

## Chapter 3

### The Old Testament and the Threefold Witness

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

-1 Corinthians 10:11

#### The Importance of the Old Testament

For the student of Scripture, the *modus operandi* of the Lord in the building of his church should come as no surprise, for the "*oikos*" formula, so apparent in the New Testament, is traceable throughout the Old Testament as well. Opponents of infant baptism have typically avoided the Old Testament and denied its importance in the matter of infant baptism. The very title of G. R. Beasley-Murray's book, *Baptism in the New Testament*, illustrates this point. Baptist pastor, J. R. Graves, stated in the Great Carrollton Debate that "all that is necessary to *faith* and *practice* is in the New Testament." Ditzler, his Methodist opponent, appropriately responded,

We all know that is utterly untrue. It assumes that all the apostolic churches had all the Scriptures of the New Testament from fifty to sixty years before they were *written*!! Poor logic! It calls into question--or rather ignores Luke's and Paul's testimony" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 709).

The only Scriptures that the first-century Christians possessed initially, until the apostolic testimony was committed to writing and circulated among the churches, were the Old Testament Scriptures--and the apostles and their associates preached Jesus Christ from those Scriptures. The Old Testament, as well as the New, is doctrinally essential and

foundational for the church. The Old Testament is not to be disparaged or disregarded by the Christian, for the seeds of the New Testament are to be found in the Old Testament.

Ditzler pointed to the Bereans who were commended by Luke for searching out the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 17:11). He also noted 2 Timothy 3:15-17 where Paul, commending Timothy's knowledge of the Scriptures, upheld those Old Testament writings as totally "inspired by God" and "profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

The Old Testament cannot be dismissed by Christians in the establishment of doctrine, as though such a dismissal were somehow in deference to the apostles. The apostles themselves asserted that the "foundation" of the church consisted of the "apostles and *prophets*" (Eph. 2:20, italics mine). They continually insisted that they were proclaiming only what the Old Testament Scriptures had affirmed (Acts 24:14; 26:22; Rom. 1:2). Rowland S. Ward stated in *Baptism in Scripture and History*,

If we cannot divorce understanding of [the] true nature of Christ's death from the teaching of the Mosaic sacrifices, neither can we divorce understanding of Christian baptism from its Old Testament roots (1991, 3).

Jonathan Edwards understood the significance of the Old Testament for the Christian church.

Far am I from thinking the Old Testament to be like an old almanac out of use; nay, I think it is evident from the New Testament, that some things which had their first institution under the Old Testament, are continued under the New; for instance, the acceptance of the infant-seed of believers as children of the covenant with their parents; and probably some things belonging to the order and discipline of Christian churches, had their first beginning in the Jewish synagogue (Gerstner

1991-, 2:105).

Jesus' announcement of salvation "to this house," in the case of Zacchaeus, was traceable to the family covenant concept in the Old Testament Scriptures. Jacob's family included "his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters--all his offspring" (Gen. 46:7). Households in the Old Testament certainly included the infant offspring (Ps. 128:6; 113:9; Num. 16:32; Joel 2:15-16; 2 Chron. 20:13-14).

Many of the Psalms illustrate how the scope of God's covenant extended beyond the individual believer to the believer's children--and even to children's children.

Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD?

He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.  
He will spend his days in prosperity,  
and his descendants will be mighty in the land.  
The LORD confides in those who fear him;  
he makes his covenant known to them (Ps. 25:12-14).

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,  
who finds great delight in his commands.  
His children will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright shall be blessed.  
Wealth and riches are in his house (Ps. 112:1b-3a).

But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's  
children--  
with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts (Ps.103:17-18).

The covenantal principle extended even from uncle to nephew, as evident in the inability of the angel of God's wrath to unleash the LORD's fury against Sodom until Lot and his family were removed from the targeted city (Gen. 19:22). The divine rationale in the matter was revealed for the church's

understanding:

So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, *he remembered Abraham*, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived (Gen. 19:29, italics mine).

