

I Will Baptize You With Water, But He Will Baptize You With the Holy Spirit

Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-18

DIG: What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is the baptism of fire? What does it have to do with doctrine of purgatory? What two metaphors does John use to describe the baptism of fire? Who does Yochanan point to and why?

REFLECT: This message caused quite a stir in Isra'el at this time. Is it still a valid message for all of us to consider for our own spiritual lives today? Why or why not?

Numerous people claimed to be **the Messiah** in first-century Isra'el, so when **the son** of Zechariah and Elizabeth prophesied in the wilderness of Judea, **the people** wondered if **he** was **the Anointed One**. **The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Mashiach (Luke 3:15)**. But Yochanan didn't claim to be **the Messiah**, only the forerunner, sent by **ADONAI** to prepare **the people** for the promised **King's** appearance.²⁵¹

The concept of **the Messiah** was well established in the Judaism of **John's** day; so it was hardly necessary to **Yochanan** to describe **Him**. The ancient Synagogue found more references to **Him** in the TaNaKh than those latter formed in the B'rit Chadashah. This is fully borne out by a detailed analysis of those passages in the TaNaKh to which the rabbis referred to as messianic. **The number comes to upwards of 456 (75 from the Pentateuch, 243 from the Prophets, and 138 from the Hagiographa), and their messianic application is supported by more than 558 references in rabbinic writings of the Targumim, the two Talmuds, and the most ancient Midrashim.**

A careful examination of these **rabbinical writings** shows that the Scriptural references to **the Messiah** in the New Covenant are fully supported by them. Thus, such doctrines as **the pre-existence of the Meshiach; His elevation above Moshe, and even above the angels; His cruel sufferings and mockery; His violent death; His work on behalf of the living and the dead; His redemption, and restoration of Isra'el; the opposition of the Gentiles; their partial judgment and conversion; the supremacy of His Torah; the universal blessings of the latter days; and His Kingdom,** can be clearly deduced from passages in **the ancient rabbinic writings.**²⁵² **John** could build on this messianic concept in introducing **Yeshua** as **the Messiah**.

So **Jesus** will take up where **John** leaves off, and this is just what **Yochanan** said must happen. **And this was his message** in the wilderness: **After me will come One** who is **more powerful than I**, (**Matthew 3:11b; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16a**). This is a summary of **John's** message so that **he** could focus on his main theme. There would be **One** coming who would be **more powerful than Yochanan**. His baptism would be with the **Holy Spirit and fire**.

John answered them all by saying: **I baptize you with, or in, water for repentance** (**Luke 3:16a**). **John's** own distinctive ministry of **water baptism** will give way to a different kind of **baptism**. This is led some to view **Yochanan's** ministry as merely a "warm-up act" for **Jesus**. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The repentance symbolized by **John's** baptism was essential to **Yeshua's** future ministry. It could not by itself **save people from their sins** (**Mattityahu 1:21**), which was to be **Yeshua's** unique roll. While **water** could cleanse a person's body, the **Holy Spirit** could cleanse a person's life and self and heart. **But one who is more powerful than I will come and baptize you with the Ruach HaKodesh and with fire** (**Matthew 3:11a; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16b-c**). **King Messiah** is coming. That was **John's** promise, and he said **Jesus** is going to perform **two types of baptisms**. On the one hand, those who believe are going to be **baptized with the Ruach HaKodesh**.

First, John promises that the Lord will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. While the baptism of **Yochanan** was important, the baptism of **Christ** would go even deeper into the spiritual call of **Isra'el**. Initially there would be an outward call to prepare for the Kingdom. But then there would be the reality of the Kingdom as experienced by the indwelling of the **Ruach HaKodesh**.

The phrase **with the Holy Spirit** is *en pneumati* in the Greek. Some make a big deal out of the change in adjectives. They say, "Well, you were **baptized in the Holy Spirit**, but have you been **baptized with the Holy Spirit?**" Or, "You were **baptized with the Holy Spirit**, but have you been **baptized by the Holy Spirit.**" All this is a smoke screen because the Greek adjective *en* can be translated either **in**, or **by**, or **with** (**Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5 and 11:16; First Corinthians 12:13**). The **Ruach HaKodesh** is given to believers at the moment of faith (see **Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith**).

The promise of the **Holy Spirit** goes back to the prophecies of **Joel** and **Ezekiel**. **Joel** predicted a time to come when the **Ruach** will be poured out on all the **people** on the earth, especially upon **Israel**. This must have been especially comforting and thrilling to the faithful **Jews** among **John's** hearers, those who hoped for the day when **God** would **pour out [His] Spirit on all people** (**Joel 2:28a**). Likewise, **Ezekiel** foresaw a time in the messianic Kingdom (see my commentary on **Isaiah Dc - A Shoot Will Come Up from the Stump of Jesse**) when **He** would **sprinkle clean water on [them], and give [them] a new heart and put a new Spirit within [them]** (**Ezekiel 36:25-26**). In that day they would at last be **baptized in**

the very power and person of **God Himself**. In other words, **John's baptism** was similar to other types of immersions found in first-century Judaism, but **Yeshua's baptism** would be of a different, spiritual nature.

