

WHY WAS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BAPTIZED?

By Brother Mike Sutherland

This study came about as the result of a question that was asked at the end of a Sunday School lesson as to why the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized. This is yet another case where the Holy Ghost used a question that was asked of the teacher to teach the teacher. This is one of the reasons that I put so much emphasis on asking questions in Sunday School. The Holy Ghost uses those questions for teaching opportunities. The Lord Jesus Christ said in *John 14:26*:

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. *John 14:26*

Teachers and students must have a teachable Spirit if they are to learn and that Spirit is the Holy Ghost. The question that was asked following that Sunday School class was: "Since Jesus is holy, why did he need to be baptized?". *Matthew 3:1-17*, *Mark 1:1-13*, *Luke 3:2-23*, and *John 1:19-36* are all accounts of the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. These passages read:

¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ² And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁷ 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? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. 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: ¹² Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. ¹³ Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴ But John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? ¹⁵ 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. 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: ¹⁷ And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Matthew*

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3:1-17

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; ² As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. ³ The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴ John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵ And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; ⁷ And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸ I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. ⁹ And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. ¹⁰ And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: ¹¹ And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. ¹² And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. *Mark 1:1-13*

² Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; ⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. ⁷ Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin 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. ⁹ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ¹⁰ And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? ¹¹ He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. ¹² Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? ¹³ And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. ¹⁴ And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. ¹⁵ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of

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John, whether he were the Christ, or not; ¹⁶ John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: ¹⁷ Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. ¹⁸ And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, ²⁰ Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. ²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, ²² And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. ²³ And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, *Luke 3:2-23*

¹⁹ And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? ²⁰ And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. ²¹ And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. ²² Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? ²³ He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. ²⁴ And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. ²⁵ And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? ²⁶ John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; ²⁷ He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. ²⁸ These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. 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. ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. ³¹ And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. ³² And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 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. ³⁴ And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. ³⁵ Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; ³⁶ And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! *John 1:19-36*

Out of these four passages come the question of why the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized. These four passages also raise other questions that relate to the purpose of baptism. Many folks have been taught that baptism washes away sin and is therefore necessary for salvation. That is not what the Bible

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teaches. Water baptism cannot wash away sin. It is only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ that can wash away sin. By insisting that water baptism washes away sin, many make the Lord Jesus Christ a sinner. Not only did the Lord Jesus Christ not sin, the Lord Jesus Christ could not sin because He IS God manifest in the flesh. *Hebrews 4:15* and *Hebrews 9:28* state:

¹⁵ For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. *Hebrews 4:15*

²⁸ So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. *Hebrews 9:28*

Since the Lord Jesus Christ could not, and did not sin, the purpose of his baptism could not have been to wash away sin. That in itself disproves any doctrine that states that you must be baptized to be saved. The thief on the cross was not baptized either. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ said he would be with Him in Paradise that very day. There are also untold millions of Old Testament saints who did not have Christian baptism who will be in heaven because salvation is by faith and not by baptism.

Now to the issue of why the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized. There are several purposes identified in the passages that deal with his baptism. The first and most obvious reason is that the Lord Jesus Christ commanded John the Baptist to baptize him. In *Matthew 3:15* the Lord told John to “suffer it to be so now”. To suffer someone to do something is to allow them to do it with prejudice or reservation. What Jesus was telling John is that even though I know you do not want to do it, do it anyhow. The second reason the baptism was done was “for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness”. What Jesus was telling John is that He, Jesus, had to be baptized to fulfill all the righteous requirements of the law. Another key is contained in the statement from *Luke 3:23* which reads “And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age”. The significance of this statement is that no one could enter into the priesthood until he was at least thirty years of age. That requirement comes from Numbers chapter 4 and indicates that the Lord Jesus Christ was about to embark on His priesthood. Even though the Lord Jesus Christ was of the tribe of Judah, he was to be anointed high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. *Psalms 110:1-4* and *Hebrews 6:20* says:

¹ A Psalm of David. The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. ² The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. ³ Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. ⁴ **The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.** *Psalms 110:1-4*

²⁰ **Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.** *Hebrews 6:20*

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When “the LORD said unto my Lord” in Psalm 110 that was God the Father speaking to God the Son. Hallelujah! These passages establish the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was THE High Priest. Since he is THE High Priest, one of the reasons for His baptism is contained in *Exodus 29:1-8*, *Exodus 40:12-15*, and *Leviticus 8:6-12* where it is written:

¹ And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest’s office: Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish, ² And unleavened bread, and cakes unleavened tempered with oil, and wafers unleavened anointed with oil: of wheaten flour shalt thou make them. ³ And thou shalt put them into one basket, and bring them in the basket, with the bullock and the two rams. ⁴ **And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.** ⁵ And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: ⁶ And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. ⁷ Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him. ⁸ And thou shalt bring his sons, and put coats upon them. *Exodus 29:1-8*

¹² **And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water.** ¹³ And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest’s office. ¹⁴ And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: ¹⁵ And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. *Exodus 40:12-15*

⁶ **And Moses brought Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water.** ⁷ And he put upon him the coat, and girded him with the girdle, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod upon him, and he girded him with the curious girdle of the ephod, and bound it unto him therewith. ⁸ And he put the breastplate upon him: also he put in the breastplate the Urim and the Thummim. ⁹ And he put the mitre upon his head; also upon the mitre, even upon his forefront, did he put the golden plate, the holy crown; as the LORD commanded Moses. ¹⁰ And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them. ¹¹ And he sprinkled thereof upon the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all his vessels, both the laver and his foot, to sanctify them. ¹² And he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head, and anointed him, to sanctify him. *Leviticus 8:6-12*

