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In His Dust – 7. Immersion and the Spirit

How Jewish Immersion foreshadows our New Birth!

March 15, 2023; revised September 2024

The meaning, the context, a personal story, and a prayer

Preface

The rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC after the victorious Maccabean revolt¹ birthed a fresh loyalty among the Jewish people and a resurgence of writing in the Hebrew language.² In the first century A.D., the followers of Yeshua (Jesus) recorded His words in Hebrew with the exception of Luke who was Greek. The New Testament was soon translated into Greek, the spoken language of the ruling Roman empire. Although the earliest known manuscripts were transcribed in the Greek language, the original Hebrew words and idioms lay underneath. I love to search for these underlying Hebrew gems sparkling beneath the surface.

Immersion – The Meaning

The Greek word **baptizmo** means **to make fully wet**. The Hebrew word from which the Greek was translated is **tâbal** (taw-bal') meaning **to immerse, dip, or plunge**. **Tâbal** was a foreshadow and symbol of the immersing, saturating Holy Spirit. In Scripture, water is a metaphor of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word **baptizmo** was *transliterated* into English as **baptize** in the early 1600s by the Church of England. A *transliteration* is a new word created using the closest corresponding letters of a different alphabet; a *transliteration* is not a *translation*. (A translation carries the meaning of the original word.) The Church of England practiced the sprinkling of believers, not immersion, so, rather than *translate baptizmo* as **immerse**, they *transliterated* it as **baptize**, a word that allowed their tradition to continue, but also prevented the ability of readers to make the connection between *immersion in water* and *immersion in the Holy Spirit*.

Immersion – The Jewish Context

Jewish ritual immersion was used for **purification**. Everyone had to be immersed to enter the Temple; therefore, many pools (*miqvehs*) were located at its southern end containing *mayim hayim* (pronounced MY-eem HY-eem) or *living waters*, meaning they were not stagnant but flowed from a natural source.

Immersion for converted Non-Jews (Gentiles) was used for **repentance**. Rabbis called these waters “the waters of the womb of the world” for they would say of the convert, “he is now a child born again,” just as a child comes from the waters of its mother’s womb.

Immersion was administered by oneself with a witness present. The entire body had to be touched by the water for complete cleansing, so one was unclothed with fingers separated and mouth open. One immersed three times and then made a confession. “The baptism of John” did not mean that John immersed the people, but that people responded to his convicting message by self-immersing in repentance and anticipation of the forgiveness of their sins.

Yeshua told Nicodemus (a Jewish ruler who had come to Him by night), “You must be born again of the water and the Spirit,” implying that Nicodemus was a proselyte in need of *repentance*. Since only Gentiles had to repent and be born anew, Yeshua’s challenge was radical – that both Jew and Gentile must come into the Kingdom the same way, not by *purifying* themselves but by *repenting* and becoming completely new by the Spirit... born out of the waters of the Spirit!

Immersion into the Spirit – a few Scripture References

- The need for repentance and the new birth is made clear by the Apostle John:
“But as many as received Him (Yeshua) to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)
- Yeshua said to the woman at the well,
“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14)
- On the last day of the great Feast of Tabernacles, a priest poured water on the altar in the Temple to symbolize the winter rains God would send for the next year’s harvest as well as the latter rains of His Spirit when He would come to set His sanctuary in their midst forever. On this same day, Yeshua cried out, saying,
“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ This He spoke of the Spirit whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Yeshua was not yet glorified.” (John 7:37-39; Ezekiel 37:26-28)

A Personal Story

On the morning of April 4, 1980, I awoke to a new life. The evening before, I had encountered Yeshua at a prayer meeting. I didn’t want to be at the meeting, and I didn’t know how to pray. I was just there because the lady who brought me to a church service took me there afterwards. I don’t remember receiving Yeshua. I only remember a deep longing for help. But my mouth opened with a very unpolished prayer and out came a mess of the chaos from my heart along with uncontrollable tears. The Holy Spirit was on the move because then came beautiful words that I was not capable of saying on my own... words, not of an unknown language, but familiar English... words of purity and a desire to be completely God’s. The Spirit drew me and gave me a longing to love purely. I could suddenly see that my love had been selfish. That next day, like a newborn baby, I could only describe my experience as being totally immersed, swimming in an invigorating body of water, looking up through its surface and seeing the world taking on new colors and vibrancy. I was covered with a knowing that I was His forever... not by my own doing, but by His amazing love. I knew I was born anew. He drew me into the clear, still waters of the Holy Spirit.

A Prayer

Father, thank You for causing us to be born again to a living hope! You have drawn us to Yourself and immersed us in the Spirit through the sacrifice of Your Beloved Son! Spring up in us as a fountain of living water! Flow from our innermost being! We praise You! We can’t wait to see You on that day by the glassy sea and the glorious river flowing with healing from Your throne!

¹ For more detail, see *The Feast of Dedication – Hanukkah* at ShaleFragments.com

² According to Dwight Pryor and the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Research