

BAPTISM

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INTRO: For years I have pondered baptism. Turn to Matthew 3. For some 400 years God had not spoken through a prophet. Some 30 years earlier there had been two amazing births in Israel. First John who became John the Baptist was born. Several months later Jesus Christ was born. All this caused quite a stir in Israel. But then things returned to normal and most people forgot about this.

But then 30 years later a preacher came on the scene. Turn to Matthew 3. This preacher's messages produced tremendous conviction of sin. We begin in verse 1:

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

2 and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him

6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

What kind of preaching does it take to bring people to where they recognize and then confess their sins publicly? Most of us may never have seen anything like that. Now note that people came from all around and they were baptized by John in the Jordan River.

One writer raised this question: "When John the Baptist is in the river baptizing, people didn't walk by and say, 'What is he doing? That's a strange thing!'" End quote. It is as if they were used to such events. I pondered this question for years: Where does baptism come from? Was it practiced in the OT? What

is it based on? Does it picture something? Is it symbolical of something?

Turn to Hebrews 6:1-2. Notice carefully what it says about baptism:

1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Baptism is an elementary principle of Christ. It is the beginning. The doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment, these are elementary discussions. We are to go on from there. But note that it says the doctrine of "baptisms" plural. There are numerous baptisms spoken of in the Bible.

We will begin by looking at the history of baptism. Where does baptism come from, or is it a totally NT doctrine?

I. THE HISTORY OF BAPTISM

A. Jewish Ceremonial Cleansing by Baptism

It may come as a surprise to us that baptism did not begin in the NT or with John the Baptist. Robert R. Cargill, speaking of the origins of baptism says:

I think it's important for people to remember, especially Christians to remember, that baptism had already existed in a different form, or in a similar form, prior to what we know today as baptism. When John the Baptist is in the river baptizing people, people didn't walk by and say, "What's he doing? That's a strange thing!" They knew what he was doing, he was baptizing; and this probably emerges from the idea of ritual immersion that existed in Judaism long before. We have evidence of ritual immersion going on prior to the advent of Christianity because we have *mikva'ot* (mikvehs) we have Jewish ritual immersion and this was for ritual purity. Before you could go worship, you would ritually immerse yourself and this wasn't necessarily for hygiene or for cleanliness, it was for spiritual purity. You would make yourself pure so that you could go in the presence of the deity, you could worship, you could

offer sacrifices. So, long before Christianity developed the idea of baptism, Jews had been practicing ritual immersion in the form of entering into a mikveh, immersing ones selves and then emerging from that purified.

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/video-gallery/o/origins-of-baptism>

It is not uncommon among Bible teachers to think that the Jewish practice of ceremonial cleansing by baptism is the historical background of baptism.

B. Jewish Proselyte Baptism

Another view is that the history behind John's baptism was Jewish proselyte baptism. A Gentile who converted to Judaism is a proselyte. What is required depends on the group one is joining but two things are usually required: Circumcision for men and baptism. This baptism is by immersion. I am not sure when baptism to become a Jew was first practiced but it is suggested it began after 539 BC.



Let me show you a picture of a Mikveh, a place to baptize on top of Masada.

Another article by Matthew Warmbier of Concordia University in Portland, Oregon says:

"Christian baptism is not a novel practice by John the Baptist and used by Jesus Christ as a missional tool.

Christian baptism is instead a product of the clash between Jewish and Christian notions of righteousness before God. Christians, who held as their Jewish Brothers did, that all are sinners and in need of repentance, invite in contrast any and all to the baptismal font. Breaking with much of Jewish Custom in the 2nd Temple Period (539 BC-70 AD), John's baptism was for all sinners and Christ's commission of his disciples sought to evangelize all by baptizing. This baptism is an initiatory ritual that is for all people regardless of birth, race, or ethnicity.

"Judaic baptism, on the other hand, was the precursor to Christian baptism and the fount from which Christianity derives much of its baptismal theology. IT is continuous with Christianity in its initiatory theology, its covenantal language, the physical action of baptism and the requirement of baptism for entrance into the community.

