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The **MEANING** of **Baptism**



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The Meaning of **BAPTISM** in the New Testament

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

THE subject of baptism occupies a prominent place in New Testament Christianity. Yet within Christendom at large, it is characterized by considerable variety and diversity of opinion—if not outright confusion and contradiction. Some churches insist that baptism entails **sprinkling** water on the head of the recipient. Others practice **pouring** water on the recipient's head. Still others maintain that the entire body of the candidate must be **immersed/submerged** in water. Comparable variation exists regarding the design/purpose of baptism. Some insist that baptism **follows** salvation, thus serving as an after-the-fact symbol—"an outward sign of an inward grace." Others indicate that baptism enables the Christian to achieve **church membership**. Still others hold that baptism is the point at which the recipient contacts the blood of Christ and **receives forgiveness of sin**.

How may such differing perspectives be resolved? Is the New Testament the author of such variation and confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33)? Is it possible for us to momentarily suspend our beliefs pertaining to baptism, take our Bibles, turn to the very beginning of the New Testament, and simply work our way through its pages—with no preconceived ideas, no expectations, and no biases in our efforts to arrive at the truth? Can

we take notice of every allusion to baptism, and allow the Bible to explain, clarify, define, and express its own parameters for the doctrine of baptism?¹

Matthew

We begin in Matthew. After a chapter on genealogies and a chapter on the birth of Christ, we come to Matthew chapter 3. We are introduced to John the baptizer—the word “baptizer” being a form of the word “baptism”—indicating that John engages in the action we are seeking to comprehend. We are informed that upon listening to John's preaching, “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5-6). From this statement, we come to realize two factors: (1) the action of baptizing was done in water, specifically, a river; (2) the baptizing of people had something to do with their **sins**—which they confessed.

On the same occasion, many Pharisees and Sadducees had “com[e] to his baptism” (Matthew 3:7), but John insisted that they must “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (3:8)—thus indicating that repentance must **precede** baptism. What's more, John announced to them, “I indeed baptize you with **water** unto repentance...” (Matthew 3:11).² Hence, as already discovered,

John's baptism involved **water**. But the action of baptism does not necessarily always entail the use of water, since John proceeded to flag the fact that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.³ Nevertheless, Jesus, Himself, came to John to also be baptized in water (Matthew 3:13). At first, John resisted complying with Jesus' request.⁴ But then he complied, and we are informed that Jesus “came up immediately from the water” (Matthew 3:16) which, again, indicates that baptism involved water and, after receiving the act, one “comes up from” the water.⁵

The next notable occurrence of the term is found in Jesus' question posed to the disciples: “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” (Matthew 20:22). The query is obviously intended to be taken figuratively, anticipating the suffering that Jesus would face, followed by the suffering that the disciples would face. However, we cannot ascertain, specifically, what the action of “baptized” is from this figurative allusion.

To finish out Matthew's Gospel account, we encounter Jesus' charge to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). From this allusion to the literal use of “baptizing” we learn that the way the apostles were to “make disciples” included the act of baptizing them.

Mark

We turn to the book of Mark. Excluding the parallel passages that we examined in Matthew, we encounter Mark's wording of

Jesus' commission issued to the 11 apostles before His departure from Earth: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). From this declaration we learn that the salvation that characterizes the Christian Era involves both belief and baptism.

Luke

Luke's Gospel account includes many of the same allusions to baptism found in Matthew and Mark—with one exception. Luke points out concerning the baptism that John and Jesus administered: "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Luke 7:30). Hence, to reject John's baptism was to reject the will of God.

John

Moving to the Gospel of John, we find a remark that deepens our understanding of the action of baptism: "Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was **much** water there" (John 3:23). Granted, the term "much" is a relative term. A bucket of water is "much" compared to a thimble of water. Nevertheless, for the text to allude to quantity implies that the action of baptism is more than sprinkling. After all, if baptism in the New Testament entails merely sprinkling water on a person, one could "baptize" scores, even hundreds, of persons with only a barrel of water.

Acts

We turn to the book of Acts. After noticing Jesus' follow-up remark concerning the apostles' impending baptism of the Holy Spirit in chapter 1, the next helpful insight may be gleaned from Peter's response to the Jews' question con-

cerning what they needed to do to get right with God: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). From this declaration we again see that repentance must precede baptism, and we also once again see that baptism is connected to forgiveness of sin. In fact, until one is baptized, he cannot receive the gift of the Spirit. We also, once again, see that to refuse baptism is to refuse the Word of God—since we are informed that on that occasion "those who gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41).

