-THE REVELATION OF BAPTISM

Any discussion of baptism is one that must be approached with reverence, a great deal of prayer, and GODLY discernment, EVEN among the Body of Christ. Denominational doctrines tend to "color" a believers understanding of baptism. For example, some denominations require baptism almost as soon as a person has made a profession of faith in Christ, while others tend to down play the water baptism of a believer, but strongly emphasize "the BAPTISM of the HOLY SPIRIT," and yet still others claim that without baptism a person cannot even be saved. Therefore, any revelations from the Father that a person receives about this most important foundational tenet of His CHURCH will be one that is very important to the spiritual growth of that individual.

Baptism is the "immerson, dipping or sprinkling of a believer in water." It symbolizes the complete renewal and change in that persons life and testifies of their faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Most believers tend to think that "BAPTISM" is a New Testament event, not found in ancient Judaism. This, however, is NOT the case. Any New Testament revelations from the Father to HIS body will always have Old Testament roots.

Leviticus Chapter 6 tells us of God's instructions to Moses as to what Aaron (the High Priest) should do before entering the Holy of Holies. This tremendous chapter is one that ALL Christians should periodically review because of its brilliant foreshadowing of the death, burial and resurrection of OUR LORD. Leviticus is an OUTSTANDING testimony to the FAITHFULNESS OF GOD! But of particular interest to this study are verses 4 and 24, which both instruct Aaron to "wash with water," BEFORE and AFTER he has gone into the "MOST HOLY PLACE."

He [Aaron]shall put on the holy linen undergarment, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his body, and be girded with the linen girdle or sash, and with the linen miter or turban shall he be attired; these are the holy garments; he shall bathe his body in water and put them on.

And he shall bathe his body with water in a sacred place, and put on his garments, and come forth, and offer his burnt offering and that of the people, and make atonement for himself and for them.(Amp - Lev. 16:4, 24)

Therefore, "washing" was an ancient Jewish rite that was practiced by most Jewish sects. The Qumran sect (writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls) laid great emphasis on purity and purifying rites which normally involved immersion and which were done to show an individuals repetence and submission to God's will. As the time of the First Advent approached, Judaism in general began to use ritual washings even more frequently, and even, on occasion, used these washings for Gentile converts - although circumcision remained the primary entry rite into Judaism.

PART I - JOHN THE BAPTIST

All four gospels tell us of John the Baptist, a voice, "OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS." All four books ALSO tell us that Jesus Himself was baptized, two bluntly state by John (Matthew and Mark) and the other two gospels, Luke and John, certainly seem to indicate the same thing. John himself tells us in he had been sent from God to "baptize in the Jordan River."

And I did not know Him nor recognize Him;
but He Who sent me to baptize in (with) water said to me,
Upon Whom you shall see the Spirit descend and remain,
that ONE is HE Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

We are told that John was baptizing in the Jordan River for the "repentance of sins..."

I indeed baptize you in (with) water because of repentance -
that is because of your changing your minds for the better,

heartily amending your ways with abhorrence of your past sins
but HE who is coming after me is mighter than I,
Whose sandals I am not worthy or fit to take off or carry;
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Amp - Matt 3:11)

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness (desert),

preaching a baptism [obligating] repentance
- [that is] a change of one's mind for the better
and heartily to amend one's ways with abhorrence of his past sins -
in order to obtain forgiveness of and release from sins.
And there kept going out to him (continuously) all the country of Judea,
and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem;
and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, as they were confessing their sins. (Amp - Mark 1:5-6)

Multitudes came to John - the tax collectors, the Pharisees and the Saduccees, even soldiers.

And the multitudes asked him, Then what shall we do?

And he replied to them, He who has two tunics (undergarments),

let him share with who has none;

and he who has food, let him do the same way.

Even tax collectors came to be baptized

and they said to him, Teacher what shall we do?

And he said to them,

Exact and collect no more than the fixed amount appointed you.

