

Assertions About Immersion (a.k.a., “Baptism”)

Made by Thomas J. Short

1. Full immersion, dunking or dipping is the appropriate understanding of the Greek vocabulary group derived from the verbs βάπτω and βαπτίζω (*bapto* and *baptizo*).
2. The 1st Century Jews used immersion in their rituals of purification. Mark parenthetically informs us that the Pharisees practiced ritualistic self-immersion whenever they returned from the public market (Mark 7:3-4). Archaeological evidence indicates that many Jewish houses had immersion tanks called “*mikvahs*” for use in ceremonial cleansing. Public pools were also located in such a way as to be used for ritual bathing before going into the Temple complex.
3. John “the Immerser” was directed by God to call Jews to repentance¹ from sin and to then immerse them “into the forgiveness” of that sin in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God//Heaven.² Jesus & his disciples also practiced the immersion of repentant Jews.
4. Before returning to heaven, Jesus ordered his followers to use immersion as part of their discipling process. There is no record of a N.T. suspension of this imperative.
5. The first Gospel sermon of the Church Era included a call for the repentant Jewish hearers to be immersed in water, “into the forgiveness” of their sins, so that they might receive the indwelling Holy Spirit.
6. The Book of Acts has several examples of water immersion being an intricate part of the conversion process. This includes the fact that the first Gospel sermon preached to a non-Jewish audience resulted in the respondents being immersed.
7. The New Testament includes several passages which indicate that water immersion was the universal practice of the Church. It is variously described as:
 - a. Being born again
 - b. Being washed
 - c. Being buried with Christ
 - d. Being united with Christ in his death & resurrection
 - e. Being clothed with Christ
 - f. Putting on the new man/woman
 - g. Being illuminated
8. Immersion of repentant believers³ was the normal practice within the Church until about the 2nd Century, at which point the consideration of human philosophy caused a gradual shift away from it, until the sprinkling of infants become the normal practice.
9. The reintroduction of the ancient practice of immersion only for repentant believers during the Protestant Revolution (16th/17th Centuries) was met with lethal resistance. At the present, it is only practiced by some Protestant groups.

¹ “A change of mindset.”

² The phrases “kingdom of God” & “kingdom of heaven” refer to the same thing. Matthew, clearly writing for Jews, almost always used “kingdom of heaven” (32 times) rather than “kingdom of God” (only 4 times), while the other Gospel writers only used “kingdom of God.” This conforms to a 1st Century Jewish tendency to avoid overusing the title “God” in accordance with their understanding of Exodus 20:7.

³ Meaning they had to be mentally capable of both repenting & believing; i.e., not a small child.

**An Exhaustive List of New Testament Immersion Passages,
In Chronological Order, In Support of the Previous Assertions**
Compiled & Annotated by Thomas J. Short

AD 28 (During the 15th Year of Tiberius Caesar)

John “The Immerser” began his prophetic ministry.

(Matthew 3:1-12//Mark 1:1-8//Luke 3:1-18//John 1:6-8)

- He warned that the wrath of God was coming upon sin.
- He preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”
- He immersed repentant people “into the forgiveness of sins.”
- These repentant people were immersed as “they confessed their sins.”
 - By being immersed, they demonstrated God’s justice in their lives (see Luke 7:29).
- He warned the Pharisees & Sadducees who came to observe his immersion that they needed to produce the fruit of repentance rather than depending upon their relationship with Abraham.
 - By refusing to be immersed, they rejected God’s plan for their lives (see Luke 7:30).
- He testified that he only immersed in water and that after him would come One greater than himself Who would immerse “in the Holy Spirit and fire.”⁴

WINTER OF AD 29/30 (3 ½ Years Before His Ascension in the Spring of AD 33)

Jesus was immersed by John “The Immerser.”

(Matthew 3:13-17//Mark 1:9-11//Luke 3:21-22//John 1:29-34)

- At first, John tried to refuse, citing that Jesus was more righteous than himself. [It should be noted that John did not yet know that Jesus was Messiah, since he testified to coming to that knowledge only after seeing the sign of the dove following Jesus immersion (see John 1:33).]
- Jesus insisted, saying that His immersion would “fulfill all righteousness.” Obviously, Jesus had no sins to repent of nor the need to be forgiven of such sins (see Hebrews 4:15). The best explanation is that His immersion would fulfill the O.T. requirement that High Priest be “washed with water” before beginning service (Leviticus 8:6).

