

**THE LAWS
FOR UNCLEANNESS
IN THE PENTATEUCH
AND
NEW TESTAMENT
BAPTISM**

Rev. Dr. R. Dean Anderson
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 THE UNCLEANNESSE LAWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT	3
1.1 The Importance of Understanding the Laws for Uncleanness.....	3
1.2 Governing Principles.....	4
1.3 An Overview of the Laws.....	4
1.4 Cleansing Rituals for Uncleanness.....	6
A) For People.....	6
B) For Things.....	11
1.5 Modifications in the Laws upon Settlement in Canaan.....	11
1.6 Uncleanness in Animals.....	12
2 RITUAL CLEANSING AND BAPTISM IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES.....	13
2.1 Ritual Cleansing in New Testament Times.....	13
2.2 The Prophecy of a New Form of Ritual Cleansing.....	14
2.3 The Baptism of John.....	14
2.4 John's Baptism as the Forerunner of Jesus' Baptism.....	15
2.5 Paul on Baptism.....	17
2.6 Hebrews.....	19
2.7 Sprinkling or Immersion?.....	19
APPENDICES	
I. Cleansing Rituals as Literally Found in the Laws.....	21
II. The Main Argument of Ausbüttel against the Existence of Burial Societies.....	23
III. Ritual Baths in Massada and Related Mishnaic Regulations.....	25

1 THE UNCLEANNESS LAWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1.1 The Importance of Understanding the Laws for Uncleanness

Why bother investigating a collection of laws which seem so distant from Christian ethics in the New Testament period? One may legitimately answer this question by quoting the apostle Paul himself when he states:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Rom. 15:4)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

And yet if these words of Paul are true, even for the so-called ceremonial laws of Moses, then we ought to be able to say something as to *how* these laws may encourage and teach us.

In the following study I would hope that the reader would gain a better understanding of what our Lord was instructing Israel of old in these laws. In addition I would hope that our understanding of God's Word would be enriched in at least five other areas (mentioned here in no particular order).

Firstly, that by understanding the laws for uncleanness we would gain a better idea of what Paul means when he speaks of the system of Mosaic laws in his letter to the Galatians (combating the doctrine of the Judaisers) and when he speaks of similar things in the letter to the Colossians (cf. Col. 2:16-23).¹

In the second place, I have attempted to show in section seven how an understanding of these laws can enrich our understanding of Christian baptism.

Thirdly, by appreciating the impact these laws must have had upon the life of the average Israelite and the way in which they separated them from other nations we may better appreciate the importance of the true cleansing of our hearts through the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, it has often been remarked that many (although not all) of these laws had hygienic consequences for the Israelites (e.g. the ban on eating pork, male circumcision). Although the laws themselves are never justified in the Bible with reference to personal hygiene, the Lord in His wisdom may have deliberately provided His people with these "side-effects".

Further, understanding these laws also better enables us to understand the forces at play in many Bible stories in both the Old and the New Testament, e.g. the stories in 2 Samuel 11 (the reason why Bathsheba was bathing outside and the cryptic comment in v.4); 2 Kings 4 (the implication for the Shunamite coming into Elisha's presence after having been in physical contact with her dead son); 2 Kings 5 (the severe limitations placed upon Gehazi and his children by the "leprosy"), or that in Mark 5:25-34 (the implications of a permanent flow of blood from the sexual organs).

Finally, a study of these laws ought also to give us a better appreciation of the importance and implications of God's awesome holiness. A family in Israel that wished to prepare to worship God in His temple was very much aware of the barrier between God's holy presence and man's sinful state. The cleanness laws serve to symbolise and shadow this important theological principle. God's anger would only be induced if a family entered His temple in an unclean state. As we learn from these laws (see below) parents planning such a family visit to the temple would have had to first calculate when the mother and / or any teenage daughters expected their period so as to avoid that aspect of ritual uncleanness. In one or other way it would need to be ascertained that none of the teenage boys had suffered from a wet dream the night before (rendering them unclean). On the day of the temple visit itself nothing unclean could at any time be touched by any family member. Even touching a dead insect would render one unclean—surely a special problem if there were rumbustious young children in the family. Contact with other people who may be inadvertently unclean would also have to be avoided as much as possible. When we begin to think through some of the practical

¹ See my article *Pharisees, Judaisers and Paul* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

implications of these laws, we suddenly realise how important the guilt sacrifices of Leviticus 5:14-19 would have been, sacrifices for sin against the Lord's holiness committed inadvertently. With this in mind, the Christian can more readily appreciate the bold access to the throne of God which we have gained through the work of Jesus Christ! (cf. Eph. 3:12; Hebr. 4:14-16)

1.2 Governing Principles

The cleanness laws presuppose a categorisation of everything in this life into one of four possible states which indicate relative proximity to God:

Most Holy—*sphere of God's personal presence (e.g. the most holy room in the temple)*

Holy—*sphere of God's personal property (e.g. the temple and its courts)*

Clean—*sphere of things which are acceptable to God's presence*

Unclean—*sphere of things which are not acceptable to God's presence*

To be unclean is not necessarily a sin,² but for the unclean to come into contact with the holy is sinful. Since cleanness is fidelity to God's law, cleanness must be attained by each person and is not transferable. This is a very important theological truth. Uncleanness is contagious. It is transferred by physical contact (cf., for example, Lev. 22:5; Num. 19:22; Hagg. 2:12-13). The Levitical gatekeepers for the temple were to ensure that no unclean person entered the holy place (2 Chron. 23:19). Likewise the most holy can only come into contact with the holy. It is sinful for the most holy to come into contact with the profane (i.e. the not-holy, whether clean or unclean). The most holy is also contagious. Contact with it makes a person or thing holy, which is why only priests in a ritual holy state may have contact with the most holy (cf. Exod. 29:37; Lev. 6:26-27; Ezek. 44:19; 46:20)³.

These four states are applied to places, persons and, to a certain extent, to time. Thus in the temple there is a most holy room (God's throne room, as it were) and a holy room. Outside the camp there are clean places and unclean places. The priests are "holy," the Levites are "clean." Nazarites are holy during the period of their vow. When the Bible calls God's people "holy," it is referring to the fact that God called all his people priests in Exodus 19 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). The sabbath day is holy (which may imply that one ought not to deliberately make oneself unclean on this day, e.g. no sexual intercourse, no touching of unclean animals, etc.).

In the New Testament the ritual distinction between the clean and the unclean is abolished in Christ (cf. Rom. 14:14, 20; Hebr. 9:13-14; 10:22). However, the duty to be *morally* clean is still very present. Both the old and new testaments speak frequently of the need for clean hands and a clean heart.

1.3 An Overview of the Laws

Genesis

7:2, 8; 8:20 This shows that the distinction between clean and unclean animals was already known and used in the time of Noah. It would appear that at this time all clean animals were sacrificial animals. Later on sacrificial animals are restricted to sheep, goats, cattle, turtle doves and pigeons.

Leviticus

4:12 The parts of the bull to be burned in the sin offering for the priest must be burned outside the camp in a *clean* place where the ashes are poured out, cf. 6:11; Numbers 18:9; and 14:40ff where an "unclean place" is

² Sinfulness may, however, result in uncleanness, e.g., in the case of sexual intercourse with a menstrual woman (see the references in the next section: *An Overview of the Laws* at Lev. 15), or in the case of eating meat from a dead carcass (see under Lev. 17:15-16). The sect of the Essenes in the time of the New Testament did however equate sinfulness and uncleanness. For them, all sin made one ritually unclean (See E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1977] 313, quoting 1QS 5.14). This sect separated themselves from the people in isolated communities (such as Qumran) and considered themselves the "true" Israel.

³ The texts in Ezekiel show that the altar, priestly garments, and guilt, sin and grain offerings had a most holy status.

mentioned (to be used for dumping building materials with a serious surface disorder). Although not mentioned, when flesh needs to be burned for other offerings this clean place must be presupposed.

5:2-3 A sin offering is to be brought when one became unclean (e.g. by touching an unclean carcass or by touching human uncleanness) and only realised this later on.

7:19 Flesh of a peace offering which touches something unclean must be burned not eaten.

7:20-21 It is forbidden to eat sacrificial meat when unclean (cf. 1 Sam. 20:26 and note 2 Chron. 30:17 where Levites slaughter the Passover lamb for unclean partakers). One can become unclean by touching another unclean thing, e.g., uncleanness of a person, an unclean (dead) animal, or teeming thing.⁴

10:8-11 Priests are not to drink wine or strong drink “so as to make a distinction between holy and profane, clean and unclean.” Note that wine and strong drink are not unclean in and of themselves, nor do they make the user unclean. Neither is wine profane, for it is used in libations. This rule is evidently *symbolic*.

10:14 The priestly portions of the peace offering need to be eaten in a clean place (i.e. outside the sanctuary, which is by definition a “holy” place). This contrasts, for example, with unleavened grain offerings which need to be eaten in a holy place (Lev. 10:12-13, rem. unleavened bread goes with the blood of the sacrifice.⁵).

11 List of unclean animals, etc. Touching their carcasses makes one unclean until evening; if a clean animal dies of itself, touching or eating it makes one unclean (*see below under 17:15-16*).

12 Laws for uncleanness after childbirth.

13-14 Laws for uncleanness through serious surface disorders for people, garments & houses: contraction of a serious skin disease implies isolation outside the camp (13:46)

15 Laws for uncleanness through flows or blood or discharges from the sexual organs (other than faeces or urine). Cf. *Leviticus 18:19; 20:18; Ezekiel 18:5-6; 22:10* which indicate that intercourse with a menstrual woman not only makes one unclean, but is also a sin.

