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THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM:  
IMMERSIONS AT QUMRAN AND  
THE BAPTISMS OF JOHN, THE  
EARLIEST CHRISTIANS, AND  
BOOK OF MORMON PEOPLES

The ritual of baptism may seem straightforward, but it is a surprisingly complex rite. For instance, is its primary function to cleanse an individual or to initiate that person into a new social organization? Or can ritual have multiple purposes? Stephen Ricks addresses these issues in his paper, which examines baptism and its institutional role in ancient Israel, early Christianity, and the innovative Jewish practices in Qumran. He then reviews the institution of baptism as described in the Book of Mormon, demonstrating the value of having this book of scripture in our understanding of this important rite as one of the plain and precious truths of the gospel. —DB

**Introduction: Miqvaot at Masada and Qumran<sup>1</sup>**

One of the most intriguing developments in the archaeology of the Second Temple period of Judaism occurred during excavations supervised by Yigael Yadin and other archaeologists at Masada, the winter residence built for Herod the Great. While excavating the south casemate wall there, these archaeologists came upon three structures that looked like a Jewish ritual bath complex, with a small pool, a medium-sized pool, and a large pool. During a routine press conference, it was announced that a possible Jewish ritual bath—or *miqveh*—had been uncovered. News

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Stephen D. Ricks is a professor of Hebrew and cognate languages at Brigham Young University.

of this discovery spread quickly throughout Israel, particularly in the very orthodox Hasidic community.

Yadin received word that Rabbi David Muntzberg, an expert on Jewish *miqvaot* and author of a study on the subject,<sup>2</sup> and Rabbi Eliezer Alter, another expert on *miqvaot*, wished to examine the *miqveh* installation at Masada. Yadin replied that he would be happy to receive them. One intensely hot day, Rabbi Muntzberg and Rabbi Alter arrived at the base of Masada. Without stopping to rest, the rabbis and their entourage slowly labored up the steep snake path on the western side of Masada in the torrid heat in their heavy Hasidic garb. When Rabbis Muntzberg and Alter arrived at the summit, they asked to be led directly to the *miqveh* installations. Armed with a tape measure, Rabbi Muntzberg went directly into one of the pools in order to determine if it conformed with the requirements of such installations as found in the rabbinic writings. The furrowed brow and grave, unsmiling expression of Rabbi Muntzberg placed the outcome in doubt, and Yadin and his associates were worried that the result would be negative. Finally Rabbi Muntzberg's expression relaxed, and he said with satisfaction that this Jewish ritual bath was "among the finest of the finest, seven times seven," an outstanding example of Jewish *miqvaot*.<sup>3</sup>

Besides this Jewish ritual bath, another *miqveh* was discovered at the northern end of Masada in the court, or the administration building. In addition, *miqvaot* were discovered at a number of other sites, including the Herodium in the Judaeen wilderness, Herod's winter palace at Jericho, and Samaria.<sup>4</sup> But the most intriguing candidates for *miqvaot* are the water installations at Qumran, which have recently been shown to be *miqvaot*, though earlier researchers of the site—including its excavator, Father Roland de Vaux of the École Biblique et Archéologique (Biblical and Archaeological School) in Jerusalem,<sup>5</sup> Frank Moore Cross,<sup>6</sup> and even Yadin—either failed to recognize the water installations at Qumran as *miqvaot* or rejected them as such.

One of the important aspects of these discoveries is that they place Jewish practices of immersion in a continuum of such ritual behavior, from Israelite purificatory rites described in the Old Testament to John

the Baptist's baptism to later Christian baptisms as described in the New Testament and by the Church fathers. Thus, by studying the similarities and differences, we can begin to appreciate the significance of this ritual act throughout the scriptures.

### **In Living Waters: The Praxis of Miqvaot Immersions, the Baptism of John, and the Earliest Christian Baptisms**

We begin in the Old Testament, where immersion functioned as part of the ritual sequence by which one became clean from physical uncleanness, which was often the result of lesions or liquid emissions.<sup>7</sup> Exodus 29:4 also indicates that Aaron and his sons were to be "washed" prior to their functioning as priests, though the washing of priests as described in Numbers 8:7 suggests that this washing was actually done by sprinkling candidates with water, not immersing them completely. Nothing is said as to how one was to acquire the water or where the water would be placed (though some believe this was the function of the laver). Yet by the intertestamental or New Testament time period, full-body immersion was normal practice among some Jewish sects, with specific instructions concerning the type of water used and the containment system for the water.

