

Water Baptism: A Mid-Acts Dispensational Viewpoint

By Ben Webb

Introduction

Today, during this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2), Uncircumcised Gentiles are saved through the fall of Israel, as Paul states in Romans 11:11. Yet no Old Testament prophecy ever even hinted at such a possibility. Instead, prophecy consistently portrays the sanctification of Gentiles as taking place through the exaltation of Israel, rather than through her fall (see Is.2:1-4, 27:13, 61:6-9, Ezek.3:4-7, Micah 4:1-3, Zech.8:20-23, Zech.14:16, etc.).

Nor was such a possibility implied even in the Four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John (see, for example, Mt. 10:5-7; compare Ezek. 3:4-7). As a result, from the standpoint of prophecy, the salvation of uncircumcised Gentiles today is a true "mystery", as the apostle Paul states in passages such as Ro. 11:25, Eph. 3:1-6, and Col. 1:25-27.

It is therefore the mid-Acts Dispensational view that because Old Testament prophecies have temporarily ceased (1 Cor. 13:8), water baptism is no longer necessary (see 1 Cor.1:17; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5); although it was absolutely required at one time for believers in the house of Israel (Mk.16:16; Acts 2:38). While some churches actually recognize the fact that believers in the previous dispensation were required to be baptized, many of them still fail to understand the "mystery" that Paul speaks of. Consequently, they still allow (or maybe even require) their members to be baptized today. Others also fail to acknowledge that prophecy has temporarily ceased today, thereby relegating Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 13:8 to a future time. This study, then, will explore the purpose behind Old Testament baptism, and the reason why mid-Acts Dispensationalists believe it is no longer relevant.

Prelude to Understanding

To begin with, the word "baptism" does not always imply water baptism. For example, some three years after His baptism by John the baptist, the Lord stated that He would experience yet another future baptism (Luke 12:50), and water played no role in that baptism. In Luke 12:50, then, the Lord was referring to His imminent baptism into death upon the cross. Likewise,

believers today are also baptized into the death of Christ (see Ro.6:3), having "put on Christ" (Gal.3:27); and water baptism is not necessary for this to occur. Instead, our baptism into the death of Christ occurs when we are baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13).

Some believers, though, may not realize this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2) was never the subject of prophecy. Yet the fact that prophecy has temporarily been interrupted (by the unprophesied salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles through the fall of Israel, as in Ro.11:11) actually shows that God now accepts men who He would never have accepted during the Four Gospels, or even during the early portion of the book of Acts. Although Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb.13:8), He does not always place the same conditions upon all believers in every age (or dispensation). In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ has actually changed certain conditions that were previously placed upon believers in the early portion of the New Testament scriptures, and this is clearly illustrated by the fact that circumcision is no longer necessary for believers today, as it was at one time.

For example, even as late as Acts chapter 10, certain meats (pork, catfish, shellfish, etc.) were still "common" or "unclean" to the Jews. At that time, Peter received a vision regarding Cornelius, who was an Uncircumcised Gentile that blessed Israel by giving "much alms to the people" (see Acts 10:2). Since the Law prohibited the Jews from eating unclean meats (Lev.20:25-26), Peter naturally abhorred these meats, even in Acts chapter 10. On this occasion, though, the Lord informed Peter for the first time that He had cleansed these meats (Acts 10:15). By doing so, the Lord then used these meats as an example to Peter that Uncircumcised Gentiles such as Cornelius were also sanctified, even though these Gentiles were previously considered to be unclean (like the meats). In Acts chapter 10, then, the Lord Jesus Christ did not change, as verified by Heb.13:8. Instead, since it had previously been unlawful for the Jews "to keep company, or come unto one of another nation" (Acts 10:28), the Lord simply changed the requirements He placed upon believers: Suddenly, He no longer required men to be circumcised.

For another example of why Christians today should not necessarily observe every commandment the Lord gave to His followers, the Lord Jesus Christ even instructed a man to offer an animal sacrifice, after healing the man of leprosy (Mt.8:1-4, compare Lev.14:1-7). But the practice of offering animal sacrifices should never be observed by Christians today, even though the Lord Himself commanded for it to be done at one time. Consequently, we cannot simply take every commandment that the Lord gave to His followers in the Four Gospels, and apply all of them to Christians in the church today. Instead, we must first determine whether these commandments are even relevant for this present dispensation of the grace of God.

Such, too, is the case with water baptism. Once again, the Lord Jesus Christ is the same today as He was "yesterday", according to Heb.13:8. However, as shown by the above examples, the Lord no longer places the same requirements upon men that He once did, even in the New Testament scriptures. As a result, we are to base our beliefs not only upon what the Bible teaches; we must also be careful to determine whether the doctrines and practices we claim were even written to Christians today. We should therefore heed the instructions which Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles (Ro.11:13; Ro.15:16), wrote by inspiration to the church today. And Paul himself wrote that Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel (1Cor.1:16-17; see below).

Indeed, water baptism originally filled a specific need in the life of the Jewish believer at one time. The ordinance of water baptism actually originated as an Old Testament obligation for priests, being necessary before they could minister unto the Lord (for example, see Ex.30:17-21, in which the priest was required to "wash with water"). This ordinance of washing (or baptizing) the priest was then carried over into the early days of the New Testament, since the nation of Israel was (and still is) destined to become a kingdom of priests (as the Lord had promised in Ex.19:6; compare Is.66:21). As a result, the Jews who believed in Christ were required to be washed (or baptized) with water for salvation (Mark 16:16), as the priesthood required (see also Ex.40:12; Lev.8:6; Lev.16:24; etc.).

Moreover, baptism "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38) only applied to circumcised believers, and remained in effect until Peter received his revelation concerning Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. And even then, Cornelius was not saved through the fall of Israel, as we are today (Ro.11:11), since he "blessed" Israel by giving "much alms to the people" (see Acts 10:2). Since the Lord had earlier promised Abraham that in his "seed" all the families of the earth would be blessed, and since Abraham's plural seed turned out to be the house of Israel (see Gen.26:4; Gen.28:14, and compare Num.24:9), the house of Israel was indeed the "seed" through whom the Lord blessed the nations at that time. During the Four Gospels, then (as well as during the early portion of the book of Acts), this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2) had not yet begun, since the Jewish believers were required to be circumcised and baptized, and only Gentiles who blessed the nation of Israel (Abraham's plural seed) had any hope at that time.

However, even though Paul himself also baptized certain believers during the early portion of his ministry, he also stated that Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel (1Cor.1:17, see below). This was because Israel temporarily fell from the Lord's favor (Ro.11:11) when the Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles (Ro.11:13). As a result, since the Lord had temporarily forsaken Israel, just as He had prophesied (Is.54:7), her future inheritance as a kingdom of priests (Is.66:21) was also placed on hold at that time.

Consequently, since Gentile salvation is now through the fall of Israel (Ro.11:11), water baptism no longer plays the same role that it once did. Instead, all believers (even uncircumcised Gentiles who have never blessed the house of Israel) are now baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:13), and not by water. Indeed, when Paul preached the gospel, he was not sent to baptize, as he writes in 1Cor.1:16-17 -

"And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect."