"Christian baptism, however, departs from Judaic baptism over the question of who should be baptized. For Christians (John the Baptist), all people are to be baptized since all are in need of repentance and washing in preparation for the impending kingdom regardless of whether they are a Jew or not. On the other hand, Judaic baptism was only for proselytes. John the Baptist criticizes the Jews for their misunderstandings for who should be baptized."

https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_commons_undergrad/128/

C. Personal View

I tend to think that baptism has a different origin. I see it as possible that both proselyte baptism in the OT and Christian baptism have their origin in something that God gave long before the destruction of the first temple.

When God instructed Moses on setting up the tabernacle and when all was finished an event took place that I think may well be the origin of baptism. Turn to Exodus 30. You are familiar with the OT tabernacle.

The tabernacle was inside the white fence which went all the way around the tabernacle. This fence had one gate. It pictures that there is only one way of salvation and it pictures Jesus Christ. When you entered that door, the first thing you met was the altar of sacrifice. This is where sin was taken care of. The next thing, and it was just in front of the entrance into the tabernacles was another structure called the laver. The laver and was a container that held water and it was open on top.

Exodus 30:17-19 says:

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it,

19 "for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it.

Exodus 40:11-15 says:

11 "And you shall anoint the laver and its base, and consecrate it.

12 "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and wash them with water.

13 "You shall put the holy garments on Aaron, and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister to Me as priest.

14 "And you shall bring his sons and clothe them with tunics.

15 "You shall anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may minister to Me as priests; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations."

This washing of water was the priest's initiation into the ministry. Before the priests used this laver for washing their hands and their feet they had to be

initiated into the priesthood by a complete washing. Turn to Exodus 29. In Exodus 28 Moses received instructions on the clothing for the High Priest and the priests. Then in chapter 29 Moses is instructed in how to initiate the priests into ministry and we'll read verses 1-4:

1 *"And this is what you shall do to them to hallow them for ministering to Me as priests: Take one young bull and two rams without blemish,*

2 *"and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil (you shall make them of wheat flour).*

3 *"You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, with the bull and the two rams."*

4 *"And Aaron and his sons you shall bring to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and you shall wash them with **water**.*

It was the High Priest that performed this baptism. On the words, "...you shall wash them with water" John Gill comments like this: "...out of the laver after mentioned, which stood between the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar: the Targum of Jonathan says, this washing was performed in forty seahs of living or spring water, which was sufficient for the immersion of the whole body, which it is highly probable was the case; and so Jarchi interprets it of the dipping of the whole body, and which seems to have been necessary, upon their entrance on their office, to denote their complete purity and holiness, though afterwards, when they entered on service, they only washed their hands and feet, see Ex 30:18-21 to which our Lord seems to allude, John 13:10, this washing shows what purity and holiness were necessary to the priests of the Lord, and that they ought to be clean that bear the vessels of his house, or minister in his sanctuary, and which were in Christ in their full perfection; and such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, and undefiled, and so could offer himself without spot, and was a fit person to take away sin by sacrifice, and to be an advocate for his people: this may also point at his baptism, which he submitted to before he

entered on his office in a public manner, and which was performed by immersion; and in this way ought all his priests, his saints, to be washed, as well as with the washing of regeneration, and with the blood of Christ; and which is necessary to their officiating as priests, or drawing nigh to God, and requisite to their communion with God and Christ."

Matthew Henry says regarding Exodus 29:1-37: Aaron and his sons were to be set apart for the priest's office, with ceremony and solemnity. Our Lord Jesus is the great High Priest of our profession, called by God to be so; anointed with the Spirit, therefore he is called Messiah, the Christ; clothed with glory and beauty; sanctified by his own blood; made perfect, or consecrated through sufferings. **{Heb 2:10}** All believers are spiritual priests, to offer spiritual sacrifices, **{1Pe 2:5}** washed in the blood of Christ, and so made to our God priests. **{Re 1:5,6}** They also are clothed with the beauty of holiness, and have received the anointing. **{1Jo 2:27}** The Spirit of God is called the finger of God, **{Lu 11:20 cf. Mt 12:28}** and by him the merit of Christ is applied to our souls. This consecration indicates the admission of a sinner into the spiritual priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

There is a lot to unpack in all this which we cannot do in one morning. But I believe that baptism has its history right here at the laver.