This covenant was conspicuous in Job's efforts of ceremonial purification on behalf of his sons and daughters following extended birthday celebrations. That God acknowledged Job as the family representative on behalf of their spiritual needs is unmistakably clear in that his intercessory actions are recorded as evidence that he was "blameless and upright" and that he "feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1-5).

This *modus operandi* of the Lord in manifesting his saving grace to his people on a household basis was apparent in Israel's ancient institutions and in God's great redemptive acts in behalf of his ancient church. The salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, the rite of circumcision, the Passover, and the crossing of the Red Sea--all so central to Old Testament history--provide a unified, retrospective testimony. They illustrate the threefold consensus of "the Spirit, the water and the blood" (1 John 5:7-8) respecting the nature of the covenant whereby the father represented his family's spiritual interests before God.

### **Israel's Ancient Institutions**

Hebrew fathers were commanded to apply the blood of the Passover lamb to the lintel and doorposts of their houses, thereby averting the plague of the death angel upon the firstborn sons in Egypt. Though Exodus 12:26 may suggest that the actual partaking of the Passover lamb was reserved for those who had attained an age of discretion and understanding in keeping with such passages as Deuteronomy 1:39, Isaiah 7:15, Hebrews 5:14, and 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, the divinely-given principle was a lamb "for each household" (Exod. 12:3).

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and pour some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, "What does this ceremony mean to you?" then tell them, "It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians" (Exod. 12:21-27).

The New Testament correlates the Hebrew Passover and Christ's redemptive work. Urging the Corinthian church to holy living consistent with that work, Paul wrote, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7 ESV). Furthermore, John the Baptist linked Jesus' ministry, not only to the Hebrew Passover, but to the entire sacrificial liturgy set forth in the Hebrew Scriptures: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). In setting forth the Old Testament typology, Moses sprinkled the blood of the Sinaitic covenant upon "all the people" Heb. 9:19). There is no suggestion that infants and children were excluded from the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant.

The application of the blood of the Passover lamb to the doorways of the Hebrew households by the fathers had propitiatory significance, and everyone in the household received

the benefit --even those who had not attained the age of discretion. The angel of death, the agent of God's wrathful judgment, upon seeing the bloodstained entrances, "passed over" the Hebrew homes; thereby a covenantal distinction was made in favor of Israel's first-born sons. Later God warned the Israelites concerning the sacred significance of the blood.

And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from his people.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (Lev. 17:10-11 NASB).

Blood sacrifices were central to Israel's worship, as God impressed upon her national psyche that "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). Against this Old Testament backdrop, the author of Hebrews wrote that "once for all, by his own blood" Christ "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12). Reflecting the Hebrew Passover, Christ's redemptive work under the new covenant, established covenantal sanctuary for the believer's household (1 Cor. 7:14). Getting at the root of the human problem, Peter reminded his readers that they had been delivered from a corrupted family tree.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

In this powerful domestic application of the Lamb's blood, Peter spoke of redemption "from the empty way of life handed down from your forefathers"; thus, Christ's blood provides a spiritual foundation for ongoing generations of the Christian family. In

keeping with the terms of the covenant, the apostle's letters to the churches set forth instruction for husbands and wives, fathers and children, and even masters and domestic servants (Eph. 5:22-6:4; 1 Pet. 2:18-3:8). Not only does the blood of the true Passover Lamb have *propitiatory* significance, therefore, in the sense of atoning for the sins of God's people, but the *covenantal* application to the family household which characterized its prototype has not been set aside.

The apostle wrote, "You have come . . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel: (Heb. 12:23-24). The blood of Abel represented the dissolution of an household relationship and cried for vengeance from the ground (Gen. 4:10). The blood of Jesus represents the salvation of the household and summons grace from Heaven (Zech. 4:7). Speaking to those who had come to address God as "Father," Peter set forth the Trinitarian implications and addressed Christian believers as those ". . . who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, though the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Pet. 1:2).