Accordingly, since Christ sent Paul to preach the gospel, and not to baptize, then the gospel which Paul preached did not require water baptism. Otherwise, Paul could not have made a pointed distinction between baptism and the gospel he preached. And since Paul was not sent to baptize, then he was not under the instructions that the Lord gave to the other apostles (Mt.28:19-20; Mk.16:16), which did require water baptism "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

Although it is true that Paul also baptized certain believers in the early days of his ministry, we must be careful not to draw the wrong conclusion from this. Paul also circumcised Timothy (see Acts 16:1-3), even after contending with the other apostles that circumcision is no longer necessary (Acts 15:1-21). Paul, then, did not circumcise Timothy because the Lord required it. Instead, Paul circumcised him "because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3). In other words, Paul circumcised Timothy of his own volition, instead of by the Lord's commandment. We therefore should never endorse the practice of circumcision, or the practice of water baptism, just because Paul performed them at one time.

Likewise, Paul also took a Jewish vow associated with animal sacrifices (Acts 21:23-27), thereby placing himself back under the Law, as well. In Acts 21:26, Paul actually joined himself with certain Jews who believed, but who were also "zealous of the law" (verse 20), having shaved their heads (verse 24). Consequently, an "offering" was to be "offered for every one of them" (as in Acts 21:26; compare Numbers 8:7-8). Yet Paul took this Jewish vow, which was associated with animal sacrifices, after he had written his epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Thessalonians! Animal sacrifices, though, were certainly not necessary at that time. Paul, then, must have performed circumcision and endorsed the practice of animal sacrifices by using his own free will, instead of by commandment from the Lord, since such practices are quite contrary to the doctrines that he himself wrote. In like manner, since he also stated in 1Cor.1:17 that Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel, then Paul must have also baptized certain believers using his own free will, as well. Otherwise, by practicing water

baptism, how could Paul be carrying out the Lord's instructions in the first place, if Christ sent him not to baptize?

We should therefore avoid endorsing any religious practice simply because Paul performed it at one time, whether it involves water baptism, animal sacrifices, or circumcision. As we have seen, there are many Bible doctrines which, although they may indeed be scriptural, should not be observed by Christians today. Even though the Lord never instructed Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, to baptize anyone at any time (1Cor.1:17), His instructions to the 12 apostles definitely included water baptism (Mt.28:19; Mk.16:16; Acts2:38). Thus, it is only when we recognize the distinctive ministry and message of the apostle Paul that we can fully understand the true purpose of water baptism, and the role that it played.

As we shall see, then, since Paul was sent to the Heathen, while the other apostles confined their ministries to the nation of Israel (Gal.2:7-9), the requirement of water baptism changed, as well. Today, Uncircumcised Gentile believers are not destined to become a kingdom of priests, as the nation of Israel was in Exodus 19:1-6 (again, compare Is.66:21, in which Israel's priesthood pertains to the New Covenant, just as it did to the Old Covenant).

In addition, this writer understands why some readers may not agree with certain statements that are put forth in this study, having "been there" at one time himself. He would, however, like to challenge the skeptical readers to compare their own beliefs to the ideas in this study, and then compare both to what the scriptures themselves teach. The reason for doing so is because the Bible itself should always be our final authority in all matters of the faith. We should never believe anything just because our church teaches it, or because Grandma believed it, or because it just feels like the right thing to do. If we cannot give any scriptural reason for believing the way we do, all we have is simply an unfounded opinion.

For example, one popular (although unscriptural) belief is the often-repeated statement that water baptism is simply a public profession of faith. Although this certainly may sound good, there is absolutely no scriptural evidence whatsoever to support such a statement. Nowhere in the Bible can we find any record of anyone who was baptized as a public expression of their faith.

Chapter 1: Baptism does not Necessarily Imply "Water" Baptism

As stated earlier, the word "baptism" does not always refer to "water" baptism, or even to the "Holy Ghost baptism" that the apostles experienced in Acts chapter 2 (when they spoke with other tongues). If we fail to understand this, we may read "water" into passages in which water

baptism is not even implied. For example, some time after His baptism by John in the Jordan river, the Lord Jesus mentioned a still future baptism that He was to endure, in Luke 12:50 -

"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

Water clearly played no part in this upcoming baptism of the Lord, since He had already been baptized with water in the Jordan river (Luke 3:21). Instead, He was referring here to His impending baptism into death upon the cross. Today, Christians are likewise baptized into Christ's death when they believe (Ro. 6:3-5), with water being unnecessary for this to occur.

Far too many people, however, read "water" into many baptismal passages that actually have no connection with water. As a result, the doctrine of water baptism has actually created numerous divisions among Christians today. Different denominations, in fact, even require different methods of water baptism, for many different reasons. Some churches insist that only believers who are baptized by their particular denomination can be saved, while others contend that water baptism in any church is necessary. Still others maintain that water baptism is only required for membership in their specific denomination, but is not necessary for salvation. Even this last opinion, though, motivates these churches to deny membership to Christians who are admittedly saved. In turn, such attitudes imply that no Christian is "good enough" to join these churches, without first submitting to water baptism by one of their ordained ministers.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, there are also those who teach that water baptism is the "seal", or the "token", of the new covenant, replacing circumcision as the "token" of the old covenant. Such a teaching, though, is not even a scriptural teaching, in the first place. There is absolutely no scriptural basis for such a claim. Although circumcision was indeed "a token of the covenant" between Abraham and God (Gen. 17:11), baptism was never a "token" or a "seal" of anything.

Moreover, there is even much disagreement over which method of water baptism should be used today, as well. Should the church merely sprinkle with water, or totally immerse; should it baptize only once "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost", or baptize three separate times? Some, indeed, even teach that none of these questions really matter at all, as long as the believer is baptized in water "as a public profession of faith" (which is yet another unscriptural claim). As a result, confusion and controversy reign supreme today over the doctrine of water baptism.

By contrast, Paul instructs us to be unified concerning baptism, as in Ephesians 4:3-6 -

"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

While few Christians disagree concerning the "one body" or the "one Spirit" of verse 4, there is much disagreement over which type of baptism is referred to in verse 5. Some dispensationalists believe that the "one baptism" mentioned here is water baptism by an ordained minister, while others (this writer included) assert that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit baptizing all believers into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13; see below). This is because there is one baptism for today, according to Eph.4:5, and not two baptisms (water baptism and Spirit baptism).

If we truly wish to strive for unity, then, as Paul instructs us to do in this passage, we must first identify exactly which baptism he is referring to in Eph.4:5. If water baptism is truly the one baptism for today, then we should indeed promote water baptism among all churches and denominations today. Yet in view of the many divisions it has caused, it should be obvious to even the most tradition-minded Christian that the issue of water baptism has actually separated far more Christians than it has unified. It would therefore be highly unlikely that the "one baptism" of Eph.4:5 could be water baptism, for the simple reason that Christians today cannot even decide among themselves as to the purpose or method of water baptism.

There is, however, another passage almost identical to Eph.4:3-6, in which Paul again addresses the doctrine of baptism along with the unity of the body of Christ. Today, we are all baptized by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 -

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

Notice especially Paul's statement in verse 13 that the Spirit baptizes all believers into one body (the body of Christ). This baptism occurs the instant we are saved, and does not depend upon water in any form or fashion. The moment we believe, the Spirit of God then baptizes us into the body of Christ. By comparing the above passage with Eph.4:5, we can readily see that the context is exactly the same: The unity of the body of Christ is the key issue in both passages. We should therefore expect the context to remain the same concerning the issue of baptism, as well.