In chapter 8, the Gospel commences to be preached for the first time to the Samaritans. Their reaction is decisive: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12). Again, we can only conclude that baptism was an integral part of the proper response—not only to John's and Jesus' baptizing prior to the advent of Christianity in Acts 2—but also to the Gospel which commenced **after** Jesus' ascension.

We then come to Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch. The text states that Philip "preached Jesus to him" (Acts 8:35). The passage then reports:

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:36-39).

From this single text, we learn at least three insights in our quest to understand the meaning of "baptism" in the New Testament. First, we once again see that water is involved. Second, we see that belief must precede baptism. Third, the fact that both the baptizer and the one being baptized "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water" suggests that something more than merely sprinkling water on the recipient is needed. Sprinkling could have been achieved by Philip simply retrieving a small amount of water from the water source.

In the next chapter, we observe the baptism of Saul, soon to be known as the apostle Paul. After encountering Jesus, Himself, in a vision, and being blinded, he asks the Lord what he must do. The

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Lord states: “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6). He spends the next three days in a miserable state, without sight and without nourishment. The Lord then sends Ananias to restore Saul’s sight and to explain to him God’s desires for him. Upon his arrival, Ananias explains:

“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened (Acts 9:17-19).

We learn from this episode that Saul had not received the Holy Spirit prior to baptism when he encountered Jesus while on the road to Damascus. In fact, when Paul later recounts his own experience, he clarifies very specifically that, after Ananias explained God’s plan for Paul to serve as the great “apostle to the Gentiles,” Ananias then asked Paul very pointedly: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Hence, we learn—once again—that baptism precedes the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, according to Ananias’ words, water baptism is the means by which one is able to “call on the name of the Lord.”

In chapter 10, we are treated to the conversion of the first Gentiles. After receiving direct visions from God chiding Peter for his reluctance to endorse the inclusion of Gentiles into the Kingdom of Christ, Peter visited the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. The centurion explained to Peter that he had experienced his own vision from God directing him to seek out Peter who would teach him. He concluded: “Now therefore, we are all

present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (Acts 10:33). Peter was now duly impressed with the significance of his own visions and articulated to those present that Gentiles were fit candidates for becoming Christians. So God miraculously intervened to verify the right of the Gentiles to be inducted into the Kingdom by empowering them to speak in tongues. Peter then drew the right conclusion concerning this divine intervention that verified the legitimacy of Gentile inclusion and so asked the entire assemblage: “Can anyone forbid **water**, that these should not be **baptized** who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he **commanded** them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47-48). From this fascinating incident, we learn once again that (1) baptism occurs in water and (2) baptism is a command with which one must comply to be accepted into the Kingdom.

In chapter 16, we see the businesswoman Lydia, a worshiper of God, who visited Philippi and met with other women beside a river for prayer. When Paul spoke to her the Gospel, “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were **baptized**, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay’” (Acts 16:14-15). Once again, baptism is integrally involved in a proper response to the preached Word. Further, this incident suggests that one is not counted “faithful to the Lord” until **after** one is baptized.

Later in the same chapter, the Philippian jailor asks Paul what to do to be saved. Paul initially tells him he must “[b]elieve on the Lord Jesus,” but then “spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:31-32). The text then states: “And he took

them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:33). From this incident, we observe that, while one must **believe** in Jesus to be saved, one must hear the Word of the Lord to grasp how to do so. Though this teaching occurred in the middle of the night, baptism was of such significance that the jailor and his entire family were baptized that night. Further, the jailor’s “rejoic[ing]” (Acts 16:34) did not occur until **after** his baptism.

In chapter 18, we are informed very succinctly that “many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). This is the pattern we have seen from the beginning. In the next chapter, Paul encountered individuals in the city of Ephesus who had been taught (probably by Apollos—18:25) concerning the baptism of John, but had not been brought up to date concerning the transition from pre-cross to post-cross religion with the advent of Christianity in Acts 2. Once they learned that Christ had come and launched His religion, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). We cannot help but begin to conclude that water baptism is of such importance that all who would receive Christ must submit to it—immediately.