In the Mishnaic tractate *Miqvaot* ("Immersion Pools"), various types of immersion pools, in descending order of acceptability, are listed: pools with "living [i.e., flowing] waters," pools with "smitten waters" (i.e., water that is salty or from a hot spring), pools "whose own water is little in quantity and which is increased by a greater part of drawn water," pools of water containing 40 *seahs*; pools containing "the water of a rain-pond before the rain-stream has stopped," and pools from "water in ponds."<sup>8</sup> *Miqveh* ritual immersions thus optimally took place in "living water," that is, in flowing water.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, in the Dead Sea Scrolls we learn that the individual was to bathe his entire body in running water (11Q19 XLV 15–16). Moreover, in 4Q274 2 I 1–9, the verb *yitbôl*, translated as "immersed," is mentioned twice, referring to both an immersion of the body and the separate washing or immersion of the individual's clothing, though this is the only reference to full immersion in the scrolls.<sup>10</sup>

This Jewish tradition of immersion in flowing water was retained in John's practice of baptizing in the Jordan River (see Matthew 3:5; Luke 3:3), which must be viewed through the lens of Judaism. John 3:23 notes that John baptized "in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there." The actual location of Salim is unknown, but, as suggested by Eusebius and Jerome, it may have been Salumaias, the modern Beth-Shean, where there are numerous springs close by sufficient to satisfy the requirement of living water.

When one encounters ritual immersion for baptism in early Christianity, one finds requirements for the rite similar to those in Judaism. For instance, in *The Didache*, a very early writing reflecting deep Jewish-Christian influence, directions are given for baptism in living water as indicating that the preferred form of baptism was immersion and not affusion (sprinkling or pouring), the manner of ritual washing performed for priestly candidates described in Numbers 8. Yet this distinction is not so clear-cut as *Didache* 7:3, which also suggests that baptism could be performed by affusion, pouring water "on the head thrice in the name of Father and Son and Holy Ghost" if circumstances did not allow for full immersion.

Jewish influence can still be seen in *Apostolic Tradition* 21, written by the priest, antipope, and martyr Hippolytus, which, "with the exception of the *Didache*, [is] the earliest and the most important of the ancient Christian Church Orders":<sup>11</sup> "Let there be flowing water in the font, or flowing from above. Let it be done in this fashion, unless there be some other need. If, however, there is some continuing and pressing need, use whatever water you find."<sup>12</sup> Here, as in *The Didache*, allowances are made for pressing circumstances and necessity that may have permitted sprinkling as well as immersion.

In *Contestatio* 1 of Pseudo-Clement, which outlines the procedure for one's potential candidacy to Christianity, we read: "One should be tested not less than six years. Thereafter you should take him, after the manner of Moses, to a river or to a spring, where living water is to be found and where the rebirth of the just occurs."<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Clement, *Homilies* 11.35.1, states: "Leading me to the fountains that are near the sea, he baptized me

in the ever-flowing water.” In the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, the following instruction is given: “Thank the Father and giver of all things through him whom he as king and treasure of unspeakable goods, that your sins may be blotted out in the water of a spring or river or even of the sea, after which the threefold name of holiness has been pronounced.”<sup>14</sup> Jerome reports that even in his day many people went to the Jordan River in order to be baptized.<sup>15</sup> The Apostle Peter is reputed to have baptized in the springs lying by the sea in Syrian Antioch.<sup>16</sup> The Apostle Thomas is also recorded as having baptized Mygdonia in a flowing spring of water.<sup>17</sup> Later Gentile Christianity would not be unaffected by these concerns.

Tertullian, who observes that “Peter baptized (*tinxit*) in the Tiber,” casts the net even wider for places of Christian baptism, saying, “Therefore there is no difference whether one uses for lustration [i.e., baptism] ocean water or standing water, a river or a fountain, a lake or a spring.”<sup>18</sup> The fourth-century saint Victor led the soldiers Alexander, Longinus, and Felicianus, who had become believers under his influence, to the sea to be baptized.<sup>19</sup> In the *Acts of St. Apollinaris* of Ravenna, the saint baptized once in a river near Ravenna and another time in the sea, while a baptism in a house is also mentioned. In the early Middle Ages, baptisms were performed by preference in baptisteries in churches, but they could also be performed in “living [i.e., flowing] water.” On his missionary journeys to Northumbria in 625, Paulinus of York baptized converts in rivers, which the historian Bede excuses since “it was still not possible to have built churches and baptisteries.”<sup>20</sup> In sum, though Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism in the Talmudic period (third to sixth century CE) required immersion in “living water” for conversion to Judaism,<sup>21</sup> Christian requirements for the location of baptism became less and less exacting until they ceased altogether.<sup>22</sup>

### **One or Two? Individual or Dual Participation in Baptism**

Another area in which Christian baptism differed from Jewish immersion was in the number of actively engaged participants. In the Old Testament, while one finds that the priest is to instruct individuals to ritually bathe, there is no indication that the priests washed these individuals. Instead,

the washing was performed by the individual himself or herself. The instructions for Qumran community suggest that the same level of participation was practiced there. The text in 4Q514 1 I 1–6 reads as if it was understood that the individuals immersed or bathed themselves.<sup>23</sup> Instructions to women also suggest that their bathing or immersions were performed by themselves only.<sup>24</sup>