Comparing both of the above passages side-by-side, then, it should become evident that the baptism by the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:13) is exactly the same as the one baptism of Eph.4:5 -

1 Cor. 12: 12 - 14

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body,

whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."

Eph 4: 3 - 6

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Since Paul states in 1 Cor.12:13 that the Spirit of God baptizes us all into one body, and he states in Eph.4:5 that there is one baptism, then the "one baptism" of Eph.4:5 must be the same baptism by the Spirit that he mentions in 1Cor.12:13. Neither passage, then, can be a reference to water baptism, unless there really is more than one baptism in effect for today. Indeed, if the baptism of 1Cor.12:13 (by one Spirit into one body) was a reference to water baptism, then in view of Eph.4:5, there would be no margin for the Holy Spirit to baptize us into the body of Christ.

So the baptism by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13) must be the same as the one baptism of Eph.4:5, and neither baptism requires water. Otherwise, there would indeed be more than one baptism. Of course, some believers try to read water into the one baptism of Eph.4:5 anyway, by interpreting the passage to mean that there is only one "physical" baptism, which (they claim) is water baptism. The problem with such an interpretation, though, is the simple fact that there is nothing else physical in this passage. Consequently, why should baptism be the one physical exception? Paul writes that there is one body (a spiritual body, which is the body of Christ), one Spirit (obviously not physical), one hope (not physical; see Ro.8:24-25), one Lord (Who is no longer physical; see 1Cor.15:42-50), one faith (faith is not physical), and one God (God is a Spirit; John 4:24). Accordingly, why would Paul "really mean" there is only one "physical" baptism in Eph.4:3-6, when everything else in the passage is non-physical?

In view of Eph.4:5, then, since the practice of water baptism only adds another baptism to the one baptism by the Spirit into one body, there is little wonder why so many Christians today disagree over the "true purpose" of water baptism. As stated earlier, even though the Lord required believers in Israel to be baptized in water at one time (Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38), that baptism was in preparation for their future inheritance as a kingdom of priests (as we shall later see in detail). So unless a passage contains an obvious reference to water (such as a commandment to be baptized), we should never be too quick to read "water" into any passage concerning baptism. Otherwise, as the previous example illustrates, we will end up reading "water" into passages in which water baptism is not even implied. This is especially true concerning passages that pertain to our baptism into Christ, such as Galatians 3:26-28 -

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

The above passage cannot be a reference to "water" baptism, unless water baptism places us "into Christ". Instead, since we are all one in Christ Jesus (verse 28), Paul is again associating this baptism with unity, just as he did in 1Cor.12:13 and Eph.4:5.

In fact, if Gal.3:27 above was a reference to water baptism, this would actually make water baptism a requirement for salvation, for one simple reason: According to verse 28, since we are all "in Christ Jesus", we first had to be baptized into Christ. However, if water baptism actually placed us "into Christ", then we could not be "in Christ" unless we were first baptized in water.

Thus, if Gal.2:26-28 is a reference to "water" baptism, the problem becomes obvious: If we must be baptized with water in order to be "in Christ" (and therefore to be saved), which church actually has the God-given authority to perform this baptism? Do we need to be baptized by the Methodists, or by the Baptists, or by the Church of Christ, or by the Mormons, or by the Jehovah's Witnesses? Suddenly, even our church affiliation is no longer a simple matter of personal belief. Instead, if we have been baptized by the wrong denomination, or if our church has mistakenly prescribed the wrong method of water baptism, we can no longer be assured of the fact that we can be saved at all. As a result, Gal.3:26-28, Eph.4:5, and 1Cor.12:13 must all refer to the one baptism by the Spirit into the body of Christ, and cannot refer to water baptism.

In addition, Paul's epistles contain even more passages which show that our baptism into Christ occurs without water, such as Romans 6:3-6 -

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

Once again, water should never be associated with this baptism. Instead, our baptism into Christ (verse 3) agrees with Gal.3:27 (we who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ), as well as with 1Cor.12:13 (by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body). Again, if the above passage was actually a reference to water baptism, then we could not "walk in newness of life" (verse 4) without first being "buried with him by [water] baptism into death".

Since we are therefore "buried" with Christ by baptism (Ro.6:4 above), we are likewise risen with Him in this same baptism, as Paul also explains in Colossians 2:10-13 -

"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;"

Again, according to verse 12 above, we are "buried with" Christ in baptism, just as Paul also states in Ro.6:4 ("we are buried with him by baptism into death"). Since we are also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands (verse 11, above), then our burial with Christ "in baptism" (verse 12) also occurs without water, as well. (after all, if we can be circumcised without hands, then why can't we likewise be baptized without water into the body of Christ?) The above passage, then, which concerns our burial with Christ "in baptism", parallels our burial with Christ "by baptism into death" of Ro.6:4, and neither baptism should be associated with water.

In addition, Paul's above statement that our circumcision is made without hands indicates that our flesh has now been cut away. This "circumcision" is evident from other passages, as well. For instance, Paul states that we "were" (past tense) "in the flesh", in Ro.7:5 -

"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."

According to this passage, since Paul states that we were "in the flesh", then we must no longer be "in the flesh". This means that our "circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col.2:11) is the result of the fact that we are no longer "in the flesh", as in the above passage. So, our burial with Christ in baptism (Ro.6:4; Col.2:12) could not occur without this "circumcision made without hands", even though it does occur without the presence of water.

Finally, concerning our circumcision of Col.2:11 that is "made without hands", Paul again states that we are "not in the flesh" in Ro.8:9 -

"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Accordingly, since Paul states here in the book of Romans that we are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, and we are also baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13), then our

baptism "into Jesus Christ" (Ro.6:3) must occur in conjunction with the circumcision that is made without hands (Col.2:11). And again, since we are circumcised without hands, we can certainly be baptized into the body of Christ without getting wet, as well.

To conclude this section, then, since we are complete in Christ (Col.2:10), there is nothing that can make us any more complete in Christ (not even water baptism). Yet if we had to submit to water baptism in order to be complete in Christ, then water baptism would be necessary for salvation, as well. Otherwise, we could never be "complete" in Christ without first being baptized in water. And again, if this was the case, the question would arise as to which church has the God-given authority to baptize. So because there is one baptism (Eph.4:5), water baptism should never be associated with the above passages. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ was Himself baptized into death upon the cross (Luke 12:50), we are likewise baptized by the Spirit into Christ's death (Ro.6:3; Col.2:12), and therefore into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13). Since our circumcision and our baptism are accomplished without hands or water, we can understand why water plays no role in any of these baptismal passages. However, if we attempt to read water into the above passages, we are then adding another baptism to the one baptism of Eph.4:5.

Chapter 2: Water Baptism (Washing): An Old Testament Ordinance for Hebrew Priests

In order to understand the actual purpose of water baptism in the scriptures, it is first necessary to look at the role water itself played in the duties of an Old Testament priest. Although our English word "baptize" is taken directly from the New Testament Greek word "baptizo", the actual practice of washing the Hebrew priest with water originated as an Old Testament ordinance. This ordinance, which the Lord imposed upon the children of Israel after delivering them out of Egypt (Ex.29:4; Lev.8:5-6), was an integral part of the Hebrew priesthood. Therefore, the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews uses the Greek word for "washings" (baptismos) in referring to the doctrine of "baptisms", in Hebrews 6:2 -

"Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment."

