



***A FRESH LOOK AT
NEW TESTAMENT
BAPTISM***

**Rev. Dr. The Hon. Gordon Moyes, A.C., M.L.C.,
B.A., D.D., LL.D., D.Litt., F.R.G.S., F.A.I.M., M.A.C.E..**

www.gordonmoyes.com

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Traditionally many arguments of "Paedo-baptism" churches (those baptising children usually by sprinkling) against the practise of "Believers' baptism" churches (those baptising only those professing personal belief usually by total immersion) have concerned the amount of water used in the first century church.

It was argued that in an extremely dry country like Israel, total immersion was impractical. Large numbers of baptisms at one time, such as on the day of Pentecost, were impossible.

It has been difficult for proponents of immersion baptism to argue strongly about this point because of the lack of concrete evidence concerning the practise of New Testament Baptism outside of the New Testament. Hence most of the debate has been philological, arguing about the meaning of the words "to baptise" "to dip" and so on.

The argument about the availability of sufficient water is still being used, as is found in the recent Victorian Council of Churches book "Initiation in Australian Churches". In one chapter, Dr. David Williams, Vice-Principal of Ridley College in the University of Melbourne and Priest-in-charge of All Saints Anglican Church, Northcote, states:

"Then there are such practical considerations as the difficulty of arranging for immersion in the jailer's house at Philippi and the large quantity of water needed for the immersion of 3,000 people at Pentecost (though, of course, they may not all have been baptised at once). Immersion has for long periods and in many parts of the Church been the usual custom and we can hardly doubt that it was regarded as the ideal, if not the norm, in the Church of New Testament times. But it is difficult to maintain that immersion was the invariable practice of the Early Church and, in any case, it would be foolish to suppose that the amount of water made any difference to the validity of the rite as simply the "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." pp 16,17.

However the amount of water does matter to those who would hold that immersion baptism is the norm of the Early Church and the most viable mode for ecumenical acceptance. While the argument has hinged in philological and theological points in the past few centuries, recent archaeological discoveries of the past few decades, and scholastic investigation since, has gradually pieced together a picture of the origins of Christian baptism throwing fresh insight onto the philological and theological argument. Evidence will be given showing a minimum of 270 litres of water was required although about 1000 litres was average.

The question of being defiled by outward contamination and by inward impurity was central to pre-Christian religions. Purification by immersion in water was recognised in Biblical times by different religions. Impurity could be contracted by touching a dead body, (Numbers 19:11), having sexual intercourse, (Leviticus 15:18), by nocturnal emission, (15:16), by birth of a baby, (12:2), or by a menstruation, (15:19). The man who led the scapegoat into the wilderness on the day of atonement was unclean, (16:26), as was the man who burnt the sacrificial bull on that day, (16:28). In all of these cases the unclean person had to undergo a total cleansing by water. The period of being unclean was usually until sunset, but a person who touched a dead body was to be unclean seven days, "and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and at evening he shall be clean." (Numbers 19:19).

Many diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases and leprosy, caused uncleanness. The leper was required to signal his approach by crying "Unclean". When Naaman the Syrian discovered he was a leper, his Israelite servant girl advised him to seek the help of Elisha the prophet who told him to "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman obviously understood this to mean to immerse himself, because "he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan." (v14)

Ceremonial impurity also required immersion. For this rite a special type of pool known as a mikveh was required. Only in the last thirty years have first century mikva'ot (plural form of mikveh) been discovered. Prior to this, they were known only from ancient Jewish texts. They have since been discovered in important sites in Israel, but also in other Jewish communities in Europe by mediaeval synagogues. They consisted of three pools, one for storing rain water or running water, one for physical cleansing, and one for the immersion as a baptismal rite.

Moses had specified that "running water" be used in connection with the purification of a person contaminated by a dead body, (Numbers 19:17), and the Rabbis insisted that only running water or rain water was valid for use in a mikveh. Water carried from a cistern or stream was not valid. As it was not possible for enough rain water to be stored in the ritual pool from one rainy season to the next, this presented a problem. Pure rain water was the ideal, but Jewish regulation allowed an effusion of rain water into the tank as fulfilling the legal requirements. The storage containers above it allowed a system whereby the bath itself could fulfil the requirements of a mingling of rain water. The Rabbis reasoned that carried water coming in touch with rain water would be purified by the latter. So the ritual bath was connected to the rainwater pool by a pipe, and when water was carried to the ritual pool, a small quantity of rain water was allowed to run through the pipe into the ritual pool, thus purifying the latter.

The Greek term baptizo describes an act of washing or immersion in water. The origin of baptism has been traced variously to these Old Testament rites of purification, the lustration of Jewish sects, and even to analogous initiation or cleansing ceremonies in pagan religions.

Early Christians regarded baptism as a sacrament of initiation to be performed once only, as distinct from the more frequent formal lustration of other sects or religions. Somewhat before the Christian era the Jews employed baptism as a symbolic initiatory act for converts from paganism to the Jewish religion. Baptism, as John the Baptist practiced it, had its origin in Jewish purification rites that took final shape in the first century after Christ (c.f. "Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology". E.M.Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, Editors. The Zondervan Corp 1983).

Theologically, the meaning and practise of baptism has been heatedly debated in the past fifty years since Karl Barth delivered his broadside that shook the Christian world: "There is no Biblical basis for the rite of infant baptism, and the ritual is not an act of God's grace but of a human response to it - which means that the individual must be mature enough to understand the meaning of such a decision." "The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism" Karl Barth. p36.

Emil Brunner in his "The Divine Human Encounter" likewise attacked the practise of infant baptism but was not prepared to abandon it completely. They in turn were opposed by some of the most able theologians who not only argued for infant baptism, but argued that our faith positively requires it. Oscar Cullmann replied to Barth in "Baptism in the New Testament" SCM 1950 as did W.F.Flemington "The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism". 1948. The Church of Scotland produced an significant report "The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism" following an extensive

Commission on Baptism. They were followed by Fr. Pierre Marchel, "The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism" 1953 and Joachim Jeremias' "Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries" 1960 and "The Origins of Infant Baptism" 1963.

This debate was taken up most notably by R.E.O.White, "The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation" 1960; Kurt Aland, "Did the Early Church Baptise Infants?" 1963; G.R.Beasley-Murray "Baptism in the New Testament" 1972; "Baptism Today and Tomorrow", 1966; and responded to by G. Bornkamm, "Baptism and New Life in Paul (Romans 6)", "Early Christian Experience", 1986.

The debate agrees on most of the following:

"Christian baptism is rooted in the redemptive action of Jesus. His submission to the baptism of John (Mk. 1:9) demonstrated and effected his solidarity with sinful men. The divine response of a heavenly voice of approval showed it to be the initiation of the movement of salvation, and gave promise of the revelation of the Kingdom in the completed action of the Messiah. The authorisation of baptism during the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 4:1 ff.) was provisional. The command to baptise falls of necessity in the resurrection era, when redemption has been achieved, universal authority accorded to the risen Lord, and the mission of the church to the world begun (Matt. 28:18ff.).

"Baptism seems to have accompanied the - proclamation of the gospel from the beginning of the church's mission (Acts 2). Luke's understanding of Christian baptism appears in Acts 2:38. Baptism is conversion-baptism; administered "in the name of Jesus Christ", in relation to Jesus Christ and with the use of his name, so that the baptised calls on the name of Christ (Acts 22:16) even as the name is called over him, signifying to whom he belongs (Jas. 2:7); it is "for the forgiveness of sins" and for the gift of the Holy Spirit."

For Paul's interpretation of baptism Gal.3:27 is significant. Baptism is "to Christ" (a shorthand expression for "in the name of Christ"); it relates the believer to Christ in such a way that he is "in Christ" (cf. v. 26). From this basic view flow the other features of baptism that appear in Paul. Baptism "to Christ" is baptism "to his death" (Rom. 6:3 ff.); it relates the believer to Christ's redemptive action, so that Christ's death on Golgotha was his death, and it entails an end ("death") to the life of estrangement from God and the beginning of life in Christ. Baptism to Christ is baptism to the - church, for to be in Christ is to be a member of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27 ff.; 1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism to Christ is baptism in the Spirit of Christ ("We were all immersed in one Spirit...and were all saturated in (the outpouring of) one Spirit", 1 Cor. 12:13), for the Spirit and Christ are inseparable (Rom. 8:9 f.; 2 Cor. 3:17). Baptism to Christ is for life in the kingdom to be revealed in the day of Christ (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

In Acts and the epistles baptism appears as a divine-human event, even as the "turning" to God, with which it is invariably associated, is a divine-human event. Both elements are given due weight - the divine and the human. Since baptism signifies union with Christ (Gal. 3:27), all that Christ wrought for man in his redeeming acts and bestows by virtue of them is conjoined with baptism in the apostolic writings. This includes union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1 ff.; Col. 2:11 f.), forgiveness of sins and cleansing from sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), bestowal of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13), membership in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27), renewal by the Spirit (Tit. 3:5), the promise of the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). Rightly to estimate this teaching required the recognition that in the apostolic writings these benefits of Christ and his saving grace are given to faith. In particular this is true of union with Christ (Eph. 3:17), participation in his

death and resurrection (Gal. 2:20; 5:24; Col. 2:12), forgiveness and cleansing (1 Jn. 1:9), the gift of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 14), renewal by the Spirit (Jn. 1:13), life in the kingdom of God (Jn. 20:31). This coincidence of divine action for faith and in baptism comes to expression in the definition of baptism in 1 Pet. 3:21, where baptism appears as a trysting place for the Redeemer and the penitent, who addresses him on the basis of the gospel.

