

Week #:	53	Text:	Hebrews 6:1-3; James 5:14-16; Matthew 3:1-17; II Kings 1:7-8; Malachi 3:1-5; Isaiah 40:30-31; Jeremiah 17:5-6, 13; Psalms 24:3-4; I Peter 3:18-22; Ezekiel 36:25; Exodus 30:17-21; Leviticus 15; Mark 7:1-23; John 13:14-15;	Title:	Hebrew Roots: Mikvah – Doctrine of Baptisms
Songs:	My Life Is In You Lord (2:57)				
	Op Up The Heavens – Meredith Andrews (3:52)				
	To Him Who Sits On The Throne – Don Moen (3:37)				
	Kadosh (Holy) – Paul Wilbur (5:54)				
	You Won't Relent – Misty Edwards (5:00)				

Hebrew Roots: Mikvah/Mikveh

The Hebrew language does not have vowels, so it is difficult when you try to translate it into other languages. This is why it is **transliterated, not translated**. In transliteration, the concept or meaning of the word or phrase is kept, but the spelling might not be. This is why we often find several spelling variations of Hebrew words when a passage is translated out of English and back to the original. The vowels are added for our benefit, but they are not in the original.

What is a mikvah / mikveh?

We are all familiar with the practice or doctrine of **baptism**. The Hebrew word for an immersion pool built for the purpose of baptism is **mikvah**.

Hebrews 6:1-3 (KJV) says:

- ¹ Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, ² Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.
³ And this will we do, if God permit.

The King James Version was translated (mostly) from the Greek into English, so sometimes we lose the purpose of the scripture, especially in writings like the book of Hebrews that was more than likely not written originally in Greek, but rather in Hebrew (or Hebraic in tone). So it's good to go back to a more Hebraic translation to see what we are missing.

Hebrews 6:1-3 (CJB) says:

- ¹ Therefore, leaving behind the initial lessons about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of turning from works that lead to death, trusting God, ² **and instruction about washings, s'mikhah**, the resurrection of the dead and eternal punishment.
³ And, God willing, this is what we will do.

Paul here encourages the Hebrew people in vs. 1 to go on to maturity. Grow up! Don't remain fixated on just the foundational doctrinal issues that will keep you from eternity with God, but rather push on to new insights and deeper teachings, maturing as you go.

What doctrinal issues does he specify?

- Doctrine of baptisms
- Doctrine of laying on of hands

- Doctrine of the resurrection of the dead
- Doctrine of eternal judgment/punishment

Skip the first one in this list for a few minutes, and let's quickly hit on the other three.

Being in a Pentecostal denominational church, we understand the laying on of hands pretty easily. Paul is talking in reference to praying for people.

James 5:14-16 says:

¹⁴ Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The last two that Paul lists, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and the doctrine of eternal judgment/punishment, is in reference to the fact that Sadducees did not believe in anything coming after death. Death meant the end – no coming back from it, and nothing beyond it.

The Jews in most cases, including the Pharisees, believed differently. They believed in death not being the final end to everything – there was something more with God, and they believed people could be resurrected from the dead.

Essentially in throwing out this doctrine, the Sadducees did not believe the prophets of old – who, in most cases, raised the dead. The Sadducees made up their own doctrine. It was not founded upon the Word of God, or upon the precepts He set forth from the beginning with Adam, or from the beginning of His nation with Moses and the law.

Rabbis of the time were known to heal people, and they were known to raise the dead. The Sadducees did not believe these things happened and they often questioned the rabbis, and even Jesus, about these miracles.

What is the Doctrine of Baptisms?

There are two kinds of baptisms:

- the immersion in water (Matthew 3)
- the baptism of the Holy Spirit and with fire (Acts 2)

It is important to note that with both of these you must first follow after Christ in obedience – turn your heart towards Him. Getting baptized is meant to be an outward sign of what God has done to your heart because you are now choosing to follow Him. As I once heard it said, it doesn't matter if you got sprinkled or dunked, if you don't know Jesus then you just got wet.

Another step in our faith walk, when we are obedient to God and stepping forward into a deeper maturity is the baptism in the Holy Spirit and with fire. We are, in essence, going from that outer court

experience of accepting God's gift of grace and giving our lives over to Him, to the inner court experience where we are focused on learning the deeper things of God through His Word and through time spent with Him.

Matthew 3:1-17 (CJB) tells us the story of Jesus' immersion experience.