Secondly, He will baptize you with fire (Matthew 3:11c; Luke 3:16b). Fire is usually the symbol for judgment or purification in the Bible. The context here demands that when **Christ** appears again there will not only be blessing of the **Spirit** for believers, but that unbelievers are going to be **baptized with unquenchable fire** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fp - The Second Death: The Lake of Fire**).

As far as the Roman Catholics are concerned, the word **fire** here is one of the proof texts for the concept of purgatory. Where, then, does Rome find her authority for the doctrine of purgatory? Four verses are cited, but not one of them has any real bearing on the subject. They are:

(1) **He will baptize you with fire**, which is the words of **John the Baptist** concerning **Messiah (Matthew 3:11c)**.

(2) **If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames (First Corinthians 3:15)**.

(3) **Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire (Jude 22-23a)**.

(4) **For Christ . . . [who] was made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive He went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits - to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water (First Peter 3:18-20)**. As a result, the four passages here cited by Roman Catholic Church surely are a very light cord on which to hang so heavy a weight.

But Rome primarily bases her doctrine of purgatory on a passage in **II Maccabees 12:39-45, Douay Version**. It is, of course, useful in historical terms but not a part of the canon of Scripture. The most important verse reads, "It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be [delivered] from their sins." But neither this verse, nor the ones above teach the doctrine at all. Nowhere is there any mention souls being tortured with the same intensity as the fire of hell, except in point of duration. In fact, the word purgatory is not found here. This, again, is a perilous passage on which to build such a false doctrine.²⁵³

After speaking of **vipers** and escaping the **fire** (**Mattityahu 3:7**), the **tree cut down and burned** (**Matthew 3:10**), and the **baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire** (**Matthew 3:11**) - **John** now adds another metaphor for judgment (also involving **fire**), that of the **threshing floor**. He said: **His winnowing fork is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire** (**Mattityahu 3:11b-12; Luke 3:17**). The verb **clear** is more literally translated *completely clean* or *purity*. In the agricultural imagery it perhaps means that the threshing floor is left bare when all **the chaff** has been separated and **the wheat** stored. But metaphorically the verb points to the purpose of **ADONAI's** judgment, the complete removal of all sin, leaving a purified **people**.²⁵⁴

In Palestine, as in many other parts of the ancient world, farmers made a **threshing floor** by picking out a slight depression in the ground, or digging one if necessary, usually on a hill where breezes could be caught. The soil would then be wetted and packed down until it was very hard. Around the perimeter of **the floor**, which was perhaps thirty or forty feet in diameter, rocks would be stacked to keep the grain in place. After the stalks of grain were placed onto **the floor**, an ox, or a team of oxen, would drag heavy pieces of wood around over the grain, separating **the wheat** kernels from **the chaff**, or straw. Then the farmer would take a **winnowing fork** and throw a pile of grain into the air. The wind would blow **the chaff** away, while the wheat kernels, being heavier, would fall back to **the floor**. Eventually, nothing would be left but **the good and useful wheat**. The valued **wheat** would then be stored for future use, while **the chaff** would be burned **up** because it was useless.²⁵⁵

In a similar way **the Messiah** will separate out everyone who belongs to **Him** and, like the farmer, **He will gather the wheat into His barn**, where it will be forever safe and protected. Also, in a similar way to the farmer, **He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**. This is a striking description of the judgment known as *Gei-Hinnom* in Jewish literature. In ancient times this valley outside of Yerushalayim was used as a burning trash dump and sometimes was even a place of pagan, human sacrifice. It was therefore a fitting picture for the real place of judgment to come in the messianic Kingdom (see my commentary on **Revelation Er - Babylon Will Never Be Found Again**). Consequently, these scriptures teach that every person, believer or un-believer, will experience a **baptism by Jesus Christ**. It will be a **baptism** of blessing with the indwelling of **the Ruach HaKodesh**, or it will be a **baptism** of fire and judgment.

The promise here is of **Jesus** bringing the predicted times of spiritual filling to those who desire it. This is why **Yochanan** humbly stated: **After me will come One who is more powerful than I. The Immerser pointed people from himself to the Lord Jesus Christ by presenting himself as His servant. In fact he considered himself to be unworthy even to be a servant. He stated that he was unworthy even to be a servant, saying: The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie, the One he came to introduce (Matthew 3:11b; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16a). John's obvious humbleness, yieldedness, and modesty compelled people to listen to him.**

And with many other words Yochanan exhorted the people continually and proclaimed the Good News, or the Gospel, to them (Luke 3:18). The message of repentance is Good News, for it means that forgiveness is possible. People can still pass from eternal death to eternal life and become part of the family of God if they repent. The tragedy and consequences of sin are not irreversible, and that, my friend, is good news. By his preaching, John was preparing our Savior's way.