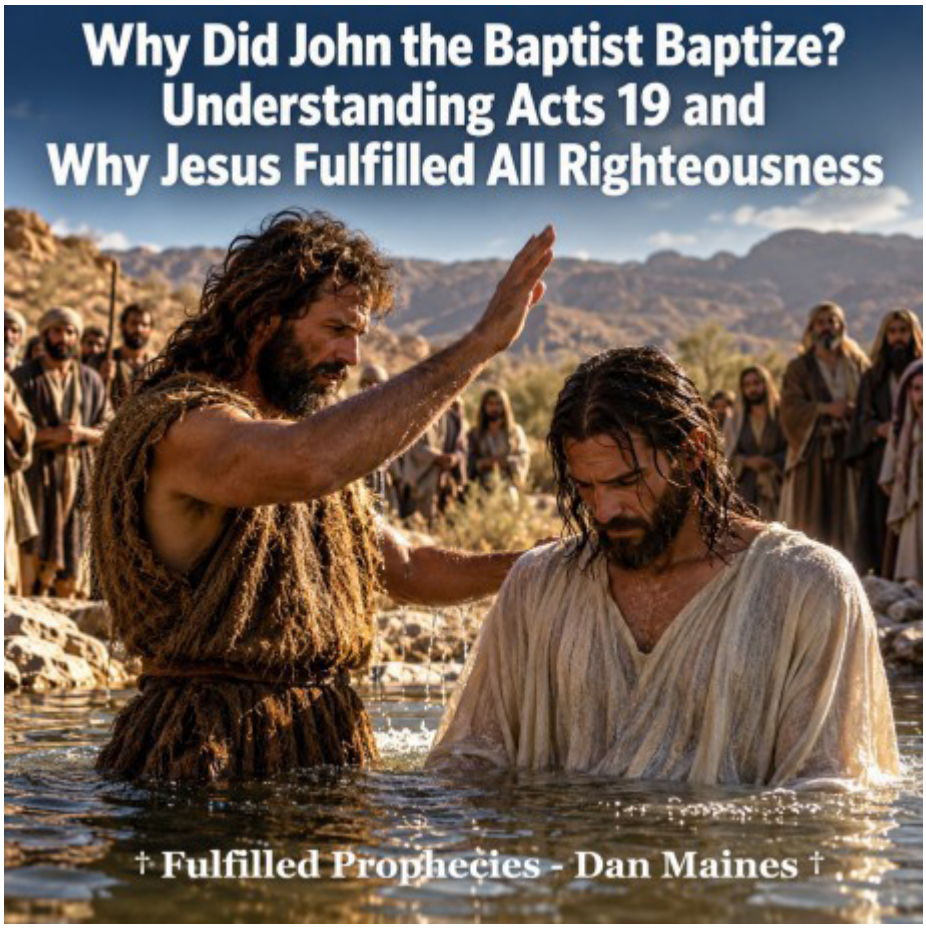
Fulfilled Prophecies

Baptism - Why Did John the Baptist Baptize? Understanding Acts 19 and Why Jesus Fulfilled All Righteousness



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† Why did John the Baptist baptize people before Jesus began His ministry? Why did Jesus Himself submit to baptism when He had no sin? And why did Paul baptize twelve men in Acts 19 who had already received John's baptism?

† These questions are important because many Christians read these passages without considering when they happened, who was being addressed, and what God was accomplishing

through Jesus Christ.
† John's baptism wasn't an independent religious ceremony intended to continue forever. It was a God-given ministry of repentance that prepared Israel for the arrival of her promised Messiah (Luke 3:3-6; Acts 13:24-25).
† Jesus didn't receive John's baptism because He needed forgiveness. He received it because He was obedient to His Father and was fulfilling everything required of Him as Israel's promised Messiah (Matthew 5:17; Hebrews 4:15).
† Acts 19 reveals the difference between preparing for the Messiah and believing in the Messiah who had already come. Understanding that difference helps explain the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-13).

John Was Sent To Prepare Israel For Christ

Matthew 3:1-3
Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'"
† John wasn't preaching about a kingdom thousands of years in the future. He announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand because the promised Messiah was about to appear (Mark 1:14-15).
† John's ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy concerning the messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord. His responsibility was to call Israel to repentance and direct the people toward Christ (Isaiah 40:3; John 1:23).
† The people of Israel had been living under the Law of Moses, but the promised New Covenant was approaching. John stood at the beginning of that great covenant transition (Luke 16:16; Hebrews 8:13).
† His baptism wasn't the fulfillment itself. It prepared the people to recognize and receive the One who would accomplish that

fulfillment (Acts 13:24-25).