"The belief that the apostles commanded the baptism of infants as well as of responsible persons is attested as early as Origen (3rd cent. A.D.), and apart from some notable exceptions it became the unquestioned conviction of Christendom until the present century."

"The rise of the critical study of the Bible caused a widespread change of opinion, so that by 1940 the majority of New Testament scholars (as distinct from systematic theologians) were agreed that in the apostolic age baptism was administered to believers only. In recent years this view has been contested, above all by J. Jeremias, O. Cullmann and in the Reports of the Church of Scotland on Baptism. It is maintained that the traditional arguments for the apostolic institution of infant baptism are vindicated alike by sound theology and by modern biblical research. For example, the conviction that household baptism (Acts 11:14; 16:33; 18:8) included infants is strengthened by the contention that the term *oikos* (house) had gained an almost technical significance among Jews and had especial reference to little children. The terminology of Jewish proselyte baptism is believed to be employed in 1 Cor. 7:14, with the presumption that Jewish customs related to the baptism of young children of proselytes were accepted by the primitive church. The saying of Jesus concerning little children and the kingdom of God (Mk. 10:14) has been given form-critical evaluation: the story is said to reflect the *Sitz-im-Leben* of a church seeking to answer the question, "Should we baptise our children?" and the answer is implied, "Yes, bring them to baptism as they were once brought to Jesus." This conclusion is supported by the belief that the command, "Do not forbid them", reflects an early liturgical use of the term in baptism."

"These views have met with differing reactions. Some, like Kurt Aland, consider the rise of infant baptism to be not earlier than the close of the 2nd cent. A.D. (K. Aland, "Did the Early Church Baptise Infants?", 1963). Others like G.R. Beasley-Murray ("Baptism in the New Testament" 1972) believe that infant baptism is excluded from the horizon of the apostolic writers, not alone by its apparent lack of mention in their writings, but by their equation of the gift of baptism with the gift of faith. In the NT it is not merely a "blessing" that is given to the baptised, but Christ and his full salvation, so that A. Schlatter could rightly affirm: "There is no gift or power which the apostolic documents do not ascribe to baptism" (*Theologie des NT*, II, 495). This is comprehensible only in a milieu where baptism and conversion are inseparable, as in the primitive church (cf. Acts 2:41; 16:33), so that the effect of the one may be predicated of the other. Where it is believed that the instinct of the church has been right in administering baptism to infants as well as to those of riper years, some would contend that there must be recognised a modification of baptismal doctrine and provision must be made at a later stage in life for an occasion for confession of faith."

"The first explicit reference to infant baptism in Christian history is that made by Irenaeus, about A.D. 180, who speaks of "all who through Christ are born again to God, infants and children and boys and youths and old men" (*Adv. Haer.*, 2, 22, 4 (2, 33, 2)), "born again to God" being a technical phrase meaning baptism, well attested in other parts of Irenaeus's writings." ("The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology", Ed Colin Brown, Vol 1,p143-160).

This debate continues, mainly on historical, theological and philological grounds. What is new, is that the debate can now continue with added argument on archaeological grounds. It is in this sphere I direct my remarks.

In the last 30 years there have been tremendous archaeological discoveries which help us understand the origins of New Testament Baptism. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has given us many insights and possible fresh discoveries still lay ahead as further scrolls are translated. Then there may be other discoveries in other caves.

Only recently the press reported: "Dramatic evidence of the 1st century Jewish revolt against Rome, which led to the siege and mass suicide at Masada, has been unearthed by Israeli archaeologists in the desert east of Jerusalem. A detailed exploration of the area has located the headquarters of the rebel leader who led the revolt of 66 to 70 AD and fought alongside the Masada rebels for several years. Archaeologists discovered the headquarters, located in a complex of hitherto unexplored caves in the Wadi Phara, 10 kms north-east of Jerusalem. The complex, of some 20 caves, was the main base for rebels led by Shimon Bar-Giora, the chief commander of the Jewish revolt. The caves were hewn out of the rock by hand and were equipped with plaster water-storage cisterns. Inside one cave, believed to be Bar-Giora's headquarters, the archaeological survey team found a hastily-written message recording that: "Joezer (the priest) has just been killed (or wounded). The (Roman) guards have entered (our hiding place)." The note was written in charcoal on the side of a plaster water-cistern. The newly-discovered sites are of particular importance for Jewish history because the Roman repression which followed the revolts of Bar-Giora and Bar-Kokhba mark the beginning of the Jewish diaspora." Sydney Morning Herald 5.10.89.

Such archaeological discoveries have been the beginning of fresh evidence on the nature of New Testament baptism. A number of discoveries impact upon our understanding.

1. JEWISH WASHINGS.

Recent discoveries have dramatically increased our knowledge of the water storage capacity in Jerusalem, and other centres in Israel during the New Testament period, which impinge upon previously held ideas about Jewish libations. The most common form of water catchment and holding was the cistern. It was commonly a pear-shaped reservoir into which water could run from a roof, courtyard or from a water channel. From about the thirteenth century BC it was plastered and its opening stopped by a suitably cut stone, large enough for protection, but sometimes quite heavy (cf Gen 29:8-10).

"It must have been a frequent misfortune, in an earthquake-fractured land, to find the stored waters of a laboriously cut cistern seeping away through a new fissure in the rocks (cf the imagery of an apostate people in Jer 2:13). In such abandoned reservoirs there is usually a mound of debris underneath the opening, consisting of dirt and rubbish, blown or knocked in, shattered remnants of water containers, and not infrequently skeletons. These may represent the result of accident, suicide, or some such incarceration as that which Jeremiah endured, although he did not experience the usual fatal end of exhaustion and drowning in water and mud. In one cistern at Gezer, archaeologists discovered a dozen or more male skeletons and the upper half of a female who had been sawn asunder at the waist (cf. Heb 11:37). These were prisoners who, unlike Joseph (Gen 37:20-29) and Jeremiah (Jer 38), were not rescued. Similar discoveries were made in cisterns at Ai and Tell en-Nasbeh. Complex structures have been unearthed at Jerusalem, Masada, Samaria, and other locations. Many cisterns constructed in antiquity are still in use." (Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology" E.M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, Editors. The Zondervan Corporation 1983.

At Qumran a number of cisterns were unearthed, one of which had fourteen stone steps leading down into it, suggesting that it had been used for ritual ablutions by the religious community there.

The significance of the cisterns in relation to baptisms has only recently been understood with fresh archaeological evidence to which we shall shortly turn.

A second form of water storage used lavers especially for the ceremonial lustration, the washing of the human body rather than to the cleansing of other objects, such as clothes. Ritual ablutions with water were required of priests and Levites before certain ceremonial occasions (Exod 30:20; Lev 8:6; Num 8:21) and were also prescribed for a variety of impure and unclean conditions (Lev 14:9; 15:13; Num 19:10). In Isa 1:16 and 4:4, water is used figuratively to describe cleansing from sin, a usage found in the New Testament with special reference to baptism (Eph 5:26, Titus 3:5). In Heb 6:2 the author alludes to pointless arguments about the relative merits of Christian and other ablutions, while in 9:9-10 he notes that the ritual washings of Leviticus have been outmoded by the work of Christ.

The lavers (basins) of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:38) consisted of round bronze bowls fitted into a square framework (2 Chron 6:12-13) and contained water for cleansing for the sacrificial offerings (2 Chron 4:6). An analogous tripod base that originally held a metal laver has been recovered from Ras Shamra (Ugarit). ("Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology". E.M. Blaiklock and R.K. Harrison, Editors. The Zondervan Corp. 1983.)

The most recent discovery that has helped us understand the size and purpose of the Laver, has been the instructions for the "Laver House" in one of the more recently translated Dead Sea Scrolls: "The Temple Scroll" (Tr. Yigael Yadin. pp.130-133. George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd. 1985). Professor Yigael Yadin writes of this large building which measured 30 cubits square and which was surrounded by wide steps to approach the Laver: "The scroll's description of the interior arrangements of the House of the Laver makes important mention of 'niches' in the interior wall. The scroll prescribes that these niches were to be 'overlaid with gold'...to be set at eye level 'from the ground four cubits high.' They were designed as receptacles for the garments of those using the laver.

The arrangement described in the scroll, together with the parallels in the Mishnah and Maimonides, are reminiscent of bath-houses in general during that period. Writing of a case in which an ordinary ritual bath-house is mentioned, the Mishnah's Tohoroth (Purities) 7:7 begins a text with: 'If a man left his vessels in a wall-niche of the bath-house attendants...' During my own excavation at Masada, we discovered an installation very similar...Alongside the bath itself stood a square building with rows of small niches in its interior walls.