17:15-16 Eating meat from an animal found dead or torn makes one unclean until evening. *This was also a sin (cf. Exod. 22:31; Lev. 22:8; Deut. 14:21; Ezek. 4:14; 44:31). This law may be compared with the stipulations in chap. 11 (cf. Deut. 14) indicating that birds which feed on dead carcasses are unclean.*

20:25 Reason for clean / unclean distinction in animal world given.

21 Priests may not make themselves unclean by contact with a corpse except in the case of close relatives. The high priest may not touch any corpse, not even his parents. *Num. 9 teaches us that laymen are also made unclean by contact with a corpse, but they are not forbidden to become unclean in this way.*

22 Priests may not eat the holy (things) if they are unclean because of a discharge; serious skin disease; contact with a corpse, another unclean person, a teeming thing, eating an animal found dead.

Numbers

5:1-2 Here the rule is given that *all* unclean persons must go outside the camp. This stricter rule serves to emphasise God’s holiness, especially in the aftermath of the sin with the golden calf. Later it applied only to army camps (i.e., not to village or city life), Deuteronomy 23:10-11.⁶

⁴ We should probably read (teeming things) instead of (detestable thing), cf. Lev. 5:2.

⁵ Leaven was forbidden for the regular grain offerings (which had to be burnt), Lev. 2:11-12. In Exod. 23:18 (34:25) it is stated that leaven may not be offered together with blood. Loaves of bread with leaven were used as wave offerings at Pentecost (Lev. 23:17) and viewed as first-fruits. The peace offering for thanksgiving (with its accompanying grain offerings of unleavened bread) were provided with leavened loaves of bread for the use of the priest (Lev. 7:13-14; Am. 4:5).

⁶ P. C. Craigie (*The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 299) interprets this text of nocturnal urination but nowhere else in the Mosaic law does urination (or the passage of stool) cause ritual uncleanness. Ritual uncleanness is related to the expulsion of one’s seed.

6:7,9 A nazirite must not make himself unclean by contact with a human corpse for he is holy.

8:6-7 The cleansing of the Levites for their service.

9 Uncleanness because of a dead person (or a long journey) ought not to hinder the celebration of Passover. Here we gather for the first time that laymen also make themselves unclean by contact with a dead person. The incident relates to Leviticus 10 (the death of Nadab and Abihu).⁷ The feast may then be celebrated one month later. This law was given one month before the law recorded in Numbers 5.

18 Priests may eat of the holy things and first-fruits when clean (cf. Lev. 22).

19 Special regulations are given concerning the cleansing ritual after contact with a corpse.⁸

Deuteronomy

12:15, 21-22 If anyone lives too far from the sanctuary, he may slaughter (clean) animals (draining the blood) and eat meat—whether he is clean or unclean.

14:3-20 List of clean and unclean animals etc.

15:19-23 First-born male animals which have a defect cannot be sacrificed, but (in accordance with the new regulation of Deut. 12) may be eaten if the blood is ritually drained.

23:10-11 The rule of Numbers 5:1-2 regarding uncleanness from a discharge is from now on to apply to army camps.

26:14 It is presupposed that removing the tithe from one's house is a religious exercise not to be performed in an unclean state.

1.4 Cleansing Rituals for Uncleanness

A) For People

A cursory reading of the respective laws with respect to cleansing uncleanness presents what appears to be a bewildering variety of rituals. This apparent variety is illustrated in the appendix where the rituals are itemised according to the exact wording in the respective laws. The picture is, however, probably not intended to be so complex. It is clear that, when the laws mention cleansing rituals, they are not always exhaustive in describing the ritual itself. For example, in Leviticus 22:4-6 it is stated that a man with a seminal emission should bathe his body in water and be unclean till evening. In Leviticus 15:16-18 we learn that he is also expected to wash any clothes upon which semen came. Another example can be found by comparing Leviticus 11:40 and 17:15-16 which shows that bathing in water must be presumed for the stipulations in Leviticus 11. Bearing such considerations in mind we may posit that most of the situations requiring ritual cleansing fell into the first two general categories which follow. The water used for bathing probably had to be "living" water in all cases, although this is only specifically mentioned in Leviticus 15:13 and in Numbers 19:17. "Living" water is water which naturally flows, i.e. from a stream, river, or natural spring.⁹ It is curious to note that, apart from the one day cleansing ritual (for more common forms of uncleanness), all cleansing rituals close with the bringing of a sin offering and a burnt offering.

As argued above in section one, uncleanness is not by definition considered a sin in God's law. Why then were these sacrifices required? The answer would seem to lie in the fact that, although uncleanness could often not be avoided in daily life, yet the factors which cause uncleanness (see below) are nearly all related to things which may be considered a result of the fall into sin. The connection with sin is then a more general

⁷ See the article *A Short Chronology of Events from the Exodus to the Departure from Sinai* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

⁸ It is clear that not everything in this law (given at some point during the wilderness journey) was new at that time. Num. 8:7 presupposes the ritual for making the "purifying water."

⁹ The laws probably intend all ritual bathing to be conducted in running water. Later Judaism considered running water (and rain water) to be pure. Water touched or moved by human hands or implements was considered impure. This led to all manner of regulations defining pure and impure water. See below.

one, not the specific sin of the person who was unclean, but the fact that his uncleanness was caused by factors which relate to the distortion of creation caused by sin (e.g. death, skin disorders), or by sexuality. Although sexuality is certainly not in itself sinful, the original sin of Adam and Eve had the result of making them (and so mankind) sexually aware before the time appointed by God.¹⁰ Each process of cleansing a person from uncleanness may be divided into three distinct time periods as follows:

1) A person does something which causes him to be unclean. As long as the cause remains, or until he begins the cleansing process he is contagiously unclean.

2) Once the cause of the uncleanness has disappeared (e.g. the presence of a discharge or flow from the sexual organs, or the bodily contact with death) the cleansing process may begin. In the case of one day cleansing this period of purification is begun with a ritual washing after which one must wait until darkness before becoming clean.¹¹ In the seven day ritual, seven days must be counted off before the ritual washing. During these seven days (in certain cases) ritual sprinklings may be applied. It would appear that the nature of one's uncleanness during the period of purification is different than before the cleansing process is begun. This is indicated by the wording of texts such as Leviticus 15:13, 28. The person is still in some sense considered to be unclean until the process has been completed and is therefore restricted from coming into contact with the holy (e.g. going to the temple). However, it would appear that his uncleanness is no longer contagious (cf. the ritual below in the case of childbirth). This seems to be the point of Leviticus 15:11 which indicates that the unclean person began the seven day process of purification by washing his hands.

3) After the appointed time for purification the person is officially designated clean, and if sacrifices are required, these may now be presented in the temple.

One day of cleansing

For this ritual one had to wash his clothes and bathe in "living" water after discovering his uncleanness. He then had to wait until evening before he was clean. The laws imply that before the ritual washing anything or anyone he touched also became unclean.

The specific laws requiring one day cleansing show that such cleansing was required after contact with the carcass of an unclean animal, or that of a clean animal which had died of itself.¹² It was also required if one came into contact with another unclean person or thing. In the third place it was required after any discharge of semen in a male, and probably after the period of normal menstruation in a woman (noted as seven days in Lev. 15:19).

Leviticus 15 deals with rituals of cleanness in respect to both normal and abnormal discharges (or flows of blood) from the sexual organs in both men and women. The chapter is chiastically arranged as follows:

abnormal discharge in a male (15:2-15)

normal discharge (of semen) in a male (15:16-18)

normal flow (of blood) in a female (15:19-24)

abnormal flow or discharge in a female (15:25-30)

¹⁰ See *The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles> where this proposition is further discussed. Is it significant that sexuality will no longer be in evidence upon the new heavens and earth (cf. Matt. 22:30)? Josephus (*Apion* 2,203) argues that the discharge of semen renders one unclean because in that act the soul of a person is divided in order to make a new soul and when a soul (or part thereof) enters (or leaves, as in the case of death) the body itself suffers, requiring the cleansing ritual.

¹¹ Failure to understand that cleansing is a *process* has often led to an incorrect translation of 2 Sam. 11:4 concerning David's adultery with Bathsheba. From the roof of his palace, David had seen Bathsheba taking a ritual bath (by definition, a bath which is outside). David sent for Bathsheba and lay with her. At this point the Hebrew introduces a circumstantial clause. The whole clause ought to read: "he lay with her while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness, and ...". Bathsheba had already begun the *process* of purification, but had not yet completed it at the time of the adultery. In other words, it was not yet dark. The sexual intercourse nullifies the effect of her ritual bath and makes her unclean once again. If she was planning a visit to the temple the following day, this would now have to be cancelled.

¹² It would obviously be too much of a burden to make contact with the intentionally slaughtered carcass of a clean animal a cause of uncleanness. This would also make sacrifices of such animals in the temple impossible (where no uncleanness can be tolerated).

