

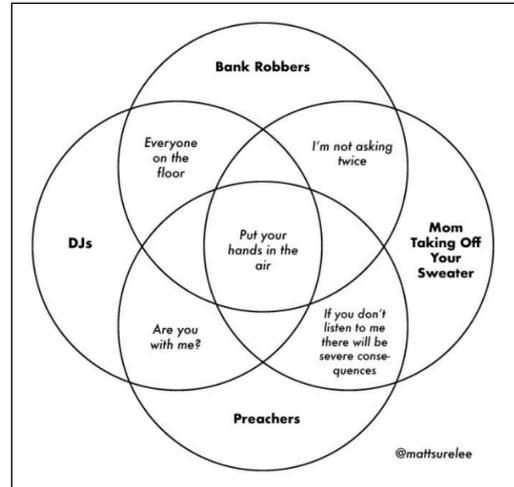
WAS JOHN'S BAPTISMA METANOIAS UNIQUE?

By Benjamin J. Snyder

1. Introduction

[slide 2]

Not long ago, this Venn diagram circulated on social media. Apart from its humor, it illustrates well the importance of *context* in interpretation. Notice, I did not say *background*. In Biblical Studies, we are accustomed to speak about *backgrounds* rather than *context*. That is, “Christianity” forms the *context* of our NT texts while the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds form the *background*.



Thus, if we *prefer* a given background as a key to interpretation, we move it to a more prominent place in interpretation and call it *context*. Likewise, if we do *not* prefer a given *context*, we may still discuss it while at the same time relegating it “safely” to the *background*. That is, it is interesting but it does not impact interpretation or it is unclear how. This is a mistake because it wrongly implies that our NT texts are distinct from the so-called backgrounds.

Returning to the Venn diagram, the bare phrase, “put your hands in the air,” means the same thing in all of these contexts since one’s hands are in the air. But once the context is known, it vastly changes the interpreted meaning of the phrase because having one’s hands in the air inextricably relates to a complex web of social implications. Since human communication and behavior *always* takes place in a context, interpreting the meaning of “put your hands in the air” depends on the proper identification of the context in which the statement and action takes place. Obviously, if one changes the context, the implication of the phrase and action takes on an entirely different meaning.

For the remainder of this presentation, I will demonstrate that many scholars incorrectly claim that John’s “baptism” is unique precisely because it is discussed against a variety of backgrounds and it is never contextualized. [slide 3] These backgrounds include: mystery religion baptism, Qumran baptism, proselyte baptism, or some washing of the HB such as priestly initiation. While there are numerous angles that one could take in examining this question, this essay challenges a specific piece of conventional wisdom, namely, that John’s baptism is *unlike* other ritual washing of his context because it is related somehow to repentance. That is, scholars assume that the

integration of repentance *distinguishes* John from his context and this is expressed in a variety of ways, such as that John adapts, transforms, transcends, or supersedes whatever he borrows by integrating repentance with it. As a final note, I translate “baptism” as immersion for the rest of the presentation. This is what the term meant in antiquity and since this is the focus of my presentation (i.e., antiquity), it should not bother anyone because I am making no claims about modern practice.

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The rest of this presentation will proceed as follows. First, since this is GRK and I believe that understanding the language of our sources is a first step in proper interpretation, I discuss the grammatical possibilities for the meaning of βάπτισμα μετανοίας “immersion of repentance.” Second I consider six texts in which washing is performed for ritual purification and is connected to repentance in some manner. I must warn you that the first one of them is in Hebrew. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about how these texts should impact the context in which we situate the phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας or “immersion of repentance.”

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2. βάπτισμα μετανοίας—What Does it Mean Grammatically?

[slide 6]

According to Mark 1:4 // Luke 3:3, John proclaimed a βάπτισμα μετανοίας.¹ Grammatically, βαπτισμά is the object of κηρύσσω, namely, what was proclaimed. and it is a cognate of βαπτίζω. The -μα ending emphasizes result. It is modified by the genitive case noun, μετανοίας.

