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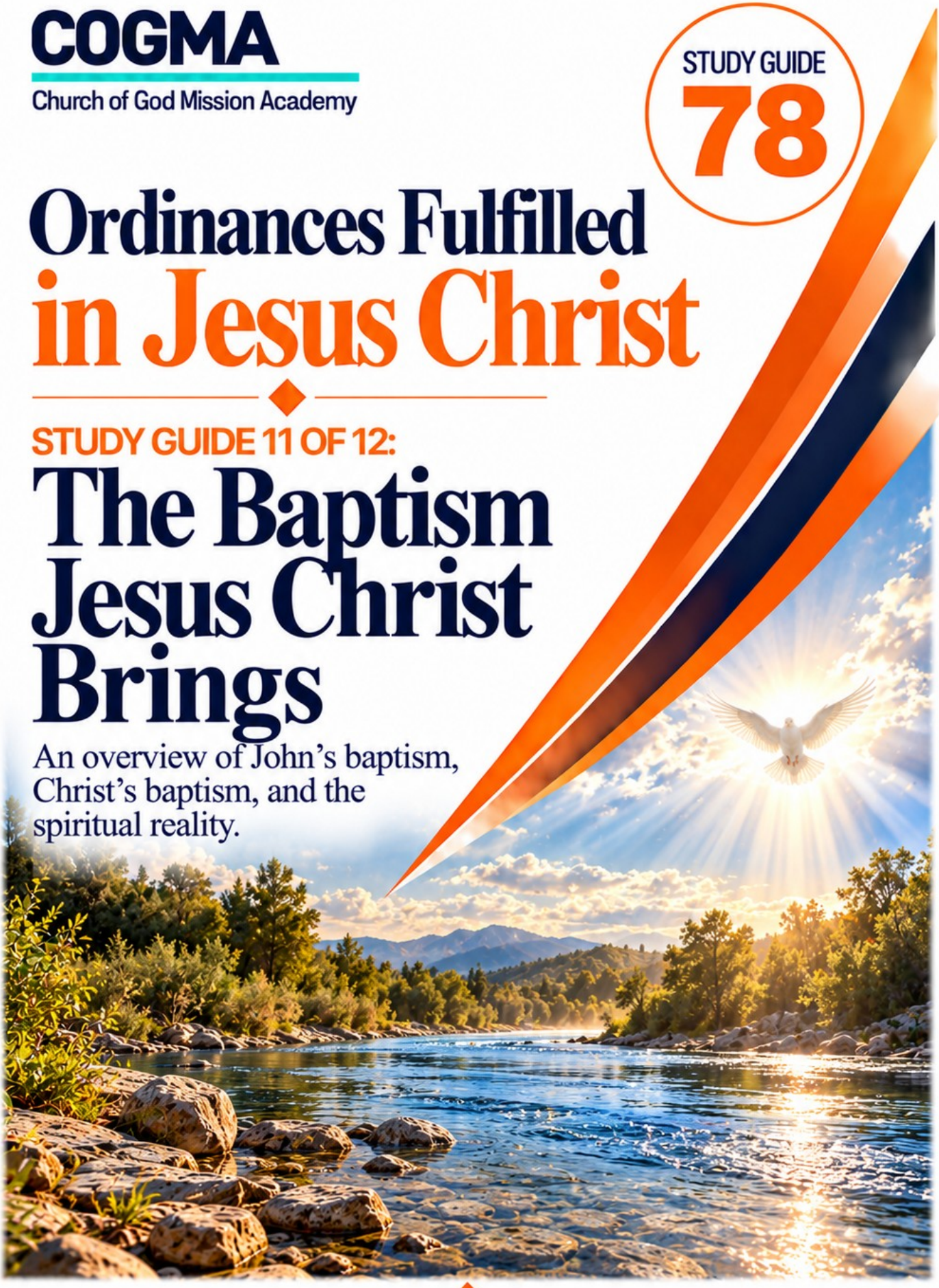
STUDY GUIDE 78

Ordinances Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 11 OF 12:

The Baptism Jesus Christ Brings

An overview of John's baptism, Christ's baptism, and the spiritual reality.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The Scriptures reveal an important distinction between the baptism administered by John the Baptist and the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring. John baptised in water unto repentance, preparing the people for the coming of Christ. Jesus Christ, however, was identified as the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost. These two baptisms served different purposes and must not be confused.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:5**:

> *"One Lord, one faith, one baptism,"*

The one baptism belonging to the New Covenant is the spiritual work of Jesus Christ. At the new birth, the believer receives His indwelling Spirit and becomes a member of His one spiritual body. This baptism cannot be performed by human hands or produced through an outward religious ceremony.

When Jesus Christ came to John at the River Jordan, He declared that His baptism was necessary *"to fulfil all righteousness."* His words must be understood in relation to the appointed purpose of John's ministry and the greater spiritual baptism John had already proclaimed. The Jordan account reveals the fulfilment of an appointed work and identifies Jesus Christ as the One who would bring the spiritual reality.

Following Jesus Christ does not mean reproducing every outward action He performed during His earthly ministry. The Christian life is the expression of His indwelling life, not an attempt to obtain spiritual standing through physical imitation.

After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. The accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts must be examined together to establish the meaning of that commission, particularly the relationship between believing, baptism and salvation. We will also examine why water baptism appears in the book of Acts, recognising that the practices of the morning-time Church must be understood through the completed work and instructions of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this Study Guide, Scripture will remain our final authority. Our purpose is to establish the baptism Jesus Christ promised, the spiritual reality it accomplishes and how a person enters His Church. This distinction is essential for understanding the difference between an outward representation and the spiritual work accomplished by Jesus Christ.

There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. That baptism brings the believer into Jesus Christ Himself. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward representation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the baptism Jesus brings direct attention to the Person rather than natural water?

Personal Reflection

What has the difference between an outward representation and receiving Christ clarified for you? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

What does receiving Christ Himself mean for your own understanding of baptism and salvation? What will you change in your understanding or practice so that the saving work belongs to Jesus Christ alone?

INTRODUCTION: MUST WE REPEAT EVERYTHING JESUS DID?

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Many Christians believe that water baptism is a continuing New Covenant ordinance because Jesus Christ was baptised by John in the River Jordan. Their reasoning is that Jesus left us an example, and therefore we must follow His footsteps by submitting to the same physical baptism. But does following Jesus mean repeating every outward action He performed during His earthly ministry?

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:21**:

> *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:"*

John also wrote in **1 John 2:6**:

> *"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."*

These Scriptures establish the importance of walking according to Jesus Christ. However, we must understand what His example teaches and distinguish the particular actions He performed during His earthly ministry from the spiritual life He came to give.

Jesus turned water into wine, walked upon the sea and fasted forty days. Are believers therefore commanded to repeat each of these actions? Certainly not. The fact that Jesus performed an action does not, by itself, establish that every believer must repeat it as a continuing Gospel ordinance.

This brings us to a more important question: Which baptism did Jesus Christ come to bring? John the Baptist had already answered that question by distinguishing his baptism in water from the greater baptism Jesus Christ would administer.

Matthew recorded his declaration in **Matthew 3:11**:

> *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:"*

John clearly distinguished his baptism in water from the greater baptism Jesus Christ would bring. When Jesus subsequently came to the Jordan, He submitted to John's baptism to fulfil all righteousness. The meaning of that event must therefore be understood through John's

declaration, the appointed purpose of his ministry and the spiritual work Jesus Christ came to accomplish.

After His resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel throughout the world. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record His instructions, while Acts begins by repeating the distinction between John's baptism in water and the promised baptism in the Holy Ghost. These Scriptures must be examined together to establish which baptism belongs to the New Covenant. The baptism associated with salvation must not be confused with an outward ceremony that cannot produce spiritual life.

Following Jesus Christ is not independent human imitation. It is receiving His indwelling life through the new birth and walking according to that life.

The question is not whether we should follow Jesus into the Jordan, but whether we have received the one baptism that Jesus Christ Himself came to bring.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does following Jesus require understanding His purpose rather than repeating every action He performed?

Personal Reflection

What assumption about following Jesus into the Jordan have you begun to reconsider?

Action Step

How could the baptism Jesus came to bring guide your own response to Him? Identify any trust you have placed in outward water or a later experience. What will you rely on instead?

THE ONE GOSPEL COMMISSION - THE WORK JESUS ENTRUSTED TO HIS DISCIPLES

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After His resurrection, Jesus Christ instructed His disciples concerning the work they were to carry into the world. His commission centred upon proclaiming the Gospel, teaching the truth and making known the salvation accomplished through His death and resurrection. Through that Gospel, sinners would hear His Word, believe on Him and receive the spiritual life that only He could give.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John record His instructions with different emphases. Their accounts must be considered together, alongside the opening chapter of Acts, to establish the meaning of the Gospel commission. In particular, the baptism associated with salvation must be understood through the harmonious witness of Scripture rather than through assumptions about outward religious practices.

Matthew and Mark: Teaching, Preaching and Believing

Matthew recorded the words of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

> *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

Jesus began by declaring that all authority belonged to Him. He then instructed His disciples to go into the nations, teach and baptise. However, the meaning of that baptism must be established through the wider Scriptures rather than assuming that every reference to baptism concerns physical water.

The disciples were entrusted with proclaiming the truth and teaching others to observe the instructions of Jesus Christ. However, they could not produce the new birth or impart spiritual life through human ability. Jesus Christ alone performs the spiritual work that brings a person into His body, and no outward ceremony can accomplish what belongs to Him.

Mark recorded in **Mark 16:15-16**:

> *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Mark identifies preaching the Gospel as the disciples' responsibility and connects believing and baptism with salvation. His words must be examined carefully because an outward water ceremony cannot produce spiritual life or bring a person into Christ's Church. The baptism associated with salvation must therefore be the spiritual work through which Jesus Christ brings the believer into Himself.