The niches in the House of the Laver were plated with gold because they held holy garments. The author attaches great importance to the whole subject of purity and impurity - a later section of the scroll goes into great detail - and he therefore gives careful prescriptions to ensure the purity of the priestly garments. His prime concern is with the clothes to be donned by the priests before they come 'to minister in the holy place'; they were not to approach the altar unless 'clothed with the holy garments'. But he also issues careful orders about the reverse procedure of clothes-changing, when the priests, after officiating and sacrificing at the altar, change from sacred to ordinary garments. These orders end with the ban on priests when leaving the inner court and going out to the people to do so while still dressed in their holy robes: 'and they shall not communicate holiness to my people with their holy garments in which they minister'.

The terminology and style of these commands are clearly influenced to a considerable extent by the language in chapters 42 and 44 of Ezekiel - particularly the ban on priests from wearing their official garments when mixing with the people. They are warned that 'when they go out into the

outer court to the people, they shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering, and lay them in the holy chambers and they shall put on other garments'.

Immediately following this text on the garments are the author's prescriptions for the disposal of the unclean water after the priests had finished bathing. 'This water was not to be used or even `touched by anyone, for it is mixed with the blood of the burnt offering'. The command, therefore, was to `make a conduit around the laver, near its house. And the conduit shall lead from the house of the laver into a pit, extending downwards into the land (ground), (so that) the water...flowing into it...will be lost in the land.' Thus, the water mixed with the blood washed off from the priests after their sacrificing was to flow from the House of the Laver directly into the ground. 'This method was similar to the one governing the disposal of the blood that dripped from the altar.'

2. THE MASADA DISCOVERIES.

It was less than forty years ago that the first mikveh was found by an archaeologist, and it aroused a tremendous amount of emotion in Jewish quarters. In 1963 the top Israeli archaeologist, Yigael Yadin, commenced excavations on Herod's fortress of Masada, on the west shore of the Dead Sea. During these excavations he unearthed what appeared to be a mikveh. News of the find was communicated to the press, and great excitement was aroused among Orthodox Jews around the world.

Professor Yadin, has not only been one of the foremost Israeli archaeologists in the past four decades, but he has remarkable facility in describing for readers his interpretation of the events surrounding his discoveries. Two significant discoveries by his team, have confirmed some very early arguments concerning Christian baptism. He describes one as follows:

"Reaching Masada by this route each day we could see to our left, on the western slope, remains of the powerful project of Herod - the water system. What we saw were two rows of what looked like dark holes, one series above the other. These were openings to huge cisterns which had been scooped out of the rock, each with a capacity of up to 140,000 cubic feet and altogether totalling close to 1,400,000. How did Herod and his engineers think of filling these cisterns, when there was not then - nor is there today - any spring near Masada, and the rainfall is so rare and meagre? Their solution reflected sheer genius, and like so many ingenious solutions, the concept was simple but the execution very difficult. They based their plan on the existence of two small wadis which pass to the north and the south of Masada. They constructed dams in two places, and from these dams they laid open channels to the two sets of excavated cisterns, one from the southern wadi to the top row, and the second aqueduct from the northern wadi to the bottom row. It was their assumption that with the rains, the water would be held up by the dams and by gravity flow would stream along the aqueducts and fill up the cisterns one after the other."

Another set of cisterns was excavated at the top of Masada and these were filled with the water from the lower cisterns which was brought up by the `electric' power of those days - thousands of slaves and beasts of burden who carried up the water in jars along two paths, from west and east, which ended by joining the `snake path'. A simple plan. A plan of genius! Yet when one stands near Masada today in the broiling sun, the area all around bare and burnt, the wadis dry, and no source of water welling forth anywhere in the vicinity, the plan could never have worked.

Both during our first and second seasons, we were afflicted by particularly harsh winters. These were a blessed boon to the country, after several years of drought, but for us at Masada they were grim. Many times the southern wind reached gale force of over sixty miles an hour and tore our tents to shreds. Torrential rains which burst from the skies without warning filled the ravines in a flash. Even the wadi between our dining hall and the volunteers' tents became a river, isolating the two sections of our camp. All the wadis west of Masada, including those crossing the Beersheba - Arad road, also overflowed their banks, and the new highway to Arad crumbled in several places, cutting us off from the rest of the country. There were days when the only way in which we could receive our basic supplies was by helicopter. There were days when we had to stop digging because the ground had turned to mud. All this was very trying. It must be remembered, too, that the tents were full of water and the clothes the volunteers had brought with them utterly soaked, with no prospect of drying them quickly. And there were two consolations: first, we witnessed a rare natural spectacle when the two wadis which had supplied the water to the Herodian channels serving the cisterns suddenly filled up and burst their banks.

The aqueducts themselves have long been destroyed; the southern one lies buried beneath the great earth ramp constructed by the Romans, and the northern channel was ruined in several places in the course of time. And so the water of the wadis streamed to waste, and instead of being harnessed by drainage ditches, leapt towards the Dead Sea in a series of breath-taking waterfalls. In the driving rain, we of the permanent staff and the volunteers would rush to see these falls and gaze in rapt wonder at such marvels of nature. Equally exciting was the visual evidence of how Herod's water supply system worked. If the aqueducts had still been in good repair, all the cisterns excavated in the slope of the Masada rock would have filled up in only a few hours.

We were also able to confirm another item in the writings of Josephus which had seemed to many scholars to be legendary: Josephus says that before the reign of Herod, years before he fortified Masada, Herod's brother Joseph plus members of his family found refuge at Masada. Holding out against the troops of the last of the Hasmoneans and his allies, the Parthians, they were about to die of thirst, when suddenly the heavens opened and all the pits that had been in Masada filled with water, and Joseph and his people were saved.

This report in Josephus had been hard to believe; for even if one could imagine the waters of the wadis piling up to fill the cisterns from the rains of Masada - or more particularly from the westward flowing rain-water of the Judean hills - it was difficult to conceive that direct rain over the Masada summit would be enough to fill its clefts. Yet I recall one of those days when we all had to rush for shelter from a sudden downpour. When it was over, I was astonished to behold that the lower-lying areas of the summit were but one huge pool of water. If I had not myself photographed this sight, I would not have believed that it had been taken at the top of Masada. So this story of Josephus had evidently also been based on reliable information." "Masada" Yigael Yadin. pp 21-34. George Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd. 1966.

That water system which provided so much water that the Zealots who fought the Romans could boast that with their abundant food storages, they wanted for nothing, was the first discovery that supported another amazing archaeological find, that of the ritual bath or mikveh. Again let Yadin tell it:

"We were much surprised by what came to light as we uncovered one of the chambers in the southern section of the casemate wall. When we had cleared all the debris from this room, what we saw was a system of three adjacent pools - one large, one medium-sized and one small. Steps had been built in the two larger pools so that one could

reach the bottom, and in the wall between them there was a connecting hole through which water could flow from one to the other. Moreover, there was an open, plastered, water conduit leading into the first - the largest - pool, and this conduit no doubt served to collect and channel rainwater from the roof of the room and its surroundings.”

This find immediately suggested to us that what we had discovered was a ritual immersion bath - Mikveh in Hebrew -and this we announced at our routine press conference. The news that we had brought to light a mikveh from the period of the Second Temple quickly spread throughout the country, arousing particular interest in orthodox religious quarters and Talmudic scholars; for the traditional Jewish laws of the Talmud relating to the ritual bath are quite complex, and no mikveh has so far been discovered belonging to this very period, the period when much of the relevant traditional law governing the mikveh was written.

This special interest in the mikveh led to one of my strangest meetings on the Masada summit, and it indicates, too, how wide was Masada's appeal to our people, and how it spoke to each in his own language. We received information one day, during the excavations, that Rabbi David Muntzberg, specialist in the laws of the mikveh, and Rabbi Eliezer Alter, were anxious to visit Masada and see for themselves the mikveh we had discovered. I signalled that I would be pleased to receive them, and one hot day, during the hottest hour of the afternoon, the two Rabbis arrived on the summit. They had climbed the tough 'snake path' on the east face under the broiling sun, wearing their characteristic heavy garments, and accompanied by a group of their Hassidic followers. Though they are no longer young, neither agreed to rest when they finally reached the top; nor did they wish to see the handsome structures of King Herod. They wanted one thing only: to be led directly to the mikveh. The aged Rabbi Muntzberg immediately went into one of the pools, a tape-measure in his hand, to examine whether in fact the volume of this mikveh was the 'forty measures' required by the ritual law.

Spiritually, these people had been deeply stirred by what apparently was a very humble structure, though, admittedly, dramatically sited within a wall at the edge of a steep escarpment. This mikveh meant more to them than anything else on Masada. This mikveh was indeed a ritual bath 'among the finest of the finest, seven times seven'.

