

Jesus Permits Baptism to Be Given At the Jordan

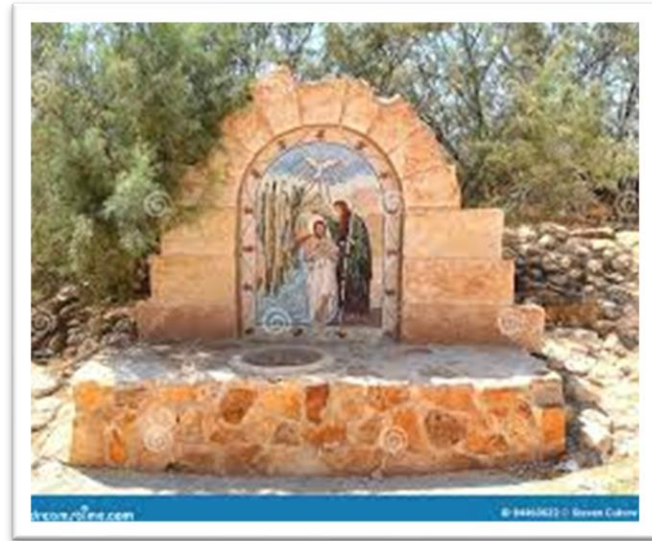
From Hai Jesus departed for John's former baptismal place, on the Jordan three hours from Jericho. Andrew and many of the disciples had come about an hour's distance to meet Him.

Several of John's disciples, some also from Nazareth, were here. Some of them went on ahead to the little village of Ono, about an hour's

distance from the place of baptism, and gave notice that Jesus would there celebrate the Sabbath and cure the sick. They told the people that Jesus was continuing John's work and teaching, and that openly and effectively He perfected that for which John had laid the foundation. Outside of Ono and about one half-hour from the baptismal place there was a private inn for Jesus' accommodation. Lazarus had purchased it for Him and had placed there a man to see to the cooking, though Jesus usually took His meals cold. This inn served Him as a stopping place when in that part of the country, and from it He went around to the neighboring villages teaching and baptizing. When He reached Ono for the Sabbath, He taught in the synagogue and cured many sick persons who had been brought thither, among them a poor, emaciated woman suffering from a bloody flux.

In these last days, Herod frequently went to John, but the latter always treated him with contempt as an adulterer. Herod interiorly acknowledged that John was right, but his wife was furious against John. John baptized no more, and Jesus was now the whole subject of his preaching. All the candidates for Baptism, he sent across the Jordan to Him.

At the place of Baptism, many changes had been made by the disciples sent thither from Cana, and all in accordance with Jesus' orders. It now presented a festal appearance, and things were better arranged than when John was there. On account of the crowds desirous of crossing, the ferry was removed to a lower point of the river, at a greater distance from that large circular enclosure which John had arranged in the open air around the baptismal pool. The spot upon which Andrew,



Saturnin, and the other disciples baptized in turn upon Jesus' command, was the little island upon which He Himself had been baptized. It was now covered by a large awning. While the disciples baptized, Jesus taught and prepared the aspirants for Baptism. The pool in which Jesus had been baptized was now very much changed. The five canals leading from the Jordan into the pool, and which had at first been covered, were now uncovered, and the four stones from the center, as well as the large, three-cornered, red-veined one at the edge upon which Jesus was standing when the Holy Spirit came upon Him, had all been removed. They had been taken to the new place of Baptism.

That the spot upon which Jesus had been baptized was the same as that upon which the Ark of the Covenant had stood, that the stones in the Baptism pool were those upon which it had rested in the bed of the Jordan, were facts known only to Jesus and John, and of which neither had spoken. So, too, the Lord was the only one who knew that these stones now formed the foundation of the baptismal basin. The Jews had long forgotten the resting place of these stones, and it was not made known to the disciples. Andrew had hewn a circular basin in the three-cornered stone which rested on the four others in a cavity filled with water which surrounded the stones like a canal. This water, as also that in the basin of the three-cornered stones, had been brought from the baptismal pool of Jesus, and Jesus had blessed it. When the aspirants stood in the canal around the triangular basin, the water reached up to their breast.

