

# The Baptism of our Lord – Epistle

## BAPTISM IN JESUS' NAME

Acts 19:1-7

### The Baptism of our Lord

#### Analysis by Carolyn Schneider

1While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. 2He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” 3Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” 4Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” 5On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied – 7altogether there were about twelve of them.

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## DIAGNOSIS: John’s Baptism of Repentance

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Confused Believers*

When Paul goes to Ephesus on his third round of visits to the new churches in Asia Minor (now Turkey), he gathers around himself some who call themselves believers. But, as they talk with Paul, they seem confused about what they believe in. They seem to believe that the world is a sinful place and that they

have a part in that sin. They have been baptized as an expression of sorrow for this sin and desire to be free from it in a new world. But they do not seem to believe that this newness has already begun. They may have heard about Jesus from Apollos (Acts 18:24-28), but they are not applying this knowledge of Jesus to their own lives; they have never heard of the Holy Spirit, at least not a holy spirit that could infuse them.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Repentant People**

These must have been good people, sensitive enough to see the injustices and evils in the world, and honest enough not to reject John the Baptizer's old call to repentance. They had received a baptism by water for repentance. What they had not heard was the second part of John's call, a call to hope because of the one coming after him: Jesus. Paul has to revive for them this forgotten part of John's preaching. The presence and power of evil everywhere can clog our hearing and keep forgiveness and hope away from us.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Hopeless Disciples**

Repentance is not meant to be an end in itself. All by itself repentance leads to despair. It is dangerous to take sin to heart alone. To expect nothing beyond John's baptism is like seeing the way that leads to hell without seeing the way that leads out of hell. Paul would have been cruel to leave these disciples of a half-heard John there.

## **PROGNOSIS: Jesus' Baptism of New Life**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – A Receptive Jesus**

Paul does not leave them there. He focuses them on Jesus, the one to whom John pointed. Jesus himself had received John's baptism and then had received the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:4-11). The ancient church liked to insist that Jesus was a human like us so that we could identify with him. If Jesus were to save us by

allowing us to identify with his life, death and resurrection, then he needed to receive what we need so that we could receive it in him. So Jesus received the Holy Spirit for us. This Holy Spirit is the one who, since the beginning, has been making something out of nothing, life out of death, a new creation, a new people.

#### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *New People***

This time the disciples heard clearly what Paul was saying, and they were baptized “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). Now each of them heard God saying, “You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased.” Then, like Jesus, they received the Holy Spirit, a spirit new to them. Already, their lives were being molded into Jesus’ life. They now knew the power of Jesus’ resurrection because it was working in their own lives. They had new lives, and they became real believers in Jesus.

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Purposeful Agents***

The new lives of the disciples were evident externally. Not only did they see themselves differently, they saw everything differently and they spoke of it differently. They spoke a new language and they described what was happening in the world in a new way. They began to live as if things could be and were in fact different. When we live this way, we have already become part of the difference, the new thing that God is doing. There is hope for the world.