Yet according to the later rabbinic Mishnah *Miqvaot*, “if one kept hold on a man or on vessels and immersed them they remain unclean” unless “one had rinsed his hand in the water,” suggesting that there were occasions in which two individuals may have been involved in a ritual immersion.<sup>25</sup> What is unclear is how involved the second individual may have been in the immersing process. At least one rabbi suggests that this mishnaic principle is in response to coordinated immersion, or in other words, to immersion that is performed with the help or assistance of another and not enacted by oneself. According to Rabbi Simeon, the immerser should “loose his hold on them” for a very short but unspecified length of time “so that the water can come into them,” adding that “it is not needful that the water should enter into every orifice and wrinkle [in the body].”<sup>26</sup> Although the written evidence here is somewhat late, it is possible that these ideas may have been known before they were committed to writing at the end of the second century CE.

It is clear that John the Baptist practiced immersion involving more than one individual. According to the New Testament, John baptized others, going into the water with them and assisting them in the immersion process. Unfortunately, we do not know precisely how John baptized (immersed) people. It is possible that he grasped them by his hand or hands when baptizing them. Interestingly, “in the account of the baptism of Jesus ‘by John’ (*hypo Ioannou*), the active participle of the verb *anabainon*, ‘coming up,’ is used for Jesus’ coming up out of the water, thus suggesting he came up by his own power, despite the fact that he was in some way immersed (*ebaptisthe*) by John.”<sup>27</sup> Thus it is possible that John baptized Jesus by immersing him in the waters of the Jordan but, in accordance with Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition, let him go at some point.

Of course, baptism in Christianity was experienced as a coordinated rite in which the proselyte went into the water and was lowered into the water by the missionary, church leader, or member, similar to the form practiced by John, and then apparently raised by the figure as well, though this latter element is never explicit in the New Testament. What does seem clear is that authority to baptize played an important role in Christian baptism. In the Gospel of John 3:26, we read that Christ himself baptized others and then delegated his disciples to do the same. Following his resurrection, Christ's instructions to his disciples referred to their authority to baptize others: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19; see also Mark 16:14–18). The use of the passive form of the verb *to baptize* is found throughout the New Testament, which only accentuates the above point. Thus, while a Jewish convert may baptize himself or herself, the Christian is baptized by someone else, demonstrating the role that ecclesiastical authority played in Christian baptism.

### **Cleansing or Changing: The Purposes of the Immersions**

So far we have noted that while there are similarities between later Jewish immersions and Christian baptisms, there are also interesting differences. So what does this mean? The answer to this appears to lie in the differing purposes for the rite. As we have seen, Old Testament ritual immersion functioned primarily as a means of symbolically representing one's purified or clean state following a state of physical impurity (childbirth, menstruation, illness, skin disease, and so forth) and thus was probably performed on a regular basis; certainly this would have been the case for women. With this said, there are a few tantalizing references that suggest that immersion was also understood as a means of repentance. In Psalm 51:2, we read: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Similarly, in Jeremiah 2:22 the reader is told, "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before thee." Unfortunately, it is unclear whether these texts referred to actual cultic practice as those explicitly mentioned in the law of Moses or were merely metaphors used by Jeremiah and the anonymous

Psalmist to describe the cleansing process of repentance. Thus they must remain intriguing but ultimately unhelpful in understanding the role of washing and immersion in particular in ancient Israel.

The later Jewish sects described within the Dead Sea Scrolls also believed that the primary purpose of the immersions or washing acts was to purify the body. In the Qumran community, in order to participate in the activities of the community, the inhabitant was expected to be ritually pure, necessitating regular ritual washings. In both cases, to maintain the state of purity, the individuals are expected to wash themselves frequently.<sup>28</sup>

While the above discussion concerns impurities that were not recognized as sinful, the community at Qumran did recognize that some impurities could be caused by sin. The *Thanksgiving Hymns* mention sin as a form of impurity, thus necessitating cleansing: "You have cleansed it [man's spirit] from the abundance of iniquity."<sup>29</sup> Another text also speaks of the need of the individual to be cleansed from sin if he seeks to be integrated into the wider community: "Further, he is not to participate in any of their deliberations until all his works have been cleansed from evil."<sup>30</sup> Finally, one of the psalmic hymns of the Dead Sea Scrolls records this plea: "Forgive, O Lord, my sins, cleanse me from my iniquities!"<sup>31</sup> In each one of these references, it is clear that sin was considered an impurity that needed cleansing, but this does not necessarily mean that the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls understood the cleansing process to include physical immersion.<sup>32</sup> Instead, at least one text suggests that the right to wash came after the repentance: "(Such a man) shall not enter the water to partake of the pure Meal of the men of holiness, for they shall not be cleansed unless they turn from their wickedness."<sup>33</sup> Josephus suggested that the same probationary time for repentance prior to the purification by immersion existed among the Essenes: "After he has given proof of his self-control in this time, they bring him closer to their way of life: he participates in the purer waters for purification."<sup>34</sup>