¹ It was during those days that Yochanan [John] the Immerser arrived in the desert of Y'udah [Jusaea] and began proclaiming the message, ² "Turn from your sins to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near!" ³ This is the man Yesha'yahu [Isaiah] was talking about when he said,

"The voice of someone crying out: 'In the desert prepare the way of Adonai! Make straight paths for him!'" [Isaiah 40:3]

⁴ Yochanan [John] wore clothes of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem], from all Y'udah [Judaea], and from the whole region around the Yarden [Jordan]. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were immersed by him in the Yarden [Jordan] River.

⁷ But when Yochanan [John] saw many of the P'rushim [Pharisees] and Tz'dukim {Sadducees} coming to be immersed by him, he said to them, "You snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming punishment?" ⁸ If you have really turned from your sins to God, produce fruit that will prove it! ⁹ And don't suppose you can comfort yourselves by saying, 'Avraham [Abraham] is our father!' For I tell you that God can raise up for Avraham [Abraham] sons from these stones!

¹⁰ Already the axe is at the root of the trees, ready to strike; every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown in the fire! ¹¹ It's true that I am immersing you in water so that you might turn from sin to God; but the one coming after me is more powerful than I — I'm not worthy even to carry his sandals — and he will immerse you in the Ruach HaKodesh [Holy Spirit] and in fire. ¹² He has with him his winnowing fork; and he will clear out his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn but burning up the straw with unquenchable fire!"

¹³ Then Yeshua [Jesus] came from the Galil [Galilee] to the Yarden [Jordan] to be immersed by Yochanan [John]. ¹⁴ But Yochanan [John] tried to stop him. "You are coming to me? I ought to be immersed by you!" ¹⁵ However, Yeshua [Jesus] answered him, "Let it be this way now, because we should do everything righteousness requires." Then Yochanan [John] let him. ¹⁶ As soon as Yeshua [Jesus] had been immersed, he came up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, he saw the Spirit of God coming down upon him like a dove, ¹⁷ and a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; I am well pleased with him."

John was Jesus' cousin — known when the book of Matthew was written, and to us today, as *John the Baptist*. This passage gives us this physical description of John: he wore clothes of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist.

This description is not meant to just tell us what John wore so we could picture him in our minds running around like a wild man in the wilderness. It is meant to describe his demeanor, his character — who he

acted like. Jewish people reading this passage would immediately think of another prophet of old because of his physical description in II Kings 1:7-8

II Kings 1:7-8 says:

⁷ He asked them, “The man who came to meet you and told you these things, what kind of a man was he?” ⁸ “He was a hairy man,” they answered him, “with a leather belt around his waist.” He said, “It was Eliyahu [Elijah] from Tishbe [the Tishbite].”

The writer wants you to associate John with Elijah. He dressed like Elijah, who was hairy and wore a belt of leather, and he acted like Elijah. II Kings 1 tells of an account where Elijah gave a prophecy about the king dying. He was then summoned by the king, and Elijah called down fire from heaven several times, killing the soldiers who were sent to get him.

John dressed to look like Elijah, and he acted like Elijah. Malachi 3:1-5 gives a prophecy that there will be one to come before the Messiah that will make the way for Him:

¹“Look! I am sending my messenger to clear the way before me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple. Yes, the messenger of the covenant, in whom you take such delight — look! Here he comes,” says Adonai-Tzva’ot [Lord of Hosts]. ² But who can endure the day when he comes? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire, like the soapmaker’s lye. ³ He will sit, testing and purifying the silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold and silver, so that they can bring offerings to Adonai uprightly. ⁴ Then the offering of Y’hudah [Judea] and Yerushalayim [Jerusalem] will be pleasing to Adonai, as it was in the days of old, as in years gone by. ⁵ “Then I will approach you for judgment; and I will be quick to witness against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers; against those who take advantage of wage-earners, widows and orphans; against those who rob the foreigner of his rights and don’t fear me,” says Adonai-Tzva’ot [Lord of Hosts].

You can see here the exploits of this messenger – they sound very much like those of Elijah. This messenger would call down fire, maybe not in the physical form like Elijah did, but in the sense of purifying the leaders of things God didn’t want in His people. This was the association God wanted them to make of John the Baptist. His dress and teaching method were very similar to Elijah. This was important because it was known from scripture what the messenger would act like – Elijah. The point being though that this man’s coming would be just before the true Messiah.