Although not specifically stipulated, we may conclude that this chapter is concerned with flows and discharges from the sexual organs. This is certainly the case for the normal discharge in a male (i.e., of semen) and for the regulations governing menstruation in a woman. Discharges of faeces or urine are not mentioned, nor do such human waste products ever make one unclean elsewhere in God's law. The abnormal male discharge regulated in Leviticus 15:2-15 should therefore be seen as an abnormal discharge from the penis. Any discharge outside of urine (not covered by this law) or semen (regulated in Lev. 15:16-18) would come under this category.¹³ It is striking that the regulations governing a normal (menstrual) flow of blood in a woman (Lev. 15:19-24) do not actually mention any cleansing ritual for her. Her menstrual flow is reckoned to last seven days, but this is not a seven day cleansing ritual since a cleansing ritual can only begin after the cause of uncleanness has disappeared (cf. Lev. 15:28).¹⁴ Going by the difference in cleansing rituals for a normal and abnormal discharge in a male, we may conclude that a normal menstrual flow was concluded with a one day cleansing ritual. Just as for the male, an *abnormal* flow or discharge in a female requires a seven day cleansing ritual. For a woman the abnormal discharge is described in terms of an abnormal *flow of blood*, probably because this is the most likely form of abnormal discharge or flow from the sexual organs likely to occur in a woman.

Seven days of cleansing

For this more serious form of uncleanness a period of seven days for cleansing was required. The seven day cleansing ritual only applied in cases of an abnormal discharge or flow of blood from the sexual organs or contact with a human corpse. The specific ritual for each of these two cases varies.

The purification ritual in the case of an abnormal discharge or flow of blood from the sexual organs resembles that of the one day cleansing ritual.

On the seventh day the unclean person was to wash his clothes, bathe in "living" water and (presumably) wait until evening when he would be clean. On the eighth day, in his clean state, he was to go to the temple and present a burnt offering (with its accompanying grain offering and libation of wine) and a sin offering. The required sacrifices are only explicitly stipulated in the case of an abnormal discharge or flow of blood in a woman (turtle doves or young pigeons, Lev. 15:28-30).

In the case of cleansing after contact with a human corpse a special ritual was followed to prepare the purifying water (Num. 19). The ashes of a red heifer, which was sacrificed as a sin offering, were added to "living" water and this was sprinkled on the unclean person by another clean person using hyssop. The sprinkling was done on both the third and the seventh day. On the seventh day, after the second sprinkling, the unclean person was to wash his clothes, bathe in "living" water and wait until evening when he became clean. No mention is made of further sacrifices, though the same sacrifices as in the case of a discharge of blood may well be intended. This ritual is mentioned in Hebrews 9:13 (cf. Ezek. 36:25-27) and compared to the cleansing offered us in the blood of Christ. The twofold action of being sprinkled and later washing one's body is metaphorically applied to the Christian in Hebrews 10:22 (see below).

In addition to these two general categories there are a number of special cleansing rituals ...

Cleansing from a serious skin disorder¹⁵

Leviticus 14:1-32 provides us with a complex cleansing procedure for someone who has suffered from a serious skin disorder which has apparently healed. The malady has often been translated as leprosy, although this is not the meaning of the Hebrew word which is also used for mildew in houses. The term indicates any disorder which mars the surface of something (in the case of a person, his skin) in an abnormal way. Whilst suffering some such skin disorder a person remains in an unclean state.

¹³ A list of possible medical conditions causing such a discharge is beyond the purpose of this article.

¹⁴ Lev. 15:24 stipulates that a man who engages in sexual intercourse during the period of menstruation shares in her 7 days of uncleanness. Although intercourse with a menstruating woman is a sin (see [section two on this text](#)), this text may refer to the (unintentional) onset of menstruation during intercourse.

¹⁵ It should be realised that the ritual in 2 Kings 5:10ff is to *cure* Naaman from his skin disorder and in that respect differs from this ritual which is applied to the Israelite *after* his skin disorder has disappeared.

The ritual (described in detail in Lev. 14) involves two live clean birds, one of which is killed and the other set free (cf. the scapegoat in Lev. 16). It also involves cedar wood, scarlet string and hyssop which is used to sprinkle the unclean person with the blood of one of the birds seven times. After this ritual he is to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe in (presumably “living”) water. The washing and shaving is to be repeated after seven days.

On the eighth day the priest who pronounced the person clean shall present him at the tabernacle for the requisite sacrifices. Before the expected sin and burnt offerings (known from the seven and fourteen day cleansing rituals) a special ritual involving a reparation offering together with a log of oil is performed. The male lamb and the oil are initially presented to the Lord as a wave offering and then the lamb is sacrificed as a reparation offering and its blood together with the oil are ritually placed upon different parts of the offerer’s body. Some of the oil is sprinkled seven times before the Lord. The oil and reparation offering appear to be required to atone for lost revenue for the Lord during the prolonged period of uncleanness brought about by the skin disorder.¹⁶ Whilst no substitute is allowed for the reparation offering, in the case of poverty the sin and burnt offering (a yearling ewe lamb and a male lamb respectively¹⁷) may consist of two turtle doves or young pigeons.

Cleansing of a mother after childbirth

Leviticus 12 stipulates distinct periods of uncleanness for a mother after the birth of a son (seven days) or daughter (fourteen days). For this length of time she is considered to be unclean “as in the days of her menstruation.” This would indicate that anything or anyone which she touches will also become unclean and need to be cleansed with the one day cleansing ritual (see above). These periods of uncleanness are simply stipulated without obvious reference to a continuing discharge or flow of blood during the specified times.¹⁸ The phrase “blood of her purification”, however, indicates that it is the post-natal bleeding that accounts for the period of uncleanness. No reason is given for the doubling of the period of uncleanness in the case of a female child. It may simply be that two weeks of uncleanness are seen to adequately cover all cases of normal post-natal bleeding. In the case of a male child, however, circumcision needs to take place on the eighth day. The regulation therefore allows for the mother (and therefore also the child, who is in constant contact with the mother) to be ritually clean for the day of the circumcision.

After the seven (or fourteen) days of uncleanness, the mother, although she is no longer technically unclean, must remain for 33 days (66 in the case of a daughter) “in the blood of her purification.” The restrictions imposed upon her because of this are the same as if she were unclean. The difference seems to be that her “uncleanness” is (after the seven [or fourteen] days) no longer contagious. Technically, uncleanness is always contagious and therefore the period of 33 days is described as “in the blood of her purification.” This period may be likened to the cleansing period in the one day or seven day cleansing rituals. After this purificatory period no ritual washings are prescribed. Whether such washings were ever intended can no longer be determined. The selection of legal material passed down to us does not always permit certain answers to such questions. Certain sacrifices in the central sanctuary are, however, prescribed. These are the same for the birth of a male or a female, namely, a lamb for a burnt offering and a turtle dove or young pigeon for a sin offering. In the case of poverty two turtle doves or young pigeons may suffice.¹⁹

The cleansing of the Levites

The ritual for the initial cleansing of the Levites is a special case (Num. 8:5-22). The Levites needed to be clean in order to serve in the tabernacle and for this purpose a special ritual was prescribed for their *en masse* cleansing.²⁰ They are to be sprinkled with “purifying water”—a term which must surely imply water prepared in the same way as prescribed in Numbers 19 for cleansing from uncleanness caused by contact

¹⁶ This suggestion comes from G. Wenham (*The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979] 210). See *Notes on the Sacrifices*. (not currently available)

¹⁷ Although the text of Lev. 14 does not make clear which lamb is for the sin offering and which for the burnt offering, the analogy with Lev. 12 would suggest that the more expensive animal (the male lamb) is to be designated for the burnt offering.

¹⁸ I am informed by Dr. M. M. J. van der Pijl (an emergency specialist) that post natal bleeding usually continues for at least a week after childbirth. This, however, does not explain why the woman remains unclean for an additional week after the birth of a baby girl.

¹⁹ Compare Luk. 2:22-24. Luke speaks of “the days of *their* purification” which is probably only a reference to the fact that husband and child were dependent on the ritual cleanness of the mother before they could all go to the temple.

with a human corpse (see above). They are then to shave their bodies completely (cf. the ritual for the cleansing of the person who suffered from a skin disorder) and wash their clothes. Presumably they were also to bathe in “living” water.

Once they are ceremonially clean the sons of Israel (for whom the Levites are substituting²¹) lean their hands upon the heads of the Levites symbolising the substitution.²² The Levites are then presented to the Lord as a wave offering. Two bulls are then brought as a sin offering and a burnt offering (with its respective grain offering and probably a libation). The leaning of the hands upon the heads of the bulls is specifically stipulated here, but this was a regular part of the sacrificial ritual.

Causes of uncleanness

Reviewing the laws for uncleanness in persons we can isolate four basic situations which cause a person to become ritually unclean.

a) Contact with death

seven day cleansing: contact with a human corpse

one day cleansing: contact with the carcass of an unclean animal, or a clean animal which died of itself

b) Flow of blood or discharge from the sexual organs (excepting urine and faeces)

seven day cleansing: abnormal flow of blood or discharge from the genitals of a male or female

one day cleansing: discharge of semen in a male, regular flow of blood (menstruation) in a female (although this is not specifically regulated)

special ritual of Leviticus 12 in the case of childbirth

c) Serious skin disorder

special ritual of Leviticus 14 involving a double cleansing seven days apart

d) Contact with other uncleanness

one day cleansing for all forms of contact with another unclean person or thing

Inadvertent Uncleanness

Leviticus 5:2, 5 provides a procedure for obtaining forgiveness due to inadvertent uncleanness. It would be all too easy to inadvertently become unclean and only realise this fact much later on (long after the cleansing should have taken place). This law shows that failure to go through the appropriate cleansing ritual, even if one was not intending a visit to the temple (i.e. a “holy” place), is considered to be sinful. A sin offering of a female lamb or goat is to be brought (provision is made for birds in the case of poverty) in order to make atonement with God.

