

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Divers Washings

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The author of Hebrews in contrasting the New Covenant with the Law of Moses writes concerning the Old Law, “*being only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation*” (Hebrews 9:10). The conscience could not be cleansed with gifts and sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 9:8). Only through the blood of Christ was the guilt of sin going to be taken from the sinner’s conscience (Hebrews 9:14).

“Divers washings” is an interesting phrase because the word translated “washings” is the Greek word “baptismos”. We see our word, “baptism” in this word. Baptism is actually the transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo” which means to dip or immerse. Under the Old Law there were different washings or “baptisms”.

The divers washings under the Old Law were connected with the cleansing or “washings of cups, and pots and brazen vessels” (Mark 7:4). The physical or ceremonial cleansings inspired by the Old Law were further developed under the traditions of the Jews to the point they would not

eat without bathing themselves and washing their hands.

The word “baptismos” is also translated “baptisms” in other verses of the New Testament. In Hebrews we read, “*of the teaching of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment*” (Hebrews 6:2). All of these subjects, including repentance from dead works and faith toward God of the previous verse were the foundations or first principles leading up to Christ, and not the first principles under the Law of Christ. Notice that the word in Hebrews 9:10 is plural - “baptisms” and not the one baptism under the Law of Christ. The plural “baptisms” is probably referring to these same “washings” or ceremonial cleansings of cups, pots and brazen vessels.

Does the fact that “baptismos” is referring to these ceremonial washings connected with the Old Law take away the meaning of “immersings” that is connected with the Greek word? Certainly not. These items no doubt were immersed or dipped under water as they were cleansed from physical filth. Their washings were accomplished through

the act of immersing the different vessels.

Understanding these baptisms were washings or cleansing of physical filth under the Old Law helps us understand what Peter says regarding the one baptism. He writes, “*...through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 3:20-21). The waters of the flood divided the righteous from the unrighteous who perished. As people were saved “through water” in the flood, people are saved today through the water of baptism. But notice that Peter adds, “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” No doubt he is contrasting the concepts of washings of the Old Testament, which washed away physical filth, from the one baptism which is an “appeal” in order to have a clean conscience. As in Hebrews, the concept of washings or taking away filth by immersion is being addressed. The baptism that saves cleanses the conscience of the guilt of sin, which the “divers washings” of the Old Law could not do.