

A Missing Link of Ancient Judaism to Christian Theology

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1 Corinthians 15:29 “Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?”

Certain credit for inspiration and information goes to Tim Hegg of Torah Resource Institute

Part One What Does That Scripture Mean?

I wrote this essay with one purpose in mind: to give Bible teachers an adequate explanation of this passage for their students. I don't want a Bible teacher who comes across this verse to not be able to adequately explain it to his or her students. Skipping over it in future classes or sermons does not have to occur anymore. This exposition seeks to strengthen a teacher's knowledge. Read on for important Hebrew historical and cultural facts. I first recommend that you do light research on the Corinthian church and the city of Corinth. A summary in a Bible commentary will reveal their troubled moral and spiritual state Paul chose to take on.

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Some 40 years ago, shortly after I chose to be a disciple of Jesus, believing him to be Yeshua the Hebrew Messiah, I attended a Christian theology school in southern California. I picked the layman's program, not pursuing a degree. I didn't picture myself as a future pastor, evangelist or missionary. But, my appetite for knowledge of Scripture was evidenced by the hours I spent in the school's small theological library. I didn't know that a theological or Bible school library shelved only books connected to religion. The variety pleased me. *Twenty different books just on Moses.* I was curious!

Occasionally, I targeted scriptures that perplexed me. I read and studied so much that a few students thought I was in the Master's program. Here's a reason why. One day lying in front of me on a library table were ten books all open to one location, 1 Corinthians 15:29. These were scholarly commentaries on the two letters from the Apostle Paul (a rabbi) to the believers in the city of Corinth, which was in southern Greece in the Roman province of Achaia. Several books systematically explored each verse in detail. His two letters focused on various topics and doctrines of the new Corinthian Messianic community (church).

Did you ever get curious about this verse? Ever think that the Corinthians did substitution baptism for the dead? Though weird, Corinthians did that...*didn't they?*

If you care about this oddity, then be patient and read things you've probably never heard of. At the end of my commentary I hope to have educated you and provided the best truthful speculation of the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in the Apostolic Writings. What I propose as the accurate meaning of this section of Scripture does take time to unpack and lay out for consideration.

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The surface reading of the verse implies two concepts. First is that certain believers in Corinth had a water ritual which was not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament (Tenakh) or surviving historical records. Meaning they believed salvation could be achieved by substitution or posthumous baptism—doing what the deceased hadn't chosen to do or was unable to do while alive. Such substituting might've even been beneficial to those already in the afterlife who could still be better off. But, were the baptizers really helping the deceased? How could they know?

A strong second interpretation I read about in my studies is that after a believer in Corinth died a natural death, in time, new believers entered the fellowship naturally taking their place. And so, new believers re-filled the ranks or pews by confessing belief in the Messiah and sealing their faith by baptism. The congregation number stayed the same or grew. However, bear in mind, most likely all believers in Corinth had had time in their lives to get baptized before death caught up with them. The interpretation of deaths by martyrdom or the need for new converts to fill seats is considered by commentators.

But, I think the verse leans more to a different purpose entirely. "Why then are they baptized for the dead?" Most translations imply that Paul considered such an activity to have been either unnecessary or a source of confusion with possible negative effects. The church planter's letter instructed that something was amiss.

From my studies I will show what most Christians don't know of ancient Hebrew culture in this matter.

The real questions are who are the "they" Paul addresses? And, was the water ritual—as we know of it today—the actual activity taking place even though our English translations use the Greek word "baptized"?

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The major thrust of Paul's letter is corrective behavior. Paul's discussing the afterlife—that is, the resurrection of the dead. He's making a case for the resurrection of all believers by showing that Christ was raised; therefore we too will be raised. His illustration about baptism for the dead is to show that many believe there is a life after this life. Whether baptism in proxy for the dead is legitimate or not, Paul is using it to prove that belief in an afterlife is a must.

