

# *What About Ordinances?*

Ike T. Sidebottom (1899-1970)



*M*ost of our present day churchmen contend for what they call the two church ordinances, water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The scriptural meaning of the word "*ordinance*" is not hard to find. The word itself means a civil, ceremonial or ecclesiastical statute, or law.

It is used in Exodus 12:14 in connection with the commemoration of the "*Lord's Passover*" and in Malachi 3:7 in connection with "*tithes and offerings*." There were many other Old Testament ordinances which God imposed on His people. Zacharias and Elisabeth "*were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and **ordinances** of the Lord blameless*" (Luke 1:5-6).

Through the writings of Paul we know of a surety that the "*ordinances*" were blotted out, taken out of the way and nailed to Christ's cross.

*Blotting out the handwriting of **ordinances** that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross (Colossians 2:14).*

*Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in **ordinances**; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace (Ephesians 2:15).*

Because of this we can understand Paul's question in Colossians 2:20:

*Wherefore, if you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to **ordinances** ...?*

There was a place for ordinances in the Old Testament times and during the period covered

by the Book of Acts, because God was then dealing with National Israel; but in this present Dispensation of the Mystery there is no room for ordinances.

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power: in Whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sin of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, Who has raised Him from the dead (Colossians 2:9-12).*

Thus we, as members of the Body of Christ, have experienced a spiritual circumcision and a spiritual baptism. These cannot be obtained through carnal ordinances and there is no scriptural suggestion that these spiritual realities are typified by the ordinances imposed upon the saints of this age by the commandments and doctrines of men.

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Colossians 2:8).*

It is utterly impossible for a child of God to join a denominational or an interdenominational church organization without following after the tradition of men. We should be satisfied with the membership which He gives us, through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in the church which is the Body of His dear Son.

*For by one Spirit are we all **baptized into one body**, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, whether we are bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13).*

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:4-6).*

Many of God's dear children are content to listen and they forget that God says study (II Timothy 2:15; c.f. I Corinthians 2:12-13). It is one thing to take what the teacher says. It is entirely another thing to search the Scriptures and find out what God has said. Too many Christians are like the little birds which are too young to leave the nest in search of food and therefore open their mouths to receive whatever the mother bird drops in. They sit without an open Bible and without searching the Scriptures to receive whatever spiritual counsel that is offered and whatever doctrine is contained in their denominational handbooks, or their interdenominational statements of faith.

Saints need to be "*rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith*" (Colossians 2:7). We need our "*loins girt about with truth*" and not with the doctrines of men. We need to wield the "*sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17), not the flimsy weapons offered to the saints by the religious corporations of this age. We must have "*the whole armor of God*" (:13) if we stand against the principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and let us remember God says "*Be able to withstand in the evil day, and having*

done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:10-18). We will not forget Paul’s last message to Timothy:

*Therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also (II Timothy 2:1-2).*

Hirelings will never give all of Paul’s message. Such a commission demands “*faithful men.*” We may well remember that “*the things*” which Timothy heard of Paul were not things pertaining to Israel’s Kingdom message with accompanying miracles, signs and wonders, and with ordinances which were ordained by the apostles of the Jerusalem church.

“*The things*” were those pertaining to “*the Mystery*” which was revealed to Paul and was not made known to men of other ages. Paul’s message, concerning grace and grace alone as it is related to the calling out of the Body of Christ, doesn’t leave room for the man-made creeds and programs of the organized churches; therefore, it will never be popular among the masses. This is why “*faithful men*” and not “*hirelings*” are needed today.

## **WHY WATER BAPTISM?**

John the Baptist preached the “*Baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel*” (Acts 13:24), but we do not find any scriptural suggestion that John ever preached to the Gentiles. His message was, “*Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*” and his ministry was in direct fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matthew 3:1-3).

