

# Why Jesus Was Baptized By John

Around AD 27, while the man known as John the Baptist was warning his fellow Israelites about the impending wrath of God with the coming kingdom and Messiah, the Son of God—the Christ—approached him to be baptized.

The question has often been asked, "Since Jesus was sinless, for what purpose was He baptized?" In fact, if you think about, this was essentially the same thing John himself asked Jesus; the NLT renders Matthew 3:14b like this: **I am the one who needs to be baptized by you. ... So why are you coming to me?** Well...

I'm sure there are many other questions concerning Jesus' baptism, but I'm just going to focus on what I see as the main reasons for Jesus Himself being baptized by John.

1. The first reason I want to consider is taken directly from the words of Jesus Himself, and I believe it's very generic in its focus, meaning that this statement includes everything that we'll study today: When John the Immerser tried to get out of baptizing Jesus, Jesus said to him, **Let it be so now; it's proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness** (Mat. 3:15, NIV).

As God's Son, Jesus was obliged to obey His Father's demands, whether they were directly from Him or indirectly through one of His prophets like John.

Paul said that, **being found in appearance as a man, Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient** (Php. 2:8a); he also said that, although Jesus was a Son, He learned what it meant to be obedient in human form (Heb. 5:8).

Surely if Jesus thought Himself obligated to pay taxes to Caesar (Mat. 17:25-27), He thought Himself obligated to pay homage to His Heavenly Father in every way possible! Furthermore I believe...

It's very probable that to fulfill all righteousness meant to effect *true righteousness* so that man could be reconciled to God: as Second Corinthians 5:21 reads, **God made Jesus ... to be sin for us, so that through Him we might become the righteousness of God**, something the Law demonstrated that we couldn't do—we, in contrast to Jesus, couldn't fulfill all righteousness, something which was demonstrated by perfectly keeping Law (Rom. 8:3-4)! See...

Jesus' baptism pointed toward His death/burial/resurrection in which He took upon Himself the sin of man so that we could come into possession of the true or **eternal righteousness** prophesied in Daniel 9:24, where God, speaking of the last days, said to Daniel, **70 weeks are determined for your people [Israel] and for your holy city [Jerusalem] to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy [Place]**.

Referring to the fulfilling of this purpose, Jesus once said, **I have a baptism to endure, and how distressed I am until it is completed** (Luke 12:50).

(We'll reflect on the significance of His being baptized *in the Jordan* momentarily. But for now...) Consider this:

The only bird allowed as an acceptable sacrifice for sins was the dove, the very bird God chose to use in the anointing of Jesus with the Spirit at His baptism; I believe this clearly implies that Jesus was likewise the only man allowed as an acceptable sacrifice for sin. In fact...

Since the original term for **in** within God's statement that **This is My ... Son **IN** whom I am well pleased** in the NKJV is in the dative case and can thus be correctly translated as **This is My ... Son **WITH** whom I am well pleased** (e.g. in the NIV, etc.), it seems clear to me God was saying that the only man He was well pleased with, as regards a final remedy for mankind's sin-problem, was Jesus. With all this in mind...

I'm also convinced that Jesus was baptized in fulfillment of the type of the ceremonial law found in Leviticus 1:9 & 13 in which we're told that the lamb had to be washed with water before he was put on the sacrificial altar to be consumed as a sin-offering.

Not only were these first few lambs very likely washed with water *from the Jordan*, since that's where they were at this time, but the Lord also alluded to doves in the very next verse (Lev. 1:14). Anyway...

In the Gospel of John (1:29), John the Baptist pointed toward Jesus and said, **Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** So...

In His baptism to fulfill all righteousness, Jesus was apparently identifying Himself with those He came to save.

Isaiah 53:12 prophesied that the Messiah would be **numbered with the transgressors**. And...

In Romans 8:3-4a Paul wrote, **What the Law couldn't do in that it was weak though the flesh [i.e. what we couldn't fulfill to thereby be truly righteous on our own merit], God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh on account of sin; He condemned sin in the flesh that [lit. *the righteousness of the Law*] might be fulfilled in us** (NKJV). So...

Jesus, who had no sin, took His place among those who had no righteousness; He who had no sin, submitted to a baptism for sinners, a baptism of suffering and death symbolized by His baptism in water. Incidentally...

