

## Baptism in the Spirit

### Chapter 4

#### More than one baptism Hebrews 6:1-2

By Richard Lee

Hebrews 6:1-2 “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment”.

#### Introduction

Is there only one baptism or are there two? Those who support the teaching that baptism in the Spirit is a subsequent experience to regeneration will argue for more than one baptism. Baptism as a profession of conversion is the baptism with which most of us are familiar. But there is also another baptism, often spoken of in the New Testament, and this is “*baptism in the Spirit*”.

It is the second form of baptism that we are concerned with in this study. I find therefore, the words of Hebrews 6:2 to be of significant interest as the term “*baptism*” is found to be in the plural, “*baptisms*”. Does the writer here mean both forms of baptism, believers baptism and Spirit baptism, or does he have something else in mind ?

There is a variety of thought expressed on this passage and so I shall repeat, briefly, some of the teachings I have found in some of the commentaries.

#### 1. Summary of views expressed in the commentaries.

1. G. Wilson “Hebrews” Banner of Truth. The author believes that Hebrews 6:2 has reference to various Old Testament rituals. He mentions Mark 7:4, 8 where βαπτισμος (baptismos) refers to the Jewish ritual of ceremonial cleansing. Equally, the term is to be found in Hebrews 9:10 “*They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings (βαπτισμοις) --external regulations applying until the time of the new order”.*
2. F.F.Bruce “Hebrews” Marshall Morgan and Scott. This writer also believes that Hebrews 6:2 has reference only to Old Testament rituals. The view expressed suggests that Hebrews may be speaking to a group of Hebrew Christians familiar with the Qumran sect of non-conformist Jews who practiced a form of baptism and even pre-baptism washing rites.

3. J. Brown. Hebrews Banner of Truth. Whilst rejecting the notion that Hebrews is referring to Old Testament rituals, he believes that the reference to “*baptisms*” in the plural is showing the difference between any former baptism (even John the Baptist’s baptism) and that of Christian baptism.
4. Albert Barnes. He believes that the two baptisms refer to water baptism and Spirit baptism. The latter he refers to Matt 3:11, Acts 1 etc.
5. Matthew Henry. His view is that the two baptisms refer to water baptism and regeneration, new birth. Henry holds the view that baptism in the Spirit is the same as regeneration.

## 2 A Study of Hebrews 6:1-2

### 1. The Context

It is important that we begin by asking ourselves something about the purpose of the writer of Hebrews 6. Now, I am not prepared, at this stage, to debate the full meaning of such a complex passage as Hebrews 6. However, it makes sense for us at least to grasp something of the writer’s purpose so that we can place our exegesis into context.

The writer has said that he wants to “*leave the elementary teachings about Christ*” and press on to “*maturity*”. The full context, following on from the end of chapter 5 would suggest that he is speaking to a group of Christians who have never developed or grown in their knowledge of the truth since their conversion. The aim of the writer is to encourage them to “*press on to maturity*”. Christian maturity is his theme.

Consequently, he wants them to leave behind the “*elementary teachings*” and not become involved in repeatedly “*laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms...*”. Now, notice that he is speaking to converted people who are now “*in Christ*” and have already begun to grasp something of the “*elementary teachings about Christ*”. He is not speaking about old, former Jewish rituals in which they may have been engaged in the past. The phrase “*teachings about Christ*” show that the author has in mind the basic doctrines of Christianity, not Judaism.

Hence his reference to “*repentance*” and “*faith in God*” are strictly New Testament teachings which make up the Christian doctrine. These are the “*foundational*” teachings, the “*elementary*” ones . But, and this is the important point, they are the “*doctrines of Christ*” ( Greek του Χριστου λογου ).

Consequently, when the writer then speaks of “*baptisms*” within the same context, he must be speaking about one of the “*teachings about Christ*”. He is not speaking about one of the teachings of Judaism.

The term “*elementary teachings*” deserves some comment. The NIV has chosen to translate the Greek as simply “*elementary teachings*”. The AV has “*the principles of the doctrine of Christ*”. This is because the Greek reads, της αρχης του Χριστου λογου , meaning literally, “*the beginning doctrines of Christ*”. What it means is the writer is speaking about those doctrines and teachings which make up the very beginning of the

Christian faith. They are the “*elementary doctrines*”, or the basic “*principles of Christ*”. I have chosen to use the term “*foundational teachings*”.