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 30/31

During this first year of ministry (carried out in Judea), Jesus ended up immersing more disciples than John “The Immerser.”⁵

- It was Jesus’ disciples (who had presumably been immersed during “The Immerser’s” ministry) who did the actual immersions of repentant persons (John 4:1-2).
- At the beginning of this year, Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about how a person needed to be “born again”⁶ “out of water and spirit” to enter “into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

⁴ The context of John’s preaching makes it clear that fire here was a metaphor for judgement. Thus, Jesus would come with an either/or proposition offering salvation (“Holy Spirit”) or wrath (“fire”).

⁵ John’s own disciples noticed this transfer of attention from “The Immerser” to Jesus and mentioned it. This gave John the opportunity to teach them that this was part of the plan all along since he was only the friend of the groom and not the groom himself- i.e., Jesus. See John 3:22-36.

⁶ Or “from above.”

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 33/34

9th Day of the First Jewish Month (On the road from Perea to Jericho)

When James & John used their mother (Jesus' aunt) to ask for the number one & two spots in the coming kingdom, Jesus inquired if they were ready to be "immersed" with the same "immersion" He was about to undergo (Matthew 20:20-28//Mark 10:35-45). The context shows that a metaphorical usage was intended and that He was referring to His impending death.

12th Day of the First Jewish Month (Just two days before the crucifixion)

Jesus asked the Pharisees where John had received the authority for his immersion – God or Man? They refused to respond because they feared saying the latter would put them at risk with the people who considered John a prophet, while saying the former would call into question why they had rejected it (Matthew 21:23-27//Mark 11:27-33//Luke 20:1-8).

About 2 Weeks after the Resurrection (After the Apostles went to Galilee as instructed)

Jesus issued "The Great Commission" to His Apostles (Matthew 28:16-20).

- This commission derives from Jesus universal authority.
- This commission has an interesting grammatical structure.
 - A single imperative command – "Make disciples of all nations (ethnic groups)."
 - Three subordinating participles describing the process of carrying out this command.
 - "Going"
 - "Immersing them into the Name⁷ of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."
 - "Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."
 - It can be easily argued that failure to adhere to any of the three subordinating commands is disobedience of Jesus' "Great Commission" to "make disciples of all nations."
 - That it would be wrong not to spread the Gospel among all ethnic groups.
 - That it would be wrong not to immerse repentant persons into the Name.
 - That it would be wrong not to teach Jesus' own words to those so immersed.

25th Day of the Second Jewish Month (40th Day after the Resurrection)

Jesus ordered His Apostles to remain at Jerusalem where they would be "immersed in the Holy Spirit" a few days later, as He promised them earlier (Acts 1:4-5; cf. John 14-16). [Shortly after the ascension, the Eleven Apostles used "the divine lot"⁸ to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot, stipulating that the person had to have been a follower of Jesus since the time of John's Immersion (Acts 1:22).]

⁷ The use of the singular here indicates a special unity among Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as a reference to the covenant name of Yahweh.

⁸ Proverbs 16:33; cf. Luke 1:9.

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 33/34 (continued)

6th Day of the Third Jewish Month (50th Day after the Resurrection = Pentecost)

The apostles were “filled” with the Holy Spirit, as promised (Acts 2:1-13). Peter preached the Gospel message for the very first time (Acts 2:14-36). When he & the other apostles were asked by those moved by the Gospel message what action they should take, Peter gave the very first New Testament invitation (Acts 2:37-40). The grammatical structure is instructive.

- Imperative Command: Each person needed to “Repent.”
- Imperative Command: Each person needed to “Be immersed upon the Name of Jesus Christ into the forgiveness of [their] sins.”
- Future Tense: Each one was promised that “You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
- Imperative Command: Each person needed to “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

About 3,000 Jewish individuals were immersed that day, forming the core of the Jerusalem “Church” (Acts 2:41).

Probably during the 2nd Half of the Year

After the stoning of the “Deacon” Stephen kicked off severe Jewish persecution of the Jerusalem “Church” (Acts 8:1-4), the “Deacon” Philip traveled to Samaria where he preached the Gospel about “the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ.” Those who believed his message were “immersed” (Acts 8:5-13). The Apostles Peter & John came to Samaria to impart the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit (i.e., the ability to prophesy, speak/interpret unlearned languages, heal, etc.; cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14) through the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:14-24). Apparently, only the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit comes automatically with immersion and the forgiveness of sins (consider Romans 8:9 and John 7:37-39).