John’s message of turn and repent is the message of Teshuvah! Teshuvah is a familiar message during the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). During these fall Feasts of the Lord, Israel is to assess her spiritual condition and turn back to God.

The chronology in the Gospels reveals that John’s arrival took place in the fall, which is the time for these feasts. The mikvah would have been a sign of inward cleansing in spiritual preparation for the Holy Days. Jesus Himself entered the waters of mikvah at this time, cleansing Himself for the festivals and as a sign of stepping into His ministry.

Jesus had to go through mikvah as a sign to all the people that He had the authority to teach the way He did. This was such an important step before He came into his ministry years that it says He traveled from Galilee to the Jordan. This is not a small journey – it was three days walking to get from Nazareth to Bethany. (See map)

The chronology on the Gospels says that Jesus traveled from Nazareth in Galilee down to Bethany, then to the Jordan where He was baptized by John, then Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness (the temptation), and then He traveled back up to Galilee to the city of Cana where He performed the miracle of the water into wine at the marriage feast. Jesus knew the significance of John baptizing Him, and this is why He traveled so far just for it.

The word “Mikveh”

Matthew 3 is the scripture we in the church usually turn to when we start to talk about the doctrine of water baptism. It is almost as

if we in the church think that this concept of immersion came from John the Baptist, but it did not.

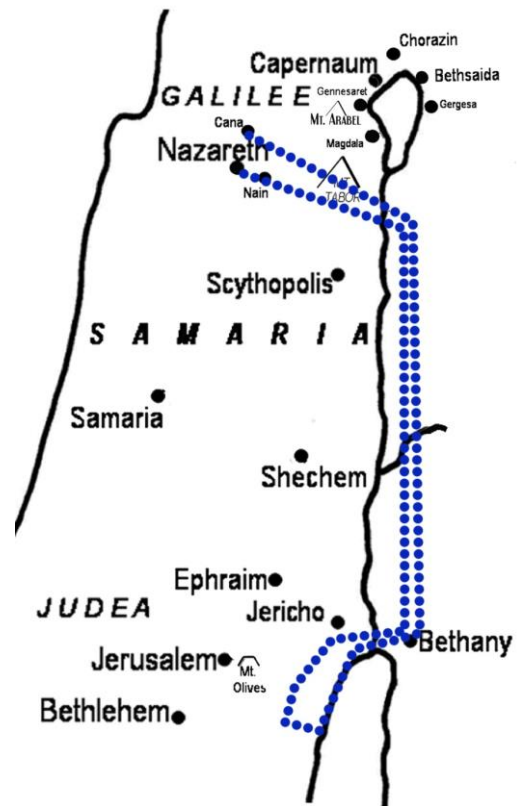
John was the son of Zechariah – who, according to Luke 1, was of the tribe of Levi. Zechariah was a priest. That means John was also of the tribe of Levi – John was also a priest.

John was not doing anything new in baptizing people – he was doing what God had directed the priests to do since the time of Moses. This Biblical ritual had been practiced regularly by all of Israel since the days of Moses.

The word baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizó*, which primarily means **a thorough change of condition accomplished through immersion**. This word is written in the Bible to take the place of the Hebrew word *tevilah*, meaning **to totally immerse**.

This ritual immersion in water is carried out in a *mikvah*, which is a Hebrew word meaning **gathering of waters**. The mikvah personifies both the womb and the grave. It is an outward sign meaning **rebirth**. It is regarded as a pure, unadulterated avenue of connection with God; and for that reason, it is **a place where hope is reawakened and strengthened**.

The Hebrew word for a ritual bath (mikveh) can help us understand a bit more about the Jewish doctrine of immersion.



mik-veh': מִקְוֵה (read right to left in Hebrew)

Letter in Hebrew:	מ – Mem	ק – Khof/Quph	ר – Resh	ה – Hey
	13 th letter	19 th letter	20 th letter	5 th letter
	waters (of wisdom, knowledge, the Torah); pictured as a wave of water	back of the head	first, top, beginning; head of a man	look, reveal, breath; divine revelation; pictured as a window
Meaning:	Mem represents both waters and manifestation. It is the ability to dive deep into the wisdom. It is said that in every person is the thirst for the words of the Creator, which are the waters of life.	Khof has to do with removing the husk of the head of wheat. The husk, or the superficial, is removed to reveal the fruit, or holiness, within.	Resh is the symbol of choosing between greatness and degradation.	Hey represent the breath of the Creator in Genesis 1.

