



WATERS OF PURITY

Understanding Immersion

As Taught In Scripture

- ▶ **The LORD said to Moses, “These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed.... Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean.... He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean” (Leviticus 14:1–4, 7, 9).**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- ▶ **Baptism sounds like such a non-Jewish concept, *oy vey* (oh my)! Most people jump to this conclusion based on the last two thousand years of church history. However, as with so many other aspects of Christianity, virtually everything goes back to its Jewish roots. Some may find it difficult to make the connection between baptism and Jewish customs, but the historical facts are irrefutable.**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- ▶ Much of the confusion derives from the word itself, baptism. *Baptidzo* is actually the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *t'vilah* (“to totally immerse”). The concept of ceremonial washings is as old as the Torah itself. God commanded the Hebrew people to wash their clothing before he gave them the Law at Mt. Sinai (see Exodus 19:10). .

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- ▶ In Leviticus, chapters 8, and 16, Aaron and his sons were commanded to wash before they ministered in the Tabernacle. There were ritual cleansings for various flows of body fluids, such as a women's menstrual period (see Leviticus 15). Perhaps the most instructional passage in the Torah about *t'vilah* is in the quoted passage above dealing with the healing of leprosy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

While it was always possible to have this immersion in a body of fresh water such as a lake or river, it became a common practice to have a special pool constructed, called a *mikveh*. The name is derived from the Hebrew word for “collection or gathering” and speaks of a place where the waters of the immersion are gathered. The earliest biblical usage for the specific word *mikveh* is found in Genesis 1:9, where God called for the collection of the waters during the creation week.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1 Kings 7:23ff, it is pointed out that Solomon had constructed two thousand “baths” for the priesthood to carry out their duties in the first Temple. Recent discoveries in Israel have found many *mikve’ot* (plural of *mikveh*) in the archeological digs of the second Temple compound. Similarly, it has been found that the Qumran community (i.e., the Essenes) not only wrote about the importance of *t’vilah*, but they also built many *mikve’ot* in the Judean desert (Connolly, *Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 31).



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The practice of *mikveh* was quite common in the second Temple period, as shown by the large number of references to this custom in the Talmud. The ritual immersions for healings and service continued as prescribed by the Torah. However, especially interesting is the practice of *t'vilah* for Gentile converts to Judaism. According to the discussions of the Talmud, this custom had been instituted some time before the first century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The two main schools of rabbinic thought, *beyt* Shammai (“house of Shammai”) and *beyt* Hillel (“house of Hillel”), debated the requirements for non-Jews to join Israel. While Shammai stressed the priority of circumcision, Hillel argued that *mikveh* was more important because it symbolized repentance and spiritual cleansing. Maimonides built upon this analogy of the *mikveh* (Birnbaum, *Mishneh Torah*, Mikva’ ot 11:12) by applying it to the verse in Ezekiel that speaks of new spiritual life:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- ▶ **I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols (Ezekiel 36:25).**
- ▶ **Indeed, the waters of the *mikveh* still hold rich spiritual lessons for those who would take a closer look at this custom appointed by God.**

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND


- ▶ The Brit Ha Dasha/Renewed Covenant tells us that many of the early Messianic Believers daily activities were centered around the Temple.
- ▶ Historically, we know that there were many ritual immersion baths (mikvaot) on the Temple Mount including one in the Chamber of Lepers situated in the northwest corner of the Court of woman

THE MIKVAOT AROUND THE TEMPLE

- ▶ **Josephus tells us that even during the years of war (66-73 AD) the laws of ritual immersion were strictly adhered to (Jos Wars 4:205).**
- ▶ **The Temple itself contained immersion baths in various places for the priests to use, even in the vaults beneath the court (Commentary to Tam 26:6 Tam1:1) The High Priest had special immersion pools in the Temple, two of which are mentioned in the Mishnah.**

THE MIKVAOT AROUND THE TEMPLE

THE MIKVAOT AROUND THE TEMPLE

- ▶ **We are told one of these was in the Water Gate in the south of the court and another was on the roof of the Parva Chamber.**
 - ▶ **There was an additional place for immersion on the Mount of Olives which was connected with the burning of the Red Heifer**
 - ▶ **A Special ramp led to the mikveh on the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount, which was built as an arched way over another arched way to avoid uncleanness from the graves in the valley below**
 - ▶ **Recent archaeological excavations have found 48 different mikvaot near the Monumental Staircase leading into the Temple Complex**
- 

- ▶ **To the ancient Jew, the mikveh was a process of spiritual purification and cleansing, especially in relation to the various types of Turmah or ritual defilement when the Temple was in use.**
- ▶ **Although YHHW has not revealed all the meaning of the mikveh, it is obvious because the amount of space given to it in Scripture, and the effort of Yeshua to fulfill it, the command is of utmost importance.**

WHY BE IMMERSED?