Notice that Jesus identified unbelief in His concluding warning. The emphasis upon believing directs our attention towards the Gospel and the saving work of Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot be made dependent upon a physical ceremony performed by another person, because the new birth is accomplished by God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do preaching, teaching and believing relate to the saving work Jesus entrusted to His disciples?

Personal Reflection

What does the distinction between a preacher's work and God's saving work clarify for you? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

What response do you want to make to the Gospel rather than rely on another person's performance of a ceremony? Name one inherited expectation you will reconsider and explain how Christ's fulfilment changes your response.

Luke and John: Repentance, Remission and the Holy Ghost

Luke recorded in **Luke 24:46-49**:

> *"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."*

Luke identifies the message to be preached: the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with repentance and remission of sins. He also records the promise of power from on high, which would equip the disciples for their appointed work. Their commission was therefore closely connected with the completed sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the promised work of the Holy Ghost.

The disciples were not commissioned to substitute an outward ceremony for the saving work of God. Their responsibility was to proclaim the Gospel so that people could hear the truth concerning Jesus Christ and His accomplished redemption. The remission of sins rests upon His saving work, not upon the ability of a minister to perform a religious act.

John recorded in **John 20:21-23**:

> *"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."*

John connects the sending of the disciples with the Holy Ghost and the remission of sins. This agrees with the spiritual purpose established through the other Gospel accounts. The disciples were being sent to proclaim the saving truth of Jesus Christ, through whom repentance and remission of sins would be made known.

No minister possesses independent power to forgive sin or impart spiritual life. The Gospel declares the remission accomplished through Jesus Christ and makes known the conditions upon which forgiveness is received. Jesus Christ Himself, the one true God, performs the work of regeneration. At the new birth, the believer receives His indwelling Spirit and is brought into His one spiritual body.

Acts: Jesus Identifies the Promised Baptism

Luke recorded Jesus' words in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

This declaration is especially important because Jesus explicitly distinguished John's baptism in water from the baptism in the Holy Ghost that His disciples were about to receive. The distinction was not between two methods of administering the same baptism, but between John's outward baptism and the greater spiritual baptism promised by Jesus Christ. The promised baptism was the work Jesus Christ would accomplish in the Holy Ghost, His own Spirit, not a ceremony performed with physical water.

Jesus further declared in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Jesus connected the promised Holy Ghost with the power required for the disciples to fulfil their commission. This promised baptism was fulfilled at Pentecost in A.D. 31, when Jesus Christ returned as the Holy Spirit. The disciples received the promised power and were equipped to proclaim His Gospel throughout the world.

The book of Acts then records the actions and developing understanding of the morning-time Church. Its historical record must be examined through the completed work and instructions of Jesus Christ, particularly where outward practices continued during the transition into the New Covenant. The fact that an action is recorded does not automatically establish that action as a continuing requirement for the Church.

Taken together, the Gospel accounts and the opening chapter of Acts establish the purpose of the commission Jesus Christ entrusted to His disciples. They were to proclaim His Gospel, teach His Word and make known the salvation accomplished through His death and resurrection. Jesus Christ brings this baptism in the Holy Ghost, His own Spirit, and gives believers His indwelling life.

Jesus Christ sent His disciples to proclaim the Gospel so that sinners might hear, believe and receive spiritual life. The apostles ministered the Word, but Jesus Christ performed the saving work. His Spirit brings the believer into His one spiritual body through the new birth.

The meaning of baptism in the Gospel commission must therefore be established through the baptism Jesus Himself promised, together with the teaching of the apostles concerning spiritual baptism into Christ. An outward ceremony cannot produce the new birth, impart the Holy Ghost or make a person a member of Christ's spiritual body. These spiritual realities are accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself.

The disciples were commissioned to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus Christ is the One who gives spiritual life. The baptism belonging to salvation is the baptism that brings the believer into the living Christ, not an outward ceremony that cannot produce the new birth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do repentance, remission and the promised Holy Ghost belong to the one Gospel commission?

Personal Reflection

What has the connection between the Gospel and Christ's promised baptism helped you understand? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could this truth guide what you personally trust for new life in Christ? Examine your own confidence before God. What belief or response must change because spiritual life comes from Christ?

MATTHEW 28:18-20 - TEACHING ALL NATIONS

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The commission recorded in Matthew chapter 28 is frequently used to establish water baptism as a continuing ordinance of the New Covenant Church. Many assume that when Jesus instructed His disciples to baptise, He was commanding them to perform a ceremony with physical water. However, the meaning of His instruction must be established through the words of Jesus Himself and the spiritual work He came to accomplish.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

> *"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

Christ's Authority and the Gospel to All Nations

Jesus began His commission by declaring that all power belonged to Him. This established the authority under which His disciples were to labour and directed attention towards Jesus Christ as the source of salvation. Their work was to be carried out under His authority, not through any independent power of their own.

The disciples possessed no independent ability to forgive sins, regenerate a soul or bring someone into Christ's spiritual body. They could proclaim the Gospel, teach the Scriptures and bear witness to Jesus Christ, but they could not produce the new birth. Jesus Christ Himself, the one true God, performs this inward work, giving spiritual life and bringing believers into His one body.

The instruction to teach all nations established the worldwide purpose of the Gospel. The disciples were no longer to regard the message as belonging exclusively to natural Israel. People from every nation were to hear the truth concerning Jesus Christ and His completed work of salvation. The commission was therefore to make His Word known throughout the world.

Paul explained the necessity of preaching in **Romans 10:14**:

> *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"*

He also wrote in **Romans 10:17**:

> *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

The responsibility of Christ's servants is to make His Word known so that sinners may hear and believe. Through the preaching of the Gospel, people hear the truth, are brought under conviction and are called to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. However, the new birth is not the achievement of the preacher. It is the saving work of Jesus Christ through His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Christ's authority govern the teaching of all nations?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between making His Word known and producing the new birth mean to you? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

How could you share His Word while recognising that giving spiritual life is Christ's work? Explain one practical response in your own life that should express Christ's indwelling life.

Baptising in the Name and by the One Spirit

Matthew records Jesus instructing His disciples to baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. These words do not identify three gods or three separate divine Persons: the Father is the eternal Spirit revealed through the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ Himself. Notice that He did not specify physical water, prescribe a method of immersion or establish a ceremony by which people would become members of His Church. The meaning of baptism must therefore be established through the wider teaching of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

The words *"in the name"* establish the authority under which the commission was given. This directs our attention towards Jesus Christ, the One who possesses the authority and power to accomplish the promised spiritual work.

The essential question remains: What baptism did Jesus Christ promise? His own words distinguish the baptism administered by John from the greater baptism He came to bring.

Luke recorded Jesus' declaration in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

The Literal Version (LITV) renders **Acts 1:5**:

> *"for John indeed baptized in water, but you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days after."*

The KJV uses *"with"* in **Acts 1:5**, but the Greek preposition EN can convey the sense of *"in"*. In **Acts 1:5**, EN appears with the Holy Ghost, while the reference to water does not repeat that preposition; in **Matthew 3:11**, EN appears with both water and the Holy Ghost. Although *"with"* is a possible translation, *"in"* makes the promised baptism in the Holy Ghost clearer in this context.

Jesus Himself distinguished John's baptism in natural water from the greater baptism He promised in the Holy Ghost. John's baptism prepared Israel for Christ, but the baptism Jesus Christ brings accomplishes the spiritual reality through His own Spirit. The Holy Ghost is not another divine Person separate from Jesus Christ, and no ceremony performed in physical water can produce the new birth.

Paul subsequently identified the spiritual baptism that brings believers into Christ's body.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Paul did not identify water as the means of entering Christ's body. He identified the one Spirit through whom believers are baptised into one body, regardless of their natural nationality or social position. This is the spiritual baptism through which every born-again believer becomes a member of the Church that Jesus Christ built. The Church is formed through the spiritual work of Jesus Christ, not through the administration of an outward ceremony.

Teaching His Word and His Continuing Presence

Jesus also commanded His disciples to teach people to observe everything He had instructed. This was not a commission to preserve every outward action associated with His earthly ministry, but to establish believers in the truth He had revealed. The disciples were responsible for teaching His Word and helping those who believed to understand and walk in the life they had received.

The Gospel teaches people to receive Jesus Christ, walk in His Word and live through His indwelling Spirit. Obedience is the expression of the life received at the new birth, not a means of obtaining or completing salvation through outward imitation. The believer does not reproduce spiritual life through personal effort, but learns to walk according to the life of Jesus Christ already dwelling within.

Paul explained the relationship between human ministry and God's work in **1 Corinthians 3:5-7**:

> *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."*

Paul clearly distinguished the work of the minister from the work of God. The preacher plants and waters through the ministry of the Word, but Jesus Christ Himself gives spiritual life. No minister can claim the saving work as his own achievement, because Jesus Christ alone regenerates and brings the believer into His spiritual body.

Jesus concluded His commission with the promise of His continuing presence. The disciples were not being sent to carry out their work independently of Him, but under His authority and through His promised power. This promise finds its fulfilment in His return as the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in A.D. 31 and His indwelling life within every born-again believer.

Jesus had already promised in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise when He returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The disciples were not being sent to continue a religious practice dependent upon outward ordinances. They were entrusted with proclaiming the Gospel through which Jesus Christ would bring people into His own life and spiritual body.

The commission in Matthew must therefore be understood through the authority of Jesus Christ, the Gospel He commanded His disciples to proclaim and the spiritual baptism He promised. His servants were responsible for teaching His Word, but the saving work belonged entirely to Him. The commission belongs to Jesus Christ, the authority belongs to Jesus Christ, and the power to save belongs to Jesus Christ.

The disciples were sent to proclaim His Word. Jesus Christ is the One who baptises in the Holy Ghost and brings believers into His one spiritual body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the one Spirit and Christ's continuing presence help explain baptising in His name?