Note that *Exodus 29:4*, *Exodus 40:12*, and *Leviticus 8:6* state that the priests had to be **WASHED** BEFORE they could enter into their priestly duties. This was a requirement of the law and it was therefore required of the Lord Jesus Christ that he be ceremonially WASHED to enter the priesthood

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to fulfil all righteousness of the law. The Lord Jesus Christ said in *Matthew 5:17-18*:

¹⁷ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. ¹⁸ For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. *Matthew 5:17-18*

Again, the law placed upon him the requirement to be WASHED before he could enter the priesthood. We know from Hebrews 9:10 that that washing involved submersion. *Hebrews 9:6-10* reads:

⁶ Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. ⁷ But into the second went the **high priest** alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: ⁸ The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: ⁹ Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; ¹⁰ Which stood only in meats and drinks, and **divers washings**, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. *Hebrews 9:6-10*

We know that the phrase “**divers washings**” is a reference to the submersion necessary for baptism because the word “washings” is translated from the Greek word “baptismos” which is transliterated into the English word “baptism” in our New Testament. Note also from *Exodus 29:7*, *Exodus 40:15*, and *Leviticus 8:12* that the High Priest had to be anointed. That anointing took place when the Holy Ghost descended as a dove upon the Lord Jesus Christ in *Matthew 3:16*, *Mark 1:10*, *Luke 3:22*, and *John 1:33*. All priests including the High Priest were required to be anointed with oil. Oil is a type of the Holy Ghost in the Word of God. So, the baptism of the Holy Ghost was the anointing of the Lord Jesus Christ as THE HIGH PRIEST. Since the Lord Jesus Christ was to come as Prophet, Priest, and King this anointing was also for the purpose of declaring Him to be the King, the Jewish Messiah, since God declared that all Kings that were to rule over His people were to be anointed by the priest. At the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ, John the Baptist was also fulfilling the role of priest since he was of the priestly lineage because his father Zacharias was a priest in the course of Abia. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ said “thus it becometh **US** to fulfil all righteousness”. So, why did the Pharisees ask of John the Baptist in *John 1:25*: “And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?”? The logical reason is that they were expecting the Messiah (Christ), that Prophet and Elijah (Elias) to come baptizing. The phrase “that prophet” is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ from *Deuteronomy 18:15-19* where it is written:

¹⁵ The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee **a Prophet** from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; ¹⁶ According to all that thou

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desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. ¹⁷ And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise them up **a Prophet** from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. ¹⁹ And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. *Deuteronomy 18:15-19*

Now, what would give the Pharisees the idea that the Messiah would come baptizing? It is likely that the Pharisees had in mind *Ezekiel 36:22-28*:

²² Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. ²³ And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. ²⁴ For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. ²⁵ **Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.** ²⁶ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. ²⁸ And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. *Ezekiel 36:22-28*

It could also be that the Jews were expecting a baptizing Messiah because of *Zechariah 13:1* which reads:

¹ In that day there shall be **a fountain** opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. *Zechariah 13:1*

Under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, John the Baptist used the Jewish expectation of a baptizing Messiah from *Ezekiel 36:25* and *Zechariah 13:1* to enlighten the Jews that the baptism they should be looking for from the Messiah was the baptism of the Holy Ghost when the Spirit of God would be put within them in fulfillment of *Ezekiel 36:26-27*. John the Baptist told the Jews that the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be baptizing **WITH** the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost baptizes no one. It is always the Lord Jesus Christ doing the baptism with the Holy Ghost. In the six times that Holy Ghost baptism appears in the New Testament it is always people being baptized WITH the Holy Ghost and NOT BY the Holy Ghost.

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Yet another reason for the baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ is given in *John 1:30-31*:

³⁰ This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. ³¹ And I knew him not: **but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.** *John 1:30-31*

The manifestation that is spoken of in *John 1:31* is the manifestation of the Jewish Messiah. John is telling the Jews that he came baptizing as a sign to them that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah they were looking for.

Baptism has never been the means to salvation. Baptism has always been the means of identifying with fellow believers and the local church. When the Lord Jesus Christ was baptized, he was identifying himself with all the baptized believers that would follow him. *Acts 2:41* identifies baptism as the door to church membership. For Bible believers, baptism has always been a ceremonial ordinance (rite) that follows salvation. Baptism is not a sacrament leading to salvation.

Baptism (always by immersion) was also practiced by the Jews during the ministry of John the Baptist because the Jews baptized all Gentiles who wished to convert to Judaism. The Jews during the time of John the Baptist constructed special baptismal pools known as mikvas. Even today, Orthodox Jews will not build a synagogue until they have constructed a mikva.

The baptism of John and the baptism commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ in *Matthew 28:19-20* was a cold slap in the face of the pharisees who made all converts to Judaism be baptized because they condemned them as pagans. We can rest assured that part of John's rebuke in *Matthew 3:7-10* was a condemnation by the Holy Ghost of that very practice of Jewish baptism that required no repentance. There is a lesson in all that from the Holy Ghost. The water of repentanceless baptism will be turned into scalding, blistering steam in the fiery pits of hell. Baptism cannot save you from the wrath which is to come. Repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ and his blood is the only act that can deliver you from the wrath which is to come (*Acts 20:21*). Read *Matthew 3:7-10* again:

⁷ 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? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. *Matthew 3:7-10*

The liquid of baptism cannot wash away your sins and make you whole again. Only the liquid of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can wash away your sins and make you whole again. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh! Precious is the flow that makes me white as snow; No other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins!

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Hallelujah!!