The only way to overcome death is by resurrection. Immersion represents burial, coming out of the water—resurrection, symbolizing new life, a new beginning and a change of status. Immersion pictured death as an upgrade to a state of heavenly purity, life overcoming death, partnering with God. If the Corinthians didn't believe in the resurrection, then why were they engaging in immersion, a ritual which solely pointed to new birth and the afterlife?

PART TWO

Religions Evolve

"This difficult and controversial verse has uncertain significance with numerous possible interpretations." This quote by Pastor John MacArthur of southern California is the start of a well-trained, wise, and popular Bible teacher's attempt to handle what the verse might mean. Through the centuries, there's

been a multitude of Bible commentaries written by scholars. Some commentators had bizarre ideas. When Bible teachers come to the verse in question some admit with honesty, “I don’t know what it means!” The pastor-teacher I quoted also tried to make sense of Apostle Paul’s (Rabbi Sh’aul) writing. He is in good company with a long history of other fine, goodhearted, highly-educated teachers of Holy Scripture. But, most likely each of those refined Christian teachers had never set foot in a Jewish synagogue—for a single service. They never shared a glass of wine with a rabbi. Also, they wouldn’t have been Jews with a strong, knowledgeable religious upbringing.

Looking back at the Corinthian practice, the revered, early church father Tertullian, of North Africa, 155-240 AD, commenting on the ritual, “whatever it might have been.”

I propose a significant missing link in the early Christian church, to ancient Jewish burial rituals dating back to Moses—over 3,500 years—some of which are observed by many Jews today. To understand the verse in Corinthians, only a light education is needed to see how the original readers probably perceived Paul’s query and comments.

Bear in mind, around 130 AD, Jews who were the physical and spiritual descendants of the original first-and-second-generation believers found themselves with an ugly problem. Synagogues became places where Jewish believers in Yeshua were less and less welcome as the gentile converts from Greek philosophy and paganism gained in numbers. These of the Greek culture influenced the meanings of handed-down teachings and written translations of the Jewish-born gospel and the entire Tenakh. They started to rewire Messianic and traditional Judaism into two different and opposing foreign cultures against the authority of the mighty Roman Empire.

Increasingly, congregations of pagan converts simply cared less about the ancient and foreign *foundations* of their faith in the Jewish (Judean) Messiah. The Messianic Jews and pagan converts were originally a sect of Judaism. In the Fourth Century, due to Emperor Constantine, and his mother Helena, Jews and their traditions weren’t needed or wanted in the ever-growing *non-Jewish* or *Jew-less Jesus* churches. Jewish history, cultural and religious ways faded from what became the Christian Church dominated by gentile Greeks and Romans. Misinterpretations of God’s holy instruction took hold. Thanks to Rome, by 325AD, certain centuries-old Jewish holidays and rituals officially morphed into pagan ones or were prevented recognition. One of the Ten Commandments, keeping the Sabbath, changed from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown—to only Sunday. The theological door opened wide to mythology and reworked God and the key players of Jewish history. For instance, Jesus’ humble mother, Mary (Miriam), became the pagan Babylonian goddess worshipped and titled as the Queen of Heaven with idol worship of her encouraged.

The Jewish structure of the Temple in the book of Leviticus was strictly a male operation. The Greek and Roman s operated using both sexes. Pagan thinking and priestly rituals gained more than a foothold—they became the norm and the authorities. What was left of Messianic Judaism merged into a Roman style Christianity with some parts and pieces remaining in good health even today. In time, Messianic Jews left churches, having their own Messianic style of religion which dwindled into a slow, painful, and confused near-death.

Most modern church-goers assume these First Century Christian (Messianic) congregations did not have many Jews attending. Think again. There were over 400 synagogues in Jerusalem in Jesus’ day. How many hundreds or thousands existed in the Mediterranean world? When Paul wrote to the Messianic disciples

in Corinth, a major trade city, we can safely assume that dozens of congregations existed as house churches. It is faulty to think he wrote to a one-room church structure, with 100 or 200 people, mostly non-Jews. Corinth had a significant population of Jews who also had the leadership roles over converted pagans and Messianic Jews. Acts 18:1-8 clearly shows this.

