1938

Jewish Proselyte Baptism and Its Relation to Christian Baptism

Glen W. Mell

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JEWISH PROSLEYTE BAPTISM

and

ITS RELATION TO CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

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Division of Graduate Instruction
Butler University
Indianapolis
1938
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With a Disciple background, the writer of this thesis has quite naturally been very much interested in the subject of Christian baptism. Any study of the value and meaning of Christian baptism will, of course, lead one back to a consideration of its origin. It seems that one is usually content with the conviction that Jesus instituted baptism and lets it go at that. It is interesting to investigate and try to discover whether this new institution of Christian baptism was really something altogether new, or whether it may have been built upon something which had been practiced before, giving it a larger content and value. Since Christian teachings and principles have their roots back in Judaism, is it possible that Christian baptism likewise might have its roots at the same source? Following this line of thought, we were led back through John's baptism to Jewish proselyte baptism and the ceremonial washings of purification, not only of the Jews, but of other peoples perhaps more primitive in some of their practices. Washings of purification have had a large part to play in the religious history of almost all primitive peoples.

It seems that beginning with the earlier states of society down to the present time, one of the natural tendencies of the human mind has been to adopt a physical and outward act as a symbol, or representation of an inward and spiritual state. An outward dramatization of an inward state has always been characteristic of almost all peoples. The purification of the body by water has always, in every religion, been considered as symbolic of that purified relationship between.
been considered as symbolic of that purified relationship between man and Deity and has always been thought of as an important religious ceremony.

This washing or cleansing of the body by water was one of the principal initiatory rites to the worship of Mithra, a Persian goddess. It was also practiced by the followers of Zoroaster. The Egyptians practiced these ablutions from the earliest times. Those who were to be initiated into their sacred mysteries were first of all bathed in water by the priests. During the annual festival of Isis, which lasted eight days, a general purification took place.

The ancient Greeks used water also in their religious rites. To be admitted to the Eleusinian mysteries, one had to be washed in the waters of the River Iliissus. In the religious ceremonies of the ancient Romans, the water of purification was likewise used. The Druids of Great Britain also used water for purifications. The Oriental religions abound in these ablutions.

The use of water for purification was introduced into the religious rites of the Jews by divine direction. Several ceremonial rites of the Mosaic Law were accompanied by washings. Bathing in water, together with circumcision, was a requirement in the admission of proselytes to the Jewish faith. Here, it seems, we pick up a line that carries us through to the mode and basic significance of Christian Baptism. It is the conviction of the writer of this thesis that Christian baptism is a development from Jewish proselyte baptism, but with a larger and more spiritual content. There is a direct relationship between the two.
Our procedure in this thesis will be to begin with a consideration of the primitive rites of purification, with our attention coming to be focused upon the Jewish ceremonial washings, proselyte baptism, John's baptism, and finally, Christian baptism.

The writer wishes to express his grateful appreciation to Dean Frederick D. Kerchner, under whom he has majored, and whose wise counsel and Christian life will always be a help and inspiration.

There is a rite practiced among primitive peoples which bears considerable resemblance to the ceremony of Christian baptism. This rite almost always carries with it a religious and ethical significance. In the ceremony, water is used to wash away impurities of body or soul, and thus by this process, become purified. The ceremonial use of water was and is quite generally among the primitives, and is looked upon as a means of ceremonial purification.

The use of water in ceremonial rites was the development from the use of water for cleansing and purifying purposes. As the water cleansed the body of dirt, the primitive mind came to attach to it the power of cleansing from evil or warding off evil. It came to be looked upon as the cleanser of the stain of moral guilt.

Tehu, or uncleanness, was removed among primitive people by washing with water. The tabu was then removed from author and new-born child. The tabu essence, as if exuding from the pores and clinging to the skin like a contagious disease, is wiped off with water, the
JEWISH PROSYLTE BAPTISM
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CHAPTER I.
PRIMITIVE RITES OF PURIFICATION

There is a rite practiced among primitive peoples which bears considerable resemblance to the ceremony of Christian baptism. This rite almost always carries with it a religious and ethical significance. In the ceremony, water is used to wash away impurities of body or soul, and thus by this process, becomes purified. The ceremonial use of water was and is quite general among the primitives, and is looked upon as a means of ceremonial purification.

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Tabu, or uncleanness, was removed among primitive peoples by washing with water. The tabu was thus removed from mother and new-born child. "The tabu essence, as if exuding from the pores and clinging to the skin like a contagious disease, is wiped off with water, the
universal cleanser." 1 Water was largely the symbol of purification.

Washing with water was a necessary ceremonial method of removing uncleanness or tabu with the Jews. Among other groups, "even a man who had touched a dead body must remove his clothes and wash himself before he mingled with his fellows;" 2 and warriors returning for battle were required to bathe in order to wash off the ghosts of their victims and remove the guilt of murder. Thus, ceremonial washing with water was necessary to remove the contagion of uncleanness. It served as a protection against impending evil by making one immune to the attacks of a visible or invisible foe.

In primitive belief, water was a beneficent living being. Its motion, sound, power, and its aid to the processes of growth, all seemed to speak of life. It was also believed that no evil spirit could cross running water. "It was by a logical process that water, considered as having many various powers, and being itself the vehicle or abode of spirits favorable to man should have been used as one method of removing the contagion of tabu or the influence of evil spirits, or at a higher stage should have been held to possess

the power of removing the guilt of sin." ¹ The Hindu believed that immersion in the waters of the sacred Ganges river would remove the sins even of a lifetime.

Water which removed dirt from the body was also thought to be able to remove the contagion of tabu. With this the case, it was next assumed that it had further qualities which could remove the stain of moral evil. On this basis are founded the ethical baptismal rites. Primarily, they are simple purifications to remove the tabu. They are also connected with the process of name giving. Then, they are used as initiations, or before the celebration of Mysteries, and in this connection, have certain ethical content. They are thought to remove sin. "The purificatory washing frequently passed over into a mere symbolic act of sprinkling, a process analogous to the change in the Christian rite from immersing to pouring water over the candidate." ²

Various religious societies or mysteries required the baptismal rite as a necessary procedure for admission into the group. Those seeking admission to the Egyptian mysteries of Isis were baptized by the priest for the purpose of purification and forgiveness of sins. Purification by water was one of the requirements for admission into the Greek Eleusinia, and was looked upon as a kind of

¹ Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 2, p.369
² Ibid. p.372
new birth. "The candidate bathed and emerged from the bath a new man with a new name. These purificatory rites freed the candidate from the stain of sin and prepared him for the revelation to come." They were thus admitted to the mysteries.

Among the simple peasant folk of Europe, the unbaptized child continues to be the prey of fairy and demons or witch, because of its pagan state, until it is baptized. At baptism, these are removed.

It was the belief of the Babylonians that water was the spermatozoa of the gods. As the god and goddess cohabited each spring, there was a large outpouring of life giving waters. The Babylonians held festivals in observance of this. In the Semitic area, springs were regarded as sacred and were thought to be the abode of deities. Thus their waters had life giving power.

The Egyptians attributed peculiar cleansing power to the waters of the First Cataract where it was thought by them that the Nile had been born. In order for the dead king to go to the sky and take his place among the gods, he must first be purified by the waters of Elaphantine.