Personal Reflection

What has become clearer about the relationship between teaching and belonging to Christ's body? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What does Christ's presence mean for your own trust when hearing or sharing His Word? Identify one conviction or attitude that this teaching challenges. What specific response will you make?

MARK 16:15-16 - BELIEVING, BAPTISM AND SALVATION

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One of the Scriptures frequently used to teach that water baptism is necessary for salvation is found in Mark chapter 16. Jesus connected believing, baptism and salvation in a single declaration. His words must be examined carefully because the meaning of baptism determines whether salvation is understood as the work of Jesus Christ or made dependent upon a physical ceremony.

Mark recorded the words of Jesus in **Mark 16:15-16**:

> *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Believing and the Baptism Jesus Promised

Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel throughout the world. He then declared that the person who believes and is baptised shall be saved. Notice that He did not mention water, prescribe immersion or identify a human administrator of baptism. His words connect baptism with salvation, but the nature of that baptism must be established through the wider Scriptures.

The question is not whether baptism is connected with salvation, because Jesus clearly connected them. The question is which baptism belongs to salvation and who performs that baptism. We must allow Jesus Christ to explain His own words rather than assume that He was referring to an outward ceremony.

Luke recorded His declaration in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

Jesus made a direct distinction between John's baptism in water and the baptism His disciples were about to receive. John administered a physical baptism, but Jesus promised the greater spiritual baptism in the Holy Ghost. These were not two methods of performing the same ceremony, but two baptisms with different purposes.

When Mark's account is read alongside this declaration, the baptism belonging to salvation must be understood through the spiritual work Jesus Christ promised. Natural water cannot perform that work, and no human minister can place a person into Christ through an outward ceremony. The spiritual baptism that brings a person into Christ belongs to Jesus Christ Himself.

Consider carefully the exact order of Jesus' words in **Mark 16:16**. The person believes, is baptised, and shall be saved. We can express the order simply as belief + baptism = salvation.

But which baptism? Many automatically assume that Jesus meant water baptism, thereby introducing the false teaching of water regeneration, as though a ceremony performed by a minister could produce spiritual life. The baptism that precedes salvation in this declaration is the baptism Jesus Christ Himself performs in the Holy Ghost. Through this spiritual baptism, the believer is brought into Christ's one body at the new birth, as Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 12:13**.

The baptism in the Holy Ghost is not an additional ceremony performed after a person has been saved. It is the spiritual work of Jesus Christ received at the new birth. When a sinner truly believes the Gospel and is born again, that person receives the Spirit of Christ and becomes a member of His spiritual body. Believing and receiving the baptism of Christ are therefore not two separate stages of salvation.

Paul wrote in **Romans 1:16**:

> *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Paul identifies the Gospel of Christ as the power of God unto salvation. He does not introduce physical water as another saving power or as something required to complete the work of Jesus Christ. Salvation is received through faith in Him, and the new birth is accomplished by His Spirit.

Genuine saving faith is answered by the saving work of Jesus Christ, the one true God, who gives the believer His indwelling Spirit and makes that person a new creature in Him. The new birth is not a partial spiritual experience awaiting completion through another baptism or outward ceremony. When a person is born again, that person receives Jesus Christ and is complete in Him.

Paul further explained the nature of salvation in **Titus 3:5**:

> *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"*

Notice the contrast between human works and the saving work of God. Paul did not say that salvation comes through washing the body in natural water. He identified the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost as the work through which God saves. This is an inward spiritual work that no outward ceremony can produce.

Through this spiritual washing, the sinner is born again, receives the life of Jesus Christ and is no longer spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. There is no period during which someone is genuinely born again but must still wait for a second spiritual baptism to complete salvation. Neither is a later water ceremony required to confirm or complete what God has already accomplished. The believer receives complete salvation through the new birth in Jesus Christ.

Unbelief and the One Baptism Into Christ

The second part of **Mark 16:16** is particularly important. Jesus did not say that the person who has not received water baptism shall be damned. He said, *"he that believeth not shall be damned."* His concluding warning identifies unbelief rather than the absence of an outward ceremony.

Jesus made the same distinction when speaking about faith and condemnation.

John recorded in **John 3:18**:

> *"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*

The issue identified by Jesus is unbelief. Those who reject Him remain under condemnation, while those who truly believe receive the salvation accomplished through His death and resurrection. The distinction is between believing and unbelieving, not between those who have undergone an outward ceremony and those who have not.

The absence of a reference to water in the concluding warning of **Mark 16:16** must not be overlooked. Jesus did not establish failure to undergo water baptism as the reason for damnation. His teaching must agree with the Gospel's repeated declaration that salvation is received through faith in Jesus Christ. The baptism associated with that salvation must therefore be understood through the spiritual work He came to accomplish.

Paul identified the baptism that brings every believer into Christ's spiritual body.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

This Scripture explains what spiritual baptism accomplishes. The believer is baptised into one body by one Spirit, regardless of natural nationality or social position. That body is the Church of Jesus Christ, consisting of those who have been born again and possess His indwelling life.

The Greek preposition EN, translated *"by"* in the expression *"by one Spirit,"* can also convey the sense of *"in."* The baptism takes place in the one Spirit and brings the believer into the one body of Christ. Paul is describing a spiritual reality rather than the administration of natural

water. Jesus Christ Himself baptises in the Holy Ghost, His own Spirit, and brings the believer into His body; no ceremony performed by human hands can accomplish this.

This agrees with Paul's teaching in **Ephesians 4:4-6**.

Paul wrote (**Ephesians 4:4-6**):

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul did not establish two continuing baptisms for the Church, one spiritual and another physical. He declared that there is one baptism, just as there is one Lord, one faith, one Spirit and one body. The baptism that brings believers into this one spiritual body is the baptism Jesus Christ performs in the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures also establish that a person cannot belong to Jesus Christ without possessing His Spirit. This is important because spiritual baptism cannot be separated from the new birth and treated as a later experience required to complete salvation. Every person who is genuinely born again has already received the Spirit of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

Notice that Paul identifies the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ in the same declaration. He does not present the believer as receiving one Spirit at salvation and another at a later baptism. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and every born-again believer possesses that one Spirit.

The person who possesses the Spirit of Christ belongs to Him, while the person who does not possess His Spirit does not belong to Him. Water baptism cannot alter this spiritual distinction or produce the indwelling life of Christ. The baptism in the Holy Ghost is therefore not a second blessing following the new birth. It is the spiritual work through which Jesus Christ brings the believer into His life and one spiritual body.

The Lord Adds the Saved to His Church

Luke recorded in **Acts 2:47**:

> *"Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*

Notice who performed the work. The Lord added to the Church those who were saved. No apostle, minister or congregation possessed the ability to create spiritual membership through the administration of an outward ceremony. Membership in Christ's body is established by the saving work of Jesus Christ.

The Church Jesus Christ built is not constituted by a register of people who have undergone water baptism. It is His spiritual body, composed of those who have been born again and possess His indwelling Spirit. A person enters that body through the new birth, not through an outward religious observance.

A person may undergo physical water baptism without receiving spiritual life. Equally, a person who has genuinely been born again belongs to Jesus Christ because of God's completed saving work, not because of a human ceremony. The outward representation cannot produce the spiritual reality. Representation is not production.

We can now return to the words of Jesus in **Mark 16:16** with the wider Scriptures in view. The baptism associated with salvation is not an outward requirement added to faith, nor is it a ceremony that precedes regeneration and causes salvation to occur. Jesus Christ Himself performs the saving work through His Spirit.

Through the new birth, the believer enters Christ, receives His indwelling life and becomes a member of His one spiritual body. This is why the words *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* must be understood in harmony with the greater baptism proclaimed by John, promised by Jesus and explained by Paul. The baptism belonging to salvation is the spiritual baptism Jesus Christ accomplishes, not a physical ceremony administered by another person.

The Gospel is preached, the sinner believes, and Jesus Christ performs the saving work. Salvation is complete at the new birth because the believer receives His indwelling Spirit and becomes a member of His spiritual body. No additional ceremony or later spiritual experience is required to complete that salvation.

Salvation is not received through baptism in natural water. It is received through the saving work of Jesus Christ, who baptises the believer in the Holy Spirit at the new birth and brings that person into His one spiritual body. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward representation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does **Mark 16:15-16** *connect believing with the baptism Jesus promised?*

Personal Reflection

What does the warning about unbelief help you consider about your own understanding of salvation?

Action Step

What response do you want to make to Christ's saving work rather than to confidence in natural water? State what you personally need to accept or correct about Christ's saving work and the new birth.

LUKE 24 AND JOHN 20 - REPENTANCE, REMISSION AND THE HOLY GHOST

BACK TO CONTENTS

The closing chapters of Luke and John provide further understanding of the commission Jesus Christ gave His disciples. Although the Gospel writers emphasise different aspects of His instructions, their accounts agree concerning the message to be proclaimed and the spiritual work that would follow. The disciples were to preach repentance and remission of sins, while Jesus Christ Himself would bring spiritual life through the Holy Ghost.

Luke: Repentance and Remission Through Jesus Christ

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Luke 24:46-49**:

> *"And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."*

Jesus established the message His disciples were to proclaim. They were to declare His suffering, death and resurrection, calling sinners to repentance and making known the remission of sins available through His name. Their ministry was to begin at Jerusalem and extend throughout all nations, bringing the Gospel to people who needed to hear the truth concerning salvation.

Notice that Jesus identified preaching as their responsibility. He did not instruct them to produce remission through physical water, nor did He make an outward ceremony the means by which a sinner would receive spiritual life. The message concerned the saving work accomplished by Jesus Christ, through whom repentance and remission of sins were to be proclaimed.

The apostles later preached this same truth concerning the forgiveness of sins. Their message directed sinners towards Jesus Christ rather than towards an outward religious ordinance. Peter made this clear when proclaiming the Gospel.