Romans

Proceeding to the New Testament epistles, we encounter Paul’s rebuke of the Romans, who were apparently continuing in the sinful lifestyle they lived prior to becoming Christians. Paul chided them:

How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that

just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:2-4).

From these verses, we learn two critical insights regarding baptism: (1) when a person is baptized, he is baptized **into Christ's death**—which surely is intended to signify how to access the location where Christ's blood was shed. This observation is reinforced by Paul's remark a few verses later: "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart **that form of doctrine** to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17). The term "form" (*tupos*) surely harks back to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which is reenacted in the act of baptism as a death to sin, a burial in water, and a resurrection from that watery grave—which Paul says results in a new life (vs. 4).

(2) A second critical insight that arises from this passage is Paul's use of the term "buried." If the fact that baptism entails **immersion** was not clear before, this passage cinches that fact.

1 Corinthians

Moving to 1 Corinthians, Paul's lengthy discussion of the dire division among the Corinthian Christians precipitated his allusion to baptism (1 Corinthians 1:13-17). He insisted that aligning themselves with various other persons rather than Christ alone was to be condemned and contradicted based on two crucial factors that determine whether a person may claim they are "of" someone else: (1) whether that person was **crucified** for you and (2) whether you were **baptized** into that person's name. In other words, the crucifixion and one's own immersion in water are critical **prerequisites** to salvation. This circumstance lends further credence to the previous observations we have seen concerning the

purpose of baptism, i.e., for the forgiveness of sin. This understanding in the context is further bolstered by Paul's thankfulness that he had personally baptized very few among them—not because baptism is unessential to salvation—but because he did not want them claiming that he had baptized them in his own name (vs. 15). In other words, Paul's job was to present the Gospel message (vs. 17). It was the responsibility of his hearers to access the effects of Christ's crucifixion by being baptized in the name of Jesus.

In chapter 10, Paul explains to the Corinthians that "all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were **baptized** into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Corinthians 10:1-2). Referring to the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites, it would appear that Paul used the word "baptized" to allude to the fact that the nation was **surrounded** by water. Exodus indicates that "the waters were divided" (14:21), i.e., God caused the waters of the Red Sea to divide, forming a wall of water on their left and a wall of water on their right. The cloudy pillar (water in the atmosphere) surrounded them as well (vs. 19). Even without knowing the meaning of the Greek word for "baptize" ("to dip, plunge, immerse"),⁶ simply forming our conclusion from the English text, it would appear that the baptism of the children of Israel entailed complete submergence in water. Verse 29 further supports this conclusion: "But the children of Israel had walked on dry land **in the midst** of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left."

Another allusion to baptism in 1 Corinthians consists of Paul stating that "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (12:13). Baptism is, thereby, the entrance-way into the body of Christ in accordance with the Spirit's instructions

(cf. John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26). Paul's reference to some unnamed persons who were "baptized for the dead" (15:29) is of little help in assessing the meaning of "baptism."

Galatians

In Galatians, Paul explained to the churches of Galatia: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). We learn from this affirmation that (1) baptism is the point at which persons become "sons of God through faith" and (2) the point at which a person becomes clothed with Christ.

Ephesians

From the Ephesian letter, we learn the significant fact that there is "one baptism" (4:5). Since the Bible teaches that there are different types of baptism (e.g., the baptism of suffering), Paul must be referring to the fact that there is only one baptism associated with the platform on which the Christian religion rests. Baptism is as integral to God's overall framework of Christianity as is the one God, one Lord, one Holy Spirit, one hope, one body, and one faith.

Colossians

Paul further clarified the design of baptism in his remarks to the Christians at Colossae:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, **buried** with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:11-12).

Observe three vital factors pertaining to baptism: (1) even as circumcision consists of the removal of skin from the physical body, so baptism removes **sin** from the spiritual

(cont. on p. 8)



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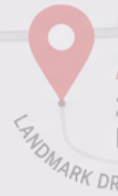
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body due to what Christ has done; (2) the action of baptism is again pinpointed as a **burial**; (3) echoing the same thoughts he presented to the Romans, Paul refers to coming up out of the waters of baptism as being raised/resurrected **with** Christ through **faith**. Baptism is no more excluded from the removal of sin than is faith in Christ. Both are essential to salvation.

