

Benjamin J. Snyder

Ritual Purity and the Origin of John's Ἀάδοβία ἰάοίβào

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IV

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dedicated to

*Amy, Luke, Joel
Salem & Ethan*

Prayer Before Study

May it be your will, Hashem, my God,
that a mishap not come about through me.
And may I not stumble in a matter of law
and cause my colleagues to rejoice over me.
And may I not say regarding something
which is *tamei* that it is *tahor*,
and not regarding something
which is *tahor* that it is *tamei*.
And may my colleagues not stumble in a
matter of law and I rejoice over them (b. Ber. 28b).
For Hashem grants wisdom; from His mouth [come]
knowledge and understanding [of God] (Prov 2:6).
Unveil my eyes that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah.¹

¹ “Prayer Before Study,” flyleaf in *Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition*, ed. Yisroel Simcha Schorr, Chaim Malinowitz, and Mordechai Marcus, ArtScroll (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1990–2005).

Abstract

This study re-examines the origin of John's "baptism" by contextualizing it within the ritual purity concerns of Second Temple Judaism. It critically employs the comparative method with an eclectic use of ritual studies, historical-critical method, archaeology, and linguistics. This work intervenes in the attempt to link John's "baptism" to a specific antecedent (e.g., Qumran, "proselyte baptism," etc.) and argues that John's "baptism," like the washings of the other antecedents, was an act of ritual purity performed in accordance with norms governing human-divine encounter (e.g., a theophany).

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Introduction

Most recent discussions of the origins of Christian baptism have acknowledged that Christian baptism and Jewish ritual immersion were somehow related, but have claimed an inability to be certain as to the nature and origins of these practices, even while still interpreting their significance.¹

A ritual which has never been performed before may seem to those present not so much a ritual as a charade. Rituals composed entirely of new elements are, thus, likely to fail to become established. . . . Rituals composed entirely of new elements are, however, seldom if ever attempted.²

Baptism is such a central rite to the Christian faith, amply debated through the centuries, that one might wonder what further could be said on the topic. Yet, despite the fact that the literature on baptism is so extensive as to be repetitious, scholars have thus far not reached a consensus regarding the fundamental question: from what did it originate? Maxwell E. Johnson observes that, “there is not one clear or certain answer and several theories have been suggested as possibilities.”³ Gordon Lathrop laments the other extreme, that “generally baptism has been dealt with as if it had no forbears.”⁴ That scholars are still unsatisfied with current explanations is further illustrated by the recent comments of

¹ Jonathan David Lawrence, *Washing in Water: Trajectories of Ritual Bathing in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 1.

² Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32.

³ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2007), 7. This is regularly observed by scholars, e.g., Nils A. Dahl, “The Origin of Baptism,” in *Interpretationes Ad Vetus Testamentum Pertinentes Sigmundo Mowinckel Septuagenario Missae*, ed. Nils Alstrup Dahl and Arvid S. Kapelrud (Oslo: Land og Kirke, 1955), 36–52, 36; John A. T. Robinson, “The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community: Testing a Hypothesis,” *HTR* 50 (1957): 175–91, 180; reprinted in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 11–27.

⁴ Gordon W. Lathrop, “The Origins and Early Meanings of Christian Baptism: A Proposal,” *Worship* 68 (1994): 504–22, 505; this is ironically the position that Johnson defends.

Hans Dieter Betz: “The historical origins of baptism have yet to be clarified; all we have at present are various theories concerning these origins.”⁵ More recently, Richard N. Longenecker specified, “Much more investigation needs to be undertaken, and much more could be said, about Jewish ritual bathing and initiatory baptism.”⁶

Regardless of one’s views on the origin of Christian baptism (whether it is *sui generis* or traceable to a specific antecedent) it is generally accepted that it somehow derives from the baptismal practice of John the baptizer,⁷ which also happens to be the dominant view among early believers.⁸ This, however, only displaces the question: from where did John’s baptism originate? Thus, to understand the origin of Christian baptism, we must first consider the origin of John’s, and then ask what, if any, development occurred between it and baptism in Jesus’s name. As such, numerous questions arise:

⁵ Hans Dieter Betz, “Transferring a Ritual: Paul’s Interpretation of Baptism in Romans 6,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 84–118, 100.

⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 613.

⁷ E.g., 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), 20–21; Ben Witherington, III, *Troubled Waters: The Rethinking the Theology of Baptism* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2007), 31; Paul F. Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A Basic Introduction to Ideas and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 3; Lars Hartman, *Into the Name of the Lord Jesus: Baptism in the Early Church*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 9, 31, 35; Derwood C. Smith, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John” *ResQ* 25 (1982): 13–32, 13; Stephen J. Patterson, “The Baptists of Corinth: Paul, the Partisans of Apollos, and the History of Baptism in Nascent Christianity,” in *Stones, Bones, and the Sacred: Essays on Material Culture and Ancient Religion in Honor of Dennis E. Smith*, ed. Alan H. Cadwallader (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 315–27, 325. Numerous other scholars in the literature review make this point. The declaration attributed to John the baptizer, ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζεν ἐν ὕδατι, does not mean it was new (John 1:33). By contrast, Hans Dieter Betz locates “Christian baptism” in Jesus’s baptism by John. Unfortunately, his analysis suffers from the anachronistic assumptions of Christianity vs. Judaism. See, Hans Dieter Betz, “Jesus’ Baptism and the Origins of the Christian Ritual,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, BZNW 176 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 1: 377–96.

⁸ Cf. André Benoît and Charles Munier, *Le baptême dans l’église ancienne (Ier – IIIe siècles)*, *Traditio Christiana* 9 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), XI; Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 853; Andréas Dettwiler, “La signification du baptême de Jean et sa réception plurielle,” *Positions luthériennes* 54 (2006): 25–37, 25; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Grobel Kendrick (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1:39.

- Where did baptism come from and why did John employ it?
- Was John intending to “initiate” people? What would “initiation” have meant for John’s audience? What about for believers in Jesus?
- If baptism did play a role in initiation, what did the act of washing mean?
- What relationship exists between John’s baptism and baptism in Jesus’s name?
- What conceptual framework would Jews have appealed to in order to understand what John or Peter was doing (cf. Acts 2)? Did *they* believe John or Peter was doing something new?
- Since new religion was bad religion in antiquity, would they not have resisted this innovation if it were attached to a new religion?
- If they viewed the act as compatible with existing elements of Jewish religion, what would these be? If there were differences, what would they be and how would they interpret them?
- In what way does Jewish ritual purity relate to and inform baptism?
- How would the Greco-Roman world have understood baptism?
- When baptism came to be applied to non-Jews, why is it never explained to them?
- What conceptual framework would non-Jews have appealed to in order to understand baptism?

The dominant method to answering the question of origins in recent scholarship is to (1) survey the parallels of various antecedents, (2) explain why none of them are a perfect genealogical match, then (3) suggest from which of them it most plausibly derives, an effort which requires considerable gap filling, and (4) defend the chosen antecedent by arguing for continuity on the basis of piling up certain parallels while minimizing or ignoring others.

The main antecedents are illustrated on the next page and include:

- the baptisms of initiation in the mystery religions
- the baptism of gentile proselytes converting to Judaism
- the baptisms of the Qumran community
- a specific type of ritual washing prescribed by the HB
- the *sui generis* argument
- the view that baptism is an ordeal-sign of judgment (a lesser known proposal)

All of these follow what I refer to as the “antecedent parallels approach,” because they endeavor to identify a specific antecedent to which Christian baptism may most plausibly be traced (see *Figure 1: Rooting John*

the Baptizer: The Traditional Approach below).⁹ The only exceptions to this are Bruce Chilton and possibly Hannah K. Harrington depending on how one assesses her argument. Both argue that John's baptism was an expression of ritual purity.

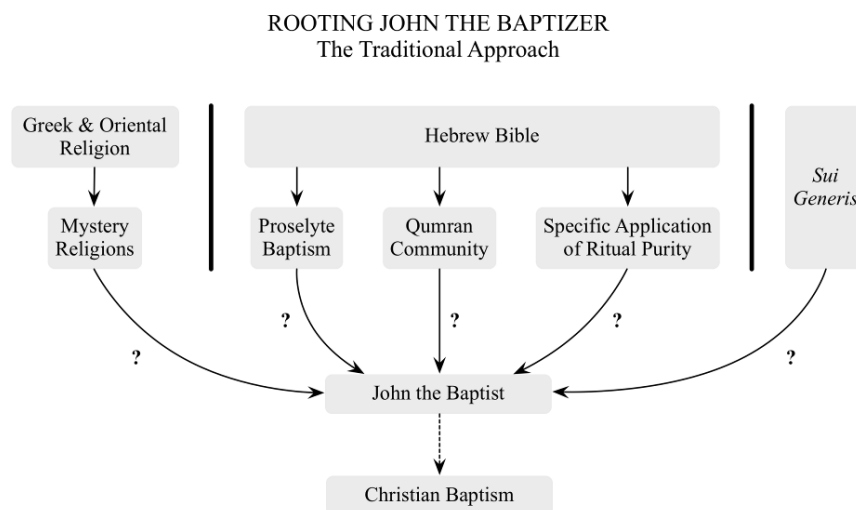


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 1: Rooting John the Baptizer: The traditional approach

Nevertheless, the antecedent parallels approach has led to extensive scholarly debate because multiple explanations can plausibly be defended depending on what is emphasized and what a given scholar finds as convincing. The *sui generis* view, despite the fact that it denies continuity with any antecedent, still follows the “antecedent parallels approach” because its proponents arrive at their conclusion *on the same basis* (i.e., via parallels). The difference, of course, is that the *sui generis* view emphasizes differences and minimizes points of contact with the antecedents to conclude that John's baptism does not correspond well with *any* antecedent and thus it must be new.

A key methodological assumption guiding the antecedent parallels approach is this: a *genealogical* connection must exist between John's baptism and some specific antecedent practice.¹⁰ In fact, the very purpose of advancing

⁹ Nearly all scholars employ the terminology of “antecedents.” E.g., Ferguson, *Baptism*, 23; Benoît and Munier, *Baptême*, XI; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

¹⁰ As Jonathan Z. Smith notes, the genealogical principle is not only viewed as the only basis of comparison worth considering, but it is also one of the arguments typically leveled

parallels is to demonstrate this connection while differences are underscored to disprove other explanations. The importance of genealogy could be demonstrated by citing examples from any of the antecedent approaches described more fully in the next chapter, but it is exemplified in one of Bruce M. Metzger's methodological principles for assessing the level of influence posed by the mystery religions on the NT. He says, "[e]ven when the parallels are actual and not imaginary, their significance for purposes of comparison will depend upon whether they are *genealogical* and not merely *analogical* parallels."¹¹ Metzger's interest is to disprove that the mysteries had any influence on the NT, especially with the practices of baptism and the Eucharist; yet genealogy is not the only way influences and origins occur.

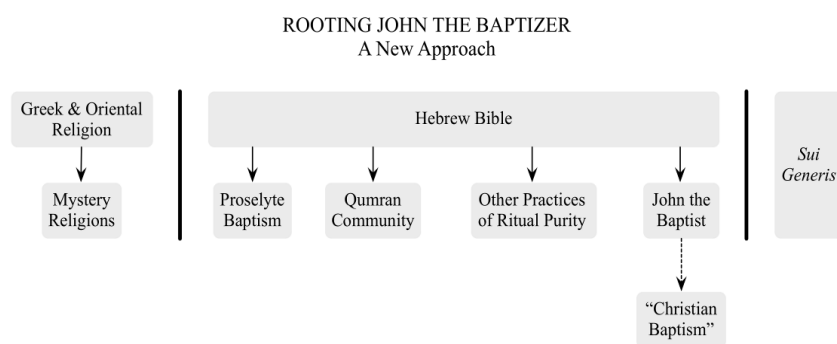


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 2: Rooting John the Baptizer: A new approach

The response of scholars to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* argument in demonstrating the genealogical dependence of John on his Jewish context is further evidence of the weight that this principle carries. While it certainly minimizes the likelihood of influence posed by the mystery religions, whether by genealogy or analogy, arguing for the Jewish context of John *does not demonstrate a genealogical tie to a Jewish antecedent*, it only excludes non-Jewish practices as a potential point of origin. Yet, what if there was no clear genetic outgrowth of John's baptism from any antecedent proposed thus far? And, is the

against the *Religionsgeschichtliche* approach. See, Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 47–48.

¹¹ Bruce M. Metzger, "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity" *HTR* 48 (1955): 1–20, 9, emphasis mine. His point is only accurate if one can demonstrate that a genetic connection to a non-mystery religion antecedent actually exists.

assumption correct that *analogous* parallels are useless (or “dangerous”), as Metzger argues, for determining the origin of John’s baptism?¹²

These questions do not entirely rule out the importance of considering a genetic connection, for it is the most logical starting point for explaining the origin of John’s baptism. Nevertheless, of all the well-argued genetic explanations, none have garnered consensus. This underscores the value of considering how analogous parallels might inform our understanding of the origin of John’s baptism. And there may also be value in considering a combination of genetic and analogous parallels since they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Minimizing or even rejecting a genealogical explanation would appear at first glance to support the *sui generis* view, however, this is not the case. For one thing, it is important to distinguish between genealogy and origins. As it plays out in research, scholars assume that to explain the origin of John’s baptism, one must identify a specific group or type of washing in the HB or Second Temple Period from which it arose (i.e., demonstrate its genetic connection). However, one can also provide an origin account without depending on a specific genetic connection if the focus is shifted from linking John to a specific group to demonstrating that his baptism arose from his environment and Jewish heritage (see *Figure 2: Rooting John the Baptizer: A New Approach*).¹³

A second, related reason is that analogy is not necessarily antithetical to explaining origins. As already noted, most scholars dismiss the *sui generis* approach since John’s baptism would be inexplicable to his audience. Somehow John *must* be connected to and understood within his Jewish context. Accordingly, a few argue that there is no single source from which John’s baptism originated (i.e., John is tied to his Jewish context but not to a specific group, or he derives from a specific group but is influenced by a variety other possible factors).¹⁴ If this is the case, then establishing a specific genealogy becomes all

¹² For a discussion on the “explanatory use of analogy,” see A. J. Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 2nd ed., vol. 12, of *A Study of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 30–41.

¹³ In this respect, my proposal follows the “sectarian matrix” that Timothy H. Lim proposes since I agree with his assessment that Second Temple Jewish groups derive from the “same common stock.” See, Timothy H. Lim, “Towards a Description of the Sectarian Matrix,” in *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament*, ed. Florentino García Martínez, STDJ 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7–31.

¹⁴ E.g., Adela Yarbo Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” *Studia Liturgica* 19 [1989]: 28–46; reprinted in *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, JSJSup 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 218–238; Hannah K. Harrington, “Purification in the Fourth Gospel in Light of Qumran” in *John, Qumran, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Sixty Years of Discovery and Debate*, ed. Mary L. Coloe and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 117–38; Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston, “Intertestamental Background of the

the more complex. In fact, once parallels are noticed across diverse groups, it suggests that an analogical approach may prove more useful and that the answer will not likely be found in a genetic argument.

To illustrate the point, from what antecedent do the baptismal practices of the Qumran community and the baptism of gentile proselytes to Judaism derive?¹⁵ Do they also arise *sui generis*? If so, how would Second Temple Jews have understood them? Did the Qumran community or those who practiced proselyte baptism depend on some other unknown Jewish or non-Jewish antecedent? Does proselyte baptism ultimately find its origin at Qumran or vice versa? If these are neither *sui generis* (since they are connected to their Jewish context) nor genetically connected to a clear antecedent, why do we impose such constraints on the origin of John's practice? For this reason, instead of assuming that John was genetically dependent on a specific group or practice, it is more convincing and profitable to consider that he followed a similar process as the Qumran community or those who practiced proselyte baptism. As such, I argue that John's baptism is not genetically tied to any specific group, but rather derives from applying ritual purification to his specific context and message.

Reasons for the Current Impasse in Scholarship

In addition to the methodological problems outlined above, several more factors contribute to the current impasse. One pertains to the nature of the evidence. Besides the fact that it is sparse, that it does not explicitly answer the questions we pose, and that it is occasional in nature, the *act* of baptism in the NT (including its significance, mode, and reception) is considered self-explanatory by its authors.¹⁶ As such, not only does this mean that the socio-historical

Christian Sacraments," in *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, ed. Hans Bormsma and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 37–51.

¹⁵ On proselyte baptism, see Louis Finkelstein, "The Institution of Baptism for Proselytes," *JBL* 52 (1933): 203–211; F. Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments* (London: SPCK, 1928), 29–36; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 43–45; Étienne Nodet and Justin Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity: An Exploration* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1998), 213–217.

¹⁶ So, Nodet and Taylor, *Origins*, 57; Hartman, *Into the Name*, 1; Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 3.

context is crucial in answering the question of origin,¹⁷ but the *sui generis* perspective is untenable from the outset. If baptism were *sui generis* one would expect more explanation in the sources since the practice would otherwise be unintelligible to a first-century audience,¹⁸ and such a position does not sufficiently account for the presence of socio-historical influences on “new” developments.¹⁹ When something is *sui generis* it is unique. Yet, as A. J. Toynbee observes, “This word ‘unique’ is a negative term signifying what is mentally incomprehensible.”²⁰ That this is not an argument from silence may be defended by the fact that the baptismal activity of John the baptizer and others *are discussed* in the NT, only it occurs in ways that suggest the original audience understood it. The only silence relates to its origin, which NT authors assume that their readers already knew or understood.²¹

Another reason for the impasse relates to issues of anachronism. For example, the familiarity of baptism to researchers and its exclusive use in the modern Christian context lead to its treatment as a technical term.²² Scholars assume a priori what it is (i.e., Christian initiation) in light of modern understandings before investigating its origin. This unwittingly limits the types of questions and evidence that are considered as relevant.²³ After all, who would venture to ask whether baptism is, in fact, “Christian initiation” since this is assumed to be a given? Moreover, this also predetermines to which antecedent it might (or cannot) relate and in many cases influences how scholars even view

¹⁷ So, Catherine M. Murphy, *John the Baptist: Prophet of Purity for a New Age*, ed. Barbara Green, Interfaces (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 110; Rappaport, *Ritual*, 32.

¹⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith repeatedly makes this observation in *Drudgery Divine*, esp. 36–53. Additionally, he reveals that the *sui generis* approach ultimately originated to serve as a “stratagem” in the Protestant-Catholic polemic (1–26, 34–35, 44–45, 48, 57–58, 79, 81, 83, 117); cf. Todd Penner and Davina Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament: Texts, Worlds, Methods, Stories* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 86. Instead of “unique,” Smith prefers “individual” because it “permits the affirmation of difference while insisting on the notion of belonging to a class” (*Drudgery Divine*, 37).

¹⁹ Ihab H. Hassan, “The Problem of Influence in Literary History: Notes towards a Definition,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 14 (1955): 66–76, 75.

²⁰ Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 11.

²¹ John 3:25 mentions an inquiry (ζήτησις) regarding purification (καθαρισμός) in the context of John’s baptizing activity, but this suggests that Jews were attempting to understand its relationship to a known practice (e.g., ritual washing, Qumran, or gentile proselytes), not that they were confused about what he was doing.

²² This will be treated further in chapter three, on methodology.

²³ E.g., if it is predetermined that it is not an act of ritual purity, then relevant evidence pertaining to ritual purity is summarily ignored or quickly dismissed in passing.

the nature of *the antecedents*.²⁴ A related anachronism is that scholars generally approach the quest for the origin of baptism by working *backwards* from later to earlier practice. The undesirable result is simply confirming in hindsight the nature of baptism, which again excludes certain evidence and questions.

A final and typically hidden reason for the impasse relates to paradigmatic assumptions brought to the research question.²⁵ That is, the option preferred by a given scholar is the one that agrees with already existing assumptions or plausibility structures held about antiquity.²⁶ For example, if one can speak of “Judaism vs. Christianity” at this stage, then this significantly influences how evidence is interpreted.²⁷ This most commonly manifests itself in the repeated claim that Jews would not have borrowed from Christians and vice versa. Since the assumptions a scholar brings to research *directly impacts the outworking of a given methodology* (just as mine will) and since numerous given assumptions such as the one just mentioned have been challenged in recent years, accepted knowledge about baptism is open to reevaluation and the relevant evidence—including evidence thought to be irrelevant in prior inquiries—is consequentially open to reconsideration and reinterpretation.²⁸

²⁴ The clearest examples are looking at the washings in the mystery religions, at Qumran, and those practiced by gentile converts as “baptism.” Once reified for Christianity, it must be reified for other antecedents so that a sufficient basis of comparison can be established.

²⁵ Paradigmatic assumptions are defined by Stephen D. Brookfield as “deeply held assumptions that frame the way we look at the world” and “the structuring assumptions we use to order the world into fundamental categories.” See, Stephen D. Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking: Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 4, 17.

²⁶ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann define “plausibility structures” as “the specific social base and social processes required for [the] maintenance of [subjective reality].” When used in connection with antiquity, it refers to the scholarly understanding of what “reality” looked like and those aspects which make a proposed theory “likely” or otherwise. See, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 174.

²⁷ A good example of this, which is very common in research on baptism, is the following: “Christians could not very well baptize their converts in *Jewish mikvehs*” (Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 69, n. 17, emphasis mine).

²⁸ Of course, this study is also guided by assumptions that are subject to challenge. Like all other scholars, I am situating my assumptions within the current state of scholarship on the issues which affect my thesis. However, I am advancing a methodology that minimizes the negative impact of the pitfalls of the antecedent approach.

How This Study Differs from Previous Approaches

This study diverges from past studies in at least four distinct ways. First, since baptism is nowhere explained in the NT,²⁹ the socio-historical context becomes more important than what the NT says about the rite *for determining its origin*. In the words of John A. T. Robinson, “even the most original and creative contributions do not drop from the blue, and the very success of [John’s] mission, attested again both by Josephus and the Gospels, bespeaks an environment where such a rite was *immediately understood and accepted*.”³⁰ As he notes, even Josephus does not find anything about John’s practice to be odd or innovative,³¹ which means that an explanation of its origin must derive from the socio-historical context.³²

Second, every attempt is made to set aside assumptions about the nature of baptism since the evidence can easily be bent in the direction of preformed notions.³³ Third, and relatedly, instead of understanding the origin of baptism by working from its later historical developments back to a more “primitive” state, this study will attempt to examine the question in the other direction.³⁴ This will mitigate later perceptions or practices from influencing

²⁹ Romans 6:3–4 is sometimes referred to as the *locus classicus* for baptism, but this is dubious for several reasons. First, baptism is employed as part of a larger argument against sin in the life of the believer, so the context is not about baptism. Second, baptism *already meant something* before Paul uses it in his argument. The recent argument by Samuli Siikavirta that, “baptism is indeed a central topic in Rom. 6,” is unsustainable from the evidence. See, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul: A Study in Pauline Theology*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 30; Samuli Siikavirta, *Baptism and Cognition in Romans 6–8: Paul’s Ethics Beyond “Indicative” and “Imperative,”* WUNT 407 (Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 103.

³⁰ Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies*, 15, emphasis mine.

³¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2 §§116–19. This does not mean, of course, that we uncritically accept the accounts of Josephus and the NT. Yet, as Jonathan Klawans has recently argued, Josephus’s record on reporting “ancient Jewish theological disputes” is much more reliable than most scholars allow. See, Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42–43.

³² Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:445.

³³ That is, what one thinks baptism is by nature necessarily limits or opens possibilities about its origin.

³⁴ I am cognizant of the pitfall’s of searching for and valuing “primitive” practice as “better” than later practice, as well as the polemical role this plays in scholarship (Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 11–13; Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing*, 83–87). That said, since the goal of this study is about the *origin* of baptism, “primitive” practice is the direct concern of this

earlier ones while underscoring the potential range of understanding available to first-century Mediterranean people. Finally, a different methodological approach will be followed. While parallels will certainly be considered, an attempt will be made to first construct the religio-cultural system within which the act of baptism was practiced. These and other related issues will be further discussed in chapter three where the methodological approach of this study is explained.

Past Methodological Deficiencies and A Way Forward

The literature review in the next chapter surveys the main proposed antecedents and evaluates their respective strengths and deficiencies. It also highlights a methodological shortcoming in nearly all of them, including the *sui generis* view—they approach baptism primarily at the *phenomenological level*. To use a linguistic analogy, numerous scholars still treat baptism methodologically in the same manner as the word-study approach discredited by James Barr. Just as the “priority of words over sentences as the bearers of meaning”³⁵ leads to distorted conclusions, so prioritizing baptism (a word) over the system in which it functions (a sentence) will lead to similar distortion.³⁶ When scholars do happen to consider the systematic level, it is implemented ad hoc and usually in view of discrediting a competing explanation.

Thus, this study seeks to methodologically reframe how we evaluate the various ways that baptism in the NT supposedly relates to various antecedents by first considering the larger systematic context of each proposed antecedent. Only then can one properly compare its use among various groups to determine how they might relate with one another and ask from what John’s baptism originates. Failing to do this, scholars will continue to arrive at disparate conclusions because they associate systematic-level meaning with the phenomenological (e.g., equating baptism with initiation).

In 1977, Shemaryahu Talmon issued a call for implementing the comparative method in this manner. He said,

study; later practice is of secondary concern. The distinction made here is methodological, not one of worth.

³⁵ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 77.

³⁶ James Barr observes, “A great deal of the difficulty here arises from a neglect . . . of syntactical relations, and groupings of words, factors just as important for the bearing of significance as the more purely lexicographical aspect of a single word.” See, James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: OUP, 1961), 222.

In any such study the full range of the available evidence must be taken into consideration: the “holistic” approach always should be given preference over the “atomistic”. The abstraction of a concept, an aspect of society, cult or literature from its wider framework, and its contemplation in isolation, more often than not will result in distortion; its intrinsic meaning ultimately is decided by the context, and therefore may vary from one setting to another.³⁷

Whether or not they were dependent on Talmon, other scholars have made similar observations.³⁸ To use Jonathan Z. Smith’s terminology, a “third term” or a “superordinate category” is required to make legitimate comparison.³⁹ For this study, the systematic-level approach is the “third term.” Similarly, many ritual studies scholars insist that it is necessary to establish the system before one is able to properly understand rituals. For example, Gerald Klingbeil illustrates this well as he applies a systematic approach to ritual texts in the Pentateuch, cf. *Figure 3: Model of Hierarchy of the Cultural Universe (Klingbeil)* on the next page.⁴⁰

³⁷ Shemaryahu Talmon, “The ‘Comparative Method’ in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems” in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977*, ed. J. A. Emerton et al., VTSup 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 320–56, 356.

³⁸ E.g., Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions*, trans. Brian McNeil (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 5.

³⁹ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 33, 51, 53, 87, 99, 117; Aaron W. Hughes, *Comparison: A Critical Primer* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2017), 46; Claude Calame, “Comparatisme en histoire anthropologique des religions et regard transversal: le triangle comparatif,” in *Comparer en histoire des religions antiques: Controverses et propositions*, ed. Claude Calame and Bruce Lincoln (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2012), 35–51, 42–45.

⁴⁰ E.g., Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, BBRSup 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 9, fig. 2, used by permission.

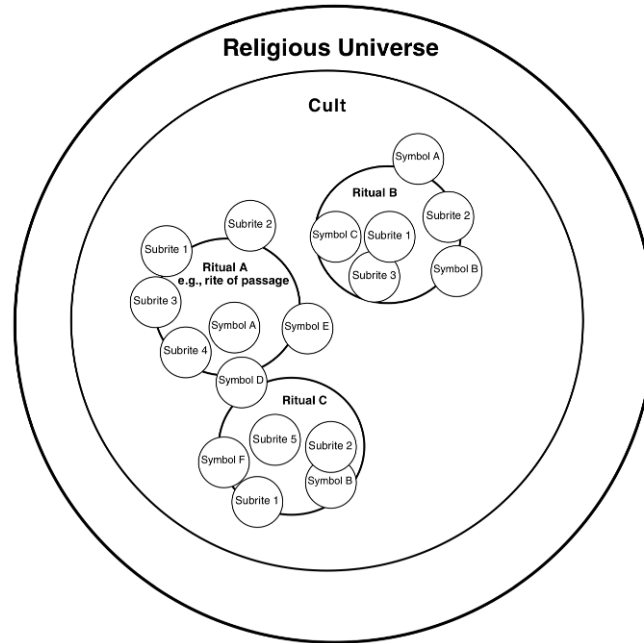


Fig. 2. Model of Hierarchy of the Cultural Universe.

Figure 3: Model of hierarchy of the cultural universe (Klingbeil)

To adapt his figure to this study on baptism, “Ritual A” represents initiation into a given group, whether Qumran, mystery religions, gentile proselytes of Judaism, or the Jesus movement. However, “Ritual A” *does not* represent baptism since the initiation process involves much more than this.⁴¹ Rather, “Subrite 2” represents baptism. Each of the respective cultural universes for each postulated antecedent to Christian baptism must be considered before comparison of the subrite (i.e., baptism) takes place. In short, this study seeks to do what C. H. Kraeling urged long ago: “To obtain a valid and vivid picture of the Baptist what we need is not more new evidence but a better understanding of the way to read the available New Testament sources.”⁴²

⁴¹ Mircea Eliade already recognized this when he defined initiation as “*un ensemble de rites et d’enseignements oraux, qui poursuit la modification radicale du statut religieux et social du sujet à initier*.” See Mircea Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 12, emphasis mine.

⁴² Carl H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Scribner, 1951), 6.

Finally, this study intervenes in the regular attempt to emphasize the uniqueness of John. The resulting distortion of this attempt manifests itself in two opposite ways. On the one hand, despite the desire to connect John to his Jewish context, scholars concomitantly emphasize how unique, special, or better John's baptism is *against* the people and practices of his context. Using the same strategy but going in the opposite direction, Rivka Nir argues that John's likeness to his context situates him with "sectarian groups on the margins of Judaism," and as a result she discredits the evidence of Josephus on this basis.⁴³ Ironically, the evidence of Josephus is problematic for most because it appears to differ from the other sources we have. But the end result is the same—despite the importance of recognizing that John must have some connection to his context, he cannot resemble it too closely! Thus, John is interpreted in supersessionist terms or he is safely regulated to the "margins" of "mainstream" Judaism. This study challenges both of these readings. While the focus of this work is to reframe the discussion on the origin of John's baptism, it does not deny or reject the ways that his practice may be distinct in his context. However, this is not the primary goal of the current project and such differences are best assessed as differences of degree, not kind.

⁴³ Rivka Nir, "Josephus' Account of John the Baptist: A Christian Interpolation?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10 (2012): 32–62.

Chapter 1

Review of Scholarship

[C]omparison has been and continues to be a dubious enterprise to explicate a set of conclusions to which one has assented before the activity has even begun.¹

Modern research on the origin of Christian baptism predominately employs the antecedent approach described above. The following review of scholarship is primarily focused on demonstrating the assumption that John's baptism is *genetically tied* to one (or in a few cases more than one) of the potential antecedents as demonstrated by emphasizing their similarities. In addition, the review will also draw attention to two other factors important to this thesis: (1) the fact that nearly all scholars who have written on the origin of Christian baptism assume that Judaism and Christianity are distinct religions, and (2) that the language used to talk about baptism and its origins reveals certain assumptions about the nature of baptism.

The following literature review is organized around the main antecedents listed below and then organized chronologically within each one. They include (see illustrations on pages 4 and 6):

- the baptisms of initiation in the mystery religions
- the baptism of gentile proselytes converting to Judaism
- the baptisms of the Qumran community
- a specific type of ritual washing prescribed by the HB
- *the sui generis* argument
- the view that baptism is an ordeal-sign of judgment (a lesser known proposal)

Each antecedent approach is introduced with comments related to its historical context and development. Next, the arguments of each scholar will be presented chronologically within a given category from oldest to most recent to highlight any development that may have occurred among scholars defending a given view. Then, at the end of each category I offer a critique under the heading, "Analysis of Approach." Finally, a conclusion will sum up the literature review and identify the recurring issues relevant to the investigation of the

¹ Hughes, *Comparison*, 61.

origin of “Christian baptism.” A table summarizing the main approaches from the literature review is featured on the next page.

Table 1: Recent history of research on the origin of Christian baptism

Recent History of Research on the Origin of Christian Baptism

	PROPOSAL	PARALLELS	PROBLEMS	PROONENTS
“Mystery Religions”	Earliest Christianity directly borrowed from the “mystery religions” for their understanding and practice of baptism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatory context • Lexical connection: βαπτίζω • Emphasis on future salvation, shared meals, unity with deity, dying and rising deity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious context • Washing ≠ initiation but preliminary purification • “Dying and rising” mean different things, pertain to different entities • Mysteries not monolithic 	Hermann Gunkel (1903) H. J. Holtzmann (1911) Wilhelm Heitmüller (1911) Wilhelm Bousset (1913) Richard Reitzenstein (1927)
Qumran Community	John was directly influenced by the baptismal practice of the Qumran community, though he must have modified their practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatory context • New Covenant • Washing = repentance + moral cleansing (assumed) • Eschatological orientation (Isa 40:3) • Anti-Temple (assumed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washing ≠ initiation but purification • Repeated washings (assumes John’s was not repeated) • Self-administered (assumes John’s was administered) 	John A. T. Robinson (1957) G. R. Beasley-Murray (1962) Derwood Smith (1962) Ben Witherington (2007)
Gentile Proselytes	John copied the practice of Jews immersing gentile proselytes at conversion, but also applied it to Jews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatory context • Conversionary context • Liturgical similarity • New status/new birth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washing ≠ conversion but preliminary purification • Repeated washings (assumes John’s was not repeated) • Self-administered (assumes John’s was administered) 	F. Gavin (1928) H. G. Marsh (1941) Franz J. Leenhardt (1946) Arland J. Hultgren (1994) Craig S. Keener (2003) Susan White (2008)
Ritual Purity	John’s baptism differs from other parallels in significant ways. Some element of the ritual purity framework of the HB must explain the origin of his baptism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mode = immersion • Terminology: כִּבְשׁוֹ = βαπτίζω • Abundant archaeological evidence (ritual baths) • Preparation for divine encounter (e.g., theophany) and forgiveness of sins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ritual purity did not resolve moral impurity nor did it indicate repentance in HB • Repeated washings (assuming John’s was not repeated) • Self-administered (assuming John’s was administered) 	Nils A. Dahl (1955) Adela Yarbo Collins (1989) Gordon W. Lathrop (1994) Bruce Chilton (1998) Hannah H. Harrington (2011) Craig A. Evans & Jeremiah J. Johnston (2015)
De novo	John’s baptism differs from other parallels in significant ways. Additionally, John’s baptism is a protest against ritual purity. Thus, it arose completely unconnected to any existing practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No compelling connection to any antecedent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignores parallels • Assumes that John’s baptism was one-time, moral in nature • No evidence that John’s baptism was a protest against ritual purity 	A. D. Nock (1952) Maxwell E. Johnson (2007) Everett Ferguson (2009) Carl Holladay (2012)

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Mystery Religions

As scholars note, the modern study of the contacts between “early Christianity” (especially Pauline circles) and the Greco-Roman mystery religions has pre-modern roots.² Ironically, while the early the *Religionsgeschichtliche* school³ argued that Christians borrowed from the mysteries, Devon H. Wiens points out that the early Church Fathers thought the borrowing went in the other direction—the mysteries borrowed from the church.⁴ Arland J. Hultgren’s summarizes the work of Wilhelm Bousset, which is representative of the *Religionsgeschichtliche* perspective: “earliest Christianity contained a host of elements from pagan Hellenism” of which one can identify “Christian baptism as

² E.g., as early as the 2nd century CE, Justin (100–165) notes the imitation (μιμῆσις) of baptism in Greco-Roman temples (*I Apol.* 61–62). Interestingly, he only explicitly mentions the mystery religions in connection with the Lord’s Supper (*I Apol.* 66). Tertullian specifically mentions baptism in connection with the Cults of Isis and Mithras as well as its general use in connection with the gods (*Bapt.* 5).

While Issaci Casauboni is generally pointed to as the first Protestant to offer a “scholarly” treatment of the subject, Günter Wagner names G. Anrich as the first to deal with it “comprehensively” and with a “precise methodology.” In Metzger’s opinion, this honor should be given to C. A. Lobeck (“Considerations,” 2). See Issaci Casauboni, *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI, Ad Cardinalis Baronii Prolegomena in Annales et primam eorum partem, de D. N. Iesu Christi nativitate, vita, passione, assumptione, cum prolegomenis auctoris, in quibus de Baronianis annalibus candide disputatur* (Geneva: De Tournes, 1654); G. Anrich, *Das antike Mysterienwesen in seinem Einfluss auf das Christentum* (Göttingen, 1894); Günter Wagner, *Pauline Baptism and the Pagan Mysteries: The Problem of the Pauline Doctrine of Baptism in Romans VI. 1–11, in Light of its Religio-Historical “Parallels,”* trans. J. P. Smith (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 7; trans. of *Das religionsgeschichtliche Problem von Römer 6, 1–11*, ed. W. Eichrodt and O. Cullmann, ATANT 39 (Zürich: Zwingli, 1962), 15; C. A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus, sive de theologiae mysticae Graecorum causis*, 2 vols. (Königsberg: Borntraeger, 1829); Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *“I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue”: Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011).

³ For the historical development and context of the “History of Religion” school, see William Baird, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann*, vol. 2 of *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 221–22, 238–53; Henning Graf Reventlow, *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, vol 4 of *History of Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, Resources for Biblical Study 63 (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 335–78; Clare K. Rothschild, “Introduction,” in *The History of Religions School Today: Essays on the New Testament and Related Ancient Mediterranean Texts*, ed. Thomas R. Blanton IV, Robert Matthew Calhoun, and Clare K. Rothschild, eds. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 1–10, 2–5.

⁴ Devon H. Wiens, “Mystery Concepts in Primitive Christianity and in its Environment,” *ANRW* 23.2:1248–84, 1249.

a sacramental act that arose out of analogous initiation rites within Hellenistic mystery cults.”⁵

A primary method employed was philological and based on the assumption that Paul’s baptismal language reveals unambiguous appropriation from the mysteries.⁶ This language implied that Paul either had personal experience in the mysteries or sufficient knowledge of their ritual practices and language. Since most scholars no longer consider this view viable (at least for explaining the origin of Christian baptism), it will receive less thorough treatment here.⁷ Ironically, my thesis allows for far more contact between the

⁵ Arland J. Hultgren, “Baptism in the New Testament: Origins, Formulas, and Metaphors,” *WW* 14 (1994): 6–11, 6; Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (New York: Abingdon, 1970), trans. of *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913); cf. Johannes Leipoldt, *Die urchristliche Taufe im Lichte der Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig: Dörrfling & Franke, 1928).

⁶ E.g., Smith calls Reitzenstein’s work (*Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*) “a protracted series of word studies” (*Drudgery Divine*, 76, n. 35). For a survey of this approach (comparing words) and its problems, see Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 54–84. For a comprehensive survey and analysis of scholars advocating the mystery religion approach, see Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 7–57; cf. Metzger, “Considerations,” 1–20.

⁷ Smith admits that this is the current consensus but in addition to his own protests he draws attention to R. C. Tannehill who states that “the question of the relation of [the dying and rising] motif to the mysteries, then, is not yet settled” (*Drudgery Divine*, 99). However, I am unable to find this quotation or idea in Tannehill’s book. Klauck also shares Smith’s optimism, that despite the clear missteps of the early *Religionsgeschichtliche* school, “this does not mean that the last word has been spoken on the subject of the relationship between the mystery cults and early Christianity” (*Religious Context*, 152). See, R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, [1967] 2006); cf. Wiens, “Mystery Concepts,” *ANRW* 23.2:1269.

For recent commentators who deny a connection with the mysteries and who note this consensus, see, e.g., Longenecker, *Romans*, 612. Joseph A. Fitzmyer cites Dunn favorably, noting that “this bearing on conduct tells against the language being derived from the Greek mysteries,” while C. K. Barrett is more cautious, suggesting that Paul may have used some of their terminology, but argues that Paul’s baptismal doctrine did not derive from them. See, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentary 33 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 435, cf. 431; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 316; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (London: Continuum, 1991), 114.

By contrast, Robert Jewett (following Brook W. R. Pearson and Hans Dieter Betz) maintains that the Isis cult forms the “cultural background” from which Paul found agreement with the Roman audience to explain that they were incorporated in the Messiah; but he does not claim that the Isis cult is the origin of Pauline baptism. See, Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 397; Brook W. R. Pearson, “Baptism and Initiation in the Cult of Isis and Sarapis,” in *Baptism, the New*

“Mystery Religions” and Christian baptism than the current understanding, which may open the door for further research.⁸ This will become clearer in later sections of this work.

The following survey of the *Religionsgeschichtliche* approach, which unanimously argues in favor of the influence of the mystery religions on Christian baptism, depends partially on the work of Günter Wagner and my own reading of some of the scholars mentioned below. Despite receiving specific points of critique,⁹ his argument remains influential¹⁰ and at this juncture I am only drawing from his literature review.

A particular difficulty for the purposes of this study is that not every advocate of the *Religionsgeschichtliche* approach argued that the origin of Christian baptism came directly from the mysteries since many conceded that

Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White, ed. S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross, JSNTSup 171 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 51; Betz, “Transferring a Ritual,” 112.

⁸ Fritz Graf rightly notes that early “Christian” apologists note a connection between baptism and ritual purification as practiced in Greek Religions, esp. the “Mysteries.” Paula Fredriksen also notes that “When commenting on what Jews did, pagans . . . would name circumcision or Sabbath observance or refusal to eat pork: These practices struck them as odd. Jewish purification and sacrifices, however, elicited no such comment, because in the religious sensibility of antiquity, such practices were simply normal.” See, Fritz Graf, “Baptism and Graeco-Roman Mystery Cults,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, BZNW 176 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 1:101–18, 114. Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 52.

⁹ Pearson credits his work with ending the conversation regarding the supposed parallels between Christian baptism and the Isis/Sarapis cult, although his own essay attempts to reestablish the significance of those parallels (“Baptism and Initiation,” 42). Similarly, A. J. M. Wedderburn notes that one of Wagner’s reviewers called it the “best study of the mystery-religions” of its time, but goes on to elucidate the reasons not all NT scholars were ultimately convinced by his argument. See A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Paul and the Hellenistic Mystery-Cults: on Posing the Right Questions,” in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’Impero romano: atti del Colloquio Internazionale su La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’Impero Romano, Roma 24–28 Settembre 1979*, ed. Ugo Biachi and Maarten J. Vermaseren, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain 92 (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 817–33; cf. the bibliography in Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 308–9.

¹⁰ See the discussion Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 309–11. In Wedderburn’s critique of Wagner, his starting point is *not* overturning Wagner’s basic argument (i.e., Paul’s practice and understanding of baptism originated from the mystery religions) but asking in what way Paul may be influenced by them. As he points out, it is now a question of modification not origin (“Paul and the Hellenistic Mystery-Cults,” 818). Likewise, Pearson’s starting point is attempting to demonstrate that a case can even be made that “baptism actually existed as part of the Isis/Sarapis cult’s initiatory practices” because this is the foundation for “subsidiary questions,” such as, its influence on Paul (“Baptism and Initiation,” 43).

Paul received the practice and its associated tradition from Jesus followers.¹¹ Thus, I do not interact with scholars who argue that Paul transformed or modified his understanding of baptism because this is no longer a matter of *origins* but of modification. Rather, I will only include a representative group of scholars classified by Wagner as arguing for “absolute dependence of Paul on the mysteries.”¹²

For *Hermann Gunkel (1903)*, whose work focused on demonstrating the syncretistic tendencies of both Judaism and Christianity,¹³ baptism was foreign to Judaism. It was, however, an integral part of Greco-Roman mysteries, and according to Gunkel, since Judaism syncretized repeatedly in the past, it is no surprise that Christianity would do the same.¹⁴ Accordingly, he claims that Paul’s understanding of baptism would have appeared “ganz unfasslich” to “der vom Alte Testament herkommt” even when taking into account knowledge of the gospel.¹⁵ He goes on to say, “Paulus hat den ursprünglich ganz *allogenen* Brauch der Taufe in diesem Interesse umgedeutet.”¹⁶

Like some other *Religionsgeschichtliche* proponents, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what Gunkel believes to be foreign to Judaism, whether baptism in general as the previous quote implies or just the Pauline re-interpretation of it, since he is mainly focused on Paul’s comments in Rom 6. He does not deal with John’s baptism at all and rightly observes that “die Taufe ist eigentlich Waschung, Reinigung, aber nicht Tötung,” which he adduces as

¹¹ His own baptism occurs in conjunction with the Jewish believer, Ananias, according to Acts 9:17–19; 22:16.

¹² Wagner classifies scholars into three groups: (1) absolute dependence on the mysteries, (2) dependence but transformation, and (3) terminological dependence but without clear influence (Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 7–57). My purpose is only to demonstrate the methodological aim of establishing a genetic link between baptism and the mysteries. See also, Metzger, who divides scholars into two main camps, those who see “a minimum of outside influence” and those who believe the influence was so significant as to contribute to “the formulation of central and crucial doctrines and rites of the Church (“Considerations,” 2–3).

¹³ Hermann Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 34–35. See also, Georges Dupont, review of *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*, by Hermann Gunkel, *RHR* 49 (1904): 209–13; Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation, Vol. 4: From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, Resources for Biblical Study 63 (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 345–46.

¹⁴ Gunkel concludes, “Das Christentum ist eine synkretistische Religion” (*Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 95, cf. 88, 94). The bulk of his work was on the HB, which informed his work on the NT.

¹⁵ Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 83.

¹⁶ Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 85, emphasis mine. Cf. the discussion of Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 8–9.

evidence that Paul has added to his understanding of baptism via the mysteries.¹⁷ Nevertheless, when he discusses the baptism of Jesus, he suggests that the Gospels' portrayal evokes the mythical images of gods with doves on their heads.¹⁸ For Gunkel, baptism appears to be a completely foreign concept for both Judaism and Christianity.

H. J. Holtzmann (1911) agrees with Gunkel that “Man darf getrost behaupten, daß im ganzen Komplex paulin[ische] Gedanken kein Element dem im Boden Israels wurzelnden Geist der Verkündigung Jesu so fern und fremdartig gegenübersteht, wie gleich die Lehre von der Taufe.”¹⁹ It is foreign for essentially the same reasons mentioned by Gunkel—it does not correspond to any concepts found in the HB or other teaching in the NT on baptism—but Holtzmann links it to the dualism of flesh and spirit. That is, Paul came to his conclusions about baptism from his reflections on his experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–18) wherein the sin nature was broken in him. He then generalized his experience as dogmatic for all believers much like the death of Jesus was dogmatized.²⁰ In his view, the identification of Paul with Jesus in this manner can only be explained via the mystery religions.²¹

W. Heitmüller (1903; 1911) argues in a similar vein as Gunkel and Holtzmann but explains the origin of baptism etymologically, namely that the practice ultimately derives from Babylon and is incorporated into Christianity by chance through the influences of Hellenism.²² As it specifically pertains to Paul, he suggests that the process was unconscious, most likely occurring in Tarsus:

Dass der Apostel mit Bewusstsein Anleihen bei Mysterien Religionen gemacht habe, dürfte als ausgeschlossen zu gelten haben: der Jude und Christ Paulus konnte daran nicht denken. Aber es gibt eben auch mittelbare Abhängigkeiten—und sie sind oft noch größer und bedenklicher als bewußte und unmittelbare herübernahme.²³

¹⁷ Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 83.

¹⁸ Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 70. Yet, it is unclear whether he has in mind the *interpretation* of what happened at baptism or the act itself.

¹⁹ H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. D. A. Jülicher and W. Bauer, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911), 2:196, cf. 199, n. 2.

²⁰ Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch*, 2:196–97.

²¹ See the further discussion in Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 12–13.

²² W. Heitmüller, “*Im Namen Jesu*”: *Eine sprach- und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, speziell zur altchristlichen Taufe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 271–72.

²³ W. Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl im Urchristentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1911), 24–25. Cf. Wagner, *Pauline Baptism*, 13–14.

Heitmüller is actually not far from Holtzmann's dualistic explanation in that baptism is not only associated with but even effects the ethical transformation of an individual through the Spirit.²⁴

Richard Reitzenstein (1927) avers that "Beide Sakramente [baptism and the Eucharist] hat Paulus in der Gemeinde [at Corinth] schon vorgefunden, und doch läßt sich aus dem Judentum keins von beiden erklären."²⁵ However, he goes further than his predecessors in claiming that this not only applies to Paul's teaching on baptism but also to John's baptism.²⁶ Regarding John, he rejects the idea that Ezek 36:29, 33; Isa 4:4; and Jer 4:14; 2:22 are a sufficient foundation for his baptism.²⁷ Moreover, to do so ignores "ihre Verbindung mit der Botschaft hellenistischer $\acute{\omicron}\tilde{\upsilon}\tilde{\eta}\tilde{\nu}\tilde{\alpha}\tilde{\omicron}$ von dem nahen Weltuntergang und der Möglichkeit einer Errettung."²⁸ Since Judaism is unable to explain the practice of baptism, its origin must be due to the twin influence of Greek and Oriental religions as mediated through Hellenistic Judaism.²⁹ In fact, Paul is even further from Judaism because "was wir von der Johannestaufe wissen, bleibt von der paulinischen Auffassung des mit Christus vereinigenden Sakramentes noch weit entfernt."³⁰ While Heitmüller was content with unconscious influence, Reitzenstein insists that Paul may have been initiated into *two or three* mystery religions.³¹

²⁴ Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl im Urchristentum*, 18; cf. W. Heitmüller, *Taufe und Abendmahl bei Paulus: Darstellung und religionsgeschichtliche Beleuchtung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 14.

²⁵ Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 3rd. ed. ([1927] Leipzig: Teubner, 1966), 81.

²⁶ According to Wiens, the Johannine portrayal of baptism is also sometimes implicated ("Mystery Concepts," *ANRW* 23.2:1269, n. 85).

²⁷ Bousset handles the problem of John in a much different way. Instead of trying to interpret him also in light of the mystery religions, he questions the historicity of the accounts of the baptizer since "[e]ven the characterization of the baptism of John as baptism by water in contrast with the Christian baptism by the Spirit presupposes the Christian sacrament of baptism" (*Kyrios Christos*, 82, emphasis mine). That is, while the tradition of Jesus's baptism by John may be historically certain, nothing else can be trusted since John is cast in a Christian manner. In rebuttal to the common view that John was "Christianized," see Clare K. Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions and Q* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

²⁸ Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*, 81.

²⁹ Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*, 17.

³⁰ Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*, 88.

³¹ Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*, 417.

Analysis of Approach

As shown above, many early *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars argue that Christian baptism finds its genetic origin in the mystery religions.³² Gunkel not only ignores John's baptism but also believes that it is foreign to Judaism. Holzmann agrees and locates its entrance into Christianity through Paul's Damascus road experience and spirit-flesh dualism. Heitmüller believes it is of Babylonian origin and incorporated into Christianity by pure chance through Paul's unconscious appropriation while in Tarsus or during his travels. Reitzenstein goes further by arguing that even in John one can find the mystery religion concept of baptism as death and that Paul was initiated into several mysteries. The (dubious) message that comes across is that *Judaism and Christianity are inexplicable apart from their connection to Greek and Oriental religion*.³³ See Table 2: *The History of Religions School & Origin of Christian Baptism* below.

Table 2: The history of religions school & the origin of Christian baptism

The History of Religion School & The Origin of Christian Baptism	
<i>Gunkel</i>	Baptism is foreign to the HB, must come from mysteries
<i>Holtzmann</i>	Paul's Damascus Road experience dogmatized via mysteries
<i>Heitmüller</i>	No conscious borrowing, diachronic and passive influence
<i>Reitzenstein</i>	Paul must have been initiated into several mystery cults

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

While these scholars advance an array of impressive parallels, many depend on problematic assumptions. The first relates to essentialism or the reification

³² So, Hans-Josef Klauck who similarly observes: "they [*Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars] postulate a *genetic* derivation of the Christian sacraments from the quasi-sacramental rites of the mystery cults" (*Religious Context*, 151, emphasis mine).

³³ Cf. Wiens, "Mystery Concepts," *ANRW* 23.2:1265; Klauck, *Religious Context*, 4; James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning From Jerusalem*, vol. 2 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 36–40.

While the first half of her statement is accurate, Adela Yarbo Collins is overly positive in her assessment of early *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars when she claims that "they were concerned to show broad intellectual connections between certain forms of early Christianity and the Hellenistic mystery religions. . . They did not assert that particular forms of Christian faith and ritual were dependent, for example, on the Mithraic cult, but that both made use of common, earlier ideas" ("Origin," 41–42, emphasis mine).

of diverse cults into a single entity. For instance, Gunkel depends on the existence of a monolithic, “offiziellen Judentum zur Zeit Jesus.”³⁴ Likewise, the mystery religions are treated as a unified concept as scholars conflate several mystery cults in the same sentence or section.³⁵ As such, diverse cults in different locations with their own distinct practices are reified into the constructed category, “mystery religions.”³⁶ Since the *individual* mysteries share far less in common with baptismal practice in the NT, it is necessary to combine them all for comparison to even be possible. In this respect, Reitzenstein’s intuition—Paul had to have been initiated into at least two or three different mysteries to successfully syncretize them into his understanding of Christian baptism—was correct. Albert Schweitzer noted this problem in 1931 when he said, “[The *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars] manufacture out of the various fragments of information a kind of universal Mystery-religion which never actually existed, least of all in Paul’s day.”³⁷ If legitimate comparison is to be made, one cannot

³⁴ Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 79. He actually allows for the possibility that belief in a “sterbenden und wiedererstehenden Christus” may have existed “in geheimen Kreisen, in den Winkeln” of “unofficial” Judaism.

³⁵ E.g., Gunkel, *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis*, 79; Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch*, 2:199, n. 2; Marvin W. Meyer, “Mystery Religions,” *ABD* 4: 941–45, 944. Meyer believes that “[t]he most balanced and judicious interpretation of the relationship between the mystery religions and early Christianity avoids simplistic conclusions about dependence, and acknowledges the parallel development of the mysteries and Christianity.”

³⁶ So, Metzger, “Considerations,” 6. Meyer notes this problem but still insists, “in spite of their differences, the mystery religions warrant being discussed together because they all represent a particular form of religion” (“Mystery Religions,” 4:941).

In contrast, Emily Kearns cautions, “It is quite misleading to speak of ‘*mystery religions*’ in this context. These rituals [of initiation], important and prestigious as they often were, were not self-standing religions but supplements to the general religious system of the Greeks. Still less should we think in terms of an opposition between mysteries and ‘state religion’. These cults were normally completely integrated into the official religious observances of the city.” See, Emily Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion: A Sourcebook* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 311–12. Cf. Luther H. Martin, “‘The Devil is in the Details’: Hellenistic Mystery Initiation Rites: Bridge-Burning or Bridge-Building?” in *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity: Shifting Identities—Creating Change*, ed. Birgitte Secher Bøgh, *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity* 16 (New York: Lang, 2014), 153–68, 156–57, 161–62; Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 277.

Klauck takes the opposite view of Kearns, insisting that their secret nature “sets them in relationship to something else, viz. to the public cult in the city state, but also to the daily domestic ritual which was not secret (*Religious Context*, 86).

³⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery ([New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1931] Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 192–93; cf. Wiens, “Mystery Concepts,” *ANRW* 23.2:1251.

conflate the diverse mysteries into a monolithic category, comparison must be carried out system to system.

A second related assumption is that later evidence was thought to be representative of earlier practices and understandings. Although the mysteries are known as far back as the seventh century BCE,³⁸ nearly all of the texts from which parallels to baptism are identified are late and relayed by people who were not cult members themselves and who were sometimes motivated by comical³⁹ or polemical interests.⁴⁰

A third assumption relates to the supposedly shared technical terminology between the NT and mystery religions. There are actually two assumptions here: (1) that the terminology is technical and (2) that the terminology is shared.⁴¹ For example, ἀάδοβαῦ and its cognates are reified as “baptism” through transliteration and then treated as synonymous with “initiation.”⁴² As a result, sufficient grounds for the comparison of “Christian baptism” with “Mystery baptism” were established because both texts and rituals were presumably referring to the same thing. This illustrates the danger of comparing things at the phenomenological level without first establishing the respective systems. It also shows how starting at the phenomenological level encourages scholars to prematurely interpret the nature of one phenomena through another. The supposedly initiatory context of both the NT and the mystery religions

³⁸ According to Marvin W. Meyer, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is dated to the seventh century BCE. See, Marvin W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries, A Sourcebook: Sacred Texts of the Mystery Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 20. Klauck notes that most cults originate between the second centuries BCE and CE but only flourish between the second and fourth centuries CE (*Religious Context*, 89).

³⁹ E.g., Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*.

⁴⁰ E.g., Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom*; Wiens, “Mystery Concepts,” *ANRW* 23.2: 1266–67.

⁴¹ A. D. Nock notes that most terms are *lacking*. See, A. D. Nock, “The Vocabulary of the New Testament,” *JBL* 52 (1933): 131–39.

⁴² Transliteration is one way scholars reifies a term by means of a scholarly construct. For example, Fejo L. Schuddeboom’s analysis of τελετή, a principle term thought to be technical, shows that this term has a wide semantic range and suggests that it must be forced into the status of a technical term. See, Fejo L. Schuddeboom, *Greek Religious Terminology: Telete & Orgia: A Revised and Expanded English Edition of the Studies by Zijderveld and Van der Burg*, ed. H. S. Versnel, D. Frankfurter, J. Hahn, RGRW 169 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 117–18. Other examples include (1) the language of “put on” and “put off,” which occurs in Greco-Roman ethical treatises; (2) σωτηρία, which is used in the political sphere in reference to the protection of cities; and (3) σωτήρ, which occurs in reference to the Emperor and other military leaders. Likewise, βαπτίζω is hardly to be restricted to the religious sphere. I will address the problems of transliteration and technical terminology, especially as it pertains to βαπτίζω, in chapter three.

reinforced the view. Scholars have rightly acknowledged these shortcomings, for as recent linguistic advances have demonstrated, words only mean something *in a context*. More importantly, while some conceptual parallels exist,⁴³ closer attention to the texts has revealed that “baptisms” in the Mysteries *did not by themselves initiate, rather they were preliminary acts of ritual purification within a more complex initiation process* done in preparation for the secret initiation rites.⁴⁴

These assumptions, which led to the ensuing “parallelomania,”⁴⁵ undergird the larger methodological problem of focusing on the phenomenon rather than first considering how the larger systems compare. For example, Reitzenstein insists that one must *ignore* how the “sacraments” functioned in their respective contexts and focus solely on terminology.⁴⁶ As such, he not only assumes that baptism is essentially similar to the washings practiced in the mystery religions, but he must also ignore their function to make comparison possible.

A final problem for the *Religionsgeschichtliche* argument is John’s baptism, which predates Romans 6:3–4 by a few decades. These scholars chose to ground discussion of the origin of Christian baptism primarily on a single text (Romans 6) and ignored its practice prior to Paul. One could argue that Paul’s comments should receive priority since they were recorded before the Gospels and Acts. Yet, if so, it is very odd that the authors of these works portray baptism in a very “un-Pauline” manner (i.e., if their audiences’ predominant understanding of baptism came from the mystery religions, why would they portray it so differently?). As mentioned above, John the baptizer is made to fit within the mystery religion framework (Reitzenstein), thought to be Christianized and thus the testimony about him thought to be unreliable (Bousset), or perhaps part of the long history of syncretization (Heitmüller,

⁴³ A. D. Nock, “Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments,” *Mnemosyne* (1952): 177–213, 185; reprinted in *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper, 1964), 109–45.

⁴⁴ So, Eliade, *Initiation*, 239; Ch. Picard, “Le prétendu ‘baptême d’initiation’ éleusien et le formulaire (ΣΥΝΘΗΜΑ) des mystères des Deux-déeses,” *RHR* 154 (1958): 129–45; J. Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development* (Nijmegen, Netherlands: Dekker & Van De Vegt, 1962), 17; Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 285–86; Joseph Thomas, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie: 150 av. J.-C.-300 ap. J.-C.* (Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1935), 339; Nock, “Hellenistic Mysteries,” 200–1; Meyer, *Ancient Mysteries*, 10; Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 650–51.

⁴⁵ Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13.

⁴⁶ Reitzenstein insists, “Bei Paulus selbst dürfen wir nicht in den Sakramenten an sich, sondern nur in der Bildersprache und einzelnen eigenartigen Worten das Verhältnis zu den Mysterienreligionen verfolgen” (*Mysterienreligionen*, 81).

Gunkel). All of these stand in opposition to current scholarly understandings of John.

As we will see from the rest of the literature review, scholars have abandoned this as a potential source for the origin of Christian baptism, in part because the consensus view is that Judaism *is* able to explain the origin of the so-called sacraments.⁴⁷ Of course, there still remains value in asking how a Greco-Roman person unfamiliar with Judaism might have understood the act, but this is not a question of origin.⁴⁸ And while it is true that we should speak of Hellenistic Judaism by the Second Temple Period,⁴⁹ this is a generalization that must be worked out in the details.⁵⁰

Response to the *Religionsgeschichte* Mystery-Religion Approach

There were four major responses to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* argument that centered on demonstrating that Judaism was able to explain Christian baptism.⁵¹ All of them are based on the premise that if one can clearly link John's baptism, the precursor of Christian baptism, to a Jewish antecedent (or none at all per the *sui generis* approach), the mystery religion connection could be undermined entirely. The first response consists of arguments linking John's baptism to proselyte baptism, the second insists that John was a former member of the Qumran community, the third claims that Christian baptism was *sui generis*, and the fourth argues that Christian baptism is tied to the ritual purity framework of the HB. Interestingly, none of the responses directly respond to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* school, at least not fully. Rather, they offer partial refutations and depend on the persuasiveness of their arguments in showing

⁴⁷ Cf. p. ? , n. 7 above.

⁴⁸ E.g. Stephen Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 302–3.

⁴⁹ Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

⁵⁰ Cf. Eric M. Meyers, "The Challenge of Hellenism for Early Judaism and Christianity," *BA* 54 (1992): 84–94; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

⁵¹ So, Klauck, *Religious Context*, 4, 151. Betz takes this point as conclusive: "At least there is certainty about the one point of concern to us: The Christian ritual of baptism has in some way developed out of Judaism" ("Transferring a Ritual," 100). This explicit response to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* argument is seen, for example, in Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 1–2, 41. As Susannah Heschel demonstrates, anti-semitism motivated German scholarship in this time period to deliberately avoid Jewish explanations. See, Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

how Judaism is able to make sense of baptism. After all, it was not until 1962 that Wagner's extensive response to the mystery religion argument appeared.⁵²

Proselyte Baptism

Scholars arguing in favor of proselyte baptism largely employ the same methodological approach as *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars to show that "Christian baptism" finds its genetic origin in Judaism.⁵³ But in order to make a comparison, the two baptisms must sufficiently resemble one another. Thus, scholars emphasize the initiatory context, shared technical terminology (i.e., *tēbilah* is transliterated from טביל and treated as a technical term just as "baptism" is from βάπτισμα), and the identification of a variety of liturgical and theological parallels. For those scholars writing after the discovery of the DSS, effort is also made to dismiss the case that John was a former Qumran sectarian.

F. Gavin (1928) responds indirectly to *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars by showing that Judaism is the preferable context for Christian baptism. As such, John the baptizer and the early church merely "incorporated the practice borrowed from Judaism."⁵⁴ Moreover, in complete contradiction to the claims of Gunkel, Gavin asserts that Judaism consistently *resisted* the type of syncretism with which Greco-Roman religion had no problem.⁵⁵ He concludes that "the fundamental beliefs and practices connected with early Christian baptism can be accounted for by reference to Judaism, without recourse to any other factor save the evaluation of Jesus the Messiah by the early Church."⁵⁶

First, he appeals to a general historical reconstruction of the years between 150 BCE to 66 CE and argues that there was an increasing sentiment

⁵² It should also be noted that while the *Religionsgeschichtliche* school's view on this matter is discredited, the method is still profitably utilized today (e.g., Blanton, Calhoun, and Rothschild, *History of Religions School Today*; Wiens, "Mystery Concepts," *ANRW* 23.2: 1258). Additionally, while the *Religionsgeschichtliche* method is associated with the Göttingen scholars during the 1880s to 1930s, it is understood more broadly in scholarship today (cf. Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing*, 88). Rothschild clarifies what makes a "history of religion" scholar and how it differs from the historical-critical method ("Introduction," 2–5). See Wiens for a helpful overview of how the *Religionsgeschichtliche* method has evolved in its approach to considering the influence of the mystery religions on early Christianity ("Mystery Concepts," *ANRW* 23.2: 1258–79).

⁵³ Beasley-Murray actually uses the term "genetic connection" in relationship to his critique of proselyte baptism (*Baptism*, 27).

⁵⁴ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 55.

⁵⁵ He is ultimately concerned with establishing the compatibility of Judaism with NT "sacramentalism."

⁵⁶ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, vii.

that gentiles were unclean by virtue of idol worship.⁵⁷ As a result, social barriers were erected in times of peace, which were scaled all the higher in times of conflict.⁵⁸ This led to the requirement of *ṭēbilah* (baptism) for new converts during the time that predated the Christian era, which explains the origin of proselyte baptism.⁵⁹ Second, by way of comparison of early Christian and Rabbinic liturgies, he outlines the “liturgical indebtedness” of early Christians to Jewish practice. Moreover, these striking similarities lead him to conclude that both proselyte and Christian baptism end up with the same effect: converts of both are freed from sin and guilt, and both enjoy new status as members of the “Fellowship of Israel.”⁶⁰

His evidence for proselyte baptism comes from *m. Pesah.* 8:8 (the immersion of non-Jewish soldiers), *b. Yebam.* 46a (the debate between R. Joshua and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus as to whether baptism or circumcision was the central rite) and *b. Soṭah* 12b (the immersion of Pharaoh’s daughter to wash off her gentile descent).⁶¹ He concludes, “that it could be a matter of debate at the end of the first century suggests definitively that it had been a long prevailing practice.”⁶² Of course, this depends on the accurate transmission of these traditions and that these later rabbinic texts record historically reliable information about the first century.⁶³

Moreover, examination of *Yebamot* and *Gerim* reveals certain details that can be identified in Christian baptism as well, such as the “master” retaining his or her hand on the person immersing.⁶⁴ Additionally, bodily immersion is assumed and there is the same preference for “living water” that we see reflected in the NT and early Christian texts such as the *Didache*.⁶⁵ Perhaps the most interesting feature of *Gerim* 1 is that while self-immersion is practiced, *a representative from the community is said to have baptized the convert.*⁶⁶

⁵⁷ He concedes that another rabbinic perspective existed (i.e., that Gentiles were exempt from uncleanness since the Law did not apply to them) but this is inconsequential because all that needs to be shown for his argument is that *some* Jews viewed Gentiles as unclean and that they submitted to *ṭēbilah* prior to the development of Christianity (*Jewish Antecedents*, 30).

⁵⁸ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 29.

⁵⁹ Cf. Finkelstein, “Institution,” 203–11.

⁶⁰ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 58.

⁶¹ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 30–31.

⁶² Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 31.

⁶³ He recognizes this problem but does not deal with it (*Jewish Antecedents*, 32). He dates *b. Yebam.* 47a and *Ger.* 1 to the first quarter of the 2nd century.

⁶⁴ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 36.

⁶⁵ E.g., Matt 3:6, 13; Acts 8:36–39; Did. 7:1.

⁶⁶ Gavin (following Burton Scott Easton) notes that the Western readings of Luke-Acts include the use of the middle voice instead of the passive, which points to the practice of

Gerim 1:5 reads: טבל ועלה אומרים לו דברים טובים, indicating that the proselyte self-immerses, and Gerim 1:8 reads: האיש מטביל לאיש והאשה מטבלת לא את האיש, which speaks of the witness(es) causing the proselyte to be immersed even when self-immersion is actually performed.⁶⁷ In Gerim 1:8, the hifil participle of טבל means “to order immersion”⁶⁸ or “bring to immersion.” This causative element presupposes agency, which implies the passive voice is appropriate.⁶⁹

When the liturgical practices above are compared with the *Egyptian Church Order (ECO)*⁷⁰ and the *Didache*, even more striking parallels between proselyte and Christian baptism emerge. These include: (1) examination of the convert, (2) a period of catechesis, and (3) baptism, which is performed on the Sabbath in running water or in the sea and which included the imposition of the hand by the priest on the convert’s head.⁷¹ Another detail which reflects Jewish sensibilities is the restriction against wearing any jewelry or other foreign articles.⁷² Some even argue that the rabbinic formula, “a newly received proselyte is like a newborn child,” could be functionally equivalent to “baptismal regeneration,”⁷³ though Gavin rightly takes issue with this.⁷⁴ These

self-immersion by early believers (*Jewish Antecedents*, 45). See Burton Scott Easton, “Self-Baptism,” *ATJ* 24 (1920): 513–18.

⁶⁷ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 35. His translation is compared here with that of Abraham Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud: Massektoth Ketannah* (London: Soncino Press, 1965):

Gavin: “He immerses himself, and when he comes up they address him (with) ‘comforting words’” (1:5).

Cohen: “When he has bathed and come up [out of the water], they speak to him words of kindness and comfort [saying]. . .” (1:5).

Gavin: “Men baptize men and women baptize women, but women (do not baptize) men” (1:8).

Cohen: “A man gives immersion to a man, and a woman to a woman but not to a man” (1:8).

⁶⁸ Jastrow, s.v. “טַבֵּל.”

⁶⁹ E.g., someone after the ceremony could ask, who immersed this person?

⁷⁰ This is more commonly identified as the *Apostolic Tradition* or the *Canons of Hippolytus* (c. 215 CE).

⁷¹ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 45–47.

⁷² According to the Mishnah, individuals had to immerse naked so that water touched every part of the body in order to be effective (*Jewish Antecedents*, 47–49). In support of these concerns, he cites m. Šabb. 6:1; m. Miqw. 8:5; 9:1; bar. Nid. 66; m. ‘Erub. 4a, b; B. Qam. 82a, b. Gavin explains that the comment in the *Trad. ap.*, “lest anything foreign from alien spirits go down into the water,” was a later gloss for which we lack the explicit, original purpose. However, he provides no evidence for this claim.

⁷³ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, vii.

⁷⁴ Gavin is assiduous in noting that this statement cannot be linked directly to the baptism of a proselyte, it only refers to the legal status of a proselyte (*Jewish Antecedents*, 51–55);

similarities lead Gavin to assert that “we possess in the Tannaitic core of the common rite *Yeb. 47—Gerim 1* and in the *ECO* roughly contemporary documents of Judaism and Christianity respectively”⁷⁵ and “we need look no farther than contemporary Rabbinic Judaism” for discovering its origin.⁷⁶

H. G. Marsh (1941) also traces Christian baptism to John the baptizer who adapted the Jewish *tēbilah* (like Marsh, he specifically means “proselyte baptism”).⁷⁷ He reasons that non-believing Jews would not have borrowed from Christian practice, so proselyte baptism must have been practiced before John. Additionally, he discounts the view that John the baptizer is “Christianized” by the Gospel authors because they would never have recorded the importance expressed by Jesus to be baptized by him.⁷⁸

Because John’s baptism was presumably one-time, it cannot be related to ritual purification, which immediately rules out a connection to Levitical washings or the practices of the Essenes.⁷⁹ Yet, the NT takes for granted that its readership knows both its origin and meaning since no explanations are offered.⁸⁰ Moreover, while John’s *ministry* is connected to the HB in the NT, no NT text ever links John’s *baptism* to a source in the HB.⁸¹ For Marsh, this suggests that it could have only been comprehensible to a first-century audience by its connection with some contemporary practice, namely, proselyte baptism.⁸²

Franz J. Leenhardt (1946), depending on Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck’s *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*,

cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 146–49; Smith, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 24. Later, however, Gavin is less clear on the matter (57–58). The relevant sources in the Talmud include: b. *Yebam. 22a, 48b, 62a, 97b*; b. *Bek. 47b*.

⁷⁵ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 45.

⁷⁶ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 58.

⁷⁷ H. G. Marsh, *The Origin and Significance of the New Testament Baptism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941), 13, n. 3, 57, 65. He agrees with Heitmüller’s observation that one must address the problem of “whether our description of John’s rite in the Gospels are too much influenced by Christian conceptions to offer any safe guidance” (*Im Namen Jesu*, 272).

⁷⁸ Marsh, *Origin*, 16–17, 67.

⁷⁹ Marsh, *Origin*, 45–46, 56.

⁸⁰ Marsh, *Origin*, 52, 55.

⁸¹ He notes, by contrast, that this is done in the case of Pentecost (*Origin*, 54). However, the emphasis there seems to be on explaining its connection to Spirit reception, not the act of water baptism. The Mishnah mentions a play on words with *תְּבִילָה*, which means “hope” in Jer 17:13. Because it also means “collecting pool, reservoir” (thus, ritual bath), R. Akiba makes the metaphorical connection between the ritual bath and God’s cleansing of Israel. However, *he does not equate the two*.

⁸² Marsh, *Origin*, 56.

claims, “On est aujourd’hui convaincu que Jean n’a pas créé le rite baptismal. Il l’a emprunté au judaïsme contemporain, qui baptisait par immersion les païens convertis [i.e., proselyte baptism], afin de les purifier des souillures de leur état antérieur.”⁸³ As to why *Jews* needed to be baptized by John, he explains, “tout homme est impur aux yeux de Celui qui s’approche pour juger.”⁸⁴ As such, John’s preaching ministry and baptism are viewed as a radical critique of fellow Jews on the basis that no Jew had previously been called upon to repent and wash away impurity (yet, cf. Isa 1:16).⁸⁵

Leenhardt insightfully asks the key question, “Pourquoi ce prédicateur si sobre, si méfiant à l’égard des apparences de la piété, si exigeant des marques véridiques de la conversion, a-t-il ajouté un rite à son message?”⁸⁶ Since Leenhardt assumes that Jewish ritual is an empty practice, John’s use of baptism presents a problem. If John were supposedly concerned about inner, moral purity, then why bother with an external act which would have been immediately associated with ritual purity? Would John not be just as guilty of promoting the supposedly superficial goals of “outward conformity” of which Marsh accuses practitioners of proselyte baptism? In response, Leenhardt believes John’s baptism to be a performative act typical of the prophets, a point he uses to explain how it might have made sense to contemporary Jews⁸⁷—baptism communicates death and rebirth and water is associated with the Holy Spirit in prophetic texts (e.g., Ezekiel).⁸⁸ He concludes that by this, “on s’explique la transformation radicale que Jean a fait subir au baptême des prosélyte.”⁸⁹

Arland J. Hultgren (1994) approaches the question differently in asserting that “It is not necessary, however, to make an exclusive choice between proselyte and John’s baptism as the antecedent to Christian baptism” and that “Christian baptism is immediately related to John’s baptism, but then John’s is

⁸³ Franz J. Leenhardt, *Le baptême chrétien: son origine, sa signification* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1946), 10–11. However, Leenhardt *selectively* uses Strack and Billerbeck because they specify that “proselyte baptism” only served as the *external form* for John’s. In their view, John’s baptism was performed as a symbol of inner moral purity, which was foreign to Levitical washing. Thus they conclude, “Dagegen haben inhaltlich die beiden Riten *nichts miteinander gemein*” (Str-B, 1:112, emphasis mine).

⁸⁴ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 11; cf. W. H. Brownlee, “John the Baptist in the New Light of Ancient Scrolls,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl (London: SCM, 1958), 33–53, 37.

⁸⁵ He does not explain why John should be viewed as critiquing Jews or Judaism.

⁸⁶ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 12, 18.

⁸⁷ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 12–13.

⁸⁸ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 15–17. Why this observation only applies to John’s baptism and not proselyte baptism is unclear. If the Spirit’s association with water works for John, surely it could apply to his antecedent.

⁸⁹ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 17.

a prophetic adaptation of proselyte baptism.”⁹⁰ He is unconvinced by arguments in favor of its origin in the HB because the numerous types of washings (e.g., Naaman, ritual, etc) were not initiatory or one-time like Christian baptism.⁹¹ By contrast, proselyte baptism offers a parallel initiation rite.⁹² Consequently, for Hultgren, the idea of initiation is integral to the nature of “baptism.”⁹³

Craig S. Keener (2003), after considering numerous antecedents, concludes that “Judaism’s most widespread once-for-all immersion ritual forms the most significant backdrop from which to understand [John’s baptism].”⁹⁴ Even though “Jewish lustrations” and “the broader cultural background” form the context for John’s activity, he maintains that “they cannot define [John’s baptism].”⁹⁵ He rejects the washings of Qumran as a likely antecedent because as Nock observed about the mysteries, “Qumran initiatory baptism” is a misnomer—it was the first washing of many.⁹⁶ This leads Keener to conclude that proselyte baptism is the source from which John’s arose. Of course, he recognizes that John must have modified it since it was applied to Jews, not gentiles.

Keener also offers the most substantial argument in favor of viewing the practice of proselyte baptism as preceding John the baptizer. As evidence, he appeals to (1) Hasmonean period ritual baths where proselyte baptism presumably occurred; (2) Epictetus’s mention of the practice (*Discourses*, 2.9.21), which he dates to the end of the first century CE; (3) the first-century debate between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai regarding the necessity of baptizing gentile converts per m. Pesah. 8:8;⁹⁷ (4) the evidence of *Sib. Or.* 4.162–65, which he dates to c. 80 CE; (5) other pre-Christian Mediterranean ceremonial washings even if they were the first of many; (6) the fact that Jews would not

⁹⁰ Hultgren, “Baptism,” 8.

⁹¹ Hultgren, “Baptism,” 7.

⁹² Oscar Cullmann makes no argument for proselyte baptism, but assumes that this is what John copies; see Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, SBT 1 (London: SCM, 1951), 9.

⁹³ Cf. Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 179.

⁹⁴ Keener, *John*, 1:445; cf. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 1: 977–82.

⁹⁵ Keener, *John*, 1:444; cf. Scot McKnight who similarly concludes, “the rites in Judaism and Christianity owe their origin to a common Jewish milieu in which water lustrations became increasingly important for converts and that Judaism’s rite of baptism may very well have received a decisive impetus from John the Baptist, Jesus, and the earliest Christians.” See, Scot McKnight, *Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 85.

⁹⁶ Keener, *John*, 1:444.

⁹⁷ Cf. b. ‘Ed. 5:2.

have borrowed from Christians;⁹⁸ and (7) the need for a “definite symbol of transition for women converts.”⁹⁹

Susan White (2008) states in her very brief entry in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*,

Christian baptism traces its roots both to the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism (increasingly common by the first century CE) and to the action of John the Baptist, whose preaching in the Judean desert concerning the coming Reign of God called for baptism in the Jordan River as a sign of repentance (see Matt 3; Mark 1:1–11; Luke 3:1–21), as well as to the *mikvah*, the periodic ritual baths for purity.¹⁰⁰

In her view, Christian baptism is to be traced to three things: John the baptizer, proselyte baptism, and the ritual bath. Unfortunately, she does not provide any evidence for these three roots, although her first two roots, John the baptizer and proselyte baptism, are supported in scholarship.

Analysis of Approach

The primary goal of scholars arguing that Christian baptism derives genetically from proselyte baptism was to provide *Jewish* evidence comparable to that promoted in favor of the mystery religions.¹⁰¹ Although their methodology resembles that of *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars, it successfully mitigated the need to look outside Judaism to explain Christian baptism since John’s was explainable within the framework of Second Temple Judaism.¹⁰² The ritual was performed by immersion (ἀάδδδδβæù translates לַבַּטּוּ) as a once-for-all initiation, which is evidenced by the technical language employed (i.e., baptism equates to the *ṭēbilah*). Numerous ritual parallels are identified, (e.g., the laying on of hands by the “master” on the person self-immersing and the presence of witnesses). Theological parallels are also found (e.g., the notion of “dying and rising” and “new birth” since proselytes were “like one who separates oneself

⁹⁸ Beasley-Murray inverts this argument and uses it against proponents of proselyte baptism (*Baptism*, 25).

⁹⁹ Keener, *John*, 1:446–47.

¹⁰⁰ Susan White, “Baptism” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47–48, emphasis mine. I interpret her to mean that John was not against the mikveh in calling people to his immersion, but how she knows that John also called people to the mikveh is unclear.

¹⁰¹ So, Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 1–2, 41; cf. Klauck, *Religious Context*, 4, 151.

¹⁰² In light of the arguments made by Gregory Dix, this view appears to have support from the *Apostolic Tradition* (c. 217 CE): “[Hippolytus’s] whole initiation rite is recognisably derived from the initiation of *Jewish* proselytes. His baptismal rite is *derived directly* from the baptismal rite for Jewish proselytes.” See, Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick, eds., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr* (London: Alban Press, 1992), xl.

from the grave” and “like a newborn child”). In light of these similarities, the chronological difficulties are easily resolved in that Jews would have never borrowed a ritual from Christians.

Unfortunately, these compelling parallels depend on the mixture of anachronisms, assumptions no longer supported by scholarship, and methodological problems of comparison. As an example of anachronism, just as *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars utilized later sources to build their case, so Gavin compares *later developments*, not origins, and reads this back onto the NT data. Similarly, Marsh and Leenhardt assume that Christianity represents a new religion over against Judaism when they characterize the latter as practicing empty, outward rituals, which John the baptizer and the early church transcend by filling with true spiritual depth.¹⁰³ Methodologically, just as mystery religion proponents attach theological meaning to baptism not demonstrably integral to it (e.g., dying and rising), so scholars impose external meaning on Jewish proselyte baptism. For example, proponents of this antecedent have ignored Gavin’s observation in 1928 that the rabbinic dictum—a proselyte is “like a newborn child”—cannot be specifically linked to the *baptism* of a proselyte.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, there is no evidence that ritual immersion ever symbolized death and new birth in the HB.¹⁰⁵ Finally, Leenhardt is correct that John is a prophetic figure calling the nation to repent and not to depend on ethnic status as a sufficient basis to avoid the coming judgment, but this is a regular feature of prophetic literature in the HB and, therefore, an insufficient basis to suggest that John is transcending Judaism or the proto-figure of a new religion.

A second problem ironically relates to one of the *main bases* for comparing proselyte with Christian baptism (i.e., its initiatory nature). While describing it as a baptism of initiation *may* work for Christian baptism it does not for John’s. He was neither initiating nor converting anyone; he called fellow

¹⁰³ Marsh, *Origin*, 59.

¹⁰⁴ The dictum refers to the *legal status* of a proselyte, even if it includes the notion of forgiveness of sins and a break with the past (*Jewish Antecedents*, 51–55; cf. Keener, *Spirit*, 146–49; Smith, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 24).

¹⁰⁵ For Hannah K. Harrington, Jacob Milgrom demonstrates “that the death/life dynamic undergirds the entire biblical purity system” (“Purification,” 120). Yet, this is different than saying that Jews understood ritual purity to involve death and rebirth when ritually immersing, especially when this is never explained in the HB. Moreover, Milgrom’s conclusion pertains to the *entire* purity system, which also includes blood sacrifices, not just water. Of course, not all scholars accept Milgrom’s theory. See, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Jews to *repent*, not *convert* to a new religion.¹⁰⁶ Making John a proto-Christian only introduces the anachronistic assumption of Judaism vs. Christianity. Thus, even if we grant that proselyte baptism was practiced prior to John and that he somehow transforms it, what has happened with the initiatory element?

A third problem relates to the purpose of proselyte baptism, the answer to which is ironically not explained until the explanation of John's is offered. Why does John require *fellow Jews* to undergo a ritual *restricted to gentiles*?¹⁰⁷ Two main suggestions are offered. Leenhardt's representative explanation is that the nation was not only ritually unclean but morally also; only a baptism of repentance was capable of purifying them.¹⁰⁸ Yet, ritual washing *was never intended to resolve moral impurity*.¹⁰⁹ Joachim Jeremias suggests that since the people of Israel entered the covenant at Sinai through "baptism," so John calls fellow Israelites to enter "eschatological salvation" in the same way.¹¹⁰ Of course, the parallel is forced because entering a covenant and eschatological salvation are not corresponding elements.¹¹¹ Regardless of which explanation is followed, in both of these cases it is unclear how John could have expected his audiences to understand his baptism when Jews were accustomed to immerse themselves on account of *ritual* impurity.

¹⁰⁶ Beasley-Murray notes, "we have no ground for believing that John regarded all Jews as virtually Gentiles (such a conclusion from Mt. 3:9 would be a misuse of the passage)" (*Baptism*, 41; cf. Robinson, "Baptism of John," 183). Smith points out there are two main arguments offered to explain why Jews would have been called to a gentile conversion ritual: (1) the entire Jewish nation was essentially like gentiles due to sin and (2) since the Rabbis thought that the Sinai generation had been baptized before entering the covenant—this being the reason for proselyte baptism—so John, following this rationale, calls Israel to an eschatological, wilderness baptism in view of entering the age to come ("Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 26–27).

¹⁰⁷ Robinson is also incredulous of this possibility ("Baptism of John," 183).

¹⁰⁸ Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 11; cf. Leipoldt, *Urchristliche Taufe*, 27. Smith rightly notes that Matt 3:8–9 and Luke 3:8 do not say this ("Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 26).

¹⁰⁹ Rightly noted by Robinson, "Baptism of John," 180. This is a key point that encouraged certain scholars to consider the baptisms of the Qumran community where it *appears* that ritual and moral impurities are conflated.

¹¹⁰ Joachim Jeremias draws from the rabbinic interpretation of Ex 24:8 (b. Yebam. 46b) and Num 15:14 (b. Ker. 9a) to arrive at this conclusion ("Ursprung," 320). Brownlee, attempting to summarize the logic, says, the "whole nation was apostate and sinful and it if was to become the people of God it must enter the society of God's people through repentance and baptism" ("John," 37). The three rituals, circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice are brought together in Sipre Num §108: *שלא באו לברית אלא בשלשה דברים במילה ובטבילה ובהצניף כיצ' בהן ובהרציית קרבן אף הגרים כיוצ' בהן*.

¹¹¹ Moreover, it is questionable that one should think about entering salvation in the same way that one enters a covenant.

Fourth, since Christian baptism is viewed as an one-time initiation, scholars must also make proselyte baptism into an one-time, special washing; these are integral to the nature of “baptism.” For example, Keener emphasizes that proselyte baptism offers the “closest Jewish parallel to John’s” due to its shared “initiatory status of a single baptism” that “provided a clear, symbolic line of demarcation between a proselyte’s Gentile past and Jewish present.”¹¹² However, this is also true of baptism at Qumran.¹¹³ In both instances, there is a “break with the past” at conversion followed by subsequent “normal” ritual washings. Since both new members of the Qumran sect and gentile proselytes to Judaism continued to wash after their first immersion, it is unclear why he rejects baptism at Qumran as “one-time” while maintaining the same for proselyte baptism.

Moreover, while I agree that a break with the past occurs, the terminology used in the discussion obfuscates the fact that this break is represented by the *entire conversion ceremony* not the *ṭēbilah alone* (i.e., *the baptism*).¹¹⁴ Just as “baptism” is unjustifiably treated as a *technical term*, so also *ṭēbilah* is treated in the same way by proponents of proselyte baptism.¹¹⁵ Nowhere in rabbinic literature does *ṭēbilah* refer to anything other than an immersion for resolving ritual impurity¹¹⁶ associated with idol worship.¹¹⁷ It is circular reasoning to assert that its use in the context of gentile conversion imbues it with the status of a technical term and then refer to those texts to prove the assertion.

¹¹² Keener, *John*, 1:445. In fact, he dismisses the initiatory washings at Qumran on the basis that they were the first of many even though they also provide a clear break with the initiate’s past and future. Additionally, they do not “purify the soul from sin” (1:444).

¹¹³ Cf. Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 182.

¹¹⁴ In fact, some Rabbinic sources indicate that witnesses were a requirement and if none could be provided, the proselyte’s status as a convert was rejected. That is, in addition to circumcision and immersion, there is also an integral communal element to conversion. See Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (New York: Ktav, 1939), 54–55.

¹¹⁵ This same issue applies to the term “baptize” as well.

¹¹⁶ Thus, Bamberger notes, “The word we have been rendering “baptism” is the Hebrew *tebilah*, which means any sort of ritual bath, and is *not specifically qualified when applied to converts*” (*Proselytism*, 43).

¹¹⁷ Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 53. This was not considered as *moral* impurity since it was viewed as contagious like other forms of ritual impurity. As Christine E. Hayes points out, the ritual impurity of gentiles vis-à-vis idolatry is a *rabbinic development* rather than a biblical principle. In fact, this development may explain the origin of proselyte baptism; if so, it would have an impact on whether proselyte baptism was practiced prior to John the baptizer. Hayes is unable to pinpoint the exact time frame, but suggests that it must have originated in the first century CE. Furthermore, *if* this is the reason for the origin of proselyte baptism, it makes John’s application of it to fellow Jews all the more problematic. See Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), 131–33, 195.

Rather, if it obtains an initiatory character, this is due to its role in a conversion ceremony, not by any inherent initiatory significance in the word. Thus, Beasley-Murray rightly transfers to proselyte baptism Nock's observation about the mystery religions—it is the first washing of many.¹¹⁸ *That it plays a role in an initiation process does not change its intended purpose.* Consequently, the comparison to John's (and Christian) baptism appears to break down.¹¹⁹ While the arguments put forward by advocates of proselyte baptism mitigate the need to look outside Judaism to explain Christian baptism, the critiques above throw into question the premise that it is genetically dependent on proselyte baptism.

Qumran Community

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provided scholars another Jewish alternative to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* explanation of the origin of Christian baptism. Not only are there liturgical parallels (e.g., mode, initiatory context) but there are theological, geographical, and social coincidences as well (e.g., Isa 40:3, location in the desert, a baptism that appears to resolve moral impurity, an imminent expectation of the end, priestly genealogy, messianic expectations, etc). This antecedent is even able to provide a Jewish parallel to the mystery religion notion of ἰδóóðñéíí through their use of their teachings and 120ⲓⲛ were apparently kept a secret as well.¹²¹ An advantage of the DSS is that they are free of the chronological challenges faced by those who argue in favor of proselyte baptism and, unlike proselyte baptism, it offered justification for John's application of baptism to Jews. Not surprisingly, scholars immediately began mining the texts to see how they might shed light on "Christian origins." As Emile Puech wryly observes, "Dès les premières découvertes à Qumrân, on a voulu faire de Jean-Baptiste, l'ascète vivant au désert, un essénien."¹²²

¹¹⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 27–31.

¹¹⁹ This is due to the fact that most interpreters do not relate baptism with ritual purification.

¹²⁰ Samuel I. Thomas, "The 'Mysteries' of the Qumran Community: The RAZ-Concept in Second Temple Judaism and in the Dead Sea Scrolls" (PhD diss., Notre Dame, 2007), 31–34; 204–6; Joseph Coppens, "'Mystery' in the Theology of Saint Paul and its Parallels at Qumran," in *Paul and Qumran: Studies in New Testament Exegesis*, ed. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 132–58.

¹²¹ 1QS 4:5–6; 9:16–17; 10:24–25; cf. *J.W.* 2.8.7 §142.

¹²² Emile Puech, "Essénisme et christianisme: Les manuscrits de la mer Morte et Jésus," *Oeuvres et Critiques* 26 (2001): 153–73, 164. William Sanford La Sor's dissertation provides a few entertaining examples that demonstrate Puech's claim. See, William Sanford La Sor,

John A. T. Robinson (1957; 1962) readily admits that his hypothesis that John the baptizer was a former Qumran sectarian involves significant speculation and gap filling.¹²³ His starting point is the intriguing fact that John, the son of a priest, is living an ascetic life in the desert. How did this come to be? He suggests, John was “sent (on the death, perhaps, of his parents?) to be reared in the desert discipline of the Qumran Community.”¹²⁴ In support of this idea, he lists the following circumstantial details: (1) priests comprised a significant portion of the Qumran community and John was from a priestly family, (2) Qumran was near John’s home and drew membership from these “rural circles,” (3) both John and the Qumran community presumably severed ties with the Temple, (4) both enacted Isa 40:3 by preparing the way in the desert, (5) both had an eschatological outlook, although John ultimately left Qumran because he believed the end was nearer than Qumran taught, (6) both envisioned a future purification or baptism of the Holy Spirit, (7) both practiced repeated washings—he allows for the possibility that John’s was repeated since it is never specified as one-time, (8) both implemented a washing that required of Jews an accompanying life change, (9) both preached a “two-ways” perspective of the world, and (10) both baptisms could be associated with “redemptive suffering” (e.g., Mark 10:38–39).

When it comes to explaining John’s baptism, the washings of the Qumran community carry the greatest explanatory power because unlike proselyte baptism, per Robinson, theirs is the only lustration that resolved moral impurity.¹²⁵ Although, they did not have a “single baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” like John,¹²⁶ their first washing was nonetheless different in that it represented a clean break with the past.¹²⁷ It was this element combined with John’s “different eschatological situation” that explains why he

“A Preliminary Reconstruction of Judaism in the Time of the Second Temple in the Light of the Published Qumrân Materials” (ThD diss., University of Southern California, 1956), 375.

¹²³ Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 175, 184, 191; cf. La Sor, “Preliminary Reconstruction,” 369. Joseph A. Fitzmyer presents similar arguments as Robinson and is also persuaded that it is likely that John is a former sectarian and that his baptism originated at Qumran. See, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls & Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 18–21.

¹²⁴ Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 176. Witherington finds this argument compelling (*Troubled Waters*, 26).

¹²⁵ Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 180.

¹²⁶ Robinson is noncommittal on this point, however, for he says on the same page that “there is no evidence that any stress was laid on the unrepeatability of baptism, and there is in fact nothing actually to say that John’s baptism was of this exclusive nature” (“Baptism of John,” 181).

¹²⁷ Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 182. Later he notes that even John’s baptism was preliminary since he expected a “future, eschatological baptism to be administered by the one coming after him” (183).

adapted the Qumran lustrations to create a ἁγίασμα ἰσχυρὸν καὶ ἄσβεστον ἁγίασμα, a “final purification of the nation.”¹²⁸ The uniqueness of John’s baptism, however, is simply one of “prominence” and degree, not kind (i.e., it is still Jewish). Christian baptism, on the other hand, is different in kind because of (1) the “uniqueness of the Christ-event” that undergirds Heb 6:4–6 and (2) Christianity abandoned the Mosaic law which required the observance of purity rules, food-laws, and sacrifices.

G. R. Beasley-Murray (1962) rejects Bultmann’s view that Christian baptism is “a bath of purification for the coming Reign of God,”¹²⁹ rather it is “the sacrament of the Gospel.”¹³⁰ Jesus’s baptism by John cannot be the foundation for Christian baptism because the two baptisms represent such different realities and “no writer of the New Testament brings the baptism of Jesus into relation with Christian baptism.”¹³¹ Regarding proselyte baptism, Beasley-Murray notes that it is a *tēbilah* like any other (i.e., done to accomplish ritual purity) and not one-time.¹³² *That it plays a role in an initiation process does not change its intended purpose.* He even asserts that “there is no point at which contact can be found between John’s baptism and proselyte baptism . . . The basic ideas behind the two institutions had little or nothing in common.”¹³³ What he finds problematic is not *chronological uncertainty* but the *purpose* or *nature* of proselyte baptism (i.e., it merely enabled participation in worship whereas circumcision made the proselyte a Jew).¹³⁴

With this, he concludes that John was influenced by the Qumran community. Yet, if Qumran sectarians practiced repeated washings and “baptism” is once-for-all, how could John’s possibly derive from them?¹³⁵ He freely admits that John “transformed whatever he adopted” but insists that he began with the “raw material [from Qumran] hard to come by elsewhere.”¹³⁶ Against the arguments of H. H. Rowley who notes that there is no evidence that the first washing differed from subsequent ones at Qumran, Beasley-Murray

¹²⁸ Robinson, “Baptism of John,” 181.

¹²⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 99.

¹³⁰ Beasley-Murray notes that the phrase “sacrament of the Gospel” originates with W. F. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1948), 99, 120, 122.

¹³¹ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 64–65, emphasis original.

¹³² Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 27–31.

¹³³ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 42.

¹³⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 28–29; cf. Dahl, “Origin,” 41.

¹³⁵ H. H. Rowley rejects this possibility in terms that resemble Beasley-Murray’s judgment on proselyte baptism: “There is not a single feature of John’s baptism for which there is the slightest reason to go to Qumran to look for the source.” See, H. H. Rowley, “The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect,” in *New Testament Essays, Studies in Memory of T. W. Manson*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 219–23.

¹³⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 40.

emphasizes their “genuinely sacramental nature” and that the first washing *did* take on an initiatory character.¹³⁷ For him, Qumran innovated in that Levitical lustrations took on “sacramental efficacy” when coupled with repentance. He explains:

if the more innocent daily lustrations could be developed in special ways by certain members of the community, it would not be remarkable if a prophetic individual who knew of them adapted them in a far more radical manner, more in harmony with their spiritual intent. There *is* a bridge from Qumran to John the Baptist and it has more than one track: for the Covenanters and for John, the End is near; it requires drastic *moral preparation*; and *lustration apart from the Temple worship*, albeit necessarily conjoined with repentance, is effective for that purpose. In each case John is more radical in his teaching and more genuinely prophetic; but the Covenanters prepared the Way of the Lord better than they knew—*by preparing the way of the Forerunner*.¹³⁸

It was John’s more radical ministry with its more immediate eschatological expectation that distinguished John’s baptism.¹³⁹ Without his first-hand knowledge of Qumran, John would have never created his eschatologically and Levitically inspired, one-time baptism.¹⁴⁰

Derwood Smith (1982) responds in detail to Joachim Jeremias’s argument in favor of proselyte baptism¹⁴¹ and concludes that the “more suitable antecedent for John’s practice is the initiation rites at Qumran coupled with the increased “eschatological tension” in John’s perspective.”¹⁴² Regarding Jeremias’s arguments, he takes issue with the following: (1) chronological

¹³⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 15–16.

¹³⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 18, emphasis mine.

¹³⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 44. This is very close to the conclusion drawn by Collins, “Origin,” 35.