"That which was physically creative was believed to have creative power also in the spiritual realm. This is the reason for the earliest recorded ceremony of what is called 'ceremonial purification.' It was

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1 Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.2, p. 373
recreative. He who experienced it was believed to have experienced a divine rebirth. Immersion in water for the purpose of obtaining birth into a higher life was an ancient custom. There is evidence of belief in the power of water as a divine agency for the renewal and rebirth of life." 1

In Israel we find the same primitive beliefs regarding the power of water, except for the fact that they were modified by the exaltation of Jehovah. Water was closely associated with Jehovah, for in the beginning "darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." 2

It is also reasonable to believe that they attached certain cleansing and life-giving power to water as is evidenced by its use in certain rituals. In order to atone for the unknown murder of a man found slain in a field, the elders of the closest city were to take a heifer which had not drawn the yoke, take it into a rough valley and strike off the heifer's neck. The priests were to come near and the elders were to wash their hands over the heifer. Thus they were to put away the guilt of innocent blood from among them. 3

If a man had had leprosy and it had left him, or if a plague had visited his house and had gone, in order for the man or the house to be completely free from infection, it was necessary for a bird to be slain over running water. 4

2 Genesis 1:2
3 Deuteronomy 21: 1-9
4 Leviticus 14: 5,50
Then there is the story of Naaman's cure from leprosy by Elisha. When Naaman had bathed himself in the Jordan seven times, "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child and he was clean." ¹ Naaman had bathed in Yahweh's life giving waters and had experienced a new birth; 'his flesh came again as the flesh of a little child.' The Hebrews believed that the waters of the Jordan had regenerative power and because the river was the river of Yahweh's land, that power came from Yahweh." ² 

Naaman's question, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" ³ points to the fact that the people of Damascus must have had similar views regarding the life giving power of their rivers, which, in all probability, they attributed to Hadad. After his healing, Naaman declared his desire to worship Jehovah henceforth, ⁴ and asked for a small portion of earth that he might take with him back to Damascus. He was convinced that the healing power of Jehovah and his river was superior to that of Hadad and his rivers. This furnishes evidence that the primitive belief in the life giving and recreating powers of water persisted in Israel.

¹ Second Kings 5:12
² Second Kings 5:17
³ Exodus 19:10
⁴ Exodus 30:18
This primitive belief is manifested all through the history of the Hebrews. When the people were awaiting Jehovah's appearance at Sinai, they were required to bathe in water. A laver was to be placed in the sanctuary in which priests were to wash. The effects of various plagues were said to be cast off by the water. Uncleanliness was said to be cleansed by water. The sin of having eaten the flesh of an animal that died without being bled was removed by bathing in water. The spoils that were taken from the Midianites were purified by being washed. Probably by this procedure, it was thought that their foreign uncleanness was taken away.

Thus, as elsewhere, it was true in Israel that to water was ascribed certain magical virtue, and was generally used in the rites of purification to cleanse and purify both body and soul. In the baptismal bath, one was cleansed of the impurities of the soul, and stain and guilt were removed. It was not only a ceremonial rite but it was also recreative.

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1 Exodus 19:10
2 Exodus 30:18
3 Leviticus 15:14
4 Leviticus 22:6
5 Leviticus 17:16
6 Numbers 31:21-24
The early Hebrews were especially noted for their kind and just treatment toward the stranger which dealt in the land.

"And a stranger shall not be wronged; neither shall thou oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 1 Then shall not oppress a stranger; for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 2 "He (God) doth execute the judgments: CHAPTER II" fatherless and widows; and loveth the stranger in giving his food and drink. Love ye therefore the stranger: THE SOJOURNER AND THE PROSLEYTE, land of Egypt." 2

These passages are not to be understood, however, as expressing universal love or brotherhood. In order for the stranger to enjoy the goodwill of the Hebrew, he must seek the protecting care of the tribe and deity. After entering into such a relationship, whether it be temporary or permanent, he became known as "sojourner," meaning "sojourner," and was granted the same legal protection as a native. Granted this protection, it followed that the "sojourners" owed an obligation to the community which protected him. As long as he was to enjoy this protection, he must not violate the law of

Moses 22:11
Exodus 23:8
Deuteronomy 10:19-19
CHAPTER II.

THE SOJOURNER AND THE PROSELYTE

The early Hebrews were especially noted for their kind and just treatment toward the stranger which dwelt in the land. "And a stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 1 "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger; for ye know the heart of a stranger seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 2 "He (God) doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widows, and loveth the stranger in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." 3

These passages are not to be understood, however, as expressing universal love or brotherhood. In order for the stranger to enjoy the goodwill of the Hebrew, he must seek the protecting care of the tribe and Deity. After entering into such a relationship, whether it be temporary or permanent, he became known as "Ger", meaning "sojourner," and was granted the same legal protection as a native. Granted this protection, it followed that the "Ger" owed an obligation to the community which protected him. As long as he was to enjoy this protection, he must not violate the law of

1 Exodus 22:21
2 Exodus 23:9
3 Deuteronomy 10:18-19
land or the Deity. There were certain religious obligations which he had to obey. He could not violate the law concerning labor on the Sabbath, neither could he engage in the practice of idolatry. He was forbidden to eat the blood of any flesh, transgress the law of marriage, or the laws of the Passover and the Day of Atonement. The death penalty for crime, such as blasphemy, could be inflicted upon him just the same as a native. Although protection was given him and in turn he agreed to certain obligations, yet he was not regarded as a citizen of the community unless he underwent the rites necessary to join the community.

"With the change of the people from a political to a religious status, this relation to the non-Jew underwent a decided change. As the contrast to the heathen became more marked, the Ger assumed a new position. As he pledged himself to abandon all vestiges of idolatry and to conform to certain principles of the Jewish law, he entered into closer relations with the people. Accordingly he adopted certain parts of the Mosaic Code, or the entire law, and thus became either a partial or complete member of the religious community of Israel. In either case, he was regarded as a follower of the God of the Covenant."

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1 X. Kohler, *Jewish Theology* p. 410
In the period following Ezra, even with the exclusive spirit of the time, there developed a desire to extend Judaism beyond the boundaries of the nation. The Babylonian Exile had partially fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, "Unto thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and shall say, Our fathers have inherited nought but lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit." 1 Zechariah looked forward to the time when "many peoples and mighty nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord," 2 and "Ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, "We will go with you for we have heard that God is with you." 3 Isaiah had predicted, "For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land and the sojourner shall join himself with them, and they shall cleanse the house of Jacob." 4 In the Psalms there is reference made to other peoples who shall turn unto Jehovah; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." 5

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1 Jeremiah 16:19
2 Zechariah 8:22
3 Zecharian 8:23
4 Isaiah 14:1
5 Psalms 22:27
The term "Ger" now became the common term for proselyte, meaning those who had rejected heathenism and joined the monotheistic ranks of Judaism as "worshippers of God." The gates became open to heathen who had become 'God fearing men,' or 'worshippers of the Lord.' Thus, the Psalms, after enumerating the customary two or, three classes, 'the house of Israel' of 'Aaron', and of 'Levi,' often add the 'God fearing' proselyte. (Ps. 115:11; 118:4, and 135:20.)

The Synagogue service, with its devotion and instruction in the Scripture was very attractive to the sincere seeker after religious truth. As the Scriptures came to be translated into Greek, the language of the cultured world, there was furnished a good opportunity to propagate the Jewish faith. The propaganda literature of Alexandria stressed chiefly the ethical laws of Judaism, and did not seek to make the Gentile observe the entire Mosaic law or submit to the rite of Circumcision. As Jewish merchants would meet Gentiles in their travels, they would present their religious faith in terms of a broad, universal religion. This consisted largely of a simple monotheism and general humanitarian precepts. It is claimed that "the number of heathen converts to the synagogue was very large and caused attacks on Judaism in both Rome and Alexandria."

1 K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, p. 412
and, "Jews and proselytes in all lands sent sacrificial gifts to Jerusalem in such abundance as to excite the avarice of the Romans."  