I Peter

In his first epistle, Peter alludes to baptism in a context pertaining to Noah's contemporaries—

who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:20-21).

From this passage, we have additional insights that may be gleaned concerning baptism. The eight souls who were saved consisted of Noah, his wife, his three sons, and the sons' wives. They were saved "through water" in the sense that water was the medium God chose to separate the saved from the lost. The ark essentially passed **through** water to safety. Peter forthrightly states that water baptism serves as an "antitype" of this antediluvian salvation. How so? In the same way that Noah's family was saved from drowning by passing safely through the waters of the Flood, so people today can be saved by God when they pass through the waters of baptism.

But doesn't that place the cleansing agent in a physical substance? No, since Peter specified very clearly by what means sin is cleansed: the resurrection of Christ. "Resurrec-

tion" is no doubt used as a synecdoche to stand for the entire salvation event of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. By removing the parenthetical statement, we are left with this clarifying reality: "There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We are saved by the atoning work of Jesus **when** we pass through the waters of baptism.

CONCLUSION

BIBLE teaching pertaining to baptism is not actually difficult to understand—**when the Bible is allowed to speak for itself and "interpret" itself**. The matter has been complicated and confused by the theological meanderings of men. Taking **only** the New Testament, and taking the statements of the New Testament at face value, allowing them to shape our understanding of **what baptism is** (as it pertains to salvation), we arrive at the following simple but profound conclusions:

- Baptism occurs in water.
- Baptism is a burial—involving total immersion in water.
- Baptism is to be preceded by repentance.
- Baptism is the point at which God makes a person a disciple of Christ.
- Baptism, coupled with belief and preceded by repentance, is the point at which a person is saved, receiving remission of sins.
- Baptism is the contact point with the death (and, therefore, blood) of Christ.
- One can no more be saved without water baptism than one can be saved without the crucifixion of Christ.
- Baptism is the point at which one becomes a son of God and is clothed with Christ.

- Baptism is the point at which sin is "cut off."
- Baptism is the point at which the resurrection of Christ saves the individual.
- Baptism is the point at which a person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

A simple perusal of the New Testament quickly reveals what baptism is and its importance to the divine scheme of redemption.

ENDNOTES

¹ Including derivatives, the terms include βαπτισμα, βαπτίζω, βαπτισμός, βαπτιστής, βάπτω.

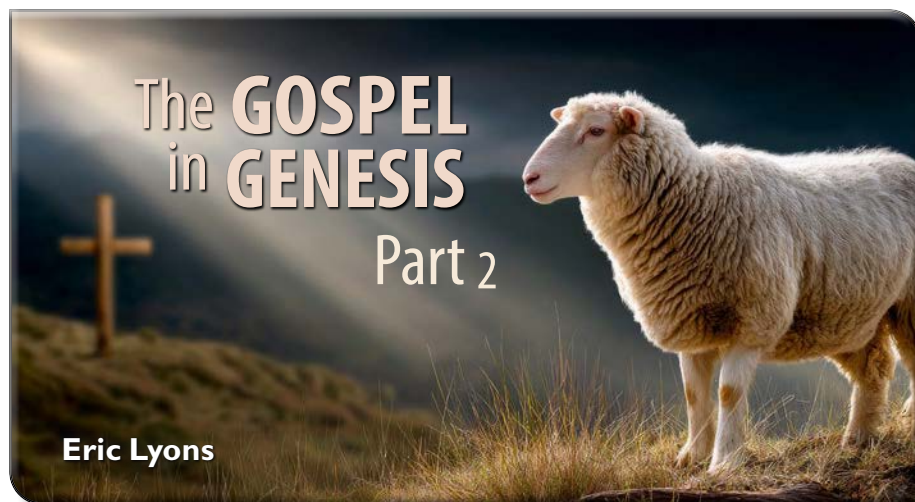
² Use of the Greek preposition "into" (*eis*), rendered "unto" in the NKJV, indicates that John insisted that the recipients of his baptism understand that they must "repent" (change their thinking concerning their sinful behavior) prior to baptism so that they would subsequently live a **penitent lifestyle**. They were to be baptized "into" the course of life demanded by John's preaching.

