



Message of the Mikvah

by Tim Kelley

Tonight we will begin the 6th month of the year based on the Jewish religious calendar. The name of this month is Elul which is Aramaic for “search”. This is an appropriate name for this month because in Jewish tradition, Elul is the month we are to “search” our hearts - cleansing them of impure thoughts and unrighteous deeds. Elul follows two months that are marked by two of Israel’s greatest sins, the sin of the golden calf in the month Tammuz, and their refusal to enter the Promised Land in the month of Av.

This month is the month that precedes the Chevlei ha Mashiach, or what is known as the Birthpains of the Messiah¹. This period, which is known to Christians as “the Tribulation”, will begin on Yom Teruah – the day of the trumpet blast.

This month also marks the beginning of the period of “teshuva”, the 40 day time of repentance that traditionally coincides with the last of three consecutive 40 day fasts by Moses as he pleaded for the lives of the Israelite people after the sin of the golden calf. Tradition states that if a person has repented of their sins by Yom Teruah, they will not have to endure the Chevlei ha Maschiach – the birthpains.

Being that Teshuva is a 40 day period that starts tonight, it will end on the Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Teshuva is an ancient Jewish custom, that according to some - predates the first coming of the Messiah Yeshua.

Teshuva (תשובה Strong’s 8666) is a Hebrew word for “return”. It comes from the root word shuwb

(שׁוּב Strong’s 7725) which again means to return or turn back. This is the word that’s most commonly used in the Tnakh (the Old Testament) when it comes to a person repenting of sins. It’s also commonly used in reference to restoration, as in restoring the relationship between God and man. A good example of the use of the word shuwb is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel –

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 18:21** "But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die."

Because Hebrew is an action-oriented language (every word is rooted in a verb), the Hebrew concept of repentance is more than just feeling sorry for what you’ve done. To the Hebrews, repentance meant restoring what you had taken or destroyed, then setting your heart to follow the correct path the next time. Everything a person does is considered part of his walk, and the Hebrew walk was to follow a narrow and strait path that was defined by YHVH’s Torah (law or instructions). Thus, when a person got off the path, it was sin.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 4:14** Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil.

In order to repent of the sin the person would simply get back on the path.

This understanding is illustrated in many of David’s psalms; for example –

^{ESV} **Psalms 119:35** Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

So, to shuwb – repent – simply means to reverse course and get back on the path. It’s a process that usually doesn’t happen overnight.

Because Hebrew words imply an action which oftentimes can be seen or witnessed, and being that Teshuva is an ancient Jewish practice, is it possible that we might see an example of Teshuva in the

¹ Based on Isaiah 66:7; Matt. 24:8

scriptures. We'll actually we do. David's many psalms are a good example of acts of Teshuva, Josiah's rending of his garments is another. I submit that another example is that of the Jewish people who came to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

In 1st century Judea and in the land of Israel, there was much expectation that the Messiah would come in their day. The Jewish people understood the prophecies about His coming, one of which was that YHVH would send Elijah to precede the Messiah's coming and the Birthpains –

^{NKJ} **Malachi 4:5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

So when John came on the scene and seemed to fit Malachi's prophecy, many of the Jews believe the Birthpains were eminent and would soon be followed by the coming of The Messiah. So we see in the book of Matthew –

^{NKJ} **Matthew 3:1** In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.' " . . . ⁵ Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him ⁶ and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

From what we see here, there were hundreds – maybe even thousands of people who came to the Jordan during this time. They came with repentant attitudes, and they showed it by an action – they baptized themselves.

On the other hand, there were those who apparently came for only one reason – to flee the wrath to come.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 3:7** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

According to John's question, their motivation was not that of repentance, but of escape. But is that what baptism is all about?

What is baptism about to you? Is a membership ritual for a church? Is it a ticket to eternity. I'm sure each of us has an idea as to why we got baptized, or maybe why we are not yet baptized. What does baptism really do?

Today I want to discuss baptism. Not necessarily the mechanics of it (immersion vs. sprinkling), nor do I want to talk about infant or adolescent baptism verses adult baptism. What we're going to discuss today is what baptism can provide for you. We're going to talk about three aspects of baptism that are not often discussed. They are:

- Hope
- Strength
- Endurance

What is Baptism?