I also believe that Jesus' journey into the wilderness immediately following His baptism is a picture of the scapegoat that symbolically carried sins into the wilderness in Leviticus 16:1-10, which means that His baptism depicts His death as a sacrifice.

2. The second reason for Jesus' submission to John's baptism that I want to consider is taken directly from the words of John the Immerser himself, and I believe it's less generic in focus than the words of Jesus, because they encapsulate the point of Jesus' baptism for God's Old Covenant people: **The reason I came baptizing with water was that He [the Messiah] might be revealed to Israel** (John 1:31b).

Anti-typically speaking, John was Elijah (Mat. 11:14 & 17:11-12); with that in mind, let's note some pertinent similarities between these two men.

- A. Prophet Elijah appointed Elisha as the next prophet (1 Kgs. 19:19-21), so the forerunner of Jesus' appoint Him for His work.
- B. As we've always heard in prayers, songs, & at funerals, the Jordan River represents death: In his comments on Psalm 42, John Phillips wrote, "In Old Testament typology, the Jordan is the river of death. It has its source in the [the hills of] Hermons, flows through a torturous valley, winding & twisting on its way, and buries itself at last in the waters of the Dead Sea 1290 feet below the sea level of the Mediterranean. From there the Jordan never emerges again." (The Dead Sea has been named appropriately because all of the Jordan's muck, mire, & filth flow into this sea where nothing can live due to its extremely high salt content.) So, with this in mind...

Reminiscent of how Moses baptized Israel in the Red Sea when he parted it and how Joshua brought Israel into their new relationship and responsibility toward God through the parting of the Jordan River, Elijah similarly baptized Elisha in the Jordan when he parted it, inaugurating his new mission for God: Second Kings 2:7b-8 read, **Elijah and Elisha ... stopped at the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.** Likewise...

John, the NT Elijah, baptized Jesus into "death" in inauguration of His mission as **The Prophet** (John 6:14) who'd suffer/die for us. Further...

- C. As Elijah was leaving his office, Elisha received a **double portion** of Elijah's spirit upon him (2 Kgs. 2:9-11)—language of sonship and inheritance (cf. Deu. 21:17); Elisha even called Elijah his father (2 Kgs. 2:12). Likewise, as John's work began coming to an end at Jesus' baptism (John 3:30), Jesus received the **full measure** of God's Spirit (John 3:34) along with God's acknowledgement concerning Jesus being His well-pleasing Son. And lastly...
- D. Once Elisha started his lone mission, he began performing many miracles (2 Kgs. 2, 3, et.al.); likewise, once Jesus began His mission, He performed many awe-inspiring miracles. So...

Those who knew the prophecies concerning the Messiah's forerunner who'd mirror Elijah should've recognized what all was occurring right before their eyes, especially since John specifically laid it out for them in John 1:32-34.

By being baptized of John immediately within the context of John's coming kingdom message (Mat. 3:1-2), Jesus demonstrated His approval of both the message and the baptism of John. So...

Not only was His being signified as The Prophet indicated at His baptism, but there's also the important connection between Jesus' baptism and His priesthood.

The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would be a priest.

In a merely symbolic ceremony, prefiguring the coming Christ, God told the prophet Zechariah to crown Joshua (the son of Jehozadak, not the son of Nun) as King and High Priest (6:9-15); verse 13 records God as saying, **It is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And He will be a priest on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two,** i.e. the offices of king and priest. Incidentally...

As you probably remember, the name "Jesus" is the Greek counter-name for "Joshua." Also...

Speaking of Joshua building the temple as a picture of Christ building it, in Hebrews 3:1-6 Paul wrote of our High Priest Jesus as being found worthy to build the house of God.

When Paul was establishing Jesus as the prophesied and eternal High Priest of God, he (in Hebrews 5—6) alluded to Psalm 110:4 where king David prophesied of the Messiah, saying, **The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek"** (cf. Heb. 8:1, 9:11, & 10:21).

Here's what's interesting about Jesus' baptism and His priesthood.

Firstly, in Exodus 29:1a & 4b, God through Moses spoke clearly about the washings to which men submitted in order to become priests: **This is what you're to do to consecrate them.... Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water.** (In Heb. 6:2 Paul listed "baptisms" as part of Old Testament requirements, and the original term used there is always used for Old Covenant washings as in Exodus 29.)