- ▶ **Jewish immersion has never been taken lightly, but in ancient times immersion was to be performed in the presence of witnesses.**
- ▶ **Prior to the Mikvah they had already bathed and cut their nails and made a fresh profession of his faith before the designated “fathers of the baptism”**

HOW IMMERSION WAS DONE

HOW IMMERSION WAS DONE

- ▶ **The individual stood straight up with the feet spread and the hands held out in front.**
- ▶ **The candidate would totally immerse themselves by squatting in the water with a witness or baptized doing the officiating.**
- ▶ **Matthew 3:16a “And after being baptized, Yeshua went up immediately from the water...**



- ▶ **Although it is the Jewish belief that repentance is necessary, purification from defilement is done primarily through water, while other effects of sins are covered by blood**
- ▶ **Romans 4:7**
- ▶ **Hebrews 9:22 Note “almost all things”**
- ▶ **The concept of immersion in rabbinic literature is referred to as a new birth.**

HOW IMMERSION WAS DONE

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT JEWISH IMMERSION:

First Aspect

- ▶ **Immersion was accompanied by exhortations and benedictions**
- ▶ **A convert would reaffirm his acceptance of the Torah by declaring “I will do and I will hear”, which was a phrase from the oath that was originally taken by the priests not to forsake the Torah**
- ▶ **This ritual demonstrates the willingness of the convert to forsake his Gentile (Pagan, confused and without God) background and assume his Jewish identity by taking on the status of one who keeps the commandments**

According to a number of Jewish sages, mayim, which is the Hebrew word for water, shares the same root as the word “mah” meaning ‘what’. This teaching points out that when a person immerses in water, he is nullifying the fleshly ego and is asking “what am I’. In the same manner that Moses and Aaron did in Exodus 16:7 when they said to YHWH ‘we are what?’”

**SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT
JEWISH IMMERSION:**

▶ Second Aspect

- ▶ The Jewish baptism candidates were often immersed three times. The idea of total immersion comes from the Scriptures in Leviticus 15:16, when it says “he shall wash all his flesh in the water” One reason it was customary to immerse three times was because the word mikveh occurs three times in the Torah.

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT
JEWISH IMMERSION:

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT JEWISH IMMERSION:

▶ Third Aspect

▶ **According to Jewish law the immersion had to have a required witness. Dr. William LaSor in the Biblical Archeology Review says apparently the Biblical phrase “in the name of” was an indication of the required witness. In several Brit Ha Dasha/New Testament references such as**

- ▶ **1 Corinthians 1:13, 15; Matthew 21:25; Acts 1:22 and Acts 19:3 we see early baptism mentioned in conjunction with the name of individuals such as John and Shaul/Paul. Further information on this can be found in Jewish Literature concerning proselyte baptism where it indicates his baptism required attestation by witnesses in whose name he was immersed**

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT JEWISH IMMERSION:

▶ **Fourth Aspect**

- ▶ **The immersion candidate was not touched by the baptizer in Yeshua's day. Because Leviticus 15:16 says "He shall wash all his flesh in the water". Judaism stresses that the entire body must come in contact with the water of the mikveh.**
- ▶ **Although the mikveh was more spiritual than physical, often the bath had two sets of steps, one entering and another leaving so as not to defile what had been purified.**

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT JEWISH IMMERSION:

▶ **Fifth Aspect**

- ▶ **The baptismal water (Mikveh) in rabbinic literature was referred to as the womb of the world, and as a convert came out of the water was considered a new birth separating him from the pagan world.**
- ▶ **As the convert came out of these waters his status was changed and he was referred to as a “a little child just born” or a “child of one day’.**

▶ **Fifth continued**

- ▶ **We see the Brit Ha Dasha using similar Jewish terms as “born anew”, “new creation”, and “born from above”. According to Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum rabbinic literature uses the term “born again” to refer to at least six different occurrences in a persons life....**

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT
JEWISH IMMERSION:

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT JEWISH IMMERSION:

- ▶ **Note each of these life changing experiences**
 - ▶ **When a Gentile converts to Judaism**
 - ▶ **When an individual is crowned king**
 - ▶ **At age 13 when a Jewish boy or girl chooses to embrace YHWH's covenant and be numbered with the believers - Bar/Bat Mitzvah**
 - ▶ **When an individual gets married**
 - ▶ **When an individual becomes a rabbi**
 - ▶ **When an individual becomes the head of a rabbinical school**

▶ **Sixth Aspect**

- ▶ **Jewish law requires at least three witnesses made up of qualified leaders to be present for certain immersions. Ordinarily a member of the Sanhedrin performed the act of observing the proselytes immersion, but in case of necessity others could do it. Secret baptism was not accepted**

SIX OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ANCIENT
JEWISH IMMERSION:











- ▶ **The practice of the *mikveh* is still followed by traditional Jews to this day. There are some notable changes from ancient practice since the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. With that traumatic event, many of the laws in the Bible were considered obsolete. The sacrificial system was gone, and the priests had no place to serve. With the Temple destroyed, Rabbinic Judaism was forced to adjust biblical teachings in order to accommodate the new reality facing the Jewish people. Their conclusion, after much debate, was to substitute prescribed prayers and righteous works for the biblical requirement of sacrifice.**