The word **Hope** is made of the last three letters of Mikvah: מִקְוֵה. Hope means *expectation, staring, waiting, looking forward*. The added letter is the letter hey, which means *reveal*. So you can easily see that the word mikvah means the *the place where hope is revealed or found*. That is to say when you immerse in a mikveh, you are soaking yourself in the hope of God; you are entangling with Him, staring at Him, and waiting for Him. How beautiful this relationship is!

The ideas of binding together, or twisting together like yarn, gives us a good mental picture of what it means to align ourselves with God, and wait for Him. We gather ourselves and bind ourselves to His Word and to Him, we line ourselves up with Him, and wait for Him in confidence and hope.

Isaiah 40:30-31 says:

³⁰ Young men may grow tired and weary, even the fittest may stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who **hope in ADONAI** will renew their strength, they will soar aloft as with eagles' wings; when they are running they won't grow weary, when they are walking they won't get tired.

This is the same Hebrew word that is used here in this scripture.

The linked concepts of mikvah (collected pool of water) and tikvah (hope, confidence) are played out beautifully in Jeremiah 17:5-6, where the prophet poetically expresses the ideas through the metaphor of trees either rooted and flourishing beside water when we trust in God, or drying up for the lack of water when we put our trust in man. A few verses later, Jeremiah (vs. 13) summarises:

Lord, you are the hope (mikveh) of Israel; all who forsake you will be ashamed (or dried out). Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.

This is a word play – the text actually says “The Lord is the MIKVEH of Israel, and all who forsake him will be ashamed or dried out!” So it makes more sense now that Jeremiah continues, to say that when we turn away from this mikveh of water and hope, we will be ashamed, which can also be translated **dried out**. Through this word play, Jeremiah deliberately points us back to the analogy of the man who trusts in God being like a tree beside plenty of water, and the one who leaves God ending up in dry, dusty shame.

A “Mikveh” of living water represents the bounty and resources of the new life that we can enjoy in God. Those who put their hope in God, choosing to align their lives with him, will never be dried out, but will always have fresh life in him.

Many Jewish people responded to the call of John to immerse themselves in the river as a sign of repentance, and a desire to get right with God. In vs. 7 he admonishes the Pharisees and Sadducees for following the crowds to him and wanting to be immersed in water when they were not living a life of obedience to God. They were, in essence, wanting to skip the step of sacrifice and go right to the step of being mikvahed.

Psalms 24:3-4 says:

³ Who may go up to the mountain of Adonai? **Who can stand in his holy place?**

⁴ **Those with clean hands and pure hearts**, who don't make vanities the purpose of their lives or swear oaths just to deceive.

David here is talking about the entry to the sanctuary, for the priests, was through the cleansing of the heart (the sacrifice), and the cleansing of the hands (the washing at the laver).

David is also referencing a little deeper here though. The Tabernacle was a physical building on earth, but it is patterned after God's description of what is in heaven. David is also saying here that the only way to go to God's Holy place – to heaven – is with a pure heart (pure intentions) and with clean hands. You cannot get to heaven by your own vain attempts. You cannot make your own way. God already decided the way to heaven, and it is through sacrifice and through the washing of your hands and heart.

This is revealed in the order of the entrance to the Tabernacle:

1. You must first pass through the seat of judgment.

Moses and the judges sat outside the entrance to the Tabernacle and here is where they passed judgment. They decided what was to be done to rectify the situations that people needed to put aside – the *he stole my sheep*, or *she ripped my tent*...or whatever other petty things that would come up in living in this encampment. These things have to first be put aside, because inside you have to have a pure heart. Your offenses have to be set aside before you can come into God's place of worship.

2. You pass through the veil.

As you pass through the veil you lay aside the emotional responses and human emotions that will keep your mind from focusing on God and your heart from fully giving everything you are to God.

3. You offer your sacrifice.

God was very specific with what animals could and could not be sacrificed. He told them how they needed to cut the animals up, how they were to burn them, how they were to dispose of the carcass and the blood. Part of the point of the sacrifice is that you are laying aside your own ideas of what God wants and doing what He says without question. Here we come to the point of surrender – it's not about us, it's about God.