This sacrifice is required only when the guilt of uncleanness has been established. One could obviously also become inadvertently unclean without ever learning of this fact (e.g. by touching a dead insect unawares). The pious Israelite will surely always have had the prayer of David in Psalm 19:12 upon his lips:

“Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.”

²⁰ This contrasts with the *sanctification* of the priests (Lev. 8) in order to make the “holy” and so able to handle the “most holy” gifts. See the outline of the various states of holiness and cleanness under section one.

²¹ See further the appendix to my online commentary on *The Laws of the Book of the Covenant* on ‘The Effect of the Sin of the Golden Calf’ to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

²² See *Laying on of hands at the Ordination of Elders* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

B) For Things

“Things” may also become unclean. They require purification if this is possible, otherwise destruction. The specific cleansing rituals as given in the laws may be found in the appendix. Putting these laws together we find that “things” are divided into three broad categories: i) earthenware,²³ ii) items of cloth, skin or wood (a solid house as well as a tent may be included in this category), iii) metals.²⁴ Causes of uncleanness in “things” are similar to those in humans. Categories *a* (contact with death) and *d* (contact with other uncleanness) listed above also make any “thing” unclean. A serious surface disorder may affect items of cloth, skin or wood, including an entire house (see Lev. 13:47-59; 14:33-53).

Only items from the first category of “things” (earthenware) can never be cleansed and must therefore always be destroyed if they become unclean.²⁵ Metals are purified by fire, although the problem of uncleanness in metals is only mentioned in Numbers 31:22-23 in connection with the special case of uncleanness through contact with a human corpse. Items of cloth, skin or wood are cleansed by putting them in (presumably “living”) water. They remain unclean until evening (a one day cleansing ritual).²⁶

As with humans, uncleanness through contact with a human corpse entails the use of the special “purifying water” of Numbers 19 which is sprinkled upon “things” of cloth, skin or wood. Earthenware must be broken and metals are put through fire.

A serious surface disorder in cloth, skin or even a house which is not malignant may be cleansed upon its disappearance. Garments are washed, but a house is cleansed with an elaborate ritual similar to that for persons when cleansed of a serious skin disorder (Lev. 14:49-53).

1.5 Modifications in the Laws upon Settlement in Canaan

The book of Deuteronomy (Moses’ speech delivered on the plains of Moab before Israel finally crosses into the promised land) introduces two changes to the laws for uncleanness.

1) In Num. 5 God had effectively declared the whole Israelite camp holy, banning unclean persons from it. This rule will have been enforced for the 38 years of journeying in the desert, but was to be modified after settlement in Canaan. From this time on the law was only applied to Israel’s military camps (see above under Num. 5:1-2). If God went with the armies of Israel (usually symbolised by the conveyance of the ark of the covenant) then the military camp was made God’s (temporary) place of residence, and so holy. Otherwise only the grounds of the temple were considered holy.

2) In Leviticus 17:1-7 God prescribed that during the period of the wilderness journey, if anyone wanted to eat a domestic animal (i.e. an animal from the herd or flock), he first had to bring it to the tabernacle and present it as a (peace) offering. (The peace offering was a particular category of sacrifice whereby most of the meat of the sacrificial animal was retained by the person presenting the offering. This meat was used by him and his family for food, though it could only be eaten by those people in his family who were ceremonially clean at the time. Lev. 7:11-21). This regulation only applied to domestic animals and not wild animals, which could be eaten anywhere, anytime, if the animals were of the “clean” variety (cf. Deut. 14:4-8). This law was provided to prevent the Israelites from sacrificing domestic animals to goat demons—a practice that was evidently a problem at that time.

The modification of this law, given in Deuteronomy 12:15-28, states that from the time they enter the land of Canaan, the Israelites no longer have to make a peace offering out of every domestic animal they happen to

²³ Later Rabbinic tradition also put vessels of glass into this category, see *M. Kelim* 30.1.

²⁴ The land can also be said to be polluted (lit. “made unclean”) through murder (e.g. Num. 35:33) or through a corpse that remains unburied (Deut. 21:23). There are, however, no rituals for cleansing in such situations.

²⁵ This is probably why Elisha requires a new (i.e., ritually “clean”) jar in 2 Kgs. 2:20.

²⁶ The cup and the dish (regularly cleansed by the Pharisees) mentioned by Jesus in Matt. 23:25-26 must have been items of wood or skin. They cannot have been earthenware which (because of the cleanness laws) cannot have been much used for eating by faithful Jews due to the risk of having to destroy them if they ever became unclean (e.g. by being touched by a person in an unclean state, by coming into contact with a dead insect, etc.).

kill. From then on they may slaughter and eat any domestic animal they wish, anywhere, anytime, just as they had been doing with wild animals (e.g. a gazelle or deer). Furthermore, when they do this they no longer have to be ceremonially clean to eat it. The only requirement that still applies is that the blood has to be poured out onto the ground. Blood was not to be eaten since God had reserved blood (in which the soul of the animal was said to reside, cf. Lev. 17:10, 14) for atonement upon the altar. Of course peace offerings were still required to be given from domestic animals, and when this was done (as with all holy gifts), they were to continue to observe the old regulations and present the sacrifices at the central sanctuary.

1.6 Uncleaness in Animals

The seeming arbitrariness in dividing up the animal world into clean and unclean creatures has puzzled many a commentator. What are the reasons behind the categorisation of individual creatures and the whole clean / unclean distinction in the animal world as a whole? It is commonly suggested that the creatures designated as unclean were those animals which the surrounding pagan nations used in the worship of their gods. This explanation, however, is not only not found in the Pentateuch, but it only partially explains the evidence. Pagans did use pigs in their sacrificial ritual, but they also used cows. Why are cows then not considered unclean? And did pagans use eels (considered unclean) for sacrifice? Another common explanation is hygiene. Animals which more easily carry disease are supposedly declared unclean, but once again this only works partially (e.g. for pigs) and is not a reason provided in the laws themselves.

Following Mary Douglas, I believe that due attention needs to be paid to the reasons for the distinctions given in the laws themselves.²⁷ A key text in this respect is Lev. 20:24-26 where the Lord makes it clear that the distinction between clean and unclean creatures is to be a reflection of the distinction which God has made between Israel as a holy nation and other peoples on the earth. Just as God had no particular reason for choosing the nation of Israel (cf. Deut. 7:6-8), the distinction between clean and unclean creatures is relatively arbitrary. In the laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 clean creatures are basically defined in terms of normative characteristics for three broad categories, creatures of the land (dividing the hoof and chewing the cud), creatures of the water (having fins and scales), and creatures of the air (birds not feeding upon carrion, insects which like birds have wings and use two legs for locomotion). Creatures which blur the boundaries of these three categories (so-called “swarming things”) are ruled unclean.

In the laws of Moses the distinctions made in the animal world are slightly different than those in evidence at the time of Noah. An overview of the difference helps to make clear how these distinctions in the animal world were intended to reflect the distinctions that God had made among humans.

The time of Noah

clean animals correspond to the believing line of Seth
unclean animals correspond to unbelievers

The time of Moses

sacrificial animals correspond to the tribe of Levi (set apart for service to God)
clean animals correspond to Israel as a holy nation
unclean animals correspond to other nations

The distinction for the time of Noah in Genesis 7 and 8 was thus a distinction which also held for the time before the flood. At this time any clean animal could be used in sacrifice. In the time of Moses, God set the tribe of Levi apart for his service and therefore a new distinction is made within the sphere of clean animals (representing Israel), namely that of sacrificial animals (clean animals which are also domestic—representing the tribe of Levi).

In accord with the general abolition of the clean / unclean distinction with the redemptive work of Christ (cf. Rom. 14:14, 20; Hebr. 9:13-14; 10:22), the distinction in the animal world is also abolished (cf. Mark 7:19). In Acts 10-11 we see confirmation that this distinction in the animal world served to symbolise Israel's

²⁷ See *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) and “Deciphering a Meal” in *Daedalus* 101 (1972) 61-81. It should be noted that I do not follow Douglas' structuralism in all its details. See further Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* Sheffield: JSOT press, 1992) 75-83, 145-46.

separation from the nations (Lev. 20:25). All Old Testament laws which symbolise this separation (removed in Christ) are no longer binding on Christians, see Ephesians 2:11-22.²⁸

2 RITUAL CLEANSING AND BAPTISM IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

2.1 Ritual Cleansing in New Testament Times

Ritual cleansing had always been very common in the life of a Jew as we have already seen. But Judaism in the time of the New Testament often went even further than the regulations in the Pentateuch. Various sects stipulated extra ritual washing. For example, at the Jewish sect in Qumran (by the dead sea) ritual washings were part of entry into the community, which was accomplished by means of a covenant ceremony along the lines of Deuteronomy 27. Josephus mentions the fact that he spent the first three years of his life with one Bannus, an ascetic who lived in the wilderness and every day and night engaged in ritual washings (*Vita* 11). The Mishnah (rabbinic discussion on the laws of the Pentateuch) adds many details to the biblical legislation for ritual washing. There are ten whole chapters of rules and regulations. As an example we may take *m.Miqw.* 6.1-3, 8 ...