All of the teachings mentioned in Hebrews 6:1-2 clearly form the basic, foundational and elementary teachings of the Christian faith that we would teach to new Christians. We can sympathise with the writer when he finds himself becoming quite exasperated with his hearers when they seem to be unable to move away from the elementary and basic teachings and have not or will not move on to maturity.

I conclude therefore, that the writer is not speaking about Old Testament or Jewish rituals of cleansing. I do not find myself in agreement with the RSV rendering of “*ablutions*”. The NIV and the AV both translate βαπτισμοις (baptismois) as “*baptisms*” . Baptisms may have featured in Jewish rituals, but this is not the intention of the writer here. He is clearly speaking to Christians about Christian teachings, doctrines of Christ.

## **2. What baptism - John, Jesus or what?**

From reading Acts 19 where the disciples in Ephesus had only known “*John’s baptism*”, it might be possible to consider Hebrews 6:2 as referring to this baptism in addition to believers baptism in “*the name the Father, and of the Son and of the Spirit*”. Thus we could have two baptisms without having to make reference to the Old Testament rituals, the “*John baptism*” and the “*Jesus baptism*”. Perhaps this is what Hebrews 6:2 has in mind when using the plural “*baptisms*”.

However, let us consider three arguments against this theory.

[i] The issue of the John versus Jesus baptism was a small localised matter and does not appear anywhere else in the NT other than at Ephesus (Acts 19). It seems strange that if this is the problem that lies behind Hebrews 6:2 why does the writer not explain his meaning by referring to John’s baptism if he has this in mind? Acts 19 clearly states the matter and the reader is left in no doubt about the problem to which Luke is referring. However, in Hebrews we are left in doubt and would have to guess at what the writer means. In other words, if the use of “*baptisms*” in the plural has John’s baptism (and Jesus’ Baptism) in mind it is strange that no further explanation is offered given that those who would have been baptised only by John would have been few and far between.

[ii] If we use the remainder of the New Testament as our guide in seeking to discover the meaning of “*baptisms*” it is highly unlikely that we will conclude that John’s baptism is the answer to this other form of baptism in Hebrews 6. Nowhere in the New Testament (other than Acts 19) is the matter of John’s baptism dealt with. The teaching epistles do not mention the problem. Furthermore, when the NT epistles deal with other “*elementary teachings of Christ*” such as repentance, judgement, faith etc, John’s baptism is never mentioned. Yet, baptism in the Spirit is something that is mentioned frequently in the New Testament and is found in the Gospels, Acts and also in 1 Cor 12:13 (if my interpretation is accepted).

[iii] Most commentators point out the pairs of thought expressed in Hebrews 6:2. For example we have repentance & faith: resurrection & Judgement: baptism & laying on of hands. Therefore, if the laying on of hands by the Apostles (Acts 8:17), and Ananias (Acts 9:17) was often associated with the receiving of the Spirit, it is likely that the term "*baptisms*" refers to water baptism and Spirit baptism.

[iv] Lastly, the writer is speaking about the "*elementary doctrines of Christ*". The baptism of John, whilst of God as a preparatory ceremony for the coming of Christ was never regarded by the Apostles as one of the "*doctrines of Christ*". John's baptism could never be said to be one of the "*elementary doctrines*". It would have to be described as an old, non relevant teaching and practice, a temporary practice that has now been succeeded. It could never be included within the basic list of Christian principle teachings such as repentance, faith, resurrection, judgement etc.

### Conclusion

I suggest that, from our study, we must conclude the writer is definitely not speaking about any Jewish ritual or cleansing ceremony. He does not have Judaism in mind. He is only thinking of the "*doctrines of Christ*". The Jewish rituals have nothing to do with the doctrines of Christ. The writer of Hebrews 6:2 has the New Testament era in mind not the Old Testament.

The two baptisms cannot refer to believer's baptism in the name of Jesus and a baptism to repentance practiced by John. In the absence of any further clarification by the writer this theory cannot be acceptable. John's baptism was not one of the "*elementary doctrines*" of the Christian faith. That practice never formed the foundation of beliefs for new converts.

This deductive process leaves us with only one conclusion. The only other baptism to which the writer is referring, other than believer's baptism, must be, in my opinion, the *baptism in the Spirit*. This, I suggest, would be the only conclusion that the unbiased reader would arrive at when reading the New Testament.

It is not my intention to suggest that we build the entire teaching of *baptism in the Spirit* on this one text. I only draw attention to the importance of this statement as it offers another mention of *baptism in the Spirit* from one of the didactic portions of the Word of God.

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