The Passover motif undoubtedly provided a theological rationale for Paul's exhortation and promise to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved--you and your household." For Paul, "faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22) was tantamount to "faith in his blood" in Romans 3:25. The "blood" of redemption and the household covenantal principle go hand in hand. Since the Old Testament salvation type extended to the entire household, it is no anomaly that the household would be the locus for the administration of the blessing of New Testament salvation accomplished through Christ the true Passover lamb.

Just as Christ fulfilled the Passover, so he also fulfilled circumcision introducing the New Testament believer to the inward spiritual reality behind the symbolic rite. Three New Testament passages clearly establish that connection:

1) Philippians 3:2-3:

Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

The apostle warned his Philippian Christian readers to beware of "dogs," a label normally used by Jews in reference to Gentiles. Jesus himself had used this term in reference to a Greek-speaking, Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:27). In this case Paul applied the term to those Jews who insisted that Gentile Christians be physically circumcised. Later Peter employed the metaphor of a "dog" to designate one who had apostatized the Christian faith (2 Pet. 2:22).

The Old Testament background for this term is found in Psalm 22:16:

Dogs have surrounded me;  
a band of evil men has encircled me,  
they have pierced my hands and my feet.

Jesus spoke the first verse of this Psalm from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Verse 16 is an obvious prophetic reference to the Roman Gentiles to whom the Jews delivered Jesus over to be crucified (Mark 10:33b). But the Jews who demanded Jesus' crucifixion (John 19:11b), and those who insisted that Gentile believers in Christ be physically circumcised, proved themselves deserving of the same label.

Paul's use of the term "dogs" castigated those Jews who so imposed physical circumcision upon Gentile Christians. While those Judaizers considered themselves, and all Jews, as "the circumcision," Paul announced the turning of the tables, *and the labels*, in the Gospel. He dared to call Gentile believers "the [true] circumcision" at the same time that he called the Judaizers "dogs."

2) Romans 2:28-29:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.

In the above Romans passage, Paul was making a play on words (not apparent in the English translation). The word "Jew" is derived from "Judah" which in Hebrew literally means "praise." To be truly "Jewish" was not merely a matter of outward ceremony, but the result of the Spirit's effectual operation in one's inner being. That person's *praise*, or commendation, came from God rather than from men.

3) Colossians 2:11-12:

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature [lit. "flesh"], not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:11-12).

Writing to the Colossians, the apostle Paul described the Old Testament rite transcendentally as "the circumcision done by Christ"--thus making an analogy between spiritual rebirth and the Old Testament rite. Unlike the Old Testament circumcision administered exclusively to males, the "circumcision done by Christ" was administered irrespective of a person's sex (Gal. 3:28). With the exception of an eight day waiting period following birth, physical circumcision was administered without regard for a person's age. If the circumcision done by the hands of men applied to all age groups, surely the circumcision done *without human hands* would also apply to all age groups. If the

regeneration of the Holy Spirit, contrary to the rite of circumcision which foreshadowed it (Gen. 17:12-14), could never apply to the infant offspring of believers, on what basis could the Lord's apostle have described it as the "circumcision done by Christ"? To suggest that infants were excluded from this blessing would be to charge the apostle Paul with misleading the church by describing the spiritual new birth in such Jewish terms.

The clear meaning of Paul's words in Romans 3:1-4 is that the institution of circumcision, the promises associated with it, and its application to infants were of divine origin. The fact that the Jews and their children, as a whole, failed to appropriate the spiritual blessing or obey the covenant associated with the rite (Psa. 78:8) was no disparagement of the institution. "Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4a).

The fact is that the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, the "circumcision of the heart," *did* specifically apply to the offspring of New Testament believers. No less a prophet than Moses spoke of this application when predicting the New Testament fulfillment of the covenant of circumcision.

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts *and the hearts of your descendants after you*, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul and live (Deut. 30:6, italics mine).

This prophecy by Moses undoubtedly correlates the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17:7-14 with the "circumcision of Christ" in Colossians 2:11-12. In Genesis 17:7 God promised to establish his covenant with Abraham "and your descendants after you" and to be God to Abraham and "your descendants after you." To reinforce this covenant, the sign and seal of circumcision was to be applied not only to Abraham but to "every male eight days old" (17:12). Parallel with the promise and the application of the outward sign to male infants, the *circumcision of the heart* later prophesied by Moses was not only promised to the people of Israel but to "your descendants after you" (Deut. 30:6).