Those serving as soldiers also asked him,

And what shall we do? And he replied to them,

Never demand or enforce by terrifying people or by accusing wrongfully,

and always be satisfied with your rations (supplies)

and with your allowance (wages).(Amp - Luke 3:10-14)

John also had a revelation from the FATHER as to what the appearance of the "Messiah" would mean. The "Messiah" would <u>baptize with the Holy Spirit</u> - (See Mark 1:8, John 1:33) <u>and with Fire</u> - See (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16

How successful was John in the mission that God had given him to do - to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah? We are given a "few hints" of not only the POWER OF JOHN's preaching- but <u>the results of it in Acts.</u>

Meanwhile, there was a Jew named Apollos,

a native of Alexandria,who came to Ephesus.
He was a cultured and eloquent man, well versed and mighty in the Scriptures.
He had been instructed in the way of the Lord
and burning with spiritual zeal,
he spoke and taught diligently and accurately the things concerning Jesus,
<u>though he (Apollos) was acquainted only</u>
with the baptism of John. (Amp - Acts 18:24-25)

While Apollos was in Corinth,
Paul went through the upper inland districts and came down to Ephesus.
There he found some disciples.
And he asked them,
Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed [on Jesus as the Christ]?
And they said, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.
And he asked, Into what then were you baptized?
They said, Into John's baptism.

It is apparent then that John was VERY SUCCESSFUL in his earthly mission - to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. As the fame of Jesus's healing and teaching spread, John's ministry began to decrease. He had known this would happen and it is only later after Herod has imprisoned him that he began to question the authenticity of Jesus as the Messiah. How long was John imprisoned before this happened? We are not told - but probably a period of at least several months and it could even been as long as a few years.....although John would not live long enough to see the outcome of Jesus's ministry, or to hear that through HIS death, burial and resurrection - there had been a LITERAL FULFILLMENT of the "repentence and baptism" that had been his mission! Or to realize what a POWERFUL EFFECT his own ministry had on those who had came to him.

PART II - BAPTISM IN THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

Following the death of John the Baptist, baptism is rarely mentioned again in the gospels. Following the arrival of the Holy Spirit though at Pentecost, baptism becomes a VERY IMPORTANT act of "faith in Jesus and the GOOD NEWS" of the early First Century Church, for both Jew and Gentile.

The first mention of baptism begins IMMEDIATELY AFTER the coming of the Holy Spirit in the upper room when Peter begins to witness to the assembled multitude who are in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. The power of Peter's preaching, and the accompanying "tongues" of those who had gathered in the upper room cause the multitude to ask, "brethren what shall we do?" (Amp. Acts 2:37)

And Peter answered them, Repent - change your views
and purpose to accept the will of God
in your inner selves instead of rejecting it
and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ
for the forgiveness of and release from your sins;and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In this passage we find that Peter has equated repentence and baptism with the name of Jesus and forgiveness of sins, but probably most interestingly he has placed the "gift of the Holy Spirit" after ALL OF IT. The next mention of baptism in Acts we find in the 8th Chapter in connection with Phillip [the deacon, not the apostle]. Phillip was in Samaria at this time following the intense persecution of the early church by Saul. Phillip's preaching and the signs and wonders following it were making numerous converts, as we read in v. 12 and 13.

But when they believed the good news (the Gospel)
about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, the Messiah,
as Phillip preached it, they were baptized, both men and women.

Even Simon [a magician - See v. 9] himself believed,[that is,]
he adhered to, trusted in and relied on the teaching of Philip -
and after being baptized devoted himself constantly to him.

And seeing signs and miracles of great power
which were being performed, he was utterly amazed. (Amp. Acts 8:12-13)

An even more well known description of Phillips preaching comes to us in the same chapter, v. 36-39.

And as they continued along on the way,
they came to some water, and the ennuch exclaimed,
See [here is] water! What is to hinder my being baptized!

And Phillip said, If you believe with all your heart [that is
if you have a conviction, full of joyful trust,
that Jesus is the Messiah,
and accept HIM as the Author of your salvation in the kingdom of God,
giving Him your obedience, then] you may.
And he replied, I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And he ordered that the chariot be stopped,
and both Phillip and the ennuch went down into the water,
and [Phillip] baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water,
the Spirit of the Lord [suddenly] caught away Phillip;
and the ennuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.

Believers today look back on the First Century Church and are astounded by the faith - miracles and movement of the Holy Spirit following Pentecost, but we should not forget that even for the apostles who were with Jesus, there were STILL areas where changes had to be made - and revelations given. The scriptures dealing with Peter and Cornelius show us that GOD's PLAN for SALVATION was NOT to be considered ONLY by the Jewish people any longer. That JESUS had made "atonement" for ALL PEOPLES - of ALL RACES, KINDREDS and TONGUES.

The 10th Chapter of Acts tells us about Cornelius, a gentile who nonetheless, venerated GOD and was devout.