Corinth's Messianic community of Jews and gentiles was having trouble with the importance and genuineness of the Messiah's Death, Burial and Resurrection. But those divine acts completed the mission of Jesus. They pointed to everyone's eventual death and promise of rising from the grave into an eternal life—godly or not. All believers have the Messiah himself confirming this supernatural work of coming back to life in an immortal, trans-dimensional body. Paul attempts to draw a simple line about the afterlife ensuring others that it will happen. If there isn't an afterlife, then why live a religious life filled with rituals—one being the significant act of baptism—and then why have other people baptized for the dead? Corinthians were selecting and rejecting various teachings. Remember, one school of Judaism had been the Sadducees, who didn't believe in an afterlife or angels.

PART THREE

Jews Baptized “Because of the Dead” 1,500 Years before the Letter to Corinth

Today, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior means the repentance of sin using a suitable or prescribed confession of faith. This might be followed by a physical act involving water, called baptism, as an initiation rite. This has been the common procedure in most churches for centuries. The modern-day disciple knows of John the Baptist (Yochanan the Immerser) and of him baptizing Jesus and others. In Israel, stretches of the Jordan (Yarden) River or Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret) were the most used and convenient natural locations. Both of their disciples officiated over Jews who (as tradition was) *self-immersed*—baptized themselves. They repented of their sins and were symbolically washed clean.

People approached these two spiritual leaders and their disciples to confess and repent of their sins, also for the traditional purification rite. They had the expectation of the coming Kingdom of God. Ear-catching preaching, increasing crowds, and claims of miracles brought religious authorities from Jerusalem to investigate this odd, raging popularity. One major controversy was John's use of the ancient and common ritual of total self-immersion in water, known as *tevilah*.

Full immersion in a manmade pool (*mikveh*) or out-of-doors natural source went back to the time of Moses and the Wilderness Wanderings. A *mikveh* (gathering of waters) can be a bath house or small pool-like structure for full immersion—*tevilah*—done for ritual purity—*taharah*. The sacrament was a spiritual purification method instituted in the Torah by Moses (Numbers 19, Leviticus 15 and elsewhere) again, *over* 1,500 years before John the Baptist got his nickname.

Whether carved from solid rock or made from stone bricks, the *mikveh* (pool) is filled with water channeled from fresh rainwater, a spring, river, and groundwater well, snow or ice—any natural source of flowing water. Sometimes water was in a cistern or holding area called an *otzar*, from where the water entered the *mikveh* for use. This immersion was never for hygienic purposes. People washed themselves as best they could before briefly entering the “collected” waters. At a *mikveh*, with an enclosure, or assured privacy

outdoors, users removed all clothing. Use in the nude was common and preferred, but never in mixed company.

This common ritual didn't *require* the physical aid of an attendant or priest. While standing in at least waist-high water, the person bent toward the small opening, the otzar, the source of life, crouched, held their breath and submerged—unassisted, before standing back up. In flowing water, such as a river, the person faced upstream toward the source.

Each use of a mikveh or act of tevilah symbolizes a birth. In fact, a fetus lives immersed within the amniotic sac, and once broken, that liquid washes past the child. The submersion in water and rising up from it are metaphors of death and new life, a birth from something to something else. In certain lands, especially Israel, a corpse was carefully handled and immersed (nose and mouth closed). If not, then attendants sponge-bathed and poured water over the body before drying and wrapping it in white linen for burial. Just who did this peculiar traditional activity is a strong point in my explanation of 1 Corinthians 15:29.

A rabbi, scribe, teacher or congregational leader at a Torah school or synagogue, required tevilah/immersion at 30 years of age when these vocations could start. And so, Yeshua began his vocation at age 30. He chose public immersion by Yochanan (a priest's son), for the beginning of his mission. This action was not an immersion to cleanse him from his sin—t'shuvah. He hadn't any sin to repent and be cleansed of. The average Jew in the crowd approached Yochanan due to the call for repentance. Christians are confused by this story of Yeshua ordering Yochanan (his forerunner) to immerse him, as perhaps, an empty gesture for the witnesses' sakes—feigned obedience. His unique reason, different from those waiting on the river's banks, was only to officiate the start of his own ministry. When he came out of the river, Yeshua made no announcement clarifying to the crowds his purpose for immersion. Indeed he was the only person there who didn't need cleansing from sin. John did need it, and most assuredly did so each day with use of tevilah/ritual reasons or t'shuvah/repentance from sin, before engaging his audiences.