Yet this author also uses the same word ("baptismos") in reference to the numerous "washings" of the Old Covenant, as well. Beginning in Heb.9:1, the author of the book of Hebrews explains that under the "first covenant" (the Old Covenant), such divers "washings" (baptismos) were temporary and inseparable from the Hebrew priesthood, as in Hebrews 9:10 -

"Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation."

The Greek word "baptismos", then, is translated as "washings" in Heb.9:10; yet the same Greek word is also translated as "baptisms" in Heb.6:2. The words "washings" and "baptisms", then, actually come from the same Greek word. Since the priests were required to partake of such "washings"(in water) before performing their duties, these Old Testament "baptismos" (washings) were therefore water "baptisms", according to the New Testament use of the Greek word.

Likewise, the Greek word "baptizo", which is translated as "wash" only in Mk.7:4 and Lk.11:38, is also translated as "baptize" everywhere else in the New Testament scriptures (the word actually appears some 80 times in the New Testament). As a result, when we read any Old Testament passages that refer to the priests being washed with water (a few of which are mentioned below), we know that these "washings" were actually water baptisms, based on the way the word is used in the New Testament scriptures. So again, this shows that the Lord actually required the Hebrew priests to "wash" ("baptizo", or baptize) with water before they could minister unto Him.

It is also important to remember that when the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, He promised to make them a kingdom of priests (Ex.19:5-6). And even though Israel will indeed become a kingdom of priests in the future (Is.61:6), she has not yet attained to this position, since she currently rejects the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, the Lord has temporarily forsaken the house of Israel, as prophesied (Is.54:7), and her future inheritance as a kingdom of priests has been placed on hold during this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2). Yet under the Old Covenant, the Lord needed to designate those individuals who would minister in the office of the priest. The Lord therefore chose the descendants of the tribe of Levi to minister unto Him in the priest's office (Numbers 3:5-7), among whom Aaron and his sons were included.

So in order to hallow (or consecrate) Aaron and his sons, the Lord instructed Moses to "wash them with water", according to Exodus 29:4 -

"And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water."

Therefore, the above instructions for Moses to wash the sons of Aaron with water, along with certain sacrifices that the Lord also commanded, allowed them to "minister unto" God "in the priest's office" (Ex.29:1). And again, since the author of the book of Hebrews uses the Greek word for "baptisms" (baptismos) in referring to these washings, we conclude that such washings were indeed water "baptisms", according to the book of Hebrews.

Of course, we also know that these sacrifices were ultimately fulfilled by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Heb.9:26; Heb.10:12), and that we are now baptized into Christ (Ro.6:4; Gal.3:27; Col.2:12). Yet the Old Testament Jews were completely unaware that this fulfillment would ever occur. Moses, then, obediently washed (or baptized) Aaron and his sons on several occasions, just as the Lord had commanded. For example, the Lord again commanded Moses to wash them with water in Leviticus 8:5-6 -

"And Moses said unto the congregation, This is the thing which the LORD commanded to be done. And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water."

In view of these washings, then, if we consider Israel's future inheritance as a kingdom of priests (Ex.19:3-6; Is.61:6), the fact that the Lord required the priests to wash (or be baptized) with water becomes significant indeed. It then becomes obvious why the Jews who believed in Christ during the Four Gospels were baptized: In accordance with their inheritance as a kingdom of priests, it was necessary for these believing Jews to be washed in water. And in turn, this meant they were required to submit to water baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

Additionally, in order to show the profound importance of such Old Testament baptisms, the Lord also stated that the priests would actually die if they burned an offering made by fire without first washing with water (Ex.30:20, below). In fact, in this same passage, these baptisms also included the washing of hands and feet, according to Exodus 30:17-21 -

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations."

Accordingly, the manner in which our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled this passage is truly astounding, if one contemplates this fact: Since the Old Testament Law (including the various washings) was only "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Heb.10:1), our Lord therefore "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb.10:12), having "perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb.10:14). Yet the above passage also required the priests to "burn offering made by fire unto the LORD" (Ex.30:20). When we therefore consider that our Lord's Soul "was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31), we can appreciate the magnitude of obedience that was required for Him to literally fulfil the burnt offering sacrifice.

Since our Lord's Soul was not "left" in hell, He therefore went to hell (see also Eph.4:9-10), in order to fulfill the required offering made by fire.

In addition to the fact that the Old Testament baptisms required the priests to wash their hands and feet with water (see Ex.30:19 above), these washings also included sprinklings, as well, as the Lord had instructed Moses in Numbers 8:5-7 -

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."

Yet among those that practice water baptism today, there is much disagreement over whether "modern" baptism should be performed by sprinkling or by totally immersing the believer. However, since the above Old Testament baptisms included both sprinklings and immersions, both methods were obviously required at that time, and each had its own purpose.

Moreover, the Old Testament ordinance of water baptism was not just in effect during Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Even King Solomon himself made provision for the priests to wash with water when he built the temple. Solomon actually made a molten "sea" measuring ten cubits (about 15 feet) across for the priests to wash in, according to 2 Chronicles 4:2-6 -

"Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about: ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about. Two rows of oxen were cast, when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east: and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hinder parts were inward. And the thickness of it was an handbreadth, and the brim of it like the work of the brim of a cup, with flowers of lilies; and it received and held three thousand baths. He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in."

In view of these scriptures, then, water baptism was actually an Old Testament ordinance, and was associated with the office of a priest. If a priest burned an offering without first washing (being baptized) with water, the Lord plainly stated in Ex.30:20 that he would die. This significance of water baptism was then carried over into the Four Gospels, and even into the early portion of the book of Acts, since it was required for salvation at that time (Mk.16:16; Acts 2:38).

Chapter 3: Israel's Inheritance as a Kingdom of Priests

As mentioned before, water baptism was required in the Four Gospels so that those Jews who believed on Jesus could prepare for their role as a kingdom of priests, as the Lord had originally promised in Exodus 19:5-6 -

"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."

According to this passage, when the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, He promised to eventually make them a kingdom of priests. Yet this "Old Covenant" was entirely dependent upon Israel's willingness to keep this covenant. Of course, we now know that the children of Israel ultimately failed in their attempt to keep this covenant.

However, the Lord also promised in Jer.31:31 to make a New Covenant "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah", and this covenant will indeed be literally established at some future date. At that time, when the nation of Israel finally repents and turns back to Him, the Lord Himself will lead the house of Israel to keep His law, as He states in Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Although many dispensationalists advocate a "Spiritual" application of the above passage to the present salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles (and even this writer himself agrees with some of these Spiritual applications), the passage nevertheless stands to be literally fulfilled at a future date. Currently, however, this passage has not yet been fulfilled in its literal sense, since the house of Israel still does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet when the Lord finally does establish His New Covenant with the house of Israel, He will actually make them a kingdom of priests at that time, just as He promised in Exodus chapter 19. This is also evident from other passages as well, such as Isaiah 61:6 -

"But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves."