Yet John's baptism was explicitly for the remission of sins, with no mention whatsoever that it was a means to cleanse one from physical impurity, thus separating his baptism from Jewish ritual immersion:



“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3). This act was to be preceded by confession of sins: “And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5), thus providing a sequence in ritual cleansing similar to the Qumranic form, with confession preceding the immersion (see Luke 3:3; Acts 10:37; 19:3–4).

John’s baptism is also unique in that it appears to have another purpose for its performance, which can be described as preparatory. Though Edmund Sutcliffe suggests that “the baptism administered by John the Baptist cannot be regarded as one of initiation” into “a religious brotherhood of his own,”<sup>35</sup> John certainly understood his mission as one to “prepare” mankind for entrance into the kingdom of heaven, which would be established by Christ and which was “at hand.”<sup>36</sup> The preparatory nature of John’s baptism, as he himself would have understood it, was to lead the individual to another greater, more powerful baptism, the baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost that Christ would bring (see Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Thus John’s baptism unto repentance not only cleansed the individual from sin, but it also prepared the initiate for the greater act Christ himself would enact.<sup>37</sup>

The initiatory nature of this act of immersion was not reflected in the Qumranic form of immersion.<sup>38</sup> Though candidates for admission to the Qumran community had to experience a preparation or probationary (i.e., initiatory) period before they were allowed into the community, this probationary period did not include a baptism-like experience of ritual immersion; the right to immerse themselves came after they had already been formally accepted into the community.

Later Christian baptism performed the same function as that of John’s, in that it was a means to cleanse one’s sinful state, as evidenced by Peter in Acts 2:38, when John instructs the proselytes to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins.” Yet Christian baptism was unlike John’s in that it was initiatory, not preparatory. The difference between these two states is admittedly a fine one, but whereas a preparatory rite prepares one for

eventual entrance into a social group, an initiatory rite is the means by which that entrance takes place. Thus, while John's rite prepared his disciples to become part of the kingdom of God, Christian baptism was the means by which one actually became part of the kingdom.

In his commentary on the early Christian text *The Didache*, Jonathan Draper noted that the verb form of *baptismo* in the first verse of the seventh section is an aorist imperative, "which implies an unrepeatable initiatory act, not a continuing process."<sup>39</sup> The initiatory nature of Christian baptism can be seen in the imagery associated with baptism by Paul in Romans 6:3–5, where baptism is equated with death and resurrection, as Paul states: "therefore we are buried with [Christ] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life." For Paul, baptism was not merely a means of becoming clean, but the mechanism by which the individual was transformed into a completely new creature, having been made new by the power of the ritual (see also Colossians 2:12). Thus the Christian was not baptized repeatedly, but marked the transition to or initiation into the new community of Christ with one immersion experience. The singular nature of Christian baptism may lie behind Paul's later assertion that there is only one baptism for the Church (see Ephesians 4:5) and Peter's claim that baptism is much more than simply "putting away the filth of the flesh [i.e., sin] but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). Thus, though they admit to the purificatory nature of baptism from sin (Acts 2:38), it is the transforming, or initiatory, nature of baptism that gives this ritual its force.

In summary, though the water rituals as performed by the ancient Israelites, the Qumran community, John the Baptist, and the later Christian communities were similar in form, the purpose of these ritual practices differed and can be placed on a continuum of ritual meaning from cleansing to purification to preparation to initiation. In the Old Testament, immersions functioned as a means to symbolically represent the state of cleanliness following a physical impurity, whereas at Qumran immersion was performed by individuals after they had already entered the community and was repeated frequently for the express purpose of

cleansing the individual from ritual impurities, both physical and spiritual. The baptism of John cleansed individuals from sin, but also prepared them to enter into the “kingdom of God,” which would later be done by Christ’s own baptizing by fire and the Holy Ghost. Finally, the Christian ritual described in the New Testament is primarily initiatory and transformative, radically changing the participant into a new creature, as well as being the ritual that was necessary to be performed to enter into the future kingdom of heaven.<sup>40</sup>

### Baptism and the Book of Mormon

While the rite of immersion is well documented in early Christianity and in later Jewish sources, for Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon provides a unique window into the significance of immersion where it appears as a rite that was both purificatory and initiatory for a community of Israelites that lived near the end of the Old Testament time period, flourished during the intertestamental period, and eventually collapsed in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, about the time that western Christianity solidified its doctrinal positions. That the rite of immersion was an important one to this group of Israelites is apparent when one considers that the Book of Mormon uses the noun *baptism* or the verb *to baptize* 138 times, a little over once every four pages.<sup>41</sup>

