

Response to Dr. David Huffstutler's *A Survey of Two Baptisms*
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Introduction

We are always glad to see the topic of John the Baptist come up in any discussion, especially amongst those who choose to borrow the label that God gave to John, that of "Baptist." As is often the case, popular thinking on John the Baptist does not accurately reflect the NT teaching about this most significant man. A recent example of this appeared courtesy of Dr. David Huffstutler, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Troy, Michigan, with his article *A Survey of Two Baptisms*, which appeared on the Proclaim and Defend website on January 9, 2026. We would commend him for dealing with this topic, and we would humbly offer our rejoinder below. Let us analyze his article sentence by sentence. For ease of reading, I have put Dr. Huffstutler's sentences in bold:

"What is the difference between the baptism of John the Baptist and Christian baptism? This short post is an attempt to describe and distinguish the two."

The first sentence is a false dichotomy. It is assuming what must be proven, that there is a difference between what John did and what Christ, His church and His churches have done. Wording it this way could be categorized as poisoning the well. It is a legitimate question, but could have been worded instead as, "How do we connect baptisms in the Gospels with baptisms in Acts in light of Paul's declaration that there is "one baptism" in Ephesians 4?" Or even, "Was John's baptism Christian?"

"Paul met some disciples in Ephesus and learned that they had not heard of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost and that they were baptized into the baptism of John, i.e., John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-3)."

There are several imprecisions and problems with this sentence. We would not recommend that one start a paper on John's baptism with the last reference to it in the Bible. It is a good hermeneutic practice to trace a doctrine progressively through the NT, and so we would suggest looking at Matthew then the later Gospels, then Acts, etc., or at least to interpret the latter in light of the former. Secondly, it is not entirely accurate to say of these disciples that "they had not heard of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost..." What they actually tell Paul is, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Acts 19:2, KJV). Not hearing whether there even be any Holy Ghost is a far different admission than not hearing of the Spirit's arrival at Pentecost, and we should not convolute the two. Considering how much John the Baptist preached about the Holy Spirit and Christ's baptism with the Spirit, it is immediately suspect as to whether these "certain disciples" were in fact true disciples of John. (As I point out on page 757 of my book (second edition) on John the Baptist: "Paul full well expected the certain disciples of Ephesus to receive the Holy Spirit since they believed. When they confess that they have never even heard of the Holy Spirit, he can tell that the men have neither heard

John the Baptist preach nor trusted Christ as their Savior”). It is biblically reasonable to conclude that these men had simply heard by word of mouth the widely known activity of John the Baptist beginning from his birth (Luke 1:65) and throughout his ministry and baptisms (Matthew 3:5, et.al). Note also that neither Luke nor Paul says that these men were John’s disciples or substantiate their claim. It is the “certain disciples” who claim to have been baptized unto John’s baptism. Neither Luke the author of the book of Acts nor the Apostle Paul make such an assertion.

Notice also Paul’s question: “Unto what then were ye baptized?” There are several legitimate answers to this question, none of which these “certain disciples” give. They could have said, “We were baptized unto repentance,” or, “We were baptized unto confession of our sins,” or, “We were baptized unto the message of John the Baptist which was _____,” or, “We were baptized unto the One coming after John whose shoes he was not worthy to loose,” or several other legitimate answers that reflect the content of John’s message. Instead, these “certain disciples” give a completely empty, illegitimate non-answer as a response to Paul’s question. They simply repeat the popular expression, “John’s baptism.” That would be like asking someone, “what do you believe at your church?” and they respond, “church beliefs.” It is a non-answer, and is a proto-example of unregenerate christendom, or cultural christianity.

“Paul consequently baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and similar to what took place in Acts 2, the Spirit then came on these men who then prophesied and spoke in tongues to indicate that these Gentiles, too, even as far as Ephesus, had been included into the church that began with the Spirit’s outpouring in Jerusalem (Acts 19:5-6).”