¹⁴¹ Smith describes Jeremias’s work as “The most thorough and persuasive argument for seeing Jewish proselyte baptism as the source of John’s baptism and hence of Christian baptism” (“Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 13). See, Joachim Jeremias, “Der Ursprung der Johannaustaufe,” *ZNW* 28 (1929): 312–20.

¹⁴² Smith, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 32. Although, Eul Kee Chung correctly notes that Smith believes the HB is the “ultimate origin” of John’s baptism, he unfortunately misrepresents him by failing to clarify that for Smith, Qumran mediated the HB to John. See, Eul Kee Chung, “The Background of John’s Baptism in Light of the Old Testament” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 22.

uncertainty of the practice prior to John,¹⁴³ (2) the supposed parallels of terminology, rites, catechetical instruction, and theology.¹⁴⁴

For Smith, John's baptism is ultimately rooted the "priestly lustrations described in the Old Testament,"¹⁴⁵ so the question is how they are mediated to John. Since John's baptism entails a "transition" from ritual to moral concerns, the practice at Qumran is the only possible antecedent from which John could have possibly drawn since it both predates him and also entails moral efficacy.¹⁴⁶ So, how are the washings of Qumran and John different and why is he dependent on them? Following Barbara E. Thiering, he accepts that Qumran distinguished between ritual and moral purities and that the latter was *not* resolved by water as 1QS 3:6–9 makes clear. That is, a distinction is made between the "ways" and "flesh" of humankind—only the spirit cleanses the ways, whereas water cleanses the flesh. However, 1QS 4:18–22, which speaks of the end of evil, envisions a cleansing performed by God wherein "the distinction between cleansing by the Spirit and cleansing by water is no longer evident," rather, they become one.¹⁴⁷ At this point, Smith departs from Thiering's argument and suggests that "the background of John's baptism is not the "present" rite of 1QS 3:8-9 but rather the "future" rite of 1QS 4:18-22."¹⁴⁸ What was future for the Qumran community was "at hand" for John (i.e. realized eschatology).

Ben Witherington (2007) agrees with the consensus that "if one were to look for the most likely antecedent for Christian baptism, it is undoubtedly in John's baptism,"¹⁴⁹ so, we must look to his context to identify its origin. He dismisses the mystery religions as a viable source of origin since there is no

¹⁴³ He first notes that no reference to proselyte baptism occurs in the HB, Apocrypha, NT, Philo, Josephus, or older targumim. In fact, when Josephus refers to the conversion of Izates, circumcision is mentioned, but not baptism. Second, he notes that the sources used by Jeremias all date to the end of the first century CE and some of them may be referring to some other sect or practice (Derwood, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 14–22).

¹⁴⁴ Regarding terminology, Smith agrees that βαπτίζω is derived from a "Jewish background" but this does not require mediation through proselyte baptism since טביל is not a technical term. Regarding rites, whatever similarities may be observed, most also apply to ritual bathing and the Christian parallels date to the 2nd century CE or later. Regarding the instruction of proselytes, this was done well before proselyte baptism began and thus not tied to it. Regarding theology, he objects to the idea that a proselyte is "morally regenerated" in proselyte baptism since b. Yebam. 46a—"One who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born"—does not refer to baptism, but to a proselyte tout court (Derwood, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 14–22).

¹⁴⁵ Here, he follows Dahl (see below).

¹⁴⁶ Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 29.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 30–31.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism," 31.

¹⁴⁹ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 31.

need to look outside of Judaism to explain it.¹⁵⁰ While he grants that proselyte baptism may have influenced the development of Christian baptism (e.g., in mode and in its recipients, i.e., children), it cannot be the origin because of the latter's "association with the death of Jesus and union with Christ made possible through the Spirit."¹⁵¹ As for ritual purity, it may serve as a general context since "we find evidence of mikvehs everywhere" but "ritual purity was seen as a precursor to and sign of the spiritual purity that only God could effect."¹⁵² The remaining option is the initiatory baptism at Qumran and on this he follows Robinson and Beasley-Murray.¹⁵³

In contrast with Bruce Chilton (below), Witherington believes that John "was primarily a prophet of apocalyptic doom."¹⁵⁴ He agrees with Robinson that John "is not following in his father's footsteps" as a priest and must have been "reared in the desert discipline of the Qumran Community."¹⁵⁵ He also mentions the parallels between John and the Qumran community identified by Robinson¹⁵⁶ and concludes, "Of all the possible influences in Judaism at this time that could have led to such a ministry, the principles and practices of the Qumran community seem the most likely wellspring from which John arose."¹⁵⁷

Witherington, of course, does not believe that John left "Qumran initiation" as-is but adapted it. As to how and why John modified what he learned, he adapts the argument of Meredith G. Kline. That is, John's baptism was developed around the ANE concept of the water-ordeal wherein baptism functions like the waters of judgment in the same way that the flood waters "judge some but save others" or the Reed Sea¹⁵⁸ saves Israel and judges Egypt.¹⁵⁹ By this, John modifies the baptism of Qumran to make it his own.¹⁶⁰

Analysis of Approach

Advocates of this approach also plausibly argue that John's and Christian baptism are potentially explainable within the framework of Second Temple

¹⁵⁰ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 9.

¹⁵¹ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 21.

¹⁵² Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 18–19. It is unclear on what basis he makes this claim since ritual purity was neither viewed as a precursor nor as a sign of spiritual purity.

¹⁵³ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 25.

¹⁵⁵ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 26 (citing Robinson, "Baptism of John," 176).

¹⁵⁶ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 27–28.

¹⁵⁷ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Anson F. Rainey, and R. Steven Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Carta, 2014), 119.

¹⁵⁹ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 30.

¹⁶⁰ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 28–30.

Judaism. The methodology employed is similar to the prior two antecedent approaches (i.e. mystery religions and proselyte baptism). Robinson's comprehensive list of geographical, social, and theological parallels suggests that if John the baptizer is a former sectarian, then his baptism must also derive from the Qumran community; but even so, it was his "different eschatological situation" that led him to create a "final purification of the nation."¹⁶¹ Beasley-Murray introduces the notion of "sacramental efficacy" at Qumran and insists that the first washing was initiatory in character. Similar to Robinson, he believes that John's more immediate eschatological expectations are the reason he transforms what he received. Smith goes in a different direction by positing that the DSS (specifically 1QS) mediate the HB priestly washings to John since the washings at Qumran are the only antecedent which entails a transition from ritual to moral efficacy with regard to ritual immersion. Witherington also acknowledges that John's baptism differs from the practices of Qumran, thus, he proposes that the ANE concept of the water-ordeal is the most likely means by which he modifies the baptism of Qumran and makes it his own.¹⁶² That is, baptism functions like the waters of judgment in the same way that the flood waters "judge some but save others" or the Reed Sea saves Israel and judges Egypt.¹⁶³

Several common traits of this view stand out: (1) John was a former Qumran sectarian, (2) the Qumran community and John were anti-temple or at least viewed the temple as ineffective, (3) the first washing undertaken by a new Qumran sectarian must have been unique and sacramental, (4) ritual washing at Qumran was effective in resolving moral impurity, and (5) John transformed his inherited Qumranic baptism due to eschatological intensity. We will now consider each of these points.

John the Baptizer, a Former Qumran Sectarian. If John were a former Qumran sectarian, the genetic connection of his baptism to the Qumran community would be extremely likely. The essential question is which, if any, of the broader parallels drawn by Robinson (or the others) are *only* explainable by a connection with the Qumran community. The one element that potentially qualifies is the contested observation that the DSS appear to conflate ritual and moral purity (more below). It could be argued that it is the *constellation* of parallels that is significant for Robinson's argument, but the majority of the points rest upon speculation, which he admits, and considerable gap filling. That is, elements of the constellation are disqualified or are less significant when further scrutinized.

¹⁶¹ Robinson, "Baptism of John," 181.

¹⁶² Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 28–30.

¹⁶³ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 30.

For example, priests lived throughout Israel and the diaspora,¹⁶⁴ so it matters little whether John's family lived in proximity to the Qumran community or that he was found in the desert and the Gospel writers use Isaiah 40:3 to explain his presence there.¹⁶⁵ As another example, it is unclear how Robinson knows the geographical locations from which Qumran members came to join the sect,¹⁶⁶ that they drew followers from the Judean hill country, or that these "rural circles" shared the same "ideals of piety" as the Qumran community.¹⁶⁷ While it is certainly *possible* that John had contact with the Qumran community,¹⁶⁸ Robinson cannot show that John was personally familiar with the community and nothing about his ministry, message, or baptism *depends* on them. He also never explains how and why John diverges so significantly from the teachings of his supposed forerunners since he differs from them in more respects than just his baptismal practice.¹⁶⁹

Anti-Temple Posture. It often claimed that the Qumran community maintained an anti-temple stance, but it is less often explained as to what is meant. While it is true that the Qumran community viewed itself as a spiritual temple,¹⁷⁰ this appears to have been a temporary measure until the arrival of an Aaronic messiah¹⁷¹ and the re-establishment of a purified temple.¹⁷² Moreover, Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook suggest good reasons

¹⁶⁴ E.g., According to Josephus, Herod appointed High Priests from Babylon to keep his rule secure (*Ant.* 15.2.4 §22).

¹⁶⁵ Luke also explains that ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν Ζαχαρίου υἱὸν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ (Luke 3:2).

¹⁶⁶ If they were Essenes, Josephus notes that members of this sect were found in cities throughout Israel (*J.W.* 1.8.4 §§124–25).

¹⁶⁷ Robinson, "Baptism of John," 176.

¹⁶⁸ Beasley-Murray finds it impossible that John was "ignorant of their existence" (*Baptism*, 39).

¹⁶⁹ E.g., Puech notes that at most, "Jean-Baptiste passerait tout au plus pour un exclu" from the community. If one only considers the issue of baptism, the following differences exist between Qumran and John respectively: self-immersion/administered, in a ritual bath/in the flowing water of the Jordan river, repeated/one-time washing, formation of an exclusive community/no formation of an exclusive community because John sends people back home ("Essénisme," 164).

¹⁷⁰ 1QS 8:5; 9:6; 4Q174 1 I, 21, 2:2–7.

¹⁷¹ 1QS 11:11.

¹⁷² 11QT 25:10–27:10; CD 4:15–18; 5:6–7; 6:11–13; 7:18–20; 12:23–13:1; 14:19; 19:10–11; 20:1; 1QS 9:10–11; 1QSa 2:11–15; 4Q174 1 I, 21, 2:11–12; 1QM 2:1–6. See also, Hannah K. Harrington, "Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls—Current Issues," *CurBR* 4 (2006): 397–428, 409; Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTS 62 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 159.

to believe that the leaders of the Qumran community were subject to *forced*,¹⁷³ not self-imposed exile as is generally assumed.¹⁷⁴ While a complete break with the Jerusalem temple may have eventually happened, Josephus describes some Essenes as participating in temple worship, only doing so in their own manner.¹⁷⁵ Regardless, the Qumran community was not anti-temple; if anything, they were critical of halakhic practices of the temple, which in their view rendered the temple cult ineffective.¹⁷⁶

Similarly, while John *may* have viewed the temple cult as ineffective, corrupt, or superseded, the idea is “weakly based”¹⁷⁷ and depends on significant speculation. Robert L. Webb, who believes John’s baptism to be in protest against the temple, admits, “the extant, fragmentary evidence concerning John contains *no explicit reference to the temple itself*.”¹⁷⁸ He is careful to note that the criticism inherent in John’s baptism is *not* directed to the building or the concept of the cult, but rather to “the temple establishment” (i.e., the Sadducean leaders). Yet, he maintains that people undergoing John’s baptism were “bypassing or eliminating the temple rite.” Here is where logic becomes convoluted, however. If John is against the corruption of the temple *establishment* and not the temple *cult*, then how exactly does his baptism critique the corrupt Sadducees? According to Webb, it boils down to popularity and financial loss. As John increases in favor among the people, they will be less beholden to the temple authorities and since they have a way of achieving atonement outside the temple, the authorities will lose money and prestige. Thus, John, a priest, replaces the temple cult by endowing ritual washing with the ability to cleanse sin, something every priest would know is not possible, all in protest against corrupt Sadducean leaders.

Admittedly, the description of John’s baptism as ἀὐτὸ ἁγιάσθησθαι ἡμέρας ἑβδόμησιν ἡμέρας ἑβδόμησιν might suggest competition with the temple since a central purpose of the cult was to provide atonement, but this depends on what John’s baptism entailed and what specifically John and his audience believed to be the basis for forgiveness of sins. As Webb notes, if John’s baptism were believed to have forgiven sins as he argues, “John would have had to explain why this

¹⁷³ Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, and Edward M. Cook, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 27–35.

¹⁷⁴ Brownlee, “John,” 37.

¹⁷⁵ *J.W.* 1.3.5 §§78–80; 2.7.3 §§111–13; *Ant.* 18.1.5 §19. It is not certain that Josephus is describing members of the Qumran community in these texts, but their concern to observe the rituals according to their understanding and in terms compatible with their observance of purity is compatible with this possibility.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. 4QMMT (4Q394, 4Q395, 4Q396, 4Q397, 4Q398, 4Q399).

¹⁷⁷ Bruce Chilton, “Yohanan the Purifier and His Immersion,” *TJT* 14 (1998): 197–212, 204.

¹⁷⁸ Webb, *John*, 203–5.

was so to his audiences.¹⁷⁹ The Gospels, in describing John's ministry, give no indication in this direction. Moreover, there are many instances in the HB and Second Temple Judaism where forgiveness of sins occurred outside the temple cult that do not necessarily entail an anti-temple posture.¹⁸⁰ To speculate in the other direction, not only is it possible that John could have served his rotation as a priest and then returned to the wilderness, but Bruce Chilton questions whether John was even a priest to begin with.¹⁸¹

Does his location of ministry (i.e., outside the temple) suggest an anti-temple stance? As previously observed, like Qumran, his reason for being in the wilderness according to the Gospel writers is explained by Isa 40:3.¹⁸² It is very possible that his choice of the Jordan River entailed some symbolic element, but John's Gospel suggests that he also baptized elsewhere for pragmatic reasons—"there was much water [at Aenon]" (3:23),¹⁸³ which minimizes the potential symbolism. The fact that John calls people to baptize outside the temple in the Jordan River is uncontroversial since Jews regularly immersed "apart from the Temple worship" to maintain a condition of ritual purity. Certainly, going to someone in the desert to ritually immerse would be out of the ordinary, but it does not require an anti-temple interpretation.

Finally, if John's baptism was anti-temple, it becomes necessary to explain this divergence from the Qumran community if he is a former sectarian. While they share the practice of immersion in the wilderness, they maintain two very different modes of thought regarding the relationship of washing to the temple. That is, John's washing is assumed by some to replace the temple cult, the Qumran community practices strict washing *because* they view themselves as a spiritual temple. That is, the "threat" posed by Qumran is their community, not their washing, which is patterned off of the Pentateuchal clean/unclean laws in its relationship to sacred space.

Baptism at Qumran, Initiation, and Uniqueness. It is generally assumed that new members joining the Qumran community immersed themselves as part of their initiation, but this is not at all certain as several scholar

¹⁷⁹ Webb, *John*, 205.

¹⁸⁰ E.g., Pss 51:9, 17; 78:38; 79:9; 1QS 3:8; 8:5–6; 9:4–5; 4Q400 1 I, 16; 4 Macc 6:29; 17:21–22; Pss. Sol. 3:8; 9:6; Philo, *Mos.* 2.24; and, of course, there was no temple at which to obtain forgiveness of sins during the exile.

¹⁸¹ It is unclear whether he is questioning whether John actually ever served in the priestly role or that John enjoyed a priestly lineage (Chilton, "Yohanan," 205). As I read Chilton, it would seem that he is arguing in favor of the latter since he casts doubt on the reliability of Luke's Gospel.

¹⁸² As Morna D. Hooker notes, "the wilderness came to be associated (as in Isaiah 40) with the idea of a new Exodus." See, Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 1991), 36.

¹⁸³ Keener notes that there is no clear reason for John to invent Aenon (*John*, 1:577).

have pointed out.¹⁸⁴ As 1QS reads, 1.1–2.25 and 6.13–23 explain the initiation process, which does not mention washing. It is in 1QS 2.25–3.12 that washing is mentioned, but only in reference to those who refuse to join the community. It could be rightly argued that what is stated negatively for those who do not join the community reflects what is true of new sectarians, but this still does not associate ritual washing with joining the community. In fact, 1QS 2.19–25, which details the annual covenant renewal, interrupts the flow between 1.1–2.25 (the initiation process) and 1QS 2.25–3.12 (where washing is mentioned). The testimony of Josephus on this issue supports the view if his comments include the Dead Sea community.¹⁸⁵

Even if it is granted that new members did wash when they joined, which I find to be a reasonable expectation, the points above argue strongly against any notion that the first washing would have differed in any way from the washings that the community performed daily in the *same* ritual baths.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, this “first” washing cannot be equated to initiation since that process took three years to complete.¹⁸⁷ Since the washing was the same as that performed any other day, it cannot be considered one-time.¹⁸⁸

This discussion underscores the problem of parallels and what is meant by “baptism.” As Rowley remarks, “[f]ew writers define what they mean by baptism.”¹⁸⁹ Yet, for scholars to compare John’s baptism to the washings of the Qumran community, it is necessary to construe the first washing to be like “baptism.” This desire is on display in Beasley-Murray’s attempt to defend “the sacramental nature of these lustrations.”¹⁹⁰ If there were anything special about the first washing, it would be the context of an initiation ceremony. However, like Nock observed about the mysteries and Beasley-Murray observed about

¹⁸⁴ Collins, “Origin,” 31; Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul*, SNTSMS 53 (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 30; Rowley, “Baptism,” 219.

¹⁸⁵ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.7 §§137–39.

¹⁸⁶ Since the Qumran community viewed themselves as a spiritual temple, it would be unthinkable that they would not require new members to immediately immerse. See also the discussion in Newton, *Concept*, 30; cf. Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament: A Comparative Study in the Temple Symbolism of the Qumran Texts and the New Testament*, SNTSMS 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. 1QS 6.13–23; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.7 §§137–39; James VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 114–16. Rowley believes that John’s baptism was initiatory (“Baptism,” 222).

¹⁸⁸ Jörg Frey, “Critical Issues in the Investigation of the Scrolls and the New Testament” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 517–45, 530.

¹⁸⁹ Rowley, “Baptism,” 218.

¹⁹⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 15–18.

proselyte baptism, the same applies here—that it plays a role in an initiation process does not change its intended purpose.

Resolving Moral Impurity by Ritual Washing. The belief that ritual washing at Qumran effected moral cleansing is uncertain despite being a common view.¹⁹¹ All of the DSS that refer to ritual washing do so in terms compatible with and dependent on the Pentateuch.¹⁹² That they might expand the rules or interpret them more strictly is beside the point. The *main* text in the DSS literature that appears to conflate ritual and moral cleansing is 1QS 2–3, which is characterized by highly compressed polemics and it is unclear as to *what* exactly effects atonement (i.e., moral cleansing). Since this text begins with an invective on people who refuse to join the קָהֳל , *this* is the reason that the ritual washings of outsiders are ineffective against ritual impurity and that they do not obtain atonement. It is not the case that ritual washing at Qumran effects atonement, rather it is membership in the קָהֳל that does so. By extension, acts of ritual purity are only effective *within the community* because only they have the divinely approved halakhic interpretation. In other words, to the Qumran sectarian, it would make no sense to speak of achieving ritual purity *outside the community* because one is de facto morally impure by *not belonging to the New Covenant people*, a more serious issue.

Furthermore, one element to which Robinson did not have access and that Witherington mentions is the archaeological remains of ritual baths. Given

¹⁹¹ Harrington, “Purity,” 409–10. Examples of those who believe conflation occurred include: Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90; Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, SJLA 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 54; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 39.

An intermediate view is represented by Casey Toews who takes issue with the view that the Qumran community conflated the *categories* of ritual and moral impurities. Instead, he suggests that what they conflated was the *purification* of ritual and moral impurity, not the categories themselves (i.e., ritual bathing resolved both of these impurities but the community distinguished between the categories). However, if they were maintained as separate categories, it is a mystery how they came to conflate their means of purification. The fact that the means of purification is the same suggests that the categories are no longer distinct since each category has its own means of purification. See, Casey Toews, “Moral Purification in 1QS,” *BBR* 13 (2003): 71–96.

Examples of those who argue that conflation did not occur include: Barbara E. Thiering argues that Qumran *did* distinguish between ritual and moral purity and resolved them in *different ways* (i.e., ablutions did not remove moral impurity); the water ritual was secondary and inferior. It is also an assumption that John the baptizer conflated ritual and moral impurities. See, Barbara E. Thiering, “Inner and Outer Cleansing at Qumran as a Background to New Testament Baptism” *NTS* 26 (1980): 266–27; M. Himmelfarb, “Impurity and Sin in 4QD, 1QS, and 4Q512,” *DSD* 8 (2001): 9–37.

¹⁹² Cf. Hannah K. Harrington, *The Purity Texts*, Companion to The Qumran Scrolls 5 (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), esp. app. A and B.

that these baths—whose purpose was to resolve ritual impurity—were “everywhere” and that the baths of Qumran are not only formally identical but utilized for the same purpose begs the question. If the predominantly shared cognitive information regarding ritual baths is related to ritual purity, and if ritual and moral purities were conflated at Qumran, and if this is where John develops his baptismal understanding, then one would expect some explanation of this in the textual evidence related to John’s baptism. That is, people coming to him for baptism (or joining the Qumran community) would be wondering just how ritual washing supposedly resolves moral impurity when the HB and other evidence points in the contrary direction.

Eschatological Tension between Qumran and John. The idea that John’s ministry (and by extension his baptism) is more “eschatologically tense” is not only difficult to demonstrate but also scholarly jargon. How does one measure eschatological intensity? On what basis can one correlate the frequency of washing to eschatological intensity? Moreover, what does eschatological intensity have to do with baptism or ritual washing? Per Robinson, John’s one-time baptism indicates greater eschatological fervor. But in fact, just the opposite could be more likely—higher intensity manifests in greater frequency. The Qumran sectarians maintained an eschatologically intense outlook as well, yet they practiced *repeated washings*, so if John and the Qumran community shared a similar outlook, why was John’s presumably one-time? Furthermore, if this is the source for John’s baptism, not only would his audiences had to have been familiar with Qumranic baptismal practice and theology to make sense of what John was doing, but they would have also required an explanation as to the reason that his baptism was one-time.

Other groups are known to have maintained an eschatological orientation during this time and the desert was a place associated with renewal and revolutionaries.¹⁹³ This at least reduces the necessity that John’s outlook derives from Qumran. And although there are historical precedents for people joining and leaving various Jewish sects—Josephus himself claims to have been members of several—leaving Qumran was final.¹⁹⁴ Abandoning the 777 meant abandoning their teachings. Finally, while John, Qumran, did share the “two-ways” perspective of the world, this is not so much eschatological or apocalyptic but an element of wisdom literature. Not only is such a view attested in several diverse sources including the HB, NT, and Greco-Roman literature and epigraphy.¹⁹⁵ A simpler explanation for their supposed similarities

¹⁹³ E.g., 1 Macc 2:29–30; *J.W.* 2.13.2–6 §§252–65; *Ant.* 20.5.1 §97; 20.8.10 §188; cf. Hooker, *Mark*, 36.

¹⁹⁴ *Life*, 2 §§11–12.

¹⁹⁵ Evidence for the “two-ways” notion are found in the following diverse places: Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287–92; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*; 1QS 3:20–21; 4Q400 1 I, 14 Deut 30:15,

is due to their shared dependence on the HB and Mediterranean culture than that John was raised at Qumran.¹⁹⁶ Of the five common traits mentioned above, none unquestionably link John to the Qumran community and some are highly questionable.

Smith's argument deserves further comment because his application of 1QS to John's baptism is the most compelling explanation as to how John could be connected with Qumran and yet differ from them. That said, his explanation stretches the evidence, at least as it pertains to John. He is right to claim that the Qumran community distinguished between ritual and moral purity and that the Gospels present John as believing that the end was immanent. However, John proclaimed the coming of another after him, ὁ ἰὸς τοῦ ἀληθοῦς (Mk 1:7), ὁ ἄλλος ὁ βαπτίζων ἡμεῖς ἐν ὕδατι (Matt 3:11) who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. There is no evidence that John believed that Spirit cleansing occurred in the present experience of his baptism and the evidence actually points in the opposite direction. Of course, it could be argued that Jesus experienced it, but no "end of evil" took place as anticipated by 1QS IV, 18–22. This would imply that Jesus needed and experienced moral cleansing, neither of which do the Gospels suggest, but which remains a problem for interpreters since some think that John's baptism resolves moral impurity.¹⁹⁷ It could also be postulated that this occurred at the Pentecost event in Acts 2, but then sin was not ultimately eradicated as is envisioned in 1QS IV, 18–22. If this text did not refer to the "end-time for the existence of evil" one could allow for repeated spirit cleansing, but the text anticipates a permanent end.

In short, there are no conclusive parallels that definitely link John to Qumran and too many are based on loose connections or are equally relevant to other groups and contexts. Their similarities are far more likely explained by a shared dependence on the HB than that John was raised at Qumran or influenced by this community. If we follow Smith's pleading that we must allow for the creativity of John to factor into the equation, is it not possible that he arrived at his baptism and eschatological thought independently?¹⁹⁸ Similar to what was done with proselyte baptism, scholars construct the ritual washings of Qumran to resemble John's baptism so that they may be compared. The

19; Ps 1; Matt 7:13–14; Did 1:1; Barn. 1:4; 4:10; 5:4; 11:17; 18:1; 19:1–2; 20:1. See also the discussion related to the "two ways" funerary monument to Pythagoras in *NewDocs* 10.6–9.

¹⁹⁶ Frey notes in his methodological discussion, "most of the parallels are far from unique, and the differences are also striking" ("Critical Issues," 529); cf. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 3.

¹⁹⁷ Note that my objection here is not on theological grounds, but on what the sources themselves state, or in this case do not state. Moreover, Jesus's Spirit filling appears to be for empowered ministry and is characteristic of other leaders in the HB.

¹⁹⁸ Although Robinson does not use the same language, he implies something similar ("Baptism of John," 177).

ambiguity surrounding what constitutes “baptism” is subsequently revealed. For example, scholars must argue that the first washing is a “baptism” at Qumran (i.e., it is special, one-time, and initiatory). John is then presented as a superior, proto-Christian figure able to transcend the shortcomings of Judaism since his baptism is supposedly unrepeatable.

Ritual Purity/Levitical Washings

A third response to *Religionsgeschichtliche* school that argues in support of the Jewish origins of Christian baptism is the attempt to trace it back to the HB. Part of the motivation for this view pertains to dissatisfaction with the arguments presented in support of proselyte baptism and the washings of the Qumran community. All proponents of this approach link John’s baptism to a specific, prescribed type of washing, or a combination of them. In this respect, they all argue for a specific antecedent. Those scholars who argue for a combination of influences implicitly recognize that John’s baptism appears to “deviate” somehow from the ritual purity system of the HB because it prescribes the resolution of specific impurities. Since John’s baptism is not clearly tied to a specific impurity, they look for the means by which John builds from the ritual purity system.

Dahl connects it to priestly washings. Collins roots it in the combination of the Levitical washings (due to the shared mode of bodily immersion) and the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition. Lathrop also argues that a connection to priestly washings is likely, though he insists that the prophetic tradition is most influential on John. Chilton calls John’s baptism a “generic purification” that is inspired by Ezek 34:22–27. Chung connects it to ritual purification before the offering of a sacrifice. Harrington relates it to predominant Second Temple perceptions of water, specifically the anticipation of the Spirit. Evans and Johnston explain it as a development from Second Temple ritual purity practices in which John applies it to national renewal. Interestingly, nearly all of these scholars except Chung and Lathrop argue for the continuity of John’s baptism with ritual purity.

Nils A. Dahl (1955) argues that “the initiatory lustrations connected with temple worship is the common background” for Christian baptism.¹⁹⁹ By “initiatory lustrations” he means the “Old Testament initiation of priests,” which serves as the pattern for the “whole, complex ceremony of Christian initiation.”²⁰⁰ He claims that these priestly immersions were also incumbent on

¹⁹⁹ Dahl, “Origin,” 45.

²⁰⁰ Dahl, “Origin,” 46.

the common people in resolving ritual impurity (Lev 11–15) in that they retained “the character of rites of consecration or initiation to temple worship.”²⁰¹ By this, Dahl secures his view from critique because initiation and consecration are inherent to a *ṭēbilah* (or baptism). Thus, even though John’s baptism does not appear initiatory, it is by definition so. Thus, John’s baptism is the equivalent of a *ṭēbilah* taken by Jewish pilgrims before entering the temple, which prepared his audience to enter the Kingdom of God by undergoing an “eschatological initiation.”²⁰²

Somewhat confusingly, he also declares that “Christian baptism is something *completely new*.”²⁰³ He explains that on the one hand, it retains the old concept that “man needs to be purified and renewed in order to approach God and worship him,” while on the other, “the members of the *ekklesia* are consecrated, neither through rites of lustration, prescribed by the law, nor by an inner, moral purification of the soul, for which the bodily rites are but the symbol,” rather it is “through the expiatory death of Jesus” applied through baptism.²⁰⁴ That is, an old framework is modified and then transferred to in a new situation.

As for other antecedents, he rejects proselyte baptism as a possible source of origin because it was *circumcision* that incorporated gentile proselytes into the people of God, whereas baptism merely consecrated them to participate in worship.²⁰⁵ He also readily acknowledges the various similarities between John and the Qumran community. In fact, according to Dahl, all of the proposed antecedents have some legitimacy, but they all err “in stressing one isolated point of contact” to the “initiatory lustrations connected with temple worship.”²⁰⁶

Adela Yarbo Collins (1989) also traces Christian baptism to the John’s baptism, which requires examining how it fit in his context.²⁰⁷ She surveys the standard antecedents to John’s baptism and finds issues with all of them. Per Collins, Qumran did not practice “initiatory baptism,” and while they share clear similarities, their differences are significant. She also questions whether proselyte baptism can be situated confidently before Yavneh. Even if it were, they were not truly “baptisms” since “there is no reliable evidence that they were tied to an initiation rite, administered, or performed in the presence of

²⁰¹ Dahl, “Origin,” 39.

²⁰² Dahl, “Origin,” 44. Note that the use of *ṭēbilah* here is non-technical.

²⁰³ Dahl, “Origin,” 47, emphasis mine.

²⁰⁴ Dahl, “Origin,” 47.

²⁰⁵ Dahl, “Origin,” 41.

²⁰⁶ Dahl, “Origin,” 45.

²⁰⁷ Collins, “Origin,” 28.

witnesses.”²⁰⁸ Like most scholars, she equates the nature of baptism with initiation. She concludes,

Only two elements have a firm claim for consideration on the question of the origin of the baptism of John. *Without these two elements, this baptism would be unintelligible.* One of these is the tradition and practice of *Levitical ablutions*. This ritual is the ultimate source of the form of John’s ritual which apparently involved total immersion in water. The other element is the *prophetic-apocalyptic tradition*.²⁰⁹

Gordon W. Lathrop (1994) traces Christian baptism not to John’s baptism but to Jesus’s baptism by John, the paradigm “whereby he becomes the pattern and the content of all Christian baptism.”²¹⁰ But since John’s baptism did not originate *ex nihilo*, one must understand it in its context.²¹¹ That said, scholars have too naively associated John’s baptism with this context (e.g., Essenes, Masbotheans, Sabaeans, Banaim, proselyte baptism, the ritual bath, etc).²¹² He claims to avoid the misstep of linking “baptismal sects” with John by suggesting that “washing for purification and, at least sometimes, washing for purification in view of the expected day of God were ideas and practices that were in the air, were *available cultural symbols*.”²¹³

For this reason, he is leery of the attempt to “construct a genealogy of Christian baptism.”²¹⁴ Instead, John’s baptism consists of an “eschatological washing,” which he interprets as, “*God’s coming to wash the people*” (cf. Isa 4:2–6; Ezek 36:24–28).²¹⁵ For Lathrop, this not only explains the location (i.e.,

²⁰⁸ Collins, “Origin,” 34. On the issue of dating, see also, Smith, “Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 14–22; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT, ed. Clinton, E. Arnold. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 112; McKnight, *Light*, 88.

²⁰⁹ Collins, “Origin,” 35, emphasis mine.

²¹⁰ Lathrop, “Origins,” 515. By connecting Christian baptism to Jesus’s baptism, he departs from the majority view of scholars who link it directly to John’s baptism, but see Hermann Lichtenberger, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist: Reflections on Josephus’ Account of the John the Baptist” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rapport (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 340–46. Nevertheless, one still must explain John’s baptism in his context to make sense of what develops from it.

²¹¹ Lathrop, “Origins,” 507–8.

²¹² Lathrop, “Origins,” 512.

²¹³ Lathrop, “Origins,” 513, emphasis original.

²¹⁴ Lathrop, “Origins,” 512.

²¹⁵ Lathrop, “Origins,” 514–15, emphasis original. These sentiments are close to the more recent suggestion by Jonathan David Lawrence who credits Brant Pitre for the idea that purification prior to a theophany is plausible antecedent for John’s baptism (*Washing*, 186–87, n. 2). This view still differs from Lathrop’s because for theophonic washing, it is not God who washes, but the people. Lawrence himself objects to the idea, however, due to the connection of John’s baptism with the forgiveness of sins, *not purification*, but he concedes that since John proclaimed the coming of God’s kingdom, perhaps “his baptism could be seen as a preparation for a theophany.”

the Jordan River) and John's intermediary role but also why his washing is fundamentally unlike ordinary ritual washing. Since his baptism was likely an administered, one-time washing, he agrees with Dahl that it resembles the priestly washings of initiation (cf. Ex 40:24–28; Lev 8:6–13). John reinterprets past practice, which is then reinterpreted by the Gospel writers via Jesus's baptism, and then later NT authors further reinterpret Jesus's baptism to arrive at Christian baptism, thus forming a "chain of reinterpretation."²¹⁶

Bruce Chilton (1998) finds it self-evident that John's baptism is an act of ritual purity. He notes that the unrepeatable nature of John's baptism is far too quickly assumed, that there are significant differences between him and Qumran, and that proselyte baptism was the first of many routine ritual washings.²¹⁷ Instead of being performed for a specific impurity, however, it is a "generic purification."²¹⁸ Since Chilton believes that the Gospel accounts are "not a suitable point of departure for a critical understanding of Yoḥanan within his own terms of reference," he looks to Josephus for firmer, though still tendentious, evidence.²¹⁹ As such, there is no doubt that John's baptism is done for purity's sake, the question is how.

Chilton asks, if John's baptism is not unique and if it was done "not in the interests of 'conversion' or permanent purification, or opposition to atonement by means of cultic sacrifice, what was its purpose?"²²⁰ He suggests that the origin of John's baptism *is not to be found in sectarian parallels* but in comparing his activity with "ordinary practices of purification."²²¹ *Since John never explains what people are being purified from, it cannot be from something outside of the normal ritual purity framework with which people were familiar.* Otherwise, how could his audience have understood what they were doing? The Gospels may portray him as a prophet, but that does not mean that his *baptism* was prophetic or in any way different from normal ritual purification.

Since he cannot explain how John's baptism directly connects to the HB, it must be a "generic purification." For this, Ezek 36:22–27 serves as the scriptural basis, a text that is especially apropos since only God can give his spirit (John 14:26, but cf. John 20:22). While no NT text, let alone John, connects his baptism with Ezekiel, the fact that this text was utilized by 1QS 4.19–23 and *Jubilees* 1:22–25 at least demonstrates that it was circulating among contemporary Jews. Furthermore, he claims, "The idea that one needs a written

²¹⁶ Lathrop, "Origins," 515–16.

²¹⁷ Chilton, "Yoḥanan," 204, 206.

²¹⁸ Chilton, "Yoḥanan," 199, 204, 206–8.

²¹⁹ Chilton, "Yoḥanan," 198–99.

²²⁰ Chilton, "Yoḥanan," 206.

²²¹ Chilton, "Yoḥanan," 207.

text in order to follow a religious impulse is not the rule in the study of religions.”²²²

Eul Kee Chung (2002) also argues that the John’s baptism cannot be informed by contemporary practices (e.g., Qumran or proselyte baptism) because he “disassociated” from them (though he does not explain how); rather it is best understood as a conceptual and functional *fulfillment* of both the “cleansing and sacrificial systems” of the HB.²²³ In his words, “just like the Israelites prepared themselves by practicing the cleansing rite in order to access the sanctuary to make atonement, so John prepared the people by purifying them with his water baptism before they encountered the Coming One.”²²⁴ For Chung, a cultic context is a prerequisite. Elsewhere, he specifies that John’s baptism also includes “the preparatory part of the sacrificial offering (repenting sin, confessing it, laying of hand(s) on the sacrifice, and transferring of sin to the sacrifice).”²²⁵ Thus, John’s repentance-baptism corresponds with ritual washing and Jesus’s baptism in the Jordan (not his death) corresponds with the basis for forgiveness since John identifies him as “the Lamb of God, the one who removes the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

In support of these claims and as an explanation for the motivation for people to invent a means of atonement beyond the temple, Chung appeals to the corruption of the priesthood, which

had made uncertain the validity of their temple sacrifices. This situation consequently resulted in the practice of atoning rites outside the Temple that substituted for temple sacrifices. From this religious turmoil, John the Baptist arose as a legitimate heir of the Old Testament. . . . John viewed his baptism from the perspective of fulfillment of the temple rites.²²⁶

Thus, were it not for temple corruption we may presume that John’s baptism would have never arisen. Not only this, but he insists that John’s audience was forced to choose between the two: the altar in the temple or John’s baptism.²²⁷ On this reading, John becomes a proto-Christian who provides a Jewish basis for replacing the temple cult.

²²² Chilton, “Yohanan,” 208.

²²³ Chung, “Background,” 105, 118, 157–59.

²²⁴ Chung, “Background,” 82, cf. 105, 158. He depends solely on James D. G. Dunn’s narrow explanation of the “OT rites and ceremonies” on this point (*Baptism*, 16–17). Chung, who favorably cites Dunn prior to this (72), goes beyond him, however, since Chung maintains that John’s baptism combined both inner and outer cleansing, whereas Dunn is careful to distinguish between the *occasion* and the *means* of cleansing and notes that “John’s baptism is a prophetic symbol *not of present forgiveness*, but of the future Spirit-and-fire baptism” (16, cf. 15).

²²⁵ Chung, “Background,” 158.

²²⁶ He cites in support of this Matt 11:12–13; Luke 16:16 (Chung, “Background,” 121).

²²⁷ Chung, “Background,” 84.

Hannah K. Harrington (2011) deals with the origin of John's baptism indirectly since her primary objective is to show that John's Gospel is *not* disparaging Jewish ritual. Rather she is interested in answering this question: "What was the common understanding of ritual ablutions that the Fourth Gospel utilized to make certain claims about Jesus?"²²⁸ Instead of focusing on the parallels of ritual actions, she examines common conceptions of water, especially in their connection with the Spirit.²²⁹

She identifies the following four items to be broadly shared beliefs that were integral to the use of water for ritual purification; these "preceded and anticipated the work of the Spirit" to bring (1) new life; (2) atonement; (3) revelation; and (4) the eschaton.²³⁰ She concludes that the "writer [of John's Gospel] uses water ablutions as they would have been understood in contemporary Judaism."²³¹ What is unique about the Fourth Gospel is *not* that water was connected with the Holy Spirit, but that John's baptismal activity "would identify and then come to fruition in the person and work of Jesus."²³² That is, "normal" expectations would connect John's use of water with the coming of the Spirit, but instead it is linked to the person, Jesus, who then sends the Spirit. Since the use of water in John's Gospel corresponds with these four elements of "anticipation and fulfillment,"²³³ John's baptism is an expression of ritual purity.

Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston (2015) state in their brief entry in the *Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* that "Christian baptism has its roots in the purity rites prescribed in Israel's ancient scriptures and various practices that emerged in the intertestamental period."²³⁴ After tracing some examples of ritual washing in the HB, they point to several Second

²²⁸ Harrington, "Purification," 118. This begs the question as to whether there was a common understanding.

²²⁹ Harrington, "Purification," 119.

²³⁰ Harrington, "Purification," 119.

²³¹ Harrington, "Purification," 137.

²³² Harrington, "Purification," 138.

²³³ She develops further the proposal of Wai-ye Ng ("Purification," 117). Specifically, she connects John's baptism to these four common anticipatory understandings in the following way: (1) new life—John's baptism entailed a change of status similar to that of proselyte baptism and the washings of the Qumran community; (2) atonement—John 1:28–29 implies that John's baptism preceded atonement just as ritual washing in the temple cult or at Qumran; (3) revelation—John's baptism anticipates the revealed word just as ritual washing was performed prior to reception of the Law at Sinai or revelation in the Qumran community; (4) the eschaton—John's baptism anticipated the end similar to what one finds in certain HB prophetic (e.g., Zech 12:10; 13:1) texts or the DSS (e.g., 1QH 19.13–17). See Wai-ye Ng, *Water Symbolism in John: An Eschatological Interpretation*, StBibLit 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2001).

²³⁴ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 37.

Temple period texts and the archaeological evidence of ritual baths to show the persistence of ritual purity leading up to and during the 1st century CE. John's baptism, which they describe as "far more than mere personal washing and purification" because it entailed both signifying repentance and national renewal,²³⁵ is explainable since "[d]uring the intertestamental period some of the laws related to washing were expanded and given new applications. One example of this is the emergence of a close association between washing and repentance."²³⁶ That is, for Evans and Johnston, John's baptism aligns well with other developments that took place during the Second Temple Period. Thus, baptism in the NT is an "eschatological immersion, signifying repentance and a break with the past" which arose as "a logical extension of the various purity regulations expressed in the Law of Moses."²³⁷

Analysis of Approach

As seen above, advocates of the ritual purity approach also argue that John's and Christian baptism are explainable within Judaism, but they are not convinced by the arguments for either proselyte baptism or the washings of the Qumran community. Those who link John to a specific water purification in the HB do so on the basis of some shared parallel feature with John's baptism. Dahl argues for the priestly washings as John's background because they are initiatory and involve an agent who purifies. Collins points to the Levitical washings because it involves bodily immersion in combination with the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition, which speaks of a future cleansing by God. Lathrop is also favorable to the priestly washings because an agent is involved, but emphasizes its prophetic origin because John was performing the "promised eschatological washing of the people (Isa 4:2–6; Ezek 36:24–28)."²³⁸ By contrast, Chilton entirely dismisses the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition on the basis of Josephus's purportedly more reliable account of John than is found in the Gospels and labels John's baptism a "generic purification." Chung believes that John's baptism is a fulfillment of the entire HB purity system (ritual and moral). For him, it corresponds to ritual washing before temple entry as well as the "preparatory part of offering a sacrifice" (Jesus represents the other part). For him, the shared parallel is the cultic context. Harrington builds her case on the multiple shared associations Second Temple Jews made with water and anticipation of the Spirit, which suggest that John's baptism was an expression of ritual purity congruent with John's day. Evans and Johnston posit that John's

²³⁵ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 43.

²³⁶ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 41.

²³⁷ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 49.

²³⁸ Lathrop, "Origins," 515.

baptism applies the ritual purity developments of the Second Temple Period to his program of national renewal since the wilderness is related to such activity.

Table 3: Ritual purity & the origin of Christian baptism

Ritual Purity & The Origin of Christian Baptism	
Dahl	Priestly initiations become “eschatological initiation”
Collins	Levitical washings combined with the prophetic-apocalyptic
Lathrop	Baptism was “in the air” as an “available cultural symbol”
Chilton	Generic purification/eschatological washing (Ezek 36:22–27)
Chung	Baptism fulfills the entire HB ritual and moral purity systems
Harrington	Water integral to new life, atonement, revelation, and eschaton
Evans & Johnston	Baptism was an eschatological immersion combined with national renewal (at least for John the Baptist)

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

All proponents of this approach believe that ritual purity was “in the air,” but struggle to show exactly how John’s baptism relates to it in light of obvious difference. Accordingly, each identify some means by which John’s baptism deviates somewhat from the ritual purity system of the HB. An adequate response to this approach requires interaction with each scholar since their specific arguments are diverse from one another.

Nils A. Dahl

Since he views Christian baptism as initiation, this conveniently serves as his link back to priestly consecration. For Dahl, initiation is integral to whatever “baptism” represents. Unfortunately, that forces him to conflate initiation (into the priesthood) and ritual purification. Emphasizing the priestly washings as initiatory while downplaying or dismissing their purificatory purpose is a category mismatch that bears significant interpretive weight. In fact, the washings *by themselves did not effect a priest’s consecration*, they played a specific role in a consecration ceremony. Thus, one must ask the question, *why* were priests washed? The tension this conflation creates for Dahl manifests itself when he maintains that common Jews consecrated themselves like priests for temple worship when they immersed. However, not only did Jews perform *self-immersion* unlike the administered washings for priests, but “the *ṭēbilah*” simply

resolved their unclean condition. There is no evidence that they thought they were becoming priest-like through this process.²³⁹

Moreover, ritual bathing was not essentially a temple-centric activity—every Jew was expected to daily maintain a clean condition *whether he or she had any intentions of personally entering the temple*.²⁴⁰ The fact that ritual purification continued after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE confirms this, for Jews would have no reason to purify themselves if it were connected to a specific Temple activity.²⁴¹ Finally, if Dahl is correct to locate the origin of John’s baptism in the priestly washings, how would common Jews have knowledge of these washings to make the connection with John’s baptism? What about John’s baptism would lead them to make this correspondence? While Dahl may be correct that all of the proposed antecedents contain “an element of truth,” but are each “false in stressing one isolated point of contact”²⁴² he fails to show why the priestly washings should be understood at the key connection for them all.²⁴³

Adela Yarbo Collins

Turning to Collins, I agree with her conclusion that the Levitical washings and prophetic-apocalyptic tradition are important elements for understanding John’s baptism. Although her essay explores how the *prophetic-apocalyptic tradition* intersects with John (e.g., Isa 1:16–17; Ezek 36:25–28) and the early Church (e.g., Joel 2:28–32), she does not explain how the Levitical ablutions relate to John’s baptism or later Christian practice. She notes that baptism in Acts 2 is a “cleansing” but neither specifies what it cleanses nor how, or whether, it relates to ritual purity, especially since it is “one-time.” Similar to Dahl’s understanding, initiation is integral to Collins’s definition of “baptism,”

²³⁹ There is good reason to believe that ritual washing was one of the ways that the nation of Israel was made holy since it set them apart from the nations (e.g., Ex 19:6); cf. Lester L. Grabbe, *Leviticus*, OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 59.

²⁴⁰ Neusner also adopts a temple centric view of ritual purity (*The Idea of Purity*, 108). See Jacob Milgrom’s critique of Neusner (*Leviticus* 1–16, 1004–9). See also, Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 49.

²⁴¹ E.g., David Amit and Yonatan Adler, “The Observance of Ritual Purity After 70 C.E.: A Reevaluation of the Evidence in Light of Recent Archaeological Discoveries” in *Follow the Wise”: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, ed. Zeev Weiss et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 121–43.

²⁴² Dahl, “Origin,” 45.

²⁴³ Smith’s critique of Dahl is similar: “the transition from the purification of Jewish washings to the moral concern of John’s baptism is still not perfectly obvious” (“Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” 29).

which raises the problem of how Levitical washings, which were not initiatory, possibly relate to baptism. The ritual washing connection is ambiguous at best.

Gordon W. Lathrop

Lathrop situates John's baptism within his socio-cultural context while also avoiding the problems of deriving it directly from a specific contemporary group or practice. However, it is confusing how John's baptism retains the immediately recognizable purpose of purification and yet starts the trajectory leading to an "explicit rejection of the old purity rules."²⁴⁴ Why is it mutually exclusive that John's baptism *either* remains an ordinary washing *or* fully jettisons its connection to ritual purification since it involves "faith in the crucified and risen Christ"?

While Lathrop is also able to explain why John's baptism is a singular washing (i.e., it is eschatological), what exactly is an "eschatological washing?" Why is it done once-for-all? And why would an eschatological washing not retain its nature of ritual purification?²⁴⁵ In fact, if John's baptism is patterned off of the initiatory priestly washings, which Lathrop finds plausible, then the once-for-all nature of his baptism communicates the opposite inference drawn by Lathrop—it would be firmly connected to ritual purity since that is the reason priests were washed. More importantly, nowhere does the NT describe baptism as an eschatological washing.

Moreover, the Gospels do not give any indication that *God* is coming *to wash* the people, rather it is judgment and "baptism" in the Spirit that is expected in connection with John's ministry. While Isa 40:3 anticipates the coming of God in the desert and while the desert is associated with revolutionaries, John 3:23 attests to John baptizing in at least one other location near the Jordan, a point Lathrop admits. Second, the comparison of John the baptizer with Theudas to support the idea of a "new conquest" in connection with John's baptism is questionable. According to *Ant.* 20.5.1 §§97–99 and Acts 5:36, Theudas claimed to be a prophet who intended to part the Jordan. His death and promised sign might suggest that he fostered anti-Roman sentiment, but John and Theudas were doing very different things. Regardless of how closely Theudas and John the baptizer might approximate to one another, it does not follow from this that baptism in the Jordan indicates "the imminence and centrality of God's action rather than private action for the sake of ritual purity."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Lathrop, "Origins," 520.

²⁴⁵ Lathrop, "Origins," 520.

²⁴⁶ Lathrop, "Origins," 515.

Lathrop makes some compelling points, but his argument that Christian baptism transcends the “broken symbol of [ritual] washing” is not convincing.²⁴⁷

Bruce Chilton

Chilton brings a fresh interpretation of John the baptizer. While he rightly notes that source bias affects our reconstruction of history, his own analysis suffers from a tendentious reading. For example, he privileges Josephus, excludes the Gospels as potential sources, and claims that the Gospels portray John in the now anachronistic terms of “law vs. grace”.²⁴⁸ Also uncertain is to what extent we may conclude that the John the baptizer is “Christianized.” That said, I agree that a new purification without explanation in the NT literature would represent an oddity and that John’s audience would naturally turn to an existing conceptual framework to make sense of John’s baptism.

Arguing that John’s baptism must be a “generic purification” is tenuous especially since Ezek 36:22–27 is not connected with John the baptizer in any source. The circulation of this text in Second Temple literature makes it possible that John may have been influenced by it, but it is an argument from silence. His point, “[t]he idea that one needs a written text in order to follow a religious impulse is not the rule in the study of religions,” is a weak claim upon which to build a case for origins.²⁴⁹ More importantly, what is a “generic purification”? Does the ritual purity framework of the HB or Second Temple Jewish texts know of such a washing? If Ezekiel is the basis for John’s washing, would it not be better classified as an “eschatological washing”? Ritual purity as outlined in the HB has in mind specific causes of uncleanness with specific methods of resolving such impurity, so it is necessary to explain how a “generic purification” would be understandable.

Eul Kee Chung

The direction that Chung’s argument leads interpreters to take with respect to John’s baptism has much to commend it, but there are significant problems. For one, the logic Chung employs to explain why John’s baptism is a fulfillment of the ritual purity *and* sacrificial systems is problematic. In his view, because the “ministry of the Messiah finds its background in the Old Testament, John’s ministry likewise has its background in the Old Testament.”²⁵⁰ Even if the two premises are correct, the conclusion does not follow. For one thing, there was no unified messianic understanding, let alone that the

²⁴⁷ Lathrop, “Origins,” 522.

²⁴⁸ Chilton, “Yoḥanan,” 202.

²⁴⁹ Chilton, “Yoḥanan,” 208.

²⁵⁰ Chung, “Background,” 80.

sacrificial system would be replaced by the messiah. Second, while Jesus's death is interpreted by the NT as a once-for-all sacrifice, it was not immediately clear to anyone that the sacrificial system was suddenly replaced. Third, rooting John's ministry in the HB does not say very much since *every* Jewish sect justified its existence and practices from the HB. Isaiah 40:3 may explain why John was in the wilderness but neither it nor Mal 3:1 helps us understand why John was baptizing in the Jordan, a place with no connection to the temple where sacrifice was made.²⁵¹

Second, Chung equates the cultic process with John and Jesus, which raises the question as to how one may legitimately compare the *cultic process* with *historical developments* associated with people. Not only are these two different types of concepts, but it is only possible to arrive at this conclusion in the hindsight of theological reflection, which suggests that people during and immediately after these events would have never made these connections. At the most basic level, if sacrifice ceases since it is fulfilled by Jesus, why does ritual washing (baptism) not cease? To put it another way, why does washing in water (baptism) continue to be practiced (even if one-time) while sacrifice is not? If Jesus fulfills the requirement of sacrifice and John's baptism fulfills the ritual purity system, why is the latter still practiced? If one may spiritually appropriate the sacrifice of Jesus, why can one not also spiritually appropriate ritual purity? Historically speaking, Jewish believers in Jesus were apparently not aware that the ritual purity system had been fulfilled since they continued to become unclean and practice ritual washing.²⁵²

Third, there is no unambiguous evidence to support the claim that "John viewed his baptism from the perspective of fulfillment of the temple rites."²⁵³ Even if people thought the temple was corrupt, why would this lead people "to desert the temple sacrifices and to establish their own atoning systems"?²⁵⁴ Chung fails to show why John's baptism would be a fulfillment and why his audience would have agreed with such a concept.

Another problem relates to his appeal to temple corruption. *While it may* have been viewed as an issue, this did not stop daily sacrifices from continuing, thousands of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for festivals that depended

²⁵¹ Even more confusing is that the messenger of Mal 3:1 comes to the temple, not the wilderness!

²⁵² E.g., Acts 21:26 or the Ebionites who were declared heretical, see Kurt Rudolph, *Antike Baptisten: zu den Überlieferungen über frühjüdische und-christliche Taufsekten*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981), 20–21.

²⁵³ Chung, "Background," 121.

²⁵⁴ Chung, "Background," 110–11. Bultmann suggests, "*Baptism* (§6, 3), of course, was also a point of departure for the development of cultic forms of their own" (*Theology*, 1:57, emphasis original). However, he is at this point describing the "earliest Church" and is careful to emphasize "they were no more than points of departure."

on the temple, or even the Essenes (who were supposedly critical of the temple) from participating in the cult.²⁵⁵ John's preaching does not indicate that he views the temple as corrupt or that his baptism is intended to replace it. Even the Qumran community, which is often described incorrectly to have been anti-temple was looking for *reformation*, not a substitution.²⁵⁶ Moreover, not only did Jesus's family participate in the temple cult (e.g., Luke 1:8–23; 2:22–24), but Jesus enjoined those whom he healed with skin disease to present themselves to the temple priests (e.g., Luke 17:14) and his teachings *assume participation* in the temple cult (e.g., Matt 5:23; Luke 18:10; John 7:14; 8:2). Even after Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, the temple was frequented by his followers (e.g., Luke 24:53; Acts 2:41–3:1; Acts 21:23–26). While there is evidence that temple corruption existed, Chung offers no data showing that this discouraged people from participating in the cult or that it launched John's ministry.²⁵⁷

Finally, it is unclear how Chung knows that the primary question on people's minds in first-century Judea or Galilee was "who was the legitimate heir of the Old Testament?"²⁵⁸ This is an anachronistic perspective read into the text. For one thing, there is nothing in the HB to suggest that a new heir was to be expected or that it would be superseded. Moreover, why would anyone suspect John to be this heir? Additionally, the notion of an "Old Testament" in the first century is difficult to defend and the available evidence suggests that the canon was in flux. That is, how can one replace or fulfill something that is in process of forming? While Chung is correct to postulate the likelihood that John's audience understood his baptism as a form of ritual washing in preparation for the coming one, he fails to explain how or why people would connect it with repentance or forgiveness of sins, not to mention that it was viewed as a fulfillment of the ritual purity and sacrificial systems.

Hannah K. Harrington

Harrington's unique approach opens up new lines of inquiry. In particular, her focus on beliefs associated with the use of water in connection with ritual purity

²⁵⁵ Cf. *J.W.* 1.3.5 §§78–80; 2.7.3 §§111–13; *Ant.* 18.1.5 §19.

²⁵⁶ Cf. 11QT 25:10–27:10; CD 4:15–18; 5:6–7; 6:11–13; 7:18–20; 12:23–13:1; 14:19; 19:10–11; 20:1; 1QS 9:10–11; 1QSa 2:11–15; 4Q174 1 I, 21, 2:11–12; 1QM 2:1–6. See also, Harrington, "Purity," 397–428, 409; Webb, *John*, 159.

²⁵⁷ Chung's interpretation of his sources is sometimes sloppy. For example, he claims that "The Zealots believed that God, because of their wickedness, turned his face from Jerusalem city and no longer esteemed the Temple sufficiently pure for him to inhabit therein" ("Background," 108). He references *Jos.*, *Ant.* 20.8.5 §166, which is *Josephus's* interpretation of why Jerusalem fell to Rome, it does not represent the ideology of the Zealots.

²⁵⁸ Chung, "Background," 158.

comes the closest to considering the function of ritual purity since she considers what is anticipated by cleansing. Regarding the origin of John's baptism, her argument is as follows: because elements of John's baptism are associated with "the common understanding of ritual ablutions" of Second Temple Jews, John's audience would have understood his baptism to be consistent with ritual purity.²⁵⁹

Although she does not use the descriptors of Lathrop or Chilton, Harrington provides a foundation upon which a "general" or an "eschatological purification" might make sense. Nevertheless, it is still ambiguous as to why ritual purification is done in the anticipatory contexts that Harrington identifies since no impurity is indicated. In fact, her argument subtly exchanges what ritual purity *immediately* anticipates (i.e., the Spirit) with what it *indirectly* anticipates (i.e., the work of the Spirit). Technically, her essay explains the latter and not what ritual purification anticipates. Moreover, she does not explain how the purpose of ritual purification (i.e., resolving ritual impurity) came to be related to the Spirit since there is no evidence to suggest that anyone ritually immersing for the reasons outlined in Lev 11–15 anticipated the work of the Spirit.

To illustrate the problem, I will briefly consider her claim that ritual purification anticipates [the Spirit who brings] new life. First, she is inconsistent in her language. "Life" as she uses it in the pertinent section of the essay refers to all of the following: afterlife, renewal of the nation of Israel, physical life, a new status, participation in the community, participation in the sectarian Qumran community through initiation, greater access to restricted holiness (e.g., in the priesthood or at Qumran), John's "initiatory" baptism, and proselyte baptism. This is an example of an "illegitimate totality transfer" fallacy, yet it is necessary for her argument that "new life" mean all of these things or comparison would not be possible. Also, she appeals to Jacob Milgrom's conclusion that "the death/life dynamic undergirds the entire biblical purity system."²⁶⁰ But what does *he* mean by "life" and "death" and is it the same for John the baptizer, the Qumran sectarians, or how Harrington is using it? Moreover, Milgrom's conclusions pertain to the *entire* purity system, which included the use of blood, not just water.

Second, the ritual purity system of the HB, as Richard E. Averbeck notes, did *not* effect a change of *status*, only a temporary change in *condition*.²⁶¹ This is demonstrated by the fact that priests held a different *status* (i.e., holy, שֹׁדֵקִים) from other Israelites (i.e., common חָלָל). *Both* holy priests and common

²⁵⁹ Harrington, "Purification," 118. This begs the question as to whether there was a common understanding.

²⁶⁰ Harrington, "Purification," 120.

²⁶¹ Richard E. Averbeck, "Leviticus, Theology of," *NIDNTT* 4: 907–23.

Israelites, however, inevitably become unclean (אָמט) in *condition* requiring ritual purification to make them clean (טהור) again. Holy and common are *states*, while clean and unclean are *conditions*; the two are clearly different. If one changed his or her *status* by becoming a priest or joining the Qumran community or becoming a disciple of John, *it would not have been based on ritual washing*.

Third, ritual purity alone is insufficient grounds to claim that “the Qumran sect provides a close parallel to John’s baptism because ritual purity separated Jews who were ‘elect’ from those who were outsiders.”²⁶² John’s baptism, unlike that of the Qumran sectarians, was not tied to an exclusive טהור. Rather, he freely admitted random crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers to his baptism (e.g., Luke 3:10, 12, 14) and then sent most of them back home.²⁶³ Relatedly, her claim that his baptism effected a “change of status” since the individual became “an insider” who made the “transition from sinner to elect and is now ready for God’s eschatological plan because he has been purified”²⁶⁴ is placed in John’s mouth, for he never refers to the elect.²⁶⁵

Finally, at the methodological level, the shift from comparing ritual acts to perceptions of water only displaces the reservoir of parallels. Instead of comparing *ritual* parallels, Harrington compares (and in some cases constructs) parallels of understanding related to what is anticipated by ritual purification. Significant differences are downplayed, ignored, or absorbed into the potential meanings of water in antiquity. To use a linguistic analogy, it resembles the “illegitimate totality transfer” fallacy wherein everything that water might symbolize or be associated with is concurrently active in John’s baptism and other Second Temple uses of water.

²⁶² Harrington, “Purification,” 122.

²⁶³ As John P. Meier observes, “The vast majority of those baptized [by John] seemed to have returned to their homes.” John had disciples (e.g., Mk 9:14) but this hardly resembled the arrangement of the Qumran community. He did not prevent his disciples from leaving him to follow Jesus (John 1:37) and is reported to have encouraged it (John 3:25–30). See, John P. Meier, *Companions and Competitors*, Vol. 3 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 53; cf. Chilton, “Yoḥanan,” 206–7; Puech, “Essénisme,” 164.

²⁶⁴ Harrington, “Purification,” 122.

²⁶⁵ She bases her comments on Matt 3:9 and Luke 3:8, but in these texts, John is not questioning Israel’s election nor offering a new form of election. Rather, he is calling elect Israel to escape God’s coming judgment in a similar manner that Jeremiah pleaded with the leaders of his generation to not depend on the inviolability of Jerusalem because the temple was located there. That is, being a member of the elect does not exclude one from judgment, a point very familiar in Second Temple literature.

Craig A. Evans and Jeremiah J. Johnston

Evans and Johnston provide a helpful sketch of the practices of ritual purity attested in Second Temple period literature but it is unclear how John specifically connects with this context. They point to two main indicators that suggest that John's baptism is an act of ritual purity: (1) Josephus's testimony points in this direction and (2) John's ἀϋδδέόιά ιἀδάϊβὰδ aligns with the close association made between ritual purity and repentance during the Second Temple period. Yet, neither of these points explain the origin of John's baptism nor what is distinctive about his practice and Josephus's testimony might simply be a misinterpretation of his baptism.

Tracing Second Temple ritual purity practices back to the HB is both reasonable, since some of the texts themselves do this (e.g., DSS), and necessary, since there is no other clear source from which these practices derived. It is true that John the baptizer appears much less unique when his context is taken into account—e.g., Bannus, a person practicing ritual purity out in the desert with at least one disciple (*Life* 11–12)—but he still stands out from it. For example, he is called ὁ ἀδδέόηδ for some reason. If everyone else is practicing ritual immersion (baptism), why would he be given this title? If we assume that his baptism is one-time, why is this the case when other ritual purifications are repeated? If his baptism was administered, why is this method employed when ritual immersion was self-administered? While I would also agree that John's *ministry* is in view of national renewal, why would ritual purification (baptism) have anything to do with it? Does his baptism cause renewal? Is renewal possible without baptism? If no direct relationship exists between the two (baptism and national renewal) then this does not help us understand the origin of John's baptism. If there is a direct correlation, then what is it?

Regarding their statement that there exists “a close association between washing and repentance,” the only two texts mentioned in support of this are Sib. Or. 4.162–70 and Jos. Asen. 14:17, 15:4.²⁶⁶ The former bears obvious similarities with John's baptism, yet the washing is self-administered, the call to wash is directed to the *nations*, and the connection to repentance is doubtful since the washing is done prior to engaging in prayer, not for repentance.²⁶⁷ Regarding the latter text, the close connection of ritual washing and repentance is even less clear for Aseneth repents the *previous day* (Jos. Asen. 11:19–14:1) and then she only washes her face and hands after being urged by the angel to

²⁶⁶ Evans and Johnston, “Intertestamental Background,” 41.

²⁶⁷ See the discussion in chapter six, “80 CE—Sibylline Oracles 4.162–70 (c. 80 CE)—Possible but Unlikely.”

do so (Jos. Asen. 14:12, 15). Since she is leaving her state of mourning by cleaning off ashes from her head, one cannot rule out the possibility that this was a hygienic cleansing. Even if it were a ritual purification, it is not directly connected with repentance. Although they claim that John's eschatological immersion is a "a logical extension of the various purity regulations expressed in the Law of Moses," this is less obvious to most interpreters.²⁶⁸

The ritual purity approach continues to garner support in part because its importance during the Second Temple Period only continues to increase as further archaeological evidence comes to light. Of course, the textual evidence for this has always been there. Nevertheless, a primary challenge for this approach has been to show how John's baptism fits within this framework. The failure of these scholars to gain a clear consensus is due in part to this problem.

Sui Generis / De Novo

A fourth response to the *Religionsgeschichtliche* argument was offered by scholars who claimed that baptism was completely new (*sui generis*); hence, Lathrop's quip, "generally baptism has been dealt with as if it had no forbears."²⁶⁹ These scholars were not only convinced that the mystery religions did not influence Christian baptism but also argued that regardless of any influence Judaism may have had on Christianity, the latter was brand new and unique. The notion that Christianity transcended Judaism meant that baptism was also new given its connection with Jesus and the reception of the Spirit. As several scholars point out, however, the context of this approach is rooted in a Protestant-Catholic polemic that included the concern to show that baptism carries no "magical" power.²⁷⁰

A. D. Nock (1952) rightly cautions against applying the later concept of sacrament to baptism and suggests that, "[w]hen considering the early development and interpretation of baptism and the Eucharist we have to put aside certain concepts which are so familiar that we take them for granted and assume that they have always been current."²⁷¹ Surprisingly, however, Nock claims that John's baptism was *novum* and by extension, Christian baptism as well.²⁷² For him, 1 Cor 10 and John 3:5 are self-explanatory in showing that *neither*

²⁶⁸ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 49.

²⁶⁹ Lathrop, "Origins," 505.

²⁷⁰ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 1–26, 34–35, 44–45, 48, 57–58, 79, 81, 83, 117; cf. Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 86.

²⁷¹ Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries," 193–94.

²⁷² Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries," 192, 199.

was directly connected to anything prior.²⁷³ Additionally, he claims that baptism and the Eucharist are *dona data*, so they must be new.²⁷⁴

Maxwell E. Johnson (2007) claims that both John's and proselyte baptism derive from a common source, which means that "John's own baptismal practice was not directly dependent upon any other previously known rituals at all."²⁷⁵ Moreover, he insists that one cannot speak of a "normative" practice regarding baptism since there is insufficient data to establish this and the extant data points to diversity. In fact, there were multiple forms of Christian initiation practiced among the various NT communities, e.g., Jesus's table fellowship, foot-washing, hand-laying, anointing with oil, and other unknown practices.²⁷⁶

Everett Ferguson (2009) identifies the following sequence of connections moving backward from Christian baptism to its origin:²⁷⁷

- 1) Christian baptism is rooted in the command of Matt 28:19 and the example of Jesus in Matt 3:13–17.
- 2) This practice found is derived from the baptism of John since Jesus's disciples practiced it as well (John 3:26; 4:1–2).
- 3) John's baptism is ultimately somehow connected to "Jewish religious washings."

Unlike most scholars, he rejects linking John's baptism to any antecedent, instead preferring to catalogue their similarities and dissimilarities; he *describes* the ancient context more than *explains* the origin of John's baptism.²⁷⁸ Although he only uses the phrase *sui generis* to describe Jesus's baptism by John, it functionally describes his view of John.²⁷⁹ Echoing Dahl, he states that they are *all alike* in that they are immersions, but John's is *unlike* the rest since it is not a self-immersion; this must be the case since it is the most likely explanation for his title, ὁ ἀάδδῶῆῶῖῖῖῖῖῖ (Matt 3:1). John's baptism involved purification but it was eschatological not ritual. Despite the fact that the DSS demonstrate a thoroughgoing eschatological outlook, both it and their washings differed significantly from John's. While his resembled the "one-time" nature of proselyte baptism, it differed in that even Jews were included. Because nothing is similar enough, he concludes that it is *sui generis*.

Carl Holladay (2012), whose book review of Everett Ferguson's *Baptism in the New Testament* turns into a springboard for his own views, does not

²⁷³ Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries," 199.

²⁷⁴ Nock, "Hellenistic Mysteries," 199.

²⁷⁵ Johnson, *Rites*, 10, 12.

²⁷⁶ Johnson, *Rites*, 2, 21–22, 31, 34, 37.

²⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 853.

²⁷⁸ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 88.

²⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 88–89, 99.

approach the NT evidence synthetically. He “further emphasizes John’s originality” and believes that the “four gospels tend to portray Jesus’ baptism as *sui generis*.”²⁸⁰ Instead, he examines each Gospel’s presentation of *Jesus’s baptism by John* and suggests that each author writes to explain how the practice of Christian baptism originated. Then he deduces the warrants a given author appears to offer for the practice.²⁸¹ The reason he takes this approach is because his purpose is in part to undermine Ferguson’s view (which is misrepresented by Holladay) that Jesus’s baptism is the origin of Christian baptism.²⁸² Regarding the *sui generis* nature of Jesus’s baptism, Holladay suggests:

- 1) For Mark, Jesus’s baptism is “by definition, a unique, unrepeatable event” since it marks the “beginning of Jesus’s messianic consciousness.”²⁸³
- 2) For Luke, it is not *sui generis* since it is portrayed as part of a “larger social phenomenon,” but he makes the “messianic revelation . . . even more private than Mark.”²⁸⁴
- 3) Matthew turns the baptism “from *sui generis* into an *exemplum*.”²⁸⁵
- 4) John moves the farthest by portraying Jesus as “a teacher of baptism,” which then becomes “an explicit warrant for Jesus’s disciples in the post-Easter period” but the example they follow is not Jesus’s baptism, but the example of his baptizing ministry.²⁸⁶

Regarding John’s baptism in general, he wonders whether “John’s pioneering role is sufficiently emphasized” by Ferguson.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ Carl R. Holladay, “Baptism in the New Testament and Its Cultural Milieu: A Response to Everett Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church,” *J ECS* (2012): 343–69, 347.

²⁸¹ Holladay, “Baptism,” 347.

²⁸² The misrepresentation occurs when Holladay says that the *sui generis* nature of Jesus’s baptism by John “creates a genuine dilemma for Ferguson. He knows that the NT tends to see Jesus’ baptism as *sui generis* but he wants to claim it as a warrant for early Christian practice” (“Baptism,” 348). When Ferguson says in chapter two that, “The baptism of Jesus could, strictly speaking, be treated as an antecedent to Christian baptism,” he says this on the basis that *early Christians* made this connection, the subject of chapter seven, not that Ferguson personally believes this (*Baptism*, 99, cf. 113.).

²⁸³ Holladay, “Baptism,” 349.

²⁸⁴ Holladay, “Baptism,” 349–51.

²⁸⁵ If this is true, it would contradict Beasley-Murray’s view below that no Gospel writer ever associates Jesus’s baptism with Christian baptism (Holladay, “Baptism,” 351).

²⁸⁶ Holladay, “Baptism,” 353.

²⁸⁷ Holladay, “Baptism,” 347.

Analysis of Approach

Scholars who advocate the *sui generis* approach agree that none of the arguments offered in support of a specific antecedent to John's baptism are convincing. Although they all recognize parallels exist, these do not outweigh the obvious differences identified between John and the given antecedents. As a result, John's and Christian baptism must be brand new and unconnected to any contemporary social or religious practice. Nock calls Christian baptism *donum datum* since it was given to the church. Johnson emphasizes the existence of Christianities and multiple forms of initiation rites practiced by early believers. Ferguson catalogues all the parallels and differences and is unable to find a convincing match. Holladay examines the diversity in which Jesus's baptism is portrayed in the four Gospels and ultimately concludes that they disagree on the matter.

There are two main critiques to be raised against the *sui generis* argument that relate to (1) the problems raised by claiming that baptism is "new" and (2) the means by which scholars make the argument, which will require me to respond to each scholar in turn. Regarding the first problem, if baptism were *sui generis* it is difficult to understand how contemporary Jews could have possibly understood the rite and why the sources fail to explain it. Instead, the sources treat it as self-explanatory. In most cases, the claim that baptism is *sui generis* is coupled with the anachronistic view that Christianity was a separate religion from Judaism. For example, since John is a proto-Christian and the "Christ-event" is unique and new, Nock believes that Jesus gives the Eucharist and baptism to the church as *dona data*. As numerous scholars have recently argued Christianity did not exist in at least the first century and it is questionable whether it did before the fourth.²⁸⁸ Moreover, new religion was bad religion in antiquity and treated with suspicion.²⁸⁹ Of course, ancient religious practice never remained stagnant, but it was always anchored to accepted forms of ancient religion.²⁹⁰ Even Johnson admits that John's baptism derives from

²⁸⁸ Evidence for this will be provided in the next chapter.

²⁸⁹ E.g., this was a primary invective of Cicero against his opponent Clodius: "For if that plague-spot and devouring flame of the republic [i.e. Clodius] should succeed in defending by means of divine religion in his iniquitous and ruinous tribunate, which he can defend on no ground of human justice, then we shall have to look around for a new ritual, new mediators between ourselves and the power of heaven, and new interpreters of the divine will" (*De domo sua* 1.1-3). Read in context, Cicero is using the idea of "new" to illicit a negative response in his favor from the Pontifical College before whom he makes his case.

²⁹⁰ The common pattern was for deities of conquered people groups to be paired with known deities of the Pantheon. Great effort was spent demonstrating the antiquity of a given religion or religious practice so as to avoid the appearance of novelty. Moreover, we do not see evidence in the NT of its authors going to any length to explain faith in Jesus as

the same common source that gave rise to proselyte baptism. Unfortunately, he never identifies the source and the justification for labeling John's baptism as *sui generis* is left unexplained.

A. D. Nock

At the beginning of his essay, Nock is adamant that one not treat baptism as a *sacramentum* because of the danger of reading later understanding of baptism back onto the first century.²⁹¹ Yet, the difference between a *donum datum* and a *sacramentum* is unclear. As I understand Nock's argument, he simply replaces one word with another and the result is the same (i.e. it is not *sui generis* by virtue of being a sacrament, but because it is a "gift given"). If baptism represents a brand new act, Nock has only claimed this to be true and his interpretation depends on the anachronistic view of Christianity vs. Judaism.

Maxwell E. Johnson

Johnson's seems to contradict himself by his admission that both John's and proselyte baptism derive from a common source while insisting at the same time that John's was not dependent on a previously known practice. Moreover, while his dependance on the notion of *Christianities* is not idiosyncratic, he has not adequately shown how multiple Christianities impact the ritual of baptism. In fact, he takes issue with the notion of a "normative view" of baptism because of the paucity of sources. Yet, if the data are too sparse and varied to speak of a normative practice of Christian initiation, then on what basis can Johnson maintain that other initiations existed? If there's not enough evidence to speak about a norm, then there is even less to conclusively establish diversity.

More importantly, practices such as foot-washing, anointing, and hand-laying *fit within a specific socio-religious matrix*, they are not randomly implemented. The various communities of Jesus followers did not stop at a metaphorical "initiation-rite shop" to select desired rituals. He also provides no evidence that Jesus's table fellowship constituted "initiation."²⁹² Even if multiple *Christianities* existed, it does not follow that every aspect of these supposed Christianities was subject to reclassification and redefinition; one must first demonstrate what made one Christianity different from another, not to mention that their forms of initiation differed. That is, *the potential existence of multiple Christianities does not mean multiple initiation rites existed.*

something new or non-Jewish. Rather, what explanations we do see are aimed toward helping non-Jews unfamiliar with Judaism to understand their practices or to show how Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.

²⁹¹ Stendahl makes a similar point (*Meanings*, 175).

²⁹² Johnson, *Rites*, 3–7.

Everett Ferguson

Turning now to Ferguson, the differences he identifies involve assumptions that are open to question. For one, John's baptism is never said to be one-time. Secondly, it is not conclusive that John's and early Christian baptisms were administered. As Marsh demonstrates above from tractate *Gerim*, one *can* speak of being baptized in the passive voice even though self-immersion is actually performed.²⁹³ In support of this, Burton Scott Easton highlights the fact that the Western variant readings of Luke-Acts include the use of the middle instead of the passive voice, suggesting the practice of self-immersion by early believers.²⁹⁴ In fact, if ritual baths were used for immersion in Jesus's name, self-immersion would have been required due to the small size of most of the baths. John's title, "the baptizer," could have been ascribed on the basis that he called people to immerse themselves or was viewed as an immersion enthusiast.

More importantly, what is an "eschatological purification" and how would this have been understood by first-century Jews? Why is such a purification needed? Why would eschatological purification differ from non-eschatological purification? Do Jewish sources attest to an eschatological purification? If this *is* what John is calling people to, why would this type of cleansing be any different in nature than ritual purification? Its eschatological focus might be enough to explain why it was (presumably) a one-time washing but then Qumran utilized repetitive washing in spite of maintaining an eschatological outlook. Either way, if it is an eschatological washing, why would contemporary Jews not understand the act as accomplishing ritual purity?

Carl Holladay

Holladay's principle of interpreting each Gospel on its own terms is a solid historical methodological principle. Yet, if the Gospel accounts attempt to explain *Jesus's baptism by John*, how does this inform the origin of John's baptism? Whatever each Gospel intends to say about Jesus's baptism, we still have to ask how John fit within his own context. Moreover, how does Holladay know the motivation for the manner in which each Gospel account portrays Jesus's baptism? His analysis appears to consist of mirror-reading, which is vulnerable

²⁹³ As mentioned above, this is based on the English translation, so, recourse to the original language is needed before accepting this with complete confidence (Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 35). It is also based on a text dated after the Second Temple period, but that is inconsequential for demonstrating the possibility of this usage.

²⁹⁴ Easton, "Self-Baptism," 513–18.

to misinterpretation.²⁹⁵ Other literary explanations are possible. For example, Holladay interprets the frequent alternation between John and Jesus as Luke seeking to erect a “prison wall” between the two. By contrast, Joel B. Green demonstrates how the rhetorical strategy of *synkrisis* offers a better explanation of Luke’s alternation, which also suggests that Luke finds more in common between them than Holladay allows.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, regardless of how differently the Gospels present Jesus’s baptism, they still must all assume existing knowledge on the part of the reader. The concern here is not against considering the evidence of each NT book on its own terms and drawing attention to the presence of potential bias in sources, but whether the conclusions drawn by Holladay are supported by the evidence.

Finally, it is worth asking (both Johnson and Holladay) whether a rite so central to the faith would have had divergent views attached to it so early on. This is especially problematic when each text of the NT (whether read synthetically or separately) assumes the reader knows and understands the origin and meaning of the rite from the outset. If baptism were a solitary act, unconnected to a larger religious system, then such an assumption might be reasonable. However, every religion entails a system of thought and practice in which every ritual plays a concrete role and finds its meaning. What religious system was John attached to? What religious system were the followers of Jesus attached to? What categories would first-century Jewish believers have used to understand baptism? Even if we detect divergent views represented in the sources, do they necessarily presuppose mutual exclusion to the others?

Ordeal-Sign of Judgment: A Lesser Known Proposal

The following proposal by *Meredith G. Kline (1968)* is treated separately because it does not fit the antecedent approach well. His proposal was not a reaction to the mystery religion argument but rather a theological exercise intended to explain baptism from the perspective of Covenant Theology and by

²⁹⁵ John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians As a Test Case,” *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73–93; Nijay K. Gupta, “Mirror-reading Moral Issues in Paul’s Letters,” *JSNT* 34 (2012): 361–81.

²⁹⁶ Holladay, “Baptism,” 350. For example, in contrast with Holladay, Joel B. Green argues that Luke’s use of *synkrisis* serves to *link* John’s baptism to baptism in Jesus’s name, not drive them apart. See, Joel B. Green, “From ‘John’s Baptism’ to ‘Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus’: The Significance of Baptism in Luke–Acts,” in *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, LNTS 171, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 157–72.

consequence to defend the practice of infant baptism.²⁹⁷ It is technically a *sui generis* argument in that John's ministry and baptism suddenly appear and are unconnected to the socio-religious context, but at the same time Kline seeks to link John's baptism to the water ordeal ritual in the HB instead of to ritual purity.

Duane A. Garrett describes Kline's proposal as "the most original and provocative theory on baptism of the twentieth century,"²⁹⁸ which argues that John's baptism was no "mere ceremonial bath of purification," but an ordeal-sign of judgment.²⁹⁹ Essentially, John appears to prophetically enact a water ordeal on the nation of Israel as a sign of coming judgment. Those who submit to his baptism are found innocent (and thus safe from the coming judgment) whereas those who do not are guilty and subject to judgment. Since both John and Jesus were "messengers of the covenant lawsuit," which was in its "ultimatum stage," John's baptism was limited to his "terminal generation."³⁰⁰ Of course, Kline recognizes that baptism continued after John and Jesus, but he claims that the meaning of baptism in the two epochs was not the same due to "the difference between two quite distinct periods in the history of the covenant."³⁰¹

Although Witherington is classified under the "Qumran Community" above, he follows Kline's argument to explain how and why John's baptism

²⁹⁷ Kline freely admits his work is guided by "covenant theology" (i.e., he attempts to make sense of baptism within this predetermined theological system, which necessarily constrains interpretive possibilities) and it is limited to interaction with "the orthodox tradition." By itself, interpreting the Bible through systematic theology is acceptable, but it is also challenging to accomplish in light of the dialectical tension between data and the system generated by the data. The tendency is to allow the given system to dictate the interpretation of the evidence, whereas systematic theology purports to be built upon the data. Nonetheless, the validity of a given system (or at least its treatment of a specific historical phenomenon like baptism) is legitimately open to question when it minimizes, ignores, or otherwise interprets evidence in a contrary direction. See, Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 7, 15.

²⁹⁸ Duane A. Garrett, "Meredith Kline on Suzerainty, Circumcision, and Baptism," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 257–84, 261.

²⁹⁹ Kline, *Oath*, 56. Kline's book is an expansion of two previously published articles: "Oath and Ordeal Signs," *WTJ* 27 (1965): 115–39; *WTJ* 28 (1965): 1–37. Carl H. Kraeling also supports a variation of this view (*John*, 110–22).

³⁰⁰ Kline, *Oath*, 61, 64.

³⁰¹ Kline, *Oath*, 64.

differs from the practices of Qumran.³⁰² That is, the ANE concept of water ordeal is the most likely means by which he modifies the baptism of Qumran and makes it his own.³⁰³ Accordingly, as Kline suggests, baptism functions like the waters of judgment in the same way that the flood waters “judge some but save others” or the Reed Sea saves Israel and judges Egypt.³⁰⁴ Kline finds John’s water ordeal baptism to be *sui generis*, whereas Witherington believes that Qumran mediates baptism to John who then modifies what he had received by the water ordeal concept.

Analysis of Approach

Garrett observes that “the suzerain-vassal covenant [forms] the centerpiece to [Kline’s] whole understanding of OT theology,”³⁰⁵ and as *By Oath Consigned* demonstrates, it also dictates his understanding of the NT as well, at least as it pertains to the new covenant and baptism. The real question is whether the ANE suzerain-vassal covenant can bear the interpretive weight placed on it.³⁰⁶ The following critiques of his work may explain why most scholars have not for the most part followed his proposal.

The main points of Garrett’s extensive critique of *By Oath Consigned* are as follows: (1) his view of circumcision—as analogous to a covenant ratification that symbolizes the sanctions of the covenant—is incorrect for the simple reason that the threat of being “cut off” (Gen 17:14) is directed to the one who “never enters into the covenant” not to those who are circumcised.³⁰⁷ (2) Baptism cannot be a “water ordeal” since the latter’s purpose was to determine guilt. Those who responded favorably to John’s baptism knew they were guilty, they did not come to find out, which is the purpose of a water ordeal.³⁰⁸ (3) The

³⁰² For references to Kline or water-ordeal: Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 11–12, 29–30, 79–90, 106–9.

³⁰³ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 28–30.

³⁰⁴ Witherington, *Troubled Waters*, 30.

³⁰⁵ Garrett, “Meredith Kline,” 257.

³⁰⁶ F. L. Moriarty, review of *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, by Meredith Kline, *CBQ* 35 (1973): 247; E. J. Kilmartin, review of *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism*, by Meredith G. Kline, *CBQ* 31 (1969): 266–67.

³⁰⁷ Garrett, “Meredith Kline,” 263, emphasis mine. There is the added difficulty that Gen 17 is not presented in the same terms as a suzerain-vassal treaty even if it *might* involve certain elements of it (Kline, *Oath*, 39, 41). Kline himself refers to Gen 15 as a “promise covenant” but then is forced by his classification of covenant types to say that in Gen 17 Abraham swears an oath of allegiance which is a feature of “law covenants” (24).

³⁰⁸ Garrett, “Meredith Kline,” 273, emphasis mine. Cf. Witherington, who admits the same: “John, as at Qumran, had a strong stress on the need for *prior repentance*” (*Troubled*

ancient 2nd cent. Mesopotamian water ordeal is privileged over the widespread contemporary practice of ritual purification in ritual baths.³⁰⁹ (4) Kline conflates the notions of a water ordeal and an oath-sign, which are not interchangeable.³¹⁰ (5) The flood of Gen 6 is incorrectly interpreted as a water ordeal—the purpose of the flood was judgment, not to see whether Noah was righteous (Gen 6:9 clearly states *וַיַּחַד אֱלֹהִים צְדִיקָתְךָ תִּמְיָם הָיָה בְּדֹרְתָיו*).³¹¹

To Garrett's critique I add the following: (6) "water ordeal" is never defined and Kline has misunderstood the practice or at least misapplied it to baptism and other water related contexts in the HB. (7) How Kline knows certain foundational elements of his thesis is unclear (e.g., that John and Jesus are "messengers of the covenant lawsuit" or that Jews of John's day comprise the "terminal generation"). (8) The sign of the Mosaic covenant is *not circumcision*, but the Sabbath (Ex 31:13; cf. Deut 5:15), so even if the author of Colossians were attempting to equate circumcision with baptism in Col 2:11, his comments would have to be understood in light of the *Abrahamic*, not Mosaic, covenant.³¹² (9) He speaks of the new covenant as if it were a written document to which everyone had access, which has the effect of importing certain unstated assumptions simply by using the term.³¹³ (10) Is it possible that any Jew

Waters, 27, 29 emphasis mine). Note that Kline subtly shifts his language from speaking of ordeals to an "ordeal sign," a necessary move since baptism is not itself an ordeal (*Oath*, 56).

³⁰⁹ Garrett, "Meredith Kline," 274–75. One could make the argument that the Maltese islanders' interpretation of Paul's post-shipwreck snake-bite is evidence that the notion of a water-ordeal was current in Paul's day (Acts 28:1–6). However, many factors argue against this since the islanders' knew nothing of Paul's accusation, there was no explicit attempt to determine Paul's guilt aboard the ship where the water ordeal would have taken place, and the narrative does not link Paul's guilt or innocence to the storm or shipwreck, although see, Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the "Acts of the Apostles,"* trans. Ken McKinney, Gregory J. Laughery and Richard Bauckham, SNTSMS 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 216–19.

³¹⁰ Garrett, "Meredith Kline," 275.

³¹¹ Garrett, "Meredith Kline," 275. This fact is problematic for his interpretation of 1 Pet 3:20–21, which refers to the flood.

³¹² This fact repeatedly escapes the notice of NT scholars who typically associate circumcision with the Mosaic covenant. Although it is plural in Ex 31:13, it occurs as a singular in the next verse and is defined in Ex 31:15, 17 as *הַשְׁבֻּעִים* (the plural anticipates its repeated observance). See, Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991), 201.

³¹³ While the concept is integral to the corpus of the NT, it appears only sparsely (Luke is the *only* Gospel to use the term in connection with Jesus; Paul mentions it twice in 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; and Hebrews mentions it four times (Heb 8:8, 13; 9:15; 12:24) and its "contents" are never spelled out anywhere. The point is, that scholars speak of it as if one could refer to the NT for its list of blessings and sanctions when these must be constructed. Even more problematic is that the sign of the new covenant is never pointed out anywhere.

coming to John's baptism would have thought he was undergoing a "re-circumcision"?³¹⁴ How would this have made sense to women?

Conclusion

As *Table 4: Antecedents of Christian Baptism* illustrates, the *Religionsgeschichtliche* approach relies on philological and initiatory parallels, but overplays the significance of Hellenism and misconstrues Judaism. The proselyte baptism argument emphasizes the parallel of initiation and liturgical similarities, but is faced with chronological issues that concern many scholars. The Qumran community approach emphasizes John's connection to the group based upon a constellation of shared parallels such as initiation, an eschatological outlook, an anti-temple stance, etc, but all of these have been thrown into question. Scholars arguing for some application of the HB ritual purity system fail to explain how John fits well in a system designed to resolve specific impurities and the Gospels do not appear to portray his baptism as pertaining to this issue. Finally, *sui generis* scholars, who find problems with every antecedent due to differences between them and John, propose an untenable argument to most scholars because it ultimately fails to explain how the original audience could have possibly understood his baptism.

³¹⁴ Kline, *Oath*, 62. There is the added problem of how the baptism of John, which was reserved for his "terminal generation," might relate to the "later baptism" of the new epoch (64–65, 78–79).

Table 4: Antecedents of Christian baptism

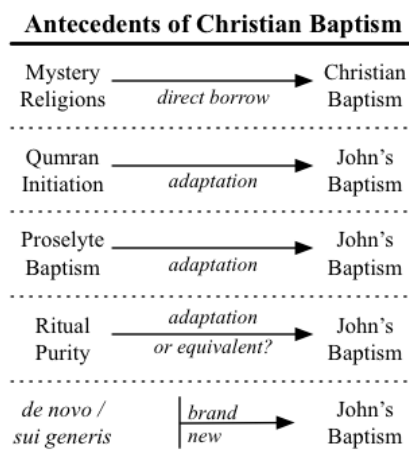


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

The above discussion raises numerous methodological issues. The first pertains to parallels. Since *every* approach outlined above cites the evidence of parallels it would appear that it is simply a matter of counting parallels and the view with the highest number wins. This raises numerous questions. Are all parallels considered equal or should they be weighed? How would we go about weighing them? How do we handle parallels that are shared across multiple antecedents? What criteria determines the precedence of one over another? What about differences between John and the antecedents? Do differences offset parallels? Should differences be weighed, and if so, how? More importantly, how do we decide which parallels are directly related to the practice of baptism and how do we measure what influence that carries?

In fact, the problem of parallels reveals the need to reframe the question. That is, what role does a given washing play in its religious system? As the above analysis underscores, the importance of considering the systematic level before making a phenomenological comparison is critical. If we can satisfactorily establish the larger religious system of each group we seek to juxtapose, we will have a better framework within which to compare John's baptism with other so-called antecedents. This does not negate the relevance of parallels, but rather it provides a more accurate basis for comparison. In this respect, we will no longer be directly comparing parallels, but rather ritual systems and specifically the role of washing within them.

A second problem that this history of interpretation has revealed pertains to the essence or *sine qua non* for "baptism." Scholars generally do not define what is meant by the term, although they reveal their assumptions in

how they connect John's baptism to a preferred antecedent or in how they weigh the evidence. The terminology is an issue since baptism is a transliteration of a Greek term and is thus not technically found in Hebrew language sources such as the DSS or Rabbinic literature; of course, the ἀάδδδβæù is a translation of טבל and vice versa.³¹⁵ Yet, as the discussion of Rowley illustrates, what we mean by baptism in the modern era dictates what we think it means in antiquity.³¹⁶

As a result of the above survey, the following issues are identified as relevant to any investigation of the origin of Christian baptism:

- The role of transliterating ἀάδδδβæù and טבל in our (mis)understanding of baptism.
- The use of anachronistic terminology in referring to baptism, e.g., sacrament or *dona data*.
- Assumptions, such as, “Christianity” vs. “Judaism,” which skew interpretation.
- The assumptions imported by the social-scientific analysis of baptism as an initiation rite.
- The role of bias and polemics in sources, e.g., is John the baptizer “Christianized”?
- The dating of proselyte baptism.
- The purpose of baptism in any antecedent.
- The administration of baptism in any context, e.g., does the passive voice even with an explicitly stated agent actually demonstrate agency?
- Whether any baptisms are one-time and what that might mean.
- Whether any baptisms can be referred to as initiatory, and if so, what that might mean.
- Whether the NT evidence should be read synthetically (canonically) or independently.
- The influence and interpretation of archaeological evidence for explaining baptisms of the Second Temple Period, especially as it relates to mode, administration, and the relationship of ritual purity to John's and Christian baptism.
- The fact the NT assumes on the part of the reader how baptism was performed and what it indicated.
- The role the HB plays in the practice and interpretation of baptism.
- Whether Jesus's baptism by John plays a role in the formation of Christian baptism.

³¹⁵ Cf. T. Muraoka, *A Greek ≈ Hebrew/Aramaic Two-Way Index to the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2010), s.v. “βαπτίζω,” “טַבַּל.”

³¹⁶ Rowley, “Baptism,” 219–20, 222.

- Whether gentiles were considered unclean, and if so, under what conditions. If they were not, then why were they baptized?

Chapter 2

Methodology and Assumptions

ὁδὶ ἅε ἀσάεῃ ἅτ δὲ ἰοῦί ἰῦέεόά δᾶνι οὐδὲ οἰεῦόσάο ἀτὶ δὲ ἀτὶοέε ὀηί ὀδᾶέβι·
ὀέέόεçñüόάοί ἅñ ὀδ ἅÝñ¹

This is the danger: comparisons often come with built-in narratives that make it difficult to begin afresh and that prevent or discourage us from looking at datasets that involve comparanda in new ways.²

The previous chapter outlines how scholars link John’s “baptism” to a specific antecedent through direct comparison. The argument for origins plays out in the battle of parallels—each antecedent explanation advances as many parallels as possible while concomitantly downplaying or ignoring differences. The *sui generis* approach simply emphasizes differences to deny any connection with any antecedent. Since John’s practice differs from whatever he supposedly borrows or inherits, most arguments attempt to explain how John derives his practice *genetically* from some an antecedent. These diverse and contradictory historical arguments built upon the selective use of parallels are examples of “parallelomania” against which Sandmel warned.³ That is, comparison is conducted uncritically and unsystematically⁴ since the driving impetus is to identify in the antecedents something sufficiently comparable to “Christian baptism.”⁵

In other words, scholars have been using comparative method (CM) *implicitly* with little to no explanation of *how* they conduct comparison and as

¹ “But the cautious man must be especially on his guard in the matter of resemblances, for they are very slippery things” (Plato, *Soph.* 231a [Fowler, LCL]).

² Hughes, *Comparison*, 61, cf. 88.

³ Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 1–13.

⁴ A notable exception is Thomas who entertains numerous comparisons between “le bap-tême” and a variety of exempla approaching or possibly corresponding with it, although he offers no explanation of his comparative methodology (*Mouvement*, 309–13, 339–41, 374–76, 410–414). Rather, the criterion establishing whether an immersion practice is part of a “baptist movement” is whether it is an “acte fondamental du culte” that inherently involves the rejection of sacrifice (270, 284, 436).

⁵ Brent Nongbri makes a similar observation about “religion.” See, Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 18.

a result they construe the data in the particular direction of their preference. Indeed, Luther H. Martin notes that biblical scholars until recently have neglected to reflect on the methodological issues pertaining to comparison.⁶ In this respect, comparison itself is not the problem, but the avoidance or lack of awareness of the ideologies operative behind analysis, and the tendency to ahistorical overgeneralization and essentialism.⁷ To remedy this, I make explicit the principles guiding this inquiry and perform comparison in a way that avoids parallelomania. Moreover, I consider several types of comparison beyond a merely genetic approach.⁸

While CM⁹ frames this research agenda (more below), historical-critical method (HCM) and the relatively new field of Ritual Studies (RS)¹⁰

⁶ Luther H. Martin, "Comparison," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 45–56, 45. According to Martin, an exception is Jonathan Z. Smith. Cf. M. Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe, eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 23–24.

⁷ Martin "Comparison," 22, Hughes, *Comparison*, 6.

⁸ For various methods of handling parallels and performing comparison, see James R. Davila, "The Peril of Parallels (Lecture)," University of St. Andrews, Dead Sea Scrolls Lectures, April 2001, <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/divinity/rt/dss/abstracts/parallels/>; Talmon, "Comparative Method," 320–56; Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 1–13; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); *Drudgery Divine*; Frey, "Critical Issues," 517–45; Calame, "Comparatisme," 35–51; Walter D. Mignolo, "On Comparison: Who is Comparing What and Why?" in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 99–119; Boring, Berger, and Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary*, 14–16, 23–32; Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory, Concepts and Comparison in Historical Sociology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 156–73; Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 174–97; John S. Kloppenborg, "Disciplined Exaggeration," *NovT* 59 (2017): 390–414.

⁹ For Michael Stausberg, CM is not a methodology proper but a "research design" that makes use of multiple other methods, such as philology, genre criticism, HCM, social-scientific approaches, etc. He also makes the point that most if not all methods "operate comparatively" even when not explicitly conscious of this (cf. Hughes, *Comparison*, 78). Ronald L. Grimes defines "method" as a "'map' of formal categories and questions one carries into a field [a people group who are the subject of modern anthropological study]," and in the sense that CM provides principles and an order for approaching data and interpretation, it is a method, although in no way "scientific." See Michael Stausberg, "Comparison," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2014), 21–39, 34–35; Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 3rd ed. (Waterloo, Canada: Ritual Studies International, 2013), 19.