Though it may come as no surprise to those who are familiar with the text, it is clear in these references that being fully immersed in water was the recognized manner for the rite to be understood as valid or legitimate. Moreover, the Book of Mormon demonstrates continuity in this form for the thousand years that made up Nephite history. In 2 Nephi 31:13, Nephi speaks of going “into the water.” In at least one reference, the actual rite is described as one in which the individual was “buried in the water” (Mosiah 18:14). Later, Christ, teaching the proper manner in which this rite was to be performed, stated that both the individual being baptized and the individual baptizing were to go into the water: “Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water . . . and then shall ye immerse them in the water, and come forth again out of the water” (3 Nephi 11:23, 26). Finally, in Mormon 7, Mormon mentions that one must be “baptized,

first with water” (v. 10).<sup>42</sup> While it is clear that baptism in the Book of Mormon required full-body immersion, both the Mosiah and the 3 Nephi references note that the ritual required two individuals, similar in form to John the Baptist’s.

The similarities between the Book of Mormon baptismal practice and that of John the Baptist and Christian New Testament baptisms extend beyond mere form to include the function, or purpose, for this act as well. Of the 138 references in the Book of Mormon to the act of baptism, only two speak of baptism as a means of purifying in general. The first of these is found in 2 Nephi 31:5, which states: “And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to baptized by water . . . how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!” While Nephi’s point is that baptism is more than simple purification (Christ had to do it, even though he already was holy), it does suggest that for the common person, baptism sanctified or made holy that which was profane. The second reference is in 3 Nephi 27:20, where Christ himself declares that baptism brings about sanctification. Yet this is a qualified purification, since it is not truly the baptism that purifies, but the opportunity following baptism to experience the Holy Ghost: “Be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost.” This qualification more likely corresponds to the baptism by fire and the Holy Ghost alluded to eight times in the Book of Mormon (as well as mentioned by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; and Luke 3:16) and the transforming nature of such baptism rather than the purificatory nature of Jewish washing.

Elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, baptism is specified as part of a process in which the conclusion is termed repentance. In Alma 6:2, the sequence is as follows: “And it came to pass that whosoever did not belong to the church who repented of their sins were baptized unto repentance, and were received into the church.” The sequence is further detailed in Moroni 6:2: “Neither did they receive any unto baptism save they came forth . . . and witnessed . . . that they truly repented of all their sins.” In both of these cases, it appears that repentance (or the giving up of sin) must happen prior to the baptismal act, similar to the sequence in Qumran.

Finally, the Book of Mormon baptism was also initiatory in function. At least seven references speak of baptism as a necessary requirement for entering into the Church. These references are relatively late in the Book of Mormon, the first being Mosiah 18, which describes events approximately 150 years prior to the birth of Christ. There we are told that “whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his church” (Mosiah 18:17). Similarly, Mosiah 25, about thirty years later, describes the establishment of many Church congregations by Alma, who himself “did go forth into the water and did baptize them; . . . yea, and as many as he did baptize did belong to the church of God” (v. 18). This is the same pattern established by Christ in 3 Nephi 26:21: “And they who were baptized in the name of Jesus were called the church of Christ.” Like the baptism of John and the Christian form, baptism was understood to be a one-time event, not repetitive like the Jewish form for purification. The singular nature of the rite, as pointed out earlier, demonstrates its initiatory character.

Beyond these, the Book of Mormon also makes explicit one more level of initiation experienced through baptism—that of entering into a covenant with God. According to Mosiah 18:8–9, those who were baptized showed that they were willing to “come into the fold of God, to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens . . . and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, . . . even until death, that [they] may be redeemed of God and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that [they] may have eternal life.”

In the above reference, frequent mention is made of new identities and communities that one may enter due to the ritual of baptism: entering into the fold of God, receiving the designation as “his people,” being numbered with those of the first resurrection, and attaining eternal life. These are all received explicitly in the text through covenants with God, which is demonstrated and made valid through the rite of baptism. Moreover, the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost may now be understood as valid evidence that the covenant entered into through the waters of baptism is in force. The actual words used in the baptism at this point reiterate the meaning above: “I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God,

as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him . . . ; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant you eternal life” (v. 13).

### Conclusion

The ritual of bodily immersion is one with a long tradition in the communities described in the scriptures. Though similar in form and appearance on the surface, closer inspection of the manner, individuals involved, and times in which the ritual was practiced reveal differences in meaning and significance. Whereas the Jewish rite stressed the role of immersion as a form of purification from physical impurities, both John’s baptism and the Christian form emphasized the initiatory nature of the ritual. The Book of Mormon provides a continuity of the rite over a thousand-year period, gives us a window into the original understanding of immersion in the Israelite community, and adds the important element of covenant making missing from the other texts.