How had this mikveh been built? According to Jewish religious law, such a bath, without which no orthodox Jew could live, particularly in those days, had to be filled for the most part with rain-water flowing into it directly, and not brought to it with buckets or the like. This of course was not possible in Palestine during most months of the year, when there is simply no rain, and the law therefore prescribes that it is sufficient if part of the water is 'pure'; additional water, drawn and brought from elsewhere and not direct-flowing rain-water, becomes 'purified' on contact with the pure water. They therefore built two pools. In one - in ours at Masada the one nearest the entrance - water was gathered during the rainy season and stored; the second was the actual bath itself. Before using it, they would open the bung in the connecting pipe allowing some drops of the stored, direct rain-water to flow into the bathing pool and thus purify it.

The third pool in the Masada mikveh, the smallest, which was not connected to the other two pools, was for actual cleansing purposes (as distinct from ritual purification), for washing the hands and feet before immersion in the mikveh. That this was not the only mikveh on Masada, and that it had clearly been constructed according to standard ritual regulations, we found out just before the end of our excavation season when we unearthed an almost identical mikveh on the other side of the summit, in the north-eastern corner of the large administration building to the west of the

storehouses. This building had also been in use both during the period of the Zealots and later at the time of the Roman garrison. We discovered the mikveh when we excavated its courtyard. Here, too, may be seen the carefully installed communicating pipe between the 'pure' water pool and the immersion pool. This device shed interesting light on a number of hitherto obscure passages in the Mishnah. It also illustrates, as do the inscriptions about tithes mentioned earlier, that the defenders of Masada were devout Jews, so that even here, on dry Masada, they had gone to the arduous lengths of building these ritual baths in scrupulous conformity with the injunctions of traditional Jewish law." "Masada" Yigael Yadin. pp.164-167. George Weidenfeld & Nicholson Ltd. 1966.

Here, for the first time in the modern era, a ritual baptistery been discovered, complete with changing rooms similar to that of the Laver Room, and the complex water system which allowed fully the use of plentiful water even on top of such a high fortress. Obviously, Orthodox Jews regarded highly the importance of the Mikveh both in the first century AD and for today. For news of this discovery sent a wave of excitement through Orthodox Jews in many countries, causing a search in other archaeological sites for evidence of the presence of Mikva'ot. To the surprise of most, the next few years unearthed many such baptisteries, from the hills of Judea to the inner city Jewish ghettos of Europe. Further archaeological light was yet to break forth on the mikveh, not far away at Qumran where the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls had ignited such interest.

3. THE QUMRAN DISCOVERIES.

The Jewish separatist movement, perhaps the Essenes, at Qumran emphasised periodic cleansing in water as a means of receiving spiritual sanctification as outlined in "The Manual of Discipline" (III,4; IV,20). Two rock-hewn cisterns lined with a plaster coating were uncovered during excavations.

One of these was long and deep, having fourteen stone steps at one end that gave access to the water at various levels. Another large cistern near the South wall of the main building had a similar grouping of steps and suggested that these structures were used periodically as baptisteries. Prof. John Allegro, whose startling claims did not endear him to the scholastic community claimed these immediately as baptisteries, a claim subsequently accepted by more conservative scholars.

Allegro writes:

"This rite of initiation into the full membership of the Community was probably accompanied by an initial baptism ceremony...Certainly this would accord with the injunction of the Damascus Document that no man shall bathe in water of less depth than that required to cover a person... Once a person had been admitted to the Purity of the Many he could be baptised in the same water as other full members, but the Sect was careful that no novitiate or non-member was allowed to touch this water, nor any of his possessions, since he was ritually 'unclean': "Let him (the 'sinner') not enter the water to come into touch with the purity of the holy men. For such shall not be cleansed until they have repented of their wickedness; for uncleanness is on all transgressors of His word." Salvation could come to the Qumran Covenanter only by complete separation of himself and his possessions from the world. This was not prompted by any smug self-righteousness on his part, but because he sincerely believed that pollution from the non-purified world meant the risk of contact with the dominion of Belial or the Devil, which might compromise the constant battle he was fighting within himself against the powers of evil." The Dead Sea Scrolls by John Allegro. pp.121,122. Penguin Books Ltd. 1956.

The Qumran pools, or mikva'ot, are of great interest to many scholars. It matters little for the purpose of this paper whether the occupants of Khirbet Qumran were the Essenes or some other separatist group. We assume it was they who hid the scrolls in the caves. The Essenes certainly were known to have practised ceremonial ablutions, and it was logical to expect that they would have had at least one mikveh for the rite of immersion. Many water pools were found at Qumran, yet until Yadin's discoveries on Masada none of them were identified as a mikveh.

Roland de Vaux led a French excavation at Qumran from 1947 to 1954. In 1973 he published a report on his excavations in which he wrote that two small water installations "were certainly baths, but archaeology is powerless to determine whether the baths taken in them had ritual significance." ("Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls" p 132.) By 1978 de Vaux modified this to: "The care taken in the constructing these installations may suggest that they were intended for the ceremony of ritual immersion."

But in an article printed in the Bulletin of The American Schools Of Oriental Research (No 256, 1984), Dr Bryant G. Wood of the University of Toronto referred to the two types of pools that had steps leading down to them, one a narrow flight to allow access of a water carrier and the other with full width steps occupying a great deal of space that otherwise would have been filled with stored water which he believed allowed access to the water by a number of people. "The obvious conclusion is that the full-width steps were intended to provide easy access on a regular basis for more than a few people. That such steps were not necessary for the ordinary drawing of water is indicated by the fact that two cisterns were not equipped with steps." He concluded that "these two types of cisterns served different aspects of life at Qumran - the narrow stepped cisterns for the practical needs of the community, and the wide stepped cisterns for their religious requirements." Page 49.

An interesting feature of many mikva'ot is a low dividing wall down the steps. The baptisteries at Qumran had such dividing walls and one has a triple division. Archaeologists have suggested that participants were meant to enter the mikveh down one side and leave on the other, the purpose being to avoid treading on a step that he or she had touched in an impure state.

Dr Stephen G. Price, of the Sacred Heart School of Theology, Hales Corners, Wisconsin, elaborates on this:

"In support of the suggestion that the stairs to such pools were divided so as to allow (impure) descent on one side and (purified) ascent on the other, let me cite the apocryphal Christian gospel fragment known as Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840 (found in Ron Cameron, "The Other Gospels" [Harper & Row, 1984]). There the chief priest in dialogue with Jesus in the Temple Court claims that bathing and changing of clothes are necessary for everyone in that holy place. Then the priest states: "I am clean. For I have bathed myself in the pool of David and have gone down by the one stair and come up by the other and have put on white and clean clothes, and (only) then have I come hither and viewed these holy utensils." The distinction of the stairs is evidence of the priest's precautions." Biblical Archaeology Review May 87.

However this point of view differed from that of Rabbi David M. Friedman, Congregation Darchei Noam, Oceanside, New York, who says: "The explanations offered for the division of the stairways leading to the Mikveh by a low wall or pillars are not sound. The stairway itself, being Mehubar L'Karkah permanently affixed to the ground, can neither contract nor impart ritual

impurity. If the fear was contact with ritual contaminants such as dead insects or the like, such a nominal division couldn't preclude a mishap. More likely, larger Mikva'ot that had a large volume of users, had these dividers to separate those entering from those exiting. The entire process was simply a formality similar to that mentioned in the Mishnah (Middot 2:2) of entering and exiting the Temple Mount using different gates." *Biblical Archaeology Review* May 87.

However, this viewpoint is unlikely as in Jerusalem the laws stated that unclean had to walk in the centre of the road or bridge (where the drains were and the donkeys walked), while the clean on their way to the Temple walked on the side of the roads nearest buildings, a sight still to be seen today. Also the Early church practise was to build divided steps as a symbol of "rising to walk in newness of life."

Professor Wood quotes from one of the scrolls to support his argument that not only were the pools at Qumran used for ceremonial purposes, but that the participant actually immersed himself in them. "Let him not enter into the water to touch the purity of the men of holiness, for they shall not be pure except they have repented of their wickedness" ("Manual of Discipline" 5:13-14). On the question of the mode of the ceremony, whether the members immersed themselves fully or sprinkled he concluded, "The members of the Qumran sect most certainly dipped."

Dr William Sanford la Sor in the January 1987 edition of the "Biblical Archaeology Review" claims that "the archaeological and Mishnaic evidence seems to support the argument for immersion. That is clearly what occurred in the contemporaneous Jewish mikva'ot, so that is probably what happened in early Jewish baptism." Page 58. From the writings of Rabbi Maimonides, 12th Century AD master of Rabbinic literature, the author quotes an interesting statement: "Whosoever immerses himself must immerse his whole body, naked, and all of it at once...And if any who is unclean immerses himself in his garments, the immersion still avails him since the water enters through the garments and these do not interpose." Even the hair must be totally covered, however the Mishnah states, "For immersion to be valid, no part of the body's surface may be untouched by water. However, it is not needful that the water should enter into every orifice and wrinkle" Mikva'ot 8:5. The Mishnah further states that the immersion pool must contain a minimum of 40 seahs, about 270 litres of water (1000 by some calculations), enough for a person standing in it to be completely immersed, (the knees may be bent), in a deep baptistery no smaller than a cubit square. It can easily be seen how significant these archaeological discoveries have been on the mode of first century baptism.