Simply put, manmade mikvot (plural of mikveh) were commonplace and convenient. Publicly submitting to John the Baptist's message to repent and be immersed gave increased credence to his mission as one infused with holiness. With neighbors or strangers witnessing one's desire for taharah, this made repentance more sincere and meaningful.

Immersion was a private, personal and obedient choice to the commandments in the Torah. Remember, for over 1,500 years many Jews included immersion purification to honor God. When we read of a disciple baptizing someone, we must understand that the disciple simply officiated the procedure. When the Gospel accounts report that the disciples of John or Jesus "baptized," they didn't lay a person backwards, under the water, and muscled him back up. That particular posture for immersion, also symbolizing death to sin and a new, born-again life via Jesus, started centuries after Jesus' own Death and Resurrection. This posture developed over the centuries as the church made changes and Jewish believers were a rarity. Crouching, facing the water source was the norm for centuries.

The New Testament (B'rit Chadashah) in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2:38, records that in Jerusalem, on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (Shavu'ot in Hebrew) "3,000 believed and were immersed." This is translated using the Greek (misleading for Western readers) word "baptized." The 120 fired-up believers used street level public mikvot, fountains or pools. Whether clothed to hurry the process, we do not know. These 3,000 didn't require anyone's assistance or witness for God to accept the symbolic act.

PART FOUR

Baptism or Tevilah

The Greek word “baptism” should correctly imply the traditional Jewish ritual of tevilah by full immersion in water. Partially due to hostile cultural differences, the Jewish roots of what became the Christian religion diminished as did leadership and attendance by Jews. Also, the twisted blame of Christ’s death on “all Jews” as a hereditary crime diminished their attendance at gentile-filled meetings (churches). A non-Jewish priesthood developed too. Eventually, in 325 AD, Constantine, Emperor of the Roman Empire, outlawed any Jewish customs in the Church. In the following years Church councils followed suit. Pagan rituals and meanings meshed in with now root-less Jewish traditions.

Initiation for new disciples meant formalities, clergy and requirement of an aid or aids. This aid became necessary to confirm the convert’s sincerity, perhaps to recite a formula prayer and of course, to witness the required act of faith. In this newer context, the procedure changed: that is, no one immersed him or herself and called it done. At least one worthy person, with hands-on, baptized a convert. But, immersion for the original purposes continued with believing and non-believing Jewish people, even to today. Certain branches of Orthodox Judaism continue the ritual bath of the tevilah in a mikveh for personal purposes. Certain branches of Judaism continue to observe the ritual, especially for converts.

PART FIVE

Matthew 9:18-23 Who Are the Mourners and Musicians?

Matthew 9:23, “When Jesus came into the synagogue official’s home, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, ‘Make room, everybody out, for the girl isn’t dead, she’s only sleeping.’” Of course they didn’t believe this newcomer. They ridiculed Jesus as an intruding fool, while they knew the obvious truth—death had come. I believe some of these visitors to the house of mourning belonged to a community burial society called the Chevra Kadisha.

Paid mourners? Ridiculous to us. But, teams of sobbing minstrels playing soft sad tunes were a typical custom at times of mourning in certain parts of ancient Jewish culture. Hired musicians and mourners took part in most funerals of that day. The large crowd and the general tumult were due to the prominence of the family in which this tragedy had occurred. The professional musicians and mourners played slow dirges on flutes, pipes and tambourines. They clapped rhythmically and sang with disheveled hair, torn clothes and dirty faces, striking their chests, moaning, wailing while swaying. Usually more women than men did these tasks. More money, more mourners were hired. Even the poorest among the Israelites could afford not less than two pipers and one woman to make lamentation. They sang praises and virtues of the deceased person while reciting the name of any near relatives who had died recently. They sang and recounted acts, dwelt on their beauty, strength, learning, or on the comforts of their family and home. This troupe would also be present at the funeral itself, creating or adding to a sorrowful scene.