As the above passage illustrates, the Lord will again separate the children of Israel ("the Priests of the LORD") from "the Gentiles" in His future kingdom, just as He did under the "Old Covenant" (see, for example, Lev.20:26; Num.23:9). Gentiles, then, will not partake of this priesthood when the Lord establishes His New Covenant, since He only promised to make His covenant "with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah", according to Jer.31:31-34 (indeed, the Lord has never made any covenants with Gentiles).

In addition, the Lord promised only His 12 apostles (among whom Paul is not included) that they would sit upon 12 thrones in the kingdom, judging the 12 tribes of Israel, in Matthew 19:28 -

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In that future kingdom, all the nations of the earth will again be required to seek the Lord through the nation of Israel, as prophesied in Isaiah 2:1-4 -

"The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."

The above prophecy clearly refers to a still future time, when Israel will finally become a kingdom of priests, as the Lord promised in Is.61:6. However, the house of Israel is not yet a kingdom of priests, since they currently reject the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord, then, presently considers Israel to be "Lo-ammi" ("not My people"), according to Ro.9:22-25 (compare Hosea 1:9). Yet when the house of Israel finally does become a kingdom of priests, the Lord will at that time restore the kingdom to Israel (see Acts 1:6), and the above passage will be fulfilled (see also Micah 4:1-3 and Zech.8:20-23, and compare the question that the apostles asked the resurrected Lord in Acts 1:6).

As a result, since the 12 apostles will judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt.19:28) when the prophesied kingdom is established, the nation of Israel is still destined to become a kingdom of priests under the "New Covenant", just as the Lord promised in Is.61:6. By contrast, though, Jews and Gentiles alike are both saved today through the fall of Israel, as Paul explains in Romans 11:11-13 -

"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:"

In addition, the apostle Paul, who was the designated apostle of the Gentiles (verse 13 above), never once mentioned the priesthood in any of the thirteen epistles that he wrote (Romans through Philemon). Evidently, this was because the priesthood pertained only to the house of Israel, which has a future national inheritance as a kingdom of priests. Therefore, since the priestly requirement of washing (baptizing) with water is only associated with Israel's destiny as a kingdom of priests, while Paul himself never associates water baptism with believers in this present dispensation of the grace of God, then water baptism has now been replaced with baptism by the Spirit of God into the body of Christ (see section 1 of this study).

The Lord, then, committed "the gospel of the circumcision" unto Peter, while at the same time committing "the gospel of the circumcision" unto Paul (see Gal.2:7, below). In addition, Peter, James, and John also agreed to confine their ministries to "the circumcision" (the house of Israel), while Paul and Barnabas alone were to "go unto the heathen", according to Gal.2:7-9 -

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

Moreover, since Peter confined his own ministry to "the circumcision" (compare also Mt.10:5-7), he therefore wrote concerning this priesthood to the believing Jews, in 1 Peter 2:5-9 -

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:"

Even the apostle John, who also agreed to confine his ministry to "the circumcision"(Gal.2:7-9; Mt.10:5-7), likewise wrote about Israel's future priesthood in Revelation 1:6 -

"And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

See also Rev.20:6, which shows that after their future resurrection, these believers "shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (just as the Lord promised in Is.61:6). Rev.1:6, then, does not pertain to Christians today. Instead, since believing Gentiles no longer need to bless the house of Israel in order to obtain the Lord's favor, then neither do we have any part in Israel's future inheritance as a kingdom of priests. Nor does the previous passage of 1Pet.2:5-9 pertain to us today. Rather, both passages were written to "the circumcision" (Gal.2:9; compare also James 1:1). As a result, the above passages concerning the priesthood, along with the water baptism associated with this priesthood, should never be applied to believers today, since there is "one baptism" (Eph.4:5) by one Spirit into the body of Christ (1Cor.12:13).

Chapter 4: Water Baptism was Required under the Prophesied Gospel of the Kingdom

The prophesied message that was preached by the Lord Jesus Christ and His 12 apostles was appropriately termed "the gospel of the kingdom" (Mt.4:23, Mt.9:35, Mt.24:14, Mk.1:14). This gospel was so designated because the Jews who believed it stood to enter the kingdom of God as priests, just as the Lord promised (again, see Ex.19:5-6; Is.61:6). In fact, although those believing Jews will certainly attain unto the priesthood at a future date, this priesthood will be established only after the prophesied resurrection of the dead (see Rev.20:6, and compare Dan.12:1-3). Even though this fact was apparently hidden from the believing Jews at that time, we now have the advantage of the New Testament scriptures, from which we receive this further understanding.

So, due to the requirement for priests to wash with water, the believing Jews were indeed washed with water (baptized) during the Four Gospels, as well as during the early portion of the book of Acts. They were washed, then, in preparation for their upcoming role as priests in the prophesied kingdom. As a result, just as baptism was required for Hebrew priests under the Old Testament, water baptism was likewise required by the prophesied "gospel of the kingdom",

which was preached by the Lord and His 12 apostles. At that time, all the people who "heard" the Lord (that is, those who believed) received the baptism of John, according to Luke 7:29-30 -

"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."

By rejecting the baptism of John, then, the Pharisees and Lawyers actually rejected the counsel of God (thereby rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ Himself), according to verse 30 above. This baptism of repentance was therefore required for the remission of sins, as in Mark 1:4-5 -

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."

Nor did the requirement of water baptism "for the remission of sins" (verse 4 above) cease with Christ's death on the cross. Instead, this baptism was required even after our Lord's resurrection, as well, since Peter also stated on the day of Pentecost (50 days after the Lord's crucifixion) that the Jews who believed still had to repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

Yet since the Lord Jesus Christ had no sin (2Cor.5:21; 1Pet.2:22; 1Jn.3:5), He had no need to be baptized "for the remission of sins". Instead, He was actually baptized for a completely different reason (as we shall see in a later section). However, many Christians today still ignorantly believe they are being baptized for the same reason the Lord Himself was baptized. By claiming that we should follow the Lord in "believer's baptism" (which is yet another unscriptural term), they are led to believe that the baptism of a repentant sinner today is no different from the Lord's baptism by John. Such a belief, though, is inconsistent with the scriptures themselves.

In addition, Uncircumcised Gentiles, who make up much of the church today, would never be allowed to partake of this baptism for the remission of sins (Mk.1:5), since they (unlike Cornelius in Acts chapter 10) do not bless the nation of Israel in order to obtain the Lord's favor. As a result, since the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" was only in effect for circumcised believers, this shows that we are not members of the prophesied kingdom of priests. Instead, our salvation is now through the fall of Israel (Ro.11:11). In fact, even John the Baptist acknowledged that he came "baptizing with water" in order to manifest the Lord to Israel, in John 1:31 -

"And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."

So, just as John the baptist preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Mk.1:4), Peter's message at Pentecost was equally clear: Even after Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven, baptism was still required for the remission of sins. Yet even though many churches today actually acknowledge this fact, some of them apparently believe the Lord is still dealing with men in this same manner. Consequently, some of these churches still attempt to impose water baptism upon their members, as well, as a requirement for salvation. Therefore, without trying to be too judgmental, this writer nevertheless believes these churches simply fail to distinguish between the Lord's former prophesied instructions to the nation of Israel and His present unprophesied instructions to the church in the "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2). As we saw earlier, the baptism that Paul mentions in his epistles should never be connected to water, since we are presently baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (see section 1 of this study). So by mixing prophecy with the present unprophesied dispensation of the grace of God, the result is confusion over the doctrine of baptism (in addition to confusion over other doctrines, as well).