Interpreting Cases

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Stanley E. Porter notes that the interpretation of cases depends on three things: (1) the meaning of the genitive case in general, (2) the syntactical relationship in which the form is used (i.e., its relationship with the words to which it is connected), and (3) the context (i.e., its relationship with the literary context).²

CONTEXT
SYNTAX
MEANING OF FORM

1. The Meaning of the Genitive Case

[slide 8]

1. Cf. Acts 13:24; 19:4

2. Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 82, fig. 2.

According to many grammarians, the genitive case serves to restrict or limit the meaning of the head noun in some way. How so exactly is debated.³

- Porter calls it “the case of restriction”;
- Wallace, “The case of qualification (or limitation as to kind).”
- Smyth, says it is the case “limits the meaning of a substantive on which it depends.”
- Robertson says, “The genitive shows διαίρεσιν (distinction) and something εἰδικόν [specific]. It is the case of genus (γένος) or kind.”

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More importantly, regardless of the way that the genitive may modify the head noun, it is *dependent on* the head noun. This is one reason that taking a symbolic view of John’s immersion in which the act of immersing in water is switched out for something else such as initiation or the expression of repentance is incorrect. For example, James D. G. Dunn says “John's baptism is the *expression of the repentance* which results in the forgiveness of sins.”⁴ That is, immersion only serves as a vehicle for something else. Yet, immersion did not mean this in antiquity and it is not grammatically possible. As Rodney J. Decker observes, citing BDAG, “In this context, the expression κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας means to preach that baptism is a necessity.”⁵

Unfortunately, grammarians classify the genitive case in numerous different ways. About this, Stanley E. Porter says, “The number of classificatory schemes of the genitive are almost as many as the various classifications themselves.”⁶ As an example, Daniel B. Wallace includes five categories with a total of *thirty three* different types of genitives!⁷ Here, I follow Porter’s ten categories of the genitive and note that only two are feasible for our case.⁸

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3. Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O’Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 22; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 77; Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges* (New York: American Book Company, 1920), 313; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hodder, 1919), 493.

4. James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 15.

5. Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 1-8: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 6.

6. Porter, *Idioms*, 92.

7. Wallace, *Greek*, 72.

8. Porter, *Idioms*, 92–97.

- (1) *Quality, definition or description*—“an immersion characterized by repentance”
- (2) *Partitive*—immersion is not a subset or part of repentance
- (3) *Possession, ownership, origin, or source*—“an immersion originating from repentance”
- (4) *Apposition/Epexegetical*—repentance is not a clarification of immersion
- (5) *Objective*—one does not immerse repentance
- (6) *Subjective*—repentance does not immerse something else
- (7) *Comparison*—there is no comparison
- (8) *Value/Price*—there is no price or value
- (9) *Time/Place*—there is no time or place
- (10) *Genitive of D.O.*—it is not the object of a verb

The descriptive category is rare according to Wallace and should only be used “when there are *no* contextual, lexemic, or other grammatical features that suggest a more specific nuance,”⁹ yet this is the category under which both Wallace and Porter list Mark 1:4. This would translate as “an immersion characterized by repentance.” However, none of the possible translations that Wallace proposes actually fit this category. He says,

There are various possible interpretations of this phrase: “baptism that is based on repentance” (causal), “baptism that points toward/produces repentance” (purpose or production), “baptism that symbolizes repentance.” In light of such ambiguity, it may well be best to be noncommittal: “baptism that is somehow related to repentance.”¹⁰

There is no such thing as a “causal genitive,” so a “baptism that is based on repentance” should be thought of in terms of source. Yet, he says, “Since this usage [i.e., source] is not common, it is not advisable to seek it as the most likely one for a particular genitive that may fit under another label.”¹¹ However, this *is* a legitimate way to interpret the phrase and exactly how James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner describe it when they say about βάπτισμα μετανολας, “it does not lead to, but springs from, repentance.” But oddly they discuss this under the subsection, “Objective and subjective genitive,” calling it a “subjective gen. of origin or cause.”¹²