That stated, another purpose came next—preparation of the corpse for burial. They rarely charged for these services. Bear in mind, many times they were strangers to the deceased, but chose involvement with a family in intimate Hebrew rituals. Throughout the year members rotated through the musical, mourning, water cleansing, burial preparations, overnight watching, burial site mourning and songs. If the burial couldn't be the same day one member remained with the corpse overnight. When required, caretakers supervised the body protecting it from desecration or outdoor elements. A “shomer” did this guardian role. He or she recited Psalms, and said prayers asking for the forgiveness of the deceased and the soul's eternal peace. Then in the morning the team members also oversaw the burial.

Through the centuries names were given to such volunteers: Chevra Kadisha means Holy Sacred Brotherhood and Holy Burial Society. Also they were known as Hevrat Chesed VeEmet—Kindness and Truth Society, and Hevra Gomelei Hasadim—Performers of Kindness Society.

Some hold to this servicing dating back to Genesis 47:29, where Joseph promises his father Jacob to carry his body out of Egypt and through the desert, to bury it in Israel. This is speculation. The seventh day of the Jewish month of Adar is a traditional celebration of the Chevra Kadisha, since on that day God Himself performed the duties of the Chevra Kadisha and buried Moses (Talmud: Tractate Megillah 13b). Some teach that the Chevra Kadisha existed in an organized local manner before King David's time treating rich or poor alike.

PART SIX

What These Volunteers Needed To Do Afterwards

As bizarre as such activities are to our Western experience of death and funerals, this was normal. Professional mourners who (perhaps) never knew the departed, didn't add an unwanted or absurd element to a funeral. Also, this business wasn't exclusive to the Hebrew culture or confined to the land of Israel. Greeks and Romans had similar customs. Some mourners might have been crisis actors, while others were sincere.

What I want to emphasize is that strangers or unknown neighbors were not only involved in Jewish death rituals, but paid to do so. Caretaker groups in Jewish communities drew together for the bereaved and to perform the burial chores. If not, family or friends, the one group to be counted on was the Chevra Kadisha.

This brings us to 1 Corinthians 15:29, *“Otherwise, what will they do who are immersed on account of the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they immersed because of the dead?”* From God's eyes, the Torah has a list of causes of defilement and remedies. The most serious or highest grade of defiling came from handling a corpse or preparing it for burial. Defilement also occurred from being in the same room as a corpse and other connected activities. Handling, preparing and burying a dead person was, of course, normal, necessary and a blessing. But still, it was the highest degree of ritual impurity. Numbers 19:1-22 tells how such voluntarily unclean persons became clean again. Personal cleansing after corpse defilement called for water purification—not once, but four times. A clean person volunteered to assist on the third and seventh days after the last defiling activity “they” were sprinkled with a hyssop branch using a container filled from fresh running water. Added to the water were ashes from a specially sacrificed, rare, red heifer. These important, yet small amounts of cow ashes had been transported from Jerusalem to synagogues in distant communities. Then the unclean persons were to immerse—not baptize for salvation—themselves on the third and seventh day. This

was never for medicinal or hygienic purposes. So, the misleading Greek translation of Paul's letter leaves out the common and ancient procedure of Jewish burial customs and the need for immersion, not "baptism," for having handled a dead person. The Greek word *huper* can mean because, on account of, and for.

Ezekiel 36:22-29 shows the importance of the sprinkling of water made holy. Restoration is the outcome, a new heart and a new life.