4. You then pass through the washing with the water.

Once you have laid aside your offenses, and once you have laid aside your own desires and are now focused on what God wants, then you have to sanctify yourself. The washing on the outside was a physical step that was needed because it showed the spiritual step of sacrifice before this. God knew that we need to be reminded of the decisions we have made in our hearts.

It is only when you have put aside offenses, and you have sacrificed what God wants sacrificed in your life, and you have shown outwardly the change on the inside that you can then enter the sanctuary of God's presence.

The primary significance of the mikvah isn't for physical cleansing, but to symbolize a spiritual cleansing. Baptism is such an important step in our faith walk because it is showing outwardly the condition of your heart being turned towards and aligning with God.

I Peter 3:18-22 says:

¹⁸ For the Messiah himself died for sins, once and for all, a righteous person on behalf of unrighteous people, so that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but brought to life by the Spirit; ¹⁹ and in this form he went and made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits, ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago, in the days of Noah [Noah], when God waited patiently during the building of the ark, in which a few people — to be specific, eight — were delivered by means of water. ²¹ This also prefigures what delivers us now, the water of immersion, which is not the removal of dirt from the body, but one's pledge to keep a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Yeshua [Jesus] the Messiah. ²² He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers subject to him.

The apostle Peter tells us here that the purpose of the mikvah is not to remove dirt from the body, but it's the pledge to keep a pure heart through relationship with God.

In Ezekiel 36:25 the prophet Ezekiel also speaks of gaining a spiritual renewal through cleansing waters:

²⁵ 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.

God spoke first of this cleansing through the mikvah in Exodus 30:17-21

¹⁷ Adonai said to Moshe [Moses], ¹⁸ "You are to make a basin of bronze, with a base of bronze, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ¹⁹ Aharon [Aaron]

and his sons will wash their hands and feet there ²⁰ when they enter the tent of meeting — they are to wash with water, so that they won't die. Also when they approach the altar to minister by burning an offering for Adonai, ²¹ they are to wash their hands and feet, so that they won't die. This is to be a perpetual law for them through all their generations.”

The priests had to be ritually clean in order to serve at the tabernacle. This was performed at the laver, both in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple.

The Israelites also needed to be mikvahed at different times (which were laid out for them in the law given to Moses in Leviticus 15). To be cleaned they had to pass their body through the water. **They did this in a pool they appropriately called a mikvah.** There are many ancient mikva'ot (plural of mikveh) to be seen in Jerusalem.

Mikvahs are pools that were made for the purpose of ceremonially washing. Archaeologists find them all over Israel. It is thought by some that the Pool of Siloam and the Pool of Bethesda might have been mikvahs. (Or they could have been the world's version of a ceremonial bath, not for God but for false gods – but that's a rabbit trail I won't go down right now.)

Most mikvahs that have been found are small – either for individuals or a few people. However, some very large ones have been found that could have several hundred in them at a time. (Again, this is based on the belief that Siloam and Bethesda could have been mikvahs – it is not really known though.)

A mikveh had to be supplied with "pure" water derived from natural sources (rivers, springs or rain) throughout the year and even during the long dry season, and it had to contain a minimum of 40 se'ah of water (the equivalent of less than one cubic meter of water) so that a person might be properly immersed (if not standing, then lying down). Once the natural flow of water into a mikveh had been stopped, it became "drawn" water (mayim she'uvim). So John immersing people in the “Living waters” of the Jordan River was perfectly within Jewish law and practice at the time.

The mikveh (pool) was required, according to the rabbinical sources, to be sunk into the ground, either through construction or by the process of hewing into the rock, and into it natural water would flow derived from a spring or from surface rainwater in the winter seasons.

The walls and floors of the mikveh chambers were plastered; ceilings were either natural rock or barrel-vaulted with masonry, and steps going down into it.

The mikveh was also used for the purifying of contaminated vessels. In the excavation of mikva'ot at Jericho and Jerusalem, some were found to contain large quantities of ceramic vessels. It is quite possible that some mikva'ot were intended specifically for the purpose of cleaning vessels and were never used for the immersion of people.