¹⁰ Ritual studies consist of a subset of the larger social-scientific methodological approach. Although it continues to develop and mature, it is now recognized as a discipline in

contribute to the selection, organization, analysis, and interpretation of the data used in the construction and comparison of the systems in which “baptism” functions and has meaning. HCM is necessary for obtaining and evaluating sources, however, RS provides more precise tools for examining how rituals function and why they change;¹¹ of course, there will be expected overlap between these methods. That said, I employ RS with some caution since as Risto Uro observes, “the study of Christian beginnings [i.e., in explaining origins] from a ritual point of view is still at *an experimental and embryonic stage*.”¹² Past RS work has primarily focused on the *existing* function, meaning, or role of “baptism” in socialization.¹³ Additionally, since RS is a sub-discipline of a social-scientific approach, I seek to avoid projecting foreign or modern concepts onto antiquity by building any models or systems from ancient sources, and by providing as far as possible a Geertzian “thick description”¹⁴ of the groups and practices discussed herein. The goal is to establish as far as possible the “webs of meaning” in which “baptism” functions and communicates, which aids in elucidating from what John’s baptism derives. Rather than taking an anachronistic understanding of John’s practice and looking for it in the so-called antecedents, I go the other direction by first establishing the use of “baptism” among these antecedents and then by asking how they, on their own terms, might inform our understanding of John.

In addition, I draw on linguistics to show that “baptism” is a theological construct achieved through transliteration as translation, which not only obfuscates the meaning of the term but also constrains scholars to look for a reified concept that did not exist in antiquity. Rather, John’s “baptism” is an

its own right (Uro, *Ritual*, 40). He also provides a helpful survey as it relates to NT studies in “Ritual and Christian Origins,” in *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, eds. Dietmar Neufeld and Richard E. DeMaris (London: Routledge, 2010), 220–32. There are five main approaches to rituals: (1) genealogical—where did it come from? (2) functionalist—what does it do? (3) symbolist—what does it mean? (4) cultural—how is it used to generate and negotiate power? (5) cognitive—how is it embodied and empirically testable?

¹¹ Catherine Bell, “Ritual, Change, and Changing Rituals,” *Worship* 63 (1989): 31–41; “The Authority of Ritual Experts,” *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993): 98–120.

¹² Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 179, emphasis mine.

¹³ A good example is Wayne A. Meek’s “socio-historical” explanation of baptism. This is particularly true with certain anthropological and cognitive approaches (e.g., Christian Strecker, Richard E. DeMaris, and Siikavirta). See, Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 140–63; Christian Strecker, *Die liminale Theologie des Paulus: Zugänge zur paulinischen Theologie aus kulturanthropologischer Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Richard E. DeMaris, *The New Testament in Its Ritual World* (London: Routledge, 2008); Siikavirta, *Baptism*.

¹⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 3–30.

exemplum of the ritual use of water for purification as attested by the various antecedents. Moreover, archeological evidence also contributes important data to this study and following Stuart S. Miller I recognize that these data are not only interpreted, but may not necessarily refer to the *same* things, but rather *similar* things.¹⁵ Finally, recent studies on the “partings of the ways” serve to contextualize anew the research question since we are looking at *intra*-Jewish practices, not “Christianity” versus “Judaism.”¹⁶ These shifting paradigmatic assumptions have significant impact on this study.¹⁷

Although this eclectic and interdisciplinary approach¹⁸ cannot exhaustively engage each method with equal depth,¹⁹ the goal is not to exhaust the nuances of one particular methodology, but rather to use any relevant means to provide the most explanatory power for an account of the origin of “Christian baptism.” Geertz’s critique—“Eclecticism is self-defeating not because there is only one direction in which it is useful to move, but because there are so many”²⁰—is valid *unless one needs to move in multiple directions at the same time*. Not only do the data invite an interdisciplinary approach, but this expands the types of questions that may be asked, provides critical heuristic tools for analyzing familiar data, and mitigates distortion of ancient evidence.

The remainder of this chapter will outline the principles of CM and their application to “baptism.” The following discussion presents the collective

¹⁵ Stuart S. Miller, *At the Intersection of Texts and Material Finds: Stepped Pools, Stone Vessels, and Ritual Purity Among the Jews of Roman Galilee*, *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements* 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

¹⁶ E.g., Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to Which Is Appended a Correction of My Border Lines),” *JQR* 99 (2009): 7–36; Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

¹⁷ These paradigmatic assumptions result in significant interpretive constraint because, as Michel Foucault revealed, we are continually constrained by our current “episteme,” which limits what is possible to think or say in a given time and context. While previous scholarship took “Christianity” vs. “Judaism” for granted, this is no longer the case. See Jeremy Carrette, “Foucault and the Study of Religion,” in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*, ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 487–95.

¹⁸ Numerous scholars advocate an eclectic or interdisciplinary approach: e.g., Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996); Edward Adams and David G. Horrell, eds. *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 241–310; Rothschild, *Baptist Traditions*, 234.

¹⁹ On this problem, see Uro, *Ritual*, 1–3.

²⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 5. In context, he made this comment in response to the attempt to define culture in an overly diffuse manner.

insights of the following CM theorists: Jonathan Z. Smith, Luther H. Martin, Michael Stausberg, Bruce Lincoln, Aaron Hughes, David Frankfurter, and John Kloppenborg. I organize the discussion around the four questions to which according to Hughes the comparativist must disclose answers:²¹

- 1) *What are We Comparing?* Here, I define the phenomenon²² that this project is focused on—what exactly is “baptism” and is there a *sine qua non* for it?
- 2) *When are We Comparing?* In this section I explain why I situate this research project in a particular historical period and why I chose the *comparanda* of this study.
- 3) *How are We Comparing?* Here, I survey the various ways of performing comparison and explain how I perform it.
- 4) *Why are We Comparing?* Finally, I clarify the comparative goals of this study, what parallels and differences actually indicate, and the implications these have on the research question.

Throughout these four sections, I disclose the assumptions (of which I am aware) guiding this study and point out some limitations that I have identified. Following the four questions, I explain how the criteria of Richard B. Hays for echoes and allusions in Pauline literature offer a useful heuristic for evaluating proposed solutions, including my own.²³

Comparative Methodology and “Baptism”

The terms we use and how we theorize the people and phenomena of antiquity powerfully shape our conception of them;²⁴ imprecise or anachronistic terminology obscures our understanding. For example, the terms associated with

²¹ These questions derive from Hughes, *Comparison*, 45, 113; cf. Mignolo, “On Comparison,” 99–119.

²² I use the term “phenomenon” in its most general sense and am not referring to “phenomenology,” which “seeks to grasp the world as people experience it, shorn of their interpretations of those experiences”; see Hughes, *Comparison*, 67–70; James V. Spickard, “Phenomenology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge, 2014), 333–45, 336.

²³ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 29–32; cf. Hassan, “Problem,” 73.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 7–16.

Christianity or Christian, Church,²⁵ Christ,²⁶ Christology,²⁷ conversion,²⁸ “the Bible” and labels of other corpora,²⁹ “Hellenistic” and “Palestinian Judaism,”³⁰ and, “Jew” and “Judaism”³¹ are now either challenged or require careful definition because they promulgate an inaccurate, or at least debated, understanding of the concepts to which they refer. This is also true with “baptism.”

What Are We Comparing?

What is “baptism” and how do we know when we have found it? It is obvious that *Christian* baptism must be different from all other antecedents since it bears the qualifier “Christian,” just as one might speak of *proselyte* baptism or *Qumran* baptism (cf. ?).³² Ironically, scholars consider these antecedents as comparanda of “baptism,”³³ even those that do not use βάπτισμα or its cognates, while concomitantly disqualifying them because none ultimately fully resemble “baptism.” That is, scholars consider all of these as comparable *at some level* even if the essential unifying characteristic(s) remains elusive. Thus, the ambiguity in defining “baptism” and its *sine qua non* reveals that it is a conceptually malleable concept and explains in part how scholars are able to shape the data toward a preferred origin, whether the “mysteries,” Judaism(s), or *sui generis* Christianity. Table 5: *Comparing “Baptisms”* presents comparative

²⁵ Anders Runesson, “The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions on Paul,” in *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 53–77; cf. Morton Smith, *Studies in Historical Method, Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen, Vol. 1 of *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 99–100.

²⁶ Matthew V. Novenson, *Christ Among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁷ April D. DeConick, “How We Talk About Christology Matters,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes et al. (Baylor University Press, 2007), 1–23.

²⁸ Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” in *Israel’s God and Rebecca’s Children: Christology and Community in Early Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. David B. Capes et al. (Baylor University Press, 2007), 25–38.

²⁹ Smith, *Studies*, 95–97; cf. Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, 13.

³⁰ Smith, *Studies*, 97–98.

³¹ Smith, *Studies*, 100–1.

³² Comparison, by definition, requires the admission of difference, otherwise, the two exempla would create a tautology. As Smith observes, “comparison is, at base, never identity” (*Imagining Religion*, 35; cf. *To Take Place*, 13–14).

³³ E.g., Thomas, *Mouvement*; Rudolph, *Antike Baptisten*, 5–37.

data points between various “baptisms.” Depending on one’s interpretation of each “baptism,” some designations are admittedly disputable.

Table 5: Comparing “baptisms”

Comparing “Baptisms”							
Trait	Ritual	Qumran	John	Christian	Proselyte	Mysteries	<i>Sui Generis</i>
Repeated	✓	✓	?		✓	✓	
One-Time		1st?	?	✓	1st?		✓
Self-Administered	✓	✓	?		✓	✓	
Administered			✓	✓	(witnessed)		✓
Non-Initiatory Context	✓	✓	✓				
Initiatory Context		1st?		✓	✓	✓	✓
Ritual Purpose	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	
Other Purpose (?)			?	?			✓
Jews Only	✓	✓	✓				
Non-Jews Only					✓	✓	
Both	(proselytes)	?	(proselytes)	✓		?	✓
Non-Eschatological	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Eschatological		?	✓	✓			✓
No Repentance	✓	✓				✓	
Repentance Associated		?	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ritual Bath/Facilities	✓	✓		?	✓	✓	
Natural Water Source	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

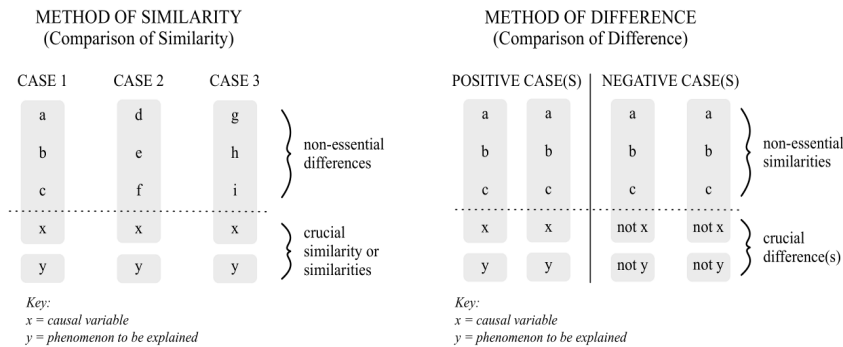
Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

To illustrate the malleability of the concept of “baptism,” consider *Figure 4: Skocpol and Somers: Method of Similarity and Method of Difference* below, which features the models of “comparative history” adapted from Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers.³⁴ To apply these to our topic, “CASE 1, 2, 3” represent the antecedents, “y” represents John’s baptism (or “Christian baptism”), and “x,” represents “the crucial similarity or similarities” shared across the antecedents. As it plays out currently in research, one predetermines the essential characteristic(s) of the antecedents (x) from John’s baptism (y). Then the scholar demonstrates the preferred antecedent to be the origin because it contains “x” while other potential antecedents are rejected because they do not.³⁵ To further strengthen one’s argument, antecedents that lack “x” are

³⁴ Skocpol and Somers, “Uses,” 184, fig. 1.

³⁵ Of course, this is circular reasoning.

highlighted as evidence that one’s argument is sound. Although the rejected cases are *similar*, they fall short and in the process reveal negatively the missing essential characteristic(s). The disagreement between scholars regarding the “correct” antecedent is based on the fact that each scholar has chosen different criteria for “x,” the *sine qua non* for “baptism.” Similarly, the *sui generis* approach simply treats all antecedents as negative cases. That is, John’s baptism (y) is not comparable to any cases because it consists of a particular constellation of characteristics that none of the potential antecedents possess. In other words, “y” and “x” are equal and the other antecedents are all viewed as “not x.”



Adapted from Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 174–97.

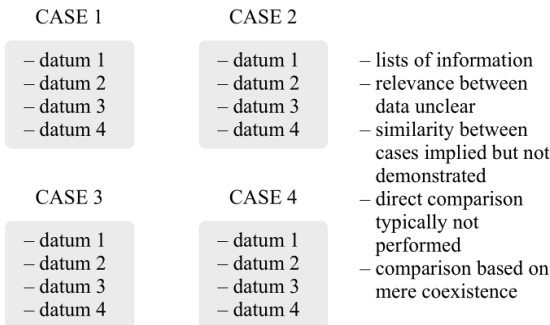
Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 4: Skocpol and Somers: Method of similarity and method of difference

Coincidentally, *Figure 5: Methods of Comparison (4 Models of J. Z. Smith): Encyclopedic* shows how the *sui generis* approach just described resembles Smith’s “encyclopedic” method of comparison. The resemblance is based on the fact that scholars adopting this approach describe in detail the various antecedents with the goal of showing that none of the cases align exactly with John’s baptism.

METHODS OF COMPARISON
(4 Models of J. Z. Smith)

ENCYCLOPEDIA



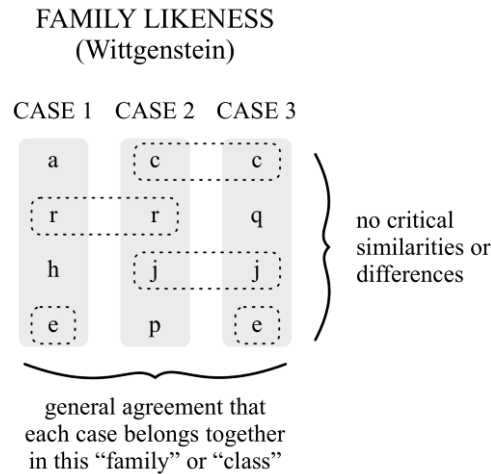
Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19–35.

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 5: Methods of comparison (4 models of J. Z. Smith): Encyclopedic

A potential alternative to identifying *the* essential characteristic of “baptism” is to use the “family resemblance” approach advocated by Ludwig Wittgenstein illustrated in *Figure 6: Methods of Comparison (Wittgenstein): Family Likeness*. The advantage of this would be that “baptism” could be defined in a variety of ways since there would not be one defining characteristic, no *sine qua non*. Rather, there would be a collection of shared traits that do not all need to be present in any one exemplum. The main problem with this is that Wittgenstein used this model in reference to defining the the *concept* of “game.”³⁶ Of course, most scholars understand “baptism” as a concept, but this is the root of the problem in our search for origins—“baptism” is not a concept but is the noun form of a verbal action.

³⁶ Calame (following James G. Frazer) also suggests that this type of comparison is based on surface analogies and as such will only be “relative, contrastive et differentielle” (“Comparatisme,” 44).



Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th. ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §§65–77.

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 6: Methods of comparison (Wittgenstein): Family likeness

If we wish to define ἀπόβασις, its lexical meaning is, “to put [something] into a yielding substance.”³⁷ In the specific context of the so-called antecedents, it refers to humans immersing their bodies (or objects) in water. Grammatically, it is an intensive or iterative form of ἀπόβασις,³⁸ although it is unclear whether this distinction carried any weight during the 1st centuries BCE and CE.³⁹ From a grammatical semantics point of view,⁴⁰ the nouns ἀπόβασις and ἀπόβασις respectively emphasize *the act* or *result* of placing something into a yielding

³⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, “The Meaning of Βαπτίζεω in Greek, Jewish, and Patristic Literature,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 24 (2011): 3–40, 16, 18. See also Appendix A: Proposed BDAG Entry (Schnabel).

³⁸ Schnabel, “Meaning,” 3; James Hope Moulton and W. F. Howard, *Accidence and Word Formation: With an Appendix on Semitisms in the New Testament*, Vol. 2 of James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908–1976), 408.

³⁹ Schnabel says, “the tendency is for intensive forms of Greek verbs to replace the root form, losing [sic] the intensified meaning in the process” (“Meaning,” 3, emphasis mine).

⁴⁰ Cf. Alan Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), §1.7.2.

substance.⁴¹ The significance of this morphological difference is again uncertain.⁴² Regardless, to put something (a human) into a yielding substance (water) is far from the moving target of what scholars mean by “baptism.” Here, I echo Brent Nongbri’s insight that ancient terms like ἀπόδουσι and ἀποδουσία are “best understood as verbal activities,” which is how native Greek speakers would have understood them, “rather than [as] conceptual entities.”⁴³

The point appears counterintuitive, yet the meaning of ἀποδουσι is *not the same as* what is meant by “baptize” in modern discourse. Consider the host of characteristics outlined in *Table 6: Sine qua non for “Baptism”?* (right) that scholars deploy to either insist on the genetic connection of “Christian baptism” to an antecedent or to assert its *sui generis* status.⁴⁴ Yet, none of these traits are essential to “baptism” because they describe diverse ways that it may be done or the various contexts in which it may be practiced. For example, frequency describes how often the act is performed and by definition it cannot be essential to “baptism”; there may be “one-time” “baptisms” just as there may be repeated ones. Despite this, scholars regularly appeal to frequency to disqualify Levitical ritual washing and “Qumran baptism” as valid antecedents since (they assume that) John’s immersion was one-time, as if frequency were essential to “baptism.”⁴⁵ Or, they are forced to argue just the opposite, that the “first washing” at Qumran was distinct from subsequent ones since a “one-time washing” is essential to the meaning of “baptism.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ BDF §109; Moulton and Howard, *Accidence*, 350–51, 353–54; Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 42–43.

⁴² As Barr notes, ascribing significance to the distinction between the endings -μοσ and -μοα is questionable (*Semantics*, 140–144; see also, Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 74). If there was a distinction made, the author of Colossians is unaware of it (cf. Col. 2:12). Moreover, the two terms are translated identically in English Bibles with the exception of Mark 7:4 because it is supposedly not referring to “baptism.”

⁴³ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 2; cf. Stendahl, *Meanings*, 175. Unfortunately, Stendahl pre-determines that “baptism” is initiation and interprets the data from that perspective. Βαπτίζω does not mean “to initiate,” and while I appreciate his insistence on “the act of baptism” (178), I do not see how initiation is “that which makes baptism baptism,” or in non-reified language, “that which makes immersion immersion” (179).

⁴⁴ Cf. ? on p. ? .

⁴⁵ E.g., Émile Puech, “Les manuscrits de la mer Morte et Le Nouveau Testament,” in *Qoumrân et les manuscrits de la Mer Morte: un cinquantenaire*, ed. E.-M. Laperrousaz (Paris: Cerf, 1997), 253–313, 261–63.

⁴⁶ E.g., see the discussion of Beasley-Murray on p. ? .

Table 6: Sine qua non for “baptism”?

<i>Sine qua non</i> for “Baptism”?		
Frequency	repeated	vs. one-time
Agency	self-administered	vs. administered
Context	non-initiatory	vs. initiatory
Purpose	ritual	vs. moral? initiatory?
Recipient	Jew	vs. non-Jew
Orientation	non-eschatological	vs. eschatological
Association	no repentance	vs. repentance
Location	ritual bath	vs. natural body of water

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

This dilemma reveals the conceptual problem that is linked to our terminology and results in the reification of “baptism” as a construct. This obscures the sole feature shared between the antecedents regardless of their context, language (i.e., Hebrew, Greek, Latin), or the specific wording employed. That is, what makes them all “baptisms” is immersion in water.⁴⁷ While the purpose of

⁴⁷ Some scholars appeal to Didache 7:3 as evidence that βαπτίζω is a generic water rite that does not necessarily occur via immersion since it permits pouring water on the head. However, the context suggests otherwise. Gerhard Barth suggests that “die jüdischen Bestimmungen über die Beschaffenheit des Taufwassers im Hintergrund stehen” in the discussion in the Didache 7:1–3. “Living water” (ὕδατι ζῶντι) is preferred, presumably because it comes from a spring, the highest quality for ritual purification according to later tradition (cf. m. Miqw. 1:8), a notion shared in Greek thought as well. The concessions for cold and then warm water should be understood within the framework of classes or qualities of water since there are both hot and cold springs. Thus, “cold” and “hot” water is not likely emphasizing temperature but water source by metonymy. For example, b. Ber. 64a attributes the following to R. Huna: “My masters, on what account do you treat lightly this matter of immersion? Is it because of the cold? It is possible to make use of the baths [i.e., warm water]” (Neusner). If this is not the case, it is difficult to understand what is meant by ἐὰν δὲ ἀμφοτέρω μὴ ἔχης. Indeed, one must have either cold or warm water to pour over the head. Moreover, m. Miqw. 3:4 and b. Ber. 64a make a similar concession of pouring water over someone who is ill and unable to self-immense. See, Gerhard Barth, *Die Taufe in*

immersion in all of these contexts is to achieve ritual purity, even this is not essential to the lexical meaning of ἀπόδοβαῦ.⁴⁸

Illustrating the Language Problem

To further illustrate how “baptism” appears as a scholarly construct, consider the following examples. When referring to an individual’s washing in water in preparation for the “mysteries,”⁴⁹ biblical scholars call it “baptism” whereas classical scholars call it immersion, washing in water, or ritual purification.⁵⁰ Likewise, scholars find “baptism” in Hebrew and Aramaic sources such as the DSS⁵¹ or “proselyte baptism” (also a construct⁵²) in rabbinic literature; for

Frühchristlicher Zeit, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 35; Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, ed. Harold W. Attridge, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 125–29; Ferguson, *Baptism*, 857–60; A. Hamman and M. Flores Colín, “Baptism: Baptism in the Fathers,” in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino, 2014, 1:321–22; Arthur Vööbus, *Liturgical Traditions in the Didache* (Stockholm: ETSE, 1968), 24–25; René Ginouvès, *Balaneutikè: recherches sur le bain dans l’antiquité grecque* (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1962), 405–7. For discussion on sprinkling and pouring, see Henry F. Brown, *Baptism Through the Centuries* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1965), 31–35.

⁴⁸ So, Schnabel, “Meaning,” 40.

⁴⁹ E.g., Leipoldt, *Urchristliche Taufe*, 38–40. Similarly, Pearson strives to find “baptism” in the Cult of Isis and Sarapis (“Baptism and Initiation,” 48–49). At least in Apuleius, the Latin transliteration of βαπτίζω is absent (cf. *Metam.* 11.1, 23).

⁵⁰ E.g., Kevin Clinton, “Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries,” *OEAGR* 3:38–41; Andrej Petrovic and Ivana Petrovic, *Inner Purity and Pollution in Greek Religion: Volume I: Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 57; Parker, *Miasma*, 285–86; although perhaps not a “classical scholar,” see Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus As the Epistle’s Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 264–66.

⁵¹ Cf. Devorah Dimant, “The Library of Qumran: Its Content and Character,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence A. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 170–76, 171. Elsewhere Dimant notes that nearly all of the sectarian writings are in Hebrew while the Apocryphal and narrative works are in Aramaic. See, Devorah Dimant, “Qumran Sectarian Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, Section Two: The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period of the Second Temple and the Talmud, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 483–550, 488.

James VanderKam and Peter Flint note that “[r]elatively few scrolls were written in Greek. The majority are biblical manuscripts and from the Pentateuch.” See, James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2002), 152.

⁵² Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 153, n. 62.

consistency, we should, as some scholars do, speak of a טבילה (*tebilah*).⁵³ A second example includes importing theological notions where none are intended, such as in Mark 10:38–39 or 1 Cor 15:29.⁵⁴ Following this logic, Webb finds it “highly unusual” that Josephus would use ἀάδδδβæù in reference to John’s “baptism” because the term was (per Webb) restricted to “death and destruction” and not used “to describe an immersion ritual” in Greek sources.⁵⁵ Third, some scholars speak of “Jewish baptism.” For example, Jacob Neusner’s translation and commentary of tractate Miqvaot in the Mishnah and Tosefta bears the title, *The Judaic Law of Baptism*. Nevertheless, he carefully notes that in the text he consistently translates the qal of טבל as “dips, meaning, one immerses one’s own body” and the hifil as “dunks, meaning, one dunks a utensil.”⁵⁶ Likewise, Joseph Thomas asks whether John’s “baptism” is “une manifestation du baptême juif?”⁵⁷ And the title of Wilhem Brandt’s book—*Die jüdischen Baptismen oder das religiöse Waschen und Baden im Judentum mit Einschluß des Judenchristentums*—betrays that “Jewish baptism” is ritual washing or bathing.⁵⁸

These examples of the reified status of “baptism” demonstrate that the term no longer conveys the verbal action of immersion in secondary literature but rather represents a conceptual construct of scholarly or religious imagination.⁵⁹ This is exemplified by tautological statements, such as “John’s baptism

⁵³ Of course, βαπτίζω is a translation for טבל; cf. Muraoka, *Greek ≈ Hebrew/Aramaic*, s.v. “βαπτίζω,” “טבל”; Jastrow, s.v. “טבל,” “טבילה.” The point is, we use the terminology inconsistently.

⁵⁴ E.g., the term βαπτίζω in Mark 10:38–39 is often read as a direct reference to “Christian baptism” when the term was used in common Greek to mean “overwhelmed” much like what is intended by “Je suis submergé” in French. Cf. Isa 21:4, ἡ ἀνομία με βαπτίζει. This is not to say that a double entendre could not be intended, but establishing this requires more argumentation than simply the lexical connection. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:29 may have in mind immersion in Jesus’s name, but there is no reason that this should be our *starting point*.

⁵⁵ Webb, *John*, 166. Similarly, Joachim Jeremias claims that βαπτίζω “originates in the vocabulary of Greek-speaking Jews” Joachim Jeremias, *Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 29.

⁵⁶ Jacob Neusner, *The Judaic Law of Baptism: Tractate Miqvaot in the Mishnah and the Tosefta: A Form-Analytical Translation and Commentary and a Legal and Religious History*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 112 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), x. Since he chooses to translate these terms throughout, it is unclear why he titles his work using “baptism,” a transliteration that does not derive from the Hebrew text.

⁵⁷ Thomas, *Mouvement*, 62.

⁵⁸ Wilhelm Brandt, *Die jüdischen Baptismen oder das religiöse Waschen und Baden im Judentum mit Einschluß des Judenchristentums*, BZAW 18 (Gießen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1910).

⁵⁹ This is not unlike the observation that Nongbri makes of “religion” (*Before Religion*, 2; cf. Geertz, *Interpretation*, 11).

was an immersion,”⁶⁰ by the juxtaposition of John’s “baptism” with “Jewish immersions”⁶¹ as if John were not Jewish or not immersing, or by proposals, such as the “baptist movement” supposedly underway in the first century⁶² when such uses of water are attested before, during and after the 1st century CE.⁶³ The bias is perhaps most obvious in the fact that all English Bible translations find it necessary to *translate* βάπτισμα in Mark 7:4 since the term is not referring to “Christian baptism.”⁶⁴ The real problem is not *that* we transliterate, but *what transliteration enables*.

The Problem of Transliteration as Translation

The transliteration of βάπτισμα and its cognates gives the false impression that when scholars use these terms they denote exactly what the Greek terms meant.⁶⁵ Yet, as Eckhard J. Schnabel rightly observes, “the meaning of a loan word depends on one’s understanding of the loan word, not on the meaning of the transliterated term in the original language.”⁶⁶ Likewise, Kurt Rudolph remarks, “Über Sinn und Berechtigung einer solchen Formulierung [i.e., “baptist sects”] läßt sich allerdings streiten, je nachdem, was man unter ‘Taufe’ und deren kultischem Stellenwert in einer religiösen Gemeinschaft versteht.”⁶⁷

To borrow again an insight from Nongbri, the main issue is not so much the mere reification of “baptism,” but rather that our particular concept

⁶⁰ E.g., Ferguson, *Baptism*, 88; Webb, *John*, 95. Cf. the criticisms of this in Schnabel, “Meaning,” 12–13; Laurent Guyénot, *Jésus et Jean Baptiste* (Chambéry: Imago Exergue, 1998), 67, n. 2.

⁶¹ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 84.

⁶² E.g., Thomas, *Mouvement*; cf. Ferguson, *Baptism*, 71–76; Benoît and Munier even speak of it in the plural “les mouvements baptistes” (*Baptême*, XII); Gerhard van den Heever, “The Spectre of a Jewish Baptist Movement: A Space for Jewish Christianity?” *Annali di Storia dell’Esegesi* 34 (2017): 43–69, 58.

⁶³ As Joan E. Taylor observes, “The notion that there was a ‘Baptist movement’—to which both the Essenes and John belonged—out of line with ‘mainstream Judaism’ rests on outdated presuppositions regarding Second Temple Judaism.” See, Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 48; cf. Chilton, “Yohanan,” 204.

⁶⁴ Betz justifies this in Mark since all other uses of βαπτίζω are not instances of “ritual baptism” (“Jesus’ Baptism,” 387). Similarly, I. Howard Marshall admits that “‘baptism’ can be used of Jewish rites as well.” See, I. Howard Marshall, “The Meaning of the Verb ‘Baptize,’” in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSup 234 (New York: T&T Clark, 2002), 8–24, 10.

⁶⁵ Marshall, “Meaning,” 8.

⁶⁶ Schnabel, “Meaning,” 12.

⁶⁷ Rudolph, *Antike Baptisten*, 5.

of “baptism” is “absent in the ancient world.”⁶⁸ Despite its appearance to represent the Greek term, ironically, transliteration as translation decontextualizes ἀάδδδβæù and invites interpreters to imbue it with anachronistic meaning. This redefinition is made possible by subconscious taxonomies through which we understand “baptism,” taxonomies that differ from those employed by first-century Mediterranean people in how *they* understood ἀάδδδβæù.⁶⁹ As a result, scholars wrongly treat ἀάδδδβæù as a technical term⁷⁰ as if it only occurs in “Christian” literature,⁷¹ or they project whatever is implied by “baptism” onto the practices of other groups and interpret them accordingly (e.g., attempting to make the first washing at Qumran “sacramental” in nature).⁷² As I explain more fully elsewhere, ἀάδδδβæù does not meet technical term criteria.⁷³ Thus,

⁶⁸ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 4.

⁶⁹ Penner and Lopez (following Foucault) observe that “we order the world in specific ways that are unique to particular people groups and individuals in particular time periods and regions of the world” (*De-Introducing the New Testament*, 31–35); Foucault, *Mots*, 7–16.

⁷⁰ So BDAG, s.v. “βαπτίζω”: “The transliteration ‘baptize’ signifies the ceremonial character that NT narratives accord such cleansing, but the need of qualifying statements or contextual coloring in the documents indicates that the term β. was not nearly so technical as the transliteration suggests.” Cf. James Barr, “Semantics and Biblical Theology—A Contribution to the Discussion,” in *Congress Volume Uppsala 1971*, VTSup 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 11–19, 16. Cf. Schnabel, “Meaning,” 3–40; “The Language of Baptism: The Meaning of Βαπτίζω in the New Testament,” in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D.A. Carson*, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 217–46. The “rebuttal” of Schnabel’s work in the newest edition of *NIDNTTE* is not persuasive since the statistical difference between the NT and the wider literature may be explained by the different foci of each and because the NT does not consistently use βαπτίζω consistently as a “technical term,” which unnamed author of the entry readily admits (Moisés Silva, ed. “βάπτω,” 1:462).

⁷¹ E.g., Thomas suggests that “La langue grecque s’était de la sorte enrichie d’un nouveau terme [i.e., βαπτιστής], qui allait devenir propriété du vocabulaire chrétien” (*Mouvement*, 1, emphasis mine). Similarly, Ysebaert claims that the “more pagan authors” supposedly avoid using the verb as the Jews, Christians, and pagans associated with magic and Hermetism used it (*Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 19). A *TLG* search for the lemma βαπτίζω restricted to first-century CE sources reveals 235 occurrences. The majority of these derive from the NT (77 hits or 33%) and Clement and Ignatius (101 hits or 43%). However, 57 hits (or 24%) occur in Josephus, Philo, Plutarch, Strabo, and Epictetus, among others who are not talking about “Christian initiation.”

⁷² See Chapter 1: Review of Scholarship, in general, and G. R. Beasley-Murray (1962), 36–37, specifically.

⁷³ It cannot be a “type 1” technical term since it is used outside of the NT. It also does not meet the criteria for a “type 2” technical term since its use in the NT falls within the semantic range of the term as used by any ancient Greek speaker. Moreover, the NT writings were not restricted to specialists. Even if some scholars concede that it is not a technical term in the NT, they will typically insist that it is treated as such in later literature. However,

the argument for transliterating ἀάδδβæù is exemplary of the “technical meaning fallacy” since transliteration depends on modern religious concerns related to “modes of baptism.”⁷⁴

In this respect, as Aaron W. Hughes observes, “[o]ur language . . . does not naturally describe facts on the ground, but simultaneously structures and processes the ‘facts’ that we want to see.”⁷⁵ David Frankfurter further elucidates the point:

We may tend to assume that in discussing *mageia* or *sacerdos* or *thusia* or *sacrificium* as “magic” or “priest” or “sacrifice” we are reflecting the indigenous, “emic” sensibilities of the Greeks or Romans whose voices we are interpreting, but this is quite erroneous. To translate is inevitably to lift a term from its “emic” sense into an often heavily loaded, “etic” category. “Magic,” “priest,” and “sacrifice,” for example, are irrevocably tainted through implicit comparison to Christian tradition—and cannot “simply” translate Greek, Latin, or other primary terms for some ambiguous area of ritual power, some acquired ceremonial leadership role, or a range of offering traditions that included ritual animal slaughter.⁷⁶

Jennifer Eyl contributes another important dimension to the problem of our language in her discussion of semantic voids.⁷⁷ To apply her insights here, the decision to transliterate ἀάδδβæù wrongly implies that a *linguistic* void⁷⁸ (or

consideration of just two examples, Justin Martyr (d. 165 CE) *Dial.* 86 and John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) *Hom. Matt.* 40.5 (*NPNF*¹ 10:263), demonstrates otherwise. See, Benjamin J. Snyder, “Technical Term or Technical Foul?—βαπτίζω and the Problem of Transliteration as Translation,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 21 (2018): 91–113.

⁷⁴ D. A. Carson explains, “in this fallacy, an interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning—a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter’s personal systematic theology.” See, D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 45.

⁷⁵ Hughes, *Comparison*, 64.

⁷⁶ David Frankfurter, “Comparison and the Study of Religions of Late Antiquity,” in *Comparer en histoire des religions antiques: Controverses et propositions*, ed. Claude Calame and Bruce Lincoln (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2012), 83–98, 88; cf. Barr, “Semantics,” 16–17.

⁷⁷ Jennifer Eyl, “Semantic Voids, New Testament Translation, and Anachronism” *Methods and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (2014) 315–39, 317–18.

⁷⁸ According to Eyl, a linguistic void “is encountered when the target language [English] shares a concept with the source language [Greek], but does not have that concept reduced to a single, compressed designator (or, word)” (“Semantic Voids,” 317–18). For example, French has no equivalent word for “stand.” Rather, one would say *se lever*, “lift oneself,” or *se mettre debout*, “place oneself on one’s feet.” Of course, the concept of rising to one’s feet is shared between English and French. As another example, Eyl points to *Schadenfreude* since there is no clear, single English term to translate the German even though one can explain the concept of *Schadenfreude* by using several English terms (e.g., “taking delight at another’s misfortune”). Additional examples include *gezellig* (Dutch), *sobremesa* (Spanish), *utepils* (Norwegian), *Schapsleiche* (German), *saudade* (Portuguese), *тоска* (Russian), and *flâneur* or *étrenner* (French).

lexical gap⁷⁹) exists when scholars are capable of translating it (cf. 2 Kgs 5:14; Mark 7:4). But more importantly, transliteration leads scholars to fail to notice or to even suppress the *referential void* that *does exist*.⁸⁰ That is, we assume that the contemporary meaning of “baptize” is continuous with its first-century CE one because it appears to be the same word. Since we never consider whether this assumption is valid, scholars unwittingly replace the referential void with a concept congenial to our modern context by considering it as initiation, a sign of conversion, or a symbolic act (e.g., “a visible sign of God’s grace”⁸¹). Unfortunately, when scholars employ the term “baptism,” it is an empty-set, laden with non-semantic, theological freight, that is deployed ideologically in the guise of representing the ancient meaning of βάπτισμα.⁸²

As a result, we do not consider *why* first-century people were immersing in water in the first place. Moreover, in answering this question we (at least Westerners⁸³) discover that no framework exists equivalent to the reason ancient Mediterranean people washed in water for other than for hygienic reasons,⁸⁴ namely, to achieve a condition of ritual purity. Although scholars have made a few arguments in favor of locating the origin of “baptism” somehow in the ritual purity system of the HB, nearly all scholars dismiss the evidence of ritual washing (textual and archaeological) because it is not “baptism” as they would define it. Since “baptism” is a priori different from ritual purification,

⁷⁹ Cf. Alan Cruse, *A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 93.

⁸⁰ A referential void occurs when “the very concept itself is not shared between the two languages” (“Semantic Voids,” 318)

⁸¹ I should emphasize that correcting our views of “baptism” is not mutually exclusive to understanding immersion in Jesus’s name as “a visible sign of God’s grace.” While *later* authors *may* describe “baptism” in these ways, this does not characterize the actual language of our sources and is far from what first-century people were thinking. See, Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academic, 2017), s.v. “baptismus”; Tricia Sheffield, “Advertising,” in *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture*, ed. John C. Lyden and Eric Michael Mazur (London: Routledge, 2015), 169–82, 171.

⁸² For other terms subject to problem of theological freight, see, Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 407–9; Runesson, “Question of Terminology,” 53–77; DeConick, “How We Talk,” 1–23; Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement,” 25–38; cf. Snyder, “Technical Term,” 91–113.

⁸³ Some modern, non-Western groups do practice ritual purification. To clarify, I am not suggesting that the ritual purity systems wherever and whenever they exist are identical, only that the concept exists in contemporary practice and that no referential void is present. See, Klaus Vollmer, “How Impurity is Concealed and Revealed: The Case of the So-Called *Burakumin* in Contemporary Japan,” in *How Purity Is Made*, ed. Petra Rösch and Udo Simon (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 245–64.

⁸⁴ I do not imply or assume our modern scientific basis for ancient hygiene here.

that evidence is ignored or used as a foil against the superiority of “Christian baptism.” As Eyl explains,

Because historians (and translators) are in the position of knowing the “results” of historical developments, that result is codified or nearly hypostasized as an objective “thing” that exists independently. People and events of the past are then evaluated either as 1) anticipating what is later fulfilled, or 3) [*sic*] failing to live up to the stabilized, fulfilled concept. By not taking historical events or figures on their terms, anachronisms in History become what Skinner called “a pack of tricks we play on the dead.”⁸⁵

Our language implicitly structures how we approach “baptism” because it controls how we classify it and its characteristics, and how we select and interpret the comparanda.⁸⁶ When John’s or “Christian baptism” controls comparison, it is equivalent to the “ethnographic” approach of comparison that Smith describes, illustrated in *Figure 7: Methods of Comparison (4 Models of J. Z. Smith: Ethnographic* (right), which scholars then combine with the “genealogical” approach when comparing “baptisms” (cf. fig. 9 on p. 112).⁸⁷ Thus, it is imperative to translate the term to avoid “exoticizing it and turning it into something *sui generis*”⁸⁸ or a reified concept. This is a necessary first step toward “a large-scale rethinking of the analytic vocabulary that we use to describe (actually, redescribe) the data of ancient texts.”⁸⁹ This study is intended, in part, to show that the past and the present *do not* “share in the same system” of meaning⁹⁰ and to pay closer attention to the meaning “clusters or constellations” of ancient sources.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Eyl, “Semantic Voids,” 331, n. 36. She confirmed that “3)” should be “2)” in personal correspondence.

⁸⁶ Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 32; Hughes, *Comparison*, 65; Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 122; Murphy, *John*, 118.

⁸⁷ Calame, “Comparatisme,” 42–45.

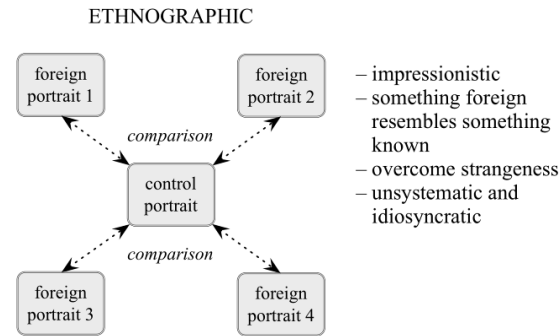
⁸⁸ Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 414.

⁸⁹ Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 408.

⁹⁰ Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 35, emphasis original.

⁹¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), vii.

METHODS OF COMPARISON
(4 Models of J. Z. Smith)



Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 19–35.

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 7: Methods of comparison (4 Models of J. Z. Smith): Ethnographic

I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

To press the point further, טבל (often translated ἀάδδδβæù) only occurs in *one sectarian DSS* that refers to Leviticus, 4Q274.⁹² In light of this, what justification is there in using the term “baptize” at all in connection with Qumran? Of course, we know that the sectarians immersed from the archaeological evidence⁹³ and from the way the DSS describes their washing in water, but the

⁹² There is understandably no entry for טבל in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zu den Qumrantexten*, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Ulrich Dahmen, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011–2016). The remaining eight uses of טבל in the DSS occur in the biblical manuscripts, several of these are reconstructed from later biblical texts, and not all occurrences pertain to ritual purification. The relevant references include: Lev 4:6 (4Q25 2, 10; Mas1a 1 II, 4–5); 9:9 (Mas1b I, 21–22); 14:16 (11Q1 F, 1–2; 11Q2 4, 1), 51 (4Q23 4, 10; 4Q23 5, 1–2); Deut 33:24 (1Q5 23, 1); Josh 3:15 (4Q48 2 III, 1–2); Ruth 2:14 (2Q16 1 I, 7–8); cf. Puech, “Manuscripts,” 262–63. That said, 3Q15 I, 11 mentions an ניקרת הטבילה, “immersion pool.”

⁹³ Cf. Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 134–62; Roland de Vaux, *L'archéologie et les manuscrits de la Mer Morte*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 6–8.

normal language used is בוא במים and רחץ במים, not טבל.⁹⁴ Moreover, a similar, though not quite as extreme, phenomenon occurs in Greek literature—while ἀάδδβæù and its cognates occasionally occur in contexts of ritual purification, authors generally use other verbs (e.g., εἶϋù or ἐάεάñβæù).⁹⁵ Again, we know that they did immerse in certain cases as some archaeological evidence suggests⁹⁶ and from the way the texts describe washing in water.⁹⁷ Despite a clear preference for the term, even the NT does not exclusively use ἀάδδβæù.⁹⁸

In light of the above discussion, the initial question—what is “baptism” and how do we know when we have found it?—is based on modern assumptions that lead us away from the language of our sources and to focus on a reified concept rather than a reference to a verbal action. For the numerous reasons above, I translate ἀάδδβæù unless it occurs in a quotation. Scholars do not consider the antecedents as comparanda to “Christian baptism” because the sources use ἀάδδβæù and its cognates, but because they refer to immersion in water or exhibit characteristics perceived to be parallel with modern practices and understandings of “baptism.”

While I noted previously that ritual purification is not essential to the *lexical meaning* of ἀάδδβæù, immersion is a primary means by which one obtains ritual purity; it is one way our sources describe the ritual use of water for

⁹⁴ For בוא במים see: 1QS 5:13; 4Q277 1 II, 8; 4Q414 2–4 II, 5. A similar Greek expression—καταβαίνω εἰς (τὸ) ὕδωρ—in is attested in Acts 8:38; Barn. 11.8, 11; Herm. Mand. 31:1; Herm. Sim. 93:4.

For רחץ במים see: CD 10:11; 4Q219 II, 13; 4Q266 8 III, 9; 4Q270 6 IV, 20; 4Q272 1 II, 6; 4Q274 1 I, 3; 2 I, 8; 4Q284 2 I, 4; 4Q414 13, 5; 4Q512 56–58, 1; 4Q514 1 I, 9; 11Q19 XL, 16; XLIX, 17; LI, 3, 5; 11Q20 XII, 9; XIV, 24, 26.

⁹⁵ Cf. Louis Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs: d'Homère à Aristote*, Études et commentaires 11 (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1952), 148–68; Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology*, 15–19; Petrovic and Petrovic, *Inner Purity*, 32–33; Parker, *Miasma*, 328–31.

⁹⁶ Obviously, ritual purification was not restricted to immersion and it may not have even been the dominant method among Greeks. That said, the ἀσάμινθος or πύελος (a structure resembling a bathtub) and certain public baths appear to be used for immersion to accomplish ritual purification. Cf. Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 136–38, 163; Ginouvès, *Balaneutikè*, 29, 38, 186.

⁹⁷ E.g., Plutarch, *Quaest. rom.* 4 §264C; Sib. Or. 4.165; cf. 2 Kgs 5:13–14 (LXX); William D. Furley and Jan Maarten Bremer, *Greek Hymns: Band 1: A Selection of Greek Religious Poetry from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 210; Moulinier, *Pur et l'impur*, 73.

⁹⁸ Cf. Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Heb 10:22; Tit 3:5.

purification,⁹⁹ just as do as well. This means ¹⁰¹ἔϊϋὸ ὀδῖοάϊϊ ἰέορ ¹⁰⁰בוא במים that ἀάδὸβæù is not a superordinating category, but rather a component of one, and thus the focus of this study is not “baptism,” but the ritual use of water for purification. Of course, there are numerous other modes¹⁰² by which water or other materials¹⁰³ are used for achieving ritual purification. Nevertheless, to limit the scope of this study, I will focus on immersion. My methodology could be profitably used to compare any of the groups or practices analyzed here with non-Jewish practices, but this is beyond the scope of this project.¹⁰⁴

The goal of this study is not to dismiss the valuable contributions of past scholarship, but to demonstrate that they are significantly distorted in part by the decision to transliterate.¹⁰⁵ Neither is this study interested in “correcting” modern understandings or practices of “baptism.” Rather, the concern is to reveal that our projection of modern categories and assumptions onto ancient sources prohibits us from understanding the practices and understandings of people two millennia ago that differ from our own even though we purport to share the same ritual.¹⁰⁶ Realizing this enables us to change the way we approach the data and ask new questions.

In sum, since transliteration enables “baptism” to be treated as an essentialized, stable concept, it is an “impediment to comparison”¹⁰⁷ because it (1) shifts our understanding of ἀάδὸβæù from a verbal action to a concept through reification; (2) wrongly leads interpreters to isolate ἀάδὸβæù as a

⁹⁹ As mentioned above, other language include במים ׀הה, בוא במים, λούω, καθαρίζω, and others.

¹⁰⁰ See p. ? , n. 94.

¹⁰¹ Sib. Or. 4.165.

¹⁰² E.g., sprinkling or the partial application of water to a body part.

¹⁰³ E.g., Plutarch, *Quaest. rom.* 1 §263E; 111 §290D; 12 §293E; 46 §302. For a modern example using smoke, cf. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 58; Sarah Iles Johnston, “Ritual,” *OEAGR* 6:125–27; Fritz Graf, “Pollution and Purification,” *OEAGR* 5:420–23; Orazio Paolletti, “Purificazione,” in *Purification, Consecration, Foundation Rite, Initiation, Heroization and Apotheosis, Banquet, Dance, Music Rites*, ed. Jean Balty, vol. 2 of *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*, 8 vols. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 19–23.

¹⁰⁴ In fact, my thesis suggests that there is far more in common between immersion in the NT and Greco-Roman religions than is commonly allowed, cf. p. ? , n. 8. Additionally, as Lincoln notes, “The more examples compared, the more superficial and peremptory is the analysis of each (*Gods and Demons*, 122).

¹⁰⁵ As Barr puts it, “semantic study . . . does not discover the meanings; rather, the meanings are there in all our experience of the language, and the work of semantics is to meditate upon these meanings, classify and clarify them, and thus deepen the understanding which we already in embryonic form, or in coarser form, possess” (“Semantics,” 18).

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *John the Baptist*, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 407.

“Christian” term;¹⁰⁸ (3) biases interpreters to view “Christian baptism” as the “true” or “legitimate” form against which the antecedents are compared, evaluated, and understood—since it functions as the standard of comparison it cannot be subject to it;¹⁰⁹ and (4) falsely posits a lexical void while denying the existing referential void. Consequently, I am not comparing “baptisms” but the ritual use of water for purification.

When Are We Comparing?

Immersion and other forms of ritual purification existed prior to John the immerser.¹¹⁰ As such, this study examines the texts and material evidence of various Jewish groups and practices of “post-Tanach Judaism,”¹¹¹ roughly from 150 BCE to 135 CE. Since the Maccabean Revolt appears to have contributed to the formation of various Jewish groups during the Second Temple period¹¹² and since the first ritual baths begin to appear at this time,¹¹³ 150 BCE is a logical beginning point.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the Second Jewish Revolt (Bar Kochba) serves as the endpoint because it permits the use of sources such as the writings of the NT,¹¹⁵ Josephus, Philo, the Didache, and Epictetus, many of which were not written until the end of the first or beginning of the second century CE. Additionally, scholars understand the Jesus movement as fundamentally “Jewish” during this period through at least the end of the 2nd century CE.¹¹⁶ The assumption here is that while 3rd century CE and later practices of immersion *might* transition away from a connection with Jewish religion, it is less likely

¹⁰⁸ This is especially true of Moisés Silva, ed. “βάπτω,” 1:462; Marshall, “Meaning,” 8–24; cf. Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 408.

¹⁰⁹ See the Methods of Comparison: Ethnographic illustration on p. ? .

¹¹⁰ Hamman and Colín note, “Baptism, the act of immersing oneself or being immersed in water, is not a Christian creation” (“Baptism,” 1:321); cf. Cullmann, *Baptism*, 9.

¹¹¹ Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 3.

¹¹² Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 158–62; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, ed. Geza Vermes et al., rev. ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 2:400–401, 412–14, 585–90. On the other hand, Jonathan Klawans demonstrates the extent to which the predominate scholarly narratives overemphasize certain features and, thus, mischaracterize the data (*Josephus*, 14–26).

¹¹³ Ronny Reich, “Les bains rituels juifs,” *Le monde de la Bible* 60 (1989): 29–33; “The Hot Bath-House (*balneum*), the Miqweh and the Jewish Community in the Second Temple Period,” *JJS* 39 (1988): 102–7, 104; Lawrence, *Washing*, 155–83, 192–202.

¹¹⁴ There are many examples of fruitful comparison done across significant spans of times and different cultures, but these are often focused on uncovering ideological or political interests (e.g., Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*) and are less helpful for explaining origins.

¹¹⁵ E.g., some date Acts into the 2nd century CE.

¹¹⁶ E.g., Cohen suggests that “Early Christianity ceased to be a Jewish sect when it ceased to observe Jewish practices” (*From the Maccabees*, 166).

prior to this. Since rituals can and do change, it is an error to assume that later evidence reflects earlier realities or understandings. It is also, therefore, not the case that later understandings must constrain the interpretation of earlier realities because later interpreters may have misunderstood earlier practice.¹¹⁷

There are a few important exceptions to this time frame. First, although the HB was written long before this period, it remains an important source of data since it engendered the thinking and practices of groups like Qumran and people like John.¹¹⁸ That said, it is obvious that 2nd Temple writings and groups *interpreted* the HB in ways that might differ from the original context of the HB, and thus I will take development into account. Second, any discussion of “proselyte baptism” requires the use sources that date well after 135 CE (e.g., Mishnah, Bavli). Despite their late *compositional* date, I will argue below with others that they often reflect realities present during the Second Temple Period.¹¹⁹ Of course, later evidence (i.e., texts, belief, practice, archaeology) must be used with caution, but this also applies to “Christian” texts as well, which scholars often invoke with less skepticism than they apply to later Jewish sources.

“Baptism” and the Partings of the Ways

A corollary of this time frame (and an assumption I make here) is that immersion as described in the NT *would have been understood by first-century people as a ritual pertaining to Jewish religion*, not something “Christian” (i.e., non-Jewish).¹²⁰ To clarify, this is not because immersion in water for ritual purity was restricted to Jewish groups. Quite the contrary, Greek and Latin sources abundantly attest to the practice of ritual purification in connection to the worship of various deities. The reason the NT data would be associated with Jewish

¹¹⁷ This fallacy is regularly asserted. While there must be *some* continuity between earlier and later development, similarities between earlier and later practice do not imply *complete* continuity. RS is helpful in demonstrating how and why rituals change. It is also assumed that early church fathers not only accurately interpret earlier texts and realities but that they represent a unanimous voice, both of which are not necessarily true. Moreover, the “application of explanatory theories to historical events can be criticized on the ground that such an account merely gives a ‘just-so story to explain with hindsight that the outcome was inevitable’” (Uro, *Ritual*, 179). See also the excellent discussion in Paul F. Bradshaw, “Ten Principles for Interpreting Early Christian Liturgical Evidence,” in *The Making Of Jewish and Christian Worship*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 3–21.

¹¹⁸ E.g., Robert A. Kugler and Kyung S. Baek, *Leviticus at Qumran: Text and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

¹¹⁹ Where relevant (Chapter 5: Proselyte “Baptism”), I will discuss the merits and limits of this assumption.

¹²⁰ The account in Acts 18:1–23 supports this.

religion, then, is due to the fact that immersion was performed in connection with the worship of the God of Israel, and more specifically, Israel's Messiah, Jesus.

On this note, Morton Smith (among others) observed in 1983 that "in spite of the recent fashion of declaring that 'Jesus was a Jew,' it is rare to find an account of first-century Judaism which recognizes that *Christianity was one of its most important forms*. Conversely, how many accounts of early Christianity treat it as an exceptional form of first-century Judaism?"¹²¹ The paradigmatic shift in scholarship exemplified in the "partings of the ways,"¹²² the *Jewish Historical Jesus*,¹²³ and the "Paul within Judaism" perspective¹²⁴ now offers new possibilities for conceptualizing "Christian origins," which I apply here to "baptism."

While others continue to explore the broader implications of interpreting "Christianity" as a Jewish sect, I consider the implications of interpreting immersion as enjoined by John and in Jesus's name as a Jewish ritual. This should not imply that either of these were devoid of distinction but that it would be comprehensible *within* a Jewish context.¹²⁵ Rather than interpret immersion in the NT as superior to, transcending, or replacing Jewish practices, I consider it an exemplum of them. If we predetermine that "Christian baptism" is non-

¹²¹ Smith, *Studies*, 99. Cf. Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 4; Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism*, 15–25.

¹²² E.g., Boyarin, *Border Lines*; "Rethinking Jewish Christianity," 7–36; Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2006); Joshua Ezra Burns, *The Christian Schism in Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); cf. Hughes, *Comparison*, 82–85; Uro, *Ritual*, 178.

¹²³ E.g., Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012); Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006).

¹²⁴ E.g., Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009); Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm, eds., *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian: The Real Message of a Misunderstood Apostle* (New York: HarperOne, 2009); Thomas G. Casey and Justin Taylor, eds., *Paul's Jewish Matrix* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011).

¹²⁵ This observation also does not preclude asking how non-Jews might have understood the act, but even this depends on the fact that the act already carries meaning in a Jewish context. Even so, the results of that inquiry are less surprising than one might think. This is because ritual purity practices were also common in Greco-Roman religion and the overlap of the purity framework between it and Judaism is extensive. This includes the practices of Qumran, proselyte baptism, "mystery religions," Greco-Roman temples, etc.

Jewish, we will necessarily analyze the data as supporting this predetermined choice.¹²⁶ This anachronistic bifurcation predisposes scholars to interpret the NT evidence in opposition to ritual purity practices, which until recently is what we find in most literature on the origin of “Christian baptism.”¹²⁷

This perspective garners support from Jan Snoek who argues that the degree to which two or more *contemporaneous* groups are *similar* to one another, the more rigidly the in-group will emphasize what is distinctive about their otherwise identical ritual practices against other out-groups; see *Figure 8: Similarity and Demarcation (Snoek)* at right.¹²⁸ This of course assumes that

¹²⁶ E.g., Rudolph, *Antike Baptisten*, 5–37. He first discusses “Die jüdischen Täufer,” which includes Qumran Essenes, Baptists, Hemerobaptists, Masbotheans, John the immerser, Bannus, Elkesaites, and Mandaeans before moving to “Christliche Täufer,” which includes Jesus and the Ebionites. Although he says that, “Das Christentum hat von Anfang an die Taufe als Aufnahmeakt in die Gemeinde besessen; *offensichtlich in Anknüpfung an die Johanneische Taufpraxis*,” he groups John with “Jewish” baptist groups (19). Cf. Thomas, *Mouvement*.

¹²⁷ The anti-ritual purity trope of *some* patristic writers (e.g., Barn. 8.1–7; 10.1–11.11; Justin, *Dial.* 14) is not evidence against this thesis. In fact, in the case of Barnabas, Ferguson notes, “the counterpoint in Judaism of Christian baptism is not circumcision but ritual washings” (*Baptism*, 214). A better explanation of patristic arguments like these lies in the fact that Gentile followers of Jesus were not bound to the Mosaic covenant in the same way that their Jewish believers in Jesus were. Moreover, the fact that some patristic writers compare immersion in Jesus’s name with Levitical ritual washing and ritual purification as practiced at temples, sacred sites, and mystery initiations (e.g., Tertullian, *Bapt.*, 5.1–5) suggests that it *is* understood in like manner. Additionally, we should not assume that early authors speak for the entire body of Jesus followers despite their claims to do so; cf. Bradshaw, “Ten Principles,” 3–21.

¹²⁸ The examples that Jan Snoek provides are groups of competing Freemasons and competing Pentecostals. Sandmel makes a similar observation when he says, “The various Jewish movements, whether we are satisfied to call them groups or sects or sectarians, make sense to me only if I conceive of them as *simultaneously reflecting broad areas of overlapping and restricted areas of distinctiveness*. The phrase ‘restricted areas’ is a surface measurement, for its extent could well have been small, but its depth tremendous. Where the literatures present us with acknowledged parallels, *I am often more inclined to ascribe these to the common Jewish content of all these Jewish movements* than to believe in advance that some item common to the scrolls and the gospels or to Paul implies that the gospels or Paul got that item specifically from the scrolls” (“Parallelomania,” 5–6, emphasis mine). See, Jan Snoek, “Similarity and Demarcation,” in *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, ed. Jan Platvoet and Karel van der Toorn, SHR 67 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 53–67, 66 for illustration; cf. Calame, “Comparatisme,” 43.

E. P. Sanders dissents somewhat when he says, “We should expect there to be a good number of agreements between any two of the parties; such agreements do not necessarily prove a close connection between the groups as wholes.” Yet, the juxtaposition of “a good number of agreements” with there being no “close connection between groups as wholes” is confusing. What I believe he is denying is the need to rely on genetic reasoning to understand

the in-group desires to distinguish itself and Snoek's hypothesis allows for the possibility that one group may work to establish a border against a similar group that does not seek the same. A perceived lack of resources (i.e., group members) is one motivation for establishing a border.¹²⁹ Since the potential of losing members is proportionally higher for similar groups, distinctions are emphasized.¹³⁰ When this occurs in the context of "Christian origins," many scholars fail to account for the apologetic dimension of the distinction drawn but take it at face value. Worse, they apply the ideology of later periods in order to explain previous periods when there is no clear evidence that the issues of debate are the same.¹³¹ This move is understandable since "every reconstruction of history and 'origins' is also a means of defining one's own individual or social identity."¹³² Yet, as Aaron Hughes observes, "When anything 'breaks from' something else, an apologetic agenda is often not far away from the surface."¹³³

the vast similarities we see between John the immerser or Paul and groups like Qumran especially since he later says, "The subgroup cannot have invented everything. In fact, it cannot have invented very much that was not available in the broader culture." See, E. P. Sanders, *Comparing Judaism and Christianity: Common Judaism, Paul, and the Inner and Outer in the Study of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 89, 94.

¹²⁹ It is equally possible that Jewish groups from different locations will arrive at different halakhic rulings. Once these different groups then come into contact one another, their halakhic differences would then need to be negotiated. That is to say, the formation of borders between similar groups is not always intentional.

¹³⁰ Snoek, "Similarity," 54.

¹³¹ Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship*, 3–21. As Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik demonstrate, even after the "Constantinian revolution," some Jesus followers saw their faith as continuous with Judaism and did not share the hard lines of division that their respective leaders repeatedly asserted. See Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007); Peter J. Tomson and Doris Lambers-Petry, *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, WUNT 158 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Simon Claude Mimouni and F. Stanley Jones, *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états: actes du colloque de Jérusalem, 6–10 juillet 1998* (Paris: Cerf, 2001).

¹³² Frey, "Critical Issues," 540.

¹³³ Hughes, *Comparison*, 70.

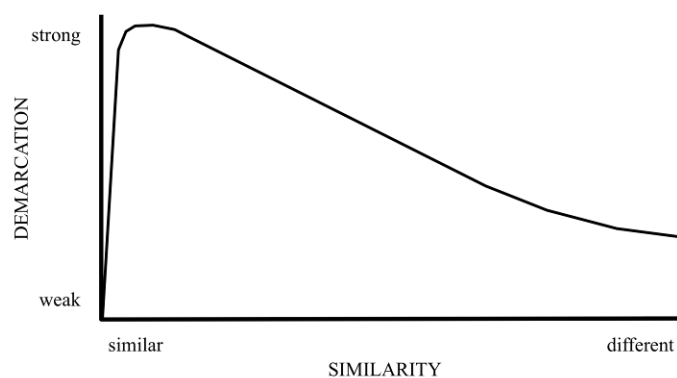


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 8: Similarity and demarcation (Snoek)

There is little evidence in the NT writings¹³⁴ of a concern to demarcate between the immersion enjoined by John or in Jesus’s name and “regular” immersion practices of Jews for ritual purification during the first century.¹³⁵ What divided people was not that the message about Jesus required Jews to abandon their Jewish way of life and join a new religion (because it did not) but whether Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and how gentiles should legitimately be incorporated into Judaism.¹³⁶ It is not until the end of the first century and later that explicit demarcation between immersion in Jesus’s name and other practices begins to appear *some* literature.¹³⁷ Consequentially, during the first-century, people would have perceived the immersion practice of John and early Jesus followers as an act of ritual purification. Later, as *some* second century and later authors felt the need to establish boundaries, *they* began to assert distinctions between their practices and beliefs against those of perceived competitors, *whose practices were fundamentally the same*.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Such demarcation *is* present in the DSS (cf. 1QS III, 6–9; V, 13–14), but what is most notable is that the ritual practice of outsiders *is the same as that practiced by the sectarians*.

¹³⁵ Potential texts where demarcation could be present include: John 3:25 (there is good reason to think the “dispute” was not about purification per se, but the perceived competition between the followers of John and Jesus), Luke 7:29–30; 20:4; Acts 18:24–19:7; Heb 6:2, 10. But as Snoek’s thesis contends, any effort at such demarcation indicates fundamental similarity.

¹³⁶ On the diversity of views regarding gentile incorporation into Judaism, see Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007); Matthew Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹³⁷ E.g., Matt 28:18–20; Did 7; Ign. *Magn.* 13.1; Odes Sol. 23:22.

¹³⁸ Snoek, “Similarity,” 53–67.

Technically speaking, the origin of “Christian baptism” is to be found in the dual development of what we today call “Christianity” and in the practice of immersion in history by specific groups since neither “Christianity” nor “baptism” existed in the period under consideration.¹³⁹ The bifurcation between “Christian” and “Jewish” is an anachronism that is not relevant until much later in history. Thus, to speak of “Christian baptism” is not only misleading, but first-century audience would not have understood it. Rather, I am comparing John’s use of immersion with similar ritual immersions in the Second Temple Period of which John could have been reasonably aware. The traditional taxonomy of these options would include: immersion at Qumran, immersion of Gentile proselytes,¹⁴⁰ and some specific immersion from the HB ritual purity system.¹⁴¹ While most believe that John derives from one of these, this taxonomy unnecessarily restricts discussion of origins to *genetic* possibilities.¹⁴² This study questions the reification of these groupings and analyzes them as exempla of ritual purity practices applied in specific socio-historical contexts.

How Are We Comparing?

There are several related problems obscuring research on the origin of John’s practice of immersion and that of early Jesus followers that this study seeks to overcome. That is, how do we compare the immersion of John with the practices of other groups without (1) merely confirming what we have already know in advance to be true; (2) suppressing, privileging, or hiding data; (3) reverting to reification; and (4) using “Christian tradition” as the normative lens and filter

¹³⁹ If Christianity did not exist in the first century, continuing to refer to it as such only confuses matters. “Believers” is a common self-designation in the NT (E.g., Acts 2:44; 4:32; 10:45; 15:5; 16:1, 15; 18:27; 19:18; 21:20, 25; Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 7:25; 14:22; 2 Cor 6:15; 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10, 13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 4:3, 10, 12; 5:16; 6:2; Tit 1:6) while “the Jesus movement” is simply meant to indicate the inclusive devotion of Jew and non-Jew around the person of Jesus.

Dunn discusses 17 different potential NT terms that refer to believers (*Beginning from Jerusalem*, 4–17). Similarly, Paul Trebilco concludes that “Christian” was an *outsider* label. He proposes that it may have also been used by “insiders” as “out-facing language” (i.e., using an outsider label when speaking with outsiders about themselves as insiders). First Peter 4:16 implies this, but I disagree that “Χριστιανοί is a not inappropriate term for us to use in our discussions of the readers of the NT, alongside other and earlier terms” because of the anachronistic ideas associated with it. See, Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁰ This is contingent on the practice pre-dating John.

¹⁴¹ See the illustration, “?” p. ? .

¹⁴² See the illustrations, “Rooting John the Baptist – New Approach,” p. ? , and “Methods of Comparison: Evolutionary,” p. ? .

through which to understand and value other practices? Having identified the subject of comparison (i.e., immersion in water for ritual purification) and the time period (i.e., 150 BCE to 135 CE), I now explain how I perform comparison. To best set the context for that, I will first revisit the methodological challenges of comparison encountered by past attempts to explain the origin of “baptism.”

The Allure (and Problem) of Evolution

Previous attempts to explain the origin of John’s practice of immersing in water are based on the assumption that it must derive *genetically* from a particular group. The genetic model, which is illustrated (next page) in *Figure 9: Methods of Comparison (4 Models of J. Z. Smith): Evolutionary*, is applied to John in the introduction. Comparison presumably provides the information to explain its origin¹⁴³ through some evolutionary process of diffusion (e.g., Christianity inherited the syncretism of Judaism, its predecessor; John copied the practice of proselyte baptism, etc) or direct contact (e.g., John is a former

¹⁴³ As Lincoln notes, however, “comparison yields not knowledge but that which provisionally passes for knowledge while inviting falsification or revision as further examples are considered and familiar examples receive fuller study” (*Gods and Demons*, 121).

Qumran sectarian).¹⁴⁴ This genetic approach to comparison is understandable since as Eric J. Sharpe explains, the principles undergirding the comparative method originally arose from the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution, which presupposed historical, genetic development.¹⁴⁵

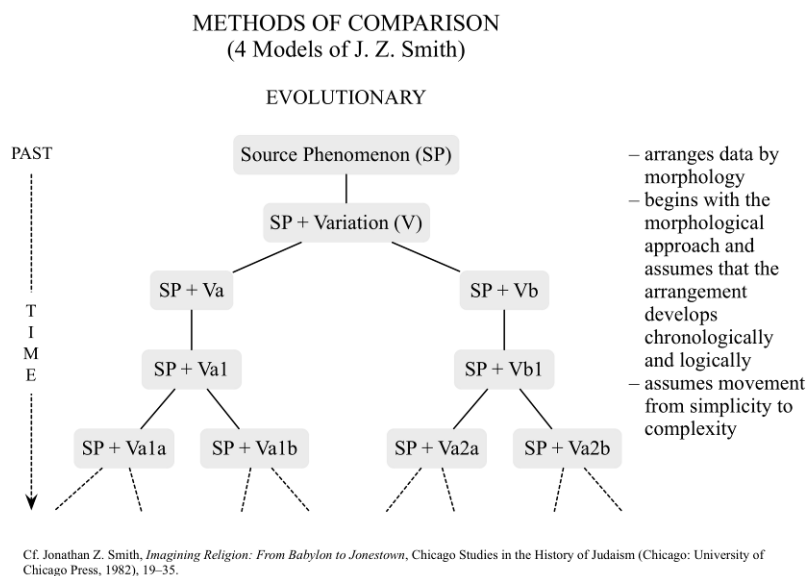


Figure 9: Methods of comparison (4 Models of J. Z. Smith): Evolutionary

Moreover, the early arguments of *Religionsgeschichtliche* scholars are partially responsible for ensuring that the subsequent research agenda would pursue the answer of origins through genealogy.¹⁴⁶ When confronted with the

¹⁴⁴ Martin, “Comparison,” 51; Stausberg, “Comparison,” 23. Davila cautions against “comparisons that imply an evolutionary goal” and instead prefers a typological approach since the genetic changes over time are not moving toward a particular goal (“Peril of Parallels”). With respect to “baptism,” the notion of an evolutionary goal is found in authors who promote John’s “baptism” as the ultimate expression of Judaism’s “empty” ritual.

¹⁴⁵ Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2003), 27–32; Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 47, n. 15; *Imagining Religion*, 24–25; Mignolo, “On Comparison,” 101–12.

¹⁴⁶ This is ironic since as pointed out above, only *certain Religionsgeschichtliche* based their argument on a genetic explanation (see “Mystery Religions,” 15–24). For an example of an *analogical* approach that *still offers a genetic explanation*, see Danny Praet and Annelies Lannoy, “Alfred Loisy’s Comparative Method in *Les mystères païens et le mystère chrétien*,” *Numen* 64 (2017): 64–96.

proposition that “Christian baptism” derived genetically from mystery religions, the genetic terms of the argument were set. Thus, to counter this claim, scholars responded by offering either an alternative, “nonthreatening,” genetic argument (e.g., Judaism)¹⁴⁷ or arguing that Christianity was unique (i.e., *sui generis*) and incomparable, thus severing any possibility of genetic connection.¹⁴⁸

Beyond A Genetic Approach

The use of comparison towards a homological end, while legitimate, is not the only comparative possibility—one may fruitfully pursue *analogical*¹⁴⁹ or others already illustrated above.¹⁵⁰ In fact, even if all of the proposed antecedents securely predate John (“proselyte baptism” is disputed), *comparison does not directly provide information about origins because it makes no inherent claim regarding chronology or genetic dependence*.¹⁵¹ Parallels do not by themselves establish a genetic connection, rather, they enable the comparativist to observe that two or more things are *similar* in some way or ways. It is the scholar’s mind that constructs the narrative explanation for how John’s baptism derives genetically from a given antecedent.¹⁵² It is here that affinity is transformed into genealogy.¹⁵³ While I share the same goal of previous scholars to explain

¹⁴⁷ Despite this rooting, scholars still felt compelled to “transcend” it. This strategy of transcendence was at play in early works on comparative religion; see Stausberg and Engler, *Routledge Handbook of Research*, 24.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 1–26, 34–35, 44–45, 48, 57–58, 79, 81, 83, 117; Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing*, 83–87; Metzger, “Considerations,” 1–20.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 47–48, 104, 112–13, 143. Metzger recognizes the existence of analogical parallels, but dismisses them as unimportant since his concern is to counter the perceived threat of Christianity borrowing from the mysteries—genealogy is dangerous, analogy is not (“Considerations,” 9).

¹⁵⁰ See, “What Are We Comparing?,” for examples.

¹⁵¹ So, Kloppenborg, “Disciplined Exaggeration,” 407. An example is provided by Smith in his comparison of Plutarch (c. 100 CE) and Kafka (early 1900s CE) on their similar assumptions about the origin of rituals (*Imagining Religion*, 53).

¹⁵² Smith calls comparison an “invention” and the identification of parallels “a sort of déjà vu” in which the “subjective experience is projected as an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like. It is a process of working from a psychological association to an historical one; it is to assert that similarity and contiguity have causal effect” (*Imagining Religion*, 21–22; cf. Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 56).

¹⁵³ As numerous scholars point out, affinity does not necessarily establish influence or a genetic relationship, cf. Hassan, “Problem,” 68, 73; Timothy H. Lim, “Studying the Qumran Scrolls and Paul in their Historical Context” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls as Background to Post-biblical Judaism and Early Christianity: Papers from an International Conference at St.*

the origin of John's practice of immersing in water, I do not share the assumption that it must derive *genetically* from a particular group. And while biological evolution *requires* genetic relationships, religious practice as a product of human socialization *does not*.¹⁵⁴

Additionally, comparison requires the admission of differences of *degree* between comparanda, otherwise they are tautological;¹⁵⁵ only differences of *kind* are able to prohibit comparison.¹⁵⁶ In this respect, *sui generis* scholars consider the differences between John's practice and those of the antecedents as one of *kind* rather than degree.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, a scholar who argues that John is a former Qumran sectarian views the differences between the two as one of *degree*, whereas he or she rejects the other antecedents because their differences are interpreted as one of *kind*. As I explain above,¹⁵⁸ the divergent views of scholars on this matter are reducible to differences of opinion on the perceived *sine qua non* for the construct of "baptism." Identifying this *sine qua non* in an antecedent is the coveted proof for the genetic argument because it represents the basis of comparison. All other differences are considered as incidental or unimportant. The dilemma, of course, is that scholars do not agree on the *sine qua non* for "baptism" because each uses different criteria to establish the genealogical connection.

Andrews in 2001, ed. James R. Davila (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 135–56; Davila, "Peril of Parallels."

¹⁵⁴ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 3–28, 175–77, 179–85; Smith, *Inventing Religion*, 26–29; Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 47–71.

¹⁵⁵ Smith observes, "comparison is, at base, never identity" (*Imagining Religion*, 35; cf. *To Take Place*, 13–14).

¹⁵⁶ It is important to note that it is still possible to compare unlike things. Differences in *kind* only disrupt the *basis* of comparison, not its possibility. Differences of kind only require the selection of a different basis for comparison. For example, if one were to compare two apples on the basis of "appleness," one could examine similarity and difference. However, if one were to compare an apple with an orange on the same basis, they would be incomparable, *but only on that basis* since apples and oranges can be compared on other grounds.

¹⁵⁷ So, Kloppenborg: "Since no two historical phenomena are identical, it is *always* possible to point to differences. The question is, whether such differences are salient in such a way to make comparison impossible, or whether some differences can be ignored in the interests of comparison" ("Disciplined Exaggeration," 397).

¹⁵⁸ See "What are We Comparing?"

The “Third Term”: Putting Parallels in Their Place

The problem with parallels is not their existence but their misuse and potential misidentification. The high value of parallels¹⁵⁹ and the fragmentary state of the extant evidence, which requires narrative backfilling, combined with the methodological problems articulated above are reasons that parallelomania still continues. Research on the origin of John’s or “Christian baptism” is inundated with parallels, which gives the false impression that one “is dealing with sifted material.”¹⁶⁰ Consequently, scholars from a variety of disciplines have called for a systematic approach to handling parallels. For example, Sandmel’s corrective to parallelomania is “detailed study,” by which he means establishing the *context* of a supposed parallel.¹⁶¹ Jörg Frey agrees that the

mere collection of ‘parallels’ cannot suffice, since ‘parallels’ have to be explained within a wide historical context. . . . Simply collecting parallels (a symptom of ‘parallelomania’) is futile and misleading. Instead, every parallel deserves cautious interpretation, considering its own original context, the possible ways of transmission, the nature of suggested analogies, their possible reasons and also alternative explanations.¹⁶²

Likewise, Everette Ferguson urges that

[w]here genuine dependence and significant parallels are determined, these must then be placed in *the whole context of thought and practice in the systems where the contacts are discovered*. Although Christianity had points of contact with Stoicism, the mysteries, the Qumran community, and so on, the total worldview was often quite different, or the context in which the items were placed was different.¹⁶³

From a RS and cognitive perspective, Uro adds, “Without a ritual system of some sort, the core beliefs would not be remembered; nor would they be transmitted to the next generation.”¹⁶⁴ Likewise, Geertz’s “thick description” is grounded on the same principle.

David M. Freidenreich articulates a potential pitfall to the systematic approach when he says, “The challenge posed by context to the comparison of

¹⁵⁹ According to M. Eugene Boring, Leander Keck once said, “[e]ven a smell of a primary source is better than a shelf of secondary sources” (*Hellenistic Commentary*, 11).

¹⁶⁰ Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 10; cf. Boring, Berger, and Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary*, 15.

¹⁶¹ Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” 2–3; cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Cultic Language in Qumran and in the NT,” *CBQ* 38.2 (1976): 159–77, 161.

¹⁶² Frey, “Critical Issues,” 539–40.

¹⁶³ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 3, emphasis mine.

¹⁶⁴ Uro, *Ritual*, 1; similarly, Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, Brill Reference Library of Judaism 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 39.

religion, however, is complicated by the fact that *the more context one considers the less similar the comparands become.*¹⁶⁵ Yet, this is precisely the strategy that scholars follow to reject antecedents that they desire to disqualify. It also sounds like an admission that an accurate and transparent examination of the full context is potentially able to expose scholarly constructs. Rather than considering the systematic approach as dangerous, it offers the least ideologically motivated way to perform comparison.

As it pertains to the construct “baptism,” what are often identified and compared as parallels are more accurately described as similarities of thought, practice, and context, similarities which may or may not have had any direct connection to “baptism.”¹⁶⁶ To illustrate the point, an eschatological outlook is shared between John the immerser and the Qumran community, but this element is entirely missing for “proselyte baptism.” Because of this, Collins drives a wedge between it and John’s immersion.¹⁶⁷ Yet, what specific relationship exists between an eschatological outlook and the practice of immersion? Is eschatology an integral element of immersion, or is it incidental? If it is non-essential, this reduces a point of contact with the washings at Qumran. If it is integral, this decreases a point of contact with “proselyte baptism” since it was not “eschatological” in nature. Yet, these arguments only carry significant weight if we operate with the concept of “baptism” rather than immersion for ritual purification because the construct permits us to easily embed other elements and expand it. Once we reorient the discussion, it becomes more challenging to explain concretely an “eschatological baptism” or why the possibility that it is an “ein prophetisches Zeichen” means it is not purificatory.¹⁶⁸

Consequently, while “eschatological washing” may appear to us as an obvious reality, we must ask whether any ancient people would have understood such a category. As Geertz suggests, often “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.”¹⁶⁹ So, while a parallel may strike the modern observer as obvious, the way we classify and organize information is not only culturally bound¹⁷⁰ but influenced by past ways of framing the conversation.

¹⁶⁵ David M. Freidenreich, “Comparisons Compared: A Methodological Survey of Comparisons of Religion from ‘A Magic Dwells’ to *A Magic Still Dwells*,” *MTSR* 16 (2004): 80–101, 94.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. p. ?, n. 128.

¹⁶⁷ See pp. 48–49.

¹⁶⁸ Heinrich Kraft, *Die Entstehung des Christentums* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), 214.

¹⁶⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 9. In the context of the statement, he is talking about modern ethnographers describing modern cultures.

¹⁷⁰ Foucault, *Mots*, 7–16; Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 33–36; Geertz, *Interpretation*, 9; Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 122; Murphy, *John*, 109.

That is, concepts like “eschatological washing” are so embedded in our modern discourse on this topic that we fail to question whether such a category made sense in the ancient context.¹⁷¹ When we fail to analyze immersion within its socio-cultural context, we are prone to apply foreign or modern criteria for classification and identify parallels or differences that ancient people may not have recognized.¹⁷² While it is impossible to fully understand or describe life from the perspective of an ancient person, we can ground our understanding of the immersion practices of various groups in the socio-historical context of their time by employing their language and taxonomies as far as possible to mitigate distortion.

As suggested above, this requires doing away with the construct “baptism” and focusing on the verbal action of immersing in water for purification.¹⁷³ Second, it involves redressing the assumption that “baptism” belongs to “Christianity” or is the truest or best form of the rite. This permits us to analyze it as a feature of Second Temple Judaism in all its diversity.¹⁷⁴ Third, since the antecedent approach promotes confusion through the phenomenological juxtaposition of various “baptisms” against the false standard of “Christian baptism” or “John’s baptism,”¹⁷⁵ I employ a different “third term,” a systematic approach.¹⁷⁶ This permits us to interpret comparanda on their own terms rather than through their conformity to the construct of “baptism.” Each group’s practice is first understood within its own ritual purity system and then compared systematically with one another. When this does not happen, in the words of

¹⁷¹ It at least makes sense in *our portrayal of* the ancient context. The difficulty that I am highlighting is that our understanding of antiquity is continually colored by modern perceptions. Since our understanding of antiquity consists of modern narratives that we construct, Penner and Lopez suggest that there is technically only one “horizon,” the modern one (*De-Introducing the New Testament*, 62–66).

¹⁷² Martin, “Comparison,” 46–47. To apply the observation of Penner and Lopez to baptism, “we have to decide on the features that we will use to differentiate [John’s baptism] from [its] larger context before we actually begin our investigation” (*De-Introducing the New Testament*, 60; cf. Geertz, *Interpretation*, 13).

¹⁷³ See “What are We Comparing?”

¹⁷⁴ See “When Are We Comparing?”

¹⁷⁵ Calame, “Comparatisme,” 44; Lim, “Towards a Description,” 8. Using John’s or “Christian baptism” as a control portrait is not balanced comparison since it not only privileges the features of one ritual practice against others without taking into account how each functions in its own context, but it also interprets other rituals through itself. When the “third term” is explicit, comparison can be performed contextually.

¹⁷⁶ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 33, 51, 53, 87, 99, 117; Hughes, *Comparison*, 46; Calame, “Comparatisme,” 42–45. As Smith explains, comparison is always “with respect to” something else and never merely between two or more things or concepts. So, even when scholars of the antecedent approach directly compare “baptisms,” they are comparing everything with respect to “Christian baptism,” which leads to a distortion of the data.

Hughes, “comparison is used to classify others using oneself, one’s social group, one’s religion, and one’s values functioning as the lodestar.”¹⁷⁷

Comparing Historical Jewish Groups

When scholars apply the construct “baptism” to historical groups such as the sectarians at Qumran, they apply an ahistorical abstraction as if it were historical. This is due in part because the term “baptism” carries a timeless dimension in our discourse in its association with Christianity, which often includes every “orthodox” development throughout history. Thus, a second core principle of this study related to the previous one is to examine *historical* Jewish groups.¹⁷⁸ As Hughes urges, when someone asserts that “Judaism maintains x” we must ask “What Judaism or whose Islam were they talking about?”¹⁷⁹ Correcting our language, from “baptism” to immersion, is one step toward examining the local, contemporary, and specific circumstances because it forces us to deal with the actual language and practices of our sources.

One could object that it is more profitable to compare John’s practice with non-Jewish practices or with those from different time periods or contexts. Indeed, Smith¹⁸⁰ and Lincoln¹⁸¹ both offer examples of comparison that are neither local nor contemporary but that are still specific, historical, and fruitful. Nevertheless, besides limiting the scope of this study, there are a few reasons that I do not to go this direction. For one, Aaron Hughes says analogously of Islam, “rather than compare what Islam says about a certain topic (e.g., monotheism) with what Christianity says, it is often more productive to compare what various Islams say about a topic.”¹⁸² This decision also makes room for the insights of Snoek regarding similarity and demarcation among similar and contemporaneous groups to illuminate comparison. Furthermore, I am ultimately interested in providing an account of origins, a task that would be challenging to realize were I to compare dissimilar or non-contemporaneous practices.

My approach to textual sources will be inclusive as I consider the evidence of various types (e.g., literary, non-literary papyri, inscriptions) without ascribing to them special status. However, insofar as a case can be made for certain texts having canonical or sacred status for a given community, this will

¹⁷⁷ Hughes, *Comparison*, 30. Earlier Hughes says, “[The scholar] looks at his own religion [or baptism], decides what is best about it, and then uses this as the term of reference to look at the other religions of the globe” (20).

¹⁷⁸ Stendahl, *Meanings*, 177; Hughes, *Comparison*, 80.

¹⁷⁹ Hughes, *Comparison*, 4–5.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *To Take Place*, 53–65.

¹⁸¹ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, passim.

¹⁸² Hughes, *Comparison*, viii; cf. Calame, “Compartisme,” 44–45.

be taken into consideration; e.g., the book of *Jubilees* for the Qumran community.¹⁸³ Archaeological evidence also plays an important role in this study because it attests to the widespread practice of ritual purity during the 2nd temple period.¹⁸⁴ This evidence is critical in contextualizing the textual evidence and immersion practices of various groups. However, I also recognize that archaeological sources are *interpreted* just as texts are, and following Miller, I do not naively assume that the texts and archaeological remains necessarily refer to *the exact same thing*, but rather *similar things*.¹⁸⁵

While I will develop these issues further in ch. 6, the practice of “proselyte baptism” is more complicated because in addition to being a scholarly construct, unlike the Qumran community, there are no identifiable historical communities with whom we may associate the practice. Our main sources for what people call “proselyte baptism” are sporadic references in rabbinic literature and possibly Epictetus, but what historical groups are in view and which sects of Judaism practiced it at conversion? I do not doubt that historical groups immersed gentiles, only we do not have textual evidence associated with a specific community like we do with Qumran. The evidence in the NT is also complicated by the fact that its writings represent the practices and views of diverse communities. The question is to what extent do their views of immersion differ.

Objections to a Ritual Purity System

Before describing how I establish ritual purity systems, it is necessary to consider whether such systems actually exist. T. M. Lemos has recently contested Mary Douglas’s maxim, “where there is dirt there is system,”¹⁸⁶ and claims that “[t]here is no ‘system of Israelite impurity.’”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, he adds that “scholars have displayed assumptions and utilized methods that are *at odds with* those of contemporary ritual studies.”¹⁸⁸ This raises the question as to whether my

¹⁸³ Debates about “canons” tend to be focused on the boundaries of a given canon. While it is challenging to define in detail the *contents* of various canons, it is much easier to demonstrate that “canonical consciousness” existed.

¹⁸⁴ Wayne O McCready and Adele Reinhartz, eds., *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Yonatan Adler, “The Archaeology of Purity: Archaeological Evidence for the Observance of Ritual Purity in Erez-Israel From the Hasmonean Period Until the End of the Talmudic Era (164 BCE–400 CE)” (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2011) [Hebrew].

¹⁸⁵ This is persuasively argued by Miller, *Intersection*, passim; cf. Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 119–67.

¹⁸⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966; London: Routledge, 2002), 36.

¹⁸⁷ T. M. Lemos, “Where There is Dirt, is There System? Revisiting Biblical Purity Constructions,” *JSOT* 37 (2013): 265–94, 265, emphasis mine, cf. 284.

¹⁸⁸ Lemos, “Where There is Dirt,” 265–66.

study is built on a flawed foundation since I assume that a ritual purity system *does* exist while also appealing to RS to support my argument. Similarly, Ian C. Werrett argued a few years prior to Lemos that the DSS *do not* “contain a cohesive purity system,”¹⁸⁹ adding further that “the systematic approach is an inadequate tool to use when trying to understand the ideas and concepts that are present in a collection of chronologically diverse documents.”¹⁹⁰ Lemos and Werrett raise objections that deserve a response.

I begin with Lemos because if there is no system in the HB, it is unlikely that one existed at Qumran. First, I generally agree with his critique of proposals that attempt to explain the *rationale* undergirding the ritual and moral purity systems (here I reveal my agreement with Klawans in using this division).¹⁹¹ The HB does not explain *why* certain things cause impurity other than explaining that its purpose is to separate Israel from the nations (this is what *שָׁדָד* means)¹⁹² and to protect the people from death.¹⁹³ In all likelihood, the original audience knew the reason(s) for the ritual purity system, much like everyone today is cognizant of the motivation behind bathroom signs that say, “Employees Must Wash Hands Before Returning to Work.” The point is, problematizing attempts to provide a unified *rationale* is not the same as demonstrating that a system(s) did not exist, rather Lemos incorrectly conflates “rationale” with “system.” Anthropologists from 300 years in the future may struggle to offer a single reason underlying the “hygienic system” of Americans, but this is different than claiming that our diverse hygienic practices are ad hoc and unsystematic.

Second, in light of the principles of the comparative methodology that I follow, I also agree with his insistence that we should examine purity constructions *historically* since it is not a given that the “biblical purity system” will remain timelessly unchanged.¹⁹⁴ However, this is very different than saying that no purity system exists. Lemos is correct to ask whether Genesis, Leviticus, Lamentations, 1 Samuel, Ezekiel, and Ezra-Nehemiah conceive of purity in the exact same manner since these texts are representative of different communities located in diverse geographical settings and times. On the other hand, the intertextual evidence suggests that certain texts are informing others even as the purity systems are applied and interpreted in different, later

¹⁸⁹ Ian C. Werrett, *Ritual Purity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 293.

¹⁹⁰ Werrett, *Ritual*, 302.

¹⁹¹ Lemos, “Where There Is Dirt,” 267–83; cf. David P Wright, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” in *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Gary A. Anderson, JSOTSup 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 150–81, 150–51.

¹⁹² Cf. Lev 20:24–26.

¹⁹³ Cf. Lev 15:31; 20:24, 26.

¹⁹⁴ Lemos, “Where There is Dirt,” 292.

contexts. Indeed, Lemos is comfortable in referring to “purity constructions,” but he does not explain in what way a “construction” is different from a “system.”¹⁹⁵ How does one establish a construction? How many are there? Do they interrelate or overlap with one another? Is a construction immune from diversity or change?¹⁹⁶ In what context do these diverse constructions carry influence and why?

Lemos recognizes the role of socialization in the formation, enforcement, and protection of purity practices, but this actually presupposes that socio-cultural systems are operative.¹⁹⁷ Such systems in any culture are continually in a state of transition even if that change is indiscernible from participants¹⁹⁸ (see *Figure 10: Interaction of World View, Culture, and Physical World* next page¹⁹⁹). If we assume that diversity and incoherence dictated how ancient people understood and practiced purity, no one would know what to do when or why.²⁰⁰ In fact, socialization depends on shared values and understandings (i.e., a system) to encourage, enforce, and sanction behavior. Yet, it also presupposes that change may happen throughout time in a given society and it allows for variation in the views of people operating within the system(s),²⁰¹ but this does not undermine its fundamentally systematic nature. Thus, the notion of a “purity system” does not require it to be static and unchanging, which Lemos appears to assume to be true of the perspectives he critiques.²⁰² Lemos’s language of “constructions” is intended to underscore the potential for diversity and change, but “systems” are able to do the same.²⁰³ Thus, my use of the term “system” is compatible with what I infer Lemos means by a “construction” because I identify it historically and locally as far as possible.

¹⁹⁵ I infer that a “construction” would *not* “emphasize organization, coherence, and non-contradiction” since he ascribes these qualities to a “system” (Lemos, “Where There Is Dirt,” 283). However, most would associate these same traits to a “construction” and it is difficult to understand how people could behave in a context that does not have organization, cohesion, and non-contradiction.

¹⁹⁶ “Constructions” appear to be “snapshots” of a the ritual purity system applied in a given time and place.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, passim; Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, passim.

¹⁹⁸ Of course, the more isolated a given culture is the less quickly change is likely to occur.

¹⁹⁹ Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 13, fig. 3.

²⁰⁰ The presence of laws and regulatory texts are efforts to clarify inherent ambiguities of a system.

²⁰¹ E.g., Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 19–20.

²⁰² In fact, a characteristic feature of Klawans’s *Impurity and Sin* is demonstrating the *historical diversity*.

²⁰³ The problem is not in the terminology but one’s understanding of that terminology.

Fig. 10: Interaction of World View, Culture, and Physical World

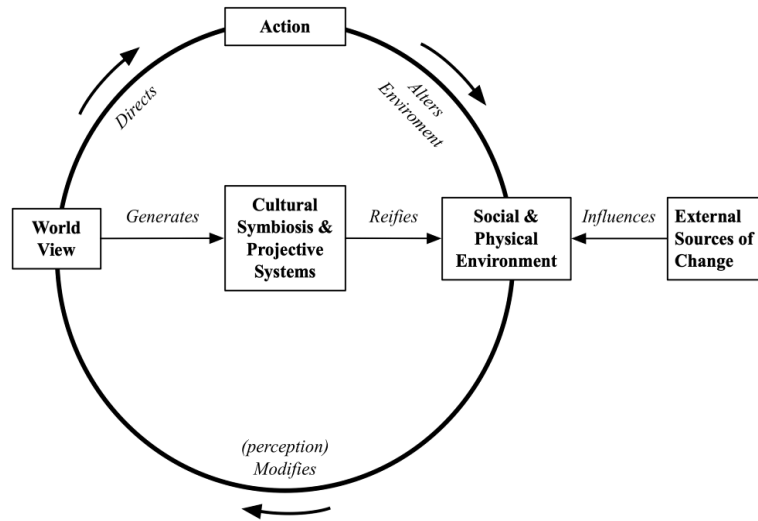


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 10: Interaction of world view, culture, and physical world

As it pertains to RS, Lemos's essential objection is that prior systematic studies postulated a "symbolic structure" from which purity rules derive. A corollary is that "beliefs are primary and ritual practices are secondary."²⁰⁴ In contrast to this Cartesian framework, Lemos suggests that the shift in RS exemplified in the work of Catherine Bell²⁰⁵ (i.e., the body and mind are a unity) corrects the errors of past scholarship. While I agree with the conclusion of this RS shift, Lemos inaccurately portrays it in opposition to systematic analysis, which does not follow. Bell herself says, "Indeed, one cannot adequately portray the full dynamics of ritualization except in the larger context of ritual traditions and systems," in a chapter titled "Ritual Traditions and Systems" no less.²⁰⁶ She goes on to discuss the passing on of tradition from generation to generation (something the HB represents) along with the "standardization of ritual activities" as instituted by "ritual experts." Lemos's value judgment that scholars should examine what rituals *do* rather than systematize them cannot ultimately

²⁰⁴ Lemos, "Where There is Dirt," 280.

²⁰⁵ He refers to Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁰⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 118, emphasis mine.

be based on the RS shift to which he appeals.²⁰⁷ Moreover, it is unclear how it is possible to analyze what rituals *do* in abstraction from how they function as a system. In fact, the work of Klingbeil, whom Lemos cites as an example of doing work in conversation with current RS,²⁰⁸ adopts both a *symbolic* and a *systematic* approach to ritual.²⁰⁹ Thus, as I understand Lemos, his critique is not so much aimed at a systematic approach, but rather against proposals attempting to explain the (unstated) *rationale* of the HB purity system(s) that depend on *ahistorical generalizations* and gloss over inconsistencies.²¹⁰

Turning now to Werrett, since the arguments above are equally applicable as a *general* response to his work, I will focus on the distinctive issues related to the scrolls. Whereas Lemos critiques of the notion of “the biblical purity system” on diachronic grounds between the texts of the HB, Werrett does the same within the library of the DSS and its relevance to the *historical* Qumran community²¹¹ (or communities²¹²), which many scholars associate together (their self-designation, 777, means “uniting, community”²¹³). A core methodological principle guiding his work is to “read the texts from Qumran

²⁰⁷ His citation of Saul M. Olyan that purity rules determined who could access the sanctuary as an example of a “new” insight based on the shift in RS is a conclusion already observed by Jacob Milgrom (Lemos, “Where There is Dirt,” 281). This does not devalue Olyan’s in depth analysis of the social function of purity.

²⁰⁸ Lemos, “Where There is Dirt,” 281.

²⁰⁹ Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 19–22; cf. the illustration, “Model of Hierarchy of the Cultural Universe,” p. ? .

²¹⁰ The supposed “inconsistencies among the purity ideas of different biblical texts” deserves a fuller response than I am able to provide here. He lists four, including: gentile impurity in Ezra-Nehemiah (Lemos, “Where There is Dirt,” 284–85), feces (285), gender defilement (285–86), and conflation of hygiene, ritual, and moral purity (286–88). We must also consider the possibility that inconsistencies may indicate our misunderstanding of the system, not that one does not exist.

²¹¹ Of course, not all scholars believe the DSS and the remains of Khirbet Qumran are related to one another and there are debates as to what type of group the Qumran sectarians were (e.g., Essene, Sadducean, etc.).

²¹² John J. Collins argues that *communities* are represented in the DSS. Since Khirbet Qumran is a particular location, it is appropriate to speak of “the Qumran community” even if there may be other groups located elsewhere who are associated with the scrolls and site of Qumran. I agree, however, that we should not assume that everything stated in the corpus is true of the community at Qumran. See, John J. Collins, “Sectarian Communities in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 151–72.

²¹³ HALOT, s.v., “777.” See also the excellent discussion by Carsten Claussen and Michael Thomas Davis, “The Concept of Unity at Qumran,” in *Qumran Studies: New Approaches, New Questions*, ed. Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 232–53; Shemaryahu Talmon, *The World of Qumran from Within: Collected Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 53–60.

as independent compositions . . . free from the witness of so-called parallel texts that might have influenced our understanding of the material therein” with the goal of reducing interpretive distortion from the “Qumran/Essene hypothesis.”²¹⁴ He documents the purity rulings across CD, 1QT, 4QMMT, and Cave IV manuscripts that pertain to purity, and concludes that there is nearly as much disagreement as there is agreement.²¹⁵ This, Werrett claims, demonstrates the inadequacy of a systematic approach²¹⁶ and that the scrolls do not “contain a cohesive purity system.”²¹⁷ Following Klawans, he suggests that a diachronic approach may be useful for explaining *some* of these discrepancies—per Werrett, six of the eight disagreements that he identifies occur within texts of different time periods²¹⁸—but that even this is ultimately inadequate because it involves (per Werrett) “highly speculative suggestions.”²¹⁹

It is profitable to inquire how one text conceives of purity unencumbered by others, but choosing not to consider how the texts make sense in light of one another goes against the nature of the data.²²⁰ Werrett claims that reading the texts in isolation brings “a greater amount of objectivity” since the texts are allowed to define their relationships with one another. Yet, it is Werrett, not inanimate texts, who has denied their interrelationship, and thus the claim of more objectivity is rhetorical.²²¹ Since some Qumran texts are *written on the*

²¹⁴ Werrett, *Ritual*, 17–18, 288. If the theory holds, which Werrett concedes, why not employ it? One may posit change and development within the Qumran community while still holding to the hypothesis.

²¹⁵ Werrett, *Ritual*, 3, 289–90, 305. The disagreements relate to specific rulings in certain cases, not whether a system exists.

²¹⁶ Werrett, *Ritual*, 10, 302.