This striking correlation compels us to apply the following statement from the pen of the apostle Paul to the believer's offspring: "Christ has become a minister of the circumcision on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises of the patriarchs so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy" (Rom. 15:8-9a).

Kingdon charged the Paedobaptists with the Christianization of the institution of circumcision, reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament (1973, 45). If that is indeed the case, they have both Paul and Moses in their support. More accurately, it was not the Paedobaptists who "Christianized" the institution of circumcision, it was Moses and the apostle Paul, and Jeremiah as well (Jer. 4:4)! Since the apostle Paul designated the New Testament transformation of the heart a "circumcision done without human hands," those who are charged with Christianizing the institution of circumcision must be in good standing with the New Testament apostles themselves! Since God instructed Moses to apply circumcision to the offspring of God's people, both with respect to its outward sign and its inward reality (Deut. 10:16; 30:6), the Paedobaptist can only marvel that Kingdon did not get the point! If Paedobaptists were imposing the outward sign of circumcision upon Gentile Christians, or restricting baptism to males, Kingdon's concern about "Christianizing the institution of circumcision" might have merit, but that is not the case here. The institution of circumcision has not been "Christianized" in that legalistic sense.

As if to corroborate Moses' prophecy, the New Testament attests to God's salvation coming to entire households, and applies the blessing of regeneration to infants (Luke 1:15; 18:15-16 [Cf. Rom. 14:17]; 19:9; Acts 16:14-15, 31, 34). Arguing from the greater to the lesser, why then is not baptism also applicable to infants? This is not to suggest that all infants who are baptized are eternally saved, or that baptism should only be applied to infants who are saved. How, pray tell, would anyone know that, since infants are not distinguished their public confessions of faith? But neither were those infants circumcised

on the eighth day so distinguished.

The apostle Paul signaled a sacramental change from circumcision to baptism in Colossians 2:11-12: "In him you were also circumcised. . . with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism . . ." Here we have the declaration of circumcision's spiritual fulfillment in tandem with circumcision's sacramental replacement. The application of baptism, in lieu of physical circumcision, must certainly be the order of the day, not only for those who openly profess their faith in Christ, but for their minority offspring as well. If "to baptize infants is to profane baptism," as Alexander Carson charged ([1853] 1981, 226), this profanation must be laid at the feet of Paul and Moses (Exod. 4:25).

### **God's Redemptive Acts**

The idea that water baptism is to be applied representatively by the believer to his infant and minority offspring is reinforced by two Old Testament events cited by New Testament apostles as symbolizing New Testament baptism.

The apostle Peter described Noah's household as having been "saved through water" and further stated that "this water symbolizes baptism" (1 Pet. 3:20b-21a). God established his covenant with Noah and commanded him: "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation" (Gen. 7:1). The author of Hebrews poignantly captured the representative aspect of the covenant, as he described the effect of Noah's obedience of faith in what was a prototype of Christian baptism:

By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark *to save his household*; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith (Heb. 11:7 NRSV, italics mine).

Here was an entire family “saved through water” symbolizing Christian baptism on the basis of the faithful obedience of the head of the household (1 Pet. 3:20-21). This Old Testament illustration shatters the notion that the principle of proxy has no basis in Christian faith, for both Peter and the author of Hebrews made it part of the very fabric of the New Testament.

Paul the apostle spoke of another Old Testament "baptism"--Israel's baptism "in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:2)-- thus emphasizing the church's sacramental continuity with ancient Israel. In Israel's case, the entire nation--men, women, and children (infants included)--were *baptized* as they passed through the sea on dry ground (Ps. 106:9).

When God said to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the Wilderness" [Ex. vii], He included the "little ones" as part of "His people," nor would He suffer them to go without the children (Gallagher 1878, 182).