The kind of proselytism as described in the above paragraph was practiced only by Hellenistic Judaism. In Palestine, the situation was different, in that the "God worshipper" who had agreed to certain obligations in return for protection, but who had not become fully a member of the Commonwealth of Israel, was largely regarded as a tolerated alien and was looked upon with disfavor in the social system. Dr. K. Kohler states that "legally the 'God worshipper' was termed 'Ger Toshab,' or 'settler,' which meant semi-proselyte."  

The Ger Toshab, however, is not to be thought of as a convert to Judaism, for he did not accept or conform to all of the principles or practices of the Mosaic law. The type of this class, Ger Toshab, was Naaman, the Syrian general, who was told by Elijah to bathe in the Jordan to cure his leprosy, and then became a worshipper of the God of Israel. In the same way, a baptismal bath was required of proselytes to wash off the stain of idolatry. They were then, legally entitled to shelter, support and religious instruction from the

1 K. Kohler - Jewish Theology, p. 413

2 K. Kohler - Jewish Theology, p. 414
authorities. Although their needs were to be provided and protection given, they could not locate in Jerusalem, as there only full proselytes were accepted as citizens.

In order for the proselyte to enjoy full citizenship and equal rights, he was required to conform to the rite of circumcision and take the baptismal bath. He thus accepted the entire Mosaic law as much as did the native Israelites. Added to this, the proselyte was required to bring a special sacrifice as a testimony to his acceptance of the one God of Israel. The term applied to such a proselyte as had carried out the above requirements was that of "Ger Zedek," meaning "proselyte of righteousness," as distinguished from Ger Toshab. The legalistic, priestly view held that only the one who offered the "sacrifice of righteousness," and declared his willingness to obey all the laws of Israel, could become an adopted citizen of Jerusalem, the "City of Righteousness."

"The prominence of the full proselyte in the early Synagogue appears in the ancient benediction for the righteous leaders and Hasidim, Soferim and Synedrion, the ruling authorities of the Jewish nation, where special mention is made of 'the Proselytes of Righteousness.' These full proselytes pushed aside the half proselytes so that while both are mentioned in the earlier classification, only the latter are considered by the later Haggadah. With the dissolution
of the Jewish state, no judicial basis remained for the Ger Toshab, the 'protected stranger.' In the time of Josephus, no proselytes were accepted unless they became full proselytes.

In addition to the term Ger which gave a legal standing to the proselyte, there was also another term used which signified conversion to Judaism. The words of Boaz to Ruth, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust," came to be applied to all who accepted the faith of Israel. Converts to Judaism came to be regarded as being "brought under the wings of divine majesty." The life of Hillel was given to missionary endeavor with the desire "to bring the souls of many a heathen under the wings of the Shekinah. But in this he was merely following the rabbinic ideal of Abraham and of Jethro of whom the Midrash says; 'After having been won to the monotheistic faith by Moses, he returned to his land to bring his compatriots, the Kenites, under the wings of the Shekinah.'

The baptismal bath which the proselyte was required to take,

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1 K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, p. 415
2 *Ruth* 2:12
3 K. Kohler, *Jewish Theology*, p. 415
signified a rebirth, and he was to be as a "newborn creature." The statement of Paul that Christian baptism puts away the old man of sin and creates a new, may be an extension of this view. There were some of the rabbis who declared that the proselyte's bath was more important than the rite of circumcision, as in the case of female proselytes, it was the only initiatory rite.

The school of Hillel, following the lead of Hellenistic Judaism, emphasized the ethical element in the law, and thus gave its encouragement to proselytism. It was greatly in favor of converting the heathen, and in all probability, was responsible for many passages in the Haggada which praised the proselytes.

The legalistic school of Shammai, on the other hand, opposed proselytism, and Eliezer ben Hyrcanos, its chief representative, distrusted proselytes altogether.

After the Temple was destroyed, anyone desiring to accept the Jewish faith and become a proselyte, had first to learn of the sad lot of the Jewish people. If, after learning of this, he still wanted to become a proselyte, he received instruction in a number of the laws, both prohibitory and mandatory, the easy and the hard, and was also informed as to the punishment for disobeying them and reward for keeping them. After this introduction
and instruction, he was required again to declare his belief in God and his acceptance and willingness to obey the laws. Following this, it was necessary for him to submit to the rite of circumcision and take the baptismal bath. He was thus fully admitted into the Jewish community.

Hellenistic Judaism was joined by many proselytes in various lands, some of which were members of the Roman nobility. However, with the advent of Christianity, the status of the proselyte changed and proselytism was discouraged.
CHAPTER LII

THE MISSIONARY ELEMENT IN JUDAISM

The assumption that Judaism as the one true religion was destined to become the universal religion, was a singularity of the Jews. No other religion in that world and time made any such pretensions or cherished such aspirations. This belief in the future universality of the true religion, the coming of an age when the 'Lord shall be king over all the earth' led to efforts to convert the Gentiles to the worship of the one true God, and to faith and obedience according to the revelation He had given.

This does not mean, however, that the Jews sent out missionaries for the purpose of making proselytes, for such was not the case. The Jews themselves were settled in great numbers in many places, there they adopted the language, and were becoming influenced by their surroundings. They were engaged in many occupations, and took their places in the industrial, commercial and political life of their communities. Through their Synagogues, they exerted a considerable religious influence, as the services were open to anyone who was desirous of attending them.

"The conviction that Judaism as the one true religion was destined to become the universal religion, was a singularity of the Jews. No other religion in their world and time made any such pretensions or cherished such aspirations. This belief in the future universality of the true religion, the coming of an age when the 'Lord shall be king over all the earth' led to efforts to convert the Gentiles to the worship of the one true God, and to faith and obedience according to the revelation He had given, and made Judaism the first great missionary religion of the Mediterranean world." ¹

This does not mean, however, that the Jews sent out missionaries for the purpose of making proselytes, for such was not the case. The Jews themselves were settled in great numbers in many places. There they adopted the language and were becoming influenced by their surroundings. They were engaged in many occupations, and took their places in the industrial, commercial and political life of their communities. Through their Synagogues, they exerted a considerable religious influence as the services were open to anyone who was desirous of attending them.

¹ G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, Vol. 1, p. 323
Those who followed the one true God and became adherents to Judaism became so by submitting to the rites of circumcision and baptism. These proselytes thus became members of the Jewish nation.

Philo wrote that a proselyte was one who had resolved to accept the true religion and had "become naturalized in a new and godly commonwealth, renouncing the mythical fictions and adhering to the unadulterated truth." ¹

The sacrifice which was to be presented in the temple by the proselyte after he had submitted to the rites of circumcision and baptism, was a burnt offering for which doves or pigeons were acceptable. This was required of all proselytes as one of the initiatory steps, until after the destruction of the temple. After the destruction of the temple, all sacrifices were suspended. However, the proselytes were required to be present and give a small coin instead of the offering, so that if the temple were ever rebuilt, they could purchase the offering at once. This requirement was later dropped when the prospect of rebuilding the temple grew very dim.

¹ G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era, Vol. 1, p. 327
The proselytes were regarded as on equality with the native Israelites, but in turn, were obligated to keep the law. Some who were forced to become proselytes, such as the Idumeans and Iturians by John Hyrcanos, proved to be very unsatisfactory proselytes; however, they were given their rights and legal protection as such. The Ger Zedek, or the sincere and genuine proselyte, who had joined Judaism for religious motives, were the most acceptable, and were regarded with favor.

The Jew never compromised his convictions with reference to his religious ideals, and the God he worshipped as being the only God. His God was unique and universal. This caused him to endeavor to win Gentiles to the acknowledgment of the one God and obedience to His will.
The exact origin of Proselyte baptism seems to be disputed; a matter of varying opinions. Professor Moers states his position thus:

"The origin of the requirement of baptism is not known.