*Any pool of water that is mingled with water from an Immersion pool is deemed like to the Immersion-pool itself. ... If a bucket filled with vessels was immersed, they also become clean; but if the bucket itself was not wholly immersed, the water within it does not count as mingled with the water of the Immersion-pool. Unless the water within the bucket mingled with the water of the pool by a stream the size of the spout of a water-skin. If there were three pools, two containing each twenty seahs of undrawn water and the third twenty seahs of drawn water, and that which held drawn water was at the side, if three went down and immersed themselves therein and the water of the three pools overflowed and mingled together, the pools are accounted clean, and they that immersed themselves become clean. ... They may render Immersion-pools clean by mingling the drawn water in a higher pool with undrawn water from a lower pool, or the drawn water in a distant pool with undrawn water from a pool that is near by. Thus a man may bring a pipe of earthenware or lead, and keep his hand beneath it until it is filled with water, and draw it along until the surface of this water is made to touch the surface of the other water; if it touches by a hair's breadth it suffices.*²⁹



See appendix III for an enlargement and additional commentary.

Ritual washings in Judaism could also be described by the word “baptism”:

LXX 2 Kings 5:14

καὶ κατέβη Ναυμὰν καὶ ἐβαπτίσατο ἐν τῷ Ἰορδάνῃ ἑπτὰκι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμα Ἐλισαίε

‘And Naaman went down and baptised himself in the Jordan seven times according to the word of Elisha.’

Judith 12:7

καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ νύκτα εἰς τὴν φάραγγα Βαιτυλοῦα καὶ ἐβαπτίζετο ἐν τῇ παρεμβολῇ ἐπὶ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος

‘And she went out at night into the gully of Baituloua and baptised herself in the camp at the spring of water’.

²⁸ For other laws symbolising this separation see, for example, Lev. 19:19 and Deut. 22:9-11.

²⁹ Translation of H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford; University Press, 1933).

Sirach 34.25

βαπτίζόμενος ἀπὸ νεκροῦ καὶ πάλιν ἀπτόμενος αὐτοῦ, τί ὠφέλησεν ἐν τῷ λουτρῷ αὐτοῦ;

‘If someone baptises himself because of [contact with] a corpse and once again touches it, what does his washing benefit him?’

Mark 7:4

καὶ ἀπ’ ἀγορᾶς ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται οὐκ ἐσθίουσιν

‘And (coming) from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they are baptised.’

2.2 The Prophecy of a New Form of Ritual Cleansing

The Old Testament itself had prophesied the coming of a new kind of ritual washing:

*Then the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; **their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.** Therefore I poured out My wrath on them ...*

*Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name ... **Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.** Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezek. 36:16-18a; 22-23a; 25-27)*

Ezekiel speaks here of a ritual washing which will be performed by God and not by oneself. It is a washing which symbolises a moral cleansing and results in a life of new obedience to God in the power of the Spirit. This prophecy forms an important link between Old Testament ritual cleansing and New Testament baptism as we shall see.

2.3 The Baptism of John

It is against this background of the cultural and religious importance of ritual washing that the baptism of John ought to be seen. John’s baptism had many contacts with ritual washing. It was no mere coincidence that his baptisms were conducted in the “living” water of a river (which was thus ritually clean). In fact, it is the failure to see the connection with ritual washing which has in part led to theories considering the dunking of baptism to be an image of drowning. This failure has primarily to do with our inability to appreciate the significance of ritual washing in Jewish society. There is no substantial evidence for considering baptism against any other background.³⁰

That said, however, it must also be recognised that John’s baptism was significantly different to the ritual washing of the Law of Moses or the first century Judaistic sects. This difference ought to be explained in terms of the new kind of ritual washing of which Ezekiel had prophesied. John’s baptism was a ritual performed once only on any given person. Ritual washings were frequently repeated. John’s baptism was administered by himself as a prophet of God (hence the designation, “John the baptiser”). Ritual washings

³⁰ J. van Bruggen in the second chapter of *Het Diepe Water van de Doop* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1997) argues for baptism as an image of drowning on the basis of four lines of reasoning, 1) the differences between ritual washing and baptism, 2) the contention that “baptism” means “sinking” or “drowning” as in the sinking of a ship or the drowning of a person, 3) Paul’s image of baptism as burial with Christ, and 4) Jesus’ speaking of his death on the cross as a metaphorical baptism. In all this Van Bruggen ignores all other evidence which points to the image of ritual washing. Neither are the reasons he brings forward very strong. Indeed there are differences between Old Testament ritual washing and New Testament baptism as we shall show. But the fact that there are differences does not have to mean that there are no similarities or connections. In the second place, the fact that the Greek word “baptism” can be used metaphorically of the sinking of a ship does not make this word actually mean “sinking” or “drowning.” As we have seen it is not infrequently used of ritual washing. In the third place, as we shall show, Paul uses multiple images of baptism of which burial with Christ is one, but ritual washing is another (cf. Tit. 3:5). Finally, the fact that Christ uses the term “baptism” metaphorically of his crucifixion does not have to mean that the word is here used in the sense of drowning. In Luke 12:50 Jesus says: “But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished.” Jesus may refer here to baptism as “drowning,” but might he not equally refer to baptism as “cleansing”?

were normally performed without the agency of anyone else. Recall that the new kind of ritual washing prophesied in Ezekiel would be administered by God. John the baptiser was “sent by God” to administer the water (Christ would later administer the Spirit). It would seem that the Jewish leaders also expected that a special person would be sent by God to administer this new ritual washing (baptism), hence their questioning of John, see John 1:19-28. They became confused when John denied that he was the Christ, or Elijah, or the prophet, since they expected that one of these would administer the special prophesied baptism. The most important distinction between normal ritual washing and John’s baptism was connected with the preaching of the coming of the Kingdom. God himself would soon return to Israel as King in the form of the promised Messiah. Just as Israel needed to cleanse themselves before God’s holy presence at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19), and always needed to be in a ritually clean state to enter his holy temple, so they also needed to be cleansed at this great moment of redemption history when God himself in the form of the Messiah would come to His people. If God, when He came, found the people unrepentant there would be judgment, see Luke 3:7, 9. This judgment eventually came in the sending of the Gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 9-11) and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (cf. Luk. 19:41-44). John’s baptism was not for ritual purity, but moral purity. It was a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4).³¹

2.4 John’s Baptism as the Forerunner of Jesus’ Baptism

John was clearly a forerunner of Jesus, the promised Messiah. John baptised with water. Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire:

He Himself (i.e. Jesus) will baptise you with Holy Spirit (= wind) and fire, He whose winnowing fork is in His hand to clean out His threshing floor, and to gather the His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3:11c-12 literally translated; cf. Luke 3:16c-17).

The imagery here can escape us if we do not perceive the double-meaning of the word “spirit,” which may also mean “wind.” Chaff was separated from the wheat by throwing the wheat up into the air with a winnowing fork and letting the wind blow the much lighter chaff away, allowing the heavier wheat to fall back to the ground (see the picture below). The message is essentially that what was a symbolic ritual for John will be turned into reality by Jesus. John warned those whom he baptised to bring forth the fruits worthy of repentance. Otherwise the axe would be laid to the tree and the tree would be cut down and burned with fire (the barren tree represents the person without genuine repentance). Jesus will sift those with genuine repentance (the wheat) from those without (the chaff). John’s baptism symbolised a genuine cleansing (= purification) from *moral* evil. After baptism John gave instruction on the good works which it was now incumbent to perform (Luke 3:7-14). When John speaks of Jesus baptising with a holy “wind” (the Spirit), he pictures the wind blowing the wheat away from the chaff after it has been thrown up by the winnowing fork. The work of the Holy Spirit is here a work of *setting apart* the true believers from those whose hearts remain cold. In the book of Acts we see the Spirit delineating true believers by gifts and removing those who do not produce the requisite fruits (cf. Ananias and Sapphira).³²

In Acts two Luke points to the fulfilment of Jesus’ baptism with the Holy Spirit (wind) and fire in the sending of the Spirit



³¹ *Contra* Josephus, *Antiq.* 18.117 who describes John’s baptism as a sanctification of the body for those who have already cleansed their soul through a life of righteousness.

³² Although some commentators (e.g. Plummer on Luke) wish to separate John’s image of baptism in Holy Spirit and fire from the following image of winnowing, John himself combines them into one sentence. The fact that verse 17 so naturally flows from the images of wind and fire and is so easily explained within the context of the meaning of John’s own baptism belies any attempt to drive a wedge between the meaning of verse 16 and verse 17.

at Pentecost. The imagery of a “violent, rushing wind” and “tongues as of fire” remind us of the image of sifting proclaimed by John the baptiser. The event was evidence that Jesus had now taken his place at God’s right hand (Acts 2:33). The Spirit settled on the large group of gathered apostles (the 12 and the 70 and the brothers of Jesus), setting them apart as those whom Jesus would send into the world to preach His Gospel. After water-baptism the apostles would pray and lay their hands on all who came to faith in Jesus as the Christ and pass on to them gifts of the Spirit enabling them to serve Jesus with the fruits of these gifts. The presence of the special gifts of the Spirit (e.g. speaking in foreign languages and prophecy) was tangible evidence for the Gentiles that they had also been accepted by God. These gifts helped the apostles and the early church to see that the Gospel is really also intended for the Gentiles, and not just Jews and proselytes. This is the point of the outpouring of these gifts on the Roman centurion Cornelius and his friends (cf. Acts 10-11, esp. 10:45-47; 11:17-18).³³

There is therefore an important difference between Christian water-baptism and the baptism of John. This difference may be particularly noted in the fact that Christian baptism is administered “in the name of” someone, indicating a sense of belonging to that person. This element was lacking in John’s baptism. As Paul put it:

John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. (Acts 19:4)

Paul went on to baptise some of John’s converts “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).³⁴ John’s baptism was a symbol of repentance and of moral cleansing. Christian baptism, while incorporating the symbol of moral cleansing, also added the element of belonging to the Triune God. It is this sense of belonging to Jesus the Messiah (Acts 19:5), or to put it another way, belonging to God the Father, Son and Spirit (Matt. 28:19), which is emphasised by being baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Jesus, therefore, instructed his apostles to make disciples of all nations and baptise them into the name of the triune God as a ritual symbolising not only their cleansing, but their sense of belonging to the God of Israel. Jews at this time would have expected Jesus to command the circumcision of new converts (as was required of proselytes to Judaism), but it is precisely Jesus’ command to baptise in this context which shows us that in the New Testament the symbol of baptism replaces this function of circumcision. This replacement is alluded to by Paul in Colossians 2:11-12 where he states:

and in Him [i.e. Christ] you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism...