Salvation happens by confession of a living person—not after death. Today's Christian baptism is limited solely as a sign of salvation or rededication. But, Paul's "they" were immersed due to or because of the dead. The dead could not prepare and bury themselves. When people volunteered to do the good deeds involving the Jewish customs they knowingly incurred temporary penalties on Earth. Believing God sees all and keeps score, they gained points of favor. Christian baptism through the centuries took on a variety of styles due to lack of the Hebrew God-given method.

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The heart of the matter? Christianity's parallel requirement is a one-time-in-life ritual with water for repentance and symbolic cleansing from one's own sin—not someone else's. It is a sign of accepting salvation due to the Jewish Messiah's sacrifice, burial and Resurrection. The reason the Corinthians in question used immersion was to picture death (uncleanness through contact with a corpse) and the return to a state of ritual purity (a symbol of life overcoming death, or resurrection). If the burial assistants actually did not believe in the Messiah's Resurrection, then why were they engaging in the ritual washings (Torah commandments), a ritual which pointed to the reality of resurrection for all humans? The process of the handlers and washers always led them to ways to undo their voluntary defiling. The "they" whom Paul is concerned about, I believe, were routine burial assistants, a community collective. Paul's concern should now start to be comprehended. **The procedure symbolized death and the hope of resurrection as promised in Scripture. Therefore, only flowing or running water was acceptable. Unclean—now clean. A change of status occurs, sin does not return, the person is clean—like a child and starting over again.**

An unclean person couldn't ascend the Temple Mount, attend synagogue services, nor participate in congregational holiday festivities or sex. If a burial occurred on the holiday of Passover unclean persons waited one month, Shloshim, to enjoy the Seder meal, Numbers 9:1-12. Interestingly, John 19:38-40 tells that when Jesus was dead on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and unnamed others helped to tend to the body for burial. Thus, they voluntarily chose uncleanness and to miss celebrating the national holiday, instead having a Passover Seder next month instead. How fanciful a picture it might have been if those involved met together for a make-up Passover Seder knowing that Jesus was alive from the dead and they and many others had seen him too!

Who Buries Whom?

Up to roughly 150 years ago in America, there were thousands of such helpful Jewish burial societies. It's a worldwide organization responsible for caring for the deceased. Certain Jewish mortuaries have a private room for the washing, drying and clothing the dead by the Chevra Kadisha. Even in our secular and religious society today, we usually turn all necessities of our loved one over to strangers. The body is transported away and we don't see it again until the day of the funeral or memorial.

The Chevra Kadisha are trained to perform the mitzvah (good deed) of a taharah, which is water purification by total immersion, or pouring water over the body or a thorough sponge bath. Ritual Washing? As newborns are washed and dressed as they enter the world, so are the dead as they leave this world. The traditional washing and dressing of the deceased is still done with the utmost dignity and respect. Jewish men prepare men's bodies, while women prepare women's bodies. Simple white burial garments or shrouds are used. Men are accompanied with their tallit (prayer shawl), which has one of the fringed corners cut off. These activities are generally free of charge.

Paul surely came across these care-givers as a normal part of Jewish life. He grew up in Tarsus, visiting hundreds of miles to and from Israel, and was well-traveled to other countries and synagogues as an apostle. As a rabbi and high-achiever Jew, could he too have done such burial deeds?

The communal aspect of Jewish people and Torah guidance set the stage for this esteemed system of do-gooders. This was not a national or international networked organization, but more a natural result of community needs. These men and women were on call 24 hours a day. When needed or desired by a family, others in the community could be called upon to carry out all or some of the death rituals. If the deceased had no next-of-kin nearby, these volunteers took over.

Due to the size of village or city and synagogue attendees, local volunteers tended to the end-of-life Hebraic duties. The wailers and musicians previously mentioned were most likely part of the Chevra Kadisha of Galilean towns. All of the paid or unpaid musicians and mourners knew they would be unclean once they entered that house (including Jesus). Yet, he reversed that by bringing back to life the deceased!