John's Baptism Was A Baptism Of Repentance

Mark 1:4-5
John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.
† John's baptism called Israel to acknowledge her sins and prepare for the coming Messiah. Repentance was essential because the people needed to turn from disobedience and recognize God's promised salvation (Luke 3:7-14).
† John's baptism involved water, confession, and repentance, but John never claimed that his baptism was the completed work of redemption. He continually directed attention away from himself and toward Jesus (John 1:26-29).
† This was a first-century ministry directed to Israel while the Old Covenant remained in effect. It announced the approaching fulfillment of God's promises rather than establishing another permanent covenant system (Acts 13:24; Galatians 4:4-5).
† John's message also contained a warning. Judgment was approaching the unrepentant nation, and merely being descended from Abraham wouldn't protect anyone from that judgment (Matthew 3:7-10).

John's Baptism Was Different From Christ's Baptism

Matthew 3:11-12
"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."
† John clearly distinguished his ministry from the ministry of

Jesus. John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Acts 1:5).
† The Holy Spirit was promised to Christ's disciples, while the imagery of fire also warned of judgment. The wheat and chaff represented separation between those who responded to God and those who rejected Him (Matthew 13:30, 40-43).
† This judgment belonged to the approaching covenant crisis facing first-century Israel. Jesus later identified Jerusalem as the city upon which the accumulated judgment for the blood of the righteous would come (Matthew 23:35-38).
† John's baptism prepared the people for these approaching realities. Jesus was the One who would accomplish salvation, establish the New Covenant, and execute the judgment He had announced (Luke 22:20; Matthew 24:34).

Why Did Jesus Need To Be Baptized?

Matthew 3:13-15
Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?" But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he permitted Him.
† John understood that Jesus was greater than he was. That's why John questioned the baptism. Jesus didn't need to repent of sin because He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).
† Jesus answered by explaining that His baptism was necessary to fulfill all righteousness. He wasn't confessing personal wrongdoing. He was submitting Himself to the Father's purpose and carrying out everything required in His mission (John 4:34; John 6:38).
† The words "Permit it at this time" are important. Jesus was speaking about something appropriate for that particular moment in God's redemptive plan. His baptism marked His identification with the people He came to redeem (Galatians

4:4-5; Hebrews 2:17).
† Jesus entered the waters where repentant Israelites were being baptized, not because He shared their guilt, but because He came to fulfill the righteous requirements they couldn't accomplish for themselves (Romans 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
† Fulfilling all righteousness included perfect obedience to the Father's will. His baptism was one act of that obedience, but His entire ministry, death, and resurrection accomplished the greater work of redemption (Philippians 2:8; Romans 5:18-19).
† Jesus didn't say everyone throughout history must receive John's baptism. He explained why John should baptize Him at that particular time, as part of His unique mission as the Messiah (Matthew 5:17; John 19:30).

The Father Confirmed Jesus As His Son

Matthew 3:16-17
After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."
† Jesus' baptism was accompanied by a divine declaration. The Father identified Jesus as His beloved Son, and the Spirit descended upon Him (John 1:32-34).
† This wasn't a declaration that Jesus had just become righteous. He was already righteous. The event publicly confirmed His identity and mission as the promised Messiah (John 1:29-34; Hebrews 7:26).
† The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinguished in this account. Jesus stood in the water, the Spirit descended, and the Father spoke from heaven (John 14:16-17).
† The baptism therefore served a purpose far greater than an ordinary washing. It revealed the Messiah who had come to accomplish God's promised salvation (Luke 4:18-21).

Jesus Came To Fulfill The Law And The Prophets

Matthew 5:17-18
"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished."
† Jesus didn't come to leave the Law and the Prophets partially fulfilled. He came to accomplish what they anticipated (Luke 24:44).
† His baptism belonged to that mission of obedience and fulfillment. It wasn't an isolated religious act disconnected from the promises made to Israel (Galatians 4:4-5).
† The Old Covenant was still operating during Jesus' earthly ministry. His death established the New Covenant, and the first-century transition reached its covenantal conclusion with the removal of Jerusalem's temple system in AD 70 (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 8:13; Matthew 24:1-3).
† Jesus fulfilled righteousness through His complete obedience, not merely through entering the Jordan River. His work provided what the Law couldn't accomplish through sinful humanity (Romans 8:3-4; Romans 10:4).
† The fulfilled perspective recognizes that Christ accomplished His covenant mission. We aren't waiting for Him to return to finish the righteousness He came to establish (Hebrews 10:12-14).