### Notes

1. Materials for this section are based on an earlier study by Stephen D. Ricks, “*Miqvaot*: Ritual Immersion Baths in Second Temple (Intertestament) Judaism,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 3 (1996–97): 277–86.
2. David Muntzberg (Mintzberg), *Mivneh Miqva’ot ve-Hekhsheram: al halakhot u-minhagim be-hakhsharat mikva’ot* (Jerusalem: Merkaz ha-artsi le-ma’an taharat ha-nishpachah, 1985–86).
3. Yigael Yadin, *Masada: Herod’s Fortress and the Zealots’ Last Stand*, trans. Moshe Pearlman (Jerusalem: Steimatzky’s Agency, 1966), 164, 166.
4. Many other *miqvaot* dating from the Second Temple period have also been unearthed—all told about three hundred, according to Ronny Reich in “The Great Mikveh Debate,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19 (March 1993): 52. In the early seventies, just outside of the wall of Jerusalem’s Old City by the Dung Gate, Israeli archaeologist Meir Ben-Dov uncovered several *miqvaot* in the homes of wealthy families. Many of these immersion fonts contain stairways separated by a low plaster wall. These stairs were probably used by individuals to enter and exit the *miqveh*. According to Hershel Shanks, “Especially palatial *mikvaot* . . . have two sets of stairs divided by a low wall or pillars. Presumably one set of steps was used to enter while the bather was in an impure state; the other set of steps was used to leave the purifying bath, uncontaminated by any contact with the impurities of the entrance

steps.” Hershel Shanks, “Report from Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (December 1977): 21. Ronny Reich has provided a thorough treatment of *miqvaot* with double entrances in “Mishnah, *Sheqalim* 8:2 and the Archaeological Evidence,” (in Hebrew) in *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period*, ed. A. Oppenheimer, V. Rappaport, and Menahem Stern (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1980), 225–26. The late Professor Benjamin Mazar of the Hebrew University, excavating the area south of Herod’s temple, uncovered approximately forty *miqvaot* near the monumental staircases that led to the Temple Mount, in *The Mountain of the Lord* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 146, 210–12; cf. William S. La Sor, “Jerusalem,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982). 2:1025. These ritual baths served Jews who visited Jerusalem during the pilgrimage festivals—Passover (*Pesach*), Weeks or Pentacost (*Shavuot*), and Tabernacles (*Sukkot*); see Shmuel Safrai, *Die Wallfahrt im Zeitalter des Zweiten Tempels*, trans. Dafna Mach (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Neukirchner Verlag, 1981), 18, 85, 163–73, 179, 217–18, who discusses the requirements and ceremonies for achieving and maintaining purity at these pilgrimage festivals. Professor Nahman Avigad, of the Hebrew University, uncovered some sixty *miqvaot* in the homes of wealthy and priestly families in the Second Temple Upper City, or Jerusalem, west of the Temple Mount across the Tyropoan Valley. At least one *miqveh*, and sometimes more than one, was found in each of the homes, cut from the rock and lined with gray plaster. One particularly elegant *miqveh* installation excavated by Professor Avigad also had an *otzar*, or reserve pool, for collecting rainwater connected to the *miqveh* proper, the only such installation discovered in Jerusalem. A pipe, which could be stopped up with a bung, connected the *otzar* to the *miqveh* itself, allowing additional water to flow into the *miqveh*, which received its usual supply of water from a cistern. Beside the *otzar* and *miqveh* was another room with a bathtub designed for normal, not ritual, bathing. In a reply to Walter Zanger, Ronny Reich, “Great Mikveh Debate,” 52–53, argues persuasively that a *miqveh* even without an *otzar* is still a *miqveh*.

5. Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 131–32; Roland de Vaux, “Qumran, Khirbet/Ein Feshkha,” in *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. Michael Avi-Yonah and Ephraim Stern (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958), 4:983–86.
6. Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 50.
7. Water in ancient Israel was the universal cleanser and purifier. Purification with water occurred following sexual relations, as a preparation to entering into the Holy of Holies, and in matters relating to life force: male and female