4. THE MIKVA'OT IN JERUSALEM.

Here we come to one of the most fascinating insights from contemporary archaeology. For centuries paedobaptists have argued that Jerusalem, on the top of Mount Zion, could not possess enough water for the immersion of 3000 people who obeyed Peter's injunction on the day of Pentecost: "Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). While some aspects of Jerusalem's water supply, such as Hezekiah's Tunnel, have been known through archaeologists, it is only in the last two decades that significant discoveries effecting our knowledge of first century baptism have been known.

A. Mazar has made a specific study of the water resources of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. He writes: "The flow of water to Jerusalem, was solely by gravity. Thus, the sources had to be higher than the city being supplied. Such sources are found south of Jerusalem in three concentrations: in

Wadi Arrub, where the springs are an average of 810 metres above sea-level; in Wadi Biyar, at the southern end of which there is a spring at the 870 metre level; and in the region of Solomon's Pools, where there are two springs above the pools, at 800 metres, and two more below the pools, at the 765 metre level. These very slight differences in height, and the numerous topographical obstructions, necessitated a meandering, lengthy route for the aqueducts, with a very slight gradient.

The first section of the aqueduct system, which we call the Arrub Aqueduct, is split up by a number of small wadis, necessitating a route of some 40 kilometres, even though the distance is only 10 kilometres as the crow flies. The aqueduct gathers the abundant waters of the springs of Wadi Arrub, partly stored in a pool of some 20,000 cubit metres capacity.

In this region, the aqueduct is built on a high foundation wall, but in the rocky region east of Beit Fajjar it is a mere channel hewn into the bed-rock, or partly hewn and partly constructed, covered over by stone slabs. In this section, it is some 50 centimetres wide and 50-60 centimetres high. In three places the aqueduct tunnels beneath ridges; the bridging of wadis was done by means of solid dams which could withstand the winter torrents. All along the Arrub Aqueduct, two major building phases can be distinguished. The initial stage is probably to be ascribed to the period of the Second Temple; whereas the second stage is apparently from Mamluk times. The aqueduct of Wadi Biyar is a short one, with a fairly straight route, mostly through tunnels. It is some 4.7 kilometres long and differs entirely from the Arrub Aqueduct. The first three kilometres of the Biyar Aqueduct is actually one long tunnel, hewn at a depth of 8-23 metres along the wadi. The tunnel was hewn through tens of shafts, a well-known technique employed in Roman aqueducts.

Tunnels of this type were generally employed to overcome topographical obstacles, but here the intent differed; the wadi provided no obstacle, especially since the opening of the tunnel is some 70 metres above the upper reservoir at Solomon's Pools. The intent here for hewing the tunnel was purely hydraulic, showing the knowledge of the engineers involved. The tunnel is hewn into soft hawwar, an impermeable limestone giving rise to springs throughout the Judean hills. The geologist A. Flexer, who has examined the tunnel, writes: "The principle of building the tunnel is in the meeting of an aquifer and an aquiclude, so that all along the way ground water is constantly being gathered." Thus, we have before us a unique hydraulic project, having no parallel in this country; the entire tunnel was hewn to serve as a water-source - three kilometres long!" "Jerusalem Revealed". Edited by Yigael Hadin. pp.80,81. Israel Exploration Society 1976.

One purpose of such an intricate system, and this was only one aspect of the Jerusalem water supply in the time of Jesus, is the number of private mikva'ot found in houses near to the Temple Mount, and by the stairs leading to the Temple near where Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost. These discoveries only made in the last few years, were possible only because of the removal of valuable Islamic buildings accidentally (?) destroyed in the Six Day war.

I have examined them closely and the results are most powerful in ending much of the centuries long debate on the mode of Christian baptism in the early church.

The outstanding Israeli archaeologist Mier Ben-Dov, who has led the archaeological excavation of many of the areas round the Temple mount, writes of his discoveries:

"Our excavations proved that residential buildings were situated as close as a dozen meters from the walls of the Temple Mount. Still, the area immediately surrounding the mount was designated for public use, meaning thoroughfares and squares as well as public and commercial buildings. It was on the slopes of the western hill and to the

north of the City of David that we uncovered the remains of residential neighbourhoods. Their buildings were constructed very close together, reminding us again that Jerusalem of the Second Temple period was both a heavily populated and highly prosperous city whose economy was nourished by the steady traffic of pilgrims and a burgeoning network of commercial ties. Although we also know that the city supported crafts and industrial enterprises, as well, to date no sign of such installations has been unearthed within its bounds. The ancient sources help us on this point by noting how the city fathers made sure that petty-crafts workshops were located outside the walls. They seemed to have been aware that ovens and other industrial apparatus pollute the environment and must therefore be kept well away from residential neighbourhoods. This precaution was all the more apt in a city as crowded as Jerusalem.”

“The lively trade in real estate for building purposes, particularly in the areas closest to the Temple Mount, made it necessary to exploit every patch of land to the utmost. Shops were even built into the piers of Robinson's Arch and Wilson's Arch. The residential quarters that began near the commercial center adjoining the Temple Mount extended southward and westward, growing into densely built neighbourhoods. In essence the streets were no more than narrow alleys that threaded their way between the houses -when, indeed, these buildings did not actually touch up against each other or share common walls - according to the city the look of a typical ancient metropolis. Yet despite the intense exploitation of the real estate and crowded effect on the outside, the houses themselves were relatively spacious inside. The format of a typical residential building in Jerusalem was of a patio house, namely, a set of rooms built around a central courtyard. These enclosures were not in themselves very large, but they allowed for relative privacy in a densely populated city.”

“Sometimes the enclosed courtyards contained no special architectural features; sometimes they were rather like peristylar courts in that they had a few pillars in the centre supporting a thatch of vineleaves. In any event, the houses in Jerusalem during the Second Temple period, though planned with care, were modest in size compared to the villas in the country's rural areas, for the sheer dearth of space and exorbitant price of land prevented even the wealthy from building in a manner commensurate with their economic standing. The houses were constructed out of stone, sometimes well dressed, sometimes only partially so. Their walls were plastered both inside and out, while the interiors were also whitewashed and decorated with simple frescoes and other artistic embellishments.”

“In Herod's day the barrel vault became almost the exclusive form of roof in Judea. It required considerable engineering skill, auxiliary equipment for building forms, and scaffolds for constructing the vaults - not to mention a good deal of work to dress the stones that would ultimately make up the vaults. When vaults were first built, they were fashioned exclusively out of dressed stone, which required precision chisel work at angles that aligned with the structure of the arches. Nevertheless, barrel vaults proved to be an unparalleled structural solution to the problem of ceilings and roofs in an area where wooden rafters were a highly expensive commodity. The stone vaults also made it possible to construct multi-story houses - and, indeed, many of Jerusalem's houses in that period rose to a height of two or three stories, which was a boon for coping with the pressures of a burgeoning population.”

"One of the hallmarks of these buildings - an element found in almost every one of them - is the mikveh or ritual bath. Since they were carved out of bedrock, these baths survived almost intact despite the subsequent destruction inflicted on other parts of the houses. Every generation has its social classes, and from this point of view the Second Temple period was no different from any other. Yet rather than be based on economic or social standards, classes then were defined on the basis of a religious guideline. Some were very strict in observing the religious precepts of the halakhah, others were less rigorous. The more fastidious in their observance of the commandments were called haverim ("comrades"), while their less exacting counterparts were called amei aratzot ("the uninitiated" or "common folk"). Yet we should note that the commandments in question are not the religious precepts whose observance or violation distinguishes between religious and non-observant people today, such as the Sabbath and the dietary laws of kashrut. Those commandments were universally observed in the Jewish community during the Second Temple period. What distinguished between the haverim and the amei aratzot was a rigorous observance of halakhic practice - most particularly the laws of impurity and purification - sometimes well beyond the demands of the halakhah. Hence the abundance of ritual baths. According to the halakhah, the water used in a ritual bath must either be rainwater or come from a constantly flowing source such as a spring. In places where there was no water source in the vicinity, rainwater was used. But that gave rise to problems of its own, for when the water in the ritual bath had to be changed in the summertime, it was necessary to draw water from cisterns."

"The sticklers of the day felt that drawing water from a standard well did not meet the demands of the halakhah, because it was "drawn water" rather than rainwater. In order to make the water fit for use, the following solution was arrived at: a receptacle with a minimum capacity of 40 seah (about 800 litres) was built alongside the ritual bath. Referred to as the "treasury," this reservoir was used to store rainwater, and its contents could not be used for any other purpose. The "treasury" and the ritual bath were connected by a pipe two fingers in diameter "like the width of the tube of a wineskin," as the Mishnah puts it.

