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## Is Baptism for the Remission of Sins an Ordinance of the Gospel Binding on the World from the Time of the Savior Only, or Was It Also Required in Earlier Dispensations?

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**Abstract:** This article states that baptism was both necessary and practiced before the birth of Christ.

## Is baptism for the remission of sins time of the Savior only, or

# Your Question

by Joseph Fielding Smith  
President of the Council of the Twelve

**QUESTION:** *“In our study group we were discussing the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,’ (John 3:5) and the question arose whether this was an edict given by the Savior that was binding on the world from his time only, or if this practice and commandment had existed from the beginning of time. Some of us thought it was a new doctrine binding upon the world from the Savior’s time and that in ancient times, and until his coming, there were other principles of salvation which did not include baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. It was stated that baptism is not mentioned in the Old Testament and it was felt by some surely if it was the practice anciently the Old Testament would have some mention of it. Will you be so kind as to enlighten us on this question?”*

**ANSWER:** Your view is one believed in by some religious denominations, but it is contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

Baptism for the remission of sins is an ordinance of the gospel which has been required of all who seek the kingdom of God since the transgression of Adam. We may well believe that it is an ordinance which has prevailed on every earth created through the ages where mortality prevailed. In fact, each principle and ordinance of the gospel has always been required for the salvation of mortal man.

There are several reasons why baptism would not be mentioned in the Old Testament. First, baptism is a Greek word meaning to dip or immerse. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, therefore the word *baptism* would not be found in the original writings. There are some passages in the Old Testament that could be interpreted to refer to baptism such as washing and cleansing. The font in the temple of Solomon was evidently used for this purpose.

Second, through the years scribes were busy making copies of the scriptures, and they inadvertently, or otherwise, made some changes. There is no original copy of any of the books of the Bible known to man

## an ordinance of the gospel binding on the world from the was it also required in earlier dispensations?

today; that eliminations could have occurred is very possible.

Third, in later translations after the scriptures fell into the hands of Christian scholars who did not accept baptism by immersion, other errors could have occurred. Especially was this the case as it was revealed to Nephi by the angel of the Lord. On this point Nephi wrote:

“And the angel of the Lord said unto me: Thou hast beheld that the book proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew; and when it proceeded forth from the mouth of a Jew it contained the plainness of the gospel of the Lord, of whom the twelve apostles bear record; and they bear record according to the truth which is in the Lamb of God.

“Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God.

“And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the foundation of a great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

“And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.”<sup>1</sup>

### Baptism a fundamental principle

The Book of Mormon teaches us that baptism for the remission of sins was a fundamental principle of the gospel among the Nephites from the time of Lehi all through their history. Jacob, son of Lehi, in a most wonderful discourse on the mission of Jesus Christ, said to them:

“And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

(See page 287 for footnotes.)

“And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.”<sup>2</sup>

All through the Book of Mormon there are references to baptism as an ordinance for the remission of sins. What their word for baptism was is not revealed, but in the translation the Prophet Joseph Smith used the familiar expression of our time.

### Purpose of baptism explained

In the Pearl of Great Price the purpose of baptism is explained as taught to Adam as follows:

“Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.

“Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying:

“That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

“For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified.”<sup>3</sup>

Therefore Adam was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus “he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man.”<sup>4</sup>

When John the Baptist came from the wilderness crying repentance and baptizing all who came to him, his act did not seem to create any curiosity as if he were introducing some (Continued on page 261)

In our next article we will begin our study of the normal child between the ages of one to three. Experts have called this challenging period, "The Age of No Reason."

*Your Question*

(Continued) new and strange doctrine. The repentant Jews took it as an essential ordinance well known among them and so it was. According to many Jewish writers baptism was an ordinance in ancient Israel. Here are a few quotations referring to this fact:

"Christian baptism is of uncertain origin. . . . Possibly the baptism of Jewish proselytes furnished the model followed by Christian missionaries."<sup>5</sup>

"John stood forth in the spirit of the prophets of old to preach his baptism of repentance symbolized by cleansing with water." (See Jer. 4:14. Ezek. 36:25. Zech. 13:1.)

"According to rabbinical teachings, which dominated even during the existence of the Temple (Pes. viii. 8), Baptism, next to circumcision and sacrifice, was an absolutely necessary condition to be fulfilled by a proselyte to Judaism." "Yeb. 46b, 47b; Ker. 9a; 'Ab, Zarah 57a. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

"The only conception of Baptism at variance with Jewish ideas is displayed in the declaration of John, that the one who would come after him would not baptize with water but the Holy Ghost." (See Mark 1:8; John 1:33.)<sup>7</sup>

In an article published in the *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following on baptism:

"In the former ages of the world, before the Saviour came in the flesh, 'the saints' were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to come, because there never was any other name whereby men could be saved; and after he came in the flesh and was crucified, then *the saints* were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, that they might be buried in baptism like him, and be raised in glory like him, that as there was but *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God and Father of us all, even so there was but *one* door to the mansions of bliss. Amen."<sup>8</sup>



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