Chapter 5: Water Baptism was also Required Under the "Great Commission"

While the term "Great Commission" refers to the Lord's instructions for His 11 apostles to teach and baptize "all nations" (Mt.28:19-20), the term itself is never actually found in scripture. Thus, the "Great Commission" itself is only an alleged term, and not really a scriptural Commission. Some dispensationalists, then, do not like to use the term "Great Commission" at all, simply because it is not a scriptural term. Other dispensationalists, though, actually prefer to distinguish between the "First Commission" (Luke 24:45-49); the "Second Commission" (Mk.16:15-18); and the "Third Commission" (Mt.28:19-20), even though the term "Commission" is never used in any of these passages. So in order to avoid such confusion in this study, we would like to clarify our own use of the term: For the purpose of this study, the term "Great Commission" will refer to the Lord's instructions to His apostles in all three of these passages. Otherwise, Christians may believe as they wish concerning whether the term "Great Commission" should be used today.

A dispensational approach to scripture, though, will answer one of the more puzzling questions that arise concerning the Lord's post-resurrection instructions to His 11 apostles, in this "Great Commission". A seeming "discrepancy" occurs in the apostles' response to the Lord's instructions in the "Great Commission", which is really no discrepancy at all: The question arises as to why the apostles continued to confine their teaching to the Jews in the early portion of the book of Acts (see Acts 10:28, Acts 11:19-20, Gal.2:7-9, James 1:1), when the Lord specifically sent them to teach and baptize all nations, according to Matthew 28:19-20 -

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The answer to the above question, though, is really quite simple, and can easily be proven from the scriptures: As far as the apostles knew at the time, the Lord would never accept Uncircumcised Gentiles. Nor would He even accept circumcised Gentiles, unless they first blessed the house of Israel (even though He now accepts both categories of Gentiles). For example, in Luke 7:1-5, the Gentile Centurion, whose servant the Lord healed, was considered to be "worthy" of the Lord's attention because he loved their nation, having blessed the Jews by building them a synagogue. So based upon the apostles' own understanding of the "Great Commission", the Lord never expected them to immediately teach and baptize Uncircumcised Gentiles at all, especially if these Gentiles failed to bless Israel. In fact, even as late as Acts chapter 10, Peter stated that it was an "unlawful" thing "for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation" (Acts 10:28). Of course, Peter made this statement because circumcision was still an ingrained part of life for the Jews, and because circumcision was required by the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen.17:9-14).

In addition, even according to the Law of Moses, whenever Gentiles allied themselves with the house of Israel, they were still required to be circumcised. Otherwise, the uncircumcised man child would still be "cut off", as the Abrahamic Covenant required in Gen.17:14 (for example, the Lord commanded in Ex.12:48 that "no uncircumcised person" could ever eat of the passover). Based upon Old Testament prophecy, then, the Gentiles were required to forever seek the Lord through blessing the house of Israel (see Gen.26:4; Gen.28:14; Num.24:9), and could never be saved through her fall (as is the case today, according to Ro.11:11). So because "the nations" were not yet circumcised, the apostles had no reason to go directly to Uncircumcised Gentiles when the Lord proclaimed His "Great Commission" in Mt.28:19-20, Mk.16:15-18, and Lk.24:45-59.

Instead, certain prophesied events had to occur first, before the apostles could ever teach and baptize "all nations" under the "Great Commission". The apostles, in fact, were actually expected to follow certain steps before baptizing "all nations" (as the Lord further explained in Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8; see below). For example, the apostles fully expected the Gentiles to receive the Lord through the exaltation of Israel, just as the Old Testament scriptures prophesied (Is.2:1-4; Is.27:13; Micah 4:1-3; Zech.8:20-23; Zech.14:16). Therefore, the apostles never expected Gentile salvation to actually result from Israel's fall, as is the case today (again, see Ro.11:11). Even later, though, the apostle Paul would receive his own revelation from the Lord, and finally write that since Israel has now fallen from her exalted position over the

Gentiles (Ro.11:11), we no longer need to bless the nation of Israel in order to obtain the Lord's favor, since Christ is the True Seed (Gal.3:16).

When the Lord therefore instructed His apostles to teach and baptize "all nations" in Mt.28:19-20, they never realized this unprophesied salvation of Uncircumcised Gentiles would ever occur. Instead, they fully expected the Gentiles to submit to circumcision, as well as to water baptism, since the Lord had never informed them otherwise.

As explained earlier, though, there are other passages that also give an account of the Lord's instructions to His apostles under the "Great Commission", and which further explain their own perspective and understanding at the time. Again, the Lord instructed them that belief plus baptism were still required for salvation, according to Mark 16:16-18-

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Of course, many sincere people today, in an honest but futile attempt to maintain their practice of water baptism, will interpret verse 16 above to mean, 'he that believes and is saved should be baptized'. However, this is not at all what the passage states. On the contrary, the Lord's words were specific: Belief and baptism were both necessary for salvation. In fact, this is exactly the same message Peter preached upon the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:38 -

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Water baptism, then, was essential "for the remission of sins" according to the above passage (as it also was in Mk.16:16), and was more than simply "a good idea" at the time. In fact, based upon another account of the "Great Commission" of Mt.28:19-20, the Lord actually instructed the apostles to begin at Jerusalem, according to Luke 24:45-47 -

"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

So under the "Great Commission", the apostles were expected to begin "at Jerusalem" (Lk.24:47 above) before they taught and baptized "all nations" (Mt.28:19), and only those who believed and were baptized would be saved (Mk.16:16). Therefore, the fact that water baptism was required under the "Great Commission" agrees with the fact that even under the Old

Covenant, the priests needed to be washed (baptized) in water before performing their priestly duties.

Chapter 6: Why the "Great Commission" Does Not Apply to Christians Today

While some Christians believe the apostles immediately went to the Gentiles in the "Great Commission", we have seen that the scriptures themselves actually teach otherwise: Since the apostles never even suspected that Uncircumcised Gentiles would ever be saved through the fall of Israel, as is the case today, we find that they were actually following the Lord's instructions to the letter when we read the book of Acts: The apostles were indeed beginning their ministry at Jerusalem, fully expecting Jerusalem to repent, just as the Lord had commanded in Luke 24:47.

Under the "Great Commission", then, the next step for the apostles (which would only occur after Jerusalem had repented) was for them to convert Judaea, and then Samaria, according to Acts 1:8 (see below). Of course, the apostles were certainly not baptizing Uncircumcised Gentiles under the "Great Commission", since this was considered to be "unlawful" (see Acts 10:28). Only when the above steps had been taken would the apostles finally take their ministry to "the uttermost part of the earth", as the Lord explained just before He ascended into heaven in Acts 1:6-8 -

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The above passage, then, further identifies the steps that the apostles were to take under the "Great Commission". After "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), they would next minister "in all Judaea", according to verse 8 above, and then "in Samaria". In fact, the apostles' simple question in verse 6 demonstrated their hope that the Lord would immediately establish His prophesied kingdom, which had been foretold throughout the Old Testament scriptures. Once this kingdom is established in Jerusalem, all "nations shall flow unto it" (Isaiah 2:2). By remaining in Jerusalem, then, the apostles were simply obeying the Lord's instructions in Luke 24:47 to begin teaching and baptizing all nations "at Jerusalem". Since the Lord would never accept Uncircumcised Gentiles (as far as they knew, at least), their intent was not to immediately teach and baptize "all nations" at the time, but to convert Jerusalem first. Prophetically, only after the house of Israel (and therefore Jerusalem itself) repented would the apostles be able to teach and baptize "all nations".