³ As it turned out, John was referring to the miraculous bestowal of the power of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 upon the 12 apostles and the first Gentiles in Acts 10. See Acts 1:5. The allusion to the baptism of fire was a foreshadowing of hell to which Jesus will assign the disobedient. See Matthew 5:22; 10:28; 11:23; 23:15. For discussions, see <https://apologeticspress.org/modern-day-miracles-tongue-speaking-and-holy-spirit-baptism-a-refutation-extended-version-1399/> and <https://apologeticspress.org/gentiles-received-the-spirit-before-baptism/>.

⁴ No doubt because he understood that Jesus was sinless and, consequently, not in need of the baptism he administered—which we are informed was "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). Jesus' insistence that John baptize Him anyway was due to the fact that Jesus' baptism served a completely different purpose that was unique to Himself—later explained by John in John 1:29-34. The purpose of Jesus' baptism was to authenticate His divine identity to His contemporaries. Also Luke 3:21-22.

⁵ The Greek grammar of the phrase means literally "to go up from."

⁶ English translators do the English speaking world a disservice by **transliterating** the letters of the Greek term *baptisma* rather than simply **translating** the word.



IN Genesis, as throughout the Old Testament, the Messiah is revealed not only in promises and prophecies, but also through real people, places, and events that serve as living illustrations of Someone much greater. These divinely arranged “pictures”—which we often call types, figures, and foreshadowings—subtly anticipate and illuminate the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

A BELOVED SON OFFERED

GENESIS 22 includes one of the most puzzling accounts in all of Scripture. God instructed his faithful servant Abraham, saying, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and **offer him there as a burnt offering**” (22:2). How could an all-good, all-loving God Who despises human sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31; Leviticus 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 18:10) command Abraham to sacrifice his son?

Though this serious ethical question is answered more thoroughly in articles and videos on the Apologetics Press website (apologeticspress.org), let me briefly offer the following response here: (1) God never intended for Isaac to actually die at Abraham’s hand: *God’s command was a “test,”* as stated in verse one of the chapter (cf. Hebrews

11:17)—and God’s tests are meant to strengthen us, not cause us to sin (Exodus 20:20; cf. John 6:5-6; James 1:13). (2) As an omniscient God, He knew that He was going to step in and stop Abraham from ever actually killing Isaac. (3) Had Abraham literally sacrificed Isaac, he would have disobeyed God, since (a) this was a test, and (b) at the moment when Abraham was about to slay his son, “[T]he Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!... **Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him**’” (Genesis 22:11-12).

But why? Why did God test Abraham with the strangest and severest of commands? What could be more difficult to hear God say? What could be more difficult to do? Why is this baffling story in the Bible?

As with most of our “why” questions, the sovereign God of the Universe does not directly answer these for us (nor does He have to). Undoubtedly, His command to Abraham and the preservation of this account in Scripture serve multiple purposes (cf. Hebrews 11:17-19), whether we know of them or not. However, based upon the theme of Genesis, of the Bible as a whole, and the placement of this story directly between two specific Messianic promises (Genesis

21:12 and 22:18), surely this account serves primarily to **foreshadow the coming of the Messiah**—the sacrificed, beloved Son of God on Calvary.

When we step back and consider the details of Genesis 22, the parallels between Isaac and Jesus are too numerous—and too specific—to ignore.

- Isaac was a promised son (Genesis 17:19; 21:12), just as Jesus was the promised Son announced to Mary (Luke 1:30-33).
- Isaac’s birth required divine intervention, since Sarah was barren and beyond childbearing age (Genesis 11:30; 18:11-14), while Jesus was conceived miraculously in the virgin Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23; Luke 1:34-35).
- Isaac is called Abraham’s “only” son (Genesis 22:2)—his unique, beloved son (cf. Hebrews 11:17; Greek *monogenes*)—just as Jesus is the uniquely begotten (*monogenes*) Son of God (John 3:16; Matthew 3:17).
- Abraham took wood for the burnt offering and “laid it on Isaac his son,” which Isaac carried for his own sacrifice up Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:6). Jesus carried His wooden cross toward Golgotha for His own sacrifice (John 19:17).
- As there is no hint of struggling on Isaac’s part in Genesis 22, it



seems that he willingly submitted to his father's will to be sacrificed. Jesus likewise declared that He laid down His life of His own accord (John 10:17-18).