Near the place of Baptism was a kind of altar upon which lay the baptismal garments. Two of the disciples imposed hands upon the shoulders of the neophytes while Andrew or Saturnin, sometimes another, dipped the hollow hand three times into the basin and poured the water over their head baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The baptizers, as well as those that imposed hands, wore long white robes girdled, and from their shoulders hung long white strips like broad stoles. John was accustomed to baptize from a triple-channeled shell from which the water flowed in three streams, and the words he used were of Jehovah and of Him that had been sent, somewhat different from those now uttered by the disciples at Baptism. None of those that had been baptized by John were here rebaptized; but I think that after the descent of the Holy Ghost, at the Baptism administered at the Pool of Bethsaida, they were again baptized. Nor were there here any women

as yet baptized. The Baptism with triple immersions I saw for the first time at the Pool of Bethsaida.

There was an opening in the awning just above the basin of Baptism. The neophytes stood at the side, the baptizer and sponsors on the corner of the stone.

Jesus taught from an elevated teacher's stand in the open air. During the heat of the day, a tent or awning was stretched over it. The subjects of Jesus' discourse were Baptism, penance, the approach of the Kingdom of God, and of the Messiah, whom they should seek not among the distinguished of this world, but among the poor and lowly. He designated this Baptism a cleansing, a washing away, while John's baptism was one of penance. He spoke also of a Baptism of fire, a Baptism of the Spirit, which was yet to come.

The bushes and trees that John had planted in the form of an arbor around the baptismal pool rose above them all. On the pointed top I saw a figure like a little child. It appeared to be rising out of the trunk of a vine, its little arms outstretched in the act of scattering yellow apples with one hand, and roses with the other. It was a remnant of the adornments of the festival that celebrated the commencement of Jesus' baptizing mission.

Jesus was now gone with several of His disciples southward from the place of Baptism and toward the west of the Dead Sea. He had entered the region in which Melchisedech sojourned when he measured off the Jordan and the mountains. Long before Abraham, he had conducted the Patriarch's forefathers thither. But the city that they built had been destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrha. I saw at that time, at about half an hour's distance inland from the Dead Sea, in the midst of a desolate region where immense caves and black, jagged rocks met the gaze, the dilapidated walls and towers in the ruined city Hazon Tamar.

Where now appears the Dead Sea, was before the submersion of those godless cities, only the river Jordan. It was here about a quarter of an hour broad. The people, who dwelt in caves and ruined buildings of all kinds at some distance from the sea, were not real Jews. They were slaves belonging to wandering tribes that had settled in those parts, and for whom they were obliged to perform all the field labor. They were poor and humble and very greatly neglected. They looked upon Jesus' arrival among them as an inconceivable favor, and gave Him a very loving reception. He cured many of them.

At the present day that region is not so desolate as it was in the time of Jesus, but in very early ages it was indescribably fruitful and lovely. It

was in Abraham's time changed by the formation of the Dead Sea from one of the most magnificent regions into a dreary desert. The shores of the Jordan were then walled in with freestone and on them once stood a great number of cities and towns, beautiful mountains and hills rising up between them. The whole region was covered with groves of date palms, vineyards, orchards, and fields of grain. Its fruitfulness surpassed description. Previously to the formation of the Dead Sea, the Jordan had, just below its greatest depth, divided into two branches between the cities that were afterward submerged. One of these branches flowed eastward, receiving in its course the waters of many smaller streams; the other watered the desert through which the Holy Family fled into Egypt, as far as the region of Mara, where Moses had rendered the bitter waters sweet, and where Anne's ancestors had sojourned. There were salt mines in the neighborhood of those cities, but they exercised no deleterious influence upon the waters of the numerous springs around. The tribes dwelling at a considerable distance in this region that afterward became so desolate, used the water of the Jordan and found it excellent.

The remote ancestors of Abraham, who had been settled in Hazezon by Melchisedech, had become very degenerate, and Abraham was, by a second exercise of God's mercy, led to the Promised Land.

Melchisedech had been in these parts long before the Jordan existed. He had measured off and determined everything. He often came and went, and sometimes he was accompanied by a couple of men, who appeared to be slaves.

Jesus went afterward with His disciples in a direction leading to Bethlehem. After His Baptism He crossed the valley of the shepherds. The people depended upon the caravans that passed through for their principal support. It is about four hours from Bethania and on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin.