So what is baptism? The first place in the Bible where we see the word "baptize" is, of course, in the New Testament with the baptism of Yeshua^[1]. Being that *baptize* is simply the English transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo* (Strong's #907), it's natural that we would not see the same word in the Old Testament. And though most Greek words in the English New Testament were *translated* into English,

the word *baptizo* was *transliterated*². The Strong's definition of *baptizo* is "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge". In the Greek, the word has no spiritual application. In fact, there are a number of ancient Greek secular writings that mention ships that were baptized, i.e. they sank.

If we trace this word to the Hebrew through the Septuagint, we find the Hebrew word *taval* (טָבַל) - Strong's #2881) which, like its Greek counterpart, means "to dip or plunge". "Taval" is the word that's used in Exodus to describe how the blood from the Passover lamb was to be applied to the doorpost of the house –

^{NKJ} Exodus 12:22 "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, **dip** it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.

It's also the word used to describe what Naaman did in order to be healed of leprosy –

^{NKJ} **2 Kings 5:14** So he went down and **dipped** seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

In both cases, this word *tabal* is translated *baptizo* in the Septuagint. So, in the case of the Passover, we would be correct in saying that the hyssop was *baptized* in the blood. It's also important to realize that the dipping is not what's important, but instead, it's the result that comes from the dipping.

Since "dipping" implies that an object is going to be surrounded by a fluid, which in our examples is either blood or water, it's quite clear that when someone is baptized, they must do so in a body of water. Therefore, baptism is dependent on having a body of water, i.e. – you cannot have baptism without a body, or gathering of water of sufficient volume to allow your body to be dipped. Thus "baptism" implies a "body of water", and in the Hebrew mindset, that body of water is called a "mikvah", and in fact, the Jewish people will oftentimes speak of baptism as being "mikvahed".

The Mikvah -

The Hebrew word "mikvah" (מִקְוָה) – Strong's 4725) simply means a "reservoir", a "collection", or a "collected mass". *Mikvah* is the female version of the masculine noun "mikveh" (מִקְוֶה) – Strong's 4723) which carries the same connotation as its female counterpart. The first place we see "mikveh" in scripture is in the creation story.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 1:10** And God called the dry *land* Earth, and the **gathering** together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that *it was good*.

Recounting the creation story, we know that before the waters were gathered together into seas, the waters covered the entire Earth (vs. 9); they were in fact one big collection of water – a worldwide "mikvah". One might say that God had "baptized" the earth!

The next place we see *mikveh* is in the Exodus story where God turned the water into blood.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 7:19** Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their **pools** of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *buckets of wood* and *pitchers of stone*.' "

² The sound of the word was spelled phonetically in a different language without regard to the meaning of the word.

In this case, the mikveh was a smaller body of water.

The word *mikveh* is connected to a number of Hebrew words, and by finding those words and tying them to the concept of immersion or baptism, we can gather some of the meaning that YHVH placed in this ancient Hebrew ritual.

Endurance

Mikveh, being a noun, obviously has a verbal root, and that root is the word “kavah” (כָּוַן) – Strong’s 6960). *Kavah* has a number of meanings, one of which is again “to collect” or “to gather”. We see this word for the first time in the creation story as well.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 1:9** Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be **gathered together** into one place, and let the dry *land* appear"; and it was so.

Though the first use of *kavah* is translated as “gathered”, the second and primary use of the word is “to wait” or “to look” as in to look longing for something or someone. In fact, out of the 49 times *kavah* is using in the Tnakh, it’s translated either “look” or “wait” 45 out of 49 times. The first time *kavah* is translated “wait” is when Jacob was blessing his sons just before he dies. Right after he delivered Dan’s blessing, he said –

^{NKJ} **Genesis 49:18** I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!

It seems that Jacob may have connected his thoughts at that moment to how he had been judged (deyn) throughout his life and recognized the salvation that had been given to him. There again, the Hebrew word is *kavah*.

Other passages where *kavah* is translate “wait” are:

^{NKJ} **Psalm 25:3** Indeed, let no one who **waits** on You be ashamed; Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.

^{ESV} **Psalm 25:5** Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I **wait** all the day long.

^{NKJ} **Psalm 145:13** Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion **endures** throughout all generations.

So waiting on YHVH is what we begin to do when we are baptized. This is what Israel had to do once they completed their “baptism” in the Red Sea. They didn’t head north toward the Promised Land, they instead headed south toward Mount Sinai.

Hope

Besides “mikveh”, another word derived from “kavah” is “tikvah” (תִּקְוָה) – Strong’ 8615) is almost always translated “hope” or something with that same connotation -

^{NKJ} **Psalm 62:5** My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my **expectation** *is* from Him.