Peter declared in **Acts 10:43**:

> *"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."*

Peter did not present an outward ordinance as the source of remission. He proclaimed Jesus Christ and declared that those who believe in Him receive remission of sins through His name. The emphasis was upon faith in Jesus Christ and the salvation accomplished through His sacrifice.

This distinction is important because human ministers may announce the promise of salvation, but they cannot accomplish the inward work themselves. Their responsibility is to proclaim the truth concerning Jesus Christ so that sinners may hear, believe and be born again. The power to forgive sins and regenerate a person belongs to Jesus Christ, not to the minister who proclaims His Word.

The Gospel does not provide remission through the authority of an earthly institution or the performance of a religious ceremony. It directs sinners to Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice established the New Covenant and through whom forgiveness and spiritual life are received. Remission comes through Jesus Christ Himself, not through an outward representation of His saving work.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Luke connect repentance and remission with Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What has this helped you understand about receiving forgiveness through Him? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

What does forgiveness through Christ mean for your own trust in a religious institution or ceremony? State one specific conclusion you need to correct or confirm in the Bible, and how it will affect your conduct.

John: The Commission and the Ministry of Reconciliation

John recorded the words of Jesus in **John 20:21-23**:

> *"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."*

John connects the sending of the disciples with the Holy Ghost and the remission of sins. This agrees with Luke's account, where Jesus instructed them to preach repentance and remission while awaiting the promised power from on high. Both accounts direct attention towards the Gospel the disciples were to proclaim and the spiritual work of Jesus Christ.

The words concerning remitting and retaining sins must be understood through the Gospel Jesus commissioned them to proclaim. The disciples were entrusted with declaring the conditions of remission and the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ. They did not become independent sources of forgiveness or possess power to regenerate sinners through human action.

Paul later explained the responsibility entrusted to those who proclaim the Gospel. His teaching distinguishes the saving work accomplished by God from the ministry given to His servants. The message of reconciliation is centred upon Jesus Christ, through whom God has made reconciliation possible.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:18-20**:

> *"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*

Paul clearly distinguishes God's saving work from the ministry entrusted to His servants. Jesus Christ, the one true God revealed through genuine humanity, reconciles sinners to Himself, while His servants proclaim the Word of reconciliation. Their authority rests in the Gospel they

have received and are commissioned to declare, not in any independent ability to forgive sins or impart spiritual life.

This was the responsibility Jesus entrusted to His disciples. Through the Gospel, they would bear witness to the One who had accomplished redemption and who alone could bring sinners into spiritual life. The minister proclaims the message of reconciliation, but Jesus Christ is the One through whom reconciliation and forgiveness are received.

The Holy Ghost and the Fulfilment of Christ's Promise

John also records Jesus saying, *"Receive ye the Holy Ghost."* These words must be understood in harmony with His earlier promise that the Comforter would come and His instruction that the disciples wait at Jerusalem. The words spoken in John chapter 20 must therefore be understood alongside the promised fulfilment recorded in Acts.

Jesus had already declared in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise at Pentecost in A.D. 31 when He returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. The Holy Ghost was not another divine person replacing Jesus Christ, but the Spirit of Christ Himself. The promised Comforter was the living Christ coming to dwell within His people as Spirit.

From that time, everyone who is genuinely born again receives His indwelling Spirit. Salvation is not followed by a necessary second baptism or a later reception of another divine presence. The believer possesses Jesus Christ through the new birth and is complete in Him.

Luke and John therefore establish the same essential purpose concerning the Gospel commission. The disciples were to proclaim repentance, remission of sins and reconciliation through Jesus Christ, bearing witness through the power of His Spirit. Their responsibility was to make His saving work known, while Jesus Christ Himself accomplished the spiritual work through which sinners receive forgiveness and new life.

The Gospel calls sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Through the new birth, He brings believers into His own life and makes them members of His spiritual body. No outward ceremony can replace the remission, regeneration or indwelling presence that belongs to genuine salvation.

The disciples were commissioned to preach repentance and remission of sins. Jesus Christ is the One who forgives, regenerates and gives His own indwelling life.

The Gospel does not lead sinners into dependence upon an outward ordinance. It brings them to Jesus Christ Himself, in whom salvation is complete.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do John 20 and the promised Holy Ghost explain the ministry of reconciliation?

Personal Reflection

What does being brought to Christ Himself mean to you personally?

Action Step

How might you respond to the Gospel's invitation to receive forgiveness and life in Him? What will you change in your understanding or practice so that the saving work belongs to Jesus Christ alone?

ACTS 1:4-8 - JOHN'S WATER BAPTISM AND CHRIST'S PROMISED BAPTISM

BACK TO CONTENTS

The opening chapter of Acts provides one of the clearest explanations of the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring. After His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received the promise He had already made known to them. In giving that instruction, He deliberately distinguished John's baptism in water from the baptism in the Holy Ghost.

This distinction is fundamental to understanding the one baptism belonging to the New Covenant. Jesus was not preparing His disciples to continue John's work indefinitely, but directing them towards the greater spiritual reality that He Himself would bring. The baptism John administered and the baptism Jesus promised must therefore be understood according to their different purposes.

John's Baptism and the Promise of the Holy Ghost

Luke recorded in **Acts 1:4-5**:

> *"And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

Notice the contrast Jesus established. John had baptised in water, but the disciples were about to receive the baptism in the Holy Ghost. Jesus did not say that John's water baptism and His spiritual baptism would remain two continuing requirements for the Church. He distinguished the former outward baptism from the greater spiritual work He had promised.

The disciples were instructed to wait because the promised New Covenant reality had not yet come. This instruction belonged to those living before the fulfilment at Pentecost. It was not establishing a requirement for people who are genuinely born again to wait for another spiritual experience after receiving salvation.

The KJV uses the word *"with"* in **Acts 1:5**, but the Greek preposition is EN, which can also carry the meaning *"in."* John baptised in water, while Jesus promised baptism in the Holy Ghost. The

contrast concerns two different baptisms, not two methods of administering the same outward ceremony. The difference lies in what each baptism represents and accomplishes.

This distinction becomes clearer when we recognise that the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Baptism in the Holy Spirit does not mean receiving another divine person separate from Jesus. It is the spiritual work through which the believer is brought into Christ and receives His indwelling life.

The New Covenant is not founded upon the believer being externally accompanied by the Spirit of Christ. Its glorious reality is that Jesus Christ Himself dwells within those who are born again. The believer receives the Person, not simply an outward representation of His presence.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Jesus distinguish John's water baptism from the promised Holy Ghost in Acts 1?

Personal Reflection

What does Christ dwelling within help you understand about His promised presence? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What does this promise mean for your own understanding of receiving Christ rather than an outward sign? Identify any trust you have placed in outward water or a later experience. What will you rely on instead?

The Promise of Christ's Indwelling Presence and Power

Jesus had already explained the promised indwelling presence to His disciples. He spoke of the Comforter who would abide with them for ever and made clear that this promise concerned His own coming to them.

John recorded His words in **John 14:16-18**:

> *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Notice the change Jesus declared: *"he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."* During His earthly ministry, the disciples had walked with Jesus Christ, heard His words and witnessed His works. The promised New Covenant reality was that His own Spirit would dwell within His people. They would possess His indwelling life rather than depend upon His outward physical presence.

Jesus then made the promise personal: *"I will come to you."* He was not announcing the arrival of another divine person who would replace Him. He was promising His own return as the Holy Spirit, bringing His indwelling life to His people. The promised Comforter was the living Christ coming to dwell within those who belonged to Him.

Luke continued in **Acts 1:6-8**:

> *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

The disciples were still asking about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Jesus directed their attention towards the promised power of the Holy Ghost and their responsibility to witness throughout the world. His answer turned their attention from the question of Israel's national restoration to the spiritual work they were about to undertake.

The Gospel was not to remain within the national boundaries of Israel. Through the preaching of Jesus Christ, people from every nation would hear His Word, believe on Him and be brought into His spiritual kingdom. Those who received His life through the new birth would become members of His one spiritual body.

Their witness would not depend upon their own spiritual ability. The life and power of Jesus Christ dwelling within them would enable them to fulfil the commission He had given. They were entrusted with proclaiming His Gospel, while the power to bring sinners into spiritual life remained with Jesus Christ Himself.

Pentecost and the One Baptism Into Christ's Body

The promised baptism came at Pentecost in A.D. 31. What Jesus had declared in **Acts 1:5** was fulfilled when the disciples received the Holy Ghost. This was the promised spiritual reality for which they had been instructed to wait.

Luke recorded in **Acts 2:1-4**:

> *"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*

This was the fulfilment of the promise Jesus had made. He returned as the Holy Spirit, bringing the New Covenant reality of His indwelling presence. The disciples were no longer waiting for the baptism He had promised, because the appointed fulfilment had arrived.

Pentecost established the fulfilment of Christ's promise, but it did not institute a requirement for every future believer to reproduce the outward signs recorded on that day. Neither did it establish a second baptism for those already born again. The events at Pentecost must be understood according to their place in the fulfilment of the New Covenant and the coming of Christ as the Holy Spirit.

Paul later identified the spiritual baptism received by every member of Christ's Church. His teaching explains how believers are brought into the one spiritual body, regardless of their natural background or position in society.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Notice that Paul included all believers. The baptism in the one Spirit brings each person into the one body of Jesus Christ. He did not describe a spiritual baptism reserved for some believers or received as a later experience by those already saved. Every member of Christ's spiritual body has received the one Spirit.

This agrees with the promise of Jesus and its fulfilment at Pentecost. What the first disciples awaited before Pentecost is now received by every believer at the new birth. There is no need for a second baptism to give an already saved person the Spirit of Christ, because the believer receives His indwelling Spirit when born again.

The baptism Jesus Christ came to bring is therefore not a water ceremony, an outward religious experience or a later addition to salvation. Jesus Christ Himself baptises in the Holy Ghost, His own Spirit, bringing the believer into His life and one spiritual body. This is the one baptism belonging to the New Covenant.

