did not know was that the expected baptism was an accomplished fact. Paul learns that it was the pre-Pentecostal baptism of John they had received (v. 3). He then proceeds to explain to them the preparatory and anticipatory character of John's baptism (v. 4). In light of the cross and the bestowal of the gift of the Spirit John's anticipatory baptism was no longer appropriate or adequate. This is a unique situation dealing with saints in transition. They needed the common salvation of the new

¹The addition of the word "given" points out the real intention of their words. In the same way the statement in John 7:39, literally rendered "for the Spirit was not yet" is amplified in the Western and Byzantine texts by the additional word "given."

era inaugurated through Christ's redemption and baptism with the Spirit. According to verse 5 when they had heard this (ἀκούσαντες), "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Their baptism assumes their conversion. Following their baptism¹ Paul laid hands upon them (ἤλαθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἐπ' αὐτούς).² As an outward evidence of the Spirit's presence "they began speaking with tongues and prophesying." The outward phenomena was necessary to assure these new Christians that they were truly apart of the church. It served to connect them with Pentecost.³ Evidently there was a delay in the Spirit's bestowal connected with the imposition of apostolic hands (as an exception to the normal pattern indicated in v. 2).⁴

¹Indicated by the aorist participle ἐπιθέοντες, "and when Paul had laid his hands."

²Bruce notes that Ephesus was to be a new centre of the Gentile mission, next in importance to Syrian Antioch, and these twelve disciples were to be the nucleus of the Ephesian church. Through the imposition of hands they became associated in the apostolic and missionary task of the church cf. Frederick F. Bruce, The Book of Acts, NICNT, ed. N.B. Stonehouse & F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 386.

³Harrison remarks, "If the original followers of the Lord needed the outward tokens of the Spirit's coming at Pentecost to assure them of the reality of His presence and power, and of the period thus introduced, how much more did these men, with less preparation, need such tokens." Everett F. Harrison, Acts: The Expanding Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 289).

⁴It's also possible that the delay was not in the actual bestowal of the Spirit (which would have occurred when they believed) but in the outward, visible evidence of the Spirit's presence.

It was necessary in order to make them realize apostolic authority and their dependence upon the apostles to give them a message from God. Through this unique situation they would recognize the foundational character of the apostolic office and look to them for guidance and instruction. While this passage deals with a transitional situation it is clear that the bestowal of the Spirit is associated with faith not baptism.

Theological considerations

In addition to these considerations from Luke-Acts a theological analysis of the rest of the New Testament revelation having soteriological implications negates attributing any saving efficacy to baptism. Some of the more important factors include: (1) The absence of any mention of baptism in the Gospel of John and his distinct emphasis on belief as the only condition for eternal salvation. (2) The Pauline emphasis on salvation by grace apart from works or human rites (i.e. Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:19-5:21). (3) Paul's clear statement that he was not commissioned to baptize but (ἀλλὰ) to preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι, I Cor. 1:17); which gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

The Soteriological Significance of John's Baptism

While baptism was inseparably connected to salvation in the early church it was considered to be the immediate expression of the inward transformation which repentance/faith secured. This is also confirmed by the nature of soteriology in the New Testament. This was true of John's baptism as well as Christian baptism since the latter was rooted and grounded in the tradition of the former. Theologically, John's baptism gave immediate outward expression to inward conversion which alone secured the forgiveness of sin. In this way, the baptism administered by John became a sign of personal salvation.

CONCLUSION

The historical data concerning proselyte baptism and the baptismal practices of the Qumran community reveals that both categories have certain similarities and differences when compared to John's baptism. In light of the striking differences it is very unlikely that John is directly dependent upon these sources. However, there are certain theological connections. The symbolical purification/consecration motif found in proselyte baptism is also found in John. Also, the eschatological and moral emphasis of the Qumran community are somewhat similar to John. However, these common theological motifs are each uniquely developed within their own framework. John's theological perspective and his development of these basic concepts were suited to his own situation. The historical evidence demonstrates that the religious community to which John ministered would have been familiar with certain theological conceptions connected to baptismal washings. John builds on these conceptions and draws similar motifs but fits them into his own unique ministry as the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah.

The materials in the synoptic Gospels indicate that John's baptism had both eschatological and soteriological significance. Eschatologically the significance is threefold. First, it functioned as a sign of the inbreaking

kingdom of God in both its physical and spiritual dimensions. Second, it became the mark by which the repentant were identified and separated from those under judgment. Third, it served as a sign of the Messiah's future work of both judgment and salvation. These three aspects have been determined by an analysis of his prophetic preaching and its inseparable connection to his practice of baptism.

The soteriological significance of his baptism is found in its connection to both repentance and the forgiveness of sins. John proclaimed and administered a repentance-baptism though theologically, it was repentance alone which secured the forgiveness of sins. This is confirmed by John's rebuke of the Jewish leaders, by the practice of baptism in the early church (which baptism is rooted in the tradition of John's baptism), and by New Testament soteriology. John's baptism gave immediate public expression to inward repentance which secured personal salvation.

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