Beasley-Murray argued that Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 subordinated the baptismal motif to ethical instruction so as to render the passage of doubtful value in constructing his theology of baptism (1963, 185). Such an objection, however, is hardly convincing to those who take seriously the unity of Scripture, particularly when the passage alludes both to Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 10:2-4) thereby establishing a double sacramental connection between the Testaments. While the ethical was the focal point, the strength of Paul's exhortation was grounded in the sacramental union between the Old and New Testaments.

If it be further objected that the foregoing argument represents an appeal to the Old Testament to prove a New Testament point, it is only such by the commanding illustrative force of the New Testament. These Old Testament baptisms, coupled with the Passover institution and the rite of circumcision, constitute the prefigurative or typological testimony of "the Spirit, the water and the blood." "For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and these

three are in agreement” (1 John 5:7-8). The *blood* of Christ our Passover Lamb is applicable and efficacious for the children (including infants) of Christian believers. The circumcision of the hearts of infants by the *Holy Spirit* is a glorious New Testament reality (Luke 1:15). Old Testament illustrations of New Testament water baptism embrace the entire family. Why then refuse the *water* of baptism to the infant and minority offspring of Christian parents? For "the Spirit, the water and the blood...are in agreement." While infancy alone does not qualify one for baptism, to refuse water baptism on the basis of infancy constitutes a repudiation of this united threefold testimony.

Indeed, the New Testament answer corresponding to Old Testament precedent is that baptism *is* applicable to the entire household (Acts 16:14-15, 33; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14-16). This fact is corroborated by Jesus' own baptism. Beasley-Murray may have acknowledged too much when he stated that "Jesus was baptized in solidarity with the people." "He stooped to become one with penitent sinners" (1963, 68, 65). For Jesus to be baptized meant for him "to suffer death for the people" according to Mark 10:38, Luke 12:50, and John 1:29-34 (Beasley-Murray 1963, 50).

The solidarity expressed by Jesus' baptism, however, was a *covenantal* solidarity. Matthew recorded that Jesus was baptized in spite of John's initial reluctance with the stated purpose "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). The righteousness fulfilled in Jesus' baptism, when viewed in its Judaic context, could not have fallen short of the righteousness that extended to "children's children" (Ps. 103:17) That had always characterized the righteousness of the God of Israel.

The covenantal solidarity conveyed in Jesus' baptism embraced the little ones conceived in sin (Psa. 51:5). Surely, the little ones did not go unrepresented by the Son of Man, as he was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12) in baptism. The prophesied sprinkling of water associated with the coming of the Messiah (Ezek. 36:25; Isa. 52:15; Matt. 28:19; John 1:24-25) answered to the prophesied New Testament outpouring of the Spirit upon parent and offspring (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28-29; Acts

2:39). It also answered to the domestic application of "the sprinkled blood" foreshadowed in the Passover ritual and Levitical cleansings (Lev.14:7; 16:14) and fulfilled in the high priestly ministry of Christ (Heb. 10:22; 12:24). To be sure, the claim that every baptized infant is saved, or that those who are saved are necessarily saved at the moment of baptism, is unfounded. Beasley-Murray lost sight of the covenant, and of God's sovereign grace, however, when he stated: "Forgiveness of infants, even in baptism, is a notion exegetically unjustifiable and theologically indefensible" (1963, 368).

The threefold witness of 1 John 5:8 must not be taken lightly, for it is God's testimony concerning his Son (vs. 9). To reject this testimony is to call God a liar (vs. 10). It is the testimony of Christ's Passion "the one who came by water and blood--Jesus Christ" (vs. 6, John 19:34). This threefold witness constitutes the very foundation of baptism. New Testament baptism is defined by each of the three consensual witnesses mentioned in 1 John 5:8 (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:2; Luke 12:50), much as it defined by the threefold testimony of the persons of the Godhead in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19). Such a threefold testimony is designed to fortify the conscience of the Christian in the face of those his adversaries (1 John 5:9-10; cf. Matt. 18:16).