Huffstutler says that “Paul consequently baptized them,” but he does not specify “consequently to what?” Fortunately, the book of Acts records exactly the answer to this, where Paul says, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). We note here that Paul preached (or re-preached) to the “certain disciples” the message of John the Baptist. The prerequisite to being baptized by the Apostle Paul was to hear and receive John the Baptist’s message, which concerned both repentance and belief on Christ. Paul is not classifying John’s baptism as a different baptism when he calls it “the baptism of repentance.” Rather, he is making the point to these “certain disciples” that if they desire true baptism they must first have true repentance and belief. When they heard John’s message re-preached by Paul, the consequence for them was to receive it and get baptized, just like today.

Huffstutler says, “and similar to what took place in Acts 2, the Spirit came on these men who then prophesied and spoke in tongues to indicate that these Gentiles, too, even as far as Ephesus, had been included into the church that began with the Spirit’s outpouring in Jerusalem (Acts 19:5-6).” First, we would point out here that Acts 2 of course is not the first time that the Spirit comes on men who had repented, believed, and had John’s baptism, but that in John 20, in the so-called “private pentecost,” Christ gave the Holy Ghost to the eleven (John 20:22). These eleven men, including Peter, John, James, Andrew, and others, were those who had “companied

with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us..." (Acts 1:21-22). These men, like the Head of the church Himself, had no other baptism than John the Baptist's. This first century phenomenon of receiving the Holy Ghost subsequent to salvation was an authenticating demonstration of the Spirit's presence with Christ's assembly, and, as Huffstatler notes, had now gone as far as Ephesus. We would also point out here that, while it is very popular to assert that the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 is the beginning of the church, the fact is that the Gospels record Christ's *ekklesia* ("my church") in action (being comprised of the 12 Apostles who were first set in the church, cf. Matthew 10:1-5, I Corinthians 12:28), preaching the Gospel (Matthew 11:5, et. al.), baptizing those who were made disciples (John 4:1), telling offenses unto the church (Matthew 18), practicing the Lord's table (Matthew 26), singing in the church (Matthew 26, cf. Psalm 22 and Hebrews 2) and being divinely commissioned to continue this movement (Matthew 28), all well before Acts chapter 2. So then what exactly happens in Acts chapter 2 if it is not "the birthday of the church?" The Lord publicly authenticated His assembly, as He did in Exodus 40 with the tabernacle and in I Kings 8 with the temple and as He will do with the millennial temple as recorded in Ezekiel 43.

"Paul explained to them that John baptized with a baptism of repentance, which was joined to the belief in Jesus who was to come after him (Acts 19:4; cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3)."

While it is possible to translate the Greek phrase "a baptism of repentance," it is better, as many translations including the KJV, ESV, NASB, etc, do, to translate the phrase as "the baptism of repentance." As is noted on page 427 of our John the Baptist book: "Though the noun *baptisma* is anarthrous and in the accusative case, it can be seen to function definitely because of the genitive noun which follows it. This principle of NT Greek has already been illustrated in the first verse of Mark, wherein the noun "beginning" has no article, but is definite because of the genitive noun which follows it." But even if we do translate it as Huffstutler and the NKJV do, we can understand that Paul is not relegating or degrading John's baptism to an inferior status. The issue is repentance and faith, which these "certain disciples" seem to be lacking. Both "John's baptism" and "Christian baptism" require repentance. In that sense they are both baptisms of repentance. Both "John's baptism" and "Christian baptism" require belief. In that sense both are baptisms of faith, specifically of faith in "he that should come." Huffstutler admits as much when he says that John's baptism "was joined to the belief in Jesus who was to come after him."

"Perhaps Paul added that John's baptism was a symbol of what Jesus would eventually do - baptize those who believed in Him with the Spirit. (Matt 3:11-12; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:15-17; John 1:26-27, 33-34)."

While there certainly is a place for biblical reasoning when handling the Scriptures, there is not really a need for conjecture here as Huffstutler does. Instead of wondering what Paul may have added which is not recorded by Luke, we can look at exactly what Paul did say to these "certain disciples," while also looking at exactly what John the Baptist gave as his reasons for

baptizing. In John 1:31, John the Baptist gives his reason for his baptism: “that he (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.” Later in 1:33, John the Baptist confirms that it was God Himself Who sent him to baptize with water. What is the reason that John gives for his baptism? It is the manifestation (revelation, showing, demonstrating) of Jesus Christ (the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world) to Israel (the chosen nation and people of the book). In the *Tanak*, the Messiah is predicted both to suffer and to be sovereign. Regarding His suffering, He is predicted to die (Genesis 3:15, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53), be buried (Psalm 16, Jonah 2), and rise again (Job 19:25, Psalm 2, 110, cf. Daniel 12,). Just as those who got saved before the cross looked forward to Christ’s sacrifice, so their baptisms by John the Baptist also demonstrated to those of Israel watching (cf. Matthew 3:7 and the attendance of many Pharisees and Sadducees at John’s baptism) the death, burial, and resurrection of their Messiah and Savior.