II. THE SYMBOLISM OF BAPTISM

So we want to look at the symbolism of baptism. I propose that the water baptism of priests was symbolical for that which was yet to come. A symbol is an object or person or situation or action that stands for something else. For example, the rainbow symbolizes hope and promise. A red rose symbolizes love and romance. A wedding ring symbolizes commitment and marriage. In Scripture, the white horse of Revelation 6 symbolizes peace. The red horse symbolizes war or bloodshed etc. I am proposing that the washing of the priests in the OT symbolized spiritual cleansing, and pictured death, burial and resurrection,

just as believer's baptism does. In the NT every believer is a priest.

A. The Picture of Baptism

1. Cleansing by water

Now in the OT, the priest was responsible for the spiritual well-being of the nation. The priest must then be a morally clean person and water pictures cleansing. In Christianity, every Christian is a priest. Listen to 1 Peter 2:7-9:

7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,"

8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

The believer becomes part of a royal priesthood. That is a most interesting phrase. Royalty and priesthood did not mix in the OT but the believer becomes both. Listen to Revelation 1:4-6:

4 John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,

6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Jesus Christ has made kings and priests of those who are washed in His blood; that is the believer. Just like the priest was initiated into the ministry by water baptism, so the believer is initiated into his priesthood by water baptism.

Peter then goes on to speak of the believer like this in verse 10:

10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The Gentiles who were once considered to not be the people of God have now become the people of God and they are a royal priesthood. And to be initiated into the priesthood, they are baptized.

We have stressed believing in Christ and have downplayed baptism as if it is not important. But if we are truly believers, we should be willing to identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection by baptism.

Let me insert here that baptism is not a work. It does not earn anything. When we think we have become Christians or we are more holy because we have been baptized, then we have made it a work and works have no part in salvation. Baptism is not a work. It is like signing a contract. Signing a contract does not earn anything, it commits us to something. Baptism is a public commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. If I am an adult and profess to be a believer, not being baptized is like a woman getting married but she will not take her husband's name.

We have the difficulty today of people making a commitment to Christ while they are young and for them to then know they they should be baptized. I believe we should be baptized when we are also ready to commit for life and when we say, "If I should fall into sin and am not willing to repent, I should be excommunicated." Today we have an almost totally undisciplined Church. To surrender to baptism is to commit 100%. If one is not ready for that, one is not ready for baptism. The Christian life is very, very serious.

2. The significance of water

So, what of the water? What does it symbolize? John 3:5 has caused no end of difficulty for Bible students. Turn to that chapter. Jesus said to Nicodemus that unless a person is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What did Jesus mean by the water? And there are a multitude of views. For example some think it is baptism and others it is like a person being born first out of a watery sack and the second time he must be born by water baptism.

I view the terms "water" and "spirit" both as symbolical. The word translated "spirit" can be translated *wind*, or *breath*, or spirit. Note in verse 5 the word "spirit." It is the Greek word *pneuma*. When we speak of pneumatic tires, they are tires with air in them, *pneuma*. Look at verse 9. It says the wind blows where it wishes. That is the word *pneuma*. So this verse could be translated like this, "Except a man be born of water and wind he cannot enter the kingdom of God." This makes both words symbolical.

Now it is very easy to know what the word "wind" symbolizes. It is not new to Scripture that it refers to the Holy Spirit (Ez. 37:9; Jn. 20:22). But what of the word "water"? Well, I believe the water represents the Word of God. Listen to 1 Peter 1:22-23:

22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the

brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,

23 having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

We are born again by the Word of God. Listen to James 1:18:

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

He brought us forth, caused us to be born again by the Word of God.

Then notice that the Word of God, like water, is a cleansing agent. Listen to John 15:3:

3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

It is the Word of God that washes us.

Listen to Ephesians 5:25-27:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

How does Jesus cleanse the Church, which is His bride? With the washing of the water of the Word of God.

Consider the symbolism of water in 1 Peter 3. We begin in verse 18.

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God,

being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,

19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,

20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.

Notice that Noah and his family were saved by water. That is a picture of baptism. Did the water save them? It is a picture of death, burial, and resurrection. The same element that drowned the world saved Noah and his family because they believed God and were in the ark. If we believe in Christ, we are saved in Him. Baptism symbolizes that salvation.