And yes, this prophesied acceptance of the Gentiles through the house of Israel will indeed come to pass eventually, since it has already been prophesied, and "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). For example, see Ro.11:12-15, in which Paul himself affirms that Israel will surely attain to her "fulness" at a future time. Therefore, "all nations" will indeed worship in Jerusalem one day, just as the Old Testament scriptures prophesy (again, see Is.2:1-4; Is.27:13; Micah 4:1-3; Zech.8:20-23; Zech.14:16). So when the Lord instructed His apostles to begin at Jerusalem before teaching and baptizing "all nations", He was actually validating the Old Testament prophecies that concerned the establishment of the prophesied kingdom.

The apostles, then, evidently understood such Old Testament prophecies, because they did indeed confine their ministries to the house of Israel during the early portion of the book of Acts, just as the Lord had instructed. And since Peter, James, and John also made a binding agreement to confine their ministries to "the circumcision" (the house of Israel) in Gal.2:7-9, their own epistles even reflect the fact that they made this distinction, as well. For example, since James actually addresses his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1), this confirms the fact that James, at least, confined both his epistle and his ministry to "the circumcision" (the twelve tribes of Israel). By the same token, Peter and John should have done likewise, since they also participated in the agreement of Gal.2:7-9. And since Peter also stated as late as Acts 10:28 that it was "unlawful" for him "to keep company, or come unto one of another nation", we again know that he was not associating with Uncircumcised Gentiles prior to that time.

In Acts chapter 10, then, the Lord sent Peter a vision of a great sheet let down to earth, filled with unclean beasts, to prepare him for his one and only encounter with Uncircumcised Gentiles. Peter, though, initially refused to eat these unclean beasts, according to Acts 10:14. Up to this point, Peter and the other apostles had been keeping the Law, having never been taught otherwise. In this vision, Uncircumcised Gentiles were represented by the unclean beasts, and the Law forbade the Jews from eating common or unclean meats (see Leviticus chapter 11). In fact, Israel's separation from the Gentiles was specifically represented by this dietary law regarding the eating of meats (as in Lev.20:26-27). So, although Cornelius (the Uncircumcised Gentile) feared God and gave alms to the people (thereby blessing the house of Israel), he was still only an Uncircumcised Gentile. Since the Jews were to remain separate from "the nations" (see Lev.20:26; Num.23:9), Peter therefore considered Uncircumcised men like Cornelius to be unclean, even if they did bless the nation of Israel. As a result, Peter hesitated to even associate himself with these unclean Gentiles, until the Lord made it clear that they had been cleansed. We can therefore understand why Peter's association with Uncircumcised Gentiles was considered to be "unlawful", as in Acts 10:28.

So, because Peter was skeptical about associating with Uncircumcised Gentiles even as late as Acts 10:28, then neither was he speaking to Gentiles in his earlier commandment for the Jews to "Repent, and be baptized", in Acts 2:38 -

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Next, in Acts chapter 3, we again know that Peter was still confining his ministry to the house of Israel: While we now realize the Lord Jesus Christ is the True "Seed" through Whom the nations are blessed (as Paul explains in Gal.3:28), Peter did not yet understand this in Acts chapter 3. So our present understanding, which is based upon the further revelation of "the mystery" that the Lord gave to Paul, was not given to Peter at the time. In Acts chapter 3, then, since the house of Israel had not yet "fallen" from her exalted position above the nations, she was still the "seed" through whom the nations of the earth were blessed, as the Lord had promised (see Gen.26:4 and Gen.28:14, for instance, in which the "seed" through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed are plural, and compare Num.24:9). For example, after healing a lame man at the temple, Peter stated to the Jews that since they were still living in prophetic times, they (the Jews) were the actual "seed" through whom "all the kindreds of the earth" would be blessed, in Acts 3:24-26 -

"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

So as far as Peter knew, even in Acts chapter 3, Israel was still the "seed" through whom all the nations would be blessed (after all, that is exactly what he stated in Acts 3:25). In Acts chapter 3, then, there is no indication that Peter even suspected Christ to be the True Seed through Whom the Gentiles were to be blessed, as Paul alone would reveal in his epistles (Gal.3:16). As a result, since the prophets had already foretold of those days (Acts 3:24, above); yet they never mentioned the fact that Uncircumcised Gentiles would one day be sanctified through Israel's fall, we cannot be living in the prophetic times of Acts chapter 3. Instead, we are living in an unprophesied time period, which Paul refers to as "the dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2). In Acts chapter 3, then, Peter and the other apostles were still not teaching and baptizing "all nations", as the Lord instructed them to do in Mt.28:19-20, since they were only "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47) before continuing on to "Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Nor was Peter teaching and baptizing "all nations" in Acts chapter 5. Instead, he was still obeying the Lord's instructions in Luke 24:47 to begin "at Jerusalem". Again, Peter's understanding that Christ was a Saviour only to Israel is reflected by his response to the high priest, in Acts 5:30-32 -

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."

Once again, according to the above passage, Peter only understood that Christ would give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. Since Peter never intended for Uncircumcised Gentiles to be included in this promise, we again know that he was not yet teaching and baptizing "all nations", as the Lord had instructed in the "Great Commission" of Mt.28:19-20.

In Acts chapter 6, though, the Grecians are mentioned for the first time. Although many Christians naturally assume that the Grecians were Gentiles (which would mean that the apostles were at least associating with Gentiles in Acts chapter 6), this is an incorrect assumption, as well: Again, in view of Peter's later unwillingness to associate with Gentiles in Acts chapter 10, the Grecians of Acts chapter 6 (with whom the apostles did associate) could not have been Gentiles. Otherwise, Peter would have been a Spirit-led hypocrite to tell Cornelius that it was "unlawful" for him (a Jew) to associate with "one of another nation" (a Gentile) in Acts 10:28, if the apostles earlier associated with Gentiles in Acts chapter 6. Since a vision was required as late as Acts 10 for Peter to understand that the Gentiles had been cleansed, he could not have known this earlier, in Acts chapter 6. As a result, these Grecians were actually Greek speaking Jews who, except for their Hebrew ancestry and religion, were indistinguishable from the Pagan Greeks (indeed, this fact is also borne out by history, as well, which is therefore beyond the scope of this study).

As a result, although it was "unlawful" for the Jews to associate with Gentiles, according to Peter's statement to Cornelius in Acts 10:28, the apostles actually did associate with the Jewish Grecians at that time, according to Acts 6:1 -

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations."

Even as late as Acts chapter 11, the disciples (who were "scattered abroad" after Stephen was stoned in chapter 7) were still preaching the word only to the Jews, according to Acts 11:19-20 -

"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus."