“From the above we see that John’s baptism symbolized something past and something future. As to the past, just as water washes away filth, so also the repentant sinner had been forgiven and washed of the guilt from his sins.”

Again conjecture is being employed here. John the Baptist does not give the analogy of water washing away filth with the baptism he performed. Huffstutler will later refer to I Peter 3:21 where such an analogy can be said to be made, but again we are seeking to understand here John’s baptism and its relation to baptisms in Acts 19. We should note that Huffstutler, while saying that John’s baptism symbolized something past, stops short of attempting to identify an Old Testament (OT) antecedent to John’s baptism. That is good, for we do not believe that John’s baptism had any OT antecedent. When Huffstutler says, “the repentant sinner had been forgiven and washed of the guilt from his sins,” he does not specify how. How is it that the sinner was forgiven and washed from the guilt of his sins before receiving John’s baptism? (It certainly was not by receiving John’s baptism, for we do not hold to any form of baptismal regeneration). The answer is found both in Paul’s answer to the “certain disciples” in Acts 19, and in other passages about John the Baptist such as Matthew 21.

Note again in Acts 19 that Paul re-preaches John the Baptist’s message to the “certain disciples,” concerning the need for repentance and faith, which as Huffstutler has noted must have the Lord Jesus Christ as the object of faith, or as Paul puts it, “should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” But also notice that Paul says nothing about the day of Pentecost. That is not the focus of Paul’s message to these men now that he has reason to suspect their spiritual condition since they never heard anyone tell them about the Holy Spirit. Finally, notice what Luke wants the reader to grasp: “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). Now that they had finally and truly heard the Gospel, they were fit candidates to receive John’s baptism, which Paul administered to them.

One of the key testimonies to John the Baptist preaching the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ is from the Lord Himself in the first Gospel written. In Matthew 21:31-32, after giving the religious leaders the parable of the two sons (which in itself was provoked by the religious leaders asking about authority and Christ answering by pointing them to John the Baptist and his

baptism), the Lord Jesus makes this unmistakably clear endorsement of John the Baptist's gospel message: "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." Notice the Lord's divine argument here: 1) those who don't look as righteous as the religious leaders are going into the Kingdom of God before those who do look outwardly righteous, 2) it is because of John the Baptist, 3) he proclaimed God's way of righteousness for sinners, 4) the religious leaders rejected John the Baptist's gospel, choosing their own righteousness over Christ's, 5) again, the outwardly dirty and "bad sinners" who are going to heaven before the religious leaders are doing so because they believed the good news that John the Baptist preached, 6) and again, the religious leaders who saw John the Baptist's preaching and baptism and were warned by him not to trust in their own religious heritage, did not repent later, 7) and because they did not repent at his preaching, they consequently still have not believed the saving message which he preached, and which Christ is preaching now, namely, His own death, burial, and resurrection as the atonement of sins and the imputation of righteousness.

"As to the future, just as the individual was baptized in water, so also Jesus would come and baptize the repentant with the Spirit."

Yes, this is true. Just as John the Baptist was immersing those who had repented of their sins and put their faith in the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world (John 1:29), so the Lord Jesus Christ, Who Himself submitted to John's baptism to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15) would baptize believers with the Holy Spirit. This began in John 20 at the so-called "private pentecost," then continued on Acts 2, 8, 12, and 19, and now according to passages such as Romans 8:9, the repentant believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of his or her salvation.

"In Acts 19:1-7, now that Jesus had come, died, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sent the Spirit, John's baptism was no longer valid."

