

Paul's Baptism

Commentary for May 15, 2019 — When It Occurred and Was Paul an Apostle?

In Acts chapter 9, after Saul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, a man named Ananias received a message from God about Saul (Acts 9:10–16). God said:

"... for he [Saul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before [1] the Gentiles, and [2] kings, and [3] the children of Israel: For I will show him how [many] great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

• Acts 9:15–16

Soon after, Saul (later Paul) went to meet Ananias¹:

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto you in the way as you came, has sent me, that you might receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit].'

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

• Acts 9:17–18

Ananias was convinced of Saul's readiness for baptism for five reasons: (1) his own vision from God to expect an encounter with Saul; (2) the vision told him Saul was blind and would be healed; (3) that Saul would receive God's Holy Spirit; (4) Paul's sudden recovery from his three days of blindness; (5) Saul's desire and agreement to be baptized.

Years later Paul (Saul) repeated his story to an angry crowd seeking to attack him outside the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 22:7–17). Paul repeated to the crowd what Ananias said:

"And he [Ananias] said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you, that you [Paul] should know his will, and SEE that Just One [Christ], and should HEAR the voice of his mouth. For you shall be his witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why tarry you [why do you hesitate, or wait]? arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'"²

• Acts 22:14–16

Paul seeing **"that Just One"** and hearing **"the voice of his mouth"** was necessary to his being a witness to what he saw and heard.

The Purpose of John's Baptism

When the angel told Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, about the coming birth of his son, he also told Zacharias the mission John would perform in his life:

"And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he

¹ The full story of Saul/Paul becoming a believer in Christ's resurrection is in Acts 9:1–31.

² Paul came to realize later after God gave Paul the revelation of the Mystery that he and everyone else had been baptized **"in Christ"** when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist.

shall be great in the sight of the Lord, ... he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

• *Luke 1:14–16*

John was famous from his birth and he performed good works approved by God.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

• *Mark 1:3–4*

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, 'Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

... Then went out to him [1] Jerusalem, and [2] all Judaea, and [3] all the region round about Jordan,³ And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, 'O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet [worthy] for repentance.'"

• *Matthew 3:1–2, 5–8*

If Saul/Paul ("**I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee,**" Acts 23:6) lived in Jerusalem or its environs during the ministries of John and Jesus, he may have traveled to hear John preach. If so, Saul would have been easily recognized because Pharisees wore distinctive clothing. Saul may have wanted to be baptized by John, but was rejected by him. Saul was, after all, one of the "**generation of vipers**" criticized by John.

Until his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road Saul remained a "**viper**" trying to eliminate the new sect of believers in Jesus' resurrection. After his conversion, Saul spent the rest of his life working to "**bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance**" (Matthew 3:8 above). He fulfilled the admonition of John the Baptist.

Paul later spoke of John the Baptist at Pisidian Antioch and at Ephesus:

"... God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus: When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, 'Whom think you that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there comes one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.'"

• *Acts 13:23–25*

"And he [Paul] said unto them, 'Unto what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Unto John's baptism.' Then said Paul, 'John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance,' saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

• *Acts 19:3–4*

We cannot know in Scripture if Saul/Paul was baptized by John the Baptist. However ...

Question: Was Paul a Legitimate Apostle?

Dr. Ernest Martin wrote about the qualifications for being an apostle in his 2001 book Essen-

³ This is verified in a parallel passage in Luke 3:3: "**And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.**"

[tials of New Testament Doctrine](#), Chapter 22, "[The Curse of Church Authority](#)." Some have wondered if Paul fulfilled those qualifications to be an apostle. Dr. Martin:

"Only a special group of people was selected by Christ to be apostles and assume such awesome and vast powers to establish the doctrines and prophecies of Christendom, and formulate the body of writings that came to be the New Testament.

Even to become an apostle in the first place required particular credentials. For one, [1] an apostle had to have been baptized by John the Baptist and [2] to have seen Jesus Christ in His resurrected state (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). They also [3] had to have many extraordinary signs and miracles associated with their ministries (2 Corinthians 12:12). All the early apostles (including the apostle Paul) met these essential qualifications for the position of an apostle, but no man of succeeding generations could meet them.