In other words, because we have been buried with Christ in baptism one may say that we have been (metaphorically) circumcised. Our sinful old nature has been symbolically cut away (circumcision), that is, it has been buried with Christ (baptism, see below for further explanation of this image).

As we will see below, Christian baptism, whilst taking on the covenantal significance of belonging to God (baptism in his name), retained the image of moral cleansing attached to John’s baptism, and therefore also the link to Old Testament cleansing rituals. In this respect, just as Ezekiel had promised (Ezek. 36:25), Christian baptism is no longer a washing administered by the believer himself, but a washing administered by God (through his office bearer). For this reason the administration of New Testament baptism (in contrast to the Old Testament) is restricted to a minister of the Gospel.

There is yet another implication of the connection of baptism to Old Testament cleansing rituals. Cleansing in ritually clean water was required to remove ritual uncleanness and enable a person to come to God’s temple. There were no exemptions to this. If babies were to be brought into the temple (e.g. the baby Jesus by Joseph and Mary), then they too needed to be first cleansed. Ezekiel 36 promises that God will grant his

³³ See further my essay, *Acts 2:38-39: The Message of the First Preaching of the New Covenant in Christ’s Blood* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>. The sifting work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost may also be seen in the judgment upon Ananias (Acts 5:1ff). This incident also shows that it was the apostles through whom the Spirit was essentially operating, even although the apostles were granting gifts of the Spirit to others through the laying on of hands (see esp. Acts 5:12).

³⁴ See also 1 Cor. 1:13-15. In 1 Cor. 6:11 speaks of the Corinthians who let themselves be cleansed, and were sanctified and justified. This is almost certainly another reference to baptism. It is interesting that, although Paul here speaks of this occurring “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” he also adds “and in the Spirit of our God” showing a Trinitarian basis for baptism.

moral cleansing along the lines of the cleansing from ritual impurity to his covenant people. This surely implies that such a symbolic cleansing as baptism, would be expected to be applied to people of *all* ages. It is this fact, that made it easier for baptism to take over that function of circumcision, namely, identifying someone as belonging to the covenant God.

2.5 Paul on Baptism

Paul often uses varied imagery in his letters when describing and interpreting Christian truths and his description of baptism is no exception. A good starting point for discussion of Paul's description of baptism is the passage in Titus 3:5-6. In this text we are again confronted with the image of ritual washing, which Paul calls the "washing of regeneration," surely referring to Christian baptism.³⁵

οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν,

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing (loutron) of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. (adapted from the NASB)

In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) the noun *loutron* (washing) occurs in the apocryphal book of Sirach (34:25, cited above) where *loutron* is connected with ritual washing after contact with a corpse. This ritual washing is called "baptism" (cf. Mark 7:4). We may conclude that the noun *loutron* could refer to ritual washing (and thus does not necessarily conjure up images of Roman bath-houses which would be strange to a Jew such as Paul, since Jews were strictly forbidden to engage in such public bathing).

In the New Testament it also occurs in Ephesians 5:26. Here it is also used metaphorically of Christ's cleansing of the church by means of the "*loutron* of water with the Word." The noun must mean "washing" (bathing) here. The verb for "cleansing" which Paul uses suggests ritual cleansing and the background is probably Old Testament cleansing ritual. The referent here, however, is not so much baptism as the cleansing effect of God's holy Word, namely, the Word of the Gospel.

We may further look at the occurrences of the synonym *baptismos* ("dipping in water," "washing," "baptism"). This noun does not occur in the Septuagint, but occurs four times in the New Testament, twice of ritual washings (Mark 7:4; Hebr. 9:10) and twice of baptism (Col. 2:12; Hebr. 6:2).

We may also note a possible parallel with Galatians 3:27 where Paul says: "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." We have already seen above that the verb "to baptise" could be used of ritual washing. The picture here seems to be of someone who has undressed and ritually washed himself (by Christian baptism). Thereupon he comes out of the water and clothes himself again. Normally the person will have clothed himself with clothes that had also been ritually washed, but in this image Paul suggests that Christians after baptism are symbolically clothed with Christ himself.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 Paul reflects upon God's rescue of the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. He compares both the crossing of the red sea and the cloud of God's presence, which accompanied them, with "baptism into Moses". Again the images depict events which applied to all Israelites, young and old, and also suggest the cleansing effect of water. Although they crossed the red sea on dry land, Paul appears to be thinking of the two great banks of water on either side of them, perhaps even dripping water onto them. The cloud of God's presence is represented as a rain-cloud in Psalm 68:7-9. Paul's metaphor even includes the idea that baptism is a ritual which binds one to a person. Even as the Israelites were bound to Moses (baptism 'into Moses'), so Christians are bound to 'Jesus' (Paul often speaks of baptism 'in Jesus' name').

It is interesting to note that in Titus 3:5-6 Paul couples the term "regeneration" with its near synonym "renewal" and attributes this action to the Holy Spirit. Paul is speaking of the washing of regeneration /

³⁵ The Greek word used here for "washing" is *loutron*. The lexicons give three possible meanings, 1. place of washing (bath); 2. water for washing (bath-water); and 3. act of washing (bathing). In deciding which meaning is appropriate here, first consideration should be given to the immediate context. Taking verse 5 on its own any of the three meanings might be appropriate. But if we consider verse 6 as well it becomes clear that one meaning is most probable. Paul parallels the "*loutron* of regeneration" with the "renewing of the Holy Spirit." The parallel between *loutron* and "renewing," which are both actions, suggests the translation "washing" for *loutron*. In this image the Holy Spirit is said to be "poured out" upon us.

renewal which arises through the work of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit has been “poured out” upon us. The metaphor of the “pouring out” of the Holy Spirit is rather common, but it is important to remember that “pouring out” is a *metaphor*. Literally speaking one “pours out” a liquid.³⁶ This is surely a reference to the pouring out of water from a pitcher used in connection with ritual bathing. We have seen above how ritual baths were important in the everyday life of Jews. A photo of such baths was also provided. The length of the two ritual baths depicted there is about one and a half metres. This means that one needed to sit in the bath with the knees bent. A pitcher of water would be used to pour water from the bath over one’s head and raised knees. Paul appears to view the “pouring out” of the Spirit here as the pouring out of the water from such a pitcher. The work of the Spirit is therefore directly connected with baptism interpreted as both an image of ritual washing and an image of regeneration or renewal.

It is certainly not impossible that Paul would connect the act of baptism itself with the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostle John describes how Jesus made precisely this connection when talking with Nicodemus. Jesus spoke to him of the necessity of being born again or from above (the ambiguity is probably deliberate), a rebirth described as being “born of water and the Spirit” (Joh. 3:5). Directly after relating this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, John goes on to describe the baptising activities of both John the baptiser and of the disciples of Jesus (Joh. 3:22 ff.), which strongly suggests that Jesus, in speaking of “water and the Spirit,” was alluding to baptism. The apostle Paul makes the connection between the Spirit and baptism explicit in 1 Corinthians 12:13 where he states that we are all baptised into one body (that of Christ) by one Spirit. He also adds that we are all “watered with one Spirit.”³⁷ If the verb *ποτίζω* (*potizō*) is correctly translated in this way we have yet another direct reference to the Spirit interpreted as the water of baptism.

The connection noted above between baptism and the work of the Spirit in the symbolism of John the Baptist’s work, and in the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:25 is here still more close. Paul, probably following Jesus (as reported in Joh. 3), not only views the sanctifying work of the Spirit as integrally connected with the Christian life which follows upon the initiation of baptism, but views the Spirit symbolically represented by the water itself. He therefore connects the image of ritual washing in baptism with the image of rebirth or regeneration, which in Paul’s thought is not confined to the moment of conversion, but is the start of the process of continual sanctification (i.e. renewing work which brings about a new obedience to God) wrought in the believer by the Spirit. In Romans 6:1-11 and Colossians 2:12 this image of baptism as a kind of regeneration is further worked out in terms of being buried with Christ under the water so that the new man may rise to walk in newness of life, just as Christ was raised from the dead.

