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## Sprinkling Is Not Baptism

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the doctrine of baptism by immersion.

## SPRINKLING IS NOT BAPTISM

BY J. M. SJODAHL

Our missionaries in the field sometimes encounter the assertion that when the Lord, through the Prophet Ezekiel, says he will "sprinkle clean water" upon the house of Israel, "and ye shall be clean," he refers to baptism, and that, therefore, the baptism instituted by our Lord can be administered in the form of sprinkling. This is a misunderstanding of the passage quoted.

In the prophecy, the Lord promises the House of Israel, through the prophet, that the time will come, when he shall gather his children out from among the nations of the earth. They had "defiled" their own land "by their doings;" their "way" was in the sight of God "unclean," and their scattering is compared to the isolation of a polluted person (see Lev. 15); but the Lord said he would again take them from the heathen; the isolation as unclean would be terminated, and they would be brought back into their land, and, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." (Ezek. 36:25.)

Ezekiel was a Jew, and he spoke as a Jew to Jews. We must, therefore, turn to the Mosaic law, to find out just what his message to the people means.

In Leviticus 14, we find the law relating to the cleansing of lepers. The priest is there enjoined to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds, "alive and clean," and scarlet wool, and hyssop. One bird was to be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. The other bird, the cedar, the wool and the hyssop were to be dipped in the blood of the slain bird, which was contained in the vessel together with the water from the running stream. Then he was to sprinkle this blood seven times upon him that was to be cleansed, and after that ceremony, the unclean was to be pronounced clean, and the living bird was set free. However, he was not yet ready to resume his place among the people. After he had been pronounced clean, he had to pass through another cleansing process, consisting in the washing of his clothes and his entire body in water, "that he may be clean," not only ceremonially and typically, but actually. First then was he admitted to the camp, and after seven days, and another complete washing of clothes and body, he was admitted to the presence of the Lord at the Tabernacle, with his sacrifices, and to receive his anointing.

It will be observed that two different processes enter into this ceremonial; one is "sprinkling," and the other is "washing" and "bathing."

In Numbers, chapter 19, the law concerning the purification of those who are unclean is stated.

The children of Israel are there commanded to bring to Eleazar, the priest, a red heifer. This was to be slain outside the camp, and the priest dipped his fingers in blood and sprinkled it "before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times." Then the remains of the animal were burnt, together with cedar wood, hyssop, scarlet wool, and the ashes were gathered up and kept for the children of Israel. The ashes were mixed with water, and this water was used for ceremonial purification. It was "the water of sin," that is to say, the water that purifies from sin.

Now, if anyone touched a dead body, or if anybody was present at a death bed, he was unclean. In fact, many things resulted in rendering a person "unclean." The law was that, for purification, a clean person should dip a sprig of hyssop in the water of purification mixed with the ashes of the heifer and sprinkle it upon, not only the unclean person, but also upon the tent and the vessels. This was to be done on the third day after the uncleanness had been contracted, and also on the seventh day. And on the seventh day, the unclean person was to wash himself and his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and then he was clean in the evening, that is at the beginning of the 8th, the next day, since the Jews began their day in the evening. (Numbers 19:2-19.) Read carefully the entire chapter.

Here again two distinct processes are prescribed by the law; one is sprinkling of water (the water of purification); the other is washing and bathing.

The sprinkling with the water of purification, which, in the case of the slain bird, was mingled with blood, and in the case of the heifer, with the ashes of the sacrificed victim, typified the atonement of Christ, who was slain for the sins of the world. The unclean Israelite was vicariously slain in the sacrifice he brought to the altar of God; and he was forgiven and accepted, not because of any virtue in the sacrifice, but in that which the sacrifice typified; viz., the atoning death of the Lamb of God. That was what the sprinkling with the water of purification meant to the Jew who understood the spirit of the Law of Moses.

But then came the washing and bathing in water. That was not sprinkling. We all know what bathing is. The word in the original for washing here means fundamentally to "subdue," as when clothes are completely submerged in a tub of water and pressed down by the foot. And this typifies the cleansing baptism which is one of the sacred ordinances of the Church of Christ. It was only after the washing and bathing that the Israelite, who had been unclean, was admitted to the sanctuary of the Lord.

Now we can understand the meaning of the promise of the Lord through Ezekiel. He tells his polluted and isolated children that he would end their isolation, and sprinkle the water of purification on them, and also cleanse them from all their idols. Note the two-fold

process of sprinkling and cleansing. Having thus accepted the atonement of Christ and the baptismal bath, they would have a new heart and a new spirit, and receive the Spirit of God, who would cause them to walk in his statutes and keep his judgments. (Ezekiel 36: 25-32.)

That the sprinkling which is prescribed in the Law of Moses, and of which the prophets speak, refers to the atoning blood of Christ and not to baptism is made absolutely certain and beyond dispute by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews. He says: "For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop [that is the water of purification] and sprinkled both the book and all the people, [He did not baptize both the book and the people], saying, This is the blood of the testament, which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover, he sprinkled with blood [the sacrificial water and blood prescribed by the law] both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. [He did not baptize the tabernacle.] And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified by these [i. e., by the blood, water, scarlet wool and hyssop]; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."

And these better sacrifices are those, the apostles says, of Jesus Christ himself, who was offered once, to bear the sins of many; "and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. 9:19-28.)

And, to remove all possible doubt, the Apostle Paul, further says: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Heb. 10:22.) Here again it is clear, that the sprinkling refers to the purification of the *heart* through faith in the atoning work of Christ, and that it is something distinct from, although closely connected with, the outward ordinance of baptism, which admits to the communion of saints and the sanctuary of God.

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## Creation

The builder of worlds wrought again,  
 And morning stars great anthems raised,  
 While sons of God, in sweet refrain  
 Of gratitude, the whole scheme praised;  
 For, in the depths of space, remote,  
 God spake the word—the earth began,  
 In orbit well defined to float,  
 A fitting domicile for man.