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 34/35

Probably during the 1st Half of the Year

After leaving Samaria, Philip was supernaturally led to a meeting with the Treasurer of Ethiopia, who was leaving Jerusalem to travel home via the Gaza road (Acts 8:26-31). Starting in Isaiah 53, Philip “preached Jesus” to the eunuch (Acts 8:32-35). While no other details of this message are given, the eunuch expressed his desire to be immersed in response to the Gospel, indicating that it must have been part of the presentation (Acts 8:36-39).

Probably during the Summer

Saul of Tarsus, who had been taking the lead in prosecuting “The Way,” went from Jerusalem to Damascus with Sanhedrin orders to arrest any Jew there who believed in Jesus as Messiah (Acts 9:1-2//22:1-5//26:1-11). When Jesus appeared to him just outside Damascus, he was blinded and had to be led into the city to await further instructions (Acts 9:3-8//22:6-11//26:12-18). After three days of prayer & fasting, he was visited by Ananias who told him what he had to do next. Again, the grammatic structure of what Paul was told is very helpful (Acts 9:9-18a//22:12-16):

- Subordinate Participle: “Getting up.”
- Imperative Command: “Be immersed”
- Imperative Command: “Wash away your sins.”
- Subordinate Participle: “Calling on the Name of the Lord.”

SOMETIME BETWEEN 37 AND 41

The Apostle Peter was supernaturally tasked with preaching the Gospel to the first group of non-proselyte⁹ Gentiles (Acts 10:1-33). Peter began telling them the Gospel story, starting with the ministry of John (Acts 10:34-43). Once the assembled Gentiles began praising God with an unlearned language, after being supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter ordered that they should all be offered the opportunity to be immersed “in the Name of Jesus” (Acts 10:44-48). It should be noted that the Jewish believers at Jerusalem initially objected to what Peter had done until after he retold the story, after which they acknowledged that God had given to Gentiles the opportunity to repent and be saved; which also included their being immersed “in the Name of Jesus,” as had been the case for all Jewish believers up to that point (Acts 11:1-18).

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 45/46

During Paul’s “First Missionary Journey”

While preaching the Gospel message in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-43), Paul included a reference as to how John “the Immerser” had preached of “an immersion of repentance to all the people of Israel” (verse 24).

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 48/49

During Paul’s “Second Missionary Journey”: Paul Wrote His Letter to the Galatians

Paul affirmed the universal nature of immersion, writing that “all of you who were immersed into Christ have been clothed with Christ,” reminding them that salvation in Christ superseded ethnic, economic and gender barriers (Galatians 3:27).

⁹ A proselyte is a Gentile who has already converted to Judaism or is in the process of doing so. While Cornelius, the key Gentile in this story was a proselyte in the making, most of those whom he gathered into his house to hear Peter’s message were certainly not.

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 49/50

During Paul's "Second Missionary Journey"

Paul preached the Gospel message to a group of Jewish women gathered on the Sabbath near the river at Philippi, Macedonia (Acts 16:12-13).¹⁰ One of the women, an itinerate seller of royal purple fabrics from Thyatira, Asia, named Lydia, "opened her heart" to the message and was immersed, along with other members of her household (Acts 16:14-15). While staying with Lydia and continuing his preaching, Paul, along with his ministry partner, Silas, were arrested & beaten by the local authorities (Acts 16:16-24). When a mid-night earthquake from God opened all the cell doors, the jailer was about to commit suicide¹¹ when Paul intervened (Acts 16:25-28). This jailer, having heard the two prisoners singing songs of faith & praying to God about their situation, asked them what he needed to do "to be saved" (Acts 16:29-30). Paul specifically told him that he, along with anyone in his household, had to "believe in the Lord Jesus" to be saved (Acts 16:31). Paul then proceeded to preach the Gospel message, after which the jailer and believing members of his household were immediately immersed (Acts 16:31-34).

At Corinth, many who heard the Gospel "believed and were being immersed," including the leader of the local synagogue (Acts 18:5-8).

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 54/55

Before Paul Arrived at Ephesus, During His "Third Missionary Journey"

An eloquent, itinerate teacher from Alexandria, Egypt, arrived at Ephesus, Asia, preaching the message of John "the Immerser" (Acts 18:24-25). Priscilla & Aquila took him aside privately and informed him about the rest of the story, after which Apollos went on to Corinth where he demonstrated there, from the Scriptures, that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 18:26-28).