As a matter of fact, when Christ's original human apostles died, there was only one apostle left who continued to live with the same extensive powers that the earlier apostles had and met all the credentials of apostleship. That person is our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And in Hebrews 3:1, Christ is called 'the apostle.' It is evident that no human could possibly have the rank and authority of an apostle today since it is impossible for modern man to meet the needed credentials recorded in the New Testament."

The question remains, was Paul baptized by John the Baptist? Dr. Martin presents no evidence to his assertion (and I find no evidence in Scripture), that Paul was baptized by John. We only know Paul was baptized after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 9:15–18) without any of the 12 apostles being present. The original 12 apostles were chosen by Jesus:

"And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles."

• *Luke 6:11*

Paul defended his credentials as an apostle when he wrote to the *ekklesia* at Corinth:

"Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not you my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are you in the Lord.

• *1 Corinthians 9:1–2*

Paul in the same epistle later wrote a list of events proving Christ's resurrection: **"And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time"** (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Many people listened to, and were convicted by John's message and were baptized by him. Later many more were baptized by the disciples of Jesus who had even larger crowds when He preached. Writing to the Galatian *ekklesia*, Paul gave a reason for calling himself an apostle:

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) ..."

• *Galatians 1:1*

Different Kinds of Apostleship?

H.W. Martin put forth an interesting idea about apostleship, but I am not entirely convinced.

“To those who object that Paul was [or should have been] the twelfth apostle ... it is but necessary to point to the words of Scripture, ‘the lot falls on Matthias; and he is enumerated with the eleven apostles’ (Acts 1:26). Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Andronicus, Junias and others, who are also spoken of as apostles, belong to the order of church apostles (1 Cor. 12:28).

The twelve apostles are the apostles of the kingdom. These two groups of apostles must be kept separate, as a different line of truth was revealed to each, and a different line of work was allotted to them. The kingdom apostles had to do with the earthly sphere of blessing, the hope of Israel, while the church apostles had to do with the formation of the body of Christ, and the heavenly sphere of blessing.”

• **H.W. Martin, “The Tripartite Ministry of the Twelve,” pp. 114–115**⁴

The apostles Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 are Gentiles, not Jews.

“And God has set some in the church [*ekklesia*], first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.”

• **1 Corinthians 12:28**

Did the criteria of being baptized by John the Baptist still hold when Paul wrote those words? I do not see how that could be so.

Conclusion

While it is likely Paul was in Jerusalem during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, it is unlikely Paul was baptized by John, though he knew about John’s call for repentance but rejected it because of his self-righteous pharisaical beliefs. He remained that way until he encountered the living and resurrected Christ Jesus on the road to Damascus.

The bottom line is this, there is no evidence Paul received the baptism of John. Paul never wrote about it, nor did anyone else.⁵ Paul did not go against his beliefs until he was compelled to do so by his encounter with Christ. All the experiences Ananias had with Paul confirmed his own divine vision from God about Paul’s sincerity and future mission (Acts 9: 10–16).

The Bible is silent about any baptism of Paul by John the Baptist or anyone else until he was baptized by Ananias. Ananias’ vision from God along with Paul’s repentance and recovery of his sight, led Ananias to baptize Paul. The Spirit of God coming upon Paul, which Ananias saw or felt, confirmed Paul’s encounter with the risen Christ.

H.W. Martin is likely correct (though I am not happy with his solution) there probably was a different understanding of what constituted an “apostle” for the Gentile *ekklesia* than for the Israelite *ekklesia* of the Kingdom. Beyond this, we cannot know.

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⁴ H.W. Martin, “The Tripartite Ministry of the Twelve, Preparatory Interlude” Series: “Studies in Acts,” *Unsearchable Riches*, Vol. 14, No. 3, February 1923, pp 114–115.

⁵ If Paul were baptized by John, he would have had to lie about his repentance to John. That is unlikely given Paul’s resolve to bring about Stephen’s murder (Acts 7: 54–60).