²¹⁷ Werrett, *Ritual*, 9–10, 13. Klawans had already demonstrated diachronic development in the DSS in *Impurity and Sin*, and yet does not make the claim that there is not a cohesive purity system. In fact, he affirms one contra Werrett. See, Jonathan Klawans, “Purity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 377–402, 382–83.

²¹⁸ Werrett, *Ritual*, 293–94. Although, as Klawans notes, there is inherent circular reasoning in the dating of some of the scrolls and their use in reconstructing the history of the Qumran sect (Klawans, “Purity,” 387–88).

²¹⁹ Werrett, *Ritual*, 299.

²²⁰ One may read the texts in light of one another with attentiveness to diachronic development.

²²¹ As Penner and Lopez note, “*objects do not speak for themselves*, on their own terms, or naturally in relation to texts. *People use stones to tell stories*” (*De-Introducing the New Testament*, 133, emphasis mine).

same scroll (e.g., 1QS, 1QSa, and 1 Qsb,²²² and 4Q414 and 4Q415²²³), share the same handwriting, terminology, and intertextuality,²²⁴ and are literally found next to one another in the same cave, one does not need the “Qumran/Es-sene hypothesis” to conclude that the texts are related.

To be clear, I am not denying that apparent inconsistencies exist between scrolls and their views on ritual purity as Werrett documents, but these are insufficient grounds to conclude that no ritual purity system exists, which Hannah Harrington demonstrates does exist.²²⁵ In fact, rather than serving as evidence against a ritual purity system, Werrett’s survey actually demonstrates the opposite—the discrepancies and debates over various purity concerns are not ad hoc, but arguments over proper interpretation within a commonly shared system.²²⁶ In fact, to invoke again the findings of Snoek,²²⁷ it is precisely this type of evidence that demonstrates the essential commonality between opposing sides. As Werrett admits, “some of the discrepancies in the scrolls are also reflective of legitimate disagreements between different groups, authors, and/or editors. . . . Moreover, the texts from Qumran are, on the whole,

²²² Incidentally, Werrett leaves these texts among others outside of his analysis because they lack any discussion of the five categories of purity that he discusses (*Ritual*, 18). According to Elisha Qimron and James H. Charlesworth, 1QS, 1QSa, and 1Qsb are “organically related.” See, Elisha Qimron and James H. Charlesworth, “Rule of the Community (1QS),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 1–51, 1.

²²³ The verso, 4Q414, also called “4QRitual of Purification A [*olim* Baptismal Liturgy],” dates paleographically to 30 BCE to 68 CE. The recto, 4Q415, also called “4QInstruction A [*olim* Sapiential Work A^d],” dates to 30 BCE to 70 CE. The point is that a purification text and a wisdom text are at least related by the fact that they are written on the same scroll.

²²⁴ E.g., Lawrence H. Schiffman, following J. T. Milik, notes that 5Q13 is connected with 1QS through the use of similar terms, a citation of 1QS, and other thematic parallels. Similarly, one portion of 1QS (4Q255) is an opisthograph preserving the contents of a hymn (4Q433a), while another opisthograph (4Q259) preserves a calendrical text (4Q319), and thematic parallels with other texts are evident (e.g., CD). See, Lawrence H. Schiffman, “Sectarian Rule (5Q13),” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 132–43, 132–33; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra and Thierry Legrand, “Règle de la Communauté (Rule of the Community),” in Marie-France Dion, Damien Labadie, Michaël Langlois, Thierry Legrand, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, trans., *Torah: Deutéronome et Pentateuque dans son ensemble*, vol. 3b of *La bibliothèque de Qumrân: Édition et traduction des manuscrits hébreux, araméens et grecs*, ed. Katell Berthelot, Michaël Langlois, and Thierry Legrand (Paris: Cerf, 2017), 283–413, 283–85.

²²⁵ Harrington, *Purity*, App A; cf. Klawans who agrees with Harrington against Werrett on this point (“Purity,” 377–402, 382–83).

²²⁶ I do not find Werrett’s rebuttal to this point convincing (*Ritual*, 301).

²²⁷ Cf. p. ? .

compatible with one another.”²²⁸ At the heart of the debate over these halakhic rulings is behavior that operates within a ritual system that is itself tied to the larger socio-cultural and religious universe of partisans. Incorrect halakhic behavior is not simply one of belief, but one that is ultimately anchored in faithfulness and obedience. Our sources attest to arguments over these matters because the improper observance of ritual purity carried grave consequences.

The debate between Werrett and Harrington is similar to the one over “common Judaism” between E. P. Sanders (its advocate) and others either who deny or question it.²²⁹ Moreover, it is representative of the conundrum of comparative methodology in general: *why* is one party emphasizing similarity and another difference? What is at stake in this debate? And is there a way to discuss it that allows for the insights of both Werrett and Harrington? For the purposes of this study, I recognize (with Werrett and others) the diachronic issues present in purity issues in the DSS while at the same time affirming that Harrington and others are correct to frame purity discussions in a systematic manner. My thesis does not depend on adjudicating the nuances of this debate, it only depends on a systematic perspective. I agree with Klawans that “[d]efilement is, then, a *structure*, whose individual components are not to be analyzed as if they were freestanding. . . . What must be studied, and then compared, are *systems* of defilement: the totalities of things that pollute, and the ways in which pollution can be conveyed. . . . [Mary Douglas’s] insistence on seeing systems of defilement remains virtually unchallenged, and rightly so.”²³⁰

Despite my confidence in a systematic approach, I concede with Penner and Lopez that “every concept, belief, and practice is contextualized historically in ways that are almost impossible to fully recreate. We can access threads of meaning and connections, but the broader backgrounds will always remain elusive.”²³¹ Nevertheless, this has not prevented previous scholars from attempting to explain the origin of “baptism,” since they all at least partially take for granted that such recreation is possible, and neither are Penner and Lopez claiming that we should not try. One advantage of studying the ritual purity system(s) among a variety of groups is that it is attested over numerous

²²⁸ Werrett, *Ritual*, 301.

²²⁹ For a basic overview, see Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz, “Common Judaism and Diversity within Judaism,” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 1–10.

²³⁰ Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 8, emphasis mine; *Purity*, 17–20; cf. David P. Wright, “Sin, Pollution, and Purity: Introduction” in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 496–97; Gruenwald, *Rituals*, 1–39; Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 3–42; Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 61.

²³¹ Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 94.

centuries and given the striking consistency of its essential contours as outlined in the Pentateuch, our difficulty lies more in precisely establishing the historical *contexts* of the system(s) than it does in demonstrating that such a system exists.

A Note on Religion and Culture

Recently, scholars have critiqued terms such as “culture”²³² and “religion.”²³³ Some assert that these are modern concepts more accurately understood as rhetorical and ideological,²³⁴ that the relationship between “religion” and “culture” are fraught with difficulty,²³⁵ or that they are ultimately vague concepts.²³⁶ These criticisms underscore that these terms have their own interpretive history, which has often encouraged anachronistic interpretation, and they reveal the tension all scholars face in attempting to understand and explain insider belief and action (emic) as an outsider (etic). To speak exclusively on emic (insider) terms is not only extreme but ultimately unintelligible, not to mention impossible, otherwise one would be an insider. To speak only in etic terms also leads to distortion as I have argued with the term “baptism.” As such, I analyze ritual purity in emic terms as far as I am able and interpret the data in such a way that is attentive to etic distortion. I make no claim to do this perfectly.

While the criticisms of the term “religion” have their validity, for the purposes of this study, Second Temple Jews used water ritually in the context of human and divine contact not unlike their Greco-Roman counterparts. That is to say, they engaged in behavior that assumed certain beliefs about the non-physical world that we designate as “religious” today. That said, the modern separation of “religious” from “secular” does not apply in antiquity. As I use the terms here, “culture” and “religion” refer to human social groups behaving

²³² On viewing religion as culture, see Berger, *Sacred Canopy*.

²³³ Nongbri, *Before Religion*, esp. 85–131.

²³⁴ E.g., Tomoko Masuzawa, “Culture,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 70–93. I appreciate Masuzawa’s explanation of the ways that culture (and religion) are deployed rhetorically and ideologically, something Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have both drawn attention to, but rhetoric *presupposes communication*. Moreover, culture does not communicate because it is “analyzed like a text,” but because *people* communicate (81). That is to say, I do not believe his critiques overturn the possibility of analyzing culture in the way many scholars do.

²³⁵ Masuzawa, “Culture,” 70; Carl Olson, “Culture,” in *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2011), 61–63; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, *passim*.

²³⁶ Masuzawa, “Culture,” 71; Bruce Lincoln, “Culture,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 409–22. Both Masuzawa and Lincoln, so far as I can tell, affirm that something “culture like” exists.

and communicating in intentional ways for various purposes within a system or systems of meaning that include rituals.²³⁷ “Religion” emphasizes the non-material dimension of ancient society that related to what we call the “supernatural” and “culture” emphasizes the human dimension of ancient society. Both terms encompass one another in antiquity.²³⁸ Finally, while I remain cognizant that a positivistic approach in which we know “what the natives ‘really’ think” is naive, we must, nevertheless, attempt an informed explanation.²³⁹

Constructing Ritual Systems

In light of the goals of this study, I construct as far as possible the ritual purity system of each group or practice *before* I compare them. It is not my goal to establish fully the entire socio-cultural system of each group, however, I do consider ways in which the ritual purity system interacts with it to understand its function. In the next chapter I describe the ritual purity system of the HB since this was the basis for non-pentateuchal, Second Temple, and post-Second Temple developments. After that, I describe the practice of immersion in the ritual systems of (1) the Qumran community, (2) Rabbinic literature and other evidence for the immersion of gentile converts, and (3) immersion in the NT as it pertains to John and early Jesus followers. The arguments of scholars who advocate for a specific antecedent within the HB ritual purity system are included as part of the next chapter and will not be treated separately since each of these proposals is integrated within a subset of the larger ritual purity system of the HB.

I base my work in the original languages of the sources and give attention to the terminology of each group while also incorporating relevant archaeological evidence. Additionally, I implement CM and RS to ask more precise questions pertaining to the ritual practices of the Qumran community, those who enjoined immersion on gentile converts, and those associated with John the immerser and early Jesus followers. For example, I employ Klingbeil’s eight criteria for analyzing “biblical ritual,” including: “(1) structure, (2) form, order and sequence, (3) space, (4) time, (5) involved objects, (6) action, (7) participants and their roles, and (8) sound and language.”²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Rappaport, *Ritual*, 50–52.

²³⁸ Phrases like τοῖς δικαιομασίαις τῶν ἐθνῶν, “customs of the nations” (2 Kgs 17:8), τὰ νόμιμα, “particular customs” (1 Macc 1:42; cf. 2 Macc 4:11; 3 Macc 3:2), τὸν πατριὸν ὅμιλον τῆς πολιτείας θεσμόν, “ancestral tradition of your national life” (4 Macc 8:7), τὰ Ἑλληνικά, “Greek customs” (2 Macc 6:9; 11:24–25), or τῶν πατρίων ἐθῶν, “ancestral customs” (4 Macc 18:5; cf. Acts 6:14; 16:21; 21:21; 26:3; 28:17) encompass under one umbrella “culture” and “religion.”

²³⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation*, 11.

²⁴⁰ Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 3.

Similarly, as rituals relate to texts, Christian Strecker suggests that their interrelationship may occur in the following six diverse ways:²⁴¹

- 1) Ein Text enthält Anweisungen zur Ausführung eines Rituals.
- 2) Ein Text berichtet oder konstatiert den Vollzug eines Rituals.
- 3) Ein Text beschäftigt sich mit der Bedeutung, Funktion oder rechten Durchführung eines Rituals.
- 4) Ein Text entstammt direkt rituellen Gebrauch.
- 5) Ein Text besitzt unmittelbar selbst rituelle Funktion.
- 6) Ein Text ist mit einem Ritual synekdochisch vernetzt.

These can obviously be extended beyond the NT and are helpful in determining the relationship between a given text and ritual.

Why Are We Comparing?

Once the ritual systems of each group or practice are constructed and the role or function of immersion identified, I then compare these with one another in Chapter 6: John's "Baptism" with the goal of providing an account of the origin of John's immersion and immersion in Jesus's name. Like past research, I situate John in his context. However, unlike past research, I do not assume that a genetic approach is necessary to explain its origin, nor do I have an apologetic interest to show that the immersion of John or "Christian baptism" is superior to or transcends Judaism.²⁴² Quite the opposite, this study argues that John's immersion and that practiced by early Jesus followers is distinctly Jewish and at a minimum should be understood as an act of ritual purification.²⁴³

This leads to a second, subsidiary reason for why I am performing comparison: I seek to displace the discussions of "baptisms" away from theological constructs and reframe it around the ritual purity.²⁴⁴ Here, I follow

²⁴¹ Strecker, *Liminale Theologie*, 78. For an English translation and interaction with Strecker's thesis, cf. DeMaris, *Ritual World*, 5–6.

²⁴² On the apologetic abuses of comparison, see Hughes, *Comparison*, 67. Lincoln insists that "Comparison is never innocent but is always interested" and that these interests dictate how researchers define, select, evaluate, and arrive at conclusions (*Gods and Demons*, 121). This chapter and this section especially is an attempt to reveal my interests. See also Mignolo, "On Comparison," 101, 112–16.

²⁴³ That comparison is used this way should not be surprising since as Lincoln notes, "As both Heraclitus and Saussure observed, meaning is constructed through contrast" (*Gods and Demons*, 121).

²⁴⁴ This principle applies whether one is talking about the "Mystery Religions," Qumran, the NT, other 2nd Temple literature, or Rabbinic literature—these are not instances of

Hughes's assertion that comparison should "show us how humans, as social actors, make meaning in their social worlds."²⁴⁵ Here, I argue that ritual purity is the best cultural tool-box from which his first-century audience would have drawn to understand it. Since John was a Jew and all of the so-called antecedents except the "mystery religions" are Jewish, there is no reason to think that John's immersion falls outside of "Judaism."²⁴⁶ In this respect, the account of at least one nearly contemporaneous, Jewish witness, Josephus, may be understood as an accurate description of John's immersion.²⁴⁷

A final goal of this study is to represent as accurately as possible and appreciate on their own terms the immersion practices at Qumran (Chapter 4: The Washings of the Qumran Community) and those who enjoined the same upon Gentiles who wished to join the people of Israel (Chapter 5: Proselyte "Baptism").²⁴⁸ As Lincoln suggests, "The point of critical analysis, then, is not to question the sincerity or integrity of those" we study, "nor is it to charge them, *ad hominem*, with bad faith."²⁴⁹ Rather, we are to understand them contextually. Unfortunately, past comparative studies have approached this information as only interesting for what it might say about "Christian baptism" or how it might serve as a foil for the "superiority" of "Christian baptism," which (supposedly) "transcends" Judaism. Moreover, these antecedents are improperly analyzed through the categories and lens of the theological construct of "Christian baptism." This unsurprisingly contributes to an inadequate and distorted understanding. When the antecedents are examined for their own sake, a different picture emerges that significantly affects the comparative act because the evidence is viewed differently (Conclusion).

Criteria of Richard B. Hays as a Heuristic Evaluation Tool

Before concluding, I propose that the literary criteria that Richard B. Hays developed for echoes and allusions in Pauline literature may be adapted to

"baptism" but rather washing in water for ritual purification. Within Judaism, the HB forms the foundation of Jewish piety and practice in all its diverse forms, and every textual expressions of Judaism explicitly draws from it. As it pertains to the Greco-Roman context, which is beyond the scope of this study (but no less interesting), it is more complex in that there are a variety of sacred texts and laws from which purity practices derive since they are associated with a variety of deities.

²⁴⁵ Hughes, *Comparison*, 78.

²⁴⁶ As I have expressed above, however, situating the discussion around ritual purity places Jewish practices in closer contact with Greco-Roman practices.

²⁴⁷ *Ant.* 18.5.2 §§116–17.

²⁴⁸ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 123.

²⁴⁹ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 15.

evaluate proposed solutions to the origin of John's immersion.²⁵⁰ Although these criteria are focused on literary "influence," I have adapted them here as a further perspective to assess what socio-cultural factors were available to both us and the ancient audience to explain John's immersion:

- 1) *Availability*: what immersion practices were available to John and a first-century audience?
- 2) *Volume*: how often might a first-century audience encounter similar practices?
- 3) *Recurrence*: how geographically widespread were other practices and in what groups?
- 4) *Thematic Coherence*: how well do other practices correspond with John's immersion and one another?
- 5) *Historical Plausibility*: what is the likelihood that John and his audience would have connected what he was doing with other similar practices?
- 6) *History of Interpretation*: in what way does John's immersion relate to immersion in Jesus's name and how do NT texts and other texts interpret both types of immersions?
- 7) *Satisfaction*: how well do other practices account for the available data and satisfy the other scholars?

Thesis

The thesis of this study is that John's immersion, and by extension immersion in Jesus's name, is an act of ritual purification just like every other type of immersion undertaken in antiquity, including those associated with the "Mystery religions," gentile proselytes, and the Qumran community. John's immersion derives from the ritual purity system of the HB as interpreted and practiced by Second Temple Jews. Dahl was correct that every prior account of the origin of John's immersion is partially correct, but all of them (including his) ultimately fail to see the forest for the trees.²⁵¹ The fact that scholars are able to trace John's immersion to the various antecedents is due in part because they are all instances of immersion for ritual purification.

²⁵⁰ Hays, *Echoes*, 29–32; cf. Hassan, "Problem," 73. For a comparable adaptation using different authors, see Immendörfer, *Ephesians*, 10–36.

²⁵¹ Dahl, "Origin," 45.

Chapter 3

Ritual Purity in the Late Second Temple Period

[D]espite the diversities that are evident in Second Temple Judaism, the fact that different Jews in different places all agreed . . . that immersion of one's body was the efficient means of removing impurity shows a somewhat surprising degree of unanimity.¹

The study of the written sources and systematic examination and analysis of the archaeological data lead us to conclude that the observance of ritual purity had an important part in the daily schedule of Jews of all social classes during the late Second Temple period.²

While some NT scholars are accustomed to talk about ritual purity, they often propagate misinformation that affects the manner in which we then view John and early Jesus followers. For example, Werner Georg Kümmel claims (without evidence) that “proselyte baptism” could not be the origin of John’s immersion because “the *ritually unclean Jordan* was not suited for such a ritual act.”³ From this assertion, Maxwell E. Johnson then declares, “The Jordan River itself was ‘ritually unclean,’ and so hardly fitting for a rite of Jewish

¹ Benjamin G. Wright, III, “Jewish Ritual Baths—Interpreting the Digs and the Texts: Some Issues in the Social History of Second Temple Judaism,” in *The Archaeology of Israel: Constructing the Past, Interpreting the Present*, ed. Neil Asher Silberman and David Small, JSOTSup 237 (Sheffield, 1997), 190–215, 213.

² Boaz Zissu and David Amit, “Common Judaism, Common Purity, and the Second Temple Period Judean *Miqwa'ot* (Ritual Immersion Baths),” in *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism*, ed. Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 47–62, 48–49; cf. Ronny Reich and Marcela Zapata-Meza, “The Domestic *Miqwa'ot*,” in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 109–25, 109.

³ This claim by Werner Georg Kümmel and Edmondo F. Lupieri is based on a misunderstanding of m. Parah 8:10. The tractate only specifies that the Jordan is invalid for making the תאטק יג , and it is uncertain whether or not this ruling was known or in effect in John’s day (so, Webb, *John*, 181–82, n. 56). As Pliny the Elder notes, the source of the Jordan river is the “spring of Panias” (*Nat.* 5.71). With the Gihon spring immediately available in Jerusalem, it is unclear why the Jordan would be used a source. See, Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament According to Its Major Witnesses: Jesus—Paul—John*, trans. John E. Steely (London: SCM Press, 1974), 29, emphasis mine; cf. Edmondo F. Lupieri, “John the Baptist in NT Traditions and History,” *ANRW*, 33.1:430–61, 441.

‘purification.’”⁴ Similarly, William La Sor claims that “Jewish ritual immersion is *purifying*. . . . Christian baptism, on the other hand, is *initiating*, or *initiatory*.”⁵ But then, John J. Davis goes even further with La Sor’s distinction by claiming, “It does not appear that members of the early church practiced *any purification rituals* that were so common to the Jews. For these Christians, *ceremonial defilement did not exist*.”⁶

Additionally, scholars also confuse the relationship of ritual purity to moral purity and holiness.⁷ For example, Anders Klostergaard Petersen incorrectly states that

⁴ Johnson, *Rites*, 11, emphasis mine. A similar sentiment is expressed by Charles Perrot, “Les rites d’eau dans le Judaïsme,” *Le monde de la bible* 65 (1990): 23–25.

⁵ Apart from the questionable reification of “Christian baptism,” even if it were “initiatory,” on what basis could it not also be purificatory? William Sanford La Sor, “Discovering What the Jewish Miqva’ot Can Tell Us About Christian Baptism,” *BAR* 13 (1987): 52–59, 58–59, emphasis mine; cf. Lawrence, *Washing*, 186, n. 2.

⁶ The basis of this claim is rather weak. Mark 7:19c is an editorial comment and *possibly* an interpolation—although there is no text critical evidence for interpolation, this is not the only basis for positing that an interpolation may be present. The debate accords with the Second Temple milieu and the editorial comment makes no sense of the immediate context. Jesus’s comments in Mark 7:14 do not pertain to the concept of ritual purity *in general*, but to the immediate context of eating without observing the *Pharisaic* practice of ritually washing one’s hands. As Bruce Chilton et al. remark, “A distortion in the meaning of the aphorism was caused by the change in the social constitution of those who recollected, and represents his teaching as a dichotomy between what is within and what is without a person. . . . Jesus’ position involved the extension of purity from the inside outwards, not any denial of the possibility of ‘external’ purity.” As Roger P. Booth and Thomas Kazen have both argued, Jesus’s statement should be understood as a *relative* rather than an *absolute* statement pertaining to ritual purity laws. Moreover, how should we understand Peter’s unawareness of this declaration in Acts 10:14? Thus, against Davis, I agree with van den Heever (who follows Uro) in arguing the opposite—“it is no longer necessary to make the sharp distinction between baptism and lustration or purificatory washings,” though I do not agree that “millennial framing” is the key to this argument (“Spectre,” 57). See, John J. Davis, “Purity & Impurity,” in vol 4 of *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity*, ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, 4 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 105–21, 110, emphasis mine; Fiorenza, “Cultic Language,” 168; Bruce Chilton et al., eds., *A Comparative Handbook to the Gospel of Mark: Comparisons with Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran Scrolls, and Rabbinic Literature*, The New Testament Gospels in their Judaic Contexts 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 243–44; Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7*, JSNTSup 13 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1986), 217–23; Thomas Kazen, *Issues of Impurity in Early Judaism*, ConBNT 45 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 113–35.

⁷ E.g., Catherine M. Murphy says, “the most pure people were priests, followed by Levites, . . . then Israelite men, Israelite women, . . . converts, . . . sojourners and Gentiles” (*John*, 118–19). She then goes on to connect this “purity map” to sacred space in the temple. None of these people or groups were inherently more or less clean than others. Moreover, a

sacredness and impurity are mutually exclusive categories: one cannot at the same time be holy and impure. . . . sacredness and impurity are contrarily related to each other. Sacredness and profanity, on the other hand, are contradictorily related, since they do not exclude each other. Here we find a different scenario, where the one category overdetermines, but does not exclude the other. One may be holy and profane at the same time.⁸

If it were true that one cannot be holy and impure at the same time, it would be impossible for priests to fulfill the command to procreate. Moreover, the contrary is true regarding sacredness and profanity—one could not be holy and profane (i.e., common) at the same time within Israel.

A final example of misinformation is taxonomic. André Benoît and Charles Munier list three different types of washing in the HB as part of their survey of antecedents to John's practice: ritual, ceremonial, and healing.⁹ They derive these categories from the perceived reason that a person washes—ritual is for removing ritual impurity (Lev 11–14), ceremonial is performed prior to entering “en relation avec le Dieu saint” (e.g., Ezek 36:25; Lev 8:6; 16:4; 2 Chron 4:2–6) and Namaan's immersion in the Jordan attests to “la pratique juive d'ablutions de guérison” (2 Kgs 5:14). Yet, in most research on ritual purity, “ritual” and “ceremonial” are synonymous since the purpose of washing is identical (i.e., to remove ritual impurity).¹⁰ Moreover, Namaan's washing in the Jordan, while effecting his healing, also made him ritually clean. Of course, one could not normally immerse and become clean of skin disease, but the point of the narrative is to connect Namaan's request to be healed from skin disease with its result (i.e., to be declared clean).¹¹ Nevertheless, the main issue with

non-holy person could never enter restricted holy space no matter how much cleansing they performed, so purity is not the primary criterion for entry. In other words, while there is a *relationship* between purity and holiness, they are not the same.

⁸ Anders Klostergaard Petersen, “Rituals of Purification, Rituals of Initiation,” in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, and Christer H. C. Norderval Øyvindand Hellholm, vol. 1 (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2011), 1:3–40, 33.

⁹ Benoît and Munier, *Baptême*, XI. See also Lawrence who provides three categories of washing in the HB: ritual, metaphorical, and initiatory (*Washing*, 17, table 1), and Harrington who classifies washings of the Second Temple period around the anticipation of new life, atonement, revelation, and the eschaton (Harrington, “Purification,” 117–38). Webb presents still more categories (*John*, 101).

¹⁰ Roy E. Gane bases this distinction between “ritual” and “ceremonial” on M. Wilson's studies of modern Nyakusa culture in which the former is “believed to be efficacious” and the latter is simply “an appropriate and elaborate form for the expression of feeling” (Gane, *Cult*, 14). Such a distinction is questionable (see below).

¹¹ καὶ κατέβη Ναυμὰν καὶ ἐβαπτίσατο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ἐπτάκι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμα Ἐλισαίη, καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν ἢ σὰρξ αὐτοῦ ὡς σὰρξ παιδαρίου μικροῦ, καὶ ἐκαθαρίσθη (1 Kgs 5:14). The

their classification scheme is that Benoît and Munier use it to distinguish these washings from John's practice because his is a "baptême" (i.e., a supposedly different category of washing).¹²

Because these examples of misinformation derive from an inadequate understanding of ritual purity, a main purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this system in the HB since it forms the foundation for Second Temple groups and their practices.¹³ Here, I define how I understand the ritual purity system and mention certain diachronic "changes"¹⁴ to argue that (1) the ritual purity system of the HB was understood and applied in specific historical contexts by specific communities or individuals,¹⁵ and (2) that no monolithic or "orthodox" view existed.¹⁶ This explains the diversity of our sources with regard to ritual purity while concomitantly affirming its systematic nature.¹⁷

As a result, I argue that John and early Jesus followers also apply ritual purity to their specific context and that there is no "standard" against which to measure their practices for "deviation" or "modification." As a corollary, we cannot speak of "progression" or "developments" as if the practice of ritual purity were an animate being that improves, advances, or matures, something NT scholars generally assume to be true about "baptism."¹⁸ Moreover, I rectify misinformation about ritual purity that scholars frequently use to distance from

seven immersions of Naaman may symbolically correspond with the seven day periods of quarantine prior to priestly examination (Lev 13).

¹² This is ironic in the sense observed by Charles Perrot, "Le point doit d'autant plus être relevé qu'il s'agit en l'occurrence du cycle d'Élie et Elisée dont l'importance sera considérable dans les milieux baptistes" (*Rites*, 24).

¹³ Cf. Christophe Nihan, "Forms and Functions of Purity in Leviticus," in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan, *Dynamics in the History of Religion* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 311–67, 367; Lawrence, *Washing*, 23; Aharon Shemesh, "The Origins of the Laws of Separatism: Qumran Literature and Rabbinic Halacha," *RevQ* 18 (1997): 223–41, 223.

¹⁴ I am not here interested in *compositional*, diachronic changes; cf., e.g., Robert A Kugler, "Holiness, Purity, the Body, and Society: The Evidence for Theological Conflict in Leviticus," *JSOT* 22 (1997): 3–27, 19.

¹⁵ Florentino García Martínez and Julio Trebolle Barrera argue just this regarding the Qumran community. See, Florentino García Martínez and Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Writings, Beliefs and Practices*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 157.

¹⁶ Harrington, "Purity," 402.

¹⁷ In fact, an analogous point may be drawn from Greco-Roman sources: the concept of ritual purity was widely practiced in association with all forms of the sacred except those gods associated with the underworld, such as Hecate (Parker, *Miasma*, 398).

¹⁸ This is usually tied to a confessional narrative that often involves a supersessionistic perspective.

it John's practice or that of early Jesus followers and demonstrate that arguments portraying John's practice (or that of early Jesus followers) as something distinct from ritual purity are based on a faulty understanding.

Ritual Purity in the HB

Whether and how ritual purity was practiced in the periods prior to the Second Temple do not concern this study.¹⁹ Since ritual purity practices are attested throughout all periods and among all groups of the ANE,²⁰ and regardless of when the portions of the HB were authored or finally considered canonical, it is unreasonable to insist (dogmatically) that it simply arises or is inserted into the HB during the Postexilic or Hellenistic period,²¹ though this is certainly a possibility.²² Additionally, while I am aware of the ongoing debates

¹⁹ Although virtually no evidence exists for Jewish ritual purity practices prior to the Second Temple Period, Frank Crüsemann interprets a pre-exilic bathtub-like structure discovered at Tel Masos as a ritual bath. See, Frank Crüsemann, "Ein israelitisches Ritualbad aus vorexilischer Zeit," *ZDPV* 94 (1978): 68–75. On pre-Second Temple Period practices, see, Ronny Reich, *Jewish Ritual Baths in the Second Temple, Mishnaic, and Talmudic Periods* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2013), 15–17 [Hebrew]; Hayah Katz, "'He Shall Bathe in Water; Then He Shall Be Pure': Ancient Immersion Practice in the Light of Archaeological Evidence," *VT* 62 (2012): 369–80; Thomas Hieke, *Leviticus 1–15*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Christoph Dohmen, and Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *HThKAT* 5A (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2014), 121–22; Mila Ginsburskaya, "Purity and Impurity in the Hebrew Bible," in *Purity: Essays in Bible and Theology*, ed. Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 3–29.

²⁰ See, Wright et al., "Sin, Pollution, and Purity," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, 496–513; cf. the essays in Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan, eds., *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, Dynamics in the History of Religion 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); J. Henninger et al., "Pureté et impureté: B. L' Ancien Orient," in *Dictionnaire de la bible: supplément, psaumes–refuge*, ed. H. Cazelles and André Fueilllet (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1979), 9:430–91; Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 77.

²¹ In this respect, I follow those who date P in the preexilic period, but I readily recognize that insisting on the antiquity of purity rituals does not entail that P was necessarily a written document at that time. See the excellent discussion in Ginsburskaya, "Purity," 15–18; Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch*, trans. Sr. Pascale Dominique (Eisenbrauns, 2006), 159; Klawans, *Impurity*, 21–22.

²² Lawrence makes a compelling argument, however, I am reluctant to put as much weight on the relative absence of purity in the rest of the Tanak (*Washing*, 40–42, 196–99). Additionally, if it is true that ritual purity was inserted into the Tanak at a later period, why only do it in the Torah and in such a peculiar manner? This is different than recognizing that ritual baths (*miqva'ot*), an installation not prescribed by the HB, emerge during the late Second

surrounding source theory,²³ these are irrelevant to my argument since Second Temple people interpreted the Torah in its “final form.”²⁴ In fact, Robert A. Kugler and Kyung S. Baek note that a single, stable text of Leviticus was available in the Second Temple Period and where one might expect to find a reworking of the text to bend toward the Qumran community’s “unique approach to sacrifice, priesthood, and purity,” such evidence is lacking.²⁵ Moreover, every book of the HB except Nehemiah and Esther is attested among the DSS.²⁶ Thus, what I present below pertaining to the HB is an “ideal system” not linked to any specific historical group of the First Temple period,²⁷ but with attention to how Second Temple Jewish groups used this as the basis of their purity practices.

The Key Binaries: Holy/Common and Clean/Unclean

Leviticus 10:10—וללהבדיל בין הקדש ובין החל ובין הטמא ובין הטהור—which is repeated in Ezek 22:26 and 44:23, explains the binaries through which the Israelites were to live.²⁸ Scholars theorize the relationship of these binaries in diverse ways depending on how they understand the way these interact within

Temple period. See the comments and bibliography in ch. 3 under, “When Are We Comparing?” For a recent proposal on the origin of ritual immersion, see Yonatan Adler, “The Hellenistic Origins of Jewish Ritual Immersion,” *JJS* 69 (2018): 1–21.

²³ Cf. Ska, *Introduction*, 108–161; Thomas B. Dozeman, *The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 33–199; Jan Christian Gertz et al., *T&T Clark Handbook of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Literature, Religion and History of the Old Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 237–382.

²⁴ I use “final form” loosely since our evidence suggests some fluidity.

²⁵ In fact, 18 of the 60 instances where rewriting is observable occur in the “proto-sectarian” documents, CD and 4QMMT (Kugler and Baek, *Leviticus*, 95–99, 103).

²⁶ That said, the preservation of a book at Qumran does not indicate it held canonical status. Additionally, Nehemiah may be attested if it were part of Ezra at this time since there are three fragments of the latter extant (VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 118–19, 150, table 6.5, 177).

²⁷ By this, I am neither claiming that such historical communities did not exist, nor am I claiming that the purity system was merely a literary treatise with no connection to actual practice.

²⁸ Cf. Lev 11:47, 14:57; 20:25; Deut 12:15, 22; 15:22; Job 14:4; Eccl 9:2 also refer to the clean/unclean binary (cf. Hieke, *Leviticus*, 119). Leviticus 10:10 occurs in the DSS in the following places: 4Q266 3 II, 23 (CD A 6:17–18); 4Q266 9 II, 6–7 (CD A 12:19–20); 4Q299 13a–b1 (4QMyst^a), 4Q512 40–41, 3–4, and possibly 4Q414 27–28, 2–4 depending on how the text is reconstructed. Moreover, 4Q394 3–7 I, 14–16 states: “For the sons of] the priest[s] are responsible to take care of this matter so as not [to] bring guilt upon the people” (trans. M. Abegg); cf. 4Q394 3–7 I, 19–3–7 II, 14.

the overall purity system or according to what they desire to emphasize by illustrating it in a given way.²⁹ For example, Philip Peter Jenson *misrepresents* James Barr's diagram of Lev 10:10 by leaving out one of the "cross lines" between "profane" and "clean" and then claims that it follows a "chiastic structure," something Barr does not claim (*Figure 11: Jenson's Adaptation of Barr at right*).³⁰ From this, he develops a "graded holiness" spectrum, which as he notes *leaves out* the element of "profane" (*Figure 12: Jenson's "Graded Holiness" Spectrum*).³¹ Yet, in Barr's original diagram, the vertical lines represent "oppositions" that are "exclusive" (as they are presented in Lev 10:10) and the "cross lines" represent "compatibilities," a point that Barr apparently discerns from the rest of the HB since this is not explained in Lev 10:10 (see *Figure 13: Barr's Diagram of Lev 10:10 at right*).³² Milgrom, whose influential work forms the basis of all subsequent work on Leviticus, diagrams it similarly through overlapping realms in which "common" is vertically contiguous with both "pure" and "impure," while "holy" is contiguous *only* with "pure" (see *Figure 14: Milgrom's Diagram of Lev 10:10 at right*).³³ Of course, similar

²⁹ In light of the various approaches that scholar's advocate to this system, Barr's comments are comical: "This system is a relatively closed one; I doubt if there are any confusing factors or any other terms which have to be included" (Barr, "Semantics," 16). Oddly, Rüdiger Schmitt claims, "Das biblische Hebräisch kennt ebenso keine binäre oppositionale Kategorisierung von 'sakral' bzw. 'heilig' (*qđš*) und 'profan.'" In light of his further comments, his claim may be more concerned with the modern notion of "profane," but he does not mention Lev 10:10 and he is incorrect to say that "Der häufig mit 'profan' übersetzte Begriff *hll* ist eine Kategorie, die zum Wortfeld von *tame* ('unrein') gehört." Rüdiger Schmitt, "'Zu unterscheiden zwischen rein und unrein...': sakraler und profaner Sprachgebrauch im Buch Leviticus," *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 18 (2006): 121–32.

³⁰ The textual chiasm is based on the fact that *שקד* and *טהר* for the outer elements while *הל* and *טמא* form the inner elements. Be that as it may, this does not make the terms synonymous, antonymous, or imply that the binaries operate in the same way. See, Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOTSup 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 44.

³¹ As Jenson admits, his schema does not include *הל* ("common") and he posits a category not attested, namely, "very unclean" as a counterpart to "very holy" (*קדש קדשים*) (*Graded Holiness*, 44; cf. Hieke, *Leviticus*, 126). Similarly, Jay Sklar diagrams a continuum from impure to holy in his discussion of "Purification, Consecration, and *קִפּוּר*," although he is not arguing quite the same thing as Jenson. He says about his diagram, "holiness is of a higher grade than purity, and thus [it] shows the relationship between them [impure, pure, and holy] progressively." Yet, a higher grade of *what*? See Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 125.

³² Barr, "Semantics," 16.

³³ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 732; Hieke, *Leviticus*, 125; Hannah K. Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 37–40.

diagrams are used to illustrate how clean/unclean and holy/common map out geographically and socially as well.³⁴

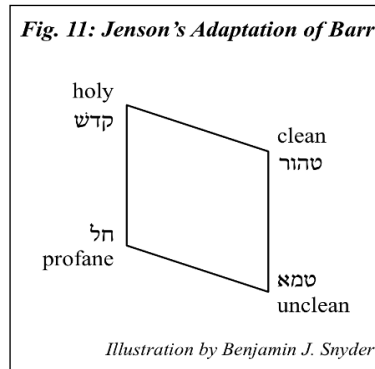


Figure 11: Jenson's adaptation of Barr

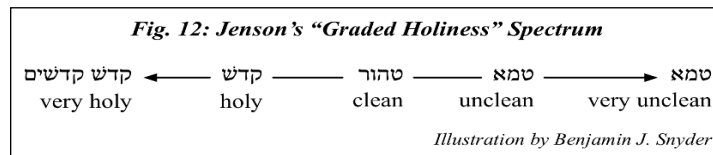
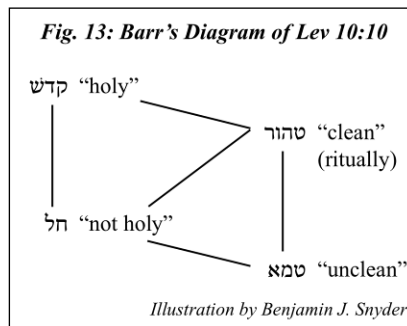


Figure 12: Jenson's "Graded Holiness" spectrum



³⁴ E.g., Schmitt, "Zu unterscheiden," 125, 129; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 722, fig. 13, 725, fig. 14; Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 173, 176, 178–79, 181–84, 190, 194.

Figure 13: Barr's diagram of Lev 10:10

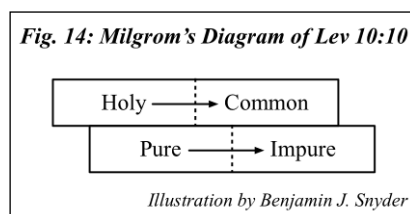


Figure 14: Milgrom's diagram of Lev 10:10

The Binaries as Status and Condition

A significant problem with all of these models is that none of them are able to account for a ritually unclean, holy priest³⁵ or the fact that the most holy place regularly becomes ritually *and* morally unclean, thus requiring purification on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).³⁶ While these conceptions are acceptable in their attempt to model *ideal compatibilities*, they do not accurately represent the binaries as presented in Leviticus, nor all of the possible interactions that actually arise. For this reason, Richard E. Averbeck's distinction between "status" and "condition" is more consistent and carries greater explanatory power.³⁷

³⁵ So, Leigh M. Trevaskis, *Holiness, Ethics and Ritual in Leviticus*, ed. David J. A. Clines, J. Cheryl Exum, and Keith W. Whitlam, Hebrew Bible Monographs 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 68.

³⁶ Nihan, "Forms," 344–45. Despite asserting that the holy and unclean "stehen in totemalem Gegensatz und dürfen sich nicht berühren," Hieke acknowledges that the the sanctuary does contract uncleanness (*Levitikus*, 126, 129).

³⁷ Richard E. Averbeck, "Clean and Unclean," *NIDOTTE* 4:477–85; "Leviticus, Theology of," 4:907–23; *NIDOTTE* 2, s.v. "קֹדֶשׁ," "טָמֵא"; cf. Trevaskis, *Holiness*, 67–70. By contrast, Milgrom says, "[p]ersons and objects are subject to four possible *states*: holy, common, pure, and impure" (*Leviticus 1–16*, 732, emphasis mine). Note the similar confusion of terminology with "state" and "condition" due to the way Milgrom conceptualizes the binaries in Harrington, *Holiness*, 39; cf. Webb, *Jesus*, 96, 106. Within the priestly order, becoming holy involved a permanent change in status, whereas becoming unclean involved a temporary change in condition. This depends somewhat on the context, however. Holiness, like comparison, is always "with respect to" something else. For example, within Israel, priests were "holy" (i.e., set apart) and the average Israelite was common. Yet, vis-à-vis the nations, Ex 19:6 describes the entire nation (including common Israelites) as מְלִכְתָּהּ כְּהִנִּים וְגַי קְדוֹשׁ. Moreover, the entire nation is called to "be holy" (Lev 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; Num 15:40). Thus, with respect to Israelite priests, the average Israelite is "common," but with respect to non-Israelites, the average Israelite is "holy." On other implications of the Israelite nation being holy, see, Hyam Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 196.

That is to say, the holy/common binary refers to the (permanent) *status* of an individual, object, or place,³⁸ while the clean/unclean binary refers to the (temporary) *condition* that any individual, object, or place³⁹ may contract whether holy or common in status.⁴⁰ As it pertains to people, Leigh M. Trevaskis articulates it this way:

- i. A שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ priest may either be טָמֵא or טָהוֹר , but not חָל .
- ii. A חָל person may be either טָמֵא or טָהוֹר , but not שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ .⁴¹

Rather than insisting against the text that טָהוֹר , טָמֵא , חָל , and שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ form a continuum, *Figure 15: The Relationship between the Binary Oppositions* (right) depicts the holy/common binary, “states that may vary within their ritual condition,” within the temporary fields of clean/unclean.⁴²

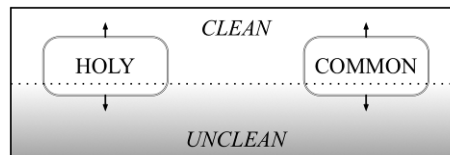


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 15: The relationship between the binary oppositions

One part of each binary is also further sub-dividable. For example, while חָל is a “flat” state, שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ involves graduations that apply to people, objects, and places—it is more complicated to move from חָל through the various graduations of שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ . Similarly, טָהוֹר is a flat condition⁴³ whereas people, objects, and

³⁸ E.g., individual (Ex 29:21; 30:33), object (Ex 29:37; 30:26–29), place (Lev 6:26 [6:19]).

³⁹ E.g., individual (Lev 14:46), object (Lev 11:33), place (Lev 6:11 [6:4]; 14:40).

⁴⁰ Cf. Hannah K. Harrington, “The Halakah and Religion of Qumran,” in *Religion In the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 79. Time may also be שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ , such as at festivals or during the Sabbath, which implies that it may be treated as common, and thus desecrated (e.g., Jub. 6.35–37). I am unaware of any text that ascribes טָמֵא or טָהוֹר to time.

⁴¹ Trevaskis, *Holiness*, 69. Of course, this is only true *within* the people of Israel, since the entire nation is said to be שֶׁדֶּדֶשׁ .

⁴² Cf. Trevaskis, *Holiness*, 69. In Harrington’s words, “an individual’s pure status is never fixed but is constantly threatened by negative forces” (“Halakah,” 79).

⁴³ Harrington observes that 4Q274 3 II, 4 “advocates being יֹתֵר טָהוֹר , more pure” (“Halakah,” 80). While it is possible that this is evidence of levels of cleanness, the phrase more

places may contract various severities of ritual more complicated it is —⁴⁴טמא to move from ritual טמא to טהר. Thus, one must not only be aware of one's own status (i.e., holy/common) and condition (i.e., clean/unclean) but also of the status and condition of the persons, objects, or places with which they might contact to determine whether it is permitted and what might be required subsequent to contact.⁴⁵ Similarly, one must be aware of the type and severity of uncleanness one has contracted in order to take the proper precautions not to spread it and perform the appropriate measures to rectify it. All of this points to the fact that the “normal,” expected state of most people was to be טהר and הל. Only under special circumstances did a person become קדש within Israel. Regardless of whether one were קדש or הל, everyone was expected to maintain a condition of טהר in both the ritual and moral dimensions.

Two Types of Clean/Unclean

The cognates of טמא and טהר apply equally to the separate categories of “ritual” and “moral” purity/impurity,⁴⁶ in part because they function as umbrella terms.⁴⁷ This is not an etic imposition, but analogous to how English also uses

likely refers to one who is not in transition from uncleanness. The immediately preceding context is not only highly fragmented but it refers to a vessel with a lid or seal suggesting the concern is related to corpse impurity. In fact, Harrington herself makes this connection when she links 4Q274 to 11Q19 XLIX, 8 where food in sealed vessels is avoided when found in the home of a corpse.

⁴⁴ See esp. Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 4–7; cf. David P. Wright, “Unclean and Clean,” *ABD* 6:729–41; “Spectrum,” 153, fig. 1; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation in Biblical Israel,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 399–414.

⁴⁵ Cf. Klawans, *Purity*, 54. We must be cautious not to apply anachronous judgments on this system, such as, that it is “oppressive.” On any given day, drivers in the US observe countless traffic laws subconsciously without any sense of burden.

⁴⁶ Scholars have employed a variety of different terms to distinguish “ritual” and “moral” impurities. Although the HB does not use this specific terminology, D. Hoffmann calls them טומאת הקדושות and טומאת הגויות and Adolph Büchler prefers “levitical” and “moral, spiritual, or religious” purity. I prefer the labels “physical impurity” and “sin-impurity” that Mila Ginsburskaya proposes, though I have retained “ritual” and “moral” due to their common recognition (“Purity,” 4). See, D. Hoffmann, *Das Buch Leviticus*, 2 vols. (Berlin: M. Poppebauer, 1905), 1:303–4, 340, 2:59; Adolf Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 212–69; Klawans, *Impurity*, 5–6; Sklar, *Sin*, 141–44; Hayes, *Gentile*, 33.

⁴⁷ Other terms that are applied generally to both types of purity include: זרק “sprinkle,” נוה “sprinkle” (cf. Num 19:13, 20 [ritual]; Lev 16:14 [moral]). In some cases, terms referring to ritual purity are metaphorically applied to moral purity, e.g., רחץ “to bathe,” כבס “to wash objects.” Lawrence notes that the collocation of כבס, רחץ, and טהר only occurs in the

the same words (i.e., pure and impure) to speak of more than one distinct type of purity/impurity (e.g., material, hygienic, and moral).⁴⁸ Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington rightly state that “Ritual impurity and moral impurity draw on the same language, but they should not be confused.”⁴⁹ That said, there *are* certain terms used only in reference to either ritual or moral purity.⁵⁰ Thus, outside of those terms context is key to determine whether ritual or moral impurity is in view when טמא and טהר occur,⁵¹ and while both cause defilement, they are *not* of the same type.⁵² Ultimately, however, the distinction between the two types of purity rests not on terminology⁵³ but rather on their cause, resolution, and significance.⁵⁴ For example, not only does the HB never say that contracting ritual uncleanness is a sin, but priests are enjoined to procreate which necessarily leads to ritual uncleanness. To illustrate their differences, I have adapted the material of Jonathan Klawans in *Table 7: The Distinction between Ritual and Moral Purity* (right). Moreover, as Mila Ginsburskaya observes, not only is there no “prohibition on becoming physically [i.e., ritually] impure,” (which would be impossible to avoid), but “no sin-impurity [i.e., moral] can be removed without a sacrifice, and no physical impurity as such warrants ‘capital punishment.’”⁵⁵

Priestly source and in reference to ritual purity (*Washing*, 28; cf. Klawans, *Impurity*, 26; *Purity*, 55).

⁴⁸ E.g., English speakers readily recognize that even though the same word is used two completely different type of purity are in view when one speaks of an impure diamond or an impure heart.

⁴⁹ Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Luke*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 83.

⁵⁰ For ritual purity: e.g., שטף, “to rinse,” and the collocation of כבס, רחץ, and טהר (cf. Lawrence, *Washing*, 28); for moral purity: e.g., חנף, “to defile,” גאל, “to desecrate,” תועבה “abomination,” נקה, “to be blameless,” ברר, “to purify,” or זכה, “to be clean.” Cf. Klawans, *Purity*, 55–56.

⁵¹ Drawing the same distinction between ritual and moral purity, though not using the same terminology, Murphy notes that the causes of impurity that derive from the “circumstances of life” are not sinful, and that “Sin is a subset of impurity and refers only to those acts that violate God’s laws” (*John the Baptist*, 119–20).

⁵² If moral and ritual impurity were the same, immersion should resolve both sources of impurity, yet this is not the case (*Pace Webb, John*, 97, 107).

⁵³ Cf. Barr, “Semantics,” 12–14, 18.

⁵⁴ Philo discusses the different types of impurity and their different resolutions (*Spec.* 1.256–61).

⁵⁵ Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 5, 15.

Table 7: The distinction between ritual and moral purity

Distinction	Ritual	Moral
Source	e.g., birth, death, sex, discharges	prohibited deeds
Sin	no	yes
Type of Contagion	physical (people, objects, places)	airborne (defiles sinner, sanctuary & land)
Duration	short-term	long-term
Resolution	ritual purification	atonement, punishment, exile
Terminological Differences	שטף רחץ+כבס+טהר	חנף, גאל, תועב נקה, ברר, זכה

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

The Relationship Between the Types of Purity and the Binaries

While ritual and moral purity are distinct, this does not entail that they form two separate, hermetically sealed systems,⁵⁶ an oversight that undergirds “conflation” theories of Qumran.⁵⁷ Since the requirement to observe ritual purity is a commandment, intentional or accidental neglect also results in moral impurity.⁵⁸ And because the interaction of someone or something נטמ with someone or something שקד may result in dangerous scenarios,⁵⁹ the priests were

⁵⁶ For a critique of this view, see, Nihan, “Forms,” 343–44; Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 24. While Klawans’s earlier work (especially on Qumran), *Impurity and Sin*, takes this approach, his more recent work focuses on “the entire process of sacrifice, beginning with the process of ritual purification” (*Purity*, 53).

⁵⁷ More on this in chapter 4, “The Washings of the Qumran Community.”

⁵⁸ This is the situation in Lev 5:2–13 and 15:31; cf. Averbeck, “טָמֵא,” *NIDOTTE* 2:365–76, 366–67; Klawans, *Purity*, 54; Kugler, “Holiness,” 17; Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 5–6. Milgrom notes, “When this occurs, even minor impurities become major ones, polluting the sanctuary from afar” (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 978).

⁵⁹ Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 976–79. Frymer-Kensky is correct to say that the causes of ritual impurity “are contagious, but they are not dangerous,” but only as long as it does not contact holiness (“Pollution,” 403). Robert A. Kugler has argued that the danger expressed in P in Lev 1–16 is not to protect the holy *but the unclean* (“Holiness,” 15). Greek sources also attest to the danger of such breaches and their consequences, though I am not implying that the two systems are identical; cf. *SEG* 6.250, 251; 38.1237; *MAMA* 4.288. E.g.,

entrusted with teaching the people to distinguish between these binaries. And because Second Temple Jews took these laws very seriously, this is one reason significant halakhic purity debates existed in the Second Temple period. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Leviticus does *not* present these binaries of $\text{שקד}/\text{לל}$ and $\text{טמא}/\text{טהר}$ in the same antithetical relationship that scholars prefer—the opposite of שקד is *not* טמא ⁶⁰ but לל .⁶¹ The binaries interact, but they do not form a singular continuum.⁶²

The Material Nature of Ritual and Moral Impurity

In the history of research on ritual and moral purity, scholars have held a range of perspectives on whether impurity is metaphorical, symbolic, or real, often with the (incorrect) assumption that the metaphorical and symbolic views represent “advanced” thinking or cultural development.⁶³ This is tied to Western

an inscription dated to the 3rd century at the entrance of a temple at Astypalaea reads, Ἐς τὸ ἱερόν μὴ ἐσέρπεν ὅστις μὴ ἄγνός ἐστι, ἢ τελεῖ ἢ αὐτῶι ἐν νόῳ ἐσσεῖται, “Anyone who is not clean may not enter the sacred area, or either he ends or will be as such in his mind” (*LSG* 130; my translation); cf. *LSS* 31, 54, 65, 112; Plutarch, *Quaest. Rom.* 27. There were also sometimes temple guardians (ὁ νεοκορός) who assured that only those who were pure or approved could enter (*Quaest. Rom.* 16; Paus. 10.12.5.) and who according to inscriptional evidence held certain rights and privileges (*LSS* 52).

⁶⁰ E.g., Milgrom says, “If we find its [*qādōš*] exact antonym and are able to determine its contextual range, we will be able to declare what *qādōš* is unlike, what it negates and, hence, being the semantic opposite, what it affirms. There can be no doubt that the antonym of *qādōš* ‘holy’ is *tāme* ‘impure’” (*Leviticus 1–16*, 731; cf. Hieke, *Leviticus*, 124–25; Harrington, *Holiness*, 39–40). Harrington notes that Milgrom must argue for the “true antonyms” of “holy” and “impure,” admitting that this departs from the way Leviticus presents it. Moreover, the assumption that “death/life” undergirds the purity system or that it is “symbolic” is not followed by all scholars (cf. Klawans, *Purity*, 56–58, 109). Finally, her analysis of the HB is explicitly representative of later rabbinic views (1). Even so, she misrepresents the “Fathers of Fathers of Impurity” since that chart is not designed to show the continuum between most unclean to most holy, but to show the extent to which impurity affects other things (41, fig. 1.2).

⁶¹ Barr does not identify טמא as the opposite of שקד , though this is how Jenson interprets his diagram (Barr, “Semantics,” 15–16; Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 44).

⁶² In addition to the misrepresentations above, Carl Olson incorrectly claims: “To purify something means to transform it into something holy or sacred from its former status as profane or possibly polluted” (“Purification,” in *Religious Studies*, 196–97).

⁶³ Fiorenza is right to critique this interpretive tendency (“Cultic Language,” 160). As Klawans has more recently surveyed, scholars generally associate the sacrificial cult with primitive literalism, while attributing to the ritual purity system a more advanced, symbolic dimension that is amicable to modern “spiritualized” preferences (*Purity*, 17–48). Yet, ironically, he points out, the two are juxtaposed in Leviticus and exist in complementary relationship in the HB, and argues that we have largely misunderstood later sources such as the DSS, NT, and rabbinic literature.

values that prefer belief over rituals, but for our interest here, it is also a question of efficacy⁶⁴—does purification *do* anything or is it merely symbolic?⁶⁵ And how would someone demonstrate that it does something? These questions are understandably analyzed and answered from an *etic* perspective since the question of efficacy is taken for granted at the *emic* level.⁶⁶ Additionally, labeling something a “ritual” has contributed to the problem because, as Bell observes, most ritual scholars assume a disjunction between belief and action, one reason that *outsiders* may refer to it as *mindless* ritual and why she prefers “ritualization” over “ritual.”⁶⁷

RS scholars are now convinced that rituals *are* effective behaviors within their social construct, but the question is *how*.⁶⁸ Those who approach rituals symbolically do not view them as *physically* efficacious since a ritual’s

⁶⁴ For more on the issues surrounding and approaches to efficacy see, Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, “Efficacy,” in *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, SHR 114-I (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 523–31; cf. Olson, “Ritual,” in *Religious Studies*, 206–10.

⁶⁵ According to Talal Asad, the positing of a disjunction between thought and action occurred during the Renaissance when previously this separation did not exist. The *ODCC* remarks, “The rationalism of the 18th cent. contributed largely to the indifference towards Baptism in the Continental Protestant Churches as well as in the C of E” (s.v. “Baptism”). As Jon P. Mitchell explains, the influence of Michel Foucault in turning scholarly attention to the genealogies of research (i.e., understanding how the culture and context of scholars informs their theorizing) has shifted the discussion from “ritual” to “ritualization” for some. See, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 19–20, 55–79; Jon P. Mitchell, “From Ritual to Ritualization,” in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*, ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 377–84.

⁶⁶ It is usually the case that insiders are “blind” to their own cultural systems. As Catherine Bell notes, “The structured environment [of ritualization] provides those in it with an experience of the objective reality of the schemes. The agents of ritualization do not see how they project this schematically qualified environment or how they reembody those same schemes through the physical experience of moving about within its spatial and temporal dimensions. The goal of ritualization as such is completely circular.” See Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81. On the issues related to emic/etic, see, Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999).

⁶⁷ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 19; *Ritual*, 80–83; Mitchell, “From Ritual,” 377–84; cf. Roy E. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2014), 6; Gerhard van den Heever, “A Multiplicity of Washing Rites and a Multiplicity of Experiences,” *R&T* 21.1–2 (2014): 142–58.

⁶⁸ Catherine Bell, “The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power,” *JRitSt* 4 (1990): 299–313, 299.

“power” lies in what it *communicates* not what it does.⁶⁹ Yet as Jon P. Mitchell explains, this semiotic approach to ritual “rests on a prior separation of action from thought, which is then resolved, with thought triumphant, in ritual.”⁷⁰ Roy E. Gane demonstrates just this when he says, “ritual activity functions on the ‘cognitive task level’ to *bridge the gap* between the material domain, in which the activity is performed, and the *nonmaterial* domain, in which the ritual impurity resides, in order to affect the impurity.”⁷¹ He goes on to say, “[a]s a *nonmaterial* entity, ritual impurity is *inaccessible to interaction with the material world* and to empirical investigation.”⁷² Thus, when he says that ritual action “affects the impurity,” there is no *real* impurity; it is merely cognitive.⁷³

⁶⁹ In objection to the semiotic approach, Frits Staal goes to the other extreme in calling them “meaningless.” Rituals do not communicate at all but are “pure activity”—meanings are only later attached to actions. See, Frits Staal, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual,” *Numen* 26 (1979): 2–22, 21.

⁷⁰ Mitchell, “From Ritual,” 379. Similarly, Bell notes the common misunderstanding that “[r]itual is . . . thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas” (Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 19, emphasis original; cf. Bell, *Ritual*, 80). This perspective of ritual is regularly applied in modern discourse on “baptism.” That is, the application of water by whatever mode does not actually *do* anything beyond represent another message, whether a public confession of faith or deeper symbolism supposedly expressed in Rom 6:3–4. In fact, were it not for traditional practice or dominical command (i.e., Matt 28:18–20), many would dispense with the practice, and some have, like the Salvation Army. Indeed, many who retain the practice, if pushed, would assert that salvation is based on one’s confession, not the application of water in “baptism.” Edward Shils articulates this line of thinking when he says “logically, therefore, ‘beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals however, could not exist without beliefs’” (as cited by Bell).

⁷¹ Gane, *Ritual*, 6. Dru Johnson misunderstands Gane who, while he does cite Bell, does *not* claim her influence on his methodology. See Dru Johnson, *Knowledge by Ritual: A Biblical Prolegomenon to Sacramental Theology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 55.

⁷² Gane, *Ritual*, 6–7, emphasis mine. This view aligns with Rappaport’s insistence that a ritual’s “formal” characteristic implies a contrast “with the physically efficacious [*sic*]” and that most accept “lack of material efficacy to be one of ritual’s defining features” (*Ritual*, 46–50). Gane follows Frits Staal to analyze rituals according to their “pure activity” (Staal) or “intrinsic activity” (Gane).

⁷³ While contemporary views of “Christian baptism” generally affirm the necessity of the rite, many traditions struggle to articulate just what it does beyond serving as a symbol for initiation or “dying and rising.” Often it is said to be “an outward symbol of an inward grace.” If one concludes that it does something, then it must be “necessary” for salvation. If it is symbolic, then one is freed of determining exactly what it does, but then one faces the problem of explaining why it is treated as a “necessary” traditional practice. Lim’s explanation of Klawans on this point illustrates the point nicely: for John the immerser and Paul, “the ritual was considered to have some power. Otherwise, John would have considered repentance as such to be sufficient for effecting atonement, without the necessity of performing a ritual act” (“Towards a Description,” 20).

The ritual activity only *communicates* what could otherwise be verbalized, “I am unclean and wish to become clean.” Thus, since rituals do not *do* anything but only convey messages, the efficacy of purification rituals is not located in material cause and effect in the same way that soap kills bacteria, but it is only “effective” at the cognitive level.

Yet, one might legitimately ask, if impurity has no interaction with the material world, why do our sources attest to people using material means to deal with supposedly immaterial impurity? Moreover, how and why does the *later* cognitive meaning of purification come to be attached to the *earlier* “pure activity” of sprinkling water, sounding a copper bell, and passing a censer and torch through an Esagila temple?⁷⁴ Finally, what is the difference between *thinking* a temple (or oneself) to be unclean and it actually being unclean?

An alternative to this Cartesian approach followed here is Bell’s application of Pierre Bourdieu’s “practice theory” to ritual.⁷⁵ In her view, belief and action are *one* and ritualization considers these behaviors as a strategic “form of social practice.”⁷⁶ Though preceding Bell’s work, Walter Burkert agrees that “[p]urification is a social process. To belong to a group is to conform to its standards of purity; the reprobate, the outsider, and the rebel are unclean.”⁷⁷ Viewed in this way, ritual purity practices do not just express belief, they also create it.⁷⁸ As applied to the Esagila temple, belief and action begin and end together—since the impurity is real, it requires action to address it. Thus, Bell says,

The social or cultural context of ritual does not exist separately from the act; the context is created in the act. In other words, ritualization is *historical* practice—historically structured, historically effective, and history-producing. . . . interpretation consists of restoring ritual’s

⁷⁴ Gane does not merely adopt Staal’s theory because he states that the “‘cognitive task’ component should not only be acknowledged as an *a priori*, but must necessarily be incorporated into the theory and analysis of ritual as a key criterion for defining ritual unity and boundaries” (*Ritual*, 5). By contrast, Staal states, “A widespread but erroneous assumption about ritual is that it consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else. . . . There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds [i.e., ritual performers] when they are engaged in performing ritual” (“Meaninglessness,” 3). I do not disagree with the insistence that the “cognitive level” is involved and that interpretation is attached to rituals, but as Bell has argued, it is with difficulty that one can cleanly separate or emphasize the importance of the belief over ritual (*Ritual Theory*, *passim*).

⁷⁵ Mitchell, “From Ritual,” 380. For a recent survey of the numerous approaches to ritual, cf. Michael Stausberg, “Introduction,” in *Theorizing Rituals: Annotated Bibliography of Ritual Theory, 1966–2005*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, SHR 114-2 (Brill, 2007), ix–xix, ix; Grimes, *Ritual Studies*, 32–33; Uro, “Ritual,” 220–32; Klingbeil, *Bridging*, 23–44.

⁷⁶ Bell, “Ritual Body,” 302.

⁷⁷ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 76.

⁷⁸ Heever, “Multiplicity,” 142–58.

practical necessity—the material (economic and social) conditions of the production of these practices and the collective understanding of the practical function they serve.⁷⁹

Whether one can *scientifically* demonstrate that ritual and moral impurity are material in nature in the same way that we can with bacteria is beside the point—the sources ostensibly treat them as real.⁸⁰ For example, Num 19:13 says, כי מי נדה לא זרק עליו טמא יהיה עוד טמאתו בו. Whatever comprises the impurity in view, it *remains on* the individual because the water of purification was not applied to remove it. Moreover, it is passed *by touch*.⁸¹

Second Temple sources also attest to the materiality of the “spiritual” world.⁸² Of course, these views are often associated with Stoicism or as a wider feature of Hellenistic culture.⁸³ Yet, the similarity of thought between Jewish

⁷⁹ Bell, “Ritual Body,” 310, emphasis original.

⁸⁰ So, Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist: A Portrait Based on Biblical and Extra-Biblical Sources, Including Recent Archeological Finds* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 94. I am focusing on ritual here. For the material nature of moral impurity, see the discussion in Klawans, *Impurity*, 32–34; Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 10–15; Yair Furstenberg, “Controlling Impurity: The Natures of Impurity in Second Temple Debates,” *Dine Israel* 30 (2015): 163–96. From the perspective of Greek Religion, Ginouvès calls ritual impurity “une tache physique, même invisible” (*Balaneutikè*, 407). Similarly, Burkert notes that “Modern interpreters, seeking to clarify the ideas which accompany the ritual [of purification], prefer to speak of a *material conception of pollution*” (*Greek Religion*, 87, emphasis mine). As an analogy, it is only recently that humans have the capacity to analyze bacteria and viruses, which were previously outside the bounds of “empirical investigation.” From an ancient perspective, they had a basis of empirical analysis that supported a material understanding of impurity (whether we agree with it): illness, death, famine, flooding, plagues, etc. I do not mean to detract from his otherwise insightful study.

⁸¹ E.g., Lev 5:2–3; 15:5, 7, 10–12; 15:19, 21–24, 27.

⁸² Unlike authors like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics who directly theorize about the material makeup of reality, Second Temple Jewish authors approach the question differently. That is, one may discern their beliefs from the manner in which the sources speak of such things. For example, Philo says in reference of Abraham’s guests (Gen 18) that they were angels that had μεταβαλόντων ἀπὸ πνευματικῆς καὶ ψυχοειδοῦς οὐσίας εἰς ἀνθρωπόμορφον ἰδέαν, “changed from their spirit-like and soul-like substance into human-like form” (*Abr.* 1.22 §113 translation mine) also noting that these incorporeal beings (ἄσωμάτους ὄντας) transformed into human form (*Abr.* 1.23 §118; cf. 1.22 §107; 1.23 §114–16; cf. 1 Enoch 19.1–3).

⁸³ Inna Kupreeva remarks, “Matter (*ousia*) is a bodily principle without qualities, formless and infinitely divisible. . . The action of divine principle on matter involves the total blending of the body of the principle and the body of the matter: thus body can go through body, and two bodies can occupy the same place.” See, Inna Kupreeva, “Matter,” *OEAGR* 4:370–73, 372. See also, Richard Bett, “Stoicism,” *OEAGR* 6:389–95; Georgia L. Irby-Massie, “Physics,” *OEAGR* 5:279–84; M. C. Howatson, ed., “Soul,” in *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Aristotle, *De an.*,

and Hellenistic sources leads John R. Levison to conclude that the Holy Spirit “was not understood in static terms; it could be construed as a reality akin to the Stoic *pneuma*, the *pneumata* that inspired sibyls and priestesses, even Socrates’ *daemon*. Though rooted in the Jewish scriptures, in other words, conceptions of the spirit were fluid and indebted to Greco-Roman culture.”⁸⁴ While it is expected that a Jewish author such as Philo will express a Stoic understanding, IQS teaches that two spirits rule humanity in the “two ways” of evil and good.⁸⁵ A metaphorical view of these spirits is difficult to maintain when it says that God will “extinguish every perverse spirit from the inward parts *of the flesh* (מִתְּכַמֵּי בִשְׂרָר), cleansing from every wicked deed by a holy spirit.”⁸⁶ Rather than posit Stoic influence on the authors of the scrolls, it makes more sense that a material understanding of the spiritual realm was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean world.⁸⁷

The material nature of the “spiritual” world also explains how evil spirits could have intercourse with women,⁸⁸ how David’s music could soothe Saul from his evil spirit,⁸⁹ how Tobias could ward off a demon by burning fish gall and liver,⁹⁰ how Eleazar could draw out a demon through someone’s nose by means of a root,⁹¹ how demons could control people or animals,⁹² or how Jesus could *feel* healing power leave him.⁹³ Additionally, the cost of written

passim, but esp. 1.1–5 §§402A–411B, which outlines preceding views, and 2.1, §§412A–413A.

⁸⁴ John R. Levison, “Spirit, Holy,” *EDEJ*, 1252–55, 1252.

⁸⁵ E.g., IQS III, 13–IV, 26

⁸⁶ IQS IV, 20–21 (trans. M. Wise, emphasis mine). On this, A. R. C. Leaney follows Licht’s suggestion that מִתְּכַמֵּי בִשְׂרָר means “from the *tissues* of his flesh,” thus, “God will purify the human body, destroying every spirit of evil *from the tissues of his flesh*.” See, A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 158, emphasis mine.

⁸⁷ Other primary sources include: 1 Enoch 15.4, 6; Philo, *Deus*, 1.1–3 §273; Seneca, *Ep.* 41; also compare Deut 34:9 with Cicero, *Div.* 1.114 and Plutarch, *Def. orac.* §432E–F. For a recent explanation of how this impacts Gentile inclusion, see Thiessen, *Paul*, 105–60. This need not imply that *everyone* held these views, of course, only that they are diversely attested.

⁸⁸ 1 Enoch 6.1–5; 15.7–16.1; 106.13–17; cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* §415B–C.

⁸⁹ 1 Sam 16:23.

⁹⁰ Tob 6:1–8; 8:1–3; he was instructed by an angel no less!

⁹¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2.5 §45–49.

⁹² Mark 5:11–13; cf. Hippocrates’s “sacred disease,” which scholars believe was epilepsy. While Hippocrates denied its divine origin, his account attests to widespread belief that the spiritual realm impacted human behavior and his objection is not based on a denial that the gods exist but on the impious application of purifications and incantations instead of taking the ill to a sanctuary (*Morb. sacr.* 4.33–60; 21.1–26).

⁹³ Luke 8:46.

records, animal sacrifices, and the construction of associated structures such as ritual baths (dug out of bedrock!) or temples, with the accompanying debates concerning what conditions are required for ritual purification to be considered effective, point to the social value invested in purity. It matters little whether *we* find these accounts plausible and it does not matter whether we can prove all of these things happened. Rather, these examples demonstrate that the authors and their audiences conceived of the “spiritual” world as material.⁹⁴

Thus, ritually unclean people believed that they had contracted a real, material impurity passable to others by touch, not something symbolic or metaphorical.⁹⁵ Perhaps, ritual washing *also* conveyed or implied an emotive sense of “unworthiness” or a need to show God or the gods “respect,” but this is derivative from the primary meaning and represents secondary level theorizing about it.⁹⁶ Similarly, when individuals or the nation committed transgressions, people believed that moral impurity materially collected at the tabernacle/temple altar, inside the holy place, on the tabernacle/temple itself, and for egregious sins, on the land.⁹⁷ A final piece of evidence that impurity was material in nature comes from the Qumran sectarians who apparently kept track of the impurities they had contracted so they could purify separately for each one.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The irony is that “ritual” purity is a categorical misnomer and Ginsburskaya’s proposal to refer to it as “physical impurity” and “sin-impurity” is more

⁹⁴ For numerous other examples and further discussion see, Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World*, Symposium Series 12 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1984), *passim*; Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 9–12; Klawans, *Impurity*, 32–34; Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan, “Introduction,” in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan, Dynamics in the History of Religion 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–46, 16; Guyénot, *Jésus*, 69.

⁹⁵ E.g., Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 19; Rappaport, *Ritual*, 29–32, 46–50. While certain impurities such as skin disease or menstrual blood are visible, others, such as corpse impurity or the uncleanness that remained on objects once the unclean material was removed, are not. Analogously, modern Western society regularly avoids contamination from *invisible* bacteria and other contaminants through washing the hands with soap. This is modern “ritual” is tied to a particular scientific worldview of human biology just as ritual purity was tied to a particular ancient worldview in which people believed the spiritual world to be active. Of course, I do not imply that *everyone* held this view.

⁹⁶ Commonly cited examples are 4Q274 and 4Q512.

⁹⁷ Note that Lev 16:16 describes that the tent of meeting is described as **השכן אתם בתוך טמאתם**. Lev 16:22 describes the goat as carrying (**נשא**) their iniquity *and* the person who leads the goat out is ritually unclean according to Lev 16:26. Finally, Lev 16:30 mentions that *the people* are purified from the contamination of moral impurity.

⁹⁸ Werrett, *Ritual*, 246–47.

accurate.⁹⁹ Ritual purity practices tell us that Second Temple Jews believed that their physical and moral condition had an impact on their individual and corporate relationship with God and one another. They did not mindlessly maintain the purity rules for their own sake but rather because these practices integrated with shared assumptions about divine presence and the conditions under which human-divine interaction might safely and appropriately take place. As Bell notes, “Ritualization [e.g., ritual purity practices] cannot turn a group of individuals into a community if they have no other relationship or interest in common.”¹⁰⁰ What is fascinating about these practices is not their unity but their diversity. This underscores that the practice of ritual purity constituted a site upon which power, prestige, and *faithfulness* were negotiated. Disagreement was not centered around *whether* ritual purity was necessary for divine-human interaction, but rather on *how* it should be best practiced.

The relevance of this to John the immerser and early followers of Jesus will become clearer later on. But, it gives us a frame of reference to ask two questions. If, on the one hand, John’s immersion *is* a form of ritual purification, what sort of impurity/impurities could he have in view and why do the Gospel writers not mention them? If, on the other hand, John’s immersion had nothing to do with ritual purification, in light of Bell’s approach to “ritualization,” what strategic social practice is John advocating through calling people to immersion? We now consider possible reasons for disagreement on purity issues, which will be instrumental in addressing these questions as well as the supporting the arguments of the subsequent chapters.

Room for Debate: How Normative Texts Result in Diverse Practices

With Second Temple groups and individuals all depending on the same authoritative source, one might assume that there would be unanimity in application of the ritual purity system. However, in addition to the fact that people regularly interpret the same text differently, the HB does not provide detailed rulings on every potential case. Indeed Moshe J. Bernstein and Shlomo A. Koyfman observe that “Any Jew or group of Jews observing Jewish law during the Second Temple era would have needed a way to supplement the legislation

⁹⁹ Ginsburskaya, “Ritual,” 4. Changing our terminology on this point may also rectify the negative connotations that scholars often attach to “ritual purity,” a point noted in E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law From Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (London: SCM press, 1990), 245.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 222.

of the Hebrew Bible in order to determine how to lead their lives.”¹⁰¹ So, interpreters used a variety of exegetical techniques to apply these authoritative texts to “new” or previously undiscussed scenarios.¹⁰² Of course, I do not rule out the potential of local influence (e.g., Greco-Roman, Egyptian, etc) on how Second Temple Jews maintained or conceived of ritual purity, but identifying these are beyond the scope of this study.¹⁰³

With regard to the second reason for interpretive diversity, the HB is neither a handbook nor a comprehensive articulation of ritual purity rules. While Leviticus comes closest to outlining the purity system, significant gaps exist for which there are no clear instructions as to how people should respond.¹⁰⁴ On this point, Klawans notes of Milgrom’s work on Leviticus that he “is willing to infer the existence of all sorts of purity rules, even though they are not explicitly stated in the Hebrew Bible” (because he approaches it a system).¹⁰⁵ In a similar way, Harrington observes of rabbinic literature: “it is my conclusion that much of what *appears* to be innovation in contrast to biblical principles is actually a valid, astute reading of Scripture itself.”¹⁰⁶ I am less

¹⁰¹ Moshe J. Bernstein and Shlomo A. Koyfman, “The Interpretation of Biblical Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Forms and Methods,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze, Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 61–87, 62.

¹⁰² Cf. Hannah K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis: Biblical Foundations* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 41–43; Werrett, *Ritual*, 304–5. For a recent study on interpretive strategies employed in the DSS, see Bernstein and Koyfman, “Interpretation,” 61–87; cf. VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 293–308; George J. Brooke, “Biblical Interpretation in the Qumran Scrolls and the New Testament,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence A. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 60–73. Additionally, Sanders observes that the Qumran community allowed for interpretive revelation (*Jewish Law*, 126–27, 130). The revelatory dimension is evident in the distinction made between הַנְּטִיפוֹת and הַנְּגִלוֹת laws (cf. 1QS V, 11–12). Also, numerous explicit examples exist in the Mishnah and Talmud when it is asked, “From where does Rabbi so-and-so derive the rule?” (e.g., m. Arak 4:4; m. Yad 4:3; b. Šabb. 7:3; 19:1; b. Pesah 7:7; b. Yoma 7:5).

¹⁰³ But see Yonatan Adler, “Hellenistic Origins,” 1–21; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 264–71. Lawrence proposes that reflection on the J-source’s description of the theophany at Sinai is a logical point of origin for the development of ritual purity practices (*Washing*, 196–99).

¹⁰⁴ For example, while Scripture outlines numerous details regarding a person who has skin disease, it does not ever explain what should happen if someone touches such a person (Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution,” 400); or another, “[i]t is assumed that the menstruant must bathe after her week of impurity since even those who touch her must bathe, Lev. 15.19” (Harrington, *Purity*, 137).

¹⁰⁵ Klawans, *Purity*, 28.

¹⁰⁶ Harrington, *Impurity*, 1, emphasis mine.

interested in determining whether legitimate “developments” occur as I am in observing that Second Temple practices are consistently based on the HB.

The implications of this are significant. A variety of practices are explainable depending on whether (1) one insists on observing only explicit rules stated in the HB (or the Pentateuch if a Sadducee),¹⁰⁷ (2) one developed an “oral torah” to “gap fill” or clarify ambiguity (e.g., the Pharisees),¹⁰⁸ (3) one applied ritual purity rules to a specific context such as the Qumran community or diaspora communities, or (4) one followed a “popular level” application of purity practices.¹⁰⁹ Of course, other scenarios are possible. Additionally, Snoek’s work discussed above is relevant here as well: groups draw boundaries or establish distinctions around their *similarities*, around the practices they all agree are important.¹¹⁰ Thus, when one group claims that another is “unclean” or “unfaithful,” this is a *relative*, not an *absolute* judgment.¹¹¹ From a group member’s perspective, others groups are “unclean” because they do not properly purify themselves or they are “excessive” in their unnecessary practices.¹¹² Yet, from the perspective of an outside observer, all of the groups are practicing ritual purity though they may disagree in their application of it.

As we turn to the diversity of ritual purity practices in the Second Temple period, it is important to transfer Barr’s observation of semantics to this discussion: “The diachrony which is most important for semantic studies, however, is not a historical tracing of individual items, but a diachronic succession of synchronic states.”¹¹³ This principle assists our understanding in two ways. First, the systematic nature of ritual purity is maintained in such a way as to allow diversity, while not also giving the impression that ritual purity is an amorphous, evolving being. Second, it reminds us that when we consider diachronic changes in the use of a word (or ritual), these changes are integrated

¹⁰⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.16; Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 100, 107–8, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 125–30; cf. Harrington, “Halakah,” 74–89; Margin G. Abegg, “19. Ordinances: 4Q159, 4Q513–514,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, ed. Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Edward M. Cook, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 230–31.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lim, “Towards a Description,” 11–14.

¹¹⁰ Snoek, “Similarity,” 53–67; cf. the discussion above (p. ?).

¹¹¹ Frevel and Nihan, “Introduction,” 11; van den Heever, “Multiplicity,” 142–58. As an example from QMMT, note the repeated “we have determined” (אָנְהָנוּ אָוּמְרִים or אָנְהָנוּ חֹשְׁבִים) related to the disputed halakhic issues.

¹¹² Charles Perrot says for example, “Ces rites d’ablution [of Mark 7:1–4], séparaient désormais le pur du peuple du pays et a fortiori ‘le juste’ du ‘pécheur’ au sens socio-religieux, c’est-à-dire celui qui est toujours dans l’incapacité de vivre selon la pureté rituelle exigée par la Loi (cf. Mc 2, 13–17)” (*Rites*, 24). Sanders suggests, however, that the “learned and pious” only considered non-group members as “sinners” if they disregarded the “major biblical laws” (*Jewish Law*, 128).

¹¹³ Barr, “Semantics,” 17.

into a larger system(s) that is only discernible from a synchronic perspective. Thus, it is insufficient to look narrowly at changes throughout time without also considering how such semantic or ritual changes relate to specific historical contexts.

Ritual Purity and Its Diversity in the Second Temple Period

Now that we have surveyed the ritual purity system in the HB and potential reasons for its diverse application, we now consider a variety of issues that scholars raise in objection to Second Temple purity practices, with special attention on John the immerser. As the introduction alluded, many objections are based on a narrow or inaccurate understanding of ritual purity and the assumption that a monolithic, “orthodox” conception of ritual purity existed. From this, scholars identify supposed “deviation,” “extra” purifications, or even claim that certain practices represent a protest or repudiation of the temple cult. Not only do I disagree with this assumption, but more traction may be gained by approaching ritual purity as an expression of faithfulness to God (i.e., ritualization) that is variously defined by diverse groups.

To illustrate the point with a contemporary example, it is common among certain evangelical groups to abstain from alcohol even though it is not proscribed by Scripture. In fact, alcohol consumption is not only assumed by NT authors, but it is central to the so-called Eucharist. Nevertheless, abstinence from alcohol is perceived as an expression of one’s faith (or the faith of an institution) as it is included in a variety of denominational membership requirements and institutional standards of living. The logic typically offered to defend this is that some people are prone to alcohol abuse and since it is “worldly” to both consume it and financially support ethically questionable companies that produce it, one should avoid it completely. In short, if consuming alcohol in moderation is good, complete abstinence is better or even more holy. In a similar vein, if some ritual purity is good, more is better.¹¹⁴

If we approach ritual purity from this perspective, especially in light of the ambiguities inherent in our sources, the diversity which defines the Second Temple period is more comprehensible. Just as there are many modern Christians who consume alcohol with no sense of being less faithful, so certain ancient people likely thought that their minimal observance of ritual purity (relatively defined) posed no issue for them.¹¹⁵ Similarly, just as modern Christians who fully abstain from alcohol have a sense of being more holy or faithful than

¹¹⁴ So Harrington, “Halakah,” 80.

¹¹⁵ Lim, “Towards a Description,” 12; Murphy, *John*, 109; Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 4.

those who do not, so also ancient people who rigorously practiced ritual purity likely thought the same.¹¹⁶

Specific Impurities and General Washings

Leviticus 11–15 discusses specific causes of impurity, such as animal carcasses, childbirth, skin disease, clothing and buildings affected by fungus, and genital discharges.¹¹⁷ Because no specific impurity is identified in association with John's immersion, many scholars conclude that it cannot be an act of ritual purification.¹¹⁸ The reasoning goes something like this:

- 1) people immersed due to specific impurities
- 2) no specific impurity is mentioned in connection with John's immersion while the Gospels appear to provide other reasons (i.e., repentance, forgiveness of sins)
- 3) thus, John's audience was not unclean and the purpose of washing must be related to something other than ritual purity.

Yet, if this logic is sound, it is odd that Josephus would interpret John's immersion this way and that John's Gospel would associate it with ritual washing.¹¹⁹ What are we to make of this supposed discrepancy? The veracity of both points 1 and 2 depend on numerous interpretive assumptions and *may* be true, but even if they are, point 3 still would not follow. Rather, this logic reflects a misunderstanding of ritual purity and its diverse understanding in the Second Temple period.

¹¹⁶ Sanders suggests that "the Pharisees had a desire for purity *for its own sake*. Purity symbolized not just the priesthood, but Godliness" (*Jewish Law*, 192, emphasis original, cf. 245).

¹¹⁷ Interestingly, these sources of impurity are all attested in Greco-Roman Religions; cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 78; Parker, *Miasma*, passim; cf. Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 52.

¹¹⁸ E.g., Webb believes John's baptism to cleanse *moral* contagion alone and claims that cleansing *physical* impurity (i.e., ritual impurity) "does not appear to have been associated with his baptismal ministry" (*John*, 196).

¹¹⁹ John 3:25; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2 §§116–17; Murphy, *John*, 110. Even if one might interpret John's Gospel as claiming the superiority of John's immersion over Jewish ritual purification, the two are classified together.

No Official List of Impurities

For one thing, because Leviticus is not a purity handbook, other potential sources of impurity are possible beyond those explicitly mentioned. Not only are “developments” discernible in the HB, but others also occur in Second Temple literature.¹²⁰ For example, while Leviticus mentions human corpses as a source of ritual impurity, details on how to handle it are not provided until Num 5 and 19. Moreover, the ritual impurity of idols,¹²¹ liquids in general,¹²² oil,¹²³ saliva,¹²⁴ urine,¹²⁵ sweat,¹²⁶ blood,¹²⁷ excrement,¹²⁸ foodstuff,¹²⁹ the deaf,¹³⁰ and non-Jews¹³¹ among others are also variously attested in Second

¹²⁰ Lawrence lists “prayer, hand-washing, and defecation” as “new contexts or uses for washing which were unknown in the Hebrew Bible” (*Washing*, 79); cf. Wright, “Jewish Ritual Baths,” 205. On the side of moral impurity, Klawans discusses several developments (*Impurity*, 43–66). Lim also notes the new “wood offering” in Neh 10:35 and 13:31 (Lim, “Towards a Description,” 14). See also, Harrington who discusses new developments in the DSS (“Halakah,” 80).

¹²¹ Ezek 36:25; 4Q271 2, 8–9.

¹²² 4Q396 1–2 II, 6–9 (4QMMT B 55–58); cf. the heavily fragmented 4Q513 XIII, 3–5; m. Ṭehar. 4:9–10; m. Makš. 1:1.

¹²³ *J.W.* 2.8.3 §123.

¹²⁴ Saliva is unclean in Lev 15:8 because it originates from an already unclean person (cf. m. Ṭehar. 4:5–6; Leaney, *Rule*, 206). 1QS 7:13 and *J.W.* 2.8.9 §147 are ambiguous since these are potentially explainable on the basis of offense as b. Ber. 24a–b attests.

¹²⁵ m. Yoma 3:2; m. Ṭehar. 4:5; m. Makš. 6:7.

¹²⁶ Possibly Ezek 44:18; though m. Makš. 6:7 rules the opposite.

¹²⁷ 1QM 9:8–9; 4Q271 2, 8–9. On the other hand, Wright suggests that the prohibition against blood in the HB is not due to ritual purity but holiness (Wright, “Unclean,” 6:736).

¹²⁸ VanderKam notes that “a toilet in Locus 51 has been identified—next to a ritual bath” (*Dead Sea*, 113). Excrement is discussed in the following sources: Deut 23:12–13 [23:14]; Ezek 4:14; 4Q265 6:2; 7 I, 3; 11Q19 46:13–16; 4Q472a (though the reading is uncertain); Philo, *Spec.* 1.74–75; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.9 §§147–49; b. San. 17b; b. Ber. 62a. According to m. Yoma 3:2, defecation required immersion during the Second Temple period. Moreover, Ronny Reich associated the Qumran ritual bath at locus 138 with those entering the site on the basis of its location and subsequent modification and suggested that one of its purposes was to purify those who had gone to use the toilet (*Jewish Ritual Baths*, 164–70). Of course, Deuteronomy does not specifically say that excrement passes ritual impurity, but the fact that unclean things are regularly taken outside the camp suggests it and the practice of Qumran and Josephus’s description of them attest that at least they viewed it so. In fact, Webb follows Wenham in explaining the washings of the sacrificial legs and entrails on the basis of excrement impurity (*John*, 98).

¹²⁹ Lev 11:38; 4Q284a 1, 2–8; 4Q284a 2, 1–5; 4Q394 3–7 I, 6–8 (4QMMT B 6–8); m. Ṭehar. 4:5.

¹³⁰ 4Q396 1–2 II, 3–6 (4QMMT B 52–54)

¹³¹ Josh 22:19; Isa 52:1; 1QS 3:4–5; 5:13–20; 4Q284^a 1.2–8; 11Q19 63.15; 4Q266 5 ii 5–7; Jub. 1:9; 30:13–14; T. Levi 14:6; 16:5; Acts 10:28; *Ant.* 12.3.4 §145; 14.11.5 §285; *J.W.*

Temple and Rabbinic sources that are traceable back to the HB through exegetical reasoning.¹³² The point is that these sources of impurity are more numerous than those mentioned in Leviticus, impurities that are integral to daily life.

No Explicit Mention of Impurity

Second, and more importantly, sources that refer to ritual purification often do not mention a specific impurity being resolved—it is simply unnecessary to mention them because they are quotidian realities.¹³³ Thus, E. P. Sanders notes, “There is a good deal of evidence which indicates that Diaspora Jews washed for religious purposes, though often we cannot say when or for what specific reasons.”¹³⁴ Moreover, it is highly likely that in certain contexts (e.g., entering sacred sites, preparing food, or preparing for prayer) people washed regardless if they were aware of having contracted a specific impurity. For example, the potential to contract uncleanness in public places is high, especially in an urban environment. While jostling about in a marketplace how is one to know whether once contracted an impurity from someone else? For this reason, the author of Mark’s Gospel reports that the Pharisees immersed upon returning from the marketplace *as a general rule*—no specific impurity is mentioned.¹³⁵

1.11.6 §229; 2.8.10 §150; m. Pesah. 8:8; m. Tehar. 5:8; 7:6; m. Nid. 7:3; t. Nid. 9:16; t. Zab. 2:1; Sifra Taz. Neg. par. 1:1; Mes. Zab. par. 1:1; b. Šabb. 83a, 127b; b. Nid. 69b. On Josephus, see the commentary by Todd S. Beall, *Josephus’ Description of the Essenes Illustrated by the Dead Sea Scrolls*, SNTSMS 58 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37.

¹³² At this point, I am not attempting to link these diverse attestations to any one particular group. Rather it is precisely their diversity that I seek to emphasize.

¹³³ Similar modern examples of a complex infrastructure and understanding undergirding a few terse words might include: “I sent you the package yesterday.” “The pizza will be here in 40 minutes.” “The sellers accepted our offer!”

¹³⁴ Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 258–60. Jodi Magness, however, notes that no known diaspora settings attest to the presence of ritual baths (though this is disputed) or chalk stone vessels. She attributes this difference to the “boundaries of the land of Israel.” Of course, she acknowledges that natural bodies of water, fountains, or other baths may have been used. And her conclusions pertain solely to the Second Temple Period, because ritual baths *have* been identified in the diaspora post-70. See Jodi Magness, “Purity Observance among Diaspora Jews in the Roman World,” *Archaeology and Text* 1 (2017): 39–66.

¹³⁵ Mark 7:3: καὶ ἀπ’ ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν. Here, I follow the NA28 rather than the variants, βαπτίζονται and ῥαντίσονται; cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005), 80. Plutarch attests an analogous concern (*Quaest. Rom.* 81). One may legitimately speculate about specific impurities that might have been contracted these scenarios, but none are mentioned. 4Q514 1 I, 1–10 attests a ruling in which no one may eat normal food without immersing first (cf. 4Q414 2; 4Q274; 4Q284). See also, Jacob Milgrom, “Purification Rule,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents*, ed. James H.

Indeed, Aristeeas notes that people in Jerusalem walked in such a manner as to avoid contacting impurity from others.¹³⁶

Other examples where ritual purification occurs without the mention of a specific impurity include: Judith,¹³⁷ Bannus,¹³⁸ Sib. Or.,¹³⁹ the LXX translators among other handwashing examples,¹⁴⁰ “morning bathers,”¹⁴¹ and the Essenes.¹⁴² Moreover, numerous agricultural processing sites throughout Israel contain ritual baths in close proximity to other water facilities.¹⁴³ Whether or not workers had knowingly contracted an impurity, they likely immersed anyway since it required little effort and the prevention of passing an unknown (or forgotten) impurity through the liquid was not worth the risk.¹⁴⁴ There are also ritual baths found (1) at burial sites even though immersion by itself cannot remove corpse impurity,¹⁴⁵ (2) in Greco-Roman style bath houses,¹⁴⁶ (3) on the

Charlesworth, *The Dead Sea Scrolls 1* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 177–79; Harrington, *Purity*, 66.

¹³⁶ Let. Aris. 1.106. Even if much of the historical reliability of the letter is in doubt, it is significant the author and audience would have a frame of reference in which to situate these comments. Cf. m. Šeqal. 8:2, which notes that certain utensils were deemed clean or unclean depending on whether they were found on the path leading to or from the *בית הטבילה*, “house of immersion.”

¹³⁷ Jdt 12:6–9.

¹³⁸ Josephus, *Life* 1.2 §11; cf. Beall, *Josephus' Description*, 34–35.

¹³⁹ Sib. Or. 4.162–65.

¹⁴⁰ Let. Aris. 1.305–6; Exod 30:18–21; Deut 21:1–9; Mark 7:3; *Ant.* 4.8.16 §222; 12.2.13 §106; cf. *Ant.* 3.6.2 §114; 8.3.6 §87; cf. Chilton, *Comparative Handbook*, 232–34. Handwashing is also attested in Greek sources; cf. Homer, *Il.* 24.304; *Od.* 4.48; 17.86. Philoxenes, Aristophanes, Alexis, Archedicos, and Plato also mention it (Ginouvé, *Balaneutikè*, 153; cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 77).

¹⁴¹ Sib. Or. 3.591–93. J. J. Collins dates this text to 160–50 BCE and notes that the text follows Clement, *Protrepticus* 6.70 in reading *χρῶα* “flesh,” whereas the MSS read “hands” (*OTP* 1:356, 375). Cf. Sib. Or. 4.165–66. Here, Collins unnecessarily allows the reified category of “baptism” to influence his analysis: “the baptism of SibOr 4 shows little resemblance to the ritual washings of the Essenes” because it resembles a “baptism of repentance” like that practiced by John the immerser (*OTP* 1:388, n. e2).

¹⁴² Josephus *J.W.* 2.8.5 §129; 2.8.7 §138; 2.8.12 §159; cf. Beall, *Josephus' Description*, 55–57, 73, 75, 109–10.

¹⁴³ Since there is nothing to clearly link these agricultural sites to Qumran or the Essenes, this appears to be a shared perspective. See, Yonatan Adler, “Second Temple Period Ritual Baths Adjacent to Agricultural Installations: The Archaeological Evidence in Light of the Halakhic Sources,” *JSJ* 59 (2008): 62–72; “Archaeology,” 92–96.

¹⁴⁴ An analogous modern example is the modern practice of washing hands regularly. Because we cannot possibly keep track of everything we might touch in the course of a day that could present hygienic danger, we simply wash our hands anyway.

¹⁴⁵ Yonatan Adler, “Ritual Baths Adjacent to Tombs: An Analysis of the Archaeological Evidence in Light of the Halakhic Sources,” *JJS* 40 (2009): 55–73; “Archaeology,” 97–106.

¹⁴⁶ Reich, “Hot Bath-House,” 102–7; Adler, “Archaeology,” 107–13.

roads leading to Jerusalem, such as at Alon Shevut where there was no known settlement,¹⁴⁷ and (4) at pottery production sites.¹⁴⁸

Moreover, there are numerous ritual baths at the Temple Mount's southern and western areas, baths that Paul may have used according to Acts 21:26,¹⁴⁹ and the purpose of which scholars have struggled to explain.¹⁵⁰ According to m. Yoma 3:2, "A person does not enter the courtyard for the service, *even if he is clean*, unless he immerses."¹⁵¹ Although they are few in number, some Second Temple synagogues feature ritual baths,¹⁵² such as the one at Gamala, the identity of which has survived recent scrutiny,¹⁵³ that also had an installation for handwashing as well.¹⁵⁴ There is also the synagogue associated with the Theodotus inscription found in the Ophel area of Jerusalem, which specifically mentions "water installations,"¹⁵⁵ and the lesser known synagogue just north of the old city that is dated to the 1st century BCE and which had a

¹⁴⁷ As Susan Haber points out, this type of ritual bath complex was designed for festival travelers. Moreover, she proposes that Jesus's arrival seven days in advance of the festivals indicates that he like all others came early to ensure that he was pure from corpse impurity since the purification process for this took seven days. See, Susan Haber, "Going up to Jerusalem: Pilgrimage, Purity, and the Historical Jesus," in *Travel and Religion in Antiquity*, ed. Philip A. Harland, Studies in Christianity and Judaism 21 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), 49–67, 58; cf. Adler, "Archaeology," 121–22.

¹⁴⁸ Adler, "Archaeology," 129–33.

¹⁴⁹ David E. Aune, "Paul, Ritual Purity, and the Ritual Baths South of the Temple Mount (Acts 21:15–28)," in *Jesus, Gospel Tradition and Paul in the Context of Jewish and Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 287–320.

¹⁵⁰ Eyal Regev, "The Ritual Baths Near the Temple Mount and Extra-Purification Before Entering the Temple Courts," *IEJ* 55 (2005): 194–204; Yonatan Adler, "The Ritual Baths Near the Temple Mount and Extra-Purification Before Entering the Temple Courts: A Reply to Eyal Regev," *IEJ* 56 (2006): 209–15; "Archaeology," 114–20.

¹⁵¹ Trans. Jacob Neusner.

¹⁵² Adler, "Archaeology," 74–91. Ronny Reich and Marcela Zapata-Meza note, "Miqva'ot have been discovered next to *all* excavated synagogues dating to the late Second Temple period"; they lists Masada, Herodium, Gamla, Jericho, and Modi'in ("Domestic Miqva'ot," 124, emphasis mine). See also, Ehud Netzer, "Ancient Ritual Baths (Miqva'ot) in Jericho," *Jerusalem Cathedra* 2 (1982): 106–19.

¹⁵³ Lidia D. Matassa, *Invention of the First-Century Synagogue*, ed. Jason M. Silverman and J. Murray Watson (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 187–210.

¹⁵⁴ E.g., Danny Syon and Yavor Zvi, "Gamala," *NEAEHL* 5:1739–742; Shmaryahu Gutman, "Gamala," *NEAEHL* 2:459–63.

¹⁵⁵ Lee I. Levine, *Jerusalem: Portrait of the City in the Second Temple Period (538 B.C.E. – 70 C.E.)* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2002), 322; cf. K. C. Hanson, "The Theodotus Inscription," <https://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/greek/theodotus.html>.

ritual bath.¹⁵⁶ The communal context of these examples are explainable on a *precautionary* approach to ritual purity without the need to identify what specific impurities were in view when people used the baths. While it is likely true that specific sources of impurity motivated the installation of these facilities, we need not assume that the baths were only used when a person knew they were unclean. Simply being in public posed enough reason to immerse “just because.”