Mark 7:1-23 says:

The *P'rushim* [Pharisees] and some of the *Torah*-teachers who had come from Yerushalayim [Jerusalem] gathered together with Yeshua [Jesus] ² and saw that some of his *talmidim* [disciples] ate with ritually unclean hands, that is, without doing *n'tilat-yadayim*. ³ (For the *P'rushim* [Pharisees], and indeed all the Judeans, holding fast to the Tradition of the Elders, do not eat

unless they have given their hands a ceremonial washing. ⁴ Also, when they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they have rinsed their hands up to the wrist; and they adhere to many other traditions, such as washing cups, pots and bronze vessels.)

⁵ The *P'rushim* [Pharisees] and the *Torah*-teachers asked him, "Why don't your *talmidim* [disciples] live in accordance with the Tradition of the Elders, but instead eat with ritually unclean hands?"

⁶ Yeshua [Jesus] answered them, "Yesha'yahu [Isaiah] was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites — as it is written [Isaiah 29:13],

'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. ⁷ Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'

⁸ "You depart from God's command and hold onto human tradition. ⁹ Indeed," he said to them, "you have made a fine art of departing from God's command in order to keep your tradition!

¹⁰ For Moshe [Moses] said, '**Honor your father and your mother,**' and '**Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.**' ¹¹ But you say, 'If someone says to his father or mother, "I have promised as a *korban*" ' ' (that is, as a gift to God) " ' "what I might have used to help you," ' ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus, with your tradition which you had handed down to you, you nullify the Word of God! And you do other things like this."

¹⁴ Then Yeshua [Jesus] called the people to him again and said, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand this! ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person which, by going into him, can make him unclean. Rather, it is the things that come out of a person which make a person unclean!"

¹⁶ Anyone who has ears that can hear, let him hear!

¹⁷ When he had left the people and entered the house, his *talmidim* [disciples] asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ He replied to them, "So you too are without understanding? Don't you see that nothing going into a person from outside can make him unclean? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and it passes out into the latrine." (Thus he declared all foods ritually clean.)

²⁰ "It is what comes out of a person," he went on, "that makes him unclean. ²¹ For from within, out of a person's heart, come forth wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance, foolishness.... ²³ All these wicked things come from within, and they make a person unclean."

As you can see, Jesus had a completely different outlook on the ritual cleaning practices. He was baptized, but not for the purpose of cleaning His outward body – it was a sign of the condition of His heart. The elders had become stuck in the traditions they had created for the outward cleaning that they were ignoring the purpose, which is to have a heart for God.

Later in John 13 Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as a sign that He knew their hearts were pure and clean and could follow Him. He knew what was to come after that last Passover meal. He knew He would be giving up His life very soon.

Peter questioned Him about why He was doing the lowliest of jobs (the job that servants/slaves did), and Jesus answered that if He did not wash Peter's feet then Peter could have no part of Him. Peter then jumped immediately to saying, "Then wash all of my." In other words, "Immerse me in a mikvah!" Jesus answered and said that it was not necessary. He did not want Peter to forget the purpose of mikvah – the outward sign of the condition of the heart. Jesus wanted Peter and the other disciples to be set apart from the elders (Pharisees and Sadducees). He wanted his disciples to understand that it is the condition of the heart that matters most, as that was the message they would need to spread after He was gone.

John 13:14-15 says:

¹⁴ Now if I, the Lord and Rabbi, have washed your feet, you also should wash each other's feet.

¹⁵ For I have set you an example, so that you may do as I have done to you.

Jesus set the standard His disciples were to follow, but the standard He used as His example was nothing new, it was the one that God had intended from the start when He gave the description of the Tabernacle to Moses. It's about the heart condition, not the outward dust.

Baptism was quite common by the time of Jesus, but after He ascended, the believers (first church) began to change how they presented baptism to those around them. They obviously got the point of Jesus' foot washing teaching, as the church in Acts 8 attached the outward baptism as not only the condition of the heart, but also as the acceptance that Jesus was the Messiah. In Acts 8, we read of a visiting pilgrim from Ethiopia, who came to believe in Jesus as he read Isaiah on the way home:

³⁶ As they were going down the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Here's some water! Is there any reason why I shouldn't be immersed?" ³⁷ And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." He answered, "I believe that Yeshua [Jesus] the Messiah is the Son of God." ³⁸ He ordered the chariot to stop; then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip immersed him.

So it is clear that by the time of the early church, baptism had come to signify a decision to accept Jesus as Messiah and Lord. This is why we in the church even today hold to the Doctrine of Baptism. It is an important step as an outward sign of the inward condition of our heart.