Finally, it should be noted that in 1 Corinthians 15:29 Paul also mentions baptism for the dead. This is a difficult text and interpretations abound.³⁸ My own thoughts on this verse follow: That Paul is not speaking of a practice among members of the Corinthian congregation may be seen from the fact that he speaks in the third person (“What will *they* do ...”). If we compare Sirach 34:25 (cited above) then it becomes evident that

³⁶ In many places in the Bible it is clear that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is connected to the use of anointing oil to install someone into a special office (e.g. high priest, cf. Exod. 29:7; Lev. 4:3; Ps. 133:2; king, cf. 1Sam. 16; 2Sam. 2:4; Ps. 132:10; prophet, cf. 1Kgs 19:16; Ps. 105:15). Such oil is poured out over the person’s head. In the Old Testament, this anointing is often accompanied with special gifts of the Spirit in order to equip the person for his task (cf. 1Sam. 16:13-14). Jesus is called the “Christ” (lit. “the anointed one”) because He was anointed for his task, although not with anointing oil, but with the Holy Spirit who descended upon Him after his *baptism* in the form of a dove (cf. Luk. 3:21-22; 4:1, 14-21). We therefore see the Holy Spirit both connected with the anointing oil *and* with baptism.

³⁷ The phrase may also be translated “given the Spirit to drink.”

³⁸ Prof. J. van Bruggen has provided an exegesis of this text in *Het Lezen van de Bijbel: Een Inleiding* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1981) 43-54. He interprets the text from Sirach incorrectly as referring to the washing of a dead body before burial (a ritual nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament). The text, however, quite clearly refers to the much more common ritual (from the law of Moses) of washing oneself after becoming unclean from touching a dead body. Van Bruggen, however, builds upon this by referring to the supposed phenomenon in the ancient world of “funeral associations” for the purpose of providing for the funerals and annual rituals at the gravesites of its members. Recent scholarship has, however, shown that such funeral associations actually never existed (see appendix two).

In addition Van Bruggen argues that the verb “to baptise” is used here in the sense “to busy oneself with.” He argues for this sense as being an extension of the metaphorical use of this verb in various contexts. However, the examples he provides do not prove his case in that they are all very clearly vivid metaphors. Diodorus Siculus 1.73.6-7 speaks of private persons who are not “drenched” or “inundated” with taxes. Plutarch *Mor.* 593F is part of an extended comparison relating our bodies to ships battling the waves of the sea. In this context we are “drenched by the matters.” And Libanius *Orat.* 45.24 also speaks deliberately metaphorically of “plunging” oneself into important matters. None of these examples demonstrate a new “meaning” for the verb “to baptise,” nor is such a meaning to be found in the lexicons.

the verb “to baptise” (i.e. “to wash”—ritually) was also used for ritual washing after contact with the dead (Num. 19). The members of the Christian congregation in Corinth came predominately from the synagogue (Acts 18:1-11). They would therefore have been quite familiar with ritual cleansing after contact with a corpse and had probably often enough gone through this very ritual themselves. The baptism for the dead here may then refer to the ritual washing after contact with a corpse among Jews. Paul’s reasoning is then as follows: If physical death does not matter and we do not need to be saved from it, then why—in terms of the Old Testament—did God stipulate ritual cleansing after contact with a corpse?

2.6 Hebrews

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists six doctrines which form the “elementary teaching about Christ” as follows:

1. Repentance from dead works
2. Faith toward God
3. Instruction about baptisms
4. Laying on of hands
5. Resurrection of the dead
6. Eternal judgment

There is a clear line in this early catechetical course from repentance to faith to baptism, which is followed by the laying on of the hands of the apostles for reception of a special spiritual gift.³⁹ Thereupon the future perspectives for the believer are laid out. A key question here is the reason for putting the word “baptism” in the plural. Two possibilities suggest themselves. The most likely would seem to be that the early catechetical instruction needed to make a clear distinction between the baptism of John and later Christian baptism (cf. Acts 19:1-7). A second possibility is that there is a reference to the early Christian practice (see below) of plunging one into (or sprinkling one with) the water three times as the names of God the Father, Son, and Spirit are pronounced.

In Hebrews 10:22 we also find a probable allusion to Christian baptism linking it to ritual cleansing in the Old Testament. We read:

Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Here the cleansing rite of Numbers 19 (see above), already referred to in Hebrews 9:13, is metaphorically applied to the Christian. He is both sprinkled clean (in his heart) and his body has been washed with pure water (a probable reference to baptism). Once again baptism is linked to the ritual bath of Old Testament cleansing. Does this text imply that the early church also used ritually pure water for Christian baptism? The reference is probably metaphorical, although the quotation from the *Didache* below shows that at least some early Christian churches baptised with “living” (i.e., ritually clean) water, cf. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Traditions* 21:2 written circa AD 215 which describes the baptism liturgy in Rome and requires flowing water (i.e. of a spring or river), cf. John 4:10-14 and 7:37-39.

2.7 Sprinkling or Immersion?

In the Old Testament legislation for ritual washing we see both ideas of bathing and being sprinkled with pure water (from a hyssop branch). If ritual washing took place in a river then one could easily enough immerse one’s body completely. However, the typical ritual baths of first century Judaism would not have permitted this (see the photo above of such baths in Massada). These baths were designed to collect rain water (which was also considered to be ritually pure), but one could only sit in them in a crouched position (with the knees bent). This meant that once the person to be cleansed had seated himself in the ritual bath, he had to take a pitcher and pour the bath-water over his head so that his whole body would be ritually washed.

When we consider this background it becomes clear that either method may suffice to convey the symbolic washing of baptism. It is probable, however, that Paul in Romans 6:1-11 has immersion in view when he describes baptism in terms of the burial of the old man. In 1 Corinthians 10:1-3, however, he clearly has sprinkling (both by the banks of water, and by rain – see above) in view.

³⁹ See further, *Acts 2:38-39: The Message of the First Preaching of the New Covenant in Christ’s Blood* to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>

An early church order from c. AD 90 (probably from Syria) known as the *Didache* instructs the church as follows:

Concerning baptism: thus you shall baptise, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with living water. But if you do not have living water, baptise in other water. If you are not able to baptise in cold water, do it in warm water. If you do not have either, pour water out upon the head three times in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

APPENDIX 1: Cleansing Rituals as Literally Found in the Laws

Laws Requiring One Day of Cleansing for People

(categories as literally found in the laws)

Be unclean till evening

- touching the carcass of an unclean animal (Lev.11)
- touching the carcass of a clean animal found dead (Lev. 11:39)
- going inside a house quarantined for serious surface disorder (Lev. 14:46)
- touching a menstrual woman (Lev. 15)
- touching something touched by an unclean person (Num. 19:22)

Bathe in water, be unclean till evening

- a person (the context is priests) who touches anything made unclean by a corpse, has a seminal emission, touches a teeming thing, or touches an unclean person (Lev. 22:4-6)

Wash clothes, be unclean till evening

- picking up the carcass of an unclean animal (Lev. 11)
- the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer (for cleansing ritual after touching a corpse) (Num. 19:10)

Wash clothes, bathe in water, be unclean till evening

- touching the bed or sitting on the chair of a man with an abnormal discharge, or touching him or being spat upon by him, or being touched by him (if he hasn't washed his hands) (Lev. 15)
- touching the bed or sitting on the chair of a menstrual woman (Lev. 15)
- seminal emission (only clothes with semen on them need be washed) from a man (also the woman if intercourse was had) (Lev. 15:16-18; cf. 2 Sam. 11:4)
- most parties involved in preparing a red heifer for ritual cleansing after contact with a corpse (Num. 19:7-8, 19, 21)
- the layman who performs the cleansing ritual for someone who touched a corpse (Num. 19)
- eating from, or picking up the carcass of an animal found dead (Lev. 11:40; 17:15-16 - *see the references under this text in section two indicating that eating this flesh is a sin*)

Wash clothes

- pronouncement of cleanness after suspicion of serious skin disorder (Lev. 13:6, 34)
- lying down or eating in a house quarantined for serious surface disorder (Lev. 14:47)

Laws Requiring Seven Days of Cleansing for People

(categories as literally found in the laws)

7 days of cleansing, wash clothes, bathe in running water, sin offering, burnt offering

- upon the disappearance of an abnormal discharge from the penis of a man (Lev. 15:13-15)

7 days of cleansing, sin offering, burnt offering

- upon the disappearance of an abnormal discharge or flow of blood from the vagina of a woman (Lev. 15:28-30) - *why is there no washing here?*

Be unclean 7 days, + ritual of ashes of sacrificed red heifer in running water

- touching a corpse (cf. Num. 6:9 which does not as yet mention the ritual) (Num. 19; 31:23-24)

Laws for the Cleansing of “Things”

Be sprinkled with “purifying water”

- the tent and furnishings where a person died (Num. 19:18)

Put in water & be unclean till evening

- wooden articles, clothing, skins, sacks etc. that come in contact with the carcass of an unclean creature (Lev. 11:32; cf. Num. 31:20, 23)
- the same would appear to apply to contact with a dead person (Num. 31:19ff)

Be washed

- pronouncement of cleanness after suspicion of serious surface disorder (Lev. 13:58)
- wooden vessels touched by a man with an abnormal discharge from his penis (Lev. 15:12)

Be purified with fire

- metals which have touched a corpse (Num. 31:22-23)

Ritual with 2 birds, cedar wood, a scarlet string, hyssop

- upon ridding a house of serious surface disorder (Lev. 14:49-53)

Destruction (by breaking earthenware, burning garments)

- earthenware vessels into which the carcass of an unclean creature has fallen (Lev. 11:33), or ovens/ stoves which a carcass has touched (Lev. 11:35)
- earthenware touched by a man with an abnormal discharge from his penis (Lev. 15:12)
- garments with a malignant surface disorder (Lev. 13:47-59)
- houses with a malignant surface disorder to be destroyed (Lev. 14:33-45)

APPENDIX 2: The Main Argument of Ausbüttel against the Existence of Burial Societies

Frank M. Ausbüttel, (*Untersuchungen zu den Vereinen im Westen des römischen Reiches*, Frankfurter Althistorische Studien, Michael Lassleben, Kallmünz, Heft 11, 1982) in his dissertation on associations boldly challenges the long held assumption that there were such things as “burial societies” in the Roman world, i.e. societies founded in order to provide a decent burial for the members, especially among the poorer classes.