9. Wallace, *Greek*, 78.

10. Wallace, *Greek*, 80.

11. Wallace, *Greek*, 109.

12. James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 3:211.

Wallace does have a category called a “genitive of direction” that could explain his translation, a “baptism that points toward/produces repentance,” but I am unconvinced that this is a valid category and other grammarians do not include it. Additionally, this would *invert* the order of the previous example, such that immersion would happen first and then repentance would follow. How immersion would produce repentance is unclear. And elsewhere Porter has argued about this phrase that “the syntax pushes for an understanding in which the governing noun, βάπτισμα, controls the relationship with the dependent genitive, μετανοίας.”¹³ Finally, the translation, a “baptism that symbolizes repentance,” is only possible as an epexegetical genitive. Thus, “John was proclaiming an immersion, that is, repentance.” This will hardly do.

In sum, we have two main options:

- a genitive of quality, definition, or description resulting in the translation, “an immersion characterized by repentance,” whatever that means, or
- a genitive of possession, origin, or source resulting in the translation, “an immersion originating from repentance”

2. *The Syntax of our Genitive Case*

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As already pointed out, the syntax of βάπτισμα μετανοίας is straightforward in that it is adnominal. And as we saw earlier, this just means the genitive says something about the head noun, not the other way around. Other syntactical possibilities include the genitive serving as a verbal object, predicate, genitive absolute, object of a Preposition, or in a genitive string.

3. *The Context of the Genitive Case*

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Now that we have considered the meaning of the genitive case and the syntax of our phrase, we now consider what the context may contribute. I refer again to Porter who says,

It is also grammatically inappropriate, on the basis of the syntax of this phrase, to posit the temporal relation between the two concepts of baptism and repentance as if they were

13. Stanley E. Porter, “Mark 1.4, Baptism and Translation,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R.E.O. White*, ed. Anthony R. Cross, 1st ed. (Sheffield, 1999), 81–98, 98.

events, or to specify the role that divinity and humanity play in the realization of them. These may be appropriate questions to ask in a larger theological context, but not of this phrase in its co-text. The grammar here does not say that John preached for people to repent and be baptized; it states that he preached a baptism (the accusative is the complement specifying the content of the verb of preaching) that is restricted by the concept of repentance, as opposed to other restricting factors (here unspecified). Although not specified, either baptism or repentance, or both, seem to lead (the local sense of the preposition) to forgiveness of sins (although agency is not expressed).¹⁴

I would prefer to say that it is grammatically *ambiguous* to posit a temporal relation between the two concepts rather than inappropriate. However, Porter is right to insist that it is the context that will answer this question, not the grammar, and βαπτισμά is clearly the D.O. Additionally, the language of “restricting factors” is somewhat deceiving since this implies that the genitive, μετανοίας, transforms βαπτισμά into a different class or type of immersion in comparison to others. But this is unnecessary since all the genitive does is ascribe an attribute to immersion. Herbert Weir Smyth says for example, “The genitive is akin in meaning to the adjective and may often be translated by an epithet.”¹⁵ Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk agree: “The genitive with the function of an adjective is the commonest way in which the case is used.”¹⁶

Of course, a genitive *may* be interpreted in a limiting way since as Wallace states, the “genitive limits as to quality while the accusative limits as to quantity,”¹⁷ but this is not required. **[slide 13]** For example, meat of a chicken and meat of a cow are different categories of meat, but they are still of the same class of food, namely, meat. **[slide 14]** Or, we could refer to a presentation of Greek, a presentation of persuasion, or a presentation of data. The limiting sense of each of these is located in the content of the presentation, but it does not change the fact all of these share the fact that they are presentations. Similarly, I argue that referring to John’s immersion as an immersion of repentance does not necessarily make it a different class of immersion from others. All that the Gospel authors are indicating by the phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας is that the immersion

14. Porter, “Mark 1.4,” 98. Robertson agrees, suggesting, “The resultant idea will naturally vary greatly according as the root-conception of the case is applied to different words and different contexts. But the varying element is not the case, but the words and the context. The error must not be made of mistaking the translation of the resultant whole for the case itself” (*Grammar*, 493–494).