John baptised in water, but Jesus Christ baptises in the Holy Spirit. The promise has been fulfilled. Every person genuinely born again has received the Spirit of Christ and, through that one baptism, belongs to His one spiritual body.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did Pentecost fulfil the promise of Christ's indwelling presence and power?

Personal Reflection

What has the one baptism into His body clarified for you about belonging to Christ? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

How could this truth guide your own response to a claim that a born-again believer still lacks His Spirit? State what you personally need to accept or correct about Christ's saving work and the new birth.

THE JORDAN IN A.D. 27 - THE APPOINTED SETTING OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

BACK TO CONTENTS

The baptism of Jesus Christ at the River Jordan was not an isolated event without prophetic significance. It took place at the beginning of His public ministry, when the appointed time had arrived for Messiah to be revealed to Israel. The prophecy of Daniel's seventy weeks establishes the chronological setting and directs our attention towards Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah.

Daniel's Prophecy Leads to Messiah the Prince

Daniel wrote in **Daniel 9:25**:

> *"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."*

The prophecy identifies a command to restore Jerusalem and a measured period leading to Messiah the Prince. The command associated with Artaxerxes in his seventh year is dated to 457 B.C. in the established chronology. The seven weeks and sixty-two weeks total sixty-nine prophetic weeks, representing 483 years.

Allowing for the absence of a year zero, this calculation brings us to A.D. 27, when Jesus Christ was publicly revealed as Messiah and began His ministry. The chronology identifies the appointed time of His manifestation to Israel, showing that His appearance at the Jordan belonged to God's revealed purpose. The events surrounding John's ministry must therefore be understood in relation to the coming of Messiah the Prince.

John's Ministry and the Revelation of Jesus Christ

John the Baptist had been sent to prepare the people for the coming of Messiah. His ministry was not intended to establish himself or his baptism as the final reality, but to direct Israel towards Jesus Christ. The purpose of his work was to prepare the people and identify the One who would accomplish redemption.

John recorded his declaration in **John 1:29**:

> *"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."*

John also explained the purpose of his ministry in **John 1:31**:

> *"And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."*

Notice John's explanation. His baptism in water served the appointed purpose of preparing Israel and making Jesus Christ manifest to the people. John was not presenting water baptism as the means by which Messiah would save sinners, but identifying the One who would take away the sin of the world.

The events at the Jordan marked the public revelation of Jesus Christ as Messiah the Prince. John had already proclaimed that One greater than himself was coming and that this greater One would baptise in the Holy Ghost. The Jordan was therefore the appointed setting in which Jesus Christ was publicly identified as the promised Messiah.

This distinction is essential because John administered baptism in water, while Jesus Christ was appointed to bring the greater spiritual baptism. John's baptism belonged to his preparatory ministry, but the baptism Jesus would bring belonged to the New Covenant reality. John's ministry directed the people towards Jesus Christ, who alone could accomplish the spiritual work that water could never produce.

The Anointing of Messiah and the Seventieth Week

Peter later described the ministry of Jesus in **Acts 10:38**:

> *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him."*

The anointing of Jesus Christ must not be understood as though He became holy or divine at the Jordan. He was already the Holy One, the genuine man in whom the eternal Spirit of God dwelt. His anointing marked the beginning of His public ministry and revealed Him as the promised Messiah.

After John's water baptism had been completed and Jesus had come up from the water, the Spirit descended like a dove. This was the sign given to John, identifying Jesus Christ as the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost. It did not mean that Jesus had previously lacked the Spirit of God or that He received divine life for the first time. The sign confirmed His identity and the appointed work He had come to accomplish.

The revelation of Messiah in A.D. 27 marked the completion of the sixty-nine prophetic weeks and the beginning of the seventieth week. Three and a half years later, in the spring of A.D. 31, Jesus Christ was cut off, fulfilling Daniel's prophecy concerning the death of Messiah. His manifestation at the Jordan and His subsequent sacrifice therefore belong to the prophetic purpose revealed through Daniel.

The Jordan stands at a decisive point in God's revealed purpose. John was preparing Israel, the appointed time had arrived, and Jesus Christ was being publicly identified as the One who would accomplish redemption. His baptism by John must be understood within this appointed setting, rather than treated as the establishment of a continuing water ordinance for the New Covenant Church.

The significance of the Jordan is not that Jesus established a continuing water ceremony. It is that Messiah the Prince was revealed, and the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost had come. John prepared the way, but Jesus Christ is the fulfilment.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Daniel's prophecy and John's appointed ministry help explain the revelation of Messiah at the Jordan?

Personal Reflection

What has this setting helped you reconsider about why Jesus came to John? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could recognising Jesus as the fulfilment guide what you personally trust, rather than confidence in repeating the Jordan event? Examine your own confidence before God. What belief or response must change because spiritual life comes from Christ?

MATTHEW 3:1-12 - THE TWO BAPTISMS JOHN IDENTIFIED

BACK TO CONTENTS

Matthew chapter 3 introduces John the Baptist and the preparatory ministry God had appointed before the public revelation of Jesus Christ. John's work was important, but it was never intended to become the final reality of salvation. He was preparing Israel for the coming of One greater than himself, whose baptism would accomplish what natural water could never accomplish.

To understand the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring, we must first examine John's own words. Before Jesus entered the River Jordan, John had already distinguished between the baptism he administered and the greater baptism that belonged to Jesus Christ. This distinction establishes the purpose of John's ministry and directs our attention towards the spiritual work of the coming Messiah.

John's Ministry of Repentance and Preparation

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 3:1-6**:

> *"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."*

John's message was repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. His ministry belonged to the closing period of the former covenant, when God was preparing Israel for the revelation of Jesus Christ. John called the people to acknowledge their sins and turn towards the One who was coming. His preaching directed their attention towards the promised Messiah.

The people who responded were baptised by John in the Jordan. This was an actual baptism in physical water, administered by a man appointed by God for a particular purpose. However, John's baptism could not produce the new birth or impart the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ. His work was preparatory, directing the people towards the One who would accomplish their salvation.

Matthew continued in **Matthew 3:7-10**:

> *"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."*

John did not regard participation in water baptism as proof that a person was right with God. He challenged those who approached him without genuine repentance, warning that natural descent from Abraham could not establish their spiritual standing. Neither their ancestry nor the outward action could replace the inward response God required.

Notice John's warning concerning fruit. He was not simply interested in people entering the river and emerging wet. He called for genuine repentance that would be evident in their lives. His warning showed that outward religious participation was no substitute for a sincere response to God's Word.

This distinction remains important because a person can perform an outward religious action without experiencing any spiritual change. Natural water cannot remove unbelief, create repentance or produce the life of Jesus Christ within a person. The outward action cannot accomplish the inward spiritual work that belongs to God alone.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why could John's outward baptism prepare people without producing repentance or spiritual life?

Personal Reflection

What does the difference between an outward action and inward change help you consider about your own beliefs?

Action Step

What response do you want to make where an outward religious act has taken the place of an honest response to God's Word? Examine where you have placed your confidence. What will you change to keep that confidence in Jesus Christ?

John's Baptism in Water and Christ's Baptism in the Holy Ghost

John then made the distinction that governs our understanding of the two baptisms. He identified the baptism he administered and contrasted it with the greater baptism Jesus Christ would bring.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 3:11-12**:

> *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

John identified two baptisms in direct contrast. The first was the baptism he administered in water unto repentance, while the second was the greater baptism Jesus Christ would bring in the Holy Ghost. John recognised that his ministry could prepare the people, but it could not accomplish the spiritual work belonging to the coming Messiah.

Notice how John distinguished the two baptisers. He said *"I indeed baptize"*, referring to his own ministry, and then *"he shall baptize"*, directing attention towards Jesus Christ. John openly acknowledged that the One coming after him possessed an authority and power far

greater than his own. The distinction concerned both the One administering the baptism and the nature of the baptism itself.

The Greek preposition EN, translated *"with"*, is used in connection with both water and the Holy Ghost. It can express the sense of being baptised in water or in the Holy Ghost. This helps us understand the contrast John established between the physical element of his baptism and the spiritual reality Jesus would bring.

John did not announce that Jesus Christ would establish another permanent ceremony in natural water. He expressly identified the Holy Ghost as belonging to the baptism Jesus would administer. The greater baptism would accomplish what John's water baptism could never produce, bringing believers into spiritual life through Jesus Christ Himself.

John's declaration also includes the words *"and with fire."* These words must be understood within the context of his warning rather than separated from the surrounding verses. John had already spoken about the consequences of failing to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.

In verse 10, John warned that the unfruitful tree would be cut down and cast into the fire. In verse 12, he described the separation of wheat from chaff, with the wheat gathered into the garner and the chaff burned with unquenchable fire. These illustrations establish the seriousness of God's judgment and His distinction between what is acceptable and what must be rejected.

The reference to fire must therefore be considered alongside John's warning of judgment and the spiritual work associated with the coming Messiah. It must not be used to introduce another outward ordinance or a necessary second spiritual baptism after the new birth. John's central distinction remains clear: he administered baptism in water, while Jesus Christ would bring the greater spiritual baptism in the Holy Ghost.

John Identified Jesus Christ as the Greater Baptiser

John later explained why God had sent him to baptise in water. His own words establish the purpose of his ministry and show that the attention was always intended to be directed towards Jesus Christ.

He said in **John 1:31**:

> *"And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water."*

This statement identifies the appointed purpose of John's water baptism. His ministry prepared Israel for the public manifestation of Jesus Christ, making known the One who had come to fulfil God's saving purpose. It was not intended to become the means by which people throughout the Gospel Day would enter Christ's spiritual body.

John also explained how Jesus Christ would be identified. God had given him a particular sign that would reveal the One appointed to baptise in the Holy Ghost.

John wrote in **John 1:33**:

> *"And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."*

Notice the concluding declaration: *"the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."* The visible descent of the Spirit would identify Jesus Christ as the One appointed to bring the greater baptism. John's purpose was not to direct people towards a continuing water ceremony, but to reveal the One who would accomplish the promised spiritual work.