BETWEEN 55 AND 57

After Paul Arrived at Ephesus, During His "Third Missionary Journey"

Paul came across twelve men who had only been immersed in accordance with the preaching of John "the Immerser" (Acts 19:1-3). They were subsequently "immersed into the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:4-5), after which Paul laid his hands on them, as an Apostle,¹² and they received the supernatural gifting from the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy and speak in unlearned languages (Acts 19:6-7).

¹⁰ When there were not enough Jews to merit the formation of a synagogue (at least ten families), it was common for the few Jews to gather near a stream for Sabbath worship. The running water was used for their ritual cleansing.

¹¹ Roman rules allowed for the guardians of escaped prisoners to be punished with whatever would have been carried out against the prisoners. Therefore, those in custody of men facing crucifixion would often chose suicide.

¹² The same scenario as seen in Acts 8, where two Apostles had to lay hands on the recently immersed believers before they could receive the supernatural gifts of the Spirit.

JEWISH YEAR SPANNING 57/58

During Paul's "Third Missionary Journey": Paul Wrote His First Letter to the Corinthians

In this letter, Paul was very concerned about cult-like divisions within the Corinthian church. In discussing this problem, he asked them, "Where you immersed into the name of Paul?" which, of course, was not the case (1 Corinthians 1:13). He then went on to state that he was thankful that he had not personally immersed any of them, except for a handful of persons he could remember (1 Corinthians 1:14-16). He then made the statement that Christ had sent him "to preach," "not immerse" (1 Corinthians 1:17). This should be understood in the historical context that teachers typically left such things to their students, since immersing someone required no special knowledge, while teaching the Word of God did.¹³ You may remember that Jesus was credited with immersing more disciples than John, although it was His disciples who did the actual immersions (John 4:1-2).

Later in the letter, he likened the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelis as an immersion "into Moses," "in the cloud" and "in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

In his continued appeal for church unity, he reminded the Corinthian believers that "we were all immersed into one body," "in (by) One Spirit," regardless of ethnic background or economic status (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

In dealing with the bodily resurrection, he asked the puzzling question of why, if the dead are not resurrected, are some "immersed upon the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:29). Rather than being some sort of proxy immersion (such as that practiced by Mormons) it is much more likely a reference to the fact that people were immersed into Christ because of the past testimony of those now dead, such as some of the Apostles & the first generation of believers. It would not make sense to have accepted their testimony about the resurrected Lord and been immersed into His Name unless you genuinely believed that they were not really dead and would be resurrected on the Last Day along with yourself.

During Paul's "Third Missionary Journey": Paul Wrote His letter to the Romans.

In this letter to both Jewish & Gentile believers Paul referenced immersion as a universal act, writing that by being "immersed into Christ Jesus" we were "immersed into His death" and that we were subsequently resurrected with Jesus "to walk (live) in a new life" (Romans 6:3-4). He further explained that since "we died with Christ" we were no longer enslaved to sin and should account our bodies as "dead to sin" and "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:5-14).

¹³ Surgeons, to save valuable time to be used with other patients, often direct others to perform the closing sutures, since it takes considerably less skill than the surgery itself. That in no way lessens the importance of the closure of the surgical site.

BETWEEN 61 AND 64

During Paul's Detention at Rome: Paul Wrote His Letter to the Ephesians

Paul upheld the universality of immersion by writing that there was "One Lord, One Faith, One Immersion..." (Ephesians 4:5).

During Paul's Detention at Rome: Paul Wrote His Letter to the Colossians

Paul portrayed immersion as a symbol of death & resurrection by writing that we "were buried with Him in immersion" and then "resurrected with Him via faith in God's work of resurrecting Him out of the dead" (Colossians 2:12).

During Peter's Ministry at Rome ("Babylon"): Peter Wrote His First General Letter

In referencing the Flood of Noah's day, Peter clearly stated, "...immersion now saves you..." (1 Peter 3:21). He goes on to clarify exactly what he meant by this assertion - "not by the removal of dirt from the flesh, but rather as a request unto God for a clean conscience via the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21-22).

BETWEEN 64 AND 68: During the First Official Roman Persecution of Christians

Book of Hebrews Was Written

The Jewish-Christian author considered "instructions about immersions" to be one of the "elementary teachings," alongside "laying on of hands, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgement" (Hebrews 6:1-3). The reference to those who had "been enlightened" in Hebrews 6:4 may be the source of 2nd Century Christian verbiage which used that term as a synonym for immersion (Justin Martyr's First Apology, Chapter LXI).

Hebrews 9:6-10 mentioned "immersions" done in connection with the Jewish Tabernacle.