Ausbüttel argues that the term “burial society” never occurs in ancient literature, but was coined for the first time by the famous classical scholar of the nineteenth century, T. Mommsen, who also wrote his dissertation on associations. Mommsen developed the theory of burial societies from his reconstruction of a famous inscription, and has been followed in this reconstruction by many classical scholars since. Yet Ausbüttel claims there are serious reasons for challenging the reconstruction of this inscription, e.g. insufficient missing letters taken account of in the lacunae, the words in the reconstruction not conforming to known phraseology of Roman law, etc..

Given that it is this inscription which forms the basis for the claim that there were burial societies in the ancient world, I give the texts as reconstructed below. The association concerned (*cultores Dianae et Antinoi*) was founded in AD 133.

CIL XIV 2112 (1,10-13) = ILS 7212: (Mommsen)

10. kaput ex s(enatus) c(onsulto) p(opuli) R(omani):
11. quib[us coire co]nvenire collegiumq(ue) habere liceat. qui stipem menstruam conferre vo
12. len[t in fun]era, in it collegium coeant, neq(ue) sub specie eius collegi nisi semel in men
13. se c[oeant co]nferendi causa, unde defuncti sepeliantur.

Reconstruction (Ausbüttel):

10. kaput ex s(enatus) c(onsulto) p(opuli) R(omani):
11. quib[us permissum est co]nvenire collegiumq(ue) habere liceat. qui stipem menstruam conferre
vo
12. len[t ad facienda sa]cra, in it collegium coeant, neq(ue) sub specie eius collegi nisi semel in men
13. se c[oeant stipem co]nferendi causa, unde defuncti sepeliantur.

() = standard abbreviation

[] = lacuna in inscription

Mommsen

The substance of the decree of the senate of the Roman people: These are allowed to assemble, convene, and maintain a society; those who desire to make a monthly contribution for funerals, may assemble an association for it, but they may not assemble in the form of such an association except once a month for the purpose of making (the contribution), from which the dead are buried.

Ausbüttel

The substance of the decree of the senate of the Roman people: These are permitted to convene, and allowed to maintain a society; those who desire to make a monthly contribution for the purpose of performing sacral rites, may assemble an association for it, but they may not assemble in the form of such an association except once a month for the purpose of making the contribution, from which the dead are buried.

Traditionally this inscription was connected with a Roman law (*Digest* 47:22:1, pr.) recorded by one Marcian probably shortly after the death of Caracalla. It reads:

mandatis principalibus praecipitur

It is ordered to the garrisons of the

praesidibus provinciarum, ne
patiantur esse collegia sodalicia neve
milites collegia in castris habeant.
sed permittitur tenuioribus stipem
menstruam conferre, dum tamen
semel in mense coeant, ne sub
praetextu huiusmodi illicitum
collegium coeat. quod non tantum in
urbe, sed et in Italia et in provinciis
locum habere divus quoque Severus
rescripsit.

provinces, neither to allow societies /
associations, nor may the soldiers have
societies in the camps: but it is permitted
for the *tenuiores* to contribute a monthly
donation, at the time when nevertheless
they gather once a month, lest an illegal
society should assemble under the same
pretext: wherefore the divine Severus has
also decided to give the imperial mandates
place not only in the city, but both in Italy
and in the provinces.

This law, in connection with Mommsen's reconstruction of the inscription, has often been interpreted as referring to a general allowance for burial societies. *Collegia tenuiorum* are in this interpretation viewed as equivalent to *collegia funeraticia* (a term coined by Mommsen). It has even been argued on this basis that the Christian churches were officially tolerated under this law. Ausbüttel's reconstruction radically changes the picture however. According to Ausbüttel the *tenuiores* are just the normal lower class (*humiliores*) of Roman society (i.e. those not of the senatorial class). He argues that this Roman law should probably be seen in the light of the *lex Licinia de sodaliciis* of 55 BC banning associations that tried to manipulate the election of magistrates. In light of the inscriptional evidence the law should be seen not to be banning all associations, but rather to be stating just which kind of societies are allowed; namely those involving men of a certain rank, and then to the exclusion of those previously banned.

The inscription (cited above), in Ausbüttel's reconstruction, refers to a religious association. The reference at the end to provision for burials is merely a subordinate clause. In his dissertation he shows further that virtually all kinds of associations had provisions for the burial of their members, but these provisions were never the purpose of any association itself.

Thus according to Ausbüttel, Roman law divides the associations into two broad groups, 1) senatorial *collegia* connected with the state (e.g. colleges of priests etc.), and 2) *collegia tenuiorum* (the private associations). Associations in the latter group can be divided, with respect to their gathering and activities, into trade, military, religious, and more or less tightly organised social associations.

APPENDIX 3: Ritual Baths in Massada and Related Mishnaic Regulations



The length of these two ritual baths is about one and a half metres. This means that one needs to sit in the bath with the knees bent. A pitcher of water would be used to pour water from the bath over your head and raised knees (compare the discussion on Tit. 3:5 further on in my paper). In accordance with the rules in the Mishnah (see below) we have here two baths placed next to each other under the open sky. Although it is not easy to see, they are connected by a small pipe two thirds of the way up the side in the middle. This means that only one bath would need to be filled with pure rainwater. The other could be regularly cleaned (after many people had bathed in it) and refilled with drawn water. The connection with the ritually “clean” rainwater (which with time would become very dirty—not much rain falls in Massada) via the pipe makes the drawn water ritually clean.

The Mishnah is essentially a study book of various rulings on laws from the Pentateuch (the so-called “books of Moses”) in the tradition of rabbi Akiva (first half of the second century AD). It was compiled early in the third century AD, probably orally at first, but later committed to writing. Rabbi Akiva stood in the tradition of the Pharisaic rabbinical school of Hillel, one of two opposing schools of Pharisaic thought in the days of Jesus. The other, that of Shammai, died out after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Although the Mishnah basically records the views of rabbi Akiva and his pupils, it also provides the views of many other rabbi’s, including some from earlier periods. The quotation in the paper comes from the tractate “Mikwaoth” (= “immersion-pools”). An analytical translation of the same paragraphs is given below, somewhat modified from that of Danby on the basis of the Hebrew as published by Sinai publishers in Tel Aviv. The Hebrew of the Mishnah is very compact and abbreviated in style. Words between square brackets are added to fill out the sense. Headings in bold type are my additions to clarify the text and are not found in the original. I should, however, admit that I am no expert in Mishnaic Hebrew. For further literature on the Mishnah see A. Goldberg, “The Mishnah—A Study Book of Halakah” in *The Literature of the Sages*, First part, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1987) 211-62.

6.1

General rule

Any [pool of water] that is mingled with [water from] an Immersion-pool is deemed like to the Immersion-pool itself.

r.Meir gives r.Akiva's mishna (anonymously)

Vessels may be immersed in [water in] holes and clefts [that mingles with the water of an Immersion-pool] in a cavern, however small [the stream by which they mingle]; but they may not be immersed in a pit beside the cavern, unless the hole between them is as large as the spout of a water-skin.

r.Yehuda

r.Yehuda said: This applies only when it is self-contained; but if it is not self-contained they may be immersed therein however small [the connecting stream].

Rabbi Yehuda, a pupil of Akiva, was well known for restricting the views of Akiva to specific times or places.

6.2 (general mishnah)

If a leather-bucket filled with vessels was immersed, they also become clean; but if it was not immersed, the water does not count as mingled unless it was mingled by a stream the size of the spout of a water-skin.

The point of this mishnah seems to be that the dirty, but ritually clean, water of an immersion pool can be used to make ritually unclean vessels ritually clean if they are lowered into the pool in a leather-bucket of (presumably hygienic) water. The bucket need not be entirely immersed if there is an opening in it to allow the mingling of the waters of the size of the spout of a water-skin. This prevents too much of the dirty, but ritually clean, water making the vessels dirty.

6.3a (general mishnah)

If there were three immersion-pools, in one twenty seahs [of undrawn water], in another twenty seahs [of undrawn water] and the third twenty seahs of drawn water, and that which held drawn water was at the side, and three went down and immersed themselves in them and they [i.e. the waters of the pools] were mingled, the pools are accounted clean, and they that immersed themselves become clean.

Note that undrawn water is ritually clean. Drawn water, having been touched by human hands, is unclean.

6.8a (general mishnah)

These immersion-pools are rendered clean: a higher pool [mingled with undrawn water] from a lower pool, and a distant pool [mingled with undrawn water] from a nearby pool. Thus a man may bring a pipe of earthenware or lead, and keep his hand beneath it until it fills itself with water and draws and spouts, if it touches by a hair's breadth it suffices.