15. Smyth, *Greek*, 313.

16. Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Robert Walter Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 89.

17. Wallace, *Greek*, 76.

is related to repentance somehow. To put it another way, immersion comes first, it is already there, and the descriptor, repentance, is added to it. The grammatical construction does not necessarily distinguish John's immersion of repentance against other immersions, we are the ones that postulate that.

[slide 15]

Let us now consider the context of Mark and Luke with recourse to Matthew and Josephus. Each of these provide narrative expansion to "immersion of repentance." Mark 1:5 states:

καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία χώρα καὶ οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες, καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ποταμῷ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.

There are two main verbal ideas. (1) The whole region of Judea was going out to John. (2) They were immersing themselves under John or were being immersed by him. The present participle, ἐξομολογούμενοι, "confessing," most likely is temporal with the present participle expressing contemporaneous time relative to the main verb.¹⁸ "They were being immersed by John while they were confessing their sins." Although confession and repentance are not identical, μετανοῖας entails a change of mind and behavior, which ἐξομολογέω would be related to. The most we can say is that immersion and confession of sin occurred in close proximity to one another, that the two actions were distinct, and that the main verbal idea is immersion..

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Luke 3:7–9 explains,

Ἔλεγεν οὖν τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ὄχλοις βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ· γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς; ποιήσατε οὖν καρποὺς ἀξίους τῆς μετανοίας καὶ μὴ ἄρξησθε λέγειν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς· πατέρα ἔχομεν τὸν Ἀβραάμ. λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι δύναται ὁ θεὸς ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων ἐγεῖραι τέκνα τῷ Ἀβραάμ. ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξίνη πρὸς τὴν ῥίζαν τῶν δένδρων κεῖται· πᾶν οὖν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.¹⁹

18. Wallace, *Grammar*, 614, 625.

19. So he began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" (NASB95)

With ἔλεγεν, we have an indication of what John proclaimed to the crowds who came to him. That is, they should bear fruit corresponding with repentance. The chronological relationship between the verbal actions appears to be this: (1) people came to John to immerse, (2) he preached to them about the coming judgment and visitation of God, enjoining them to repent, and (3) those who were committed to this course of action immersed. Thus, repentance came first and then people immersed as they confessed their sin.

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Turning to Matthew 3:1–2, 5–6, we do not find the “immersion of repentance” summary statement of Mark and Luke, but rather Matthew provides a snippet of what said.

Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις παραγίνεται Ἰωάννης ὁ βαπτιστῆς κηρύσσων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ τῆς Ἰουδαίας [καὶ] λέγων· μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. . . . Τότε ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία καὶ πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου, καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῳ ποταμῷ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν.²⁰

In Matthew, John’s proclamation is not immersion, but repent. Nevertheless, the same chronological relationship is discernible: (1) people came to John, (2) he preached to them about the coming judgment and visitation of God, enjoining them to repent, and (3) those who were committed to this course of action immersed and confessed their sins as they did so.

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Finally, Josephus (*Ant.* 18.5.2 §117) says of John:

For Herod had put [John the Baptist] to death, though he was a good man and had **exhorted** the Jews to lead **righteous lives**, to **practise justice** towards their fellows and piety towards God, and so doing **to join in baptism**. In his view *this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God*. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as **a consecration of the body** implying that **the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behaviour**. When others too joined the crowds about him, because they were aroused to the highest degree by his

20. Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” . . . Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. (NASB95)

sectarians reasoned, if you are morally impure, a greater impurity, and do not resolve it, then one should not expect to find purification from a lesser impurity, namely ritual impurity. That is, ritual purification is ineffective if you are morally bankrupt. It is critical to note that the Qumran sectarians did not depend on their ritual washing for moral purity, rather for this they depended upon God's mercy and grace.

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1QS III, 4–6

לוא יזכה בכפורים ולוא יטהר במי נדה ולוא יתקדש בימים ונהרות ולוא יטהר בכול מי רחץ.
טמא טמא יהיה כול יומי מואסו במשפטי אל לבלתי התיסר ביחד עצתו.

