

**Series: Baptism - What Does the Bible Really Teach?**  
**“Water Baptism Before Paul” - Part 1**

**Introduction:**

1. One of the great debates today is the issue of water baptism. It is hotly contested among all religions of the world. Most religions quote Scripture to validate their views.
  - Some believe that water baptism is absolutely essential to salvation; others believe it is not essential at all.
  - How could there be such diametrically opposed views on this subject? It is simply because there are verses in the Bible to support **both** views.
2. So what is the answer to this dilemma? The answer is to do what **2 Timothy 2:15** commands us to do. To rightly divide the Word of truth.
3. We see a division in the book of Acts that is unmistakable.
  - From Acts 1-8, the key figure is the apostle Peter.
  - From Acts 13 to 28, Peter disappears from off the historical record and Paul is the key figure, and the next book is Romans and begins with the word "Paul."
  - From Acts 9-12, we see the transition from Peter to Paul.
4. Did you know that Peter and Paul had two completely different ministries (**Galatians 2:7-9**)? You will never understand issues like water baptism until you understand this basic Bible principle.
5. Paul didn't get his message from Peter, but directly from Jesus Christ (**Galatians 1:11-12, Ephesians 3:1-3**), so we would expect them to be different, would we not?
  - They, in fact, **were** different. **Galatians 2:1-2, 6-7; 2 Peter 3:15-16**
  - Peter eventually did come to an understanding of Paul's gospel. **Acts 15:7-11** (the only time Peter is mentioned in Acts 13-28)
6. Let's examine the issue of water baptism before Paul and his gospel show up in the book of Acts.

**Baptism under the Old Testament Law**

1. Someone may immediately question this and say, "Baptism wasn't part of the Old Testament law."
2. **Hebrews 9:8-10** is discussing the Old Testament tabernacle and sacrifices and says that "*divers washings*" were a part of this Old Testament system.
  - The phrase "*divers washings*" is the word translated "*baptisms*" in **Hebrews 6:2**.
3. According to the Bible, the washings of the priests and the sacrifices were baptisms. They spoke of ceremonial cleansing. **Exodus 29:1-4; Leviticus 1:9**

**Baptism under John the Baptist**

1. As the book of Matthew opens, we see John the Baptist proclaiming to Israel, "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" **Matthew 3:2**
2. John is announcing that the Messiah is coming and you'd better get ready! Israel was in a state of utter apostasy from God. John was calling them to repent and turn to God.

- God's imminent wrath and judgment were part of John's message.  
**Matthew 3:7-12**
3. God had long promised Israel a Messiah who would deliver them from their oppressors and reestablish Israel's glorious kingdom over the entire earth. God said that they would be a kingdom of priests unto Him on the earth. **Exodus 19:6**
    - Remember, what must a priest do before he could function in that priestly position? He was washed with water.
    - As John comes proclaiming that it is time to gather the nation together and prepare themselves to function in that kingdom, what does John require?  
**Matthew 3:5-6**
    - One side note: It is interesting that John baptized believing Jews in the Jordan River. This is the place Israel crossed when they first went into Canaan to possess the land under Joshua and where Christ will enter at His Second Coming. This is a significant spot in regards to Israel's kingdom.
  4. John preached "*...the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*" **Mark 1:4-5**
    - If the Jews heard John's message and believed it, what would their faith cause them to do? Confess their sins and allow John to baptize them in water.
    - They would submit to this outward ceremonial cleansing which expressed their faith in John's message.
  5. But was water baptism really necessary at this time? Couldn't a person just believe John's message in his heart and **not** be baptized, and still be acceptable to enter the kingdom? Not according to **Luke 7:29-30**. What does this passage clearly teach?
    - How did the people justify God? In other words, how did they declare that "God is right and we are wrong?" By being baptized with the baptism of John.
    - How did a person reject the counsel of God at this time? By **not** being baptized of him.
  6. It was such an important issue for Israel that even Jesus submitted to this water ceremony. Jesus identified Himself with the believing remnant of Israel.  
**Luke 3:21; John 1:31**
    - The King-Priest (Christ) and all that wanted to be a part of His kingdom were baptized in water to prepare for this kingdom.
    - The people were baptized as a ceremonial cleansing to prepare for the coming kingdom, when at that time their sins would be remitted. (This will be discussed later.)
  7. The twelve disciples and Jesus preached the same basic message as John and operated under this same commission during Christ's earthly ministry.
    - They preached "*...the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" and they preached this message exclusively to Israel. **Matthew 4:17, 10:5-7**
    - They also baptized in water as John did. **John 4:1-2**
    - They did **not** baptize people to picture their faith in the future death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The twelve disciples themselves did not understand this future work of Christ. **Luke 18:31-34**

### **Concluding Thoughts:**

1. Do you see now why it is so important to rightly divide the Scriptures? If not, a person could read all of this and get very confused.

2. Many Bible teachers try so hard to make John the Baptist's message to Israel and Paul's message to the body of Christ one and the same. It simply won't work. Compare **John 1:33** with **1 Corinthians 1:17**.
3. They are **not** the same and never will be. It's simply two different time periods, two different messages, two different purposes, two different commissions to two different people groups. An honest student of Scripture can clearly see and recognize this.