To be sure, the primary purpose of the threefold testimony is to assure the believer himself of eternal life in Christ. But the testimony which relates to the believer's salvation, and the assurance that it brings, relates very much to the salvation of his household. Under the covenant of grace, what applies to the believer also applies to those under his roof (Luke 19:9; Acts 16:31). He represents the family before the throne of God as he daily intercedes for them in prayer, offering his petition in the name of the Son who, as the High Priest over the House of God, represents all Christians before his Father's throne (Heb. 7:25). God has given the believer promises that pertain to his household, and a threefold testimony corroborates those promises. One of those witnesses, water baptism, attests that the promise extends to the little ones.

## **Proselyte Baptism**

This threefold agreement between the Spirit, the water, and the blood was reflected in the ritual established for the admission of Gentiles as proselytes, or converts, into the Jewish community. The initiation ceremony for Gentile proselytes to Judaism included circumcision (for males only, of course), baptism, and the offering of an animal sacrifice (Edersheim 1959, 1:273-74; 2:744-47). The Babylonian Talmud stated, "The proselytes entered not into covenant but by circumcision, baptism, and sprinkling of blood" (Wall [1705] 1889, 4).

Jewish medieval scholar, Maimonides, stated that

in all ages when an Ethnic is willing to enter into covenant and gather under the wings of the majesty of God, and take upon himself the yoke of the law; he must be circumcised, and baptized, and bring a sacrifice.

...and at this time, when there is no sacrificing, they must be circumcised and baptised: and when the temple shall be built, they are to bring the sacrifice [*Isuri Bia*, c.xiii. and xiv.] (Wall [1705] 1889, 2-3).

Maimonides also stated that the baptism was to be done "in the presence of three"; whereas the Babylonian Talmud affirmed that "two" were sufficient (Wall [1705] 1889, 3-4).

Alfred Edersheim and others have maintained that proselyte baptism was in effect at the beginning of New Testament times (Matt. 23:15; Edersheim 1959, 2:747; Jeremias 1962, 24-29; Wall [1705] 1889, 12). Wilhelm Brandt dated the introduction of proselyte baptism near the end of the first century (Hastings 1910, 408-9). Solomon Zeitlin contended that the ritual bath was not added until about A.D. 65 when "all non-Jews were declared *ipso facto* unclean" (Rosenbloom 1978, 52). Jacob Ditzler reflected, however,

The Jews in Christ's day would not enter the public hall lest defilement disqualify for the Passover the next day. Is it reasonable that such a people, in Christ's day would allow Gentiles, the touch of whom required Jews to baptize [ritually bathe], (Mark vii. 3-4; Num. xix. 9-22; Lev. xi. 28-36, etc.) to enter the church unbaptized?" (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 689).

As evidence for the existence of Jewish proselyte baptism in Christ's day, Jeremias cited (1) the testimony of the schools of Hillel and Shammai who flourished in the late first century A. D.; (2) a text of the Testament of Levi 14:6 from Qumran which can be dated approximately 100 B. C. and which seems to question the scriptural validity of proselyte baptism; (3) and various New Testament references which presuppose the "uncleanness" of Gentiles, such as John 18:28; Acts 10:28, 11:12; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 8:7; and Galatians 2:12 (1962, 24-29). Tertullian may have inadvertently born witness to the antiquity of Jewish proselyte baptism in his treatise *On Baptism* when he characterized the heathen rites of Apollo and Ceres as a demonic imitation of "the things of God." Such rites existed long before Christian baptism.

. . . at the Apollinarian and Eleusinian games they are baptized; and they presume that the effect of their doing that is their regeneration and the remission of the penalties due to their perjuries. . . . we recognize here the zeal of the devil in rivaling the things of God, while we find him too practicing baptism in his *subjects* (Roberts & Donaldson, 1885, 3:671).