Whenever a householder wanted to clean his ritual bath and change its water, he plugged up the pipe, cleaned and rinsed the bath, and then refilled it with water drawn from a cistern. Afterward the pipe was unblocked and contact was made between the fresh water already in the bath and the water of the "treasury". This blend purified the water of the mikveh and made it fit for bathing according to halakhic demands. These three components - the ritual bath itself, the "treasury" beside it, and a cistern from which the water was drawn to fill and change the bath - were found in every one of the houses uncovered on the slopes of the western hill. In cases where there was not enough room to build the three components side by side, or for the sake of conserving space, the "treasury" was sometimes built under the steps leading into the ritual bath. Occasionally the cistern was cut into the rock below them both.

The ritual baths were coated with a gray-coloured plaster to prevent seepage. In addition to lime and sand - the standard ingredients of the plaster - olive oil was added to strengthen it and enhance its impenetrability. The ritual bath was entered by at least six steps that were covered by water and were considered an integral part of the bath. Anyone who entered the mikveh would descend these steps impure and ascend them cleansed. To ensure that the purified bather would not come into contact with the part of the step he had tread on while descending into the mikveh, a number of baths had railings to divide the steps and indicate one side for descent and the other for ascent (we

have evidence of this convention in the Mishnah). We also uncovered other kinds of ritual baths within the residential quarters, including "seeded" baths that did not draw upon a "treasury" and baths cut into the rock like caves. So far forty-eight ritual baths have been excavated.

The abundance of ritual baths in the area of the Temple Mount, compared to their relative scarcity in the Upper City and other quarters of Jerusalem, prompted scholars to formulate a number of theories. Some posited that the residents of the neighbourhoods adjoining the Temple Mount must have been more pious than the members of the aristocracy, who lived in the Upper City and were less zealous in their adherence to the halakhah. From the standpoint of strict observance of the laws of ritual purity, it is hardly necessary for everyone to have his own private mikveh, especially as public ritual baths definitely satisfied the need.

Then why this abundance of ritual baths in the houses built near the Temple Mount? As we have seen, a prerequisite for entering the Temple Mount was purification in a ritual bath. We know that many pilgrims lodged in hospices and public hostels, but the custom of renting rooms existed back then, too. Imagine the attraction of a notice tacked up on a street corner were it phrased to the following effect: "Rooms for rent. Reasonable rates. Private mikveh on premises." That is how I would explain the profusion of these baths, for many of the householders living near the Temple Mount made a living from renting out rooms. The cisterns uncovered in these buildings are huge, accommodating some 150 square metres of water. What's more, five such cisterns were found in a single building!"

"Our work exposing the entire area revealed a mammoth building with some ten rooms, five water cisterns, and three ritual baths! Its state of preservation, relative to Jerusalem buildings of the Second Temple period, was excellent. In a number of places vaults were unearthed fully intact, as were doorways from the threshold right up to the lintel. The foundations of this structure were hardy walls from the First Temple period. Although our excavation of the building is not yet complete and we still have not compiled all the information on it, clearly we have come upon a multi-roomed building of at least two storeys." "In The Shadow Of The Temple" Meir Ben-Dov. pp.149-155. Kester Publishing House 1982.

The old paedobaptist arguments that there were no facilities in Jerusalem to immerse 3000 people on the day of Pentecost, and an inadequate water system except the drinking pools which would not have been allowed to be used as baptisteries, have been totally destroyed by recent archaeological discoveries of the 48 mikva'ot in the very area where Peter was preaching.

The "Encyclopaedia Judaica" (1971, Vol , p1543) says:

"There were many mikva'ot on the Temple Mount...even during the fratricidal war on the Temple Mount the laws of ritual immersion were strictly adhered to (Josephus Wars 4:205). The Temple itself contained pools in various places for the priests to bathe even in the vaults beneath the courts. The High Priest had special mikva'ot in the Temple for immersion in the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. There was an additional place for immersion on the Mount of Olives."

By the great staircase recently excavated, leading into the Holda Gates and into the Temple Mount, there is a mikveh where women were purified after child-birth. Mary would have entered this special female mikveh for her purification.

This occurred 33 days after the birth of Jesus when they brought Him to the Temple. (Luke 2:21-24). The 48 others are also at the foot of these stairs. The 48 mikva'ot also must not be thought to have been the only ones in the area of the Temple Mount. They are the only ones to have been thus far excavated. The difficulties of trying to excavate in a built-up and extremely sensitive area are enormous, but what has been discovered in a small area already is sufficient to end the old arguments about the availability and sufficiency of water for the performance of immersion baptism of adults in the Early Church.

5. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

We need to look at how this evidence effects our understanding of the person of John the Baptist and his mode of baptism. John is commonly credited with having introduced baptism as a rite of purification at the time of Jesus Christ, although any who knew contemporary Jewish rites would not make this claim.

John was not the first to use water purification for ritual or moral uncleanness. The Essenes or whoever were the occupants of Qumran, used immersion in water for ritual purposes. John was also baptising at the same time less than ten kilometres away at the point where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea.

It is most likely that John was simply using a current custom practised by the Essenes who also occupied the Wilderness of Judea. In fact it has been suggested that John was brought up in the Essene community, possibly at Qumran itself. This was possibly the closest Essene community to the place south of Jericho where John first practised baptism.

In his book, "The Dead Sea Scrolls", John Allegro devotes a chapter to discussing this intriguing issue. He says: "To most people the association of the River Jordan, baptism, and the call to repentance brings to mind most vividly the figure of John the Baptist. Marked off from his youth for the ascetic life of a prophet, John remained in the deserts of Judaea until 'the time of his showing unto Israel'. His wild, unkempt appearance, his uncompromising call to repentance, and his fanatical assurance of the nearness of the Day of Judgement, made a particular appeal to the people when he finally began his public ministry. He cared for no man and condemned hypocrisy and complacency wherever he found it, to the delight of the ordinary man who had suffered enough from both in the priesthood. There seems to have grown up around him a band of admirers who were later inclined to ascribe to him a messianic role, which, according to the Fourth Gospel, he was most anxious to deny. He was but a messenger, 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord. (John 1:23; Isa 60:3).

John's baptism was for the remission of sins, but that remission depended on a genuine showing of the fruits of repentance, after which alone could the suppliant be purified in the flesh with water. Even this was a preparatory ritual only, for the days were coming when the "Messiah himself would baptise, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Matt.3:11) Indeed, the eschatological process had already begun, "even now the axe is laid unto the root of the trees", (Matt.3:10) and thoughts of personal wealth and prestige could be put aside for ever. Now was the time to share one's worldly goods, to live honestly, and in quiet expectation of the end.

The Qumran Community quoted the same Isaiah passage to describe their own work of preparation, which was to study the Law and abide by the teachings of Moses and the prophets. They also demanded true repentance before baptism, and likewise promised a further cleansing by

God through the Holy Spirit. As we know, the Sect believed in the approach of the Day of Visitation and that this period of preparation would not allow of the accumulation of personal wealth, and they practised communal ownership of property.

Yet for all the similarities in their respective teachings, John was clearly at this time not of the Qumran Community. His mixing with the common man and thus separation from the 'Purity of the Many' would make his continued membership of the Community impossible. There was no evangelistic call to mankind, but an esoteric Community of the Elect.

Whilst others could join, it was only after a rigorous period of self-denial and probation. It does appear, however, that John may have belonged to the Essene movement, and correspondences with Qumran doctrine could easily be explained on the basis of their possessing many ideas and documents which were common to the Essene Sect as a whole. One interesting suggestion has been advanced that John had been adopted by the Qumran Sect as a boy, and this would certainly account for his being in the desert at such an early age. We have already seen that some branches of the Essenes eschewed marriage, and to keep up their number adopted other people's children whilst yet pliable and docile, and regarded them as their kin and moulded them in accordance with their own principles.

As the son of a priest he would have been welcomed by such a Community and probably marked out for a leading role in the Sect. When we meet him he is no longer a member, which may suggest expulsion, or voluntary resignation, perhaps when he received this overwhelming conviction of the need to take his message to the common people. We are told that besides his wearing of only the simplest garments, he ate only honey and locusts, both of which are mentioned in the food laws at the end of the Damascus Document. This again may indicate that the food he was able to eat was strictly limited owing to his purity vows taken in the Community.

Whether this theory be in accordance with the facts or not, it is certain that John the Baptist and his disciples exercised a very considerable influence on Jesus and the Church, and it is equally certain that much of John's message finds its parallels in Qumran teaching." "The Dead Sea Scrolls" John Allegro. pp 157-159. Penguin Books 1956.

John seems to have developed two new aspects of baptism which continued into the Christian tradition. Neither of these seem to have any antecedents in Jewish practise and both are found within the Early Church of the first century. David Down, the Australian archaeologist, has stated: "First, the Essenes practised immersion as a continuing ritual. As long as ceremonial impurity could be contracted there was a need for repeated ritual ablutions. But John seems to have used it as a total form of purification. Certainly Jesus and the disciples used it as not only as a form of permanent purification, (Gal 3:27), but as a form of initiation into the church (1 Cor.12:13.)