genital discharges—normal and abnormal—and skin diseases. According to Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 140, “the sequence of [Leviticus] 12–15 seems to have been determined not according to theme but according to the duration and complexity of the purification process”: parturients (i.e., women who have just given birth), forty or eighty days (chapter 12); scale-diseased persons, eight days, four sacrifices, and anointing (chapters 13–14); and persons with genital discharges, seven days for menstruation, and one day for seminal emission (chapter 15). In the case of parturients, no bath or water ablution was required, although sacrifice was. The person with skin disease (translated as “leprosy” in the KJV at Leviticus 13:2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 40, 42, 43, 47, 49, 51, 52, 59; 14:3, 7, 32, 34, 44, 54, 55, 57) who had been cured was required to “wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe in water; then he shall be clean” (Jewish Publication Society [JPS], Leviticus 14:8). When a man with an abnormal genital discharge “becomes clean, . . . he shall count off seven days for his cleansing, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in fresh water; then he shall be clean” (JPS, Leviticus 15:13). Thereafter he will make a sin (or purification) offering and a burnt offering “before the Lord” (i.e., at the tabernacle/temple). The person who touches the man who has an abnormal genital discharge “shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening” (JPS, Leviticus 15:7). A man who has a normal genital discharge (i.e., a seminal emission) “shall bathe his whole body in water and remain unclean until evening. All cloth or leather on which semen falls shall be washed in water and remain unclean until evening” (JPS, Leviticus 15:16–17). Also, following marital sexual relations, “they shall bathe in water and remain unclean until evening” (JPS, Leviticus 15:18). During her regular menstrual cycle, “she shall remain in her impurity seven days; whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. . . . Anything that she lies on during her impurity shall be unclean; anything that she sits on shall be unclean. Anyone who touches her bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening” (JPS, Leviticus 15:19–21). In preparation for the Day of Atonement, the high priest “shall bathe his body in water” before putting on his linen garments (JPS, Leviticus 16:4).

8. These phrases were based on Herbert Danby’s translation of *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), 732–33; see also the excellent translation and discussion of *miqvaot* in chapter 1 in Jacob Neusner, *The Judaic Law of Baptism: Tractate Miqvaot in the Mishnah and the Tosefta: A Form-Analytical Translation and Commentary and a Legal and Religious History* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), vol. 13, *Commentary*, 11–40; vol. 14, *Miqvaot, Literary and Historical Problems*, 9–16.



9. Professor Lawrence Schiffman, New York University, personal communication, May 11, 2000. In contrast, Jacob Neusner observes in his study, *The Judaic Law of Baptism*, vol. 14: *Miqvaot, Literary and Historical Problems*, 205:

In an age in which men and women immersed themselves in spring-fed lakes and rushing rivers, in moving water washing away their sins in preparation for the end of days, the Pharisees observed the passing of the seasons, which go onward through time, immersing in the still, collected water which falls from heaven. They bathe not in running water, in the anticipation of the end of days and for the sake of eschatological purity, but in still water, to attain the cleanness appropriate to the eternal Temple and the perpetual sacrifice. They remove the uncleanness defined by the Written Torah for the holy altar, because of the conviction of the Oral Torah that the hearth and home, table and bed, going onward through ages without end, also must be and can be cleaned, in particular, through the rain: the living water from heaven, falling in its perpetual seasons, trickling down the hills and naturally gathering in ponds, ditches, and caverns, from time immemorial. As sun sets, bringing purification or the Temple, so rain falls, bringing purification for the table.

10. "And he shall bathe and wash before [. . . he shall imm]erse him the seventh time on the Sabbath. He may not sprinkle on the Sabbath because [. . .] the Sabbath da[yl] . . . anything which touches a discharge of semen, whether it be a person or any vessel, he shall immerse, and the one who carries it [shall immerse . . .] and he shall immerse the garment which is on him and the vessel he carries."
11. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1953), 2:180.
12. Hippolytus of Rome, *Paradosis (Apostolic Tradition)* XXI, in Bernard Botte, trans. and ed., *La tradition apostolique*, Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 1968), 80; author's translation.
13. Pseudo-Clement, *Contestatio* I, 1, in *Patrologia Graeca* 2:29. The mention of Moses suggests that the text refers to the tradition recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:2, in which the children of Israel "were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea."
14. Pseudo-Clement, *Recognitiones* XI, 32, in *Patrologia Graeca* 1:1329.
15. Jerome, *De Situ et Nominibus Locorum Hebraicorum* 182, in *Patrologia Latina* 23:931 A.
16. Pseudo-Clement *Recognitiones* XI, 26, in *Patrologia Graeca* 2:293.
17. Acts of Thomas 121:5.