Consider this gap. In modern times in Western countries, a new believer in Jesus as Messiah typically submits to a sanctified water ritual as a seal of salvation done by someone ordained in ministry. Close family or friends might lend a hand or stand nearby, but a leader officiates and not the father, mother or spouse. In 1Corinthians 15:29, Paul's emphasis is on "they," those who must immerse themselves three and seven days after defilement. I propose that these people were Chevra Kadisha volunteers. Paul questions the motives of the heart of those carrying out these Torah instructed procedures—now a lifeless ritual or not? He tries to make them think about their concept of spiritual cleanliness before God—needed now or not?

According to the Jewish burial custom or mitzvah, burial preparation activities are unselfish nonprofit acts, nobody should ever look for compensation. The burial and preparation were a communal responsibility. Therefore, depending on the size of the Jewish population or location, today, communities have their own Chevra Kadisha. Being a member is a unique privilege and is considered a great honor and only for persons of high moral character.

This was done in Corinth as it was done wherever Jews lived—but not always consistently through the centuries. Paul seems to question what these faithful volunteers would do if they completely stopped the ancient ritual of needed sprinkling and personal immersion. I must assume that Corinth was losing enthusiasm of holy observances in a variety of ways. Their behavior alarmed him in person and at a distance. Believers' faith was deteriorating. He pleads for unity and moral uprightness. Empty, faithless rituals, no matter how ancient, do not please God's heart. The procedure symbolized death and the hope of resurrection as promised in Scripture. Therefore, only flowing or running water was acceptable. Unclean—now clean. A change of status occurs, sin does not return, the person is clean—like a child and starting over again.

Summary

Paul wrote about actions fully known and understood by the people of his day.

Baptism for the dead is a culturally Hebraic out-of-context reference for today's Bible teachers and readers.

Once a reader accepts that the mystery of 1 Corinthians 15:29 is due to the translation of the Greek word baptism for the Hebrew, *tevilah* (immersion), then a desired, logical hinge is found.

The activity of water immersion or thorough rinsing of a corpse, was instituted by Moses, in the Torah, over 1,500 years before Paul's letter.

The action of water immersion (*tevilah*) was commonplace for many other rituals.

The deceased person was taken care of from death to the grave. Those who helped prepare the corpse for burial knowingly became defiled or unclean. To become undefiled (*taharah*) they themselves needed immersion three and seven days after final contact.

Paul's question might be put "On those two days why do you *bother* to immerse yourselves on account of (or because of) handling a corpse?" See Numbers 19:1-22.

Over the centuries similar groups of Jews (in large enough communities) took care of the dead. Even today, these volunteers are called the *Chevra Kadisha*. They choose to become unclean on a regular basis.

Certain Jews around the world still do burial rituals slightly referenced by Paul. See also Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38-41.

To volunteer for the acts of *tevilah* (immersion), preparation for burial, and burial, are all good deeds or (*mitzvah* or law) because the deceased cannot do for themselves what needs to be done for their own body.

Whatever Corinth's practice of actual substitution baptism was, such a ritual was forbidden in general by the early Church, and so did not continue into mainstream Christianity. It was considered a vain practice and heretical.

Finally, I believe Paul was challenging the well-known routine of Corinth's Chevra Kadisha members—the "they." Why do "they" immerse themselves for ritual cleansing (taharah) in a pool (mikveh) after being in contact with a corpse? If the Torah isn't God's specific instruction to Jews, why should they obey that part?

Appendix on Many Mikveh Uses

The use of a mikveh (mikvot, plural) was for various heartfelt purposes, such as a landmark in one's life, or an anniversary. On the morning of their wedding day, the couple separately used a mikveh. Also, the morning of a boy's Bar Mitzvah ceremony (age of responsibility) at 13. And, entering into the military at age 20; repentance from sin and rededication to Adonai; if a person or married couple had an anniversary. Even a serious or deadly disease in which they fully recovered (leprosy), a healing themed tevilah was in order. And yes, a baby placed in water and dedicated to Adonai. A male proselyte underwent circumcision and tevilah, and was said to be a new born. Female proselytes immersed. Scholars have held that the mikveh performed a cleansing of one's life from the pagan uncleanness in which they had lived.