Additionally, among diaspora communities, there is some evidence that Jews maintained ritual purity with no mention of what specific impurity they may have contracted.¹⁵⁷ For example, *Ant.* 14.10.23 §258 and Acts 16:13 both mention δῆλιόν ἕρμα next to the sea and a river respectively. Whether or not these are synagogue *buildings* is irrelevant for the point being made here. The association of prayer with the fact that Paul could expect to find a gathering *by water* and that the government protection extended to the Jews is recognized ἐκείνη ὁ δὲ δῆλιόν ἕρμα suggests that ritual purification preceded prayer or was incorporated into Sabbath worship. And I have also already mentioned above the cases Jdt 12:6–9 and Sib. Or. 4:162–63.

Conclusion

Of course, all of the “new developments” of the examples cited above, despite the lack of mention of specific impurities, are explainable from the perspective of Second Temple Jews working out the practical application of purity halakhah to real life. For this reason, descriptors such as “new developments”¹⁵⁸ or “going beyond the witness of Scripture,”¹⁵⁹ while technically correct in that these specific applications are not explicitly mentioned in the HB, overlook the fact that the Torah does not deal with every possible scenario and is not arranged as a halakhic handbook.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, in some cases, these “new developments” are introduced by modern interpretive categories, such as “initiatory washing,” when there is nothing to suggest that the ancient audience would have distinguished it from ritual purification (i.e., the label and category are

¹⁵⁶ Rainer Riesner, “Synagogues in Jerusalem,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, vol. 4 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 179–211, 192. See also his comments on the Theodotus inscription (192–200).

¹⁵⁷ For further discussion, see Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 258–71.

¹⁵⁸ E.g., Lawrence, *Washing*, 56.

¹⁵⁹ E.g., Werrett, *Ritual*, 18.

¹⁶⁰ So, Ginsburskaya, “Purity,” 3, 15–18.

ours).¹⁶¹ The fact that immersion occurs in an initiatory context does not alter its purpose and in no case does immersion alone ever initiate anyone (just as circumcision does not either).¹⁶²

That John's immersion is not specifically connected with any specific impurity is *typical* of many Second Temple texts (and archaeological settings) where the audience assumed its general relevance. By analogy, Ginsburskaya suggests, "If a mother tells her son 'Go wash your face!' it implies that his face is dirty, even though the word 'dirty' has not been used."¹⁶³ As such, there is no reason that those who responded to John's preaching were not motivated to immerse for ritual purification, especially if God's coming was expected!¹⁶⁴ All of this undermines those who wish to disqualify ritual purification as an explanation of John's immersion on the basis that a specific impurity is not mentioned. Since "initiation" practices were so diverse that no clear pattern may be identified,¹⁶⁵ since "initiatory immersion" is a modern label, and since immersion was so widely performed for the purpose of ritual purification that Boaz and Zissu can say that "[d]omestic *miqwa'ot* are found in *every* type of building inhabited by Jews" and that since mid-second century BCE "ritual baths have been found in *every* farm, estate, or village,"¹⁶⁶ ritual purification is a viable explanation for John's immersion.

Was Ritual Purity Temple Centric?

In the introduction, I mentioned the misunderstanding related to John's immersion in the Jordan river, water that *was* appropriate for ritual washing despite the claims of some.¹⁶⁷ Yet, scholars also object to John's immersion as ritual

¹⁶¹ Note the multiple ways that Lawrence must nuance his discussion. For example, he notes that (following Cohen) the HB is "silent about conversion and initiation," that one must "read between the lines" to find initiation in Second Temple texts, that the text of Joseph and Aseneth "never says explicitly" that her face and handwashing initiated her, that texts related to John the immerser never mention initiation, and that Josephus never clearly links the Essene washings with initiation (Lawrence, *Washing*, 71–78).

¹⁶² We do not speak of "initiatory circumcision," "initiatory confession of faith," "initiatory instruction" etc. Rather, we refer to circumcision, a confession of faith, or instruction.

¹⁶³ Ginsburskaya, *Purity*, 10.

¹⁶⁴ I explain more fully the reason people were ritually immersing in response to John's preaching in chapter seven.

¹⁶⁵ E.g., Lawrence states about the Second Temple period, "Even with so few initiatory texts from this period, there is a great diversity of ideas concerning the requirements and process of initiation" (*Washing*, 76).

¹⁶⁶ Zissu and Boaz, "Common Judaism," 49, 51.

¹⁶⁷ See p. ? .

purity because it had no clear connection to the temple with some going so far as to say that he was even critiquing or against the temple.¹⁶⁸ This is based on the assumption that ritual purity is temple-centric,¹⁶⁹ which is ironic because the HB describes the provision of the ritual purity laws long before the First Temple was built. Indeed, one of the first practices of ritual purity occurs at Sinai even before the construction of the tabernacle.¹⁷⁰ This at least suggests that ritual purity is tied to divine presence which was not limited to a structure. In response to this, I briefly discuss the following points: (1) the requirement to observe ritual purity is a commandment to be observed at all times and by all Israelites and thus not conditional upon entering the temple, (2) there are numerous examples of purity practices outside of Jerusalem with none conveying an anti-temple posture, and (3) ritual purity practices have continued from the destruction of the temple until today.

Ritual Purity Was A Commandment, not a Temple Entry Rule

As I have already pointed out above, although it is not a sin to contract uncleanness, leaving it unresolved results in moral impurity because this breaks a commandment.¹⁷¹ Yet, nowhere does the HB add to the ritual purity rules the concession, “if you plan to enter the tabernacle.”¹⁷² Lester Grabbe agrees, noting that “uncleanness needed to be removed even when access to the cult was unlikely in the near future.”¹⁷³ And E. P. Sanders presents a list of impurity rules that apply to common Israelites all the time.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, if ritual purity were primarily about the temple, what sense is there in Israelite families

¹⁶⁸ E.g., see my discussion above, “Anti-Temple Posture,” as it relates to the Qumran community and John the immerser.

¹⁶⁹ The temple-centric reading is argued by Jacob Neusner and Hyam Maccoby, who are critiqued by Milgrom and John C. Poirier respectively. In light of Second Temple evidence, Gedalyahu Alon argues that a dual expression—“restrictive” and “expansive”—is evident among various groups. See, Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, SJLA (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 108; Maccoby, *Ritual*, 2–4, 149; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1004–9; John C. Poirier, “Purity Beyond the Temple in the Second Temple Era,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 247–65; Gedalyahu Alon, *Jews, Judaism, and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977), 190–234.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Ex 19:7–15. The fact that the theophany is described in temple-like language is beside the point.

¹⁷¹ See above, “The Relationship Between the Types of Purity and the Binaries.”

¹⁷² Similar logic may be adduced in relationship to eating unclean animals, a prohibition that was not tied to entering the tent of meeting.

¹⁷³ Grabbe, *Leviticus*, 49.

¹⁷⁴ Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 147–48, 151.

breaking earthenware vessels that become unclean¹⁷⁵ or cleansing objects that will never enter the temple?¹⁷⁶ Or why declare a *structure* such as a home unclean?¹⁷⁷ Of course, the tabernacle/temple was a holy place and ritual purity would be expected, but that does not make it *the* reason for ritual purity rules. In this regard, John C. Poirier also notes this non sequitur logic, which is as follows:

- 1) Leviticus commands people to observe ritual purity laws.
- 2) “[P]urity is of a more serious nature when connected with temple observance.”
- 3) Thus, purity rules are temple-centric.

He goes on to argue that the temple-centric approach derives from a misunderstanding of Leviticus and “the rabbinic interpretation of that book.”¹⁷⁸

Finally, two further examples demonstrate that the tabernacle was not in view when people are commanded to observe ritual purity. First, in the case of Num 5:2–3, those afflicted by skin disease or corpse impurity are to be put outside the camp, but it is protecting the *camp* against impurity, not the tabernacle, that is in view. Second, uncleanness was prohibited when the priests and their families consumed “the holy things” (i.e., offerings the people dedicated to God), which took place *outside the temple*, so that God’s name would not be treated as common (חלל).¹⁷⁹ To clarify, yes, one had to be clean to enter the Temple, but this does not make ritual purity temple-centric. One also had to be clean in numerous other instances and delaying the resolution of ritual impurity became a source of more serious moral impurity.¹⁸⁰

Ritual Purity Was Observed outside of Jerusalem

Even if First Temple Jews viewed purity as temple-centric, Second Temple practice is difficult to explain from this perspective. The most obvious problem examples have already been mentioned in the previous section to which I again

¹⁷⁵ It is significant to note the preponderance of chalkstone vessels at Jewish settlements, which were impervious to ritual impurity (Adler, “Archaeology of Purity,” 161–220, 311).

¹⁷⁶ E.g., Lev 15:12.

¹⁷⁷ E.g., Lev 14.

¹⁷⁸ Poirier, “Purity,” 253.

¹⁷⁹ Lev 22:1–9; Exod 28:37–38 [38–39]; Num 5:9–10; Deut 12:26.

¹⁸⁰ Milgrom notes that “[w]hen this occurs, even minor impurities become major ones, polluting the sanctuary from afar . . . But then we are dealing with the contact of the sacred and the impure” (*Leviticus 1–16*, 978).

make appeal. For example, how should we explain the practices of the Qumran community whom no one disputes was strictly observing ritual purity? Even taking into account that their withdrawal (or expulsion) from the Jerusalem and the temple may have been gradual, and even accepting that they may have viewed themselves as a “spiritual temple,” the point still stands. Klawans adds

The sectarians did, of course, understand many of their ritual behaviors in cultic terms, and they did maintain high levels of purity, even though they were not in close or frequent proximity to the Jerusalem temple. . . . While these behaviors are sometimes interpreted as aspects of an antitemple or antipriestly approach, there is really no reason to interpret them that way. *To the contrary, extra-temple, nonpriestly purity was a common aspect of religious behavior in ancient Judaism.*¹⁸¹

From an archaeological perspective, Yonatan Adler has documented over 850 ritual baths throughout the land of Israel, most of which date to the second temple,¹⁸² and more continue to be found as excavations continue.¹⁸³ In addition, I have already mentioned multiple diaspora practices of ritual purity where temple entry was not in view (e.g., Jdt, Sib. Or., Let. Aris., etc). And

¹⁸¹ Klawans, *Purity*, 173.

¹⁸² The number and distribution of ritual baths suggests that while “biblical laws made most Jews impure most of the time,” many Jews also sought to resolve this impurity most of the time. See, E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 73; Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 82. On the archaeological evidence, see, Adler, “Archaeology of Purity,” Table 1 “רשימת מקוואות הטהרה”; Reich, *Jewish Ritual Baths*; David Amit, “Ritual Baths (Miqva’ot) from the Second Temple Period in the Hebron Mountains” (M.A. thesis, Hebrew University, 1996); Boaz Zissu, “Rural Settlement in the Judean Hills and Foothills from the Late Second Temple Period to the Bar-Kokhba Revolt” (PhD diss., Hebrew University, 2001) [Hebrew]; Reich and Zapata-Meza, “Domestic Miqva’ot,” 109–25; Rainer Riesner, “Das Jerusalemer Essener Viertel und die Urgemeinde Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* V 145; 11QMiqdasch 46,13–16; Apostelgeschichte 1–6 und die Archäologie,” *ANRW* 26.2:1775–1922, esp. 1811–16, 1825–27, 1853, plate (Tafel) II.

¹⁸³ Perhaps the most fascinating find comes from Magdala, discovered in 2012. They are unique in that they are the first ritual baths found around the Sea of Galilee (itself a source for resolving ritual impurity), and because they are the first that are *not* sealed, but fed by ground water (Reich and Zapata-Meza, “Domestic Miqva’ot,” 109–25). See also, Marcela Zapata-Meza, “Domestic and Mercantile Areas,” in *Magdala of Galilee: A Jewish City in the Hellenistic and Roman Period*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 89–108; Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, “Mikva’ot in Galilean Caves Suggest Lives of Refuge and Religion,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, 2012; Noah Wiener, “Mikveh Discovery Highlights Ritual Bathing in Second Temple Period Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, 2013; http://www.antiquities.org.il/article_eng.aspx?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=1997&module_id=; Megan Sauter, “Secret Mikveh Discovered Under a Living Room Floor,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, 2015; http://www.antiquities.org.il/Article_eng.aspx?sec_id=25&subj_id=240&id=4126&hist=1; Biblical Archaeology Society Staff, “Second Temple Period Discoveries at Biblical Hebron,” *Biblical Archaeology Society*, 2017.

why would it matter to the Pharisees (who did not all live in Jerusalem) to immerse themselves or wash their hands before eating since they were neither priests nor eating priestly rations? Postulating that they wanted to be priest-like¹⁸⁴ (although this conclusion is based on a temple-centric view of ritual purity) does not alter the fact that their ritual purity practices were not ultimately temple-centric.

Ritual Purity Was Practiced after the Destruction of the Temple

The most conclusive evidence against a temple-centric view is that ritual purity was practiced long after the destruction of the temple.¹⁸⁵ Scholars have generally assumed that the decline of purity concerns coincided with the destruction of the temple. This was based in part on archaeological evidence, however even that was not conclusive. Thus, to explain purity observance post-70 CE, scholars frequently suggest a romantic or similar motivation (e.g., they were compensating for the lack of temple). For example, Harrington suggests that after 70 CE, “purity continued as a consolatory substitute for the Temple cult.”¹⁸⁶

Yet, Adler has recently argued, “there is no archaeological evidence to speak of that might indicate any decline at all in the use of *miqwa’ot* amongst Jews living in Judea immediately following 70 CE, or indeed at any time prior to 135 CE,” and the evidence post 135 CE is inconclusive.¹⁸⁷ While the observance of ritual purity eventually appears to decline,¹⁸⁸ it has never ceased. Following the destruction of the temple, ritual baths continue to be built, maintained, and used, from all historical periods until today.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, Jewish followers of Jesus reportedly observed ritual purity despite the fact that according to traditional “Christian” thought (i.e., gentile) Jesus supposedly abolished

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1979), 83; Hannah K. Harrington, “Did the Pharisees Eat Ordinary Food in a State of Ritual Purity?” *JSJ* 26 (1995): 42–54; Against the view that the Pharisees attempted to live priest-like, see Sanders, *Jewish Law*, 131–254.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Adler, “Archaeology,” 353, Map 4; Lawrence, *Washing*, app. C; Amit and Adler, “Observance,” 121–43.

¹⁸⁶ Harrington, *Purity*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ Yonatan Adler, “The Decline of Jewish Ritual Purity Observance in Roman Palaestina: An Archaeological Perspective on Chronology and Historical Context,” in *Expressions of Cult in the Southern Levant in the Greco-Roman Period: Manifestations in Text and Material Culture*, ed. Oren Tal and Zeev Weiss, Contextualizing the Sacred 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 269–84, 273.

¹⁸⁸ For a variety of possible explanations, see Adler, “Decline,” 278–81.

¹⁸⁹ For post-70 CE examples from the 4th, 12th, 19th, and 20th centuries, see Miller, *Intersection*, 72, 184–97, 332–42; cf. Marc Saperstein and Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jews in Christian Europe: A Source Book, 315-1791*, rev. ed. (Pittsburgh: Hebrew Union College Press, 2015), 508–15; Reich and Zapata-Meza, “Domestic *Miqva’ot*,” 124.

such rules. Finally, the text of 4Q278 which deals with ritual purity rulings is dated paleographically to 74–132 CE.

Scholars frequently explain later rabbinic writings on the basis of reminiscence and in light of the archaeological evidence, we must revise the explanation. Not only were people talking about purity in texts like the Mishnah and Talmud, but they were also practicing it. Perhaps it is time to question the conventional wisdom that explains this as compensation for the loss of the temple and consider that people were talking about and practicing purity because it mattered whether or not the temple was standing. If ritual purity practices were temple-centric, then it is very difficult to explain the continuance of purity observance after the fall of the temple if purity depended on it.

Conclusion

We may draw at least two conclusions from this discussion. First, one can only speak of “extending” purity practices from the temple if one assumes in advance that purity is temple-centric. Once this choice is made, the numerous examples where the data does not fit must be interpreted as “extensions.” Yet, if this assumption is incorrect as I have argued here, the idea of “extension” loses its force and new interpretations are possible.¹⁹⁰ Second, the foregoing discussion should lay to rest the notion that John’s immersion practices outside of Jerusalem indicate that he was against the temple or that his washing could not be ritual purification.¹⁹¹ It is possible that he was anti-temple or that his immersion was not ritual purification, but neither points can be based on the fact that he and others immersed in the Jordan.

Agents and Ritual Purity

Another tenacious objection that scholars raise against viewing John’s immersion as ritual purification is the fact that John administers the rite. Scholars assume that John’s title, ὁ ἀάδδέόόηδ, explains this especially since Second Temple Jews performed ritual purification by auto-immersion. Thus, Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch assert,

¹⁹⁰ For example, Poirier suggests the possibility that “the rabbis’ temple-oriented understanding of the purity laws was strictly intended to render those laws obsolete” (“Purity,” 265). Whether Alon intended to make the same point, he implies that this is in effect what happened in rabbinic interpretation (*Jews*, 233–34). Cf. Adler, “Decline,” 278.

¹⁹¹ Actually, even if the temple-centric view were correct, this would still support the point made here.

In antiquity people used water for purification rituals, which they undertook by themselves, on their own behalf. Such rituals restored people to some proper state after having stepped out of that state. John's baptism, however, *was not a purification ritual*, if only *because it required dipping in water by a person other than oneself*.¹⁹²

Similarly, from a ritual studies perspective, Uro proposes that “ritual competence theory may be helpful in explaining the evolution of early Christian baptism *from purification rites* to a rite that was normally performed only once for each individual.”¹⁹³ While this makes for good rhetoric and supports a supersessionistic reading of the NT, the assertion does not withstand scrutiny and is misguided by deductive models not based on ancient sources. *If* John performed the immersion of others, an assumption that I question below, this would only differentiate the *mode* of immersion from other practices, but this does not mean that it is no longer an act of ritual purification. Indeed, there are several examples of administered water rituals that are performed to resolve ritual impurity in both the HB and Greco-Roman sources.

Agents of Ritual Purity in Leviticus 8 and Numbers 8 and 19

The clearest examples are the application of the מִי הַטָּהַר on the Levites (Num 8:7), the application of מִי נִדֵּה for corpse impure persons (Num 19:13), and Moses washing Aaron and his sons as part of their “ordination” process (Lev 8).¹⁹⁴ In the case of Num 8 where the Levites are presented before God, Moses is instructed to clean (רָחַץ) the Levites by sprinkling the water of purification on them.¹⁹⁵ This is followed by the Levites cleansing themselves through shaving their bodies and washing their clothes.¹⁹⁶ Here, ritual purity is achieved through the actions of *both* an agent *and* the individuals themselves.¹⁹⁷ The case of Num 19 is even more interesting because the unclean person who has contracted corpse impurity is sprinkled with the water of purification by an agent

¹⁹² Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 190; *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 333, emphasis mine.

¹⁹³ Uro, Carlo Severi, and others question the “global” scope of that the ritual competence theory approach seeks to obtain. See Uro, “Ritual,” 230; Carlo Severi, “Language,” in *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, SHR 114-I (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 582–93, 588–90.

¹⁹⁴ As Webb notes, Num 19:9 identifies the מִי נִדֵּה as הַטָּהַר הוּא.

¹⁹⁵ This is indicated by the 2nd person, singular, hifil imperative, which contrasts with the 3rd person, plural, hifil perfects.

¹⁹⁶ The hithpaal indicates reflexive action.

¹⁹⁷ Note that the text does not say they are made holy through this process—בִּדְלָה rather than שִׁדְּקָה is used (Num 8:14), which contrasts with what is said of the priests (Lev 8:12).

who must be clean (implying *passive* purification),¹⁹⁸ and yet, the immediately preceding text says that the unclean person must cleanse him or herself (implying *active* purification).¹⁹⁹ That is, the unclean person cleanses him or herself *through an agent*.²⁰⁰ A similar view is articulated in 4Q512 1–6, 1–9.²⁰¹

Finally, in Lev 8:6, which Dahl preferred as the origin of John's immersion,²⁰² Moses washes Aaron and his sons. Yet, there are at least two directions that interpreters go regarding agency. On the one hand, Moses is taken at face value to be the agent who performs the washing (and dressing!).²⁰³ For example, Rambam accepts that Moses washed them only clarifying that he washed Aaron first and *then* his sons.²⁰⁴ And while the text uses רהץ, modern translators usually gloss it “immerse” possibly following Rashi's comments on Exod 29:4 where the instructions for Lev 8 are first given.²⁰⁵ Commenting on רהץ in Exod 29:4, Rashi states, טבילת כל הגוף.²⁰⁶ But as Milgrom notes, במים “implies full immersion” and the water could not have come from the laver because it had not yet been sanctified for use or possibly even constructed.²⁰⁷ So, if Moses actually functioned as the agent and if Rambam's interpretation is correct, Moses would have immersed Aaron and his sons, though it is unclear where. On the other hand, Ibn Ezra understands the passage differently. Rather

¹⁹⁸ וזהו הטהר על הטמא Num 19:19. Interestingly, the agent becomes unclean in the process of purifying another.

¹⁹⁹ הוא יתחטא בו ביום השלישי וביום השביעי יטהר Num 19:12.

²⁰⁰ The entire process involves sprinkling on the third and seventh days followed by washing one's clothes, washing one's body in water, and then waiting until evening.

²⁰¹ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar assign a different reference to this text: 4Q512 1–3, 1–10. See Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2:1039.

²⁰² Cf. above, “Nils A. Dahl (1955).”

²⁰³ In support of this view is Hieke's observation that there is a clear shift of emphasis to “das Tun des Mose” (*Levitikus*, 342).

²⁰⁴ Charles B. Chavel, trans., *Ramban Nachmanides Commentary on the Torah: Leviticus* (Brooklyn: Shilo Publishing House, 1974), 93.

²⁰⁵ E.g., Eliyahu Munk translates the comments of Jacob ben Asher, or Ba'al ha-Turim (c. 1269–1343), “immerse” and adds “in a ritual bath” (<http://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.8.6>). Cf. Nosson Scherman and Hersh Goldwurm, *Leviticus: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources*, 2nd ed., Artscroll Tanach Series (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2013), 127.

²⁰⁶ Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of *Sapirstein Edition Rashi: The Torah with Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated and Elucidated*, ed. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2017), 402. Interestingly, Rashi makes no comment on Lev 8:6. See, Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg, *Leviticus*, vol. 3 of *Sapirstein Edition Rashi: The Torah with Rashi's Commentary Translated, Annotated and Elucidated*, ed. Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2017), 86.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Exod 30:20 where it is רהץ־מים (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 501).

than interpreting what appears to be a clear case of Moses functioning as an agent, Ibn Ezra interprets his role as a supervising authority or witness.

Lev 8:6 ויקרב משה את אהרן ואת בניו וירחץ אתם במים

Ibn Ezra: ויקרב משה את אהרן. אל הכיור (to the laver)

וירחץ אותם. בצווי (i.e., he commanded them to wash)²⁰⁸

On this reading, Moses is not personally involved in performing the immersions, but rather he, in his authority as the ritual expert, orders Aaron and his sons to do so. Nevertheless, in all of these cases just discussed, not only does agency pose no problem for ritual purification, but it is the *means* by which one ritually purifies. Furthermore, agency does not entail initiation as Num 19 attests—Leviticus 8 and Num 8 may not either depending on what one means by “initiation” and whether that best describes the ceremony for the Levites and priests. Moreover, if Ibn Ezra’s interpretation is correct it adds further support to the next point.

Agents of Ritual Purity in Rabbinic Literature

One could argue that the above examples do not count since they do not clearly involve immersion or are performed in “abnormal” circumstances such as priestly ordination. Since the observance of ritual purity (incumbent on Israelites) presupposes that people are healthy and mobile, what happens if they are unable to immerse? While it admittedly derives from a later period, the Mishnah permits others to pour nine *qabs*²⁰⁹ of water over one who is ill at the time of contracting uncleanness (i.e., he or she cannot immerse) in order for the person to become clean.²¹⁰ A similar provision is made in b. Ber. 64a. In the case of m. Miqw. 8:5, an agent is mentioned immersing another person, although he must let go completely for it to be considered valid.

²⁰⁸ Michael Carasik translates this quite differently: “Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward. To the laver. And washed them. Rather, ‘and he washed them’—someone who had been instructed by Moses to do so.” See, Michael Carasik, *The Commentators’ Bible: Leviticus: The Rubin JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2009), Leviticus 8:6, emphasis original.

²⁰⁹ A *qab* is equal to 2.2 L or 1/2 gallon. See, “Weights and Measures,” in *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, ed. Avraham Negev (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990), 401–3.

²¹⁰ m. Miqw. 3:4; cf. Neusner, *Judaic Law*, 89–93.

As argued above,²¹¹ *although it is admittedly later evidence, tractate Gerim describes self-immersion, yet, a witness is described as immersing the convert.*²¹²

1:5 טבל ועלה אומרים לו דברים טובים

1:8 האיש מטביל לאיש והאשה מטבלת לאשה אבל לא את האיש

In Ger 1:8, the hifil participle of טבל means “to order immersion”²¹³ or “bring to immersion.” This causative element presupposes agency, which implies the passive voice if formulated with the convert as the subject of the verb.²¹⁴ This is evidence that one could auto-immerses and yet one could say that the individual was immersed. After building a case that John may not have actually administered immersion, Taylor concedes the point saying that John “must have been more than a witness, because a witness could never be understood as ‘immersing’ someone else,” but this is evidence to the contrary.²¹⁵ However, she goes on to note that D and *it* have a textual variant at Luke 3:7 wherein the people were immersed εἰς ἑαυτοῦ.

As two final examples that resemble tractate Gerim, b. Ketub. 11a explains that a gentile minor proselyte (גר קטן) may be immersed by another (מטבילין אותו) on the authority of the בית דין, “the court.” The subsequent discussion confirms that an agent is involved as concern is raised about the fact that the decision is made on behalf of the minor. Also, b. Yebam. 47b explains that an adult gentile proselyte is both circumcised and immersed (מטבילין אותו) (מיד) by others. In this latter example with the adult, it follows tractate Gerim further in that the adult is said to be immersed by the witnesses and yet, the individual immerses him or herself.

Agents of Ritual Purity in Greco-Roman Sources

Not only do Greek sources attest to agents performing ritual purification, but also in many cases it has nothing to do with initiation, suggesting that agency is not integral to it. For example, Aristotle mentions Epimenides who purifies Athens.²¹⁶ There are individual called ὁ ἀϊείδωδὸς and ὁ ἀϋδδὸς, and there are ἐαεϋνδῶς, or purifiers who could be called on in times of illness,²¹⁷ epidemic,

²¹¹ Cf. p. ?.

²¹² The Western readings of Luke-Acts use of the middle instead of the passive (Easton, “Self-Baptism,” 513–18; Gavin, *Jewish Antecedents*, 45).

²¹³ Jastrow, s.v. “טבל.”

²¹⁴ E.g., someone after the ceremony could ask, “Who immersed this person?”

²¹⁵ Taylor, *Immerser*, 52.

²¹⁶ Aristotle, *Ath. pol.* 1; cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 77.

²¹⁷ E.g., Hippocrates, *Morb. sacr.* 2.32.

or community struggles.²¹⁸ Moreover, worshippers ritually immersed the statues of gods/goddesses²¹⁹ and exiled murderers had to seek out a foreign purifier to resolve their uncleanness, which was contagious by touch.²²⁰ Agents were also involved in cleansing madness, which people thought derived from a god²²¹ or a *ἄβιύι*.²²² Similarly, before offering sacrifices, people were sprinkled with water by an agent.²²³ Finally, it is important to note that the ritual purification of *all objects* in both Jewish and Greco-Roman religion *depends on* an agent. In all of these examples, agency is fully compatible with ritual purification.²²⁴ Thus, *agency cannot be used to assert that an administered immersion no longer qualifies as ritual purification.*

Conclusion

Above, I raised the question that if John's immersion *is* a form of ritual purification, what sort of impurity/impurities could he have in view and why do the Gospel writers not mention them? As we have seen, it would be enough for him to be motivated by impurity in a general sense and it was *typical* of Second Temple texts to mention purification without identifying specific impurities. Moreover, I suggested that in many contexts, especially when divine-human encounter is anticipated (e.g., at Sinai, at the temple, before prayer, at synagogue, etc), people likely immersed "just because."

I also raised the opposite question, if John's immersion had nothing to do with ritual purification what possible strategic social practice would John be advocating through calling people to immersion? In light of the ubiquity of ritual purity practices it is more difficult to imagine that John's immersion represented some strategic social action other than ritual purification. Inventing a new use of immersion that does not depend on the shared social practice of

²¹⁸ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 77.

²¹⁹ Immersing statues in a sea or river is not simply "maintenance" since they could be washed in place and they are treated as if "alive" by being clothed, perfumed, crowned, etc. (Ginouvés, *Balaneutikè*, 283–84). For Greek religions cf. *Hom. Hymn Aphr.* 6.1–18; Pausanias 2.36.1–2; 2.38.2–3; 8.25.4–5; Euripides *Iph. taur.* 5.1039–41, 1199; Strabo 14.1.639; Xenophon, *Hell.* 1.4.12. For Roman religion cf. Plutarch, *Quaest. rom.* 61; *Num.* 19.2; Ovid, *Fast.* 4.5.136–39.

²²⁰ Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 80–82.

²²¹ Cf. Hippocrates, *Morb. sacr.*

²²² Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 76.

²²³ Parker, *Miasma*, 20, n. 7.

²²⁴ It is irrelevant that immersion is not the sole means of ritual purification in the examples above since the point is to show that agency does not disqualify a ritual from being an act of purification.

ritual purity would not only be *unstrategic*, but incompressible to a first-century audience. To put it another way, John's "ritualization" is easily situated as ritual purification but more difficult to identify if not. It is only by insisting that John's immersion is *symbolic* that one can make a case for something new. As is well known, this involves portraying John as a proto-"Christian" and requires dismissing ritual purity.

Moreover, I have demonstrated that arguments made to distance John's immersion from ritual purification are based on an incomplete understanding of the ritual purity system of the HB, a selective appeal to Second Temple sources, and the assumption of orthodox view or practice of ritual purity. Rather than pitting John against his environment, I have argued that he fits well within it by proposing that his immersion is an expression of ritual purity, a form of ritualization meant to impact his audience. Furthermore, if both ritual and moral purity are material in nature as I have argued above, the logic of John's immersion begins to take form. That is, humans do not approach the divine without first preparing themselves physically through ritual washing. This is especially true since he reportedly anticipated the Holy Spirit to come upon the one coming after him²²⁵ and ritual purity would be expected in preparation for such an event. That is, the material stain of ritual impurity must be removed before divine presence would mix with the body of the one he anticipated, namely Jesus. If John was preparing the people for the coming of God analogously to how the Israelites prepared for God's appearing at Sinai, this alone explains his immersion. The moral status of John's audience may be assumed to be clean²²⁶ or they may be impelled to repent as John is reported to have done.

While the arguments made here are admittedly negative in nature as they apply to John, it was necessary to clear some ground so that positive arguments may be built later on in chapter seven where I will deal more fully with John's immersion. This chapter should, however, lay to rest any arguments against the possibility of interpreting John's immersion as ritual purification. This chapter will also prove useful as we now turn our attention to the Qumran community.

²²⁵ Cf. John 1:31.

²²⁶ This point will be further developed in the next chapter. It also alleviates the "problem" of Jesus's immersion.

Chapter 4

The Washings of the Qumran Community

[T]he lustrations of the Qumran Community and of the later Essenes had a more than ceremonial significance. . . . the lustrations were effective for the cleansing of moral impurity where they were accompanied by a spirit of penitence and submission to the will of God. It is evident from Josephus that by his day certain lustrations were practised among the Essenes with a special sacramental import.¹

Among all of the Jewish groups of the Second Temple era, the Qumran Community was the most rigorous in the maintenance of purity. The laws of purity and impurity were a central concern for the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In fact, the majority of the community's laws recorded in the extant manuscripts deal with matters related to the cult and purity.²

There is no evidence of the use of water lustrations for initiatory purposes in the Dead Sea Scrolls.³

Since their discovery, NT scholars have primarily approached the DSS with the interest of what they can tell us about "Christian origins."⁴ For example, in the first quote above, Beasley-Murray is eager to distinguish the "special nature" of the first washing of a Qumran sectarian from "merely ceremonial" washing as a means to connect John the immerser to their community. A symbolic understanding of immersion⁵ is also evident in his analysis since the "ceremonial," daily lustrations do not *do* anything—"sacramental" washing, on the other hand, is a different case.⁶ Thus, in Beasley-Murray's view, John takes the "best" of Qumran and makes it "better." Similarly, C. Marvin Pate also

¹ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 17, emphasis mine; cf. Brownlee, "John," 41.

² Harrington, *Purity*, 7.

³ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew? Rabbinic and Halakhic Perspectives on the Jewish Christian Schism* (New York: Ktav, 1985), 26.

⁴ On this methodological problem and how it pertains to our understanding of the Qumran sectarians, see Martin Goodman, "Constructing Ancient Judaism from the Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81–91.

⁵ See the discussion above in chapter four, "The Material Nature of Ritual and Moral Impurity."

⁶ Brownlee claims, "These lustral washings and sacrifices are by no means merely initiatory rites" ("John," 41).

finds it remarkable that both the Qumran sectarians and John require an immersion of repentance of “*fellow Israelites* (not just Gentiles, as was typically the rule),” something he claims is unheard of in the extant Jewish literature from that time.⁷ This is only true, however, if at least four assumptions are made. First, one must ascribe normative status to “proselyte baptism” and use it as a heuristic device to interpret what John was doing. Second, whatever proselyte baptism is, it must serve a different purpose from ritual washing. Then, one must conflate conversion (of gentiles) and repentance (of Jews). Fourth, the initial immersion of 777 initiates must be understood as intrinsically different from “ordinary” washing. Only then can one claim that such practices are “unheard of.”

In the second quote, Harrington presents a different view altogether of the Qumran community because she approaches the DSS to understand the beliefs and practices of the 777 for its own sake. In her view, the immersion practices of Qumran correspond to the ritual purity system in the HB even if their specific halakic *rulings* may have become more stringent over time.⁸ It is only *after* analyzing the beliefs and practices of the Qumran community for their own sake that she considers any possible similarities with John.⁹ Comparing these two approaches to the Qumran community illustrates that not only does the evidence selected for analysis have a significant impact on our findings but also the context in which (or against which) we situate it.

The main purpose of this chapter is to construct the worldview of the Qumran community as attested by the sectarian DSS and other non-sectarian sources, and to identify the role of immersion within it. We must first understand the washings of the Qumran community before considering to what extent they may or may not compare with John’s immersion. Nearly every dimension of the “Qumran community” is disputed, and most of these issues are complex and depend on a constellation of interpretations of the data.¹⁰ For this reason, I will state my views and acknowledge that a different picture may

⁷ C. Marvin Pate, *Communities of the Last Days: The Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament & the Story of Israel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 96.

⁸ Cf. Werrett, *Ritual*, passim. He omits 1QS, 1QSa, 1QSB, 1QHabPesh, and 1QH because they do not directly discuss the “five major categories of purity under consideration,” which only permits a partial picture of ritual purity at Qumran (18).

⁹ Harrington, *Purity*, 23.

¹⁰ For an excellent and recent overview, see Gwynned de Looijer, *The Qumran Paradigm: Critical Evaluation of Some Foundational Hypotheses in the Construction of the Qumran Sect*, EJL 43 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015). For an assessment of the archaeological complexities, see Katharina Galor and Jürgen Zangenberg, “Introduction,” in *Qumran, the Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates, Proceedings of a Conference Held at Brown University, November 17–19, 2002*, ed. Katharina Galor, Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and Jürgen Zangenberg, STDJ 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1–15.

emerge if one arrives at other conclusions.¹¹ Where possible, I will consider how such divergences might affect my analysis. In what follows, I will first explain my assumptions, then explain the conceptual universe of the Qumran community, and finally, describe the role of water within it.¹²

Assumptions

At least three major assumptions undergird what follows and I briefly discuss them here.¹³

- 1) The DSS and the ruins at Khirbet Qumran are related to one another.
- 2) The DSS are representative of the Qumran community.
- 3) The DSS present a cohesive picture of this community's belief and practice.

The Connection Between DSS and Khirbet Qumran

Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, and Jodi Magness rightly argue that the relationship between the caves and the ruins are *not dependent on the DSS manuscripts*.¹⁴ Additionally, Shemaryahu Talmon insists that the title "Dead Sea Scrolls" is a misnomer that should be corrected as "Qumran scrolls" because "unrelated written materials roughly contemporaneous with some of the documents found at Qumran were found in other locations in the Judean Desert."¹⁵ Thus, I assume a relationship between the DSS and Khirbet Qumran for the following reasons.¹⁶

¹¹ Charlotte Hempel observes, "the identification of the Qumran community, or communities, remains one of the most debated issues in Qumran scholarship" ("Qumran Community," *EDSS*, 2:746–51, 746).

¹² I use the terms "worldview" and "conceptual universe" interchangeably. By these, I simply mean the combination of beliefs and practices that guide the lives of the Qumran sectarians, which includes things like authoritative sources and their understanding of the nature of reality. Ritual washing, then, does not stand alone as an isolated practice, but is integrated into their conceptual universe.

¹³ This differs slightly from what Gwynned de Looijer calls the "Qumran triangle," which consists of combining early cave 1 scrolls, the site of Qumran, and classical sources (Looijer, *Qumran*, 2).

¹⁴ Magen Broshi and Hanan Eshel, "Daily Life at Qumran," trans. Claude Grenache, *NEA* 63 (2000): 136–37. Jodi Magness, "Qumran," *EDEJ*, 1126–31.

¹⁵ Talmon, *World*, 273–74, n. 2.

¹⁶ For a recent analysis of the issues, see Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, the Essenes, and Christian Origins: New Light on Ancient Texts and Communities* (Waco, TX: Baylor University

(1) *They are literally connected to one another.* Leading directly from the ruins to the caves are paths on which were discovered pottery shards and over sixty sandal nails suggesting frequent travel.¹⁷ Caves 4–10 are only 100–300 meters from the ruins and the rest of the caves containing scrolls are less than 2 km away (see *Figure 16: DSS Caves in the Vicinity of Qumran (Magness)* on previous page).¹⁸ More significantly, Stephen Pfann notes that the scrolls of caves 7–9 were “within the enclosure walls of the site itself” (see *Picture 1: Khirbet Qumran Enclosure Wall and Caves 7–9*¹⁹ below).²⁰ Moreover, a recent study testing the claim that Qumran a “busy area” due to its proximity to trade routes, has demonstrated that it was in fact relatively quiet and isolated.²¹ That said, isolation does not mean no contact with the outside world.²²

Press, 2018), 32–47; cf. Beall, *Josephus’ Description*, 3–6; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 239–52. For alternative theories, see Harrington, “Purity,” 404; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 252–54; Craig A. Evans, *Holman QuickSource Guide to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2010), 214–18.

¹⁷ Magen Broshi, “Qumran, Khirbet and ‘Ein Feshkha,” *NEAEHL* 4:1235–41. Evans notes and dismisses the likelihood that these nails came from the sandals of Roman soldiers (*Holman QuickSource Guide*, 220–21).

¹⁸ Illustration used by permission from Magness, “Qumran,” *EDEJ*, 1130. As of 2000, around 270 “caves, cracks, crevices, and little nooks” in the 8 km area near Qumran have been excavated with 40 suggesting occupancy (Broshi and Eshel, “Daily Life,” 136). Cave 8Q even had a *mezuzah*. See also, Magen Broshi, “The Archaeology of Qumran—A Reconsideration,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 103–15.

¹⁹ Barry Beitzel, “Qumran caves and excavations arial from south, bb00060074,” BiblePlaces.com, <https://www.bibleplaces.com>. Image used by permission, annotations follow Stephen Pfann, “A Table Prepared in the Wilderness: Pantries, Tables, Pure Food and Sacred Space at Qumran,” in *Qumran, the Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates, Proceedings of a Conference Held at Brown University, November 17–19, 2002*, ed. Katharina Galor, Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and Jürgen Zangenberg, STDJ 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 159–78, fig. 7.1.

²⁰ Pfann, “Table Prepared,” 160, emphasis mine.

²¹ Joan E. Taylor and Shimon Gibson, “Qumran Connected: The Qumran Pass and Paths of the North-Western Dead Sea,” in *Qumran und die Archäologie: Texte und Kontexte*, ed. Jörg Frey, Carsten Claußen, and Nadine Kessler, WUNT 278 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 163–209.

²² Galor and Zangenberg conclude, “the more archaeological material becomes available, the less unique and isolated Qumran becomes” (“Introduction,” 5). This reference is incorrectly listed as page 9 in de Looijer, *Qumran*, 14, n. 53; cf. Dennis Walker, “Notes on Qumran Archaeology: The Geographical Context of the Caves and Tracks,” *QC* 3.1–3 (1993): 93–100.

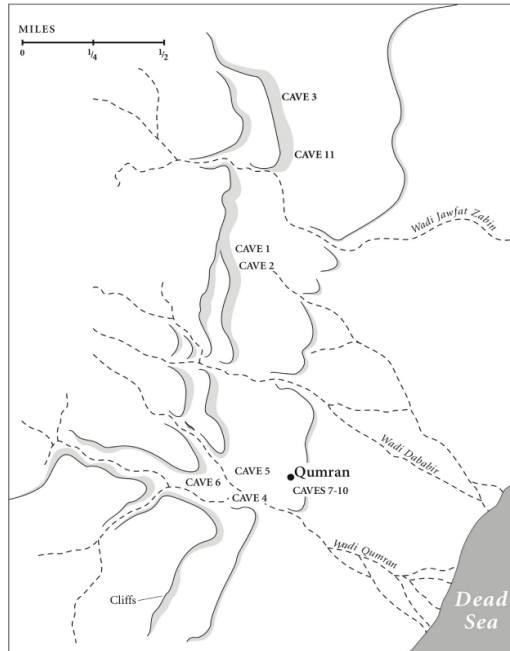
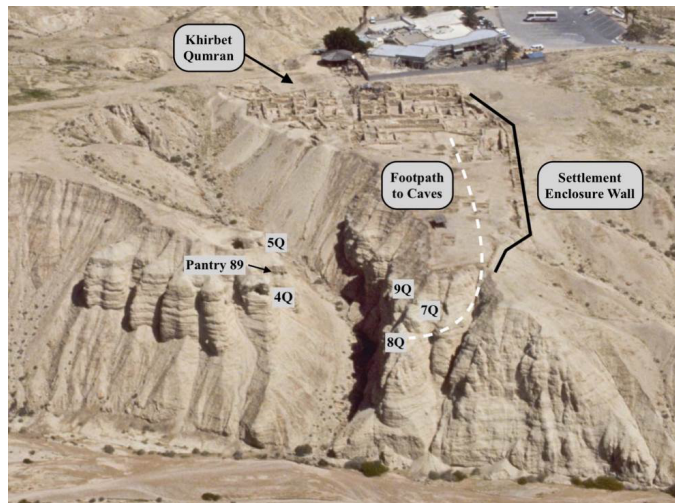


Figure 16: DSS caves in the vicinity of Qumran (Magness)



Picture 1: Khirbet Qumran enclosure wall and caves 7–9

(2) *The material finds between the caves and the ruins are identical.* “Scroll jar” pottery unique to Qumran was located in both the caves and ruins.²³ This specific type of pottery is not attested following the site’s destruction in 68 CE although other types are, and most notably, *no* Qumran “scroll jars” have been discovered in Jerusalem (a challenge to the temple library theory).²⁴ While some of the non-scroll jar pottery found in the caves was made from Jerusalem clay, Magness suggests that the clay was transported to Qumran and made on site.²⁵ Finally, the same hand writing is identified on inscriptions found in both the caves and the ruins²⁶ and inkwells were found among the ruins, an object that is rare to find in excavations according to Allan Rosengren Petersen.²⁷

(3) *The contents of the scrolls, which describe a community, correspond well with the ruins.*²⁸ Maintaining ritual purity was a significant concern of the

²³ Magness, *Archaeology*, 73–89; cf de Vaux, *Archéologie*, 44; Hempel, “Qumran Community,” *EDSS* 2:748. According to Broshi and Eshel, twenty six caves contained “Qumran pottery” (“Daily Life,” 136). There are two types of “scroll jars,” a “classic” (type 2B) and a “non-ovoid” type. Outside of Qumran, the classic type is *only* attested at Jericho by a *single exemplar* as of 2006. This 2B jar belongs to a family of “genizah jars” classified at Jericho that includes types 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, etc., but only the 2B type is shared with Qumran. Magness incorrectly cites R. Bar-Nathan’s unpublished M.A. thesis as supporting the claim that “Qumran pottery” was also found at Masada, but according to Gregory L. Doudna, this claim does not appear in Bar-Nathan’s thesis. See, Gregory L. Doudna, “The Legacy of an Error in Archaeological Interpretation: The Dating of the Qumran Cave Scroll Deposits,” in *Qumran, the Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates, Proceedings of a Conference Held at Brown University, November 17–19, 2002*, ed. Katharina Galor, Jean-Baptiste Humbert, and Jürgen Zangenberg, *STDJ* 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 148–57.

²⁴ Broshi, “Qumran,” *NEAEHL* 4:1240. In fact, according to Doudna, there is *no evidence* to suggest that these “scroll jars” should be associated after the end of the 1st cent. BCE (“Legacy,” 151).

²⁵ Although Magness notes that Fredrick Zeuner suggested that the “clay” available at Qumran was not suitable for pottery making, Jan Gunneweg has successfully fired an inkwell that resembles authentic Qumran exemplars that “became ceramic, at least to the look and feel of it.” After subjecting the fired and unfired clay to INAA and XRD testing, he demonstrates that it is not *chemically* “real clay” *before or after* firing, but that a fired specimen produces the “look of a real ceramic, although it is not.” See, Magness, *Archaeology*, 75; Jan Gunneweg, “The Dead Sea, the Nearest Neighbor of Qumran and the Dead Sea Manuscripts. What SEM, XRD and Instrumental Neutron Activation May Show About Dead Sea Mud,” in *Holistic Qumran: Trans-Disciplinary Research of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Jan Gunneweg, Annemie Adriaens, and Joris Dik, *STDJ* 87 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 175–81.

²⁶ de Vaux, *Archéologie*, 80.

²⁷ Allan Rosengren Petersen, “The Archaeology of Khirbet Qumran,” in *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson, *JSOTSup* 290 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 249–60.

²⁸ Magness, “Qumran,” *EDEJ*, 1131; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 239–54.

authors of the sectarian DSS and the ruins reflect this concern with the elaborate water system and ritual baths.²⁹ I must emphasize that the identification of the ritual baths at Qumran is *not dependent on the contents of the scrolls*, but rather on their typological features that are shared with ritual baths elsewhere throughout Israel. Moreover, the occupants made their own pottery, which was susceptible to impurity.³⁰ Finally, the site's arrangement, scriptorium, and refectory are congenial to the communal interests described in the scrolls.

(4) *Pliny the Elder mentions an Essene community in this vicinity.* He explains that a group of Essenes (Esseni) live on the west coast of the Dead Sea among the palm-trees, and that just south of this, one finds Engedi (*Engada*).³¹ Magen Broshi notes that there "is *only one site* that corresponds to this description," namely "the Qumran plateau, and that only the "region between Khirbet Qumran and Feshkah" permit the growth of palm trees.³²

Of course, if the assumption based on the evidence above is incorrect, only the archaeological connection is lost; one must reckon with the existence of the community that the scrolls assume.

The DSS as Representative of the (Essene) Qumran Community

In general, I interpret the DSS as representing the beliefs of an Essene community that inhabited Khirbet Qumran. While alternative theories exist regarding the ruins of Qumran, Simon J. Joseph rightly states that "It is one thing, however, to reject the Qumran Essene hypothesis. It is quite another to produce a more compelling explanation for the full range of data."³³ Of course, this does not imply that every detail in the scrolls is fully representative of the community, nor does it require complete agreement among the various authors of the scrolls or the community members.³⁴ The sectarian scrolls assume that

²⁹ Bryant G. Wood, "To Dip or Sprinkle? The Qumran Cisterns in Perspective," *BASOR* 256 (1984): 45–60.

³⁰ Interestingly, a few jars found at Jericho that resemble those at Qumran "come from an industrial area [pottery manufacture?] dating to the time of Herod" that included a structure with miqva'ot (Magness, *Archaeology*, 81).

³¹ *Nat.* 5.73. See the discussions in Geza Vermes and Martin D. Goodman, eds., *The Essenes: According to the Classical Sources* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989); Jörg Frey, "Essenes," 599–602; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning*, 240–42. On the meaning of *infra* in Latin as "south" and not "below," see, *OLD*, s.v. "ifra"; Edward E. Cook, "What Was Qumran?: A Ritual Purification Center," *BAR* 22 (1996): 39, 48–51, 73–74.

³² Broshi, "Qumran," *NEAEHL* 4:1241, emphasis mine.

³³ Joseph, *Jesus*, 44.

³⁴ On the other hand, VanderKam and Flint suggest, "If all of the texts were associated with this group, we may use all of them as indicators of its beliefs or theological convictions. Even the presence of scrolls neither written nor copied at Qumran says something about

deliberations would happen.³⁵ Moreover, it is obvious that the sectarians did not author the biblical texts nor some other non-biblical texts.³⁶ Thus, the mere presence of a text in the Qumran library should not *require* that every idea mentioned therein should be understood to represent the beliefs and practices of the community.

Additionally, we need not restrict the beliefs and practices of the Qumran community to these ruins. Indeed, both 1QS, the “Community Rule,” and Josephus refer to the existence of Essene groups that exist in numerous geographic locations.³⁷ Compare for example,

באלה יתהלכו בכול מגוריהם כול הנמצא איש את רעהו

Covenant members will conduct themselves by these rules *wherever they dwell, in any place* where a member and his neighbor are found.³⁸

Ἰβά α' ἴνῃ ἑοδόει ἀυδοῖ δυεέο ἀεῖ' εἰ ἐεῦόση ἰἀοῖεῖυόοί δῖεεῖβ.

Moreover, there is not a single city of their own, rather *the majority settle in each city*.³⁹

And, importantly, Alison Schofield notes that “the term ‘*Yahad*’ is never tied to Qumran or any one place.”⁴⁰ In this respect, I follow the “multicommunity (Essene) hypothesis,” a revision of the “Gröningen hypothesis.”⁴¹ Because

which texts were read by the group” (*Meaning*, 255, emphasis mine). Taking a different posture, Jörg Frey says, “it is at least clear that most of the texts in the Qumran library were not composed by the community itself. Therefore, only the community writings (esp. 1QS, 1QSa, CD and 4QD, 1QH, the pesharim, and 4QMMT) can serve for the comparison with the classical sources and for reconstructing Essene beliefs” (“Essenes,” *EDEJ*, 599–603, 600).

³⁵ The crowning privilege of an initiate or a sectarian restored from probation is the community’s acceptance of his “counsel and judgment” (1QS VI, 22; VII, 21).

³⁶ Hartmut Stegemann, *The Library of Qumran, on the Essenes, Qumran, John the Baptist, and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 80–85.

³⁷ Cf. Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 113.

³⁸ 1QS VI, 1–2, translation mine.

³⁹ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.4 §124, translation mine; cf. Philo, *Prob.* 76.

⁴⁰ Alison Schofield, *From Qumran to the Yahad: A New Paradigm of Textual Development for The Community Rule*, ed. Florentino García Martínez, STDJ 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 189.

⁴¹ Torleif Elgvin, “The Yahad Is More than Qumran,” in *Enoch and Qumran Origins: New Light on a Forgotten Connection*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 273–79; Charlotte Hempel, *The Qumran Rule Texts in Context: Collected Studies* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 99–100; Charlotte Hempel, “Community Structures in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Admission, Organization, Disciplinary Procedures,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 67–92; Schofield, *From Qumran*, 188–90; Looijer, *Qumran*, 10–14. Cf. the earlier defense of the Gröningen hypothesis in Florentino García Martínez, “The History of the Qumran Community in Light of Recently Available Texts,” in *Qumran Between the Old and New Testaments*,

1QS suggests that the Qumran community functions like a headquarters for the 777 , I assume that any satellite communities that accepted the charter of the 777 would have generally followed the beliefs and practices of the Qumran community. That said, what I discuss below is focused on the site and community of Qumran.

The DSS Present a Cohesive Picture of this Community's Belief and Practice

Recent scholarship accepts a complex history and development of both the DSS and the Qumran community. However, as Klawans points out, chronological arguments for textual development are based in part on circular reasoning.⁴² In principle, the chronological reclassification of the scrolls would certainly impact a description of the historical and ideological development of the 777 . However, as it pertains to purity, I agree with Harrington who observes, “while the *organizational laws* of the community do show fluctuation with reference to audience and date, *the biblical laws* remain relatively unaffected by these changes and repeatedly reflect a common bias in interpretation.”⁴³

Since my ultimate focus is on the time period of the beginning of the first century CE, I make no serious effort to reconstruct the chronology of the scrolls or the community, both of which scholars continue to debate.⁴⁴ Regardless of whatever changes occurred, by the time of John the immerser, the majority of the scrolls were already written and the community at Qumran was well established.⁴⁵ I have already argued above that despite changes in the

ed. Frederick H. Cryer and Thomas L. Thompson, JSOTSup 290 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 194–216.

⁴² Klawans, “Purity,” 387.

⁴³ Harrington, “Halakah,” 74, emphasis mine. By “biblical laws” she means purity laws. Later she adds, “The interpretations of biblical law found in the Scrolls are invariably more difficult to observe, but they are logical, straightforward interpretations of Scripture. Their stringency was championed at Qumran as part of the group’s self-identity” (77). However, elsewhere she clarifies that a textual focus on purity alone does not suffice to label the source “sectarian” (Harrington, “Purity,” 404).

⁴⁴ In my view, 4QMMT represents an early letter of the community to their opponents. Similarly, CD represents an early document related to the founding of the Essenes. 1QS, then, represents the official charter of Essene groups associated with Qumran. Whether there were non-Qumran affiliated Essene groups, I cannot say.

⁴⁵ See “Appendix B: Seven Architectural & Settlement Models of Qumran.” According to B. Webster, “All Qumran texts dated in *DJD* fall between 250 BCE and 135 CE with only a handful being from 250–200 BCE or after 68 CE.” Barbara E. Thiering proposes much later dates for many scrolls based on updated Carbon 14 dating, which she uses to bolster her theory that “the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist and the rival teacher who ‘flouted the Law’ was Jesus.” To my knowledge, her theory has not garnered any serious

community and the scrolls, a coherent understanding of the community's view of purity is possible to identify.⁴⁶ That said, it is reasonable to assume that the community matured in their views and practices as some have proposed, a fact that is true of any human organization.⁴⁷ However, changing views regarding a specific *ruling* is far different than restructuring the entire concept of purity. I now turn to describing the conceptual universe of the Qumran community.

The Qumran Community's Conceptual Universe

What follows is more of a sketch than the full, monograph-length treatment it deserves. However, the purpose is simply to describe enough of the 777's worldview to adequately situate the ritual use of water within it.⁴⁸ Numerous fuller descriptions of the Qumran community exist and much of what I present here is not new, though to be sure, scholars debate many of these details.⁴⁹ To

support despite the revised C₁₄ dating. And in light of Doudna's shocking review of the dating of the scrolls, scroll jars, and the site of Qumran, Thiering's arguments about dating are highly questionable since "the existing radiocarbon data, while confirming second and first century B.C.E. dates of scribal activity among the Qumran cave finds, *do not confirm scribal activity in the first century C.E.*" (Doudna, "Legacy," 153, emphasis mine). See, B. Webster, "Chronological Index of the Texts from the Judaean Desert," in *The Texts From the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, ed. Emanuel Tov, DJD 39 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 351–446, 371; Barbara E. Thiering, "The Date and Order of Scrolls, 40 BCE to 70 CE," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 191–98, 192. On the difficulty of dating these scrolls, see the brief discussion in Matthew A. Collins, *The Use of Sobriquets in the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls*, LSTS 67 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 30–32

⁴⁶ Cf. the discussion above in chapter four, "Objections to a Ritual Purity System."

⁴⁷ Werrett, *Ritual*, passim. Charlesworth argues that we should speak of "'theologies' at Qumran" and that the scrolls cannot be "pressed into a unified system." See, James H. Charlesworth, "General Introduction," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community and Related Documents*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, The Dead Sea Scrolls 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), xxii.

⁴⁸ It is important to recognize that even though there is apparent agreement between the scrolls and the ruins, whether the community lived exactly like the scrolls describe is difficult to prove. On the possibility of constructing "cultural memory" from the Qumran scrolls and its usefulness (and limitations) for "real" history, see Philip R. Davies, "What History Can We Get from the Scrolls, and How?" in *The Qumran Rule Texts in Context: Collected Studies*, ed. Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 31–46.

⁴⁹ Helpful surveys include: García Martínez and Treballe Barrera, *People*, 31–96; Talmon, *World*, 53–60, 273–300; Lawrence Schiffman, *The Eschatological Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Study of the Rule of the Congregation* (Atlanta: Scholars Press,

construct the Qumran community's views, I depend primarily on the sectarian manuscripts, especially 1QS, which dates paleographically to 100–75 BCE,⁵⁰ but I also draw on numerous other sectarian and non-biblical scrolls. A reason for the focus on 1QS is due in part to its nature. Jacob Licht remarks that from this document, “למדו אנשי כת מדור-יהודה כיצד לנהוג ובמה להאמין.”⁵¹ Similarly, Jassen describes 1QS as “one of the most significant texts for the reconstruction of Jewish thought and practice in the Second Temple period.”⁵²

Some caution is in order, however, in that scholars have demonstrated significant redactional activity pertaining to Community Rule texts, which reveals the complex historical development of the *ḥḥ* according to some. Even so, no clear consensus exists on either the order of the textual development between the 1QS and 4QS scrolls or its significance.⁵³ For example, according to Sarianna Metso, there are “contradictory practices” in the textual history leading up to 1QS, including two different procedures used for initiation and three different penal codes.⁵⁴ In contrast, Philip S. Alexander argues that 1QS is the oldest textual version while the 4QS copies are newer, abridged versions.⁵⁵ Recently, Alison Schofield's argued that the various Community Rule

1989); Paul Swarup, *The Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community: An Eternal Planting, A House of Holiness*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe, LSTS 59 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006); Magen Broshi, “Qumran and the Essenes: Purity and Pollution, Six Categories,” *RevQ* 22.87 (2006): 463–74.

⁵⁰ Qimron and Charlesworth, “Rule,” 1; Sarianna Metso, “Rule of the Community (1QS + Fragments),” *EDEJ*, 1169–71. This happens to coincide with the archeological evidence, which suggests that the sectarians first inhabited Qumran ca. 100 BCE (Magness, *Archaeology*, 47–72). On the various chronologies proposed for the settlement at Qumran, see, Dennis Mizzi, “Archaeology of Qumran,” in *T&T Clark Companion to the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. George J. Brooke and Charlotte Hempel (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 17–36, 22, fig. 2.2 (provided in App. E).

⁵¹ Jacob Licht, *The Rule Scroll: A Scroll From the Wilderness of Judaea, 1QS, 1QSa, 1QSB: Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1965), 8, my translation: “the people of the sect from the Judean Desert learned how to conduct themselves and what to believe.”

⁵² Alex P. Jassen, “Rule of the Community,” in *Outside the Bible*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2013), 2923–75, 2926.

⁵³ Cf. Daniel C. Timmer, “Sinai ‘Revisited’ Again: Further Reflections on the Appropriation of Exodus 19-Numbers 10 in 1QS,” *RB* 115 (2008): 481–98, 483, n. 7.

⁵⁴ Nevertheless, Sarianna Metso remains optimistic on the possibility of reconstructing the history of the sect, but that such an effort would require careful study of numerous texts. Following J. T. Milik, she argues that the 4QS copies are older versions that are redacted into 1QS. See, Sarianna Metso, *The Textual Development of the Qumran Community Rule*, STJD 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 154–55.

⁵⁵ Philip S. Alexander, “The Redaction-History of Serekh Ha-Yahad: A Proposal,” *RevQ* 17 (1996): 437–56.

documents are best understood as reflecting the different socio-historical realities of the “camps of the many” mentioned within the Community Rule texts themselves.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, my attempt to sketch a view of the community is warranted in light of the numerous parallels that exist between 1QS and other DSS,⁵⁷ the fact that many concepts remain largely unaffected by the textual development of the Community Rule texts,⁵⁸ and the fact that I am focused synchronically on the turn of the first centuries BCE and CE when 1QS had been long written.

The People of the יהד

From the scrolls we learn that the community was comprised primarily of Jewish people,⁵⁹ and more specifically, priests, Levites, and lay Israelites.⁶⁰ As in the HB, this hierarchical relationship defined the Qumran community because the title “priest” was not fictively transferred to the entire community.⁶¹ A

⁵⁶ Schofield, *From Qumran*, 66–67, 188–90. On her reading, there is not necessarily direct textual development, but rather older texts were constantly being updated. Hence, the textual diversity is due the differing socio-historical realities of the various camps in dialogue with one another.

⁵⁷ Cf. Schofield, *From Qumran*, 179, table 3.4; E. J. C. Tigchelaar, “Annotated Lists of Overlaps and Parallels,” in *The Texts From the Judaean Desert: Indices and an Introduction to the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert Series*, ed. Emanuel Tov, DJD 39 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), 351–446, 319, table 46.

⁵⁸ For two examples, see below, p. ? , n. 78, and above, p. ? , n. 43, and the discussion under “Objections to a Ritual Purity System.” An exception appears to be the use of ברית “covenant” (discussed below).

⁵⁹ Michael O. Wise translates הנלויים in 1QS V, 6 as “Gentile proselytes,” which has precedent in Esth 9:27 (Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 122). Stökl and Legrand translate it “tous ceux que les rejoignent” (“Règle” 335); cf. J. Pouilly, *La règle de la communauté de Qumrân, son évolution littéraire*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique 17 (Paris: Gabalda, 1976), 121. Grammatically, הנלויים, “the ones being joined,” should be read in parallel with המתנדבים, “the ones freely offering themselves,” since they are both participles and objects of the infinitive construct לכפר, “to atone.” If המתנדבים לקודש באהרון, “the ones offering themselves freely to holiness in Aaron,” is to be understood as the priests and Levites and המתנדבים לבית האמת בישראל, “the ones offering themselves freely to the house of truth in Israel” as lay Israelites, then viewing הנלויים as “Gentile proselytes” is plausible.

⁶⁰ Robert A. Kugler, “Priests,” *EDSS* 2:688–93; Neusner, *Idea*, 50. Cf. 1QS I, 16–II, 25.

⁶¹ Note the focus on מקום גורלו, “one’s place of membership,” in 1QS II, 23. Depending on to whom the text is referring, 4Q400 1 I, 3 might suggest such transference to the entire community, but then again, the entire nation of Israel is referred to as a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod 19:6). Josephus doesn’t mention priests, but observes their hierarchical organization (*J.W.* 2.8.10 §150). See also, Fiorenza, “Cultic Language,” 166; Florentino García Martínez, “Priestly Functions in a Community without Temple,” in *Gemeinde Ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des*

significant impetus for the $\eta\eta$'s origin is found in halakic (not theological) disagreements with others, and this forced them to separate from fellow, "disobedient" Jews.⁶² They were thoroughly invested in studying and living according to God's revealed and hidden laws,⁶³ and derived their very existence from Scripture.⁶⁴ Isaiah 40:3 and Zeph 1:6 (among other texts) provided prophetic justification for this.⁶⁵ While the community expected a royal "messiah,"⁶⁶ no clear evidence exists that anyone served in the role of a "king" or any other political role in the community.⁶⁷ As Schiffman notes of 11QT, the (future) king is not only distinct from the high priest, but the former is subordinate to

Jerusalem Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum, ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer, WUNT 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 303–19; Nathan Jastram, "Hierarchy at Qumran," in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran, Published in Honor of Joseph M. Baumgarten*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 349–76.

Tempering this somewhat, Robert Kugler casts doubt on the idea that actual priests were instrumental in the group's founding or leadership and believes that the evidence points to a *literary* elevation of priests and Levites. If Kugler and Schiffman are both correct, the result is an oddity: on the one hand there is an actual power shift from priests to laity (Schiffman) while at the same time the "textual world" experiences the ascendancy of priestly power (Kugler). See, Robert Kugler, "Priesthood at Qumran," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 93–116; but see, Heinz-Josef Fabry, "Priests at Qumran: A Reassessment," in *The Qumran Rule Texts in Context: Collected Studies*, ed. Charlotte Hempel, STDJ 90 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 243–62; Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 98–111.

⁶² Davies locates the significance of this in the "cultural memory" recored in CD in which a distinction is made between "old Israel" and "new Israel." He observes that "The memory recorded in these two passages [CD VI, 11; XII, 23] makes a simple contrast between the failure of the old covenant with the ongoing new covenant, previous disobedience with present obedience. Its function, therefore, is to distinguish the community both chronologically from the preceding era and also contemporaneously from outsiders, who belong typologically to the 'old' Israel since they are still ensnared in disobedience to the divine will" ("What History," 35–36).

⁶³ 1QS V, 11–12.

⁶⁴ Metso notes, "The ethos of the Hebrew Bible permeates the entire Qumran corpus" ("Rule," *EDEJ*, 1171).

⁶⁵ For Isa 40:3 see 1QS VIII, 12–16; for Zeph 1:6 see 1QS V, 10–13. I do not agree with Edward M. Cook that "All the wilderness imagery must be taken symbolically" ("What Was Qumran?" 51).

⁶⁶ "Messiah(s) of Israel and Aaron": CD XII, 23; XIV, 19; XIX, 10–11; XX, 1; 1QS IX, 11. "Branch of David": 4Q161 8–10 III, 18; 4Q174 1–2 I, 12; 4Q252 1 V, 3; 4Q285 7 3–4.

⁶⁷ Despite the importance of the "teacher of righteousness" for the community, Davies remarks that he was "not historically a figure of *national* significance but only a sectarian messianic claimant" ("What History" 46).

the Torah (as ideally presented in the HB),⁶⁸ and according to 4Q161 8–10 III, 18–25, also subordinate to the instruction of the priests.⁶⁹ We may conclude, then, from its organizational structure that the קָהִלָּה was religiously oriented and that their future political hopes were subsidiary to this.⁷⁰

The “New” Mosaic Covenant, Separation, and the קָהִלָּה

This community had entered into a “new covenant”⁷¹ that did not de facto include every Jewish person.⁷² In their view, they represented “true Israel,”⁷³ an idea supported by the concept of remnant in the HB.⁷⁴ As is well known, the community referred to itself as קָהִלָּה .⁷⁵ James C. VanderKam explains that Exodus 19:8 is the likely source for their name on the basis of numerous textual and conceptual parallels between 1QS and Exod 19,⁷⁶ which suggests that the community celebrated their covenant renewal ceremony on the date the Sinai covenant was supposedly given (3/15).⁷⁷ In his assessment, “The Qumran

⁶⁸ Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem*, 99–101.

⁶⁹ Craig A. Evans, “Messiahs,” *EDSS* 1:537–42, 539. Evans wonders whether this might be a corrective to the combined religious and political role played by Hasmonean high priests, which diverges from the biblical model.

⁷⁰ Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison with Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period*, NTOA (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 16–21, 45.

⁷¹ The Qumran community understood “new covenant” as the reestablishment of the Mosaic covenant; קָהִלָּה in the verbal form means “to make anew, restore” (*HALOT*, s.v. “ קָהִלָּה ”).

⁷² Thomas R. Blanton, IV notes that בְּרִית הַדְּשָׁה , “new covenant,” only occurs three times in CD and once in 1QpHab. Additionally, however, בְּרִית occurs with the verbal form of קָהִלָּה , “to make anew,” three more times in 1QSa, which was appended to 1QS and written by the same person. Finally, this same construction is found once in 1Q34. See, Thomas R. Blanton, IV, *Constructing a New Covenant: Discursive Strategies in the Damascus Document and Second Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 71–75.

⁷³ CD I, 4–5, 7–18; 1QSa I, 1; cf. 1 Enoch 1.1–9.

⁷⁴ Blanton, *Constructing*, 39–70; Davies, “What History,” 35–36.

⁷⁵ On this term see Talmon, *World*, 53–60; Claussen and Davis, “Concept,” 232–53.

⁷⁶ James C. VanderKam, “Sinai Revisited,” in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze, *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44–60. Claussen and Davis disagree and conclude that there is no scriptural basis for their title (“Concept,” 238).

⁷⁷ The renewal ceremony is described in 1QS I, 16–III, 12. Charlesworth proposes that the covenant renewal took place on the Day of Atonement (“Rule,” 3–4). Yet, it is logical that the community would celebrate their covenant renewal on the day it was originally given. On the relationship between the renewal, initiation, and post-probation reinstatement, see Michael A. Daise, “The Temporal Relationship between the Covenant Renewal Rite and the Initiation Process in 1QS,” in *Qumran Studies: New Approaches, New Questions*, ed. Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 150–60.

community saw itself as re-creating the camp of Israel in the wilderness.⁷⁸ As the next section further explores, the context for establishing this “new covenant” is that the temple authorities and people continually violated the Mosaic covenant because they did not correctly observe its regulations (per the יְהוָה).

The importance of the covenant to the יְהוָה may be demonstrated by the following points:

- 1) Everywhere that בָּדַל, “to separate,” occurs one also finds entering the covenant.⁷⁹
- 2) As Chart 1: Occurrences of בְּרִית in 1QS by Column shows (next page), “covenant,” occurs 33 times in 1QS, and column five, which is concerned with entrance into the community, contains 42% of these.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ VanderKam, “Sinai,” 59. Daniel Timmer expands VanderKam’s observations and argues that Exod 19–Deut 10 influenced the community’s self-understanding. Importantly, he notes that these themes are found across the redactional history of 1QS (Timmer, “Sinai,” 484).

⁷⁹ Cf. 1QS V, 1, 10, 18.

⁸⁰ Frequency by column and line—1QS I, 8, 16, 18, 20, 24; II, 10, 12–13, 16 (reconstructed), 18, 26; III, 11; IV, 22; V, 2–3, 5, 8–12, 18–20, 22; VI, 15, 19; VIII, 9–10, 16; X, 10.

Frequency by column—1QS I (5x), 1QS II (6x), 1QS III (1x), 1QS IV (1x), 1QS V (14x), 1QS VI (2x), 1QS VIII (3x), 1QS X (1x).

Schofield notes that the high frequency of בְּרִית in 1QS in comparison with the other Rule texts indicates “a more developed theological self-awareness” (*From Qumran*, 156). While the fragmentary status of the 4QS texts make full comparison with 1QS difficult, according to Schofield, “Hempel has done a thorough comparison of this passage [1QS V, 7–20] in the three versions, and she observes that ‘the covenant is mentioned a striking seven times in this passage in 1QS over against a single reconstructed occurrence in 4QS^{b,d}, an example that is only tentatively restored (4QS^d I, 11)’ (158).

- 3) 1QS V, 10–13 explicitly states the primary reason for separation: the אֲנָשֵׁי הָעוֹלָה, “people of iniquity,” are not to be reckoned (חָשַׁב) as covenant members and the scriptural basis is Zeph 1:6.

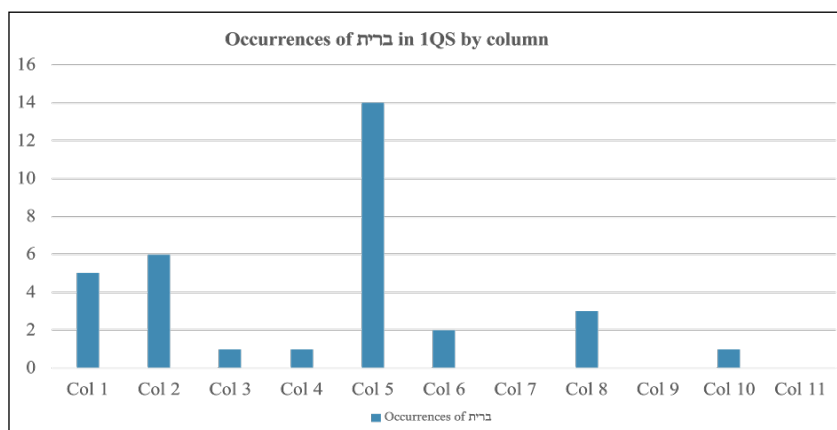


Chart 1: Occurrences of ברית in 1QS by column

Non-covenant members pose a danger for two reasons: they transgress “hidden” laws (הַנְּסֻתָרוֹת), but worse, they transgress revealed laws *deliberately* (בִּיד רְמָה).⁸¹ Since the community had entered a new covenant with God, fraternizing with the disobedient would provoke God’s anger and invoke the covenant curses (בְּאֵלוֹת בְּרִית).⁸² This is confirmed by the fact that the author(s) of CD invokes Israel’s past breaking of the covenant with its associated curses as a means to explain the current situation.⁸³ Thus, it is not surprising that separation from others despite their ethnic connection.⁸⁴ In fact, 1QS V, 11’s allusion to Zeph 1:6 directly links the transgression of revealed and hidden laws with the Mosaic covenant curses and the community’s expected annihilation of

⁸¹ On the connection of the hidden laws in the Hodayot to Daniel 11:27–34, see Trine Bjørnung Hasselbalch, *Meaning and Context in the Thanksgiving Hymns: Linguistic and Rhetorical Perspectives on a Collection of Prayers from Qumran* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 208–13.

⁸² 1QS V, 2, 14; VIII, 22; cf. Leaney, *Rule*, 172; Schiffman, *Qumran and Jerusalem*, 250.

⁸³ Cf. the opposite strategy in 1 Macc 1:11–15, where certain Jewish leaders made a covenant made with the nations as means of avoiding future disaster (διαθήκη μετὰ τῶν ἔθνων τῶν κύκλῳ ἡμῶν).

⁸⁴ CD I, 2.

the disobedient, the very context of Zeph 1:6.⁸⁵ The text further specifies on the principle of Lev 22:16 that any association (תָּחַ) with the אֲנָשֵׁי הָעוֹלַם involving “work or wealth” renders a sectarian liable for his guilt, and thus, also vulnerable to the covenant curses.⁸⁶ H. Dietrich Preuss articulates the logic well when he says, “the texts [of the DSS] often speak of ‘abhorrence’ or ‘abomination’ in a *separative sense*, with respect to both God and other human beings: *one must abhor whatever or whomever Yahweh loathes or shuns.*”⁸⁷ It is well known that Jubilees was highly influential to the authors of the DSS⁸⁸ and this excerpt from Jubilees further demonstrates why the תָּחַ employed the concept of “new covenant” to protect themselves:

If one does this or shuts his eyes to those who do impure things and who defile the Lord’s sanctuary and to those who profane his holy name, then *the entire nation will be condemned together* because of all this impurity and this contamination. There will be no favoritism nor partiality; there will be no receiving from him of fruit, sacrifices, offerings, fat, or the aroma of a pleasing fragrance so that he should accept it. *(So) is any man or woman in Israel to be who defiles his sanctuary.*⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Cf. 1QS V, 19; Deut 4:29; Jer 29:13; Prov 11:27. This allusion is noted by Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 123; Jassen, “Rule,” 2942; Stökl and Legrand, “Règle,” 337, n. 7. No mention is made in Eduard Lohse, ed., *Die Texte aus Qumran: Hebräisch und deutsch mit masoretischer Punktation, Übersetzung, Einführung, und Anmerkungen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 1:19; Leaney, *Rule*, 172.

⁸⁶ Cf. 1QS V, 14–15. There are two ways to read this text depending on whether the *principle* or the *context* of Lev 22:16 is in view. If the *context* is in view, sectarian food is equivalent to “sacred donations” and thus the sectarian would cause inadvertent guilt to fall on the outsider (cf. Kugler and Baek, *Leviticus*, 57, and the translation of García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 1:81). If the *principle* is in view, then it is the outsider who causes the sectarian to bear guilt; see the translation of Jassen, “Rule,” 2942–43. Others leave it ambiguous, e.g., Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 123; Stökl and Legrand, “Règle,” 339; Lohse, *Texte*, 19. Since the deeds (עֲוֹנוֹת) and possessions (חֲפָצִים) of sinful individuals are in view, and the concern is to avoid uniting (תָּחַ), this suggests that the *principle* alone is operative, though this may not mutually exclude the context.

⁸⁷ H. Dietrich Preuss, “תָּחַ עֲוֹנוֹת,” *TDOT* 15:591–604, 603, emphasis mine; cf. 4Q418 81+81a, 1–3.

⁸⁸ James C. VanderKam lists 15 different manuscripts found throughout caves 1–4, and 11. See, James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: A Translation*, CSCO 511 (Louvain: Peeters, 1989), vii.

⁸⁹ Jub. 30.14–15; VanderKam, *Book*, 195–96. While the context is specifically concerned with the Israelites marrying gentiles—“if anyone has given one of his daughters to any foreign man”—the text cited here includes in its purview more sources of impurity.

Covenant, Holiness, and the יְהוָה

A corollary of entering the covenant and separating from others is the establishment of holiness. This is expressed in Exod 19:5–6, “And now, if you will faithfully obey my voice and my covenant, you will be my treasured people from among all the peoples, because all the earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy (שְׁקִינִי) nation.”⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, 4Q400 1–2 I, 1–II, 7 explores the significance of the community’s holiness in comparison with the angelic priests of the heavenly temple with whom the יְהוָה worships God.⁹¹ The author(s) asks, “How shall we be reckoned among them? As what our priesthood in their habitations? [How shall our holi]ness [compare with their utter] holiness? [What] is the praise of our mortal tongue alongside their div[ine] knowledge?”⁹² The holiness of the יְהוָה and angelic presence are also reasons that those members who posed high risk of ritual impurity were not permitted among the assembly.⁹³

Covenant, Atonement, and the יְהוָה

The disagreements between the sectarians and their opponents were not primarily intellectual or theoretical. Rather, as 4QMMT C explains, everyone was at great risk of the covenant curses promised against violators.⁹⁴ The only solution apart from comprehensive halakic reform was separation and the establishment of a “new covenant” community, which demonstrated their resolve to “circumcise in unity the foreskin of one’s nature, the stiff neck.”⁹⁵ Yet, separation was not only a strategy to protect holiness and to avoid the covenant curses, but also it impacted their ability to achieve atonement for the יְהוָה, the land (אֶרֶץ), and sin (עוֹן).⁹⁶ Thus, Fiorenza concludes, “Since the community

⁹⁰ Translation mine.

⁹¹ This text is from the Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice, psalms used on the Sabbath, which dates paleographically to 75–50 BCE. Cf. 1QS XI, 7–9.

⁹² Translation Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 466.

⁹³ 4Q400 1 I, 14–16; 1QSa II, 3–10. The 1QSa text does not indicate that ritually impure people are prohibited from joining the יְהוָה, only that they may not enter the קהל, “assembly” (the text also uses עדה, “national, legal and cultic communities”; *HALOT*, s.v. “עדה”).

⁹⁴ 4Q397 14–21, 5–16; 4Q398 10, 1. The text explicitly notes, “because of the violence and the fornication, [some] places have been destroyed” and references Deut 7:26. Cf., García Martínez, *People*, 32–35.

⁹⁵ 1QS V, 5, my translation; cf. 4Q504 4, 11–12.

⁹⁶ Atonement for the community is found in 1QS V, 6; for the land, 1QS VIII, 6, 10; 1QSa I, 3; for sin, 1QS VIII, 3. Note that while כפר is used in reference to the land and community, רצח, “propitiate” is used in reference to sin (עוֹן). The text is reconstructed, but see 1Q34bis

has taken over the holiness of the temple, the only means for maintaining the holiness of Israel and for achieving atonement of sins is life in the Qumran community in perfect obedience to the Torah.⁹⁷ Although the יְהוָה believed that their covenantal obedience was critical to their community becoming an effective sacrifice of atonement, they also understood that God was the one who atoned.⁹⁸ 1QS XI is clear that righteousness comes from God,⁹⁹ that he atones for sin,¹⁰⁰ and that this is only possible “in him.”¹⁰¹ And 1QHa XIX, 13–14 explicitly recognizes that God cleanses the people from transgressions.¹⁰²

The Jerusalem Temple, Divine Presence, and the יְהוָה

Whatever may have occurred in the history between the יְהוָה and the authorities of the Jerusalem temple, the former believed that the temple was defiled and this was due to incorrect halakic practices (including following the wrong calendar) in addition to moral impurity stemming from their breaking of the commandments.¹⁰³ Of course, this did not make them “anti-temple” since they sought its reform and anticipated a future restored temple.¹⁰⁴ Yet, logically, if the temple were defiled to the extent envisioned by the יְהוָה (i.e., they were in the “last days” and fearful of the covenant curses), God’s presence was no longer found there.¹⁰⁵ Rather, the יְהוָה was God’s dwelling place on earth. In fact, 1QS VIII, 20–23 explains just this as the יְהוָה becomes “an ‘eternal planting,’¹⁰⁶ a temple (בֵּית קֹדֶשׁ) for Israel, and—mystery!—a Holy of Holies (קֹדֶשׁ קֹדְשִׁים) for Aaron.”¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in what appears to be a prayer book

3 I, 4–5 and the translation of Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 206. It is unfortunately highly fragmentary, but also 4Q414 1 II–2 I, 3.

⁹⁷ Fiorenza, “Cultic Language,” 166; Neusner, *Idea*, 50.

⁹⁸ Cf. 4Q414 1–2 II, 3.

⁹⁹ 1QS XI, 2, 5, 10–12, 14.

¹⁰⁰ 1QS XI, 14.

¹⁰¹ 1QS XI, 17.

¹⁰² כבודכה טהרתה אנוש מפשע להתקדש לכה מכול תועבות נדה ואשמת מעל להוחד עם בני קדושיכה . . . Cf. 4Q370 1 II, 3; 11Q5 XIX, 14; XXIV, 12.

¹⁰³ Cf. 4QMMT; CD VI, 11–13; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.5 §§18–19.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. CD XI, 19; 11QT; Josephus, *War.* 1.3.5 §§78–80; 2.7.3; §§111–13; *Ant.* 18.1.5 §19; Klawans, *Purity*, 145–74.

¹⁰⁵ Neusner, *Idea*, 50. It is important to note that in the early stages of the conflict between the Essenes and/or Qumran community, the effectiveness of the temple was potentially in flux, but this depends on how one interprets Josephus’s comments (Josephus *Ant.* 18.1.5 §19). As Beall notes, textual variants indicate that they do *not* send offerings to the temple (Josephus’ *Description*, 25).

¹⁰⁶ Jub. 16.26.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. 1QS X, 4 (trans. Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 129).

intended for public liturgical use due to its arrangement by days of the week,¹⁰⁸ 4Q504 provides further evidence that the community¹⁰⁹ had received God's holy spirit,¹¹⁰ experienced his very presence,¹¹¹ received his purification for their sin,¹¹² and all of this is framed within the context of God's covenant with Israel.¹¹³ Even so, the importance of the Jerusalem temple is affirmed in 4Q504 1–2 IV, 2–4 (recto).¹¹⁴

Purity within the יהד

4Q403 1 II, 26 calls God, מלך הטהור, and since the semantic range of טהר encompasses both ritual and moral purity, there is no reason from the context to exclude or prioritize one over the other. Moreover, as pointed out in the previous chapter, ritual purity laws are commandments.¹¹⁵ Thus, covenant obedience entailed *both* moral and ritual purity and it provided the means to resolve both types of impurity (in most cases).¹¹⁶ In fact, 1QS VIII, 20–23 not only envisions the possibility of blameless observance of the torah, but it mandates permanent expulsion from the community anyone who transgresses ביד רמה

¹⁰⁸ Maurice Baillet explains, “Le document était destiné à un usage liturgique dans le cadre des jours de la semaine. On y trouve des titres de sections indiquant le mercredi, jour de l’Alliance (f. 3 ii 5) et le samedi, jour de la louange (ff. 1–2 recto vii 4). Ce qui précède ce dernier convient au vendredi, jour de la confession des péchés.” See, Maurice Baillet, *Qumrân Grotte 4, III, (4Q482–4Q520)*, DJD 7 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982). See also the analysis of the scrolls and commentary in James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works*, Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 239–66.

¹⁰⁹ James R. Davila notes that this is a “presectarian composition adopted by the sectarians and used by them for a very long time” (*Liturgical Works*, 242). By “presectarian” I assume he means prior to the settlement at Qumran.

¹¹⁰ 4Q504 1–2 V, 15–17 (recto); 4Q504 4, 5–6.

¹¹¹ 4Q504 6, 10–12.

¹¹² 4Q504 1–2 VI, 2–7 (recto); 4Q504 4, 7–8.

¹¹³ 4Q504 1–2 II, 7–11 (recto); 4Q504 1–2 III, 4–13 (recto); 4Q504 1–2 V, 4–14 (recto); 4Q504 1–2 VI, 7–9 (recto); 4Q504 6, 5–8.

¹¹⁴ “Your tabernacle [...] a place of rest in Jerusa[lem, the city that You ch]ose out of all the earth, that Your [name] should dwell there forever” (Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 523).

¹¹⁵ See the discussion, “Ritual Purity Was A Commandment, not a Temple Entry Rule.”

¹¹⁶ 4Q414 2–4 II, 4–8 (partially reconstructed) expresses that it is God's will that the people purify themselves before God—יכה לפני יהוה להטהר. Cf. Esther Eshel, “4Q414 Fragment 2: Purification of a Corpse-Contaminated Person,” in *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran, Published in Honor of Joseph M. Baumgarten*, ed. Moshe Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez, and John Kampen (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3–10.

or by deceit.¹¹⁷ Thus, the קִהָּי members did not observe ritual and moral purity for their own sake, rather they are integral to the topics discussed above.

The covenant also set the people apart as holy, and the sectarians reasoned that if other Jews refused to set themselves apart, then why be polluted with them and suffer the covenant curses? It is in this sense that observing ritual purity is connected to holiness.¹¹⁸ Harrington proposes that the קִהָּי pursued a strict halakah to establish maximum holiness, but just the opposite could be true.¹¹⁹ Rather than making one derivative from the other, they simply entail one another—the קִהָּי is holy and thus they observe strict halakah, just as they observe strict halakah to be holy; logically, one cannot exist without the other.¹²⁰

Given the community's view that they are a sacrifice of atonement, any impurity that might be permitted to exist among them jeopardized their communal offering as רִיחַ נִיחֻחַ , “a sweet savor,” a phrase repeatedly used in connection with sacrificial offerings in Leviticus.¹²¹ That is, they had to maintain a heightened level of purity (ritual and moral) and holiness for fear that God might reject their sacrifice of atonement. Like any offering, to be accepted and effectual, their sacrifice had to be blameless (see *Figure 17: Acceptable and Unacceptable Sacrifice of Atonement* at right).

¹¹⁷ Paul makes this very claim in Phil 3:6.

¹¹⁸ It is rare in the HB to find שָׁקַט (LXX: $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha\zeta\omega$) in the context of ritual purification outside of texts pertaining to priestly ordination, but see 2 Sam 11:4.

¹¹⁹ Harrington, “Halakah,” 81.

¹²⁰ As argued above, holiness and purity are *relative* terms and *distinct* even though they entail one another. This relative nature explains how ritual purification is one way that the common Israelite sanctifies his or herself from the nations (since Israel is a “holy nation, a kingdom of priests”) and why the common Israelite is *not* holy vis-à-vis priests *within* Israel. See the discussion in chapter four, “The Key Binaries: Holy/Common and Clean/Unclean,” and “The Binaries as Status and Condition.”

¹²¹ Leaney, *Rule*, 213, 217; Jassen, “Rule,” 2953–54; 1QS VIII, 3, 6, 9–10; Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9, 12; 3:5, 16; 4:31; 6:8, 14; 8:21, 28; 17:6; 23:13, 18; 26:31. Leviticus 26:31 is especially enlightening since it ties together disobedience, the desolation of the land, and the phrase רִיחַ נִיחֻחַ , all concerns that we find in the context of 1QS VIII.

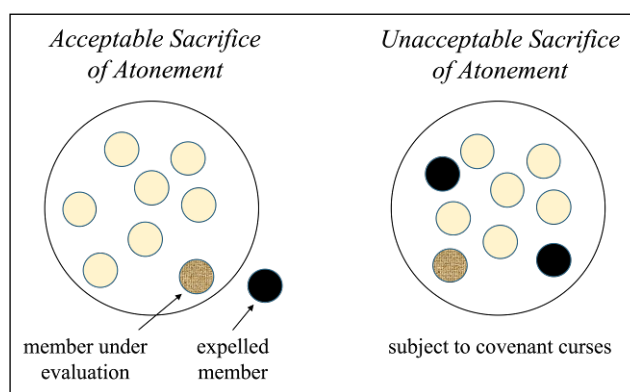


Figure 17: Acceptable and unacceptable sacrifice of atonement

Yet, the sectarians faced a peculiar problem that required continual attention—only God knows who are the “Sons of Light” and “Sons of Darkness,” and the former are not immune to the influence of the Angel of Darkness.¹²² According to 1QS IV, 16–17, “the outworking of *every deed* inheres in these divisions [of light and darkness] according to each person’s spiritual heritage,” which meant that community examination provided the *only means* to determine one’s lot.¹²³ (Incidentally, this is also why the the 777 proscribed the legal judgment of initiates until they were accepted as full members.) In this regard, Loren T. Stuckenbruck rightly observes, “the heart’ of each human being is regarded as a combat zone for powers that struggle to assert their control.”¹²⁴ Every moral transgression throws into doubt one’s lot as a Son of Light, so the community protects itself by sanctioning guilty members. In fact, repeated or flagrant

¹²² Cf. 1QS IV, 22–26; 1QS III, 13–VI, 26.

¹²³ This is expressed clearest in 1QS VI, 18–19: “When he has passed a full year in the Yahad, the general membership shall inquire into the details of his understanding and works of the Law. *If it be ordained, in the opinion of the priests and the majority of the men of their Covenant*, then he shall be initiated further into the secret teaching of the Yahad” (emphasis mine); cf. 1QS IX, 1–2. In 1QS IX, 12–16, which indicate that it is the Instructor who determines who are the Sons of Light.

¹²⁴ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, “The ‘Heart’ in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Negotiating between the Problem of Hypocrisy and Conflict within the Human Being,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages, and Cultures*, ed. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold, VTSup 140/1 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 1:437–53, 452.

violations may reveal that a sectarian is actually a Son of Darkness, a reality that would endanger the covenant community and their communal atonement.¹²⁵

Consequently, this concern explains why examinations of moral conduct are regularly performed¹²⁶ and the 4Q477 fragments demonstrate that the $\eta\eta$ documented infractions.¹²⁷ These examinations occurred when joining the community, after a year of probation, after the second year of probation, and then annually.¹²⁸ Once fully accepted as a Son of Light, any subsequent prohibition from the $\eta\eta$ indicated the loss of one's status and the initiation process recommenced.¹²⁹ It is critical to note that for both new initiates and insiders who are demoted, there is *never* an inspection of their level of ritual purity, rather the inspection pertains to their moral conduct. At the same time,

¹²⁵ So, Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony and the Penal Code*, BJS 33 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 173. Lesser violations still receive censure, but, in light of their lesser status, do not merit prohibition from the $\eta\eta$. The violations that involve immediate dismissal indicate that the infraction was so severe that the guilty person is taken to be a Son of Darkness and cut off from the people.

¹²⁶ Cf. 1QS II, 11–18.

¹²⁷ Since sectarians are urged to rebuke comrades in the presence of witnesses (1QS V, 24–VI, 1) and that such rebukes were recorded (4Q477), this explains the situation wherein an accuser is unable to prove an accusation (1QS VII, 17–18). In fact, reproof is reserved for “those who have chosen the Way” since it might accidentally expose the Instructor’s secret “insight into the Law when among perverse men” (1QS IX, 16–18). See also Schiffman, *Sectarian Law*, 89–109; Jassen, “Rule,” 2944.

¹²⁸ Cf. 1QS II, 19–25; V, 23–24; VI, 13–23.

¹²⁹ This is actually stated as such in 1QS VIII, 16–19: “No man belonging to the Covenant of the Yahad who flagrantly deviates from any commandment is to touch the pure food belonging to the holy men. Further, he is not to participate in any of their deliberations until all his works have been cleansed from evil, so that he is again able to walk blamelessly. They shall admit him into deliberations by the decision of the general membership; afterwards, he shall be enrolled at an appropriate rank. *This is also the procedure for every initiate added to the Yahad*” (emphasis mine). The person in view is a community member! Additionally, the circumscription of the probationer’s judgment offers further support since one must become a full member before one’s advice is permitted (cf. 1QS 6:22; 8:25). Cf. Newton, *Concept*, 45; Schiffman, *Sectarian Law*, 165–68, 173; García Martínez and Treballe Barrera, *People*, 154.

In fact, one’s advancement through the stages of initiation to become a full member *is not based on ritual purity concerns at all*; it is assumed that one follows proper halakah in this respect. Thus, there is no progression through levels of purity as many assume, but rather there is an advancement in *rank*, which is based on moral purity (*pace*, Newton, *Concept*, 46; Schiffman, *Sectarian Law*, 162–65; García Martínez and Treballe Barrera, *People*, 152–57). Josephus’s comments do not contradict this since neophytes would be just beginning to learn Qumran halakah (*J.W.* 2.8.10 §150). Just as one does not know the ritual condition of an outsider, one should not assume that neophytes are properly following prescribed halakah.

whenever a member was prohibited from the טהרה, this simultaneously gave an offender the benefit of the doubt regarding his identity as a Son of Light and recognized that no member was free from the influence of the Angel of Darkness.¹³⁰ Infractions that did not mandate separation were not significant enough on their own to cast doubt on one's identity, whereas infractions that required immediate ejection summarily exposed one as a Son of Darkness.¹³¹ Thus, the separation of *even* community members was impelled by covenantal concerns with a view toward offering God an acceptable sacrifice.¹³²

The Conflation of Ritual and Moral among the יחד?

This integrated perspective goes a long way in explaining the יחד's penal code (more below), but more importantly, it challenges the consensus view that the Qumran sectarians conflated ritual and moral impurity, a view that significantly impacts how we understand the community's use of ritual washing. For example, García Martínez and Treballe Barrera claim that the DSS "completely equate what we distinguish into ritual impurity and moral impurity."¹³³ Many assume that the sectarians believed that ritual washing was effective for removing *moral* impurity, which represents a supposed touchstone between the יחד and John the immerser on the assumption that John's immersion also removed moral impurity.¹³⁴ This is remarkable because, per Klawans, apart from the *sectarian* Qumran scrolls *every other textual witness of Judaism consistently and clearly distinguishes between the two forms of impurity*.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Cf. 1QS III, 21–24. In fact, 1QS V, 24–VI, 1 encourages community members to rebuke one another so that they do not continue in sin. In the same way, penalties ascribed to violations function the same way.

¹³¹ This is confirmed by 1QS VII, 22–25 in the prohibition of a sectarian in good standing from sharing food or belongings with ejected members since they are considered to be outsiders; cf. 1QS VIII, 20–IX, 2; *J.W.* 2.8.8 §§143–44; Jassen, "Rule," 2952.

¹³² This is further confirmed by the fact that the *counsel* of those guilty of certain infractions is also circumscribed. It is unclear how counsel, advice, or judgment fits within the conflation paradigm. Cf. Newton, *Concept*, 45.

¹³³ García Martínez and Treballe Barrera, *People*, 154; Neusner, *Idea*, 54; Magness, *Archaeology*, 137; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 17; Eyal Regev, "Washing, Repentance, and Atonement in Early Christian Baptism and Qumranic Purification Liturgies," *Journal for the Study of the Jesus Movement in Its Jewish Setting* 3 (2016), 33–60. Certain scholars nuance conflation as "blurring." See Klawans, "Purity," 386; Harrington, *Purity*, 30; Toews, "Moral Purification," 94; Yair Furstenberg, "Initiation and the Ritual Purification from Sin: Between Qumran and the Apostolic Tradition," *DSD* 23 (2016): 365–94.

¹³⁴ E.g., Leonard F. Badia, *The Qumran Baptism* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1980), 13, 25; Klawans, *Impurity*, 67–91.

¹³⁵ Among these he includes the HB, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, T. Levi, Psalms of Solomon, Philo, NT, and Tannaitic writings. Klawans, *Impurity*, 60, 90–91, 158–62.

Indeed, how would a group led by priests who withdrew, or were driven from Jerusalem¹³⁶ come to conflate these two types of purity, *especially when they held them as previously distinct*? Why does conflation *only* appear in the sectarian documents?¹³⁷ What would have provoked this sudden change?¹³⁸ Would they have continued to conflate if they had regained control of the Jerusalem temple (4QMMT) or began to minister in the restored messianic temple (11QT)?¹³⁹ Why does 4QMMT, which is ostensibly concerned with halakic issues, not mention this? Moreover, Harrington has thoroughly documented the correspondence of ritual purity in the DSS with the HB, and according to Milgrom, the sectarians not only distinguished between “purity” and “holiness,” but also *two* grades of holiness.¹⁴⁰ Thus, *if* the sectarians conflated, they must have done so intentionally, especially since a single, stable text of Leviticus was available in the Second Temple Period, and the Qumran copies of Leviticus do not indicate scribal engagement that bends the text to support their way of life.¹⁴¹

Klawans has advanced the following five main arguments in favor of conflation at Qumran:¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Although 4QMMT C, 7–8 (4Q397 14–21, 7–8) implies withdrawal, Wise, Abegg, Cook argue that Pharisees forced the sectarians out of Jerusalem (*Dead Sea Scrolls*, 16–35). The two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

¹³⁷ Klawans insists that the “nonsectarian or protosectarian” texts (4Q381, 11QT, and CD), the “formative period” 4QMMT, and the sectarian 1QpHab, *all maintain the distinction between ritual and moral purity* (*Impurity*, 60, 73, 161). According to Hempel, all of these except 4Q381 are “widely regarded as sectarian” (“Qumran Community,” *EDSS* 2:747); cf. Florentino García Martínez, “Les limites de la communauté: pureté et impureté à Qumrân et dans le Nouveau Testament,” in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A.F.J. Klijn*, ed. T. Baarda et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 111–22.

