

To Fulfill All Righteousness

Charles Fry

Moses the Man of God was called into the presence of the LORD on Mt. Sinai to receive instructions for Israel to build a tabernacle for God's dwelling among the people of Israel (**Exodus 24:12-31:18**). God had initially proposed that the new nation of Israel should become a kingdom of priests (**Exodus 19:6**), obeying the LORD and keeping his covenant. However, the presence of the LORD on Mt. Sinai terrified the people and they requested that Moses be their representative before God, speaking to the LORD in their behalf, and then conveying God's message to them. If Israel were not a kingdom of priests dealing directly with God, then they needed a priesthood to interact with God on their behalf. The LORD chose Aaron, Moses's brother and his spokesman in all that had been done in Egypt, to be the first high priest for Israel, serving in His tabernacle. Aaron's sons served as priests with their father, and passed the priesthood afterward continually from generation to generation (**Exodus 28-29**).

The LORD prescribed a ceremony for Aaron and his sons to be consecrated as priests, and it's initially described in **Exodus 29**. The ceremony called for the preparation of specific sacrificial animals and specific bread offerings, and began with the ceremonial washing of Aaron and his sons with water. After being washed, Aaron was to be clothed in the special garments of the high priest and then anointed with sacred oil. Then his sons were to be dressed in their priestly garments, and afterward the sacrifices and offerings were presented in a specific order with specific application of blood from the sacrifices. These ceremonies were carried out about 9 months later, after the Tabernacle had been constructed and the sacred garments produced (**Leviticus 8-9**). Only after the required sacrifices had been presented over a period of 7 days could Aaron and his sons begin to present offerings at the Tabernacle on their own behalf and for Israel. From the day that Aaron's consecration was completed, for the next 1500 years his sons and their sons served in the tabernacle, and the temple that Solomon built, and the second temple built in the days of Haggai and Zechariah, about 100 high priests in all until the 2nd temple was destroyed by the Romans, suppressing the Jewish revolt in 70 AD.

A generation before the last of those high priests from the lineage of Aaron met their doom, God sent a man named John, who happened to be a priest himself from the sons of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, to prepare the way for a new priest and a new priesthood. Since the first priesthood and its attendant covenant (see **Numbers 25:10-13**, **Malachi 2:1-9**) had been given to the sons of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, and enacted through the LORD's prophet Moses, of the tribe of Levi, it was appropriate that the last prophet of the Old Testament, John the Baptist, son of Zechariah the priest (**Luke 1:5-25, 57-80; Matthew 11:7-11**), should be the onewho would consecrate the great high priest of the New Covenant by washing him with water.

Jesus came all the way from Nazareth in Galilee (**Mark 1:9**) specifically to be baptized by John (**Matthew 3:13**) in the Jordan river at Bethany on the far side of the Jordan (**John 1:28**), which is in the vicinity of Jericho, the same area where Elijah the prophet was taken up in a whirlwind leaving Elisha as his spiritual heir (**2 Kings 2**). Eight hundred years before John was born, Elijah had been instructed by God to anoint Elisha as his successor (**1 Kings 19:16**). John the Baptist fulfilled the promise of another Elijah to come (**Malachi 4:5; Matthew 11:14, 17:10-13**). In a similitude of Elijah and Elisha,

God intended for Jesus to be his anointed prophet and high priest in the New Covenant (see **Hebrews 2:17, 4:14ff**, etc.) as successor to John the prophet, and successor to the whole Aaronic priesthood that John was born into.

When Jesus presented himself to John for baptism, John hesitated, feeling unworthy to baptize Jesus (**Matthew 3:13-14**). Jesus assured John that it was right to do this, “to fulfill all righteousness” (**Matthew 13:15**). Jesus was providing an example of submission, of course, but he clearly didn’t need a baptism of “repentance for forgiveness of sins,” which is what John preached and practiced. The New Testament affirms repeatedly that Jesus had no sin. Nevertheless, it was right for Jesus to be washed with water by a priest descended from Aaron, consecrating him for the priesthood and preparing him for his anointing, fulfilling the righteous requirements of God.

When Moses washed Aaron 1500 years before Jesus came to John, he then clothed him in the garments prepared for his service and anointed him with the sacred oil. When Jesus was washed (baptized) by John, “*the heavens were opened to him*” (**Matthew 3:16**, and see **Mark 1:10**, **Luke 3:21**). In that moment, the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon Jesus and came to rest on him, as a dove would descend. We know that John saw the Spirit descend because he described the event (**John 1:32-34**) as a confirmation that Jesus was the one who was to come, whose way he had been preparing.

The time when Jesus was washed by John in the Jordan River was when he was anointed, not merely with consecrated oil but with the Spirit of God and power, as Peter proclaimed in **Acts 10:37-38**. That’s when Jesus became the Christ, the Messiah, God’s anointed high priest and chosen king and greatest prophet. Jesus needed to be baptized, washed with water, so that he could be anointed and receive the new priesthood, initiate the New Covenant, and provide the necessary sacrifice(s) for redemption and consecration for all humanity. While Jesus had no sins to cleanse through repentance and baptism, God’s righteous mandate given through Moses called for him to be washed with water, anointed with the Holy Spirit, and acclaimed as holy to the Lord, to fulfill all righteousness.