### **Why Was Jesus Baptized?**

The Holy Spirit was very careful to tell us just why John the Baptist came baptizing with water and just why Jesus, Himself, was baptized by the hands of John in the river Jordan. He gave us this information through the testimony of John the Baptist, himself, who said,

*I knew Him [Christ] not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water (John 1:31).*

Thus it is clear that water baptism was necessary in connection with the manifestation of Christ to Israel. However, it does not necessarily follow that water baptism is linked with the manifestation of the Lord Jesus to “*Gentiles in the flesh,*” which were “*at that time aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Back in the days of John the Baptist, Gentiles were alienated strangers, “*But now in Christ Jesus*” they are “*made nigh by the blood of Christ*” (Ephesians 2:13).

“*The blood,*” by which the “*far off*” Gentiles are now made nigh, necessitated a *second* baptism for Jesus Christ. Long after He had been baptized in water, He said, “*I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened [pressed] until it is accomplished!*” (Luke 12:50).

The fact that this *second* baptism had such a terrific straitening, or pressing, effect upon the Savior suggests that it is the same baptism which He refers to in Matthew 20:22-23, where He said,

*Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

Surely, this can be nothing other than His baptism into “*death*,” which He experienced on the cross of Calvary, and which the present day believer experiences when he is “*Buried with Him by baptism into death*” (Romans 6:3-4).

There is a vast difference between the water baptism, which Christ entered into with John the Baptist, that He might be made manifest to Israel as their King, and the death baptism, which He entered into on the cross, that He might be the Savior of the whole world.

Water baptism was included in the program of Christ’s *earthly* ministry. This is evidenced by the testimony borne in John 4:1-2:

*When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus, Himself, baptized not, but His disciples), He left Judaea, and departed into Galilee.*

Since both John the Baptist and Jesus preached Israel’s Kingdom message (Matthew 3:1-3; Matthew 4:12-23) and since they were both sent to the people of Israel (Acts 13:24-25; Matthew 15:24) and since they both labored to make national Israel behold and receive her King, it is no strange thing that water baptism is practiced in connection with both of their ministries. Wherever we find Israel’s bona fide Kingdom message being given, we always find the use of water.

### **The So-Called Great Commission**

The so-called “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19 was given by the risen Christ to the “*Apostles whom He had chosen*” (Acts 1:2), and to whom He had said, “*I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me*” (Luke 22:29). I do not know why churchmen have designated this particular passage of Scripture as the “Great Commission.” There is no particular portion of God’s Word that is designated as “the great commission.” It does seem, however to me, that II Timothy 2:1-2 would be a much more appropriate passage to single out as God’s commission for this present dispensation of the mystery.

Since there is no particular portion of God’s Word that is designated as “the great commission,” we consider it dangerous to follow “*after the tradition of men*” along this or any other doctrinal line (Colossians 2:8).

Under the so-called “Great Commission,” unto the “Eleven” and to Matthias, who later took the place of Judas and was numbered with the eleven, the risen Lord said:

*Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world [age].*

We call special attention to three very important things which the Lord has included in this divine commission:

1. They were to go to “*all nations.*”
2. They were to teach the observance of “*all things*” whatsoever Christ had commanded them to observe.
3. He promised to be with them to the “*end of the world [age].*”

This commission was never fully carried out by the “Twelve” to whom it was given; it has not been fully carried out by any other company of saints since the days of the twelve apostles; and it will not be fully carried out until the “*Hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel*” preach it again during the period of “*great tribulation*” immediately preceding the “*End*” (Matthew 24:13-14, 21).

“*Great salvation*” through this kingdom message “*first began to be spoken by the Lord*” and it was “*confirmed*” unto the Hebrew believers “*by them that heard Him,*” namely the “*Twelve,*” and God was with them “*bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His Own will*” (Hebrews 2:34).

Just “*after the Lord had spoken unto them*” (the eleven) the words of the so-called “*great commission,*” He was “*received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following*” (Mark 16:19-20).

### **Why Water Baptism During the Acts Period?**

That period of time covered by the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (approximately 30 years immediately following Pentecost) is the period during which Israel’s Kingdom message was “*confirmed with signs following*” (Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:3-4), according to the commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:14-18.

During that period, the Holy Spirit was offering the Kingdom to Israel. The nation had rejected and crucified her King, but His prayer for them, on the day of His crucifixion, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,*” was answered when the nation was given another chance to accept the Messiah under the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. When they rejected His offer of their Kingdom they committed the “*unpardonable sin*” of Matthew 12:31-32. The nation was set aside until after the calling out of the “*Church, which is His body,*” and then Israel’s Kingdom message will again be given to all nations, after which, the Dispensation of Grace will end and the Kingdom of Heaven will be set up.