There were in Betharaba many possessed. They ran about outside the city crying out that Jesus was coming. Jesus commanded them to cover themselves, and in a few moments they had made aprons of leaves.

Jesus delivered them from the evil spirits and, on entering the city, sent back to them messengers with clothes. There were some among them whose body used suddenly to swell to a great size.

Andrew and five other disciples had left the place of Baptism and preceded the Lord to Betharaba in order to announce His coming and to give notice that He would there celebrate the Sabbath.

Jesus and His disciples put up at a private inn, one of those free inns,

such as in those times were always found in the different cities for the accommodation of travelling teachers and rabbis. Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, and others from Jerusalem had come hither to meet Jesus. Jesus taught in the synagogue, also from a stone seat that stood in a public place intended for such use, and on all the streets and corners, for the crowds were too great for the school to accommodate. He healed numerous sick of different kinds whom the disciples brought to Him, making a way for them through the crowd. Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea stood in the distance.

At the close of the Sabbath, the Lord returned to Ono with His disciples. They passed through the little town of Bethagla, one of the stopping places of the Children of Israel after they had crossed the Jordan, for they did not all cross at one and the same place. They went over in bands at different points of the dry bed of the river. When arrived at Bethagla, they arranged their clothing and girded themselves. Jesus passed the stone of the Ark of the Covenant where John had celebrated the feast.

Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea returned to Jerusalem. Nicodemus had not come. He was more reserved, on account of the office that he held, but he served Jesus in secret, and to the end notified the little Community of any danger that threatened.

The next day was the first feast of the new moon, and I saw that the serving class and civil functionaries in Jerusalem had a holiday. It was kept as a festival of joy, a day of rest, consequently there was no baptizing on it.

The flags for the Feast of the New Moon were waving from long flagstaves on the roof of the synagogue. Large knots were made at intervals on the staves between which the folds of the streamers opened in the breeze. The number of knots signified to those at a distance what month had just begun. Such flags were unfurled also as signals of victory or of danger.

The whole day Jesus was busy preparing for Baptism the people who had gathered there on the eve and encamped around; but there was no baptizing, because a feast was being celebrated in commemoration of the death of a wicked King (Alexander Jannaeus). The place of Baptism had been very beautifully arranged and adorned. Andrew and the other disciples began very early on the following day the Baptism of those that Jesus had prepared the day before.

The preceding evening Lazarus had returned with Obed, Simeon's son, and with them Jesus started very early the next morning for the

neighborhood of Bethlehem, passing between Bethagla and Ophra, which was more to the west. Jesus took this journey with Lazarus in order to hear what reports were circulating about Himself at Jerusalem, also to give him some instructions, which he was to transmit to the little Community, as to how they should conduct themselves under certain circumstances. They took the road once trodden by Joseph and Mary when going to Bethlehem, and in about three hours reached a row of poor, isolated dwellings belonging to shepherds. Lazarus told Jesus all that was being said about Him at Jerusalem, and that they spoke of Him in a manner partly derisive, and partly inquisitive. They said that they would see whether He would come to Jerusalem for the Pasch and, if He did, whether He would as daringly perform His miracles in a great city as among the credulous people of Galilee. He told Jesus also of the spying of the Pharisees and of what they reported of Him in different places. Jesus relieved Lazarus' anxiety on these points, and drew his attention to various passages in the Prophets wherein all this had been foretold. He said that He would be about eight days longer at the Jordan, would then return to Galilee, then go to Jerusalem for the Pasch, and after that call His disciples. Jesus consoled Lazarus on the subject of Magdalen, of whom He said that already there had fallen upon her soul a spark of salvation, which would entirely consume her.

They spent the greater part of the day among the shepherd dwellings, at which they were entertained with bread, honey, and fruit. There dwelt here only about twenty-one women of the shepherd class, all widows. Some had grown sons, who supported them in their old age. Their dwellings were merely cells separated from one another by hedges of living brushwood. Some of these women had visited the Crib Cave at the birth of Christ and offered gifts. Jesus taught here. He entered some of the cells and cured the sick inmates. One was very old and emaciated, and lay upon a couch made of leaves. Jesus led her forth by the hand. The women had a refectory and dormitory in common.

Lazarus and Obed went back to Jerusalem, while Jesus continued visiting and curing the sick. Toward three in the afternoon, I saw Him again at the place of Baptism.