The rite has a superstitious analogy to the many baths prescribed in the law for purification after one kind or another of religious uncleanness. It is assumed that proselytes were required to bathe in order to purify themselves from the uncleanness in which the whole life of the heathen was passed. This explanation is nowhere explicitly propounded by Jewish teachers in the early centuries."

Moers comments further: "In the whole ritual there is no suggestion that baptism was a real or symbolical purification. It is essentially an initiatory rite, with a forward and not a backward look. A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like that of a newborn child. Former sins are done away by conversion and reception into the Jewish religious community through circumcision and baptism. Proselytes were so regarded and treated so long..."

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CHAPTER IV

THE ORIGIN OF PROSELYTE BAPTISM

The exact origin of Proselyte baptism seems to be disputed; a matter of varying opinions. Professor Moore states his position thus:

"The origin of the requirement of baptism is not known. The rite has a superficial analogy to the many baths prescribed in the law for purification after one kind or another of religious uncleanness, and modern writers have explained that proselytes were required to bathe in order to purify themselves from the uncleanness in which the whole life of the heathen was passed. This explanation is nowhere explicitly propounded by Jewish teachers in the early centuries." 1

He comments further: "In the whole ritual there is no suggestion that baptism was a real or symbolic purification. It is essentially an initiatory rite, with a forward and not a backward look. A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like that of a newborn child. Former sins are done away by conversion and reception into the Jewish religious community through circumcision and baptism. Proselytes were so regarded and treated so long

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1 G. F. Moore, Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era, Vol. 1, p. 332
as they had been properly received and did not openly apostatize. 1

In connection with the foregoing it is interesting and enlightening to notice the discussion of Professor Louis Finkelstein on proselyte baptism relative to its origin. 2 In this article he claims that the Pharisees held that "a ritual bath was required not only to wash away impurity but also as a symbol of higher purification and consecration." He discusses Professor Zeitlin's theory relative to baptism for proselytes originating in the year 65 B.C. as set forth in his treatise. 3 Professor Finkelstein claims that neither of the two premises upon which Professor Zeitlin's theory rests is acceptable. Zeitlin maintains that "the ritual bath for proselytization was part of the nationalistic program enacted into law in 65 B.C.," and that "this enactment proves that the institution was unknown before that time." To this Finkelstein replies that a "survey of all the available evidence shows that far from being a part of a nationalistic program, the purification and baptism of proselytes

3 Ibid. p. 78 A Note on Baptism for Proselytes
was more strongly insisted upon by the pacificistic opponents of nationalism than by the nationalists, and the conclave of the year 65 B.C. re-enacted many laws and gave sanction to many customs which had been prevalent before it, so that even if the baptism of proselytes was one of its decrees, that would not in itself prove the youth of the custom."

Professor Zeitlin bases his belief that the ritual bath for proselytes was introduced in 65 B.C. upon the assumption that the pagans were declared levitically impure at that time.

He draws the conclusion from a statement from a Babylonian Amora in the fourth century, R. Nahman Isaac, who said, "they decreed that pagan children should be considered impure lest Jewish children be seduced by them into sodomy." Zeitlin identifies this decree with the declaration that all pagans were impure. "But," says Finkelstein, "this is highly questionable for if R. Nahman was referring to the impurity of adult pagans, he should not have said 'pagan children.' The most likely interpretation seems to be that even according to R. Nahman the impurity of adult pagans was much older than the synod and that the synod of 65 B.C. extended the status of levitical impurity also to pagan minors." Since the synod referred to was dominated largely by the intense nationalist school of Shammai, it
it is hardly probable that the synod would have decreed levitical impurity to pagan minors, unless it had already been so regarded, as this school was much more lenient regarding the impurity of pagans than were the members of the school of Hillel.

Finkelstein asserts that there was a different emphasis of nationalists and pacifists concerning the purity of pagans. The nationalists emphasized circumcision, and the pacifists, ritual immersion. He says, "The Nationalist laid less stress upon the Levitical purification of the proselyte than the pacifist, whereas according to Professor Zeitlin's theory, the roles should have been reversed. He continues by saying that even if Professor Zeitlin's contention that heathen were declared impure in 65 B.C., and therefore a ritual bath was required for conversion thereafter, this would not imply that the same doctrine and institution had never existed before. It was quite common for one synod to repeat the same regulations and ordinances of a previous synod. Several of the Eighteen Decrees were mere enactments of norms long established." Finkelstein concludes his discussion by saying that in view of the weaknesses stated, "Professor Zeitlin's theory cannot be accepted," and that "We simply do not know why or how the rite of bathing as a means of conversion became so-
While it seems that perhaps it is impossible to state definitely just when proselyte baptism originated, the writer is inclined to favor the position of Professor Finkelstein, in that it was already a prevailing custom at the time the synod met in 65 B.C. Whatever the real origin of the proselyte baptism may have been, it was prescribed for the proselyte in order to work a cleansing and wash off the stain of idolatry.

CHAPTER V

THE BAPTISM OF THE PROSELYTE
THE BAPTISM OF THE PROSELYTE

The practice of baptism of the Jews was a rite which signified purification or reconciliation. With regard to the Levitical laws of purity and expiation of their sins, baptism was necessary in order to atone for any transgression. However, baptism was intended to go further than this in that it was to form a part of holy life. CHAPTER V - it possible for a closer approach to God.

THE BAPTISM OF THE PROSELYTE

The fact that there were many Jewish converts who joined the ranks of Judaism caused the practice of sacramental baptism to be given a new application, that of baptism of proselytes. As the rite of bathing after exebation or nocturnal pollution was, by the period after the destruction of the Temple, regarded by the Rabbis both as a purification, and as a kind of consecration for intercourse with the sacred words of the Law, so was the bathing of proselytes considered at once a purification from heathenism and an initiation or consecration of the convert before his admission to the people of God. 1 Regulations which would demand

1 J. Darwin, The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Church
The practice of baptism by the Jews was a rite which signified purification or consecration. With regard to the Levitical laws of purity and in violation of them, baptism was necessary in order to atone for any transgression. However, baptism was intended to go further than this in that it was to form a part of holy living and make it possible for a closer approach to God.

The fact that there were many Gentile converts who joined the ranks of Judaism caused the practice of ceremonial ablution to be given a new application, that of baptism of proselytes. "As the rite of bathing after cohabitation or nocturnal pollution was, in the period after the destruction of the Temple, regarded by the Rabbis both as a purification, and as a kind of consecration for intercourse with the sacred words of the Law, so was the bathing of proselytes considered at once a purification from heathenism and an initiation or consecration of the convert before his admission to the people of God." ¹ Regulations which would demand

¹ F. Gavin, The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments
of the Jew that he bathe in order to be cleansed and regain his levitical purity, would certainly be followed by a baptism for Gentiles becoming Jews. If any contact whatever with pollution would cause the necessity for meeting the requirements for purification, then surely one who had lived in heathen pollution, and by the very fact of being a heathen, was impure, would be required to comply with a process of complete purification before he could become fully an Israelite. It was thus required of every Gentile who became a Jew to submit to the rite of purification from heathen pollution by immersion. "Baptism of proselytes was an obvious and natural procedure. The law prescribed immersion, a bath for purification in a dozen instances. The state of defilement or uncleanness had to be removed by complying with a divinely ordained ceremony as a means of rehabilitation to the normal state of cleanness." 1

The Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Be KAKOT, says concerning proselytes that "one is not to be regarded as a proselyte until he has been circumcised and undergone immersion, and as long as he has not undergone immersion, he is still a non-Jew." 2

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1 F. Gavin, The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments p. 31
2 The Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Be KAKOT p.305
It further says, "And the idolater may not be taken for Zimmun. That is evident. With what are we dealing? With a proselyte who has been circumcised but has not undergone immersion." ¹

Concerning the process of proselyte baptism, we are told that according to the Talmudic testimony, the baptism of proselytes which took the form of an immersion was carried out in accordance with the Rabbinical regulations for ceremonial purifications and in the presence of three witnesses. The candidate, if a male, was first circumcised and when the wound had healed he was taken to the bath. While he stood in the water the Rabbi's once more recited to him some of the great and lesser commandments. Then the convert made a complete immersion and stepped forth as a fully privileged Israelite." ² A proselyte could not be baptized legally at night, on the Sabbath, or on any holy day.