- Abraham was willing to offer up his son (Genesis 22:9-12; Hebrews 11:17), and two thousand years later God "did not spare His own Son" (Romans 8:32).
- A ram "*just happened*" to be provided as a substitute in Isaac's place (Genesis 22:13), surely pointing forward to Jesus—the true Lamb of God (John 1:29)—Who gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 3:18).
- Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac—through whom God had promised to bless all nations—because he knew that God could raise him from the dead, "from which he also received him back as a type" (Hebrews 11:19, NASB)—as a symbolic representation. And what was this figurative event foreshadowing? Surely the triumphant resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20; Romans 4:24-25).

Individually, all of these similarities are striking. Together, they form a powerful picture: long before Calvary, God was quietly preaching the Gospel on Mount Moriah. There, a father learned what it meant to trust God with his son—so that one day the world might better understand what it meant for God to give His.

A SUBSTITUTE PROVIDED

THE Bible's picture of the penalty for sin and the cost of redemption goes back even earlier than Genesis 22. In fact, when sin entered the world in Genesis 3, we immediately—however so subtly—begin to see what salvation from sin will cost.

Some 2,000 years before Abraham named the place where God provided a substitute for Isaac,

"The-LORD-Will-Provide (*YHWH Yireh*)," God provided in the Garden for Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:21 says, "[T]he LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." Implied in this short statement is the fact that *God shed the blood of an animal for Adam and Eve*.

The Creator of the Universe did not *become* perfectly holy (unable to fellowship sinners) and perfectly just (demanding punishment for sin) after making a covenant with Abraham or after giving Abraham's descendants the Law of Moses. The spiritual truth that "blood...makes atonement for the soul" was not some new idea in Leviticus 17:11 (some 2,500 years after sin entered the world). The fundamental, divine truth that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22) has always been true.

Before Abraham sacrificed the substitutionary ram (Genesis 22); before Noah offered animal "burnt offerings on the altar" following the Flood that destroyed a wicked world (8:20-21); before Abel "brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat" as an offering to the LORD (4:4); *God shed the blood*

of an animal in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve's sin (3:21). Even before they fully understood the depth of their need, God graciously acted to provide for Adam and Eve. Indeed, such a substitutionary sacrifice seems implied in the animal covering of Genesis 3:21.

One cannot help but wonder what Adam and Eve were thinking as they watched an animal being killed because of their sin. On that day, the innocent life of an animal was taken because of their sin. *God covered sinners with a substitute*. From the first sin onward, forgiveness would not come cheaply—it would come covered in blood.

Today, God calls upon sinners to no longer walk in the lusts of the world, but to "*put on* the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have **clothed yourselves with Christ**" (Galatians 3:27, NASB). Indeed, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) graciously and mercifully makes sinners fit for God's holy presence, having "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

SPEAKING SCHEDULES

Kyle Butt

July 1	Hoover, AL	(205) 822-5610
July 8	Spring Hill, TN	(931) 486-2104
July 9-11	Paintsville, KY	(606) 789-6219

Eric Lyons

July 5	Columbia, TN	(931) 388-7334
July 10	Hope Hull, AL	(334) 281-6020
July 16-18	Branson, MO	(877) 338-3397

Dave Miller

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July 10-12	Huntersville, NC	(704) 895-1155

Jeff Miller

July 30-Aug. 1	Williamstown, KY	(334) 272-8558
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Aubrey Strickland

July 22	Buford, GA	(770) 945-8620
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A MEDIATOR GRANTING ACCESS TO HEAVEN

GENESIS not only foreshadows the ultimate substitute for our sins, but it also provides a brief symbol of “the way” to God. In Genesis 28, the LORD reminded Jacob in a dream of the promise He made to his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham—“in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (28:14). In this dream, “a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it” (28:12-13). When Jacob awoke astonished, saying, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is **the gate of heaven!**... And he called the name of the place Bethel” (28:16-17,19), meaning “house of God.”

Jacob had this dream as he was fleeing from his brother Esau, who was threatening to kill him for stealing Esau’s firstborn-blessing from their father (see 27:1-41). This theft followed Jacob’s exploitation of Esau, craftily leveraging Esau’s weariness and hunger to secure his birthright. Indeed, Jacob practiced deceit (27:35), and Esau responded after these two instances, saying, “Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!” (27:36).