18. Tenrtullian, *DeBaptismo* 4:3; the translation for this passage is taken from Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 129.
19. *Acta St. Victoris* 11, in *Acta martyrum*, ed. T. Ruinart (Ratisbone [Regensburg]: Manz, 1859), 337–38; French translation by M. Drouet de Maupertuy, *Les véritables actes des martyrs, recueillis, revus et corrigés sur plusieurs anciens manuscrits, sou le titre de Acta primorum martyrum* (Besançon, France: Petit, 1818), 1:415–16.
20. Bede, *Historia Anglorum* II, 15. A similar story is told of St. Phocas, bishop of Sinope, in Boninus Mombritius (Bonino Mombrizio), *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 2421.
21. Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York: Ktav, 1968): 43–44.
22. This was probably the result of practicality. As the Church expanded outward, the conversion of others would have occurred in areas without established church baptistries. With that said, it is possible that the lessening importance in location was meant to further distance themselves from Jewish practice.
23. 4Q514 1 I 1–6: “And he shall bathe and wash on the d[a]y of [his] uncleanness . . . and on the day of their [c]leansing all those who are unclean of days shall bathe and wash in water and shall become clean.”
24. See 4Q274 1 I 4–9.
25. Mishnah *Miqvaot* 8:5. This and other translations of the Mishnah are taken from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah*, 732–45.
26. Mishnah *Miqvaot* 8:5.
27. Joan Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 51. I was greatly aided in preparing material for this section by a perusal of Taylor’s *The Immerser*, 51–53.
28. Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 11.129.
29. 1 QH IX 31–33.
30. 1 QS VIII 16–18.
31. 11Q5 XIX 13–14.
32. Some suggested that this was indeed how the cleansing took place. See Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23–26, 85–88; also Edmund F. Sutcliffe, *The Monks of Qumran as Depicted in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1960), 108; L. F. Badia, *The Qumran Baptism and John the Baptist’s Baptism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980), 19. But the texts are silent as to how exactly the cleansing was done, though 4QMMT B 64–72 mentions the need to bring a sin offering for the one who sins unknowingly.
33. *Rule of the Community* V, 13–14. This translation of the *Rule of the Community* from the Dead Sea Scrolls—as well as all other English translations of

the Dead Sea Scrolls—is taken from Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 104. Josephus’s account, on the other hand, suggests that ritual immersion may have been used as part of the initiatory process among the Essenes, see Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2.129, where he discusses the process for admission into the group and the oaths that the novice must take. He describes a three-year initiation period. During the first year, while the novice remains outside, he is put under their way of life. Then, having given proof of his self-control, he is brought closer to their way of life: he may join in the “purer waters for purification,” that is, the cleansing baths, but is not received into the common ways of living, including the common meal. This second stage lasts for two years. Finally, after taking “awesome oaths,” the novice is admitted as a full member into the community and is permitted to eat the common meal. Unfortunately, this is only secondhand and not a primary text; thus whether ritual immersion was part of the initiatory process must be uncertain. See also Lawrence, *Washing in Water*, 135–41, who tries to demonstrate initiatory elements in Qumranic material, but must ultimately conclude that “there are no explicit references to washing as part of initiation into the Scrolls community.”

34. Flavius Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 2.138, translated in Todd S. Beall, *Josephus’ Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19.
35. Edmund Sutcliffe, “Baptism and Baptismal Rites at Qumran?,” *Heythrop Journal* 1 (1960): 180.
36. This is reflected in the New Testament texts concerning John and his mission. See Luke 1:76–77; Matthew 3:1–6; John 1:19–27. Though we are told his baptisms lead to repentance, repentance in turn is one of the elements required for admission into the new social organization, the kingdom of heaven.
37. Jonathan David Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 71–77: “Scholars disagree as to the origin and exact significance of John’s baptism and the nature of the community into which he baptized them, if it can even be described that way. However, most would agree that it was an initiation of some sort.”
38. See Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989): 28–46.
39. Jonathan A. Draper, “A Commentary on the Didache in the Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Documents” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1983), 150, though Draper does note that it is “remarkable that no theology of baptism is apparent in *Didache* 7 and that the instructions are of a purely external nature.”
40. For a discussion concerning the differences in their sociological setting see Ellen Juhl Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul: A Study of Ritual*

*Boundaries as Identity Markers* (New York: Brill, 1995), who comes to the same conclusion as this study, that Christian baptism, at least for Paulines, was a rite of entrance (initiation), while the Jewish form was for purification. With this said, there is one intriguing text from the Damascus Document, which states, “The Man of Mockery appeared, who sprayed on Israel lying waters, he led them to wander in the trackless land” (CD A I 14–15), suggesting that washing as induction into a group was not unknown and was even spoken against by the community of believers.

41. In comparison, the New Testament references both of these terms only eighty times. Of the fifty-five references to washing in the Old Testament, many do not refer to a full immersing act, but to washing of clothes, equipment for the temple, the pieces of the sacrifice, and so forth. Of the fifty-five, only eleven refer to “bathing” (immersion) as part of the process. Washing of hands is mentioned a few times, as is washing of arms and feet for the priests. Also, the vast majority of these fifty-five references concern washing for purity.
42. The nature of the water in which one is baptized (e.g., living waters) is unfortunately not explicit in the Book of Mormon, though in Mosiah 18:10, the “fountain of waters” at the Waters of Mormon (where a source of water flowed into the Waters of Mormon), where Alma baptized Helam (and himself), square with the later Jewish requirement of immersions in “living water.”