John Himself Pointed Beyond His Own Ministry

John 3:28-30
"You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent ahead of Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease."
† John understood that his ministry wasn't permanent. He was

the messenger preparing the way, not the Messiah who would fulfill the promises (John 1:19-23).
† His statement that Christ must increase while he decreased reveals the temporary and preparatory nature of his work (Acts 13:24-25).
† The bridegroom had arrived. John rejoiced because the promised Christ was present, and his responsibility was to direct people to Him (John 1:29).
† Once the Messiah had come and accomplished redemption, John's preparatory ministry couldn't remain the center of God's covenant relationship with His people (Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 10:19-22).

Acts 19 Explains The Difference Between The Two Baptisms

Acts 19:1-5
It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
† This passage answers one of the most important questions concerning John's baptism. Paul encountered disciples who knew John's baptism but hadn't received the fuller message concerning Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24-26).
† Paul didn't tell them that John's baptism had been sinful or meaningless. He explained its original purpose. John had baptized people in repentance while directing them toward the Messiah who was coming (Acts 13:24-25).
† But Jesus had already come, died, and risen from the dead. These men needed to understand that the One John had

announced was Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22-24; Acts 13:28-30).
† When they heard Paul's explanation, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This demonstrates that John's preparatory baptism and baptism acknowledging the accomplished work of Jesus weren't identical (Romans 6:3-4).
† Notice that Paul didn't command them to repeat John's baptism. He directed them to Christ. Their earlier baptism had pointed forward, while their new confession recognized the Messiah who had already come (Acts 4:12).
† Acts 19 describes a particular first-century situation during the apostolic period. It doesn't establish that every believer must undergo two separate water baptisms (Ephesians 4:4-6).
† The essential distinction is between anticipation and fulfillment. John announced the coming Messiah. Paul proclaimed the Messiah who had already accomplished redemption (Acts 13:32-39).

Why Did The Holy Spirit Come Upon Them?

Acts 19:6-7
And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. There were in all about twelve men.
† The Holy Spirit came upon these men during the apostolic period, when God was confirming the message of Jesus Christ through His appointed witnesses (Hebrews 2:3-4).
† Speaking in tongues and prophesying were among the spiritual manifestations recorded during the establishment of the first-century church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).
† These gifts served the developing church while God's revelation and covenant purposes were being brought to completion (1 Corinthians 13:8-12).
† From the fulfilled perspective, those temporary revelatory gifts belonged to the foundational apostolic period, not to an endless continuation of new prophecy after AD 70 (Ephesians 2:20; Jude 3).
† Acts 19 doesn't teach that every Christian must speak in

tongues to prove salvation. Paul himself explained that not everyone possessed the same spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

Apollos Also Needed A Clearer Understanding

Acts 18:24-26
Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.
† Apollos knew the Scriptures and taught concerning Jesus, but his understanding was incomplete because he was acquainted only with John's baptism (Acts 19:3-4).
† Priscilla and Aquila didn't reject him. They explained God's way more accurately so his understanding could grow (Acts 18:27-28).
† Notice that Scripture doesn't say Apollos was baptized again. We shouldn't add that claim to the account. The passage emphasizes instruction and a more complete understanding (2 Timothy 2:15).
† Both Apollos and the disciples in Acts 19 demonstrate why the first-century transition must be understood. Some people still knew the preparatory ministry of John without fully understanding what Jesus had accomplished (Acts 13:24-30).

Christ's Completed Work Is Greater Than John's Preparation

Hebrews 10:12-14
but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time

onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.
† John's baptism called people to repentance, but Christ accomplished redemption through His own sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-14).
† Jesus didn't merely prepare people for righteousness. Through His obedience and sacrifice, He established the basis for their acceptance before God (Romans 5:18-19).
† The New Covenant rests upon Christ's completed work, not upon a continuing system of preparatory ceremonies (Hebrews 8:6-13).
† This is why we must distinguish between what John announced and what Jesus accomplished. Preparation wasn't the destination. Christ Himself was the fulfillment (Colossians 2:16-17).

