

This May Be the Funniest Verse in the Entire Bible

When I was writing my book *Identity Theft*, I came across this verse and it struck me as odd. At your first reading, unless you come from a Jewish background, you might not agree. But I will clarify.

Peter, speaking at the home of Cornelius, said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of [these Gentiles] being baptized with water” (Acts 10:47, NIV).

Isn't that hilarious? Let me explain.

Traitor!

Growing up Jewish, we were told that to be baptized in water was the ultimate act of treason against our people. To publicly go into the waters of baptism was to reject your heritage, your people and your God.

And, yet, here is a Jewish man, Peter, not proclaiming that it is OK for Jews to be baptized, but that it was OK to baptize Gentiles. Since when has it ever been controversial to baptize Gentiles? Yet, if not for the facts that:

- Peter had a vision symbolizing that Gentiles could be cleansed by the blood of Jesus,
- God told Peter to go with the Gentiles who would come for him at Simon the Tanner's house,
- The Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, causing them to speak in tongues;

Peter would have never been in the position to recognize that Gentiles could be baptized.

Baptism Was Jewish

You have to understand that baptism, in the New Testament, was the way that someone confessed faith in Yeshua—it was, if you will, the sinner’s prayer of the New Testament. In the beginning, it was exclusively Jews being immersed in water.

Now, 2,000 years later, we tend to think that baptism is foreign to Jewish life and culture. Not so. The reason that God chose baptism as the way to identify with the Messiah’s death and resurrection is precisely because it was so familiar to the people.

The temple was surrounded with well over 50 immersion tanks (*mikvot*). These were used before someone would bring his sacrifice to the temple. The Torah mentions ritual cleansing through baptism:

The priests had to be ritually clean (*tahor*) in order to serve at the tabernacle, and Israelites who had become ritually unclean (*tamay*) had to restore their situation with the passing of time and bathing their whole body in fresh, ritually clean (*tahor*) water, according to Leviticus 15. (*One For Israel*)

So What Happened?

Good question! How did something that was so Jewish become perceived as utterly anti-Judaism? Why was it a local scandal in 1983, in the Richmond Jewish community, when I was baptized as a follower of Yeshua? It is a sad history.

The Church, as early as the second century, turned against the Jewish people. Over the centuries, Jews were accused of deicide—killing God, collective guilt, which deserved collective punishment; we were presented as being incurably lost.

“Take heed to yourselves and be not like some piling up your

sins and saying that the covenant is [the Jews] as well as ours. It is ours, but they lost it completely just after Moses received it.”

Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter 4:6-7 (between A.D. 138 and A.D. 130).

“We may thus assert in utter confidence that the Jews will not return to their earlier situation, for they have committed the most abominable of crimes, in forming this conspiracy against the Savior of the human race ... hence the city where Jesus suffered was necessarily destroyed, the Jewish nation was driven from its country, and another people was called by God to the blessed election.”

Origen of Alexandria, (185-254 A.D.) – An ecclesiastical writer and teacher who contributed to the early formation of Christian doctrines.

These attitudes against the Jews continued to grow. In 325 A.D., Constantine and the Bishops of Nicaea outlawed Passover for Christians to celebrate the resurrection. It was replaced with Easter.

During the Crusades (1095 – 1291), Jews were butchered, raped and murdered by so-called Christians as they marched, on orders of the pope, across Europe to fight Muslims in the Holy Land. These saints were told that if they died in battle, they would go straight to heaven. Sound familiar?

Then, in the Inquisitions (1492), the Jews of Spain were told to either be baptized as Christians or leave the country. Moles who worked for the church would spy on these “New Christians,” as they were called, to see if they would return to Jewish practice. (The other name they used for them was Spanish for swine!) Offenses included lighting Shabbat candles and refusing to eat pork, among others. The guilty would be arrested and severely punished—thousands were burned at the

stake.

Now You See

It is thoughts of forced conversions/baptisms and persecutions that are conjured up in the Jewish mind when one mentions baptism today. They do not think of Jewish revival on the day of Shavuot (Pentecost), when thousands of Jews were immersed in water in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. Sadly, the historic church has done more to push Jewish people from faith in Yeshua, than any other force.

But there once was a day when a Jew named Simon Peter was stunned to see Gentiles receive the Jewish Messiah, and made the controversial decision to baptize these non-Jews into the kingdom. He was even attacked for this decision:

“So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the [Jewish believers] believers criticized him and said, ‘You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them’” (Acts 11:2-3, NIV).

Now you know why I think Acts 10:47 is the funniest scripture in the New Testament. And yet, I find myself crying.

Pray that the eyes of Israel would be opened. {eo}

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