Second, the Essenes, and those who patronised the mikveh, practised this as a personal ritual. But John administered it to others. At least he supervised the ritual, or formally witnessed the act of immersion. Whether he physically immersed the candidate with his own hands is open to question. There is no Biblical or historical evidence to suggest that he lay candidates down backwards as is done by some Christian ministers today. Immersion in a mikveh was practised by bending at the knees and immersing beneath the water, and this was probably the method supervised by John." "Digging Up The Past". Sept 87.

The Christian church certainly argued the unrepeatability of baptism, and the form of backwards immersing was to emphasise the burial of the candidate into Christ's death. (Rom 5:1-3).

John Allegro's belief that John the Baptist was, for some time at least, part of the community at Qumran or with a nearby Essene sect, has the powerful support of Yigael Yadin, who says: "It seems evident that John himself not only knew the Essenes but may also have been a member of the community for a period. He roamed about in the same area - the eastern edge of the Judean desert close to the river Jordan and the Dead Sea - preaching and practising an ascetic mode of life; and the type of baptism he advocated is in keeping with the texts on baptism in some of the Dead Sea scrolls. Archaeological remains associated with baptism were excavated at Qumran." "The Temple Scroll" by Yigael Yadin. p.240. George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd. 1985.

A further development of this argument has been presented by Dr William Sanford La Sor, a Presbyterian scholar who writes: "We may ask what was the role of John and other baptisers in Christian tradition? Were they administering the baptism, immersing those who were being baptised? Again the philological evidence is technical and inconclusive. It is possible, perhaps probable, that John did not "administer the sacrament" (to use a church term), but rather witnessed the rite.

Jewish law required ritual immersion in the mikveh to be witnessed, although it is clear that the person immersed him or herself. The Mishnah uses the words *tabal* "immersed himself" (Mikva'ot 2:1,2) and *tabelu* "immersed themselves" (Mikva'ot 7:6). ("repent and immerse yourselves" is reflexive in Greek and fits in with 1 Cor 10:2 - Moses obviously did not perform the act of baptising all of Israel in the Red Sea, they immersed themselves - G.K.M.)

"Incidentally, to be a witness at a ritual immersion, it was not necessary to be a rabbi. Accordingly it would not have been necessary for the disciples to be rabbis if they either witnessed or "administered" a ritual immersion (baptism). Thus, we find Philip (most likely one of the Seven), (Acts 6:5) and Ananias of Damascus involved in the baptism of the Ethiopian and Saul, respectively (Acts 8:38, 9:18).

"What lies behind the Christian custom of baptising "in the name of"? According to several references in the New Testament, the new believer was to be baptised "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38), "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16), or in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). Paul asks "Were you baptised in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:13).

A possible suggestion is that baptism "in the name of" was originally an indication of the required witness. John's baptism was commonly referred to as "the baptism of John" (Matt 21:25; Mark 11:36; Luke 7:29; Acts 1:22, 18:25), which could imply that he was the witness rather than the administrator. On the other hand, there is no talmudic basis, so far as I know, for naming the witness to ritual immersion when it is required.

One major difference between Jewish ritual immersion and Christian baptism has been mentioned by a number of scholars who have considered the possible relationship between the two. Jewish ritual immersion is purifying, or to use the technically correct term, purificatory. Christian baptism, on the other hand, is initiating, or initiatory; it is a one-time ritual that initiates the person into the sect (as the early Christians were known).

Initiatory baptism, however, has its parallels in Jewish proselyte baptism. Three things were required of a proselyte to Judaism: circumcision, the offering of a sacrifice and immersion in the mikveh (and of course acceptance of the Torah, the law). After the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the sacrifice was no longer required. While the Church confined its missionary activities to

Jews, circumcision was not an issue. When it decided to reach out to gentiles, the requirement of circumcision was abrogated.

This left ritual immersion in the mikveh as the only applicable Jewish requirement of conversion. Ritual immersion (i.e. baptism) became the central Christian initiatory rite.

According to Jewish tradition, a convert "is like a new-born child." Jesus himself said that "Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). How can he be born anew? "Unless he is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Paul compares baptism with being baptised into death with Christ and raised with him to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 3-4). The early Church was composed in the beginning exclusively of Jews, and assuredly followed Jewish law and tradition. We can learn much about the early Church by a better understanding of its Jewish background. The Jewish mikva'ot and laws of ritual immersion are but an example." "Biblical Archaeology Review." January/February 1987. p52ff

Some scholars have disputed that the baptisms of the Essenes should be identified with Christian baptism, seeing that the Jewish immersions were repeated and Christian baptism was received once only. However the first baptism of a novice initiated him into full membership of the Community (Manual of Discipline 2:25-3:12). The baptisms at Qumran had a more than purely ceremonial significance. Where they were accompanied by penitence and submission to the will of God they symbolised the cleansing of moral impurity and character.

All that we have learnt in the past three decades indicates that John came from an environment similar to that at Qumran, used the same Scriptural texts, observed the same life style, and practised the same mode of baptism in the same local area. John baptised only once, for the remission of sins, administering the rite as either witness or administrator in the tradition of the Community - the total immersion of the candidate.

6. THE BAPTISMS OF JESUS.

Jesus was baptised Himself by John and immediately started gaining disciples and baptising them - although John's Gospel points out that it was his disciples who had been baptised by John who baptised others. This lay conduct of baptism is in line with the practise of proselyte baptism which required a witness, but not necessarily a Rabbi.

The archaeological discoveries have further confirmed two aspects of our knowledge of Jesus: all that Jesus did and said is consistent with the times in which He lived, and the scriptural records of His baptism have been confirmed by similar baptisms by immersion, for a similar reason in the same geographic region. During these same three decades, theology has been seeing Jesus more clearly within Judaism. As James H. Charlesworth writes:

"What is most significant in recent research on Jesus? The single most important result of "disinterested scientific" historical research is the discovery in our time of date clarifying the life of a man from another time."

As the Jew Gaalyah Cornfeld, in 'The Historical Jesus' (pp.11-12), states:

"Modern archaeology and scholarship have now established beyond doubt that a man known as Jesus certainly did exist in history and that the criticism of the sceptics was ill founded."

This statement is possible because of amazing discoveries, especially those near Qumran, Nag Hammadi, and throughout what is now Israel. It also comes after an unparalleled barrage of charges that Jesus never existed - claims espoused especially by critics in Russia, West Germany, and England.

The monumental discoveries, however, do more than prove the polemist wrong; they help us, indeed compel us, to engage in Jesus Research. Long ago a distinguished and influential New Testament scholar at Yale, Hils Dahl, correctly argued that "we must view Jesus within the context of Palestinian Judaism. Everything which enlarges our knowledge of this environment of Jesus indirectly extends our knowledge of the historical Jesus himself."

It is still not possible to estimate what the textual findings from the Qumran caves (Dead Sea Scrolls) may yield; in any case they impel us to resume the quest of the historical Jesus. As never before we have the possibility of tracing the trends and ideas which, both positively and negatively, form the presuppositions for his ministry." "Jesus Within Judaism" James H. Charlesworth. p.168. Doubleday 1988.

The baptism of Jesus, seen in the context of first century baptisms, shows both that Christian baptism has its roots in a Jewish rite, and that its meaning comes from the baptism of Jesus itself. There was that about the baptism of Jesus that gave to Christian baptism new meaning and significance. If this is so, then it has immense significance to contemporary practise concerning both the mode of baptism and the candidate for baptism. If the meaning is uniquely Christian, then arguments from the Old Testament about candidates are pointless. While it is not the point of this paper to pursue this insight it should be considered. This line of argument is presented by the English theologian R.E.O.White:

“The baptism of Jesus affects the meaning of the baptismal rite in at least five ways. First, it lends to the practice His personal authority, thus ensuring for all His followers that baptism may never be a "mere" rite, devoid of truth, value or importance. Secondly, it lends a note of positive enrichment, rather than of negative renunciation, to baptism; expectation of immediate and future blessing becomes as prominent in the mood of the baptised, as regret for the past - a change of emphasis which led indirectly to more sacramental interpretations, and which rests upon the experience that came to Jesus.”

“Thirdly, our Lord's submission to the rite has added to the motives for its acceptance the powerful one of personal dedication and obedience - the emulation of the attitude in which He also approached the decisive event; baptism thus is linked to one of the most formative and fundamental of New Testament conceptions, the imitatio Christi. Fourthly, our Lord's experience at Jordan has added to baptism a "filial overtone" - an awareness, given and received, of filial relationship and privilege, which becomes a constitutive element in the Christian doctrine of baptism (John 3, Gal. 3:26,27. Rom. 8:14-17, etc.).”

“And finally, our Lord's experience in baptism transformed the rite by linking with it the reception of the Holy Spirit; the prophets' association of water and the Spirit is here translated into reality and becomes normative for the Church - baptism becomes the "sacrament for the transmission of the Spirit.”

Taken together, these five new elements in the baptismal conception, deriving almost wholly from the baptismal experience of Jesus, abundantly justify the contention that it is to His act we must look for the main origin of the Christian rite.