Historical References
† Josephus, in Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 5, Section 2, described John the Baptist as a man who called the Jews to virtue, righteousness, and baptism. His account independently confirms that John's ministry was associated with moral repentance and washing.
† Josephus also recorded that Herod Antipas feared John's influence over the people and had him executed. This places John's ministry within the actual political and religious circumstances of first-century Judea.
† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, Book 1, Chapter 11, preserved Josephus' account of John the Baptist and connected his ministry with the historical setting of Jesus' appearance.
† These historical writers help establish the first-century setting, but Scripture provides the explanation of John's prophetic mission, Jesus' fulfillment of righteousness, and Paul's teaching in Acts 19 (Matthew 3:13-15; Acts 19:1-7).

How It Applies To Us Today

† We need to read Scripture according to its original audience and historical setting. John's baptism was given to prepare Israel for Christ, not to establish a separate path of salvation that would continue after the Messiah's arrival (Acts 13:24-25).
† Jesus' baptism reminds us that He obeyed the Father perfectly. He didn't need forgiveness, but He willingly fulfilled the mission entrusted to Him (John 6:38; Hebrews 4:15).
† Acts 19 teaches us to distinguish between preparing for Christ and trusting in Christ's accomplished work. Our faith rests in Jesus, not in remaining within the preparatory ministry of John (Acts 4:12; Hebrews 10:12-14).
† Water baptism doesn't replace faith in Christ or become an independent source of righteousness. Salvation rests upon God's grace through faith, not human achievement (Ephesians 2:8-9).
† We also shouldn't use Acts 19 to demand that every Christian experience tongues or prophecy. Those events occurred within the foundational apostolic period (Hebrews 2:3-4; Ephesians 2:20).
† Today, we live in the established New Covenant. We don't need to return to the Old Covenant or wait for the Messiah John announced. Jesus has come, accomplished redemption, and reigns as King (Hebrews 12:22-24; Colossians 1:13).
† The message remains repentance, faith, love, and obedience to Jesus Christ. The difference is that we now proclaim the completed work of the Messiah rather than announcing His first coming as something still approaching (John 3:36; 1 John 2:3-6).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why did John the Baptist baptize people?
A: John preached repentance and prepared Israel for the coming Messiah. His ministry fulfilled the prophecy concerning the messenger who would prepare the Lord's way (Matthew 3:1-6; Acts 13:24-25).
Q: Was John's baptism the same as baptism in Jesus' name?

A: No. John's baptism anticipated the Messiah. In Acts 19, Paul explained that the Messiah was Jesus, and the disciples were then baptized in His name (Acts 19:3-5).
Q: Why was Jesus baptized if He never sinned?
A: Jesus wasn't baptized to receive forgiveness. He submitted to baptism in obedience to the Father's purpose and to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:13-15; Hebrews 4:15).
Q: What did Jesus mean by fulfilling all righteousness?
A: His baptism was one part of His complete obedience to the Father's will. Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets and accomplish redemption through His righteous life and sacrifice (Matthew 5:17; Romans 5:18-19).
Q: Did Jesus become righteous when John baptized Him?
A: No. Jesus was already without sin. His baptism publicly identified Him as the beloved Son and confirmed His mission (Matthew 3:16-17; Hebrews 7:26).
Q: Why were the twelve men in Acts 19 baptized again?
A: They knew John's baptism but needed to understand that Jesus was the Messiah John had announced. After Paul's explanation, they were baptized in Jesus' name (Acts 19:1-7).
Q: Was Apollos also baptized again?
A: Scripture doesn't say that. It tells us Priscilla and Aquila explained God's way to him more accurately (Acts 18:24-26).
Q: Does Acts 19 prove every Christian must speak in tongues?
A: No. Paul explained that spiritual gifts weren't distributed identically to every believer (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).
Q: Does John's baptism still prepare people for a future coming of Christ?
A: No. John's ministry prepared Israel for the Messiah's arrival in the first century. Jesus came and accomplished the redemption John had announced (Acts 13:24-30; Hebrews 10:12-14).
Q: What should Christians understand about baptism today?
A: Baptism must be understood in relation to Jesus Christ and His completed work. Our salvation depends upon God's grace through faith, and our new life is found in Christ (Romans 6:3-4;

Ephesians 2:8-9).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:4-5; Matthew 3:11-12; Matthew 3:13-15; Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 5:17-18; John 3:28-30; Acts 19:1-5; Acts 19:6-7; Acts 18:24-26; Hebrews 10:12-14.
† Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 5, Section 2; Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History, Book 1, Chapter 11.

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