This is false. And furthermore, we would say this is a potentially dangerous statement to make about John the Baptist. It is with this sort of presupposition in mind that many begin with Acts 19:1-7 in an attempt to prove their point. But no verse in the Bible indicates that John's baptism ever became invalid. This is an assumption that must be proved, and has not been proved, and, in fact, is disproved by the testimony of the NT. As we alluded to earlier, Christ, Who is the Head of the church, had no baptism other than John's. The same is true of the 12 Apostles, and the first 120 members of the church at Jerusalem. If John the Baptist's baptism ever became "no longer valid" then the Lord Jesus Christ has an invalid baptism, as do the Apostles who wrote much of the NT and baptized thousands.

As we have discussed more fully in our book on John the Baptist, John's baptism 1) had no OT antecedent, 2) was of divine origin, 3) had selective participants because it was a believer's baptism, 4) had a Christ-centered purpose, 5) was an immersion, 6) was necessary to obtain membership as one of "John's disciples," 7) was necessary to obtain membership as one

of “Christ’s disciples,” 8) pictured the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and the sinner’s identification with Him, and 9) is the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4. The suspect testimony of these “certain disciples” is woefully lacking as evidence to overthrow John’s baptism.

“It anticipated something that was now past, the coming of Jesus and the initial baptism with the Spirit.”

We agree with this statement insofar as it goes, but it misses much of what John’s baptism signified. John said his baptism was to make the Messiah manifest to Israel (John 1:31). Christ submitted to John’s baptism because it fulfilled all righteousness. All baptisms look to the cross of Christ. Those who were saved and baptized during the ministry of John the Baptist and during the ministry of Christ looked forward to the cross. Those who were baptized after Matthew 28 looked back to the cross. In this, John’s baptism and baptism in Acts are one baptism.

“What Paul administered to these Ephesians was *Christian baptism.*” (italics in the original)

No verses are cited to support this statement, which is implied to mean that John’s baptism was not Christian, meaning “following Christ, imitating Christ, of Christ,” etc. This would mean that Christ did not have Christian baptism. This would mean that Peter, who preached on Pentecost and exhorted the listeners to get saved and then get baptized, had not yet submitted to Christian baptism himself. Of course, we understand that from the beginning of Matthew to the end of Acts represents a time of transition in God’s dispensational dealings with man, but would Huffstutler deny that John the Baptist preached the Gospel? Christ Himself declared that the Law and the Prophets were until John (Matthew 11:11) and Mark stated that the beginning of the Gospel was with John (Mark 1:1-4), and some of the greatest statements on salvation in the NT are from the mouth of John the Baptist (cf. John 1:29, 3:36).

“This baptism involves an individual’s immersion into and being brought up from water (as did John’s), primarily symbolizing his union with Christ in His death and resurrection in that he has died to sin and has been made alive unto righteousness (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:11-12; I Pet. 3:21).”

Huffstutler does not delineate any differences here between John’s baptism and what he calls “Christian baptism.” John’s and Paul’s baptisms both were immersions, as Huffstutler notes. John’s and Paul’s baptisms both symbolized Christ’s death and resurrection, and both were restricted to those who professed to have trusted Christ, i.e. believers’ immersion, cf. Matthew 3:8, Acts 19:4. Whether it was the religious leaders of Matthew 3 or the “certain disciples” of Acts 19, both were lacking in repentance, and needed to be reminded of the content of the Gospel. Today, we would say to someone who came to our church seeking baptism, “Bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” that is, we need to see some evidence or testimony that you have in fact been biblically converted to Christ. The Apostles of Christ who began as John’s disciples may have for a time been lacking the Holy Spirit until John 20, but they were not lacking Christian baptism and never had to be re-baptized. The “certain disciples” may or may not have ever gone through the motions of baptism, but they were lacking the Holy Spirit in Acts 19 because they had not yet been biblically converted to Christ. They were “unsaved Baptists.”

“Implied in this symbolism is that the individual will be one day resurrected as Jesus was long ago (Rom 6:5).”

We believe this statement is true for both John’s baptism and Paul’s baptism and every scriptural baptism in the NT and thereafter. We believe that the doctrine of the resurrection is taught in the OT, and that John the Baptist was a master of the OT and of the gospel of Christ, and understood that while “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” so too is Christ “the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” The promised Messiah was One Who was both to suffer and to reign. We believe John’s baptism demonstrated both these truths to Israel and to his own disciples.

“Similar to the baptism of John, Christian baptism looks to the past and future.”