That Jewish proselyte baptism was being practiced at the time John began baptizing is plainly acknowledged by the *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*. In the article on "Baptism," T. C. Smith wrote,

The baptism which Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20 must of necessity be interpreted in

the light of the baptism proclaimed by John, and John's baptism in turn must be viewed against the backdrop of Judaism of that day. John's baptism most assuredly finds its earliest historical connection in the Levitical washings of the Old Testament. A closer connection is seen in the use of water by the prophets (Isa. 1:16; Jer. 4:14; Psalm 51:2; Isa. 4:4; Ezek. 36:25). The prophets not infrequently employed the metaphor of washing to represent ethical purification. The closest prototype of John's meaning of baptism among the prophetic utterances is found in Ezekiel 36:25-26.

Smith's article goes on to say, "John was acquainted with the bath required of Gentiles before they were admitted to Judaism" (Smith 1958, 107).

T. C. Smith unwittingly rebutted the argument of an earlier Baptist who had insisted that Jewish proselyte baptism was nothing more than a "tradition of the Elders" (Mark 7:5) with no authorization in the Word of God--and hence of no value in the discussion of infant baptism (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 667). Old Testament Levitical washings, historically foreshadowing John's baptism, were also reflected in proselyte baptism regarded by Smith as part of the "backdrop of Judaism" in John's day. A simple comparison of 2 Chronicles 30:15, 17 with Leviticus 11:25, 36 and Numbers 9:14; 15:15; 19:9, 18 establishes that the consecration of the assembly of Israel during appointed feasts and fasts involved the water of ritual cleansing, not only for the Levites, but for all the people (Graves & Ditzler 1876, 659). The Jews viewed Israel's consecration mentioned in Exodus 19:10 as consisting of a ritual bath (Wall [1705] 1889, 5). Even "those nursing at the breast" were included as part of the assembly to be consecrated in Joel 2:16.

Proselyte baptism apparently was administered to infants and minority children, as well as older children and adults. The *Jerusalem Talumud* referred to infants under age 3 becoming proselytes. Maimonides stated that a male child under age 13 and 1 day, or a female child under age 12 and 1 day, were

baptized by the request of, and with the consent of the father, or by the authority of the Court, the Jewish House of Judgment. Lightfoot, commenting on Matthew 3:16, said, "The baptizing of infants was a thing well known in the church of the Jews, as ever it has been in the Christian Church" (Wall [1705] 1889, 8, 10).

As for the New Testament termination of animal sacrifices previously associated with proselyte initiation, there can be no doubt.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God....

Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts  
I will remember no more."

And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:11-12, 17-18).

As for the ritual of circumcision, it too was rendered obsolete by the Gospel. "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal. 5:20).

Concerning baptism, however, Marcus Dod wrote,

It may be almost said...that when John baptized the people, he meant to impress them with the idea that they must be re-born before they could enter the kingdom. He, as it were, excommunicated them, and by requiring them to submit to Baptism, declared that their natural birth as Jews was insufficient for participation in the Messianic blessings (Hastings 1917, 1:169).

John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the apostles all insisted that Jews be baptized--a ritual reserved by Jewish rabbis for "unclean" Gentile proselytes. Inasmuch as Jesus and the apostles did not break with proselyte baptism, even going so far as to apply it to the Jews themselves, why would they withhold baptism from babies without giving so much as a hint of it in the New Testament?

The question becomes all the more pertinent in the light of Jesus' words, spoken as parents were bringing infants to be blessed by him, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:15-16).

W. A. Mackay wrote,

The apostles were Jews brought up under the Jewish economy, and accustomed to see the same visible external rite which recognized believing parents as the disciples of the Lord, administered also to the infant children of these parents (n. d., 64).

Pierre Marcel summed up the matter:

In reality, the silence of the New Testament regarding the baptism of children militates in favour of, rather than against, this practice. To overthrow completely notions so vital, impressed upon the soul of the people, to withdraw from children the sacrament of admission into the covenant, the Apostolic Church ought to have received from the Lord an *explicit prohibition*, so revolutionary in itself that a record of it would have been preserved in the New Testament (1953, 191).

William Wall's conclusion is inescapable. "He took into His hands baptism such as He found it: adding only this, that He exalted it to a nobler purpose and larger use" ([1705] 1889, 12).