The Grecians, then, were not Gentile believers. As a result, the apostles still continued to separate themselves from the Gentiles, and confined their ministry to the nation of Israel, even during the early portion of the book of Acts, because they were still being obedient to the Lord's instructions under the "Great Commission". When the prophesied kingdom is finally established, with Israel placed at the head of the nations (Deut.28:10-13), the 12 apostles will sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt.19:28). In turn, these 12 tribes of Israel will reign as priests over the Gentiles (Is.61:6), as well as over all the earth (Rev.20:4-6). Yet today, the Lord has temporarily forsaken the house of Israel (Is.54:7), and is currently saving Gentiles through her fall (Ro.11:11). Therefore, the Gentiles are no longer required to bless the house of Israel in order to obtain the Lord's favor, as they were at one time (Gen.26:4; Gen.28:14; Num.24:9). In place of the "Great Commission", the Lord has ushered in this present "dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph.3:2), thereby saving uncircumcised Gentiles through the fall of Israel. This was never prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures.

Chapter 7: Why was our Lord Jesus Christ Baptized?

In order for Israel to become a kingdom of priests, they must first have a high priest over them. In view of this, the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews, in writing to Hebrews (Jews), proves that their high priest is to be none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Heb.4:14, Heb.8:1, etc.). Therefore, the Lord was baptized in fulfillment of the requirements laid down under the Old Covenant, in which the priests had to first be washed with water (to fulfil "all righteousness", according to Mt.3:15). In addition, after washing with water, the high priest was to be anointed with oil (which represents the Holy Spirit), as Aaron did in Exodus 29:4-7 -

"And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water. And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him."

This ceremonial anointing of the high priest with oil, which was required under the Law, was clearly symbolic of the later anointing of the Lord Jesus Christ with the Holy Ghost. In fact, since

the author of the book of Hebrews even stated that the Law was only "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Heb.10:1), Peter also stated that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Ghost in Acts 10:38 -

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."

In keeping with the anointing of the High Priest in Ex.29:4-7, the Lord was anointed with the Holy Ghost after being baptized, according to Luke 3:21-23 -

"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,"

In addition, according Luke 3:23 (above), the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized when He was 30 years old, at which time His ministry began. This age is significant due to the fact that that all priests entering the priesthood (the Levites in the Old Testament) were to begin their ministry at the age of 30 years. The Lord specifically commanded Moses to number the sons of Levi "from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old", according to Numbers 4:1-3 -

"And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation."

According to verse 3 above, these priests ("all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation") were to be no younger than thirty years old. See also verses 23-24 (concerning the sons of Gershon) and verses 29-30 (concerning the sons of Merari), who were also to begin their "work in the tabernacle of the congregation" at the age of 30 years.

Of course, after Aaron (the high priest) was anointed with oil (Ex.29:7), his sons were also anointed with oil, as well (Ex.29:21), but the high priest was always anointed first. We can therefore understand why the Lord would respond to John the Baptist that He needed to be baptized in order to fulfil "all righteousness" in Matthew 3:13-15 -

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

The Lord Jesus Christ, then, was baptized at the age of 30 years (Luke 3:23), which was the age at which the priest began his ministry (Num.4:47). Since the High priest was to be anointed with oil under the Law (Ex.29:7), and since the Law was a "a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things" (Heb.10:1), the Lord Jesus Christ, as Israel's High priest, was anointed with the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:38) when He descended upon Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:22), and the Lord was baptized in order to "fulfil all righteousness" (Mt.3:15).

Again, though, it is also important to understand that the Lord Jesus was not baptized as an example for men to follow, as many Christians believe. Because John the Baptist preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4), to even suggest that John baptized the Lord as our example would be to portray our Lord as a sinner in need of this baptism of repentance. In fact, there are no scriptures anywhere that would even suggest that Christ was baptized as our example, nor should any be interpreted to "mean" such a thing. As we have seen, the scriptures plainly teach that the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized as the high priest over Israel when He was 30 years old (the specific age determined by Numbers chapter 4), in order to fulfil all righteousness. Therefore, contrary to popular (although unscriptural) belief, the Lord was not baptized as an example for us to follow today.

Chapter 8: Water Baptism was not a Replacement for Circumcision

Some Christians today, who ascribe to the "Covenant Theology" point of view, also believe water baptism is a New Testament ordinance which replaced the Old Testament sign of circumcision. Again, though, there is not one shred of scripture anywhere that would even suggest such an idea. Instead, this whole theory is proved to be false by the fact that only males were circumcised under the Old Testament. The churches which practice water baptism today, however, baptize both men and women alike. Consequently, if water baptism is a replacement for circumcision, then these churches have no business baptizing their female converts.

Another reason water baptism could not have replaced circumcision is because Peter and the other apostles continued to separate themselves from uncircumcised Gentiles (who were considered to be unclean) even as late as Acts chapter 10, long after the Lord's resurrection. Because the Lord had promised from the very beginning that the nation of Israel would be His chosen People (see, for example, Ex.19:5-6, Ex.33:16), the Law strictly commanded the children of Israel to remain separate from uncircumcised men (Lev.20:24-26). Therefore, the Lord sent Peter a vision of a sheet filled with both clean and unclean meats in Acts chapter 10, in order to prepare him for his one and only encounter with uncircumcised Gentiles. Although Peter had been practicing baptism for quite some time (as in Acts 2:38), he nevertheless admitted that it was still an unlawful thing for him (a Jew) to associate with uncircumcised men (Acts 10:28).

Why, then, would Peter hesitate to even associate with uncircumcised men, if water baptism had replaced circumcision? In fact, the Lord never instructed His followers to avoid associating with those who had not been baptized. Therefore, if water baptism replaced circumcision, why would the Lord need to send Peter a vision to show that uncircumcised men were no longer unclean?

In fact, all 12 apostles continued to support circumcision for at least 17 years after the Lord Himself was baptized (see Gal.2:1-5; compare Acts 15:1-6). Even after the Lord sent Peter his vision in Acts chapter 10, the other apostles still contended with him over the fact that he went to the uncircumcised Gentiles in Acts 11:1-3 -

"And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

As a result, because the apostles were observing the ordinance of circumcision at the same time they were also baptizing believers, water baptism obviously could not have replaced the practice of circumcision. Instead, both circumcision and water baptism were Old Testament ordinances, and were meant specifically for the nation of Israel.

In summary, then, we are not to "follow the Lord in believer's baptism today" (a very unscriptural term). The 12 apostles preached water baptism (Mt.28:19, Mk.16:16, Acts 2:38) to the house of Israel (Gal.2:7-9; compare James 1:1), while Paul was not sent to baptize (1Cor.1:17-18). Since the 12 apostles were instructed to confine their ministry to Israel (Mt.10:5-7, Gal.2:7-9), and will one day sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt.19:28), while the Lord designated Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles (Ro.11:13), Paul did not preach the same thing to the Gentiles that the other apostles preached to the nation of Israel. If we therefore wish to keep the unity of the Spirit (as Paul instructs us to do in Eph.4:3-6), we are to teach only the one baptism by the Spirit into the one body (1Cor.12:13). Consequently, we should not practice water baptism today.

Further information can also be found in the study on Basic Dispensationalism as a supplement. Some concepts, which are only mentioned in this study, are more fully explained there.