¹³⁸ Ian C. Werrett suggests that although withdrawal from the Jerusalem temple precipitated such a change, this evolution “would have taken several generations to complete.” See, Ian C. Werrett, “The Evolution of Purity at Qumran,” in *Purity and the Forming of Religious Traditions in the Ancient Mediterranean World and Ancient Judaism*, ed. Christian Frevel and Christophe Nihan, *Dynamics in the History of Religion* 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 493–518, 514. García Martínez and Treballe Barrera also associate the change with the break from the temple (*People*, 156–57). However, this does not require conflation.

¹³⁹ Klawans, *Purity*, 250–51.

¹⁴⁰ Harrington, *Purity*, 71–128, 134–38, app. B; Jacob Milgrom, “First Day Ablutions in Qumran,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls Madrid 18–21 March, 1991*, ed. Julio Treballe Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2:561–70, 567–68.

¹⁴¹ See above, p. ? , n. 25. In fact, according to Kugler and Baek, eighteen of the sixty instances where rewriting is observable are in the “protosectarian” documents, CD and 4QMMT (*Leviticus*, 99).

¹⁴² Klawans, *Impurity*, 67–91.

- 1) terminological confusion related to תועבה and נדה
- 2) outsiders are morally contagious (in a way that resembles ritual impurity)
- 3) sinful insiders are morally contagious
- 4) repentance requires ritual washing
- 5) ritual impurity is sinful

Since I agree with his conception of and distinction between ritual and moral purity, my disagreement pertains to his interpretation of the DSS, which I find unconvincing for the following reasons. First, Klawans demonstrates that the range of things that qualify as תועבה, “abomination,” is expanded in Second Temple literature, but it *always* occurs in reference to moral impurity in the scrolls¹⁴³ and the HB.¹⁴⁴ Second, he demonstrates that נדה, “impurity, is used *more frequently* in the sectarian scrolls to refer to moral impurity than ritual, but the semantic domain of נדה (in the HB and the DSS) includes both ritual and moral impurity, a point that he admits.¹⁴⁵ Thus, lexical arguments of *frequency* are irrelevant to conflation and rhetorically misleading.¹⁴⁶ Evidence to

¹⁴³ For the term תועבה, his evidence is 1QS IV, 21 and VII, 17–18. Yet, the focus of 1QS IV, 21 is entirely moral as human deeds are purified (cf. מעשי גבר, “works of man,” and עלילות רשעה, “evil deeds”). The purpose of God’s refining (זקק) is to end (תמם) every spirit of injustice (רוח עולה) and make the human spirit clean (טהר) by means of a spirit of holiness (ברוח קודש). In fact, since the spirit of truth is sprinkled *like* the waters of impurity against abominations of deceit, the comparative language shows that ritual and moral impurities are distinguished (cf. Lev 16:19, 30; Jer 13:27; 33:8 for the use of טהר and Num 5:28; Job 17:9; Ps 19:10; Hab 1:13 for the use of טהור to indicate moral purity).

1QS VII, 17–18 pertains to insiders and is explainable on the basis of wanting to avoid covenant curses and assure the community’s atoning sacrifice would be acceptable, see below.

¹⁴⁴ This phenomenon is already noticeable in the HB. See Paul Humbert, “Le substantif to‘ēbā et le verbe t‘b dans l’Ancien Testament,” *ZAW* 72 (1960): 217–37. Moreover, if there were new sources of moral defilement in Second Temple Texts that do not imply conflation (as Klawans argues), then why not also at Qumran?

¹⁴⁵ For נדה, he appeals to 1QS IV, 10, among several other texts, where the word “connotes Israel’s sinfulness,” and I agree completely with his analysis of the term (Klawans, *Impurity*, 77). Cf. Lev 20:21; Ezra 9:11; 2 Chr 29:5; Ezek 7:19–20; Lam 1:17; Harrington, “נדה,” *ThWQ* 2:885–90, 888.

¹⁴⁶ For example, he says in contrast to the sectarian scrolls, “the Temple Scroll uses these terms (נדה and תועבה) exclusively within the semantic range tolerated by Scripture itself” or “Both [11QT and 4QMMT] use these terms only within the semantic ranges allowed by the Pentateuch” (Klawans, *Impurity*, 78–79). To be fair, when he makes these statements, he could mean that no *new* abominations appear in 11QT or 4QMMT or that the use of נדה is statistically similar to the HB in the ratio of its use for ritual and moral impurity. Yet, this

prove the claim would require something like the scrolls calling ritual uncleanness “sin” or using terms restricted to moral impurity in reference to ritual impurity and vice versa.

Second, Klawans interprets 1QS V, 13–14¹⁴⁷ as proving that conflation has occurred¹⁴⁸ because the morally impure outsider is prohibited from touching the טהרה “pure food.”¹⁴⁹ 1QS III, 4–6 supports this in its assertion that the unrepentant outsider cannot ritually purify him or herself. And based on 1QS V, 19–20,¹⁵⁰ he adds that the belongings of outsiders are also impure. Yet, if the *moral* condition of outsiders were viewed as physically contagious, why is the explicit concern of 1QS centered around contamination of their *food*?¹⁵¹ Since the archaeological evidence and Josephus suggest that they were served and ate from separate dishes, how could an outsider contaminate the food?¹⁵² Moreover, why is it acceptable to *purchase* the belongings of outsiders if they are impure?¹⁵³

assumes that there is a normative list of abominations presented in the HB. From my perspective, the semantic range simply includes its use for ritual and moral impurity in general.

¹⁴⁷ He cites as evidence 1QS V, 1–2, 10, 13–14 where outsiders are kept separate from the טהרה “pure food” and Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.10 §150.

¹⁴⁸ I am unaware of any DSS interpreter that disagrees with this interpretation of 1QS V.

¹⁴⁹ On the meaning of טהרה as “pure food,” see Schiffman, *Sectarian Law*, 162–65; Philip R. Davies, “Food, Drink and Sects: The Question of Ingestion in the Qumran Texts,” *Semeia* 86 (1999): 151–63, 160; cf. 1QS IV, 5; V, 13; VI, 16, 22, 25; VII, 3, 16, 19–20, 25; VIII, 17, 24, and an interesting parallel in *Clementine Homilies* 13.4. On the significance of meals at Qumran, see Dennis E. Smith, “Meals,” *EDSS* 1:530–32; VanderKam, *Dead Sea*, 111–12, 115–16, 212–14; Jassen, “Rule,” 2942.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. CD VI, 14.

¹⁵¹ It is notable that the text does not use נטנ. Rather, interpreters supply this as the rationale for the prohibition.

¹⁵² *J.W.* 2.8.5 §130. David Kraemer, “Food, Eating, and Meals,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 403–19, 409; Jodi Magness, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 83; Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 64–67.

¹⁵³ Cf. 1QS V, 17; CD XIII, 12–15. The conflation/purity approach is unable to explain this because the transfer of ownership has no purificatory effect on either ritual or moral impurity. Leaney’s suggestion that buying equates to a form of purification is not convincing, though I do not dispute that an item’s status would have changed once it came under the ownership of a sectarian (Leaney, *Rule*, 174). A change of ownership (legal status) has no effect on ritual or moral impurity. If a sectarian could purchase something and then ritually purify it, there is no reason he could not do the same with something borrowed. Jassen simply calls this an “exception” and makes no comment on its condition of impurity (Jassen, “Rule,” 2943). Thus, at Qumran, an outsider’s belongings were certainly dangerous, but not because they were ritually or morally contagious. Rather, the sharing of goods was a gesture of cooperation with outsiders and would render them susceptible to the covenant curses.

Interpreters have simply misunderstood what 1QS is asserting. In fact, it is necessary for the two forms of impurity be separate for the author(s) of 1QS to claim that it is impossible for a morally impure person to ritually purify. Where most see conflation, the text only points out the futility of the morally impure who might attempt to attain ritual purity. It is simply ineffective.¹⁵⁴ The *אנשי העורל* cannot ritually purify even if they use the sectarians' baths and follow their ritual halakah. Repentance is required because morality trumps ritual, not because of conflation.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, as Hyam Maccoby notes, ritual *always* "gives way to morality" whenever there is a conflict between them.¹⁵⁶ The text itself provides this rationale since it explains *why* the individual cannot ritually purify: "because (כִּי) ritual impurity (טִמְאָה) remains on anyone transgressing His word (עֹוֹבְרֵי דְבָרָו)."¹⁵⁷ The logic is no different from the prophetic critique of the Israelite cult.¹⁵⁸ Thus, Laurent Guyénot states that prophetic texts, especially Isaiah 1:12–20; 58, "stipulent que la pureté et la droiture du coeur doivent précéder la purification rituelle, pour que celle-ci soit acceptable par Dieu. Joseph insiste également sur cette préoccupation, qu'il attribue notamment aux esséniens."¹⁵⁹

To say that moral impurity invalidates any attempt to resolve ritual impurity *may* be an innovation, but this demonstrates that the *הה* distinguished between them. Moral transgressors *are* a source of ritual impurity, but not because of conflation, they remained in a condition of *perpetual ritual*

¹⁵⁴ Not joining the Qumran sect implied by definition that one was morally impure (Blanton, *Constructing*, 101–4).

¹⁵⁵ Pace, García Martínez and Trebelle Barrera, *People*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ Maccoby, *Ritual*, 193. This is also the conclusion of Kazen regarding Jesus's view of the relationship between ritual and moral purity (*Issues*, 133–34; cf. Booth, *Jesus*, 219). Petrovic and Petrovic make a similar observation with regard to Greek religion: "Purity of mind and purity of soul, and their opposites *determine the outcome of a ritual action*" (*Inner Purity*, 298, cf. 4–5).

¹⁵⁷ My translation. While *טִמְאָה* may refer to either moral or ritual impurity, the latter is in view because *טהר* follows *בְּמִים*. Even if one understands *טִמְאָה* to refer to moral impurity in this context, the meaning is the same. In that case, moral *טִמְאָה* remains on the transgressor and this fact inhibits ritual purification. This is simply evidence that moral purity takes precedence over ritual, not that they are conflated.

¹⁵⁸ I agree with Klawans that the prophetic critique should be historically located, but I do not find it "suspicious" that "the prophets opposed ritual only when performed in a state of moral turpitude" (Klawans, *Purity*, 98). Cf. Aaron Glaim, "I Will Not Accept Them": Sacrifice and Reciprocity in the Prophetic Literature," in *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity: Constituents and Critique*, ed. Henrietta L. Wiley and Christian A. Eberhart (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 125–49.

¹⁵⁹ Guyénot, *Jésus*, 69.

uncleanness.¹⁶⁰ This alone explains their prohibition from the “pure food” and conflation is unnecessary. Moreover, drawing near to such a person violates Ex 23:7, which includes discussing matters of Law, eating or drinking their food, or taking their wealth, the very things around which the sectarians unified.¹⁶¹ However, in light of the following texts, presented roughly in chronological order, I am unconvinced that this is an innovation but rather a common view among ancient Mediterranean people.

1QS V, 13–14 (100–50 BCE)

כיא לוא יטהרו כי אם שבו מרעתם כיא טמא בכול עוברי דברו

Indeed, they cannot ritually purify themselves unless they turn from (repent) their evil ways, because ritual impurity remains on anyone transgressing His word.¹⁶²

1QS III, 4–6 (100–50 BCE)

לוא יזכה בכפורים ולוא יטהר במי גדה ולוא יתקדש בימים ונהרות ולוא יטהר בכול מי רחץ. טמא טמא יהיה כול יומי מואסו במשפטי אל לבלתי התיסר ביהוד 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 *ḥḥ* of his congregation.¹⁶³

*Aramaic Levi Document 2.1–4//4Q213a 1, 6–10 (75–50 BCE)*¹⁶⁴

1 ōūōā ēāḥ ēdēōiā ōū iūōēū iṯō,

¹⁶⁰ Schiffman rightly states that “violators of the law were regarded as sources of ritual impurity,” but it is not because they conflated ritual and moral purity, it is because *they could not resolve it* (*Sectarian Law*, 191).

¹⁶¹ 1QS V, 15–16; cf. 1QS V, 1–3. The verbal occurrences of *ḥḥ* in 1QS include 1QS I, 8; III, 7; V, 14, 20; IX, 6. In every case, except 1QS III, 7, the stem is nifal. While the act of uniting requires human action, the passive use emphasizes divine action.

¹⁶² My translation.

¹⁶³ My translation.

¹⁶⁴ My translation. The Greek text is preserved in a manuscript from Mount Athos (8th cent. CE), see Henryk Drawnel, *An Aramaic Wisdom Text from Qumran: A New Interpretation of the Levi Document*, JSJSup 86 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 98–101. A much earlier Aramaic copy is preserved in 4Q213a. The underlined Greek text above reflects the extant Aramaic equivalent.

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.¹⁶⁵

*Sarapis Oracle (1st/2nd cent. CE?)*¹⁶⁶

ÓáñÜðéáïò ÷ñçóìòð ÒéíáéíÝðφ·

άάíáò ÷áññάò ε÷ύí éáí ίñí éáí ãεωðóáí άεçèñ

άύó<έ>έέ, ñ εñάðññò, άεεά ίύφ éάéáññò·

άñéáí áÜñ è' όóβñέò ράίò ÷άάðìò· άíáñά äè δάυέñí

ñà' άí ó δάò εñύόάé ÷άýíάόéí ώεάáíúò.

Oracle of Serapis to Timainetos.

Having consecrated hands and mind, and a true tongue,

enter, not merely by washing, but pure in mind.

For one drop of water suffices for the morally upright; but a thoughtless man,

¹⁶⁵ Trans. 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.

¹⁶⁶ 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 Röscher 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.” According to Chaniotis, this text derives from a manuscript preserved in Vienna. The date of the inscription is uncertain, but perhaps it is from the second century CE. See, 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.

not even the entire ocean with its water could possibly wash.

Justin, Dial. 13 (c. 160 CE)

Ἰὼ ἀὐτῶν ἀΐ ἀὰ ἀτὸ ἀἀεῖαῖαῖτι ὑἰᾶὸ ἔδαῖδαῖ ἩὸἀἸἀὸ ἀδῖεῖδῶῖἸΐῖδὸ ἐεᾶῖ δῶῖ οὐῖῖ ἐαῖ δὸὸ ἄεεᾶὸ
ἀῖἀῖδῶῖ, ῖδὸ ῖδᾶε δὸ δῆδ ἔεῖῖδῶῖδῶ ἰεῖῖδῶῖ δᾶῖ ῖᾶῖῖ ἔεῖῖῖδῶῖ.

For Isaiah did not send you to a bath, there to wash away murder and other sins, which not even all the water of the sea were sufficient to purge.¹⁶⁷

Despite their diversity, all of these texts express a similar perspective regarding the interplay between ritual and moral purity. This clarifies that conflation does not motivate the prohibition against the *אֲנָשֵׁי הָעוֹלָם* from entering the waters and touching the pure food in 1QS V, 13. While inviting perpetually unclean outsiders to dinner would certainly be undesirable, it was not “just dinner.” Access to the pure food indicated full member status. Rather, the text prohibits the *חֵטְאִים* from fellowshiping with the unrepentant or permitting them to join the community, because uniting with those under the covenant curses was dangerous and jeopardized the *חֵטְאִים*’s atonement. It also explains the need to interrogate (*שְׁרַף*) new initiates since they must determine whether they are qualified to be reckoned (*חֵטְאִים*) as covenant members.¹⁶⁸ Thus, it is a category error to interpret 1QS V through the lens of conflation, which obscures the primary concern of the text: prohibiting unqualified people from joining the covenant community and protecting themselves from liability to the covenant curses.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ ANF 1:200. 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.

¹⁶⁸ 1QS V, 20–21. This makes good sense of the “Treatise on the Two Spirits,” which immediately precedes this section (1QS III, 13–VI, 26).

¹⁶⁹ I refer the reader back to the Jubilees 30.14–15 citation above, p. 174. Scholars often appeal to the useful heuristic tools of social-scientific approaches, such as purity/impurity, to interpret “table-fellowship,” but in this specific context, it unfortunately misses the mark. Scholars debate whether the *חַדָּשׁ* held a sacrificial status at Qumran, but it is intriguing that later rabbinic evidence highlights the importance of the table in the absence of the temple: “Both R. Yohanan and R. Eleazar say, ‘So long as the house of the sanctuary stood, the altar atoned for Israel. Now a person’s table atones for him’” (b. Ber 55a). See, e.g., Davies, “Food, Drink and Sects,” 151–63; Jerome H. Neyrey, “Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship,” in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 159–82, esp. 168–74.

The third argument of Klawans is that the sectarians regarded the moral impurity of *insiders* as contagious.¹⁷⁰ He applies the same logic of prohibiting outsiders from the טהרה to the “penal code,” (1QS VI, 24–VII, 25), which deals with sectarians who sin.¹⁷¹ Per Klawans, conflation is clear since they physically separated guilty members from the טהרה.¹⁷² I agree with Klawans’s assumption that the יהד’s motivation to prohibit *outsiders* from the טהרה is the same employed for *insiders*. However, as already argued, a different motivation is at play, namely, the desire to avoid the covenant curses, which cling to outsiders *and* potential apostate insiders.¹⁷³

Moreover, there are several difficulties with Klawan’s explanation. For example, why are violators *only separated from the food but not also from other sectarians*? That they still attend communal meetings and receive food rations is evidence that they are *not* sent “outside the camp.”¹⁷⁴ Moreover, the context of this section is the communal inquiry of members (במדרש יהד).¹⁷⁵ Since attendees to communal meetings were required to be ritually clean, once they identified moral impurity, we should expect some requirement of the יהד to purify itself from the contamination acquired from offenders.¹⁷⁶ If it is true that a “transgressor, by his very presence, brings ritual impurity,” as Schiffman claims, it is odd that *no concern* is expressed for the purification of the community.¹⁷⁷ Third, we should expect *all* moral violations to involve separation from the טהרה, but this is not the case, and certain egregious violations result in immediate ejection.¹⁷⁸ Finally, ritual washing should be the appropriate

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 1QS VI, 24–25; 1QS VII, 16–18.

¹⁷¹ On the structure of 1QS, see Charlesworth, “Rule,” 1; Metso, “Rule,” *EDEJ*, 1169–71, 1169; Jassen, “Rule,” 2923; Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 126–28.

¹⁷² Cf. 1QS VI, 25; CD VII, 3; cf. Klawans, *Impurity*, 76. According to Leaney, it has even been wondered whether “the stewards prepared special unclean meals for those undergoing punishment” (Leaney, *Rule*, 201)!

¹⁷³ Cf. 1QS II, 11–18; Leaney, *Rule*, 134–35; Schiffman, *Qumran*, 236.

¹⁷⁴ On meetings see 1QS VI, 1–3, 12–13; VII, 18–21; Leaney, *Rule*, 208; Jassen, “Rule,” 2952. On rations see 1QS VI, 25, 27; VII, 2–6, 8, 11–19. Since the sectarians rejected the concept of יום טבול, “bathed that day,” one cannot appeal to this principle to explain this problem.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. 1QS VI, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. 1QSa I, 25–27; 1QSa II, 5–10; Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 29–31.

¹⁷⁷ Schiffman, *Eschatological Community*, 173.

¹⁷⁸ E.g., 1QS VI, 27–VII, 2. Because conflation controls the analysis, Klawans is forced to argue (with Jacob Licht and Michael Newton against Schiffman) that *all* infractions in this section de facto involve separation from the טהרה and that ellipsis is utilized for “stylistic reasons” in the instances where separation is not explicitly stated. Klawans confesses, “If we were to adopt Schiffman’s approach, it would not be accurate to say that the sectarians recognized the ritually defiling force of all sins committed by insiders.” Yet, even if the point is not granted, he insists that conflation offers “reasonable justification for banning these

method of resolving moral impurity, *yet nowhere is this prescribed*. Indeed, it is unclear how rationed food, temporary exclusion from the טהרה, fines, or a period of probation serve to purify the morally unclean.¹⁷⁹ In fact, as García Martínez and Trebolle Barrera note of the penal code, “*not even one* [of the violations] *refers to the domain of purity*”!¹⁸⁰

Rather than seeing a purity problem motivated by conflation, what I have describe above regarding the conceptual worldview of the יִי' better accounts for the data. That is, the יִי' had entered a new covenant which required separation from outsiders who refuse to repent and live according to community's interpretation of Torah. Any association with covenant outsiders would be *guilt by association, not contagion*, and such an arrangement would endanger the יִי' and their ability to effect atonement.

The fourth reason for conflation is that “moral repentance is not efficacious without ritual purification” and Klawans argues that ancient Israel did *not* incorporate ritual purification “in the process of atonement” since ritual impurity was not related to sin,¹⁸¹ while 1QS II, 25–III, 12 and V, 13–14 demonstrate that moral and ritual purities are “mutually dependent conditions.”¹⁸²

As argued above, these texts do not provide evidence of conflation, they simply assert that one cannot be morally delinquent and expect ritual purification to function mechanically. But the converse is also true—*one would never seek moral purification without first achieving a ritually pure condition; divine encounter and ritual impurity are incompatible*.¹⁸³ Moreover, it is incorrect to claim that ritual and moral purities did not coincide in the Israelite cult.

sinners from the pure-food,” especially since *the infractions are not violations of ritual purity* (Klawans, *Impurity*, 83).

¹⁷⁹ On rationed food, see 1QS VI, 25. Regarding separation from the טהרה, García Martínez and Trebolle Barrera associate the various time periods of separation with the different durations of impurity as dictated by the HB (*People*, 155). Regarding probation, see 1QS VII, 6–7. This is a significant problem for the conflation perspective. For, if one approaches this as a “purity problem,” as does Newton, then *time* is required “to reach the standard of purity required of a full member” (*Concept*, 45). According the HB, *time does* play a role in resolving ritual purity, but this is only *after* ritual purification and there is no evidence in the scrolls linking ritual purity with the probationary periods.

¹⁸⁰ García Martínez and Trebolle Barrera, *People*, 152, emphasis mine.

¹⁸¹ Klawans, *Impurity*, 85.

¹⁸² Klawans, *Impurity*, 86.

¹⁸³ There are occasions where God's presence or angels suddenly appear to people without ritual purification, such as Moses and the burning bush or the spirit filling the gentiles in Acts 10. These are extraordinary cases not governed by ritual norms. So, the point I am making has in mind *human initiated* encounters. Indeed, the shock and fear that often accompany such surprise appearances underscores the inappropriateness and unworthiness felt by the humans involved.

In fact, Klawans has since changed his opinion on the matter as one of his recent works critiques past studies for this very methodological problem—“the separation of ritual purity from sacrifice.”¹⁸⁴ He rightly insists that ritual purification *begins* “the sacrificial process.”¹⁸⁵ Since the Qumran community envisioned itself as a living sacrifice of atonement for the land and for sin, this is sufficient reason to explain the close connection of ritual and moral purity without requiring conflation.

In the fifth and final argument for conflation, Klawans points to 4Q512 29–32 (“Ritual of Purification”) and 4Q274 (“Tohorot A”) as evidence that the sectarians viewed ritual impurity as sinful. The former involves a blessing while the latter reflects a “penitential tone.” Besides the fact that 4Q512 is extremely fragmented, it is uncertain whether ערוֹת נדה, “filthy shame,” refers to the ritual washing of menstrual impurity or sin in the broader sense, which Klawans concedes.¹⁸⁶ Second, as it was commonplace for ritual purification to precede prayer, Joseph M. Baumgarten notes that the blessing came *after* immersion, so it need not indicate conflation any more than a prayer said after a meal or at sunrise.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, given that the subject of טהֵר and כפר is the second person, singular, referring to God, any penitential tone would pertain to the contents of the blessing, not the washing.

Thus, one can agree with Baumgarten’s assertion that the 4Q512 author(s) regarded “purification from any defilement as a gift of divine grace and a restoration of one’s spiritual and social integrity” *without any need for conflation*.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, we need only affirm with him that the “purification rituals were ... *accompanied by* the expression of repentance,” not that they effected

¹⁸⁴ Klawans, *Purity*, 48, 53, 72–73.

¹⁸⁵ Klawans, *Purity*, 56.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Harrington, “הַדָּג,” *ThWQ* 2:889

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Sib. Or. 4.165; Harrington, *Purity*, 121. Esther Eshel attempts to derive some significance from the fact that הִטַּאתִי, “I have sinned,” occurs in these fragments. In actuality, the texts read (with fragmentation brackets) as follows: הִטַּאתִי, “my sin,” (4Q512 29–32, 18), הִטַּאתִי, “my sin” (4Q512 28, 4), and הִטַּאתִי, “sin” (trans. Wise, Abegg, Cook, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 479). Not only are these attestations in extreme fragmentation, but she points out the connections between these texts and 1QS I, 25, which pertains to entering the covenant, an act that required repentance, and as we know from the context of 1QS, involved confession. Thus, it is highly speculative from this evidence to postulate that the people using these liturgical texts conflated ritual and moral purification. Moreover, if Davila is correct that 4Q512 56–58 may have been used in the Jerusalem temple (based on the mention of הַמִּקְדָּשׁ), this would complicate Eshel’s proposal. See, Eshel, “4Q414 Fragment,” 5–6; Davila, *Liturgical Works*, 269.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Purification Rituals in *DJD* 7,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 199–209, 201–2.

moral purification.¹⁸⁹ Since the Qumran community viewed covenantal faithfulness, which included halakic exactitude in the maintenance of ritual purity, as approximating to an atoning sacrifice, expressions of gratitude for God's acceptance should not be surprising.¹⁹⁰

Regarding 4Q274, Klawans associates the lying down of an impure person "on a bed of sorrow" and sitting "in a seat of sighing" with a sense of *moral* regret for the cause of ritual impurity.¹⁹¹ While possible, he assumes that sorrow and sighing are indicative of repentance. Yet, the social upheaval alone of separation from the community and the difficulty of caring for oneself while impure is enough reason to cause sorrow with no sense of moral regret, especially since the impurity in view is skin disease, a more severe impurity.¹⁹² Indeed, the rest of the text goes on to cite dispassionately further examples of ritual impurity from Leviticus.

In short, it is inconclusive at best that the evidence of these two texts suggests that the sectarians viewed ritual impurity as sinful. Since ritual and moral purification normally function together in the temple cult without conflation, there is also no reason to conclude that the sectarians believed that they "were conceptually intertwined" in a way that requires conflation.¹⁹³

Conclusion: Ritual Purity and the טהרה—Some Guiding Principles

Before turning to specific texts which pertain to the use of ritual washing at Qumran, I will draw some inferences from the above discussion. A key methodological assumption I make is that if we wish to accurately understand how ritual washing functioned, we must understand the role of water within the conceptual universe. This is not an arbitrary constraint, but rather a contextual one. Granted, I may be incorrect in the sketch of the טהרה's conceptual universe, but this is better than large scale or superficial comparisons that are based on generalities. Apart from my disagreement with the consensus regarding the conflation of ritual and moral purity, the elements that form the above description of the Qumran community depend on descriptions of Qumran that other experts have advanced. The following inferences may thus be drawn with regard to ritual purity:

¹⁸⁹ Baumgarten, "Purification," 207; cf. Harrington, *Purity*, 28.

¹⁹⁰ Leaney, *Rule*, 168. Eyal Regev agrees: "Eines der wichtigsten Mittel, um Sühne zu erlangen, stellte ethisches bzw. tora-konformes Verhalten dar" ("טהרה," *ThWQ* 2:121–30, 127).

¹⁹¹ Harrington also follows this line of interpretation because of its contrast with b. Ber. 51a; b. Pesah 7b (Harrington, *Purity*, 59–60).

¹⁹² Leviticus 13:45–46.

¹⁹³ Pace, Klawans, *Impurity*, 87; Regev, "Washing," 35–40.

- The הקו based their existence, beliefs, and practices primarily on the HB. As it pertains to ritual purity and the use of water, their views are thoroughly biblical even if stricter in interpretation. Most significantly, they were practicing ritual purification without any intention to enter the temple, a fact that is only surprising if one assumes ritual purity laws are temple-centric.
- The הקו had entered into a renewed Mosaic covenant as a means to avoid the covenant curses that clung to the rest of the people. This obligated the community to observe ritual purity practices since these commandments are integral to the covenant and not temple-centric. Disregarding moral or ritual purity put the community at risk of covenant curses.
- The self-understanding of the הקו as a temple, a space that is by definition sacred, would explain their strict observance of ritual purity. In light of Jub. 30.14–15 (cited above) and the above discussion, we may infer the transference of purity logic from the physical temple (now defiled) to the הקו (the current dwelling place of God).
- The self-understanding of the הקו as an atoning sacrifice required their community be blameless. This entailed (1) the refusal of the unrepentant who were perpetually unclean to enter the covenant community, (2) the continuous community examination of moral and halakic behavior (which included the observance of ritual purity), and (3) a lengthy covenant entry process (often called initiation).
- Following VanderKam's proposal regarding the origin of the name, הקו , as corresponding to the establishment of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, I argue that immersion performed during the annual covenant renewal ceremony is analogous to ritual purification originally enjoined upon the people in Exodus, even though this is not explicitly stated. From the negative statements in 1QS III and V against those who refuse to enter the covenant (i.e., that they remain perpetually unclean and are prohibited from ritually purifying in the הקו 's ritual baths), we may infer that the הקו did what 1QS prohibits for outsiders.
- Finally, a significant point remains to be made about the הקו 's view that outsiders remained in a perpetually unclean condition. That is, the strict halakah of the הקו *is not evidence that they were in any sort of purity competition with others*. They were not attempting to be "more pure" than other groups since in their view *no ritual washing* outside the context of the covenant community was effective. For them, it was a question of absolutes (valid/invalid) not one of degree (more/less clean).

With this brief list in mind, I now consider what specifically the non-biblical DSS say about ritual washing within the הקו .

The Qumran Community's Use of Water

For the remainder of this chapter, I discuss various ways the community used water for ritual purification.

Entering the Waters—Purity Language and Practice

The DSS use the following vocabulary to speak of ritual washing:

- בוא במים (to enter the waters)¹⁹⁴
- רחץ במים (to wash in water)¹⁹⁵
- טהר (to cleanse)¹⁹⁶
- כבס (to wash objects)¹⁹⁷
- נזה (to sprinkle)¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ 1QS 5:13; 4Q277 1 II, 8; 4Q414 2–4 II, 5. A similar Greek expression—καταβαίω εις (τὸ) ὕδωρ—in is attested in Acts 8:38; Barn. 11.8, 11; Herm. Mand. 31:1; Herm. Sim. 93:4.

¹⁹⁵ CD X, 11; 4Q219 II, 13; 4Q266 8 III, 9; 4Q270 6 IV, 20; 4Q272 1 II, 6; 4Q274 1 I, 3; 2 I, 8; 4Q277 1 II, 4–5; 4Q284 2 I, 4; 4Q414 13, 5; 4Q512 56–58, 1; 4Q514 1 I, 9; 11Q19 XL, 16; XLIX, 17; LI, 3, 5; 11Q20 XII, 9; XIV, 24, 26.

¹⁹⁶ As with the biblical usage, the semantic range covers both ritual and moral purity as well as the less common use for amoral purity, such as “pure light”: CD X, 10, 12; 1QS III, 4–5, 7–8; IV, 21; V, 13; XI, 14; 1QM VII, 2; 1QHa IV, 38; VIII, 30; IX, 34; X, 5; XI, 22; XII, 38; XIII, 18; XIV, 11; XV, 33; XIX, 13, 33; 4Q219 II, 19; 4Q255 2, 1, 3; 4Q257 III, 6–7, 10, 12; 4Q258 XIII, 2; 4Q262 1, 1–2; 4Q264 1, 2; 4Q265 7, 16–17; 4Q266 8 III, 9–10; 4Q270 6 IV, 20–21; 4Q274 1 I, 7; 4Q277 1 II, 8–10; 4Q284 3, 5; 6, 1; 7, 2; 4Q286 7 I, 6; 4Q303 1, 4; 4Q365 16, 2; 18, 1–2; 19, 3; 4Q367 1a–b, 6, 8, 10, 13; 4Q370 1 II, 3; 4Q381 45a+b, 1; 46a+b, 5; 69, 6; 4Q393 3, 5; 4Q400 1 I, 15; 3 I, 2; 4Q403 1 I, 19, 42; 4Q405 6, 3; 13, 3; 17, 4; 19, 4; 20–22 II, 3, 11; 23 I, 7; 23 II, 9–10; 4Q414 1 II–2 I, 6; 2–4 II, 1, 4, 8; 7, 6; 13, 2, 7, 9; 22, 1; 4Q424 2, 2; 4Q429 1 II, 3; 4Q504 1–2 VI, 2 (recto); 4Q509 307, 1; 4Q511 20 I, 1; 36, 2; 52+54–55+57–59, 2; 4Q512 39 II, 2; 33+35, 10; 29–32, 9–10; 15–16 I, 9; 7–9, 2; 1–6, 2, 6; 42–44 II, 5; 64, 8; 181, 3; 4Q514 1 I, 4, 6–7, 9; 4Q524 2, 2; 4Q537 12, 1; 11Q5 XIX, 14; XXII, 6; XXIV, 12; 11Q6 4–5, 14; 11Q17 IV, 6; VI, 5; VII, 5, 13; IX, 5, 7; 11Q19 XLV, 5, 15, 17–18; XLVII, 14–16; XLIX, 14, 20; L, 4, 6–8, 16, 18; LI, 3, 5; 11Q20 XI, 26; XII, 8, 10–11; XIV, 7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 21, 25; XV, 1; PAM43676 14, 3.

¹⁹⁷ 4Q272 1 II, 6; 4Q274 1 I, 9; 2 I, 9; 4Q365 18, 2; 4Q394 8 IV, 16; 4Q396 1–2 III, 6; 4Q397 6–13, 7; 4Q512 11, 3; 4Q514 1 I, 3; 11Q19 XLV, 8; L, 13, 15; LI, 4; 11Q20 XI, 3; XIV, 15, 18, 26.

¹⁹⁸ As with the biblical usage, this verb is used for both the waters of purification and for the application of blood; in a few instances it is used metaphorically: 1QS III, 9; IV, 21; 4Q255 2, 3; 4Q257 III, 12; 4Q265 7, 3; 4Q269 8 II, 4, 6; 4Q271 2 XI, 13; 4Q274 2 I, 1–2; 4Q276 1, 4; 4Q277 1 II, 5–7; 4Q365 9b II, 2; 4Q375 1 II, 3, 6; 4Q394 3–7 I, 17, 19; 4Q395 1, 9–10; 4Q414 13, 5; 4Q512 1–6, 5, 7; 11Q19 XVI, 3; XLIV, 18, 20; L, 3, 14–15; 11Q20 XIV, 7, 15.

- נִטְּף בַּמַּיִם (to rinse in water)¹⁹⁹
- מַיִם חַיִּים (living waters)²⁰⁰
- מֵי הַנְּדָה (waters of purification)²⁰¹

Lawrence observes that the language of the DSS generally follows that of the HB.²⁰² As noted above, there is one reference outside of the biblical DSS where טָבַל is used,²⁰³ and incidentally, 2 Kgs 5:14 is the *only time* the HB uses the verb.²⁰⁴ It is also clear that the יָהָר practiced complete, bodily immersion, as did any Jewish person of the time period who observed ritual purity.²⁰⁵ This is confirmed both by the archaeological remains of the ritual baths and the textual evidence, such as CD X, 11; 4Q270 6, IV, 20, which required the water level to be sufficient to completely cover a person,²⁰⁶ and Josephus *J.W.* 2.8.5, 13 §129, 161.²⁰⁷ Moreover, according to 4Q277 1 II, 6–11, those suffering corpse impurity first immersed and then were sprinkled with the waters of purification while standing in the ritual bath.²⁰⁸

Ronny Reich has identified ten of the sixteen water installations at Qumran to be ritual baths.²⁰⁹ He also calculated that the architectural footprint of ritual baths at Qumran to occupy 17% of the built up area of the site. While it is often assumed that the place given to ritual washing at Qumran was “excessive,” it actually compares with the 14.8% footprint of Upper City homes

¹⁹⁹ 4Q278 1, 1–9; cf. Lev 15:11.

²⁰⁰ 11Q19 XLV, 16; 11Q20 XII, 9; cf. this requirement in Lev 14:5, 50–52; 15:13.

²⁰¹ 1QS III, 4, 9; IV, 21; 4Q255 2, 4; 4Q257 III, 6, 12; 4Q262 1, 1; 4Q265 7, 3; 4Q284 1, 7; 3, 3; 11Q19 XLIX, 18.

²⁰² Lawrence, *Washing*, 84.

²⁰³ See Chapter three, p. ? , n. 92.

²⁰⁴ Namaan is told רַחֵץ וְטָבַל (LXX: λούσαι καὶ καθαρίσθητι) and the text says וַיִּרְדֵּן בִּירְדֵּן וַיִּטְבַּל (LXX: καὶ κατέβη Ναιμαν καὶ ἐβαπτίσατο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ).

²⁰⁵ See the discussion in chapter 4, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.”

²⁰⁶ Cf. 4Q277 1 II, 6–11, where the person who was to be cleansed from corpse impurity first entered a ritual bath and presumably immersed before or after being sprinkled with the מֵי הַנְּדָה.

²⁰⁷ As explained above, I hold to the “multicommunity (Essene) hypothesis.” If one disagrees with this view, it is possible that Josephus’s comments here are irrelevant to Qumran. While I am aware that most believe the Qumran community did not have women permanently living there, there is no reason that, following the multicommunity hypothesis, that women did not temporarily visit there with their husbands and children, say at the annual covenant renewal. See also, Harrington, *Purity*, 49.

²⁰⁸ Cf. 4Q277 1 II, 6–11; 4Q414 13, 1–10 and 4Q284 2 I, 2–4.

²⁰⁹ See Appendix C: Ritual Baths at Qumran, p. ? . However, note that he lists 11 in his master table (Reich, *Jewish Ritual Baths*, 307–8).

in Jerusalem.²¹⁰ Moreover, Bryant G. Wood's study on the water system of Qumran, which included all of the water facilities, found that the amount of water available to the community far surpassed ordinary needs even taking into account the evaporation rate of the desert environment.²¹¹ According to Wood, the non-stepped pools at locus 91 and 110 had a combined capacity of 259,000 liters *after* taking into account evaporation loss during Period Ib (100–31 BCE), which was enough to support approximately 200 people and any pack animals during the eight month dry season. Then, during Period II (4/1 BCE to 68 CE) the community modified one of the ritual baths with a dividing wall, thus adding another cistern at locus 58, which increased the total non-stepped pool water capacity by approximately 25%.²¹²

Why Did They Ritually Purify?—Explicit Forms of Uncleaness

One obvious and expected way that the DSS employed water for ritual purification was for the sources of uncleanness mentioned in the HB. Harrington has analyzed the Qumran scrolls on two different occasions, once comparing Qumran perspectives with rabbinic literature, and then, later, with a focus solely on the scrolls.²¹³ Similarly, Werrett has also examined a CD, 11QT, 4QMMT and certain 4Q scrolls with a specific focus on the overlap between the HB and the scrolls.²¹⁴ From the evidence of both studies, it is manifestly clear that the Qumran scrolls attest to the same concern for biblical purity as the HB and the rabbinic literature. It is true that the *rulings* on specific issues may be different, but even the “extra biblical” washings are explainable as an application of the HB to the *Sitz im Leben* of the קִיּוּן . Thus, when 4Q512 42–44 II, 3–5, states that God's mouth determines the purification of all things, it is referring to at least the HB and possibly the secret teachings of their sect (revealed by exegesis). *Table 8: Comparing Impurity* (next page) adapts elements from the charts of Harrington and Werrett to illustrate this correspondence. It is not exhaustive, and neither does it imply that the rulings all agree, rather it simply illustrates the correspondences of the two corpora regarding the sources of impurity.

Werrett is particularly concerned with diachronic issues and whether the scrolls agree with one another. He only identifies *eight* places where there

²¹⁰ Reich, *Jewish Ritual Baths*, 35; Ronny Reich, “Miqwa’ot at Khirbet Qumran and the Jerusalem Connection,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years After Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997*, ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. Vanderkam (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 728–31; cf. Magness, *Archaeology*, 134–62.

²¹¹ Wood, “To Dip,” 45–60.

²¹² Magness, *Archaeology*, 149.

²¹³ Harrington, *Impurity*, 283–91, app. B; *Purity*, 134–38, app. B.

²¹⁴ Werrett, *Ritual*, 307–10, appendices A–D.

is “explicit disagreement” and six of the eight belong “to different chronological categories.”²¹⁵ No instances of disagreement exist among the sources of impurity involving diseases or animals, rather they are found in rulings related to corpses, discharges, and sexual relations. I am unconvinced by his claim that his study overturns Harrington’s and have discussed this above.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Werrett, *Ritual*, 288–94.

²¹⁶ See the discussion in chapter three, “Objections to a Ritual Purity System.” In light of the interpretive challenges of sorting out the ambiguity of the HB, and given that the rabbinic literature is full of disagreements, it is more surprising to see the level of *agreement* within the rulings of the DSS.

Table 8: Comparing impurity

Comparing Impurity			
Category	HB	Qumran	Mishnah
Animals & Carcasses	Lev 11	CD XII, 11–15 11Q19 XLVIII, 1–5 11Q19 L, 17–LI, 5	m. Hul. 9:1, 5 m. Tehar. 1:4 m. Zabim 5:3
Childbirth	Lev 12	4Q266 6 II, 5–13	m. Nid. 4:6; 10:6
Skin/House Disease	Lev 13–14 Num 5:2	CD XIII, 5–6 4Q396 1–2 II, 4–7 11Q19 XLV, 17–18	m. Neg. 3:1; 4:7–10
Abnormal Discharges	Lev 15:1–15 Num 5:2	4Q266 6 II, 2–4 4Q274 1 I, 4–5 11Q19 XLV, 15–17	m. Kelim 1:3 m. Zabim 5:6–7 m. Nid. 7:4
Sexual Relations	Exod 19:10–11, 15 Lev 15:16–18	CD XII, 1–2 4Q274 2 I, 8 11Q19 XLV, 7–10	m. T. Yom 2:2 m. Zabim 5:10–11
Menstruation	Lev 15:19–30	CD XII, 1–2 4Q272 1 II, 7–17 11Q19 XLV, 7–10	m. Kelim 1:8
Corpse	Lev 22:4 Num 5:2; 19, 31:19	CD XII, 15–18 4Q276 1 I, 1–9 11Q19 XLIX, 5–16	m. Kelim 1:6–9; 2:1; 11:2 m. Mo'ed Qat. 15b m. Parah 3:2–4
Produce w/juice & Priestly Rations	Lev 11:38 Lev 7:20	4Q284a I, 4 4Q274 II, 1; 3 II, 7–9	m. Tehar. 9–10 m. Hul. 2:5 m. Zabim 3:2
Excrement	Deut 23:12 Ezek4:14	4Q265 VI, 2; 7 I, 3 4Q472 11Q19 XLVI, 13–16	m. T. Yom 2:1 m. Makš. 6:7

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Before moving to “new” and unmentioned sources of impurity, it is important to consider why a community concerned with purity and led by priests would have mentioned specific impurities. It was certainly not because they were ignorant of them. Rather, in texts like 4QMMT, CD, or 11QT, the community was explaining its halakic position on debated issues or anticipated scenarios. For example, throughout 4QMMT one finds the formula וְעַל , “and concerning,” repeated throughout, and 11QT envisions the construction of a vast new temple with holy space extending to the whole city of Jerusalem.²¹⁷ In other

²¹⁷ This is similar to the $\text{\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}}$ construction in Greek.

genres, such as liturgical works, specific impurities are sometimes mentioned in their connection with a liturgy used during rituals of purification. For example, the 4Q512 fragments mention זוב טמאתו, “his unclean discharge,”²¹⁸ or uses other phrases, such as וּבְמִילָא ת לו שבעת ימי טהרתו, “and when his seven days of purification is complete,”²¹⁹ that refer to a certain type of impurity. Here the concern is not a ruling, but a liturgy to accompany the act of purification.

Why Did They Ritually Purify?—“New” Sources of Impurity and No Explicit Impurity Mentioned

As with other Second Temple literature, “new” sources of impurity or requirements for purification in contexts not mandated by the HB are also attested at Qumran. Lawrence mentions hand-washing,²²⁰ prayer,²²¹ and excrement.²²² To this list, I add oil,²²³ eating meals,²²⁴ harvesting foods with natural juices,²²⁵

²¹⁸ 4Q512 10, 1, translation mine.

²¹⁹ 4Q512 11, 2–3, translation mine.

²²⁰ However, I am unable to find an unequivocal example of ritual handwashing apart from the biblical practice, see, 4Q277 1 II, 11; cf. Lev 15:11; see also 4Q537 12, 1 and 11Q19 XXVI, 10, which pertains to priests.

²²¹ 4Q213a 1, 6–10.

²²² Lawrence, *Washing*, 109. See the discussion in chapter four, “No Explicit Mention of Impurity,” esp. p. 128.

²²³ Cf. 4Q513 13, 4; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.3 §123. In light of the comments in 11Q19 XXII, 15, there is a potential conflict between Josephus and 4Q513 with 11Q19. On the other hand, the anointing with oil in 11Q19 is associated with the Festival of New Wine and eating in the outer court, not necessarily daily practice.

²²⁴ Cf. Josephus *J.W.* 2.8.5 §129 and the ritual bath just north of the refectory. See also the discussion in Magness, *Archaeology*, 153. In addition to the concern regarding eating in a ritually clean condition in Mark 7:1–4 and Luke 11:38, Jacob Neusner notes that nearly 70% of rabbinic texts attributed to the schools of Hillel and Shammai pertain to *table fellowship*, most of which he believes to describe accurately the first-century context (Neusner, *Idea*, 65). Cf. Jacob Neusner, “Pharisaic Law in New Testament Times,” *USQR* 26 (1971): 331–40, 337; Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1998), 95; Kazen, *Jesus and Purity Halakhah: Was Jesus Indifferent to Impurity* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 67–78.

²²⁵ 4Q284a 1, 2–8; 4Q284a 2, 1–5; cf. “gentile grain” in 4Q394 3–7 I, 6–8 (4QMMT B 6–8).

pottery making,²²⁶ and leadership qualifications.²²⁷ Yet, as I have argued above (and agree with Lawrence), most of these concerns are not distinct to Qumran but are reflected among Second Temple literature in general and represent the logical application of (often ambiguous and incomplete) ritual purity laws.²²⁸

Some of these examples, such as prayer, eating meals, harvesting foods with natural juices, and pottery making do not specifically mention any impurity in view. In addition to these, we may add ritual washing associated with Sabbath observance or other festivals,²²⁹ the annual covenant renewal and initiation,²³⁰ and communal meetings.²³¹ We may plausibly infer that the common sources of impurity motivated these washings, but in all likelihood, they washed regardless of whether they were consciously aware of impurity. For example, the danger of creating pottery in an unclean condition that would be employed by the entire community is reason enough to propose this.²³² And it was standard practice to ritually purify before festivals and other holy days.²³³

Conclusion: Implications for Comparison

From the results of the above discussion, we may draw the following conclusions. First, the use of water at Qumran was thoroughly biblical. Second, the times in which they “go beyond” the requirements of the HB are explainable as the application of the Torah to their specific context and in many cases these

²²⁶ This is on the basis of the ritual baths adjacent to the pottery making facilities at Qumran (cf. Magness, *Archaeology*, 150, 154). According to Lev 11:33 and 15:12, once rendered unclean, pottery had to be broken since there was no way to cleanse it, although this may only pertain to more severe impurities. Cf. m. Hag. 3:2, which explains that vessels (כְּלִי) prepared in a state of cleanness still require immersion for use in connection with holy things.

²²⁷ For example, according to 1QSa II, 5, those suffering from extended forms of impurity were prohibited from serving as leaders.

²²⁸ See the discussion in Chapter four, “Specific Impurities and General Washings.”

²²⁹ Cf. 4Q400 1 I, 14 and The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400–4Q407, 11Q17. Mas1k).

²³⁰ Interestingly, 1QS I, 1–III, 12 *never* actually describes or prescribes immersion or any form of ritual purification; interpreters *assume* that it occurs, most likely on the basis of Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.7 §138. Wise, Abegg, and Cook translate 1QS II, 14 in a way that suggests the initiates are standing in water—“Surrounded by abundant water”—but this is not clear from the Hebrew. Moreover, 1QS II, 25–III, 12 refers to those who are refused entry into the 7Π. Of course, it is not unreasonable to infer that initiates performed what the text prohibits for outsiders.

²³¹ E.g., 1QSa I, 25–27.

²³² As a modern analogy, we wash our hands with soap whether or not they are actually hygienically dirty.

²³³ See Chapter four, p. ? , n. 147.

“developments” are attested in other Second Temple sources. Third, arguments that depend on or advance the notion that there was a special “baptism” at Qumran do so through the construction of a foreign, theological construct. There is nothing in particular that is special or “sacramental” about the the washing of initiates, it was simply ritual washing. Of course, it is reasonable to believe that the covenant entry ritual *was* viewed as special to the inductees and the community, but this was not due to the immersion. Indeed, the meaning and significance of that washing must be interpreted in the context of the entire ritual, just as the meaning and significance of any washing practiced by the community must be understood in the context of the community. Finally, we should dispense with talking about Qumran “baptism” or similar terms. There simply *was* no such thing.

If we attempt to answer *why* inductees or the community may have immersed during the covenant renewal/initiation ceremony, VanderKam’s proposal makes the most sense. That is, they were immersing in remembrance of the first giving of the covenant at Sinai and preparing for the receiving of it anew in their community. But the *washing* at Sinai was not special, but rather ritual purification. Referring to it as a “theophany washing” may clarify its *context*, but the category of “theophany washings” is arbitrarily assigned and there is nothing to suggest that the original audience distinguished that washing from any other. It is only because such practices are unfamiliar to modern interpreters and that we have not fully understood the original context that we (incorrectly) see a “new” practice emerging.

Chapter 5

Proselyte “Baptism”

It is often claimed that Jewish baptism, in contradistinction to Christian, was *crudely purificatory* rather than moral, spiritual and sacramental; it had no higher significance—that was confined to circumcision. . . . Those who think of Jewish proselyte baptism as levitical in the sense of quasi-physical rely almost exclusively on indirect, comparative, folkloristic evidence. But this has little bearing on the Judaism of New Testament times, an *advanced religion*.¹

On est aujourd’hui convaincu que Jean n’a pas créé le rite baptismal. Il l’a emprunté au judaïsme contemporain, qui baptisait par immersion les païens convertis, afin de les purifier des souillures de leur état antérieur. . . . tout homme est impur aux yeux de Celui qui s’approche pour juger.²

[T]he rites in Judaism and Christianity owe their origin to a common Jewish milieu in which water lustrations became increasingly important for converts and . . . Judaism’s rite of baptism may very well have received a decisive impetus from John the Baptist, Jesus, and the earliest Christians. *The origins of Jewish proselyte baptism, then, may have been in the entrance requirements of Jewish Christianity*.³

Like the other antecedents, ideological motives are discernible in scholarly analysis of “proselyte baptism.”⁴ Although this concern is most commonly evident in authors who desire to establish that John’s practice *must* (or *must not*) have derived from a given antecedent, the first quote above illustrates David Daube’s concern to persuade scholars from holding a “crude” view of “proselyte baptism.”⁵ Because most scholars associate a more “advanced” or

¹ David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 106–7, emphasis mine. T. M. Taylor says, “While initiation is the major note in proselyte baptism it has not lost entirely its *primitive ritualistic* cleansing character.” See, T. M. Taylor, “The Beginnings of Jewish Proselyte Baptism,” *NTS* 2 (1956): 193–98, 194, n. 3.

² Leenhardt, *Baptême*, 10–11; cf. Brownlee, “John,” 37, 39.

³ McKnight, *Light*, 85, emphasis mine.

⁴ To clarify, I am not saying that merely arguing in favor of “proselyte baptism” makes an argument ideologically motivated. The evidence for this depends on *how* one argues for it.

⁵ What it is that makes ritual washing for physical impurity, “crude,” is not clear. However, in light of anti-semitism (the article forming the basis of that chapter was written in

“spiritual” dimension with John’s practice, in that he “improves” or “transcends” whatever antecedent he adapts, Daube’s concern with the “special nature” of “proselyte baptism” is understandable.

Ironically, whether the concern is to ensure a “sacramental” view of “proselyte baptism” (Daube) or to argue that John’s practice improves upon it (Leenhardt) the special nature of immersion must be emphasized.⁶ Just as scholars want to find John’s “baptism” in the “Mystery religions,” the practices of the Qumran community, or some specific washing of the HB, so also they look for it in rabbinic literature, which mentions the immersion of gentiles at their conversion (in some cases). In the second quote above, Leenhardt articulates a particular difficulty with this antecedent option that may be expressed in the following syllogism:⁷

- 1) Gentile proselytes were converted through immersion.
- 2) John called fellow Jews to immersion.
- 3) John treats fellow Jews just like gentiles.⁸

The most obvious problem is that if we assume that “proselyte baptism” entails “conversion,” then logically we must conclude that John is calling *fellow Jews* to conversion if this is his source for his practice—*but conversion to what?*⁹

1945) and the anti-Jewish tone of many post-Enlightenment scholars that Édouard Will and Claude Orrieux describe, suggests that Daube is reacting to this anti-Jewish sentiment. This is a further example of the abuse of comparison and why I endeavor to describe the antecedents on their own terms. See, Édouard Will and Claude Orrieux, “*Prosélytisme juif*”?—*Histoire d’une erreur* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), 211–89.

⁶ So, Keener, *John* 1:444–48; *Acts*, 1:980–82.

⁷ Confusion on this is noted by many, e.g., Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 354.

⁸ In its most anachronistic form, he converts them to “proto-Christianity.”

⁹ On the problems related to the term “conversion,” see the discussion below on p. ? .

Additionally, the premises above are incomplete at best¹⁰ and they depend on a variety of questionable assumptions.¹¹

Moreover, the Qumran community significantly tempers the above view of John because the בן , who also called fellow Jews to immerse, saw them as *covenant violators*, not gentiles.¹² In this respect, the Qumran community's call to conversion is reminiscent of the prophetic call in the HB for Israel to repent.¹³ Additionally, since other Jews would have disputed this critique against them, it is important to remember that the בן 's perspective is *relative*, but it illustrates that John's call to repent does not mean conversion in the modern sense. Furthermore, we saw in the previous chapter that בן 's immersion practices were performed for ritual purification.

¹⁰ E.g., immersion *alone* is insufficient for conversion according to sources dating to the first century CE and prior. See, John Nolland, "Uncircumcised Proselytes?" *JSJ* 12 (1981): 173–94, who overturns the arguments of Neil J. McEleney, "Conversion, Circumcision and the Law," *NTS* 20 (1974): 319–41. According to those represented in Acts 15:1, 5, circumcision was viewed as essential for gentile salvation (i.e., gentiles had to convert to Judaism); cf. Esth 8:17; Jdt 14:10; Gal 2:3; 5:2; Phil 3:5; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.2.4 §38–48; cf. Sipre Num 15:14 (which is, of course, later than the first century). The account of Josephus regarding Izates is exceptional since both the king and Ananias feared repercussions had he become circumcised. The account also makes it clear that Izates, in not being circumcised, was falling short of complete fulfillment of the Law since this is what determined whether Izates's subjects would have viewed him as a Jew, and Ananias told Izates that God would forgive him in light of the pressure. By the end of the first century, Suetonius reports that Domitian (81–96 CE) used circumcision as a basis to determine who was a Jew so as to force tax evaders to pay the *fiscus Iudaicus* (*Dom.* 12.2). Cf. Barclay, *Jews*, 310–13, 323–24, 407. However, this does not mean that the status of gentiles was clearly defined in all respects. See, Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *HTR* 82 (1989): 13–33.

¹¹ E.g., regarding (1): did gentiles convert uniquely through immersion? Did this immersion essentially mean "initiation" or "conversion"? Did Jews view this as a "one-time" washing? Was this washing "life-changing"? Regarding (2): did John's immersion mean the same thing as that undertaken by gentile converts (i.e., initiation or conversion)? Was John's viewed as "one-time" or "life-changing"? Regarding (3): even if we grant for the sake of argument that premise one and two are accurate as stated, the conclusion only follows if John means to "convert" fellow Jews.

¹² In fairness to Leenhardt, the DSS were not known at the time he wrote. Nevertheless, proponents of "proselyte baptism" still continue to argue this. Aharon Shemesh argues that the Qumran community *did* view Jewish non-members as equivalent to gentiles, and by analogy perhaps John did as well ("Origins," 223–41). However, as I argue in chapter five, better reasons exist to explain the Qumran community's desire for separation.

¹³ There is no term for "conversion" in antiquity, which is another problematic word.

In the third quote above, Scot McKnight takes the *opposite* position to Leenhardt, which used to be the dominant view,¹⁴ and which now has recent support.¹⁵ One reason for these conflicting opinions pertains to the problem of dating the practice prior to John. Yet, another reason relates to the contrasting assumptions of Leenhardt and McKnight with regard to Second Temple Judaism(s), the parting(s) of the ways, and what "baptism" is and does. Many scholars assert that proselyte baptism *must* have been practiced prior to John because "Jews" would never have borrowed from "Christians,"¹⁶ yet McKnight concludes just this! According to recent research on the parting(s) of the ways, scholars agree that although there was *conflict* between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not, we cannot speak of "Christianity" vs. "Judaism."¹⁷ This means that gentiles who were immersed in either context performed the ritual in the context of "common Judaism."¹⁸ In this respect, McKnight is correct to question the common assumption that "Jews" would not have borrowed from "Christians" or vice versa because it depends on anachronistic categories.¹⁹ Whether he is correct that non-Jesus-believing Jews actually *did* borrow

¹⁴ H. H. Rowley, "Jewish Proselyte Baptism and the Baptism of John," *HUCA* 15 (1940): 313–34, 313, n. 1. Beasley-Murray inverts this argument and uses it against proponents of proselyte baptism (*Baptism*, 25).

¹⁵ Yair Furstenberg, "The Christianization of Proselyte Baptism in Rabbinic Tradition," forthcoming, 1–28; available at https://www.academia.edu/29572276/The_Christianization_of_Proselyte_Baptism_in_Rabbinic_Tradition_-_forthcoming.

¹⁶ E.g., Augustin Calmet says, "les Païens, et les Chrétiens étaient trop odieux aux Juifs, pour croire que ceux-ci aient voulu les imiter en cela" (I have provided the updated spelling from 1726). See, Augustin Calmet, *Commentaire littéral sur la Bible: St. Matthieu, St. Marc, St. Luc, St. Jean, et les Actes des Apôtres, avec les variétés de leçons des évangiles*, Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament 7 (Paris: Emery, Saugrain, Pierre Martin, 1726), 288. Schiffman observes that while there is "ample background for understanding the requirement as a purification ritual," the HB provides *no basis* on which to understand the symbolic transformation that supposedly occurs, and this is one reason some have argued for "Christian" influence (*Who Was a Jew*, 25–26). Despite this, he asserts that the majority view is that proselyte baptism antedates "Christian" practice and that "proselyte baptism" must have been practiced by at least the mid-first century CE. (That this is the "majority view" is questionable.) Surprisingly, he makes no comment on John the immerser. So, he either must assume that Jesus followers ignored John entirely and adapted "proselyte baptism" or it derives from John the immerser!

¹⁷ The "good news" proclaimed to the nations is that they are eligible for salvation through Jesus, *the Jewish messiah of Israel*. See the discussion above in chapter three, "'Baptism' and the Partings of the Ways."

¹⁸ Properly speaking, immersion for ritual purification is not an uniquely Jewish practice.

¹⁹ Taylor says that "over the centuries there have been indubitable influences in both directions between Judaism and Christianity" ("Beginnings," 194). Bultmann also notes, "The analogy which exists between early Christian baptism and the Jewish baptism of proselytes

the practice from Jesus followers, I cannot say, and it is ultimately irrelevant in light of what I argue here.

The main purpose of this chapter is (1) to identify the methodological challenges related to constructing a conceptual universe for rabbinic texts and to explain how I proceed in light of these challenges; (2) to discuss the evidence of the various sources with consideration of diachronic developments; and (3) to identify the role of immersion in its connection to proselytes who sought to join the Jewish community through conversion. Whether the Judaisms of this time merit the label “missionary” is of minimal concern to this chapter.²⁰

Methodological Problems with “Proselyte Baptism”

Scholars advance evidence for “proselyte baptism” from Second Temple literature, Greco-Roman sources, and rabbinic sources. I will consider the nature of specific sources as I come to them in the next section. Here, I address methodological issues related to evidence as a whole.

“Proselyte Baptism”—Technical Term or Technical Fallacy?

There is no phrase used in ancient sources that we can translate as “proselyte baptism.” The first attestation approximating the label of which I am aware is Rashi’s 11th cent. CE mention of טבילת גירות, “immersion of *female*

does not signify that the former originated out of the latter; for if that were the case, one would expect it to have been performed on Gentiles only” (*Theology*, 1:40).

²⁰ Some important contributions to this debate (listed chronologically) include: N. Samter, *Judenthum und Proselytismus: Ein Vortrag* (Breslau: W. Jacobsohn, 1897); Bamberger, *Proselytismus*; William G. Braude, *Jewish Proselyting in the First Five Centuries of the Common Era, the Age of the Tannaim and Amoraim* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1940); Joachim Jeremias, “Proselytentaufe und Neues Testament,” *TZ* 5 (1949): 418–28; Folker Siegert, “Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten,” *JSJ* 4 (1973): 109–64; Martin Goodman, “Proselytising in Rabbinic Judaism,” *JJS* 40 (1989): 175–85; McKnight, *Light*; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?” in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, ed. Menachem Mor, Studies in Jewish Civilization 2 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 14–23; Louis H. Feldman, “Was Judaism a Missionary Religion in Ancient Times?” in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, ed. Menachem Mor, Studies in Jewish Civilization 2 (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 24–37; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Will and Orrieux, *Prosélytisme juif*.

converts”²¹ and טבילה גר, “immersion of a convert.”²² As T. M. Taylor notes, in 1911, “Alfred Plummer pointed out that the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, the New Testament, Philo, Josephus and the older targumists are all notable for their silence on the subject of proselyte baptism. This observation still stands.”²³ I suggest that this explains the silence of ancient sources on “proselyte baptism” since no such “thing” existed in antiquity.²⁴ Thus, the same critique I raised in chapter three regarding the construct of “Christian baptism” applies equally to “proselyte baptism.”²⁵

The interpretive problems with the phrase, “proselyte baptism,” derive from *both words*. I have already dealt with issues pertaining to “baptism” above.²⁶ While it may be that something remarkable is happening to a gentile who converts, it is the result of the *conversion process/ceremony*, not the טבילה.²⁷ In fact, the *same word*, טבילה, in rabbinic literature refers to both the “ordinary” immersion of Jewish people for ritual purity’s sake and the immersion of gentiles.²⁸ Hence, Wayne A. Meeks rightly observes, “Even the immersion required of proselytes is only a special case of the ordinary purifications and not an initiation in itself.”²⁹ Unfortunately, interpreters read anachronistic ideas into the sources because of modern associations with the term “baptism.”

²¹ My translation of Rashi (on b. Yebam. 45b). Wilhelm Brandt translates it as “das Tauchbad des Proselytentums,” the immersion bath of proselytes (*Jüdischen Baptismen*, 57–58).

²² Rashi on b. Ketub. 11a; cf. Rashi, Tosafot on Pesah 7b; Tosafot on Qidd. 62b.

²³ Taylor, “Beginnings,” 195.

²⁴ Of course, I recognize that the antiquity of a practice is not dependent on a label. After all ritual baths are found everywhere, yet they are never referred to with a specific label until the Mishnah. A difference, however, with that example is that the label, “proselyte baptism” also denotes the *nature* of the practice to which it refers, and in this sense, it claims more than the evidence allows.

²⁵ See the discussion above, “What Are We Comparing?”; cf. Will and Orrieux, *Prosélytisme juif*, 25–49.

²⁶ See the discussion, “The Problem of Transliteration as Translation”; cf. Snyder, “Technical Term,” 91–113.

²⁷ E.g., b. Yebam. 22a is frequently adduced as evidence that “proselyte baptism” makes the convert “like that of a child just born.” However, not only is the focus on the *legal status* of the גר, but טבילה is not mentioned; cf. Lupieri, “John,” *ANRW*, 33.1:440

²⁸ So, Chilton, “Yoḥanan,” 206; *pace* Taylor, “Beginnings,” 194, 196. Taylor egregiously dismisses Marsh’s use of “the tebillah” for “proselyte baptism.” Yet, it is Marsh who uses the actual language of the sources, and Taylor who employs an invented phrase. E.g., *all* of the following *mishnayot* use the word טבילה in connection with the ritual purification of Jewish people: m. Ber 3:6; m. Ḥal 4:8; m. Yoma 3:2–3; m. Šeqal 8:2; m. Ta’an 4:8; m. Meg 3:2; m. Ḥag 3:2–3, 8; m. Mid. 1:6, 9; 5:3; m. Tamid 1:1; m. Neg 14:8, 10; m. Parah 3:7, 9; 12:1; m. Miqw. 1:8; 8:2; m. Nid. 10:7; m. Zabim 1:4–5.

²⁹ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 153.

“Proselyte”—*Technical Term or Technical Fallacy?*

Similar issues arise with the term “proselyte,” which is exclusively associated in the modern mind with personal religious choice and “conversion,”³⁰ another term (i.e., conversion³¹) that is absent in ancient sources.³² Thus, Joel Green can say, “the concept of conversion . . . is not a particularly biblical term.”³³ Joshua Ezra Burns notes that Second Temple sources (e.g., Philo and Josephus) depend on the *legal category* of גל, “resident alien,” in the HB when referring to gentile converts.³⁴ Cohen affirms the same of the rabbis, stating, “Although [גל] *did not denote religious change*, this *colorless term* was preferred by the rabbis because *it allowed them to find the institution of conversion in the Bible*.”³⁵ In fact, not only is δñïóβëððïò only one of several possible translations for גל,³⁶ Exodus 22:21 uses the term in reference to *Israelites*.³⁷ Neither גל in the HB nor δñïóβëððïò in the LXX are synonymous with “convert” in the

³⁰ E.g., Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic define “Jew” as “A person whose religion is Judaism.” See, Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic, *The JPS Dictionary of Jewish Words*, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2001), 72.

³¹ See the classic (1933) study A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933); in critique of Nock, cf. Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 4–16; M. J. Edwards, “conversion,” *OCD*, 371; Nancy Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius’ Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 23–30. On the modern conception of religion and conversion being distinct from antiquity, see Asad, *Genealogies*, 19–20, 55–79; Nongbri, *Before Religion*, 1–45, 85–105, 132–53.

³² Some terms associated with conversion include: בוש, μετανοέω, ἐπιστρέφω, *convertere*. For others, see, Donaldson, *Judaism*, 487–88. As Cohen rightly notes, these terms most often referred to “inner-Jewish conversions, i.e., acts of repentance.” See, Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Conversion to Judaism in Historical Perspective: From Biblical Israel to Postbiblical Judaism,” *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1983): 31–45.

³³ Green, *Conversion*, 13. There is no entry for “conversion” in Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*.

³⁴ Joshua Ezra Burns, “Conversion and Proselytism,” *EDEJ*, 484–86; cf. Cohen, “Conversion,” 31; George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:326–27.

³⁵ Cohen, “Conversion,” 31.

³⁶ T. Muraoka lists the following: γείτων, γειώρας, ξένος, πάροικος, προσήλυτος (*Greek* ≈ *Hebrew/Aramaic*, s.v. “גל”). Γειώρας is a loan word from the Aramaic אררלג, which is attested in inscriptional evidence from the first cent. BCE (cf. Donaldson, *Judaism*, 438, 442–43). Obviously, not all of these mean “convert.” I cannot find the use of γείτων that, according to Muraoka, occurs in Job 19:5. Cf. Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7.

³⁷ Thus, Terence L. Donaldson overstates his case when he says, “as a rendering of גל, προσήλυτος was from the beginning linked inextricably with non-Jews (*Judaism*, 414).

modern sense, and neither *ever* mean (at least from a legal perspective) that a gentile “becomes a Jew.”³⁸ Thus, Jan Joosten asserts that “it is *impossible* for the term *gēr* to designate “‘proselyte’ [in the modern sense]. . . . The *gēr* is an exceptional situation: *not an Israelite*, yet entitled to live as a free man among the people.”³⁹ While Exod 12:48 indicates that the $\gamma\lambda$ becomes a פּרָזִיט , “full citizen,” through circumcision, this is a socio-political term and it does not mean equal to Israelites.⁴⁰ And this distinction is maintained in the DSS,⁴¹ the NT,⁴² Philo,⁴³ first-century burial inscriptions,⁴⁴ and rabbinic literature.⁴⁵ Thus, Martin Goodman affirms, “the distinct definition of a proselyte as a particular *sort* of Jew was retained throughout antiquity.”⁴⁶ Finally, the $\lambda\delta\eta\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\nu\epsilon\delta\omicron\delta\iota\omicron$ was *not even required to be circumcised* and his or her

³⁸ E.g., $\gamma\lambda$ is translated προσήλυτος in Exod 12:48 where religious duties are *optional* and as Jan Joosten and Jacob Milgrom demonstrate below, the $\lambda\delta\eta\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\nu\epsilon\delta\omicron\delta\iota\omicron$ is not equal to an Israelite.

³⁹ Jan Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17-26* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 66, emphasis mine. See also, Mark R. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018).

⁴⁰ For example, the $\gamma\lambda$ could never own land. Milgrom states about the distinction made between Israelite and $\gamma\lambda$, “the admonition of civil equality for the resident alien *by no means should be construed as a general statement of parity between Israel and the alien*. Whereas civil law held the citizen and the alien to be of equal status (e.g., Lev 24:22; Num 35:15), in the religious domain the alien neither enjoyed the same privileges nor was bound by the same obligations. The religious law made distinctions according to the following underlying principle: the alien is bound by the prohibitive commandments but not by the performative ones.” See, Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 185–86, emphasis mine; cf. Karl Georg Kuhn, “ προσήλυτος ,” *TDNT* 6:727–44, 729; Cohen, “Conversion,” 41.

⁴¹ E.g., CD VI, 21; XIV, 3–6; cf. Tob 1:8. Kuhn suggests that the Qumran sect did not allow non-Jews since 1QS mentions only priests, Levites, and the people and leaves out the $\gamma\lambda$ (“ προσήλυτος ,” *TDNT* 6:735).

⁴² E.g., Acts 2:11. If they were “fully Jewish,” why distinguish them as προσήλυτος ? Cf. Acts 18:4.

⁴³ E.g., Philo, *Spec.* 1.54; *Virt.* 1.103.

⁴⁴ Donaldson notes that gentile converts “were nevertheless differentiated from their neighbors in burial by the fact that their non-Jewish origins followed them to the grave” (*Judaism*, 445).

⁴⁵ E.g., Sipre to Numbers §109 (on Num. 15:14–16). See also, Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 18–21 [Mishnah], 35–36 [Tosefta], 57–59, 62–63, 67 [early midrash], 75–78 [Yerushalmi], 102–6 [Bavli].

⁴⁶ Goodman, *Mission*, 86, emphasis original.

participation in Israelite religion was completely *optional*. It is clear that at least in the HB/LXX, the $\Gamma\lambda/\delta\tilde{\eta}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}\beta\tilde{\epsilon}\delta\acute{o}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}$ is not the same as a modern proselyte.⁴⁷

When scholars refer to the “technical” use of the term, they mean a gentile who has become “fully Jewish” by adopting the Jewish religion epitomized by circumcision (if male), “baptism,” and sacrifice.⁴⁸ Yet, there is no command in the HB pertaining to the circumcision of proselytes and Shaye J. D. Cohen admits, that the Bible “*nowhere regards it as the essential mark of Israelite identity or as the sine qua non for membership in the Israelite polity*. It attained this status only in Maccabean times.”⁴⁹ This raises two signification and related questions: (1) how should $\delta\tilde{\eta}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}\beta\tilde{\epsilon}\delta\acute{o}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}$ be defined and translated in Second Temple literature, and (2) if the meaning of $\Gamma\lambda/\delta\tilde{\eta}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}\beta\tilde{\epsilon}\delta\acute{o}\tilde{\iota}\acute{o}$ does not derive from the HB/LXX, from where does the supposed “technical” term, “proselyte” find its origin?⁵⁰ In light of the fluidity and changes occurring between the Second Temple and rabbinic periods, I argue that scholars read the technical sense back into earlier contexts.

Philo comes the closest to understanding the term in the modern sense when he says:

⁴⁷ So, Alfred Bertholet, *Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1896), 167.

⁴⁸ E.g., Shmuel Safrai, “Oral Tora,” in *The Literature of the Sages, First Part: Oral Torah, Halakha, Mishna, Tosefta, Talmud, External Tractates*, ed. Shmuel Safrai, CRINT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 35–120, 90, s.v. “גירר”; LSJ, s.v. “προσήλυτος”; BDAG, s.v. “προσήλυτος”; and most secondary literature.

⁴⁹ Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 44, emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Kuhn proposes that while the $\Gamma\lambda$ is *sociologically* distinguished from Israelites in the HB, his or her religious status “comes very close to the ‘proselyte’ of later Judaism” (“προσήλυτος,” *TDNT* 6:729). Yet, through developments that are discernible through analysis of the sources, he claims, “In the closing stages of the Jewish Law, then, $\Gamma\lambda$ is wholly defined by the religious aspect but still harmonises with the national sociological structure of Palestinian Judaism” (6:730). (An early date for P would completely undermine his theory). Finally, in the context of the diaspora, the Greek term *προσήλυτος* was coined by Jews and incorporated into the LXX. If this is true, it is difficult to understand why there are so many words used to translate $\Gamma\lambda$ in the LXX, and why is the term rarely used? Will and Orrieux push this much later and argue that $\Gamma\lambda$ and its cognates undergo a semantic shift that is datable in the Targums but not finalized until the Mishnah (Will and Orrieux, *Prosélytisme*, 52–55). This corresponds somewhat to Cohen’s proposal in which he traces the following stages of development (1) preexilic Israel, (2) Babylonian exile, (3) Ezra, (4) Maccabean period, (5) rabbinic period (“Cohen,” 41–42). Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury assume that a change was made from “sojourner” to “convert” but admit that no one knows when this occurred—they insist it was “before the Christian era.” See Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury, *The Acts of the Apostles, Vol. 5: Additional Notes to the Commentary of The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 84.

These last he calls “proselytes,” (δῆϊόβῆδοῖο) or newly-joined, because they have joined the new and godly commonwealth (δῖῆδέδαβιά). Thus, while giving equal rank to all in-comers (ἐδῆεῖόδο) with all the privileges which he gives to the native-born, he exhorts the old nobility to honour them not only with marks of respect but with special friendship and with more than ordinary goodwill. And surely there is good reason for this; they have left, he says, their country, their kinsfolk and their friends for the sake of virtue (ἀπᾶδῆ) and religion (ὀρέεῖδο). Let them not be denied another citizenship (δῦεῖδο) or other ties of family (ῖεᾶῖο) and friendship (ὀβῆεῖο), and let them find places of shelter standing ready for refugees to the camp of piety (ἀπόΨᾶᾶῆ).⁵¹

Karl Georg Kuhn takes this as proof of the “new understanding of the OT term,” which “does *not* describe a sociological status; it is a *religious* title.”⁵² Yet, several reasons point to the contrary. For one, when Philo says, “*he* says,” *he* is referring to what Moses (i.e., the LXX) says about the δῆϊόβῆδοῖο. Thus, Philo’s comments are explicitly informed by the LXX understanding of the term. Second, he must explain *why* they are called δῆϊόβῆδοῖο,⁵³ and he later uses ἐδῆεῖόδο instead of δῆϊόβῆδοῖο,⁵⁴ which suggests it was *not* a religious title. Third, they *remain gentiles*⁵⁵ and Philo urges them not to abandon their worship of God upon threat of death.⁵⁶ Fourth, while he points to the convert’s religious motivation, Philo also emphasizes the *sociological/political* dimensions of the change as he explains why the Jews should receive such a person.⁵⁷ For these reasons, F. H. Colson rightly cautions, “The word [δῆϊόβῆδοῖο] of

⁵¹ Philo, *Spec.* 1.51–52 [F. H. Colson, LCL]; cf. *Virt.* 1.102–103. Personal choice is explicit in *Praem.* 1.152.

⁵² Kuhn, “προσήλυτος,” *TDNT* 6:731–32, emphasis mine. He also (following Debrunner) leans heavily on the fact that there is no “pre-Jewish or pre-Chr. instance” of the term (6:728). It appears that such evidence may now be available in C. Butera and David M. Moffat, “P. Duk. Inv. 727: A Dispute with ‘Proselytes’ in Egypt,” *ZPE* (2011): 201–6.

⁵³ According to Philo, the term προσήλυτος derives from προσέρχομαι, and even here he is careful to distinguish between Jews who are born so and those who are not (*Spec.* 1.51). Kuhn notes that it derives from the stem -ελυ-, the 2nd perfect form of προσέρχομαι, though he assumes the reader will make this connection (“προσήλυτος,” *TDNT* 6:728).

⁵⁴ In this context, the two terms are used interchangeably in reference to those who may be designated “proselytes.” προσήλυτος occurs in Philo eight times: *Cher.* 1.108, 119; *Somn.* 2.273; *Spec.* 1.51, 308; *QE* 2.2. ἐπιλύτης occurs ten times: *Mos.* 1.7, 147; *Spec.* 1.52–53; 2.118–119; *Virt.* 1.102–103, 182, 219. And Philo also uses other terms as well, such as ἐπιλυς (*Cher.* 1.121; *Exsecr.* 1.152 [= *Praem.* 1.152]; *Flacc.* 1.54; *QE* 2.2) and ἐπήλυτος (*Cher.* 1.120–121; *Somn.* 1.160; *Spec.* 1.309; 4.176–177; *Virt.* 1.104). For still other terms that may be included in Philo’s “larger vocabulary set” related to gentiles who join the Jewish people, see, Donaldson, *Judaism*, 273, n. 80.

⁵⁵ τῶν δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔθνους εἶ τινας (Philo, *Spec.* 1.54); cf. *Virt.* 1.103.

⁵⁶ This is the same posture toward the uncircumcised ῥλ in the HB. While the ῥλ does not have to worship the God of Israel, he or she may not worship other gods.

⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Philo says that God is the only “true citizen” and everyone else are πάροικον δὲ καὶ ἐπήλυτον (*Cher.* 1.121).

ὁοὶ ἐὰυῖ) were a distinct group from “proselytes.”⁶⁷ Alternatively, the author of Acts may be distinguishing between two kinds of proselytes, those who have “converted” and those who have not (as in the case of Exod 12:48). With respect to Matt 23:15, if the term “proselyte” is not predetermined to mean “the religious conversion of gentiles to Judaism,” δᾶνέϋᾶᾶδᾶ δῆι ἐϋῆᾶόᾶί ἐᾶί δῆι ἰϕᾶῖ as “you cross land and sea,” when the phrase need mean nothing more than that they traveled *around* (δᾶνέϋᾶᾶδᾶ) the Sea of Galilee (δῆι ἐϋῆᾶόᾶί) and Judea (δῆι ἰϕᾶῖ).⁷¹

⁶⁷ Cf. BDAG, s.v. “σέβω”; Ralph Marcus, “The Sebomenoi in Josephus,” *Jewish Social Studies* 14 (1952): 247–50. I agree with the assessment of Irina Levinskaya that Luke saw gentile proselytes as “indistinguishable from native Jews in outlook *where matters of religion were concerned*,” but it is not clear to me why it would be any more easy or difficult for Paul to lead them to believe in Jesus than fellow Jews. See, Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, vol. 5 of *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, ed. Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 48–49, emphasis mine. Against the classification of various types of gentile adherents, see Moore, *Judaism*, 1:326–27; Lake and Cadbury, *Acts*, 84–85.

⁶⁸ This is supported by the lack of evidence for an *active* gentile mission, and that the Pharisees would have had more success among fellow Jews who had less to give up in adopting a Pharisaic way of life than a gentile. Any gentile adopting Pharisaism would also de facto be considered a προσήλυτος. Yet, assuming that Jesus is not against gentiles becoming ϫϫϫ, he must have *Pharisaism* in view (so, McKnight, *Light*, 107). Thus, προσήλυτος in this context must mean “one who has come to Pharisaism,” *not Judaism* (an amorphous ascription in the diversity of Second Temple Judaism). His analysis is overly harsh, but see also Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 317.

Against the idea that fellow Jews are in view, Keener argues that this “would be an unusual use of the term ‘proselyte.’” See Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 547–49; cf. McKnight, who agrees (*Light*, 107). Unfortunately, the term προσήλυτος is ambiguous in specifying ethnicity (unless one assumes its technical status), and whether Jews or gentiles are in view depends on the assumed context. For further discussion of the NT evidence, see, Levinskaya, *Book*, 35–49.

⁶⁹ Goodman notes Josephus’s use of the participial form of προσέρχομαι, τοὺς προσιόντας, from which προσήλυτος derives in reference to the Essenes (*J.W.* 2.8.7 §142; Goodman, *Mission*, 73).

⁷⁰ E.g., Cohen paraphrases it as, “the *entire world*” (“Conversion,” 36). Apparently, H. Graetz interpreted this verse’s mention of a “single convert” to mean *specifically* Flavius Clemens. For this and other interesting interpretations, see Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 267–73.

⁷¹ Cf. Matt 4:23, Καὶ περιῆγεν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ; Matt 4:18; 8:24; 15:29; Mk 6:6. For the collocation of θάλασσα and ξηρός, see Jon 1:9; Hg 2:21; 1 Macc 8:23, 32; 1 En 97:7.

To clarify, I am not questioning that some gentiles converted to Judaism or “became Jews” in the eyes of some⁷² or that some Jews at some point incorporated circumcision and immersion into a conversion ceremony for gentiles. However, I question (1) the validity of the extra-semantic baggage accompanying both words of the phrase “proselyte baptism” that contributes to the reification of the collocation as a “thing” rather than a verbal action, and (2) the certainty and stability that scholars associate with the phrase, assumptions that inevitably color interpretation. Rather than understanding sources to describe the immersion of a gentile, what scholars usually mean by “proselyte baptism,” is a once-for-all, life-changing initiation-immersion that resembles “Christian baptism,” *because the latter has set the terms for interpreting the data.*⁷³ This, I argue, is read into the texts via its perceived connection to John’s (supposedly) one-time, life-changing immersion. Using the label and treating it as a technical term influences interpretation by inviting interpreters to imbue it unwittingly with anachronistic meaning and to locate concepts in texts that are not present.⁷⁴ I provide two illustrations.

To illustrate this confusion and the way that “Christian baptism” frequently controls the analysis of “proselyte baptism,” consider these comments by McKnight:

the issue is whether there is evidence for Jews of the Second Temple period practicing an initiatory, *unrepeated rite for entrance into the community*. The distinction being made is fine, and the evidence is not always clear. However, *unless one recognizes the distinction between a simple religious lustration* (e.g., washing hands to effect ceremonial cleanness or

Hence, Donaldson rightly says, “This little verse has had an influence all out of proportion to its size” (*Judaism*, 413). Will and Orrieux propose an alternative reading of the verse, taking ὅτι as relative, e.g., “vous qui,” rather than causal, e.g., “parce que” or “car” (*Prosélytisme juif*, 131). But this goes against the natural reading in which a *reason* is expected for the “woe.” Moreover, ὅτι would need to occur *after the verb* for their argument to be grammatically possible.

⁷² Josephus uses this language with regard to Izates—εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος, “to be validly a Jew” and that his people would οὐκ ἀνέξεσθαι τε βασιλεύοντος αὐτῶν Ἰουδαίου, “also not bear the ruling over them by a Jew” (*Ant.* 20.2.4 §38–39). See the discussion in Barclay, *Jews*, 402–5. On the other hand, “to be validly a Jew” could more accurately mean the *sort* of Jew indicated by the term רגל.

⁷³ Keener, *John*, 1:445

⁷⁴ E.g., the label “proselyte baptism” leads scholars to interpret the immersion of gentiles through the lens of “Christian baptism” rather than interpreting the texts on their own terms; it implies an active Jewish mission, which is doubtful (and unnecessary to explain Paul); and it assumes the modern, *transitive* sense of attempting to convert others, when the term προσέρχομαι, from which προσήλυτος derives, was *intransitive* in its use in antiquity (Will and Orrieux, *Prosélytisme*, 11–49).

even a ceremonial bath) and an initiatory, unrepeatable baptism (e.g., Christian baptism), then one cannot speak of “entrance” rites.⁷⁵

This is simply linguistic posturing in which “special washings” are called “baptisms,” and “normal washings” are called “lustrations” or “ablutions.”⁷⁶ To the contrary, I argue that an immersion performed in a conversion ceremony is *identical* to a “normal” lustration. It is the context that leads us to see it as “initiatory” or “unrepeatable,” and calling it “baptism” enables us to shift the focus from the verbal action to something else.

In the case of “proselyte baptism,” what makes a lustration an “initiatory, unrepeatable baptism” for McKnight and others is its *essence*—it is *unlike* “normal” lustrations. Yet, from a ritual perspective, there is no reason that an “entrance-rite-lustration” should be essentially different from a “simple religious lustration.” We do not speak of “initiatory prayers” or consider such prayers as distinct in *essence* from any other prayer. And while a conversion ceremony provides a specific context for rituals, it is their nature as *common religious practices* that makes rituals desirable to include in a ceremony.⁷⁷ While one might argue that a break with the past occurs for the convert, this is the result of the *entire conversion process* not “the טבילה” alone.⁷⁸

Obviously, if one insists that conversion is a singular event epitomized in a ceremony that is marked by a unique, never-to-be-repeated baptism, then this significantly narrows the scope of our inquiry and explains why identifying John’s baptism in the available antecedents is so problematic.

⁷⁵ McKnight, *Light*, 82, emphasis mine. It is unclear how McKnight arrives at this definition and it is equally uncertain whether ancient people would understand this distinction. Moreover, if one insists on a difference between the nature of “proselyte baptism” and other repeated, even if “initiatory,” washings, it is unclear how the latter can serve as evidence for the antiquity of the former as Keener claims (*John*, 1:446–47).

⁷⁶ Surprisingly, Thomas uses this *modern* linguistic distinction (i.e., posturing) as evidence for “le baptême des prosélytes” (*Mouvement*, 365)! Cf. Taylor, who attempts to artificially distinguish between *tebilahs* (“Beginnings,” 196).

⁷⁷ This is a significant shortcoming in the analysis of Taylor, who claims that “proselyte baptism” is “set off apart from the ritual baths of purification” (“Beginnings,” 194). His use of double separators, “set off” and “apart from” are rhetorically revealing. In fact, the *same word* is used in rabbinic sources to the contrary of his claim “In these documents [b. Yebam. and Gerim] it is no ordinary bath of purification (*tebilah*) but has become one of three specific requirements for the reception of proselytes into Judaism.”

⁷⁸ Some rabbinic sources indicate the requirement of witnesses and if the person could not provide any, the proselyte’s status as a convert was rejected (Bamberger, *Proselytism*, 54–55). That is, in addition to circumcision and immersion, there is also an integral communal element to conversion.

Second, to illustrate the confusion related to the term “proselyte” and the interpretation of rabbinic literature, consider R. J. Zwi Werblowsky’s cautionary note:

The danger of being misled by deceptive metaphors that conjure up associations with mystery initiations has been illustrated by more than one scholar’s interpretation of the rabbinic statement to the effect that “a proselyte who has converted is like a newborn child.” Whatever rebirth-significance a certain type of phenomenological analysis may find in any and every immersion ritual, there can be no doubt that it is conspicuously absent from the explicit and overt meaning of rabbinic proselyte baptism. The metaphor of the “new born child” refers not so much to mystical regeneration but to a new legal status.⁷⁹

To summarize some of the main points of the above discussion: (1) the HB does not know of the conversion of gentiles; (2) authors of Second Temple and rabbinic literature employed the legal category of $\Gamma\lambda/\delta\eta\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\nu$ as a means to receive non-Jews into the community but $\delta\eta\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\nu$ is not a technical term; (3) no term approximates to “proselyte baptism” in ancient sources; (4) the appearance of ritual baths attests to the increased attention toward ritual purity; (5) “Judaism” and “Christianity” did not exist as discreet religions in antiquity and, thus, the notion of borrowing across religions is an anachronism; (6) the טבילה for Jews and converts is not distinguished in ancient literature; and (7) John’s “baptism” or “Christian baptism” distorts the analysis of other texts and practices.

Rather than looking for “proselyte baptism,” we should be looking for evidence of the immersion of gentile converts in some connection with a decision to worship the God of Israel whether it is integral to a “conversion ceremony.”⁸⁰ This complicates matters because modern scholars, just as ancient people, disagree on what constitutes “conversion,” and once the criteria related to “proselyte baptism” is removed, it widens the possibilities of what may be counted as evidence. Thus, what I analyze in this chapter, are gentiles who immerse at some point before, during, or after a ceremony in which a gentile “joins the house of Israel,”⁸¹ whatever that might have specifically meant to first-century people. In so doing, I show how our analysis of the ancient texts and context presents a different picture if we do not approach our sources with “proselyte baptism” as a heuristic lens. However, I should underscore that the identification of such an immersion (at or around conversion) does not in my

⁷⁹ R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, “A Note on Purification and Proselyte Baptism,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty—Part Three, Judaism Before 70*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 12 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1975), 200–205, 203; cf. Lupieri, “John,” *ANRW*, 33.1:440, n. 31.

⁸⁰ For arguments related to dating “proselyte baptism” prior to John, see, Keener, *John*, 1:446–47; *Acts*, 1:980–82.

⁸¹ Cf. *Jdt* 14:10; *Philo*, *Virt.* 1.102–3; *b. Yebam.* 47b; *Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Nez.* 18.

view make it “special”; rather, it is the first of many immersions to come. Finally, while I am unconvinced that both $\gamma\lambda$ and $\delta\eta\iota\omicron\beta\epsilon\delta\delta\omicron\iota\omicron$ are technical terms in the first centuries BCE and CE, for the sake of brevity and to leave ambiguous what may have been required of such gentiles, I use the term “converts.”⁸²

Groups that Practiced the Immersion of Gentile Converts

Methodologically, I have maintained that rituals like immersion must be analyzed and interpreted within the conceptual universe of the practicing group(s). On the one hand, whereas Qumran and the DSS provide a window into a definable group, the same is not true of rabbinic and Greco-Roman sources. It is impossible to identify with any certainty specific, historical, Jewish group(s) associated with the textual evidence or what precisely these different communities actually thought and practiced.⁸³ Along these lines, Cohen says,

To what extent rabbinic laws were “traditional,” that is, of pre-70 C.E. origin, and to what extent they were innovated by the rabbis themselves, is the subject of scholarly dispute. This uncertainty applies to the rabbinic laws concerning conversion, many of which, as we have already seen, are not attested in pre-70 sources. *The list of possible innovations is long and impressive*: the requirement of immersion; the matrilineal principle (see above); the requirement of a sacrifice; the institution of a conversion ceremony, almost catechism, which must be performed publicly (in front of either two witnesses or three judges).⁸⁴

To put it another way, we cannot assume that the evidence of one particular text speaks universally for all Jews of the time. Rather, it *may* constitute evidence for a particular group and a particular practice in a particular time. It *may* be possible to interpret the diverse textual evidence as saying the same thing, but we must argue this and not simply assume it.

⁸² I prefer to avoid the transliterated term, “proselyte” because of past scholarly discourse that accompanies it and “God-fearer,” wherein the distinction concerns circumcision. I realize that “convert” also has semantic baggage, but the term captures well the generalities of leaving something and coming to something else (cf. Philo above), and leaves open the specific details on how various Jewish communities may have defined the requirements differently for such a move. On the complexities “conversion” in the ancient through modern period, see, Gary G. Porton, “Conversion in Judaism,” *EJud*² 1:480–94.

⁸³ So, Cohen, “Crossing,” 13–14, 31–33; Porton, *Stranger*, 10; cf. Lake and Cadbury, *Acts*, 77. Elsewhere, for example, Cohen says, “The Mishnah is not living in real time and does not seem interested in the affairs of its own time” (“Mishnah,” *EDEJ*, 960–61). See also, the methodological concerns raised by Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis: Selections from the Jewish Encyclopaedia* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), xxxv–xxxviii.

⁸⁴ Cohen, “Conversion,” 41.

To categorize the diversity with which Jews viewed gentiles in the Second Temple period, I refer to the work of Terence L. Donaldson in which he identifies four patterns of universalism:⁸⁵

- 1) *a spectrum of sympathizers*—association with the Jewish community at some level
- 2) *converts*—identification with the Jewish community
- 3) *ethical monotheists*—Torah, as an expression of natural law, is parallel with Greek philosophy and hence accessible to all
- 4) *participants in eschatological redemption*—gentiles who benefit through Israel’s redemption.

To this, Matthew Thiessen adds a fifth, albeit minority posture, namely, gentiles could *never* become Jews, so there was no need to try.⁸⁶ In light of these five categories, which ones would have expected gentiles to immerse and for what reason? Would “sympathizers” (those not yet circumcised) be expected to immerse before joining in worship at the local synagogue,⁸⁷ entering the Jerusalem temple, or when they “joined” the Jewish community in some capacity? And would such an immersion “count” as “proselyte baptism”?

The monolithic view makes it easier to postulate that “proselyte baptism” was a common, widespread practice of John’s day, just as the labels, “proselyte baptism,” “proselyte,” and “convert,” all imply the existence of centralized (à la rabbinic) authority. This implies that Second Temple Jews all agreed on the *possibility* of gentile conversion and *how* it should happen.⁸⁸ Given the variety of perspectives toward the conversion of gentiles and the

⁸⁵ He notes that the modern caricature of Judaism as “particular” (because gentiles were required to “become Jews” for “salvation”) versus Christianity as “universal” (because of the supposed erasure of ethnicity) is incorrect (Donaldson, *Judaism*, 1–13). In fact, in the ancient context wherein the combination of ethnicity and the worship of a certain deity or deities were the norm, “proselytism represented a striking step in a universalistic direction” (5). See also the seven categories of Cohen, “Crossing,” 13–33.

⁸⁶ Thiessen notes his agreement that “the dominant view in the late Second Temple period” was that gentiles could become προσήλυτος through circumcision, but he also presents evidence that “call[s] into question the scholarly construction of a monolithic role for circumcision in antiquity” (*Contesting Conversion*, 11). Elsewhere, he uses this thesis to explain Paul (Thiessen, *Paul*). He says that “Paul opposes gentile circumcision and adoption of the Jewish law, not because he thought Judaism was a religion of works-righteousness or because the ethnocentricity of Judaism repulsed him, but because he rejects one particular Jewish solution to the gentile problem—conversion” (14).

⁸⁷ I am aware of the paucity of evidence pertaining to the synagogue *structure* in the first century, so my use of it here need not imply a building.

⁸⁸ Thus, Cohen argues that conversion was performed in a variety of ways until the mid-second century (“Conversion,” 31–45).

uncertainty about the actual conversion process, I hesitate to conclude that this practice was so widespread or stabilized that it inspired John to adapt it for his own context.⁸⁹ Rather than employ the heuristic category of “proselyte baptism,” which implicitly groups sources together and subconsciously gap-fills the lacunae of our sources, I interpret the texts independently and do not assume that first-century Jews were aware of later developments and rulings. In fact, not only do we need to account for development during the Second Temple to the rabbinic period, but as Moshe Lavee and others have shown, we also need to attend to development within rabbinic literature itself.⁹⁰ Finally, I account for the diversity of Second Temple Judaism in my analysis.

Gentile Conversion and Evidence for Immersion at or around Conversion

Dating “proselyte baptism” prior to John is a problem.⁹¹ Thus, one goal is to ascertain whether evidence exists to suggest that John may have adapted the prior practice of Jews immersing gentiles at or around conversion. Another goal, in light of my methodology is to identify (where possible) any clear reasons for *why* gentiles (were) immersed by considering its function in the ritual system. Because I am not looking for “proselyte baptism,” my approach departs from the usual discourse. Rather than working backwards, I will start in the other direction. As I proceed, I will treat the evidence chronologically based on the date of the source. Then, I will date the time period of the event recorded in the source. Where relevant, I precede textual discussion with comments about the nature of the corpus in which a text is grouped.

The criteria I used for selecting sources is simple. I consider any texts that other scholars advance in support of “proselyte baptism.” However, since I am not looking for “proselyte baptism,” I occasionally include other texts or

⁸⁹ Of course, by this, I do not wish to say that it is impossible.

⁹⁰ Moshe Lavee, *The Rabbinic Conversion of Judaism: The Unique Perspective of the Bavli on Conversion and the Conversion of Jewish Identity*, *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1–14; Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Is ‘Proselyte Baptism’ Mentioned in the Mishnah? The Interpretation of M. Pesahim 8:8 (= M. Eduyot 5:2),” in *Pursuing the Text: Studies in Honor of Ben Zion Wacholder on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. John C. Reeves and John Campen, JSOTSup 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 278–92; Michael Rosenberg, “The Early Rabbinic Conversion Process as a Transition from Impurity to Purity,” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL/AAR, Denver, CO, 18 November 2018).

⁹¹ Rudolph does not even consider it in his survey (*Antike Baptisten*, 11).

evidence not normally adduced. I arrange the sources below in three main blocks:

- 1) *through 27/29 CE*—to account for evidence prior to John the immerser.⁹² This does not mean that later texts do not provide evidence, but any evidence prior to John would be significant. With regard to the pre-exilic period, I follow Cohen who says that since the HB "is unfamiliar with the notion of conversion . . . it is also unfamiliar with rituals of conversion."⁹³ In the post-exilic period through the end of the Second Temple period, the evidence is inchoate.
- 2) *27/29–200 CE*—to account for evidence immediately prior to and after the destruction of the temple and prior to the Mishnah.
- 3) *200–600 CE*—to account for the Mishnah and rabbinic literature dependent upon it.