The following accounts describe the process by which the proselyte was received into the fold of Israel. These two accounts differ somewhat but they are essentially the same.

¹ The Babylonian Talmud, Tractate B ² HAKOT p. 305

"One who comes to be made a proselyte in the present time is to be asked 'Why dost thou come to be made a proselyte? Dost thou not know that at this time Israel is afflicted, buffeted, humiliated and harried, and that sufferings and sore trials come upon them?' If he answers, 'I know this and am not worthy' they are to accept him immediately. Then they are to instruct him in some of the lighter and weightier commandments, and to inform him as to the sins in regard to the corner of the field, the forgotten sheaf, the gleaning, and the tithe for the poor. Then shall they teach him the penalties for transgression: 'Know well that up until the time that thou hast some hither thou hast eaten the forbidden fat of cattle without incurring the sentence of excommunication; that thou hast profaned the Sabbath without incurring the penalty of lapidation. But from now on if thou eat the fat of forbidden cattle thou wilt be excommunicated; if thou profanest the Sabbath thou wilt be stoned.' In the same way as they instruct him about the penalties of transgression shall they teach him the rewards for the observance of the commandments and shall say to him, 'Know thou that the world to come was made only for the righteous,"
but Israel at this present time may not experience very
great good or very great afflictions. Yet one must not
multiply words or go too much into detail.' If he ac­
cept, he is to be circumcised immediately and received.
In case of a discovery of any defect as to a previous
circumcision, he is to be circumcised over again, and when
healed, brought to baptism immediately. Two men learned
in the law shall stand near him and instruct him as to some
of the lighter and weightier commandments. He immerses him­
self, and when he comes up he is in all respects and Israel­
ite." ¹

"One who desires to be made a proselyte is not to be re­
ceived immediately but they are to ask him 'What makes thee
desire to become a proselyte? Behold, seest thou not how the
people are humbled and afflicted among the nations of the
world, how many ills and sufferings come upon them, how they
bury their sons and grandsons, and how they are put to death
for circumcision, baptism and all the other ordinances, and
do not conduct their lives openly and freely like other peoples?'

¹ F. Gervin, Yebamoth, 47 a,b, as quoted in The Jewish
Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments p.33-35
If he answer, 'I am not worthy to give my neck to the yoke of Him who spoke the word and the world came into existence,' they are to accept him immediately. If not, he is dismissed and goes on his way. In case he assume the obligation upon himself, they bring him down to the baptismary and cover him with water to his genitals. They recite to him certain particular commandments; that he should begin to give the corner of the field, the forgotten sheaf, the gleaning and the tithe. As they instruct a man, so they instruct a woman, that she should begin to be scrupulous in regard to the regulations as to purification, the priests' share of the dough, and the kindling of the Sabbath light. He immerses himself and when he comes up they address him with comforting words, 'To whom hast thou joined thyself? Happy art thou. To Him who spoke the word and the world came into existence, for the world was created only for Israel's sake, nor are there any called 'sons' save Israel and all the words which we spoke unto thee have we said only in order to increase thy reward.'

Thus the initiatory rite unto the Jewish fold consisted of the presentation and examination of the candidate, instruct-

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1 F. Gavin, Gerim 1:1-5 as quoted in Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments, p.33-35
ion of the candidate, circumcision, and baptism in which the candidate entered the water, was given further instruction, immersed, and then concluded with congratulation and exhortation.

Upon the basis of Exodus 19:10,14,22, the Talmudic scholars argued the necessity for proselyte baptism. In these passages the Israelites were commanded to sanctify themselves before the Law was given at Sinai. This involved ablation and was a necessary rite in approaching God. "The Rabbis believed that the act was ordained in view of the holy covenant which was to be completed by a sacrifice (Exodus 24:4-8), but which was about to be instituted from the divine side by the giving of the Law. (Exodus 20). They thus assumed that even at that early state, an ablation was the ordained means of gaining admission into the covenant. The proselyte baptism was regarded also as a bath of purification designed to remove the uncleanness of heathenism." 1

While it was the desire on the part of Israel to "spread the knowledge of the Deity and Law," and make the God of Israel the God of all, which led to proselytism, yet Judaism could not

1 Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.2
properly be called a proselyting faith. 1

"Non Jews were accepted only if they applied for Jewish fellowship of their own free will and accord. Every conversion presupposed not only instruction in the principles and ceremonial institutions of Judaism, but also the dissuasion of the prospective convert from his step. He was made acquainted with the sad lot of persecution which Israel endured. Only after this, and after the promise of willingness to share that lot with his newly adopted brethren, could the convert hope to be accepted." 2

In attempting to make clear the significance of proselyte baptism as a cleansing rite, from the impurities of heathenism, attention is also called to the fact that this baptism had in addition the restoration of the cleansed proselyte to purity, so that he became a new person. The baptismal rite connected with every conversion had in it the suggestion of the new birth. "Conversion signified a change of the whole man, as Naaman, the proselyte, after bathing in the Jordan seven times became clean 'and his flesh like that of a little child.'" 3

Again we quote "The expression used by the Rabbis for the

1 C. G. Montefiore, Hibbert Lectures, p.369
2 W. Rosenau, Jewish Ceremonial Institutions and Customs p. 137
3 Jewish Encyclopedia Vol. 3, p.220
person who underwent a change of heart through repentance and conversion is 'berich hadasah' meaning a new creature. The verse 'the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord,' (Psalms 102:19), is explained, 'the people who shall be reborn through repentance of their sins shall praise the Lord,' and it either refers to the Messianic future, 'the generation to come', or to the annual regeneration on the day of atonement which, by blotting out the old year's sins, renders 'the first day' of reckoning of sins.'

We further note that, "After being received as a proselyte, he is regarded as 'newly born' with reference to any guilt as to his past sins and misdeeds and to their punishment. This is the Godward relation of his new status. In regard to Israel, as a child newly born, he is entirely cut off from his family after the flesh; all social relations start anew; he has a special and peculiar relationship legally to the fellowship of Israel." ²

Thus, the proselyte, by his baptism was purified of heathen

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¹ Jewish Encyclopedia Vol. 3, p.220

² F. Gavin, Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments, p. 52
pollution and idolatry, and became a new creature.

We shall now turn our attention to a study of the baptism which was practiced by John, the forerunner of Jesus.
CHAPTER VI

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

The religion of Israel was based upon what was felt to be a covenant relation between God and Israel. When Israel did the will of God, then she was righteous and enjoyed prosperity; and when she disobeyed God, then dreary times were here. As Israel looked at her past, she felt that natural prosperity had been brought to her at intervals. It was further her feeling that only by a supreme intervention of God could she be lifted from her natural bondage and miseries, and that her redemption would come by justice to them. For the Messianic age all Israelites longed for and waited anxiously.