We would say that the reason why Dr. Huffstutler continues to point out so many similarities between John’s baptism and Christian baptism is because they are one and the same. Yes, John’s baptism was administered before Christ died, but so were the baptisms administered by Christ and His disciples throughout the four gospels (cf. John 4:1ff.). Both John’s baptism and the baptism that Paul administered to the “certain disciples” of Acts 19 looked to the past and the future.

“As to the past, it looks back to the death and resurrection of Christ and symbolizes the believer’s death to sin and new life unto righteousness.”

As we said above, if John the Baptist’s baptism was not Christian because it could not look back to the death and resurrection of Christ, then neither was the baptism that Christ and His apostles practiced throughout the Gospels. To simplify the matter, it would be best to say, all biblically sound baptisms look to the death and resurrection of Christ. The baptisms in the gospels look forward to the death and resurrection of Christ, and the ones following the commission in Matthew 28 look back to the death and resurrection of Christ. In both cases, the baptizee is to identify with Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection as the Lamb of God and Savior of the world.

“Perhaps also, just as one’s baptism by water brings one into the local church administrating as much (one would hope), so also water baptism may look back and symbolize one’s Spirit baptism and its function of having brought one into the church universal, all of which normally takes place at one’s regeneration (I Cor. 12:12-13).”

This sentence is unclear. It seems in the first part Huffstutler is saying that baptism is a prerequisite for membership in the church that is administering the baptism. If so we would agree with that. We would add that baptism by John the Baptist was a prerequisite for being one of “John’s disciples,” and that in order to be one of “Christ’s disciples” one had to have the same baptism which began with John and continued with Christ. As to the second part of Huffstutler’s sentence above, we completely disagree. We do not believe that believers’ baptism looks back to Spirit baptism (note Huffstutler himself couches his premise with “perhaps” and “may.”). Rather, we believe that John’s baptism was looking forward to Christ and His ministry of baptizing believers with the Spirit. We believe this was an authenticating ministry that began in John 20 and continued through Acts as something temporarily subsequent to salvation, and then

became simultaneous with salvation. Furthermore, we do not see anywhere in Scripture “the church universal” and the passage cited at I Corinthians 12:12-13 says nothing about Christ baptizing believers in the Spirit as John the Baptist prophesied, so it certainly is not any fulfillment of Spirit baptism.

“The abnormal situations in which Spirit baptism takes place after conversion are found only in the church’s transitional period recorded in the book of Acts, such as we see with the Ephesians described above (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7).”

We agree here as well, and this is an important point. Huffstutler rightly notes that the normative giving of the Holy Spirit since Acts is simultaneous with conversion. He points out that the believers in Acts 8 and 10 (we would add chapters 1-2), and the “certain disciples” in Acts 19, had a transitional period where for a time they were saved but did not possess the Holy Spirit the way that believers since automatically do upon believing. We would add that based on the testimony of John the Baptist and on the event in John 20 of the so-called private pentecost, that the transitional period of giving of the Holy Spirit is not just recorded in the book of Acts but in the Gospels as well.

Conclusion

In summary, John the Baptist’s baptism is believers’ immersion, the one baptism of Ephesians 4. John required repentance and faith before admitting someone to the baptismal waters, just as Baptists have done through the centuries. Spirit baptism was a first century authentication of the Lord’s ministry, and I Corinthians 12:13 is not talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but is speaking of water baptism. This is clear because John the Baptist taught that Christ (the subject) would baptize (the verb) believers (the direct object) in the Spirit. In contrast to this, I Corinthians 12:13 speaks of believers being baptized in one body. The body is not the Spirit. The baptism in I Corinthians 12:13 unites believers in the local body of Christ, which is the church, as both Jews and gentiles are baptized into that one body and then drink in the spirit of unity through communion.

Acts 19:1-5 is a warning to those who call themselves Baptist but have not believed what John the Baptist preached, the Gospel of Christ, and consequently have not received the Spirit of God. It offers hope to those who are religious but lost that they do not have to stay in that condition if they will truly repent and believe on the Lord Jesus alone for salvation. If a Baptist today believes that John preached a different message or that John practiced a different baptism, then it is on that person to consider changing their moniker from “Baptist” to something else.