Secondly, in Numbers 4, God mentioned seven times that the Levites could only be priests beginning at the age of 30. And how old was Jesus when He was baptized? According to Luke 3:23 He was 30; and if this wasn't the specific reason that Luke recorded Jesus' age, then I'm at a total loss as to why this was important enough to even mention. And...

Thirdly, after Jesus demonstrated His authority as God's chosen, eternal High Priest by cleansing the temple, He was asked, **By what authority are You doing these things? ... And who gave You this authority?** (Mat. 21:23). Remember how He responded? He replied in verses 24-27 by alluding to ... John's baptism—the baptism to which He submitted and after which He was endorsed by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit! (Acts 10:37-38 say that Jesus was anointed by God with the Spirit at His baptism by John.)

Some of the very things I just stated here bring to my mind something else very interesting in the relationship between Jesus and John's baptism. Let's briefly consider why Jesus' baptism is the first event mentioned after Jesus was found in temple at the age of 12. What happened in that 18 years? I now believe Jesus was going through the school of rabbinical training that culminated at His baptism by John and for good reason. Consider...

The concept of "the yoke" (such as when Jesus in Mat. 11 spoke of taking *His* yoke upon them) was a rabbinical concept; each rabbi who had been through 18 years of what was called "Beit Talmud" (the house of learning) was considered a rabbi, but only after he was baptized with two witnesses as actually graduating with what was called "semikhah" (which means "one with authority") could He make the "take my yoke upon you and learn from Me" statement. And...

As we've already noticed, at the end of 18 years of Jesus being in obscurity, He's baptized by an accepted prophet of the people with two witnesses (viz. John & Yahweh Himself) attesting to His authority (which is why it was to John's baptism that Jesus pointed when asked by the Scribes and Pharisees for His authority to teach what He was teaching). Following His baptism Jesus was often and without hesitation called "rabbi" and a rabbi with a following who was teaching *His* version of truth, which obviously regularly went against and even indicted Jewish leaders (cf. Mat. 7:29).

Now we know why Jesus wasn't baptized earlier, such as at the age of 12, for example, as we'll see even more momentarily, the age of 30 not only corresponded to being a priest, but it also corresponded to being a recognized rabbi among the people; baptism was the accepted way to signify a change in one's social/religious status among the Hebrew people. And what do we find Jesus doing in His very first teaching? Pointing the people to what He says in contrast to what they've always heard. ☺ Well...

Not only was Jesus revealed to Israel as God's Prophet and everlasting High Priest when He was baptized by John, but it seems that He was also revealed to Israel as their prophesied and eternal King.

A few moments ago I referred to the symbolic coronation of Joshua to the office of High Priest AND King. Remember? That's found in Zechariah 6:9-15. Besides that, however...

God spoke often concerning how the Messiah would sit upon the throne of David.

In Acts 2:30, Peter said to the Pentecostians about David that he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16).

In Luke 1:32b-33, the angel Gabriel said to Mary about Jesus that The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end, or as the NKJV says, Of His kingdom there will be no end. Related to this...

In Isaiah 9:7, God prophesied of the Messiah-King saying, Of the increase of His government [i.e. His kingdom] ... there will be no end. He will reign ... over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. (Cf. Isa. 22:20-23 w/ Rev. 3:7.)

Not only was Jesus of the kingly lineage of David (Mat. 1:1-17) and born in the city of David (Luke 2:11), but He was also anointed at the same age as David—the age of 30 (2 Sam. 5:1-4 & Luke 3:23). So...

## **In Conclusion...**

There were two reasons specified for Jesus' baptism.

Jesus said it was to fulfill all righteousness, depicting His perfect obedience to all God's commands and enduring the baptism of suffering and death necessary to effect this righteousness—the righteousness of God—for our reconciliation. And...

John said it was to reveal the Messiah to Israel, depicting His coronation as God's eternal Prophet, Priest, and King, all of whom were *anointed* to their offices in Old Testament times (1 Kgs. 19:6, Num. 3:3, & 1 Kgs. 1:34-39). So...

Jesus' baptism wasn't a minor event in our Lord's life—it was a very significant one!

[Tony E. Denton, 7/08; Slightly edited to use in Tucson, 3/11. [AsiteForTheLord.com](http://AsiteForTheLord.com). Altered and used last at home in Oct. 2015.]