Among those who shared this conviction, very definitely, was John. He realized that in order for this age to come when Israel would be delivered from oppression, there must come a radical change in the national religious situation. The Messiah would come only to a people who were prepared and righteous, and ready for God to rule in their midst. He knew that before the spirit of the Lord could be poured out upon the fullness, there was needed a general repentance toward God and toward His Covenant. John, deeply moved by these circumstances, began his.
CHAPTER VI

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

The religion of Israel was based upon what was felt to be a Covenant relation between God and Israel. When Israel did the will of God, then she was righteous and enjoyed prosperity, and when she disobeyed God, then distressing times were hers. As Israel looked at her past, she felt that natural prosperity had been hers only at intervals. It was further believed that only by a supreme intervention of God could she be lifted out of distress and despair, and that prosperity and redemption would come by justice to them. For the Messianic age all Israelites longed for and waited anxiously.

Among those who shared this conviction, very definitely was John. He realized that in order for this age to come when Israel would be delivered from oppression, that there must be a radical change in the nation's religious attitude. The Messiah would come only to a people who were penitent and righteous, and ready for God to rule in their midst. He felt that before the spirit of the Lord could be poured forth in its fullness, there was needed a general repentance toward God and toward His Covenant. John, deeply moved by this conviction, began his
work of calling the people to repentance, and began the
practice of baptism of repentance for the remission of
sins. His message was "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of
Heaven is at hand." 1

"And there went out unto him all the country of Judaea
and all they of Jerusalem; and they were baptized of him in
the river Jordan, confessing their sins." 2 Why were they bap-
tized? Evidently because their old sinful selves had to be
replaced with a new character in order that they might be
ready to be citizens of the approaching Kingdom of God. John's
baptism was primarily corporate in idea, having to do with the
salvation of a people. This is why Jesus was able to be bap-
tized by John without any feeling of sin except in the corpor-
ate sense. He regarded it as an act of obedience to a divine
ordinance. Since salvation for Israel was as yet only a pro-
mise conditioned upon obedience to the Messiah when he should
come, John claimed no saving virtue for his baptism, but only
a certain preparedness as it was the outward demonstration of
an inward penitence. The baptism of the Messiah was to add
something to John's baptism in that the Holy Spirit was to be
given, and thus adding a spiritual significance.

1 Matthew 3:2

2 Mark 1:5
We know very little about the life of John the Baptist. His appearance in Judea as a preacher of repentance and of the coming of the Kingdom of God, was rather sudden. His father, Zacharias, was a priest; his mother, a devout woman. His attire was rough, his food was of the plainest; his message was one of denunciation and condemnation. He was troubled at the social and religious rottenness of the time. His personality was stern, uncompromising, and fearless. He was a prophet without regard for people or position and resembled Amos at Bethel, or Elijah. He astounded the people of Jerusalem and Judea, and they came in throngs to hear him. Some came through curiosity, others through fear, others because of the desire to prepare for the new day which he was predicting would come. As the people heard him they were stirred with new hopes and expectations. The nation was aroused.

John was fervent in his rebuke of all sins and of those who committed the sins, and was put to death by Herod because of John's condemnation of his immoral conduct. John's words were those of moral exhortation. It seems that in his thinking, the Kingdom of God was to be the purification of the national
life. "By no word does he suggest other than a moral-re-
ligious role for the Messiah, and no record connects him or
his followers with any political movement." ¹

In the proclamation of his message, he was fearless and un-
compromising. "Like Elijah he worked only for present reform-
ation within the bounds of the national religious organisations.
He hoped for a coming Kingdom of God but he did not cherish the
brilliant anticipations of the writing prophets. He did not
think of himself as the person destined to introduce the new
dispensation of things. He felt that while he was a preacher
of righteousness, a stronger arm than his was needed to estab-
lish the perfect divine society. He spoke of a successor who
should complete what he had begun and who should baptize 'not
with water but with the Holy Spirit.' ”

According to Matthew 11:14, Jesus declared John to be a
prophet and more. He said of John that no greater man than he
had yet appeared in Israel. Later, in answer to the Pharisees
who demanded of him his source of authority for doing the things

¹ C. H. Fay, Judaism and Christianity, p.333
2 Ibid p.334
he was doing, he asked them whether they regarded the baptism of John as receiving authority from men or from God. 1 They would not answer his question, and he made no further reply, but this indicates that he regarded both John and himself as in the same category relative to the authority for individuals, a moral renovation. He succeeded in preparing their work.

After the death of John, his disciples continued to exist for a time in the form of a sect, but exerted very little influence. They, as a group, did not join the movement of Jesus, but maintained their separate organization. "John's movement was a response to the demand of the times, but not strong and deep enough to furnish all that was needed. It was the last attempt of the old prophetic thought to guide the religious life of the nation. The Johannites, however, never attained to any deep spirituality nor affected the growth of their group." 2

John was a continuation of that line which held to the traditional moral religious ideas. Courageously he lashed at the vices, and denounced the Pharisees and Sadducees.

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1 Matthew 21: 23-32

2 C. H. Fay, Judaism and Christianity, p. 336
According to one reference, ¹ he may have been of the thought that the Kingdom of God would have in its membership some who were outside of Israel. He attracted the attention of all groups in society, and demanded of all groups and individuals, a moral reformation. He succeeded in preparing the way for his successor who was to usher in a new era in religious life and practice and lead the way to spiritual heights never before attained.

The baptism of John was quite in harmony with the long established usages of the Jews, considering the many lustrations which constituted a part of the Mosaic law and which were practiced on various occasions both by the priests and by the people. Ablution in the waters of the Jordan was well fitted to represent the washing away of sins through repentance. This is also similar to the baptism of the proselyte who through his baptism puts away the impurities of paganism; however, John's baptism differed from the proselyte baptism in that it was administered to Jews.

In John's baptism, the candidate gave witness of his repentance by his baptism, and with the remissions of sins and

¹ Matthew 3: 9
a new character, became fitted for citizenship in the approaching Kingdom of God.
JESUS, AND HIS RELATION TO JOHN

When Jesus heard that John was baptizing in the river Jordan, he came to be baptized and take his stand with the Baptist in the reform work John had begun. Matthew 3:17

He, like John, was troubled over the social and religious rottenness of the time. He was now ready to make a larger service.

CHAPTER VII

While Jesus has been here we have seen:

JESUS, AND HIS RELATION TO JOHN

John's work was only preparatory to the coming of Jesus as the one great need of the time was moral regeneration and true fellowship with God. Jesus always showed a great love of goodness and a desire to carry out the purposes of God. He laid down certain moral principles which were to form the basis of social order and the solution of social evil. Jesus was the one perfect human society. He showed the possibilities of a perfect spiritual establishment.

Jesus did not bless the temptation but called his disciples to be the first to withstand it.
When Jesus heard that John was baptizing in the river Jordan, he came to be baptized and take his stand with the Baptist in the reform work John had begun. (Matthew 3:13)

He, like John, was troubled over the social and religious rottenness of the times. He was now ready to give himself in larger service.

While Jesus may have begun his career as a disciple of John, it was not long until their paths became separated.

John's work was only preparatory to the coming of Jesus. The one great need of the times was moral regeneration and a closer fellowship with God. Jesus always insisted upon a sincere love of goodness and a desire to carry out the will of God. He laid down certain moral principles which were to guide in the solution of social-moral problems and which should produce a perfected human society. He supplied the stimulus to moral-spiritual attainment.

Jesus did not himself baptize with water, but he did command his disciples to do so. They had themselves, in all probability
been baptized by John. (John 4:2) In their practice, they continued the baptism which he used.

In his early ministry, Jesus had for his message practically the same one that John had declared in the wilderness, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) There is no record of the disciples of Jesus continuing the baptism of John after he was imprisoned and beheaded. Baptism is not mentioned as being one of the requirements in order to become a disciple of Jesus.