Water baptism was preached and practiced by Spirit-filled men throughout the Acts period. The Holy Spirit said, through Peter,

*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).*

The baptism of this verse is “water baptism,” and it was essential to salvation at that time. Let us remember, however, that the Spirit was here addressing the “*House of Israel*.” God was still endeavoring to make Christ “*manifest to Israel*” as their King, therefore water baptism was still in His program.

While the Holy Spirit was giving the message of Acts 2:38, He was also telling Israel about that “*which God had **spoken** by the mouth of all His holy prophets **since the world began***” (Acts 3:19-21). This could not be the same as “*the Mystery, which was kept **secret since the world began***” (Romans 16:25) – “*the Mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations*” (Colossians 1:25-26).

These simple comparisons of “*spiritual things with spiritual*” (I Corinthians 2:13) prove that Israel’s Kingdom message of John the Baptist, and of Christ, and of the “*Twelve*” was continued on into the opening chapters of the Book of the Acts. This is why Peter and the “*eleven*” preached and practiced water baptism.

Cornelius and his household were Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3), yet God saved them, gave them the Holy Ghost, and “*put no difference*” between them and the Jews upon whom He poured out the Holy Ghost at Pentecost (Acts 15:7-11). These are the first of a chosen number of Gentiles who are elected to be “*a people for His name*,” and their call is in full agreement with “*the words of the prophets*,” and they are to be linked with the building again of “*the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down*” (Acts 15:13-18). This links Cornelius with Israel’s kingdom hope and, therefore, accounts for his water baptism of Acts 10:47-48.

Paul the apostle and the teacher of the Gentiles (II Timothy 1:11), did not preach water baptism at any time, yet during the Acts period he practiced baptism with water (I Corinthians 1:14-16). During this period, Paul was an “*able minister of the [Israel’s] New Covenant*” (II Corinthians 3:6), and, as such, he was guided by the Holy Spirit to make a difference between the “*Jew*” and the “*Gentile*” (Romans 1:16; 3:1-2; I Corinthians 9:19-22). His Acts period ministry *to the people of Israel* included “*none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come*” (Acts 26:22). This accounts for Paul’s recognition of both water baptism and Spirit baptism during the Acts period, and for his clear-cut statement *after* the Acts period that there is just “*One Baptism*” (Ephesians 4:5). This “*one baptism*” is Holy Spirit baptism and not water baptism.

John the Baptist knew only one baptism, and that was water baptism. During the Acts period two baptisms are recognized – water baptism, and Spirit baptism. In our present church age we have only one scriptural baptism and that is Spirit baptism (I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5).

A summary of the scriptural use of water baptism in God's plan and program for Israel will clearly distinguish three different groups of "laborers together with God." These three groups are set forth in the Scriptures as follows:

1. John, the Baptist, and the earthly ministry of Christ with His twelve disciples (Matthew 3:11; John 4:1-2). These labored under the old (law) covenant.
2. The Acts period ministry of the Holy Spirit through Peter and the eleven (Acts 2:38; 10:46-48). These labored under the new covenant.
3. The Acts period ministry of the Holy Spirit through Paul and his co-workers (I Corinthians 1:14-17; 9:19-22). These were "able ministers of the new testament" (II Corinthians 3:6).

We call your special attention to the fact that the ministry of the above mentioned groups does not include the preaching of "the mystery of the gospel" (Ephesians 6:19) or the teaching of the truth concerning the dispensation of "the mystery" (Colossians 1:24-27). Therefore, there is no scriptural reason for introducing the use of water baptism in our present Mystery Dispensation on the grounds that it was preached by John, the Baptist, the twelve apostles and even Paul during his Acts period ministry.

Since Holy Spirit baptism puts us into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), and since Paul was not sent to baptize with water (I Corinthians 1:14-17), it seems clear that the "one baptism" of Ephesians 4:5 is Holy Spirit and not water.