He cannot purify himself with acts of atonement; he cannot cleanse himself with the water for purification; he cannot consecrate himself in seas or rivers; he cannot cleanse himself with any water of washing! Unclean! Unclean, he shall be all the days that he rejects the judgments of God so that he not be instructed by the יהד of his congregation.²³

This text reiterates the same point made in column 5, but with an expanded list of what kinds of purification are ineffective. The condition that must be satisfied is the last line of the quote: so long as one “rejects the judgments of God,” which in context refers to living by Torah, one cannot expect to find moral purification through acts of atonement, one cannot be ritually purified from corpse impurity, one cannot be consecrated for festivals such as Passover, etc. Again, God's mercy and grace was the source for their moral atonement.

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Sarapis Oracle²⁴

Σαράπιδος χρησμὸς Τιμαινέτω·
ἀγνὰς χεῖρας ἔχων καὶ νοῦν καὶ γλῶτταν ἀληθῆ

23. My translation.

24. My translation. The Greek text is from Maria Totti, *Ausgewählte Texte der Isis- und Sarapis-Religion* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1985), 147; also cited in Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity*, 285. An alternative translation is found in Angelos Chaniotis, “Greek Ritual Purity: From Automatism to Moral Distinctions,” in *How Purity Is Made*, ed. Petra Rösch and Udo Simon (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 123–39, 132. “Come here with clean hands and with a pure mind and with a true tongue. Clean not through washing, but pure in mind. For pious persons one drop of water is sufficient; the evil man cannot be washed by the entire ocean, with all its waves.”

εἴσ<ι>θι, μὴ λοετροῖς, ἀλλὰ νόῳ καθαρός·
 ἀρκεῖ γάρ θ' ὅσοις ῥάνις ὕδατος· ἄνδρα δὲ φαῦλον
 οὐδ' ἂν ὁ πᾶς λούσαι χεύμασιν ὠκεανός

Oracle of Sarapis to Timainetos.

Having consecrated hands and mind, and a true tongue,
 enter, not (so much as) by washing, but (more so) pure in mind.
 For one drop of water suffices for the morally upright; but a thoughtless man,
 not even the entire ocean with its water could possibly wash.

The date of this oracle is uncertain, with one source postulating that it comes from the second century CE.²⁵ In my translation I have put in parenthesis (so much as) and (more so) because this type of negation allows for it, and more importantly, we know that water was extensively used in the worship of Sarapis.²⁶ That is, it would be out of place for the oracle to deny the need for water. Rather, we have the same principle driving the logic that we saw in 1QS. The effectiveness of ritual purity is dependent upon moral uprightness. Repentance is implied by the emphasis on moral uprightness and the contrast made with the thoughtless man.

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Sibylline Oracles 4.162–70

162 ἄ μέλαιοι, μετᾶθεσθε, βροτοί, τάδε, μηδὲ πρὸς ὀργήν
 163 παντοίην ἀγάγητε θεὸν μέγαν, ἀλλὰ μεθέντες
 164 φάσγανα καὶ στοναχὰς ἀνδροκτασίας τε καὶ ὕβρεις
 165 ἐν ποταμοῖς λούσασθε ὅλον δέμας ἀεναίοισιν,
 166 χεῖράς τ' ἐκτανύσαντες ἐς αἰθέρα τῶν πάρος ἔργων
 167 συγγνώμην αἰτεῖσθε καὶ εὐλογίαις ἀσέβειαν
 168 πικρὰν ἰλάσκεσθε· θεὸς δώσει μετάνοιαν
 169 οὐδ' ὀλέσει· παύσει δὲ χόλον πάλιν, ἥνπερ ἅπαντες
 170 εὐσεβίην περίτιμον ἐνὶ φρεσὶν ἀσκήσητε.²⁷

25. Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, ed. Richard Gordon, trans. Richard Gordon, RGRW 165 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 180, n. 105.