^{NKJ} **Psalm 71:5** For You are my **hope**, O Lord GOD; *You are* my trust from my youth.

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a **hope**.

^{NKJ} **Ezekiel 37:11** Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our **hope** is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'

Hope, then is byproduct of baptism. When we have enough faith in someone that we want to emulate everything he does, we look to him as a hope for the future.

Strength

Though “tikvah” usually means hope, in 2 out of its 34 occurrences in the Tnakh, and in fact, the first time we see it in the Tnakh, it’s translated “line” or “cord”. In the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies, we remember that Rabab knew that the Israelites would be destroying the city of Jericho, and based on the evidence of what the Israelites had done to the cities on the east side of the Jordan, no one would be left alive. Therefore, she asked the spies to spare the lives of her and her family. The spies agreed by and oath and gave her a token of that oath – a piece of scarlet cord – to place in her window –

^{ESV} **Joshua 2:18, 21** Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household . . . ²¹ And she said, "According to your words, so be it." Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

How do the translators get the words “cord” out of the word “tikvah”? Because the root word “kavah” has as its underlying meaning the idea of “twisting”, “stretching”, and “tension”, like the tension one has when he’s waiting for something that will bring a lot of joy.³ It’s like the kids in the back seat when they’re heading for grandma’s place – “are we there yet?” A cord or rope is often twisted and it tends to stretch in order to relieve the tension that’s put on it by its load.

The scriptures also point out that a cord made from three individual cords is a strong cord⁴, and thus “strength” is another meaning of *kavah* and it’s derivative *tikvah* along with another derivative “qav-qav” (קַו-קַו – Strong’s 6978). Because of the idea of “twisting”, the cord was probably a twisted cord, which again would increase its strength.

So to Rahab, that cord not only represented the hope that she and her family would be delivered, it also represented the strength that Israel possessed that would ensure her deliverance.

Thus the thought of a cord and strength are also tied to the idea of baptism in a mikvah, and as we can see, hope, waiting, a cord, and strength are all “tied” (pun intended) together with the mikveh in Hebrew thought.

Baptism – Waiting on YHVH

So what might YHVH be trying to tell us in regards to the mikvah and baptism?

Christians often think of baptism as the point when they are saved – and for those who enter the water for the right reasons, I would wholeheartedly agree, for salvation is not when you cross into the Promised Land, salvation is when you put your trust in YHVH and are willing to follow Him. Baptism only marks the beginning of the journey.

In 1 Corinthians Paul was addressing a number of problems, one of which appears to be the thought that being a part of “the church” gave you a ticket to the Promised Land. This was a typical way of thinking within the Judaism of his day, so Paul used the story of the Red Sea crossing to explain –

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 10:1** Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they

³ BDB pg. 875b

⁴ Ecc. 4:12

drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness.

According to Paul, the Israelites were baptized and they ate spiritual food and drank a spiritual drink every day, but never-the-less, they died in the wilderness, never to see the promised land. Apparently they thought that once they crossed the sea, their battle was over, they now had the key to the “eternal life” door. To emphasis his point, just a few verses later he wrote –

^{NKJ} **1 Corinthians 10:12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Why Baptism?

So if baptism does not provide eternal life for the believer, what does it do?

Like I showed earlier, to be baptized means that you are dipped into a liquid, and the result is that you come out looking like what you were dipped into. When the Israelites dipped the hyssop in the blood, the hyssop now looked like blood . . . and after wiping the hyssop on the doorpost, the doorpost now looked like blood.

Believers, if they did so for the right reason, are baptized into Messiah Yeshua.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 3:26-27** ²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

The word “put on” is from the Greek “enduo” (Strong’s 1746) which means to “cloth yourself”, or to “sink into (His) clothing”. In other words, baptism will cause our outward appearance to be like Yeshua’s . . . He becomes our covering – our garment. It’s at that point that we are clothed in His righteousness -

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 61:10** I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

But being saved and clothed in His righteousness (becoming acceptable to YHVH) doesn’t necessarily mean that we look like Him from the inside. Paul explains this further in Romans –

^{NKJ} **Romans 6:3-5** ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection . . .

Paul is saying that when we are baptized, our old self is to die just as He died. And when we come back out of that water, we should walk a new life, just as Yeshua walked in a new body. Verse 5 is an interesting verse. In the King James version it reads like this –

^{KJV} **Romans 6:5** For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of his resurrection:

In this verse, Paul is saying the same thing he said in the two previous verses – he’s just doing it from an agricultural perspective - that a seed, once planted in the ground, will shed its outer shell and re-emerge as a new plant. What’s more, if two seeds are put into the same soil, both will put off their outer shell and should emerge with similar bodies. So if we are of the same seed as Yeshua, when we are put into the grave (for us, the watery grave of baptism), we should emerge as new life. The Jewish people called it being “born again”⁵.

⁵ John 3:1-12

In verse 5, the Greek word for “planted together” is “sumphutos” and it comes from a root word that means “spring up”⁶. This root word is only used in two places in the New Testament. One place is Hebrew 12:15 where it talks about a root of bitterness “springing up”. The other two places are in the parable of the sower. In that parable a lot of seed was sown, but only part of it sprung up; and of that part that sprung up, only that seed that landed on fertile ground actually endured and made it (by implication) to the Kingdom. Notice Yeshua’s words as He explained the parable –

^{NKJ} **Luke 8:15** "But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.

When you tie Romans 6:5 with the parable of the sower it shows that simply being baptized into the Messiah does not mean that you’ve “arrived”. You will only “arrive” if you were baptized “in the likeness of His death”, meaning that we have put off the old man and have become a new creation. But there’s more to it than that. In the parable of the sower, Yeshua said that the good seed are those who 1) have a good heart, 2) hear the word, 3) keep the word, and 4) bring forth good fruit with patience.

Notice that our good fruit must come with patience, or as my margin shows – with “endurance”. The Greek word here is “hupomone” (Strong’s 5281) and it means steadfastness, constancy, and endurance.

If we search for this Greek word in the LXX, we find that its Hebrew counterpart in the Tnakh is *kavah* or one of its two derivatives – *mikveh* and *tikvah*. Here are all the places these shows up:

^{NKJ} **1 Chronicles 29:15** For we *are* aliens and pilgrims before You, As *were* all our fathers; Our days on earth *are* as a shadow, And without hope (**mikveh**)

^{NKJ} **Psalms 9:18** For the needy shall not always be forgotten; The expectation (**tikvah**) of the poor shall *not* perish forever.

^{NKJ} **Psalms 39:7** "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope (**kavah**) *is* in You.

^{NKJ} **Psalms 62:5** My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation (**tikvah**) *is* from Him.

^{NKJ} **Psalms 71:5** For You are my hope (**tikvah**), O Lord GOD; *You are* my trust from my youth.

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 14:8** O the Hope (**mikveh**) of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, Why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler *who* turns aside to tarry for a night?

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 17:13** O LORD, the hope (**mikveh**) of Israel, All who forsake You shall be ashamed. "Those who depart from Me Shall be written in the earth, Because they have forsaken the LORD, The fountain of living waters."

So what did Yeshua mean when he said “with patience”? He meant that we are to continue in good works, always waiting in the hope of His return.

^{NKJ} **Romans 8:23-25**³ . . . we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.²⁴ For we were saved in this hope (**Gr. - elpis; Heb. – tikvah**⁷), but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait (**Gr.- hupomone; Heb.- tikvah**) for *it* with perseverance.

The mikvah is what provides us hope. On the Egyptian side of the Red Sea, the Israelites had no hope, but once they went through the sea, they did have hope, but their hope waned because of the journey.

What is the source of our hope? According to Paul, our hope is in the word of God –

⁶ “phuo” – Strong’s 5453

⁷ Prov. 23:18; Job 4:6; 5:16; 8:13; 11:18; Ezek.37:11

^{ESV} **Romans 15:4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (**Gr. – elpis; Heb. – tikvah**).

Just as Israel was saved by the Red Sea, we can have hope because of our Red Sea crossing – baptism, but we must be willing to take the journey and endure to the end.

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 10:36** For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

The scriptures are filled with hope for those who wait on YHVH. Abraham waited 25 years for the child of promise; Joseph waited about 24 years to be re-united with his father, and Moses waited 40 years to see the promised land. But these stories of hope and endurance were only given so that we could have hope in God's covenant plan . . . to bring the descendants of Abraham to the Promised Land. But that will only happen when Israel sees her Messiah and begins to honor Him.

So what is the Message of the Mikvah? It's a message of strength, hope, endurance to those who keep their eyes focused on the Promised Land and the Rock of our salvation – Messiah Yeshua.

^{NKJ} **Psalms 27:14** Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!

Shalom Alecheim!