Now [living] at Caesarea there was a man
whose name was Cornelius,
a centurion of what was known as the Italian Regiment,

A devout man who venerated GOD and treated Him with reverential obedience,
as did all his household,
and he gave much alms to the people,
and prayed continually to God.

About the ninth hour (three o'clock) of the day
he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God
entering and saying to him, Cornelius!

And he gazing intently at him become frightened,
and said, What is it Lord?
And the angel said to him, Your prayers and your [generous] gifts
to the poor have come up [as a sacrifice] to God
and have been remembered by Him.

And now send men to Joppa,

and have them call for and invite here
one Simon whose surname is Peter.

He is lodging with Simon a tanner,
whose house is by the seaside.

When the angel who spoke to him had left,
Cornelius called two of his servants
and a God-fearing soldier from among
his own personal attendants.

At about the same time as Cornelius is told to send for Peter- Peter too, is given a vision. His vision and the accompanying voice tell Peter NOT to defile and profane things that GOD HIMSELF has now declared "clean." The servants that Cornelius have sent to Peter - arrive as the vision is ending - and Peter accompanies them to Joppa the next day. Verse 34, of Chapter 10 tells us that Peter's "spiritual" eyes are opened and he recognizes that...MOST CERTAINLY AND THOROUGHLY I NOW PERCEIVE AND UNDERSTAND THAT GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY AND IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS. As Peter tells Cornelius - and those other Gentiles assembled about Jesus - [v. 44] the Holy Spirit fell on those who were listening. The assembled Jews who had accompanied Peter and Peter are AMAZED by this event! But there was NO mistaking it's being from God - because, They [the Jews] heard them [the Gentiles] talking in [unknown] languages and extolling and magnifying God! What a REVELATION to the Jewish brethren there assembled! That GOD would bring the Gentiles into the fold! Another important aspect though of this event, is often missed. The Gentiles received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit - PRIOR to water baptism, which is NOT mentioned until the last verse in this chapter.

And he [Peter] ordered that they be baptized

in the name of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Then they [the Gentiles] begged him [Peter] to stay on there for some days.

The conversion of this gentile group is SO remarkable that word of it spreads quickly. Acts, Chapter 11 tells us that Peter is called to Jerusalem to explain his actions. Verse 2, describes the "attitudes" of the JEWISH BELIEVERS who were aghast at his actions, So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcison party (the Jewish Christians) found fault with him - separating themselves from him in a hostile spirit, opposing and disputing and contending with him Peter explains what happened, and how THE DECISION to go or not to go had already been made for him by his vision and the subsequent appearance of the men arriving at Joppa. Again, Peter stresses in v. 15 and 16, that the Holy Spirit OBVIOUSLY had plans that were different than his Jewish brethren's.

When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit

fell on them just as on us in the beginning.

Then I recalled the declaration of the Lord, How He said,
"John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with -
be placed in, introduced into - the Holy Spirit. (Amp.)

The Book of Acts includes other references of baptism - both through the ministries of the apostles, and of Paul. Other references include: Acts 16:14-15, 31-33, and 18:8.

IN CONCLUSION

Baptism is to reveal to a believer that they HAVE BEEN RAISED up - if they are indeed in Christ.

Go then and make disciples of all the nations,

baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit.(Amp. Matt 28:19)

If then you have been raised with Christ,
[to a new life, thus sharing His resurrection from the dead],
aim at and seek the [rich, eternal treasures], that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.(Amp. Col 3:1)

This saying is worthy of confidence and sure;
If we have died, with Him, we shall also live with Him.

BAPTISM of a believer was initiated by God long before the New Testament Church was formed at Pentecost. However, a deep study of "baptism" as it relates to the Church Age, shows that baptism is a foundational tenet of Christianity - (to show to others by an outward act, the inward cleansing we have received). WHEN it is done though - is NOT as important as many have been led to believe. The Lord will lead a believer to be baptized when HE knows the person is spiritually ready to make that public committment. Baptism is a VERY IMPORTANT act that all believers should have done, but it is NOT NEARLY as important as the state of a person's heart...as we see from the passages in Acts about Cornelius and his family and friends. Every believer before taking this most important step should approach the act with a great deal of prayer and meditation, waiting for their own personal "REVELATION FROM THE FATHER."

NEXT - THE REVELATION OF GOD'S WISDOM

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