After Jesus had served his earthly ministry, he made one statement concerning the water baptism to be practiced by his followers. Before his ascension he left the commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16. Some scholars reject these passages, claiming that they were not added until later, and so are not authentic. However, if one is to believe that Jesus did command baptism, and if the Scriptures are to be used as proof, one must accept these passages as authentic.

One of his final instructions to his inner circle of disciples was for them to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. (Luke 24:49 Acts. 1:8) This spirit baptism was to be the distinctive baptism of the
of the Messianic age. John had said that the Messiah would 
baptize with the Holy Spirit. (Mark 1:8) For any direct 
command from Jesus relative to water baptism as having any 
part in Messianic baptism, we must depend upon Matthew 28:19, 
and Mark 16:16.

The water baptism which Jesus permitted his disciples to 
publish, if not identical with John's, was much more like it 
than Christian baptism. It was preparatory and not perfect-
ing; symbolical and not sacramental. Christian baptism was 
not possible until Christ had died and had risen again. When 
John was put into prison, Jesus continued John's preaching. 
(Mark 1:14,15.) In all probability, while Jesus continued 
John's preaching, his disciples continued John's baptism. 
This baptism was not accompanied by the gift of the Spirit 
for the Spirit had not yet been given. Jesus was not yet 
glorified. (John 7:39) In the mission of the Twelve or 
the Seventy, no command was given to baptize. (Luke 9:15; 
10:1-16) This omission would be strange if there was already 
in use a rite equal in efficacy to the baptism of the gospel. 
Until Christ had died and had risen again, and sent the Holy
Spirit upon his disciples, no such baptism by them was possible.

"The baptism of John and that continued for a time by Jesus, was not a ritual act of individual salvation but an act of dedication to a religious and social movement. Baptism of the Jordan was not received to save the individual by himself or in the future life; it was received in view of the impending Messianic salvation and as an act of allegiance to a new order of things. The baptism of John cannot be separated from his preaching; the former received its content and meaning from the latter. His preaching called men to repent of their old ways of living. Baptism was the dramatic expression of an inward consent and allegiance to the higher standards of life which were to prevail in the Messianic community. There is no indication that Jesus or his disciples practiced baptism during the Galilean period of his work. When the practice was resumed by the primitive church, it was once more an act of obedience and faith in view of the impending Messianic Kingdom at the return of the Lord. The ritual act now got its ethical interpretation from remembered sayings of the Master and from the fraternal
Different meanings were gradually attached to baptism. It became an act whereby the guilt of past sins was erased, and also an act of regeneration. It was by baptism that the individual turned his back upon former loyalties and entered into the fellowship of the Christian group. It was an act of dedication to the Kingdom of God.

1 Rauschenbusch, A Theology for the Social Gospel p. 198
THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

"Christian baptism is most intelligible on the supposition that it was a Jewish rite which the Christians took over in obedience to Christ's command, modifying it by the natural adoption of the name and by an equally natural connection with the gift of the Spirit." 1

It is quite probable that Christian baptism was a carry-over from the Jewish rite of purification, proselyte baptism, and the baptism of John in a new setting and a new significance.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon Israel as fulfillment of the promise of Jesus, the first pronouncement was made concerning the conjunction of water baptism and the Spirit. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed to the multitude about him, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the

1 Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 8, p.351
CHAPTER VIII

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

"Christian baptism is most intelligible on the supposition that it was a Jewish custom which the Christians took over in obedience to Christ's command, modifying it by the natural adoption of the name and by an equally natural connection with the gift of the Spirit." ¹

It is quite probable that Christian baptism was a carry over from the Jewish rite of purification, proselyte baptism and the baptism of John, but it was given a new setting and a new significance.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon Israel in fulfillment of the promise of Jesus, the first pronouncement was made concerning the conjunction of water baptism and the Spirit. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed to the multitude about him, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the

¹ Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 2, p.381
Throughout the book of Acts there are numerous references to baptism, and there are points of identification with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the letters of Paul, there is considerable evidence of a connection between baptism and the gift of the Spirit. Paul's "doctrine of Baptism is that on the positive side it gives the Christian union with Christ, which may also be described as inspiration with the Holy Spirit, while on the negative side it cleanses from sin. This it accomplishes by the power of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the sacramental effect of the water."  

In Paul's letters, baptism is regarded as union with Christ. According to Romans 6:3 ff., we are "buried with Christ by baptism into his death and are planted together in the likeness of his death." We are also raised in the likeness of his resurrection to walk in newness of life. Baptism is here regarded as the gift of the spirit, according to First Corinthians 12:13. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized .

1 Acts 2:38
2 Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics Vol. 2 p.382
into one body." The spiritual Christ and the Spirit are almost if not quite, the same. 1 Baptism thus is now regarded as union with the death and resurrection of Christ, and becomes the beginning of a new life of union with the risen Christ. 2 Baptism is also regarded by Paul as cleansing from sin. 3 The rite here is only implied and not specifically mentioned. It is "represented as a cleansing effected through the name of the Lord and through the divine Spirit. Baptism can produce these effects because it works 'in the name' and so links up baptism with the view, prevalent at the time in almost every circle, that the pronouncement of the name of anyone, if properly used, would enable the user to enjoy the benefit of the attributes attached to the original owner of the name." 4

Peter, in referring to baptism, deals with the moral rather than the doctrinal nature of the rite. 5 Since Jesus had been victorious over death and had arisen from the tomb, we may also

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1 Romans 8:9-17 Second Corinthians 3:17
2 Galatians 3:27 Colossians 2:12
3 First Corinthians 6:11
5 First Peter 3:21
through him and his power, do the same.

In the Synoptic Gospels, reference is made to baptism in Christ’s commission to the disciples after his resurrection.

Various references in Hebrews indicate that baptism is regarded by the writer of that book as essential and the beginning of the Christian life.

There is no mention made to the doctrine of baptism in the writings of John.

Israel was admitted into the Covenant with God by circumcision, baptism and sacrifice. Whenever a Gentile wished to join Israel, worship Israel’s God and be obedient to His law, it was necessary for him to be circumcised, baptized, and offer a sacrifice. “The statement here bears directly upon the baptism of the Gentile Christians, and it casts light also on the genesis of Jewish Christian Baptism, for apart from circumcision, the cases were largely parallel. Sinful Israelites too, needed to re-enter the Covenant in a deeper sense; (the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 ff; Mark 14:24, and First Corinthians 11:23) on the basis of the Messiah’s sacrifice.
for them, (Isaiah 53:4 ff; Acts 8:30 ff) so placing themselves under the wings of the Shekinah for protection, (Hebrews 6:1 "Repentance from dead works and faith fixed upon God," and Acts 20:21 - "Repentance toward God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ") and pledging themselves to obedience to the Lord's will under the yoke of His Law.  

In Judaism, baptism meant a purificatory consecration from an old state to a new one. This was likewise true in Christianity. The convert was to have a penitent attitude toward his past sinful state with its "dead works," and disharmony with God, and was to have a new attitude of faith toward God and the Lord Jesus Christ as a ground of hope for the future of which Christ's resurrection was the guarantee of type. "Baptism doth now save us...by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."  

In baptism, past sins were forgiven, and the Holy Spirit was imparted. Thus the convert became a member of the Messianic kingdom. Ananias instructed Saul to "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord."  

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1 Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 2, p. 376

2 First Peter 3:21

3 Acts 22:16
Christian baptism was proceeded by faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sins and the renunciation of the old allegiances and loyalties, and the confession of Jesus as Messiah and the pledge of loyalty and allegiance to him. This process is well set forth in Romans 10:9 ff. Christian baptism was the summary and final process by which one became a member of the kingdom. In the above mentioned passage, Christians were described as those who "call upon the name of the Lord." "With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." Salvation is bestowed upon the heart in which there is faith, and which expresses itself both in the word of the mouth and in baptism.