Take note: In order to ascend to the Temple Mount, Jews respectively used street-level male and female mikvot.

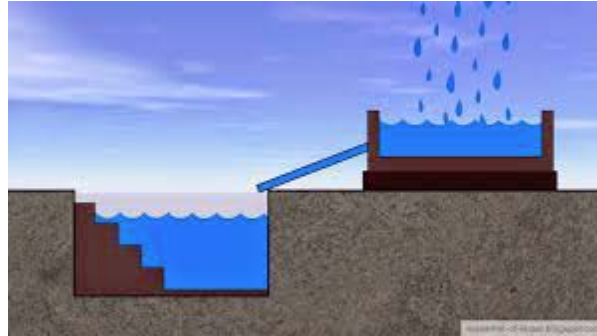
In the routine of life, women have been the main mikveh users due to post-menstrual purposes, one day each month—seven days after the blood flow stopped—never for hygiene. Also, 40 days after the birth of a male child, 80 days for a female, immersion is required. During the menstruation cycle, a woman experiences a mini-death in that the potential of conception has ended in the flow of blood, rather than the beginning of the life of a child. (This is not sinful.) Immersion in the mikveh causes a woman to become ritually clean again, as mentioned in Luke 2:22. Yosef and Miryam needed to "purify themselves."

Other mikveh uses were the entering of the priesthood, or when on duty each morning the priests used secluded, priests-only mikvehs on the Temple Mount. Interestingly, on the Mount, there were over two dozen cisterns collecting rainwater, or melting snow or ice. The high priest had a private mikveh which he used only one day a year for Yom Kippur. The day before Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—everyone sought to purify (taharah) themselves by immersion, or a thorough sponge bath plus pouring water over the body. No doubt people waited in long lines at a mikveh.

When a Jew performed tevilah at a mikveh, someone *could* aid him — perhaps, if he or she were old, feeble, ill, pregnant, or wanted the intimacy of a close companion. A young child might prefer a family member nearby. An attendant could say a prayer, blessing or affirmation.

I've been asked to comment on the Mormons, also known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), concerning their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29.

According to the LDS Church, the practice of baptism for the dead is based on a revelation received by their prophet, Joseph Smith. This ordinance of the LDS church baptizes by vicarious or proxy baptizing the dead allows the kingdom. Mormons view the indispensable requirement. The LDS Church are genealogy, which is then used temple baptism for as many



Baptism for the dead is an ordinance of the LDS church. Since 1840, Mormons literally perform vicarious ceremonies, believing that lost souls enter into God's rite of baptism as an ordinance. For this reason, members of the LDS Church are encouraged to research genealogy as the basis for performing vicarious baptisms for deceased persons as possible.

One person can be baptized a multitude of times. LDS has the world's largest genealogical database called Family Search. LDS members first concentrate on their own family roots. Peculiarly, they teach that in the afterlife, once notified, ancestors or unending strangers are then taught the gospel in the spirit world. The recipients are free to accept or reject the service done on their behalf.

Any previous baptism under a different faith does not qualify. There are age restrictions. Mormons hold to a strict immersion, in which the person is specially attired, a priest is present, formula prayers are recited. The person administering the rite is in the water too. Men act as proxy for deceased men, and women as proxy for deceased women. This takes place at certain Mormon Temples. There are over 150 temples worldwide.

The church's reported membership as of December 31, 2014 was over fifteen million.

My opinion? A dead person cannot get "saved" by being baptized vicariously by proxy. A variety of Scriptures show how that could not be. In one's mortal life, each must be convinced of their own sin and the holy judgment of God which awaits them. Needing a savior or redeemer, here and now, they must choose the Messiah on their own and worship him in thanks for his bloody, deadly sacrifice—before leaving this world.

FOR MORE INFORMATION READ MY BOOK "Ring of Torrents: A Jewish Mary"

ANCIENT AND MODERN MIKVEH (MIKVOT)





MODERN MIKVOT LOOK LIKE COMMON HOT TUBS, BUT THE PLUMBING IS COMPLICATED

