

BAPTISM OF JOHN & OF CHRIST

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Isaiah 40:3-5 says, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” This prophecy is quoted several times in the New Testament and applied to John the Baptist. For example, the Gospel of Mark begins in this manner: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Mark 1:1-3; see also Matt 3:1-3; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:22-23). Malachi 3:1 also prophesied that John the Baptist would prepare the way for Jesus Christ: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts” (Mal 3:1; Matt 11:7-10; Luke 7:24-27). John the Baptist’s father, Zachariah, spoke of his son’s purpose after his birth: “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” (Luke 1:76). A major part of John’s work of preparing the way for Christ was baptism.

Similarities between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ

After quoting the prophecy in Isaiah of John the Baptist, Mark 1:4-5 says, “*John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.*” From this, we can see some important points about John’s baptism that served to prepare for Christ. First, it was an immersion in water based upon repentance for the forgiveness of sins. It was also a *commandment* of God, and was not optional for the Jews who lived in the time of John’s ministry. Luke 3:2-3 says that “*the word of God came unto John the son of Zachariah in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*” John’s baptism was according to “the word of God” which came to him. Luke 7:29-30 says, “*And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.*”

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(continued)

Those who were baptized of John “justified God” by their obedience, whereas those who refused were guilty of rejecting the counsel of God. Jesus Christ emphasized that John’s baptism was from heaven, not of men (Matt 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8). Even though Christ had no sins to repent of, since God *commanded* John’s baptism, Jesus himself was baptized of John to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). Following Christ’s crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, his church was established in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day, the people asked Peter and the rest of the Apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:37-38). Christ’s baptism is also a commandment of God. It is also an immersion in water based upon repentance and is for the forgiveness of sins. In that way, the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ are both alike.

Differences between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ

But there are important differences between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ. The baptism of John was based in a belief “*on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus*” (Acts 19:4). The baptism of Christ is a participation in what Christ has already done: “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin*” (Rom 6:3-6). Also, John’s baptism accompanied his preaching about the kingdom which would soon come (Matt 3:1-2). The baptism of Christ puts one into that kingdom which has already come, that kingdom being the church of Christ (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor 12:13). Finally, the baptism of John was not in *Jesus’* name (authority). His baptism was from heaven (Matt 21:23-27; Mark 11:28-33; Luke 20:1-8), but at that time the authority of heaven had not been given to Christ. After his resurrection, Jesus was given *all* authority in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18), and now *everything* must be done in Christ’s name (Col 3:17), including baptism (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:38; 19:5). Christ’s baptism is that “one baptism” that is commanded to all mankind today for eternal salvation (Mark 16:16; Gal 3:26-27; 1 Pet 3:21).