Recalling these events, as well as the meaning of “Jacob” (“supplanter” or “deceiver”), is important as readers ponder a particular New Testament passage—John 1:43-51. Upon learning of the identity of Jesus, Philip the apostle finds his friend Nathanael to tell him: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” When the initially skept-

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onward, forgive-
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tical Nathanael sees Jesus for the first time, Jesus says to him, “Behold, an Israelite in whom is **no deceit!**”

Unlike Jacob the “supplanter,” Nathanael was a thoroughly honest man. And when he received only a small piece of evidence for the Messiahship of Jesus, he immediately responded, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49). To which Jesus responded: “You will see greater things than these.... Truly, truly, I say to you, **you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man**” (1:50-51, ESV).

In Genesis 28, Jacob dreamed of a ladder bridging Earth and heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending, and the LORD standing above it. In John 1:51, the only explicit reference to Jacob’s dream outside Genesis 28, Jesus refers to the angels ascending and descending *upon Him*. He is the reality of Jacob’s dream! He is the bridge from Earth to heaven. He is the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5). He is “the way” to the Father in heaven (John 14:6), and no one enters the Father’s presence except through Him (John 14:6). He is the “gate” into heaven (John 10:9, NIV). The Son of Man is the one and only access point for all peoples (Ephesians 2:18)! This truth was faintly foreshadowed in Jacob’s dream all the way back in Genesis 28.

CONCLUSION: THE GOSPEL FORESHADOWED IN GENESIS

AS far back as Genesis, God was illustrating the way for sinful humans to somehow be found acceptable in God’s sight and have access into His perfectly pure presence. Atonement for sins and restored fellowship with our holy God cannot be “achieved” through mere *confession* or *regret* of sin. Access to God could never be “earned” by some meritorious—even herculean—effort on our part. We can’t force our way back to the Father.

Adam and Eve were deserving of death. We are deserving of death! (Romans 1:32). “[T]he wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). “**But God**, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses” (Ephesians 2:4-5) began to show us all the way back in Genesis—in the Garden of Eden, on Mount Moriah, and at Bethel—that He had a plan. A substitutionary Lamb would shed His blood and give His life in order to grant sinners access to God’s presence. “[B]y the blood of Jesus” we can “draw near” to the Father (Hebrews 10:19-22)—the greatest truth the world has ever heard, foreshadowed all the way back in Genesis.

[Part three of this article will appear in next month’s issue of *R&R*.]



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NOTE FROM

The Editor



AP Staff Spotlight: Aubrey Strickland, Bible Department

It's not every day that Apologetics Press adds a full-time member to its Bible Department. When we do, we pray for someone who genuinely loves the Lord, is grounded in Scripture with a high view of God's Word, and possesses both the character and ability to help advance AP's mission for years to come. We believe God has blessed us with such a person in Aubrey Strickland, our newest team member, who started at AP last month.

I first met Aubrey in March 2023 on a mission trip to Panama when he was a senior at Freed-Hardeman University. Two memories of him stand out from that trip. First, hearing him teach a well-prepared Bible lesson on Sunday morning. Second, losing to him in a ping-pong game—which I did not see coming. Thankfully, he was a gracious victor. More importantly, I was impressed by his maturity, thoughtfulness, and steady demeanor, especially as a young man in his early 20s.

Over the past three years, I have had the opportunity to watch his development from afar and speak with several individuals who know him well. Without exception, they have spoken highly of his



mature Christian character, doctrinal soundness, work ethic, and potential.

Aubrey graduated from Freed-Hardeman University in 2023 with a B.A. in Biblical Text and completed his Master's degree in Old Testament earlier this year. For the past two years, he has served as youth minister with the Central church of Christ in Moore, Oklahoma.

As a member of AP's Bible Department, Aubrey will assist with research and writing projects, edit many AP materials, answer Bible-related inquiries, work with AP's auxiliary writers, coordinate our Bible internship program, and help develop a variety of future biblical and apologetics resources for all ages. Lord willing, he will help strengthen and expand AP's work for years to come.

We are truly thankful that Aubrey and his sweet wife, Abigail, have joined the AP family. We believe he will be a tremendous asset to the work, and we look forward to seeing how God uses him in the years ahead. Please join us in welcoming Aubrey to Apologetics Press.

Eric Lyons
Executive Director