John's water baptism therefore served its appointed purpose by preparing the people and making Jesus Christ manifest to Israel. The attention was never intended to remain upon John, the river or the outward ceremony. It was to be directed towards Jesus Christ Himself, whose coming would bring the spiritual reality that John's ministry could only announce.

Paul later identified what this greater baptism accomplishes. His teaching establishes how believers are brought into the one spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The believer is brought into Christ's one spiritual body through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is not accomplished by John, an apostle or any minister performing an outward ceremony. It is the saving work of Jesus Christ received at the new birth, when the believer receives His indwelling Spirit and becomes a member of His Church.

John prepared the way for the coming Messiah, but Jesus Christ is the One who fulfils God's saving purpose. John's baptism called Israel to repentance and prepared the people for His manifestation, while Christ's baptism brings the believer into His own life and spiritual body. The preparatory work must not be confused with the spiritual reality it announced.

John baptised in water unto repentance. Jesus Christ baptises in the Holy Ghost, bringing the believer into His one spiritual body. The baptism of John was preparatory, but the baptism of Jesus Christ is the New Covenant reality.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the two baptisms John identified reveal the greater work of Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

What has the difference between preparation and fulfilment clarified for you? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

What does Jesus as the greater Baptiser mean for your own trust in Him for spiritual life? Choose one present decision and explain how you will respond from Christ's life within, not independent effort.

MATTHEW 3:13-17 - JESUS FULFILLING ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS

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The baptism of Jesus Christ at the River Jordan is frequently presented as evidence that water baptism must continue as an ordinance of the New Covenant Church. The argument is that because Jesus submitted to water baptism, every believer must follow His example by

undergoing the same ceremony. However, this conclusion overlooks the purpose Jesus gave for His baptism and the distinction John had already made between water baptism and the greater baptism Jesus Christ would bring.

To understand this event, we must examine the complete account and follow the order in which Matthew recorded it. Particular attention must be given to John's objection, Jesus' answer and what occurred after the water baptism had been completed. These details establish the purpose of the event and direct our attention towards Jesus Christ.

John's Objection and the Fulfilment of Righteousness

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 3:13-17**:

> *"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Notice John's reaction when Jesus came to him. Rather than immediately baptising Jesus, John objected because he recognised that Jesus was greater than himself. He also understood that the baptism Jesus would bring was greater than the baptism he administered.

John said, *"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?"* These words must be understood alongside his earlier declaration that he baptised in water, while Jesus Christ would baptise in the Holy Ghost. John was acknowledging his own need for the greater baptism that belonged to Jesus Christ.

John was not suggesting that Jesus needed repentance or cleansing from sin. Jesus Christ was without sin, and His submission to John's baptism had a purpose different from that of the people who came confessing their sins. This distinction is important because Jesus was fulfilling an appointed purpose rather than seeking the spiritual cleansing associated with repentance.

Jesus answered John with the words *"Suffer it to be so now."* The word now is important because Jesus was speaking about what was appropriate at that particular point in God's appointed purpose. John had been sent to prepare Israel for Messiah, and his ministry had not yet completed its work.

John's baptism belonged to the period in which God was bringing the former covenant order towards its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. His ministry was not a mistaken practice that Jesus needed to condemn, but part of the preparation God had appointed. It served its purpose before the New Covenant reality was fully revealed through Jesus Christ.

Jesus therefore instructed John to allow the baptism to proceed. John had an appointed responsibility to fulfil in his preparatory ministry, while Jesus Christ had come to accomplish

what that preparation anticipated. Both were fulfilling their appointed responsibilities according to God's revealed purpose.

The command was not, *"Continue this baptism throughout the Gospel Day."* Jesus said, *"Suffer it to be so now."* His explanation concerned the fulfilment of righteousness at that appointed time, not the establishment of a permanent water ceremony for the New Covenant Church.

Jesus then explained His purpose: *"For thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."* These words are central to understanding why He submitted to John. Jesus did not say that He was instituting a new water ordinance, but that He was fulfilling righteousness according to God's appointed will.

Righteousness concerns what is right before God according to His revealed purpose. The former covenant had been established by God and was righteous for its appointed purpose and time. Jesus did not come to disregard what God had previously commanded, but to fulfil the purpose towards which that order pointed.

Jesus declared in **Matthew 5:17**:

> *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."*

John stood at the closing period of the former order, preparing Israel for the revelation of Messiah. Jesus Christ was the One who would fulfil God's promises and establish the New Covenant through His completed work. His submission to John's baptism must therefore be understood in relation to that fulfilment.

Jesus did not submit to John's baptism because He needed spiritual cleansing. Neither was He declaring that physical water would remain the means of entering God's kingdom. He fulfilled what was appointed for that time and directed attention towards the greater spiritual reality He had come to bring.

The Completed Water Baptism and the Sign Identifying Christ

Let us carefully picture what happened at the River Jordan, because the order of events is extremely important. Many people imagine Jesus being immersed in water while the Spirit descends like a dove and the voice from heaven declares Him to be the beloved Son. Yet this familiar picture can cause us to overlook a distinction Matthew carefully records.

Jesus Christ came to John and submitted to baptism in natural water to fulfil all righteousness. John performed the baptism he had been appointed to administer. That baptism was completed before Matthew described the heavenly manifestation.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 3:16**:

> *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:"*

Notice the words *"when he was baptized."* Matthew is not describing John continuing to baptise Jesus while the Spirit descended. He first records the completed water baptism and then describes Jesus coming up from the water.

The Greek word BAPTISTHEIS (βαπτισθείς) means *"having been baptised."* It describes the baptism as an action already completed before Jesus went up from the water.

The Literal Version (LITV) expresses the beginning of **Matthew 3:16** particularly clearly:

"And having been baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water."

Matthew also uses the Greek preposition APO (ἀπό), translated *"out of"* in the KJV. It conveys movement from or away from the water. The picture is of Jesus leaving the water behind and moving away from the place where John had baptised Him, towards the bank of the Jordan.

The point must not be missed: John had finished baptising Jesus. The water baptism was over.

Now consider what Matthew records concerning that completed baptism. He records no heavenly voice acknowledging the water baptism while John was administering it. Neither does he record the Spirit descending during the water baptism itself.

But then something very different happens.

The heavens open. The Spirit of God descends like a dove and lights upon Jesus Christ. Here is the visible sign that directs our attention beyond John's baptism in natural water to the greater baptism Jesus Christ Himself would bring.

This second scene provides a wonderful spiritual picture in type. John's water baptism had been completed, but the spiritual baptism that Jesus Christ came to bring was something altogether greater. The visible descent of the Spirit points towards that greater baptism, which John had already declared would be in the Holy Ghost.



John later explained the purpose of this visible sign.

He wrote in **John 1:32–34**:

> *"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."*

Notice carefully what John was told. God had given him a particular sign by which he would recognise the One appointed to bring the greater baptism. The Spirit would descend and remain upon that Person, and John would then know that He was the One who baptises in the Holy Ghost.

The sign therefore identified Jesus Christ as the promised Baptiser. John could baptise in natural water, but only Jesus Christ could accomplish the spiritual baptism that brings a sinner into His life and one spiritual body.

The descent of the Spirit did not mean that Jesus Christ had previously lacked the eternal Spirit or was receiving another divine Person. The one true God already dwelt within His genuine humanity. The visible descent was a sign given to John, and it provides a type of the greater spiritual baptism Jesus Christ would bring.

Now notice what happened after the Spirit descended.

Matthew continued in **Matthew 3:17**:

> *"And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

Consider that order. The water baptism had been completed. Jesus had come up from the water. The Spirit descended like a dove and lighted upon Him. Only then does Matthew record the heavenly declaration concerning the beloved Son.

Why is this distinction so important?

Which baptism makes a person a son or daughter of God? Is it the baptism administered by a minister in natural water, or the baptism Jesus Christ Himself performs in the Holy Ghost?

The declaration from heaven did not make Jesus Christ the Son of God. He already was the Son, the genuine man through whom the one true God was revealed. The declaration identified Him and expressed divine approval of the Person whom John had been sent to reveal.

Nevertheless, the order provides an important spiritual truth. The heavenly acknowledgement followed the Spirit's descent, not the administration of John's water baptism. Understood in type, this directs our attention away from water as the means of receiving sonship and towards the spiritual baptism Jesus Christ alone can accomplish.

John's water baptism fulfilled its appointed preparatory purpose, but God did not appoint that outward baptism to make sinners His children. Water cannot regenerate a person, remove sin from the heart or impart the indwelling Spirit of Christ. The baptism that brings a person into the family of God is the baptism Jesus Christ performs in the Holy Ghost.

This distinction must remain clear. We are not teaching that Jesus Himself needed to receive another saving baptism at the Jordan. The visible manifestation was a sign identifying Him as the One who would administer the greater baptism, and it reveals in type the spiritual reality He came to accomplish.

Neither does the heavenly declaration establish three separate divine Persons. The Father is the eternal Spirit revealed through the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ Himself. The visible sign and heavenly voice directed attention towards Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah and the One who baptises in the Holy Ghost.

The two baptisms must not be confused. John administered baptism in natural water. Jesus Christ brings the baptism in the Holy Ghost. The former was an outward preparation; the latter is the spiritual reality through which the believer is born again and brought into Christ's one body.

The water baptism was finished. The Spirit descended. The heavenly declaration followed.

The believer does not become a son or daughter of God through an outward ceremony. That spiritual relationship is established through the new birth, when Jesus Christ gives His own indwelling life.

The representation cannot produce the reality. Jesus Christ Himself is the reality, and He alone brings the baptism that makes us children of God.