"Salvation was thought of mainly in its collective aspect. It was the community's state of true prosperity in which, through confession of faith and baptism, from the old sinful state the individual came to participate in the new, holy, or consecrated one." ¹

Christian baptism carried with it the identification of the believer with the Messiah or Christ who was the head of the Messianic kingdom. After one had been baptized in

¹ Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 2, p.376
the name of the Lord, he was regarded as having "put on Christ," or being "in Christ." Christ was himself the coventant for his followers and as they belonged to him, they endeavored to carry out his will and bring their characters and personalities more and more to conform to his. The name of "Christian" was proper and fitting. As the moral union between Jehovah and Israel was, in the Old Testament, likened unto the marriage bond, so in the New Testament, the same figure is used to show the relation between Christ and the Church. The Church is called the "bride of Christ."

Baptism openly sealed the union of the believer with Christ, that there might be the intimate spiritual relation already virtually present in faith, in much the same manner as the marriage ceremony united and sealed together the husband and wife. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit." 1

Jewish Christians thought of baptism largely on its collective side as initiatory into an ideal community with Christ as the new covenant and Messianic ruler. Paul thought more of the personal side and gave emphasis to faith as the bond that

1 First Corinthians 6:17
2 First Corinthians 14:33
3 Romans 5:5-10
held the believer to Christ, "our life." 1

However, there was no essential conflict as both recognized baptism as corporate in idea, "into one body," 2 and also believed that faith and repentance were prerequisites to baptism.

Christian baptism is a testimony of one's faith in Christ, and confirms the consciousness of the break with the old life or moral deadness and identification with the new and abundant life of Christ. From then on, the baptized believer is to "walk in the newness of life." 3 Baptism is the final step in the process of salvation from self and the world and becomes the initiatory step into the body of Christ, the Church.

Immersion was the mode of baptism in the early Church, and it is reasonable to believe that this followed in continuity with Jewish proselyte baptism. There are several references in the New Testament which make it clear that immersion was the practice of the time. Paul implies immersion in his figure of baptism as a burial and resurrection. 4

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1 Colossians 3:4
2 Romans 6:4
3 First Corinthians 12:13
4 Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12
As baptism was the custom of the Jews, both in their purificatory rites and at the reception of proselytes into the Jewish faith, and was also practiced by John, the Baptist, so it was continued by the early church in obedience to Jesus when he entrusted to his disciples the great commission and instituted baptism as one of the rites of his church and Kingdom. "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; 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." 1 And again, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." 2

In obedience to the divine command, the apostles required of all who received baptism a confession of faith in Christ. The language of Peter on the Day of Pentecost to the Jews and Gentiles at Jerusalem was, "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 Spirit." 3

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1 Matthew 28: 19, 20
2 Mark 16:16
3 Acts 2:38
"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." 1

When the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard his preaching in the house of Cornelius, Peter said, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" 2

When the Ethiopian eunuch made the request of Phillip to be baptized, Phillip's answer was "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." 3 Thus was fully established the Christian baptism which implied on the one hand repentance and the washing away of sins and guilt, the cleans- ing from evil, often expressed as "dead unto sin;" and on the other hand, faith in the risen Saviour and allegiance to him, and a new status with God, regarded as regeneration, new birth, a "new creation," or as "life unto righteousness." It was an outward and visible sign that the convert took unto himself the profession of Christianity. By this act, he renounced his Jewish or heathen opinions and practices, and adopted the principles of the Christian faith.

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1 Acts 2:41
2 Acts 10:47
3 Acts 8:37
Instituted by Christ as a perpetual ordinance of his religion, baptism is the symbol of his death, burial and resurrection. It represents as regards the believer, death to sin and the world, and resurrection to a new life. In baptism, the believer is united with Christ and is incorporated into the body of Christ. "Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto 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. Even so reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus."  

1 Romans 6:3-5 ; 11
In this sense we have seen that baptism was practiced by many primitive peoples in general. We have observed that it was a purification or exorcism. In the commission of a proselyte to the Jewish faith, baptism was one of the requirements, having for its purpose the cleansing of the proselyte from the impurity of idolatry and the purification in purity of the CONCLUSION.

The movement of Christianity in reality began with the appearance of John the Baptist. He realized the coming of the Lord, and returned to the multitude on the shores of the Jordan River, preparing them for the approaching end of the present world-kingdom with the proclamation, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and preaching, "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Matt. 3:1-3; Luke 3:3, 6.)

John's baptism was in harmony with the long established usage of the Jews. A ritual in the waters of the Jordan River was well fitted to represent the washing away of sins through repentance and faith. In the ensuing centuries the same to take sway the world.

Jesus and the question came chewing on the heads of men.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have shown that baptism was practiced among primitive peoples in general. We have observed that it was a purification or consecration. In the admission of a proselyte to the Jewish faith, baptism was one of the requirements, having for its purpose the cleansing of the proselyte from the impurity of idolatry and the restoration to purity of the new-born man.

The movement of Christianity in reality began with the appearance of John the Baptist. He realized the coming of the Lord, and rallied the multitude on the shore of the Jordan River, preparing them for the approaching end of the Roman world-kingdom with the proclamation, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." (Matt. 3:2; Luke 3:5) John's baptism was in harmony with the long established usages of the Jews. Ablution in the waters of the Jordan river was well fitted to represent the washing away of sins through repentance and faith in the coming Messiah who was to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus and the apostles were baptized at the hands of John
and when John was imprisoned and finally killed by Herod Antipas on account of his preaching against him (Matthew 4:12; 14:10) Jesus continued his message, and his baptism at least for a time.

After the resurrection of Jesus, and just before his ascension, he entrusted to his disciples the great commission and instituted baptism as one of the peculiar rites of his church and kingdom. In obedience to this command, the apostles, early disciples, and all the disciples of Jesus down through the centuries, have insisted upon baptism as a necessary requirement in becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, and to be identified with his church and his kingdom.

In the Christian faith, baptism has come to mean a cleansing from sin, faith in a risen Saviour and allegiance to him. It is the initiatory step into the body of Christ. By this act Jesus renounces evil practices, old sins are washed away and he becomes a "new creature in Christ." It is the dramatic expression of the inner experience. Christian baptism stands forever as the symbol of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. In Christian baptism, the gift of the Spirit is conferred. The baptism of John did not claim to
give the Spirit, nor did Jewish baptism. Baptism stands at
the door to Christianity in every stage of its development.
Mark styles the ministry of John "the beginning of the Gos-
pel of Jesus Christ," and John "came baptizing." (Mark 1:1)

Jesus was baptized upon his entrance into the work of
his public ministrations. His disciples were baptized and
they in turn baptized. Finally when Christ gave his last
great command to his disciples, to preach the gospel to every
creature, the injunction to baptize was incorporated with it.
Thus, the subject of baptism is of no small importance and is
worthy of the attention bestowed upon it.

Having briefly summarized the line of thought of this
thesis, we shall now make a few concluding observations with
reference to Jewish proselyte baptism and Christian baptism.

(1) Apart from circumcision, the cases were largely
parallel.

(2) The mode of each was immersion.

(3) In each, there was the renunciation of the old
allegiance and the pledging of a new allegiance.

(4) Each was a cleansing from the old pagan life
and signified the restoration to purity of a new born man.
Each was the initiatory rite into a particular group.

Christian baptism had this additional characteristic; that, with it there was the gift of the Spirit; and it symbolized the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. The candidate was baptized in "the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."
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