26. E.g., Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis* (Leiden: Brill, 1981).

27. (162) Ah, wretched mortals, change these things, and do not (163) lead the great God to all sorts of anger, but abandon (164) daggers and groanings, murders and outrages, (165) and wash your whole bodies in perennial rivers. (166) Stretch out your hands to heaven and ask forgiveness (167) for your previous deeds and make propitiation (168) for bitter impiety with words of praise; God will grant repentance (169) and will not destroy. He will stop his

This text is from Book 4, a “political oracle from the hellenistic age updated by a Jew in the later first century A.D., and adapted for specifically religious purposes.”²⁸ The author was presumably Jewish, and the text, which is free of “Christian” interpolation,²⁹ issues a call for the *nations* to repent and wash in rivers. Although the text does not use βαπτίζω or its cognates, Collins sees a parallel with John the Baptist and asserts that “the distinctive requirement, if disaster is to be averted, is baptism.”³⁰

This text follows quite closely to the order of things that I argued regarding John the Baptist. The author calls the audience to repent, which Collins translates as “change.” “These things” or τάδε refers in the context to violence, so repentance means the cessation of certain behavior, just as we see with John the Baptist. In light of the perfective aspect of μετατίθημι, μεθήμι, λούω, and έκτανύω in contrast with the imperfective aspect of αἰτέω and ἰλάσκομαι, we may surmise the following sequence of events. First, after repentance, washing was accomplished to achieve a condition of ritual purity before engaging in prayer (or asking). Second, the hands are lifted into the air since this is a common posture of prayer. Third, having properly prepared for divine encounter and having assumed the proper posture, prayer commences and the verbal action is conveyed using imperfective aspect.

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Philo, *Deus* 1.8–9

καὶ γὰρ εὐήθεις εἰς μὲν τὰ ἱερὰ μὴ ἐξεῖναι βαδίζειν, ὃς ἂν μὴ πρότερον λουσάμενος φαιδρύνηται τὸ σῶμα, εὐχεσθαι δὲ καὶ θύειν ἐπιχειρεῖν ἔτι κεκληλιδωμένη καὶ πεφυρμένη διανοίᾳ. καίτοι τὰ μὲν ἱερὰ λίθων καὶ ξύλων ἀψύχου τῆς ὕλης πεποιήται, καθ’ αὐτὸ δὲ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἄψυχον· ἀλλ’ ὅμως ὃν ἄψυχον ἀψύχων οὐ προσάψεται μὴ περιρραντηρίοις καὶ καθαρσίοις ἀγνευτικοῖς χρησάμενον, ὑπομενεῖ δὲ τις τῷ θεῷ προσελθεῖν ἀκάθαρτος ὢν ψυχὴν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τῷ καθαρωτάτῳ, καὶ ταῦτα μὴ μέλλων μετανοήσειν; ὁ μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τῷ μηδὲν ἐπεξεργάσασθαι κακὸν καὶ τὰ παλαιὰ ἐκνίψασθαι δικαιοῦσας γεγηθῶς προσίτω, ὁ δ’ ἄνευ τούτων δυσκάθαρτος ὢν ἀφιστάσθω· λήσεται γὰρ οὐδέποτε τὸν τὰ ἐν μυχοῖς τῆς διανοίας ὀρώντα καὶ τοῖς

wrath again if you all (170) practice honorable piety in your hearts [trans. Collins, *OTP*].

28. Collins, *OTP* 1:381.

29. It does, however, attest to redactional levels. According to Collins, the original oracle dated to 300 BCE and consisted of 4.49–101. Then, 4.1–48 and 4.102–72 were later added with 4.102–51 providing a political update, and 4.1–48 and 4.152–72 offering moral instructions.

30. Collins, *OTP* 1:383.

ἀδύτοις αὐτῆς ἐμπεριπατοῦντα.

