
Baptism

D&C 22:4

Ten days after the Church was organized, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation on baptism by proper authority. According to Elder Orson Pratt,

In the early days of this Church there were certain persons, belonging to the Baptist denomination, very moral and no doubt as good a people as you could find anywhere, who came, saying they believed in the Book of Mormon, and that they had been baptized into the Baptist Church, and they wished to come into our Church. The Prophet Joseph had not, at that time, particularly inquired in relation to this matter, but he did inquire, and received a revelation from the Lord. . . . These Baptists had to be re-baptized: there was no other way to get into this Church.¹

The Lord also revealed the method of baptism to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Those seeking to become members of the Church must be baptized by immersion by one holding the authority to administer the first saving ordinance of the gospel.

Anciently, the Jews participated in an immersion rite long before John began baptizing in Bethabara. Mosaic Law dictated that the Levitically defiled or unclean be immersed before offering a sacrifice to Jehovah. The Law also dictated that Gentiles be immersed to become “proselytes of righteousness.” A proselyte of righteousness acknowledged through immersion the symbolic removal of moral defilement which corresponds to Levitical uncleanness.

The immersions of John differed from those performed according to Mosaic Law. John taught that all Jews should be immersed in a baptism of repentance. Because of the uniqueness of John’s immersions, he was called John the Baptist. John said, “I indeed

¹ Orson Pratt, “Distinguishing Characteristics between the Latter-day Saints and the Various Religious Denominations of Christendom,” *Journal of Discourses*, 16:293–294.

baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose" (Luke 3:16).

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him" (Matthew 3:13). The River Jordan has the distinction of being the only river in the world that flows most of its course below sea level. The river begins at the base of Mount Hermon and flows downward through the Sea of Galilee before emptying into the Dead Sea.

Symbolically, the baptism of Jesus represents the depth of his humility. President Russell M. Nelson wrote, "By example, He taught us that He literally descended beneath all things to rise above all things."² By accepting baptism Jesus acknowledged the importance of John's baptism as a covenant with God for the remission of sins (see Matthew 28:19). By so doing, he fulfilled all righteousness.

² Russell M. Nelson, "Why This Holy Land," *Ensign*, December 1989.