In each title subheading below, I provide (1) the earliest date or the date range for the evidence; (2) the name of the text, corpus, or evidence; (3) the earliest date or date range of the recorded event in parentheses, however, I make no attempt to establish the historicity of most events; and (4) the likelihood that the evidence supports the immersion of gentiles at or around conversion using the following designators.

certain—clear indications exist in which the text offers positive evidence

possible—the text is unclear, but could be interpreted as positive evidence

uncertain—nothing in the text explicitly suggests immersion, but other indicators may suggest its possibility

unlikely—the text is unclear, but interpreting it as positive evidence would strain the text or context considerably

not possible—clear indications exist (or are absent) in which the text must be distorted or manipulated to offer positive evidence

I must emphasize that these designators are *neither* indicating historicity *nor* that it should be considered as evidence prior to John. Rather, it refers to the

⁹² For the dating of John's public career, see, Joan E. Taylor, "John the Baptist," *EDEJ*, 819–21; Lee Martin McDonald, "New Testament Chronology," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 7–22.

⁹³ Cohen, "Conversion," 38. He uses Num 31:13–24 to show that whereas Midianite utensils required immersion before use, this did not apply to Midianite virgins.

likelihood that the evidence should be understood as gentile immersion at or around conversion. The date of the recorded event in the heading subtitle determines whether it represents evidence prior to John (i.e., it must date prior to 27/29 CE). Where a given text is brief, I include the original under the subtitle with a footnoted translation.

Through 27/29 CE—Preexilic, Postexilic & Maccabean Periods

7th cent. BCE—2 Kings 5:1–19, The Immersion of Naaman (9th cent. BCE)—Unlikely⁹⁴

εἰ ἂν ἄδὲ ὁ δαίμων ἦ ἄεθροῦ ἡ ἀσθενεία ἐκείνη, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου (2 Kgs 5:10).⁹⁵

εἰ ἂν ἄδὲ ὁ δαίμων ἦ ἄεθροῦ ἡ ἀσθενεία ἐκείνη, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου, ἡ δὲ ἰατρὴ ἐκείνη ἐδοῦτο εἰς τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰορδάνου (2 Kgs 5:14).⁹⁶

Some scholars point to Naaman, an Aramean commander who suffered from skin disease, as the first convert who immersed.⁹⁷ An Israelite slave girl whom he had abducted during a raid advised him to go to Samaria to see a prophet of Israel. Elisha instructs him to wash (יָרַךְ, *ēyū*) in the Jordan river. Then, the text explains that he immersed (לָבַט, *lāḇōḇæu*) seven times. According to the text, he explicitly immerses *to be healed* and only after his healing does he determine to pledge cultic loyalty to God. Scholars who find a connection to “proselyte baptism” in this text do so (incorrectly) on the basis that *lāḇōḇæu* is a “technical term.” This is unlikely evidence simply because the reason for immersion shares no connection to conversion. Naaman immersed for healing and there is no clue from the text that he would or be expected to convert. Moreover, the solitary nature of this event is remarkable if the authors of the texts in HB/LXX knew of the conversion of gentiles.

⁹⁴ Scholars date the translation of 1–2 Kings (=3–4 Kingdoms) into Greek between the third and first centuries BCE. See, Timothy Michael Law, “3–4 Kingdoms (1–2 Kings),” in *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*, ed. James K. Aitken (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 147–66, 149–50.

⁹⁵ “Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, ‘Go and bathe seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean’” (JPS85).

⁹⁶ “So he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had bidden; and his flesh became like a little boy’s, and he was clean” (JPS85).

⁹⁷ Cf. 2 Kgs 5:13–14, 17–18; so, Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 43; “Conversion,” 41.

160–100 BCE—Judith (8th cent. BCE)—Not Possible⁹⁸

ἰαὼί ἀε̄ Ἀ=εὐñ δῦῖοά, ὄοά ἐδῖβζοάί ὁ ε̄αδὸ δῖῦ Ἐόνῆαε̄, ἐδβόοάδῶάί ὁφ̄ ε̄αφ̄ ὀούῶñá ε̄αί δᾰñε̄άδῶῖάοῖ ὁῆῖ ὀῦñε̄ά ὁῆῖ ᾰε̄ñῖάδῶῖάδᾰ ᾰνὸῖῦ ε̄αί δñῖῖάδῶῖε̄ç ᾰῖὸ ὀοῖ ῖῖε̄ῖ Ἐόνῆαε̄ ε̄ῦδ ὁῆῖ ῆῖῖñάδ ὀάγδφ̄.⁹⁹

Although the setting of this Jewish novella is the 8th century, it was authored sometime between 160–100 BCE and likely played a role in forming (and reflecting) Jewish thinking toward conversion. Of note is the fact that Achior is circumcised and “added to the house of Israel.” Admittedly the details regarding his conversion are sparse, but it is solely circumcision that is noted. Thus, it is not possible for this text to provide evidence of gentile immersion at conversion.

150 BCE—Archaeological Evidence (150 BCE–?)—Possible

The innovation of ritual baths in the mid-second century BCE make it *possible* that gentile converts immersed prior to John the immerser.¹⁰⁰ The archaeological evidence at least provides certain evidence that some Jews were concerned to resolve ritual purity through immersion in human-made baths, which would qualify as potential locations for gentile immersion.¹⁰¹ In fact, since ritual baths were a *convenience* for immersion, not a requirement, it is possible that converts were immersed even earlier than this. In either case, immersion in this context would relate to ritual purity.

100 BCE—Joseph and Aseneth (1876 BCE/1638–1540 BCE)—Not Possible¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Dating the events of Judith is difficult since it contains a conflation of various settings. See Betsy Halpern-Amaru, “Judith, Book of,” *EDEJ*, 856.

⁹⁹ “When Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God. So he was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day” (NRSV).

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Keener points to the Hasmonean period ritual baths where proselyte baptism presumably occurred (*John*, 1:446–47; *Acts*, 1:981).

¹⁰¹ Ritual baths are identified as the place for immersion of the רַבַּל in b. Yebam. 47b.

¹⁰² The dating of Joseph in Egypt is variously assessed. John J. Collins places Jacob’s family as entering Egypt in 1876 BCE. K. A. Kitchen places Joseph’s entry c. 1720–1700 BCE. If Joseph’s reception and ascendancy to power is better explained by Hyksos rulers, then the 15th dynasty (1638–1540 BCE) is the more accurate time period of Joseph’s rule. See, John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018), 13; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006),

Joseph and Aseneth is a haggadic love/conversion story based on the marriage of Joseph to Pharaoh’s daughter Aseneth mentioned in Gen 41:45. Aseneth abandons idolatry and becomes an adherent to the God of Israel. The conversion process is narrated, not presented in liturgical form.¹⁰³ Details related to her conversion include:

- repentance: e.g., 6.1–8; 9.2; 11.11, 16–18
- weeping, sorrow, and ashes: 9.2; 10.1, 15–17
- rejection of other gods/idols: 9.2; 10.10–13¹⁰⁴
- intercession and blessing by Joseph: 8.9
- fasting: 10.1–8; 17; 13.9
- confession of faith: 11.10–14; 12.1–2, 13
- confession of sin: 12.3–5; 13.13
- prayer: 12.1–13.15

While it is uncertain which elements of the above list Second Temple Jews may have *required* of gentile converts, I follow Thiessen who suggests that this story pertains to “a live issue in the author’s community: how can a pious Jew take a non-Jewish spouse?”¹⁰⁵ There are two points of interest. First, $\delta\tilde{\nu}\tilde{\iota}\tilde{o}\tilde{\rho}\tilde{\epsilon}\tilde{o}\tilde{\delta}\tilde{i}\tilde{o}$ (or cognates) is not used.¹⁰⁶ And second, while Aseneth washes her face,¹⁰⁷ she never immerses.¹⁰⁸ In light of all the other detail that the narrative provides regarding her conversion, this text offers no evidence for the

343–59; Barry J. Beitzel, *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 106.

¹⁰³ This is accomplished through the narrator’s comments about the internal disposition and thoughts of the characters, as well as explicit statements such as Joseph’s prayer over Aseneth (8.9).

¹⁰⁴ Her repudiation of idols extended even to her own dogs.

¹⁰⁵ Matthew Thiessen, “Aseneth’s Eight-Day Transformation as Scriptural Justification for Conversion,” *JSJ* 45 (2014): 229–49. That said, I do not think Jos. Asen. is limited to the issue of exogamy, but includes justification for gentile proselytes in general (cf. Jos. Asen. 15.7–8); so, Donaldson, *Judaism*, 147. As Patricia Ahearne-Kroll notes, the author’s view regarding marriage contrasts with other Jewish perspectives on this question, e.g., Jub. 30. See Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, “Joseph and Aseneth,” in *Outside the Bible*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2013), 2525–89, 2527.

¹⁰⁶ Donaldson, *Judaism*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Her face washing may be understood as an act of ritual purification since it is coupled with the washing of hands and possibly connected with her mourning in ashes and the presence of the heavenly man.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, “Conversion,” 38; McKnight, *Light*, 83. Furthermore, an argument can be made that her hand and face washing has nothing specifically to do with “conversion,” but rather it is related to her marriage preparation.

immersion of a gentile convert. Hence, C. Burchard remarks, “The absence of a reference to proselyte baptism is of little avail since we do not know when the custom began.”¹⁰⁹ Since this story is the “longest and most elaborate conversion story to be found in the Jewish literature of the period,” it is all the more noteworthy that immersion is not mentioned.¹¹⁰ Another reason this text is problematic for evidence is that its date is uncertain.¹¹¹ Interestingly, some of the language related to Aseneth’s conversion resembles the description of Philo mentioned above (e.g., leaving family and needing shelter).¹¹²

30–1 BCE—4Q267 9 V, 9–10 (30–1 BCE)—Uncertain¹¹³

יִכְתְּבוּ בְּשֵׁמוֹתֵיהֶם אִישׁ אַחֵר אַחֵיהוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים לְרֵאשׁוֹנָה וְהַלְוִיִּים שְׁנַיִם וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלוֹשָׁתָם וְהַגֵּר רִבְעִי. 114

4Q267 is a fragment of CD that mentions four classes of people: priests, Levites, Israelites, and resident aliens. While this is not a text normally cited in support of “proselyte baptism,” it may offer evidence of the immersion of gentiles who joined the Essene community. This depends somewhat on the relationship between the Essenes and the Qumran sectarians, and whether CD represents the views of the larger Essene community. Kuhn suggests that the Qumran sect did not admit non-Jews since 1QS mentions only priests, Levites, and Israelites, and omits the גר.¹¹⁵ However, this would not necessarily rule out Essene groups connected with Qumran from accepting gentile converts as the text implies was the case. Nevertheless, I consider this evidence uncertain since it depends on speculation. If it is relevant as evidence, it would pertain to ritual purity as I argued in chapter five.

¹⁰⁹ C. Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” *OTP* 2:177–247, 188.

¹¹⁰ Donaldson, *Judaism*, 141. Later, he explains this omission through correspondence with other “Hellenistic Jewish literature” that minimizes Torah and emphasizes “natural law” (149).

¹¹¹ This work is dated anywhere between 100 BCE to 115 CE (Ahearne-Kroll, “Joseph,” 2526; Burchard, “Joseph and Aseneth,” *OTP* 2:187–88). The later this text may be dated the more difficulty it poses to the early practice of gentile immersion.

¹¹² Cf. Philo, *Spec.* 1.51–52 with Jos. Asen. 11.3–14.

¹¹³ Cf. 11Q19 XL, 5–6, which mentions entry of the גרִיִּם.

¹¹⁴ “Then they shall be recorded by name, one after the other: the priests first, the Levites second, the children of Israel third, the proselyte fourth” [trans. Wise, Abegg, Cook]. For the sake of clarity, I have provided the text of CD XIV, 4–6, which scholars used to reconstruct the damaged portions of 4Q267. Apart from some spelling differences, the texts are identical.

¹¹⁵ Kuhn, “προσήλυτος,” *TDNT* 6:735

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.”¹¹⁸ The author was presumably Jewish, and the text, which is *free of “Christian” interpolation*,¹¹⁹ issues a call for the *nations* to repent and wash in rivers. Although the text does not use ἀάδδδβæù or its cognates, Collins sees a parallel with John the immerser and asserts that “the distinctive requirement, if disaster is to be averted, is baptism.”¹²⁰

While this text could refer to the immersion of gentiles at conversion, upon closer examination, the washing is explainable as ritual purification prior to prayer, and “baptism” could only be seen to prevent disaster if it is understood by metonymy to refer to the series of imperatives and subjunctives in the text. The context of the call to repent is placed within an historical overview in which evil grows so great that the pious are all killed. As such, the author anticipates the destruction of all humans by fire (Sib. Or. 4.152–61). To prevent such things, the author commands the audience to repent (ἰάόάδδβèçìé)¹²¹ from these behaviors that leads God to wrath. Having abandoned (ἰάèβçìé)¹²² such practices, they are ordered to wash (èÿÿù),¹²³ and having spread out (èèôáíÿù)¹²⁴ their hands in prayer they are ordered to ask (áíδÿù)¹²⁵ for pardon. Finally, they are commanded to propitiate themselves (ἰèÛóèÿíáé) from bitter impiety by means of blessing God.

Grammatically, washing is not linked with, nor does it symbolize, repentance, but rather it *precedes* prayer.¹²⁶ The act of repentance is explicitly

with words of praise; God will grant repentance (169) and will not destroy. He will stop his wrath again if you all (170) practice honorable piety in your hearts [trans. Collins, *OTP*].

¹¹⁸ Collins, *OTP* 1:381.

¹¹⁹ 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.

¹²⁰ Collins, *OTP* 1:383.

¹²¹ This is the first imperative (aorist) of the list.

¹²² This aorist participle describes action taken prior to washing and is dependent upon the imperative (λούω).

¹²³ This is the second imperative (aorist).

¹²⁴ This aorist participle describes action taken prior to asking and is dependent upon the imperative (αἰτέω), not (λούω).

¹²⁵ This is the third imperative (present).

¹²⁶ Note the similarities with the Latin text of LAE, 1.1–17.3, which probably derives sometime between 100 and 400 CE. That washing, repentance, and prayer, are distinct, is evident when Adam says to Eve, “let no speech come out of your mouth, because we are unworthy to entreat the Lord since our lips are unclean from the illegal and forbidden tree” (*OTP* 2:260). A similar account about Adam is recounted in the eighth/ninth century CE Pirque R. El. 20.9. See, H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and*

identified by ὁὔα in 4.162, which refers back to 4.152–61, and the abandonment of “daggers and groanings, murders and outrages”¹²⁷ in 4.164. That is, repentance has to do with ceasing certain behavior (i.e., “these things” ὁὔα), not washing or saying certain things in prayer. Moreover, the aorist imperative, εἴϋ, is linked to the present imperative αἰὸϋ by ὁϋ. As such, the aorist participle ἐεὸαίϋ “stretch out” modifies αἰὸϋ, not εἴϋ since ὁϋ is joining *clauses*, not words as in Sib. Or. 4:164. Additionally, it is difficult to wash the body with one’s hands extended in the air, a common posture of prayer.¹²⁸ In light of the perfective aspect of ἰάόόβέçíé, ἰάέβçíé, εἴϋ, and ἐεὸαίϋ in contrast with the imperfective aspect of αἰὸϋ and ἰεὸέἰἰάé, 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.

Conversion is present in the text if by that we mean gentiles who turn from their evil deeds and the worship of idols to virtuous living and the worship of Israel’s God (4.1–39). Yet, the washing is self-administered and no community is identified as receiving these repentant gentiles. Thus, it is difficult to conceive of these gentiles as “proselytes” in the modern or ancient sense. “Baptism” is present in the text if by that we mean immersion in water, but its significance in this text is best explained as ritual purification prior to prayer. This text is possible evidence for the immersion of gentiles at conversion, but it is not representative of “proselyte baptism,” at least as modern scholars understand that designation.

90s CE—Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.2.3–4 §§34–48 (c. 18–22 CE)—Not Possible

Josephus recounts the conversion of Izates, king of Adiabene, who converted to Judaism at the tutelage of a certain Jewish merchant named Ananias. However, he was not circumcised at first, and the account describes his conversion as a process.¹²⁹ The details of conversion that Josephus mentions include

Midrash, ed. Markus Bockmuehl, trans. Markus Bockmuehl, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 329.

¹²⁷ Collins, *OTP* 1:388.

¹²⁸ Cf. Sib. Or. 3.591–93: ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἀείρουσι πρὸς οὐρανὸν ὠλένας ἀγνάς ὄρθριοι ἐξ εὐνῆς αἰεὶ χροά ἀγνίζοντες ὕδατι (“For on the contrary, at dawn they lift up holy arms toward heaven, from their beds, always sanctifying their flesh with water,” trans. Collins).

¹²⁹ Cf. Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96–106; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 108.22; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.1–2. Juvenal describes the process of conversion in the following way: (1) the father observes Sabbath,

Ἰωδαίῳ. ἰϋδου̅ ἐὰν ἠϊα̅το δα̅να̅ά̅α̅δ̅ό̅ό̅α̅β, εὐ̅α̅φ̅ ἰεῖ Ἰωδαίῳ, ἔ̅να̅φ̅ ἂ̅ ἄ̅ε̅ε̅ ὁ̅έ, ἀ̅ο̅δι̅θ̅ά̅ε̅α̅το̅ δ̅η̅δ̅ὸ̅ ὁ̅δί̅ εὐ̅α̅ί̅, ἰ̅α̅ε̅ἡ̅αῖ̅ ἂ̅δ̅ὸ̅ οἰϋ̅ =ἡ̅ἡ̅ο̅ε̅ά̅ε̅ οἰγ̅ο̅ί̅ε̅ὸ̅ ἂ̅ ε̅Υ̅α̅ί̅αῖ̅, ε̅δ̅’ ἴ̅δ̅ὸ̅ ὠ̅δ̅ ἂ̅ί̅α̅υ̅δ̅α̅ὸ̅ ἂ̅υ̅δ̅α̅ ε̅δ̅ά̅ε̅ἡ̅ῖ̅α̅ε̅α̅.¹³³

Scholars often interpret Arrian’s *Epicteti dissertationes* as evidence for the immersion of gentile converts. Donaldson even interprets the text to advocate immersion *without* circumcision.¹³⁴ Of course, if Epictetus has immersion in mind, it must have been common practice prior to his teaching for him to cite it as if it were common knowledge. How far before 100 CE, we cannot know. Since Epictetus lived in Rome and Greece, his familiarity with it may suggest the geographic diffusion of the practice, but this assumes that it was practiced elsewhere.¹³⁵ However, even considering all of these points, it does not establish that it was a widespread practice prior to John.

Moreover, I am unconvinced that Epictetus is actually talking about immersion. The text refers to ὁδ̅ δ̅ϋ̅ε̅ῖ̅δ̅ ὁδ̅ οἰϋ̅ ἂ̅ά̅ά̅α̅ἰ̅Ἰ̅ῖ̅δ̅ ἐὰν ἠ̅ἡ̅ç̅ι̅Ἰ̅ῖ̅δ̅ and ἰϋδου̅ ἐὰν ἠϊα̅το δα̅να̅ά̅α̅δ̅ό̅ό̅α̅β. Although “baptism” and circumcision do not appear in the text, Elizabeth Carter (1759) translates the former as, “one who hath been baptized and circumcised,”¹³⁶ and W. A. Oldfather translates both phrases respectively as “the man who has been baptized and has made his choice” and “we also are counterfeit ‘baptists.’” The following points suggest that scholars are reading these rituals into the text. First, ἂϋδ̅δ̅ὸ̅ is an uncommon term to refer to the immersion of people as it normally refers to dyeing clothes or dipping things in a substance.¹³⁷ In fact, this discourse is the *only* reference that LSJ lists in connection with “baptism.” It is possible that he did not know the

¹³³ “Why, then, do you call yourself a Stoic, why do you deceive the multitude, why do you act the part of a Jew, when you are a Greek? Do you not see in what sense men are severally called Jew, Syrian, or Egyptian? For example, whenever we see a man halting between two faiths, we are in the habit of saying, ‘He is not a Jew, he is only acting the part.’ But when he adopts the attitude of mind of the man who has been baptized and has made his choice, then he both is a Jew in fact and is also called one. So we also are counterfeit ‘baptists,’ ostensibly Jews, but in reality something else, not in sympathy with our own reason, far from applying the principles which we profess, yet priding ourselves upon them as being men who know them” (Oldfather, LCL)

¹³⁴ Donaldson, *Judaism*, 390; cf. McElaney, “Conversion,” 332. Donaldson uses this view to explain the meaning of παραβαπτιστής. The problem with this interpretation is that Epictetus is using τὸ τοῦ βεβαμμένου καὶ ἡρημένου as a *positive* example, not a negative one.

¹³⁵ So, Keener, *John*, 1:446; *Acts*, 1:981.

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Carter, ed., *All the Works of Epictetus which are Now Extant; Consisting of His Discourses, Preserved by Arrian, in Four Books, The Enchiridion, and Fragments* (Dublin: Hulton Bradley, 1759). Thomas Wentworth Higginson also translates it as “one who has been baptized and circumcised.” See Thomas Wentworth Higginson, ed., *The Works of Epictetus: His Discourses, in Four Books, the Enchiridion, and Fragments* (Medford, MA: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1890), 1140.

¹³⁷ Cf. Moises Silva, s.v. “βάπτω,” *NIDNTE* 1:460; Albrecht Oepke, s.v. “βάπτω,” *TDNT* 1:529–30.

evidence, especially since he is recounting a prominent conversion c. 20 CE not long before John the immerser began his prophetic work.¹⁴¹ Although Epictetus does not explain the purpose of immersion (if that is actually what he is talking about), the washing in the Sibylline Oracles pertains to ritual purity.

200–600 CE—Mishnah, Talmudim, and Other Rabbinic Sources

No unambiguous textual evidence for the immersion of gentiles exists until sometime after 200 CE. Below I contextually examine rabbinic evidence, favoring Jacob Neusner’s documentary approach, which Gary G. Porton applied to conversion in rabbinic literature.¹⁴² While I am not opposed to interpreting the evidence synoptically, this must be done after contextual analysis, otherwise our reconstruction of sources results in an ahistorical conflation that never existed (akin to the “mystery religions”). Hence, Porton observes,

a good deal of confusion concerning conversion in the rabbinic period arises from the inappropriate confluence of information from different rabbinic documents. That is, when material from amoraic documents is sometimes read into the tannaitic texts or contradictions among the various rabbinic collections are ignored, we create a supposed system that never existed.¹⁴³

Like other Second Temple groups that based their beliefs and practices on the HB, we find the same practice in rabbinic literature. I repeat my agreement with Harrington, who observes of rabbinic literature that “much of what *appears* to be innovation in contrast to biblical principles is actually a valid, astute reading of Scripture itself.”¹⁴⁴

According to Jacob Neusner, the Mishnah is distinguished from the other rabbinic literature for at least two reasons. First, it is “different from Scripture in language and style, indifferent to the claim of authorship by a biblical hero or divine inspiration, stunningly aloof from allusion to verses of Scripture for nearly the whole of its discourse—yet authoritative for Israel.”¹⁴⁵ Second, “the entirety of rabbinic literature *except for the Mishnah*, took shape as a commentary to a prior document, either Scripture or the Mishnah itself. So the entirety of rabbinic literature testifies to the unique standing of the

¹⁴¹ Other Greco-Roman literature that discusses conversion also notably omit any reference to immersion, see the sources on p. ? , n. 129, and Donaldson, *Judaism*, 363–409.

¹⁴² Porton, *Stranger*, 13, *passim*.

¹⁴³ Porton, *Stranger*, 132.

¹⁴⁴ Harrington, *Impurity*, 1, emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁵ Jacob Neusner, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 126.

Mishnah, acknowledging its special status, without parallel or peer, as the oral part of the Torah.”¹⁴⁶

The remarkable fact confronting advocates of “proselyte baptism” is that *there is no such requirement or description of the same for the conversion of a gentile in the two authoritative texts of Judaism, namely the HB and the Mishnah*.¹⁴⁷ Of course, this does not preclude that some Jews might create such a ritual requirement. However, it demonstrates that not only does the HB not know of “conversion,” but the process and associated ritual requirements were negotiated over time and differed among various Jewish groups throughout the Ancient Mediterranean. I agree with Porton that the evidence of our sources point in *this* direction rather than in the direction of a stable, monolithic understanding or practice of conversion that existed prior to John the immerser.¹⁴⁸

Finally, as is well-known, identifying and dating rabbis is challenging. I depend heavily on *H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger’s Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, *Neusner’s Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis*, Brad Young’s *Meet the Rabbis*,¹⁴⁹ and Shulamis Frieman’s *Who’s Who in the Talmud*,¹⁵⁰ in addition to any secondary literature that may exist on the passages discussed.

200–220 CE—*m. Pesah* 8:8; *cf. m. ‘Ed.* 5:2 (c. 10–80 CE)—*Not Possible*

גר שניתגייר ערב פסחים בית שמי או טובל ואוכל את פסחו לערב ובית הלל או הפורש מן העורלה כפורש מן הקבר¹⁵¹

It is certain that *m. Pesah* 8:8 mentions the immersion of a gentile, but the text refers to the gentile as a גר *before* immersion (i.e., immersion is unconnected

¹⁴⁶ Neusner, *Introduction*, 128.

¹⁴⁷ Cohen observes, “The Mishnah, neither here nor anywhere else, explains what a gentile has to do in order to convert” (“Proselyte Baptism,” 282). Porton says similarly, “Mishnah has little to say about the ritual of conversion” and there is *only one* reference to the circumcision of a convert, *m. Pesah* 8:8 (Porton, *Stranger*, 17–18).

¹⁴⁸ E.g., Porton, *Stranger*, 49, 130.

¹⁴⁹ Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

¹⁵⁰ Shulamis Frieman, *Who’s Who in the Talmud* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000).

¹⁵¹ This text is exported from Accordance and based on the Kaufmann A 50 manuscript. “The School of Shammai say: If a man became a proselyte on the day before Passover he may immerse himself and consume his Passover-offering in the evening. And the School of Hillel say: He that separates himself from his uncircumcision is as one that separates himself from a grave.” Unless otherwise specified, all translations of the Mishnah are from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

with becoming a גר).¹⁵² Moreover, the debate between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel concerns the *ritual purity condition* of the גר, *not his status as גר* or what is required to become one,¹⁵³ which y. Pesah 8:8 makes explicit.¹⁵⁴ In fact, the context pertains to conditions under which one could or could not slaughter and eat Passover (one had to be both circumcised¹⁵⁵ and ritually clean¹⁵⁶) and m. Pesah 8:6–8 specifically mentions corpse impurity.¹⁵⁷ In the view of Beth Hillel, a newly circumcised convert is *like* one who has contracted corpse impurity (which required seven days for purification) and thus would not be permitted to eat, but *not because he was not a full convert*.¹⁵⁸ This point is explicit in b. Pesah 8:8 92a.¹⁵⁹ By contrast, Beth Shammai permitted the

¹⁵² So, Cohen, “Proselyte Baptism,” 282.

¹⁵³ Pace Thomas, *Mouvement*, 358; Daube, *New Testament*, 107–8. Daube ignores the context of Exod 12, where it is clear that it is the בן־נכר, “foreigner,” that is prohibited (along with a few others), a non-Jew who is distinct from the גר; so, R. Martin-Achard, “גור,” *TLOT* 1:307–10, 308. Nahum M. Sarna defines the בן־נכר as “a non-Israelite who resides in the land temporarily, usually for purposes of commerce” *Exodus*, 63; cf. Deut 15:3; 23:21; Prov 20:16; 27:13.

¹⁵⁴ Shammai’s rule is explained on the basis of Num 31:19, “Just as you did not become unclean until you entered the covenant [at Sinai], so your captives did not become unclean until they entered the covenant [hence, uncleanness that occurs before conversion does not require a process of purification]” (Neusner). Hillel’s rule is explained on the same scriptural basis but interpreting Numbers differently, “just as you require sprinkling [for purification] on the third and seventh [days, as stipulated in Num. 31:19], so your captives require sprinkling on the third and seventh [days] [for uncleanness by reason of contact with a corpse that, prior to conversion, did not take effect but that now, after conversion, applies retroactively (as if the captives just had contact with a grave)]. [The situation of Numbers 31, which specifies that it applies to all those who had contact with a corpse, is assumed to be paradigmatic for the conversion of every gentile, in that all gentiles are assumed to have had contact with a corpse.]” (Neusner). Yerushalmi rules in favor of Beth Shammai, citing R. Hiyya b. Joseph and R. Giddul b. Benjamin on the authority of R. Judah.

¹⁵⁵ So, Sarna who also notes on the basis of Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael that uncircumcised Israelites were also excluded from the Passover (*Exodus*, 64).

¹⁵⁶ Exod 12:43–49; Num 9:6–14. Cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book*, 186. It is also possible that everyone eligible to celebrate Passover simply immersed whether they were knowingly unclean or not. Cohen suggests that m. Hag. 3:3 explains why immersion was required in the case of a mourner (Cohen, “Proselyte Baptism,” 285).

¹⁵⁷ So, Taylor, “Beginnings,” 195: “when read in context, obviously points not to special proselyte baptism but to the immersion bath necessary for anyone who was unclean from any cause whatsoever before he would be eligible to eat the Passover meal (Hallowed Things).”

¹⁵⁸ So, Cohen, “Proselyte Baptism,” 279.

¹⁵⁹ b. Pesah 8:8 92a cites R. Rabbah bar bar Hanah who cites R. Johanan that the disagreement between the two houses “concerns a gentile who was not [yet] circumcised.” That is, if the גר in question were a former slave (i.e., already circumcised but not converted), Shammai would allow him to immerse and eat (i.e., this assumes the slave was set free and

convert to eat following immersion.¹⁶⁰ Assuming the attribution is historical, this would place the debate c. 10–80 CE,¹⁶¹ but even if it predates John the immerser, it is irrelevant because it does not concern what scholars mean by "proselyte baptism."

All that m. Pesah 8:8 offers is evidence that Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel debated c. 10–80 CE when a גל could *eat Passover*, not when one became a proselyte.¹⁶² In fact, this text argues *against* the view that immersion was an integral requirement with circumcision for conversion, for if immersion normally followed a period of healing after circumcision (which takes several weeks for adults),¹⁶³ it would be superfluous for Beth Shammai to require it

chose to convert); cf. t. Zabim 2:7. According to Hillel's view, as interpreted by R. Johanan, Hillel ruled the way he did (again assuming the גל in question were a former slave) as a "precautionary decree" so that next year the convert would not think he could simply immerse and eat had he actually contracted corpse impurity. We do not know for certain whether this explanation in Bavli accurately represents the houses, but it at least suggests that later rabbis were trying to make sense out of their debate. Even so, they understand it in terms of ritual purity.

¹⁶⁰ Since the rulings of Beth Shammai were typically stricter than those of Beth Hillel, m. 'Ed. 5:2 cites this ruling in m. Pesah 8:8 as one of six examples of Beth Shammai's more lenient rulings.

¹⁶¹ See Neusner, "Tannaim and Amoraim," *Dictionary of Ancient Rabbis*, 422–40, 422.

¹⁶² So, Nolland, "Uncircumcised," 183. While y. Pesah 8:8 explains the reason for immersion per Beth Hillel, it does not explain why Beth Shammai requires it. For four possible reasons, see Cohen, "Proselyte Baptism," 281–86. These include: "(1) the immersion is 'proselyte baptism'; (2) the immersion is the statutory immersion required of all those about to enter the temple; (3) the immersion is to purify the convert of impurity; (4) the immersion marks a change in the convert's status vis-à-vis the temple cult."

Christine Hayes also argues for a fifth possibility: "in t. Pisha 7:13-14 and m. Pes 8:8 the case of the convert is one of many cases concerning the Passover participation of persons who have undergone a change in status or eligibility prior to consuming the Passover sacrifice." While her argument goes against my own view (i.e., the immersion was for ritual purity), it *still* discounts the "proselyte baptism" view. Her reason for countering ritual purity relates to her concern that gentiles in general were not considered unclean. However, this is *not* what I am assuming in my argument. Once a gentile is a convert, he or she is bound to follow the Torah as a Jew, and thus *both* Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel can disagree and yet have ritual impurity in view. Moreover, Hayes notes, "Whether the new convert is to observe the second Passover or not is unclear." *The contextual reason that one was required to observe a second Passover is explicitly due to ritual impurity* (cf. n. 151 above; Philo, *Mos.* 2.221–32). See Christine Hayes, "Do Converts to Judaism Require Purification? M. Pes 8:8 — An Interpretative Crux Solved," *JSQ* 9 (2002): 327–52.

¹⁶³ Cf. b. Yebam. 47a–b. Cohen humorously says about t. Pesah 7:13–14, "the gentile soldiers who converted on the fourteenth of Nisan must have had a busy day indeed." According to the Mayo Clinic, infant circumcision takes 10 days to heal and the period is longer for adults. See Mayo Clinic Staff, "Circumcision (male)," <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/circumcision/about/pac-20393550>.

here.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, even if this Mishnah were discussing conversion, the disagreement indicates that no “authorized” process of conversion existed prior to at least the second century CE. Thus, Ernst Gottlieb Bengel is justified in saying, “Daß die Stelle im Tract. Pesachim c. 8. § 8 . . . gewiß nicht von der Proselytentaufe . . . sondern von der Lustration.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, t. Pesah 7:13–14 (c. 300 CE),¹⁶⁶ which is parallel to m. Pesah 8:8, and to which I. Abrahams points in support of “proselyte baptism,” is *worse* evidence because Beth Shammai and Hillel *agreed* on the fact that an uncircumcised gentile had to be circumcised *before* the sprinkling of blood, and only then could the convert eat.¹⁶⁷ What they disagreed on was *how soon after* circumcision and sprinkling a convert was eligible to immerse and eat. R. Eliezer b. Jacob’s concluding comment regarding Roman soldiers simply supports the ruling of Beth Shammai and proves nothing about “proselyte baptism,” *pace* Abrahams.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Cohen, who changed his view regarding the interpretation of Beth Shammai’s ruling, suggests that they required immersion for the convert because he or she was as “one who lacks atonement” (on the basis of m. Hag. 3:3). I agree with Rosenberg’s arguments to the contrary and that the immersion pertains to ritual purity. However, I do not follow his logic in conflating immersion for ritual purification with conversion simply on the basis that *other* tannaitic attributions support immersion at conversion (“Early Rabbinic Conversion,” 16–17).

¹⁶⁵ Bengel only claims that the immersion is not one of “proselyte baptism,” he makes no claim regarding the antiquity of the practice. Abrahams argues for the antiquity of *conversion* on the basis of t. Pesah 7:13, but is incorrect that the immersion referred to is related to conversion. See, Ernst Gottlieb Bengel, *Über das Alter der jüdischen Proselytentaufe: eine historische Untersuchung* (C.F. Ostlander, 1814), 90, n. 81; *pace* I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, First Series* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 37.

¹⁶⁶ The dating of this document is contested though some of its attributed contents is early material. I follow Neusner’s dating at c. 300 CE (*Introduction*, 129). See also, Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 151–58; Fergus Millar, Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, and Yehudah Cohn, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity, 135–700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27–28.

¹⁶⁷ Cohen notes that the mid-second century sages knew about the rulings of Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel but were uncertain regarding the *identity* of the person under question since the textual variants and later interpretations include an uncircumcised Jew, an uncircumcised gentile (male), and a convert (male *or* female). The wording of the Mishnah allows for both men and women converts (taking “foreskin” to refer to the “gentile state;” cf. m. Ned. 3:11; Eph. 2:11), whereas, the Tosefta has only men (converts *and* slaves) in view. Moreover, the Tosefta agrees with Beth Hillel while Bavli agrees with Beth Shammai (“Proselyte Baptism,” 287–88; cf. Nolland, “Uncircumcised,” 182–85).

¹⁶⁸ Cohen argues that this “historical anecdote” may be interpreted in two ways: “either it supports the House of Shammai against the House of Hillel (if the soldier were a gentile), or it supports the assertion that the Houses agree in the matter of an uncircumcised Jew,” but

Finally, if we take into consideration the comments in *m. Ker. 2:1*, attributed to R. Eliezer (c. 80–120),¹⁶⁹ we find evidence that a convert was expected to offer a sacrifice pre-70. However, like *m. Pesah 8:8*, the convert is *already* called a גל and the discussion in *m. Ker. 2:1* pertains to when *atonement*, not conversion, is complete. Of course, the text does not say what the person was required to do to become a גל, but in light of the pervasive mention of circumcision in earlier documents, including Greco-Roman authors, we may expect that males were circumcised.¹⁷⁰ By contrast, with the lack of any clear mention of immersion *for or at conversion* in earlier sources,¹⁷¹ we cannot simply assume it here. If the convert were bringing a sacrifice for atonement, it is certain that he or she would have immersed, but that immersion would have been for ritual purification, not "initiation" or some other reason. As Cohen concludes,

This Mishnah [*m. Pesah 8:8*] hardly proves that 'proselyte baptism' was widely known, let alone widely practiced, in the first century CE, and this for three reasons. (1) Positions ascribed to the Houses do not necessarily derive from the pre-70 period; (2) the Hillelites do not know, or at least do not mention, this immersion; (3) most significant, the Tosefta shows that another version of the debate between the Houses was current in the second century CE. The editor of *m. Pesahim* and R. Yosi in *m. Eduyot* have given us the 'canonical' version, but we no longer have any way of verifying that their version is more 'genuine' or 'authentic' than the non-canonical one. In the non-canonical version the Houses are not speaking of gentile converts at all, and 'proselyte baptism' is irrelevant to the discussion.¹⁷²

this requires the soldier to have been an uncircumcised Jew ("Proselyte Baptism," 290). Yerushalmi takes the latter perspective (cf. *y. Pesah 8:8 36d*; *y. Naz. 8:1 57a*).

¹⁶⁹ He was born prior to 70 CE, so was familiar with the Second Temple, but he was a second generation tanna'im (Neusner, "Tanna'im," 422).

¹⁷⁰ So, Lavee, who notes that circumcision is traceable to the Second Temple period (e.g., *Jdt 14:10*; *Esth 8:17 [LXX]*; *1 Macc 2:46*; *Joseph. Ant. 13.257, 318–19, 397*) but that immersion is only attested in the tannaitic period (*Rabbinic Conversion, 57*). Another potential way to interpret the text that follows the meaning of גל in the HB is that גל *does not equal* "convert." Rather, one was a גל by simple association with the Jewish community, and if he or she wished to participate in worshipping the Jewish God, circumcision was required (if male). This could suggest that the text is referring to a גל who has converted via circumcision and is completing that conversion with sacrifice. Regardless, immersion is not a requirement for conversion, nor would it have been done for any reason other than ritual purification.

¹⁷¹ The soonest this occurs is in Bavli (see below).

¹⁷² Cohen, "Proselyte Baptism," 291–92.

250 CE or After—Sipre to Numbers §108 (on Num. 15:14–16)
(90–130 CE)—Certain

This Sipre is a “miscellaneous reading of most of the book of Numbers.”¹⁷³ According to Neusner, the date of the document falls between 200 and 400 CE.¹⁷⁴ H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger date it to “some time after the middle of the third century,”¹⁷⁵ while also noting that these “exegetical midrashim . . . endeavor to establish Scripture as the source of the halakhah.”¹⁷⁶ That is, the authors were connecting halakic practices of their day back to scriptural bases, whether such scriptures were originally the impetus for the halakic practices. Finally, Strack and Stemberger note that almost all of the midrashim originated in Palestine.¹⁷⁷

רבי אומר מה ישראל שלא באו לברית אלא בשלשה דברים במילה ובטבילה ובהרציית קרבן אף הגרים כיוצא בהן¹⁷⁸

The focus of this exegetical midrash on Numbers 15:14–16 revolves around whether *both* Israelites *and* converts were responsible to offer a blood sacrifice.¹⁷⁹ The ruling depends on what “for you” entails.¹⁸⁰ According to R. Judah (135–217 CE), gentile converts (גרִים) submitted to three requirements for conversion (i.e., to enter the covenant): circumcision, immersion, and an

¹⁷³ Neusner, *Introduction*, 305.

¹⁷⁴ Jacob Neusner, “Rabbinic Canon: [1] Defining the Canon,” *EJud* 3:2113–20; cf. Jacob Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation, Volume One: Sifré to Numbers 1–58*, Brown Judaic Studies 118 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁷⁵ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 267, cf. 151.

¹⁷⁶ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 247.

¹⁷⁷ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 240.

¹⁷⁸ The text is from H. S. Horowitz, ed., *Siphre d’Be Rab, Fasciulus primus: Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre zutta Cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus* (Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1966), 112. “Rabbi says, ‘Just as an Israelite enters the covenant in one of three ways only, namely, circumcision, immersion, and the propitiation of an offering, so proselytes fall under the same rule.’” Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Sipre to Numbers are from Neusner, *Sifré*, 148.

The wording of this translation wrongly implies a choice between the three. The three requirements of R. Judah here are cited in b. Ker. 2:1 9a and examined for scriptural support. There, Bavli provides more explicit scriptural support than simply the biblical narrative. Even so, Sinai (i.e., entering the covenant) is the paradigmatic context for conversion. On the development of this and integration into later practice, see Lavee, *Rabbinic Conversion*, 68–79. Sinai also plays a key role in b. Yebam. 46a–48b, wherein the proof-text, Ex 24:8 “refers to the sprinkling of blood, and since the sprinkling of blood is . . . related to sacrifice that can only be made after immersion, the Bavli concludes that immersion took place in that context” (Lavee, *Rabbinic Conversion*, 74).

¹⁷⁹ That is, *sacrifice* is the focus of the discussion, not conversion or immersion.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Porton, *Stranger*, 60.

offering.¹⁸¹ This is the earliest *textual* evidence that specifically connects immersion to the *process* of conversion, but it does not establish that the practice pre-dates John the immerser. If we assume the attribution is historical, it reflects a perspective, and hence, a potential practice of the mid-second to early third century CE. When the practice began is not possible to show from this text, nor can we assume that it is necessarily representative of “Judaism” in light of later debates about conversion in rabbinic literature.

As to the purpose of the immersion, it pertains to ritual purity.¹⁸² According to Neusner, all exegetical reasoning in the Sipre begins and ends with the specific wording and trajectory of Scripture.¹⁸³ That is, Scripture is not subsidiary to and cited in support of a logical argument, but rather reason is employed to understand what Scripture teaches with regard to a given topic or scenario. Thus, R. Judah follows the biblical account in Exodus to arrive at his ruling: (1) the Israelites (a mixed multitude!) were previously circumcised prior to their arrival at Sinai as it was the sign of the *Abrahamic* covenant, (2) they ritually purified themselves by abstaining from intercourse and washing their clothes (Exod 19:10–15),¹⁸⁴ and (3) they offered sacrifice, the blood of which was sprinkled on the people to ratify the covenant (Exod 24:3–8). Logically, then, for R. Judah, a convert (i.e., a גל who wished to worship Israel’s God) must be circumcised (Exod 12:48–49), ritually purify, and offer sacrifice.

400 CE—y. Qidd. 3:12, 64d (c. 100, 200, and 400 CE)—Certain

[R. Hiyya bar Ba] came to R. Yohanan. He said to him, “What case do you have in hand?” He said to him, “A proselyte who was circumcised but had not yet immersed himself, [who

¹⁸¹ Cf. b. Ker. 9a. It is often noted per R. Simeon that post-70 CE, the requirement of sacrifice was abandoned (see t. Šeqal. 3:22). However, according to Porton, an anonymous ruling insisted that converts had to still set apart two birds even if they did not offer them as a sacrifice.

¹⁸² Scriptural support for the immersion of a convert at conversion in b. Ker. 2:1 9a comes from the explanation of Ex. 24:8—“there is no sprinkling without immersion” (i.e., for ritual purification). Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Bavli are from Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud a Translation and Commentary*, 22 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005).

¹⁸³ Jacob Neusner, “Rabbinic Canon, III: Earlier Aggadic Documents,” *EJud²* 3:2142–57, 2150.

¹⁸⁴ By argument from lesser to greater, later Jewish interpreters assume that if the clothes were washed, immersion of the body was assumed (e.g., Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael 19:10). See also y. Pesah 8:8 36b.

had sexual relations with a Jewish girl—what is the status of the offspring]?” He said to him, “And why did you not deal with him [and invalidate the offspring]?”¹⁸⁵

This text clearly supports the view that immersion is the final and necessary step of conversion for R. Yoḥanan bar Nappaḥa (d. 279 CE). The evidence for this is that the offspring of a circumcised, but not-yet-immersed convert (גל) and a Jewish woman is considered invalid (i.e., not eligible to marry a priest).¹⁸⁶ The not-yet-immersed convert is not a Jew,¹⁸⁷ but a mamzer.¹⁸⁸

However, this is only part of the story since there are opposing views. Although R. Yoḥanan criticizes R. Hiyya (bar Joseph?) for not invalidating the offspring of the case he brought, R. Joshua ben Levi (c. 200–250 CE) supports R. Hiyya against R. Yoḥanan (i.e., the offspring was valid). At this point, the gemara questions the evidence attributed to R. Joshua ben Levi since he is reported to have previously sided with an indeterminate view, that “The offspring is neither valid nor invalid but unfit.” Next, the resolution of R. Joshua ben Levi’s ruling in this early third century debate is interrupted by earlier rabbinic authorities. Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (d. 131 CE) insists on immersion whereas R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (c. 90–130 CE), a staunch opponent of R. Joshua ben Hananiah, finds circumcision sufficient.¹⁸⁹ The text returns to the evidence of R. Joshua ben Levi and it states that it accords with the teaching of R. Eleazar bar Qappara (c. 200 CE), namely, the offspring was valid. The gemara clarifies why: “For there is no proselyte who has not immersed for his nocturnal emission, [and this satisfies the requirement of immersion for

¹⁸⁵ I did not have access to the original text at the time of writing. Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Yerushalmi are from Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ Earlier, in the same section, according to R. Yose bar Abin (a.k.a. bar R. Bun), a fifth generation amora'im (c. fourth cent. CE), on the authority of R. Judah (135–220 CE), “A proselyte and a freed slave and an impaired priest are permitted to marry a priest.”

¹⁸⁷ A similar scenario is discernible in t. 'Abod. Zar. 3:11 wherein the offspring of not-yet-immersed gentile slaves retain the status as gentile. However, since this text is specifically dealing with slaves (i.e., the circumcision of slaves did not make them converts), it cannot be used to make a general statement about all converts. On the circumcision of slaves, see Gen 17:12, 23, 27; Exod 12:44. Moreover, the text understands them as causing (perpetual?) ritual impurity—“Things upon which they sit or lie are deemed unclean—implying that if they were immersed (i.e., converted), their immersion would resolve this impurity. Obviously they would have to perform repeated immersions for other impurities once converted.

¹⁸⁸ The meaning of *mamzer* is not entirely clear since it is not defined in the HB and m. Yebam. 4:13 provides three definitions. Modern scholars also debate the meaning. See Herbert W. Basser and Simcha Fishbane, “Mamzer,” *EJod* 3:1625–31. Scolnic and Eisenberg define it as “An offspring of an illicit relationship” (*JPS Dictionary*, 98).

¹⁸⁹ Cf. b. Yebam. 8:1–2, 71a where R. Eliezer rules, “A proselyte who has been circumcised but not immersed is a perfectly valid proselyte.”

conversion].” Then, the gemara asks whether the two immersions (i.e., for nocturnal emission and conversion) are actually the same. Finally, R. Jose bar Abin (fourth century CE) is cited in support of R. Eleazar bar Ḳappara and the gemara’s clarification, namely, that the circumcised, but not-yet-immersed proselyte meets legal requirements.

We may draw three significant points. First, none of this puts the immersion of gentiles at conversion prior to John the immerser. Second, from the early evidence cited in Yerushalmi to its final redaction, there was no agreement on the issue of immersion at conversion. Moreover, the majority of the authorities mentioned in Y. believe that circumcision is sufficient. Third, and most importantly, the gemara equates immersion for ritual purification (i.e., nocturnal emission) and the immersion of a gentile at conversion.¹⁹⁰ That is, all agreed that immersion was important, but they debated its timing and necessity at conversion. Since there were cases of gentiles who were circumcised prior to choosing to convert (e.g., as slaves), one can see the important social function that immersion may have played in the eyes of some in these instances. For those who were not slaves, circumcision sufficed since the convert would immerse in the very near future.

600 CE—b. Yebam 4:12, 46a–48b (c. 100, 200, and 600 CE)—
Certain

ר' חייא בר אבא איקלע לגבלא חזא בנות ישראל דמעברן מגרים שמלו ולא טבלו וחזא חמרא דישאל דמזגי עובדי כוכבים ושתו ישראל וחזא תורמוסין דשלקי עובדי כוכבים ואכלי ישראל ולא אמר להו ולא מידי אתא לקמיה דר' יוחנן א"ל צא והכרז על בניהם שהם ממזרים ועל יינם משום יין נסך ועל תורמוסן משום בישולי עובדי כוכבים לפי שאינן בני תורה על בניהן שהם ממזרים ר' יוחנן לטעמיה דאמר ר' חייא בר אבא אמר ר' יוחנן לעולם אין גר עד שימול ויטבול וכיון דלא טביל עובד כוכבים הוא¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Cf. y. Qidd. 4:7 where R. Abbahu accepts the immersion of a previously circumcised גר (who also had children to integrate into the Jewish community), and they immerse him on the Sabbath. As Porten notes, “this cannot be an immersion related to conversion because one cannot ‘be improved’ on the Sabbath; therefore, it is an immersion for uncleanness,” which is explicitly stated in the text (*Stranger*, 266, n. 15). I would rephrase his comment to say that the immersion *is* related to conversion as the text plainly indicates, but is done for ritual purification. See also y. ‘Erub. 4:5; Porten, *Stranger*, 267, n. 17. Additionally, b. Yebam. 78a–b (cf. y. Shab. 19:5) notes that a pregnant mother does not interpose with her child in utero when immersing at her conversion so that the child is understood to have also been immersed and is treated as a Jew at birth (i.e., the child’s status follows that of the mother). Rules of interposition are explicitly tied to ritual purification.

¹⁹¹ B. Yebam. 4:12 46a. Text is from www.sefaria.org (Wikisource Talmud Bavli). “Hiyya bar Abba came to Gabla. He saw Israelite women who had become pregnant by gentiles who had been circumcised but not immersed. He saw Israelite wine that gentiles had

This text is obviously very similar to y. Qidd. 3:12, 64d above, so I refer the reader to the immediately preceding subsection. That said, the similarity is deceiving.¹⁹² On a plain reading, this text, which falls in the “min-tractate” of conversion in b. Yebam. 46a–48b, provides certain evidence for the immersion of gentiles at conversion.¹⁹³ Like the discussion of y. Qidd. 3:12, 64d, there is no agreement among the Rabbis cited. However, *unlike* Yerushalmi, Bavli presents a “majority view” in support of the necessity of immersion. In fact, according to Lavee, the new context of the material with the blending of other material from Sipre to Numbers, the Tosefta, Yerushalmi, Gerim, and Bavli serves to present the “official” rabbinic procedure of conversion.¹⁹⁴ Scholars then read this expanded, “official” picture back into earlier, less detailed (and even divergent) sources, and assume that Bavli’s picture of conversion is how it always was. In the words of Porton,

a good deal of confusion concerning conversion in the rabbinic period arises from the inappropriate confluence of information from different rabbinic documents. That is, when material from amoraic documents is sometimes read into the tannaitic texts or contradictions among the various rabbinic collections are ignored, we create a supposed system that never existed.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, even if we take at face value the attributions to the various rabbis in b. Yebam. 46a–48b, they and Bavli consider the immersion of a gentile

mixed, being drunk by Israelites. He saw lupines boiled by gentiles and eaten by Israelites. And he said nothing whatsoever to them. He came before R. Yohanan. He said to him, ‘Go and proclaim concerning their children that they are mamzers, their wine that that it is subject to prohibition by reason of being libation-wine, their lupines that they are subject to prohibition by reason of having been cooked by gentiles, for the people are not disciples of the Torah.’ ‘their children that they are mamzers.’ R. Yohanan is consistent with views expressed elsewhere, for said R. Yohanan, ‘A person is not deemed a proselyte until he is circumcised and immersed, and if he has not immersed, he remains a gentile.’” Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Bavli are from Neusner, *Babylonian Talmud*.

¹⁹² Lavee accepts that circumcision is traceable to the Second Temple period, that immersion at conversion was practiced by some Jews beginning in the tannaitic period, that one had to commit to being Law observant, but he rejects that notion that these were integrated into a “regulated, structured and supervised conversion procedure” (*Rabbinic Conversion*, 57, 67). Moreover, through a synoptic presentation of the material used in b. Yebam. 46a–48b (231–83), he exposes how Bavli re-presents inchoate pieces of evidence in such a way to promote a unified, majority view that appears well established in the first centuries CE, and that the conversion court was fabricated by Bavli whole cloth (46–56).

¹⁹³ For two partially overlapping approaches to the structure of this text, see, “Appendix D: Structure of b. Yebam. 46a–48b,” p. ? , and “?,” p. ? .

¹⁹⁴ Lavee, *Rabbinic Conversion*, 27. For an article length treatment of this, see, Moshe Lavee, “The ‘Tractate’ of Conversion—BT Yeb. 46-48 and the Evolution of Conversion Procedure,” *JJS* 4 (2010): 169–213.

¹⁹⁵ Porton, *Stranger*, 132. For scholarly examples of this, see 133.

convert as an act of ritual purification. The fact that it was a requirement at conversion for some does not change its fundamental nature. Here are a few examples:

- When restraining a slave during immersion (so he or she does not declare their freedom), the neck chain is slightly loosened so as to not cause interposition, a (later?) requirement for a valid ritual purification (b. Yebam. 46a [Neusner: I.19]).
- One could immerse on the Sabbath, because in the view of some, it was performed for ritual purification (b. Yebam. 46b [Neusner: I.24–25]).¹⁹⁶
- Converts immerse in the same place (and manner) as a woman (i.e., in a ritual bath), and interposition invalidates the immersion just as it would for an immersion of ritual purification (b. Yebam. 47b [Neusner: I.37])

Summary Through 600 CE

In examining the rabbinic sources, I have made no attempt to establish the historicity of the attributions made to them, but have accepted for the sake of argument that these statements are actually what they believed and taught. My interest is not to solve the question of the historicity of the attributions, but to reiterate three main points. First, evidence for immersion at conversion certainly exists, but nothing places it before John. In fact, the earliest evidence comes from Sipre to Numbers (c. 250 CE or after) with attribution to c. 90–130 CE.¹⁹⁷ Second, no evidence supports a “standard” view of conversion until perhaps the end of the talmudic period.¹⁹⁸ Third, and most importantly, no matter what one thinks about whether immersion was required at conversion, abundant evidence in all chronological strata exists to show that the immersion of a gentile at or around conversion was performed for ritual purification.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ While the objection against immersion on the Sabbath for those who required it for conversion is based on the fact that by it one “improves his situation,” this still does not invalidate it from being an act of ritual purity. All it means is that this particular act of ritual purification happens to be conjoined with a conversion process and because it completes the process, it may be seen as “improving one’s situation.” Rashi (b. Yebam. 47b) says that the immersion of the convert and slave is not because of impurity/purity as other immersions, though he does not explain its purpose—*ואע"פ שאין טבילתו - וועבד משוחרר טובלין - משום טומאה וטהרה כשאר טבילות*. This conclusion is rather puzzling in that interposition would disqualify the immersion. In what sense could it be disqualified if not for purity sake?

¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, this time frame corresponds with Epictetus, the only possible Greco-Roman source discussed here that *might* offer evidence of the practice of gentile immersion at conversion.

¹⁹⁸ So, Porton, *Stranger*, 134.

¹⁹⁹ Daube claims, “Proselyte baptism, however, was essentially quite outside the levitical sphere: pagans were not susceptible of levitical uncleanness, so in principle there was simply

A Path Not Taken

Before concluding I wish to draw attention to a path not taken by scholars. In addition to overlooking the possibility of gentile converts at Qumran or among the Essenes, no one considers the NT evidence. The reason for this is obvious since “proselyte baptism” is distinctly Jewish and “Christian baptism” is not. Since I am not looking for “proselyte baptism,” but rather the immersion of gentiles at or around conversion, there is no reason the NT evidence should be dismissed. In fact, it provides the earliest definitive evidence for it. The modern bifurcation between “Judaism” and “Christianity” as separate religions is artificial and anachronistic, and in the religious landscape of antiquity, gentiles who turn to worship the God of Israel are converts from polytheism to monotheism whether they were circumcised or simply accepted that Jesus was Israel’s messiah. Moreover, as Thiessen has argued, the Pauline approach to gentile converts and his insistence that they *not* be circumcised is explainable as a genealogical purist approach to gentiles.²⁰⁰ We must also not forget that Izates, an exception or not, was viewed by at least one other Jew as an acceptable convert without circumcision, and as mentioned above, circumcision was not required of the LXX δññóβῆδδῖδ. While I do not have space to develop this here, the earliest *textual* evidence for this is probably Gal. 3:28 (c. 54/55 CE)²⁰¹ if water immersion is in view,²⁰² or 1 Corinthians 1:13–17 (c. 56/57 CE; cf. Acts 18:8).²⁰³ *The earliest possible historical event* for the immersion of non-

no room for purification” (*New Testament*, 107). Yet, if gentiles are not susceptible to ritual impurity, it is difficult to understand Lev 17:15–16 (cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book*, 186). It is, nevertheless, odd that there is no ruling in Leviticus on the impurity status of the נכר. Did their transient status not endanger the sanctuary?

²⁰⁰ Cf. Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion and Paul and the Gentile Problem*.

²⁰¹ The dating of Galatians with its relationship to Acts, where exactly the Galatians were located (i.e., Northern or Southern theories), and when Paul’s activities should be dated there are much disputed. The precise dating of the letter and the events related to Paul’s ministry to the Galatians are irrelevant to my point. See, Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 273–91, 322; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24–31, 180–210; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, ABRL (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 467–77; Steve Mason and Tom Robinson, *Early Christian Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 106–8.

²⁰² Witherington appeals to 1 Cor 12:13 to argue that “water baptism” is not in view (*Troubled Waters*, 81–82).

²⁰³ Only the verbal form, βαπτίζω, occurs in 1 Corinthians 1:13–17; 10:2; 12:13; 15:29 and 1 Cor 1:13–17 is the only clear reference to immersion in connection with conversion. The occurrence in 1 Cor 10:2 is used metaphorically, 12:13 is ambiguous, and the meaning of 15:29 is widely disputed.

Jews in connection with conversion is *probably Acts 10 and the immersion of Cornelius and his household*.²⁰⁴

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first critiqued the concept of “proselyte baptism” with the goal of demonstrating that it imposes anachronistic and foreign concepts on our sources. Employing it as a heuristic ultimately distorts our conception of the sources. Instead, I argued that we should look for evidence pertaining to the immersion of gentile converts at or around conversion. Additionally, I noted the methodological problem that rabbinic literature presents since it is not connected to a historical group in the same way that the DSS were. To account for this problem, I paid close attention to the inherent diversity in the sources and examined sources contextually, following Neusner’s “documentary approach.”

Second, I analyzed textual sources dating through 27/29 CE and identified no certain evidence prior to John the immerser for the immersion of gentiles at or around conversion. The ritual baths provided a context for this starting in 150 BCE and 4Q267 provides very uncertain evidence for this possibility. Third, I analyzed textual sources dating through 200 CE and again, no certain evidence was found. Epictetus provides *either* nearly certain *or* unlikely evidence depending on how one interprets the text, but even if it is positive evidence, it again does not place the practice prior to John the immerser. Fourth, I analyzed rabbinic sources dating through 600 CE and the first possible evidence comes from Sipre to Numbers (c. 250 CE or after) with attribution to c. 90–130 CE. The other positive evidence comes from later sources (Yerushalmi and Bavli) but these do not place the practice before c. 90–130 CE. Moreover, the rabbinic evidence demonstrates disparate opinions on whether immersion was a requirement and no “standard” conversion process is identifiable. Furthermore, the rabbinic evidence demonstrates that the immersion of gentile converts pertained to ritual purification.²⁰⁵ Fifth, I suggested that

²⁰⁴ Although the author of Acts describes Cornelius as ἀνὴρ δίκαιος καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν, it is not until Acts 11:3 that his uncircumcised condition and those of his household is known. Other possibilities in Acts include the Samaritans (Acts 8:4–17) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40).

²⁰⁵ If Hayes is correct in arguing that the ritual impurity related to gentiles and idol worship is a rabbinic development, then this suggests that the immersion of gentiles during a conversion ceremony should correspondingly be a rabbinic development post-John the immerser. On the other hand, she tentatively posits that the uncleanness of gentiles likely began

the NT and perhaps the DSS provide the earliest evidence for the immersion of gentile converts.

It is rare for a scholar to change one’s mind, but in light of the evidence surveyed above, I agree with Werblowsky’s self-correction when he says, “Proselyte baptism . . . is deeply embedded in the halakhic system of what, for lack of a better term, is called ‘ritual’ purity and impurity.”²⁰⁶ With this, we may return to the syllogism pertaining to John the immerser mentioned in the introduction of this chapter and improve it in a way that better aligns with the above evidence.

- 1) Jews immerse for ritual purification.
- 2) תנ"י initiates, John’s audience, gentile proselytes, and Jesus followers immerse.
- 3) These immersions are for ritual purification.

in first-century CE Palestine (*Gentile*, 131–33, 195). Cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.10 §150; Acts 10:28.

²⁰⁶ Werblowsky, “Note,” 200.

Chapter 6

John's "Baptism"

Somit: under dem endlosen, überall geübten "Taufen" fiel doch des Johannes "Taufen" als ein absonderliches, wesentlich anderes und neues auf, was die Phantasie des Volks frappierte und ihr zur Charakterisierung seiner Eigenart dienlich schein.¹

John the Baptist addressed Israel with a message of repentance, and for reasons not entirely clear to us, he accompanied this message with the offer to baptize those who repented. . . . The purpose of ordinary immersions according to the Torah—ritual cleansing of the body—seems not to have played a major role in John's baptism.²

Il n'y a pas non plus de raison de douter que l'immersion recommandée ou conduite par Jean—à vrai dire, nous ne savons même pas s'il intervenait physiquement dans le processus—était autre chose qu'un rite de purification.³

John's baptizing activity cleansed the bodies of people who had already cleansed their behavior—all our sources agree about this. And this suggests that we cannot understand what John was up to without analyzing the cultural notions of purity and pollution within which he and our sources were operating.⁴

From the pairs of quotations above, we have a tale of two immersions. Each derives from how and to what one compares John. One is striking, new, and peculiar while the other is familiar, normal, and expected within Second Temple Judaism. The former is comfortably traditional but overlooks (or actively dismisses) ritual purity altogether. The latter, if true, is difficult to comprehend for most,⁵ especially in light of the eschatological context and typological framing of John,⁶ as well as the fact that John's immersion does not perfectly

¹ Adolf Schlatter, *Johannes der Täufer*, ed. D. Wilhelm Michaelis (Basel: Verlag Friedrich Reinhardt, 1956), 61.

² Skarsaune, *Shadow*, 354, emphasis mine.

³ Guyénot, *Jésus*, 68.

⁴ Murphy, *John*, 110.

⁵ E.g., Uro, *Ritual*, 83–84.

⁶ Indeed, Craig A. Evans rightly observes that scholars have created a false dichotomy that pits the prophetic against ritual purity with regard to John's immersion. See, Craig A. Evans, "The Baptism of John in a Typological Context," in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical*

resemble ritual purity practices, at least as most scholars imagine them.⁷ Moreover, Catherine M. Murphy observes, "Nowhere in Jewish tradition was baptism associated with the messiah or the endtimes."⁸ Yet, it is not *eschatology* that demands ritual purity, but rather *the implications* of the eschatological message that demands it (i.e., God is coming). Thus, as it pertains to the *origin* of John's immersion, I argue in the second portion of this chapter that John does not depend on any prior group (e.g., Qumran), a specific practice of the HB (e.g., priestly initiation), or any possibly contemporary practice (e.g., "proselyte baptism"), and that ritual purity in general sufficiently explains his immersion. The mere fact that John is preparing the people for the coming of God (i.e., human-divine encounter) is reason enough to ask people to ritually and morally purify. However, in keeping with my methodology, I first describe John's immersion in context before comparing him with the so-called antecedents previously discussed.

and Theological Studies, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSup 234 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 45–71, 45.

⁷ Even Taylor finds John's practice "novel or extraordinary and yet comprehensible" (*John*, 94).

⁸ Murphy, *John*, 60. Ritual cleansing is linked to the endtimes in prophetic texts, such as Ezek 36:22–32 or Zech 13:1 (although this is true only for the HB text as the LXX contains an alternate reading). Cf. IQS III, 7–9; IV, 21, which appeal to Ezek 36:25. See also, Num. Rab. 7:10; m. Yoma 8:9, where Rabbi Akiva makes a pun on $\eta\eta\eta\eta$, combining Ezek 36:25 with Jer 17:13.

Contextualizing John's Immersion

Sources and Methodological Comments

Our sources for John the immerser include Q,⁹ Mark, special Matthew (SM), special Luke (SL), John, Josephus,¹⁰ as well as texts from Nag Hammadi,¹¹ NT Apocrypha, NT Pseudepigrapha,¹² Slavonic Josephus,¹³ and Mandaean literature.¹⁴ For reconstructing the "historical John," the last five corpora mentioned are less valuable, not because they are "non-canonical," but because they are literarily dependent upon earlier sources.¹⁵ In fact, they provide insight into how the traditions of Jesus and John were understood by later authors and illuminate potential difficulties that interpreters had, such as why Jesus was baptized or the relationship between John and Jesus. Where relevant, I provide references to these later sources as secondary support.

⁹ Not all scholars accept the hypothetical Q source. See, e.g., Mark S. Goodacre, *The Case Against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002); Mark S. Goodacre, Nicholas Perrin, eds., *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Graham N. Stanton, Nicholas Perrin, "Q," *DJG*², 711–18.

¹⁰ On the issues related to John in Josephus, see John P. Meier, "John the Baptist in Josephus: Philology and Exegesis," *JBL* 111 (1992): 225–37; David B. Levenson and Thomas R. Martin, "The Latin Translations of Josephus on Jesus, John the Baptist, and James: Critical Texts of the Latin Translation of the Antiquities and Rufinus' Translation of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History Based on Manuscripts and Early Printed Editions," *JSJ* 45 (2014): 1–79; Nir, "Josephus' Account," 32–62; Lichtenberger, "Dead Sea Scrolls," 340–46.

¹¹ These include the Gos. Truth 30–31; Gos. Thom. §46; Ap. Jas. 6.20; Exeg. Soul 135; Paraph. Shem 30, 32, 36–38; Disc. Seth 63; On Bap. A and B; Apoc. Paul (possibly); Steles Seth 118.

¹² These include the Gos. Naz., Gos. Heb., Gos. Eb., Prot. Jas., Acts of Pil.; Ps.-Clem. Rec. 1.53–54.1–3, 8; 1.60.1–4; 1.63.1; and A New Life of John the Baptist. In general, see, A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, eds., *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). For the New Life of John the Baptist, see A. Mingana, *Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshuni, Edited and Translated with a Critical Apparatus*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1927), 1:138–145, 234–87. The existence of and reconstruction of the "Jewish-Christian Gospels" is disputed; cf. Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2005), 261–62.

¹³ Webb summarizes the numerous problems with this source (*John*, 43–44). The Slavonic variants are conveniently presented in French translation in S. Reinach, "Jean-Baptiste et Jésus suivant Josèphe," *REJ* 87 (1929): 113–36, 132–36.

¹⁴ According to Webb, this source is of no historical value (*John*, 44–45).

¹⁵ Cf. Evans, *Ancient Texts*, 257; Webb, *John*, 77–91; W. Barnes Tatum, *John the Baptist and Jesus: A Report of the Jesus Seminar* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994), 88.

Since we do not have any sources directly from John himself, this raises the question of "Christian shaping."¹⁶ By this, scholars generally mean that the historical John was operating within *Judaism* and independent of the Jesus movement, whereas the authors of the Gospels and Acts have absorbed him into "*Christianity*."¹⁷ This is an anachronism that I reject; there is nothing about John or our sources that indicate "appropriation" that requires an "extra-Jewish" interpretation.¹⁸ This need not imply that the Gospel authors are neutral in their use of John, nor does it preclude that John's portrayal served the ends of a given author, but any "appropriation" must be interpreted as "within

¹⁶ The view that the Gospels "Christianized" John's message, ministry, and immersion is widely held as fact. Dettwiler says for example, "Les différents courants du christianisme primitif, quant à eux, l'ont complètement intégré dans leur interprétation de la vie de Jésus de Nazareth, quitte à dénaturer pour une bonne partie les rapports historiques entre ces deux personnages" "Signification," 25; cf. John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 21, 100–101.

Going in the opposite direction, Clare K. Rothschild has argued that the Gospel writers do not so much bring John in line with the Jesus movement, but that they redact Q traditions that were originally about John for Jesus (*Baptist Traditions*); cf. Christopher Tuckett, review of *Baptist Traditions and Q*, by Clare K. Rothschild, *JTS* 58 (2007): 197–200. While I do not imply that Rothschild is correct, John A. T. Robinson offers a similar analysis of the *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67–79) in which Jesus is exchanged for John; see, John A. T. Robinson, "Elijah, John and Jesus," in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, 28–52, 48–52; cf. Morton S. Enslin, "Once Again: John the Baptist," *Religion in Life* 27 (1958): 557–66, 559–60.

¹⁷ In recent research, all that some scholars mean by "Christian" is a "Jesus follower." See, e.g., Christopher M. Tuckett, *Q and the History of Early Christianity: Studies on Q* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 107, n. 1.

¹⁸ On the ways that scholars believe that John is appropriated, see, e.g., Lupieri, "John," *ANRW*, 33.1:430–61; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 244–53; Hartwig Thyen, "ΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ ΜΕΤΑΝΟΙΑΣ ΕΙΣ ΑΦΕΣΙΝ ΑΜΑΡΤΙΩΝ," in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag im Auftrage der Alten Marburger und in Zusammenarbeit mit Hartwig Thyen*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964), 97–125; Holladay, "Baptism," 343–69; Murphy, *John*, 23–84; Wink, *John*, passim.

About this, Andréas Dettwiler asks: if John and Jesus were not historically speaking in basic alignment and working toward the same ends, then what reason would motivate the Gospel writers and the author of Acts to begin the public ministry of Jesus with John ("Signification," 25)? He proposes that Jesus represents God's love which stands dialectically in relation with the judgment of God, the very message of John. Others propose that the *Sitz im Leben* pertains to later disputes between John's and Jesus's followers (Bultmann, *History*, 247; Thyen, "ΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ," 114; Wink, *John*, 107). Such disputes are possibly noted in John 3:22–30.

Judaism."¹⁹ Additionally problematic is that scholars arrive at opposite conclusions *even when using the same tools* in the attempt to discern the "historical John" from "appropriation."²⁰

Numerous treatments of the historical John exist and my analysis makes no attempt to duplicate these.²¹ Rather, I describe John and his context to the extent necessary to identify the religious system within which his immersion functions. *Every* scholarly portrait of John depends on comparison, which typically presents John as *against* "normative Judaism." For example, Walter Wink groups John with "syncretistic Jewish sects" who, although were "fiercely independent, shared one thing in common: the centrality of baths or baptisms *in lieu of sacrifice*."²² This postulation of a so-called group of "syncretistic Jewish sects" and the classification of John with them imposes significant interpretive weight on the evidence. For, if this is accurate, it is easier to argue that he stands in critique of the temple, the cult, and its personnel. Hence, the traditional "Christian" reading: John, a "radical," wilderness prophet who lives in the "margins" or "periphery" and operates outside of "authorized" religious space, warns of coming judgment and promotes a "unique" or "new" "baptism" in preparation for the emerging new religion of "Christianity."²³ I

¹⁹ Motivations for redactional activity related to John's portrayal include: bending John into a proto-Christian, subjecting John to Jesus's superiority, creating agreement between early and later traditions, and settling disputes between Jesus and John's followers.

²⁰ For example, Benjamin I. Simpson outlines an example of this using the differing conclusions of John P. Meier and James D. G. Dunn regarding the historical reliability of Jesus's immersion by John and the theophany. See, Benjamin I. Simpson, *Recent Research on the Historical Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 120–39; Meier, *Mentor*, 100–116; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 339–82; cf. Robert L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism by John: Its Historicity and Significance," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 95–150. On the problem of our tools, see Morna D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81.

²¹ E.g., Maurice Goguel, *Au seuil de l'évangile, Jean-Baptiste: La tradition sur Jean-Baptiste. Le baptême de Jésus.—Jésus et Jean-Baptiste. Histoire de Jean-Baptiste* (Paris: Payot, 1928); Schlatter, *Johannes*; Scobie, *John*; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, SNTS 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer*, BZNW 53 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989); Webb, *John*; Tatum, *John*; Taylor, *Immersioner*; Guyénot, *Jésus*; Murphy, *John*; Joel Marcus, *John the Baptist in History and Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018). Regrettably, I did not discover Marcus's book until after I had completed this study, so my engagement with his work is notably minimal.

²² Wink, *John*, 108.

²³ So, Meier, *Mentor*, 21–22; Oscar Cullmann, "L'opposition contre le temple de Jerusalem, motif commun de la théologie johannique et du monde ambiant," *NTS* 5 (1959): 157–73; Paul W. Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptist's Preaching Mission in the

make no such assumptions, and in light of my arguments in chapter four, this portrait of John is imposed on the texts, not discovered there.²⁴

The "Historical John" and His Context

John Reumann has shown the folly of claiming that a scholarly consensus exists regarding the "historical John."²⁵ Although I share his concerns, there are several points about John discussed below that many believe to be historically probable or even "certain."²⁶ It should be obvious that scholars nuance these details in various ways and not every scholar cited agrees on every point. Moreover, our reconstructions of John depend on gap-filling and circularly resorting to what we imagine to be possible in our reconstructions of antiquity.²⁷ Finally, there is a small minority who think that one can find *little if anything* historical about John in the NT writings.²⁸ However, even if some of the details of the following main points about John may be historically uncertain, they show how our sources portray John through the literary constructs in which John and his immersion are remembered.²⁹

Context of Palestinian Judaism," *ANRW* 19.1:850–75; Carl R. Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 35.

²⁴ I do not suggest that such an interpretation is *impossible*, but, this must be argued, not assumed.

²⁵ John Reumann, "The Quest for the Historical Baptist," in *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in Honor of Morton S. Enslin on the Hebrew Bible and Christian Beginnings*, ed. John Reumann (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1972), 181–99. To provide a simple example, some scholars believe that John and Jesus never met, while others posit that Jesus was a disciple of John for an undetermined period of time. See also the helpful surveys of "John research" that update Reumann in Tatum, *John*, 142–143, 164–65; Robert L. Webb, "John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 179–229.

²⁶ Cf. Lupieri, "John," *ANRW* 33.1:461; Murphy, *John*, 83–84; Webb, *John*, 381–82; Meier, *Mentor*, 19–233.

²⁷ Otto Böcher, "Johannes der Täufer in der neutestamentlichen Überlieferung," in *Rechtfertigung Realismus • Universalismus in biblischer Sicht: Festschrift für Adolf Köberle zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Gotthold Müller (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 45–70, 56; Penner and Lopez, *De-Introducing the New Testament*, 62–66.

²⁸ In addition to Reumann, e.g., is Morton S. Enslin, *Christian Beginnings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1938), 149–53, 155–57; "Once Again," 557–66; *The Prophet from Nazareth* (McGraw-Hill, 1961), 41–44, 66, 84, n. 9; Chilton, "John the Purifier," 203–20; Ithamar Gruenwald, "The Baptism of Jesus in Light of Jewish Ritual Practice," *Neotestamentica* 50 (2016): 301–25, 318–19.

²⁹ To argue that John is inaccurately portrayed assumes that we have access to reliable sources that offer the "true" account of John. Yet, Reumann suggests that even sources that may be isolated as belonging to "Baptist circles" are also unreliable because of their "Baptist

1. *John was a Jewish prophet who proclaimed an eschatological message directed to fellow Jews.*³⁰ He is filled with the Spirit and given a divinely ordered name and ministry from birth.³¹ Not only do Jesus and the populace consider him a prophet,³² but he receives the prophetic word in the desert in a manner patterned off of Jeremiah.³³ He is dressed in a manner reminiscent of Elijah³⁴ and even his parents prophesy according to Luke.³⁵ Edmondo F. Lupieri even says, "The death of John is the logical conclusion of the adventure of Elijah, who had been preserved by God (2 Kg. 2,11f.) for this occasion."³⁶ Moreover, Jerome Murphy O'Connor argues that the contrast between John's call to prepare all Israel and his choice to locate "in the wilderness," a location difficult for people to impulsively travel, suggests that this was a "deliberate

use" ("Quest," 187). Of course we need to be aware of bias in our sources, but if we follow Reumann, *all* human productions must be discarded because no source exists without bias. At best, then, we may identify potential ways that John may be misconstrued or aligned with the trajectory of the Jesus movement, but even this "misalignment" depends on *our modern reconstructions* of John's context.

³⁰ That John was Jewish needs no defense. He was circumcised on the 8th day (Luke 1:59) and known as a righteous man (Mark 6:20; Matt 21:32; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2 §117). There is no clear evidence that gentiles came to John, though some point to the "soldiers" in Luke 3:14. However, στρατεύω and its cognates refer to Jewish soldiers as well; cf. *J.W.* 2.19.2 §521; Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 89. As Beasley-Murray notes, "What John thought about the relation of the Gentiles to the Kingdom we have no means of knowing; he ministered solely to the Jews and gave no word about the fate of the Gentiles" (*Baptism*, 33). Josephus does not explicitly refer to John as a prophet, which leads Meier to suggest that Josephus either does not know or suppresses John's eschatological dimension (*Mentor*, 20). However, Josephus does mention his righteous life, call to piety, the crowds that followed him, the political risk John supposedly posed, and divine retribution for his death.

³¹ Luke 1:60–66; cf. Jer 1:5. Murphy questions the historical value of this pericope since the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke differ significantly, and the information about John is singularly attested in Luke (*John*, 49).

³² Q 7:25–26 (Luke 7:25–26//Matt 11:8–9); Matt 11:14; 14:5; Mark 9:11–13//Matt 17:10–13; Mark 11:32//Matt 21:26//Luke 20:6; cf. Mark 8:27–28//Matt 16:13–14//Luke 9:18–19 where John is grouped with Elijah and Jeremiah. See also, Gos. Eb. (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.4); A New Life of John the Baptist (Serapion); Ap. Jas. 6.20. Josephus does not explicitly refer to him as a prophet.

³³ ἐγένετο ῥῆμα θεοῦ ἐπὶ Ἰωάννην Luke 3:2

τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ἰερεμίου Jer 1:1

³⁴ Cf. 2 Kgs 1:5–8; Zech 13:4; Mark 1:6//Matt 3:4. See also, Evans, "Baptism," 48–49; Murphy, *John*, 53. Against this, Rudolf Pesch claims that John was merely dressed like a Bedouin. See, Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markus-evangelium*, 2 vols., HThKNT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), 1:80–82.

³⁵ Luke 1:41–45, 67–79.

³⁶ Lupieri, "John," *ANRW* 33.1:435.

prophetic gesture."³⁷ We may at least conclude that people who went to John in the wilderness *wanted* to see him.³⁸

Q, the earliest tradition, attests to the close connection between John and eschatology. T. W. Manson argues that eschatology frames the whole of Q, which begins with John.³⁹ In Luke, five different narrative voices (three are SL) define John's prophetic ministry as preparing the way of the Lord.⁴⁰ Moreover, Christopher M. Tuckett observes that in Q there is "no hint that John's message had been superseded, or rendered in any way invalid, by the ministry of Jesus."⁴¹ In fact, Matthew has Jesus proclaiming the exact message of John.⁴² Not only do the ministries and messages of Jesus and John overlap, but there is no reason that Jesus should exalt John if he is simply a foil.⁴³

³⁷ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "John the Baptist and Jesus: History and Hypotheses," *NTS* 36 (1990): 359–74, 360.

³⁸ This point can obviously be overstated. The distance from Jerusalem to the wilderness was not that great and ancient people were accustomed to travel great distances by foot. Nevertheless, John's location was not convenient.

³⁹ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus: As Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Matthew and St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 39–148. While his theory of Q has been criticized regarding his stance on the supposed lack of *polemical* material, the eschatological dimension enjoys support from scholars. See, e.g., G. N. Stanton, "On the Christology of Q," in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 27–42; Tuckett, *Q*, 108–9.

⁴⁰ ἐτοιμάσαι κυρίῳ λαὸν κατεσκευασμένον Luke 1:17 [Mal 3:1; 4:6] (Angel)

ἐτοιμάσαι ὁδοῦς αὐτοῦ Luke 1:76 [Mal 3:1] (Zechariah)

ὁ ἡτοίμασας (σωτήριόν σου) Luke 2:30–32 (Simeon)

ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου Luke 3:4 [Isa 40:3] (Luke)

κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου Luke 7:27 [Mal 3:1] (Jesus)

⁴¹ Tuckett, *Q*, 109. In support of continuity between John and Jesus, see, Joan E. Taylor and Federico Adinolfi, "John the Baptist and Jesus the Baptist: A Narrative Critical Approach," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 10 (2012): 247–84; Federico Adinolfi, "Jesus and the Aims of John: Abandoning the Quest for the Underivable Jesus," in *From Jesus to Christian Origins, Second Annual Meeting of Bertinoro (1–4 October, 2015)*, ed. Adriana Destro, Mauro Pesce, and Francesco Berno, *Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme* 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019). Special thanks to Federico Adinolfi for sending me an advance copy of this essay.

⁴² John: μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 3:2).

Jesus: μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 4:17).

Murphy thinks that Matthew conforms Jesus to John, while Wink interprets it in the other direction (Murphy, *John*, 62; Wink, *John*, 35).

⁴³ I do not wish to deny possible redactional interests aimed at the relationship between John and Jesus, but the simplistic presentation that John is plucked from history and misrepresented does not correspond with the evidence.

Craig A. Evans argues that the Gospels's typological casting of John around the Elijah and Joshua narratives has contemporary parallels (e.g., Theudas and the Egyptian) and that this cannot be adequately explained as a creation of later Jesus followers.⁴⁴ As for John, he reportedly denied the Elijah connection⁴⁵ and performed no known miracles.⁴⁶ Of course, miracle working is not the *sine qua non* for a prophet,⁴⁷ so we may best understand his Elijah-like prophetic role in his effort to ἐδέοον Ἰσαΐά ἐάνῃ βασιλεὺς δαδὸν ἡμῖν ἐδὶ ὁ Ἰεσοῦ ἐαὶ ἀδὰ ἐατὸ ἐὶ ὄντι βασιλεὺς ἀεὶ ἐατὸν before the coming judgment.⁴⁸ Additionally, Webb attempts to contextualize John among Second Temple prophets, classifying him as a "popular prophet."⁴⁹ Of course, these two analyses are not

⁴⁴ Evans, "Baptism," 48. Justin Martyr also makes this connection (*Dial.* 49). However, James D. G. Dunn disagrees: "the particular association of the Baptist with Elijah implied in the echo of 2 Kgs 1.8 is more likely to be a Christian evaluation of the Baptist." See, James D. G. Dunn, "John the Baptist's Use of Scripture," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and W. Richard Stegner, JSNTSup 104 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 42–54, 46.

⁴⁵ Regarding his role as a prophet, the *Jesus Seminar* considers it probable (voting pink), but only find it possible (voting gray) that he imitated Elijah (Tatum, *John*, 141). Robinson proposes a three stage development of John's eventual identification with Elijah, which Reumann summarizes in a table (Robinson, "Elijah," 33–39; Reumann, "Quest," 197, n. 37).

⁴⁶ Cf. John 1:21, 25; 10:41. Josephus also makes no mention of miracles. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor uses this as proof that Jesus himself must have immersed others (despite the denial in John 4:2) because miracle working could not have been the basis for linking Jesus with John ("John," 371–72). Evans follows Trumbower against Murphy-O'Connor and John 1:21, 25, in asserting that "John's deliberate choice of this site indicates that the Baptist probably did see himself as Elijah *redivivus*" ("Baptism," 49, n. 5). Additionally, Mark 6:14 implies that Jesus had "powers" because John was raised from the dead. If John performed no miracles, why would his raising transfer them to Jesus?

⁴⁷ Of all the Second Temple period prophets that Webb surveys, only the "popular prophet" is associated with miracles (*John*, 307–48).

⁴⁸ Luke 1:17, 76–79. Many have noted that there is no connection between the return of Elijah and a messianic figure, rather it is between Elijah and the Day of the Lord. See, Robinson, "Elijah," 28–52; Morris M. Faierstein, "Why Do the Scribes Say That Elijah Must Come First," *JBL* 100 (1981): 75–86; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "More about Elijah Coming First," *JBL* 104 (1985): 295–96. In contrast, see Dale C. Allison Jr., "'Elijah Must Come First,'" *JBL* 103 (1984): 256–58. See also, Webb, *John*, 250–54. On the proposed development and rationale for the coming of Elijah and its connection to the messiah, see Elie Assis, "Moses, Elijah and the Messianic Hope: A New Reading of Malachi 3,22–24," *ZAW* 123.2 (2011): 207–20.

⁴⁹ He discusses three categories: (1) clerical, (2) sapiential, and (3) popular. While complete demographic information is unavailable for the cases he considers, he only classifies clerical prophets as priestly, which is not accurate. Under sapiential, he mentions Essenes, some of whom were of a priestly class, and there is nothing to preclude a "popular prophet" from also being from the priestly class, of which John belonged if Luke is accurate. In critique of Webb, I agree with Taylor, *Immerser*, 223–35.

mutually exclusive, especially since the Second Temple prophets often depend to some extent on their HB counterparts. Thus, John functioned like the prophets of the HB⁵⁰ while the Elijah connection specifies his role and explains his message of coming judgment.⁵¹ Whether John himself thought he was Elijah *redivivus* is doubtful, though his dress and Jordan River ministry is suggestive.⁵²

2. *He was likely of priestly lineage.*⁵³ John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, are portrayed after the image of Abraham and Sarah, both being blameless, advanced in years, and barren.⁵⁴ Zechariah was reportedly a priest,⁵⁵ and scholars cite this as a key fact to emphasize John's connection with the Qumran community. Because Josephus mentions that the Essenes accept and educate others' children,⁵⁶ and Luke (alone) mentions that John "was in the wilderness until the day of his commissioning to Israel,"⁵⁷ scholars speculate (with additional reasons) that John was sent to be raised by the *priestly* Qumran

⁵⁰ So, Bornkamm, *Jesus*, 46; Meier, *Mentor*, 29.

⁵¹ The expectation of Elijah in Sirach (2nd cent. BCE) makes it unlikely that this is a novel application of the Gospel authors to John: "At the appointed time, it is written, you are destined to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and to restore the tribes of Jacob" (Sir. 48.10; NRSV). In this respect, Murphy-O'Connor argues that John did not view himself as Elijah *redivivus*, but sought to "evoke the day of eschatological judgment, which would be preceded by the return of Elijah (Mal 4. 5) of whom he spoke" ("John," 362, n. 7).

⁵² The *Jesus Seminar* believes it possible (voting gray) that John's followers, Jesus, and Jesus's followers identified John as Elijah. That Mark or Q identified him as Elijah is probable (voting pink) (Tatum, *John*, 154). Since Josephus does not describe him as a prophet, Chilton thinks John's portrayal in the NT is a full fabrication ("Yohanan," 197–212). Ernst reasonably proposes that John's identification as Elijah was the result of his followers attempting to make sense of his death (*Johannes*, 352–53).

⁵³ Priestly prophets are attested in the HB (e.g., Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Of the Gospel writers, only Luke makes this connection (Luke 1:5–25; 3:2). For later material that accepts John's priestly lineage, see Gos. Eb. (=Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6); Prot. Jas. 22.3–24.4; A New Life of John the Baptist; Apoc. Paul 51. Either these authors had access to Luke's gospel or the tradition that Zechariah was his father was widely known.

⁵⁴ Luke 1:5–7; cf., Gen 11:30; 17:1; 18:11; 24:1; Justin, *Dial.* 84. However, Murphy also notes that strong parallels exist between the births of Samson (Judges 13) and Samuel (1 Samuel 1), and Luke 1:46–55 appears to be based on 1 Sam 2:1–10 (*John*, 45).

⁵⁵ Luke 1:5–25.

⁵⁶ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.2 §120; cf. 1QSa I, 4–8; 1QH IX, 34–35. However, Philo presents a possibly contrasting view, see *Hypoth.* 11.3.

⁵⁷ ἦν ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις ἕως ἡμέρας ἀναδείξεως αὐτοῦ πρὸς τὸν Ἰσραὴλ (Luke 1:80, my translation). However, Luke also notes that John's family home was located in Judea (Luke 1:39–40). According to tradition, the unnamed town is En-karim, just southwest of Jerusalem (Beitzel, *New Moody Atlas*, 239).

community.⁵⁸ Although the priest connection is singularly attested in Luke,⁵⁹ many accept John's priestly lineage as historical.⁶⁰

Assuming John was of priestly lineage, his public ministry in the desert need not imply that he has "turned his back on" his priestly responsibilities or the temple cult,⁶¹ nor is the claim that "John separated his immersion completely from the temple" certain.⁶² For one thing, priestly decent did not automatically entail service at the temple.⁶³ Moreover, Murphy suggests that "Josephus uses sacrificial language to speak of John's baptism [to be acceptable] . . . thus drawing his own connection between John's activity and the Temple."⁶⁴ As Regev observes, repentance culminates in sacrifice only in certain cases,⁶⁵ and there are many instances of repentance and forgiveness achieved outside of the temple cult that do not imply a negative posture towards the institution

⁵⁸ See the discussion in chapter two, "Qumran Community"; cf. Meier, *Mentor*, 25, but cf. 27.

⁵⁹ If Luke is *not* using a source for John's priestly connection, then its occurrence in Gos. Eb. (=Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6) may suggest a second source for this tradition. If, however, Gos. Eb. pre-dates Luke as David Sloan and James Edwards have argued, it is possible that the author of Luke's Gospel used Gos. Eb. as a source. See James R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 112–17; David B. Sloan, "What if the Gospel according to the Hebrews was Q?" (paper presented at the Annual meeting of the SBL, Boston, MA, 18 November 2017, 1–11. But see the scathing critique of Edwards by Mark S. Goodacre, review of *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*, *CBQ* 73 (2011): 862–63.

⁶⁰ So, Marcus, *John*, 133–34; Otto Böcher, "Lukas und Johannes der Täufer," *SNTSU* 4 (1979): 27–44, 29; Ernst, *Johannes*, 269–72; Meier, *Mentor*, 24–25; Murphy, *John*, 49; Lupieri, "John," *ANRW* 33.1:446; Scobie, *John*, 55–56. Guyénot is favorable but non-committal, mainly because he doubts the historicity of Luke 1–2 (*Jésus*, 59–60). In contrast, the *Jesus Seminar* believe it is improbable (voting black) that John's parents were Zechariah and Elizabeth, but consider it possible (voting gray) that John was a priest (Tatum, *John*, 112); cf. Enslin, "Once Again," 558.

⁶¹ Kazmierski, *John*, 39–40. As Meier admits, "Luke never draws these lines of convergence himself" (*Mentor*, 25). Prophetic figures in the HB, who were also sometimes of priestly lineage, were sometimes unmarried (e.g., Jer 16:2). The Qumran community apparently eschewed marriage as well, though they did not abandon their priestly roles. See also the fine discussion in Chilton, "John," 34–36; Uro, *Ritual*, 80–85.

⁶² Skarsaune, *Shadow*, 353. Similarly, Meier claims that "both John and Jesus . . . were centering their religious lives on a new type of rite that lacked the sanction of tradition and the temple authorities. Their eschatological outlook . . . did mean the introduction of a new type of ritual that implicitly called into question the sufficiency of temple and synagogue worship as then practiced" (*Mentor*, 110).

⁶³ Chilton, "John," 35.

⁶⁴ Murphy, *John*, 53.

⁶⁵ Eyal Regev, "Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumranic Ideology," *HTR* 97 (2004): 383–411, 403; Uro has the reference incorrectly at 405 (*Ritual*, 81).

or leadership.⁶⁶ Josephus makes no comment regarding John's supposed anti-temple posture or "unauthorized" ministry, and Josephus himself, a priest, practiced wilderness immersions with Bannus with no sense of being "anti-temple."⁶⁷ Furthermore, those who argue for the historicity of John's priestly lineage do so on the grounds that his immersion practice would *not* be surprising,⁶⁸ though many present it as "illicit" since it is wrongly construed as an "extra-temple" ritual.⁶⁹ Dunn is correct in observing "a washing ritual would not require a stimulus or authorization from any particular Scripture,"⁷⁰ as is Taylor in noting that "Immersion was never a substitute for Temple sacrifices."⁷¹

3. *He lived and ministered in the desert, especially around the Jordan River and Aenon near Salim.* That John ministered in the wilderness is widely accepted today,⁷² but the implications of this for interpreting his immersion

⁶⁶ E.g., Psalm 51; 1 Kgs 8:46–50//1 Chr 6:36–39; Isa 6:5–7; Dan 9:3–20; Hos 14:2–3; Jon 3:6–9; Luke 5:21; 18:9–14; Philo, *Mos.* 2.23–24 (Uro, again has the reference incorrectly as 2.23–34); *Spec.* 1.187; Odes Sol. 3:9; ALD 2.14//4Q213a 1, 13–14; Sib. Or. 4.162–70. Cf. Friedrich Avemarie, "Ist die Johannes Taufe ein Ausdruck von Tempelkritik? Skizze eines methodischen Problems," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum*, ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer, WUNT 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 395–410, 398–401; Taylor, *Immerser*, 31; Uro, *Ritual*, 81–82.

⁶⁷ Amy-Jill Levine makes the same point (Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 84).

⁶⁸ E.g., Chilton, "Yohanan," 204.

⁶⁹ Webb suggests that "the Temple hierarchy probably viewed John's baptism as 'cheap grace'" ("John," 191, n. 37)! He is preceded by Morton Smith who argued that it was cheap grace in light of the expense of temple sacrifice. See, John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (HarperOne, 1991), 231; Uro again has the reference incorrectly at 331 (*Ritual*, 80). Others supporting an "unauthorized" view include, Lupieri, "John," *ANRW*, 33.1:440; Cullmann, "Opposition, 158; Meier, *Mentor*, 24–25; Murphy, *John*, 49. Ritual purity practices are widely attested outside of the temple proper, and religious practices such as prayer, scripture reading, repentance, etc. are not limited to the temple. See also the discussions in chapter four, "Was Ritual Purity Temple Centric?" and chapter two, "Anti-Temple Posture."

⁷⁰ Dunn, "John," 50; cf. Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 84.

⁷¹ Taylor, *Immerser*, 31.

⁷² Bultmann (following K. L. Schmidt) argues that it is due to "Christian accretions" that the Gospel authors place John in the desert in accordance with Isa 40:3 because it plays into the "forerunner" concept (*History*, 245–46); cf. Willi Marxsen, *Der Evangelist Markus: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Evangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 26–31. Of course, the DSS (unavailable to Bultmann and Schmidt) show that this is an unnecessary conclusion. The *Jesus Seminar* finds it certain (voting red) that John ministered in the wilderness (*John*, 115–16); cf. Murphy-O'Connor, "John," 359–74; Robert W. Funk, "The Wilderness," *JBL* 78 (1959): 205–14.

practice is unclear. For example, Evans draws connections between John and other "Jewish prophets of deliverance" mentioned in Josephus, many of whom were guided by "Jordan typology,"⁷³ which is connected to the "anticipated restoration of Israel."⁷⁴ He notes in support John's location at the Jordan and the reference to "these stones" in relation to "children of Abraham" with their potential evocation of Joshua and Elijah.⁷⁵ Evans and Johnston further develop this argument to conclude that John's immersion was connected to "national renewal" and "far more than mere personal washing and purification."⁷⁶

Yet, the numerous differences between John and the other "Jewish prophets of deliverance" indicate that John was *unlike* them in significant ways, which throws into question the continuity that Evans and Johnstone propose. *Table 9: Jewish "Prophets" Mentioned in Josephus* conveniently presents these differences on next page with subsequent commentary.⁷⁷

⁷³ The contents or significance of "Jordan typology" is left undefined.

⁷⁴ Craig A. Evans, "Josephus on John the Baptist and Other Jewish Prophets of Deliverance," in *The Historical Jesus in Context*, ed. Dale C. Allison Jr., Amy-Jill Levine, and John Dominic Crossan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 55–63, 59; cf. Evans, "Baptism," 45–71; Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 231–32.

⁷⁵ Regarding how a Greek audience might understand the reference, see Craig S. Keener, "Human Stones in a Greek Setting: Luke 3.8; Matthew 3.9; Luke 19.40," *JGRChJ* 6 (2009): 28–36.

⁷⁶ Evans and Johnston, "Intertestamental Background," 43–44.

⁷⁷ See also the helpful chart in Richard A. Horsley, Bandits, *Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 260–61; and the "Types and Trajectories of Peasant Unrest in Early Roman Palestine" in Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, app. 2, 451–52.

Table 9: Jewish "prophets" mentioned in Josephus

Jewish "Prophets" Mentioned in Josephus						
Name	Date Range	Ruler	Location	Typology	Goals	Traits
John the Baptist <i>Ant.</i> 18.5.2 §§116–19	c. 28 CE	Antipas Pilate	Machaerus Jordan Area	None (in Josephus)	Piety Virtue	Immersion, Repentance, Ethical Reform
The Samaritan <i>Ant.</i> 18.4.1 §§85–87	c. 36 CE	Pilate	Mount Gerazim	New Moses?	Reveal Hidden Temple Vessels	Armed Followers
Theudas <i>Ant.</i> 20.5.1 §§97–99	c. 45 CE	Fadus	Jordan River	New Exodus Joshua	Cross Jordan on dry ground	Followers with "Possessions"
The Egyptian <i>J.W.</i> 2.13.4–5 §§258–63 <i>Ant.</i> 20.8.6 §§167–72	c. 52–58 CE	Felix	Wilderness Mt. of Olives	New Exodus Jericho	Perform Miracles Cause Jerusalem's Walls to Fall	Armed Followers
An Imposter <i>Ant.</i> 20.8.10 §188	c. 60 CE	Festus	Wilderness	New Exodus	Provide "Salvation" and "Rest"	Armed Followers?
Jonathan <i>J.W.</i> 7.11.1–5 §§437–42 <i>Life</i> 1.76 §§424–25	c. 73 CE	Catallus Vespasian	Wilderness	New Exodus	Show Signs and Apparitions	Unarmed Followers?