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

- ▶ **With the destruction of the Temple, the custom of *mikveh* changed, too. The cleansings for the priests and the related healings were no longer practical. However, modern Judaism maintained the need for *mikveh* in some situations. One is for the cleansing of a woman through the purification of the *niddah* (literally “removed or separated”), after her menstrual period. The Torah specifies that a woman shall be separated from her husband for seven days at this time of the month, abstaining from sexual relations (Leviticus 15:19–24).**

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

- ▶
- ▶ **The Bible draws a distinction between the holy and the profane, between the clean and unclean. The waters of the *mikveh*, according to the rabbis, teach the Jewish people a great deal concerning these truths. The *niddah* period is to teach husbands and wives the need for discipline, respect and moderation in all things. The waters symbolize spiritual cleansing, as seen in the *mikveh* for Gentile converts to Rabbinic Judaism. For traditional Jews, the ritual immersion is also a graphic reminder of their need for God's cleansing and new life. As one source notes:**

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

- ▶ One interpretation of the *mikveh* relates it to an experience of death and resurrection, and also to the reentry into the womb and reemergence. Immersing fully, you are like the fetus in the womb, and when you come up out of the *mikveh* you are as reborn. The individual who has sinned and become impure is transformed; he dies and is resurrected and becomes a new creation, like a newborn child (Buxbaum, *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, p. 569).

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

- ▶ **These thoughts may sound familiar to those who remember Yeshua's dialogue with a certain rabbi (see John 3), as well as Saul's description of the Messianic *mikveh* (Romans 6). With this understanding of the *mikveh*, it should become more meaningful. The *mikveh* can be appreciated as a beautiful custom appointed by God to remind all of the need for new spiritual life and a pure walk in this world.**

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

- ▶ **Due to its rich symbolism and because it was a command from Messiah (see Matthew 28:19), believers in Yeshua follow this custom of immersion in the *mikveh*. Salvation is secured by trusting in the Messiah's death and resurrection (see Ephesians 2:8–9). However, the Messianic *mikveh*, a sign of what God has done for believers, is an important testimony of one's faith. One should not overlook the fact that a Messianic *mikveh* will often serve as a public testimony to the world that there is a growing remnant of Jews and Gentiles who call on Messiah's name.**

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH
SERVICE

7 TYPES OF BAPTISM	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE
PURIFICATION	ACTS 21:15-26, John 11:55
REPENTANCE	MATT 3:11, MARK 1:4, LUKE 3:3; ACTS 19: 4-5
IDENTIFICATION WITH YESHUA	ACTS 2:38, ROMANS 6:3-4, GALATIANS 3:27-29, 3:21, 1 PETER
SPIRIT	MARK 1:8, JOHN 14:16,26; ACTS 11:15; GALATIANS 5:22-23, 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11
FIRE	ACTS 2:3-4, 17-21, 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6
SUFFERING	ROMANS 5:3-5, ROMANS 8: 17-18; 2 TIMOTHY 3:12
SANCTIFICATION	ROMANS 8:13-14, 2 CORINTHIANS 7:2 1 THESSALONIANS 4:7-8, 1 JOHN 3:3

- ▶ **What the Apostolic Scriptures have to say about Water Immersion**

- ▶ **PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH SERVICE**

- ▶ **This ceremony is simple yet powerful. A wonderful part of the event can be having the person share a personal testimony of how they found Messiah. A Messianic immersion service can take place at any time. At *Kehilat Ariel* Messianic Congregation (this author's congregation), the *mikveh* is observed at two key times of the year. On the afternoon of *Rosh Hashanah*, there is a ceremony of repentance called *tashlikh* that takes place at a body of water.**



PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH
SERVICE

- ▶ **This is the perfect context for a Messianic *mikveh* service. The second *mikveh* service takes place shortly after Passover, as believers reflect on their redemption. Appropriate Scripture readings and music can also enhance this joyful time. As the people are immersed, the traditional blessings can be recited with some Messianic adaptations:**

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH
SERVICE

Barukh atah Adonai, eloheynu melekh ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al ha-t'vilah (one can add: b'shem Ha'Av, Yeshua HaMashiakh v'Ruakh HaKodesh). Amen.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has sanctified us by his commandments and commanded us concerning the immersion (in the name of the Father, Yeshua the Messiah and the Holy Spirit). Amen.

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH
SERVICE

- ▶ *Barukh atah Adonai, eloheynu melekh ha'olam, shehekheyanu v'kiymanu v'higiyanu lazman ha'zeh. Amen.*
- ▶ **Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe who has given us life, sustained us and brought us to this time. Amen.**

- ▶ **Every person needs to ask if he or she has found the new life illustrated in the waters of the *mikveh*. Every believer needs to take the sign (i.e., immersion in a *mikveh*) of their salvation in Yeshua the Messiah. May this God-appointed custom be a source of great joy for those who have been touched by the power of the living God.**

PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR A MESSIANIC MIKVEH
SERVICE