For it is absurd that a man should be forbidden to enter the temples save after bathing and cleansing his body, and yet should attempt to pray and sacrifice with a heart still soiled and spotted. The temples are made of stones and timber, that is of soulless matter, and soulless too is the body in itself. And can it be that while it is forbidden to this soulless body to touch the soulless stones, except it have first been subjected to lustral and purificatory consecration, a man will not shrink from approaching with his soul impure the absolute purity of God and that too when there is no thought of repentance in his heart? He who is resolved not only to commit no further sin, but also to wash away the past, may approach with gladness: let him who lacks this resolve keep far away, since hardly shall he be purified. He shall never escape the eye of Him who sees into the recesses of the mind and treads its inmost shrine.³¹

In this excerpt from Philo, he is making an argument from lesser to greater. On one level is the physical domain, which concerns things like the body and temples. In order for a person to enter appropriately a temple, Philo explains that one must be ritually clean. On the other level is the spiritual domain, which concerns things like the soul and deities. He basically argues that it is absurd for a person to think that he or she can become ritually clean through washing if that person is morally stained and has no intent to repent. Once again, the logic of Philo is parallel with that of 1QS, the Sarapis Oracle, and Sib. Or. 4 (at least in the order of things). Repentance is necessary in Philo's view, and accompanies ritual purification.

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Justin, *Dial.* 13

Οὐ γὰρ δέ γε εἰς βαλανεῖον ὑμᾶς ἔπεμπεν Ἡσαΐας ἀπολουσομένους ἐκεῖ τὸν φόνον καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἀμαρτίας, οὓς οὐδὲ τὸ τῆς θαλάσσης ἰκανὸν πᾶν ὕδωρ καθαρῖσαι·

‘Indeed, Isaias did not send you to the bath to wash away murder and other sins which all the water of the ocean could not cleanse, but, as expected, it was of old that bath of salvation which he mentioned and which was for the repentant.’³²

31. Colson and Whitaker, LCL. What is absurd to Philo is that an evil person would dare pray and sacrifice. He uses ritual purity as an argument from lesser to greater, and makes the same point as 1QS V—ritual purity is simply ineffective for the unrepentant.

32. Greek text from Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae Graecae*, vol. 6 (Paris, 1866). English translation from

In Justin's *Dialog with Trypho*, the reference to "a bath" and "everlasting covenant" refers to Isaiah 55. While it appears that Justin misunderstands the purpose of Jewish ritual washing (it was never intended to purify moral impurity), his later comments suggest otherwise (*Dial.* 14). He notes that the Jewish ritual baths τὴν σάρκα καὶ μόνον τὸ σῶμα φαιδρύνει, "only cleanse the body," whereas τοῦ λουτροῦ τῆς μετανοίας, "the bath of repentance," is able to cleanse both body and spirit. His polemical point is directed at convincing his Jewish dialogue partner that Isaiah foretold immersion in Jesus's name. The point to notice here is that Justin knows full well that ritual and moral cleansing derive from different sources and he depends on this to convince his dialogue partner. Especially intriguing is his reference to "all the water of the sea," a phrase that is also found in 1QS and the Sarapis Oracle.

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4. Conclusion

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We are now prepared to answer the question, "Was John's βάπτισμα μετανοίας unique?" in the negative. When John is contextualized within the religious worldview represented by these texts that date from the first century BCE to the second century CE, and that represent diverse contexts such as Qumran, the Cult of Sarapis, Sibylline Oracles, Philo, and Justin Martyr, his call for fellow Jews to repent and immerse in preparation for the coming of God fits quite nicely within the religious sensibilities of the Mediterranean world. He does not stand against or apart from Judaism, nor does he promote something new or unique.

Obviously only 1QS chronologically predates John the Baptist, so one could object that these texts cannot serve as context for John. This misses the point, however, because the scope of these texts demonstrates that this was an ancient Mediterranean principle. No one would argue that the Sarapis Oracle or Philo were influenced by John, so how can we explain their similarity? Moreover, Philo was born before John and is speaking in reference to ritual purity and its connection to the sacred, something any Jew, Greek, or Roman would have immediately understood.

Justin Martyr, The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greeks, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or The Rule of God, in vol. 6 of *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 166.

This need not cause us any alarm, for God throughout history speaks to humans in their context and in terms that are understandable to them. The importance and value of John does not rest in his uniqueness, but rather in the work he was doing among the people of Israel.

Thank you!

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