It remains only to add that not one of these new dimensions of meaning, derived from the baptism of Christ, can be predicated, except in the most faint and distorted fashion, of the rite of infant baptism. Conscious obedience or imitation of Jesus, positive dedication to new ideals, acceptance of the new endowments of grace, the awareness of belonging to the divine family, the moral and spiritual regeneration consequent upon personal appropriation of the gift of the Spirit - none of these can be affirmed to be the experience of the baptised babe, except with all kinds of reservations, qualifications and assumptions that modify their meaning beyond recognition. All that happened in baptism for Jesus, at about thirty years of age, as the crown of one stage of development and the deliberate entrance upon another, is beyond the understanding and experience of the child, and it is no exaggeration to say that when scholars pass from discussion of Christ's baptism to discussion of infant baptism they leap a gulf of meaning and implication in which deep differences in connotation are concealed by the simple device of using one word - baptism - in two totally different meanings.

Christ's baptism was not merely something done to Him; the effect of His baptism was not traceable to the objective act, the authority of the baptiser, convenient grace working independently of human response, proleptic or vicarious faith, or any of the other theological devices invented to "explain" the efficacy of infant baptism. The relation of infant baptism to Christ's baptism in fact neither one of theological consistency nor precise historical derivation, but is largely accidental, if not indeed a purely verbal coincidence." "Christian Baptism" Ed: A. Gilmore. p.96-98. Lutterworth Press 1959.

7. FIRST CENTURY BAPTISM.

It should now be clear that the baptisms conducted by the Jewish sects and by the Early Church were of believers, by voluntary choice, before witnesses, in sufficient quantities of water to accord with the traditions, in specially constructed mikva'ot or in running water and by total immersion. There is no evidence of any variation of this such as was developed by the church in later centuries in regard to the candidate, mode or meaning of the rite.

It would be helpful to consider further the link between Jewish proselyte baptism and Christian baptism. "The link is partly through circumcision, to which proselyte baptism had been added, and partly through the similarity of the two rites. The earliest Jewish references to proselyte baptism are "Greek Testament of Levi" (14:6) "The daughters of the gentiles shall ye take to wife, purifying them with lawful purifications"; "Sibylline Oracles" (4:165-67) "Bathe the whole body in ever-flowing streams, and reach your hands to heaven, praying forgiveness for these things that ye have done"; and Mishnah, Pesahim (8:8) "The school of Shammai say, If a man became a proselyte on the day before passover he may immerse himself and consume his passover offering in the evening; and the school of Hillel say, He that separates himself from his uncircumcision is as one that separates himself from a grave" (i.e. he remains unclean for a week). The most important facts to notice here are, first, that proselyte baptism is basically a lustration for the unclean; secondly, that since uncleanness may befall anybody, it is not just a religious duty of adult males, like so many of the religious duties of Judaism, but also of females; and thirdly, that it is spiritualised to refer to cleansing from moral impurity as well." ("The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology", Ed Colin Brown, Vol 1,p143-160).

These last three aspects were taken up in Christian baptism. Archaeological evidence to support this is found in the early Christian buildings where baptisteries for immersion are common. These baptisteries in early Christian churches in Israel, Turkey, Greece and Rome were built on the same principle as mikva'ot - small or large pools with steps down into which candidates could step to be immersed. At the corner of the old church of St John Lateran in Rome is a large baptismal pool.

The old church of St Mary in ancient Ephesus, and also the Church of St John, has a baptistery similar to a mikveh. An old Greek church in Thessalonica also has such a baptistery, as does a fourth century Church outside the old city walls at Philippi by the River Ganga where Paul baptised Lydia (Acts 16:13-15). I have measured these baptisteries and all conform to the requirements of mikva'ot and interestingly, a number have divided steps apparently used by the candidate who entered the water leaving behind his old clothes, and exited, rising into new life as symbolised by the new white clothes worn by catechumens. Note the baptismal suggestions of Paul to the Colossians: "Put off...put on....clothe yourselves..."(Col.3).

8. TWENTIETH CENTURY ORTHODOX JEWS.

One final point of note is of interest: the growing practise among Orthodox Jews to reinstate the Mikva'ot and the archaeological search near synagogues in a score of countries. In a striking coincidence, I read in an American airport the following newspaper article: "The mikveh, or ritual bath of purification, is among the oldest of Jewish institutions and one still strictly adhered to be religiously observant Jews. Orthodox Jewish women use the mikveh, as the bath pool itself is called, following the menstrual cycle, and before resuming sexual relations. Orthodox Jewish men commonly use the mikveh prior to the start of the Sabbath and the High Holy Days, although some ultraorthodox Hasidim use it every day before morning prayers. Torah scribes are required to use the mikveh before writing the word "God."" "Rabbi Yehuda Lebovics oversees the only mikveh in California's San Fernando Valley. It's at the Orthodox Shaarey Zedek Congregation and is one of only a half-dozen mikva'ot in the Los Angeles area. "Most Jews probably know as little about mikva'ot as do Christians," he said. "Unless they're observant, that probably don't even know what a mikveh is and never saw one.""

"Outside of Orthodox Judaism, the mikveh is little used by contemporary Jews. In Conservative Judaism it generally is confined to conversions, much like the Christian rite of initiation. However, rarely do Reform rabbis, members of Judaism's most liberal and fastest-growing branch, require converts to use a mikveh. One requirement of mikva'ot is that the water supply be, at least in part, from a pure source, which traditional Jewish law defines as flowing. Hence John the Baptist's use of the Jordan River. Modern, indoor mikva'ot, such as the one at Shaare Zedek, often collect rainwater as their pure source. At the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, which has the only Conservative-operated mikveh in the Southwest United States, ice collected in mountain areas is melted to provide a source of pure water, said administrator Lilian Zelcer. She also said that "a resurgence, of sorts" in regular mikveh usage has occurred among Conservative Jews, although the majority of Jews who belong to the faith's middle-of-the-road branch "take it for granted and never use it." "Ironically, she said, the resurgence is most evident among converts who experienced the mikveh as part of their conversion process." "The Arizona Republic", Saturday, January 31, 1987.

In recent times there has been a rush of archaeological discoveries of Medaeval mikva'ot in Europe: Italy, Spain, Germany, Bohemia, Lithuania, Poland and other places. The oldest have been in Cologne from 1170; Spire 1200, Friedberg 1260, Offburg 1351 and later at Andernach, Alsace, Worms, etc. The one at Worms has 19 steps down from the entrance hall and 11 steps into the mikveh itself. Similar deep mikva'ot have been now found in Cairo and Jerusalem.

Modern mikva'ot have been built in Israel for men and women in the one building, featuring men's and women's facilities, showers, dining rooms, powder room, and steam room, while in USA some have been built with hairdressing and beauty parlours! All of these are built within the strict guidelines required by traditional Judaism. There is even published a valid "Do it Yourself Mikveh!"

Much of the argument over the mode of baptism over the past centuries has been philological and theological. Much heat has been expended over the use of words relating to baptism, often expending much energy on how the words were used in classical Greek (cf Kittel, "Theological Dictionary Of the New Testament" Vols 1-9, 1964-74, baptiso, louo). This emphasis from the Middle Ages has continued down until present times, with little emphasis being placed on the practise within Judaism. The lack of conclusive philological evidence has allowed the baptismal debate to continue with churches adopting extremist positions, or more accommodating positions such as in the Uniting Church In Australia. There, the Basis of Union declares: "The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ incorporates men into his body by Baptism. In this way he enables them to participate in his own baptism, which was accomplished once on behalf of all in his death and burial, and which was made available to all when, risen and ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Baptism into Christ's body initiates men into his life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit. The Uniting Church will baptise those who confess the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility."

Constitution and Regulations The Uniting Church in Australia. The Basis of Union 7. Uniting Church Press 1986.

There is a way out of the debate between the traditions of the church which does not require compromise. That is the acceptance of immersion of believers as the Ecumenical Baptism and the development of a rite of acceptance for children by the church. The Lima document: "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" W.C.C. 1982, which came as a result of a fifty year long consultation program represents a significant theological convergence in an agreed statement which the church as a whole has responded to with enthusiasm. An Ecumenical Baptism, based upon the now proven method of immersion of believers within the Early Church, would be a great step towards Christian unity and a witness to the divided world.

That the immersion of believers was the norm for the Early Church cannot now be disputed on the basis of archaeological evidence. If we value baptism and value Christian unity, so that we will be eager to perform it in the way that cannot fail to be meaningful to the majority of Christian believers, we can adopt as valid for all churches the immersion of believers as the norm.

The Orthodox Churches baptise children by immersion as the only mode of baptism as a witness to their traditional roots going back to the New Testament Church. Since all Christians regard immersion (or such a degree of affusion as wets the entire person) as an acceptable method of baptism, some regard it as a preferable method, and many regard it as the sole method - it follows that immersion is the only method of baptism which can claim to be ecumenical. The archaeological evidence is compelling. New Testament Baptism was by immersion of believers.