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

- Josephus treats John differently than the other prophetic figures, suggesting that he does not consider them to be similar. In fact, Webb suggests there is only *one* shared "tactical trait" between John and the other prophetic figures, namely, non-violence. Yet, even this is not completely true since some of the other groups were armed.⁷⁸
- *All* of the examples *post-date* John, so we cannot infer that John was influenced by them.
- *Only* Theudas is associated with the Jordan River.
- John's message is *relatively* non-political in light of the others, and neither he nor his followers were said to be armed (only Jonathan's group is identified as unarmed).
- According to the Gospels, John proclaims deliverance if people repent and immerse, yet it is *God*, not John, who will deliver (in contrast to the other figures). However, he says nothing about political deliverance and the coming judgment is aimed at the people of Israel, not Rome.
- Unlike Elijah or the promises of Theudas, John never attempts to part the water. To the contrary, *people get wet*, and John apparently had to cross the Jordan normally like everyone else (in contrast to Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Webb, *John*, 360.

⁷⁹ Cf. 4 Bar 6:23–25; 8:6 (c. 100–135 CE). Even Webb, who argues ambiguously for some symbolism admits, "it is unclear how [John's immersion] could be a symbol from the people's past history, especially the Exodus and Conquest" (*John*, 361).

- Even if there is a wordplay implied in the Gospels between אֲבָן and בֵּן,⁸⁰ that John appeals to the twelve-stone symbolism is questionable on several grounds. For one, there are *several* twelve-stone stories and, second, they all occur in *different* places. Moses's and Elijah's stones were constructed into altars for sacrifice at Sinai and Mt. Carmel respectively, while Joshua constructed two non-altar stone piles, one in the middle of the Jordan (i.e. *under water*) and the other in Gilgal.⁸¹ That is, *none* of the twelve-stone piles were visible to John or his audience. Third, John did not camp out at a single location, but traveled around. Hence, it is unlikely that he was at the very spot where Joshua crossed the Jordan (if the location were even known in antiquity).⁸² Fourth, neither he nor the Gospels make any reference to the number of stones in question. Finally, with the other ways that stone imagery is employed in the HB, all that John may mean, to use Keener's words, is that John "savaged their sense of security."⁸³
- Finally, Josephus *explicitly* identifies the typological claims of the other prophets but is *silent* about John's. In the Gospels, he is connected with Elijah, but even there, nothing explicitly or implicitly links him to Joshua or the Exodus.

Evans also admits that not "all of John's baptizing was eschatological and initiatory" since according to John 3:23 he immersed at the springs of Aenon.⁸⁴ It is difficult to believe that John offered both an eschatological-initiatory variety of immersion as well as a "standard" version (who would not want the "deluxe" version?). Additionally, John 3:25 notes the dispute between John's followers and "a Jew" ὁ Ἰουδαῖος.⁸⁵ The simpler answer to this is that John is patiently concerned with ritual purification and there are few places in the

⁸⁰ Meier notes the problems with this (*Mentor*, 29, 75, n. 51).

⁸¹ Cf. Exod 24:4; 1 Kgs 18:30–32; Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael 19:10.

⁸² John 1:28 has him in Bethany, on the other side of the Jordan (cf. John 3:26; 10:40), in John 3:23 he is at the Springs of Aenon, and Luke 3:3 says he traveled throughout the region of the Jordan. In defense of the Joshua narrative, see Colin Brown, "What Was John the Baptist Doing?" *BBR* 7 (1997): 37–49.

⁸³ Keener, *Matthew*, 125. Of course, John or the Gospel authors may intend polyvalence (so, Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 82).

⁸⁴ Evans, "Baptism," 59. As Keener notes, "John lacks much theological incentive to create Aenon" (*John*, 1:576). There are multiple sites that have been proposed for this otherwise unknown location: (1) Sapsaphas in the Transjordan according to the Madaba Map, (2) modern ed-Der near Scythopolis, i.e., Beth-shean, and (3) modern Salim in the hill country of Samaria. Cf. Rainey and Notley, *Sacred Bridge*, 350–51; Beitzel, *New Moody Atlas*, 240; Keener, *John*, 1:576.

⁸⁵ On the ongoing debate regarding ritual purity among Jesus followers, see Niclas Förster, "Jesus der Täufer und die Reinwaschung der Jünger," *NTS* 64 (2018): 455–72.

wilderness where this is possible to perform (i.e. he was in the desert because of Isa 40:3, not to create a Jordan typology).⁸⁶ If he performed immersions elsewhere, then this argues all the more that the Jordan was simply a water source. His eschatological message leads to immersion because of the anticipated coming of God, and, thus, is based upon the same ritual purity logic that motivated any immersion in John's day.⁸⁷ Therefore, I question to what extent John falls "into the same category as those of Theudas and the Egyptian"⁸⁸ and agree with Günter Bornkamm: "[John] has nothing in common with the political revolutionaries and with those who pretend to be the Messiah."⁸⁹ Moreover, Chilton is correct to note that "the symbolism of bathing is not transparently revolutionary. It can scarcely be compared with what Josephus said the false prophets [i.e., Theudas and the Egyptian] did."⁹⁰

In light of the above, it is necessary to tweak the conclusion of Evans and Johnston: John was interested in national *renewal* whereas the other prophets were interested in national *deliverance*, something absent from John's purview.⁹¹ I agree with Murphy-O'Connor that John's location in the desert is a "deliberate prophetic gesture," and perhaps with Evans that John's presence at the Jordan is "consciously typological," but the potential typologies are too numerous and ambiguous to follow with certainty. John himself appears to be resistant to these and as we have seen, one's presence the wilderness may be due to a variety of reasons.⁹² If John or the Gospel traditions sought to make a typological connection with John's immersion, it is subtle at best.⁹³ On the other hand, the connection to Isa 40:3 is sufficient to explain John's presence

⁸⁶ So, Ernst, *Johannes*, 332; Marsh, *Origin*, 37.

⁸⁷ In this respect, I disagree with Ernst who claims that "Das Taufen allein wäre stumm und bliebe unverständlich, wenn der Sinn nicht in dem begleitenden prophetischen Wort erschlossen würde" (*Johannes*, 333, 340).

⁸⁸ Evans, "Baptism," 47.

⁸⁹ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene McLuskey, Fraser McLuskey, and James M. Robinson, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 45; cf. Taylor, *Immerser*, 233.

⁹⁰ Bruce Chilton, "John the Purifier," in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, AGJU 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 203–20, 211; later published with expansions and reduced notes as Bruce Chilton, "John the Purifier: His Immersion and His Death," HTS 57 (2001): 247–67.

⁹¹ It is reasonable to assume that John may have envisioned the eschatological trajectory of the HB prophets in which the nations were eradicated, subjugated, or incorporated into Israel, but this is not explicit in John's ministry in the same way it appears in Josephus's other examples.

⁹² Cf. Webb, *John*, 344–45; Funk, "Wilderness," 205–14. We have not even considered Bannus or the Qumran community.

⁹³ E.g., see the typological casting of Elijah after Moses in Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 39–45.

in the wilderness and it is the only reference explicitly attributed to John.⁹⁴ To put it another way, on the basis of Isa 40:3, John's prophetic imperative was to go to the desert to prepare the way.⁹⁵ Since he expected God's coming, the people would need to ritually purify and the Jordan River was the most obvious and convenient source of water to use for this purpose. While the Jordan *may* have been pregnant with meaning, it is unclear *whether* or *how* his immersion there captured it. By consequence it is unnecessary to posit a distinction between "national renewal" and "mere personal washing." Rather, John's immersion was one way national renewal was realized.

4. *He called Jews to repent and immerse to prepare for God's coming.*⁹⁶ Some scholars interpret John's invective against the "brood of vipers" and his adjuration that his audience not depend on Abrahamic ancestry for safety as evidence that John's views are "radical" and that he is part of a new religious movement about to be born.⁹⁷ This is an anachronism, for Qumran nurtured a similar perspective, yet they are interpreted as within Judaism. Moreover, such a view is congenial to the prophetic messages of the HB, wherein people thought they were immune from judgment simply because they were God's elect or inhabited his chosen city.⁹⁸ John's comments regarding ancestry are rooted in the logic of the Deuteronomistic History and thus his

⁹⁴ John 1:23. For arguments in support of the independence and historical reliability of this attribution to John, see Keener, *John*, 1:437–40; Dunn, "John," 45–46. For John's possible redactional interests, see Martinus J. J. Menken, "The Quotation from Isa 40:3 in John 1:23," *Bib* 66 (1985): 190–205.

⁹⁵ It would be startling that a figure such as John would give no scriptural reflection to his actions in proclaiming the coming of God and judgment. The Qumran community notably also uses Isa 40:3 as a justification for their existence (1QS VIII, 12–14), yet they construct human made ritual baths (i.e., washing in the Jordan was apparently not integral to fulfilling Isa 40:3). This is all the more significant if Dunn is correct that the importance of Isaiah for both John and Qumran indicates the likelihood that John's ministry was also shaped by post-biblical influences ("John," 54). Webb proposes that the Qumran community utilized the Jordan for "an immersion of special significance" but does not explain why or what would warrant this (*John*, 139, n. 23).

⁹⁶ Q 3:8 (Matt 3:8//Luke 3:8); Mark 1:4–5, 7–8//Matt 3:1–2, 5–6, 11//Luke 3:3, 16; Matt 3:11; John 1:24–28; Acts 13:24; 19:4; cf. Gos. Eb. (=Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6; 30.14.3); Exeg. Soul 135; On Bap. A 40–41; Paraph. Shem 30, 32, 36–38 (negatively assessed as demonic). The *Jesus Seminar* agreed (voting red) that John certainly "preached baptism" (Tatum, *John*, 119).

⁹⁷ Webb observes that this perspective is often associated with those who hold to "prose-lyte baptism" as the origin of John's immersion since John is treating Jews and non-Jews (*John*, 201, n. 115).

⁹⁸ E.g., Jer 7.

message is neither unique nor against Judaism.⁹⁹ As Tuckett observes of Q 3:7b,¹⁰⁰ "it simply says that appeal to Jewish birth alone is in itself insufficient to escape what is coming soon."¹⁰¹ From what John was calling people to repent is unfortunately never explicitly explained. We may surmise from his ethical demands in Q 3:7–9¹⁰² and Luke 3:10–14 (SL), if historical,¹⁰³ and the fact that Mark 3:5 states that people were confessing their sins, that it was Torah unfaithfulness.

5. *He was a renowned person with his own followers.*¹⁰⁴ John is mentioned by name eighty times in the canonical Gospels¹⁰⁵ and he merits mention in Josephus.¹⁰⁶ His renown is also evidenced by the fact that His ministry forms the "starting point" for the Jesus movement, a point repeatedly made in the NT and subsequent sources.¹⁰⁷ Whether John was forming a sectarian group¹⁰⁸ or

⁹⁹ Cf. Thomas Römer and Jean-Daniel Macchi, "Luke, Disciple of the Deuteronomistic School," in *Luke's Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. Christopher M. Tuckett (Sheffield, 1995), 178–87; Benjamin J. Snyder, "The 'Fathers' Motif in Luke-Acts," *Journal of Inductive Biblical Studies* 2 (2015): 44–71. Whereas Römer and Macchi primarily focus on Acts 7 with brief mention of a few other passages in Acts, my article examines Luke-Acts more broadly. Levine and Witherington note that "whereas Judaism does speak of the Merits of the Fathers . . . it generally rejects the idea of what might be called the 'sins of the Fathers,'" but in light of Second Temple literature which *does* make use of the "sins of the Fathers," this is apparently only true of later, rabbinic literature (*Gospel of Luke*, 87).

¹⁰⁰ Luke 3:7//Matt 3:7.

¹⁰¹ Tuckett, *Q*, 115; cf. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 33.

¹⁰² Matt 3:7–10//Luke 3:7–9.

¹⁰³ The *Jesus Seminar* finds it possible (voting gray, though 6% of the committee voted red and 44% voted pink) that John spoke the words attributed to him in Q 3:7–9 and Luke 3:10–14, but probable (voting pink) that toll collectors and soldiers came to hear John (Tatum, *John*, 133, 138). In light of the early date of Q (if it existed) and the likelihood that toll collectors and soldiers heard John preach, what else might he say to them even if this is not his *ipsissima vox*?

¹⁰⁴ The *Jesus Seminar* finds it certain (voting red) that John enjoyed "widespread appeal," probable (voting pink) that he had disciples, and certain (voting red) that Jesus identified John as a "great figure" (Tatum, *John*, 135, 137, 155).

¹⁰⁵ According to Webb, "John," 179, n. 1.

¹⁰⁶ See also, Q 7:27 (Luke 7:27//Matt 11:10//Exod 23:20a–b [LXX]//Mal 3:1a [LXX]//Mark 1:2), Q 7:28 (Luke 7:28//Matt 11:11), Q 7:33 (Luke 7:33//Matt 11:18); Mark 6:19–20; Luke 1:13–16, 36, 41–45, 58, 65–66; 3:10–14; Gos. Thom. §46; Ap. Jas. 6.20; Ps.-Clem. *Rec.* 1.60.1–4; Disc. Seth 63 (negatively); Steles Seth 118 (possibly); Pistis Sophia 7.

¹⁰⁷ Q 16:16 (Luke 16:16//Matt 11:12–13); Mark 1:14–15//Matt 4:12, 17//Luke 4:14; Mark 11:30–33//Matt 21:23–27//Luke 20:1–8; Acts 1:22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24; 18:25; 19:4; cf. Ps.-Clem. *Rec.* 1.53–54.1–8; 1.60.1–4; Exeg. Soul 135; P.Cair.Cat. 10735, Pistis Sophia 7.

¹⁰⁸ Meier notes, "there is no sign of any organization, or indeed, any permanent membership in the group" (*Mentor*, 26); cf. Carsten Claussen, "John, Qumran, and the Question of Sectarianism," *PRSt* 37 (2010): 421–40. In protest, Webb notes that "an initiatory rite does not necessarily need to initiate someone into a closed community" ("John," 195). Since

intending to "initiate" people into something depends largely on what one means by these terms.¹⁰⁹ Ancient people were concurrently members of numerous overlapping social groups unless a given group required exclusive adherence.¹¹⁰

6. *Herod Antipas executed him at Machaerus because of the political danger he posed.*¹¹¹ As a result of John's itinerant preaching, he reportedly influenced many people. Although he was unlike the other prophetic movements that arose after him, and even though the crowds that gathered to hear him dispersed, he was viewed as a political threat and executed.¹¹² Josephus mentions the potential for John to raise an $\alpha\delta\upsilon\omicron\delta\acute{\alpha}\omicron\epsilon\omicron$, Mark and Josephus both mention his public preaching, Herod's marriage to Herodias was politically sensitive (Mark and Josephus each mention this, although differently), and there appears to have been general anticipation or desire for national restoration among the populace.

Summary. Although we have no "pure" John to evaluate, redaction criticism and the analysis of our sources allow us to form some basic contours of his life and ministry. John saw as his prophetic duty to prepare the way of the Lord in accordance with Isa 40:3, and others interpreted him in the manner of the expected Elijah figure before the Day of the Lord (Mal 3:1). Thus, his *message* was necessarily eschatological in nature and directed to the Jewish people. To properly prepare the way of the Lord, those who needed to repent (i.e., change their ways and thinking) were called to do so, and although the precise details are ambiguous, the "fruit of repentance" must have meant adherence to Torah.¹¹³ He expected judgment to come upon the people of God,

two of John's followers leave him to follow Jesus according to John 1:35–40, this implies that John's group was different than Jesus's, but just what this difference consisted in is unclear.

¹⁰⁹ Those who argue in favor of initiation include: Webb, "John," 194–97; Oscar Cullmann, "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research Into the Beginnings of Christianity," in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl (London: SCM, 1958), 18–32, 21; Theodore A. Bergren, "Jesus' Baptism by John in the Context of First-Century Judaism," in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al., BJS 358 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 3–7. Those who argue against initiation include: Jürgen Becker, *Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), 38–40; Thyen, "ΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ," 98–99, n. 6; Ernst, *Johannes*, 340.

¹¹⁰ So, Webb, "John," 195.

¹¹¹ The *Jesus Seminar* finds it certain (voting red) that Herod Antipas imprisoned and executed John for "political expediency" at Machaerus (Tatum, *John*, 158–61).

¹¹² Cf. the denouncement of Diogenes (flogged) and Heras (beheaded) on the anticipated marriage of Titus and Bernice in 75 CE (Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 65.15.4).

¹¹³ Lupieri rightly notes that Josephus's presentation of John is unsatisfactory since his message is "practically empty of content" ("John," *ANRW* 33.1:452). Either he viewed John

but he was not anticipating or proclaiming deliverance from Rome like others who came after him. Additionally, immersion played a key role in his proclamation and preparation of the way of the Lord, the precise function of which we will now examine.

The Language and Nature of John's Immersion

Now that we have described John contextually, we turn to consider specifically his immersion. As with the preceding chapters, this discussion is rooted in the language used by our sources. However, it is important to recall that the common representation of John's immersion depends on (1) reifying it as a special "baptism," (2) claiming that it has no connection to ritual purity or that it somehow supersedes it, (3) viewing it as anti-temple because John supposedly mediates forgiveness in an "unauthorized" ritual, (4) considering it "radical" that John calls fellow Jews to repentance and "baptism," and (5) labeling it an "eschatological sacrament."

In chapter three, I demonstrated that (1) reification of the term through transliteration is unjustified. This study argues that (2) John's immersion is fully explainable as ritual purification. We simply do not know (3) whether John's immersion was anti-temple, and in light of our findings in chapter four, the diverse ritual purity practices and lack of "normative Judaism" argues against this.¹¹⁴ Since John operates like a HB prophet (4) John may have been *socially* radical as most prophets are, but he is fully comprehensible within Judaism. Finally, (5) the concept of a "sacrament" derives from theological developments of later authors.¹¹⁵ If we do not begin with the usual assumptions, a very different understanding of John's immersion emerges. I now consider the language of our sources with respect to John's immersion.

1. ὁ ἁπλοῦς ὁ ἰουδαϊσμοῦ. Unlike the other so-called antecedents, where there is no explicit identifier for "the immersion of Qumran" or "proselyte immersion," our sources *do* speak of "John's immersion." Mark and Matthew use a second attributive adjectival construction with the article

as merely a maintainer of standard ethical values or Josephus does not wish to reveal (or he does not know) that the majority of John's audience were not upright. Yet, as Carl H. Kraeling notes, neither does the NT define repentance (*John*, 70–71). As such, we must assume that the HB notion of repentance was operative (Meier, *Mentor*, 73, n. 46).

¹¹⁴ Uro incorrectly criticizes Taylor for arguing "against such an outdated view" (*Ritual*, 84). For one, she is not arguing against what is implied by the modern use of the term "sect," and second, many scholars still view John's immersion as deviating from or outside of "mainstream" Judaism; cf. n. 23 above.

¹¹⁵ Ernst rightly critiques the label "eschatological sacrament" (*Johannes*, 335).

nominalizing Ἰωάννου,¹¹⁶ while Luke-Acts uses the genitival modifier.¹¹⁷ All that may be discerned from the grammar is that this is either a genitive of source (an immersion originating from John) or a subjective genitive (John immerses).¹¹⁸ Additionally, Paul reportedly asks some ἰακώβ, αἰὸ ὅβ ἰὺί ἐάάδδὸβλόεζὸά; to which they respond, αἰὸ ὁὸ Ἰωάννου ἀϋδδὸέόιά.¹¹⁹ This raises two key questions: (1) does this indicate that John's immersion is *sui generis*, and (2) does this indicate John's immersion was "initiatory"?

I have already noted that a *sui generis* ritual would be incomprehensible to an ancient audience, requiring extensive explanation, which our sources do not provide.¹²⁰ Moreover, both Josephus and John 3:25 understand John's immersion as ἐὸ ἀϊάβζ οἰϋ ὀβίαὸὲ and δᾶνι ἐάέᾶνέόιϋ respectively.¹²¹ Thus, the *sui generis* argument depends on *theological* undergirding.¹²² At the same time, there *appears* to be "special circumstances" for John's immersion that suggest it is distinct from "normal" ritual purity practices, and that this may explain the "dispute" in John 3:25. On the other hand, John's immersion is classified as ritual purification,¹²³ and since his identity is in question in John 1:19–22, the dispute in John 3:25 may be about *John* rather than his immersion. Since I address the nature of John's immersion in more detail below, for now, "the immersion of John" simply refers to that which John called his audience

¹¹⁶ Rodney J. Decker notes that this is a rare construction in the NT (i.e., the second attributive with an article governing a genitive). The only other occurrences are the parallel in Matt 21:25, Acts 15:1 (though in the dative), and Dan 8:26 in the LXX. See, Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 9-16: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 102.

¹¹⁷ Mark 11:30//Matt 21:25; Luke 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 18:25. This is labeled a "subjective genitive" by Martin M. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 235–36.

¹¹⁸ The second attributive suggests the former while the simple genitive suggest the latter.

¹¹⁹ Acts 19:3.

¹²⁰ See Chapters one through three above.

¹²¹ The *Jesus Seminar* finds it probable (voting pink) that John's immersion "was understood to purify from uncleanness" (Tatum, *John*, 124).

¹²² This undergirding often consists in evaluating John as a harbinger of a new era in *Heilsgeschichte*, which introduces a certain amount of discontinuity with the past, and as the one who reveals the "empty rituals" of Judaism by introducing repentance and promising the spirit, etc.

¹²³ So, Witherington who notes, "If the dispute mentioned in John 3:25 is about the relative merits of John's and Jesus' (or that of his disciples') baptism, then the two are closely related at least in the disputer's mind (and perhaps the evangelist's), for they both fall under the label of 'ceremonial washing.' The phrase *ceremonial washing* indicates that both were thought of as falling within the category of the Jewish system of purifications, which would only be natural (*Troubled Waters*, 31; cf. Dunn, *Baptism*, 21; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 219.

to undergo in preparation for the coming of God. If this is the context in which John proclaims an immersion of repentance, then it is not surprising that it was named after him.

This is confirmed in part by the context of the passages in which "John's immersion" occurs. In Mark, Jesus aligns his own authority to teach the people and to proclaim the good news with the same source of authority that John had to proclaim the good news and call people to immersion; Mark's editorial comment that the people viewed John as a prophet evokes his proclamation.¹²⁴ Luke 7:29–30 (SL?¹²⁵) is even more explicit in noting that those who did not undergo John's immersion rejected for themselves the purpose of God (i.e., they did not believe John's message and "prepare" themselves, or they thought they were already prepared).¹²⁶

Scholars dispute whether John's immersion was an "initiation rite,"¹²⁷ which depends on at least three things: (1) what one means by "initiation rite" (NT scholars rarely define it), (2) whether John and his followers constituted a "social group," and (3) whether immersion was an explicit means to enter it. What scholars often mean by initiation is some internal, ontological change. This is evident in Peterson's definition: "Rituals of initiation effectuate an irreversible transfer of individual persons into a *higher state of being* than the one they had prior to the ritual act."¹²⁸ Besides the subjective nature of such a claim, it also assumes that *all* so-called rituals of initiation have as their goal a "higher state of being." Additionally, his essay draws an unnecessary (model driven) bifurcation between initiation and purification. For example, as we

¹²⁴ Cf. Mark 11:27–33//Matt 21:23–27//Luke 20:1–8. Note the connection between immersion and believing John's message (i.e., that one must repent and immerse in preparation for God's coming).

¹²⁵ According to *The Critical Edition of Q*, it is uncertain whether Q 7:29–30 should be included. See, James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q: A Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 138–39. Matthew 21:31–32 is parallel with Luke here, but does not share verbal similarity and does not mention immersion. Murphy notes, "Matthew emphasizes John's message of repentance and righteousness, while Luke emphasizes the baptism," which suggests to me that Luke uses John's immersion metonymically here and in Acts (*John*, 79).

¹²⁶ οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ νομικοὶ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ ἠθέτησαν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς μὴ βαπτισθέντες ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

¹²⁷ The *Jesus Seminar* finds it probable (voting pink) that John's immersion was understood as "an initiation into a Jewish sectarian movement" (Tatum, *John*, 125). Their arguments are reflective of Webb's (a fellow of the *Jesus Seminar*), which is discussed further below.

¹²⁸ Petersen, "Rituals," 31, emphasis mine. His comments on p. 27 are evidence that I am not reading into his phrase, "higher state of being."

have seen with the "mysteries," ritual purification was employed as part of an initiation *process*.¹²⁹ While one could refer to ablutions in this context as an "initiation rite," this is only accurate if one does *not* equate the water rite with initiation (i.e., the purpose of the washing for ritual purification remains unchanged and it is not solely responsible for initiation). Since recent research has largely abandoned the subjective dimension of "initiation,"¹³⁰ it is more common to discuss its *social* function. Hence, Luther H. Martin explains, "initiation refers to ordinary procedures of recruiting and admitting new members to some social group."¹³¹ C. J. Bleeker's comment that "initiation has both a religious and an anthropological meaning" confirms this since both of these are social categories.¹³²

¹²⁹ In fact, Arnold van Gennep subdivides "rites of passage" into three types: separation, incorporation, and transition. Rites of "initiation" are a type of "transition" rite according to van Gennep. NT scholars incorrectly conflate the three types of "rites of passage" to explain baptism as "initiation," when these are actually *distinct rituals* that "have their individual purposes," and which may be juxtaposed and combined with one another in a complex ceremony. See, Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 10–12; cf. Eliade, *Initiation*, 12. Meeks's interpretation of "baptism" in the Pauline letters is representative of this (incorrect) conflation (*First Urban Christians*, 156, fig. 1, 157). My issue with Meeks's interpretation is not his "V" shaped interpretation, but that all of the various elements are placed solely upon "baptism," when it is only one of multiple rites involved in "initiation."

¹³⁰ Cf. Veikko Anttonen, "Rethinking 'Religious' Cognition: The Eliadean Notion of the Sacred in the Light of the Legacy of Uno Harva," *Temenos* 43 (2007): 53–72. On the other hand, Eliade *does* recognize the role of socialization in the process of initiation, and he is careful to distinguish between the ancient vs. modern understanding of the world. That is, his recognition of the subjective experience and effects of initiation rituals is indicative of his attempt to respect the emic worldview of our sources (*Initiation*, 11–21). Moreover, one will look in vain for entries on "initiation" or "initiation rites" in recent works on ritual, such as Olson, *Religious Studies*; Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg, *Theorizing Rituals: Issues*; or Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Discussion is typically found under "rites of passage."

¹³¹ Luther H. Martin, "Initiation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual*, ed. Risto Uro et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 334–52, 334. This shift is also discerned when Olson says with regard to the use of dance as an "initiation rite" that it "possesses the ability to transform a person from an inferior social status to a higher one" ("Dance," in *Religious Studies*, 64–65); cf. Ronald L. Grimes, "Performance," in *Theorizing Rituals: Classical Topics, Theoretical Approaches, Analytical Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, SHR 114-I (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 379–94, 388.

¹³² C. J. Bleeker, "Some Introductory Remarks on the Significance of Initiation," in *Initiation: Contributions to the Theme of the Study-Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions Held at Strasburg, September 17th to 22nd 1964*, ed. C. J. Bleeker, SHR 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 15–20, 19.

As it pertains to John, Webb focuses on the social dimension in defining "initiation rite" as "an external action which serves to change the status of a non-member to that of a member."¹³³ He rightly disputes the *restriction* of John's immersion to an individualistic extent¹³⁴ and argues that John's immersion delineates two groups of people. However, of the six categories that Bleeker proffers, "initiation into religious truth" best describes the distinction that John's immersion created, rather than initiation into "certain societies," "a closed society," or a "cult." In other words, Webb imposes "membership" on John's immersion when it is not present in our sources.¹³⁵ In fact, according to Q 3:7–9,¹³⁶ it is *the bearing of the fruit of repentance* that distinguishes between the wheat and the chaff, and according to Q 3:16–17,¹³⁷ ὁ ἰοῦδῶν ὁ ἀνὴρ is the one who will distinguish between those who otherwise form the *same group* (i.e., Jews). Thus, Webb conflates "John's baptizing *ministry*" with "John's repentance-*baptism*."¹³⁸

Moreover, apart from John having a group of adherents (ἰάεçðάβ), the requirements of whom are never stated, he never implemented any group structures or provided a basis for subsequent meetings to those who accepted his message;¹³⁹ they simply returned home to daily life.¹⁴⁰ And Webb's claim that Second Temple sectarian movements "distinguished themselves in some way from ethnic Israel as a whole" while remaining "functioning members of society" is curious since no Second Temple group abandoned their ethnic

¹³³ Webb, *John*, 197, 202; Bleeker, "Introductory Remarks," 18–19. Meeks argues similarly with respect to "Christian baptism" when he claims, "By making the cleansing rite alone bear the whole function of initiation, and by making initiation the decisive point of entry into an exclusive community, the Christian groups created something new. For them the bath becomes a permanent threshold between the 'clean' group and the 'dirty' world, between those who have been initiated and everyone who has not" (*First Urban Christians*, 153, emphasis mine).

¹³⁴ Scholars emphasizing the individual include Becker, *Johannes*, 39–40; Ernst, *Johannes*, 340; Lupieri, "John," *ANRW* 33.1:461.

¹³⁵ Ernst rightly states, "Jünger des Johannes ist jeder, der auf die Predigt des Täufers hörte und die Taufe empfing" (*Johannes*, 352).

¹³⁶ Matt 3:7–10//Luke 3:7–9.

¹³⁷ Matt 3:11–12//Luke 3:16–17//Mark 1:8a, 7b, 8b.

¹³⁸ Webb, *John*, 197.

¹³⁹ So, Ernst, *Johannes*, 351.

¹⁴⁰ Webb misses this point in his critique of Scobie (*John*, 201, n. 114). This is at least one factor that contributes toward identifying "optional groupings" (cf. Malina, *New Testament Word*, 45; K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, "Faction," "Group," in *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 182).

identity.¹⁴¹ Additionally, Webb places disproportionate weight on the meaning of ὁδὶβçìé and the type of dative indicated by ἀάδδóéóìç in Josephus,¹⁴² and he does not appear to allow for the possibility that one can be a member of a "social group" that lacks a means of "initiation" (i.e., not all groups have initiation rites).¹⁴³ Thus, even if John's followers may be described as a social group, it does not follow that his immersion is an initiation rite.¹⁴⁴ Rather, in keeping with his prophetic call, he was preparing members of the already existing "natural grouping" for God's coming.¹⁴⁵ He neither asked his audience to leave a social-group (e.g., "Judaism," the synagogue, the temple, etc) nor to form a new one (e.g., proto-Christianity, "Baptist" Judaism, etc). Hence, Markus Öhler is correct to conclude that "die Johannestaufe hat aber nach Ausweis der Quellen keine Bedeutung für die Konstituierung einer spezifischen Gruppe."¹⁴⁶

Ernst *may* be correct that after John's death his immersion took on an initiatory role,¹⁴⁷ but this would only underscore that his devotees added the initiatory function *later* and it would not necessarily change the fundamental reason for the immersion (i.e., ritual purification), unless we assume something akin to 1 Cor 1:13—ἀìò òò õííá 'IùŪííõ éääδδβóèçôâ; While I find the argument that John's immersion had an initiatory function unconvincing, even if it

¹⁴¹ Webb, *John*, 199. It is possible that he does not mean "from ethnic Israel," but "within ethnic Israel," in which case I would agree with the statement.

¹⁴² Interpreting it as dative of means is but one of several possibilities. Moreover, συνίμυ is not a technical term indicating "initiation." Contrary to Webb, Josephus *can* be interpreted as evidence of "group baptism" (*John*, 199).

¹⁴³ While the *Jesus Seminar* emphasizes that immersion was used as an initiation rite "among sectarian groups in first century Judaism," they do not identify any (Tatum, *John*, 125–26). Based on Webb's book on John, we may infer that only Qumran is in view since he denies that "proselyte baptism" is pre-70 and none of the other washing examples are classified as initiation. If so, this is hardly representative of *groups*. Moreover, our findings in chapter five argue against this interpretation of immersion at Qumran. Even if this is incorrect, that some groups *may* have used immersion as an initiation rite does not mean that John did. For example, take Bannus and Josephus, did they form a "social group" or sectarian "movement" with immersion as an initiation rite? One cannot dismiss the fact that they are but two individuals, for definitions of "social groups" include phrases like "two or more people."

¹⁴⁴ So, Uro, *Ritual*, 84. I must stress that whether we should understand John's immersion as an "initiation rite" *does not depend on* it being a "once-for-all" rite, which Uro implies and NT scholars assume.

¹⁴⁵ "Natural groupings" according to Malina "depend on circumstances over which the individual has no control, for example, birth" (*New Testament World*, 44–45).

¹⁴⁶ Markus Öhler, "Neues Testament," in *Taufe*, ed. Markus Öhler, TdT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 39–81, 42; cf. Ernst, *Johannes*, 337, 340, 349–52.

¹⁴⁷ Ernst, *Johannes*, 352–56, though his discussion is speculative. Acts 19 *infers* that Paul discovered John's μαθηταί in Ephesus, but the account never identifies them explicitly as *John's*; cf. Mark 2:18//Matt 9:14//Luke 5:33.

immersion and since we are apt to read modern practice into our sources, it is warranted to explore other potential explanations for the origin of his title and to propose other, legitimate interpretations of the passive voice.¹⁵⁸

One approach is to only accept Josephus's account and dismiss the NT evidence.¹⁵⁹ However, this does not adequately explain why the Gospel authors must perform redactio-narrative maneuvers to provide "solutions" to an unnecessarily invented problem.¹⁶⁰ Another approach is to assume the opposite. For example, Ithamar Gruenwald asks "was John present and *then removed* from the story for theological reasons, or was he absent and *then introduced* into the scene for similar reasons?"¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, his fascinating question is weakly argued and he never answers how or why John would have been introduced.¹⁶² These two approaches arrive at their peculiar view of John by disregarding large portions of evidence.

Since both Josephus and the NT writings refer to John with a title, what does it convey? We mentioned examples of similar titles above,¹⁶³ and an analogous title occurs in, *Baptai*, a play of Eupolis, where *male* worshippers of Cotys (dressed as women), are called *ái Æððóáé*.¹⁶⁴ That is, their title refers to

¹⁵⁸ Gruenwald's question—"What is there in the "passive voice"? Does it speak for the presence of another person, whoever he might be, who administered the act of baptism, or does it reflect uncertainty regarding the presence of such a person?"—is unsatisfactory ("Baptism," 309, emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁹ So, Chilton, "Yohanan," 197–212; Enslin, "Once Again," 557; Gruenwald, "Baptism," 318–19. Going in the other direction, Scobie dismisses the evidence of Josephus (*John*, 111).

¹⁶⁰ Enslin proposes that the Gospel authors incorporated John in order to "rid themselves of an embarrassing rival" and "to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi and thus silence Jewish criticism that the Christian claim that the 'great and terrible day of the Lord' was at hand was impossible since the divinely appointed precursor had not appeared" ("Once Again," 557–58).

¹⁶¹ Gruenwald, "Baptism," 301, emphasis mine.

¹⁶² In fact, the majority of his article assumes the typical view that John was "written out" of the scene. However, the *Jesus Seminar* provides an explanation that could support Gruenwald's case: the baptism of Jesus by John could have been created to elevate Jesus's status in light of John's popularity such that Jesus would obtain "legitimacy" (Tatum, *John*, 149). From a linguistic perspective, the passive voice indicates "demotion or deletion of the subject" of an equivalent active phrase, but it is not clear what it is intended to communicate. See, Bernard Comrie, "In Defense of Spontaneous Demotion: The Impersonal Passive," in *Grammatical Relations*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerrold M. Sadock, in vol. 8 of *Syntax and Semantics* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 47–58.

¹⁶³ See chapter four, "Agents of Ritual Purity in Greco-Roman Sources," p. 153.

¹⁶⁴ LSJ, s.v. "βάπττης"; Ginouvès, *Balaneutikè*, 398. Robert Parker notes that scholars *may* have mistakenly associated immersion in water with the title, but in support of this, he notes the prohibitions against women purifying themselves in the Thesmophoreion (306, n. 125, 307, n. 126); for alternative explanations that do not depend on immersion, see Ian C. Storey,

- 1) "the energy for the action, and acts deliberately"—Jo hit the baseball.
- 2) merely the "will" and not the energy—Jo rallied her team to victory.
- 3) "the energy, but not the will"—Jo accidentally knocked the bats over.

The first option best describes the traditional way of thinking about John's role wherein the person is functionally equivalent to an utensil that requires ritual purification. In light of John's Second Temple milieu, I argue that option two offers a more accurate description of John's role vis-à-vis his audience for a few reasons. First, it coheres well with the causative force of ἀάδδβæù by recognizing the will of those persons involved in the verbal action (as opposed to inanimate objects). Second, this causative dimension aligns with both Josephus's account that John "*commanded* virtue" and "*to come together* in immersion," and also the NT writings in which John appeared "*announcing* an immersion of repentance."¹⁷² Third, as Ferguson notes, "Codex D and several manuscripts of the Old Latin read at Luke 3:7 that the people were baptized '*before*' John" rather than *by* him.¹⁷³ Depending on how one interprets Luke 3:21, this may also be implied by the genitive absolute that follows the εἰ δὲ infinitive phrase. Fourth, the middle voice is used in Acts 22:16 with reference to Paul's immersion. Fifth, Easton notes that other variants exist in which the middle voice is used.¹⁷⁴ Also, in other places, the text can read as either a middle or a passive.¹⁷⁵

Approaching the grammar in this semantically nuanced way opens up another equally plausible option for the origin of John's title—it is not because he personally immersed anyone, but rather, his public ministry was characterized by *urging* people to ritually purify. Some will object that this does not

¹⁷² Mark 1:4//Luke 3:9, κηρύσσω βάπτισμα μετανοίας. While the specific phrasing (i.e., κηρύσσω) is only attested in the NT, Josephus conveys the same point (*pace* Ernst, *Johannes*, 330). It is true that Josephus is silent regarding the eschatological dimension of John's ministry, but ethics and eschatology are not mutually exclusive categories and one would expect ethical uprightness in view of the end. Thus, it is correct to not put words in Josephus's mouth (i.e., that he views John's work is eschatological), but it is incorrect to assume things from that silence, such as that Josephus performs "de-eschatologizes" John (*pace* Ernst, *Johannes*, 336).

¹⁷³ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 88, n. 29, emphasis mine. Bezae (D) reads here: ΕΛΕΓΕΝ ΔΕ ΤΟΙΣ ΕΚΠΟΡΕΥΟΜΕΝΟΙΣ ΟΧΛΟΙΣ ΒΑΠΤΙΣΘΗΝΑΙ ΕΝΩΠΙΟΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ. Interestingly, Matt 3:7 presents it as people presenting themselves before John: ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ.

¹⁷⁴ Easton, "Self-Baptism," 514. These include: Luke 3:12 (minuscule 604, now 700) and Luke 12:50 (minuscule 954 and 1). I have not been able to personally verify these readings. Although scholars paleographically date minuscule 700 to the 11th century, it is considered a second class, consistently cited witness.

¹⁷⁵ E.g., John 3:23; Acts 8:12; 8:16; 18:8; 1 Cor 15:29.

fully explain the role of John in the process as indicated by ὁδὸ Ἰουῦνιῶ.¹⁷⁶ However, the example Cruse provides is instructive—"The sergeant-major marched the recruits round the parade ground." In the passive: "The troops were marched round the parade ground by the sergeant major." In this example, an intransitive verb, march, is used transitively. Similarly, ἀάδὸβæù may be used intransitively or transitively depending on the context.¹⁷⁷ The authority that the sergeant holds over his troops, such as disciplining those who do not follow orders, is equivalent to John's prophetic authority¹⁷⁸ over his audience in his rhetorical threat of them being liable to God's judgment if they reject his message.¹⁷⁹ While understanding ὁδὸ + gen. in this manner is not common, it is a grammatically valid interpretation.¹⁸⁰ Here then, the sergeant-major is INSTIGATOR in providing the "will" to march, whereas the troops perform the verbal action of marching. If John is functioning as INSTIGATOR, then it is possible to understand the passive construction as a means to emphasize his role while also interpreting the verbal action of immersion as intransitively performed by the audience.¹⁸¹ Whether stated in the active or passive, the sergeant did not literally march the troops even when stated as such in the active. By consequence, this demonstrates that one may say that John immersed the people without his personal involvement in performing the act. Only knowledge of the socio-historical context provides the data to determine whether such an explanation is legitimate, and in this case, I argue it is more accurate than later tradition or contemporary practice.¹⁸²

This argument is supported by Luke 11:38 where the passive, ἐάάδὸβὸεç,¹⁸³ is used in reference to Jesus not immersing prior to eating with a Pharisee. Since this is in reference to ritual purification, since the middle voice is used in Mark 7:4 in a similar context, and since we know that self-immersion was the norm, how may we resolve the use of the passive here? One solution

¹⁷⁶ Easton also notes that several variants omit the agent (ὅπό + gen): Luke 3:7; Acts 10:47; 16:15, 33 ("Self-Baptism," 516).

¹⁷⁷ I.e., it is intransitive when an individual is self-immersing and transitive when an individual is immersing an object (e.g., a cooking utensil).

¹⁷⁸ Or it is equivalent to his *ritual expert* authority if one rejects his prophetic role as does Chilton.

¹⁷⁹ NB: John warns that their liability rests *not* in whether they immersed, but whether they bear the fruit of repentance.

¹⁸⁰ So, Taylor, *Immerser*, 51. Cf. LSJ, s.v. "ὅπό"; Homer, *Od.* 19.114—ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὅπ' αὐτοῦ, "and the people prosper under him" (Murray, LCL).

¹⁸¹ In at least this respect, John *is* like the other prophetic figures who came after him.

¹⁸² Keener agrees, saying, "'Baptizing' in this period involved mainly supervision while the people coming for purification immersed themselves; the disciples could, like John, supervise mass baptisms without individual attention (Luke 3:3, 7, 12, 16, 21)" (*Acts*, 1:995).

¹⁸³ However, Ƴ45 and 700 read εβαπτισατο.

is to assume that a house servant may have been responsible for leading Jesus to one of the home's ritual baths, and at his or her bidding Jesus declined to go ("he was not immersed"). Had Jesus complied and someone asked the servant whether he or she immersed Jesus, the response would be "yes, I immersed Jesus" even though Jesus would have self-immersed. A second option is to exclude the hypothetical servant and assume that the agent and patient of the passive were the same (i.e., "Jesus had himself immersed" or more simply, "he was immersed"). In fact, English speakers also sometimes use a passive when the agent is also the unstated patient, e.g., "His hair was not even brushed!" or "He was not even bathed!" This passive construction implies that the unstated agent is also the person responsible for the action,¹⁸⁴ unless contextual factors indicate otherwise (e.g., the individual was paralyzed). Similarly, Easton proposes that

Even Attic Greek had long since ceased to insist on the necessary use of the middle voice to express reflexive acts, and the insistence was still feebler in the *Koiné*, so that e.g., ἀάδδóóéâßð might be used to denote the fact of baptism without reflection as to its agent. So Merx: "The passive ἀάδδóóéêñιάέ can be given the following logical resolution. לַטְבִּיל means to bring or induce to baptism, and that is the sense of ἀάδδóβæù, while לַטְבִּיל is to immerse one's self, and that is the sense of the middle ἀάδδóβæáóéáé. From the Hiphil לַטְבִּיל there can be derived the passive Hophal לַטְבִּיל, with the meaning to be brought or induced to baptism, and that would be ἀάδδóóéêñιάέ."¹⁸⁵

Lest one think that this explanation is far fetched, this is exactly how later Jewish literature refers to the immersion of a convert.¹⁸⁶

A similar interchange between the passive and middle voice occurs in Acts 9:18 and 22:16 respectively. As Porter notes, the use of the middle voice in Acts 22:16 does not grammaticalize an explicit agent responsible for immersing Paul (whether Paul himself, Ananias, or someone else), Paul is simply

¹⁸⁴ In English, a "Causer-Affected" verbal construction is known as "ergativity." That is, where the verbal action represents a "goal," the subject of a passive construction is a participant in the verbal action and affected by it. An implied or stated agent is, thus, more accurately described as a "causer." See, Graham Lock, *Functional English Grammar: An Introduction for Second Language Teachers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87–92; Manuel Arce-Arenales, Melissa Axelrod, and Barbara A. Fox, "Active Voice and Middle Diathesis," in *Voice: Form and Function*, ed. Barbara A. Fox and Paul J. Hopper, *Typological Studies in Language* 27 (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), 1–21. Porter confirmed in personal communication (21 Dec 2018) that he views the Greek middle voice as ergative. Based on Lock's discussion, ergativity may apply to all three voices.

¹⁸⁵ Easton, "Self-Baptism," 516.

¹⁸⁶ Review the discussions above on p. ? in chapter two and "Agents of Ritual Purity in Rabbinic Literature," in chapter six.

told to "be involved in the baptismal process."¹⁸⁷ Based on the discussion in Cruse and the example I provided above, although the passive voice grammaticalizes a patient and implies an agent, these may be one and the same depending on the context.

If John did personally immerse people, this would, indeed, differ from the ritual purity practices of John's day, but even so his agency would still not disqualify it as an act of ritual purification. It is frequently asserted that there is no evidence in Jewish literature for an agent in ritual purification and this is simply incorrect as chapter four demonstrates.¹⁸⁸ Why John urged his audience to immerse and the nature of his immersion will be further elaborated below. Nevertheless, I find the arguments (or sometimes just the assumption) of the few interpreters who insist that John's audience performed self-immersion to be convincing.¹⁸⁹

3. ἀὐθόεοῖα ἰαδαίῖβαὸ ἀὶὸ ἄῶῶεί ἰἰἰῶέοῖ.¹⁹⁰ This phrase is frequently cited as evidence that John's immersion is fundamentally different from ritual purification. Adolf Büchler articulates the consensus view when he says, "In [John the immerser]'s procedure there follows after that the washing of the body with a view to obtaining from God the pardon of sins. This presupposes the practice of immersion, *not as cleansing from a levitical defilement, but from social and religious sins*, in the circle of Jews to which John belonged."¹⁹¹ Similarly, Ferguson states that "the phrase 'baptism of repentance' is used only of John's baptism, thus preserving a distinctive terminology for John's baptism."¹⁹² While this is accurate concerning the *particular phrasing*, I argue that numerous sources examined below present the same concept without using the specific phrase "immersion of repentance." Moreover, Ferguson clarifies that "The association of baths with forgiveness of sins was made with

¹⁸⁷ Porter is concerned to correct the view that the middle should automatically be understood reflexively in English translation. Stanley E. Porter, "Did Paul Baptize Himself," in *Dimensions of Baptism: Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, JSNTSup 234 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 91–109, 109; Stanley E. Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), §11.3.3.

¹⁸⁸ See "Agents of Ritual Purity in Leviticus 8 and Numbers 8 and 19," and "Agents of Ritual Purity in Rabbinic Literature."

¹⁸⁹ See, e.g., Rudolph, *Antike Baptisten*, 10; Taylor, *Immerser*, 49–58; Leipoldt, *Urchristliche Taufe*, 26; Keener, *Acts*, 1:995.

¹⁹⁰ Mark 1:4//Luke 3:3; Matt 3:1–2, 5–6; Acts 13:24; 19:4; cf. Gos. Naz. (Jerome, *Pelag.* 3.2); Gos. Eb. (Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30.13.6).

¹⁹¹ Adolf Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 368, emphasis mine.

¹⁹² Ferguson, *Baptism*, 85; cf. Scobie, *John*, 95, 111.

certainty only by those groups that were later than John."¹⁹³ And Guyénot is correct in noting, "Le repentir, la rémission des péchés et le baptême sont peut-être indissociables, *mais ils ne sont pas identiques*: ce n'est certainement pas le baptême en lui-même qui produit le repentir ou la rémission des péchés."¹⁹⁴ In interpreting the meaning of this phrase in light of other ancient evidence, I follow Meier's observation that "Very different types of Jews—from Philo, the Therapeutae, and the Essenes to the Pharisees and the Sadducees—might disagree on *what* rituals to observe and *how* to observe them. *But they all took for granted that external ritual, accompanied by the proper inner dispositions, was an integral part of religious life.*"¹⁹⁵ As such, I raise the question, "Was John's ἀὐδοεσία ἰαδαίβαο unique?"

First, we must consider the grammatical options for ἀὐδοεσία ἰαδαίβαο. In context, ἀὐδοεσία is the object of ἐχρήσθη, namely, what was proclaimed, and it is a cognate of ἀάδοβαο.¹⁹⁶ The -ία ending emphasizes result and it is adnominally modified by the genitive, ἰαδαίβαο. Stanley E. Porter notes that the interpretation of cases depends on three things, which is illustrated in *Figure 18: Interpretation of Cases (Porter)* at right):

Fig. 18: Interpretation of Cases

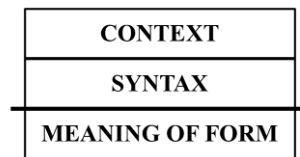


Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

Figure 18: Interpretation of cases

- 1) the meaning of the genitive case in general,
- 2) the syntactical relationship in which the form is used, and
- 3) the context.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Ferguson, *Baptism*, 86. In fact, the Didache makes no mention of forgiveness of sins in connection with immersion. Cf. the references on p. ? , n. 66 above.

¹⁹⁴ Guyénot, *Jésus*, 70, emphasis mine; cf. Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 83–84.

¹⁹⁵ Meier, *Mentor*, 110, emphasis mine; cf. Keener, *John*, 1:442.

¹⁹⁶ By contrast, Matthew 3:1–2 has John proclaiming *repentance*.

¹⁹⁷ Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1999), 82, fig. 2.

Regarding (1), according to many grammarians, the genitive case serves to restrict or limit the meaning of the head noun in some way. How exactly is debated.¹⁹⁸

Concerning (2), we have an adnominal construction and regardless of the precise way that the genitive may modify the head noun, it is *dependent on* the head noun.¹⁹⁹ This is one reason that taking a symbolic view of John's immersion in which the act of immersing in water is exchanged for something else (e.g., initiation), or merely treated as a vehicle for something else (e.g., 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."²⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this would require treating ἰαδῶν ἰαδῶν as an epexegetical genitive—"immersion, that is, repentance." Immersion is distinct from repentance and this interpretation is not possible. As Rodney J. Decker observes (citing BDAG), "In this context, the expression ἐκ τῆς ἰαδῶν ἰαδῶν means to preach that baptism is a necessity."²⁰¹ What this means is the genitive, ἰαδῶν ἰαδῶν, cannot transform ἰαδῶν ἰαδῶν into a different class or type of immersion in comparison to others, the genitive only ascribes an attribute to the head

¹⁹⁸ 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.

¹⁹⁹ As Porter notes, "the syntax pushes for an understanding in which the governing noun, βάπτισμα, controls the relationship with the dependent genitive, μετανοίας. . . . 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)." See, 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.

²⁰⁰ Dunn, *Baptism*, 15. The same objection may be raised about Webb's "repentance-baptism" or "baptismally-expressed repentance" (*John*, 191). Ernst go so far as to claim that "Die Taufe erhält ihre Sinngebung nicht aus dem Ritual als solchem, sondern nur in Verbindung mit der Verkündigung" (*Johannes*, 340).

²⁰¹ Rodney J. Decker, *Mark 1-8: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 6.

noun, immersion.²⁰² The phrase ἀϋδόμεοία ἰαοάιῖβαò simply indicates that immersion is related to repentance, it does not specify how.

Unfortunately, grammarians classify the genitive case in numerous ways.²⁰³ I follow Porter's ten categories and note that only two are feasible for our case: a genitive of "quality, definition or description" (i.e., "an immersion characterized by repentance") or a genitive of "possession, ownership, origin, or source" (i.e., "an immersion originating from repentance").²⁰⁴ Thus, determining the best way that immersion is related to repentance ultimately depends on the literary and socio-historical context. Mark 1:5//Matt 3:5 explains that (1) people went to John, (2) they immersed, and (3) they confessed their sins as they did so as (the present participle indicates contemporaneous action).²⁰⁵ Luke 3:7–9 explains that part of John's proclamation included the requirement of bearing 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 while confessing their sins.²⁰⁶ Thus, repentance came first and then people immersed as they confessed their sin. The evidence of Josephus follows this same pattern: (1) people heard John preach, (2) he enjoined them to repent,²⁰⁷ (3) and then they immersed. While ἀϋδόμεοία ἰαοάιῖβαò is ambiguous syntactically, consideration of the context suggests that ἰαοάιῖβαò be understood as a genitive of source (i.e., immersion originated from, followed, or was motivated by repentance).²⁰⁸ In other words, people heard John preach, they repented, and then they ritually purified for confession (i.e., prayer) in preparation for God's coming. As such, John's immersion may be

²⁰² Cf. Smyth, *Greek*, 313; 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.

²⁰³ "The number of classificatory schemes of the genitive are almost as many as the various classifications themselves" (Porter, *Idioms*, 92).

²⁰⁴ Porter, *Idioms*, 92–97.

²⁰⁵ Wallace, *Grammar*, 614, 625.

²⁰⁶ As Levine and Witherington note, "A person baptized by John would be comparable to a person who responded to an altar call or public invitation to become a follower of Jesus" (*Gospel of Luke*, 83).

²⁰⁷ This is implied by his clarification that the washing pertained only to the body and that the soul had been previously cleansed by right behavior (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.5.2 §117). Cf. Philo, *Deus* 1.7—"For we, studying to conduct ourselves with gratitude to him, and to show him all honours, should purify ourselves from sin, washing off all things that can stain our life in words, or appearance, or actions."

²⁰⁸ So, Taylor, *Immerser*, 97.

understood as ritual purification in both Josephus and the NT even though they present things differently.

Having identified the significance of John's "immersion of repentance," we now consider to what extent it corresponds with the ritual logic of the ancient Mediterranean world. I argue that the following texts articulate what Josephus means by "the correct use of immersion"²⁰⁹ and that John's is by no means unique. The relevant texts that correspond to the comments below are provided in chapters five²¹⁰ and six.²¹¹

IQS V, 13–14 (100–50 BCE). This text is central to the debate over whether the Qumran sectarians conflated ritual and moral impurity. I argued that such a view regularly and wrongly assumes that ritual purification is "mechanical," something similar to hygienic washing (i.e., whether my heart is "right" is irrelevant, the mere act of washing makes me hygienically clean). On an argument from greater to lesser, the Qumran sectarians reasoned, if one is morally impure (a greater impurity) with no intention to resolve it, then one should not expect to find purification from a lesser impurity (i.e., ritual) simply because one performs a ritual act.

IQS III, 4–6 (100–50 BCE). This text reiterates the same point made in column five but with an expanded list of ineffective purifications. The condition that must be satisfied is stated in the last line of the quote: so long as one "rejects the judgments of God," which in context refers to living by the Torah as interpreted by the Qumran sectarians, one cannot expect to find moral purification through acts of atonement, be ritually purified from corpse impurity, be consecrated for festivals, such as Passover, etc. It is critical to note that the Qumran sectarians did not depend on *ritual washing* for moral purity, rather they depended upon God's mercy and grace. Nevertheless, ritual washing was the preliminary requirement before seeking God in prayer and asking for forgiveness (i.e., the bath was *not the basis for forgiveness*). I argue that John's immersion is analogous.

Aramaic Levi Document 2.1–4//4Q213a 1, 6–10 (75–50 BCE).²¹² The unfolding of events in this text resemble very closely that of Sib. Or. 4.162–70 with the minor difference that repentance is mentioned second. As it is worded, the verbal actions occur as undifferentiated wholes (aorist), suggesting that the chronology of verbal actions occurs serially. However, the use of $\delta\ddot{u}\delta\acute{a}$ at ALD 2.1, 3, followed by $\acute{e}\acute{a}\beta$ + verbal actions in ALD 2.1–2 and 2.3–4, suggests that

²⁰⁹ See the discussion in Webb, *John*, 190–94.

²¹⁰ See the subheading, "The Conflation of Ritual and Moral among the $\tau\pi\tau$?" esp. pp. ? – ?.

²¹¹ See the subheading, "80 CE—Sibylline Oracles 4.162–70 (c. 80 CE)—Possible but Unlikely."

²¹² See also, the discussion related to 4Q512 and 4Q274 on p. ?, n. 187, in chapter five.

these should be understood as occurring in the same approximate time frame or even together. The first set of verbal actions in ALD 2.1–2 focuses *generally* on the ritual and moral preparations for prayer, while the second set in ALD 2.3–4 is *particularly* concerned with the posture of prayer, leaving ambiguous, but implying that the person is still standing in water during prayer. This is very similar to Mark 1:5//Matt 3:5 in that the author connects repentance *prior* to immersion with the confession of sin occurring concomitantly with immersion. As in Sib. Or. 4.162–70, the purpose of immersion here is for ritual purification that is associated with repentance prior to engaging in prayer. This is analogous to those in John's audience who were convicted by his message and then chose to repent, immerse, confess sin, and pray for forgiveness of sins in view of God's coming.

Philo, Deus 1.8–9 (c. 50 CE). Here, Philo makes an argument from lesser to greater. On one level is the physical domain, which concerns visible things like the body and temples. In order for a person to enter sacred space appropriately, Philo explains that one must be ritually clean. On the other level is the spiritual domain, which concerns invisible things like the soul and deities. He argues that it is absurd for a person to think that he or she can become ritually clean through washing if that person is also morally stained and has no intent to repent. Once again, the logic of Philo is parallel with that of IQS, the Sarapis Oracle, and Sib. Or. 4. Repentance is necessary and accompanies ritual purification in Philo's view, yet like these other texts, they are also distinct from one another.

Sibylline Oracles 4.162–70 (c. 80 CE). See the comments in chapter six. This text follows quite closely to the order of things argued above regarding John's immersion.

Sarapis Oracle (1st/2nd cent. CE?). The date of this oracle is uncertain, with one source postulating that it comes from the second century CE.²¹³ In my translation I include "merely" because we know that water was extensively used in the worship of Sarapis (i.e., it would be odd for the oracle to deny the need for ritual purification even if moral purity is more highly valued).²¹⁴ Rather, we find the same logic here that we saw in IQS, Philo, and Sib. Or. 4. The effectiveness of ritual purity is dependent upon moral uprightness which is implied by the contrast with the "thoughtless man."

Justin, Dial. 13 (c. 160 CE). The contextual reference to "a bath" and "everlasting covenant" refers to Isaiah 55. While it appears that Justin

²¹³ Alvar, *Romanising*, 180, n. 105.

²¹⁴ E.g., Wild, *Water*. In support of my translation to use "merely," which points to "[+addition/accumulation]" by the use of *ἄλλᾶ*, see, Shawn Craigmiles, "The Pragmatic Constraints of *ἄλλᾶ* in the Synoptic Gospels" (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), esp. 297–304.

Furthermore, the question of the one-time nature of immersion in Jesus's name is itself an assumption that depends on a variety of factors that I cannot address here.

The most promising line of argument for a one-time interpretation is the eschatological context. The urgency with which people are called to repent and prepare provides the sense that *now* is the time to act, yet, there is a certain relativity to this and nothing would prevent repeated immersions in this period of "now." Moreover, it is also important to recall that the eschatological *context* does not make the *immersion* eschatological.²²³ On the contrary, it is an immersion performed for ritual purification, and rather than something like the requirement to enter holy space or to prepare food in a clean condition serving to require the immersion, the *context* does (i.e., God is coming to judge his people). In other words, it is neither the messiah nor the endtimes that require immersion, rather it is human-divine interaction. In Taylor's words: "John's immersion itself seems to be subsumed under his primary objective of preparing the newly righteous people for the Lord. The people who walked the way of the Lord had to be clean, as Isa. 35:8 expressly states, 'A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for them who walk the way.'"²²⁴

In the final analysis, whether John's immersion should be considered one-time cannot be answered with certainty and this is intimately tied to the extent to which interpreters go in *classifying* John's immersion as something separate from "normal" immersions practiced by Second Temple Jews. Yet, it is not our sources that distinguish between "normal" and "special" immersions, *it is our act of classification* animated by the referential void that exists (at least for Western interpreters) and the linguistic void that we introduce through transliteration.²²⁵ It is likely that John's audience would have viewed John, his preaching, and the context of his ministry as "special," but very unlikely that anyone would have viewed his immersion that way. Rather, our sources, the archaeological evidence, and the socio-historical context indicate that Second Temple Jews would have readily drawn from the pervasive practice of ritual purity to interpret John's immersion.

Thus, I conclude that the *context* in which John's immersion was undertaken *may* have been "one-time" (as defined by the timespan of his ministry), but there is no clear reason to suggest that the *immersion*, which was performed for ritual purification, could not or would not have been repeated if John or his audience thought it was appropriate. Moreover, there is no clear emic reason to classify John's immersion with his context *against* immersions

²²³ Pace Ernst, *Johannes*, 332–33.

²²⁴ Taylor, *Immerser*, 93.

²²⁵ See the discussion "The Problem of Transliteration as Translation," in chapter three.

performed in other contexts of ritual purification. That is, would a Second Temple Jew designate a difference between "temple-entry-immersion" and "food-preparation-immersion"? The degree to which interpreters link the *context* with the *immersion* will determine the extent to which they agree or disagree with this conclusion.²²⁶

5. John's Immersion of Jesus. Although the question of Jesus's immersion by John is irrelevant to explaining the *origin* of John's immersion, it potentially impinges on its *nature*. Most scholars assume that it presented an embarrassment to followers of Jesus that the Gospel writers attempted to "deal with" in their own way.²²⁷ Although a few interpreters doubt its historicity,²²⁸ most consider it to be one of the most certain "facts" of Jesus's life despite its singular attestation in Mark.²²⁹ While the *later* literary evidence indicates that the Jesus movement struggled to explain Jesus's immersion, it does not follow that their specific reasons or understandings represent John's context.²³⁰

I argue that understanding John's immersion as an act of ritual purification evaporates the supposed "embarrassment" of Jesus's immersion since as a human being he would have been subject to ritual impurity, which was distinct from moral impurity.²³¹ In fact, the same pattern observed in the several texts discussed above is discernible in the way Luke 3:21 describes the

²²⁶ This same problem attends the "first" immersion for a new Qumran sectarian and the "proselyte" who converts to Judaism.

²²⁷ I do not suggest that this assumption is ill founded, only that this may not be the only way to interpret evidence. For example, it is odd that the Gospel writers would introduce the problem at all if this were such an embarrassment.

²²⁸ E.g., Enslin thinks John and Jesus never met, and Chilton thinks John was dead by 21 CE (Enslin, "Once Again," 560, 564; Chilton, "John the Purifier: His Immersion," 267). Bergren questions the historicity of Jesus's baptism by John and proposes that Mark incorporates this account in order to follow the anticipated "literary convention" in which a public figure spends time in the "wilderness" undergoing a "spiritual initiation . . . at the hands of an authoritative figure or teacher" ("Jesus' Baptism," 3–7).

²²⁹ So, Ernst, *Johannes*, 337. The *Jesus Seminar* finds it certain (voting red) that John immersed Jesus, though note the argument presented against this (Tatum, *John*, 148–50). They also note that the event may be multiply attested if the evidence from John's Gospel is interpreted as independent from Mark, and some have argued that Q contained the account as well since Q 4:1–13 "presupposes a baptism account." See also, Armand Puig I Tàrrach, "Pourquoi Jésus a-t-il reçu le baptême de Jean?" *NTS* 54 (2008): 355–74, 355, n. 2.

²³⁰ E.g., in the Gospel of the Nazarenes, Jesus rejects John's immersion because he is sinless (Jerome, *Pelag.* 3.2); in Ignatius, Jesus's suffering (and death?) serve to purify the water of immersion (*Eph.* 18.2); and in Tertullian Jesus's holiness purifies the water of immersion (*Pud.* 6.16; *Adv. Jud.* 8.14). See also, Bradshaw, "Ten Principles," 3–21.

²³¹ Of course, it is possible that the embarrassment does not pertain to the immersion, but rather to Jesus's lower status to John. The answer to this question is related to whether Jesus was a disciple of John (Ernst, *Johannes*, 338).

immersion of Jesus: he first immerses, and then prays.²³² Of course, our sources do not indicate that Jesus also repents (though this may be implied²³³), but unless he was already known as or believed himself to be a "sinner," repentance would not be required since the reason for emphasizing repentance as explained above is to counter any misunderstanding that ritual purification is "mechanical." Because John's ministry is aimed at national renewal and John was not the only person concerned about such matters, some in his audience were already righteous,²³⁴ ready to embrace his message, alongside those who were "sinners," won over by his preaching. Repentance, as immersion, would have been a corporate act performed in solidarity with the covenant people.²³⁵ Additionally, the basis of forgiveness of sins is not found in the immersion itself. Rather, immersion prepared the people for confession and prayer in view of God's mercy to forgive. Moreover, in light of the corporate ritual purification in preparation for God's presence, such as Sinai, Jesus, as a human, would naturally be bound to ritually purify.

Summary. The "immersion of John" simply indicates that which the people undertook when they accepted John's message. However, it does not indicate the formation of social group or sectarian movement since his purview was the Jewish people, nor does it indicate that John stood in protest against the temple cult or its leaders. The only certain thing that his title indicates is that he was intimately associated with the practice of immersion. The decision to undertake John's immersion was predicated upon repentance and performed in view of God forgiving sins at or prior to the coming judgment; immersion, repentance, and forgiveness are distinct from one another even if they converge

²³² This chronological distinction is justified in the change from the aorist to present participles (βαπτισθέντος > προσευχομένου). As I. Howard Marshall notes: "Luke's interest is in what happened *after* Jesus himself had been baptised and *while* he was at prayer." See, I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 152, emphasis mine.

²³³ The Gospel of the Nazarenes may leave open the possibility of unintentional sin (Jerome, *Pelag.* 3.2); cf. Levine and Witherington, *Gospel of Luke*, 91.

²³⁴ E.g., the Pharisees. This need not imply that the Pharisees were self-righteous or arrogant, despite the fact that the NT sometimes presents them that way. In fact, Matthew's redaction of Q 3:7 records that "many Pharisees and Sadducees" presented themselves for immersion, though Luke 7:30 (SL?//Matt 21:31–32) suggests that as a whole, the Pharisees and Sadducees rejected immersion. John 7:47 also implies that *none* of the Pharisees believed in Jesus. On the other hand, Pharisees are involved at the earliest stages of the Jesus movement (e.g., John 3:1; 7:45–52; 9:16; Acts 15:5; Phil 3:4–5).

²³⁵ So, Ernst, *Johannes*, 336. Such a notion is reflected in the temple cult, which addressed the corporate dimension of unintentional sin and transgressions for which no sacrifice was provided regardless of whether specific individuals were guilty. This corresponds to the corporate dimension of John's immersion and Jesus's response that his immersion by John is to "fulfill all righteousness" (πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην) in Matt 3:15.

(cf. this convergence in the temple cult). Whether he personally immersed people or whether it was "one-time" cannot be determined. Finally, Jesus's immersion by John is not "embarrassing" when understood as an act of ritual purification.

Comparing Notes—The Origin of John's Immersion

Now that we have considered the main antecedents that scholars propose for the origin of John's immersion, as well as the immersion that John proclaimed, we are at a place to propose its origin. I reiterate that my argument is not *genealogical* but *analogical*. More specifically, the "third term" governing comparison is the Mediterranean practice of ritual purification, not "Christian baptism" or even John's. Since I am specifically interested in immersion as a means of ritual purification, I first established the ritual universe for each antecedent to the extent that I was able from our extant sources, and then I analyzed how immersion functioned contextually. Below, I briefly summarize these findings and compare them with John's immersion to propose its origin.

"Mystery Religions"

Because most scholars agree that the immediate origin of John's practice is Second Temple Judaism, I did not devote a specific chapter to this antecedent. Nevertheless, it is valuable to recall a few points made about them in chapter two and elsewhere, especially since there is justifiably a much closer connection between them and John's immersion than most NT scholars currently allow. These points include:

- some immersions were self-administered, while (in some cases) others were administered purifications;
- the location of the immersions and other purifications varied from the open sea to the private locations where the mystery or mysteries were revealed;
- their purpose was for ritual purification despite their incorporation in the *process* or ceremonies of initiation;
- the immersion practice and context of each cult must be individually examined since "the mystery religions" is an ambiguous, ahistorical, scholarly construct (and this even applies to the various *local manifestations* of the *same* cult since they differed from one another);
- regardless of what the "mystery" represents, or the promises and benefits that initiates may have received in joining the cult, immersion was not *the* means by which they obtained access to such things.

A Specific Ritual Purity Practice in the HB

Chapter four considered the ritual purity system of the HB and developments during the Second Temple Period. As with all the other antecedents, scholars have approached this antecedent with modern conceptions of "baptism" controlling the analysis. Rather than asking how John's immersion makes sense as a manifestation of ritual purification, they look backwards to identify a specific practice, such as priestly initiation (Dahl), since they assume that "baptism" is equivalent to this. Our analysis indicated the following results:

- ritual purity practices constitute a sub-system operative within the religious universe(s) reflected in the HB, which served as the basis for all Second Temple Period practices;
- no systematic, "official" impurity laws list existed and this contributed in part to the diversification of ritual purity practices and beliefs during the Second Temple Period;
- ritual purity/impurity is distinct from moral purity/impurity, although both overlap in the context of human-divine encounter as epitomized in the temple cult;
- ritual purity is also distinct from holiness, although again, both overlap, and this is most sensitive in holy space or with holy things—in fact, ritual purification is often implemented in the process of making someone or something holy;
- ritual purity/impurity was operative at the *material* level even if the resulting condition or its passing may have been invisible;
- the negligence or incorrect observance of ritual purity laws resulted in moral impurity, a fact that motivated purity disputes;
- ritual purity was neither "temple-centric" nor restricted to Jerusalem, although it was highly important in both places;
- agency is *irrelevant* to whether an immersion serves to ritually purify someone or something;²³⁶
- authors only mentioned specific impurities in the context of immersion or ritual purification when some halakic point was at stake or required emphasis;
- the so-called "baptist movement" during the Second Temple Period is a misidentification of ritual purity practices in general.²³⁷

²³⁶ By this I mean that agency cannot disqualify an act from being ritual purification. Certain purity laws *require* agency (e.g., corpse impurity), while others *permit* or are indifferent toward agency (e.g., helping an invalid or ill person immerse).

²³⁷ E.g., Thomas, *Mouvement*, passim; Ernst, *Johannes*, 339.

The Washings of the Qumran Community

The Qumran community was a group of priestly led Essenes whose community and practices were based upon the HB. The community was eschatologically oriented and they expected the coming judgment of everyone, including fellow Jews, who remained outside their New Covenant community, which included satellite locations. Like the other antecedents, rather than understanding the Qumran community on its own terms, scholars select, filter, and assess the data through the controlling paradigm of "Christian baptism" (or John's). They practiced immersion to maintain ritual purity at all times since their community constituted a place where God's spirit dwelled. The following points summarize our findings:

- as is done in the HB, the community maintained a distinction between ritual and moral purity/impurity as well as holy/common (contrary to claims of conflation);
- the community incorporated immersion for ritual purification during the *process* of initiation (which took two to three years!), but it did not by itself initiate, and no distinction was made between immersions;
- immersion was a daily practice performed at a variety of times, such as at sunrise, prayer, communal meals, community meetings, study of scripture, and when one had contracted a specific ritual impurity;
- liturgies accompanied some instances of immersion and halakic regulations governed the conditions under which purification was considered valid;
- ritual purification was ineffective without repentance or moral uprightness (however, this does not point to conflation);
- their sensitivity to the impurity of outsiders and even some insiders stemmed from uncertainty as to whether such individuals were observing proper halakah.

The Immersion of Converts to Judaism

The authors of rabbinic literature grounded their literary reflection and practices in the HB like other Second Temple groups. Since a systematic list is not found in the HB and numerous ambiguities exist, the rabbis sought to clarify matters. Their debates and rulings resemble those of the Second Temple Period. While the same type of eschatological outlook as Qumran does not characterize rabbinic reflection, gentile converts became inheritors of the "world to come" by joining "the House of Israel." As with the other antecedents, the controlling paradigm of "Christian baptism" has led to an equivalent "Jewish" term, namely, "proselyte baptism." After examining the sources advanced in favor of the practice, we identified the following results:

- no "standard" view of conversion exists in rabbinic literature until (possibly) the end of the talmudic period;
- diverse communities of Jews navigated and constructed how to handle gentile converts;
- the terminology used for the immersion of proselytes and Jews is identical, the sources make no distinction between them, and immersion takes place in the *same* ritual baths;
- the HB neither requires immersion nor circumcision of the $\gamma\lambda$ unless he or she desired to observe the Passover and participate in Israel's worship;
- the rabbis employed the HB $\gamma\lambda$ as a *legal category* for regulating gentile conversion, including the requirement of immersion;
- this *legal category* explains comments, such as, "new birth";
- while circumcision is widely attested as the ritual requirement for conversion, no unambiguous evidence for immersion as an initiation requirement is found prior to the second century, and the evidence that does exist makes sense as ritual purification;
- one basis for gentile immersion at conversion derives from exegetical reflection related to Israel's entry into the covenant at Sinai wherein ritual purity played an explicit role;
- another basis for gentile immersion at conversion derives from uncleanness related to idolatry, which was discussed in categories of *ritual* impurity (i.e., contagiousness);
- immersion of gentile converts for ritual purification was eventually incorporated into an initiation *process*, but it did not by itself initiate.

The Origin of John's Immersion—A Proposal

In light of the above results, *all* of the proposed antecedents employed immersion as a means of ritual purification. This is to be expected given that ancient Mediterranean people understood the visible and invisible world in terms of purity/impurity, and human-divine interaction was strictly governed by ritual purification (among other things). Thus, the reason that scholars are able to provide so many parallels shared between John and each antecedent is because all of them are operating within the same the religious sensibilities of the Mediterranean world. They are all found in the same forest and scholars are fixated on finding which trees link John to a particular group, when such a connection *did not exist*.²³⁸ Of course, alongside these parallels are significant differences (again, because a link did not exist), and these have rightly made a consensus view impossible. We must cease attempting to construct a genealogical bridge

²³⁸ E.g., does Josephus describes John in Qumran sectarian terms, or is he describing John in more general terms that we misidentify (Ferguson, *Baptism*, 85)?

from John to the specific groups of his context and consider that he does not derive from any of them. Rather, John applies ritual purification in the context of his public ministry in a way analogous to how the Qumran community implemented it in their specific context or how certain Jewish groups applied it to gentile converts.

Since ritual purity carried significant socio-religious weight, it constituted a "site" around which various people and groups sought to establish and exercise authority.²³⁹ The ways in which ritual purity practices were implemented attest to their value as emblems of expertise, authority, and piety. They were strategic ways of acting in the world, and if ritual purity did not already enjoy a high level of cultural capital, some other site would have been selected around which to negotiate socio-religious influence. Ironically, scholars miss this in their attempts to insist on an "official" or "authorized" list of ritual purity laws, or to create the impression that "normative" Judaism stands in contrast with "sectarian" expressions of Judaism. I must reiterate with Snoek that this negotiation over the site of ritual purity implies the inherent *similarity* shared between the groups in question and that this negotiation does entail animosity or antithesis, although it does not exclude it. That is to say, certain groups may adopt a "closed" or exclusionary posture, while others inhibit a more "ecumenical" one. Much depends on how one rhetorically and practically implements ritual in the exchange for power.

Finally, I return to the question of how we classify John's immersion. Since classification represents a primary means by which we make meaning, the implications of adjusting these lines cannot be understated. This study has thrown into question the traditional criteria of classification because these are etically imposed rather than emically derived. The quest to understand John's immersion contextually, as well as those of the various antecedents, inextricably leads me to redraw the lines of classification, and to propose an origin of John's immersion that makes better sense of his context and that does not depend on supersessionistic and anachronistic lines of interpretation.²⁴⁰ Instead of classifying the various antecedents and John as discrete entities, they are exemplars, not of a "baptist movement," but rather of ritual purity. All of these groups, including John, drew from the HB and Second Temple understandings of the HB in applying ritual purity to their context.

²³⁹ A great example of this is Jesus's question: τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ Ἰωάννου πόθεν ἦν; ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἢ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων; (Matt 21:25).

²⁴⁰ Such anachronisms lead to comments, such as Cullmann's: "The Jewish Christian texts contained in the Pseudo-Clementines prove besides that at the beginning of the second century there was in fact a Jewish Christian minority for whom Baptism had *reverted to the status of a Jewish rite*" (*Baptism*, 13, emphasis mine).

Criteria of Richard B. Hays as a Heuristic Evaluation Tool

In closing, I adapt the criteria of Richard B. Hays for echoes and allusions in Pauline literature as a heuristic tool to evaluate my proposed solution to the origin of John's immersion. It is one thing to consider how modern scholars might connect John to his context, but quite another to ask how a Second Temple Jew would have interpreted John. To facilitate this comparison, I present the data from the perspective of an "average" Second Temple Jew in the table that follows the descriptions of each criterion. See *Table 10: Criteria of Richard B. Hays as a Heuristic Evaluation Tool* below.

Table 10: Criteria of Richard B. Hays as a heuristic evaluation tool

Criteria of Richard B. Hays as a Heuristic Evaluation Tool			
Criteria	Ritual Purity	Qumran Community	Immersion of Converts to Judaism
Availability	Pervasive—in all geographic and social locations	Unavailable—isolated, but satellite Essenes possible?	Unavailable?—must assume practice prior to John
Volume	Constant—daily interaction or observation	Rare—direct contact unlikely, word of mouth	Uncommon—converts existed, volume varied per location
Recurrence	Prolific—in all religious and domestic locations	Very little—satellite Essenes possible?	Common—converts attested across the Mediterranean world
Thematic Coherence	Clear—an expectation of human–divine interaction	Doubtful—requires insider knowledge	None—John's audience neither gentile nor converting to anything
Historical Plausibility	Certain—Josephus and John 3 make the connection	Possible—but depends on insider knowledge	None—very unlikely John's audience would connect the two
History of Interpretation	Satisfied—e.g., Tertullian compares it to ritual purity	Unsatisfied—only modern scholarship	Unsatisfied—only modern scholarship
Satisfaction	Satisfied—accounts well for the data	Ambiguous—accounts for some data	Ambiguous—accounts for some data

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

- 1) *Availability*: was this practice available to John and a first-century audience?
- 2) *Volume*: how often might a first-century audience encounter this practice?
- 3) *Recurrence*: how geographically widespread was this practice?
- 4) *Thematic Coherence*: how well does this practice correspond with John's immersion?
- 5) *Historical Plausibility*: what is the likelihood that John and his audience would have connected what he was doing with this practice?
- 6) *History of Interpretation*: is there evidence connecting this practice with John's immersion?
- 7) *Satisfaction*: how well does this practice account for the available data and satisfy the other scholars?

Obviously, the table contains my evaluation of the data and criterion seven ultimately depends on the conclusion of other scholars. The Qumran and "proselyte baptism" arguments have each satisfied many modern scholars even as they recognize that John's immersion does not exactly align. Hay's criteria helpfully redirects us to consider what was available to Second Temple Jews in interpreting John. It is worth highlighting that the Qumran proposal would require insider knowledge of Qumran's practice, or perhaps exposure to satellite Essene communities, for Second Temple Jews to have made this connection. Similarly, the immersion of gentile converts to Judaism proposal requires that (1) this would have been practiced prior to John, (2) John's audience would have viewed themselves as somehow equivalent to gentiles, (3) his audience would have thought they were converting to something other than Judaism, and (4) that there existed a "standard" or uniform practice of conversion shared by Jews across the Mediterranean world. Shifting the analysis from antecedents such as these to understanding them as instances of ritual purity allows us to appreciate the similarities shared between all of them while advancing a more precise explanation for the origin of John's immersion.

Conclusion

When a variety of explanations is advanced for the origin of a liturgical custom, its true source has almost certainly been forgotten.²⁴¹

Many ideas heretofore considered influence from the Essenes are now being understood as common Jewish traditions in this period.²⁴²

Religions and religious traditions do not interact, social groups composed of individuals do. . . . If they recycle terms and motifs, it is not a conscious borrowing, but a drawing upon a collection of such motifs employed by other groups engaged in similar social construction with whom they are in contact.²⁴³

This study argues that John's immersion is best understood, not as genetically deriving from any so-called antecedent, but rather as an exemplar of ritual purity. The three quotes above each support this in their own way. Bradshaw's observation in the first quote underscores the problem discussed in our review of scholarship in chapter two on the origin of John's immersion. In that chapter, we examined the rise of the "mystery religions" antecedent and the various reactions to it. In the process, I revealed the ideological motives that

²⁴¹ Bradshaw, "Ten Principles," 11.

²⁴² Harrington, "Purity," 419.

²⁴³ Hughes, *Comparison*, 65.

undergirded each antecedent explanation. Yet, rather than conclude with Bradshaw that the origin is lost, I have provided evidence to suggest that our construction of the problem is incorrectly framed and that its origin may be recovered if we adopt a different approach.

The new approach adopted here requires a shift from parallelomania in which "Christian baptism" controls analysis to the critical use of comparative method. This requires a "third term" or superordinating principle (Smith and others) for proper comparison. Indeed, as Harrington's quote indicates, "common Judaism" provides a better starting point, and, thus the basis of comparison for this study is ritual purity. To make the case for this, chapter three addresses the four main questions for proper comparison (Hughes): (1) what are we comparing? (2) when are we comparing? (3) how are we comparing? and (4) why are we comparing? As such, I argue against the linguistic voids introduced by transliteration as translation, insist on interpreting the Jesus movement as an instance of Judaism rather than "Christianity," propose that a systemic analysis is required (per RS), and perform analysis so as to understand the subjects of inquiry on their own terms (per CM). Throughout this study, I also incorporate insights from RS, especially Bell, to add more precision to the types of questions I pose and to guide how I perform analysis.

In chapter four, I explain the system of ritual purity within the HB since it forms the basis of reflection for all Second Temple practices. Of particular importance to this study is the fact that ritual and moral purity remain distinct from one another among *all* Second Temple groups, and that differences and developments during this period are due to the fact that no "authorized" list or understanding exists in the HB. Rather, John, like all other groups, applies this system to his own context.²⁴⁴ Importantly, agency, has no negative impact on the effectiveness of ritual purification and it is required in some instances. Additionally, ritual purity is not temple-centric in either the understanding of the authors of the HB or Second Temple Period literature and both ritual and moral purity were material in nature.

The immersion practices of the Qumran community are the focus of chapter five. In this chapter I demonstrate that their practices are grounded in the HB and do not reflect conflation as some assert. To the contrary, a covenant framework better explains the sectarian perspective toward purity as well as their insistence that outsiders are perpetually unclean (i.e., their moral uncleanness renders ineffective any attempt at ritual purification). Immersion was

²⁴⁴ It is for this reason that I find Uro's comments curious: "There is no reason to assume that John or his followers (including Jesus) were able to create doctrinal unity with regard to immersion" (*Ritual*, 83). As a form of ritual purity, there was nothing doctrinal at stake, and there is no need to be concerned about the variety in which it was implemented among Jesus followers.

stringently practiced at Qumran for numerous reasons, but especially because they saw their community as the dwelling place of God's spirit. As any sacred space would require, so their community demanded high standards of moral and ritual purity. Finally, Sinai provided a template with which to understand the practice of immersion for new members seeking to join the community, but that this immersion was the same as any subsequent immersion undertaken in that it was performed for ritual purity.

Chapter six critiques the scholarly construct of "proselyte baptism" in terms similar to chapter three. Rather than depend on the framework of "Christian baptism" to analyze the evidence, I argue that the language of our sources points instead to the immersion of gentile convert and that this is identical to ritual purification undertaken by any Jew. While pervasive evidence exists for the antiquity of circumcising gentile converts, the same is not true for immersion. The earliest possible evidence for this does not occur until the second century CE and it is explainable as ritual purification. Moreover, the evidence examined suggests that no standard or uniform practice of conversion existed prior to the talmudic period.

Finally, chapter seven examines John's immersion and makes the case that John's immersion is not genetically dependent on any antecedent, but is rather the application of ritual purity to his context. Rather than pointing to eschatology, messianic expectations, or the desire to establish a new sectarian movement as the key to explaining the origin of John's immersion, I argue that it is more simply explained by the fact that he anticipates God's coming. Of course, this coming is found in the context of eschatological and messianic expectations, so there is a relationship between them, but it is preparing for God's coming that forms the impetus for ritual purification, not these expectations. His role is to prepare the people for this in a way that is analogous to Moses preparing the people for God's coming at Sinai. Since human-divine interaction required ritual purification in antiquity, John's proclamation of immersion is to be expected. Like numerous other Second Temple texts and groups, ritual purification is not mechanical and repentance is required if a person was not morally impure. However, this does not mean that John's immersion effected moral purity. While numerous details surrounding John's immersion remain ambiguous, I make the case that John did *not* personally immerse anyone, but rather served as the prophetic voice instigating the people to prepare. I must emphasize that even if John did personally immerse people, my thesis remains unaffected since agency does not negatively impact ritual purification. Finally, I propose that while the *context* of John's immersion may be envisioned as "special," his immersion is not "one-time" since it is performed for ritual purification. The same may be said for those joining Qumran or converting to Judaism. The *process* of initiation may incorporate ritual purification

via immersion, but it is not a "one-time" immersion because of its presence in such a ceremony.²⁴⁵

In 1972, Morna D. Hooker wrote the the following about the tools we bring to interpretation:

For in the end, the answers which the New Testament scholar gives are not the result of applying objective tests and using precision tools; they are very largely the result of his own presuppositions and prejudices. If he approaches the material with the belief that it is largely the creation of the early Christian communities, then he will interpret it in that way. If he assumes that the words of the Lord were faithfully remembered and passed on, then he will be able to find criteria which support him. Each claims to be using the proper critical method. Each produces a picture of Jesus—and of the early Church—in accordance with his presuppositions. And each claims to be right.²⁴⁶

It is entirely possible that my study is guilty of the above. Since I interpret John's immersion as an instance of ritual purity, then I find tools and evidence to support my view. But it also means that the contrary is true. Those who insist that John's immersion is really a "baptism" that instigates the birthing of a new "Christian" religion are guilty of the same.²⁴⁷ The question before the scholar is which approach best accounts for the evidence.

Also in 1972, Kümmel said, "In view of this uncertainty in the understanding of the religio-historical context of John's baptism, its exact meaning remains hidden from us; yet it may be said with great probability that the baptism, as a sacrament related to the imminent end-time, *served as purification to prepare the man* who, firmly committed to conversion, allowed himself to be baptized by John, *to withstand the final judgment.*"²⁴⁸ While I have certain quibbles with the way Kümmel understands John, there is little I disagree with in these comments. Yet, I trust that this study contributes to understanding more precisely how John makes sense in his religio-historical context. Of course, situating John in his context does not require us to deny ways his practice may be distinct, however, in light of the findings of this study, such differences are best assessed as differences of degree, not kind.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of this research have significant implications on the origin of immersion in Jesus's name. The original intent of this project was to explain just

²⁴⁵ The exception would be if Jews immersed by John thought that they were no longer susceptible to ritual impurity, and that John's immersion somehow made them perpetually clean.

²⁴⁶ Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," 581.

²⁴⁷ E.g., Lupieri claims "The Baptism of John has no future." Yet, he concludes this because he thinks Jesus effaces ritual purity ("John," *ANRW* 33.1:437).

²⁴⁸ Kümmel, *Theology*, 30. This is the 1973 English translation of his 1972 German book.

that, but in light of the amount of material required to explain John's immersion, I was unable to complete this. If the account I provide of the origin of John's immersion is accurate, then it remains to be examined in what ways continuity exist between the two, as well as any discontinuity, and what might be the reasons for these changes. In my own view, I tend to see continuity and plan to work on this in a future project. Since John's immersion involved preparing for the one who was to come after him, the one who would immerse in or with the Spirit, there is an inherent connection between the two immersions. Immersion (in water) in Jesus's name, according to Acts and Paul, is intimately connected with people being immersed by the Holy Spirit. Since this is an instance of human-divine interaction, and Acts 2 is presented as a theophany, immersion in Jesus's name also makes sense as an act of ritual purification. In fact, immersion in Jesus's name points to one of the earliest pieces of evidence of Jesus's divinity.

Additionally, this study invites a complete rethinking of the relationship between John and his context (i.e., how we understand Second Temple ritual purity practices, Qumran, "proselyte baptism," etc.), as well as how things may have developed in the second century and following. It raises questions such as, when did immersion in Jesus's name (and Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) lose its significance as an act of ritual purification? Which Jesus followers continued observing ritual purity practices, which ceased to do so, and why? Did immersion practices among Jesus followers impact the development of immersion of gentile proselytes, and if so, how? Finally, it would be worthwhile to reexamine the relationship between the ritual purity practices of the "mysterics" and those practiced by Jesus followers.

Appendix A

Proposed BDAG Entry (Schnabel)

I. Physical Uses

1. *to put into a yielding substance* (such as a liquid, e.g., water or dyes, or the body of an animal)

glosses: *to plunge, to dip, to immerse*

1a. *to cleanse with water*

glosses: *to wash* (extended meaning of 1: to remove dirt by immersion in water)

1b. *to make ceremonially clean*

gloss: *to purify, to cleanse* (extended meaning of 1: to immerse in water symbolizing or effecting the removal of moral or spiritual defilement)

gloss of (later) ecclesiastical language: *to baptize*

1c. *to take water or wine by dipping a drinking vessel* (in a stream, a fountain, a well, a bowl)

gloss: *to draw* (extended meaning of 1: to immerse a vessel in water or wine to obtain a drink)

1d. *to perish by submersion in water*

gloss: *to drown* (extended meaning of 1: to suffer death by suffocation being immersed in water [of persons]; or to disappear by submersion in water, to sink [of ships])

1e. *to put to death a living being*

gloss: *to slaughter, to kill* (extended meaning of 1: to plunge a knife into the body of an animal or a human being)

1f. *to tinge fabric with a color*

gloss: *to dye* (extended meaning of 1: to immerse fabric in liquid with color pigments); this meaning is frequently attested for ἀπόβαψαι but not for ἀπόβαψαι

II. Figurative Uses

2. *to be overpowered by an abstract reality, such as debts or arguments or thoughts*

glosses: *to be overwhelmed, to be immersed* (transferred meaning of 1: a person is 'immersed' in intangible or abstract realities and consequently overwhelmed by their force)

3. *to be intoxicated*

gloss: *to be drunk* (transferred meaning of 1: a person is 'submerged' in the effects of intoxicating liquids)

Appendix B

Seven Architectural & Settlement Models of Qumran

Table 11: Seven models of Qumran’s architectural development & settlement types (Mizzi)¹

	140 BCE	100 BCE	50 BCE	1 CE	50 CE
Roland de Vaux	<i>Period Ia</i> c. 130–100 BCE part of WB & part of MB sectarian	<i>Period Ib</i> c. 100–31 BCE expansion of settlement & of water system Qumran reaches its definitive form sectarian		<i>Period II</i> c. 4–1 BCE–68 CE minor changes & additions strengthening of MB + WB sectarian	
Jodi Magness	<i>Period Ib (pre- & post-31 BCE)</i> c. 100–9/8 BCE Qumran in definitive form (de Vaux’s Period 1A = ?) minor changes after 31 BCE sectarian			<i>Period II</i> c. 4–1 BCE–68 CE minor changes & additions strengthening of MB + WB sectarian	
Jean-Baptiste Humbert	<i>Niveau 2A</i> c. 100–56 BCE MB & part of WB villa		<i>Niveau 2B (Interlude)</i> 56–31 BCE fortification of WB refuge camp	<i>Niveau 3 (A–C)</i> post-31 BCE–68 CE expansion of settlement & of water system Qumran reaches its definitive form Essene settlement	
Yizhar Hirschfeld	<i>Stratum II</i> c. 130–37 BCE MB & fortification of the tower fortress			<i>Stratum III</i> c. 37–68 CE expansion of settlement & of water system Qumran reaches its definitive form centre of a rural estate	
Yitzhak Magen & Yuval Peleg	<i>Phase B</i> early 1st cent. BCE		<i>Phase C</i> up to 63 BCE	<i>Phase D</i> c. 63–31 BCE minor changes & additions	<i>Phase E</i> c. 31 BCE–68 CE minor changes & additions strengthening of MB + WB
	MB & part of WB (B) expansion of settlement & of water system reaches definitive form (C) military outpost		pottery production center	pottery production center	
Robert Cargil	<i>Phase 2</i> c. 140/130–120/110 BCE MB & WB fortress	<i>Phase 3</i> c. 110/100–31 CE expansion of settlement & of water system Qumran reaches its definitive form sectarian		<i>Phase 4</i> 31 BCE–68 CE minor changes & strengthening of MB + WB sectarian	
David Stacey	<i>Hasmonean Phase</i> c. 100–31 BCE WB & part of MB seasonal industrial site			<i>Herodian Phase</i> c. 31–1 BCE	<i>c. 41–44 CE</i> <i>c. 50–68 CE</i> expansion of settlement & of water system Qumran reaches its definitive form (31–1 BCE) settlement in decline (1 BCE–40CE) permanent depot & seasonal industries/seasonal use (41–44 CE) seasonal use (50–68 CE) refuge camp

MB = Main Building; WB = Western Building

Illustration by Benjamin J. Snyder

¹ Adapted from Mizzi, “Archaeology,” 22, fig. 2.2; reproduced from Dennis Mizzi, “Qumran Period I Reconsidered: An Evaluation of Several Competing Theories,” *DSD* 22.1 (2015): 1–42, 18, fig. 9.

Appendix C

Ritual Baths at Qumran



איור 193: תפרושת מקוואות הטהרה בקומראן

Figure 19: Plan featuring the ritual baths at Qumran (Reich)

Appendix D

Structure of b. Yebam. 46a–48b

According to Jacob Neusner

*C. Composite on Conversion in General*¹

- a. I:18: Immersion results in a change in legal status with regard to slaves
- b. I:19: Restrain a slave during immersion and immediately issue an order to prevent his freedom
 - I. I:20: A secondary, theoretical, nonessential issue
 - II. I:21: A pertinent case to the theme
 - A. I:22: Same problem as the case in I:21
 - 1. I:23: An explanation of I:22
 - c. I:24: Debate over what makes a proselyte (circumcision/immersion/both?)
 - I. I:25: An explanation of I:24
 - II. I:26: An explanation of I:24
 - A. I:27: A case
 - d. I:28: Requirement of three witnesses
 - e. I:29: Witnesses required if convert is unknown and claims to be a convert
 - I. I:30: An explanation of I:29
 - II. I:31: An explanation of I:29
 - III. I:32: Continuation of I:31
 - IV. I:33: Rule applies both in Israel and in the Diaspora

¹ Although I have simplified/adapted the outline, I retain the notation method and structure as found in Jacob Neusner, *Tractate Yebamot*, vol. 8 of *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 715–18.

- f. I:34: If a convert has no witnesses to testify to his conversion, it is invalid
- I. I:35: A case
- II. I:36: An explanation of I:35
- g. I:37: Motives of converts must be tested
- I. I:38: An explanation of I:37
- II. I:39: An explanation of I:37
- III. I:40: An explanation of I:37 (case of Ruth)
- IV. I:41: An explanation of I:37
- V. I:42: An explanation of I:37
- VI. I:43: An explanation of I:37
- VII. I:44: An explanation of I:37
- VIII. I:45: An explanation of I:37
- IX. I:46: An explanation of I:37
- A. I:47: Expansion of (Deut 21:11)
- B. I:48: Continuation of I:47
- h. I:49: Can one have uncircumcised slaves?
- i. I:50: Yes, for a twelve month period at most
- j. I:51: This rule does not apply in the land of Israel
- k. I:52: Reasons for the harassment of gentiles

According to Moshe Lavee

The Literary Structure of the "Mini-Tractate" of Conversion²

1. The requirement for both immersion and conversion; (Neusner, I:22-23)
2. The case of circumcision without immersion; (I:24-28)
3. Acceptance of someone who claims to be a convert; (I:29-33)
4. The requirement to establish a conversion court / witnesses to the conversion; (I:34-36)
5. A detailed protocol of the conversion procedure; and (I:37-51)

² This outline is reproduced identically from Lavee, *Rabbinic Conversion*, 28. However, I have included in parenthesis the correspondences with Neusner to show where the two overlap.

6. A theological reflection on the suffering of converts.
(I:52)

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When my M.Div. was complete and we moved to Wilmore, KY, for my PhD studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (ATS), I brought this topic with me and continued to work further. In my first semester, I concentrated on (water) baptism in Luke-Acts in Craig S. Keener’s seminar on Acts. In Fredrick J. Long’s Roman Hellenism: Advanced Studies, I focused on the topic of purity in Greek and Roman contexts. Then, Lawson G. Stone’s Biblical Archaeology class permitted me to research the archaeological evidence related to ritual baths, which I continued to develop in the context of the Qumran community in Michael D. Matlock’s course on Intertestamental Judaism. In Ben Witherington’s Socio-Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament, I was able to focus solely on water sources and ritual baths in Jerusalem. Finally, in an independent study, Christian Scriptures and the Mishnah, with Matlock, I read through the entire Mishnah with a particular focus on purity issues. Needless to say, many people, and many have gone unnamed, have been a part of the formation of this study, but I cannot say to what degree they will agree with my argument. This work is, nonetheless, a testimony to their fine scholarship and it is written in gratitude for how each of them has contributed to my formation as a scholar.

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