Jesus Christ Is Our Righteousness and the Greater Baptiser

Paul identified where righteousness is now found. His teaching directs the believer towards Jesus Christ Himself rather than towards an outward action performed during His earthly ministry.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 1:30**:

> *"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:"*

The believer's righteousness is found in Jesus Christ Himself. Salvation is not obtained or completed by reproducing an outward action He performed during His earthly ministry. The born-again believer receives His indwelling life and is complete in Him. Righteousness, sanctification and redemption are found in the Person of Jesus Christ, not produced through a physical ceremony.

Paul also identified the baptism that brings believers into Christ's spiritual body.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The baptism that brings the believer into Christ's body is spiritual. It is received at the new birth, when Jesus Christ gives His own indwelling life and makes the believer a member of His Church. Natural water cannot accomplish that work, regardless of who administers it or how the ceremony is performed.

The event at the Jordan therefore directs us beyond John's preparatory baptism towards Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness and brought the greater baptism. John's ministry served its appointed purpose in preparing Israel and identifying the promised Messiah. The spiritual reality belongs to Jesus Christ, who brings believers into His own life through the baptism in the Holy Ghost.

John baptised Jesus in water according to the purpose appointed for that time, fulfilling all righteousness. That baptism was completed, and Jesus had come up from the water before the Spirit descended like a dove. This subsequent sign identified Him as the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost.

The one baptism that belongs to the New Covenant brings the believer into Jesus Christ Himself. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward representation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do John's objection and the sign identifying Christ help explain fulfilling all righteousness?

Personal Reflection

What has this helped you understand about Jesus' baptism rather than a ceremony that makes you righteous? Which part of your own understanding does it challenge?

Action Step

What does Christ Himself as righteousness mean for your own approach to acceptance with God? Identify a belief about your completeness in Christ that needs correcting and the difference it should make to your conduct.

JOHN 1:29-34 - THE SIGN IDENTIFYING THE BAPTISER IN THE HOLY GHOST

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John's Gospel provides an important explanation of what occurred at the River Jordan. Matthew records that Jesus Christ had already been baptised and had come up from the water before the Spirit descended like a dove. John explains why God gave this subsequent sign and what it revealed. His testimony directs our attention away from physical water towards Jesus Christ, the One appointed to baptise in the Holy Ghost.

John's Ministry Was to Make Jesus Christ Manifest

John recorded in **John 1:29-34**:

> *"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."*

John's declaration identifies Jesus Christ as the One who takes away the sin of the world. This was the purpose towards which his preparatory ministry pointed. John did not announce that water baptism would take away sin, but identified Jesus Christ as the One who would accomplish redemption.

The distinction must remain clear because John's water baptism prepared people for the revelation of Messiah, while the removal of sin required the saving work of Jesus Christ. The physical ceremony could not accomplish what only the promised Messiah would bring. John's responsibility was to prepare the people and make known the One through whom salvation would come.

John explained his own ministry with the words *"that he should be made manifest to Israel."* This statement identifies the purpose for which God had sent him to baptise in water. His ministry served the revelation of Jesus Christ to the people of Israel, directing their attention towards the promised Messiah.

John was not establishing himself as the source of salvation, nor was his baptism the final reality towards which the people were being directed. The purpose of his preparatory work was to reveal the Person who would fulfil God's redemptive promises. His baptism was therefore important because of its appointed purpose, not because physical water possessed the power to produce spiritual life.

Consequently, the significance of John's baptism must be measured by the purpose God assigned to it. It was right for its appointed time, but its importance lay in preparing the way for Jesus Christ. It was not given to establish a permanent requirement for physical washing throughout the Gospel Day.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why was John's ministry given to make Jesus Christ known to Israel?

Personal Reflection

What has the appointed purpose of John's baptism helped you see more clearly? What difference should this make to your own response?

Action Step

How could that purpose guide your own attention towards Christ rather than towards natural water? Examine your own confidence before God. What belief or response must change because spiritual life comes from Christ?

The Spirit's Descent Identified the Greater Baptiser

John twice declared *"I knew him not."* He then explained that God had given him a particular sign by which he would recognise the One appointed to baptise in the Holy Ghost. His words must therefore be understood in relation to the identifying revelation God had promised.

God had instructed John to recognise the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost by the sign of the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him. Matthew records that Jesus had already been baptised in water and had come up from the water before describing this heavenly sign. John's baptism was finished, and the account had moved beyond the water baptism itself. John witnessed the Spirit descending upon Jesus Christ and subsequently bore record that He was the Son of God. The sign identified Jesus Christ as the promised Baptiser in the Holy Ghost, not as someone still undergoing John's water baptism.

John said that the Spirit descended *"like a dove."* The comparison describes the visible manner of the sign; it does not mean that the Spirit of God was literally a bird. What mattered was that John witnessed the sign God had promised and could therefore identify the One who would bring the greater baptism.

Neither does the descent mean that Jesus Christ had previously lacked the eternal Spirit. The one true God was already dwelling within and revealing Himself through the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ. He did not become divine at the Jordan, nor did He receive another divine person. The sign publicly identified who Jesus Christ already was and the spiritual work He had come to accomplish.

John's concluding identification is decisive: *"the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."* God had not instructed John to identify the One who would establish another continuing ceremony in natural water. He had given John a sign by which he would recognise the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost.

The Greek preposition EN appears in the expressions concerning baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Ghost. It can convey the sense of in, while the surrounding words establish the distinction between the two baptisms. John administered baptism in natural water, while Jesus Christ would administer the greater spiritual baptism.

The contrast therefore concerns both the baptiser and the baptism. John's appointed ministry was preparatory, while Jesus Christ came to accomplish the spiritual work that brings believers

into His own life. The water belonged to John's ministry, but the baptism in the Holy Ghost belongs to Jesus Christ Himself.

John's Testimony Directed People Towards Jesus Christ

John's purpose becomes clearer as the Gospel account continues. Having identified Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, John directed others towards Him rather than encouraging them to remain dependent upon his own ministry. His testimony was intended to lead people to the Person whom God had sent him to reveal.

John recorded in **John 1:35-37**:

> *"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."*

John did not attempt to retain these disciples around himself or his baptism. His testimony directed them towards Jesus Christ, and they responded by following the One whom John had identified. This demonstrates the purpose of John's preparatory ministry: to lead people towards the Messiah rather than towards continued dependence upon the outward ceremony.

John later declared in **John 3:30**:

> *"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

These words express the purpose of his ministry. John's responsibility was to direct people towards the Messiah, whose Person and saving work were greater than everything John could accomplish. As the promised Messiah was revealed, the attention was to turn from the preparatory servant towards Jesus Christ Himself.

The baptism John announced was subsequently identified by Jesus Christ. After His resurrection, Jesus repeated the distinction between John's baptism in water and the promised baptism in the Holy Ghost. His words confirmed that the greater baptism belonged to the spiritual work He had come to accomplish.

Luke recorded in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

Jesus confirmed the same distinction John had proclaimed at the Jordan. John's baptism had been administered in physical water, but the disciples were about to receive the baptism in the Holy Ghost. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost in A.D. 31, when Jesus Christ returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people.

Paul subsequently explained what this baptism accomplishes. His teaching identifies the spiritual work through which believers are brought into the one body of Jesus Christ.

He wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Through this one spiritual baptism, the believer is brought into Jesus Christ and His one body, the Church. This baptism is received at the new birth, when the believer receives the indwelling Spirit of Christ. No outward ceremony can produce that spiritual life or complete the salvation already received through the new birth.

John's testimony therefore establishes both the purpose of his own baptism and the identity of the One who would bring the greater reality. His ministry prepared Israel for the revelation of Messiah, while the sign at the Jordan identified Jesus Christ as the One appointed to baptise in the Holy Ghost. The spiritual work belongs to Jesus Christ, who brings believers into His own life and makes them members of His Church.

John was sent to make Jesus Christ manifest to Israel. The sign at the Jordan identified Jesus as the One who baptises in the Holy Ghost.

The attention must not remain upon the water or the preparatory ministry of John. The reality is Jesus Christ Himself, who brings the believer into His life through the one baptism of the Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How did the Spirit's descent identify Jesus as the One who baptises in the Holy Ghost?

Personal Reflection

What does John's testimony help you understand about who gives spiritual life? Is there a familiar expectation of yours that now needs reconsidering?

Action Step

What response do you want to make to Jesus as the Baptiser in the Holy Ghost? What will you change in your understanding or practice so that the saving work belongs to Jesus Christ alone?

ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM - THE GREATER REALITY

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The Scriptures establish that there is only one baptism belonging to the New Covenant Church. This baptism is not performed in natural water, nor does it depend upon a minister, a particular ceremony or membership in a religious organisation. It is the spiritual work of Jesus Christ through which the believer is born again, receives His indwelling Spirit and becomes a member of His one spiritual body.

The distinction between John's water baptism and the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring must therefore be understood through the teaching of the apostles. Their writings reveal the nature of this one baptism, what it accomplishes and how completely the believer is brought into Jesus Christ. The emphasis is upon the spiritual work accomplished by Jesus Christ rather than an outward representation that cannot produce spiritual life.

One Baptism Into One Spiritual Body

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1-6**:

> *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul was establishing the unity of God's people. He identified one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God. These truths belong together because they describe the spiritual unity established through Jesus Christ. The Church is one body because its members possess the one Spirit through the new birth.

Notice that Paul did not speak of two continuing baptisms, one performed by a minister in physical water and another performed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. He declared that there is one baptism, just as there is one Lord and one Spirit. The question is therefore which baptism brings the believer into this one body, and Paul answers that question directly.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:12-13**:

> *"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

Paul identifies both the baptism and its result. By one Spirit, all believers are baptised into one body. That body is the Church of Jesus Christ, consisting of those who have received His life through the new birth. The spiritual unity of the Church is therefore established through the one Spirit, not through a ceremony performed by human hands.

Notice the Greek wording. The preposition EN appears in the expression translated *"by one Spirit,"* while EIS appears in the expression translated *"into one body."* EN can convey the sense of in, while EIS expresses movement or entrance into. Together, these expressions describe the spiritual baptism through which believers enter Christ's body.