We go on to verse 21:

21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

There is an antitype that saves us, and that antitype or symbol is baptism. So we ask, "Does baptism saves us?" No! It is a symbol of our salvation. It is not a washing to wash off the dirt on the body. It pictures the washing of our inner man by the Word of God. Therefore we are never baptized to be saved. We should be baptized to show we are saved and fully surrendered to Jesus Christ. We have been washed by the Word of God, now we show that by the washing of water in baptism.

B. The Picture of Immersion

I think a case can be made for immersion, or better, submersion baptism. Some hold that the laver which stood between the altar and the temple was big enough

to submerge in. Jewish proselyte baptism and their ritualistic baptisms were by going under water.

As I pondered this again, baptism pictures both cleansing and death burial and resurrection. This is what is pictured by Israel going through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). When they came up out of the watery grave on the other side it pictures resurrection and that happened on the day of the Feast of Firstfruits, which pictures the resurrection.

From the method of pouring water on a baptismal candidate we might conclude that baptism pictures the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believer. But I think baptism pictures death, burial and resurrection. So Romans 6:4 says:

*4 Therefore we were **buried with Him** through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

III. JOHN'S BAPTISM

Our next question is; what was the significance of John's baptism? John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and prepared people for Jesus Christ. In the OT sinners were saved by grace through faith, just like in the NT. The difference, however, lay in the fact that their faith looked forward to the sacrifice that would yet happen for their sins. Their sins were not yet forgiven, they were covered. The removal of those sins awaited the day when the Messiah would die for mankind.

Turn to Acts 19. We have an interesting event recorded in here. The Apostle Paul had come to Corinth and he found some disciples there. We'll read from verse 1:

1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples

2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

In verse 4 Paul said that John baptized with a baptism of repentance saying that the people should believe on Him who would come after, that is on Christ Jesus. That name is all important here. The name Christ means he was the anointed one. God Almighty had anointed Him. This was when the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove at His baptism.

So note the words that they should believe on the One that should come after John. They were still looking forward. But the work that would secure the forgiveness of sins was not yet complete. When these disciples heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. I expect that if we had the whole message we would hear Paul explain how Christ had died in their place, had been buried and been in the grave three days and three nights, and then had been resurrected. He had secured the forgiveness of sins by His sacrificial death on behalf of all those who believed in Him.

They then were baptized in His name, meaning all that He stood for. And so at this baptism they were initiated into the New Covenant. Today believers do not need a rebaptism. Christ's death, burial and resurrection has been done. It is finished. It is all complete. There is nothing more to follow.

IV. BELIEVER'S BAPTISM

After the Church began, I believe baptism is the initiation rite that shows the repentant sinner has entered the New Covenant with Christ. This could not happen before Christ died, was buried, and rose again.

Believers do not need to be baptized again and again. They are baptized once, showing they have entered a covenant relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ for life. To violate this commitment requires excommunication by the church. I might add that the OT priest was baptized once. After this he only needed to wash his hands and feet.

V. FINAL FULFILLEMTN

Now I ask, since this picture of baptism has significance in the past, and since it has significance in the present, does it have significance in the future? I believe there is a final fulfillment of that which was begun when the priests of the OT were baptized at the laver. Where do we find this fulfillment? Appropriately it is found in the book of Revelation! We go first to Revelation 4:6. In Revelation 4-5 the Apostle John is taken up to heaven and it tells us what he saw there. He is taken to the throne of God. The first thing John sees is the throne of God. Verse 6 says:

6 Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

Before the throne of God in heaven there is a sea of glass, like crystal. No further description is here given of what this might be other than that it is like crystal. John Walvoord rightly says, and I quote "As in other portions of the book of Revelation, however, John expects the reader to draw conclusions from similar scenes elsewhere in the Bible. There seems here to be an analogy of comparison to the sea of brass in the Tabernacle in the Old Testament or the molten sea in the temple. Both were lavers or washstands, designed for the cleansing of the priests, and contained water used for various ceremonial rites. This may represent the sanctifying power of the Word of God" (108-9).