### WHY THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Modern churchmen refer to their various "communion services," which include the eating of bread and the drinking of wine, as "The Lord's Supper." However, the expression "Lord's Supper" is used only once in all of the Word of God: and this one time it is telling a company of Acts period saints that when they came together in "one place" **they could not eat the Lord's Supper.** We quote this one verse which is recorded in I Corinthians 11:20:

*When you come together therefore into one place, **this is not to eat the Lord's supper.***

In the original language the verse reads "You cannot eat the Lord's supper." There is a scriptural reason why they could not partake of the Lord's supper in one place (or in a general assembly). This reason was the fact that the Lord's supper was the anti-type of "The Lord's Passover" of Exodus 12:11, and was to be eaten in their houses and not in a general assembly (Exodus 12:3-4).

The day of "The Lord's Passover" was set forth as a memorial day to be kept throughout the generations of Israel "by an ordinance forever" (Exodus 12:14-17). This Passover was eaten by the children of Israel on the night before their redemption by blood from the iron hand of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt. Almost 1500 years later it was eaten by Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles on the night before His sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary.

I call your attention to His own language concerning that last Passover supper.

*And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said unto them, "With desire I have desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the Kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22:14-18).*

The kingdom reference in this passage is explained more fully in verses 28 to 30 of this same chapter.

*You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father has appointed unto Me; that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Two important dispensational truths are brought out in the Scriptures quoted in the above paragraph. The first one is the fact that Christ and His disciples were eating "**the Passover**" which had its beginning in Exodus, chapter 12. The second truth referred to is the fact that Christ declared He would not eat the bread and drink the wine with them again until the yet future day when they shall eat and drink at His table in His kingdom, and "*sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" This helps us to understand the expression of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11:26,

*For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death until He comes.*

According to Paul's own instruction, the Corinthians were to eat the bread and drink the wine (I Corinthians 11:23-27). However, we must bear in mind that this eating and drinking was a household affair and not a service that could be performed in an assembly (I Corinthians 11:20).

The reason for this is found in Exodus 12:3-4, where the children of Israel were specifically instructed to eat the Passover supper in their respective households and not in a congregational assembly. We are also to remember that when Paul received this ordinance from the Lord and delivered it unto the people he was an "*able minister of the New Covenant*" (II Corinthians 3:6), and not a minister of the Dispensation of "*the Mystery*" (Colossians 1:24-26).

As a laborer together with God under the "*New Covenant*," Paul instructed the Corinthians concerning the teachings of Christ Who said,

*This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:28-29).*

He was giving instruction concerning the "*New Testament*" and the "*Hope of Israel*," not the "*Revelation of the Mystery*" and Christ in the believer, "*the hope of glory.*"



After the setting aside of National Israel in the closing chapter of the book of Acts, the apostle was no longer a minister of “*the New Covenant*,” which was promised through the prophet to the “*house of Israel and the house of Judah*” (Jeremiah 31:31-34), but he was “*a minister, according to the dispensation of God*” which was given to him “*to fulfill the Word of God*” (Colossians 1:24-25).

“*The Lord’s supper*” along with all other externals must be left behind by those who would “*go on unto perfection*” in Body truth. We say with Paul of old:

*Wherefore, if you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to **ordinances**, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using); after the commandments and doctrines of men?* (Colossians 2:20-22).

Under the Old Covenant, the Passover lamb was slain and its blood covered the sins of the people. Under the New Testament, Paul said, “*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*” (I Corinthians 5:7), but in the Mystery Dispensation he declares that Christ is,

*Our peace, Who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in **ordinances**; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were far off, and to them that were nigh* (Ephesians 2:14-17).

There was a place for “*the Lord’s supper*” among those who were looking to Him as their “*Passover*,” but there is no room for such an *ordinance* among us who are members of the Body of Christ, who know Him as our “*peace*.”

Some of the doctrines of other dispensations have been brought over into the Mystery Dispensation, and the things which God has brought across we rejoice to teach and practice. However, it seems clear that both *water baptism* and *the Lord’s supper* are not only left out of Paul’s Mystery Dispensation, but they are forbidden by such Scriptures as Ephesians 4:5; Colossians 2:14, 20-23; and Colossians 2:9-10.

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