Natural water cannot place someone into the body of Jesus Christ. Only His Spirit can accomplish that spiritual work, bringing the believer into a genuine spiritual relationship with Him. This baptism is received at the new birth, when the believer becomes a member of Christ's one body.

Paul also wrote in **Galatians 3:26-27**:

> *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*

Notice that Paul did not say believers are baptised into a religious organisation or into natural water. He said they are *"baptized into Christ."* This identifies the spiritual relationship established through the one baptism belonging to the New Covenant. The believer is brought into Jesus Christ Himself, not simply into an outward association with His name.

The Greek preposition EIS, translated *"into,"* is important because it identifies the Person into whom the believer is brought. The saving baptism is not simply an outward action performed in connection with the name of Jesus Christ. It brings the believer into Christ Himself, establishing the spiritual relationship that belongs to those who are born again.

This agrees with the spiritual reality of the new birth. The believer does not receive a religious identification while remaining outside Christ, nor does an outward ceremony create membership in His Church. Through the one spiritual baptism, the believer is brought into His life and becomes a member of His body.

In Christ and Walking in His Spirit

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Notice the expression *"in Christ."* Paul does not describe salvation as a person remaining spiritually separate from Jesus while attempting to follow Him through outward actions. The new birth establishes a genuine spiritual relationship in which the believer possesses the life of Christ. This is why Paul describes the born-again believer as a new creature.

Paul also wrote in **Colossians 2:6**:

> *"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:"*

The believer receives Jesus Christ and then learns to walk in Him. This is not an attempt to obtain Christ through obedience, but the life of Christ being expressed through the person who has already been born again. The believer's conduct flows from the spiritual life already received rather than becoming a means of obtaining or completing salvation.

The same principle appears in **Galatians 5:16**:

> *"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."*

Walking in the Spirit describes the spiritual life of the born-again believer. Christianity is not simply walking alongside Christ as an external example or attempting to reproduce His conduct through independent human effort. It is living and walking through His indwelling life, allowing that life to govern our thoughts, desires and actions.

Paul also established that the Spirit dwelling within believers is the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself.

He wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

This Scripture identifies the Spirit of God as the Spirit of Christ. There is not one Spirit who saves a person and another who must subsequently be received through a second spiritual baptism. Whoever belongs to Jesus Christ possesses His Spirit, because the indwelling Spirit is received at the new birth.

Paul also declared in **2 Corinthians 3:17**:

> *"Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."*

The baptism in the Holy Ghost therefore does not place the believer in relationship with a divine person separate from Jesus Christ. It is the work of Jesus Christ Himself, who comes to dwell within His people as Spirit. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ and the Holy Ghost are the one Spirit received by every born-again believer.

This is the New Covenant reality established through the saving work of Jesus Christ. The believer is not left spiritually separated from Him, depending upon outward observances to maintain a relationship that a ceremony cannot create. The believer possesses the Person, not simply an outward representation of His work.

Complete in Christ Through the Operation of God

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:9-12**:

> *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."*

Notice the word *"Godhead"* in **Colossians 2:9**. The original Greek word is THEOTĒS (θεότης), appearing here as THEOTĒTOS (θεότητος). It means deity, or the state of being God, which we may express in English as *"Godhood."* The word does not describe three gods or three separate divine Persons. Paul is declaring that all the fulness of the one true God dwells bodily in Jesus Christ. He is not one Person within a Trinity, but the one true God revealed through genuine humanity.

Notice the relationship between completeness in Christ and baptism. Paul does not describe baptism as an additional ceremony required to complete someone who has already been saved. He identifies the spiritual work as *"the operation of God."* The same Scripture declares that the believer is complete in Jesus Christ, who possesses the entire fulness of the one true God.

The circumcision Paul describes is made without hands, and the baptism is associated with being buried and raised with Christ through faith in God's operation. These are spiritual realities accomplished by God, not results produced through a physical ceremony. The believer is brought into the completed work of Jesus Christ through the new birth.

The believer is complete in Jesus Christ from the moment of the new birth. There is no missing spiritual baptism, no later reception of another Spirit and no outward ceremony required to finish the saving work of God. Complete means complete, because the believer has received Jesus Christ Himself.

The baptism that brings the believer into Christ also brings that person into His spiritual body and kingdom. These are not separate stages through which a believer must progress before salvation becomes complete. They are different descriptions of the one completed salvation received in Jesus Christ.

John's baptism served its appointed preparatory purpose, directing Israel towards Jesus Christ. The baptism Jesus came to bring accomplishes the spiritual reality that natural water could

never produce. Through the new birth, believers enter Christ's one body, receive His indwelling life and become members of His Church.

There is no separate baptism for Jews and Gentiles, no additional baptism necessary to complete salvation and no human ceremony that can make someone a member of Christ's Church. All who genuinely belong to Jesus Christ have received the one Spirit. Their spiritual standing rests upon His completed saving work, not upon any outward religious observance.

There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. That baptism is in the Holy Spirit, bringing the believer into Jesus Christ and His one spiritual body. The believer is complete in Christ, for the believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward representation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do one Lord, one faith and one baptism describe the believer's place in Christ?

Personal Reflection

What does completeness through God's work mean to your understanding of spiritual belonging? What does this reveal about an assumption you have held?

Action Step

How could being complete in Christ guide your own trust and the way you respond to His Spirit? Choose one present decision and explain how you will respond from Christ's life within, not independent effort.

CONCLUSION: CHRIST'S BAPTISM, NOT AN OUTWARD REPRESENTATION

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Throughout this Study Guide, we have examined the distinction between John's baptism in water and the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring. The Scriptures establish that John's ministry was preparatory, directing Israel towards the promised Messiah. Jesus Christ fulfilled the righteousness associated with that appointed work and brought the greater spiritual reality of the New Covenant.

The Greater Baptism Jesus Christ Promised

Matthew recorded John's declaration in **Matthew 3:11**:

> *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:"*

John did not identify his baptism as the final reality. He clearly distinguished the water he administered from the greater baptism Jesus Christ would bring. When Jesus submitted to John's baptism at the Jordan, He declared that it was necessary to fulfil all righteousness, not that every future believer must reproduce that outward action.

After John's water baptism had been completed and Jesus had come up from the water, the Spirit descended like a dove. This subsequent sign identified Jesus Christ as the One who would baptise in the Holy Ghost. It did not mean that Jesus had previously lacked the Spirit of

God or needed another divine person to enter Him. The sign revealed His identity and confirmed the greater spiritual work He had come to accomplish.

Luke recorded the words of Jesus in **Acts 1:5**:

> *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."*

Jesus confirmed the distinction John had proclaimed between water baptism and baptism in the Holy Ghost. His promise was fulfilled at Pentecost in A.D. 31, when He returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. This established the New Covenant reality now received by every believer at the new birth.

The One Baptism Brings Believers Into Christ

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

The Church is not formed through physical water, religious membership or human ceremonies. Jesus Christ brings believers into His one spiritual body through baptism in the Holy Spirit. Every person genuinely born again possesses His indwelling life and belongs to His Church, because this spiritual work is accomplished by Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul also declared in **Ephesians 4:5**:

> *"One Lord, one faith, one baptism,"*

Following Jesus Christ does not mean reproducing every outward action He performed during His earthly ministry. It means receiving His life through the new birth and learning to walk in the Spirit. Christian conduct is the expression of Christ's indwelling life, not an attempt to obtain or complete salvation through outward imitation.

John administered the preparatory baptism in water. Jesus Christ brings the saving baptism in the Holy Spirit. The former pointed towards the promised Messiah, while the latter brings the believer into the spiritual reality accomplished through His completed work.

There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. The believer is complete in Jesus Christ, for the believer possesses the Person, and the Person is greater than the outward representation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What is the one baptism that brings the believer into Christ?

Personal Reflection

What assumption about water baptism has this teaching challenged for you?

Action Step

Name one belief about water baptism you will correct, and explain how you will respond to Christ's spiritual baptism.

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Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

What is the baptism Jesus Christ came to bring, and why is He the greater Baptiser? Use John's testimony and **Acts 1:4-8** *to explain the difference between his preparatory water baptism and Christ's promised baptism.*

2. Understanding

How do Matthew's command to teach all nations, Mark's words about believing and baptism, and Luke and John's teaching about remission describe one Gospel commission? Explain the servants' work and Christ's saving work.

3. Personal Reflection

What has the question of repeating everything Jesus did helped you reconsider about following Him into the Jordan? Explain how His purpose there challenges or strengthens your own understanding.

4. Response to Truth

How do Daniel's prophecy, John's appointed ministry and the revelation of Messiah at the Jordan guide your own response to Jesus Christ? Explain why the Person revealed matters more than repeating the outward event.

5. Action Step

Consider trusting Jesus Christ Himself for spiritual life rather than relying on a water ceremony. What does this mean for your own understanding of salvation? Explain any response you want to make.

6. Early Response

Have you already responded to the truth that spiritual life comes through Jesus Christ Himself rather than a water ceremony? If yes, explain what you did or now understand more clearly. If not, explain what you are still considering or what has made it difficult to respond.

7. Ongoing Practice

How could the truth of one Lord, one faith and one baptism continue to guide your trust and daily choices? Explain how being complete in Christ relates to walking in His Spirit.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why did Jesus tell John that His baptism would fulfil all righteousness? Connect **Matthew 3:13-17** *with the sign in* **John 1:29-34** *to explain why Jesus' baptism does not establish water as the source of spiritual life.*

9. Living the Truth

Someone says that a born-again believer still needs another baptism to receive Christ's Spirit. How would His promise and its fulfilment at Pentecost guide your reply? Explain how you would speak with care for that person.

10. Final Response

How do the Gospel commission, John's preparation and the one baptism into Christ fit together? Explain what has become clearer about Christ as the greater Baptiser and your own response to Him.