In my view he is completely right in all of what he said. When one studies the Bible for many years your mind automatically makes connections when you read a verse like verse 6 and those were the same conclusions I came to. Further, there is no doubt in my mind that baptism is a key idea in this laver. Gill says on verse 6 after giving numerous other views: "Others think the ordinance of

baptism is designed, of which the Red sea, through which the Israelites passed under the cloud, was an emblem; and which may be compared to a "sea of glass," for its transparency, it clearly expressing the sufferings, burial, and resurrection of Christ; and to crystal, for its purity; and to all this for its cleansing nature, as it leads unto the blood of Christ; and its being before the throne may denote its being the way of entrance into the Gospel church." End quote.

Does anyone know what this laver was made from? The brass sea before the tabernacle was made of the mirrors women used. The mirrors women used were made of brass and the water the sea held is also a mirror. I have no doubt the significance is that of seeing oneself in the Word of God. We could say much here, but all of it boils down to this that when the sinner sees his reflection looking like that of the Word of God, he will see one who has been purified by the Word of God.

So we go now to Revelation 15:1-2:

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

JFB comment on verse 2:

"2. sea of glass - Answering to the molten sea or great brazen laver before the mercy seat of the earthly temple, for the purification of the priests; typifying the baptism of water and the Spirit of all who are made kings and priests unto God."

And then he comments further:

"mingled with fire - answering to the *baptism* on earth *with fire*, that is, fiery trial, as well as with the Holy Ghost, which Christ's people undergo to purify them, as gold is purified of its dross in the furnace." End quote.

After the believer passes the altar at the entrance of heaven, here, on this sea of glass, the believer gets to stand. That which the waters of baptism signified is here fulfilled. Here is the perfected believer. That final perfection has taken place at the altar of sacrifice which is the first thing the believer meets when he enters heaven (Rev. 6:9-11. Here all final purification takes place. In these verses we find those we might call "fresh off the boat." It says:

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Now notice further in Revelation 15:3 it says:

3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!"

When did Moses sing that song? When they came out of the baptism of the Red Sea. Listen to 1 Corinthians 10:1-2:

1 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea,

2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

So baptism has a past significance, a present significance, and a future significance. Only those who are cleansed by the Word of God will stand on that final sea of glass.

CONCL: So to conclude, I believe that baptism did not develop out of Jewish customs. I believe the Jewish customs, John's baptism, and Christian baptism developed out of the washing of the priests in the OT. It was a commitment to the service of God for life, that which was signified in the baptism of priests at the laver. Later, because these practices of baptism were so common among the Jews, when John came on the scene and baptized, baptism was nothing new to the Jewish community. However, John did not baptize in some place specifically designed for that. He baptized by the Jordon River. You see, the Gospel would go to the whole world, and baptisms could be performed wherever there was water.

When the Jewish priests were washed, they were initiated into the ministry by this baptism. They were only washed once. After that they only washed their hands and feet. There may be some connection there to Jesus' washing of the disciple's feet. He said in John 13:10:

10 Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

When a sinner converts and becomes a Christian, baptism is the initiation rite into the universal Church. It pictures that he has been cleansed, and it pictures his death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ. It further pictures the believer's continual washing by the water of the Word.

When the believer enters heaven he first comes past the altar of sacrifice. Anything that is not cleansed yet is cleansed there. I believe that there the loss of rewards or the giving of rewards takes place. When he is, what we say, clean as a whistle, he will get his turn on the sea of glass before the throne of God Almighty!

I ask everyone who has been baptized, are you standing true to your commitment? Has work, or pleasure, or sin, or the difficulties of being a 100% committed Christian been squeezing you out of that commitment? A man who had gone through deep difficulties said, "Sometimes I wish I could be a mediocre Christian." I wonder where he is today. I ask you, are you totally committed this morning? You don't want to serve in the church? It cuts into your other interests? I ask you, is Jesus Christ truly your Lord? And you say, "He is, but..." Well, then He isn't.

I ask every baptized believer, is it time to renew your commitment? Some young person, is it time to consider if you are really sold out to God? You say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian. I made a commitment once." I ask you, is it time to make another one? Let me name for you a rare commodity in the church: Commitment!

Could I ask you, if we had a gauge and we could put your name on it, and it would read your commitment level, I ask you, with 10 being highest, what would it read? Then may I ask you, will you come past the altar at the entrance gate of the New Jerusalem? Will you get to stand on the sea of glass and see a perfected saint? And then let me give this warning from Jesus Christ Himself: Out of the total of mankind, few will be saved.